

A SMALL WINDOW OPEN ON ORTHODOX GUIDES AND SCOUTS OF EUROPE

Last spring, Pierrette, as well as other members of the Federal Bureau visiting the charming « National Base » of Italian Scouts of Europe, asked me with her exquisite delicacy to present to this assembly, as influent as friendly, a reflection on the way of understanding better the Orthodox guides and scouts who belong to our International Union. I accepted with pleasure and I started to work seriously for I couldn't rely only on experiences covering almost fifty years of my life in an active "Byzantine-Slavonic rite" to which I have officially belonged since July 12th 1954, although I was born in the Latin Church in 1924. This rite has an unutterable beauty that struck me at the beginning; then, little by little, it took me, body and soul, almost to each breathing. There was a change when, by the choice of a superior authority, on March 19th 1957, choice that I accepted joyfully, I entered the Eastern Pontifical Institute, in the department that has become several years later the Faculty of Eastern Canon Law, the only one that exists till now. I still belong to this faculty as an emeritus professor, but I couldn't say whose the merits in question are!

However, the point here is not to give a university course. Those who invited me to talk in front of this assembly know perfectly well that my foible as a speaker is to always try and back up my speech with scientific documentation typical to such lectures. I almost did it. But Attilio, our Chairman, and a few months later the Canon Vander Perre, kindly reminded me to present, in a way accessible to all, the spirit, or better say the Christian heart of our Orthodox guides and scouts, impregnated with this Christian culture that every one of them learnt on his mother's lap. They still live from it and, as good scouts or good guides, they should live from it more intensely, in their commitment to reach the aim for which God has created them. I am most grateful to Attilio and to Canon Vander Perre. I have tried to do my best to confine myself to the line indicated with such delicacy and I hope I'll not disappoint you.

Strength of double presumption

First of all, less than fifty years ago, I could not have redacted such a conference on Orthodox scouts. As a matter of fact, in spite of our admirable scout / guide Law – that I did not know at that time – which proclaims universal brotherhood between scouts, I would have felt squeezed as in narrow tongs. Indeed, according to the historic-canon matters, Catholics presumed that all Orthodox were in the wrong faith, because of the schism, and so that they were notoriously struck by major excommunication, whereas their bishops were also submitted, apart from excommunication, to the *a divinis* suspension (= not allowed to celebrate the Holy Mass), because they had been consecrated by people also schismatic and excommunicated. This was so true that I could not receive into the Catholic Church any Orthodox without a formal abjuration of the schism and as a formal absolution of the excommunication, even if this was repugnant to me (I was in Ireland at that time), sure that in the Orthodox who asked for becoming Catholic there would be no hint of schismatic sin. Furthermore, it might occur that this person was much kinder than the one who was allowed to absolve him from this presumed excommunication.

Things became more complicated later on because the feelings of the Orthodox Churches were substantially the same towards the Catholics. But there already existed some communities where it did not happen, such as the Foyer Saint-Georges of Meudon, near Paris. In this Foyer, for one year I was "prefect" in charge of eighty Russian boys, almost all Orthodox. With these boys, under the wise leadership of Father Paul Maillieux, s.j., a Belgian priest applying the scout methods – even if I don't know if he has ever been a scout – and a great "ecumenist before the time", we sang every evening stupefying hymns of the "evening prayer" in Church Slavonic; and every Sunday we took part, singing altogether, in the Divine Liturgy (= the Holy Mass) of saint John Chrysostom. The fact that the priest mentioned the Pope of Rome in the Divine Liturgy created no problem either for any of these boys or for their parents: it was "normal" and they often told me that they wished all the best for the Pope, while remaining good Orthodox. The idea of excommunication did not occur to them at all.

I often joined these boys during the summer in a chalet on the lake of Geneva. There I played with them like a scout – although I was not a scout yet – and I prayed with them; we sang in a four voice choir in the beautiful little Byzantine church that father Igor Sendler, s.j., a famous iconographer, has drawn, built with his hands, and partly with ours, and painted. Once again, no hint of excommunication.

In 1964, excommunications disappeared, also at the official level.

During the “4th public Session” of Council Vatican II (on November 21st 1964), when the Pope approved with the Council Fathers the decree on ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), the presumption concerning the sin of schism of the Orthodox or the Protestants was inverted. Since then, the presumption has been in favor of good faith. As a matter of fact the Council, speaking of schisms of passed centuries, “sometimes caused by the fault of people from both sides”, declares what follows, in reference to Protestant and Orthodox communities: “The children who were born in these Communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection”. The Council also says that “men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect. [...] They are members of Christ’s body and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church” (UR 3).

Life in almost full communion

From then on, when we speak of Orthodox or Protestants, it is no longer possible to call them « heretics » or « schismatic » - please God – and either to call them « dissidents » or « separated brothers » as it sometimes happens still nowadays. Let us simply talk of brothers, brothers with whom there is “a certain communion, even though imperfect” as the Council expressed in the text already quoted, or even better, of brothers “who are not yet in full communion” with the Catholic Church. And even today we should talk of Orthodox as brothers who are “in almost full communion” with the Catholic Church. This would cope with what the Pope said at least three times (January 21st and February 8th 1971 and January 25th 1973) about the Orthodox Churches, estimating them already in “quasi-full” or “almost total” communion with the Catholic Church and recognizing their bishops as the pastors of the part of Jesus’ flock that is entrusted to them” (in Constantinople = Istanbul – on June 25th 1967). Consequently, we may be convinced – and act according to this – that the acts of jurisdiction of the bishops on whom our Orthodox guides and scouts depend must be considered as accomplished in communion with the Catholic Church, except those that would be contrary to the Scripture, to the Catholic Doctrine and to natural faith (as I have written in *La civiltà cattolica* 122 [June 19th 1971] 562).

What do we have in common with Orthodox scouts and guides? The answer is clear: from a human point of view, absolutely everything; from a religious point of view, quite much, almost everything.

What is missing in this « everything » has been shown during this long and impressive silence that happened during the Pontifical Mass celebrated in Saint-Peter’s with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (at the end of June 1995) when he got down from the altar after praying the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople. He stood in a reserved place down the altar, where he placed himself “to attend”.

I was there. Nobody breathed, emotion was intense, sorry, many tears shone in the eyes. What is happening? What is missing? Why can’t they both go on with the celebration? For me, suffering was particularly intense because the Patriarch, as he was still a deacon, had been my student for almost three years at the Oriental Pontifical Institute as he had sustained (in December 1968) his theses of Ph.D. under my direction. The absurdity of the division of the Churches was obvious.

Yes, the communion between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches is already “almost total”. However, this is not enough to enable Catholic and Orthodox priests to concelebrate the Holy Mass (always called the Divine Liturgy in Eastern Churches) because we all agree, Catholic and Orthodox, to say that the Eucharist is the sign *par excellence* of full communion between the Churches. Nevertheless, as long as full communion between the Churches is not reestablished, it would be a misinterpretation for Catholic and Orthodox priests to

concelebrate the Divine Liturgy during which the sacrifice of the Cross takes place, with the consecration of bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of Christ. This is why the Ecumenical Patriarch came down of the altar before the beginning of the central part of the Divine Liturgy; this explains why in both Codes of the Catholic Church, the Latin code and the Eastern code (for 21 Churches – see comments of the FSE Religious Directory), it is strictly forbidden for Catholic priests to concelebrate the Divine Liturgy with non Catholic priests.

What is missing for the full communion between us and the Orthodox relies in the word “quasi” or “almost” in the Pope’s expressions, mentioned above, about the “quasi-full” or “almost total” communion. It seems not much, but this “quasi” prevents us from plenitude, and this “quasi” still indicates a very serious reality.

In our case – from a Catholic point of view – this reality relies in the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff, not recognized by the hierarchies of the Orthodox Churches, except in the limited sense of “*primus inter pares*” (first among his pairs). What has just been said seems obvious because Byzantine liturgical books, printed on the Vatican presses, are sometimes used by Orthodox priests (it happened frequently during the communist regime); the same for liturgical books printed by Orthodox Churches. Books are identical, except for the mentions of supreme chiefs, as is right and proper. In the books printed by the Vatican presses, we pray, before naming the local bishop, for “our most holy and universal Pontiff, NN, the Pope of Rome”; in Orthodox books, at the same place, we commemorate the supreme Chief of the concerned Orthodox Church, for instance the Patriarch of Rumania or of Bulgaria. I have seen liturgical books edited in the Vatican, used by Orthodox priests, where the Pope’s name was struck off and replaced by the name of the Orthodox patriarch. And I have seen the contrary in some books edited by the Orthodox and used by some Eastern Catholic priests. These two erasures, most horrible, are eloquent answers to the question of what is missing to the full communion between the Churches.

For the rest, all of us, Catholic and Orthodox, we believe in the same fundamental dogmas of faith, about the Holy Trinity, about the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary, Jesus Christ. We all have the same seven sacraments, ministered by priests and bishops validly ordained and hierarchically organized; our “local” Churches recognize each other as sister Churches, we recognize our bishops, at all levels of the hierarchy (such as metropolitans and patriarchs), as the pastors to whom part of Christ’s flock is entrusted.

We all wish deeply to re-establish full communion between the Churches so that, from a desire point of view, we may be one heart and one soul, together with Christ’s Heart, who prayed for unity. We all have the same sincere promptitude to accept the future results of an ecumenical dialogue between the Churches. So we accept, already now, the same future solutions to our present differences. It is obvious that the *formulae fidei* (formulations of the Creed) must be the same, but they gather us rather in external aspects, whereas what unites us deep in our hearts is the charity of Christ, good faith, the same fundamental promptitude to accept, in its integrity, the whole doctrine of the Church, that is to say in the direction indicated by her under the authority of its Magisterium. Does this not mean, perhaps, that right now all Catholics and Orthodox, taken individually, even if they are not yet in full communion on a formal level, belong, in the best possible way, to the same Church, one, saint, catholic and apostolic?

A certain diversity of customs and observances proper to the disciplines that rule the life of each Orthodox Church, often from time immemorial, apart from the fundamental dogmas that unite us, far from being an obstacle to the Church’s unity, rather “adds to her splendor, and is of great help in carrying out her mission” (UR 16). “The differences in theological expression of doctrine”, as long as their substance is safe, is not either an obstacle to this unity: these differences appeared because of different methods and perspectives used in the East and West, in order to “confess God’s truth” (UR 17). The Council declares that “it is hardly surprising, then, if from time to time one tradition has come nearer to a full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed it to better advantage. In such cases, these various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting. Where the authentic theological traditions of the Eastern Church are concerned, we must recognize the admirable way in which they have their roots in Holy Scripture, and how they are nurtured and given expression in the life of liturgy. They also derive their strength from the living tradition of the apostles and from the works of the Fathers and spiritual writers of the Eastern Churches. Thus they promote the right ordering of Christian life and, indeed, pave the way to a full vision of Christian truth” (ibidem). So “all this heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology, in its various traditions, belongs to the full Catholic and apostolic character of the Church (ibidem). It belongs to me, to you, be it Catholic or Orthodox, it belongs to us, to all of us.

In the following lines, I am going to try to display, by short allusions, some aspects of this diversity, aspects that I chose according to the practical aim of this conference : a better knowledge of Orthodox scouts and guides who belong to the UIGSE-FSE, in order to be able, in the full respect of their Christian culture, to live with them in full conformity with what the UIGSE-FSE proposes through its Principles, the scout / guide Promise, the scout / guide Law and its other core texts.

Daily invocation to the Holy Spirit

Each of my classes in the Eastern Institute of Rome begins with a prayer led in turn by the students of the various Eastern Churches. If they belong to the various Churches of Byzantine rite (Rumanian, Greek, Melkite...), they sing almost always the same following prayer:

O Heavenly King, the comforter, the spirit of Truth, Who art present everywhere and fillest all things; Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life; come and abide in us and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Gracious One.

About the Holy Spirit, it is true that there is a substantial difference between the Catholic and the Orthodox because of the word « Filioque » inserted in the West in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (... "he proceeds from the Father and the Son"...). Well, I have the feeling that a complete clarification is now pointing out. Yet, I never say this word in the Creed that I pray every day in the Divine Liturgy. I don't pronounce it:

1°) because for more than four centuries, it has been declared by the popes (Clement VIII in 1595) that we, Catholic of Byzantine rite, are obliged to believe that the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son, but we are not obliged to say it explicitly in the Creed,

2°) because in the book that I use for the celebrations, published by the Vatican, the Creed is deprived of this word, still today,

3°) because the Pope and the Ecumenical Patriarch, during the concelebration of the Liturgy of the Word, till the Offertory, that I mentioned above, recited together the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople in its original text, without the word « Filioque ». After a few months, this fact received its best explanation in a substantial document of the Pontifical Council for the unity of Christians (see *L'Osservatore Romano* dated September 13th 1995, and *Service d'Information* n° 89 (1995/II-III, 87-91), document that I consider acceptable also by Orthodox).

I am convinced, as one of the highest personalities of the Orthodox world told me during my journey to the East in 1968, that if the question around the « Filioque » could be overcome at the Council of Florence (they all agreed on the formula « he proceeds from the Father through the Son » - *ex Patre per Filium*), it can also be overcome nowadays. Anyway, this is a matter of high theology.

I come back to the prayer "O Heavenly King" that I have just quoted. It is an epiclesis (= invocation to the Holy Spirit) similar to the two prayers of the Latin Church, the "Veni Creator Spiritus" used in specific circumstances (for instance in such assemblies as ours) or to the "Veni Sancte Spiritus" which is the sequence of Pentecost Sunday in the Latin rite. However this very short "epiclesis" is used every day in the East. Almost all Divine services start with this invocation to the Holy Spirit, including the Divine Liturgy, even if it has its proper "epiclesis" after the consecration of the Eucharistic Species. I do not go further in order not to go out of my subject.

Recently, I have been very happy to read the works of the worldly known Rumanian Orthodox theologian, Dumitru Staniloae, and to notice that this author considers the prayer "O Heavenly King" as the "epiclesis" by which any Orthodox should start all his days, all his activities, feeling united to the "Epiclesis" written with a capital letter, that unceasingly rises up from the whole Church towards the Holy Spirit (see *Prière de Jésus et expérience du Saint Esprit*, 1981, p. 115). This is the deepest prayer that resounds in each baptized person because, by the sanctifying grace, life 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3,3), he is "led by the Spirit of God" (Rm 8,14) that makes him cry "Abba, Father" (Rm 8, 15-16), speaking unceasingly to God with extreme joy in his heart. This same "Spirit of his Son", that is to say the spirit of Jesus, "sent by God" into his heart, "crying Abba, Father" (Gal 4,6).

Such is the cry common to all of us, the cry of the whole Church and it is not possible to say this « Abba » without being in communion with all the baptized.

May our scouts and guides belonging to the Eastern Churches, Orthodox or Catholic, keep the habit – and if this habit has been lost, may they re-establish it – to invoke the Holy Spirit often, beginning their morning prayers, that are even written in all liturgical books and which are beautiful, and their evening prayers, with the prayer “O Heavenly King”, and may they live in its dimension at each moment of the day.

The Prayer of the Heart of Jesus

The book “Sincere story of a Russian pilgrim to his spiritual father” (the bibliography is quite numerous) is very famous. He tries to enforce Jesus’ teaching on the “need of praying always, without fainting” (Lk 18, 1), of praying “without ceasing” (1 Ts 5,17). Exhorted by a *starets* (= spiritual father), the pilgrim, a simple man, starts repeating the words of this Publican who was spied by a Pharisee who, thinking he was just, did not pray at all, whereas the publican struck his breast and repeated unceasingly the same words : “O God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Lk 18, 13). In the Orthodox Churches, this short prayer has been turned into: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me” (and the Russians add at the end the word “sinner”). The “Russian pilgrim” starts repeating it on his lips thousands of times a day, reaching the number of 12 000 times, then he does not count any longer because he notices that the prayer has entered into his heart and that he repeats it unceasingly at each heartbeat, day and night.

Of course, it is not advisable to do the same. We must even take care that this practice does not get too near to “psycho-physical methods” that aim at uniting prayer to breathing or to heartbeat, which sometimes leads to a feeling of warmth, quiet and concentration looked for by those who practice “yoga”, “Zen” or similar things. But these are natural phenomena which have nothing in common with the effects of the Divine grace.

But, as T. Špidlik writes in his presentation of the Italian edition of D. Staniloae’s book mentioned above, of course these serious reprimands do not concern those who use Jesus’ prayer as a simple jaculatory prayer, in a very spontaneous way. Indeed, this prayer is perfectly adapted: “in a world forgetting either God or its own sin, this prayer nourishes the sense of God’s presence, the experience of merciful Jesus”. Thanks to this prayer, often repeated, “the feeling of sin grows in the heart, which is the basis of conversion; and at the same time the joy of being forgiven. So the soul belongs to “the blessed who mourn” (Mt 5, 4). The soul lives in continuous thanksgiving (*Eucharist*); one’s own weakness gives the opportunity of experiencing Divine mercy”. Furthermore, Jesus’ prayer – the same author goes on writing – has a marvelous *antirrhetic* effect (*antirrhesis* = answer), that is to say a determined refusal of “bad thoughts that worry us continuously, devil’s suggestions, by answering as Jesus answered to Satan when he was tempted by him with this verse of the Scripture (Mt 4, 1-11).” It is “a marvelous formula, adapted to cast out all demons”. And we also add that there is a whole theology around Jesus’ name, even in this prayer. Špidlik writes: “to pronounce this name is as if we were painting an icon of Jesus not with colors but with the acoustic sound of lips. Icons, in the faith of Eastern Christians, make the painted personality become alive. In the same way, Jesus is present when his name is pronounced” in a pious prayer, obviously.

It is one of the jaculatory prayers that have been circulating in the Christian world since the first centuries, especially among monks; everyone had one, that he ruminated unceasingly, thus he was united to God and penetrated always more into the depth of the meaning of his jaculatory prayer. At the end, some formulas prevailed and among these, towards the end of the 11th century, Jesus’ Prayer, that some people call “the heart of Orthodoxy”. It is a contemplative prayer, in which watching, feeling, tasting divine things, the fact of sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening (like Mary, Martha’s sister in Lk 10, 39), the ardor of the heart, as for the two disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24,32), the fact of feeling forgiven and being in God Father’s arms with immense joy as the prodigal son (Lk 15, 20), all this prevails on intellect. This is the prayer that each people favors, in the East and in the West. Yes, in the West too. Didn’t our mothers, of Latin rite, teach us jaculatory prayers? Didn’t they pray the Rosary in the same eminently praying disposition as these Orthodox who recite Jesus’ prayer with “chotki” (crown made of a hundred beads of woven cord) in hand or without “chotki”, while doing domestic tasks?

It is not a mere coincidence if the Pope, in his recent Apostolic Letter (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, October 16th 2002, nr. 5) makes a comparison between Jesus’ Prayer and the Rosary, saying that the latter “belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation. Developed in the West, it is a typically meditative prayer, corresponding in some way to the “prayer of the heart” or “Jesus prayer” which took root in the soil of the Christian East”.

I must confess that the most beautiful thing, thanks God, I have attended in the FSE, especially in our scouts' summer camps, is the circle that gets nearer to the fire every night to recite the Rosary, under the direction of the troop chief. After the announcement of the "mystery" (and a specific intention for each decade), one scout after the other says his Ave Maria. I think that the Lord, from Heaven – I'm using human words – looks with great satisfaction such a living crown of boys who, down there, under the stars, greet his Mother fifty times with Angel Gabriel's and saint Elisabeth's words, and who pronounce Jesus' name as many times, contemplating the mysteries of his life in the aim of imitating him as good Christians, while their eyes are fixed on the dying and sputtering fire.

How I would enjoy to take part with Orthodox scouts or guides (or with Catholics of Eastern rite) in such a circle in which, starting with the recitation of the prayer "O Heavenly King", the Doxology, the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity, Our Father and the twelve "Kyrie eleison" (repetitive too), scout after scout, guide after guide, everyone would pronounce Jesus' Prayer, with from time to time short liturgical songs, and at the end the most ancient prayer to Mary: "Beneath thy protection we seek refuge", by which we used to finish, with four voices, the evening prayer with the Russian boys in Meudon school... Why not have such a beautiful dream!

Marian dimension

All Divine Liturgies (= Holy Mass) in Byzantine Churches include, without any exception, both following prayers to the Mother of God (Theotokos). Especially the first one is recited four times after the three initial litany prayers and the one prayed before the Creed, whereas the second one is situated between the central prayers of the Divine Liturgy, after the consecration, the memorial (cross, deposition, resurrection, ascension, place at the right of the Father, second coming) and the epiclesis to the Holy Spirit.

First prayer: Remembering our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever Virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.

Second prayer: It is truly right to bless Thee, Theotokos, ever blessed, most pure, and mother of our God. More honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, without corruption Thou gavest birth to God the Word. We magnify Thee, the true Theotokos.

It is said that in Orthodox Churches the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not recognized. Maybe it is an official statement but when I ask any Orthodox to say that the Virgin is "more honorable than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim", and to affirm at the same time that She was subdued to the original sin, he looks at me as if he would excommunicate me. And he is right, because he also celebrates with great devotion the feast of Mary's Assumption in Heaven – also called Dormition feast in the East –; on this icon, the apostles seem completely despaired to see the Virgin in a grave and wonder how it is possible that the most pure Mother of God, without the stain of the original sin, can be subdued to corruption. On the icon, Christ appears and solves the problem. He comes by himself, not like at the Annunciation in order to stay on the earth and to die for us, but to take his mother in his own arms and to lift her up to heaven. How is it possible to paint this? Difficult to say. But Byzantine iconographers, who believe in symbolism, managed to do it, with a little girl holding Jesus' hand. The Immaculate and the Virgin of the Assumption are inseparable.

There is a famous theologian (Bulgakov in *Kupina neopalimaja*) who asserts that to be an Orthodox it is necessary to believe in three truths, before all: the Resurrection of Christ, the Ascension and the Assumption, that is to say the glorification of the Mother of God, as being "lifted up as Christ's Mother now in the whole plenitude of its meaning, Mother of mystical Christ, Mother of the whole Church" (see Špidlik, *Eastern Liturgies...* Vatican 1996, p. 1237). Once again, it seems that Catholic and Orthodox fully agree.

I think that we should renounce to any comparison between Eastern and Western Churches as far as the Marial dimension is concerned. We can only say one thing: in the way of exalting the Blessed Virgin Mary, both parties overcome the others, and vice versa. The Marial hymnology impregnates the Byzantine Divine office and, if we may say so, leads to the *Akathistos* hymn that all Orthodox guides and scouts certainly know. Even if this hymn is sung by all people only once a year, it is in the heart of any Orthodox and it can be used almost every day – for instance to conclude a camp fire – choosing one stanza or another, as it is wisely divided into several stanzas.

There are numberless Marial Sanctuaries in the East (in Russia, at the beginning of last century, there were more than 1000) and some of the miraculous icons that are venerated there are also well spread in the West. Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that an icon is placed in an inadequate position, only as a decoration, without feeling the presence of the Mother of God in this environment, which is always the case for an Orthodox when he contemplates a Marial icon (but also other icons make the painted subject become real). This is why he feels consequently obliged to behave in front of this icon as in a church. For instance, in front of an icon, we do not smoke; according to me, this belongs to the style of our Orthodox scouts and guides.

Far from wanting to teach our Orthodox scouts and guides something about their Marial devotion, about Marial pilgrimages, about the Virgin's feast, I think that they can discover in their own tradition, which is so deep, what the FSE proposes around the feast of the Annunciation, where we are used to renewing the *Act of consecration to Our Lady of the Annunciation*, recited for the first time during the Eurojam 1984, in Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral. On this point, they seem to be privileged by the fact that this feast has remained in Byzantine East one of the major twelve feasts (in the Latin Church, it is only a feast "of precept" now), for which our guides and scouts cannot fail to attend the divine offices that are celebrated in each church. The divine offices and the Divine Liturgy of the feast lends itself to understand well this "Act of consecration", whereas the short and incisive *troparion* (*tropaire*) of the feast – it should be checked with chiefs and religious advisers of Orthodox units – could perhaps be recommended for a frequent use, why not daily, for instance among the morning and evening prayers, or even as a sort of "Angelus" that Catholic guides and scouts should recite three times a day. Here is the *troparion* of the Annunciation.

Today is the beginning of our salvation and the revelation of the eternal mystery!

The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin as Gabriel announces the coming of Grace.

Together with him let us cry to the Theotokos: "Rejoice, O Full of Grace, the Lord is with you!"

Worship of Saints

In the chapter « Tenderness and Holiness », D. Staniloae (in the book mentioned before, pages 21-33) describes masterfully the figure of a Saint as it is conceived by the Orthodox. Here are only some allusions:

The saint excels by his availability, by his extreme attention to the other, by his promptitude to give himself to Christ. The saint shows towards any human being his behavior full of delicacy, purity of thoughts and feelings. His delicacy also reaches animals, all things, because he sees in each creature a gift of God's love. He respects all men and all things. If a man suffers, and even if an animal suffers, the saint expresses his deep compassion. The saint irradiates a spirit of generosity, of abnegation, of participation, without any preoccupation of himself. He does not give orders but kind pieces of advice, which nevertheless impose themselves as a liberation coming from divine goodness. The one who approaches him discovers in him the summit of kindness and purity, covered with a veil of humbleness that makes him still more attractive. The saint is a person committed in a dialogue totally open and unceasing with God and with men. He is the limpid transparency of the dawn of the eternal divine light in which mankind will reach its perfection. In a word (p. 33), the saint "is the integral reflection of the humanity of Christ".

If it were necessary to propose something more for our *Comments of the Religious* directory, as it has already happened, I would have followed these tracks for the 3rd article of the *Directory*, in which the FSE affirms that it gives the primacy to the vocation of all baptized to holiness.

Orthodox scouts and guides can find in these allusions a safe way to follow, on the tracks of so many of their saints, former and recent. Staniloae proposes three of them at the end of his book (S. Callinico di Cernica † 1868, staretz Ioanikios † 1944, the "old" George † 1918), as « charismatic figures », almost inaccessible, but they too indicate that holiness is a fundamental vocation for all, which finds its expression in practical daily life by availability, attention to the other, delicacy, transparence, purity of thoughts and feelings, service after Christ.

As for the Patron Saints of Orthodox scouts and guides, I will remark that saint George is common to all Christian scouts in the world. We could perhaps suggest to include the Troparion of Saint George (April 23rd, as in the Latin Church) into the morning and evening prayers, as it was done in Saint-George college in Meudon, when we sang every evening with the Russian boys. Here is the text:

As the deliverer of captives and defender of the poor, healer of the infirm and champion of kings, victorious great martyr George intercede with Christ our God for our souls salvation.

As for the Patron Saints of Europe, who are six for us Catholic, shortly described in the *Comments of the Religious Directory*, of course the Orthodox have no "formal cult" towards them, except saints Cyril and Methodius, who are much venerated by all of them. On this point, we must have a specific sensibility and trust what chiefs and religious advisers of Orthodox associations or units may decide; if it seems opportune for them, they may designate another Patron Saint for the other branches (wolfcubs, ladybirds, rangers, rovers), like the Italian association which has chosen saint Catherine of Siena for the ranger branch, saint Paul for the rovers and saint Francis of Assisi for the wolfcub and ladybird branches.

As far as saint Francis is concerned, I mention that an Orthodox author, who precised that in the « excommunicated » Catholic Church – we were in the pre-ecumenical era – there could be no saints, made an exception for saint Francis of Assisi, considering him as the « unique Orthodox saint within the Catholic Church » (Iljin, *Aksiomy religioznogo opyta*). Obviously, saint Francis has all the characteristics of a saint described by Staniloae. And about the so-called “pacification with the cosmos and with the whole nature”, in which we can find swallows and fish, but also where ferocious bears and wolves obey the saint with docility, pacification that appears in the life of Orthodox saints, especially Russian saints, we must say that this pacification also impregnates the Franciscan spirituality. If I had to choose a Patron Saint for Russian ladybirds (hoping that they will exist one day) or for Russian wolfcubs, I would choose saint Sergius of Radonezh without any hesitation; we also venerate him in the official cult of the Catholic Church, among others because he was able to renounce to his meal gently in favor of a hungry wild bear. It is interesting to read the comparison between these two saints in T. Špidlik’s study, “Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Sergius of Radonezh”, in *Il Battesimo nelle terre russe*, Florence 1991, pp. 423-435.

Liturgical catechesis

Scout chiefs are not all “catechists”. However, in the FSE, they educate to faith life, which also corresponds to Baden Powell’s purest conceptions; according to him, scouting in itself, “through its services and all its activities” must “have a religious basis to life” (Rovering to success). The Comments of the Religious Directory (art. 5) is very clear on this point, by placing in the middle of the educative harmonious work the integrality of the personality of the boy or of the girl, who have to be educated according to the living and active faith of the Church in which they have been incorporated since their baptism.

I am not aware enough of the way the catechetical work is developed in the specific Orthodox Churches, I mean where the boys learn the Christian doctrine, to have any strong opinion on this subject. It is obvious that, in the FSE, chiefs – as well as good Christian parents – must pay attention to the fact that the young people who are entrusted to them must attend regular lessons of catechism, with profit, whereas chiefs will do all they can to prompt boys and girls, right from the youngest branches, to apply what they learn in catechism, by example, words, initiatives and activities that involve them actively, because it is important to follow the golden rule in this matter : “the scout learns by doing”.

Among such initiatives, it seems to me that the main one would be a conscious participation to the Liturgical life of the Orthodox Churches, illuminated by the chiefs’ example and promoted by them as a proposal, convincing and enthusiastic, as well as discreet and balanced. Indeed the Orthodox dogma is totally preserved in the Divine services and by them, thanks to texts of the Church Fathers, the dogma is explained by the greatest Orthodox theologians too.

We could almost say that the person who attended the divine services as a child, with the help of his mother, has impregnated himself with the truths of faith in the deepest way, with all his soul and all his heart. Catechism will be useful to him in order to deepen what he already knows and lives. On the contrary, for the person who has not attended the divine services since his childhood – I consider that it is frequently the case in the countries coming out of communist domination or also because of the general religious indifference of modern society -, he is lacking this deep Christian culture; in these cases, the example of the chief or the chieftain in the way of living the liturgy of his own Church and being able of expressing it with enthusiasm will be practically the only means to insert himself on the road of holiness to which he is also called by his baptism. It is never too late, even if we start with the youngest, there is a good hope of substantial recuperation of lost time.

Practically speaking, I consider that it is not difficult to make our boys follow the liturgical year of the Orthodox Churches. Maybe the best way is to focus on the important moment starting with Sunday, with the abstinence of meat, and by the following one, which eliminates also all dairy products, with the beginning of the strict fasting of Lent; after the Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday, it leads to the Holy Week. During this week, the Orthodox Churches are full of people – the crowd of men is apart – making a “retreat” before the Paschal confession. Then comes Easter; joy literally bursts out, paschal joy, with the greeting that the faithful, in church, in the street, at home, everywhere, exchange mutually, a thousand times: “Christ is risen – Truly he is risen”. This joy goes on not only during the whole “luminous Week” (Easter Octave) but till Pentecost, with a way marked by the Sundays of saint Thomas, of the holy women at the grave, with the paralyzed man, with the Samaritan wife, with the born-blind, with the feast of the Ascension and the Sunday of the Church Fathers (just before Pentecost). Then come 34 weeks (in the Latin rite, where we speak in terms of liturgical colors, they are mentioned in green as “Sundays of ordinary time”), the last Sunday being the one of the prodigal Son, just before the one where we started from, with meat abstinence and the beginning of Lent fasting.

This way is integrated to the twelve major feasts¹ (we must remind that the liturgical year begins on September 1st and that the nomenclature of the feasts mentioned below is official and is self-understandable:

The [Nativity of the Theotokos](#) (8 September)

The [Elevation of the Holy Cross](#) (14 September)

The patronage of the Holy Theotokos (1 October)

The [Presentation of the Theotokos](#) (21 November)

The [Nativity of the Lord](#) (25 December)

The Circumcision of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 January)

The [Theophany](#) (Epiphany) of the Lord (6 January)

The [Presentation of the Lord](#) (2 February)

The [Annunciation](#) (25 March)

The Nativity of John the Baptist (24 June)

The Memory of Saint Peter and Paul (29 June)

The [Transfiguration](#) (6 August)

Wolfcubs, ladybirds, boy scouts, girl guides, rovers and rangers who, year after year, live knowingly what the Orthodox Churches propose in their divine offices, particularly in the Divine Liturgy, acquire an appreciable knowledge of the whole mystery of salvation, a deep love of all that constitutes their Creed, which is completely united to their personalities. Without any doubt, these young people will understand what the FSE means with the expression “good Christians”. The world needs them.

Iconographic catechesis

I add another indication to this catechesis, not only because it is closely linked to this liturgy, but also because it seems to me very adapted for the “visual” explanation of the Christian truths to our boys, in the particularly sacred atmosphere created in front of any icon. Indeed, in the Christian East, iconography is not a “free” art but a “canonic” one; so it must correspond not only to artistic criteria but it must also present in a visual and symbolic way what is expressed in an aural way in the readings and hymns of the liturgical services. The Council of Nicaea II (787) said that “if the Fathers have transmitted us the Gospel, they have also transmitted us the icons, because the representation is inseparable from the evangelical narration; on the reverse, the evangelical narration is inseparable from the representation. Both are good and worthy of veneration, because they mutually explain each other and demonstrate each other”. The Father also added, referring to saint Basil: “What the word communicates through hearing, the icon demonstrates it silently” (see Pia Compagnoni, *Il linguaggio dell'icona*, Milan, 1988, p. 15).

However, it is not an “art illustrating the Holy Scripture, as we could understand in the West the frescoes or the Breton calvaries, also called “Bible of the poor”, because they were understandable even by illiterate people. The icon corresponds to the Scripture in the same way as liturgical texts. The icon represents various moments of the history of salvation, transmits in a visible way their meaning and their vital signification. Thus, through liturgy and through icon, the Scripture lives in the Church” (ivi, p. 16). “It is not the icon, work of sacred art, which is beautiful, but its truth which escapes from painting in images, at it is revealed in words by sacred Books. By representing the Lord Jesus, the Theotokos and the saints, the icon makes them mysteriously present (ibidem p. 17). The icon contains a whole theology of divine life, eternal life, out of time. This is why the iconographer monks, entitled by the ecclesiastic authorities to write icons, were called *zoographers* – writers of life. This is why a true icon must be blessed by the ecclesiastic authority and is called “canonic” if it corresponds to the “canons” dictated by the Church.

¹ This list of the 12 major feasts may vary according to the Eastern Churches (note of the translator)

There are some rather precise rules on all aspects for the iconographic schools; on the way of preparing the wooden board, of using the gilding, on the meaning of each color, on what is convenient to paint according to the represented evangelical fact... Good books exist on this subject. I only quote the book of father Igor Sendler, s.j. – very well informed and “realistic” – who led the iconographic school of the Foyer Saint-Georges in Meudon, already mentioned: *L'icône, image de l'invisible*, Paris 1981.

For our groups of Orthodox scouts and guides, may the deep knowledge of canonic icons be the simplest and the deepest catechesis, educating them also to sublime beauty, fascinating the hearts and printing in them what the icon represents, so that the contemplation of the icon may lead them quite naturally to a deep prayer.

It is also a very accessible activity for the youngest. All the feasts mentioned above, as well as the Sundays having a specific name, have their own canonic icon, exposed in all the churches in the middle of the nave. For our youngest, who obviously have difficulties in attending divine services, generally rather long (here, we must be very cautious, according to what good Orthodox parents do), the icon exposed in the church, if it has previously been explained in the dens of the corresponding units, by simple means of reproduction, prints in the heart and in the spirit the evangelical mystery that it represents. If the meeting with the same icon is renewed every year, it constitutes a point of firm reference to what the Gospel teaches, enabling them to overcome the obstacles against a life in conformity with it. Is there a simpler and more radical catechesis? Let us have a practical glance at it.

L'ICONE CANONICA DELLA NATIVITA'

Pittura murale di Rastislav Bujna (settembre 2002)
Cappella bizantina del Pontificio Istituto Orientale, Roma



Here is a copy in colors of a recent « canonic » painting (September 2002) of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. I just give a few outlines of the contents of the paintings. For more details, you can refer to Georges Gharib's book. He was a friend of mine and co-disciple in the first years of my life in the Eastern Pontifical Institute: *Le icone di Natale, storia e culto*, Roma 1995. I follow this book in this iconological reading. It is also a very accessible activity for the youngest.

The golden background (sky – *ouranos*) common to all icons (unfortunately the quality of the copy is not so good) transports the whole scene from the earthly sphere to the celestial sphere, out of time.

The landscape, as much as possible stylized, describes the joy of the whole creation, following the various invitations to joy contained in the liturgical texts, among which this one: "Mountains and valleys, trees of the forest, rivers and seas, all beings that live and breathe, exult with joy. Behold the salvation and the Virgin is ready to give birth to Jesus in the city of Bethlehem". The big mountain on which the nativity of Jesus takes place is the symbol of the one that came out of the stone (Messiah) that destroyed the famous statue seen by Nabuchodonosor in a dream, explained by Daniel (Dn 2,35).

The central scene (Mary, Jesus, the cave as an abyss) reminds the text of the Revelation (Rv 12, 1-8) (the dragon, in front of the woman travelling in birth, ready to devour the child...). The figure of the Virgin is imposing, in order to show her central role in the history of salvation. She is the Mother of God, as it is indicated in the inscription MP OY (the inscriptions are also compulsory in the icons). The purple drape emphasizes the Virgin's real dignity, the stars on her garment and on her forehead mean her perpetual virginity. She is not looking towards Jesus but towards Joseph who doubts, as it is written in Mt 1, 18-25. The strange person talking with Joseph represents this Doubt that often envelops mankind. And it is precisely to mankind that the Virgin shows Jesus with her right hand, as the unique Way to follow. (In the icon of Christmas, she already appears as "Hodoghitria"). Her left hand (not so visible) relies on her heart, to make us reflect about Luke's words: "she kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2, 19).

The infant, always wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger, as Luke repeats (Lk 1, 7, 12, 16), has almost the features of an adult, to signify that it is not a child like the others but the Son of God, according to the inscription IC XC. He stands out against the background of the cave as a Light that shines in darkness (Jn 1, 4-5). And maybe the star that comes down from the sky means that he "has been taken up to God" as it is said in the Book of Revelation (12, 5). He is born, but not to live, like us; to die and to save us: this is what is meant by the haloed cross, the almost funeral clothes in which the infant is wrapped, the manger in shape of tomb and the cave which, as in the icon of the Resurrection, symbolizes the underworld.

The ox and the ass make allusion to the prophet Isaiah ("the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib" Is 1, 3) and to the prophet Habakkuk ("In the midst of two animals thou shalt make it known" Ha 3, 2). These animals prefigure Judaism (ox) attached to the Torah and the pagan world wrapped in the sin of idolatry (ass) between which lies the Son of God who sets them both free from their burden. For some people, this also means Eucharist "the bread which cometh down from heaven; that if any man eat of it, he may not die" (Jn 6, 50).

In the right part, at the bottom of the canonic icon, the scene represents the child being washed. The highest meaning given to this scene is the faith that Jesus is a true man, similar to us in all things except sin. In itself, the scene comes from the apocryphal Gospels, among which the Armenian Gospel of childhood identifies one of the women as Eva, who has come to contemplate by herself the accomplishment of redemption.

Of course, the shepherds (there is one « representative » in the icon) and the angels are compulsory figures who remind us of Luke's narration (2, 9-19). The Wise Men (without horses in this icon) refer to the narration of Matthew (Mt 2, 1-33) who, in the Byzantine liturgy, is as one with Luke's narration, with a frequent evocation of the star. Indeed, this star had to appear to the Wise Men on Christmas day but it needs time to reach Bethlehem. But time has no importance in icons, because they transcend it as they represent truths of all times, or better say out of time. The Wise Men, astrologists who study the stars, "serve" them and in their turn are "taught by a star" in order to bow in front of the Sun of Truth". They represent science, ready to know the one who is the Truth, "the Orient from on High". In this perspective, the meaning of the icon has unlimited horizons. Above all, this is the *leitmotiv* of Christmas Liturgy and icon, defined by the Christmas *Troparion* (in Greek it is called *apolytikon*), with some surprising words which echo at Christmas time in all our scouts and guides' hearts, as well as in mine. Let me conclude with this Troparion, this deep prayer:

Your birth, O Christ our God has shed upon the world the light of knowledge; For through it, those who worship the stars have learned from a star to worship You, the Sun of Justice and to recognize You as the Orient From On High. Glory be to You, O Lord.