

of ecclesiastical hierarchies, nor a professional speciality to some elite clergy, but a way of being among Christians, an existential necessity that affects the witness of the unique Church of Christ in the world. Very significantly, in her writings, the French theologian names the Churches in the way they name themselves and not in the way the other Churches qualify them; for example, she only uses with quotation marks the adjective "uniate" for the reason of the pejorative connotation with which this qualifier is filled, in the benefit of the "Catholics of Eastern rite". She did not ignore the resurgence of proselytism in some Christian communities of Western origin dispersed in Eastern Europe, but she kept a critical distance from the events and knew how to witness a great respect for the other Christians without condemning a whole Church family due to the indigenous behaviour of some of its members. The attention given by Elisabeth Behr-Sigel to the terminology is a sign of patristic wisdom; our tradition gives a great importance to names.

In the same way she was reluctant to use the word "Churches" in the plural when discussing dialogue towards unity, because in this approach, it is the One and Holy Church of Christ that manifests itself in a process of reconciliation. The division of the Body is unbearable when the Gospel is open before us.

At last with many other Orthodox thinkers, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel understood as a manifestation of the providence of God the presence of

Orthodoxy in the West. For her, the Orthodox of Western Europe are charged with a particular mission because of their permanent contact with other Christians: to formulate the Orthodox Tradition of the Church in a renewed language, in a world which is in constant evolution. Like the Fathers of the Church, we have to proclaim the mystery of salvation in an intelligible way for the people we speak with. It is not we who choose the people with whom we cross paths, it is the Father who sends them to us, or rather who sends us to them. To talk to the world today, we have to love it in its strengths and in its weaknesses, and tell it about the Christ we know. This great lady, Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, was sought to take on this charge until the dusk of her life, with true pastoral concern towards the next generations. May God rest her soul in peace and grant her eternal memory.

In this issue of *Syndesmos News*, you will find information on the events organised by our Fellowship since 2005. Due to technical reasons, it has not been possible to send this issue earlier. News about the activities of *Syndesmos* since the beginning of 2006 will be published in the next issue of *Syndesmos News* in a few months.

Christopher D'Aloisio, president

Warmest thanks to Marc Victoroff who helped much in the translation of the text.

REPORTS FROM SYNDESMOS EVENTS 2005

"Martyrdom and Christian Witness today":

a week in Rome with the Community of Sant'Egidio,

17-23 July 2005

Is it really possible to be a saint today? If it is, where do we start?



Fr. Roberto Cherubini leads the excursion.

When we hear the Gospel, we regularly feel awkward about how little we follow what we know to be right, what we believe is the glorious path towards our salvation and the transformation of the world.

Our life is full of a great contradiction; we know what we are called to do, but we don't do it. We know the commandment to

love God, to love our neighbour (Mc 12, 28-34). We know we are even asked to love our enemies (Lk 6, 31-36). However, we do not put love in the centre of our lives.

We know that our mission is to go and preach the Gospel to all nations and baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt 28, 18-20). We know that we are to be the salt of the

earth (Mt 5,13). But we stay at home, most of us and keep our Good News for ourselves, and find it extremely difficult to try and start living it.

We know we are to see Christ in any hungry person (Mt 25, 40). We understand that material goods will be of no use at the end of our journey (Mt 6, 19). If we examined our possessions, we would



Adriano Rocucci - Secretary General of Sant Egidio and Lydia Obolensky-D'Aloisio.



Prof. Grant White (Cambridge).

admit that we do not need half of what we have, and yet we do not share what we have with the poorest. And when we do feed the hungry or help shelter the homeless, we merely give them enough to be at peace with ourselves.

We believe in the resurrection of the dead, we know our life will be eternal, but is there anything we are more scared of than our death and the death of those we love?

The contradiction between what we want to do and what we actually do probably comes, most of the time, from the feeling that we just don't know where to start. We feel small and weak when we see the needs of the world. We can't see how we could make a difference.

We are scared of what would happen if we did give ourselves away to God: the change would be too radical. The fact is: we know we are called to be saints, but we don't want to follow this calling, or we think it is very arrogant to only try. And so, we restrict our efforts to areas that seem easier to reach.

In the Orthodox Church, for instance, we are particularly good at "keeping close to the tradition". Often it is synonymous to making sure that nothing will change in what we think to be the great tradition of our church, but is nothing more than our local habits. We can become very passionate at making sure things will remain "as they have always been" or "as they should be".

Yet, if we open our eyes, while we are busy with our debates, we see on our doorstep people that are on their own, that have no home, no family, no hope. Sometimes they are also ill, disabled. Sometimes their only comfort is in alcohol. Those who live outside are frozen in winter, dehydrated in summer. Very often they are displaced very far from the place they were born. Some of them are baptised, some are not.

Almost none of them are members of our cosy parishes, parts of our lives, and we would not feel comfortable spending too much time with them. We know they are the needy, the hungry, the lonely, the homeless Christ spoke about in the Gospel (Mt 25, 34-46) but apart from giving some money or clothes to them, we do

not feel we can do very much to make a change. And there we are, with the love we receive and give to those around us, with our faith, our time and energy, so rich with all these things we have, and so weak when time comes to try and share what we have.

The feeling is: "Yes, I could just drop some of the things that matter so much now, I could probably follow another path, yes, I could decide now to take my cross and follow Christ, but it would imply changes that would be so radical, that I don't think it is reasonably possible to try. So, what can I do, apart from giving something to help the poor?"

What can we do apart from praying that the Saints be our intercessors? We are in awe in front of martyrs, we worship their radical love, their love for God and people that was stronger than the fear of dying, but we do not dare to feel we can try and live it ourselves: have the martyrs any real implication in our lives? Where do we start if we want to be what Christ has showed us we can be?

The witness of Sant'Egidio Community: a possible answer to many of our questions.

When coming to Rome, we knew that the Community of Sant'Egidio is a lay movement in the Roman Catholic Church. We knew that we would share their experience of serving the poor. We also knew that the theme of the exchange was "sainthood and martyrdom", and that among the proposed activities, there would be a pilgrimage to the places of the first Christians of the undivided church of early times, as well as to places of martyrdom of many of our common and most venerated Saints (such as the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Saint Clement of Rome, Saint Cyrille apostle of Slavs).

What we did not know was that the Community of Sant'Egidio would give us a living example of some possible answers to the questions we keep asking ourselves.

And their answers seem to be very humble and simple.

Live with your neighbour in need.

Loving the neighbour is not to give him things or to help him. Loving him is to know him, to talk and listen to him, to share his life, to become his friend. This is how the Community started,



Secretary General of Sant'Egidio, Adriano Rocucci and Lydia Obolensky-D'Asloisio.



The Orthodox liturgy.

almost 40 years ago, when some Catholic students in Rome started spending some time every day with gipsy people. After having spent some hours with the gypsies, they used to gather for a daily prayer. The rest of the time, they were carrying on with their studies and family lives. Nowadays it is thousands of people around the world that share this way of live: they have a job, families, and they spend time with vulnerable or lonely people, and also meet to pray together.

What is special about this kind of life is that it is not a charity activity. It is not barely giving to those in need. It is actually loving them, living with them (which, of course also involves feeding them, or allowing them to have a shower or get medical help).

As part of that life, there is also common prayer. During vespers (the structure is similar to the vespers we know in the orthodox church) every evening, there is a Bible reading, and a member of the community gives a sermon on that text. It is very impressive indeed to see the big Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere full of people that come to vespers every single evening of the week, and it is difficult not to compare it with so many of other churches that are almost empty on Saturday evening for vigils or vespers.

From this example we recognise that it is possible to offer a part of our "normal" daily life, love and energy to people who need it more than others and to pray together, read the Scripture and meditate on it, as Sant'Egidio members do.

The efficient and universal power of love.

One can see even more in the way of life Sant'Egidio proposes us. Their lives give the members of Sant'Egidio a better ability to recognise Christ in anyone they meet. Once they have learnt how to see their brother in the person of beggars, of gipsy families, of lonely elderly people, or disabled persons, they become more aware of the brother who is in any human person. Once they have spent parts of their lives with those people close to them that need them most, they find it natural to deeply and genuinely identify with the suffering of anyone on earth.

Loving the poor neighbour on the doorstep, they also very concretely love the neighbour very far away, as far away as Africa. This is how Sant'Egidio has helped solving conflicts in Algeria or Mozambique. This has led Sant'Egidio community to address all urgent issues whenever they identified a need, to become active in contributing to such matters as death penalty, HIV-Aids, war and violence. For Sant'Egidio, the victims of the death penalty, HIV and war are not figures on TV news, but real people, brothers and sisters. They have managed to reach that real and deep concern through sharing their daily life with everyone they meet.

With love and respect, the community, in addressing all possible urgent issues of humanity, has come to collaborate fruitfully with other Christians as well as with non-Christians. It has developed deep relationships with many people of different denominations, faiths, beliefs, and this network allows the message of peace and life to spread in many places and reach people throughout the world.

An important thing to underline is that throughout all their activities Sant'Egidio has managed to avoid any kind of ambiguity in their relations with other Christians. It is clear to anyone that meets them that love and fellowship is what the Community cares for. This is how the community has managed to gain trust from all Christian churches, including orthodox local churches.

Martyrdom: the last stage of radical love.

Another very significant element in the life of Sant'Egidio is that the Community has revived to a great extend the veneration of holy Christian martyrs. They venerate martyrs of the early church and are extremely conscious of the privilege it is to be living in Rome and to be able to literally walk where great martyrs did. Sant'Egidio also venerates new martyrs of the XX century. The XX century has been a century of great struggle and sorrow for many Christians. It has also given to the world a renewed witness of martyrdom. In Rome, Sant'Egidio takes care of the church of Saint apostle Bartholomew, and has devoted all lateral chapels of the church to New Martyrs. The Orthodox know well of the new martyrs of soviet regimes (and they were very many, it is true). Our trip to Rome reminded us of the numerous other Christian martyrs of last century that met a martyr's death in many countries around the world.

We may think that martyrdom is not something for us to consider, but it is disturbing to realise that in the last few generations (and even in the last few years) so many people went through martyrdom and showed the world that a martyr's death, this total

giving away of one's own self to God, is not something of the past only, it is something for today. Martyrs are persons who loved God and their neighbour until the very end of their life on earth.

Being a martyr is of course not something we choose to become. But when we look at how Sant'Egidio community lives, we can easily imagine that their witness, their radical consistency with Christ's commandments, is of the kind that under certain circumstances would turn them into joyful and glorious martyrs.

Lydia Obolensky-D'Aloisio

More about the Sant'Egidio community at: www.santegidio.org.

Seminar on liturgical language and translation

24-29 August 2005, Brühl, Germany

The idea of organising an event on translation arose during the Syndesmos assembly 2003, when so much was said about Syndesmos history. Above all, it reminded us of the fact that during the initial years after its founding, Syndesmos was holding theological conferences on different subjects which have helped to renew the Church - as, for instance, in the mission area. It was urgent to do something about a subject, which involves our faith and our witness to the world: the use of language in Church.

Language is primary to our faith, as its very centre, God's Son who became man, is called Word, Logos. Because of the incarnation and by words, we can express or speak about God, who is inexpressible. Without words, which we understand and which nourish, we cannot build up our relationship to God. But how is it that in our everyday church life today, many Orthodox Christians are not able to understand the language of the prayers they are saying and are not able, during the liturgy, to act as the "co-



Group photo with metropolitans Augustinos and Seraphim.



Alexandra Popescu, the coordinator of the seminar.

liturges" they are meant to be, as members of the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2,9)?

The seminar about liturgical translation proposed a mixture between a theological seminar for translators and a Syndesmos event open to all. About 7 translators of different languages (Russian, English, German and French) and 25 other participants from 7 different countries met together and managed to find a common ground for communication. It was also a scientific seminar, but not one concerning only specialists. The topics discussed are of great importance for us all and have immediate implications.

The seminar was hosted by the parish St. John the Baptist in Brühl, a very active parish in the middle of a little German town near Cologne. We are very thankful to Fr. Konstantin Miron and the whole parish for their genuine hospitality.

The subject was divided into two main questions: *why* do we translate, and *how* do we translate?

The answer to the crucial question of "*why*" we have to translate our church offices may seem obvious. However, we often find ourselves having to answer arguments against it, such as "maintenance of tradition" or the "inadequacy" of modern languages". Fr. George Kochetkov, principal of the theological institute St. Philaret (Moscow) tried to give some answers to this question. Fr. George has been working on translation of liturgical texts into modern Russian for 25 years together with a group of other theologians and philologists. His main argument for the necessity of translation was that the theological reasons for translating go back to the essence of our faith, as people from all countries, nationalities and cultures are to receive life in Christ (cf. Gal 3,28). Fr. George spoke also about some principles and implications of creative translation. Translation should be creative in order to make texts written long ago accessible and understandable for the faithful today by letting aside secondary aspects. This is why liturgical translation enables us to deal more intently with forms and to retrieve their essential aspects. The spiritual health of a Church can be measured by her capacity to see the necessity of translating liturgical texts and to face contradictory theological debates, which can be provoked by such translations.

Fr. George also spoke about the danger common among Orthodox believers to cling to secondary aspects of Tradition and to forget the main ones. Before translating, he said, we have to restore the foundation for translation - for example reading the prayers of the