

Confessing Christ Today

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Can it be considered in any way appropriate today to refer to a kingdom - even if it be the Kingdom of God - at a time when criticism of, and hostility to, the institution of the monarchy has reached a state of paroxysm in many parts of the world? What kind of response is likely to be aroused today by such preaching or by the raising of such expectation? But exactly the coming of the kingdom of God means the surpassing of every other type of reign and power. "Thy Kingdom Come", writes Origen, "that every authority and power and force and every kingdom of the world and sin which reigns in our mortal bodies be abolished, and that God reign over all of these". "Thy Kingdom Come", that the hypostatic LOVE (1 Jn 4:16) reigns absolutely in us, and in the universe.

To those concerned with the interpretation of Holy Scripture it is clear that the "kingdom of God" or the "kingdom of heaven", which lies at the core of Christ's teaching, refers, firstly, to an eternal fact, secondly, to a new reality inaugurated by the life and the work of Christ in the history of mankind and, thirdly, to something that is to be fully realized in the future. We are concerned here with a central motive that dominates the so-called "synoptic tradition". Luke and Mark predominantly use the expression the "kingdom of God" whereas Matthew usually refers to the "kingdom of heaven" and the "kingdom of the Father". This difference has given rise to not a few discussions, but eventually nearly all have agreed that the same fact of the "divine kingdom" is referred to in all instances. The same reality is also described as "life" (Mk 9:43, 46; Mt.7:13), "life everlasting" (Mk 10:17) - which in John is the central motive of Christ's teaching - and these terms are associated with such ideas as "redemption" (Lk 21:28), and "glory" (Mk 10:37).

Jesus begins his teaching by assuring us that the "Kingdom" has been inaugurated by His presence and His work. All His wondrous acts, especially the liberation of man from conditions of disease and privation, and the driving away of the demons that harass men, are "signs" of the presence of the Kingdom (Mt 12:28; cf. Lk 11:20). When the Pharisees ask "when is God's kingdom coming", Jesus assures them that "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Lk 17:20 ff.). The confines of this spiritual Kingdom are unimaginably broad and embrace the whole world. Invited into it and expected to come "from east and west" (Mt 8:11) are former sinners and tax-gatherers, the despised and insignificant of this world (Mt 5:10), and this is something never conceived of in Hebrew thinking. The requirements for admission to the Kingdom refer to neither race nor class but are spiritual and moral in nature. The characteristics of those that shall enter the Kingdom are described in the "beatitudes".

The manner in which the "kingdom of God" is referred to in the Gospels demonstrates that this reality exceeds accepted and logical limits; therefore the "mysteries of the Kingdom" are announced by parables, by images, by poetic diction.

A schematic review of the meanings attached to the "kingdom of God" in Christian thinking, leads to a discerning of three basic view points: a) that it implies the visible Church founded by Christ and carrying on his redeeming work until the Second Coming; b) that it is the kingdom of Christ on earth between the Second Coming and the final judgment; and c) that it refers to the absolute kingdom of God after the last judgment. Some interpretations with more dominant social elements were added subsequently to these classical views: that the

kingdom of God is a Christian transformation of the social situation, that it is humanity organized in accordance with God's will.

In our day, interpreters of the Bible have turned to a more radical approach: How did Jesus Himself understand the Kingdom? Some have spoken of an immediate expectation of the end, leading Him to an unreserved acceptance of death, others b) have transposed the "eschaton" to the historical "present" by maintaining that the Kingdom has already been realized by means of Christ's work; others still c) have attempted a synthesis of these two points of view by highlighting each to a different degree and have seen the experience of the "kingdom of God" in the present but to be universally completed by a surprising act of God to take place in the future. Most investigators now tend to accept the view that the kingdom of God started with Christ's presence in the life of mankind and is now in the process of realization.

Another important theological contribution of our generation has been the underlining of the "tension" existing between the "already fulfilled" and the "not yet fulfilled", i.e. that the Kingdom is already in the process of coming in time and will also only be fully accomplished at the end of time. Meanwhile, within time there is a constant tension between the present partially fulfilled reality and the delayed reality of the Second Coming.

It is of decisive importance that Jesus Himself inseparably associated His own person with the Kingdom. The certainty of the Apostolic Church that after the Resurrection God "has highly exalted" Christ, that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Ph 2:9-11), has led it to speak of the "kingdom of Christ". Thus the christological interpretation given by Christ Himself to the kingdom of God, namely that only in Him is the Kingdom present, is preserved. According to Origen: "The kingdom of heaven is Christ Himself, urging all men to repent and drawing them to Himself by grace".

In the Orthodox theological tradition, the starting point and basis of the "kingdom of God" is a Trinitarian one. It is the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is the Kingdom of God and "the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13), coming into history by means of the Holy Spirit. It is an eternal reality entering "into us" by divine grace and by means of the sacraments and the full accomplishment of which is the aim and end of history.

In this framework of the already begun and expected "kingdom of God", mission, the announcing of the Kingdom "unto the ends of the earth", and to the whole of mankind, and in the light of its eschatological fulfilment, holds a fundamental position.

A continuing duty of all disciples of all ages is the preaching of the kingdom of God, and incorporation into the mystical body of His Church - which is the prelude and the "image" of His Kingdom. The preaching to the entire universe remains the prerequisite for the consummation of the historical process of the maturation of mankind: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Mt 24:14). It is not a matter of mere transmission of teaching and views, but an incarnation of the Word in new geographical areas and new circumstances with a view to the establishment of new "churches", of new cores of truth and grace, where the sacraments of the Kingdom will be celebrated and where its coming will be experienced in Eucharist and glorification. (As pointed out by the Orthodox Conference in Bucharest on "Confessing Christ

today"): "Every thing will be fully revealed and realized in the Eschaton; meanwhile the Church already participates in it through the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit. She, therefore, confesses this eschaton to be open through the Logos in the first-fruit of the Spirit which are the source and power for advancing the whole of humanity towards the coming Kingdom and for giving to the world a joyful hope of authentic and eternal life which follows the sacrifice of the Cross". Through the sacraments of the Church, the faithful see and experience the Transfiguration which presages the coming in glory of Christ the King, and through mission invite all men to communion in the new life by participation in the joyful paeans of praise of the Resurrected Christ, by participation in the Liturgy where the present and the future coming of the Kingdom are experienced.

In every generation of men, the preaching of the Kingdom continues. But each period has its peculiarities and its particular circumstances. Repeated analyses of the peculiarities of our era have been made in recent years, and points which call for special attention today have been emphasized. In the following brief review I propose to pinpoint only a few particular features which are observed over wide areas of the earth, and which are of special reference to the responsibilities and role of the Orthodox.

1) In the area inhabited by most of the traditionally Orthodox peoples, the Church succeeds in sustaining its sacramental presence under the new circumstances of a socialist society and an often anti-Christian ideology. In an environment which exults in and boasts of the achievement of social equality and justice in history, Christians must draw attention to the more complex riddle of the human person, to man's metaphysical gropings, to the steps that still have to be taken to justify human existence. Discreetly but unequivocally, the presence of the Church points to the human problems of the deep meaning of life, of death, of the meaning of history. Especially by their life in worship, by their humble confession of Christ, by the "martyrion" and the living experience of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), the giving of glory and the looking forward to the eschatological end, the Orthodox communities in these parts of the world are like ever-burning lamps contributing to the awakening of the conscience and consciousness of humanity to the final coming of the "kingdom of God".

In the Western world, the galloping technological development, free economy and free movement of ideas tend to create a type of life that is mainly characterized by its whirling around "worldly aspirations" and its being sucked into engrossment in the delights of this transient world (secularisation). Rationalistic currents have penetrated even traditionally Orthodox countries, like Greece, inciting young people, thinkers and artists to call in question the meaningfulness of Christian faith, and especially that of the organized Church.

The times call for inspired church leadership, living and related to theology of our times serious monastic centres, elders and spiritual leaders to assist the people in the practising of vigilance, and to accustom men and women never to lose sight of the "end" of history.

The Orthodox communities that are scattered as minute minorities throughout the western countries are centres of spiritual life for their members, "signs" of the sacramental body of the Church, old - and therefore particularly precious - humble images of the Kingdom. They are called to continue to present Orthodox experience to their environment in a direct manner adapted to contemporary social conditions. They will best be able to do this by achieving a creative fusion of the depths of Orthodox tradition with the practical efficiency of western society.

The western Christian communities are making sustained efforts to head off these various tendencies of technocratic development, social adjustments, philosophical orientations, interdependence on a world-wide scale. They are striving to understand their meaning and to practice self-criticism so that they can rethink their positions and present a more meaningful witness to Christ. We Orthodox too, in both socialist and free-economy countries have a duty to concern ourselves theologically, with love, wisdom, and spiritual courage with the problems of modern man, to become aware of the radical changes brought about by the flowering of the sciences, to lend an ear to both their positive and their negative messages and soberly to evaluate and utilize the new theories of life and social organization that they put forward in the light of Orthodoxy.

We cannot leave to others the monopolistic exploitation of the world-wide campaign for justice and brotherhood; for these ideals are at the very heart of the proclamation of the Kingdom and indeed the basic ingredient thereof: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rm 14:17). The "sons of the kingdom", often referred to by the synonymous expression "the righteous" (Mt 13:38,43), should be factors of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" in their immediate or broader environment. The new and ever revolutionary notion they have to offer is the transcendental value of the human person, which has been virtually overlooked by both capitalism and communism.

A characteristic note in our era is the explosive protest of the young against every kind of "establishment", their longing for fullness of life, for deep experiences, their striving after forms of spirituality that go beyond the traditional individualistic morality, their searching in the field of Asiatic religions and their attempts at a more direct escape - by the use of drugs. To my mind, the latter phenomenon seems like a return to a sort of primitive religion; among primitive peoples there are witch-doctors who administer herbs with narcotic properties to men afflicted by obsessive ideas and desires so as to induce a kind of "release", an ecstatic state, a leap into another world. The Orthodox have to speak about the process of inner transformation and renewal through the acceptance of the Word and the quickening power of the Holy Spirit and introduce people into the "deifying" area of the mysteries of the Kingdom. They can transmit the "fullness of life" ("that they may have life, and have it abundantly" - Jn. 10:10), that the Christian faith can give by emphasizing the transcendental nature of man, the "divine image", the existentialist communion with the Holy Trinity which is activated in and by the Holy Spirit and leads to a substantial transformation of life.

2) In the immense expanses of the so-called third world, the presence of Christians is very limited and that of Orthodoxy very slight, indeed no more than a token presence. However, there are minuscule Orthodox communities (in Eastern and Central Africa, in Japan and in Korea), as a reminder of the existence of Orthodoxy. They are humble candles bearing witness to the fact that Orthodoxy is not identified with any particular place or culture and that there is a long forgotten commandment (Mt 28:19) that awaits our attention. These communities are also ambassadors representing the Eastern Christian tradition in countries where people have become accustomed to looking upon Christianity as a sort of spiritual foreign trade commodity of Western Europe, forgetting that Christianity was born in Palestine and that it first spread to Asia and Northern Africa.

Despite this all but non-existent presence of Orthodoxy in this enormous geographical area, it is imperative that, being members of the wider Christian family, we should be aware of

the spiritual fermentations taking place in these parts and of the missionary efforts being made by other Christian Churches.

A significant development of the last years in this area has been that our more responsible participation in the Ecumenical Movement has resulted in our being confronted by a continuous invitation and challenge to share in the problems of the Christian communities of the so-called third world but also by our being offered an opportunity to transmit theological experiences from the historical consciousness and subconsciousness of Orthodoxy and thus indirectly to contribute to a correct orientation of world-wide missionary activities. The dynamic Orthodox minority in the Islamic world has an important role to play in promoting mutual understanding between Christians and Moslems in the context of the theological dialogue that is just beginning.

Moreover, the sensitivity of these new Christian communities to the historical development and progress of their own people and to significant social and concrete issues, can teach us a great deal about the historical aspects of the Kingdom, and the dimension of "now", so that we may avoid any one-sidedness in our looking at the eschatological mystery of the kingdom of God. This is a mutual give-and-take process, and therefore it is useful to have some knowledge of the problems of these new Christian communities.

In Africa, new movements, partly of a nationalist or totalitarian political nature, partly of a religious nature, are bursting forth and spreading with a rapidity akin to the luxuriant growth of the African virgin forest. In parallel with Christian mission, two other world-wide movements electrify the Africans: Islam and the communist ideology in its various forms. The Orthodox certainly have an opportunity, but also an obligation, to develop a more active and systematic struggle in this area, where a few Orthodox outposts are already in existence. But also in the general theoretical area of the development of an African Christianity, they can help to avoid: (i) an uncritical underestimation of, leads towards indifference to, or contempt of, African religious experiences; (ii) an opposite uncritical overestimation and idealization of everything African; (iii) an uncritical differentiation tending to see everything African as radically different from the universally human. The slogan of "indigenisation" (initially a slogan signifying the liberation from western structures and ideas that had been introduced along with Christianity by western missionaries) must not lead to new forms of servitude, viz. to an exclusively "African" totalitarianism or to a naive African "messianism". The "kingdom of God", to which all men are called regardless of colour or race, has universal human dimensions in the present and will always have them in the future. The Trinitarian theology of the East remains the best theological foundation for the development of the significance of the human person and its harmonious coexistence with other persons in a communion of love in the mystery of the Trinitarian God. It is the best way to overcome both the egotistical "individualism" cultivated by the capitalist mentality of the West, and the risk of "massification" under the kind of arid and relentless black dictatorship which afflicts and is the scourge of many African countries.

In Latin America, the striving for national identity and a more just society are hot issues of immediate interest to people and pose immediate theological problems to the Christians living in this politically explosive area. The desire for a healthier social structure and the notion of a historical reality of the "kingdom of God", lead to an urgent socio-economic militant attitude, to a "theology of liberation" all characterized by various types of invariably earth-centred messianism. The Christians of Latin America are reluctant to leave the exclusive initiative for a dynamic transformation of society to political forces, and indeed

political forces with a negative attitude to the Faith, as happened once in Eastern Europe. This shows a sensitivity to the historical process which is undoubtedly highly significant. However, as O. Clement has correctly pointed out, "the risk in this theology is that it may come to focus exclusively on the Old Testament and Jesus, overlooking the mystery of the Holy Spirit and the mystery of the Trinity". In the tension of struggle, one-sidedness is always a possibility.

In concert with the vigilant conscience of so many other Christians in Latin America. Orthodox presence and Orthodox theological thinking should serve as reminders of the need to preserve the overall view of both the historical and the eschatological significance of the Kingdom, i.e. to answer the call for social struggle towards justice, peace and joy in the time of history, but without losing sight of the perspective of the implications of the eschatological consummation of the Kingdom.

In Asia, the great religious systems (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, etc.) with their many facets continue to dominate the scene. The Christian Churches constitute a small - in many countries minute - but often dynamic and important minority. Apart from efforts in terms of missionary activities, a need has recently made itself felt to carry on systematic dialogue with people of other religious and ideologies. Even though in some Christian circles this "dialogue" gives rise to suspicion, it is true that its significance is becoming increasingly clearer and its importance gaining increasing acceptance. As noted in the Report of a recent theological conference at Chiang Mai, Thailand, "we need dialogue to help us not to disfigure the image of our neighbours of different faiths and ideologies... We adopt it rather as a means of living out our faith in Christ in service of community with our neighbours".

Nevertheless, the meeting with the other religious will probably constitute a strenuous and difficult task and I admit that I find it difficult to share the optimism and the expectations put forward by some of my dear Orthodox brothers who believe that "the religious themselves ought to be converted to Christ now", or to speak about an effort "to awaken the Christ who is asleep in the night of the religions". I am afraid that these views overlook some historical facts, namely that the great world religions are closed complex system with structures and conditions that make it very difficult to hope realistically for a "discovery" of Christ from within them. However I do believe myself that religions are not closed lakes but great rivers, fed not only by their main sources but also by the melting of snow on other mountaintops along their courses, and by rainfalls that allow waters coming from nearby or far-off seas to flow into them.

Undoubtedly, dialogue and Christian witness on a world-wide scale will not only enable Christians to understand the religious experiences and achievements of other peoples better, but will also open windows through which the latter may catch a glimpse of the Kingdom and, hopefully, open some doors and access roads enabling them to move in its direction. Orthodox worship and ascetic experience and discipline are, I believe, largely attuned to the same wave-length as the customs and experiences of the eastern world. I must say that while travelling in Thailand, Ceylon, Korea and Japan, I felt that many of the external elements of popular Buddhist religion were very close to our own expression of "piety" "devotion", even though their theoretical associations are entirely different.

China is a special case. It would seem that communism here has acted as a bulldozer to the religious flowerings of the past, has destroyed a great many roots, including the sacred patriarchal structure in the family (which had been frozen in Confucianism), and many of the magical elements (cultivated by popular Taoism), and in general given very strong emphasis

to Chinese realism. However, it would be risky to say that no vestige of popular religious feeling survives in China. Great trees may be destroyed in a forest fire, but the roots of smaller plants, such as grasses, are more resistant. Also, irrespective of the situation in continental China, Chinese populations still live in Formosa, Hong-Kong and Singapore. There are many who look forward to the day when the Chinese will re-create their religious environment by freely choosing among elements of their own religious patrimony and those of other cultures, including Christian culture in particular. The message of the "kingdom of heaven" will be of vital importance for this numberless people that has always lived by the vision of a cosmic harmony where man is the mediator between heaven and earth.

It would be too long to extend these hasty brush-strokes to other individual Asian countries. My aim in presenting this sketchy review has been to point out that our increasingly integrated world, in which the Kingdom must continue to be preached, includes a wide variety of forms and that the Christian witness must keep a watchful eye for "signs of the times", meditating on their meaning and making creative use of the circumstances of historical reality. The "kingdom of God", it is true will only be complete at the "Eschaton", but let us not forget that it has already entered into history and that the activation of the "leaven" (Mt 13:30) of its presence in the Oikoumene, in geographical space and in the historical process, remains for the Christians an urgent apostolic task.

Following this review of the world-wide missionary situation, it might be of interest to add a historical parenthesis of information regarding specific missionary development in the area of Orthodoxy.

During earlier meetings of "Syndesmos" special emphasis had been placed on "External Mission" as an entirely neglected and forgotten area. Today, there exists pan-orthodox agreement concerning its importance and necessity. It is now evident that the Orthodox Church, which preaches that God loves the whole world, cannot remain indifferent to any part or aspect of life in the world. "Let the ends of the earth see the salvation of our God. There is no place which does not partake of the kingdom of Christ".

With God's grace, considerable practical steps have also been possible. Following the creation of the missionary centre "Porefthendes" (Go Ye) and its well-known pioneer work (to rekindle missionary interest within the Orthodox Church, to study missionary problems from the Orthodox viewpoint, and to help small and isolated Orthodox communities), the Church of Greece has established a number of missionary institutions and activities, including: "External Mission Week", a special External Mission Office of the Synod, Centre of Missionary Studies, Missiology as a new subject in courses on the curriculum of the Theological Faculty, establishment of a women's convent intended to combine monasticism and missionary work, post-graduate studies for Africans, Koreans and Japanese, series of special editions on missionary subjects, a provision allowing "temporary transfer of priests and deacons of the Church of Greece to missionary areas of Orthodox Churches with full pay". Furthermore, various associations were formed in a number of provincial towns for the purpose of providing assistance to specific missions.

Equally important activities were developed in America: Special training has been provided by St. Vladimir's Seminary for priests wishing to work in Alaska and Japan, while the special Mission Office of the Greek Archdiocese of America has provided assistance to the Orthodox of Korea and Africa. There are now experienced and enthusiastic clergymen working in missionary Orthodox communities. Finally, in the framework of the Division of

World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches the post of a secretary "for research and relations with Orthodox Churches" was created for the first time. The openings referred to above were nearly all due to initiatives taken by members of co-workers of "Porefthendes", the centre born out of "Syndesmos".

Nonetheless, it must be admitted that we are only at the beginning. Apart from the familiar socio-political difficulties, a serious problem remains in the fact that the Orthodox forces are uncoordinated and inert as a result of that strange kind of apathy cultivated by the traditional separation into "spheres" of independent jurisdictions. Thus the Orthodox Churches with the greatest human potential and financial resources avoid undertaking missionary activities in areas like Africa or Asia in order not to violate customary church rights. This leads to a passive attitude and isolation which does everything but promote the pan-orthodox missionary effort. As again pointed out during the 2nd Congress of Orthodox Theologians at Penteli last year (1976), it is necessary that cooperation be promoted through the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate if viable solutions are to be found, which must be both faithful to tradition and realistically adapted to new conditions so that an effective Orthodox witness may be ensured on a world-wide scale.

The emphasis on the duties of Orthodox Mission extending to "the ends of the earth" should not make us oblivious to the need for witness in the particular circumstances of our respective home countries ("... in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth", and in Greece, and in Russia and in France, and in America, etc.). It is common knowledge that many doubters and unbelievers are to be found in the formerly so-called Christian countries. Internal and external mission are but the two sides of the same coin. Any polarization is inadmissible. Each form of mission reinforces and consolidates the other, nor can mission be thought of as a specialized activity of certain "missionaries".

The apostolic duty is universal and that refers both to the recipients and to the bearers and the content of the message. The entire Church must offer the entire Gospel to the entire world: to those near and to those far away and to man as a whole and to human life as a whole.

In the area of internal mission or so-called evangelism we are informed by various Christian publications that many significant actions are undertaken by local Churches at the initiative of Synods, bishops, priests and laymen. Some of these are better known than others. Unfortunately, there is still no systematic study concerning the character and the positive or negative aspects of all these initiatives.

However, there persists a diffuse feeling that evangelism is slow in adapting its means and ways to the ever-changing conditions of our times. Our Church structures remain as a rule closer to the organization of a rural and rather static society.

We must look for new forms of work corresponding to the dynamic changing modern reality of large cities, to the contemporary pace of life, to the problems of a technological society and to the desire of people for a fullness of life. The basic cell of the Orthodox Church, the parish, is faced with far-reaching changes both in the cities of the old Orthodox countries and in the so-called "diaspora" in the West, which require fundamental pastoral and missionary adjustments. There is an unquestionable need for a more systematic mobilization, imagination, enthusiasm, loyalty to tradition, but also creative continuity, exchange of ideas, plans, and programmes among ourselves, information concerning the experiences and the successes of others. The pan-orthodox meetings, in particular which in recent years have

become established institutions, especially on the theological level, should become more extensive, more systematic and more numerous.

The awareness of the unity of Orthodoxy, the certainty that the local churches, despite their cultural and linguistic variety, are expressions of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, that Orthodoxy is the uniform realization of Him "who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23) and not a "confederation of Churches" must be cultivated in depth and in breadth among the people and utilized for a dynamic common witness. A more profound theological infrastructure and eucharistic spirituality will be needed in the various missionary activities both at home and abroad. I am referring to the real theological evaluation and confrontation of the questions and new problems arising from our encounter with new theories and realities in the life of humanity so that the present of Orthodox Churches may be organically linked with the past and that new horizons may be opened into the future, all the while keeping the Kingdom firmly in sight.

After this general review of the present-day international scene, it is now time to come to the personal sphere and look at some aspects of the preaching of the "kingdom of God" which concern us as individuals, in existentialist terms.

a) As pointed out earlier, the "kingdom of God" has come and is coming. For the believer, this is the most certain thing in human history. It is a blessed reality which will be fully consummated in the end no matter what delays or human reactions may intervene. The feeling and awareness of its nearness, and the vision of its full realization in glory, has been the content and most vital nerve of mission. This vision fills the souls of the believers with courage, optimism, serenity and peace. No labour undertaken for the sake of the Kingdom is never lost. The vision of that which lies beyond history, the projection of the "eschaton" into the present activates the will to make right use of the present moment.

b) Our contribution to the advent of the Kingdom begins with the actual development of its "signs" within ourselves. When a human being submits consciously to the criteria and the requirements of the "kingdom of God", when he becomes "dwelling" of the Holy Spirit, then he gradually comes to be a "sign", a living sign-post indicating the expected full realization of the Kingdom; and then the Kingdom penetrates more deeply into the human community. Its brilliance shines from, and its image is reflected in, the faces of the saints who have accepted it with all their hearts. St. Makarios the Egyptian made the following comment in connection with the passage "the Kingdom of heaven is within you": "That the Kingdom is within, what else can this mean but the heavenly bliss of the Holy Spirit being activated within worthy souls, just like the spiritual delight and joy and bliss in eternal light that the angels will have in the Kingdom? A pledge and a beginning of this is given to worthy and faithful souls to possess even now through active communion with the Holy Spirit.

c) The "kingdom of heaven" is a gift of God, it is an offer from God, yet it requires intense human effort, "... the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Mt 11:12; cf. Lk 16:16). "Nor is the kingdom of God for the sleeping and the foolish" (Clement of Alexandria). There are certain conditions that need to be consistently fulfilled, there are heights that must be conquered. Basic prerequisites are repentance (Mt 3:12), the right attitude toward Christ, with whose person the Kingdom is associated, and union with Him through faith. "The kingdom of heaven is grace through faith, the adoption through the Spirit that unites man to God" (Origen). The Kingdom cannot be gained by mere lip-service ("Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', shall enter the kingdom of heaven...")

(Mt 7:21). Nor can it be conquered by conventional religious habits ("... unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" Mt 5:20). Violence and grace complement each other.

Christian life has a dynamic, evolutionary character. The believer is already in possession of something precious but goes on finding more and more through the presence and the action of the Holy Spirit. There is a process of transformation from "glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18). The Christian unceasingly receives, discovers and offers ("Therefore every scribe who has been instructed into the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" Mt 13:53). The believers who convey the message of the Kingdom are neither perfect nor free from sin. They are like thirsty men who know where the "living water" is and tell others so that they too may quench their thirst.

d) Our personal Christian experience is consolidated and strengthened through our incorporation into the mystical body of Christ. Our confession draws strength from the experience of the Church. Therefore our individual, personal witness for Christ is ecclesiastical in the final analysis. When we confess the Lord, we do so mainly as members of a confessing community, of the Church which carries on His work. "Therein only is the Kingdom of Heaven proclaimed and thereto points everyone of the redeeming Gospel's aims" (Eusebius). Orthodox missionaries do not act as individuals. If they go in twos and threes, if their immediate aim is to form a worshipping community with the local people, they do not do so merely for mutual support, but in order to constitute a "sign", a revelation and an instrument of the already come and also coming kingdom of heaven.

In this place or that, the Church's historical outward aspect may at times cause a scandal, but the Church remains nevertheless a "divine institution" and of divine substance. The presence of "scandals" in the field of history does not annihilate the existence of the Kingdom, but rather confirms its historical authenticity. During its time on earth, in the interval between the founding of and the fulfilment of the Kingdom, between the sowing of the seed and the reaping of the weeds and "the good seed" that have "grown up together" (Mt 13:24-43), they both, the "sons of evil" and the "sons of the Kingdom", will be inter-mixed. There is nothing surprising in this. "All scandals" will be swept away together at the end of time, upon the fulfilment of the Kingdom. Until then we must patiently accept this historical reality and must strengthen "the good seed" in every way.

e) The culmination of the experience of the Kingdom on earth and the announcement of its advent, resides in the life of worship. This is the model and reflection of the heavenly liturgy, an echo of the hymns of the angels and saints at the sight of the King of the universe. The nature of the Kingdom is beyond verbal description. In the eucharistic congregation with the believers of all times and places, while we partake of the holy Body and the precious Blood "to augment the divine grace and appropriate the kingdom", we sense the Kingdom with our whole being and receive a fore-taste of it. The experience of the already founded and yet still expected "kingdom of heaven" gives us a different sense of life and a different kind of dynamism. The Kingdom dawns within us. In the life of worship the "age to come" is announced, the vigilance of the spirit is intensified by the anticipation of the "eschaton", the present is bathed in the reflected light of eternity, and the wearing of the world's historical everyday aspect is transformed. "The Liturgy is our thanksgiving for and on behalf of the created world; and the restoration of the fallen world in Christ. It is the image of the Kingdom; it is the Cosmos becoming Ecclesia". So the liturgy as whole becomes witness and mission,

and mission is not merely an announcement of salvation in Christ but mainly a revelation of salvation through the Eucharist and an invitation to share in the redeeming event in Christ.

f) The "kingdom of God" is already in the world but is not "of the world" (In 18:36). As a rule, earthly kingdoms are in contrast with the kingdom of God. The "principalities" the "powers" of this present darkness" (Eph 6:12) have been virtually dethroned by the redeeming work of Christ but have not yet been eliminated. In the historical process of humanity, they will continue stubbornly to launch their counter-attacks even though they know that the battle has already been decided by the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. The lot of the "sons of the Kingdom" is in conflict with these powers, and continuation of the work of Christ who came "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:8).

The mission of the Church prepares the final advent of the Kingdom of God; it does not shape it historically by its social and other activities. The faithful have to fight for "righteousness and peace and joy" (Rom 14:17) which are basic ingredients of the Kingdom, but it would be superficial on their part to identify the coming of the Kingdom with political or social struggles or with romantic messianic expectations in the immediate future. True, the dialogue with contemporary social movements and ideologies involves many elements we Christians must evaluate and use to our best advantage. But while remaining sensitive to present "political" issues, we must never lose sight of, and never cease to point to, the eternal and the eschatological.

g) Whoever lives in the light of the Kingdom and senses its importance, cannot fail to feel the "urgency" of its announcement. The phrase "Confessing Christ today", which has been extensively used as a slogan in recent years, does not lead us to think only of present circumstances, but calls to mind the imperative duty to confess Christ, to announce the Gospel of the Kingdom not tomorrow, but today. Men can -and must -enter the Kingdom today (Mt 5:20; 18:3; 20:1-16); the effort to live the principles and the spirit of the Kingdom must be made at every "present" moment. The devil relies heavily on the great resolutions of today which are postponed until tomorrow. And perhaps, being a modern devil, he may take satisfaction in the endless discussions in committees and assemblies in which action is often drowned.

h) Participation in the Kingdom implies "gladness" and "tribulations" as well. The parables of the treasure in a field, and of the pearl of great value (Mt 13:44-45), refer to excessive joy at the discovery and the acquisition of the great gift of God. "Peace and rejoicing in the Holy Spirit" is the atmosphere of the Kingdom; but at the same time, readiness for self-denial and sacrifice is demanded. Entry is through the "narrow gate". The apostolic experience and the lives of the saints show that "... through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

To clear the way for the advent of the Kingdom in the hearts of men is by no means a simple or easy task. There is a price to pay. Whoever wants to work effectively for the propagation of the Gospel must be prepared to accept pain and hardship. There is no Christianity without the cross; nor is there Christian and missionary life without crucifixion with Christ. Those who look for comfort, for power and for worldly reaches and privileges cannot be true preachers and "sons" of the Kingdom. They only contribute to misconceptions and the misconstruing of its meaning. The ascetic tradition of the Orthodox Church is a continuous existentialist protest against an easy and comfortable Christianity, which pays lip-service to the Cross but in reality avoids or even hates it (Phil 3:18).

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"Blessed be the Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy spirit...". It is with the giving of glory to, and the invocation of, the Kingdom, that the Church begins the celebration of her fundamental mysteries, the sacraments. It is with the Eucharistic invocation, its giving of glory to, and its contemplation of, the Kingdom, that our lives are transfigured -in the midst of our everyday living - into the mystery and into the "image" of the Kingdom.