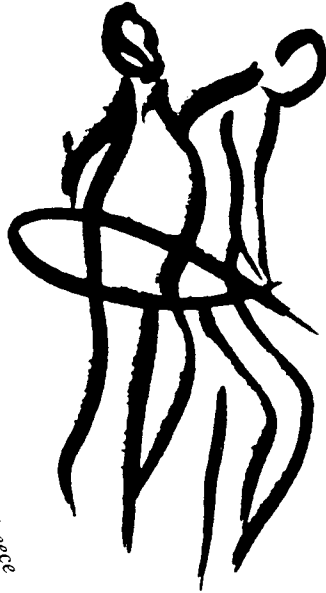
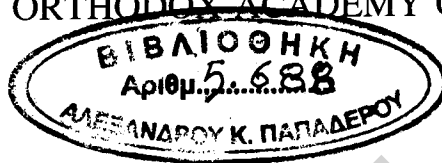


Nana Frangaki, Greece



“FACE TO FACE”
LITERATURE AND ART
IN THE RENEWAL
OF THE CHURCH’S MISSION

A PROJECT
OF THE ORTHODOX ACADEMY OF CRETE



INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSION
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In his editorial in the April 1990 issue of the *International Review of Mission*, Christopher Duraisingh, director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, pointed out that the four sectional themes of the world conference on mission and evangelism in San Antonio (May 1989) were closely related to the four sub-themes of the forthcoming VIIth Assembly (February 1991) of the World Council of Churches. He saw, thus, a profound relationship between the San Antonio section I theme, "Turning to the Living God," and the fourth sub-theme of Canberra, "Holy Spirit — Transform and Sanctify Us!"

For this issue of the IRM, the Orthodox Academy of Crete was invited to share some significant aspects of one of its projects, on literature and art, having a strong missionary connotation.

The way in which the Academy conceived this project and the responses to it could perhaps offer some new insights to further the understanding of the relationship between the two sub-themes. What follows is a description of the project and an interpretation in light of the sub-themes of the San Antonio conference and the Canberra assembly. The illustrations selected for reproduction in this issue are all works belonging to the Orthodox Academy of Crete's project and collection "FACE TO FACE."

Renewing the church's mission in creative ways

In 1983, the Orthodox Academy of Crete invited artists from all over Greece to take part in an original project, the theme of which was the dialogue between the fourth century monk, St Makarios of Egypt, and a skull:

MAKARIOS: "Who are you?"

SKULL: "I was a priest of the pagans. When you pray for us in hell, we are consoled."

MAKARIOS: "What is it like in hell? What kind of consolation do you feel?"

SKULL: "We are standing in the midst of flames, which reach up to the sky, but our actual torment is that we cannot see each other's face because we are bound — tied *back to back*. That is hell indeed! But when you pray for us, the ropes become loose, and we can see each other, *face to face*. That is the consolation!"

This profound existential question emanating from the depths of the desert, where the dialogue took place, stirred the interest of many, first in Greece and then in countries on all continents. Hagiographers, painters, sculptors, carvers, poets, composers and others, a total of 231 persons from 28 countries, have already donated their works to the Academy. In addition, 90 children from Greece and Finland have participated in the programme with 94 designs of impressive sensitivity.

The confrontation of the human being with him or herself, with fellow human beings and with nature, loneliness, unsociability, war and death, but also life, tenderness, forgiveness, solidarity, motherhood, love, friendship and peace, are

some of the pivots around which revolved the creative thoughts of those who took part in the spiritual message of Abbot Makarios.

The Academy hosted first the Greek artists who took part in the project and subsequently, in 1989, artists from several countries in the framework of an international conference and exhibit of literature and art. We were deeply impressed to discover that, through the Academy's programme, a spiritual message, such as that of St Makarios, reached the ends of the world, moved so many persons of different backgrounds and aroused many creative ideas in them. It serves as a productive example of the renewal of the church's mission through new, creative ways.

To turn the realities of this world

A tragic outlook on life is emphasized in many of the works, with less attention to the overcoming of everyday hell. But the theme of the project also contains an aspect of consolation. The consolation is to turn the realities of this world, and instead of being tied back to back, be able to become united and "face to face." One is reminded here of some lines from the San Antonio report: "Christian mission is the humble involvement of the one body of Christ in liberating and suffering love, the witness of God's saving acts in Christ, and the practice of God's incarnational love for all humankind. The mission is expressed through the communion of love and justice which embodies the church's self-giving solidarity with the human family."¹

Until now humankind has lived with the logic of destruction. The ancient Romans said: "*homo homini lupus.*" (The human being is a wolf for the human being.) Even Jean-Paul Sartre says: "*L'enfer c'est l'autre.*" (My neighbour is my hell.) In other words, the presence of the human face is my hell. On the contrary, in the spirituality of the Orthodox tradition we learn that real hell is the absence of the human face, the inability for *koinonia* in love and fellowship. Surely, we experience the projection of hell in our everyday lives — there are plenty of cauldrons, tar, flames surrounding us! Real hell, however, is the human being's estrangement from God, his/her turning "away" from the living God.

The theme of our project, "Face to Face," is therefore a call to us all, to struggle to overcome that reality, consequences of which are such phenomena as loneliness, despair, conflict, prejudice, injustice, war, death! In these phenomena, whose main outcome is the destruction of the *koinonia*, unity and communion, through the Holy Spirit, we discern clearly contemporary mission challenges as well as the possibilities for a transforming and sanctifying synergy (cooperation) with the Holy Spirit. Orthodox theologians gathered here, in the Academy, to deepen the assembly theme, stated that: "Wherever the Holy Spirit blows, the boundaries of individualism are transcended, and love and communion emerge. Liberation from individualism in the Holy Spirit results in freedom for others, in a community."²

ALEXANDROS PAPADEROS, Director, Orthodox Academy of Crete

¹ *The San Antonio Report*, F. J. Wilson, ed., WCC: Geneva, 1990, pp. 27-28.

² Orthodox Reflections on the Assembly Theme," in *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 42, Nos. 3-4, July/October, 1990, p. 302.

GUIDE TO THE ILLUSTRATIONS:

1. An African expression of St Makarios' dialogue.
Woodcarving by PIERRE NSHMYEYEZU, Rwanda.
2. Face to face in a broken world.
JULIE SIMMONS, USA.
3. St Makarios in dialogue with the skull.
STELLA PISSARDOU, Cyprus.
4. The grace of God is spread above the whole cosmos like a rainbow. The faithful of the three monotheistic religions face their symbols, and are engulfed in flames, back to back.
RAIMUND BLENINGER, Germany.
5. Contemporary hell in various expressions.
VIOLA BERKI, Hungary.
6. Three figures represent all of humankind on this earth, struggling with problems, trying to understand and control their future by consulting the horoscope and doing other magic acts. The symbols below, in the design patterns of ancient Indian art styles, include the horse, representing war, and the snake, symbolizing sin.

Above the figures, the curve of heaven contains an apple signifying the original sin of Adam and Eve, from which disobedience to the laws of God and the broken relationships with him have brought about all the misfortunes of human beings.

Into the darkness between this place of holiness and the world, where human beings struggle to deal with their problems through such hopeless superstitions as horoscopes and magic, the cross forms a bridge of hope by which any believer can come out from the darkness and death into the light of *koinonia*, face to face.
SURESH TELORE, India.
7. God, source of light and life, showers his grace on the whole creation. The representatives of the three monotheistic religions, however, concentrate on themselves, live in loneliness, back to back to each other.
ERNST-HERRMANN PEKIE, Germany.
8. "Metamorphosis" — material transfigured into Spirit.
BASILIOS KELAIDIS, Crete.



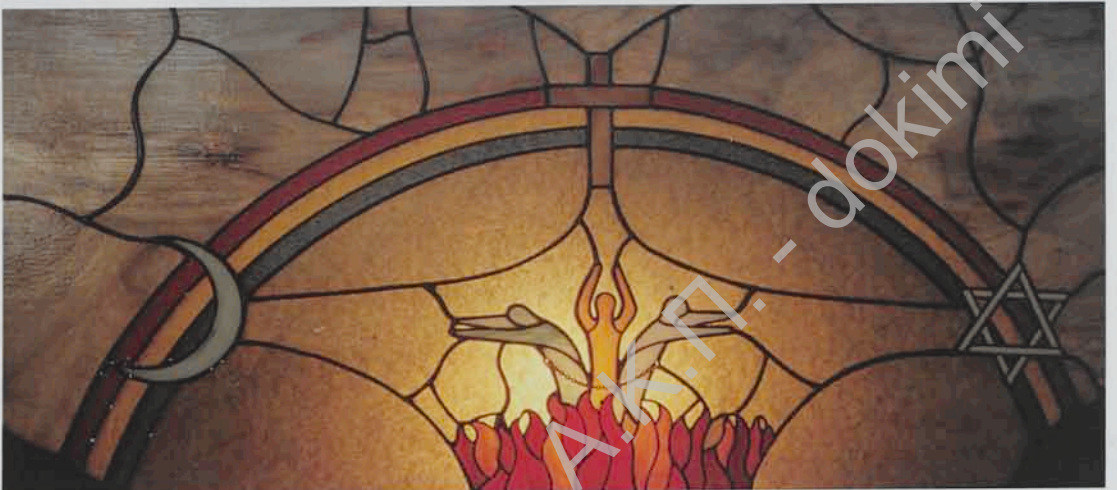
Pierre Nshmyeyezu, Rwanda.



Julie Simmons, USA.



Stella Pissardou, Cyprus.



Raimund Bleninger, Germany.



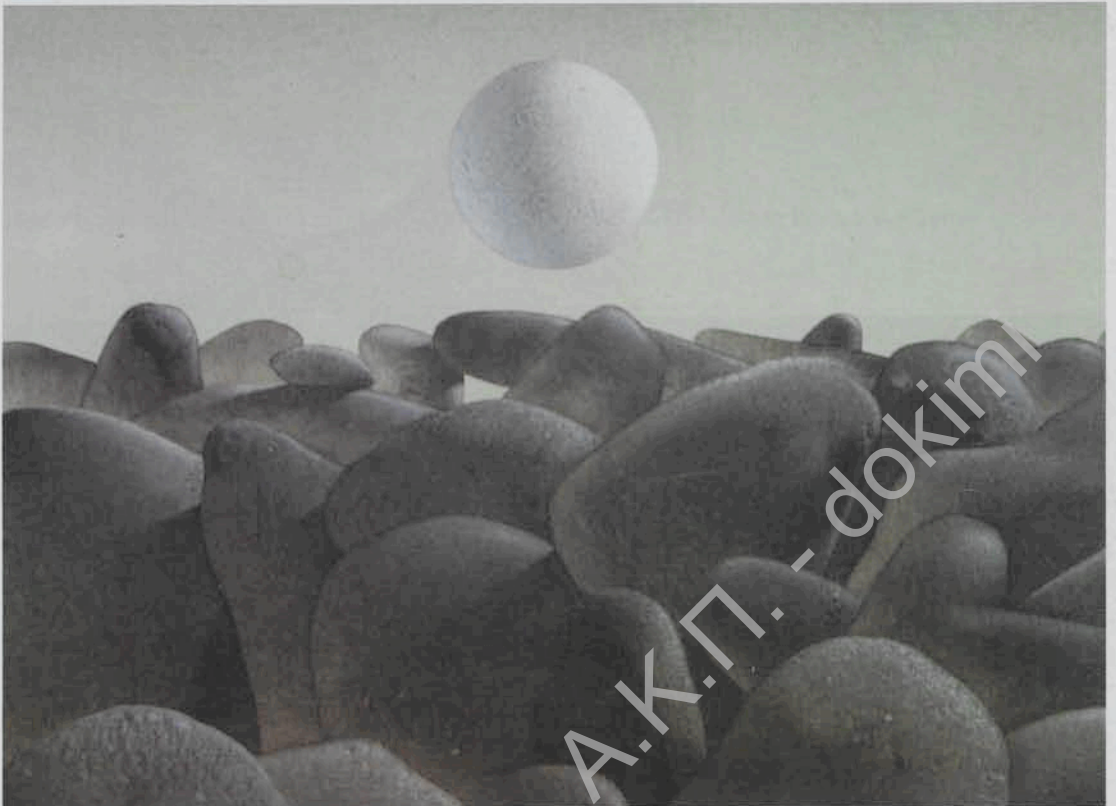
Viola Berki, Hungary.



Suresh Telore, India.



Ernst-Herrmann Pekié, Germany.



Basilius Kalaidis, Crete.