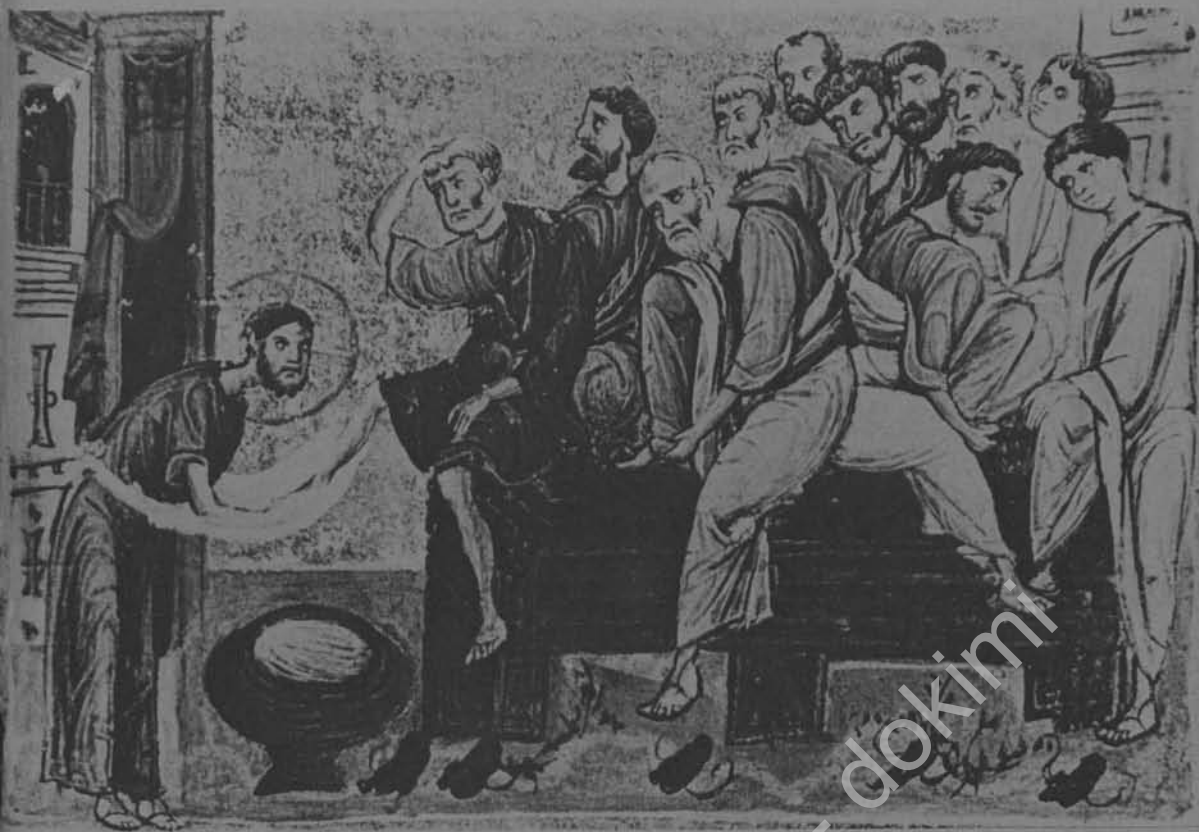


# AN ORTHODOX APPROACH TO DIACONIA

Consultation on Church and Service



Orthodox Academy of Crete, November 20-25, 1978

# Liturgical Diaconia

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We are asked at this Consultation:

- a) To give a theological interpretation of Christian service;
- b) To get acquainted with various forms of diaconal service by the Orthodox churches in the midst of their own societies;
- c) To find ways and means for further cooperation of the Orthodox Churches and CICARWS in the field of diaconia; diaconia being understood in the biblical sense of service to humankind.

In this introductory address, therefore, I shall have to refer to all three points, which are in various ways closely interrelated. The first two I wish to examine by way of a brief biblical and historical analysis, which may perhaps help us to see which WCC diaconal efforts Orthodoxy can share in more actively and effectively. Starting from the contemporary situation, I also wish to take into account here the global dimension of Christian diaconia today as 'service to humankind'. In a purely introductory address I shall have to restrict myself, of course, to considerations which directly affect the WCC's present priorities as established at Nairobi with Orthodox participation and with reference to the work of CICARWS as presented in Document No. 1 of the Strasbourg Commission meeting of July 1978 (Be Doers of the Word and not Hearers only). Account will be taken of the relevant literature as far as possible.

## In face of the Crisis

The Declaration made by the Ecumenical Patriarchate on August 16, 1973 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the World Council of Churches 1) referred to 'critical developments' in the life and work of the WCC which had led to a much discussed polarization. The Declaration states that the WCC 'is constantly tending to move into new fields of activity. Its original calling to serve the churches in their witness and service to individuals, nations, and to the world as a whole for the sake of their salvation has naturally led it to see its work as touching on many facets of the life of a world in travail. The problems of this world are inevitably the Council's problems, because they are the problems of the Christian churches themselves.' 2)

Yet, it is in a onesided emphasis on these problems in our ecumenical commitment that the crisis 'threatening the ecumenical movement as a whole and the WCC in particular takes its root. For, while some regard the WCC as simply a 'forum for ... theological discussion' others consider it 'an organization pursuing certain social and political aims on behalf of the churches' and, employing a questionable method, as only looking into 'the theological considerations to do with those aims in so far as they can help to justify positions the Council and the churches have already adopted.' 3)

The Message of the Russian Patriarchate to the Central Committee on the same occasion (August 7, 1973) (4), which refers especially to the Bangkok Conference and its 'Letter to the Churches' was even more precise in locating the seat of the crisis in a 'deliberate trend towards onesided and detrimental understanding of salvation in the spirit of a boundless 'horizontalism' (5), so that 'there is no room left for the main 'vertical' dimensions.'

According to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 'the impasse to which this polarization is leading can only be overcome if a proper balance is held between these equally extreme interpretations of the aims, hopes, indeed of the very raison d'être of the WCC'. (6)

Clearly, it is not just the World Council of Churches and its relations to the member churches which is in question in this conflict about dimensions (the horizontal and the vertical). The conflict (Martha and Mary) which is a fairly ancient one though posed more sharply and freshly today in the context of our modern problems, stirs the whole of Christendom in various ways as also the whole world of religions generally. Some can only regard 'verticalism' as an alibi for the evasion of social and political responsibilities and as an attempt to shore up the questionable status quo, while others appear to regard 'horizontalism' as simply an ideologically loaded secularization.

Although it is now five years since the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued its Declaration, the crisis seems to some not only not to have been overcome, but to have actually worsened. The World Council of Churches finds itself subjected to severe and growing criticism not only on the part of its member churches, but also from academic and political circles as well as from the general public.

As members of the WCC, the Orthodox Churches have meanwhile continued to share in the world-wide diaconal decisions and actions of the WCC. As a result, they too have been drawn into the accompanying tensions. A consultation of this kind, therefore, was long overdue. The seriousness and extent of the crisis underline the heavy responsibility which rests not just on your introductory speaker but also and above all on the Consultation itself. Clearly, therefore, we cannot proceed further in our reflections without first of all having laid our concerns humbly at God's feet and placing them in the light of His Word as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and authentically reflected in the life of the Church.

#### Biblical and Theological View of Diaconia

From the history of the term 'diakonia' itself, it is clear that the ancient world's scale of values was reversed by Christianity and new ideals established.

The secular Greek idea of diakonein (waiting at table and, in its extended sense, providing for the maintenance of life) was associated with an inferior human activity unsuitable for all but slaves. But when related to the polis (service of one's country, city, or to the State as a statesman, with a view to doing the service entrusted to him and not to dominate), to the cosmos (in the sense of everything the human being, as microcosm, must do so as not to disturb the unity and harmony

of the whole world, the macrocosm) and to God (e.g. the wise man as God's servant, instrument and witness, in Aristotle and Hellenism), the term diakonia took on a broader meaning which found an echo in early Christian writings and in the patristic literature. But in the sense of a sacrifice of oneself for the sake of the other, the term diakonia still had a long way to go: to rule rather than to serve was still what best befitted man. "How can a man who has to serve someone possibly be happy?" asked the Sophists.

In Judaism, on the other hand, the notion of service was strongly influenced by the oriental spirit, according to which it was not demeaning to perform services for another, least of all when that other is a great lord and even God Himself. It is significant that the LXX, which does not use the word diakonein, employs the term douleuein or, for Hebrew words referring to the cult, the terms leitourgein and latreuein. There are many examples of a helpful attitude to the neighbour in the Old Testament. But in late Judaism the supreme command of love to the neighbour (Lv. 19:18) tended to fade into the background and, as a result of the contrast drawn by the Pharisees between the just and the unjust, was eventually almost completely obscured. Service came to be practiced more as a work which is meritorious in God's sight and less as an act of sacrifice.

Into this pitiless world came the Gospel as the Good News of God's great love and mercy. To demonstrate and attest this love to all men is the task of Christian diaconia.

The term diakonein is sometimes used in the N.T. in its original sense of waiting at table. But at the same time it undergoes a radical change of content.

Firstly, the verbal connection made in Hellenistic Judaism between service and self-service was completely abandoned. On the 'natural' scale of values, the one who sits down and is waited on at table has more 'standing' than the one who serves him. 'But I am among you as one who serves' (Rev. 22:26f); precisely as He who, though Lord of the Kingdom of God (v. 29), voluntarily assumes the role of servant, thereby turns upside down the human style of values and shows the way to true greatness which is not the way of the princes and rulers of this world (Mk. 10:42; Mt. 20:25) but the way of the cross which He himself travels: 'If any of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to be first, he must become the slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people' (Mk. 10:43-45. Cf. the story of the feet-washing). This is certainly not just the establishment of a new pattern of ethical behaviour, a new 'law' whose fulfilment would be nothing more than a 'service which brings death' and condemnation. What Jesus seeks rather is a 'service of the Spirit', a 'service by which men are declared innocent', which surpasses in glory anything known in the past (2 Cor. 3:7-9).

Diakonia thus becomes a basic trinitarian-christological-ecclesiological and eschatological concept. As love of the neighbour, diakonia is the fruit of God's love: the love of God to humanity which, in Jesus Christ,

has revealed the type of the true deacon through kenosis and cross; and the love of man to God which is measured by and revealed in service to the neighbour.

True diaconia, therefore, can only be properly understood in terms of God's mercy (eleos) and only properly be exercised by the power of God's mercy (eleos). In a world which, as I have said, is pitiless, its primary purpose is to communicate an atmosphere of mercy (eleos); the kind of atmosphere we experience in our liturgical life. The Kyrie eleison of the congregation which permeates every act of Christian worship as a constant dominant theme expresses its confidence in God's unspeakable mercy, His grace and favour, His goodness and faithfulness, the mercy, compassion, blessing and philanthropy whose 'fullness' we have experienced and are to communicate to others. Just as the creation of the world and of humankind is an expression of God's mercy (eleos), so too the restoration (apokatastasis, palingenesia) and the redemption (soteria, lytrosis), the whole economy of salvation, are due to the mercy (eleos) of God towards which the congregation too is eschatologically oriented, looking for the eleos of its Lord (Jude 21). The Church itself is the eleemene on which God has showed mercy (7). The Church prays for the Jews that God may have mercy on them (8). Christians show mercy to pagans in the hope of winning them to Christianity (9). St. Isaac the Syrian would later describe eleemosyne as 'the ardour of the heart's love for the creation, for the animals, for man, indeed, even for the devil!' Human beings are to drink this pure wine until they are drunk with it and then really live!

In this universal atmosphere of love, of course, diaconia is neither simply a distribution of alms nor welfare service, though this too is certainly recommended frequently in the NT as a sign of genuine love. But the term diaconia actually becomes the very essence of all Christian love in action (service in relation to all human needs) as well as the essence of genuine discipleship (unity of diaconia, obedience and witness). The fact that the very first deacons did not refrain from preaching altogether (Stephen!) and that even the apostles continued to consider works of love as their task (e.g. the organization and delivery of collections, 2 Cor. 8:19-20) shows the unity of preaching and service, and the essential correlation of ministries in the life of the Church. Sharing one's daily bread and offering the Gospel as the bread of life are inseparable!

It is in this sense that diakonein takes place in the congregation and with a view to its mission to the world. It is in the life of the congregation that the one Spirit distributes charisms and ministries (1 Cor. 12) in order that the members of the Body may in unity care for one another, share each other's joy and burdens, for the upbuilding of the Church. Every charisma is given for a specific service, bestowed by God in the richness of His grace and exercised only by the power of the Spirit, in the one Lord. No charism and no diaconia has any arbitrary existence or any independent function, any more than does any member of the Body. No member can ignore the whole body or claim to represent or lead it alone. Nor is any diaconia to be despised or relegated to the margin by the others (10). Finally, the various diaconia are not meant to foster any kind of works-righteousness or

self-glorification. They are to be employed exclusively to the glory of God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 4:10f.). Unless this eschatological dimension is kept steadily and clearly in view, the servant of God is in grave danger of becoming the diakonos of Satan (2 Cor. 11:14) and of sin (Gal. 2:17).

I wish to draw attention here to one final aspect of diaconia, in the light of the choice of the first seven deacons (Acts 6). When thinking of this appointment of deacons, we tend to dwell on its importance in relieving the apostles of part of their burden; the apostles were to devote all their energy to preaching. But the aspect of that choice seems to me especially relevant today. As you remember, the Hellenistic widows were then being overlooked at mealtimes, i.e. when the daily distribution of food took place. Probably under Pharisaic influence (the Jew could not eat at the same table with those who did not observe the law, i.e. with 'sinners'), discrimination and marginalization betrayed their presence in the early Church! It is therefore important to understand the decision of the Christian community correctly; it filled all seven 'places' with Hellenistic disciples! In other words, with representatives of the oppressed minority! This was a radical decision: 'For the committing of this service to the Hellenistic Seven surely implies rather more than a purely external release of the leaders of the community from administrative duties.' (11)

Understood in this sense, diaconia became the final and exclusive criterion for admission into the heavenly kingdom and to fellowship with God (parable of the Last Judgement, Mt. 25:31-46): Christ identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner.

'Listen, you nations, listen carefully, you Christians !  
It is not with his own voice that the Lord speaks but  
through the mouth of slaves ...' Basil the Great, PG 31,  
324.

The development of the diaconal ministry and the shift of emphasis from the social to the liturgical cannot be discussed here. The ministry of deaconesses will be referred to later on.

Let me conclude this brief survey by way of summary with a final remark. As discipleship of Christ, Christian diaconia means action on behalf of Christ's brothers and sisters, those whom this world regards as the 'least', action even including the sacrifice of one's life. 'To serve the neighbour, Christ, or God, is one and the same thing. The resultant fellowship with the Father is the reward of such service'. (12)

### Historical Testimony

If we are seeking ways in which Orthodoxy can cooperate creatively in resolving the present crisis in the WCC and in the advancement of its

diaconal efforts, we must first of all examine the history of our own Church and see how our forebears responded to the biblical commission to service in the course of the centuries. This retrospect is also necessary to the extent that the crisis in the WCC is, we believe, to be traced back, at least partly, to the fact that in its social and diaconal work, the WCC obviously started with the assumption that all its members churches were able to agree together in giving a universal Christian answer to the questions arising at any given time. That assumption was certainly not true! Do we even have a common basis of life in the same way that we have tried to formulate a common basis of faith ?

In view of the cultural differences which exist, it is doubtful whether Orthodoxy itself is able today to offer a single common answer to modern social questions. The only thing we can say with safety is that the entire body of Orthodoxy is permeated and the Orthodox communion shaped and held together as a single unity of life and meaning, by one formative principle which constitutes a unifying factor.

Elsewhere I have described this formal principle as the liturgical principle (13). I would like to retain this description here, convinced as I am that it expresses the quintessence of the Orthodox awareness of itself, of humanity and the world. I realize, of course, that when isolated from the total context such concepts can be misleading and even degenerate into mere clichés and fashionable slogans (as e.g. with the terms "eucharist", "spirituality", pleroma, "doxology" and so on, and more recently with the term "conciliarity"). But I believe we can use this term "liturgical" to show why and in what sense every Christian diaconia to the world, to culture, to politics, to human beings, must be a liturgical diaconia.

By 'liturgy' I do not simply mean any specific cultic act but a definite life style which, while certainly rooted and focussed in the eucharistic liturgy, also embraces the whole life of the person. For Orthodox Christians, liturgy in this sense means 'bringing the heavenly into the earthly, in the way that John Chrysostom suggested when he heard the singing of the heavenly choirs and the harmonies of an eternal song in the very midst of the things of time' (14). But at the same time liturgy is the elevation of the earthly into the heavenly places, the fulfilment of every immanent creaturely telos (goal) and its transfiguration by grace. In this eucharistic liturgy the destined sanctification of humanity and the cosmos, and therefore their consummation and fellowship with God (theosis), are realized through the self-offering of the incarnate Logos, in anticipation of the eschatological hope.

The main characteristic of liturgy, understood and experienced in this way, is its catholicity. By its very nature, the ecclesiological concept of catholicity is christological concept. When St. Ignatius says 'wheresoever Christ Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church' (15). He is certainly referring to the hypostatic union of Christ with his Body the Church and to its unadulterated and intact pleroma

Without entering into a discussion of this pleroma, I would like to

formulate here the main thesis of this address:

In the context of the Church's liturgical understanding of humanity, world, society and history, any division between verticalism and horizontalism is not merely absurd but actually heretical !

It is just as absurd and heretical as the distinction (in the sense of divorce) between salvation history and world history, between the cross and resurrection, between the divine and human nature of Christ or of the Church, or between faith and works. It is high time we stopped playing the one off against the other! This is a game in which there are only losers!

One of the things for which we are most indebted to the church fathers, particularly to the Cappadocians, is the way in which they overcame these dualisms and established firm standing ground for us and for our dealing with earthly problems. Starting from the biblical theology of creation, from Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection, and on the basis of confidence in the 'new ktisis' ('new creation') and the metamorphosis of transfiguration of the cosmos by the power of the Spirit, they exorcised the demons from the ancient world picture with its distorted dualistic approach. This enabled them to wage a successful struggle against ancient philosophies of nature, against the Stoics and the Gnostics, and to equip us with spiritual weapons to enable us, too, to continue the struggle today against modern dualisms against deism, pantheism and materialism. This patristic view of the world and history was aptly summed up by Metropolitan Ignatios of Latakia at the Uppsala Assembly in his address on the main theme. He stressed that:

- 'the structure of the world is dialogical in the proper theological sense of the Logos';
- 'the structure of the world is also diabolic in the proper theological sense of the word';
- 'the structure of history is Pascal, in the proper theological sense of the "passage" from this world to a new creation'; and
- 'the present structure of history is already a parousia-structure, in the proper theological sense of the Presence (parousia) of God-with-men'. (16)

How then can we possibly let ourselves be seduced by ancient and modern heresies, by succumbing for example to the dichotomies already mentioned and thereby asserting that the 'secular' is irrelevant to salvation, including in the term 'secular' such things as hunger and illiteracy, injustice and the absence of peace and freedom!

Are we to forget the fundamental trinitarian and christological decisions - and therefore soteriological, social and ethical decisions - of the early ecumenical councils? Are we to be deceived by the dualism of the Nestorians (divorce between the divine and the human) or by the monism of the Monophysites (absorption of the human by the divine)? The Church, on the contrary, has firmly maintained the theandric nature of Christ and frequently testified that any divorce here would certainly end up in heresy, as certainly as would any confusion or change! In my view,



this sense of catholicity and unity is of fundamental importance for the problems of this Consultation. For only as we have this sense of catholicity and unity will diaconia keep the whole human being in view of the midst of the totality of factors and conditions of our earthly existence and only by this sense of catholicity and unity can we preserve the necessary balance and correlation in our practical deployment of the ministries and charisms in the Christian community for the life and upbuilding of the Church and for the salvation of the world.

#### Microdimensional and Macrodimensional Diaconia

By microdimensional diaconia I mean all the concrete measures taken by the Church to remedy the concrete distress of individuals and groups by concrete means. I include here, above all, the charitable institutions and organizations which, as is well known, the Church began very early to create in order to deal effectively with human needs of various kinds. There is no need for me to describe these charitable activities in detail, but three points should be kept in mind in our discussions:

Firstly: most of these charitable institutions were established in the neighbourhood around the church as an extension of the sacred altar to include concrete human distress and, indeed, as something central to the life of the whole Christian community, since charitable work is also its task and not the sole responsibility (monopoly!) of the bishop or the clergy.

Secondly: the Church always showed remarkable flexibility, great freedom, alertness and inventiveness in abandoning old methods and patterns of charitable work and employing new ones depending on the needs and conditions at any given time.

Thirdly: the Church did not regard charitable activity as its own exclusive privilege or as a bone of contention and occasion of tension between itself and the State and society but on the contrary sought to encourage both State and society to assume their responsibilities for people in need; it was always the Church's concern to permeate with the spirit of mercy (eleos) the entire machinery of government and society (administration, legal system, legal practice, police and prison services, social organizations). This last concern of the Church, especially, constitutes part of the social activity which we have labelled 'microdimensional diaconia'. Certainly, the Church realized that, however vital and impressive its microdimensional diaconia might be and however clear a sign of the vigour of the Christian community, this service could never even approximately deal effectively with the social needs requiring to be met. Besides this, the Church had a much broader conception of its diaconal task right from the beginning; understanding it as a macrodimensional diaconia as well, and this in three directions:

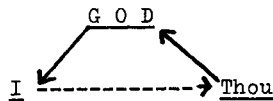
- as the development of a fellowship of solidarity;
- as a mission with a diaconal dimension; and
- as a commitment to social justice and liberation.

## Development of a Fellowship of Solidarity

In the liturgical life the Christian experiences in a quite special way his or her personal participation in the koinonia of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). He knows that he is called not to order his life around some 'law' or to carry out certain 'commandments' but rather to rise to a new way of living, in Christ: to be crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:19), to be raised up and made alive by Him (Eph. 2:6) to put on Christ like a garment (Gal. 3:27), to share as a child of God in the inheritance of God (Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:14; Eph. 1:18; Col. 3:24; Pet. 1:4). He therefore knows he is incorporated into a worldwide fellowship.

From this liturgical sense of catholicity and unity have sprung the great currents which have permeated the whole earth, shaping cultures and establishing communities.

In the liturgy the Orthodox Christian learns, for example, that he or she does not stand in the presence of God as an individual, concerned only with his or her own justification (Augustinian-Reformation anguish of mind). On the contrary, he (she) stands as a person who exists in loving interpersonal communion with fellow human-beings and therefore with God, in harmony with the basic principle of Orthodox soteriology and social ethics which may be represented diagrammatically as follows:



My movement in love towards my fellow-human 'Thou' is in fact possible because God has taken the initial movement in love towards me, a movement to which I can only respond via my neighbour (Mt. 5:23f.) (17).

'As I was reading the holy Gospel, I also came across the place where our Christ says that no Christian man or woman can care for him or herself alone or how he or she can be saved, but must also care for the brothers and sisters that they may not be damned' (18)

The spiritual room in which the individual also feels accepted and safe is neither the bliss or damnation of the individual but the transfiguration of the creation and the theosis of the whole humanity.

'We were all in Christ and the common prosopon (face) of humanity is raised again to live towards Him' (19)

This security in the eucharistic koinonia of the universal fellowship

of humanity has particularly profound consequences for social diaconia, when diaconia means far more than just the distribution of charity. From a purely empirical sociological analysis it is easy to show how wisely the Church adopted ancient forms and patterns of social life and filled them with new meaning or else created new structures (mostly with their source in liturgy) in order to meet various needs. Solidarity - the main characteristic of these structures - still remains intact to a large extent in the cities even today, despite the corrosive effects of the urbanization and rationalization of human life. Let me give a few points to illustrate this form of macrodimensional diaconia.

### Suffering transfigured

Secure in the eucharistic fellowship of solidarity, there is no longer any need for the human being to bear suffering or joy in isolation and loneliness. As you know, the form of the liturgy preserves certain elements of ancient drama. But what was presented as inner longing and inner tension in the mystery cults is here revealed as the reality of the new creation, as the victory of the cross over death, as the expression of resurrection. A theology of illuminated suffering, expressed poetry, music and architecture symbolizing the economy of salvation, helps the Christian to find a deeper meaning in his own suffering and humbly and confidently to bear both personal and collective suffering in the light of the cross, resurrection and eschatological hope.

Here you experience the great compassion of Christ and of God 'who became what you were that you might become what you were not' (20) Here we see Christ 'crowned with glory and honour because of the death he suffered' (Heb. 2:9), sharing our 'flesh and blood', destroying the devil who had the power over death (2:14), setting free all those who were slaves throughout their lives because they were afraid of death (2:15), as their faithful and merciful High Priest in his service to God (2:17), as the 'great artist of suffering', as Chrysostom calls him (21). For the Christian community, therefore, the path of suffering (martyrium) of Christ and his saints remains the permanent sign of the unlimited solidarity of God with his people through all their pain and distress and his gift to them of his Spirit whom we experience above all as the great Comforter (Paraclete). Without this confidence, it would be almost impossible to explain the endurance and patience of most, indeed of all, Orthodox peoples in face of the often cruel calamities which have marked their several histories.

With the security of the same fellowship of solidarity, Christians learn as brothers and sisters to bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2). Above all, here the strong learn to bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom 15:1). For Christians live on the basis of their acceptance by Christ and must also themselves live by the acceptance of others (Rom. 15:17), without distinction, without restriction and unconditionally, so that the Gentiles may learn to praise God for his mercy (15:9). Thanks to this new ethos, as is well known, a rich variety of forms of voluntary solidarity and mutual aid have been developed for the relief of distress in all sorts of situations, and not only distress of a material kind: 'The primary eleemosyne is zealously to rebuke the brethren' (22).

What institution would ever have been able to shoulder spiritual or material needs or needs of any kind, had not the Spirit of mercy (eleos) produced this fellowship of solidarity and the security it affords!

But important as the diaconia in suffering is, the diaconia in human joys is just as important (1 Cor. 12:26; Rom. 12:15; 13:6). It is perhaps easier for a human being to bear suffering alone than to rejoice alone! Within the fellowship of solidarity, however, no one need to be shut up alone in a private sphere. Indeed it is impossible for anyone to do so, since the personal is also at the same time the supra-personal fellowship.

In this connection it should be emphasized very strongly that, particularly in the spiritual breathing space of the eucharistic fellowship, the sense of festival in the setting of so many feast days (saints' days) and liturgical ceremonies has filled human life with a wealth of joy and happiness. In the atmosphere of liturgical festival, personal relations are deepened, tensions resolved, conflicts settled, peace established, forgiveness practised. Here, above all, people experience that distinctive tranquility and inner happiness which is poles apart from the inebriation procured by the modern pleasure industry. Particularly in face of the human quest for happiness and joy (silent families glued to the TV screen, leisure occupations and tourism, drugs, sexism, materialism and consumerism) we are all the more sharply aware of the need for a diaconia of joy in the context of real eucharistic koinonia.

In the atmosphere created by this coenobitic (koino-biotic) spirit of Orthodoxy we also become acquainted with the wide and varied range of impulses which permeate, cement and fructify the whole of life, both private and public. Think, for example, of the sanctification and deepening of the 'natural' orders such as kinship by means of the sacraments of marriage and baptism (including spiritual kinship in the shape of marriage witnesses, baptismal sponsors) leading to an extension of personal communication and solidarity which is also of importance from a sociological standpoint. Think also of how the ancient Church, and even monasticism, promoted a rich variety of forms and patterns of solidarity and even created them, whereby social as well as purely economic concerns could be satisfied in brotherly mutuality, often in surprisingly modern ways. In the Byzantine and post-Byzantine period (Turkish occupation), our people developed this coenobitic (koino-biotic) tradition further with remarkable success. Think finally of how even the modern cooperatives, so important for economic and social development generally, in many places originated and found their inspiration and creative power in precisely this coenobitic spirit and can still find it today, as a number of contemporary examples here in Crete can demonstrate (23).

All these affirmations add up to this: Christian diaconia can never be limited exclusively to institutionalized welfare work, the distribution of charity and the care of the individual. In this merciless world of selfishness, hostility and universal strife, the task of Christian diaconia - in the sense of macrodimensional diaconia - is rather to bear witness to the mercy of God (eleos), to develop structures of fellowship in solidarity and to seek to illuminate the darkness of human attitudes and social cultures (of justice, economy, labour, etc.)

with the glimmer of Christian love and hope. Not with any idea of transforming this earth into a paradise but in order to prevent it from turning into a human hell.

### Mission with a Diaconal Dimension

To be consistent, those who affirm that the Gospel is only concerned with the salvation of the soul ought to condemn the entire Christian mission as a mistake. For Christian evangelism has always gone hand in hand with Christian diakonia in the sense I have described. Although we repudiate today the frequent misuse of diakonia as a means of proselytizing, it is impossible to detect any divorce between witness and service in the history of the church. On the contrary, the Church has always understood mission as the proclamation of the Good News of the liberation and redemption of the whole human being. This is why the Church has in the past and still for the most part today also carried out its missionary diakonia as a contribution to the transformation of society as a whole. It is unnecessary to give examples of this understanding of missionary activity from the history of our Orthodox church. I merely point out that it was actually monasticism, with its denial of and withdrawal from the world, which provided the most powerful impulses to diaconal missionary activity and provided an outstanding example of concern for the preservation and creative development of society and culture (agriculture, crafts, manuscripts - to which we owe almost all we know of the ancient - pagan! - world; large-scale charitable undertakings in the monasteries and in their neighbourhood, educational work, arts and sciences). Above all the monks were aware - none more so - that cultura agri, cultura animi, and cultura Dei belong inseparably together.

### Commitment to Social Justice and Liberation

What macrodimensional diakonia means can best be illustrated by the leading church fathers who themselves developed a wide range of microdimensional diakonia. Their great concern for the whole human being and for mankind as a whole is well-known.

Evil in its myriad forms and with its far-reaching consequences grieved them deeply. Certainly they lived at a time which was not yet ready for radical changes. But this does not mean that we are free, today especially, to mistake, minimize, misinterpret ideologically, or even ignore altogether the deeper springs of their concern for a more just, free and peaceful world. Especially now that modern social research has more or less uncovered the structures of evil and humankind is beginning to engage resolutely in a life and death struggle for its liberation and for a worthier human world.

The first lesson we must learn from the church fathers is that it is high time we gave up rebuking evil cautiously and non-committally in abstract rhetorical language! The church fathers stigmatized the concrete forms and consequences of sin and named those responsible by name. They did so with prophetic zeal and spiritual power. They sided uncompromisingly with the hungry, the persecuted, the debtors, the oppressed, the deprived. They were not preoccupied with the Church privileges, its stability, its 'good' relations with the economic and political powers, not even with their own lives, which most of them

also exposed to persecution, martyrdom and death. But not even the loss of the Church's great representatives, not even the conflicts which they provoked in the course of this struggle, ever in the long run damaged the Church. On the contrary, the Church was built up by the blood and suffering of its children and renewed by every struggle for truth and justice, emerging from these struggles all the stronger. Even in this present century, Orthodoxy has had very painful reminders of this experience. A Church which is no longer willing to risk anything has perhaps already lost everything!

A second lesson we must learn from the church fathers is how to guard ourselves from the above-mentioned quarrel about the dimensions. The church fathers were supremely aware of the eschatological dimension of salvation, the eschatological dimension of the world and of the historical Church itself. They knew that the supreme criterion both for the contemporary world and the contemporary Church lies in the eschaton. Unlike the chiliasta and the messianic enthusiasts, they were not in a hurry to build the kingdom of God in this earth. And they, more than others, recognized sin for what it really is.

But the church fathers also knew why the masses in their days were tormented with poverty, why injustice was so rampant, why nations groaned under tyrants. They were not therefore confronted with the false alternatives of the sort we hear today: Is sin something within man or something all around him? Should the Christian heal himself first or society? At this point I want you to listen to what the church fathers have to say.

They did not glorify poverty as such, nor did they condemn riches as such. Nor did they cherish any illusions.

'...The Lord speaks through the mouth of slaves...: let not us who are rational creatures be more cruel than the irrational animals. The animals make use of everything which grows naturally on the earth as something they have in common... whereas we clutch to ourselves alone what belongs to all... Let us emulate the pattern of life of the first Christians who had all things in common: property, spiritual life, harmony, the common board, indivisible brotherhood, unfeigned love, making them, the many bodies, into the one Body, uniting the many sould into a single harmony.' (24)

'Tell me, what is yours, where did you get it? Where did you obtain these goods and bring them into your life?... If you say, they came to you automatically, you are wicked because you refuse to acknowledge your Creator and show Him no gratitude, who is the Giver. But if you acknowledge that you have it from God, explain why you keep it to yourself. Is God unjust - distributing to us inequitably the necessities of life? Why do you become richer and richer while others are forced to beg? Surely not because you reap the reward of your honesty and thrift and another is honoured for his great struggles?' (25)

'The religious person is not the person who distributes alms to many but one who treats no one unjustly.' (26)

'I tell you, wealth is an offence, since no one ever grew rich walking the straight way of Christ. He has either wronged some individual or else all his fellow human beings together... Do not therefore follow criminal and lawless ways so as to be able to eat and drink and satiate yourself more than your neighbour or to clothe yourself more lavishly than him... If Christ himself had only these two things (i.e. bread and water) and a garment to clothe himself against the cold, anything more than this is a fork of the devil. Rejoice therefore in your poverty and complain not. For only those who have lost sight of the vision of heaven have a blaspheming mouth and a burdened heart thirsting for the goods of this world.' (27)

'To say "this is mine" and "this is thine" is to utter empty (meaningless) words. Money belongs to God wherever we get it from... Even your soul belongs to God, how then can the money be yours?' (28)

'Have you observed how gold prevents people from being human, transforming them rather into beasts and demons?' (29)

'The bread you have belongs to the hungry, the clothing you have stored away in your cupboard belongs to the naked, the shoes you no longer need belong to the barefooted, the silver you have buried away belongs to the person who needs it. You wrong so many people to whom you could have given these things.' (30)

(The Greek word tokos means 'confinement', 'delivery', 'birth' but also 'rent' or 'interest').

'It seems to me that tokos (=interest, in the sense of the product of growth) was so called because of the fertility of evil. Or perhaps because of the griefs and troubles caused by interest in the souls of those who borrow money. Interest for interest; evil offspring from evil parents. Otters, it is said, are born by devouring the mother otter's belly. Interest, too, is bred by devouring the debtor's home. Seeds produce their shoots in due season whereas interest is born today and starts proliferating immediately.' (31)

'Hades has never said: that's enough! Neither have the avaricious ever said: that's enough!' (32)

It must also be remembered that the Orthodox has always supported and promoted the struggle of its peoples to preserve or to recover their freedom. It counts among the most glorious pages of its history those which tell how it comforted and encouraged its members in the great decisive moments of their history; as for example when in times of enslavement the monasteries were transformed into centres of resistance, or when the Orthodox clergy played their part in clandestine liberation organizations, kept underground schools going in order to preserve the faith and national identity, organized rebellions and even used force in conducting them sometimes taking over the national leadership (ethnarch) when the political leadership failed or broke down altogether. Will anyone who thinks that salvation means only the salvation of the soul disapprove of this concrete activity of the Church?

Finally, it should be pointed out that the Orthodox Church has consistently opposed all forms of racism. Typical of this opposition is an encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarch Metrophanes III to the Orthodox Christians of Crete in the year 1568. Crete was then still under Venetian rule. A quarrel between the Cretan Jews and Venice over the payment of certain debts provoked the Venetians to adopt antisemitic measures. The wave of antisemitism seems to have been initiated by the Latin Patriarch of Venice, Laurentius Justinian. The Jews had appealed to the Ecumenical Patriarchate complaining that even Orthodox Christians had taken part in hostilities towards the Jews. Whereupon the Patriarch wrote that those who unjustly treat the Jews in any way are excommunicated and condemned, since injustice and defamation were wrong whoever the victim was, and no one who committed such wrong could possibly regard himself as innocent on the pretext that he had only wronged someone of another faith and not one of the faithful. For even our Lord Jesus Christ tells us in the Gospel not to bully or blackmail anyone (Lk. 3:14) .. 'making no distinction and not permitting Christians to deal unjustly with people of other faiths.' At the very time when Gobineau and Chamberlin were stirring up Europe with racist heresies, the Synod of Constantinople (1872) officially condemned contemporary racism with its nationalistic overtones (ethnopyletismos) - if not the first, certainly one of the first official pronouncements of the Christian Church on this subject!

#### Dilemma or False Dilemma ?

In view of what has been said about the biblical, theological and historical aspects of our theme, the question arises as to why this conflict about the dimensions ever broke out at all and inevitably led to the present polarization.

We find ourselves presented with a dilemma: contemplation or commitment? The almost automatic alienation of contemporary men and women, our congregations, our Church under the pressure of 'secular' anxieties, the endemic crisis and inflation of our economies, the absolute claims made on us by political and ideological conflicts, our captivity to the mass media, our 'wealth' or possessions and tasks turns out to be appalling emptiness! The popularity of the promises of oriental religions is an alarm signal which no one can ignore! This situation prompts many among us to point to the 'one thing needful' (Lk. 10:42). In this context it is not difficult for us to understand the stringent demands of Christian asceticism:

'But you, if your wish to remain serene, must become like the cherubim who pay no attention at all to everyday things. Always remember that no one exists on earth except you and God... for unless one hardens one's heart and resolutely avoids charitable works (eleemosyne) and all other worldly anxieties and persists in prayer only ... it is impossible to be free from unrest and fretfulness and to devote oneself to tranquility. If it then occurs to you to care for someone for virtue's sake, which will destroy your calm and peace of mind, say to yourself: Certainly the way of love and charity for God's sake is good; but also for God's sake I do not



choose this way. Once a monk was running after a hermit and called to him: "Wait, Father! It is for God's sake that I'm running after you!" to which the hermit replied: "And it is for God's sake that I am running away from you!" Abbas Arsenios - for God's sake - would receive no one... He chose for himself silence and calm. He was consequently able to commune with the Holy Spirit in the very midst of the sea of this life... for complete silence is absolutely essential for tranquillity.' (33)

We know, of course, that such severity is appropriate for the monastic life and ascetism. But many of us make the mistake of turning such recommendations into general principles for the life of the Church as a whole. All the same, it cannot be said that this spirit is completely irrelevant to our problems.

But on the other hand, the cry of the hungry, the sick, the enslaved, the political refugees, the disillusioned, the desperate of this earth gets louder and louder. Can the Christian Church ignore this cry? Can it ignore this cry 'for God's sake'? Certainly this cry cannot be allowed to mislead us into making overhasty decisions, but when we think in terms of a macrodimensional liturgical diaconia the question cannot be avoided: Is this a real dilemma or only a false one? Do we really have to choose between these two alternatives? When we Orthodox employ trinitarian terminology and when we speak of the eucharistic fellowship, the doxological ethos, the mysteries of prayer and so on, we often give the impression that we are turning our backs irresponsibly on the world and history, shutting our eyes and our ears to them. The actual history of our Church, of course, gives the lie to this impression. But many of us when confronted with concrete tasks too easily take refuge in the twilight areas of mysticism and seek support for this in the monastic ideas just mentioned, ignoring the testimonies in the opposite sense, also drawn from the ascetic life. This, for example:

'A monk once met Abbas Silvanus on Mount Sinai. When he saw the monks working there, he said to the old man: "Labour not for the meat that perishes! For Mary chose the better part!" The old man then said to his disciple Zachariah: "Give this brother a book and conduct him to an empty cell!" When it was the ninth hour, the monk went to the door of the cell, expecting someone to call him to supper. When no one came to invite him to supper, he went to the old man and said to him: "Abbas, have the brothers not eaten today, by chance?" The old man replied: "Of course they have!" "Then they have not invited me as well?" The old man replied: "Because you are a spiritual man and don't need such food, whereas we are fleshly and need to eat, which is why we work. But you have chosen the better part, devoting the whole day to reading and refusing to avail yourself of any fleshly nourishment!" Hearing these words, the monk prostrated himself and said: "Forgive me, Abbas!" "Of course", the old man said. "Even Mary needs Martha, for even Martha contributes to Mary's glorification!" (34)

### Décalage chronologique (chronological gap)

One of the questions our Consultation must deal with is how Orthodoxy can share more effectively in the diaconal work of the WCC, understanding diaconia to mean the service of humankind.

The first point to be considered is the question of criteria, the question of method. How in fact are priorities established in the WCC? Are the WCC's priorities also the priorities of its member churches?

Here, in my view, we have the source of many misunderstandings, conflicts and tensions. To be sure, decisions are arrived at collectively (Assembly, Central Committee), though more often than not under severe pressures of time and documentation, and by a notorious voting system which, while requiring a majority vote, does not always ensure a consensus! But even supposing consensus was reached, the decisions made by the delegates are still far from being the carefully considered decisions of the churches. Thus, although the executive organs of the WCC have good reason to feel justified and authorized in making such decisions, the churches themselves sometimes feel they have been ignored. But even if the synods fully endorse the arguments of the WCC, the ordinary membership of the churches remain almost completely untouched by the problems and the decisions. In other words, decisions are taken but the churches are not taken along with them!

But the problem seems to me to lie even deeper. Here I want to make use of the concept of 'décalage chronologique' (chronological gap) used in the cultural sciences. I use it here in a special sense. The term describes a concrete cultural situation: two peoples, coexisting in time and space, culturally display a difference at the chronological level. One for example, is still culturally in the first century B.C. whereas the other is preparing to welcome the 21st century A.D. An understanding between these two peoples is hardly to be expected.

What does this phenomenon imply for our situation? We should realistically and sincerely recognize the gulf that exists and humbly acknowledge that, thanks to its information network, its conscientization by daily exposure to the social and political realities at the world level, its theological and ecclesiological assumptions and the personal commitment of its staff, the World Council of Churches is moving on a plane which is hardly accessible to most church leaders. It seems to me altogether normal that this plane should be felt by so many to be paradoxical, dimly lit and even perhaps mysterious!

The churches are summoned to cooperate in a field which naturally seems to them to be particularly difficult by reasons of its very complexity. If the churches are to respond affirmatively and creatively to this summons, they must take a decisive step forward: from therapeutic to prophylactic philanthropy. By therapeutic philanthropy I mean all measures of microdimensional diaconia to help the victims of social evils and of all other kinds of suffering. By prophylactic philanthropy, on the other hand, I mean all measures of macrodimensional diaconia which urgently need to be taken today if the presence of such victims is no longer to be regarded as a normal feature of our society.

I believe it is possible to maintain that the Church today, while not neglecting therapeutic philanthropy, must give priority to prophylactic philanthropy.

But are our churches adequately prepared to take this step resolutely? Let me mention briefly here by way of illustration some of the charges which are levelled at the WCC today, showing the problem areas where the decision of the churches is called for today. Many are no longer willing to regard the WCC's commitment to freedom and justice in the Third World, for example, as anything other than a deliberate participation in the world revolution which is turning everything upside down! The "Third World" itself they dismiss as a figment of the imagination: there is really no such thing. It has simply been invented (in fact by left-wing theologians and Marxists) in order to fill a certain vacuum. In the course of the 20th century, the dualism which used to be the basis of the arguments of the churches on the one hand and the Marxists on the other has ebbed - between heaven and hell, God and the devil, good and evil, and (for the Marxists) between proletariat and non-proletariat. In addition, the welfare state has arrived, its welfare systems restricting still further the churches' area of activity. To fill the vacuum thus caused, a new dualism has been invented by the theologians and the Marxists, the opposition between 'poor' and 'rich' countries, a dualism which, as I have said, does not even exist at all! For there are developed and underdeveloped countries or regions even in the industrialized world as well as in the 'Third World' and therefore the difference between these 'worlds' is not as great as it is represented, and the tension between North and South is also artificial! This fact was even ignored in the papal encyclical Popolorum progressio which consequently caused great damage.

We know, of course, that if anything is a figment of the imagination, here it is that the Third World is a figment of the imagination! But this does not mean that we are at liberty to ignore the 'Third World' in ourselves and around us.

Another accusation is that the churches are propagating the utopian idea that the huge gulf between rich and poor countries is attributable to certain structures of injustice and can only be bridged by dismantling these structures. The only result of this completely unrealistic view has been to hinder development: by stirring up the Third World peoples, stimulating aggression, breeding hatred even among these people themselves, for in the 'Third World', the person regarded as 'rich' is the one who, thanks to his abilities, has abandoned his wooden hut and been able to build a stone house and now becomes the object of special hatred, just as are the anonymous 'rich' of the North and even the 'rich North' itself. It is here that the causes of unrest must be sought, the growing aggressiveness, tension and fear, i.e., those factors which unsettle the Third World peoples and compel them to arm themselves more and more and out of all proportion, so that they will be even poorer tomorrow than they are today.

A third and last accusation I wish to mention here is the charge that the churches have naively adopted the secularized idea of mission from the USA of the nineteen fifties: a 'combination of materialism and military strategy.' This idea of mission was based on the conviction that

certain structures of oppression, economic preponderances and inequalities, having their centres in western industrial countries, were responsible for the poverty of the Third World. By adopting and propagating this idea, the churches had reinforced the sense of guilt already felt by many people - especially young people - in the West (because of colonialism). This resulted in hatred of one's own country and social system, the mystification and glorification of violence, anarchism and terrorism! To this must be added a noticeable ebbing of enthusiasm for development projects in western societies: people were already beginning to ask if it was really right to love their distant neighbour more than their neighbour next door.

The West has been subjected to a too severe asceticism in the field of development! (35)

These and similar accusations naturally cause great confusion. The WCC is able to respond, of course, by stating its own views and criteria. But how can the churches' leaders and ordinary church members be expected to master such complex problems and cooperate creatively in a genuinely participatory way towards their solution? Is there any realistic possibility of making this level more transparent for church leaders?

This cannot, of course, be regarded as the exclusive task of the WCC alone. It is also and above all a task for the churches themselves. Are our spiritual leaders willing to reexamine many of their assumptions and habits? To surmount their provincialism and take a global view of the human situation now facing us? To learn to understand this human situation? These are also questions for our theological faculties and seminaries. So far as we Orthodox are concerned, a radical reexamination of our ecumenical practice seems to me to be urgently required. Ecclesiological, historical, psychological, sociological and administrative factors are still helping to create a situation in which, after even twenty or thirty years membership of the WCC, the ecumenical movement has still not got further than the limited circle of synods (?) and specialists, has still not gripped the imagination of the clergy, the lay theologians, the opinion makers and multipliers, much less the general public, not to mention the suspicion and reserve which is shown to even occasional participation in ecumenical activities, even when this is undertaken officially on behalf of the Church!

Here too, there is a décalage chronologique (a chronological gap). The significance of this for our Consultation is this: If Orthodoxy is no longer content to delegate its responsibility for decisions which it has not carefully considered, then it must look for ways and means to bridging the gap at this first level (i.e., between the ecumenical level and the level of church leadership) and, at the same time, the gap at the second level (i.e., between the ecumenical level and the level of church membership and the general public) must also be bridged if the pleroma of the Church is ever to be conscientized for effective participation in a total macrodimensional Christian diaconia for liberation, justice and peace.

## Renewal of Christian Life through Diaconia

So long as the WCC remains an instrument of the member churches, acting as their representative, the dilemma already mentioned will lead to even greater crises unless the décalage chronologique is bridged right down to the level of the congregations. The combination of the two tasks - diaconia and the renewal of Christian life - therefore seems thoroughly justified. Nor should we be discouraged by the fact that the renewal of the congregation is a lengthy process and that we cannot therefore counsel the people who are in distress to be patient until that renewal arrives, when perhaps the only petition they are in a position to offer is the prayer: 'Oh God, give us patience, but at once!'

CICARWS refers to the document drafted here in our Orthodox Academy in April 1978 by the WCC Workshop on "The Worship of the Congregation" and emphasizes the passage (p. 7) where it says: 'Liturgical renewal requires a recovery of the unity of worship and life, the integrity of cultic celebration with "the daily liturgy of the faithful" that should be expressed by it and follow from it. A community that is truly eucharistic follows its Lord in offering its life for the life of the world.' In other words, 'a liturgy after the liturgy' as we Orthodox are fond of insisting, (36) even if we do not always think quite as seriously about the implications of this phrase. If liturgy is understood in the sense indicated at the beginning of this address, then one can also thoroughly endorse the theological content of the sentence quoted. But we must ask ourselves honestly where in congregational practice today is the life of the congregation, indeed even merely a small proportion of its time, of its own potentialities, really being offered 'for the life of the world'? On the contrary, do we not sometimes have a feeling that the generally accepted patterns and methods of microdimensional therapeutic diaconia hardly represent more than just a means of maintaining the status quo, an automatic habit which seems to betray no feeling at all for the real tasks of today? Are not many charitable institutions (which do not always serve real needs!) little more than a sedative for the Christian conscience, a cover-up for social evils which are consciously or unconsciously ignored, an alibi for growing indifference? A further question, of course, would be how far the use of the customary as an alibi is reinforced when government regulations erect ideological and administrative barriers to any possible social reflection and action on the Church's part.

As I see it, diaconia can contribute to the renewal of Christian life:

If microdimensional efforts (institutions etc.) are the responsibility of the whole church and not primarily of the bishop and a small group of salaried staff or (less frequently) volunteer workers.

If microdimensional and macrodimensional diaconia are not divorced from one another but are seen as in harness and worked at in parallel.

Only in this way can the ordinary church member's eye for the macrodimensional tasks be sharpened. For example, Christians are thereby

enabled to discover macrodimensional tasks in their own neighbourhood (e.g., structures of injustice). Then they will soon recognize how often the Church finds itself compelled to make concessions to industry or the State in order to be able to continue its welfare services and is consequently not in a position to strive resolutely enough to bring about changes whose failure to materialize actually results in increasing the number of victims! Only by this macrodimensional experience can Christians be schooled to decide someday that it might perhaps be preferable to close the institutions and the collecting boxes rather than their mouths!

But, in addition, only when microdimensional and macrodimensional diaconia are seen in parallel can the priorities be correctly established. Only in the light of our worldwide responsibility, for example, can we decide whether to apply to CICARWS or some other financial source for money, resources or services for some specific diaconal project, when these resources may perhaps be more urgently needed in other parts of the world. If we have first exhausted all local possibilities and really confronted our own community with its responsibilities, it will then be possible to consider whether the application should be made. For the 'ecumenical sharing of resources' surely means in the first place the 'ecumenical sharing of responsibilities!'

To make it easier perhaps to cope with all these tasks, CICARWS should reexamine many of its own priorities and assign priority to microdimensional programmes which might serve as models at congregational and regional levels for making us aware of and concerned for our common global responsibility.

#### Social Diaconia and Westernization

If the church's social diaconia is to help to inaugurate global social changes, in the sense of prophylactic philanthropy, the question at once arises as to the particular pattern of society, the particular form and quality of life we have in mind.

As I pointed out earlier, we still lack a common basis of life. Resisting the temptation to create a uniform sacral culture, Christianity has respected, indeed actually fostered, the diversity of cultural life. The only limit it recognized to this cultural accommodation came at the point where respect for the basic principles of Christian life was at stake (e.g., monogamy). Today, by contrast, the whole world is exposed to the strong temptation to cultural uniformity and seems to be moving in the direction of the so-called 'great society' which will undoubtedly be accompanied by serious cultural impoverishment. The initial phase of this process coincided with Western colonial and cultural expansion accompanied step by step even by the Western church missions. Inspired by the dream of the 'Europeanization' (more precisely, 'westernization') of the world, the conscious aim was to spread the western patterns of civilization and ideals of life!

'Both as means and end, a truly great century!', wrote Herder ironically of the expansion of his day. 'How far its beams (sc. of wisdom) now spread!... The whole earth is almost already

basking in Voltaire's light! ... Just look at what noble-minded France has already undertaken to do with uncouth Corsica! ... To educate bearded bandits and turn them into human beings like ourselves, kind, strong, happy human beings!' (37)

This expansionist messianism confronts the ecumenical movement today in two ways. On the one hand, an old question is posed in a new way: How is the Christian message related to the different cultures? Especially in the context of Faith and Order work it is becoming increasingly clear since Bangalore that the first thing to be clarified when we reflect on the conditions for church unity is the transcultural authority of the ancient creeds of the Church. If we remember the point made earlier about the importance of the decisions of the first ecumenical councils for a true understanding of the Church, it becomes clear why the resistance - already strong in many places - to this expansionist cultural messianism also directly affects the problems of diaconia. Born of a fear of cultural syncretism, such resistance encourages cultural isolationism among the peoples of Africa and Asia. Many Christians in these continents are also tempted by this isolationism to search for an Asiatic or African Christianity. But this is an attempt to bypass history, to ignore the Jewish and Greek heritage common to Christianity as a whole, and to naturalize the Gospel into their own culture, supposedly by returning directly to the Bible. Such a development would inevitably make the search for a common basis of life even more difficult and, likewise, would complicate even further the problems connected with diaconia. But on the other hand, in face of the danger of worldwide cultural uniformity, the anxiety of many people about their identity is quite understandable and must be taken into account in a macrodimensional diaconia. The trouble is that this latter possibility seems to get steadily smaller, since the process of westernization inexorably causes profound changes in all parts of the world. Despite the strenuous (and violent!) struggle between the ideologies for world mastery, capitalist and socialist aims coincide in one point at least, one which is important for us here and is typically 'western': To escape from underdevelopment, the Third World nations must take a definite path and this path involves the adoption of quite specific ideals, behaviour patterns and methods: for example, individual success, social advancement, material prosperity, an achievement-oriented educational system, rationalization processes, expansion of levels and patterns of consumption, industrialization, competition, and so on. Politicians, technocrats and development strategists are quite uninhibited here. They are undeterred by the inevitable 'human costs' of such 'progress': destruction of traditional rhythms of life, expensive social structures, overstrain, 'rat-race' mentality, restlessness, inability to relax, insecurity, loneliness, dependence on medicaments, high suicide rate, subordination of all aspects of life to centres of power which are barely visible let alone amenable to control - in short, a loss of meaning in life.

If this really is the only way for humankind (who in fact decides?), then all our microdimensional therapeutic activities seem almost laughable in comparison with the gigantic threats confronting humanity. These threats are so radical that they call for an equally radical metanoia on our part if the churches are not to be pushed to the margins

of history and become mere spectators of this appalling spectacle.

But once again and here especially we note how little Orthodox theology and experience has been able to bear its testimony within the WCC. In other words, how onesided and 'western Protestant' the assumptions and aims of the WCC in its social diaconal work still remain. While the Orthodox churches find it almost impossible at present to make an effective material contribution here, what has become of its spiritual experience and solidarity in this serious effort to develop common witness in Christian life in these days of major crises and decisions?

#### Must Ecumenical Diaconia Bypass the Church?

The question with which the last paragraph ended helps us to understand what Document No. 1 of the Strasbourg meeting meant by speaking of 'temptation' (p. 3). If the churches prove unable (i.e. unwilling) to practise diaconia in the sense of promoting justice and liberation, the WCC (and, along with it, all socially committed groups) would be tempted to look for a 'Church outside the churches', one which would really be in a position to venture to move forward, enthusiastically and resolutely, from microdimensional therapeutic diaconia to macrodimensional prophylactic philanthropy.

This confronts us with possibly the greatest threat to Christian unity the Church has ever known. For the emphasis has clearly shifted today from formal dogmatics and confession to the structural dimension, even though this shift also has its own theological basis. The question as to whether social diaconia promotes or destroys the unity of the Church thus becomes a burning issue and must be regarded as a central theme for ecumenical reflection.

The view that, especially since Bangalore, we are nearing the end of so-called 'secular ecumenism' (38) seems to me over-optimistic - or rather unrealistic! Let me remind you of the way we have taken. Evanston (1954) and its famous statement of Christian hope underwent modification after Louvain (1971). There was a growing realization that it is not possible to 'account for the hope that is in us' (1 Pet. 3:15) without at the same time asking how far Christian hope has 'illuminating power for life in this world' and how far the great hope of Christians can be related to 'the little hopes of human beings in their concrete everyday world.' This modification was the result of the insights of the Montreal Conference (1963). After that Conference 'seemed to have blocked the direct way to church unity, many people thought they could promote the cause of Christian unity more effectively by an indirect approach, i.e. by wrestling with the contemporary world problems which confront all churches alike' (39), as the Declaration of the Ecumenical Patriarchate also stated. But, as I said earlier, as a result of the secular ecumenism then produced, 'political and social conflicts have increasingly been brought into the ecumenical movement and have again and again jeopardized its unity'. (40) The development now seems as follows: after these experiences and the threat which was felt to accompany them, the tendency is once more to concentrate on unity in faith as the condition of church unity. This turn of events thrusts a special obligation on to us Orthodox, for it



would hardly have been conceivable had Orthodoxy not clung stubbornly to the conviction that, in the life and struggle of the Church, everything depends on our looking to the power of the Holy Spirit alone. But, of course, even if this turn of events should soon become clearly established, it is hardly likely in the foreseeable future to diminish the temptation, already mentioned, namely, to seek a Church outside the churches. On the contrary! It is surely obvious that the number of those tempted in this way is steadily growing. They are Christians who ask themselves more and more insistently: Who is really my brother, Christ's brother?

To ignore or to pooh-pooh this fact and the tensions which accompany it will in no way increase the stability and unity of the individual churches or of the whole Christian family.

On the other hand, we know from past experience that even promising initiatives have sometimes failed, not because they lacked faith or love, not because many such groups, movements, councils, and so on, far from displaying humility, made a nuisance of themselves, but because in the process of achieving their autonomy they lost their ecclesiological centre. Another reason may have been that, lacking the seal of the witness of the total Church, their credibility inevitably declined. Not only theological but even strictly sociological findings strengthen our conviction that it is absurd to imagine that the world can be healed, so long as its sickness persists in the life of the Church!

How then could be 'break down the fences' referred to in Tolstoy's trenchant story (Doc. No. 1, p. 3)? In this situation of conflict, it is essential, it seems to me, to preserve a minimum of mutual trust and solidarity within the individual churches and within the ecumenical movement. But this minimum can be no less than the maximum given to us all, namely, knowledge of the love of God for the whole of humankind, a love which we are called to share with one another and to distribute to all as the bread of life.

### Summary

To sum up, let me stress the following points, which are to be regarded as no more than a contribution to further discussion:

1. The contemporary crisis in the life and work of the WCC is a reflection :
  - a) of the crisis in the life and work of the individual member churches themselves, one which is due to a discordant 'response' to the 'challenges' of a changed world situation;
  - b) of points of friction in the relationship of member churches to the WCC. These points of friction are the result of
    - the already mentioned crisis (1 a) and of
    - the décalage chronologique between the WCC, on the one hand, and church leadership and church people on the other.

2. The WCC, whose chief purpose is to promote the unity of the Church, cannot allow this crisis to degenerate into an unbridgeable polarization.

The WCC alone cannot be expected to avoid this polarization: on the contrary, it is the common task of the member churches themselves to make good the deficit in awareness wherever such a deficit still exists and, in accord with the Message of the Ecumenical Patriarchate already mentioned, to keep the divergence between extreme interpretations under the control of a common purpose so as to maintain the necessary balance between an inevitable diversity of interpretations of the world situation and of the forms and objectives of social commitment.

3. Exercising its responsibility as a member of the WCC and in solidarity with the whole Christian family, Orthodoxy is summoned as a matter of urgency to strengthen this common purpose and thus to contribute to the successful handling of this crisis.
4. In developing and articulating this common purpose in respect of diaconia as service to humankind, the Church has no other signpost than God's own purpose, revealed in Holy Scripture, fulfilled in Jesus Christ and, by the 'dynamis' of the Holy Spirit (the Paraclete) experienced in the life of the Church as obedience or, because of the weakness of the flesh misunderstood and ignored in the form of indifference and apostasy. Measured by this purpose of God, Christian diaconia is understood as :
  - a) proclamation of mercy (eleos), God's great mercy and compassion for humankind and for the creation;
  - b) service of the neighbour, especially the 'least', after the manner of Christ, in unconditional sacrifice for the amelioration of personal and collective distress and need, as well as for victory over socially structured sin and death and all its accomplices (servitude, injustice, inequality, exploitation, etc.);
  - c) service of the creation, with the general human responsibility for the creation (ecological questions, protection of the environment, basic material resources, etc.);
  - d) service of the whole human being, in the unity of eucharistia, martyria and diaconia (overcoming the divorce, the dichotomy, between verticalism and horizontalism);
  - e) the service of the whole community (spiritual unity and complementary activation of offices and charisms, conscientization and commitment of all members of the community;
  - f) liturgical diaconia, therefore, in accordance with the catholicity of God's economy of salvation, a diaconia which equips us with the required 'spirituality for combat' (M.M. Thomas, at the Nairobi Assembly), (Liturgy as basis and focal point for every diaconal activity and as liturgical awareness of self and of the world, as 'liturgy after the liturgy')

and finally,

- g) eschatological diaconia (protecting diaconal aims from chiliastic-messianic expectations, and from the loss of the christological understanding of personal and collective suffering and its replacement by an immanent eudaemonism); diaconia as 'sign' and foretaste of the kingdom of God and as criterion for acceptance into fellowship with God.
5. Christian diaconia is to be performed simultaneously and in mutual interrelationship as microdimensional and macrodimensional diaconia, i.e., as therapeutic and prophylactic philanthropy, in accord with the aspects listed in point 4.
  6. Microdimensional diaconia is to be understood as the extension of the Holy altar to the concrete sufferings of human beings, adapted flexibly to the given circumstances, performed in solidarity and cooperation with non-church efforts (by State and society) and not in opposition to them and with an effort to identify and make people aware not only of therapeutic but also of prophylactic concerns.
  7. While not neglecting microdimensional diaconia, the Church today, in face of the present world situation with its unmistakable 'litany of the victims of the structures of injustice' (M. Manley at Nairobi) and its 'threat of suffering to come' (C. Birch at Nairobi) must give macrodimensional diaconia absolute priority in its theology of diaconia and in its social commitment.
  8. In the history of the Church, Christian diaconia has been understood as a contribution to the creation of a fellowship of solidarity, in the sense of a metamorphosis of 'natural' orders and the outlook of a society composed of individuals into a koinonia of persons. This remains a constant task of the Church but one which is supremely urgent today when modern conceptions and conditions of life are forcing appalling paramorphoses (disfigurements) on human society.
  9. Christian mission has always had a diaconal dimension (cf. 4 d). Evangelization of humankind and the liberation of human beings from inward and outward sufferings constitute one single task for the Church. The very fact that man has been created in the image of God lays upon us an inescapable obligation to defend the human dignity of the person in all its aspects. Cultura agri (living conditions), cultura animi (sanctification, 'theosis') and cultura Dei (eucharist, doxology) are, therefore, inseparably connected.
  10. Being the service of the whole human being and of the whole of humankind and of creation, diaconia involves a definite commitment to social justice and liberation yet at the same time respect for the divine commission to Christians to be messengers of reconciliation and sober insistence on the eschatological dimension of salvation. Love of the neighbour must also take the form of diaconia to 'tempted tempters'! When in exceptional situations Christians

consider themselves obliged to endorse violence, the whole Christian family should feel itself exposed to temptation; here solidarity should help Christians to bear conscious guilt together.

11. On these assumptions and in face of the complexity of the world situation, Christians must pray fervently today that God may richly endow them with the charisma of 'discerning the spirits' (1 Cor. 12/10) so that they may discern between real dilemmas and false in the performance of their diaconia (Martha-Mary conflict, verticalism and horizontalism).
12. Accusations levelled at the WCC or individual churches or programmes should in every case be carefully examined and discussed and dealt with in brotherly solidarity and with a sense of common responsibility. Churches must persevere trustingly in their appointed role as 'bond-servants of God', for only by so doing can they maintain their freedom over against ideologies and political systems which the Church cannot under any circumstances or for any considerations of expediency enter into coalition or even identify itself with, but of which it must always remain the prophetic 'crisis'.
13. As an act of love, diaconia is a life in love and therefore in God. Diaconia, therefore, is never merely a giving but always at the same time and above all a receiving and therefore a growth in love and fellowship, in mercy and hope. Diaconia in this sense can contribute to the renewal of the Christian life just as, conversely, the renewal of Christian life leads to the intensification and purification of diaconia. In view of the present situation in the Church and in the world, it is essential:
  - a) that diaconia be performed as the task of the whole community (4e) (i.e., including: renewal of the local congregation, activation of the laity, reintroduction of the office of deaconess and a reexamination of the task and role of the woman in every aspect of the Church's life, involvement of young people in diaconal ministries and projects);
  - b) that priorities should be established in the light of the world-wide situation of the Church and of humankind by the parallel practice of micro and macro-dimensional diaconia; and
  - c) that there should be cooperation in this with men of goodwill in order to disabuse them of prejudices about the Church's objectives and to show support for their own efforts to overcome and dismantle unjust structures and man-made tyrannies.
14. In face of the threatened reduction of humanity to global uniformity (cultural syncretism), a discussion would seem to be due in the ecumenical movement in order to clarify the special task of macro-dimensional diaconia in this respect in the context of the struggle between the arrogant cultural expansionism of the West and of modern ideologies, on the one hand, and the alarmist (sometimes nationalistic) tendency of many peoples to cultural isolationism, on the other (quality of life for which we should strive by diaconia).

15. An authentic liturgical diaconia conducted in the light of the whole Gospel and with the whole human being and the whole Church in view is never to be sought outside the Church. We must all remember the trinitarian character not only of the Church but also of its diaconia. If the Church appears to be a threat to diaconia or diaconia to the Church, it means that one or the other, or both, has lost its trinitarian landmark. The unity of the Church, as expression of the triune nature of God, and diaconia as expression of the love of God and love to God are rooted in the trinitarian 'as': the disciples are to be one as the Father and the Son are one (Jn. 17): and they are sent forth by the Son to bear witness and to serve as the Father sent Him (Jn. 20:21).

Therefore :

- a) the idea of a 'Church outside the churches' is neither ecclesiologically legitimate nor sociologically and strategically viable;
- b) this idea of a 'Church outside the churches' is nevertheless still an alternative which is actually practised, and represents an increasing challenge not only to the unity of the Church but also and above all to its apathy and indifference; it constitutes something new at the level of the total Christian family (although it is a phenomenon which has frequently occurred in the history of the Church) and must be heeded by the churches with all urgency and care;
- c) at this juncture, with all its tensions and the decisions requiring to be taken, we need at least a minimum of reciprocity and trust in order to conduct 'our confrontation in love' (Prof. V. Borovoy at Nairobi), so that fresh division may not destroy the foundations of an effective diaconia and in order that we may on the contrary, fulfil our common mission in love and concord 'that the world may believe.'

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