

AN ORTHODOX ENCOUNTER AT THE BOSE MONASTERY

On September 4, 2019, a three-day conference on Orthodox spirituality opened at the Bose Monastery in Magnano, Italy. It was the 27th year that this conference has been held. The theme of this year's conference was "Called to Life in Christ." The speakers included prominent Orthodox hierarchs such as Metropolitan Hilarion (Moscow Patriarchate), Metropolitan Porfirije (Serbian Patriarchate), and Metropolitan Andrei (Romanian Patriarchate) and prominent Orthodox theologians such as Dr. Christos Yannaras. Approximately 225 persons, including nine official delegations from Local Orthodox Churches, attended this year's conference. Greetings to the conference were sent by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who personally attended the conference in 2017.

As the host of one of the most important Orthodox conferences each year, one would think that the Bose Monastery is an Orthodox monastery, but it is not. Rather, it is an ecumenical monastery which is very different from typical Orthodox or Catholic monasteries. It is a monastic community composed of both men and women of different Christian confessions. They dedicate themselves to a life of prayer, work, poverty, celibacy, and obedience to the Gospel. At the present time, the community consists of approximately 80 persons with roughly equal numbers of men and women. The community includes five Catholic priests and one Reformed pastor.

The community had its origin in 1965 when a 22-year-old Catholic layman, Enzo Bianchi, decided to live a life of prayer in solitude at a farm house near the small town of Magnano. Magnano is located in a beautiful rural setting between Milan and Turin near the foothills of the Alps. Three years later Bianchi was joined by several men, a woman, and a Reformed pastor. They developed a communal life centered on the liturgy of the hours, the study of Scripture, and the offering of hospitality. The community steadily grew in size. In 2000, the community was canonically approved by the local Catholic bishop as a private association of the faithful.

Enzo Bianchi has become very well known as a speaker and author of dozens of books. In 2014 Pope Francis appointed him as a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. In 2016 Bianchi announced his retirement as prior of the monastery, and Brother Luciano Manicardi was elected as his successor. In 2018 Pope Francis wrote a letter to Bianchi congratulating the Monastery on its 50th anniversary and stating that "your Community has distinguished itself in its commitment to preparing the way of unity of the Christian Churches, becoming a place of prayer, of encounter and of dialogue among Christians, in view of the communion of faith and of love for which Jesus prayed."

Especially at this time of great tensions between the Moscow and Ecumenical Patriarchates, the Bose Monastery serves the important role as a neutral venue. For example, both Metropolitan Hilarion (Moscow Patriarchate) and Archbishop Job (Ecumenical Patriarchate) attended this year's conference. Dr. Peter Bouteneff, one of the conference

speakers, described it very well: “For a few days, interchurch tensions melt away as we find each other in this idyllic place, with the community’s gracious hospitality, at a conference organized with the greatest care and with spiritual and theological sensitivity.”

Perhaps for this reason, the Bose Monastery hosted the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches last November. It is again hosting the Committee’s meeting this November. However, the hospitality of the Monastery extends to everyone. With approximately 80 guest rooms, the Monastery offers the opportunity for many visitors to join the community in prayer and study (see www.monasterodibose.it).