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LA PREDICATION ET L'ENSEIGNEMENT
DE LA FOI CHRETIENNE AUJOURD'HUI

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En anglais

Document 52.A

Orthodox Consultation on
PREACHING AND TEACHING CHRISTIAN FAITH TODAY
Monastery of Zica, Yugoslavia
September 20-25, 1980

As you may know, CWME has now a long experience in organising Orthodox consultations dealing with the mission of the church today, especially with the problems, possibilities and challenges of the Christian witness in different parts and situations of the Orthodox communion. Through CWME, several churches have invited such gatherings to spend a few days in prayer, worship and encounter with their local communities, trying to understand how the Orthodox proclaim the crucified and risen Lord at this very moment of history. The participants have been astonished to discern everywhere a living and faithful people of God and to see the extraordinary evangelistic impact and effectiveness of the Orthodox spirituality. In some places we have been able to identify the pillars of the church, those who are bearing Christ in their very existence and body. We have been illumined by the contribution of some outstanding bishops and theologians, but above all, we have been enriched by the experience and determination of the Orthodox parish priest, who leads the concrete combat for the extension of the kingdom of God on earth. In fact, in setting up the programme of this consultation we had in mind the lesson learned from this experience. Let us mention therefore some of the grounds for concentrating our attention on this topic for the consultation.

Firstly, there is an urgent need to understand the reality of the church in both its very being and mission in the present situation. The nature, the spirit, the mystery of the church cannot be separated from its concrete mission, historical witness and human service. What is necessary is a pastoral and realistic ecclesiology, which avoids any supposed dichotomy between the doctrine of the church and her continued incarnation in the world and in time, between the church as a new life given from God and church as a human community struggling to be and remain the new people of God.

Besides, there is a fundamental point of ecumenical consensus that the liturgical community, by being the bearer of the sacramental and charismatic gifts, is the main resource for pastoral energy and missionary inspiration and, accordingly, the paradigm of the contemporary church.

Secondly, the continuity of the teaching tradition is not a mechanical transmission, but an apostolic vocation and consecration. Hence the immense responsibility of the church in communicating the truth of God in each generation and in every tongue. The holy tradition is a living anamnesis of the history and salvation. It is becoming alive in both kerygma and dogma of the church,

as St. Basil the Great said. The tradition has to be transmitted and translated continually in the kerygma of the church. This tradition, which is not a matter of the transmission of a message, but is to hallow the Lord Christ in our hearts (1. Pet. 3, 15) and to irradiate the Spirit of Christ, exists only as a living kerygma. Already in the second century (especially for Irineus and Tertullian), the concept of the apostolic succession includes the passing down of a body of faith, of a teaching tradition, alongside the sacramental ordination of the bishops as successors to the apostles.

Thirdly, the church is under the obligation to share the gospel with those who have never heard the Good News but who need it, to search for those who are not of the church's flock, and to identify those who are waiting for the kingdom of God "outside the gate". The faith is not our private possession, but the very flesh of our Lord, as St. Ignatius put it. The Son came to share with us the mystery of the living Father. Without the concern of sharing the reality of God's incarnation, the mission of the church is under question. The apostolic task of the church is to spread everywhere the kingdom of God. It is not primarily a concern for ecclesial implantation, for the extension of the Christian society, for the sake of church universality, but a concern for bearing witness to Jesus in a spirit of love and prophecy (Rev. 19,10) for the sake of those who are not members of the church.

Let us say a few words about the purpose and task of this consultation. The aim is not to prepare a document dealing specifically with the sacramental priesthood, consecrated by ordination in the apostolic succession, or to go into details of its threefold ministry: preaching the gospel, sanctifying and nourishing by sacraments and Holy Mysteries, and ruling the people of God. It is rather an attempt to assess anew the ministry of the priest (presbyter) who presides over the people of God in his parish, in full union and obedience with the bishop who sends him, in announcing the living truth of the gospel. The complexity of the pastoral and missionary needs of the day impels the church to situate anew the role of each member within the total apostolate. Following St. Ignatius, we take for granted the typology of the sacramental orders: the bishop, who is a type of the Father; the presbyters, who take the place of the council of the apostles; and the deacon, who represents the ministry of Jesus Christ¹. But this typological approach has not prevented the church from establishing institutions and functions corresponding to the three orders of priesthood. Our concentration will be on the presbyter - the parish priest - on the assumption that the forming of the local communities and the organisation of a parish system are an integral part of the modern Orthodox liturgical life, which cannot be limited to episcopal cathedrals and monastic centers. We would like to suggest that the consultation consider the main topic under three aspects:

1. Attached by ordination to his bishop, the presbyters are his co-workers, assisting him and representing him in serving the people of God, the local community which is becoming his flock. Together with the bishop, in a hierarchical order, the presbyter participates in the one and same priesthood and mission of Christ himself. "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (John 20:21). He is not only the celebrant of the sacraments (other than ordination) and Holy Mysteries, but also the minister of God's word, teacher of the faith for those who are members of the community in order to nourish them and prepare them for the sacraments, and preacher of the gospel to those outside in order to draw them to faith. For him, the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the faith are not peripheral pastoral work and have no substitute.² The task of preaching flows from his ordination and consecration, as part of the apostolic mission entrusted to the church. This is not a mere ecclesiastical or ritual obligation, but a liturgical and revelatory act by which the presbyter constitutes the body of Christ in its concrete and visible form.

There is a solid theological motivation in insisting on preaching as a continuing necessity, especially in the framework of the liturgy.

Scripture and Eucharist, sharing of the gospel and participation in the Holy Mysteries are two aspects of the same divine economy of redemption. One of the newnesses of the New Testament revelation is that it does not separate word and sacrament - "The Word of God and the prayer made it (food) holy" (1 Tim. 4:5) - the sacerdotal ministry and the announcing of the Good News. Of course, the liturgical synaxis is not a synagogue in the rabbinic sense, a gathering where the Word is preached and studied under the rabbi. In the liturgy, the proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Lord is inseparably linked to the offering of the sacrifice of Christ.

The sending of the apostles takes its start from the Resurrection and received its power from Pentecost. In fact, it is the risen and glorious Lord (1 Cor. 15:24) possessing full authority in heaven and on earth, who gives the power to the apostles and who sends them to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them in the name of God the Trinity and to teach them the Good News (Matthew 28:19-20). Hence the centrality of the Resurrection in liturgy and mission. "Do this in remembrance of me" implies both proclamation and celebration of paschal mystery.

Being identified essentially as priest, the presbyter is also teacher and shepherd of the community. The ministry of the Word is extremely important because of its ecclesial vision. It means listening to and recognizing the voice of the Good shepherd that the sheep may become one flock (John 10: 4, 16). By proclaiming the gospel, the presbyter calls together men and women to form the people of God. There is obviously a close connection between the ministry of the Word and the implementation of the parish system. Where the preaching and teaching apostolate of the priests and bishops are eluded, evacuated or forbidden, the parish structure of the church disintegrates.

2. If tradition means the paradox of kerygma, kerygma demands communication, and communication implies not only the language of faith but also sacramental and liturgical symbolism, an ongoing dialogue with the faithful and unbelievers. Do we detect any alienating element in the traditional language in which the church preserves its doctrine, or in the catechetical form in which it is presented to the people? Is not the passive receptivity of the faithful linked to the fact that the preaching does not respond to specific pastoral needs and is not in the language of the people as such? The alienation of people from the church is due also to the fact that communication of the gospel does not take into account the specific cultural environment in which the faithful are living. In many countries, for example, the Orthodox Church is facing today an acute tension between the gospel and new cultures, religions and ideologies, which raises questions more fundamental than that of terminology. Hence a new task for the preacher, namely, to help the faithful - especially the younger generation - to see the real image of the new societies and cultures. Of course, preaching expects conversion of the spirit, which involves giving up sin, the negative humanity, and putting on grace, the new humanity. But through reading and meditation of the Holy Scriptures, by explaining the church's doctrine and by observing regular times of prayer, intercession and praise, the priest reveals the God's mystery in human history. By all means, the priest should lead the faithful capable of expounding the secrets of revelation (Clement of Rome, The First Epistle to the Corinthians 48). The church receiving the gospel is not passive, but is a new reality with a new vision and function. It becomes a hermeneutical and revelatory (apocalyptic) community which reveals the forces operating in history, precisely the different ways in which God operates. The presbyter should utilize this new angle of preaching if he wants to avoid alienating the people from the church.

3. The local community, the liturgical assembly, comes back into the focus of missionary theology and practice. This view corresponds with the basic affirmation of Orthodox ecclesiology, according to which life in Christ, communion with God in Christ, and community with God's people are aspects of the same reality. Since the community aspect of life is based on the common priesthood of all the faithful, it means the involvement of the whole people of God in the mission of the church. Evangelistic responsibility is placed on the entire community, and it is the priest's duty to make his people real and active partners in mission. It is not simply a matter of forming the faithful through regular sermons and catechetical instruction, using various media of communication. The parish has to be a place where the spiritual growth of the person takes place, and the life of prayer and contemplation is deepened and strengthened as a whole, the community must be a sign of Christ's presence, an invitation for unbelievers, preparing the path to Christ.

All priests' ministry and community life have their source in the Eucharist, the parish horizon should not, however, be reduced to a kind of ritualism and parochialism.

As the Melbourne Conference on 'Your Kingdom Come' said the Eucharist is real food for missionaries, pilgrim bread, since the same Christ who lives and acts through the liturgical ministries leads and nurtures his people on its pilgrim way. After celebrating the paschal mystery, Christians are invited to "depart in peace in the name of the Lord", to follow their Lord "outside the gate", to live and suffer for others. The liturgical assembly becomes a pilgrim people, moving forward toward those who are entrusted to it in a special way: the poor, the captives, the blind and the downtrodden (Luke 4:18).

Therefore, the parish is not a self-preserving, but a self-denying, inclusive and open community, in order that an environment may be created beyond its limits in which people (including the catechumens and unbelievers) are reconciled and liberated and new human relationships are possible.

Let us conclude these general remarks by saying that the future of the church will be much determined by the pastoral work of the priests, by their dedication and capacity to go to the heart and the extreme of Christian martyria. In this sense, the centuries-old tradition of the Serbian Church is a unique evidence. We learn from the past and recent history of this holy Church how vital were the determination and sacrifice of the simple parish priests. We should never cease to honour the ministers of the grace of God in all Orthodox Churches, for their humility, detachment and spirit of poverty in the service of the gospel.³ Today when many churches are looking for a kenotical style of mission and evangelism, it is the example of such priests who finished the race of faith unshaken, that we must make our own. The kenosis of the priesthood is an absolute condition in enabling the church to have a new pastoral vision, to see new historical ways which correspond with the signs of the kingdom of God. We are very grateful to His Holiness the Patriarch German, to His Holy Synod and to His body of priests for giving us the opportunity to meet here in a climate of sober piety, and humility.

On behalf of Dr. Philip Potter, General Secretary of WCC, of Dr. Emilio Castro, director of CWME, and of all the participants, I would like to express once again our profound gratitude to His Holiness the Patriarch German for his warm hospitality and deep concern extended to us during the consultation.

Let me end with St. Paul's exhortation to Timothy, which will be these days our apostolic commandment in reflecting on preaching and teaching the Christian faith today: "Do not let people disregard you because you are young, but be an example to all the believers in the way you speak and behave, and in your love, your faith and your purity. Make use of the time until I arrive by reading to the people, preaching and teaching. You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the body of elders laid their hands on you; do not let it lie unused. Think hard about all this, and put it into practice, and everyone will be able to see how you are advancing. Take great care about what you do and what you teach: always do this, and in this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you." (1 Tim. 4:12-26.)

1. St. Ignatius Martyr: "Take care, I urge you, to do everything in the harmony of God, with the bishop presiding and taking the place of God, and the priest taking the place of the apostolic senate, and the deacons (who have a very special place in my heart) having entrusted to them the ministry of Jesus Christ who before all time was with the Father and has appeared at the end" (The Epistle to Magnesians, 6). "Let all revere the deacon as Jesus Christ, just as we revere the bishop, who is a type of the Father, and the priests, whom we revere as the senate of God and the council of the apostles - without them it is not called a church." (The Epistles to Trallians, 3).

2. Canons of the Apostles, canon 58: "If any Bishop or Presbyter neglects the Clergy or the laity and fails to instruct them in piety, let him be excommunicated: but if he persists in his negligence and indolence, let him be deposed from office". The Sixth Ecumenical Council (690), canon 19: "We declare that the deans of churches, on every day, but more especially on Sundays, must teach all the Clergy and the laity words of truth out of the Holy Bible, analyzing the meanings and judgements of the truth, and not deviating from the definitions already laid down, or the teaching derived from the God bearing Fathers ..."

3. The Didache, 4: " By day and by night, my son, remember him who speaks the word of God to you. Give him the honour you would give the Lord; for wherever the Lord's attributes are the subject of discourse, there the Lord is present. Frequent the company of the saints daily, so as to be edified by their conversation".

Orthodox Consultation on
Preaching and Teaching the Christian Faith Today

Monastery of Zica, Yugoslavia
September 20-25, 1980

Representatives of both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, members of the WCC, gathered in their fifth panorthodox missionary consultation, at the historic Serbian Monastery of Zica near Kraljevo, Yugoslavia, from September 20-25, 1980. They sought to address questions regarding the Preaching and Teaching of the Christian Faith Today. We heard several papers, comments and stories. These set the tone of our thinking and led us to highlight the following: - the ministry of the priest as teacher and evangelist, the parish as the place where he is both leader and servant of the witnessing community, the new missionary situation faced by the Orthodox priest today. Although the limitation of time prevented us discussing the innumerable questions implied in the main theme, a significant consensus, be it only general and tentative, has been reached on several issues discussed in groups. Here follow the reports. These are only group working papers which we are sending to the Orthodox Churches throughout the world for consideration and implementation as they undertake new efforts in renewing the pastoral life.

THE PRIEST AND THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL

According to our Biblical and Traditional foundations, there are various considerations in the life of the Orthodox priest in which he is to preach the Gospel as the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have attempted to isolate some of these considerations, knowing only too well that all that the contemporary priest is and does, is itself that "proclamation".

We can postulate three foci in which this proclamation is realized:

I. The Spiritual Life of the Priest

We are led into the consideration of this first aspect because all that the priest does must reflect his own inner spiritual life. There is an inextricable bond between his "outreach" and his "inreach", i.e. there is an overpresent dynamic between the going outward to the "people of God" and the going inward in his own prayer life. Certainly, this dual dimension in the priest's spiritual life is brought to our mind in St. Paul's letters to Timothy (I & II) and can be summarized in the phrase of the Book of Acts 20:28: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock..." In the diversity of the Orthodox world, where the priests are brought vis-à-vis many different problems, they need this dual dimension in order to be agents of change and transfiguration of the life in this world. It is our belief, then, that the priest's life in Christ is "radiated" to the people who can in this way best be led into communion with the Triune God.

II. The Relationship of the Priest and Bishop

It is our firm contention that the relationship between the priest and bishop has a direct bearing on the proper proclamation of the Gospel in the life of the Church. This proclamation we understand to be more than speaking the word, but a proclamation of the very life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the continuation of the life of the Church. We see the following criteria as vital to the process:

A. According to the Orthodox Tradition, the local priest is the representative of the bishop on the concerned jurisdiction level but a priest in his own right in terms of sacraments, i.e. as the bishop's co-worker (synergrat) as his "co-worker" (synergist), the Bishop having to bear responsibility with the priest in facilitating this proclamation within the parish. The Bishop's task is, itself, a pastoral and proclamatory one and should not be limited to administration, consecration or ordination, as isolated events, but rather as various events along the continuum of a larger process in which the Bishop's pastoral ministry is effected.

As one example, when a Bishop consecrates a Church building, this consecration is continued in the various tasks of the local pastor through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, in ordination, the work and efficacy of the laying on of hands by the Bishop, i.e. the transmission of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, is continued by the pastor in his own acts of sacrifice and consecration. The importance of this relationship between Bishop and Priest for the proper proclamation of the Gospel is made most explicit when during the ordination, the Bishop hands the Lamb (Amnos) to the priest with the following words: "Take this token and protect it until the second coming (parousia) of the Lord, when you will be judged on it."

B. Today, in the present "crisis of discipline", in which this proper proclamation is in a veritable danger, the local priest must be disciplined in fulfilling his pastoral tasks under the leadership of the Bishop. We believe, however, that the Bishop must not abuse his capacity to discipline. Thus, both the priest and Bishop need a responsible discipline to insure this proclamation. It is in this mutual responsibility and discipline, when the Bishop is "father" to the priest and his family, that the Bishop supports the priest, and the priest respects his Bishop. Surely the Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy has such an implication: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophesy with the laying on of hands of the presbytery." (I Tim. 4:14).

III The Relationship of the Priest to the People of God (Laos tou Theou)

The proclamation of the Gospel also is properly realized within the relationships of the priest to the people of God.

The Orthodox Priest is ordained in and married to, a particular parish with the implication that this relationship is for life.

We do realize that "by economy" (kat' economia) the Church, in certain circumstances, has allowed for the movement and transfer of local pastors, but we must insist that this "theme" of marriage to a particular parish is vital in the sense that there must be a deep intimacy and caring for the entire life of the people of God on the part of that priest.

The parish priest has also a responsibility for "outreach" to the people of God, i.e. outside his local sanctuary, to his "potential parish", those persons who are the baptized Orthodox Christians, but who have fallen out of regular communion with the Church as well as those who have not heard the Gospel. This means, then, that his responsibility extends to all matters which relate to the "potential parish"; his proclamation properly must be addressed to such persons.

Within the relationship of the priest to the people of God, we can distinguish four functions of the ministry of proclamation:

A. Priest as Liturgist

It is through the proper participation in the Liturgy that the people realize both the teaching and then the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is the very reality of what we are attempting to proclaim. In other words, the Liturgy itself is the proclamation of the Gospel in the existential and experiential manner. This has certain implications for the Orthodox priest.

1. The Liturgy is not for the priest alone, i.e. it is not himself alone who celebrates, but rather the entire people of God (clergy and laity) who celebrate. It is in his function only, given in ordination, that he is to lead the people in the Liturgy.

2. The priest must never separate the Kerygma of Christ, i.e. the teaching, proclamation, and exhortation of the Scripture from the Liturgy; this Kerygma is part of the very fabric of the Liturgy. There is an analogy of this link between the teaching and the sacrifice (anaphora) and the eating (koinonia), to be seen in the life of our Lord when He first taught the people and then offered Himself in His Body and Blood on behalf of all.

3. The parish members must be educated to understand what it is that is happening in the Divine Liturgy and in this way, to comprehend the proclamation in the Liturgy.

4. Because of the aforementioned factors regarding the Liturgy as proclamation, it is furthermore imperative that the People of God participate in this reality. Our contention is that all people, children and adults, men and women, learn the hymns of the Liturgy. In order to facilitate this, the Liturgy should be in the language of the land which is (comprehensive and contemporary) and thus encourage the active and conscientious activity of participation on the part of the people.

5. Finally, through Sermons and Homilies, the priest must adapt the words of the Scripture to the reality of the circumstances. Noting the difference between relativity and relevance, we believe that this adaptation, as application, must be done without changing the essential, life giving, and salvatory message. For this, we must add, there is a constant need for proper training and preparation vis-à-vis the sermon.

B. Priest as Catechist

We must first clarify what we mean by "catechist". The catechist is the one who teaches to deepen the faith of the members of the Church; it requires a definite, pedagogical concern, and its thrust is different (although certainly related to) the evangelistic function which follows (see "C" below).

1. Our first concern is that the priest proclaims the Gospel as a catechist in the sense that he is to both protect and transmit, that which the Church has received (Paradosis) and which he is responsible to pass on to the people of God. We find the Scriptural basis for this concern in St. Paul's letter to Timothy (II Tim. 4:1) "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort with patience and doctrine".

2. As the catechist, the priest must use all his various pastoral ministrations to deepen the Orthodox Faith in the hearts of the faithful through sermons, in confession, pastoral visits and counseling, in Bible Classes, etc.

3. The priest as catechist varies from culture to culture, each offering different possibilities. But he is, in all cases, the "catechist of Catechists," i.e., even when others are doing the actual pedagogy, it is he who is ultimately responsible and must give continuous emphasis, impetus and orientation.

C. Priest as Evangelist

We mean "evangelist" which differs from catechist, as one who must "Go forth and proclaim the Gospel," i.e. to both the aforementioned "potential parish" and to non-believers. This, however, presents various problems with which we Orthodox must deal.

1. It is within the very nature of the Faith that the Evangelion, as a "witness" to Jesus Christ be emphasized. In various cultures, this must be done with whatever means are possible to the priest.

2. We find here the personality of the priest to be crucial in the sense that he must have the proper respect for others, possess an integrity of character, and allow others to use their free will in coming to the Orthodox Faith.

3. It is our belief in line with the aforementioned point, that coercion of any sort in the name of Christ, does not lead to a faith development but to a desire for spiritual aggressiveness. Thus, we wish to distinguish between proselytism and an evangelism which seeks to demonstrate our Orthodox Faith to the world as an "active presence." By this "active presence," the Orthodox Christian roots in the land are strengthened. This, however, can only come forth by a deep missionary consciousness on the part of the priest, and in turn, by the people of God.

D. Priest as Pastor

By our use of this term pastor, we refer to the priest's capacity as a shepherd to whom Isaiah refers when he says "he shall know the sheep by name," and again in St. John's Gospel (10:3) "... and the sheep hears his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out". This as he who "mourns with those who mourn, rejoices with those who rejoice", or again, as the "good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep." Here we mean to emphasize the pastor's compassionate love, not to be acquired, but given as a gift of the Holy Spirit which must constantly be "warmed up" (as in the words of St. Paul), as that which constitutes the pastoral task of the priest. With such a meaning before us, we believe the following points must be made.

1. There is a constant need in the training of pastors to keep the bond between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. In fact, this must be continued throughout the priest's life. We do not see an antithesis, in which on the one side is theology, and on the other, practice (praxis). Rather, we see a theological practice in which the very practice of the Orthodox ministry is theological. Thus, theology stands over both theory and practice and this means that both are needed to keep our theology straight (Orthodox). In short, we cannot practice our ministry as proclamation, without properly being rooted in Orthodox ecclesiology and doctrine, and on the other hand, we cannot have proper Orthodox ecclesiology and doctrine without it being activated and implemented in proper practice. Thus, the need for a continuous tension between theoria and praxis in the theological tasks of the Orthodox pastorate.

2. We contend, in line with this, that Orthodox Seminary professors must themselves be "pastors" to the students and to establish a relationship with the people of God outside the seminary walls; he must never be only an academician.

3. Furthermore, regarding the training of pastors in Orthodox Seminaries, we believe that it is of central importance that he experience in life (under supervision) what he is taught in classes. This is vital for a proper ministerial formation. We must ask, how can he truly understand what it means to pray for "the sick and the suffering", in the Liturgy, or to live out the Biblical injunction to "visit the prisoner, to give bread to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked," etc, unless he is brought into a living relationship with these conditions of life. For we Orthodox, the mind (nous) and the heart (kardia) are that fullness which aptly describes how we are to live; we see this truth as applicable in the training of pastors.

4. It is the pastor as shepherd who both calls the people to him, i.e. who offers them the "bread of life," and sends them out, being energized by this food, to do the works of the Church outside the limits of the parish.

5. The pastor then is responsible for proclamation within all the activities of his parish, in directing, guiding, exorcising, repenting, visiting, reconciling. He is there to continuously relate persons, with all their tribulations and joys, to the life of the community, the Body of Christ (soma tou Christou).

6. Finally, we believe there needs to be a new thrust for a continuing pastoral education program in each diocese aimed at both those who have and have not received the Orthodox seminary training.

THE PLACE AND ROLE OF THE PARISH IN THE CHURCH'S MISSION, TEACHING AND PREACHING

I

We agreed first of all that the missionary character of the Parish is rooted in its very nature. Although administratively and institutionally it is a part of the Church, sacramentally and spiritually it possesses the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is indeed the presence and epiphany of the whole Church, of the whole faith, and of the whole grace, as the whole Church the parish is called to preach and to teach the saving Gospel of Christ in the world and to be the witness of Christ in the particular conditions set for it by God.

In this sense the entire life of the parish is a mission for it exists not merely for the religious edification of its members, but above all for the salvation of the whole world from the power of the "prince of this world".

II

The living source of the fulfillment by the parish of this mission is the Liturgy whose very essence is the Epiphany and the communication of the Kingdom of God revealed in the life, the teaching, the death, the resurrection, and the glorification of Jesus Christ. The meaning of the Liturgy has been often obscured by one-sided interpretations, in which it was presented almost exclusively as a means of individual sanctification. It is urgent, therefore, that we rediscover the initial lex orandi of the Church in its cosmic, redemptive and eschatological dimensions. Behind this static and individualistic understanding of the Liturgy we must recover its dynamic nature and power. It edifies and fulfills the Church as the sacrament of the Kingdom, it transforms us, the members of the Church, into the witnesses of Christ and his co-workers.

III

Together with the rediscovery of the essential meaning of the Liturgy, we must rediscover the true nature and vocation of the laity in the Church. For too long the very term laikos carried with it connotations of passivity, of not belonging to the active, i.e. clerical, stratum in the Church. But we know that initially the term meant the belonging to the laos, the people of God - to "a chosen generation, royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people" which God "has called out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). We know that in the sacraments of Baptism and holy Chrismation each member of the Church was made into the Temple of the Holy Spirit, dedicated, consecrated to God and called to serve Him. We know, in other terms, that each laikos is, above all, called to be a witness, i.e. an active participant in the Church's mission in the world.

Some of the participants of our Consultation testified that today in several parts of the world the task of bearing testimony to Christ, of bringing new people from "darkness into marvelous light" of knowing Christ, is carried primarily by the laity. This fact alone should encourage us to rediscover the true nature and vocation of laity, their unique place in the overall missionary ministry of the Church. And again, there is no better way to that discovery than the study of the Church's leitourgia as truly concelebration, a corporate act in which each member of the Church finds his place in the edification of the Body of Christ.

IV

On the basis of this consensus we recommend:

a) a thorough reexamination by the Churches of methods and content of teaching. None of the urgent "rediscoveries" mentioned above: - that of the parish as mission, that of the Liturgy as the living source of the mission, that of the laity as ministry of apostolate, will be possible without, first, a deep change in the very understanding of the place of theology in our Church. For centuries theology was thought of as an exclusively clerical task. But the time has come for a declericalization of theology. If theology is, above all, the study of the saving Truth, it is needed by all members of the Church, is their essential spiritual food. To become this, however, it must revise its language, forms, methods, be made into a common concern of the Church. We had no time for a discussion of the practical problems involved in this change. Maybe a special consultation should be held to clarify this entire area. But we know that this change is needed by both clergy and laity, that - in a manner still to be defined - edification in the Church must become a continuous process of absorbing the saving truth and thereby entering it.

b) The participants of the Consultation felt very strongly the need for a pan-Orthodox consultation on liturgical problems facing the Church. For in this area, which constitutes the very heart of the Church's life, there exist great divergences among the Orthodox.

Of particular importance is the question concerning the lay participation in the Eucharist and, in general, the sacramental discipline of the Church. These divergences and discrepancies, however, reflect different theological traditions and require for their elimination a deep theological, pastoral and spiritual investigation and effort. No revival of the parish as a truly liturgical community fulfilling itself at Christ's Table in His Kingdom is possible without a eucharistic revival, which alone can give life and integrate with one another the gifts and charisms of all members of the Body of Christ.

c) While working together the participants of the Consultation became aware of a serious lack of communication between the Orthodox Churches. Some Churches require urgent help. Some others are capable of providing such help. The missionary efforts remain isolated, and the Orthodox witness in the world is fragmented. We call the Orthodox Churches to enter into communication and to take all necessary steps for mutual help. We request therefore the CWME to enlarge the scope of the Commission's Orthodox desk by empowering it with the mandate to receive from, and to give aid to, Orthodox Churches around the world, for training personnel for mission, for strengthening the libraries and supporting missionary activities.

The participants of the Consultation realized the tremendous diversity of situations and conditions in which the Orthodox Churches are called to fulfil their mission. However, if some of the difficulties the Churches are facing today are primarily external, rooted in today's social and political realities, some others seem to arise from hostility among Christian confessions. We think that this question must be placed on the agenda of a pan-Orthodox consultation, as well as on that of the Orthodox-Roman Catholic and Orthodox-Protestant dialogues.

d) The participants of the Consultation wish to stress that although the essence of the Christian mission is the proclamation to each human being of the Gospel of forgiveness, resurrection and life eternal, such proclamation is valid, credible and effective only if it is not isolated from the Gospel of love, by which Christians are recognized as Christ's disciples, and this means - from involvement and sharing in suffering wherever it may appear. For mission is the work of the same Holy Spirit which anointed Christ "to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach to captives, to recover the sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19).

While preaching the Gospel of the eternal Kingdom which is yet to come, we know that this Kingdom is already present in the midst of us and is realized every time we sacrifice ourselves for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

e) We fully realize that in our work we raised questions to which, given the time allocated to us we could not give any practical answers. But the questions are real and urgent. And therefore our final recommendation is that a pan-Orthodox centre be established for the study of problems common to all Orthodox Church - and more specifically those concerning the area of mission.

FACING THE WORLD REALITIES

Nowadays large sectors of society are living outside the church. These are not only the non-believers or the mass of the half-hearted Christians in our parishes, but those who have never known, or have lost the "sense of God" or who have lost the understanding of human values.

The secular news of the mass media has taken the place of prayer and substituted for the need to listen to the voice of God. We can observe how men and women of the 20th century desperately look - in the arts, eroticism, drugs, technology, or different forms of revolution - for a means of substituting the absolute. For this category of men and women the notion of God has become meaningless, the only reality and value being the world and the search for material progress. In face of this situation our words have become empty.

Therefore, we ask, in pain and suffering, how the notion of church and world can be better related so that our mission in the modern world is improved. The church is commissioned to change this worldly attitude to life, without forgetting that human person and dignity cannot be known fully without an authentic biblical revelation. It is her duty to affirm that the same world, where God is present and acting does not lack the signs of the breath of the Holy Spirit. Sanctity and hope still sustain the health of this world and are still capable of liberating man, who has become unhinged because of his anguish, and leading him back to God, the only source of joy and peace.

A number of clergy are frustrated before their mission as true evangelists. Others are taken by a certain agitation and a sort of escapism. Instead of preaching the word of salvation they prefer an easier apostolate. Their circle of interests is limited to the parishioners they happen to know. They rarely hold out their hands to "others" from outside, to those who remain on the fringe, to the unbelievers, for such a mission involves laborious work, difficult dialogue, thorough training, and demands patience, humility and serenity. Thus the majority of men are untouched by the presence or witness of Christians. In fact, in no society has missionary activity been an easy field of action. Past and present show almost the same attitude towards the saving word of God. Refusal or abdication are common reactions of the world. And yet, the priest has to work in such a world in season and out of season in order to save this world, neither hating the world nor withdrawing from it, with discouraging feelings.

Although our roots are in the Risen Christ, we as priests have contributed towards the alienation of the people from the reality of God by our own indifference to the needs of the world and also our unwillingness to respond to the tragedies of the world in a remedial and effective manner. We have to be penitent for our failures in the past and also submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit that at least from now onwards we must be godbearers and effective missionaries spreading the goodness of the Kingdom.

Jesus Christ, the Lord crucified outside the gates, beckons the bishops, the clergy and the people of God to share the pain of the pained, that they may listen to the Gospel of the Resurrection and be saved with those who stand in need of salvation. Therefore, we ask that the priest be fully the bearer of the Good News of the resurrection. The attitude of the priest of today must be different from that of the priest of yesterday. Faced with the disruptions and changes of our present society, the priest cannot remain passive and fatalistic. He must be informed as to his social duties and the new demands of our age, in which poverty presents new aspects and riches show itself in social injustices and hide behind other facades.

Today we are convinced of the fact that our witness to man can only be rendered as a divine witness of man to man. Thus our pastoral attitude can only be edifying if it manifests the love of God which shows itself in loving one's neighbour as oneself. This love should under no circumstances be possessive. It should rather manifest itself in prayer, service and the koinonia in the word of life.

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