

# Our Ecumenical Diakonia – Both Large and Small

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*Dr Alexandros Papaderos in this article contributes perhaps the most deeply theological part of this symposium. Written from the standpoint of the Orthodox churches it nevertheless illuminates profound issues for all churches sharing in the ecumenical movement. And here is a theologian who writes also of eggs, tomatoes and cucumbers!*

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The Orthodox Church has received invaluable material aid from the ecumenical community over the past forty years, chiefly through CICARWS (a very modest but convincing report on the World Council's activities in this field has recently been given by a faithful and long-serving member of its staff<sup>1</sup>). What I would like to stress from the outset is that to see only the material aspect of the aid we have received and to measure its value only in material terms would be totally to underestimate the real and effective value of this support and to misunderstand its true nature. One thing I shall try to do in this article, therefore, is to highlight some of the non-material, or at least not primarily material, aspects of ecumenical aid.

This is obviously no easy task – not just because, to the best of my knowledge, the Orthodox literature available on the subject has paid little attention to these aspects. The main difficulty is to disperse some of the fog still surrounding this matter and win through to some transparency on the other side. If I undertake this daunting task nonetheless, it is because I believe such an effort is long overdue.

One difficulty here, I must admit, is that we have been requested by the editor to tell something of our own involvement with people and events, and to do so through personal stories, adding

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Tsetsis, *I Diékklesiastiki Synergasia stin Ellada*, Ekthesis Pepragmenon, 1983.

something about the significance these have had in our own lives. Visser 't Hooft has spoken of the dangers of writing an "I-book".<sup>2</sup> The dangers are no less, it seems to me, in writing an "I-article"! However, since we are all involved in the process of ecumenical learning and hope that one day our ecumenical fellowship will be transformed into an eucharistic fellowship, we must not only confess our sins and shortcomings to one another (James 5:16) but also confide our experiences, anxieties and hopes.

### **"Protestant eggs"**

The day in October 1956 when I heard I had passed my final examination at the theological faculty of the University of Thessaloniki was a red-letter day. What better excuse for a party! Some of my fellow students and I were enjoying ourselves thoroughly when another student suddenly burst into the middle of the fun shouting " 'Buddha' wants you! Hurry!" "Buddha" was our nickname for our elderly professor of the history of religion who only a short time before had been congratulating me warmly on my final results. He had even awarded me a "distinction". We had nicknamed him "Buddha" not because of his interest in Buddhism but because, as far as the church's care for people and for the world was concerned, he had long since reached a state of Nirvana! Somewhat surprised, I now reported to his study where I found a nervous group of fellow students, general agitation and a stern-faced "Buddha" with nothing of Nirvana about him. Beside himself with rage he shouted at me: "You have failed my exam – and you will never pass it. Get out of my sight!"

What had happened? After two years it had belatedly come to the ears of our normally good-humoured professor that some of his theological students were working with Protestants, distributing clothing, food, medicine, etc., to various parishes in the town. In his view this could mean only one thing: surreptitious infiltration, proselytism – through his own theological students, no less. For him it seemed that the hour of the anti-Christ had come, he felt "the mystery of lawlessness already at work" (2 Thess. 2:6–7). When he questioned the other students about "collaborators" and discovered that I – his favourite student – had actually been the instigator of the outrage, his disappointment boiled over.

The background was this: a few years before some American Congregationalists had started an aid campaign in Thessaloniki. The city and the surrounding area, the birthplace of Alexander the Great, like the whole of Greece, was struggling in the miserable

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<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs*, London, SCM Press, 1973, p. ix.

aftermath of the war and the civil war which had followed it. There were many orphaned children, homeless, unemployed refugees of all kinds and origins, old people who had lost their families, sick people, and people living in great fear and little hope. As the bishop of the city had entrusted me with the task of preaching in one of the worst-hit areas of the city, I was confronted almost daily with an anomalous situation: Tanoula, the Congregationalists' Greek assistant, a charming and attractive Orthodox girl, with tremendous energy and commitment, was trying with little success to persuade the people to accept the strangers' gifts which they feared would harm their immortal souls. Our old bishop had had some ecumenical experience, even before the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council which he attended as a participant, and also since then, so he was not long in accepting my suggestion (which had the full support of Tanoula and her employers) that it would be better to have groups of theological students carry out the distribution of the aid than to leave it to the foreigners. The people would then lose their fear and we students would have a chance to begin to understand the practical meaning of theology.<sup>3</sup>

With the bishop's blessing I set about organizing a "social work group" among the students and continued to lead it until I finished my studies. After that it was taken over and developed further by Prof. S. Agouridis and some other teachers. These groups later produced some outstanding priests and lay theologians, many of whom accompanied the thousands of Greek migrants abroad and are caring for them there.

Not a word of this valuable practical experience had reached the good professor of the history of religion until the day in question when I was examined and re-examined. After a somewhat stormy interview with me and a length telephone call to the bishop he informed me, not without visible signs of disapproval, that I had passed after all. Apparently the bishop had convinced him that our American friends could rightly claim that their effort "does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile" (1 Thess. 2:3).

At that time, too, the farm school run by the Quakers in Thessaloniki gave us eggs to distribute with the other goods. "Buddha" was the first but certainly not the last to suspect these "Protestant eggs" of proselytism and to paint the students' social commitment red, even though those eggs came from "capitalist" sources.

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<sup>3</sup> "Wenn Theologie praktisch wird", in *Festschrift für Hauptpastor H. J. Quest, Hamburg*, ed. J. Sonnenberg, Stuttgart, Steinkopf Verlag, 1983. This contains some useful articles which are also relevant to diakonia.

### Healing through diakonia

I have begun with this rather personal anecdote because it shows very clearly some of the points of friction that could be expected in inter-church aid in those days, and which have still not been entirely removed everywhere. These points of friction were deeply rooted in the Orthodox mind, solidly fixed by long historical experience. Since the Crusades and, still more so, since the Reformation, the meeting between East and West has almost always taken place on the ground of proselytism, not always conducted by the most elegant methods, and usually to the detriment of Eastern Christendom. Large areas of the East suffered for centuries under foreign domination, including "Christian" enthrallment. Countless hundreds of Orthodox Christians suffered martyrdom for the sake of their faith, thousands lived a life of fear and terror as secret Christians. The gospel preached to them was not the good news of redemption, but dogmas and counter-dogmas. When the British and Foreign Bible Society announced its intention of preparing a translation of the Bible in modern Greek, the great scholar Adamantios Korais wrote:

What fruit can a gift such as this bear among people who are groaning under the yoke of a cannibal and robber. Especially when the gift is offered by the Allies, the robber's friends and defenders. The British gift speaks of "isonomy" (i.e. equality), but their other behaviour has helped to keep us under the tyrant's yoke so that we continue to endure the suffering caused by its unlawfulness, and, worst of all, learn unlawfulness ourselves. No! No! Any gift they may give us, except freedom, is just a pretence and not a true act of benevolence.<sup>4</sup>

Nikiphoros Theotokis (1736–1800) who worked as a missionary among the Tartars accused Western proselytizers of impure intentions and meaningless efforts because they exploited the poverty of the people simply to win what later became known as "flour and rice Christians". He wrote:

The lips of your proselyte have sworn but his soul has not believed. . . . What you have created therefore is not a Catholic, but a liar, a pharisee, a mocker of God. . . .<sup>5</sup>

With this historical background it will be clear that the real task for inter-church aid in our situation was not just to alleviate material suffering but, in doing that, to do something much deeper

<sup>4</sup> Alexandros Papaderos, *Metakensis: Griechenland's kulturelle Herausforderung durch die Aufklärung in der Sicht des Korais und des Oikonomos*, Meisenheim am Glan, Verlag Anton Hain, 1970, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

and more important, namely, to heal the wounds in the hearts of believers and in their historical consciousness. Deliberately or not, inter-church aid in Greece did in fact start such a process. The qualitative difference was at once apparent and people soon realized that this was not proselytism, but something radically new and different which was without precedent. Not even the early Christian *Logeia* corresponded to it, for the relationship between the Protestants of the West and the Orthodox of the East in the twentieth century was not the fraternal relationship that existed between the disciples in Antioch and Judaea (Acts 11:27–30) or between the Christians in Galatia and Corinth and the Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:1–4) in the first century. In this case there was a long history of bad relations to redress, the barriers of many centuries to overcome. Money and materials to restore devastated churches, clothes for the naked, food for the hungry, medicines for the sick, homes for orphans, scholarships to help young theologians to study abroad, ecumenical work camps, development projects – all of these things were unquestionably valuable for their own sake. Yet the most important thing in all of them, everywhere, was this noticeable new quality of active, disinterested love.<sup>6</sup> Or at least not pursuing the old interest of proselytizing. For, although perhaps not explicitly and consciously tied in with it, the other result of this aid, the growing together into the ecumenical fellowship, was certainly present or at least expected as the fruit of growing trust.

The process of healing that I mentioned is by no means complete. Old wounds could begin to bleed again at any time, especially when zealots will not leave them alone. Other zealots on our Orthodox side still occasionally resort to reminders about “Protestant eggs” to disguise the lack of any substantial theological arguments against this growing ecumenical fellowship, or perhaps, if truth be told, against a social commitment which, though faithful to the gospel, is alien to custom and a habit of inertia. Despite this, however, the new quality in inter-church aid has become increasingly apparent, supported by other elements which I shall look at in greater detail below.

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<sup>6</sup> According to John Chrysostomos (Migne, pp. 63, 83), we must show mercy to all human beings without distinction, whether they be monks or secular, Hellenes (heathens!) or Christians or even heretics, without considering whether they be worthy or not!

### Creative challenge and response

Elsewhere I have expressed the opinion that "second only to the predominance of an atheistic system of government in many Orthodox countries, the ecumenical movement represents the major challenge to Orthodoxy in this century".<sup>7</sup> It is like a "gadfly" attached to the body of the church, stinging, irritating, troubling it as Socrates once did the conscience of the Athenians. This experience is no longer confined to the Orthodox but has now become a general experience of mutual challenge which extends to all Christians.

I am tempted briefly to consider this new situation in Christianity in terms of the contrasting yet harmonious ideas of challenge and response in order to see whether a certain parallel cannot perhaps be drawn between ecumenical development and cultural-morphological development.

These two notions are taken from the universal historical system proposed by A. J. Toynbee.<sup>8</sup> His analyses of the creative tension between challenge and response are, you remember, based on the approach of Chinese philosophy which sees the whole dynamic of all cosmic and historical events as a constant transition from Yin (a state of perfect creation, harmony, balance, peace) to Yang (incompleteness, instability, motion, activity) and back again to Yin. Alongside this "inward" factor in events Toynbee sets an "external" one, anything that acts as a stimulus to a culture from the outside at any given time, constituting a challenge, and forcing it into a testing situation (ordeal). When a culture is seriously challenged in this way the majority of people simply capitulate (a phenomenon of which the Westernization currently in progress throughout the world is a prime example). Few, if any, succeed in finding and giving a response to this challenge. To be really creative the response must do more than simply maintain or restore balance. It must be carried by an inner *élan vital* (Bergson), creating momentum, causing movement, for then and then only will a new challenge be provoked, eliciting a new response and so continuing life and moving it forward. Otherwise it is practically impossible for the culture in question to avoid stagnation or absorption into another culture.

Obviously we cannot simply transpose this kind of activist evolutionism, with its undertones of determinism, to the churches'

<sup>7</sup> "The 'Gadfly' on Trial: the 'Political' Commitment of the World Council of Churches", in *Voices of Unity, Essays in Honour of W. A. Visser 't Hooft*, Geneva, WCC, 1981, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> *The Study of History*, 10 vols, London, 1934-1954, esp. Vol. I. Cf. also O. Anderle, *Das Universalhistorische System A. J. Toynbees*, Vienna, 1955.

relations with one another and try to understand the ecumenical development of this century in these categories. I use the terms “challenge” and “response” nonetheless, principally because many Christians today do in fact perceive these relations as just such a critical challenge and are firmly convinced that the response to it is proving more and more creative. Moreover, certain relatively meaningful analogies can certainly be drawn, even if only at the level of language. There is no denying, for example, that like the “arrested civilizations” the churches remained immobile for centuries. Over-adaptation to the geographical, cultural and historical conditions in which they existed had led them, as it were, to idolize their thinking, their action, the whole of their life, an idolatry of the outer crust of their heritage. Some of them had forgotten the specificity of the Christian way of life, the tightrope walking, the perpetual Exodus, and had become sedentary. Like certain nomads, they had settled in the oases of their present state. Toynbee speaks of *koros* (surfeit, satiety, spoiling by success, disgust), *hybris* (overweening arrogance, outrageous behaviour) and *ate* (disaster, blind impulse) as the causes of the breakdown of cultures which “rest on their oars”.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, the factor which brought movement into the churches' relations with one another this century was unfortunately not an “inward” one but an “external” one. The first stimulus came not from an awareness of the sinfulness of our divisions, nor from repentance, love, truth or the will for renewal but primarily from the challenge of the external situation: the radical questioning of the Christian message, the destitution that followed the First and, still more, the Second World War, the persecution of Christians in many places, the groaning of the creation under new threats, the brokenness of our societies, the fear and despair of our peoples.<sup>10</sup> Before long, however, this external challenge stimulated an inner response in the form of the ecumenical movement. Phenomenologically and qualitatively speaking this was something quite new in church history, which

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<sup>9</sup> *A Study of History*, Vol. IV, p. 258.

<sup>10</sup> The ecclesiological-pneumatological nature of the arguments on this subject in the letters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate which became so important for the ecumenical movement is all the more typical. “Patriarchal and Synodical Encyclical” of 1902; “Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920. Cf. *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. C. Patelos, Geneva, WCC, 1978, pp. 27–43. Nevertheless, even in these letters the concern for people and for humanity is clearly shown. The latter Encyclical actually mentioned acute needs and dangers and notes that “manifold dangers threaten not only particular churches, but all of them. These dangers attack the very foundations of the Christian faith and the essence of Christian life and society.”

has known many outside stimuli and challenges but not so many inner responses!

It was in inter-church aid that this response made itself felt most tangibly and visibly, with the most immediate and creative effects. As long ago as 1920, the Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere", included among its eleven concrete suggestions for closer relations and cooperation among Christians everywhere: "whole-hearted mutual assistance for the churches in their endeavours for religious advancement, charity and so on", because "friendship and a kindly disposition towards each other can also be shown and demonstrated by willingness to offer mutual aid and help" and because "many good things will thus be achieved for the glory and benefit both of themselves and the Christian body". The Encyclical does not of course consider this mutual assistance as necessary "for its own sake", but as part of a comprehensive relationship and a new growing together into the love of Christ: "Above all, love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches, so that they should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives and as being a part of the household of Christ and 'fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ' (Eph. 3:6)."<sup>11</sup>

In the early stages of the ecumenical era the position of Orthodoxy can be described, it seems to me, as both defensive and receptive. It was defensive, as ever, in its traditional refusal of Western proselytism, yet at the same time it was also receptive to the very things it rejected under the heading of proselytism.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42. The ecumenical relevance of inter-church aid mentioned here was fully confirmed in the following centuries. The Orthodox consultation in Kiev (cf. *Just Development for Fullness of Life*, Geneva, WCC/CCPD, 1982, p. 19) notes: "Microdiakonia can also contribute to the healthy development of ecumenism. Our world is a divided world, and division is real not only among nations, but among Christians as well. Words alone are no longer adequate means to achieve unity, but deeds are needed to foster visible and concrete progress along the path towards unity. When Christians from different churches work together to serve fellow human beings in need, their love and concern for justice may serve to draw them together. Microdiakonia in ecumenical form can become an effective element in healing the divisions among Christians."

In his introduction to the Festschrift *Voices of Unity* (p. viii), Philip Potter says of my contribution: "The first generation of ecumenical leaders thought that doctrine divided but that service would unite. They had a point, as Alexandros Papaderos demonstrates with regard to the Orthodox churches. It was through the expression of love in service that these churches came into loving contact with the churches of the Reformation." The opposite is also true, as I have observed elsewhere (cf. *Oikoumenismos: Klisi kai proklisi*, Gonia, Chania, 1984, p. 39, note 1) and shall endeavour to show here.



Theology, music, icon painting, church order and church life in general all continued to show signs of Western influence long after the end of the nineteenth century. This receptivity of the Orthodox churches, which is entirely understandable from the historical point of view, had placed them in the position of being receivers, and this position was naturally reinforced and even intensified by inter-church aid. One of the psychological reasons underlying their hesitation is perhaps this: aid was accepted under pressure of need, to relieve the suffering of the people. In reality, however, the outward acceptance of material aid was accompanied by an inner attitude of defensiveness. The Orthodox response to this external challenge was, therefore, only in a limited sense creative, even though the aid was no longer given as a means of proselytizing but came as a challenge of love.

Not until some time later – it is difficult to pinpoint the moment exactly – did the Orthodox response to the ecumenical challenge begin to be truly creative both for Orthodoxy itself and for the whole fellowship of the churches. The ecumenical initiatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople at the beginning of the century, which I have already mentioned, contained the seeds of many creative developments. Then came the great Orthodox diaspora which gave the West an open window on the Orthodox spiritual world, enabling Western Christians to see inside it and discover hitherto unsuspected spiritual treasures. Gradually the relationship became less “from-to” and much more “with” one another. The Orthodox response began to be less defensive. Apart from the great “offensive of love” under Patriarch Athanagoras, this response was generally cooperative rather than offensive; not dialectical in the sense of the interplay of Yin and Yang, mentioned above, but dialogical in the strength of the *Logos*, who took flesh and revealed himself as love, and as the way, the truth and the life. Inter-church aid thus ceased to be understood and carried out in a subject-object relationship in the tension of contact between East and West and became a substantive element in an entirely new reality of dynamic catholicity in which the Holy Spirit is the real stimulus of events, so that the formerly one-sided relationship could be transformed into genuinely creative interaction. Even microdiakonia (I define these terms below) which intervenes at specific, concrete points, is thus seen to be part of an all-embracing macrodiakonia in the ecumenical context.

### **Mutual enrichment**

The speed and intensity with which this interaction progressed and developed can be seen from the example of the language. By

this I do not mean the vocabulary only, but also and above all the spirit and ethos, the content of the language. Here Orthodoxy can claim with some justification to have given an effective and creative response to the ecumenical challenge, and to have offered its own gifts in return for the many spiritual and material gifts it has received. Although originally Greek, these gifts have long since become the property of the whole of Orthodoxy and should be seen as such. One need think no further than the many concepts, with their corresponding theological content, without which we would never have reached agreement today, and which are becoming all the more relevant the closer we move to a common expression of the apostolic faith. First of all there is the word *oikoumene* itself (and *oikos* with all its "living stones" as Philip Potter reminded us so vividly at the Vancouver Assembly of the WCC); and then the many others like *ekklesia-ekklesiologia*, *eucharistia*, *koinonia* (*sobornost*), *martyria*, *liturgia* (and liturgy after the liturgy), *dialogue*, etc. as well, of course, as the term *diakonia* itself which concerns us particularly here.

Again, I would emphasize, the important thing is not so much the words as their content, the fresh insights, new perspectives, new approaches they convey, and in this we again have not one-sided giving and taking, but reciprocity, common reflection, mutual enrichment through sharing and participation. As far as the Orthodox world is concerned, this extremely creative process has received effective encouragement in recent years from the work of the Commission on Faith and Order, as well as from CICARWS and CCPD and the Orthodox consultations organized by them.<sup>12</sup>

I should like now to look at two concepts which are characteristic of the growing creativity in this form of work. These are "micro-diakonia" and "macrodiakonia" which I shall try to define rather more clearly than has hitherto been done, demonstrating their content with some concrete examples.

I first proposed the two concepts of microdiakonia and macrodiakonia in my keynote address on "Liturgical Diakonia" at the "Consultation on Church and Service" organized by CICARWS and the Orthodox Task Force at the Orthodox Academy of Crete in November 1978.<sup>13</sup> In that address I emphasized that Christian diakonia is at one and the same time micro- and macro-dimensional

<sup>12</sup> *Orthodox Thought*, reports of Orthodox consultations organized by the World Council of Churches, 1975-1982, ed. Georges Tssetis, Geneva, WCC, 1983.

<sup>13</sup> *An Orthodox Approach to Diaconia*, WCC, Geneva, 1980, pp. 17-46. Cf. Alexandros Papaderos, *Diakonie II*, *Orth. Sicht*, in *Ökumene-Lexicon*, Frankfurt/M., 1983, pp. 245-247.

and that the two must be carried out together as therapeutic and prophylactic philanthropy. By microdiakonia I mean “all the concrete measures taken by the Church to remedy the concrete distress of individuals by concrete means”. (These include all the charitable institutions and organizations, and all the particular, individual demonstrations of love of the neighbour.) Macrodiakonia, on the other hand, means here all the measures which aim in the long term to make microdiakonia unnecessary! While recognizing all the inherent dangers of utopianism, I nevertheless believe that the Church today, though not neglecting microdiakonia, should give absolute priority to macrodiakonia, both in its theological work and in its social commitment. Not with a view to building paradise on earth, but to prevent situations from being perpetuated on earth that look like images of hell. Macrodiakonia thus means conscious commitment to bringing about the kind of changes that will guarantee peace, promote justice, bring liberation, effectively fight against want and suffering, safeguard the dignity and rights of the human person and preserve the integrity of creation.

The Crete consultation, although it did not use the two terms itself, nevertheless fully accepted their content. This marked a new beginning with deep and lasting implications, as anyone familiar with the development of Orthodox theology and practice concerning diakonia in recent centuries will appreciate. Within a short time after its publication, the report of the consultation had set in motion a remarkable process of reflection, which was further encouraged in the ensuing years, amongst other things, by the inter-Orthodox meetings organized by the World Council of Churches. This is particularly true of the consultation on “Just Development for Fullness of Life: an Orthodox Approach” held in Kiev in 1982, when the concepts of micro- and macro-diakonia formed the main focus of the papers and discussions and gave rise to a new concept: *macrojustitia*<sup>14</sup> Here, too, the stress is laid on the intrinsic oneness of diaconal service:

(In reality, there exists only one diakonia . . . under two different forms: *microdiakonia* by and to individual members, and *macrodiakonia* as service to societies and their structures) and on their one common basis, which is agape, for love of God and humanity. Both diakonias

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<sup>14</sup> The three subject areas of the consultation were: Orthodox theology of development; macrodiakonia of the Church on a general level; and micro- and macrodiakonia on personal, family, parish, social, state and international levels. Cf. *A Responsible Christian Participation*, Geneva, WCC, 1983.

are extensions of the eucharistic service. Both are a liturgy after the liturgy. Both express the missionary task of the Church.<sup>15</sup>

To anyone whose mental picture of Orthodoxy corresponds to A. von Harnack's description of it at the beginning of the century as "an ossified religious community", or to Oswald Spengler's view of Dostoevsky's authentically Orthodox thinking as the ultimate devaluation of the social by the metaphysical (as opposed to the supposedly Western-influenced thinking of Tolstoy which had produced the ultimate devaluation of the metaphysical by the social), the report of the Kiev consultation will come as a surprise. Sentences like these reveal the new awareness of macrodiakonia:

In some cases, the Church's influence can extend to all aspects of society: social, economic, cultural and political life. The churches have a special God-given duty to work for the realization of justice and peace for the development of peoples and nations. The churches should be ready to defend human rights (freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of belief) and condemn their violations.<sup>16</sup>

If one reads some of the other documents of this consultation, for example, the brilliant contributions by Stanley Harakas, Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Osthathios, Dimitrios Tsaoussis and others, it is soon apparent that such "revolutionary" sentences are by no means new and strange in Orthodoxy, but are firmly and legitimately founded in holy scripture and the tradition of the great Fathers of the Church, as the Crete consultation also demonstrated. What is new here is not the macrodiakonia mandate of the Church in itself, but our rediscovery and awareness of it. And for this we Orthodox can also largely thank the ecumenical fellowship. I say "also" because, like others, we did not simply take over a "foreign" theological property, for which we could again have had "Protestant eggs" thrown at us. Rather, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our common effort of rethinking in the ecumenical fellowship, as Georges Tsetsis showed convincingly at the same Kiev consultation when he spoke of the "mutually enriching experience" achieved by the participation of the Orthodox churches in the World Council.<sup>17</sup> Julio de Santa Ana's contribution at the same consultation shows just how "mutual" this experience actually is.<sup>18</sup> Even an Orthodox theologian can largely subscribe to his ideas – and not just because of his eminently Orthodox vocabulary! This

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>17</sup> "The Orthodox in the World Council of Churches", *ibid.*, pp. 41–47.

<sup>18</sup> "The WCC Sixth Assembly and Orthodox Participation", pp. 29–39.

whole process has increasingly shown itself to be a generally creative response to the ecumenical challenge to everyone, by everyone and everything.

### **The hard way forward**

Despite these very positive developments we are, of course, still a long way from the final goal. A great deal of mature reflection is still required in our efforts for macrodiakonia to make sure that we do not confuse the vision of the kingdom with the vision of a comfortable existence, nor the fulfilled life we seek with what is simply a full life. Yet at the same time, with God's help, we need to do all in our power to bring movement where there is still immobility and apathy, wherever we are still blindly "resting on our oars". Let me give a few examples by way of illustration.

A few years ago, a far-sighted person recommended to us that the Orthodox Academy of Crete should encourage the people in one area of our island to start cultivating a piece of land which had lain untouched since the creation of the world. Helped by a team of Mennonites from Europe and America, we had already successfully promoted the use of greenhouses, a new economic development in our region, at our Centre for Agricultural Development as part of the wider macrodiaconal programme of the diocese of Kissamos and Selinon. The land that was to be brought under cultivation seemed ideally suited to growing cucumbers and tomatoes under glass. Over the years, however, poverty had left the area practically depopulated. For the people there, the one means of survival was to leave the land and emigrate. Not without some hesitation, we invited the farmers still living in the area to an initial information seminar for which we had deliberately chosen the title "Hope in the desert".

A second seminar followed, then a third and so on until the project could claim to be a great success. Finally we encouraged the farmers to form a cooperative and to be willing to include those of their compatriots who wanted to return from abroad, now that jobs and an opportunity to earn money had been created for them. Thousands of tonnes of tomatoes, cucumbers, etc., produced in this area are now on the market in Greece and Western Europe.

One of our priests, however, had great difficulty in fitting all this into his understanding of the mission and ministry of the Church. After the first seminar therefore he circulated a memorandum. It was the time of the military dictatorship in Greece, when any collective effort was regarded with suspicion as a possible plot. Talk of poverty and need did not suit the propaganda about

rapid economic growth. Anyone who talked like that could only be a communist or a crypto-communist and was dealt with accordingly. If, into the bargain, one was dubbed a heretic by the Church one felt the rope tighten around one's neck. And heresy was precisely what the good priest thought we were engaged in. His argument was this: Christ came into the world to sow the seed of God's Word (Matt. 13) and not . . . tomatoes and cucumbers. How could an academy call itself Orthodox when it was busy caring for tomatoes and cucumbers?

The priest in question was basically a good-natured and very honourable Levite who had no intention of denouncing us and having us "put away". He was concerned only for the right continuation of the Church – the Church as *he* saw it, of course. As far as we could tell, the main difficulty was that he could see no connection between the foodstuffs in question and the liturgical-diaconal context, although for over fifty years he had been repeating in the Holy Liturgy the prayer: "For temperate weather, abundance of fruits of the earth, and for peaceful seasons, let us pray to the Lord." This difficulty, namely, thinking and acting in specific contexts, reveals a discrepancy which is a problem for many of us – the discrepancy between our theology and our prayers on the one hand, and our contact with the realities of the world and the needs of individuals and humanity on the other. A discrepancy of this sort is positively dangerous when set against the background of certain fundamental concepts of Orthodox theology and piety such as *pleroma* – fullness of life in the Holy Spirit, eucharistic understanding of the whole world, adoption and sanctification of matter with the removal of the polarity between the spiritual and the material, etc. In the report of the Crete consultation we read:

Christian diaconia flows from the divine liturgy. . . . Each local celebration of the Eucharist is complete and universal, involving the whole of creation and is offered for the material and spiritual needs of the whole world.<sup>19</sup>

And that includes the need for tomatoes and cucumbers, for the possibility of returning home from abroad, for work, for hope.

Let me describe another example. Many people in our country, particularly priests and monks, are fond of evoking the Orthodox clergy's glorious tradition of commitment to the struggle for human dignity and liberation during the centuries of foreign rule suffered by a number of Orthodox nations. Not infrequently this

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<sup>19</sup> *An Orthodox Approach to Diaconia, op. cit.*, p. 11.

struggle called for resolute and violent action. Although the clergy did not do this without considerable inner distress, they did it – and who would dare to criticize them for their action today? Indeed, on the contrary, even self-confessed critics and opponents of the Church praise them for this diakonia of liberation for which they had no need of a fully fledged theology of liberation. For them it was sufficient to know that the gospel is good news to the oppressed in that it brings salvation not only from sin, but also from the sinners, the tyrants who oppress them!<sup>20</sup>

The same question exists today, but the answer is not so self-evident: what are the structures, the systems, the powers which today exploit, alienate, intimidate groups of people or even whole peoples, directly or indirectly enslaving them with modern methods and means?

At the beginning of the seventies we arranged a number of seminars for priests and others in positions of responsibility in our Church, when we dealt in depth with such issues. At the theoretical level we reached a broad measure of agreement, but it was a different story when it came to putting the theory into practice. For our practical work we chose to concentrate on the marketing system for citrus fruit. About six thousand families in our area of western Crete live mainly from growing the famous oranges of the region. *Live?* What does the word really mean here? Who actually *lives* off the hard work of these people? We knew that as well as the farmers themselves: the market was controlled by wholesalers and middlemen who captured the bulk of the profits for themselves. When we began to discuss a cooperative marketing system with the farmers and organized a public vote in a number of villages to decide on the matter, the dictatorship and the wholesalers were unanimous in condemning our action as un-Christian. When some priests even began to have doubts about whether this kind of involvement was really our affair, we and they together had to face the question of what really concerns us in this world. What makes us concerned? What must concern us?

I remember how much time we spent thinking about Christ's descent into hell at that time. He who holds the key of death and of hell (Rev. 1:18), before he rose again, descended into Hades, in other words, into the very centre of death. Even there, in the kingdom of the dead, of those who have cut themselves off from *koinonia* with God, that is, the powerful and the wealthy who have surrounded themselves unjustly with riches, the insatiable, those

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<sup>20</sup> Alexandros Papaderos, "Skizzen aus dem Leben kretischer Priester", in "Wenn Theologie praktisch wird", *op. cit.*, pp. 230-245.

who have been led astray and those who lead others astray,<sup>21</sup> the Lord brought the Good News of the Gospel.<sup>22</sup> He descended "with great power" into Hades<sup>23</sup> and brought freedom, justice and peace.<sup>24</sup> Where else, until the *parousia*, can the real place of Christ's Church be, therefore, except wherever death prevails in relations between people. And what are the structures and mentalities which create injustice, exploitation, and coalition with Mammon, if not centres of death? Discipleship has always meant, and will always mean, being present with Christ in the centres of death, in solidarity with all those who have never lost sight of the vision of his kingdom, despite all their trials and tribulations, but also with those who have yet to gain, or regain, that vision. As we try to carry out our work of solidarity in the widest sense of macro-diakonia and plan our aims accordingly, we must together learn more about where the mission with which we are charged is calling us:

If the Church is the church of Jesus Christ, it knows only one destination: the Kingdom of God. And all human goals must be critically analysed in the light of the information which we have received about the nature of that Kingdom and the road that leads towards it. The Church must therefore ask: which development, which emancipation, which revolution is in line with God's design?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Basil the Great, Comment. in Jes.1.497E (Migne, para. 30.322D and 498A, B (para. 30.393A).

<sup>22</sup> Clem., Str. 6.6 (para. 9, 268C).

<sup>23</sup> Acta Thomae A 156.

<sup>24</sup> Jn. Damasc, *De fide orth.*, 3.29 (para. 94.1101A).

<sup>25</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs, op. cit.*, p. 367. Emilio Castro is certainly correct in writing: "The teaching of Orthodox theologians on the transformation of the whole reality on the model of the transfiguration can help us in our understanding of the relation between history and eschatology." Equally correctly, for the Orthodox and everyone else, he adds: "This transformation is not an automatic process; it is a continuous search. It is an exposure of ourselves in worship to the action of God" *Sent Free*, Geneva, WCC, 1985, p. 80.