

The Role of the Orthodox Church in Coexistence and Reconciliation between Turkish- and Greek-Cypriots in Cyprus

by Areti Demosthenous, Nicosia

Coexistence and reconciliation are terms that refer to the ways in which antagonistic groups or formerly antagonistic groups relate to each other. Coexistence points primarily at types of dispassionate relations which exclude overt struggle, whereas reconciliation opens the door for more harmonious relations through overcoming wounds inflicted by extreme, violent conflict. Kriesberg considers coexistence as bearing on structural and subjective aspects of relations between persons and groups.¹ Applying this perspective, we could say that structurally, while sustaining a mostly separate existence on the island after the Turkish invasion of 1974, coexistence before this invasion but also after it is integrated at the national level. Reconciliation is a rather new concept in studies of inter-ethnic struggle. It points to the need for constructing peaceful, cooperative and trusting relations in a society after a long period of conflict.² Reconciliation processes are multifaceted and vary according to the future visions of peace held by the parties involved. These can range from integration, such as in the case of South Africa, to separation, such as in the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.³ In Central and Latin America, reconciliation efforts have been perceived as a prerequisite for the constitution of democratic regimes after long years of violent conflict.⁴ Reconciliation efforts are in general hard to realize. Interest in reconciliation seems to follow from a sense that dealing with ethnic conflicts only at the structural and legal levels is insufficient.

Long-lasting conflicts reach stages in which new generations are not aware of any other possible realities. The move toward coexistence and reconciliation thus becomes

¹ See L. Kriesberg, Coexistence and reconciliation of communal conflicts, in: E. Wiener (Ed.), *The handbook of interethnic coexistence*, New York, 1998, p. 183.

² Conflict resolution is an important but not a sufficient condition for stable and harmonious peace between former enemies. Reconciliation is considered the long-term goal of any process of conflict resolution. The concept of reconciliation involves psychological processes, both cognitive and emotional, adding an important element to the analysis of conflict termination. See Y. Auerbach, *The Role of Forgiveness in Reconciliation*, in: *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, Oxford 2002, p. 152.

³ See Z. Bekerman, Can Education Contribute to Coexistence and Reconciliation? Religious and National Ceremonies in Bilingual Palestinian - Jewish Schools in Israel, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 8/ 3, 260.

⁴ See P. B. Hayner, In Pursuit of justice and reconciliation: Contributions of truth telling, in: C. J. Arnsperg (Ed.), *Comparative peace processes in Latin America*, Stanford 1999, p. 365f.

an important issue. The mobilization of social, cultural, and educational systems within a given society is central to the creation of an environment which fosters reconciliation. The structure of the relations between a religious institution and its social environment is one of the most interesting issues of the social and economic history of the country. The Church of Cyprus has a long contribution to the promotion of coexistence and reconciliation in Cyprus. In this article we will study some aspects of this reality.

About the Cyprus problem

The two main communities in Cyprus are the Turkish (11,5%) and the Greek (84,4%). There are also some Armenians, Maronites, and Latins (all together 1%).⁵ The present Cyprus problem unfortunately goes back years. On 15th July 1974, the ruling military junta of Greece staged a coup to overthrow the democratically-elected Government of Cyprus.⁶ On 20th July, Turkey, using the coup as a pretext, invaded Cyprus, purportedly to restore constitutional order. Instead, it seized 35% of the territory of Cyprus in the north, an act universally condemned as a gross infringement of international law and the UN Charter. Turkey, only 75 km (47 miles) away, had repeatedly claimed, for decades before the invasion and frequently afterwards, that Cyprus was of vital strategic importance to it. Ankara has defied a host of UN resolutions demanding the withdrawal of its occupation troops from the island.⁷

The invasion and occupation has had disastrous consequences.⁸ Today there are fewer than 500 enclaved persons. The invasion also had a disastrous impact on the Cyprus economy.⁹ On 15th November 1983, the Turkish-occupied area was unilaterally declared an independent "state". The international community, through UN Security Council Resolutions 541 of 1983 and 550 of 1984, condemned this unilateral declaration by the Turkish-Cypriot regime, declared it both illegal and invalid, and called

⁵ The foreign residents are 3,1%. As regards the Turkish population this number is estimated according to censuses held before the invasion of 1974. The population on the Turkish side of the island has also increased through new settlers coming from Turkey. See *Republic of Cyprus*, Demographic Report 2004, Department of Statistics and Research, Ministry of Finance, Nicosia 2004, p. 14.

⁶ According to the Zurich-London Treaty, Cyprus became an independent republic on 16th August 1960. As an independent country it became a member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement. According to the above treaty, Britain retained two sovereign bases on the island. The 1960 Constitution had incorporated a system of entrenched minority rights. In November 1963, when President Makarios proposed a revision of the Constitution in order to facilitate its smooth implementation, the Turkish side rejected it. The Turkish-Cypriot ministers withdrew from the Council of Ministers and Turkish-Cypriot civil servants ceased attending their posts. The ensuing constitutional deadlock gave rise to intercommunal clashes and Turkish threats to invade.

⁷ On 1st November 1974, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 3212, the first of many resolutions calling for respect for the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and non-alignment of the Republic of Cyprus and for the speedy withdrawal of all foreign troops.

⁸ About 142 000 Greek-Cypriots living in the north – nearly one quarter of the population of Cyprus – were forcibly expelled from the occupied northern part of the island where they constituted 80% of the population. These people are still deprived of the right to return to their homes and properties. A further 20 000 Greek-Cypriots enclaved in the occupied area were gradually forced through denial of their basic human rights to abandon their homes.

⁹ See *About Cyprus*, Republic of Cyprus, published by the *Press and Information Office*, Nicosia 2002. See also the website www.pio.gov.cy.

for its immediate revocation. To this day, no country in the world, except Turkey, has recognised this entity.¹⁰

Nicosia is still the only divided capital city in the world at the beginning of the new millennium. Last year, the UN under the initiative of Kofi Anan proposed a plan for the solution of Cyprus problem but it was rejected by the majority of the Greek-Cypriot population mainly because of security issues. In April of 2003, and under the initiative of Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktas, checkpoint restrictions were lifted, so that Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots could spend a few hours in any part of the island. Hundreds of Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots visited the other side and met old friends. The feelings expressed dissolved the myth that coexistence is not possible.

The Orthodox Church of Cyprus

The Orthodox Church, acting as ethnarchy (leader of the nation),¹¹ a capacity recognised by the Ottoman rulers,¹² contributed to peaceful coexistence in Cyprus. The Ottoman rulers empowered the Church to exercise leadership of the nation (millet). The "reestablishment"¹³ of the Orthodox Church as an independent Organisation in 1571 was an important event in the history of Cyprus. Under the guidance of Archbishop Timotheos, the Orthodox Church soon redeemed the monasteries annexed or seized by the Turks¹⁴ during the expedition and bought and freely disposed of all kinds of property. In 1589 the Christians of Larnaca bought back from the Muslims the famous church of Saint Lazarus, which the Muslims had taken during the conquest. From those early years we have the first testimony about the Church's role in the running of the taxation system: John Villamont states that "each district has its subcommissary for the Turks while the parish priest represents the Christians".¹⁵ We speak about a "reestablishment" of the Orthodox Church because this Church had a basic and important role for the Christian-Cypriots since the early years of Christianity. Hence, from the point of view of the Greek Orthodox population, nothing changed in the status and character of the Church. It remained the depository of the national values under foreign rule, and its head kept all the attributions of millet-bashi, national chief.

¹⁰ See N. Kizilyürek /M. Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, An Analysis of the Cyprus Conflict: Its Structure and Causes, Cyprus and the European Union. New Chances for Solving an Old Conflict?, *Südosteuropa Aktuell* 23 (1997) 10-23. Also see N. M. Ertekün, The Cyprus Dispute and the Birth of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Nicosia 1984.

¹¹ Ethnarchy is a Greek compound word consisting of the Greek words "ethnos" (nation) and "archo" (to act as a leader).

¹² See Th. Papadopoulos, Studies and Documents relating to the History of the Greek Church and People under Turkish Domination, Brussels 1952, p. 103-107. H. Lukach - D. Jardine, The Handbook of Cyprus, London 1913, p. 37.

¹³ The power of the Orthodox Church was reduced owing to the dominating role of the Latin Church during Venetian rule.

¹⁴ The national censuses conducted under British rule speak of Mohammedan or Moslem inhabitants or Christian inhabitants of Cyprus, and not of "Turkish-Cypriots". Towards the end of the British rule, however, the terms "Greek-Cypriots" and "Turkish-Cypriots" are used. See A. Pavlides, Turkish Cypriots, (The Grand Cypriot Encyclopaedia 13), Nicosia 1990, p. 113f. We often use the term Muslim for the Turks and Christian for the Greeks as we speak about coexistence between Muslims and Christians. This means that the communities are identified by their religious adherence and not according to their ethnic difference.

¹⁵ See C. Kyrris, History of Cyprus, Nicosia 1996, p. 263. C. Kyrris, Symbiotic Elements in the History of the two Communities of Cyprus, in: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Political Geography, Nicosia 1976, p. 136-137.

The Church has enjoyed from early times the privilege of autocephaly. This privilege was acquired during the reign of Emperor Zeno.¹⁶ The Archbishop's ethnarchic role in the 17th-18th centuries is reflected, for example, in the visit of Germanos II (1690-1705) to Constantinople on behalf of the *râya* at a time when the Church and the people of the island suffered a lot. The Archbishop was the representative of the Christian-Cypriots and as such had to speak with the Sultan about the disorder existing in his country. It is also important in this regard that family life of the Christian population was governed by the Canon Law of the Orthodox Church. Judges were bishops or priests having authority on marriages and divorce disputes. The role of the Orthodox Church as the leader of the nation (ethnarchy) was further strengthened through the Khatti Sheriff of Gülhane (or Khatti Khumayun) reforms promulgated by Sultan Abdul Mejid (19th century). The acquired privileges of the communities were confirmed by the so called Law of Tanzimat. It is a very important enactment because it granted autonomy in the administration of communal affairs to all Christians and other non-Muslim communities living in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷

British rule in Cyprus was more liberal than the Ottoman, and this offered wider opportunities for political activity on behalf of the Church, despite the serious encroachments on its civil jurisdiction and privileges. The restrictions imposed by British rule gave rise to an attitude of resistance and defiance, which the Church assimilated to the national cause. Despite a number of drawbacks and disabilities, the Church succeeded in maintaining intact the ethnarchic character of its policy, reinvigorated by ill-advised persecutions of its hierarchy by the British government after the abortive rising of the Greek population in 1931. The treaty establishing the independent Republic of Cyprus afforded an occasion for the Church to reaffirm its old privileged status by means of protective clauses incorporated in the constitution of the new state. Thus the present status of the head of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus as an ethnarch and political chief has been devolved upon him by history.

The Contribution of the Church to peaceful Coexistence

Initially, the Turks on the island were few in number. In fact, the garrison brought to Cyprus after the 1571 occupation of the island consisted of four thousand men, one thousand of whom were *yeniçari* (i. e. "new soldiers"). These were children of Christian-Greek families, abducted in early childhood by the Turks and trained to be ex-

¹⁶ During the reign of Emperor Zeno the autocephaly (juridical independency) of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus was disputed by the Patriarch of Antioch. Though Archbishop Anthemos defended his Church's independency, there was no official recognition by the Emperor. At that time assistance came from a most strange and unexpected event. A cave was found, in which there was a chest containing the remains of the Apostle Barnabas, with a copy of St. Matthew's Gospel in Barnabas' own handwriting upon his chest, where it had been placed by Mark. The most sceptical could no longer doubt that the Church of Cyprus was equally as apostolic as that of Antioch, and, therefore, of equal rank. Overjoyed at the discovery, Anthemos set off at once with the precious relics to Constantinople, where he reported the occurrence, and requested the Emperor's protection against the Patriarch's tyranny. Zeno, due to this discovery, confirmed the autocephaly of the Church of Cyprus and conferred upon the Cypriot primates certain privileges, which they have most zealously guarded ever since. Among others they received the right of signing in red ink, a mark of distinction enjoyed otherwise only by the Emperors, wearing a purple cloak at the festivals of the Church, and carrying an imperial sceptre in place of the ordinary pastoral staff. See *J. Hackett, A History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus*, New York ²1972, p. 23 ff.

¹⁷ See *G. Serghides*, Internal and External Conflict of Laws in regard to Family Relations in Cyprus, (*Studia Juris Cyprii* 1), Nicosia 1988, p. 32.

tremist Muslim soldiers.¹⁸ This method was also employed in the years to follow, and resulted in the increase of the invaders' forces in Cyprus, Greece and other occupied countries. In 1596, Girolamo Dandini, Professor of Theology, University of Perugia, sent by Pope Clement VIII to the Maronites of the East, made an important observation about Cyprus. He notes, among other things: "Of the 30 thousand inhabitants of Nicosia only 4-5 thousand are Turks and there is a total of 12-13 thousand Turks on the whole island. Most of them are Christians who have converted to Islam for fear of persecution."¹⁹ A special group of Muslim-Cypriots were the "Linobambakes" (canvas-cottons),²⁰ who were "Cryptochristians" (secret Christians). Officially they were regarded as Muslims but privately they strove to remain Christians. The constant persecutions and frequent bloodshed in 1821 forced them to become either "Cryptochristians" or convert completely to Islam. In 1860, they numbered 10-12 thousand, with the Muslim population totalling only 45 thousand, so almost a third of the Muslims were "Cryptochristians".²¹ During British rule, most of them, encouraged by the British, were assimilated by the Turkish community. In spite of the fact that a considerable number of Muslims wanted to get baptized and become Christians, the Orthodox Church was never ready to accept them and has never developed missionary work due to the fact that emphasis was on the symbiosis of the two main communities and not on "supporting Muslims to become Christians".²²

The churches were open to Muslims and Christians without any discrimination. The traveller Pietro della Valle mentions that when he was in the monastery of Agia Napa on Sept. 9th 1625, during a celebration which was attended by Christians and several Muslims alike, everybody danced, sang, and ate together.²³ The company of Muslim Cypriots at the festival of Agia Napa was not at all unusual. Other such shared festivities were that of Panagia tou Kykkou in Kykko Monastery, that of Panagia Troothidissa in Troothidissa Monastery etc. One holy site that is, to date, officially recognised despite the Turkish separation, is the monastery of Apostolos Andreas in the north east of the island.²⁴

¹⁸ In a Spanish document dated 24. 10. 1587, actually a copy of a letter from Archbishop Timotheos to Spain's King Philip II, Cyprus' Head of Church informs about the obligatory conversion of Cypriots to Islam as imposed by the Turkish government, about Cypriot boys being abducted, about families' property being seized, and about exorbitant tax-levying. See A. Pavlides, Turkish Cypriots, (The Grand Cypriot Encyclopaedia 13), Nicosia 1990, p. 115.

¹⁹ Excerpta Cypria, Materials for a History of Cyprus, transl. by C. D. Cobham, Cambridge 1908, p. 182, p. 233. A French visitor to the island reports, in 1670, that many Greek-Cypriots were prepared to convert to Islam out of poverty and fear, but that not everyone was accepted as a convert by the subjugators, in order to keep payments flowing into the Turkish treasury in form of tributes. It is acknowledged that only Greek subjects were condemned to pay the poll tax.

²⁰ A compound of the two words canvas and cotton, to stress that these people had two faces: a Christian-Greek and a Muslim-Turkish one. See F. Papadopoulos, Τούρκοι, Μουσουλμάνοι ή Κρυπτοχριστιανοί Nicosia 2002, p. 32f.

²¹ See P. Samaras, Η ελληνική καταγωγή των Τουρκοκυπρίων, Athens 1987, p. 21.

²² This has been a reason for criticism against the Church especially during difficult days for reasons beyond the purpose of this article.

²³ See Excerpta Cypria, 213. Also see H. Inalcik, Ottoman Policy and Administration in Cyprus after the Conquest (The Ottoman Empire: Conquest, Organisation and Economy, Collected Studies) London 1978, p. 5-23.

²⁴ "Official" travel guides acknowledge this monastery to be a sacred place for all Cypriots. See the book Historical and Archaeological Places of Famagusta Area, 1982, published by the Federated State of Kibris (Ministry of Education, Culture and Youth, Department of Antiquities and Museums), which states (pag. 15): "The monastery of Apostolos Andreas is a holy place both for Turks and Greeks."

The Orthodox Church has been a shelter for Turkish-Cypriots too. As evidenced by toponymes,²⁵ many purely Turkish villages and villages with a Turkish majority had names of Christian Saints. For instance the villages: "Agios²⁶ Ioannis", "Agios Nikolaos", "Agios Isidoros", "Agios Georgios" et al.²⁷ Church property was a suitable place for employment for all the inhabitants of the island, Muslims and Christians alike, not only during the Ottoman period and the British rule, but even after Cyprus' independence. In many cases the Stavropegiaic Monastery of Kykko bought the plots of land from the Ottoman Rulers of the island in order to avert the ownership of land exclusively by the Turks,²⁸ and then used it for the benefit of all Cypriots. The manuscripts which I have studied dating back from the 16th century to the present, give light to real coexistence relations which existed in monastery and church property where Muslims and Christians were employed on equal payment. Register²⁹ XLII of the year 1733, Register XLVI (of 1773) and Register LIII (of 1867) record for instance cases of olive trees which in spite of the fact that they are situated in Muslim-Cypriot property belong to Christian-Cypriots or to the village church.³⁰

Register LXVIII (of 1892-93) cites expenses of the Archbishopric of Cyprus as well as of the famous monastery of Saint Neophytos in Paphos. Here we find a big number of Muslims who work together with Christians in the farms and gardens of this monastery and are paid equivalently.³¹ Register XII³² reports about distribution of goods (wheat, barley, corn etc.) to Christian- and Muslim-Cypriots for vegetation. It is important that the distribution is done according to the size of the land everyone possesses and not according to religious or ethnic adherence.³³

Register CVII (of 1911-1923) records cases of tenants who rent church property. Tenants are Muslims or Christians but also Muslims and Christians together. For example, in Arediou village, Savvas Chatzipanagi, Loizis Petri and Ismael Imbrahim rented the flour-mill of Vardalis which belonged to the church.³⁴ This kind of cooperation presupposes friendship, trust, shared feelings of justice and social order as well as acceptance of the religious beliefs of the other, elements which according to these documents³⁵ existed in the Church of Cyprus.

Tolerance of mixed marriages between Muslims and Christians was a further example of the contribution of the Orthodox Church towards coexistence. Although such

²⁵ Toponymes are names of places.

²⁶ Agios means Saint.

²⁷ See C. Kyrris, *Peaceful Coexistence in Cyprus under the British Rule (1878-1959) and after Independence*, Nicosia 1977, p. 29f. C. Kyrris, *Symbiotic Elements in the History of the two Communities of Cyprus*, in: *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Political Geography*, Nicosia 1976, p. 243 ff.

²⁸ C. Cokkinoftas, *the Holy Monastery of Kykko in Cyprus Press (1878-1899)*, Nicosia 1999, p. 21-30.

²⁹ In Greek *katastichon*. The secretarial materials which have survived in the Archbishop's Archive include very important Registers such as the Megas Kodex and the Ktematicos Kodex, and a big amount of other documents of great significance. These Registers include categories of documents such as: Registers of yearly revenues of the See from churches and monasteries of the dioceses such as Reg. XXVIII (1821-1857), Registers of ecclesiastic property in whole kazas or villages or towns such as Reg. XLII (1733-1744), Reg. XLVI (1777-1779), Reg. XLV (1772-1833) including also some records of Marriage Licences etc., Registers of Expenses such as Reg. XXXIV, Registers of rents such as Reg. XI, and others. Though a small section of this Archive has already been used in philological and historical treatises as testimony, its vast majority remains unpublished, and much has still to be done before its satisfactory utilisation in research.

³⁰ Register XLII (of 1733), 26, 99. Register XLVI (of 1773), 163. Register LIII (of 1867), 18, 23, 65.

³¹ Register LXVIII, 4, 16, 20, 26, 30.

³² This Register has no date. From the way it is written it seems to date back to the end of 18th century.

³³ Register XII, 21, 22, 26, 36, 60, 62, 80, 92.

³⁴ Register CVII, 13.

³⁵ It would lead beyond of the purposes of this article to refer to all Registers of this famous Archive.

a «sin» in other denominations may cause considerable problems (excommunication or denial to baptise the children), in Cyprus the Church helped these families without sending them away. Richard Pococke notably states that often, Muslim men married to Christian women and then husband and wife observed the Christian period of Lent.³⁶ The interesting point here, is that Islamic Law prohibits mixed marriages of Muslim women to Christian men,³⁷ because according to Islamic Law women are inferior to men,³⁸ so a woman could be forced to renounce her Islamic belief by her non-Muslim husband.³⁹ In contrast, Muslim men are free to marry “kitâbîya” (Jewish and Christian) women,⁴⁰ because as patriarchs they are responsible for educating their children in the Islamic tradition and their wives are integrated in their Muslim family presenting no danger to the family’s religious profession.⁴¹ Many Turkish-Cypriots originate from such families (father Muslim - mother Christian). The important thing is that, although married couples observed Lent, their children were brought up as Muslims. Both cases of mixed marriages evidence tolerance by the Church. William Turner who visited Cyprus in 1815, wrote down what he experienced: “There are many Muslims on the island who are registered as Muslims but who are secretly Christians. They observe Lent and also even drink wine and eat pork without remorse - outrageous behaviour for devout Muslims. They marry uninhibitedly to the island’s Greek women, because their religion (Islam) allows men to marry non-Muslim women yet prohibits Turkish women from marrying non-Muslim men.”⁴²

Reconciliation of Turkish and Greek Cypriots as a Religious and Cultural Duty of the Church

Despite the hard feelings because of the Turkish invasion in 1974, the continuing occupation of a large part of the island, and the de facto separation of the two communities, the feeling of belonging to the same fatherland, the memories of the long symbiosis⁴³ of the two communities and the desire for reestablishing relationships between both communities in all walks of life lead to the emergence of a reconciliation movement. The Orthodox Church of Cyprus, continuing its contribution towards co-existence through the centuries, is active in the modern reconciliation movement as well.⁴⁴ Let us first see the theoretical frame of reconciliation as the religious and cul-

³⁶ See *Excerpta Cypria*, p. 269.

³⁷ Koran 2, 221.

³⁸ See Koran 2, 228 and 4, 34.

³⁹ See *H. Kotzur*, *Kollisionsrechtliche Probleme christlich-islamischer Ehen dargestellt am Beispiel deutsch-maghrebinischer Verbindungen*, Tübingen 1988, p. 27-29. *K. Ahmed*, *The Muslim Law of Divorce*, New Delhi 1984, 693-695.

⁴⁰ Koran 5, 5.

⁴¹ See *G. Helmsdörfer*, *Moslemitisches Eherecht nach Hanifitischen Grundlagen*, Amsterdam 1968, p. 59. *S. Niazi*, *Marriage with the People of the Book (Islamic Literature)* Juli 1971, p. 397-405. *S. a’lâ Mawdûdî*, *Towards Understanding the Qur’ân*, Vol. II, Sûrahs 4-6, English version of *Tafhîm al-Qur’ân*, Leicester 1989, p. 137 f.

⁴² *Excerpta Cypria*, p. 449.

⁴³ See *P. Kitromilides*, *From Co-existence to Confrontation: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Cyprus*, in: *The Result of a Seminar on the Cyprus Problem*, *M. Attalides (Ed.)*, Nicosia 1977, p. 47f. Also *M. Attalides*, *Relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots in perspective*, in: *International Symposium on Political Geography*, Nicosia 1976, p. 56.

⁴⁴ The Church played a positive role towards coexistence also in other countries. Regarding the contribution of the Protestant Church in Germany see for instance *Richard Schröder*, *The Role of the Protestant*

tural duty of the Church. In the New Testament we come across the word "peace" ninety-nine times. In the Epistle of St James (3:17) it is written: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity". Saint James continues as if he wanted to answer the burning question of our days on why wars are waged and so much enmity exists among people: "What causes wars, and what fights among you? Is it not your passions that are at war in your members?" (4:1)

According to the Gospel of St Mathew (5:9) "blessed are those who are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God". Sons of God will be called all those who have peace and create peace. That is, therefore, why according to the Bible the reconciliation of Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots is a religious and cultural duty of the Church. It is religious, because, according to Romans (15:33). God is nothing else but a God of peace. It is also cultural, because the peacemakers will be called sons of God. Let it be noted here that the study of history makes it clear that war does not keep pace with civilization. The former obviously destroys the latter. Civilization is born in periods of peace. For this reason blessed will be the peacemakers and be presented as sons of God during the Day of Judgment. In Timothy I (5:8) we read: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than the unbeliever". Who does not come for his relatives and more specifically his intimates commits the sin of infidelity and becomes even worse than infidels. Considering that the Turkish-Cypriot Muslims lived as neighbors and compatriots with us for so many years, members and leaders of the Orthodox Church have both a cultural and a religious duty to reconcile with them and join efforts for a united Cyprus free from any kind of intolerance, just as mentioned in the Bible: "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

A priority for religious leaders as well as theologians should be the establishment of Non-Governmental Organizations having the following objectives: to get to know the unknown neighbor and his/her language and therefore to contribute to the Peace process; to establish close contacts aiming at cooperating with scientists from the other community; to develop a political language, which will take into account the multicultural character and tradition of Cyprus society; to promote the idea and the necessity for reconciliation by organizing activities (lectures, panel discussions etc.).

Many Christians who are active members of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus often take part in bicommunal activities organized by the following NGOs: The Centre for World Dialogue, The Peace Centre, The Institute of Historical Research for Peace, The International Association for the Promotion of Women of Europe (Branch: Cyprus), The Bureau of Bicommunal Reconciliation and Strengthening of Civil Society in Cyprus, KAYAD Toplum Merkezi, Hands Across the Divide (HAD), Covillagers Project, Youth Encounters for Peace, Youth Promoting Peace, Cypriot Culture group, Steps for Peace (Cypriot Dances group), Rhythm of Peace (Music group), Free our Children (Human Rights Youth Group) and Cyprus Youth for Peace.

Reconciliation between Turks and Greeks is well promoted by the World Forum of Religions and Cultures in Nicosia. It is a Non-Governmental Organization established in 2001 under the initiative of his Eminence the Bishop of Kykko Nikiforos in order to become a forum for bicommunal and international activities which may promote rec-

conciliation between Muslims and Christians as well as multicultural values. The World Forum of Religions and Cultures successfully hosted three international conferences organized in collaboration with the Cultural Olympiad 2001-2004, two of them in Nicosia and one in Athens (2004) with strong Turkish-Cypriot representation under the leadership of Sheikh Nazim Kibrisli, the President of the International Muslim Association, who is a Turkish-Cypriot.

For the Church, reconciliation presupposes social, political and mainly spiritual forgiveness so that the two communities will be able to live peacefully on the island and promote their culture and values, as had been a noble tradition during Ottoman rule.