

# THE EVANGELISTIC WITNESS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH TODAY \*

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1. a. Undoubtedly one of man's most basic needs is his need to communicate. It is overpoweringly difficult psychologically—if not impossible — for him to keep secret that which prevails in his soul. This need to communicate is invincible, even when the imparting of knowledge of certain things places him in grave danger. We need only recall King Midas' barber who, possessed by an overwhelming desire to tell someone that his master, the King of Phrygia, had the ears of a donkey, dug a hole in the ground and in fear and trembling communicated to it his great secret.

b. If then the fear which accompanies the telling of such secrets is overcome by the need to communicate them, how much more so must one not be content merely with announcing, but must unceasingly proclaim that which for him is Εὐαγγέλιον, «good news» or rather «life» and its communication, the source of life and the cause of eternal glory? As Tobit says, «A king's secret ought to be kept but the works of God should be gloriously proclaimed»<sup>1</sup>.

c. But if the announcing of the riches of divine Revelation of which we have been made worthy, both as a whole, i. e. as the Orthodox Church, and as members in particular, through the divine enlightenment of understanding the faith delivered us, is in itself life and life-giving, light and light-giving, then how much more so must it be, since it is for us our highest mission — a mission which in a sense makes us equal to «the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus»<sup>2</sup>? «As my Father hath sent me even so send I you»<sup>3</sup>. Every man that expresses and

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\* A paper delivered at the Orthodox Consultation on «Confessing Christ Today» recently held in Bucharest, Rumania from June 4-8, 1974.

1. Tobit 12,11.
2. Hebrews 3,1.
3. John 20,21.

conveys the treasure of the appearance of Christ's glory to him and speaks to another about His Holy Name «gloriously proclaiming to Him the works of God» and calling him to become a participant, a joint-heir and a partaker of the faith and the glory of the Kingdom of Christ, becomes a «mouth of the Word». The «mouths of the Word (Logos)» are called «all-golden» (πάγχρυσα) by the *Doxastikon* of the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, i.e., filled with divine glory and divine gifts. And indeed, all those who preach the Word and gloriously proclaim the works of God are called Apostles and *ισαπόστολοι*, «equal to the Apostles», regardless of whether they preached Christ to non-Christians (e.g. SS. Methodios and Cyril, Vladimir), or to the Christian faithful (e.g. SS. Constantine the Great, Cosmas the Aetolian). St. Cosmas the Aetolian, a humble Athonite hesychast, strengthened, with his words filled with divine wisdom, the Orthodox in their love for Christ and in their contempt for the pressures exerted upon them by Islam, and sealing his preaching of the Logos with the crown of martyrdom, was proclaimed upon his repose *ισαπόστολος*, equal to the Apostles.

d. In addition, it should be pointed out that Evangelism is a command with the promise of an hundredfold. «Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature»<sup>4</sup>, that is, to all those who know the Gospel insufficiently or not at all.

2. a. The preaching of the Gospel is carried out by two groups of people: a) those humble servants of the Lord who lost in the nameless crowd are known only to God. Their work is usually accomplished without «means» and «method». And yet despite this fact, it usually brings forth more wondrous results, possibly because it is carried out «not with the wisdom of words», for when the preaching of the Gospel is carried out in wisdom of words, the Cross of Christ and the mystery of the Cross are made of no effect. On the contrary, when the wisdom of the world is set aside, it is the power of Christ, viz. the power of the Cross and the Resurrection<sup>5</sup>, that is active<sup>6</sup>. According to the proclamation of the Most Holy Eastern Orthodox Patriarchs (1848) the guardian, observer, continuator and first preacher of the Orthodox Faith in its purest form is the Orthodox people (λαός). Such were the founders of the Church of Rome and of countless other Churches.

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4. Mark 16,15.

5. Philip. 3,10.

6. II Cor. 12,9.

b) the special laborers of the Gospel, the experts in Evangelism. The strange thing is that sometimes in the hands of the experts, the *ex cathedra* evangelists, evangelism finds itself in a sickly state, at times even incurably so. They often feel that the best way to preach to the «neo-pagan» contemporary world is to appear to know «something more». The foolishness of the kerygma is thus transformed into a religio-philosophical system *ad hominem*, conforming to the spirit of the times.

But as the Most Rev. Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh points out, the Orthodox kerygma may be conformed only outwardly «in order to make...sense»<sup>7</sup> and never inwardly, that is, as regards its content.

The Orthodox Church is the Church of Tradition. Tradition is something that is at the same time static and dynamic. The dynamism in conforming the kerygma in order that it be comprehended by contemporary man should in no way harm the stability of changeless Apostolic Tradition which we are obliged to protect from harm and to preserve unadulterated from all types of modernizing and conformity, i.e., from alteration. Preaching the divine truths to present-day man must not accommodate or conform the eternal Gospel to the world «whose fashion passeth away»<sup>8</sup>; but rather we must adapt and conform the transient world to the Lord's eternal Gospel, thus «churchifying» the world «ἐκκλησιοποιούντες αὐτόν». In other words, in preaching the Gospel today we must be «precise guardians of the Apostolic Traditions» that is to say, preachers of the total treasure of Faith. «And they shall turn again to Thee and Thou shalt not turn again to them»<sup>9</sup>.

3. We have now come to a most controversial point. We were given the topic, «Evangelistic Witness of the Orthodox Church Today», that is to say, an aspect of the topic, «Salvation Today». The undertaking of expounding such a topic at first sight appears to be correct. Indeed, the message of salvation in Christ must be music in the heart of the preacher. The mentality of the hearers, all children of their times, is the music that is in the hearts of those to whom the message is directed. And if the message is directed simply *in terms* which modern man understands, we then have harmony in its reception.

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7. «Interview with Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh» *International Review of Mission* Vol LXIII, No 249, Jan 1974, p. 88.

8. I Cor. 7,31.

9. Jeremiah 15,19.

Unfortunately, however, very often the kerygma is compromised in content. We need not mention here the criticism rightly made by His Holiness, Patriarch Pimen of Moscow, about the Bangkok Consultation on Salvation Today. The points raised are well known<sup>10</sup>.

It should be pointed out that many expected that the *aggiornamento* would bear many sweet fruits. However, it did not; or rather, they «waited for it to bring forth grapes and it brought forth thorns»<sup>11</sup>. It is indeed a frightening and unnatural thing for the vineyard to bring forth thorns and the Church poisoned by conformity to the world to bring forth fruits of apostacy and exoneration of unmentionable acts. The Church has never had so many means of Evangelism at her disposal as she has today. And yet never has her kerygma, despite so much adaption, proven to be so anemic.

Why? Because theology has been replaced by anthropology. Theology is considered to be an exhausted field, and has been pushed aside. Man has now become the center of our concern. The importance of «the phenomena» has been overly stressed. Horizontalism has overcome verticalism. Horizontalism, instead of being understood as the shadow of the upright, the vertical, Cross of Christ which is called by the sacred hymnodists of our Church «a ladder reaching to Heaven» κλίμαξ οὐρανομήκης, and as the fruit of the vertical demension, has become a purpose in itself. It has become a hope and consequently an abomination like the brasen serpent in the days of Hezekiah<sup>12</sup>.

At this point I should like to mention certain opinions mentioned by Michael Cassidy in his article, «The Third Way»<sup>13</sup>.

«...all evangelism is mission. Not all mission is evangelism'... Humanization which excludes spiritual salvation— or places it on a lower level or even on the same level with something earthly — is not true humanization, for it is Jesus alone who introduces men to their fullest potential and their truest humanity. Thus mission which has no place for evangelism is not mission in the biblical sense... The Christian valuation of the secular, both positively and negatively, depends on faith in God and eternal life». «...To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus in the power of the

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10. Cf. «Editorial Correspondence» *International Review of Mission*, op. cit., p. 125-129.

11. Isaiah 5,2,4.

12. IV Kings (II Samuel) 18,4.

13. *International Review of Mission*, op. cit., p. 17-20.

Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church.' This is not to invalidate the horizontal, social or political, but to insist that these depend upon the vertical and do not precede it».

«...The fact that aspects of this message may be either unacceptable or offensive to modern rationalistic man should not make us restructure the message to accommodate him, but to explicate its meaning relevantly, to touch him not simply in his cultural or social context but in his existential need, perplexity and moral guilt. To proclaim relevantly therefore is not as Helmut Thielicke observes, 'To accommodate ourselves or ape those we would reach. Far from it. Paul actually contradicted the Greeks and the Jews and showed them God was completely different from what they had expected. But it was in terms of their suppositions and notions that he searched them out. He met their questions on their level. That makes all the difference. He did not ape what they were saying just to make the Gospel palatable.' Modernity can never be an end in itself, and certainly not at the cost of reworking, or amputating the Kerygmatic content. The world sets neither the final agenda nor the message. Nor in this connection will we forget the message of the Cross is generally *skandalon* before foundation-stone».

The entire meaning of the Orthodox kerygma is contained in the words of the *prokeimenon* of Good Friday: «Lord, on the very same day Thou madest the thief worthy of paradise; do Thou also through the wood of the Cross enlighten me and save me». More than William Temple<sup>14</sup>, the Orthodox Church insists that «natural theology and sacramental universe hunger for Divine Revelation», because a social or modern or horizontal kerygma means spiritual starvation for the people of God and is labor in vain.

4. The Orthodox Church, if it is to remain orthodox, must at all times and in all ages repeat unfalsified the kerygma of the Apostles and the prophets. «As the prophets saw, as the Apostles taught, as the Church received, as the Teachers dogmatized, as the *Ecumene* believed in

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14. Quoted in Cassidy, op. cit., p. 21.

unanimity, as Grace shone forth, as Christ rewarded, so do we believe, so do we speak, so do we preach Christ our true God»<sup>15</sup>.

The kerygma of the Orthodox should revolve around the three following poles:

a) The doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Even though the special characteristic of our age is that it is anti-dogmatic, the dogma of the Holy Trinity constitutes the first kerygma of the Church. The Orthodox Church does not simply believe in the Trinity as a paragraph of the *depositum fidei*. The Holy Trinity is all in all. «τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν». The Triune God is without beginning, incomprehensible, indescribable and changeless. He is our hope, the source of life and sanctity. He is the Father, the Saviour, the Rewarder, the King. The entire life and *doxologia* of the Orthodox Church revolve around the thrice-Holy God. «And this is life eternal, that may know thee, the only true God»<sup>16</sup>.

Let us recall for a moment the words of St. Gregory the Theologian in his *Συντακτήριον (Supremum Vale)*. «Χαίροις μοι, ὦ Τριάς, τὸ ἐμὸν μελέτημα καὶ καλλώπισμα. Καὶ σώζοιο τοῖσδε. Καὶ σώζοις τούσδε, τὸν ἐμὸν λαόν. Καὶ ἀγγελοῦ μοι διαπαντὸς ὑψουμένη καὶ λόγῳ καὶ πολιτεία. Τεκνία φυλάσσοιτέ μοι τὴν παρακαταθήκην». «Hail, O Trinity, my meditation and my adornment. May you ever be preserved in their hearts, and may you ever save them who are my people. And may I always hear that you are forever exalted by men's words and by the manner of their lives. My children, please preserve the *parakatatheke* (deposit)»<sup>17</sup>. The Holy Trinity is the *parakatatheke*, the deposit. It is the kerygma which must be kept alive in the consciences of the faithful and be proclaimed and glorified by word and by manner of life.

b) The Divine Economy, that is, the Incarnation of the Logos and all that it implies. Economy is that meaning which pervades and fills the Orthodox Church and penetrates to the very marrow of her bones. As St. Anastasius the Sinaite says: «Οἰκονομία ἐστὶ ἐκούσιος μεγέθους συγκατάβασις πρὸς σωτηρίαν τινῶν γινομένη» «Economy is majesty's voluntary condescension for the salvation of some». Divine Economy as it is accepted by the Orthodox differs greatly — at least according to certain theologians — from the soteriological tenets of the Westerns: the Roman Catholics

15. *Synodikon* of The Sunday of Orthodoxy.

16. John 17,3.

17. Homily 42,27.

and the Protestants. Divine Economy, as Economy, can never have as its purpose the satisfaction of Divine Justice or the satisfaction of man's emotional needs.

Divine Economy is a voluntary condescension in order to crush the devil and to raise man to the throne of Divine Majesty. «He hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His goodness towards us through Christ Jesus»<sup>18</sup>. He became man so that we might become as God. The purpose of Divine Economy is the *theosis* of man. As St. Irenaeus states: «Qui propter immensam suam dilectionem factus est quod summus nos, uti nos perficeret esse quod ipse est»<sup>19</sup>. «Because of His infinite love He became that which we are in order to make us that which He Himself is». Furthermore, St. Athanasius says that through Divine Economy He became a flesh-bearing God, (Θεός σαρκωφόρος), while we became Spirit-bearing men, (άνθρωποι πνευματοφόροι).

«The fallen race of men, ἡ κάτω κειμένη ἀδαμιαία μορφή, has become συγκάθεδρος (seated-together) upon the throne of the Holy Trinity»<sup>20</sup>. Without Divine Economy all of man's efforts to progress and be perfected are something demonic. «Ἐψεύσθη πάλαι Ἄδὰμ καὶ Θεὸς ἐπιθυμήσας οὐ γέγονεν» says the *troparion* of the feast of the Annunciation; i.e., «Adam in ancient times was beguiled and desiring to become God did not become so». «God becomes man so that He might make Adam (man) God». Through Economy, says St. Gregory the Theologian, «ὁ πλουτίζων πτωχεύει πτωχεύει τὴν ἐμὴν σάρκα, ἵνα ἐγὼ πλουτίσω τὴν αὐτοῦ Θεότητα». «He who is rich becomes poor. He becomes poor by assuming my flesh so that I might become rich by receiving His divinity».

No greater injustice can be done to Divine Economy than to assert that it occurred simply in order to announce as formally as possible God's mandate concerning the salvation of the world!

The Divine Economy is the greatest treasure of truth, the greatest power of life eternal, of life indestructable. The entire spirituality of the Orthodox Church is based upon Divine Economy. As St. Symeon the New Theologian writes: «O how miraculous! that man is united with God spiritually and bodily, for the souls are not separated from the mind,

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18. Eph. 2,6,7.

19. Adv. Haer. E., prologue.

20. Service of the Ascension.

neither is the body separated from the soul. God is united with man essentially (οὐσιωδῶς) that is, both body and soul».

It might behoove us to say here a few things about *theosis* basing ourselves on Archimandrite Meletios Kalamaras' book, *Hagiologia*<sup>21</sup>.

a) The *Theosis* of the Soul or the *phronema* (mind, convictions).

When God says, «Be ye holy for I am holy» (I Peter 1,16) or «Be ye merciful as your Father also is merciful» (Luke 6,36), He wants to say, «Be ye of a like mind with Me». Man begins to think as God does through *theosis*. Deified are those who possess the desires of the Spirit. Their life is «in God» (ἐνθεος). From the moment a man becomes deified and begins to think as God does, the words of the well-known *apolytikion* may be applied to him and it may be said of him that «In thee, Father, the καρ' εἰκόνα (image) has been precisely preserved, for having taken up the Cross, thou hast followed Christ and by your deeds you taught (men) to overlook the flesh for it passeth away, and to care for the soul which is immortal».

The result of *theosis* is that man becomes the image of God. According to St. Maximus the Confessor, he becomes not merely the living image of Christ, but the very same thing as He, through grace rather than by likeness.

Man's mind reaches the point where it becomes indetical with the mind of God.

b) The *theosis* of our actions or energies.

A natural consequence of the *theosis* of the *phronema* is the *theosis* of the energies. Through *theosis* the mind (διάνοια), the heart, the will, the body, are filled with the grace and power of God. Through *theosis* not only do those who are deified improve their nature but also assume the divine energy itself, says St. Gregory Palamas. Thus man's words, his energies, his works become expressions of God's grace and power. As St. Gregory Palamas underlines with special emphasis, «the saints participate not only in the results (of God's energies), but like the angels and in the dignity of the angels, they participate in the very energies themselves» «οὐ τῶν ἀποτελεσμάτων μόνον (τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ) ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῶν τῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐνεργειῶν ἀγγελομιμήτως τε

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21. Hagiologia, by Meletios Kalamaras, Athens 1973, p. 18-22.



καὶ ἀγγελοπρεπῶς οἱ ἅγιοι μετέχουσι»<sup>22</sup> that is to say, they act in God's name and in His stead, as do the holy angels.

St. Basil the Great clearly teaches that the Spirit-bearing souls, «αἱ πνευματοφόροι ψυχαί», when they are illumined by the Holy Spirit not only do they themselves become spiritual but also allow the light to be transmitted to others «αἱ πνευματοφόροι ψυχαί, ἔλλαμψεῖσαι παρὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος, αὐταὶ τε ἀποτελοῦνται πνευματικαὶ καὶ εἰς ἑτέρους τὴν χάριν ἐξαποστέλλουσι»<sup>23</sup>.

### c) The *Theosis* of the Body.

One of the most essential results of *theosis* is the sanctification and deification of the body. The body is not the prison of the soul, as Plato taught. Nor does the body have only an earthly predestination. «The body is not for fornication but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body»<sup>24</sup>. The body should be the temple of God and the temple of God is holy. Thus the body must be completely sanctified through *theosis*. The body finds its true and full value in *theosis* and not in the humanistic worship of the flesh.

However, let us see for a moment what St. Symeon the New Theologian says about the *theosis* of the body.

«The soul which has been made worthy to become a partaker of Divine Grace because it has been sanctified, sanctifies as a result, its body, for it is she who holds the body together and is found in all its members. For this reason, as the grace of the Holy Spirit appropriates the soul it also appropriates the body. However, as long as the soul is with the body, the Holy Spirit does not completely transfer to its glory the soul's body, for it is necessary that the soul express her will till the end of this life, i.e. to manifest whether or not she follows this grace of the Holy Spirit. But when the end comes and the soul separates from the body: when her spiritual warfare has ceased and she leaves the body with the crown of incorruptibility, then I say the grace of the Holy Spirit appropriates and sanctifies completely the entire body of such a soul, and it is for this reason that the naked bones and the relics of the saints exude cures and heal every illness. For when with death the soul separates from the body, then by herself, without the body, she finds herself united together with all of divinity, i.e., divine grace, and she becomes

22. Περὶ τῆς θεοποιουῦ μεθέξεως. CHAP. 19.

23. Περὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. CHAP. 9.

24. I Cor. 6,13.

God by grace, κατὰ χάριν. The body on the other hand, remains alone, without the soul, united only with divinity, and manifests the divine energy to men through miracles. For then neither is it possible for the soul to be hindered any longer by any obstacle arising from her union with the body since she is now separated from it. Nor again can the body be burdened any longer with any bodily need arising from the soul, viz., hunger, thirst and similar things. But because both these two, the body and the soul, have been loosed from every necessity or hindrance arising from their being united together, Divine Grace is present and acts (ἐνεργεῖται) unhindered in both, for both soul and body have already become God's completely, and Divinity appropriates them because of the God-befitting manner of life which they lived while joined together. And at the time of the common resurrection the body also receives that incorruptibility which God has granted to the sanctified soul»<sup>25</sup>.

Likewise, St. Athanasius states that «the grace of God is to be found in the souls and (bodily) members of the saints»<sup>26</sup>.

Thus, only if one takes seriously into consideration the teaching concerning *theosis* which is the center of Orthodox Theology, anthropology and spirituality, can he understand how greatly Orthodoxy's kerygma can be distorted by a) horizontalism, b) modernity, c) the humanistic valuation of sex observed in Western Theology, d) theological priority given to rationalism and philosophy and e) the enticing words of man's wisdom, i.e., the «convincing» sermon.

The Orthodox Church is defined by the following landmarks:

- a) the condemnation of Arianism, i.e., religious rationalism.
- b) the condemnation of Origenism, i.e., religious philosophical speculation.
- c) the condemnation of Iconoclasm i.e., Orthodox Theology's being invaded by elements and criteria from other religions.
- d) the condemnation of the Barlaamites and the triumph of the Patristic Tradition of apophaticism, *theosis* and hesychasm which constitutes the complete denial of horizontalism.

That is to say, the Orthodox Church has condemned all deviations and has remained Apostolic and Patristic.

It is indeed unfortunate that the Western world does not possess even the presuppositions for understanding Orthodox teaching. Dr.

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25. Homily 4,d.

26. Hermeneia of Psalm 117.

Philip Potter, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, speaking at the Silver Jubilee of the World Council talked about «the inability of our western, both Roman and Protestant, world to take seriously the Orthodox tradition and witness»<sup>27</sup>.

Without the teaching of *theosis* which is the fullest presence of the Holy Spirit in man, that is to say without the Spirit or at least the «crumbs» of the Spirit, the Orthodox, regardless how good a theologian he may be, is a natural man, *ἄνθρωπος ψυχικός*. «And the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. Neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned»<sup>28</sup>.

Within the general principle of *theosis* through the Divine Economy, the works of *askesis* (cleansing oneself from the passions) and the spiritual virtues obtain infinite value, for the virtues are proofs that the *phronema* and the energies have been deified. This, however, does not mean that Orthodox life degenerates at any time into self-righteousness or into a religion of the dead-letter, since all works and all virtues are nothing more than the presuppositions or the fruits of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### c) The Doctrine concerning the Church.

For the Orthodox, the Church is the center and the organ of communicating salvation to men through the kerygma of the Divine Word and through the perfecting of the Divine Mysteries. Orthodox believe in the Church just as they believe in the Holy Trinity. The Church is something more than the people of God, something more than the Communion of saints. She is inconceivable and incomprehensible. She is the oldest of all and for her was the world created, «ἡ πρεσβυτέρα πάντων δι' ἣν ὁ κόσμος ἐκτίσθη». According to Professor Ioannis Karmiris, «she is a *mysterion* united with the *mysterion* of the Divine Incarnation, a 'mysterious' and inexpressible union of God with man»<sup>29</sup>.

Orthodox Ecclesiology, essentially different from Roman and Protestant Ecclesiology, cannot easily be compromised with views of horizontalism, modernity, etc. — all genuine off-springs of Protestant and Roman Catholic Ecclesiology.

For the Orthodox, *keryx* is not the individual but the Church.

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27. Quoted in Mundvel V. George, «Incarnational Mission and Liturgical Proclamation, Internat'l Review of Mission, op. cit., p. 38.

28. I Cor. 2,14.

29. Ioan. Karmiris. *Ekklesiologia*, Athens 1973, p. 9.

The individuals believe in the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and believing they preach as they believe. «And we also believe and therefore speak»<sup>30</sup>.

5. Orthodox priests do not carry out their ministry of preaching according to their own personal convictions and subjective outlook, but in accordance with the Tradition of the Church. Indeed, the more he is faithful and bound to Tradition, the deeper is the response in the hearts of the Orthodox. As examples I mention here but two of the many clergymen who lived and worked in Athens during the present century. a) Father Nicolaos Planas who, although illiterate, was a worker of signs and miracles and a most worthy proclaimer of the Gospel of Christ, and b) Protopresbyter Angelos Nissiotis, a man wise in worldly wisdom but even wiser in the wisdom of God; a man with tremendous spiritual radiance and genuine Orthodox direction.

In place of any conclusions, I shall close with a dialogue which transpired between a Protestant theologian and propagandist and a simple Orthodox Christian.

— What do you believe?

— Whatever *she* believes, answered the Orthodox, pointing to the Church.

— And what does she believe? asked the Protestant again.

— That which I, too, believe.

The Faith of the people and the faith of the Church are one and the same, and the one safe-guards the other. The Kerygma of the People and the Kerygma of the Church are identical and the one illumines the other.

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30. II Cor. 4,13.