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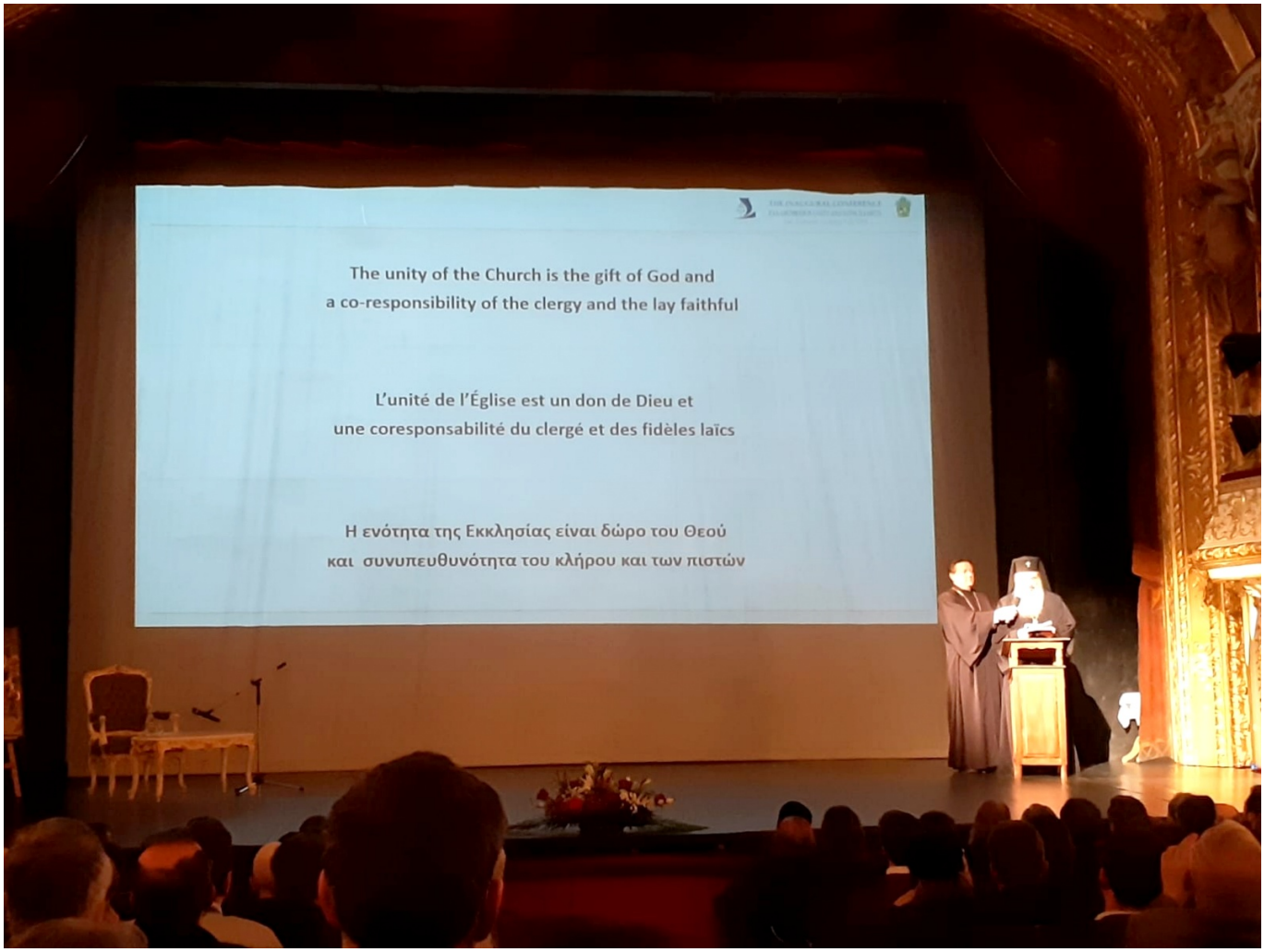
Message by Romanian Patriarch Daniel at IOTA Conference (Full Text)



The unity of the Church is the gift of God and a co-responsibility of the clergy and the lay faithful

Message of His Beatitude Daniel, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, at the International Theological Conference "Panorthodox Unity and Synodality", Iaşi, 9-12 January 2019.

In contemporary society, characterised by increased secularisation, i.e. through relativisation of religious and moral values, a renewal of present Orthodox theology is more and more necessary, through a presentation of the deep connection between the truths of faith, the liturgical life and the mystic-ascetic experience of the Church. This dynamic relational presentation must be accomplished by deepening the great themes of the faith and of the life of the Church in dialogue

with the present pastoral and missionary needs.

Unity is an attribute or a fundamental note of the Orthodox Church as confessed in the Creed: “I believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church“. Understanding the unity of the Church, its realisation and manifestation in the concrete life of the Church must be a permanent concern, both theologically and spiritually, as well as in the pastoral-missionary field. In this sense, synodality is a canonical rule and a practice in the life of the local Orthodox Churches in order to express the unity of the Orthodox faith, of the sacramental life, and of the canonical discipline, according to the Holy Scripture and the Holy apostolic and patristic Tradition. If synodality is a permanent canonical norm at the local level, it must be today a permanent practice also at panorthodox or universal level, not just in exceptional or in crisis situations, but in maintaining and permanently asserting the ecclesial communion and the pastoral and missionary co-responsibility of Orthodoxy in today’s world.

The present Orthodox theology is called to deepen the truth regarding the ecclesial, dogmatic, eucharistic and canonical unity, starting from the fundamental teaching that the Most Holy Trinity is the source, model and purpose of panorthodox unity and synodality in the Church, as the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ for the unity of His Church shows to us: “that all may be one, as You, Father, in Me, and I in You so that they may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory that You have given me I have given them, that they may be one, as We are one” (John 17:21-22).

The understanding of Orthodox dogmatic theology as a science of salvation and service to the unity of the Church was the main concern of the great Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae, who in his work has re-orientated and renewed the academic Orthodox theology, often influenced by Western scholasticism, liberating it from this influence by intensifying the connection of contemporary theology with the theology of the Holy Fathers, with the liturgical and mystic-ascetic (philocalical) spirituality of the Church.
Speaking about the importance of the Dogmatic Theology as a synthesis and systematisation of the whole theology, with a precise and unified purpose, Father Stăniloae noted in 1930: "The lack of dogmatics from a theologian's formation makes the theological disciplines disparate studies with problems that have lost sight of subordination to a unitary purpose. The theologian's attention is deviated from God and His action to philology, history, social issues, etc., viewed for themselves. The central-religious problem, the connection of the soul with God, in which all the other problems are solved is, if not forgotten, pushed to a secondary plan"[1].

Pointing to the vocation of Orthodox theology as a science of salvation or deification of the human being and of the unity or ecclesial communion in the life and mission of the Church, Father Stăniloae makes the necessary distinction between a theology done in a given time and the perpetual teaching of the Church, stating that "not every theology becomes ecclesiastic teaching, but only that which the Church absorbs through its unanimous consensus in time and space […]. Thus, theology is made in the Church, and the Church retains from it as permanent teaching that which authentically explicates the plan of human's deification" […]. "Theologians must enclose their ministry in this work of salvation for the Church's faithful (emphasis added) from all times. Therefore, personal theological reflexion must be animated not by the desire for originality at any cost, but by the explanation of what is common inheritance and serving the salvation of the Church's faithful (emphasis added) in that time; it must stay in close intimacy with the life of prayer and ministry of the Church, in order to deepen and revive this ministry. Without this, the Church can become formalist in its service, and the theology distant and individualistic"[2].

Therefore, today, the theological reflection on panorthodox ecclesial unity must be deepened also in relation to the concrete life of the present ecclesial communities. In this sense, the academic chair and the altar of the Church must be in constant cooperation, the professor of theology and the shepherd of souls are co-responsible for the defence, preservation and cultivation of local and panorthodox ecclesial

unity. In this regard, we would like to remind that the dogmas and the canons of the Orthodox Church were formulated and approved by the Ecumenical Councils by bishops, spiritual shepherds in their dioceses, being helped by erudite theologians, all of whom had a profound conscience of their responsibility in maintaining the unity of the Church as a necessity for the salvation of the clergy and the faithful of the Church, that is, their union with the Most Holy Trinity. Moreover, on the basis of the Orthodox faith, Eucharistic Liturgies were elaborated in living ecclesial communities, uniting prayer with theological reflection, dogma with doxology, the internal unity of the Church with its dynamic mission in society. In addition to underlining the truth that the Most Holy Trinity is the source, pattern and purpose of the Church's unity, today's Orthodox theology must emphasize that the unity of the Church is a gift offered by God, but also the responsibility of the bishops, priests, deacons and lay believers, in order to maintain the unity of the Church, so that "the world may believe" (cf. John 17:21-22).

At the same time, Orthodoxy needs a deeper theological reflection on the relationship between individual freedom and ecclesial communion, between academic theology and the life of parishes and monasteries, between primacy and synodality, at local and panorthodox level, between local autocephaly and panorthodox co-responsibility, because autocephaly should not be confused with isolation or unity with constraint. Dialogue, mutual consultation and concrete cooperation between our autocephalous Churches must become a permanent, well-organised practice, not just isolated or conjectural events. We must constantly be vigilant so that individual or collective egotism should not undermine the holiness of ecclesial communion.

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We pray the Most Holy Trinity to give light, peace and joy to all participants in the International Theological Conference in Iaşi (9-12 January 2019), with the theme "Panorthodox Unity and Synodality".

† DANIEL
Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church

[1] "Preface" to the translation of Hristu ANDRUTSOS's manual, The Dogmatics of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Sibiu, 1930, p. V, quoted by Deacon Assist. Ioan Ica jr. in the homage book: Person and Communion. Tribute of Honour to Reverend Professor Academician Dumitru Stăniloae 1903-1993, Sibiu, 1993, p. XXV, note 3.

[2] Rev, Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, Tom 1, 5th Edition, in collection Pr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Opere Complete (Rev. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Complete Works), BASILICA Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018, pp. 100-

101.

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