

Chronicle of the 3rd International Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Pastoral Health Care

With the blessings of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the 3rd International Conference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Pastoral Health Care took place between the 8th – 12th of October, 2014 on the historical island of Rhodes. The Conference was organized by the Patriarchal Network for Pastoral Health Care, assisted by the Metropolis of Rhodes.

The *Patriarchal Network* has an educational and socio-medical character. Within this realm, over the past years the *Patriarchal Network* has organized various activities for the further education of healthcare professionals and for the support of the sick. The *Patriarchal Network* holds a conference every three years (2008, 2011). This event offers the opportunity to clergy and healthcare professionals worldwide to come together in a spirit of Christian fellowship, dialogue and cooperation so as to improve the spiritual care given to the sick and their families. More so, it gives the motivation and structure for local Churches to organize similar events.

Attending the 3rd Conference were 225 participants from different parts of the world. Guests were invited to consider the theological and medical - scientific aspects of "The Wound": how people are injured in the various stages of life, particularly from physical illness, from abuse, from natural disasters and national calamities; and how they can deal with these wounds in the most appropriate manner .

More specifically, the participants attending were representatives from all the Metropolises that belong administratively and spiritually to the Ecumenical Patriarchate world-wide (Crete, the Dodecanese, Thyateira and Great Britain, Europe, the North and South Americas, Australia), from the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Moscow Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, the Church of Cyprus and representatives from most of the Metropolises of the Church of Greece. Archbishop Ieronymos of Greece sent a special representative together with the Holy Synod of Greece. Also attending the Conference were representatives and professors from Orthodox Theological Schools and Ecclesiastical Academies in Greece and abroad, including a representative from Halki, the Holy Cross School of Theology in Boston, and the University of Tartu in Estonia. The International Orthodox

Christian Charities (IOCC) took part as well as many physicians, nurses and other professionals related to the care of the sick and the sensitive area of health care. Special guests were Fr. Dariusz Giers of the Pontifical Council of Pastoral Health Care Workers, Rev. Dr. Richard Fischer, Executive Secretary of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches and Anneke Kemper, a former representative of the European Network of Health Care Chaplaincy, presently working as a pastoral counselor at the Mediant Psychiatric Hospital in the Netherlands.

Wednesday October 8, 2014

During the opening ceremony, which took place on Wednesday evening the of 8th of October, Archimandrite Agathangelos Siskos, reprehensive of the Archdiocese of Constantinople, read the greetings sent by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the participants. His All-Holiness expressed his satisfaction in the Conference of representatives in Rhodes and congratulated the *Patriarchal Network* in its efforts to better organize pastoral care offered to the sick. Addressing the Consultation, His Eminence Metropolitan Kyrillos of Rhodes and President of the Consultation expressed his joy in the continuation of the Conferences being held in Rhodes. Describing the icon on the poster and the program of the Conference, "Like a Pelican", (which refers to one of Lamentations of Good Friday), he spoke of how the pelican wounds itself to revive its children who have been poisoned by the semen of a snake, comparing this to Christ who was voluntarily wounded in order to save mankind. Closing his greeting, the Metropolitan asked: "We are called to be wounded in our ministry. Are we ready to accept this call?" Greetings were read from Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and other Church leaders. The Mayor of Rhodes welcomed the participants to the island, extending a hand of hospitality. Following these greetings, the Coordinator of the Network of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for Pastoral Health Care, Protpresbyter Stavros Kofinas, spoke about the significance of the *Patriarchal Network* and described how it has grown since its founding six years ago, making it a point of reference for pastors and medical professionals. He underlined that "even if all health care facilities are equipped with the best diagnostic and medical equipment and provisions are made so that the patient's expenses are covered to pay for his and her care, if this

does not include the proper human element (people that have the appropriate knowledge who will care for the patient with discretion, loving devotion and compassion) true therapy cannot be offered. Without this human element, no health care system will be able to offer well- rounded care. On the contrary, the wounds of the patient will only be deepened to the point of death". Concluding, Fr. Kofinas presented a special plaque to "*The Archbishop Iakovos Leadership 100*" and to the Honorable Basil and Anthony Kambourakis, proprietors of the *Rodos Palace Hotel* in gratitude for the ongoing support they have given to the Network over the past six years. The Conference was officially opened by the Regional Governor of the Southern Aegean. The opening address was presented by Archimandrite Theodosios Martzouchos with the topic "The Great Wound – Man". Fr. Theodosios explained how man was responsible for his fall from God's grace and how mankind has suffered ever since. He stressed that the Church is a hospital that cures souls. One must expect that, in entering this hospital, he will experience discomfort and will even have to be wounded in order to be healed.

Thursday October 9, 2015

On the second day of the Conference, Athanasios Papathanasiou, editor-in-chief of the periodical *Synaxis*, spoke about "the wound and martyrdom: wavering between misery and witness". In his presentation, he stated that one must distinguish between narcissistic martyrdom and a martyrdom that springs from a living relationship with God. Thus the martyr bears two wounds: the wound induced by maltreatment of the body and the soul, which very often stems from a need for self-punishment and "the great wound of love", in which and for which one gives witness. Following Mr. Papathanasiou, Fr. Lambros Kamperidis, Professor of Greek Literature and Theology and the priest of the Metropolis of Canada, spoke on the topic: "'Much beloved the burning wound' – the wounded heroes of Papdiamantis. He compared the wounds of Papdiamantis's heroes to the wounds of today's man. What predominates in the wounded heroes of this Greek writer is the presence of a greater power which is interposed between man and his failures. This presence redefines the consequences of life's calamities and justifies life with compassion, uplifting the wounded man from the imminent death of his soul. Today, man tries to heal his

wounds by satisfying his wants and desires in an attempt to attain self-fulfillment but, in doing so, he brings on more trauma and hurt. Following Fr. Kamperidis, Prof. Christos Yiannaras spoke on "the wound: the mark of an unfulfilled relationship". Prof Yiannaras drew his ideas from empirical examples, describing in what way and for what reason relationships are formed and why they often fail. Then, Dr. Alexis Lappas, a child psychiatrist from Thessalonica, spoke about the trauma from an incorrect religious upbringing, referring to "children and families at the altar of a faith". Thursday afternoon a roundtable discussion on "the wounded adolescent" took place. Taking part in the table was Protopres. George Liagkas, a child psychiatrist and a priest from the Archdiocese of Australia, Archim. Chysanthos Papapostolou, who serves the Archdiocese of Greece, Archim. Chrysostomos Tympas from Great Britain and Philip Mamalakis, Professor of Pastoral Care at the Holy Cross School of Theology in Boston. The common points in their presentations were that adolescents have been wounded by the breakdown of the family, their lack of trust in today's socio-political systems causing lack of meaning in their lives. The climax of the first day was when the participants of the Conference went to the Church of the Annunciation. There, in one voice, they all chanted in one voice the Service of Supplication to the Most Holy Theotokos for all the sick and bedridden and for those that minister to them.

Friday October 10, 2015

Friday, the third day of the Conference, the morning sessions were centered on the medical aspect of the wound and that of psychological trauma. Fr. Peter Bistolaidis, a priest of the Metropolis of Detroit and a general surgeon in Saginaw, Michigan, together with Dora Pappas, head nurse at the General Oncological Hospital "Sts. Anargyri" in Athens, spoke about the complications of treating a physical wound and its post-surgical implications. They underlined the difficulties one has in expressing pain and how isolation complicates their emotional ability to deal with the feelings of insecurity. The topic "the meaning of psychological trauma" was discussed by Athena Marouda-Chatzouli and Gregory Vasiliadis, both psychotherapists. The traumatized patient suffers a type of hysteria in which he wants to reject the person or situation that inflicted pain on him yet years for him

or the situation. Thus he tries to keep the inflictor alive in a pathological way. They stressed the need to form a trusting relationship with the traumatized patient within well-defined boundaries and the need for his or her reinstatement into a accepting community. The third session of the day dealt with the topic "trauma and abuse". During this session, Prof. Dr. Natia Beriannaki of the University of Athens spoke on the abuse of women which is on the steady rise on a universal scale. Following, Dr. Demetrios Ananostopoulos, Professor of Child Psychiatry, also at the University of Athens, spoke on how priests and educators can serve as role models for children and how they can intervene in their dysfunctional families. Closing the morning sessions, Danai Papadatou, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Athens and a long-standing co-worker in the *Patriarchal Network*, described the different stages of helping young people deal with the trauma caused by a tragic road traffic accident. Her presentation was drawn from the work she did with young students following the fatal bus collision which took many young lives on the Athens–Thessaloniki highway at the Maliakos Gulf in 2004. On Friday afternoon, Professor Chysostom Stamouli from the University of Athens and Dr. Eleni Aggelopoulou- Karagianni, a child-psychologists and a group and family therapist, spoke on the "wound of love". They cited how the problem of guilt plays a major role in not allowing genuine feelings of eros to be expressed. They described the impasse relationships face today due to their distorted sexual prototypes and their inability to foster tender relationships. The evening ended with work groups in which the representatives were called to answer to two questions: "what are the difficulties faced in ministering to the sick in their respective countries?" and "what steps need to be taken to facilitate this ministry in a more positive way?".

Saturday October 11, 2015

Two major sessions took place on Saturday October 11th. The first was on "the trauma following a national disaster". Protopres. Basaam Nassif described the trauma of the war-torn people of Lebanon , Protopres. Angelos Pappas prolifically related the terror and the trauma of those that suffered in the twin tower disaster in New York in 2011, while Christina Giannakaki spoke on the "the trauma of losing one's birthplace and the way it is faced by future generations". Fr. Nassif

related how difficult it is for those that suffer in war to close their wounds due to the continual losses they suffer and their lack of optimism in the prospect of peace. Fr. Pappas spoke of how dismay overshadowed the horrifying event of 9/11, the need to flee and the inability to do so by those that were in the area yet the heroic endeavors of those that stayed to save lives. Christina Giannaki, an expert in Balkan affairs, eloquently associated losing one's birthplace with the loss of the one's mother.

Metropolitan Paul of Sasanios and Siatista and Dr. George Papageorgeou were the final speakers at the Conference. His Eminence offered a sincere and honest presentation on the wounds of the clergy which stem from inadequacy, disenchantment, refutation of one's initial goals. This is complicated by a hasty decision to enter into the priesthood, the inability to relate and communicate with others, together with marital and familial dysfunction. These areas of conflict increase when there are parish difficulties. In turn, Dr. Papageorgeou spoke on similar lines, stating that the wounds of a healer are caused by the extreme and very often uncontainable demands placed on the therapist by the patient and his or her family that very often cannot be met. The therapist is not able to have appropriate time for his spouse and children. There is also a strong demand to maintain a certain social position based on a high economic and social status. The commercialization of medical care and cut backs in wages and hospital care have made the profession even more stressful.

During the open discussion that took place on Saturday, the participants stated that the presentations were of high caliber and helpful. They also expressed their support of the *Patriarchal Network* and their desire to assist in expanding its efforts in offering support and education to those that serve in the area of health and to the sick. It was pointed out that there has to be a clear statement of the Network's aims and goals.

Sunday October 12, 2015

Following the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy on Sunday, during the last session of the Conference, the Coordinator of the Network thanked all the representatives for their participation. He noted that if the Conference was indeed successful, it was because of the sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that was formed during the participants'

stay on the island of Rhodes. Thanking the contributors for their support, he brought special attention to the members of the Organizing Committee who work solely out their love for the cause of the Network and their love for the Patriarchate. Closing the Conference, Metropolitan Kyrillos of Rhodes reconfirmed his commitment to the *Patriarchal Network* and invited the representatives to return for the 4th Conference in 2017.