

Speech on Academic Memorial Event for the Late Metropolitan Damaskinos (Papandreou) - 10 years of His passing, University of Fribourg, Switzerland.

One year ago, the Mayor of Thermo, a historic municipality on the mountains of the east side of lake Trichonida in Greece, where Metropolitan Damaskinos was born, Mr. Spyridonas Konstantaras, approved the publication of a Collective - Tribute Volume to mark the tenth anniversary of the passing of the late Metropolitan Damaskinos. We started working on this effort and we started communicating with people who collaborated, who worked with him, who knew him or who due to their professional-scientific subject may have had a good contact with the interest and the wealth of the work and the general tribute that Damaskinos created and bequeathed to the universe.

Such was the response to our invitations that very soon we realized that it was not possible to be one book enough for all these people who wanted to publish their academical texts and thoughts dedicated to His memory. We hope that soon we will come back with other actions to give place to more and more significant people and academics to express themselves for this great Theologian. I will try to make a short presentation of the Published Volume, referring to Metropolitan Damaskinos by using some few thoughts and ideas from the texts which are contained in the Volume published by the municipality of Thermo on August 2021.

Damaskinos was a man who left this world so many years ago and every year of absence or better, every year of silent presence brought him closer to the hearts of us all, because someone who offers this significant work as it is the work of the late Metropolitan Damaskinos, in this way, such a man, can never actually be absent. We became each one of us separately, a separate, a different place, a different land, of Damaskinos and so it is not only His land the village of Kato Chrysoitsa of the Municipality of Thermo or the hill of hope and the Theological School of Halki or

Constantinople and Fanari, or Switzerland, France, Germany... *"for a person like Damaskinos we are all His place. Where his memory resides"*¹.

And we may all know the great Ecumenical Theologian Damaskinos but perhaps the course of his life is not as well known. A poor child, son of a priest from a small mountain village on the East side of the Lake Trichonida, passing by the Theological Seminary of Halki and apprenticeship with leading theologians, sculpting his ecclesiastical mind and building his theological knowledge in the hug of the Mother Church in the center of Orthodoxy in Constantinople, managed to reach another lake this time, the Lake of Geneva and from the city of Calvin to teach Orthodoxy, to teach Christianity, to teach love and to fight for the value of inter-Christian and inter-religious dialogues.

Professor and former Vice President of the Greek Government Dr. Evangelos Venizelos says very descriptively: *"This curve of his earthly journey from a village in Etoloakarnania, to Halki, to Germany, to Geneva and the amphitheatres of the most prestigious theological schools and from the peak of ecumenical activity to the silent period of contemplation and preparation for the afterlife, this is the transition from the theology of action to the theology of silence, gave the Blessed Damaskinos the privilege of a special relationship with the memory of those of us who are left behind"*².

And Damaskinos Papandreou may have been a great Ecumenical Theologian with a monumental work to which I will refer briefly later, but He was also a man who provoked the interest of all of those whom we were blessed to meet Him. With a description which came from her soul, the Professor of the Theological School of the University of Athens, Dr. Vasiliki Stathokosta, describes - creating with her writing a vivid image - their first meeting in Chambesy: *"From the beginning I felt familiar with the Metropolitan of the Orthodox Diaspora, a spiritual figure but at the same time a nobleman, a Roumelian (Roumeli is a territory of Greece where also the birthplace of Damaskinos belongs and Professor's Birthplace also belongs) with straightforward manners and courtesy, with*

¹ Ευάγγελος Βενιζέλος, Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου από τη θεολογία της δράσης στη θεολογία της σιωπής, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ. 26.

² Ευάγγελος Βενιζέλος, Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου από τη θεολογία της δράσης στη θεολογία της σιωπής, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ. 26.

obvious - in my eyes - the characteristics of our place. With a very good sense of humor and rather short-spoken Himself, with good manners and a language learner, he seemed to move very comfortably between East and West”³.

Stavros Giagazoglou, Assistant Professor of the Theological School of the University of Athens, reports on the dialectical ability of Damaskinos’ work, with the modern reality, in which it was created and thus it managed to keep theology in an open vivid dialogue with modern reality. He says: *"The work of Papandreou Damaskinos dialectically expressed the era in which it was unfolded, interpreting prophetically and creatively the demands of the times and changing established mentalities but also the paradigm of doing theology”⁴.*

While the same time respectively is describing the dynamic of the character of Metropolitan Damaskinos, the current Metropolitan of Switzerland Maximos, who is having a clear view and perception, He tells us: *"Both the great visions of the late Metropolitan Damaskinos and the missions assigned to Him by the Mother Church, became reality according to the powers and possibilities of the times and the ways he had at His disposal ”⁵.*

At the same time, intense is the action of Metropolitan Damaskinos and His concern on the development of European Union and the renewal of the unified identity of Europe. Professor at the Theological School of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki Dr. Niki Papageorgiou says about

³ Βασιλική Σταθοκώστα, *Ο Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου και η συμβολή του στην ανάπτυξη των οικουμενικών διαλόγων, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ. 179.*

⁴ Σταύρος Γιαγκαζογλου, *Η αποστολή και η οικουμενική μαρτυρία της Ορθόδοξης Εκκλησίας στον σύγχρονο κόσμο. Η συμβολή και το έργο του Δαμασκηνού Παπανδρέου, Μητροπολίτη Ανδριανουπόλεως, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ. 77.*

⁵ Μητροπολίτης Ελβετίας Μάξιμος, *Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου Προϊστάμενος του Ορθόδοξου Κέντρου του Οικουμενικού Πατριαρχείου και πρώτος Μητροπολίτης Ελβετίας, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ. 176.*

Him that He was: *"Concerned about how the enlarged version of Europe, while maintaining its diversity, can work together and not be divisive"*⁶.

It is His action, His offering, and His work which are not limited to local alleys, they belong to the Ecumene. What becomes clear, then, is *"That the horizon of the work of Damaskinos goes beyond the ecclesiastical and religious space and opens literally to the universe, it is addressed with love in every direction, to every man of good will"*⁷.

As an epilogue, I can summarize my thoughts on Damaskinos Papandreou as following: *"Greece gave birth to many brilliant personalities, who left their own personal mark of contribution to the enormous wealth of Orthodoxy. The Late Metropolitan of Adrianople Damaskinos, from Switzerland, is as it appears from all the essays submitted in the dedicated volume of the Municipality of Thermo to His memory, which highlight his monumental contribution either with empirical testimonies and thoughts of associates, students and people who had the blessing of meeting Him in the path of their lives, or with the expressed views of academics, clergy and people of science who knew Him through His work, He is unquestionably one of the most brilliant personalities in the modern era of the Orthodox Church"*⁸.

With the hope that the Dialogues will continue, bringing everyone closer to peace and the existing possibility of coexistence, let us keep in mind what Damaskinos said: "From a dialogue one does not expect the other to cease to be who he is, but to be recognized just as He is"⁹, and without fear let us look our fellow human beings in the eyes, trying to conquer a future full of hope .

⁶ Νίκη Παπαγεωργίου, *Η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία στην πλουραλιστική Ευρώπη: Οι θέσεις του Μητροπολίτη Δαμασκηνού Παπανδρέου, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ 147.*

⁷ Στυλιανός Τσομπανίδης, *Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός (Παπανδρέου) Ο οραματιστής της ζωντανής οικουμένης, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ 201.*

⁸ Χαράλαμπος Καραπάνος, *Επιλογικό Σημείωμα, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ 243.*

⁹ Maria Brun, *Ο Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου και η συμβολή του στην ανάπτυξη των οικουμενικών σχέσεων και του ενδοχριστιανικού διαλόγου, Μητροπολίτης Δαμασκηνός Παπανδρέου 1936-2011, Δήμος Θέρμου, Θέρμο 2021, σελ 205.*

Dear friends, “There is no fear in love because perfect love expels all fear”¹⁰.

May His memory be eternal.

¹⁰ *1 John 4:18.*