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Metropolitan Stylianos Harkianakis - bishop and theologian in the service of reconciling the Churches

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**METROPOLITAN STYLIANOS HARKIANAKIS —
BISHOP AND THEOLOGIAN
IN THE SERVICE OF RECONCILING THE CHURCHES***

As a participant in the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church I would like first to express my great joy of granting this honorary doctorate to the two chairmen of the Joint Commission, in recognition of their great contribution to the reconciliation of the Churches, as well as for their exceptional responsibility for the shape of the Christianity of tomorrow. We are approaching the end of the second millennium of Church history which has witnessed the greatest divisions among the Christians. At the same time, the end of this millennium has been marked by particularly intensive efforts towards reunion and the restoration of "the ancient beauty of the one and undivided Church" (Athenagoras I. Address of 3rd April 1965). It is impossible not to see in this the blessing and grace of the Holy Spirit.

Having been for many years engaged in ecumenism, and research work on the theology and spirituality of the Orthodox Church, I feel special joy in the fact that my Alma Mater is today distinguishing with the highest academic honour one of the most ecumenically active Orthodox bishops and theologians of the present day, Metropolitan Stylianos, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Australia. My joy is made even greater by the fact that this ceremony, as a part of the session of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint Roman Catholic — Orthodox Commission which has just met in Opole, is taking place a few months before Metropolitan Stylianos's 50th birthday.

1. Archbishop Stylianos is a well-known figure in the international ecumenical movement. He is a man of dialogue, actively engaged in the holy task of "rebuilding the friendship between God's Churches" (St. Basil the Great, Ep. 70). He knows from the inside the difficulties and hopes connected with this great task which he serves as a bishop and theologian. It is indeed a service to God not only with all heart, but also with all mind (cf. Mt 22,37). In a certain sense he is, along with others in the Church hierarchy,

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a symbol and a personification of the ecumenical efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This Patriarchate, represented by Metropolitan Stylianos, had touched in its encyclical upon the question of relations between the Orthodox and other Christians as early as the beginning of the 20th century (Encyclical of 1902 and 1904). The encyclical of 1920 called for the formation of a sort of League of Churches, or "fellowship between Churches" (*koinonia metaxi ton Ekklesion*), on the model of the establishment of the League of Nations, and aimed at overcoming the spirit of bitterness and mutual mistrust. As is known, this idea became reality in 1948 with the establishment of the World Council of Churches.

His life, studies and positions of responsibility prepared Metropolitan Stylianos well for becoming a man of dialogue. He was born on 29th December 1935 in Rethimnon in Crete. He studied philosophy and theology at the Theological Academy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chalki, receiving his theological degree in 1958. On the 28th August 1958 he was ordained and went on studying fundamental theology and the philosophy of religion at Bonn University. In February 1964 he became the igumen of the Vlatadon patriarchal monastery near Thessaloniki, where the Institute of Patristic Studies was established. In 1965 he obtained his doctorate in theology at Athen University for his thesis on the infallibility of the Church in Orthodox theology. He obtained his post-doctoral degree in 1969 with a thesis devoted to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council. On 6th December 1970, he was ordained bishop, and in 1975 was made the Greek-Orthodox Archbishop of Australia.

His years of study in West Germany prepared him for his encounter with Western theology. He is well versed in Roman Catholic theology. He is able to combine a thoroughgoing knowledge of the theology and spirituality of the East with an ecumenical openness to the traditions of the Christian West. He could name J. Auer and J. Ratzinger, his professors of dogmatic theology from the University of Bonn, his "dearest teachers and friends". After many years he admits his deep indebtedness to them. They met again during Metropolitan Stylianos's lectures when he was invited by his former professors lecturing then at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Regensburg University. The introduction to the Metropolitan's book *Orthodoxe Kirche und Katholizismus* (München 1975), a collection of the Regensburg lectures, was written by none other than J. Ratzinger.

Metropolitan Stylianos is one of the most representative personalities of contemporary Orthodoxy. He has been a frequent representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at international meetings and ecumenical conferences, among them the IV General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala (1968) to

which he devoted one of his books (*He IV Genike Syneleusis tou Pankosmiou Symbouliu ton Ekklesion*, Thessalonike 1969). Until 1976 he was the co-chairman of the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission, and between 1977 and 1978 a member of the Commission. Since 1980, along with H. Em. Cardinal J. Willebrands, he has been the co-president of the Joint International Commission for the theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. His wide-ranging studies and research work prepared him well to rise to this difficult, delicate task of dialogue between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, laden as it is with unusual responsibility. Under the chairmanship of Cardinal Willebrands and Metropolitan Stylianos, the Commission produced its first document entitled *The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* published shortly after the second plenary session in Munich (1982). It has also prepared another, entitled *Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church*.

During the third plenary session of the Joint Commission in Crete in June 1984, its participants had the chance to meet the mother of Metropolitan Stylianos (he lost his father during the Second World War). In the final speech given at the Orthodox Academy in Gonia and in the presence of his mother, the Metropolitan said: "When I come to Crete, where I was born and where my mother lives, I feel reborn and become more humble". In these simple words, which have remained deep in my memory, I discerned a discreet paying of homage from a son to a mother, full of respect and admiration for her love and self-sacrifice. Is not what we are in large measure dependent on what we have received from our mothers and fathers?

Since 1975 the Metropolitan Stylianos has been lecturing Orthodox theology and spirituality at the University of Sydney. In 1979 he founded the monthly "Voice of Orthodoxy", where he has been publishing regularly main theological papers. Soon his greatest dream will become a reality: St. Andrew's Greek-Orthodox Theological School will begin in Sydney its activity in January 1986. This is going to be the first Orthodox high school on the southern hemisphere.

It often happened in the past, that many great thinkers, theologians and mystics of the Eastern Church, not finding a full expression of their religious experience in reasoning and arguing, had recourse to poetry. Suffice it to mention only St. Gregory the Theologian (St. Gregory of Nazianzus), an inspired singer of the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and St. Symeon the New Theologian († 1022), praising continually, especially in his *Hymns*, the Holy Spirit of God. When the language of information, analysis and systematic reflection fails, then comes poetry to one's aid. His Eminence Metr. Stylianos is also a poet. He has published eight little volumes of his

poems, both religious and worldly in content. A collection of first five of them has only recently been published under the title: *En ge allotria — In Foreign Land* (*Poiemata I*, Athens 1985). The first little volume has been translated into English (*Soil and Ashes*) by Prof. Peter Been, a well-known translator of the new Greek Literature (e.g. of the writings of N. Kazantzakis). In 1980 the Metropolitan Stylianos was awarded by the Academy of Athens for his two first little volumes of poems. Earlier, in 1973 he got the international award of Gottfried von Herder for the whole of his activity.

2. As a theologian, Metropolitan Stylianos favours a systematic approach to the questions he deals with. He does not, however, minimize the values of thinking in historical terms. He is well aware that an authentic and critical knowledge of the past has a purifying force (*katharsis*) and liberates the present from the weight of bad experiences. As a systematician, he takes the view that, in relation to controversial questions in particular, it is necessary to separate the historical elements (*das Geschichtliche*) from the fundamental elements (*das Prinzipielle*) in the evolution of a given problem. In dialogue with Anglicans, he stressed that contemporary Orthodoxy does not reject a critical approach to the Holy Scripture, fearing only liberal and modernistic tendencies. The Gospel is not simply the letter of the Bible, but the entire teaching of Christ living today in the Church and whose main interpreter (*Hermeneus*) is the Holy Spirit. Likewise, he drew attention to the fundamental significance of the "mind of the Fathers" (*phronema ton Patron*) for a healthy Christian theology. This refers to the witness of the Fathers both in the East and in the West; no wonder then, that in the writings of the Archbishop these witnesses appear sometimes side by side: Cyprian, Augustine, John of Damascus.

A favourite theme of Metropolitan Stylianos is the relationship between the doctrine on the Holy Trinity and the doctrine on the Church, i.e. ecclesiology. He deals with question most often in a comparative perspective, pointing out the similarities and differences between Orthodox and Roman Catholic theology. He raises difficult and controversial problems which have a crucial significance for dialogue between the two Churches. This he has done both in his doctoral thesis entitled *Peri to alatheton tes Ekklesias en te orthodoxo theologia* (On the Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Theology), Athens 1965, and in his post-doctoral thesis *To dogmatikon syntagma "Peri Ekklesias" tes B' Batikanes Synodou* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II), Athens 1969. In his works, he does not disguise the differences and contradictions between the two Churches, but at the same time takes care to note those things which they have in common. His method of approaching particular problems allows us to feel the need of a mutual interdependence of

the two Church traditions and the need to theologize according to the integral trinitarian pattern of Christian Revelation. It is not a superficial comparative method which would blur the differences in teaching and practice of the two Churches. Rather, he attempts to approach problems from the inside, investigating the foundations of particular views and circumstances conduced to them. His openness to the values of other traditions makes him particularly sensitive to the problem of Christian unity.

At the beginning of the 20th century the famous Protestant theologian O. Dibelius wrote that it was to be the "century of the Church", mobilizing all Christian denominations. Later, the Protestants began to caution against becoming excessively interested in ecclesiology. An appeal was made to concentrate on the faith in the divine Trinity (E. Schlink). An exaggerated interest in the Church on the part of Catholic theologians was criticized as *eine Überproduktion an Ekklesiologie* (K. G. Steck, G. Maron). Metropolitan Stylianos takes the view that this type of criticism would be justifiable only in relation to a positivistic and rationalistic understanding of the Church, characterized by immanentism. All depends on what sort of ecclesiology one criticizes and rejects. In the Protestant criticism of ecclesiology one can see an element of warning against the danger of placing the Church in the very centre of Christian faith, and thus against ecclesiological narcissism. The answer Metropolitan Stylianos gives is clear: whoever consciously develops an authentic teaching on the Holy Trinity, recognizes the need and importance of ecclesiology, and vice versa. In this context he rather tends to speak with R. Slenczka of an "underdevelopment of ecclesiology in all Christian Churches". The most developed aspect in Archbishop Stylianos's theological writings is precisely the showing of new perspectives for fully trinitarian ecclesiology, seeking the main principles of ecclesiological thinking in the light of the Bible and patristic teaching on the Church as a reflection of the mystery of the Trinity (*eikonismos*).

The contemporary theologian concerning himself with ecclesiology must realize the meaningfulness of these reflections. The Church does not stand in the centre of faith; rather, it serves to indicate a reality larger than herself, that of the Triune God. Metropolitan Stylianos justifies the theological importance of ecclesiological reflection through stressing a strict connection between teaching on the Church and teaching on the Holy Trinity. It is in trinitarian dogma that he sees the core of Christian theology and the true centre of ecclesiology. According to him, all theological thinking is a thinking in the light of the mystery of the Triune God, and thus it is basically trinitarian (*trinitarisches Denken*). It is faith in the Holy Trinity which gives the unique character to Christ's teaching, pointing to its newness in relation to all other religions and

ideologies. Whoever asks about the connection between ecclesiology and teaching on the Holy Trinity, must perceive that the mystery of the Church is rooted in the exemplary way of being of God Himself both as one and the many. The Church is a communion (*koinonia*) of human persons created to the image and likeness of the Creator. In her existence she must imitate the way of being of the divine Persons living in continuing communion and in relation to others. Ecclesiological personalism bases itself on trinitarian personalism. It reveals the personal nature of human existence in the Church. Ecclesiology is inseparable from the teaching on the Holy Trinity and anthropology. Nature and grace thus permeate each other.

As for the main problem of all theology in the history of the Church, the Metropolitan regards it to be the question of the relationship between the one (unity) and many (plurality). This is the key to the solution of many theological problems. The one Church founded by Christ exists in many particular Churches. Many persons in the Church form one body, one living organism. Once again, then, we see here the significance of the trinitarian dogma for Metropolitan Stylianos. The Holy Trinity is an exemplary way of being of the divine Persons in inner-trinitarian unity, and the deepest foundation of all Church unity. In the opinion of the Archbishop, Christ's words: "may they all be one: as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee" (Jn 17:21) have a normative character for theological thinking at all times. In this perspective, the communion of the divine Persons becomes the first, definitive, ontological justification of the Church. In ecclesiology, one cannot simply see Christ, as it seems to be in the incarnational-christological or the sacramental-eucharistic models (the latter being developed in the so-called eucharistic ecclesiology). A fully trinitarian model is necessary to show all three divine Persons, thanks to which one can avoid the danger of christomonism. It complements christological models with an integral trinitarian approach.

In its teaching on the Holy Trinity the early Christianity solved the problem of unity and plurality in an exemplary way. The consubstantiality of the divine Persons (*homoousia*) and their mutual penetration into one another (*perichoresis*) do not infringe upon their autonomy, thus excluding all forms of subordination. In the same way, the unity of the Church cannot encroach upon the autonomy of particular Churches (the principle of autocephaly) and particular persons within the Church, which thus excludes any ecclesiological subordinationism. In the eyes of Metropolitan Stylianos, the teaching on the Trinity implicitly contains two main, correlated ecclesiological principles: the principle of collegiality and the principle of autocephaly or autonomy, which together link freedom with authority. Thus, trinitarian and soteriological reasons justify the

attachment of Orthodoxy to the collegial and synodal structure of the Church.

A trinitarian perspective in ecclesiology, in the opinion of the Metropolitan, protects the Church against the temptations of rationalism and activism, triumphalism and feelings of self-sufficiency. Having as her model the Holy Trinity, rather than anything on this earth, the Church continuously finds herself on the road towards final fulfilment. She remains forever the pilgrim Church heading towards the triune God. This fundamental, trinitarian relationship reveals itself in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, especially in the Eucharist. Archbishop Harkianakis has clearly made a valuable contribution in exploring these themes.

In a thorough and careful analysis of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, Metropolitan Stylianos was glad to discern traces of its "trinitarian opening" (*Lumen gentium*, 4; *Unitatis redintegratio*, 2). Through this initial trinitarian perspective he sees the main achievement of Vatican II in the field of ecclesiology, thanks to which there began a process of drawing nearer to Orthodox ecclesiology. At the same time, however, he points out with some sadness that in the teaching of the Council there remain "painful traces" (*schmerzliche Spuren*) of thinking in juridical terms. This applies in particular to the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, being the main obstacle on the road towards unity. Sooner or later it will have to become the subject of a serious dialogue between the two Churches. "Vatican II was the beginning, and not the end". According to the Metropolitan, a basis for hope exists in a new religious consciousness, among the people of God in the Roman Catholic Church, awakened and deepened by Vatican II.

3. The task which Metropolitan Stylianos serves is not an easy one. Not without difficulties and tensions goes on the process of listening to each other, and of growing together in mutual knowledge and trust. For each Church the moment of truth has come. Dialogue demands a genuine exchange: giving and taking, offering spiritual values and learning from others. The work of Metropolitan Stylianos shows that Orthodoxy brings to this dialogue deep theological insights coming from centuries-old tradition of spirituality and theology. According to Fr. Yves Congar, an admirer of Eastern tradition, the Christian East is "a forgotten half of ourselves which ought to be present and fertile anew within our Christianity" (*Essais oecuméniques*. Paris 1984, p. 108). On the other hand, whoever knows Orthodoxy more deeply will admit that Father Congar is right when he states that, in relation to Catholicism, "all is in the very depth of things identical and all is different — even that which is identical" (p. 107). Dialogue is great chance and a great promise for both sides. It has not been without the beneficial in-

fluence of the Eastern tradition that all Christians have rediscovered certain forgotten truths and values. Through openness to each other, the Churches today are coming to a better understanding of the presence of the Holy Spirit, invoking Him with increasing intensity in ecumenical epiclesis.

We stand before new challenges and new possibilities. We have to recognize ourselves for what we are, and in remaining loyal to our own Church, have the courage to ask critical questions of our denominational traditions. The dialogue between both Churches helps to fulfil this difficult task and to answer the call of the Holy Spirit in our time. A new Christian era is opening, filled with chance and promise, an era rich in ecumenical hopes. Aware of the history of difficulties in the mutual relations between Western and Eastern Christianity, Metropolitan Stylianos with his personality, theological creativity and ecumenical attachment contributes to paving the way for a better tomorrow of Christianity.

In his address given on the 4th of July 1982 during the Third Plenary Session of the Joint Commission in Munich, Archbishop Stylianos spoke on the theme of "the ethos of dialogue". He called the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue "the most important of all theological dialogues in our time". Division is always a "common misfortune". No wonder, then, that in this dialogue the Metropolitan sees a "holy undertaking", even "liturgy" and one of the holiest forms of prayer. As such this dialogue must be an act of penance, thanksgiving, patience, respect, and prayer.

At the end of one of his papers devoted to the problem of ecclesiology Metropolitan Stylianos recounts the deep reflections contained in the paschal message written in 1971 by the late Ecumenical Patriarch, Athenagoras I, just a year before his death († 1972). In it, the Patriarch explains that the wounds on the body of the risen Christ indicate not only His complete identity with the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, but are also a sign that even after the resurrection there remains a pain in the body of the Church until the final transfiguration of the universe. It is also a pain caused by the divisions and schisms in the Church.

Let these words of Patriarch Athenagoras, the great champion of unity of the "sister Churches" (*adelphai Ekklesiae*), equally be during today's solemn ceremony a sincere expression of recognition of the ecumenical initiatives of the venerable Church which that unforgotten Patriarch led with love and which today is represented by His Eminence Metropolitan Stylianos. Ecumenism needs such distinguished personalities who have wide horizons of thought and a great openness of spirit. "Let us now praise famous men and our fathers in their generations ... Leaders of the people in their deliberations and in understanding of learning for the people, wise in their words of instruction" (Syr 44,1.4).