



Conference on World Mission and Evangelism

Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship

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Perspectives on Evangelism as contextual and prophetic (Europe)

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A. Need for evangelism

The workshop was discussing evangelism. A young man from the Global South was studious and devoted to his missionary call. His question was spontaneous: Who brought the Gospel to your country? Since when are you Christians?"

I replied: since the Apostle Paul proclaimed the Gospel of grace and truth in my hometown of Thessaloniki and in other Greek cities known from the Acts of the Apostles eventually reaching Rome. Then, until the end of the first millennium, the Word of God spread throughout the European continent and beyond.¹

The young man was a little surprised, but he continued to ask: If you Europeans are Christians for almost two thousand years, why are your churches not full on Sunday and why do you not have young people among you?

I agreed in part with the point of view, adding: it is undoubtedly necessary to rekindle Christian testimony in Europe.

The flame that enlightened the nations in Europe by offering the crucified and resurrected Christ as a way out of the fear and shadow of death (Matt. 4:16) has not been extinguished at all. In many cases, however, it has been "driven out" (Matt. 5: 1).

B. The infrastructure of the indifference

The secularisation of society, globalization, individualism and indifference to religion are usually referred to as the root causes of the decline of Christian faith in Europe. To these should be added the storm of totalitarian regimes that prevailed for decades of the 20th century in many of its countries, and with inhuman means attempted to uproot the faith in the God of love from everywhere: from the way of life, from the memory and from the heart of Christians. In the late 20th century, these regimes collapsed, but the virus of atheism that has systematically penetrated the consciousness of three generations is difficult to heal.

But the test of Christian faith in Europe had already begun much earlier. The "Age of Enlightenment" overcame logic and aspired with intellectual human functions and technological means to interpret and control natural creation. Religious faith has been overcome, overpowered and undermined.

Since then, the achievements of scientific research and its technological applications have been marvellous and beneficial to the peoples of all the earth. However, the dark aspects of the Enlightenment, individualism, exploitation, corruption, hypocrisy and amorality led to the current crisis of the values that plagues Europe.

¹Cf. the missionary work of St. Cyril and Methodius at the Slavic people (9th century) and the work of their disciples with the Russians (10th century).

C. Mission: sharing of gifts

It is time to place the lamp on the lampstand (Matt. 5:15), to illuminate those who will want to be in tune with the wavelength of God's grace and take up its gifts.

The message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete, 2016) clarifies the theological background of mission, its purpose and its results:

“Faithfully following the example of the Apostles and our god-bearing Fathers we have once again studied the gospel of freedom “for which Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5: 1). The foundation of our theological discussions was the certainty that the Church does not live for herself. She transmits the witness of the gospel of grace and truth and offers to the whole world the gifts of God: love, peace, justice, reconciliation, the power of the Cross and of the Resurrection and the expectation of eternal life.”²

These gifts are invaluable and respond to the deeper needs of every human being. The question is how the recipients will be cultivated to receive them and how, after an initial enthusiasm, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, they will grow into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom they will also be built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (cf. Eph. 2:20-22).

In a troubled field, the surface grass can cause temporary missionary euphoria. In Europe, however, the Christian faith resembles a tree with very deep roots and abundant spiritual fruits that have given hope and meaning to the lives of countless people through the ages. What is needed now is careful care with modern and effective methods for new fruition.

The transfer and reception of the message of the Gospel is a complex process involving several equally important factors. For this reason communication planning is being adopted by churches in Europe either for the re-evangelization of those who have been removed from the Eucharistic community or for the evangelization of those who have never heard of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

Sowing is the work of Christ's associates; fruitfulness is the work of the risen God (2 Corinthians 9:11). The life of the Church to date has shown that words are not convincing when not accompanied by similar works. And works are never enough if they do not come from an unwavering spiritual experience of the presence of Christ within human existence. Those who love God with all their soul and in all their intellect are those who give the good testimony of His love, peace and righteousness. The light of the divinity that sanctifies the holy people - men and women - is the one that beams all over the home and leads other people to know and glorify the father in heaven.

²<https://www.holycouncil.org/-/message>