



CONCLUSIONS - 2nd ORTHODOX YOUTH CONFERENCE
“MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH – CITIZENS OF THE WORLD”
Istanbul, 11-16 July 2007

“You are the light of the world.” (Math. 5:14)

The Ecumenical Patriarchate, under the auspices and blessing of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, organized in the City, from the 11th until the 16th of July, the 2nd Orthodox Youth Conference, with the theme: “Members of the Church - Citizens of the World.” The first such Conference took place in the City in June 2000.

Approximately 900 young men and women participated in this Conference from all the Eparchies of the Ecumenical Patriarchate throughout the world, as well as from sister Orthodox Churches, Monastic Communities, other Christian Churches and Confessions, Orthodox Theological Schools and Academies, Institutes and Seminars, International Church Organizations and International Youth Associations, Cultural Foundations and local Christian Churches.

The Conference provided a forum for participants to become acquainted with one another, offering them the opportunity for communication and dialogue, as well as to meet the Mother Church and personally with His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch. In addition, there was occasion to visit the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Theological School of Halki, and the ancient monuments of the City. Coming from different cultural environments, we realized the ecumenical dimension of Orthodoxy, its unifying power and, at the same time, the richness of each of our traditions. We experienced the Ecumenical Patriarchate not as a national Church but as an embodiment of the ecumenical spirit and universal dimensions of the Christian Gospel, where the ethnic, linguistic and cultural expression of its members is never undermined but only enhanced and established as an instrument of society.

The opening of the Conference was blessed by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who reminded us, as youth, of our personal place and particular role within the divine-human body of the Church, according to the gift that each has been given or will be entrusted with in the future by God. His All Holiness invited us to recognize and embrace our unique talent and role in the Church in order willingly and responsibly to respond to the calling of God. As citizens of the Kingdom who are simultaneously citizens of the world, we should neither identify with the world nor reject the world without cause, but rather assume a “critical stance” in the world according to the standard that “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20).

The various presentations and ensuing discussions revealed to all of us the creative intensity and dynamic dialectic between our capacity as Members of the Church and as Citizens of the World.

1. *The Eucharistic and eschatological identity of the Church does not release us from our responsibility and witness in history and the world. The eschatological nature of the Church is incompatible with an anti-canonical and anti-historical eschatology. The phrase “not of the world” does not refute the phrase “in the world” but in fact strengthens and directs it toward eternity. Through the Eucharist, the Church is placed at the end, while at the same time in the very center of history.*

2. *Mission belongs to the identity of the Church. It is more of an ontological feature, an expression of the Church’s Trinitarian constitution and life, rather than merely relating to its operation and activity. The Holy Spirit is a spirit of witness. Christian mission has no hidden agenda and no intention of proselytism. We are witnesses of salvation in Christ, and everyone is free to decide accordingly. This Orthodox missionary ethos already exists within the worship of our Church and we ought to discover it anew. Participation in the Divine Liturgy must become a fundamental source for authentic missionary inspiration and activity.*

3. *Since the heart of the Church beats in the Holy Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy is always a spring of salvific experience and knowledge. For this reason, we must not only understand the liturgical life of the Church but also experience the liturgical ethos of the Church as the core of our life. The mystery and sacraments of the Church also guide us toward respect and protection of God’s creation, namely toward a Eucharistic relationship with the natural environment.*

4. *The miracle of saintliness adorns the life of the Church throughout the ages. The communion of saints includes those that have experienced the presence of God, those that have suffered like Christ, spiritual fathers and mothers, both known and unknown workers of the Gospel and martyrs of the faith, true revolutionaries, authentic prototypes of Christian life. Saintliness was and remains the criterion of our salvation.*

5. *The expression of the Eucharistic existence of the Church and the proposition of Orthodoxy to the modern world is the “civilization of being,” namely freedom as love and love as freedom. Christ is the true liberator, the Truth which sets us free. The Christian understanding of personhood resists the modern glorification of the individual, as well as the restriction of the human person within the vast, impersonal framework of a global economy and mass communication.*

6. *Functioning as the place of “culture for the human person,” the Orthodox Church currently presents an invitation and challenge, offering a new proposal for life and freedom in response to the dramatic impasses of our world. Far from dogmatisms, absolutisms and superficial ethics, the Church witnesses to the Word of the Cross and the Resurrection and renders this Word contemporary, existential and timely. Faced with “confusion of the heart” and the overturning of values, our Church promotes the truth of life in Christ, genuineness in interpersonal relationships and respect for human rights; it encourages volunteerism, cultivates respect towards the natural environment and a Eucharistic approach to the world, expressing a word of hope before anthropological and bioethical dilemmas as well as the utilitarian logic of science and of technology.*

7. *Faced with modern globalization, the Church is called to embrace her ecumenical elements, to resist the dynamic pressures towards inhumane conduct resulting from the preeminence of economic considerations and the dwindling of societal achievements, to participate in a globalization that retains a human face, and to operate as a place beyond economic vindications, and as a culture of solidarity and love, where particular cultural identities are not only preserved but also operate as a vehicle for communion and participation.*

8. *The Church's response and stance toward that other great challenge, namely secularization, must not be an inevitable secularization of the Church. The Church can reveal its soteriological role only by remaining faithful to its Eucharistic identity, namely to what it ontologically is, which is always so much more than what it does and says in the world. If the Church identifies itself with the world, then it loses its power to save and impoverishes its word of prophesy and discernment.*

9. *We Orthodox youth consider the Church as the ideal place for the development and respect of freedom in the human person. Thus, as a communion of relations, the Church should promote particular pastoral care for disenfranchised youth. In so doing, the Church must remain faithful to its founder and His particular care for "those who labor and those who are burdened." The Church must collaborate with all social means and contribute in solidarity to supportive institutions, embodying everywhere and always the love of the Good Samaritan, an instinctive affection for the ailing. Christian philanthropic intervention is neither abstract nor impersonal.*

10. *In our age, family relationships are increasingly described in sociological and legalistic terms. However, we believe that the family must be perceived anew and alternatively within a Christian perspective, far from narrow institutional parameters, in order to be understood, within the authentic ecclesiastical and eschatological dimensions, as a laboratory of salvation and theosis, as an icon of the Church.*

11. *We know that, as youth, we are the focus of the Church's spiritual concern and care. Amid the chaos of definitions and meanings of the term "youth," we hear the words of Christ and the Church: "Come to me." We are certain that the response to this invitation offers a solution to the existential problems that torment us. One such current problem is loneliness, one of the most common human experiences through the ages but especially manifest in contemporary societies with the dis-functionality of human relations and the absence of solidarity. In response to this loneliness, the Orthodox Church calls for active participation in the life of the Church, where the Truth is not just "something" but "someone," not something grasped or understood by the intellect, but rather communion and relationship with Christ and our fellow human beings.*

12. *Our conference also dealt with the issue of sexual relationships and the authentic function of sexuality and eros. Presentations brought to light the complexities, as well as the anthropological and psychological roots of sexuality. Discussions revealed the difficulties encountered by young people with regard to sexuality and faithfulness to the ethos of freedom in Christ. There was discussion about a realistic approach to the subject of pre-marital sex in the pastoral ministry and theology of the Church. Apart from eros as the mutual encounter and commitment of two persons, the conference stressed the significance of Christian marriage as the place where a relationship between man and woman is fully consummated in the "mystery of love," the authenticity and preservation of which we must continually strive for.*

13. *Many participants expressed their respect for the vocation of monasticism and the value of asceticism. The subject of abstinence in asceticism, defined within a Christian context and meaning, was discussed. It was stressed that the relationship with ourselves and with others is always connected to the image that we have of the human person and the meaning that we attribute to existence. When we see ourselves and others as mere machines, then we act and react mechanically. When we consider blissfulness as the object of life, then we exploit everyone and everything as a means to achieve blissfulness. However, when we regard ourselves and others as icons of God, we discover asceticism as a source of freedom, then our attitude towards ourselves and others is no longer possessive but loving. For, life in Christ is not possession, but relationship.*

14. Particular reference was made to contemporary forms of entertainment and leisure. Young people cannot sweepingly reject modern means of enjoyment, so long as these do not offend the human person. Many participants emphasized that this subject should not be approached with detailed prescriptions or strict guidelines with regard to their way of life. Furthermore, there was objection to a spirituality that guides and isolates youth, developing within them a sense of introversion and an attitude of elitism. An Orthodox Christian, as an ecclesial being who draws the fullness of his or her identity from the final days, cannot remain isolated within the self-sufficiency of personal belief or ethical purity, indifferent to or uninspiring for the rest of the world. We believe that a Christian is someone "on fire" -- creative and loving, open and dynamic, illuminating and affirming life.

15. In an age of communication and a society of information, Christians are called to use with prudence and confidence all the capabilities offered by new technologies for the spreading of the Word of the Gospel, always endeavoring to transform impersonal trajectories and forms of contact into an opportunity for personal communion and parallel enrichment. In the chaos of information, the Gospel of the incarnate Word of God, which is in fact closer to each of us than we are to ourselves, invites us to a life of genuine personal communication through which alone can satisfy the spontaneous need of an individual for communion with other persons and which is always blessed with the presence of the Triune God.

16. In our conference, we ascertained the value of dialogue as the real acceptance of the other and the real respect of their freedom with his or her differences. We consider the word "openness" -- to what is different, to other Christian confessions, to other religions, to other civilizations, and to our fellow human beings in general -- as the essential definition of our identity. Apart from sharing and participation, openness expresses a profound vision for Orthodox youth. An isolated Orthodoxy does not correspond to our most authentic traditions and fails to express the ethos of ecclesiastical freedom, also ignoring universal values which the Church has substantially worked to create. No possibility for real Christian witness can exist in the contemporary world without this sense of openness.

17. We believe that our Christian identity of openness not only obliges us to co-exist with others but is also able to nurture them. Therefore, we cultivate our own particular identity, aware that this is how we can best understand and accept the particularity of others. By respecting differences in others, we discover unexpected aspects of our own personality. In honest dialogue with others, who are different, we do not betray our faith but in fact make it better known to others. The future does not belong to the disinterested or half-hearted; it belongs to those who love their tradition and therefore respect the traditions of others.

18. We know that, as members of the Church, we both convey and continue a tradition spanning two millennia. This means that we ought to discover in depth the Orthodox ecclesiastical way of life, familiarizing ourselves with the historical forms of expression within the Church and simultaneously preserving and protecting without corruption the elements of our ecclesiastical tradition in our age in order to convey them to the next generation in an equally authentic, intelligible and practical manner. As Orthodox young men and women, we demonstrate our conviction that the Church provides for us both existential support and a refuge for life.

19. We wish to offer our Christian witness in our own dynamism and our own way, respecting our own priorities. We do not wish to be considered simply as the "future of the Church," marginalized from contemporary developments, but instead desire to contribute in the present to what is happening now, to participate energetically in the pastoral, communal and liturgical life of the Church. As youth, we have distinctly pronounced existential concerns and

social sensitivities, a developed sense of conflict and disappointment in life, which adults have ceased to notice. We do not believe in simple prescriptions for the exercise of our freedom. We are convinced that each of us possesses priceless gifts and compassionate potential, which through divine grace may be multiplied in the Church for the body of Christ and for the general good.

20. We express our warm gratitude to the venerable head of Orthodoxy, namely the authentic, dynamic and the especially youthful Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, for the opportunity he granted us to participate in this conference, as well as for the heartfelt Abrahamic hospitality and cherished experiences of these days in the Queen of Cities. We close the Conference with the indelible and illumined figure of the Patriarch in our hearts and minds! Moreover, we address fervent thanks and congratulations to the conference President, H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios, to the members of the Organizing Committee and to all those who contributed visibly or invisibly to the success of this ecumenical synaxis. We express our sincere desire that the near future will bring the 3rd Orthodox Youth Conference, in which we believe that more presentations should be assigned to younger conference participants.