

Message to the 27th International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality

Called to Life in Christ: In the Church, in the World, in the Present Time

Bose Monastery, 4-6 September 2019

Your Eminences and Graces, Reverend Fathers,
Dear Brother Enzo, Founder of Bose Monastery,
Dear Brother Luciano, Prior of Bose Monastery,
Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

As one who has personally benefited from the hospitality and ecumenical spirituality of the Bose community, I am delighted to offer my greetings at the onset of your conference. The monastery remains a true ecumenical beacon in its commitment and contributions, as evidenced in the strong relationships and friendships of the community with the WCC and our members.

The Orthodox spirituality experienced and lived in this monastery cannot be separated from its continual sharing beyond its walls and beyond confessional borders. Life is communion: communion with each other and with God. The Apostle Paul says it beautifully: "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). In the liturgy of John Chrysostom, we hear repeatedly: "Let us commend ourselves and one another and our whole lives to Christ our Lord." This call teaches and reminds us what the Christian life is all about. Against any compartmentalization, it stresses the wholeness of the life which must be directed toward the source of life, which is God.

The theme of your conference proposes three dimensions of our living in Christ: (1) in the church, (2) in the world, and (3) in the present time. Allow me to offer a few brief reflections on each.

(1) Life in Christ in the church

Being in Christ means being in his body, which is his church. The church is unity in Christ, the closest union with Christ. Being parts of the body of Christ, Christians contribute conjointly to the realization of the kingdom of God, which is an icon of the Trinitarian reality. Everything sinful estranges us from this reality. Through repentance, a key point in understanding the relation with the church in Orthodox spirituality, Christians become reconciled and united unto the church, as the prayer at confession says. Cultivating in us and in our world the gifts of this communion, we experience a foretaste of the coming reign of God.

(2) Life in Christ in the world

Not only the Evangelists and St. Paul teach us about our relation with the world, but also early Christian literature. The letter of Mathetes to Diognetus from the 2nd century says about Christians, that "they live in the flesh, but they are not governed by the desires of the flesh. They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven." Our heavenly citizenship expresses the idea that living in the world, our home and which we are charged to protect, entails discipleship that transcends mere worldly values. Acting accordingly, Christians make present Christ's healing presence: "They live in poverty, but enrich many; they are totally destitute, but possess an abundance of everything. They suffer dishonor, but that is their glory. They are defamed, but vindicated. A blessing is their answer to abuse,

deference their response to insult. For the good they do they receive the punishment of malefactors, but even then they rejoice, as though receiving the gift of life” (ch. 5). John the Evangelist expresses the same stance: “If you belonged to the world the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you” (John 15:19). The message of Christians can be very uncomfortable for the world. Still, Christians have the responsibility to speak loudly and prophetically the message of the gospel, which is a message of love, against personal and collective sins, which affect our lives, our inter-personal relations, and our relation with the whole environment.

(3) Life in Christ in the present time

Our present times are marked by major challenges: migration, the rise of populism, religious extremism, environmental crises—the list goes on. Living in and witnessing to the transforming love of Christ, Christians are called not only to serve the urgent needs of our world but also to work and pray for healing, reconciliation, and sanctification of every human being. With its theme “Christ’s love moves the world toward reconciliation and unity,” the next WCC assembly in 2021 in Karlsruhe, Germany, points to the reality and goal of being co-workers of Christ in our turbulent times.

I am sure that this gathering will make an important contribution to greater understanding of the Christian vocation today, and I wish for you an enriching time of fellowship, discussion, and reflection as you explore common spiritual sources.

Sincerely yours in Christ, our God and Saviour,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary
World Council of Churches