Final Thanks

XX International Ecumenical Conference

Bose, 8 September 2012

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by ENZO BIANCHI

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on Orthodox spirituality

MAN–CUSTODIAN OF CREATION

Bose, Wednesday 5 - Saturday 8 September 2012

in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches

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To conclude this 20th conference — it seems only yesterday that with great hesitation and trembling we began this adventure twenty years ago — I simply wish to express profound thanks to the Lord. It is the Lord who always accompanies us in these conferences, it is the Lord who is in our midst with his mercy and his love, it is the Lord who allows us to meet, to listen to each other, to exchange gifts, the gifts that our Churches have and that ought to be shared among those who call themselves Christians. We will, of course, express our thanksgiving in prayer, but it is as well a profoundly felt sentiment in our hearts, hence we must by all means express it at the end of our meetings.

The ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew I said last June that “the real crisis is not in the environment, but in men’s hearts”. I believe that this is not only true, but that it is something that ought to engage us in a real and true responsibility, which is that of the Christian life. I try never to forget the words of bishop Ioann (Wendland), later metropolitan of Jaroslavl’ (†1989), representative of the Russian Church at the World Council of Churches. He introduced himself and the Russian Church with these words: “Brethren, we wish to thank you for having welcomed us among you. You will ask what is our contribution. We do not offer a new religious doctrine, we offer the faith of the early Church. Perhaps we have not been capable of living up to it. We offer it to you and we hope that you will be capable and that together we will be capable of producing the fruits that perhaps alone we have not been able to bear.”

These are humble and great words, which reveal what meeting each other, welcoming each other, tending towards communion in Christ can signify. Ecumenism is not a kind of compromise of tactics or of strategy, wrote metropolitan Anthony Bloom, a way of bringing together different Churches and of drawing believers; ecumenism is an attitude of the spirit that recognizes that Christ is the Lord of the world and that our role is to bring to this universe a truth that embraces, exalts it, that leads it to a beauty and a salvation that it did not know. The end of ecumenism is the transfiguration of the world, all together, because “God has conceived our salvation also through the material of the world, the material world, the visible world,” as St John Damascene writes (*On the sacred images,* 1,16).

The ecological crisis, as metropolitan Ioannis of Pergamum said, is not only the consequence of individualism, of opulence, of consumerism, but is above all a consequence of a pathology of man’s identity, who risks forgetting who he is and to what he is called. Our conferences, which from the very beginning have had the blessing of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and of the Patriarchate of Moscow, which have always supported and encouraged us, and now also the blessing of the other Orthodox Churches, would like to be an antidote in this direction, a humble possibility of encounter, a seed of hope!

So I truly feel the duty of thanking: the patriarch of Constantinople **Bartholomew I;** metropolitan delegate **Ioannis of Pergamum,** co-president of the international mixed commission for theological dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches; without forgetting archdeacon **John Chryssavghis** and archimandrite **Athenagoras,** who this morning, on the solemnity of the Birth of the Mother of God, celebrated the divine liturgy.

A thank you to the patriarch of Moscow **Cyril,** to metropolitan **German of Volgograd and Kamišin,** who has kindly returned in our midst, to bishop **Amvrosij of Gat?ina,** head of the delegation, with father **Porfirij of Solovki** and father **Aleksij Dikarev;** to bishop **Antonij of Boryspil’** of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, sent by metropolitan Volodymyr of Kiev, whom we greatly love and who is always in our prayers; to bishop **Stefan of Homel’ and Zlobin,** of the Belarusian

Exarchate, representing metropolitan Filaret of Minsk.

I also thank the Churches that have sent their representatives or messages of fraternal participation: the bishops who have attended this conference and who have visited us, among them cardinal **Roger Etchegaray;** archbishop **Antonio Mennini,** apostolic nuncio in Great Britain; bishop **Mansueto Bianchi** of Pistoia, president of the Commission of the Italian Bishops' Conference for ecumenism; mons. **Andrea Palmieri,** who is the new undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, whom we assure of our prayers for the great responsibility that he has assumed; metropolitan **George of Mount Lebanon,** who has honored us by returning among us, giving us his words of wisdom, reading the message of patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch, whose great suffering on account of the situation in Syria we know and to whom we are close with intercession to the Lord; bishop **Andrej of Remesiana** of the Serbian Patriarchate, auxiliary of patriarch Irinej and very dear to us, with whom we have ties of fraternal friendship and whom we encourage from the heart in his love for ecumenism and for dialogue; metropolitan **Serafim of Germany,** to whom we are much indebted for his faithfulness at our conferences, but also for all his care in his relations with our community and with the other Churches; bishop **Ioannis of Thermopylae,** punctually present in our conferences; **Melchisedek, bishop of Pittsburgh,** for who we pray heartily...

In sum, we truly thank everyone. The speakers have offered us papers f great spiritual and intellectual quality, which held the attention of our assembly of over 250 persons.

A special word of thanks to the members of the Scientific Committee, first of all to father **Michal van Parys,** who at the end has given us a concise summary of the proceedings, to professor **Antonio Rigo,** who is always of great stimulus and support; to **Hervé Legrand,** who offers us his wisdom; and to the other members.

I wish to express the joy of our community every time that it welcomes monks and nuns of eastern and western monasteries, with whom we have a sincere communion in perseverant following of the Lord.

We thank the interpreters, the technician, our friends who faithfully return, all the participants.

We dare to say: good-by until next year, in the same week of September. By that time the Acts of this conference, we hope, will have been published.

As for the theme of our next conference, if you have nay suggestions, we will be glad to receive and evaluate them. The Scientific Committee will meet on 4–5 November.

Sincere thanks, from me, from the Community. I want to express to you all our friendship, all our desire that we may see one another not only in these conferences, that we may see one another again during our earthly course. Every moment of the year our community is open to receive you, to taste together how good and how sweet is the Lord. Thank you truly!

ENZO BIANCHI