

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](http://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



At the liturgy.

anaphora aloud, which enables the participation of the whole community -, otherwise, it is pointless to translate at all.

The second keynote speech, given by Fr. Ephrem Lash from Manchester, whose translations are used by many English-speaking parishes, was mainly about the question of “*how*” to translate. Fr. Ephrem began by saying that our entire tradition is based on translation: the New Testament conveys Christ’s words, which He originally spoke in Aramaic, into Greek. The question “*why*” we should translate doesn’t even need to be addressed, he said. Fr. Ephrem sketched in his talk four principles of a good translation: precision, compatibility with the Orthodox tradition, audibility and “singableness”. He showed, using many examples that a 100% translation is impossible because either the target language doesn’t have the precise word or some ambiguities present in the text cannot be brought forward in the target language. However, with intense work on the original text and on other texts of the Holy Scripture, the Fathers and other existing translations in different modern and old languages one can achieve a felicitous translation. However, translation should not be blocked by the constraint of literality. If it is, then we will get a “language fossil” and not a living text. One of the functions of liturgical texts is to transmit Tradition to the members of the Church of each era; in this perspective, we must keep in mind that the primary importance of a translated text is to be lived, heard and sang.

Beyond the interest of the particular examples he gave, Fr. Ephrem’s talk and his many contributions to the discussion during the whole seminar helped us to recognise how important it is for translators to cooperate and to combine the knowledge they possess. It can be only regretted that the instances of such cooperation are not very frequent, while it is a perfect possibility for living conciliarity in our Church.

The idea of combining a scientific seminar with a meeting of larger interest developed into a colloquy for participants interested in special problems of translation. Four talks were the subject of this colloquy. Firstly Elie Korotkoff from France (Caen) spoke about translation for and in the Church. Elie Korotkoff is the coordinator of

a translator group in France, which is acknowledged by the Bishops’ Assembly in France and tries to create French translations to be used by all. This group works on a “conciliar” basis: translations are discussed and sent to different persons for comments. In France there are already many other translations of the most used texts, so the time has come to search for a unified translation.

Secondly, Fr. Peter Sonntag, the priest of a German-speaking parish in Düsseldorf, spoke about the reasons, which hinder the translation of liturgical texts and its spreading. Firstly, exaggerated “apophatism” - to affirm that these texts surpass our comprehension in each language; however, only after hearing these texts in a comprehensible language are we enabled to wonder about the unspeakable “spoken” in them. Secondly, there is a kind of “over-sacralisation” of the typikon and of the liturgical language; and thirdly, a fear to banalise and rationalise the offices, to lose our identity and substance. Fr. Peter stated, however, that translation is traditional, as tradition originally also means “transferring”. As the Church Fathers have done when they adapted - or better, “baptised” - notions of the Greek-Latin culture of their time to express Christian Faith. Translation is in fact a kind of prolongation of the Incarnation of the Word of God. We on the contrary “disincarnate” our Faith if we don’t let the Word be expressed in the language of our cultures.

Thirdly, Cyrille Mozgov, a young specialist in Church Slavonic from the translation group of Fr. George Kochetkov in St. Philaret’s, spoke about the specific problems of Church Slavonic as a liturgical language today. He traced the historical development of Slavonic and showed that it is absurd to consider the translation used now as a reference, when in fact it is also a translation, which was developed over centuries. He also presented the difficulties in Russia of helping the people to accept that they don’t really understand Church Slavonic. Often seemingly understandable words or phrases may distort the meaning of the text.

Finally, Fr. Paisios (Rauer) from Germany spoke about the different practical difficulties of translation - such as the dogmatic importance of the text, the singing/reading character and the style.



One of the sessions.



French-speaking participants' quire.

The participants were also received by the Metropolitan Augustinos (Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Seraphim (Patriarchate of Romania) in Bonn. A very open discussion took place, in the course of which Metropolitan Augustinos said that translation and also the expression of our faith in an appropriate language is absolutely necessary, but it should go with the enculturation and not be forced; it also should happen under coordination of all the Orthodox present in Germany.

In the end of the meeting during an exchange about local experience, Fr. Timothy Dewedi from Benin spoke about his experience in his country and other countries in Africa. There was an orthodox mission there during the last decades, and naturally the languages used were local languages, mainly French and Swahili, but also many others, like Fon for Benin. The offices are held in these languages as a matter of fact, as no one would think to found a mission in Greek or Slavonic. This should make us reflect on our own situation in Western Europe and the implications of language use for our witness here.

One important outcome of this seminar was the founding of a contact group for translators. It became clear that some translation issues surpass the language barrier and that translators in different languages can help each other to find principles of translation and to surpass special difficulties. A publication containing the talks of the conferences will be published this year.

What we could ask ourselves after such a seminar is: what immediate results could it have on the language situation our Church is living in at the moment? Perhaps we could hope for more of openness to the idea that we are not simply being “modernists” when promoting translation, but that we are acting in the true spirit of our Tradition. It must also be said that few would propose to give up entirely the old liturgical languages; but each language spoken by members of the Church should also be a language of their prayer - if not, we will speak in Church “ten thousand words in an unknown tongue instead of five words with our understanding” (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:19).

*Alexandra Popescu*

## “Unity in diversity: being different, being together” Youth Encounter between the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox *Vanadzor, Armenia,* 22 - 27 September 2005

We can with regret remember the battles over participation of youth organisation from the Oriental Orthodox Churches in Syndesmos at the XVI Syndesmos General Assembly in New Valamo (Finland) and the reaction to those of an Indian sister, which was published in the Assembly Bulletin: “In India I’m proud to be an Orthodox Christian, but here I found out that I’m just an Oriental”. Without going into depth regarding the theological aspects of the dialogue between Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches, it is with deep shame that we should consider the situation of someone feeling excluded or undervalued in the family of Churches that claims to have retained the tradition of the Apostolic Church.

Syndesmos Constitution declares our Fellowship “an instrument for furthering cooperation and deeper communion between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches”. This commitment was reaffirmed in September 2005, when 25 young people from the Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox traditions gathered to reflect upon the theme “Unity in diversity: being different, being together” 22 - 27 September 2005 at Gyumri, Armenia. This project was supported by the European Youth Foundation, to which we express our gratitude.

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In the monastery of Haghpat.