

Perspectives of ecumenical cooperation in Theological Education in Eastern and Central Europe

An answer on the question on perspectives of ecumenical cooperation in Theological Education in our region needs at first to characterize the

Eastern and Central Europe Context

If we discuss the European context we can say that today the European and Asian contexts are sufficiently comparable in some aspects. There are some regions in Europe where Christians are a minority. While nominally they may be regarded as a majority, but in practice, the greatest portion of a population may be secular and very far from religious life. Very specific context we have in Eastern and Central Europe – in post-soviet, post-communistic space. Education is priority in today mission and topics “religious pluralism, tolerance, ecumenical cooperation” must be on the top of priority lists for theological education.

The concept “Eastern Europe” was born when after World War II ended in 1945, the continent Europe was divided into two major political and economic blocs—Communist nations in Eastern Europe and non-Communist countries in Western Europe. Between 1989 and 1991, however, the Eastern bloc broke up. Communist regimes surrendered power in most Eastern European countries. East and West Germany were unified. The Soviet Communist party collapsed, multilateral military and economic ties between Eastern Europe and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics were severed, and the USSR itself ceased to exist. The ideology of communistic atheism was not any longer dominant in E/C European countries. But rebirth of religious life and restoration of human rights were found to entail many problems, many challenges.

Now it's time to support the integration process in Europe, to introduce Eastern European Theological Institutions into the World system of theological institutions. To develop the logic, whole Europe needs a common strategy for future development of the education with a special attention to problematic parts of the Europe. Each region of the world needs coordination of different ecumenical educational initiatives and support in activity, not only regions with weak economy.

Concrete E/C Europe contextual problems

Special attention should be given in Education. It is related to the following cultural, historical and political realities:

a) the church life within the post-soviet and post-communist space has been going through turbulent renaissance over the recent decade. The arising problems are primarily rooted in deep secularization (or, rather atheization) of the society and in nearly complete lack of any system of religious education under the communist regime. Attempts at searching for and developing such a system bring about a lot of questions. It would be hardly realistic, and in no case adequate to reanimate the structures or resort to the methods that were the customs before the communist regimes took power. There are countries, e.g. Russia, in which the gap continued over seventy years. The society and the mass consciousness have essentially altered;

b) while integration in Europe is in the full swing, the Eastern and Central European countries differ as to their involvement in the process. The political aspects relevant to the legal issues (liberty of conscience, teaching religion at state schools, participation of religious communities in programs for moral education of the society, social service etc.) appeal to the Churches for making clear their position on the matters of social service, interaction among Churches in every European country, call for cooperation of the prevailing Churches and Churches that find themselves in a minority;

c) the current situation in Eastern and Central Europe seems of interest for the Western Europe and even the world, since it is just in the region that new circumstances emerge, new legislations are brought for appraisal, new patterns of relationships between the Church and the state are being tried; these are not always copies of the West-European models; rather, they may serve examples to follow if reforms are likely to take place in the Western Europe;

d) ecumenical trends have recently become weaker in the Eastern Europe, particularly, in the countries of the former U.S.S.R. Moreover, there have grown interstate and international tensions among the former “brother” republics. The Churches might prove helpful in reducing conflicts and overcoming the tensions, but adversely, for the time being, inter-Church conflicts (splits and other chronic strains) can only aggravate the tensions, both international and interstate;

e) peculiar to the religious situation in the region turned out to be a sudden and aggressive overflow of new religious (and sometimes, pseudo-religious, i.e. commercial) movements in the early 90-ies which created a perplexing problem, both legal and missionary;

f) the problems implicit in proselytism have acquired a special poignancy because of increasing activity of many Churches and religious communities. Actions of charismatic communities are especially noticeable;

g) most urgent tasks that all the Eastern and Central European Churches are faced with arousing in believers the spirit of mercy and love, encouraging charitable activities and interest in social ethics, and introducing these subjects in educational systems at different levels. Under overwhelming state atheism when any social activities of the Church and even preaching charity were officially prohibited there have grown up several generations;

h) related not only to human rights, but also to Christian peacemaking, of special importance is the topic of Churches –minorities whose status in democratic societies deserves special attention. As Christians, we are responsible for letting not to lose the diversity of traditions and national cultures in the process of European integration, for resisting negative manifestations of globalization;

All the above – mentioned problems, and much more they entail make the mission of the Churches within their countries, “internal mission”, the most pressing task that all the Churches of the region have in common. In practice, missionary activities of the Church should start with education of children and newly converted adults, with active participating of Churches and missionary projects in all systems of education. So, specific to the region is an exceptional importance of missionary subjects in theological curricula, and a need for a new, contextual regional missiology. One of the most important aspects of the issue is a share of religious lessons in state educational institutions and prospects for inter-church collaboration for the purposes of religious education.

The E/C European actual task: theological education as a part of mission and preparing for mission.

If we understand Church mission not only in classical sense and we see our missionary activity as a truly Christian approach to contemporary problems, whether they be economic, social, or pertaining to individual morals, we need to teach future priests and lay people to see Christian answers on various challenges of our changing world. Theological education has in this direction the highest responsibility. Today, theological education must be mission-oriented and considered a fundamentally important part of the mission of the Church.

The methods and character of mission must conform to the challenges of the contemporary world. The analyses of the needs of the Church as related to its mission and of the strategy and tactics of mission, as a subject of missiology, are a special theological discipline.

In Eastern Europe we see a lack of Church analytical missiological work. Churches need a thorough, unbiased study of the religious situation in their countries and in the world at large. Missiology draws our attention to the fact that the world is constantly changing, thus presenting the Church with new problems and issues, the answers to which may be found in the Holy Scriptures if read it in today context. Yet for the world to pay attention and comprehend it must be addressed in a language it can understand. Spiritual life demands unceasing activity, ascetic feats, and incessant

renewal. Remaining faithful to the tradition of the Church means being successful in avoiding the Scylla of reformation, liberalism, and modernism and the Charybdis of fundamentalism, phariseism, and triumphalism. It is only possible to avoid these by cultivating a profound knowledge of the history and tradition of the Church, a sincere personal faith, and accepting the inner religious experiences, both personal and communal, which begin with penetrating the mysteries of the Church. All these qualities and abilities should be nurtured in theological institutions on different levels.

For many E/C countries, seeing the objectives of theological education not only in qualifying priests for theological seminaries, academies, and University departments but also in preparing laymen to become the servants of the Church, is a new concept. But all Churches in these countries need people who are working in both church and secular capacities as teachers of religion, religious journalists, librarians, museum keepers, publishers, etc.

Ecumenical vision of education as missionary perspective.

One of the most important challenges for E/C Europe today is an ecumenical cooperation in education and mission. The concrete and effective way of supporting missionary activity in each Church and of improving ecumenical understanding of our common task is to reorganize our theological education in a missiological perspective. Theological education seems nearly the last source where the Churches can resort to for missionary recruitment. Renewal of parochial life is only possible if there are eager and competent priests and believers that have been trained and instructed by their Church for working with parishioners, for pursuing new missionary tasks set by the Church. Doings of the WCC, so significant and important for the Christian world at large and for its member-Churches, cannot be interesting and meaningful for members of a Church unless the latter are continuously and intelligibly taught relevant subjects. Education is a priority everywhere nowadays, but first and foremost, in the countries – and in the Churches of the countries – that have recently started for a new life, where changing generations means also changing ideologies and world-outlooks.

The first step in this direction in Eastern Europe is to introduce “missiology” into our theological agenda, but even there, first it should be ecumenically oriented. Missiology can open an ecumenical perspective of Christian mission. Only a common Christian mission, a “shared mission” may meet the requirements of the new democratic open civil society, whose institution is nowadays declared by many E/C European countries. A common mission is likely to be the most fertile and efficient path. It is essential that on this path of joint efforts a value that has not before ranked among the missionary ones should be recognized, i.e. tolerance. A peaceful life is impossible in the multi-confessional and multi - religious world without preaching tolerance as a value, without cultivating a taste for tolerance. This concept can be differently defined and referred to, it can be treated as a liberal value, but anyhow, tolerance is one of the priorities in ecumenical education which should make it possible to interpret adequately the many aspects of mission, for example, the phenomenon of proselytism. It is noteworthy that in new Russia, the government approved a special state programme on fostering tolerance among the citizens of the country. For a society that has for years been living under a totalitarian regime, it means much. Were such education a reality, many inter-confessional and inter-religious conflicts might have been escaped. And, reversibly, steps towards preventing inter-confessional and inter-religious crises are beneficial for introducing tolerance as an absolute value.

Common mission in E/C Europe

The need of mission in E/C Europe is motivated by points which are listed above. The number of theological schools has grown considerably but there is lack of good professors. There've been some reforms in theological education in Russia now. However, preparing qualified teachers and researchers in theology also requires a special missiological analysis and missionary strategy. Any mistake in theological education will be multiplied by the number of schools and students. Considering lack of religious knowledge, the need for common Christian missionary action in the

society is obvious. It is not only problem of lack of material resources but also intellectual resources. There is also need of exchanging experience, even sad experience.

At the beginning of political changes in Eastern Europe, a very well-known missionary and a brilliant missiologist Lesslie Newbigin wrote: "Now that the pressure of Marxism on the greatest of the Orthodox churches has been lifted, I hope that the missionary thinking and action of the WCC will gain new strength and coherence from the Orthodox witness"¹. However the ecumenical situation in Russia and other countries has become different, and there are now specific barriers to ecumenism, stumbling blocks which don't allow to develop cooperation². To improve the ecumenical situation is only possible through changing and improving atmosphere and curriculums in theological schools and not only curriculums.

Ecumenical dimension in theological, religious and religious science education. Three aspects of the same task. Overcoming of fundamentalism.

The same attention as to the theological education Churches should pay to religious education and to religious science education in different higher schools. Religious education is connected very strongly with theological education, and it means the study of religion and religious knowledge and being prepared to let it bear fruit which thus becomes available not just to priests or practicing believers but to all. Religious education means working to bring society, even a multi-denominational, multi-religious or even largely atheistic society, if not quite as hostile as before, by degrees back to Christian values.

Coordination between theological, religious education and religious science education should work for destruction of false stereotypes and atheistic dogmas, which took root in the public consciousness even before the communist regime. This coordination is on responsibility of Churches. The interrelations of three dimensions of education is a social and cultural issue and at the same time a missiological issue. One of the aspect of the topic is "the place of religious education in state system of education".

In every sphere of education it is possible to show (and we need do it) that majority of conflicts between Christians do not arise out of confessional motives, but out of a clash between two types of mentality, fundamentalistic and creative (practically the same is true with reference to any inter-religious conflicts).

Fundamentalism is a temptation and a main obstacle to common mission. Applying the term "fundamentalism" to Orthodoxy perplexes many. Many think fundamentalism the underlying principle of Orthodoxy, which is strict and faithful in its attitude toward Holy Scriptures and Holy Tradition. Serious objections exist as to so wide a use of this word. Fundamentalism ardently stands for traditionalism while opposing modernism and liberalism. Characteristically, it opposes science, as long as its conclusions are not in keeping with the literal understanding of biblical descriptions of Creation, while maintaining that any non-fundamentalist stance precludes anyone's becoming and being a real Christian. It has a tendency to decisively Christianize politics, mainly through the affirmation of moral values as the absolute norm of the society.

The concept of fundamentalism appeared within Protestantism, yet, as a phenomenon, it is also well-known among both the Catholic and the Orthodox. The type of spirituality making a claim to being the only criteria of the Truth may be found anywhere. It would be incorrect to consider fundamentalism somewhat synonymic to conservatism, traditionalism, rigorism, or integrism.

At the first glance one may think that fundamentalists are the most active and traditionally pious preachers. Yet a careful observation will reveal that without creativity and the freedom of choice piousness is superficial and does not reach deep where personality is concerned. Usually, fundamentalism is exactly what prevents people remaining outside of the Church from trusting it or

¹ A Word in Season, Perspectives on Christian World Missions, Saint Andrew Press Edinburgh, 1994, p. 200.

² But there are some projects and form of activities in this direction. See the materials of the CMS conference in Moscow "Together in Mission", CMC, London, 2001.

being open to fundamentally new ideas and becoming tolerant towards the values they are not used to. Yet the nature of Christianity at large is openness.

Overcoming fundamentalism will serve the interests of the society at large as the way towards its stronger unity, and life without distrust, nationalism, pseudo-patriotism, and obscurantism. Overcoming of fundamentalism is a spiritual way but Churches need use all resources and especially theological education.

Special task for theological and religious education in E/C Europe is to include social topics in curriculums of different theological schools. Leafing through Russian Orthodox seminary programs of the 19th century, one will find basic courses in medicine or even bee-keeping. The introduction in today's programs of such disciplines as missiology, psychology, or Christian cultural studies is natural and no wonder. Probably, there also should be basic political science, finances, and law. As courses in medicine we need now special knowledge about HIV/Aids, to prepare future priests to pastoral work with the ill people and their relatives, for helping to prevent dangerous developing of this "new pest", to prevent epidemic.

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The Eastern and Central European context as a general post-atheist context requires a thorough analysis not only for the sake of the countries involved, but also for the Western European countries and even other continents. The events that are taking place here today are of the utmost importance for the whole Christian world. It is a kind of experimentation in vivo, a laboratory of missionary activities. At the same time, it is an offer open to all the Christian Churches to contribute to reanimating the religious life within the space where by many it was believed to be unable to influence social growth any longer. Today, there is a chance, and the challenge should be met ecumenically and in interreligious dialogue.

Challenges to Theological education in Eastern and Central Europe at the beginning of 3rd millennium. Education as a Liturgy before Liturgy.

Time flies. The eighth year of the new century and the new millennium will soon be over. The turn of the centuries, and even more, millennia, makes itself keenly appreciable in politics and culture, in mass consciousness, in inter-church and inter-faith relationships. This is true with regard to every region of the world, but it seems to be most poignantly taken in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, that is in post-communist space, which is undoubtedly related to the processes of liberalization that have been going on for more than fifteen years. The new vision of European culture, relationships between the Church and the State, politics, economics and social ethics is conditioned by the process of globalization which is quite contradictory in itself. Another process that demands special attention is integration of Europe. The new Europe is getting to see itself as a whole with increasing clarity, but there are countries that have not been recognized fit to be members of the EU. There are countries among the candidates in which atheist ideology was predominant not long ago, and there are countries with Moslem populations prevailing, e.g. Turkey. There are countries like Russia that have not yet been invited for EU membership. The attempts at formulation of a European constitution have been severely criticized by Christian Churches since the draft constitution even fails to mention the Christian roots of the European civilization, the religious constituent of the evolution of Europe.

It is quite natural that the Churches cannot but concern about such a secular image of the future Europe. Still, we have no choice but to admit that such is the real picture of our politics, our mass consciousness, such is the position of the Christian Churches in the eyes of our society. To change the situation, we need evangelizing activities of the Churches, a new interpretation of the mission of the Church in the society, which in its turn requires a new approach to theological education. It makes sense now to turn to what has been taking place in the region over the last year and try to discern a strategic prospect in the past events, processes and tendencies. The gained experience suggests new emphases, helps articulate new tasks that while not disregarding the former, would further the identified and accepted in the region strategy of evangelization.

Setting up theological faculties at secular state and independent educational institutions

It is long since secular culturology came to see that education is the dynamics of culture. Maintaining and developing the system of education alone can guarantee keeping the level and richness of culture in the society, intactness of a people, of a nation as a whole. The language of Orthodox theology in which the word “tradition” is one of the key notions helps understand that faith, spiritual heritage, and traditions are being stored and passed over from one generation to another, and it is this conveyance that should be meant when we speak of a system of education. The latter should ideally comprise not only a system of educational settings, but the whole system of evangelization.

The importance of education has been repeatedly pointed out by Orthodox hierarchs and Councils, the highest Church authorities. As far back as ten years ago, in 1994, the Bishop’s Council of ROC accepted a decision “On the tasks of the Church in the Field of Theological Education” which, in particular, said that theological education is a “prior all-Church task; to what degree we are equal to it will considerably shape the image of our Church”. Since that time the tasks of theological education have become still more diverse. It’s not only training of prospective clergy for new communities, but also evangelization of the society at large, implementing the mission of Christian culture, theological interpretation of new aspects of social responsibility, searching after answers to the continuously raising questions and challenges of the technological and informational civilization, resistance to the negative side-effects of the globalization processes, and first and foremost, service to peace and concord, Christian witness to the secular world.

The scope of these tasks is by far wider than what the theological educators had to deal with a hundred years ago. As to Russia, theological education was in the country relegated to special church educational settings, i.e. seminaries and academies, there have been practically no precedents of a theological school being included into the structure of a university or other secular institutions. To this day, the idea that theology cannot be studied at a secular educational institution is prevailing.

The Orthodox education in the other Eastern European countries – Bulgaria, Serbia, Rumania, Macedonia – was long ago introduced into university curricula, but practically ceased to exist in this form under the regimes with the communist ideology. Today, the university programs are restored in these countries, but this is not the case with Russia, where establishing theological faculties is absolutely new and in many respects, disputable. Though there have been some first attempts, the classical models of strictly confessional faculties can hardly prove promising in the new Russia. Anyhow, there are theological faculties or departments are now functioning at nine Russian universities. One has to admit, though, that the general level of theological education is very poor, and both inter-confessional cooperation and integration into the European educational system are bitterly needed.

Education for Tolerance as a new task of Theological and religious Education

To be allowed to take communion, according to Orthodox Eucharistic piety, one is obliged to get reconciled to the members of one’s community. This gospel principle «while your offering is still before the altar, first go and make peace with your brother, then come and make your offering» (Mt 5, 24), as before, remains for us a commandment of Our Savior. But we entered the third millennium with a new vision of the community of people of the world. We have come to be possessed of a wide scope of knowledge and the tragic experience that should be sufficient for us to see how closely we the human family are tied in the community of men created in God’s image. We may not be particularly emotional towards the other, but we are bound to realize our responsibility for each other. Because of the inescapable processes of globalization, because of the gigantic technological progress the Earth our dwelling-place has turned into a “communal” flat where in the power of every inhabitant lay its condition and quality of life of all the rest. In such a situation,

enmity and aggressiveness, which are underlain by intolerance and lack of pluralism, may prove fatal for the whole family.

The experience of wars and terrorism of the XX–ieth century and the first years of the XXI-st makes us admit tolerance and pluralism as new and essentially important social values. Both religious tolerance and religious pluralism are not something perfectly new; the history of Christianity has known such experience, but never before have they been proclaimed Christian values, significant guiding lines for evangelization and mission of the Church. The ecumenical lesson of the XX century has prepared the ground for such interpretation and calls for further elaboration.

The opposition to tolerance and religious pluralism that manifests itself today in some Christian Churches can be to a large degree accounted for by difference of opinions as to the meaning of the very word “tolerance”. If tolerance is taken as ability of a person, a group or a state to hear and respect another’s views, to meet opinions that differ from their own without hostility, we Christians loyal to our traditions have no grounds for intolerance.

In the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance which was proclaimed and signed by the Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995 we read: “1.1 Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.”³

To see what religious pluralism and confessional tolerance are, one should keep in mind that tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values.

Religious tolerance consists of valuing the right of another person to hold beliefs that you know absolutely to be wrong. Religious tolerance means to refrain from discriminating against others who follow a different religious path. Tolerance is more difficult to maintain when you are sure that your religion is right and their religion is wrong. For many believers (especially in fundamentalistic circles) it is naturally to confess: “Truth, not tolerance”.

Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and states. The Declaration says: «Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law. It involves the rejection of dogmatism and absolutism and affirms the standards set out in international human rights instruments”.⁴ It is noteworthy that we are not expected here to take the word dogmatism in its theological meaning. To be tolerant, a Christian doesn’t need to reject dogmata of the Church. Religious tolerance is not religious indifference. Tolerance is a privilege of those strong and clever who don’t doubt their ability to move towards the Truth through a diversity of positions and opinions and through the dialogue. We need not to forget that the practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one's convictions. It means that “one is free to adhere to one's own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs. It means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behaviour and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are. It also means that one's views are not to be imposed on others”.⁵

Unfortunately, the concept of tolerance has not been brought to theological discussion in all Churches. One can meet in church documents warnings against tolerance. For example, a ROCh document of consequence (namely, Basic Principles of the Attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church Toward the other Christian Confessions⁶) reads: «Even a position of tolerance towards

³ <http://www.peace.ru/tolerance/doc.htm>

⁴ 1.3.

⁵ 1.4.

⁶ adopted by the Jubilee Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church August 14, 2000

differences in faith is unacceptable». This warning follows the statement «2.10. It is inadmissible to introduce relativism into the realm of faith, to limit unity in faith to a narrow set of necessary truths so that beyond them "freedom in what is doubtful" may be allowed». Sufficient reflection upon this statement makes one get aware once again of the urgency of paying special attention to the subject of tolerance in theological education.

Education and Upbringing as a liturgy before Liturgy

The Orthodox idea of theological education and upbringing bears a clear-cut liturgical tinge. The point is not only that the main task is to prepare clergy, to inculcate in their mind that Eucharist is the heart of a Christian life. In XX century there has been a strong emphasis in Orthodox Ecclesiology on the eucharistic understanding of the Church. Truly, the Eucharist Liturgy is the event in which the people of God are celebrating the incarnation, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, sharing His glorified body and blood. But sometimes there arises a misunderstanding, sometimes opinions are voiced that the Orthodox reduce the notion of the Church to an exclusive worshipping community, to protecting and to preserving the Good News for its members.

Father Ion Bria spoke that it was felt to affirm that the Liturgy is not a self-centered service and action, but is a service for the building of the one Body of Christ within the economy of salvation which is for all people of all ages. "The liturgical assembly is the Father's House, where the invitation to the banquet of the heavenly bread is constantly voiced and addressed not only to the members of the Church, but also to the non-Christians and strangers." He explained that there is a double movement in the Liturgy: on the one hand, the assembling of the people of God to perform the memorial of the death and resurrection of our Lord "until He comes again". It also manifests and realizes the process by which "the cosmos is becoming ecclesia". Therefore the preparation for Liturgy takes place not only at the personal spiritual level, but also at the level of human historical and natural realities. In preparing for Liturgy, the Christian starts a spiritual journey which affects everything in his life: family, properties, authority, position, and social relations. It re-orientates the direction of his entire human existence towards its sanctification by the Holy Spirit. Father Ion Bria spoke about "Liturgy after liturgy" because renewed by the Holy Communion and the Holy Spirit, the members of the Church are sent to be authentic testimony to Jesus Christ in the world.⁷ The mission of the Church rests upon the radiating and transforming power of the Liturgy. It is a stimulus in sending out the people of God to the world to confess the Gospel and to be involved in man's liberation.

Now this concept of "Liturgy after liturgy" is very popular and it helps us to see our charity activity as a sacral responsibility, as a part of our liturgical life, our church life. But the same logic, I think, brings us to the concept of "liturgy before Liturgy". Religious education, evangelization, catechization, having the believers ready for Eucharist is a worship: a "liturgy before Liturgy".

It seems reasonable that this phrase should embrace not only the process of catechization, not only religious education, but theological education as a whole. While receiving communion demands of an Orthodox member of the Church a certain preparedness, that is a period of abstinence, special prayers, penitence, - such matters as giving a trial to one's conscience with special attention paid to the dogmata should also belong here. It should be made clear that checking up one's own conscience and confession means also testing one's beliefs and aspiration to ridding oneself of vagueness and obscurities. A member of the Church is expected to keep oneself aware of one's attitudes toward every religious rite one participates in and to be ready to the best of one's abilities, spiritual maturity and moralities for intelligent Christian answers to the questions life poses before oneself. One should not only, if asked, be able to give an account of one's faith "be ready at any time when you are questioned about the hope which is in you, to give an answer in the fear of the Lord and without pride" (1 Peter 3, 15), but first and foremost, make out this answer for oneself.

⁷ The first who told about Liturgy after Liturgy was archbishop Anastasios. (Yannulayos). It was in 1968.

Continual learning is needed not only in the form of approaching the comprehension of the Revelation of the Holy Scripture and the Tradition, but also in the form of perceiving the Revelation discernible in nature, sciences and social structure. Being a well educated person is a virtue; a neglectful attitude towards education moves one further away from God, because ideally, education should prepare one for meeting Christ, for thanksgiving, for Eucharist, for grateful service to Our Lord. The way towards Christ is a way towards Light, for “Christ is our Light”. He is «Light of reason», «Light of Truth»; «Light of Christ enlightens all persons».⁸

The Light of Christ emanates upon everybody, but focusing its beams and turning them to educate, enlighten and warm an individual person is a peculiar service, it’s a mystery of Christ’s enlightenment, it is a process of education and formation, it is also a priority work of the Church, it is a service to God, it is a liturgy before Liturgy. The words uttered by the blessed Edith Stein, a refined intellectual and a humble Roman-Catholic nun, who savoured the joy of philosophical knowledge and through the latter came to Christ, a martyr of the XX-ieth century, are simple and clear, and none the less, sometimes we fail to see this simple truth. What she said is near to a truism: «The one who seeks after the Truth seeks after God, whether or not he is aware of it”. To help a seeker after the Truth means to contribute to this service to God through education and enlightenment, thus participating in a liturgy before Liturgy. And we ought to stir the instinct of thirst for Light Our Lord endowed the man with within the one who is not after the Truth and has not experienced the joy of acquisition of knowledge, and then to cultivate his or her taste so that one might recognize the fruits of true spirituality, to tell true Light of Christ from artificial luminescence.

Thus theological education should be also interpreted as a prerequisite of liturgical life. Besides, it is just theological education that serves a basis for religious education and provides the society with trained catechists. Education ranks among the objectives of the Church, it is a common cause, it is a “liturgy before the Liturgy” and the beginning of the liturgy. However, this conception may include a religious constituent found in secular education, too. The words of a secular course in any science or art, if they help the students to find the Way, the Truth and the Life. The first words of evangelization, will be also a liturgy before Liturgy. That is why one of the tasks of theological education is close cooperation with non-theological disciplines and secular educational institutions. The phrases a “liturgy before Liturgy” and a “liturgy after Liturgy” may be taken skeptically, for they are not dogmatic definitions; rather, they belong in imagery. The impressiveness of the language of theology, however, like that of the language of the arts, lies in its imagery, but not definitions.

Ecumenical education as education in tolerance – our missionary task.

This concept can be differently defined and referred to, it can be treated as a liberal value, but anyhow, tolerance is one of the priorities in ecumenical education which should make it possible to interpret adequately the many aspects of mission, for example, the phenomenon of proselytism. It is noteworthy that in new Russia, the government approved of a special state programme on fostering tolerance among the citizens of the country. For a society that has for years been living under a totalitarian regime, it means much. Were such education a reality, many inter-confessional and inter-religious conflicts might have been escaped. And, reversely, steps towards preventing inter-confessional and inter-religious crises are beneficial for introducing tolerance as a Christian value. The situation in other Eastern European countries is better but can be much more ecumenical.

Above all, tolerance, the ability to refrain from condemning the others, from reproaching them and calling them to order, but instead, to be anxious not to lose one’s own way is a matter of spirituality. The spirituality of humbleness, the spirituality free from arrogance by no means neglects missionary goals. But the mission then should be interpreted not only as a call “repent!”, but as witnessing to the Truth through the fruits of its assimilation, that is, through the love and light of the Truth. Such task of education and upbringing is sacral, it cannot be limited by methodological

⁸ Expressions from Orthodox liturgical texts.

prescriptions. Approaching the issue in such a way, one can find an image to refer to education and upbringing: a liturgy before Liturgy.

And let's return to a local context. It gives a resource to understand, do we have perspectives and what perspectives.

Ecumenical situation in Russia.

As to the ecumenical situation in Russia, it is very poor, much worse than some 30 years before. We hear from many people that ecumenism is the worst heresy of the XX century, and that all non-Orthodox are heretics. It is clear that these voices are fruits of religious ignorance and illiteracy, and it is partly fault of the society that it is not active enough to be able to overcome this dangerous illness of obscurantism. As Prof. Bria wrote about it: «The quasi-fundamentalistic fixation on the "limits" of the church in ecumenical conversations and the strictest interpretation of Cyprian's opinion that outside the church there is no salvation comes from a lack of deep insight into the liturgical and missionary experience of the faithful»⁹. The characteristic given in 1998 has not lost its actuality. In the 90-ieth, there was an explosion of anti-ecumenism in several churches; conservative groups were pressing the authorities to withdraw from the World Council of Churches.

There are, however, some "islands" of tolerance and even undertaking some ecumenical initiatives, St Petersburg being probably the first among such exceptions, an "island". It can be explained by the history of the city: the northern capital of the "Russian Empire was destined to be "a window cut into Europe". Now there is the Interchurch Partnership "Apostolic City – Nevskij perspective", which has organized Religious- Pedagogical Centre, (there was the office of the WCC "Ecumenical theological education in Eastern Europe" as a guest and now the office of the "Association of the Religion and Theology Educators in Eastern and Central Europe". There are some other places and persons in Russia with ecumenical initiative but it is a responsibility of the society to support ecumenical initiatives in religious circle. It is a task of education to help people to see an urgency of ecumenical cooperation. There is no any hope to develop interreligious dialogue without Christian ecumenism. Basis for tolerance, for trust, for religious pluralism should be prepared in Christian ecumenism.

6-7 years ago ecumenical situation was in a sharp crisis. Some of the hierarchs with a considerable portion of clergy and laity accused the Church authorities for her participation in the WCC and the CEC. The major danger for the Church was in fact that most theological schools were already consumed with anti-ecumenism and religious fundamentalism.

The situation in province and in many circles of clergymen stays anti-ecumenical but there are some good signs now. If we compare an attitude of ROCh to General Assembly of the WCC 7-8 years ago and now we see an ecumenical progress. In comparison with the Eighth Assembly of the WCC held in Harare in 1998, the number of Orthodox participants in 2006 in Porto-Alegre was significantly larger. The Moscow Patriarchate, the largest among the members of the WCC, in 1998 was represented by a delegation of three people headed by a hieromonk. To the assembly in 2006 the Moscow Patriarchate sent a delegation of 21 persons headed by a bishop.

The main problem of today ecumenical activity is a lack of tolerance in own tradition. Tendency to search for enemies, for heretics, for not enough truly Orthodox is a very characteristic for today post-communist religious life in Russia. Misunderstanding that Orthodoxy is not unification but a rich pluralistic family with both principles: *akrebeia* (*akribeia*)¹⁰ and *economy* (*oikonomia*)

The new wave of anti-ecumenism began in 2007 with the call of Chucotka bishop Diomid to all bishops and clerics in the Russian Orthodox Church to adjudicate ecumenism. It is important to remark that main supporters of this strategy are nationalists, anti-Semitic leaders and fundamentalists. Some of hem declared themselves not as anti-Semitic but as anti-Judaists.

⁹ Ion Bria. The Orthodox church in post-communist Eastern Europe. ("Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope": Unfolding the Eighth Assembly Theme)// Ecumenical Review. April, 1998.

¹⁰ *Akribeia*, the Greek word for "exactitude".

It is not enough to search peaceful cooperation only between Orthodox but it is strong requirement to search for Christian Unity. And now we see that main misunderstandings and sharp conflicts in ecumenical sphere come not because of different confessional attitudes but because of different types of mentality, because of different psychological and moral types of personalities in the same confession. We find splits between so called fundamentalists and liberals in each confession and in each tradition. We see last time a tendency to search unity with some communities only because of common opposition to some others.¹¹ We hope that ecumenism mainly is a common search for Truth, Justice, Peace, Love, Integrity of Creation and others Christian absolute values. Our understanding of religious pedagogy has a real ecumenical perspective.

So, ecumenical situation in the region needs renewing of ecumenical strategy, structures, organizations. WOCATI and WCC have good resources but also responsibility to mobilise Churches for this renewing.

Our perspective is to support all initiatives for promotion ecumenical education and to participate to any project which can support our theological education not only for future clerics but for all persons who search for Truth.

Supplement. On Inter-faith Dialogue.

Let us read now some words from His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow Alexy II to show that Russian Orthodox Church understands how important is Inter-religious dialogue, as well as dialogue between religion and secular ideologies. It was an answer to the initiative of the 138 Muslim theologians who addressed an open letter to leaders of Christian Churches.

His Holiness begins his response by thanking all the Muslim religious leaders and scholars who sent an open letter to representatives of Christian Churches and organizations. 'Christians and Muslims', says the Patriarch, 'have many similar aims, and we can unite our efforts to achieve them. However, this unity will not occur if we fail to clarify our understanding of each other's religious values. In this connection, I welcome the desire of the Muslim community to begin a sincere and open dialogue with representatives of Christians Churches on a serious scholarly and intellectual level.'

According to His Holiness, 'Christianity and Islam are engaged today in a very important task in the world. They seek to remind humanity of the existence of God and of the spiritual dimension present both in man and the world. We bear witness to the interdependence of peace and justice, morality and law, truth and love.'

'Christians and Muslims', continues the Patriarch, 'are drawn together first of all by the commandment of the love of God and the love of one's neighbor. At the same time, I do not think it is worthwhile for us to identify a certain minimum that seems to fix our convergences in faith and to be theologically sufficient for the individual's religious life. Any doctrinal affirmation in Christianity or Islam cannot be viewed in isolation from its unique place in the integral theological system. Otherwise, one's religious identity will be obliterated to give rise to a danger of moving along the path of blending the faiths. It seems to be more fruitful, therefore, to study the integral faith of each side and to compare them.'

His Holiness then turns to the understanding of God as Love as the key point of Christian theology. The Divine nature 'has love as it's most essential, characteristic and important property.' The Christian concept of God the Trinity is interpreted against the background of the notion of God as love: 'A lonely isolated essence can love only itself: self-love is not love. Love always presupposes

¹¹ The head of Russian Orthodox delegation at the last WCC Assambley Bishop Hilarion (Alfeyev) told about a 'tactical alliance' with the Catholics to oppose liberal reforms that extend a divide in the Christian world: 'The gap between the traditional wing, represented mainly by Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church, and the liberal wing, represented by many Protestant churches, is only growing day by day... Traditional Christianity's very survival is in jeopardy of warrior secularism, warrior Islam or warrior liberalism present in Protestantism. We have no right to delay this strategic alliance, because in 20-40 years it will be too late', the bishop underscored. <http://www.rsnews.net/print.phtml?id=3594&lang=ENG>

the existence of the other. Just as an individual cannot be aware of himself as personality but only through his communication with other personalities, there cannot be personal being in God but through love of another personal being. That is why the New Testament speaks of God as one Being in three Persons - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is the unity of three Persons who have the same divine nature, which belongs to each of them in its fullness so that they are not three but one God. God the Trinity is the fullness of love with each hypostatic Person bespeaking love towards the other two hypostatic Persons. The Persons of the Trinity are aware of themselves as "I and you": "just as you are in me and I am in you" (John. 17, 21), Christ says to the Father. "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you", Christ says about the Holy Spirit (John. 16, 14). Therefore, every Hypostasis in the Trinity refers to the other Hypostasis.'

The Divine love is manifested not only in the communion of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, but also in God's revelation to the created world. The incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the humanity was a manifestation of Divine love: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John. 3, 16).

According to the biblical teaching, shared by the representatives of all the three Abrahamic religions, man was created in the image and after the likeness of God (Gen. 1, 26). This means, points His Holiness Patriarch Alexy, that 'God's love is communicated to human beings to become their inner property, their living force that determines, penetrates and forms their whole lives. Love in man arises in response to God's love.'

As the Patriarch of Moscow further states, 'the manifestation of man's true love of God is possible only if man is free. This freedom makes it possible to do good by fulfilling the will of God by choice, not only out of fear or for the sake of reward. The love of God inspires in man the selfless desire to fulfill His commandments. For, according to St. Isaac the Syrian, "Because of His great love, God was not pleased to restrict our freedom but was pleased to draw us near Him through the love of our own heart". Therefore, human freedom increases, extends and grows stronger as human beings grow in love of God, which is the core of human religious and moral perfection. Those who love God seek to emulate their Creator in their actions: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5, 48).'

His Holiness specifies that his letter does not have the aim of setting forth the entire Christian theology. He is convinced, however, that 'Christian and Muslim thinkers would benefit from regular studies of each other's doctrines in their fullness.' In this connection, he muses, 'it seems desirable to develop a doctrinal Christian-Islamic dialogue to broaden academic and research cooperation, to study doctrinal affirmations, to create an in-depth basis for developing multifaceted cooperation between our two religious communities.'

His Holiness notes that 'the doctrinal dialogue between the Orthodox Church and Islam has considerably intensified recently. This happened not only because we have to communicate more intensively and to build societal life together, but also because Christians and Muslims have come to face the same challenges which are impossible to meet on one's own.'

Among these challenges the Patriarch mentions 'a pressure from the anti-religious worldview that claims universality and seeks to subject all the spheres of life in society.' I would like to comment on this assertion by pointing out to the fact that, indeed, militant secularism and atheism, quickly gaining in numbers in Western world, lays claims to a monopoly on world views and remains intolerant of competition. Today's liberal humanists and atheists believe that there is no place for God in the public domain. For them, to mention God in documents of public significance, or to wear religious symbols in public places, violates the rights of unbelievers and agnostics. They forget, however, that the ban on mentioning God and wearing religious symbols discriminates equally against believers, who are refused the right to openly express their religious convictions. Thus, anti-religious worldview becomes a challenge for both Christians and Muslims alike, as well as for the representatives of other traditional religions.

Another challenge, states His Holiness, comes from 'attempts to assert a "new morality" that contradicts the moral norms supported by traditional religions.' This statement refers, in particular,

to the norms related to sexual ethics, and I would like to make a short excursus here in order to better understand the concerns of the Russian Orthodox Church and its spiritual leader.

In all traditional religions, including Christianity, Judaism and Islam, there is the notion of marriage as a divinely-established union between a man and a woman. Christianity insists on the uniqueness of marriage and the principle of its indissolubility, viewing divorce as a sin (although there are a number of exceptions to this rule). Traditional religions condemn all forms of fornication, adultery and marital infidelity, as well as prostitution and promiscuity.

Until the second half of the twentieth century the norms mentioned above were considered generally accepted in the majority of Western countries. However, the 'sexual revolution' which followed the Second World War and the outbreak of the feminist movement in the 1960s led to a radical transformation of family and sexual ethics. The avalanche-like liberalization of legislation concerning morality began and continues to this very day. The monumental social break with the past, unprecedented in scale and brought about by the sexual revolution, affected practically all Western countries. In less than half a century the traditional notions of the family and sex were overturned, making way for 'progressive' norms based on the liberal world-view. Not only did this radically change the entire face of Western liberal civilization, but it also created an unbridgeable gulf between it and those religions in which traditional family and sexual ethics continue to be adhered to.

One of the 'accomplishments' of the sexual revolution was the change of the traditionally negative attitude toward homosexual relations and other forms of sexuality which until recently were considered sexual deviations (e.g. bisexuality, transsexuality). This change is the result of well-planned action taken over the course of many years by advocates of the rights of sexual minorities to win over popular opinion and liberalize legislation in the area of sexual ethics. In each country events have unfolded according to the same scenario. First advocates for the rights of sexual minorities call for tolerance toward their lifestyle, and then obtain the legalization of homosexuality at the legislative level. This is followed by the battle for the full equality of homosexual unions with heterosexual ones and the recognition of the former as equal to marriage. Finally, homosexual couples manage to win the right to adopt and rear children. In various Western countries this process has taken place with varying degrees of speed, but nevertheless with the same, clearly visible general tendency toward the abolishment of all prohibitions and limitations in the area of sexuality. For the time being there remains one final frontier: the official sanctioning of the seduction of minors has not yet been given. But will activists of sexual freedom have to wait long to overcome this last hurdle?

I would like to stress that traditional Christianity in no way demands the renewal of repressions against members of sexual minorities and does not call for discrimination against them. However, the Church resists attempts to present a sinful tendency as a norm and opposes all means of propagating homosexuality. A large number of examples bear witness to the fact that in societies where the propagation of homosexuality is forbidden, this phenomenon, although it may exist, does not reach mass proportions (as in the case of Islamic countries). On the other hand, in places where the systematic propagation of homosexuality is carried out, this phenomenon acquires a mass character. Today in the West the rules of political correctness forbid any criticism of homosexuality, while its propagation through the mass media and the school system is encouraged and welcomed. The inculcation of a positive image of 'homosexual love' is one of the ideological paradigms of modern Western civilization, while the abolishment of 'discriminatory' laws concerning sexual minorities is demanded of all countries wishing to enter the 'civilized community.' These tendencies cannot but cause serious concern among traditional religions and should become a matter of special attention within the framework of the Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Setting objectives for such a dialogue, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church mentions that 'some people among both Christians and Muslims have expressed fears that the development of interreligious dialogue may lead to religious syncretism, a review of the doctrines and obliterated borders between religious traditions.' His Holiness believes, however, that 'a reasonable system of cooperation between religions helps to preserve and emphasize the unique nature and identity of

each of them. Moreover, the development of appropriate forms of interreligious dialogue in itself has proved to be a serious obstacle for manipulations aimed to establish a kind of universal super-religion.'

The Patriarch then turns to the experience of co-existence between Christianity and Islam in Russia. He notes that in Russia the traditional religions 'have never come into conflict while preserving their identity for a thousand years. Russia is one of those rare multi-religious and multinational states whose history has not known the religious wars that have plagued various regions of the world. The basic religious and ethical principles held by the traditional faiths in Russia invariably guided their followers toward cooperation with people of other religions and beliefs in the spirit of peace and harmony. Various religious communities lived side-by-side, working together and defending together their common Motherland. Nevertheless, they stood firm in the faith of their own forefathers, safeguarding it against encroachments from outside and often doing so together in face of invaders from other countries. To this day, our compatriots have not come into any real conflict between them based on religious grounds.'

The concluding part of the Patriarch's response to the Muslim theologians deals with concrete issues related to the co-existence of Christians and Muslims in various parts of the world. 'In many Muslim countries,' the Patriarch notes, 'Christians have enjoyed invariable support and have the freedom to live according to their own religious rules. However, in some Islamic countries, the legislation prohibits the construction of churches, worship services and free Christian preaching.'

Iraq, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia may serve as examples of places where the situation of Christians is desperate. In Iraq, the killing and abduction of Christian clergy is a daily reality. In Afghanistan, conversion to Christianity may lead to the death sentence. In Saudi Arabia, no single Christian church exists and Christian workers are not allowed to read the Bible or to come together for worship. Alarming news about the persecution and killing of Christians comes from Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, as well as from many African nations. The Patriarch of Moscow expresses his hope 'that the letter of Islamic religious leaders and scholars proposing to intensify dialogue between our two religions will contribute to establishing better conditions for Christian minorities in such countries.'

According to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, 'on the practical plan the Christian-Muslim cooperation could be aimed at safeguarding the role of religion in public life, struggling with the defamation of religion, overcoming intolerance and xenophobia, protecting holy places, preserving places of worship and promoting joint peace initiatives.' This relates, in particular, to the Kosovo region, where churches are being brutally destroyed, and thousands of Christians are left homeless or forced into exile. Another such region is that part of Cyprus which is still unlawfully occupied by Turkish military forces, where churches are being ruined and Christian population continues to suffer excessively.

Turkey aspires towards membership in the European Union, while at the same time continuing to neglect the needs of its Christian population. Turkey's refusal to reopen the theological school on Halki, in spite of repeated requests from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, is but one of many examples of such neglect. One hopes that Christian-Muslim dialogue will help to make sure that the Christian minority in Turkey will be treated according to civilized standards.

Concluding his response to the Muslim leaders, His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow states: 'It is my conviction that it is precisely the Christians and the Muslims that should initiate inter-religious dialogue on regional and global level. Therefore, in the framework of international organizations, it seems useful to create mechanisms that make it possible to be more sensitive to the spiritual and cultural traditions of various peoples.' This is a clear call to concrete actions which will significantly intensify the Christian-Muslim cooperation and may lead to a breakthrough in the relationship between major world religions.