

I. THEOLOGIA W PERSPEKTYWIE EKUMENII

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CHALLENGES FOR ECUMENICAL LEARNING IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY¹

Introduction

This seminar for young lecturers and professors of theology, organized jointly by WCC/ETE, CEC, and the Academy of Volos on „The Future of Theological Education in Central and Eastern Europe” is a significant initiative by these ecumenical organizations responding to a need that has been neglected far too long – at least by the WCC, i.e. directing the reflection on the future of theological education to the specific situation of churches and institutions for theological education in Central and Eastern Europe.

Considering the involvement of the WCC, it is true that its former Programme on Theological Education organized a consultation on theological education in Europe 28 years ago in Herrnhut. Among the preparatory regional groups was also a group in Eastern Europe; however it had only two Orthodox members (from Russia and Poland) and its contribution reflected almost exclusively the situation in the Protestant churches. Financial and other limitations prevented a follow-up to this first effort to address questions of theological education in Europe from an ecumenical perspective. Many of the recommendations of the consultation remain valid, however, and we shall return to some at the end of this lecture.

¹ Opening address at the consultation on „The Future of Theological Education in Central and Eastern Europe” at the Sambata Monastery, Romania, 25 September 2008.

Already two years earlier, i.e. in 1978, and under auspices of the same WCC programme, a consultation had been organized on „Orthodox Theological Education for the Life and Witness of the Church”. It brought together representatives of Orthodox Theological Schools in Armenia, Czechoslovakia, France, Georgia, Greece, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Romania, USA, USSR, and Yugoslavia, thus including most of the relevant countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The meeting addressed in particular three themes which were meant to „challenge and stretch the understandings and practices in Orthodox theological education today”. These were: (1) Ministry of the Eucharistic Liturgy and the Ministry of the ‘Liturgy after the Liturgy’; (2) Extending the Benefit of Theological Education Beyond the Ordained Ministry to the People of God; (3) The Ecumenical Dimension in Orthodox Theological Education. The initiative for this consultation was warmly welcomed by the participants and the PTE/WCC was encouraged to provide further opportunities for such exchanges and to deal with ecumenical demands „both inherent in the Orthodox tradition and as they are present in contemporary situations”. However, once again there does not seem to have been a deliberate follow up to this initiative, either from the side of the WCC or from Orthodox churches.

In 1996 the WCC’s ETE organized the global consultation on the „Viability of Ecumenical Theological Education” at Oslo. It was the culmination of a three-year programme and brought together a broad cross-section of participants from over 40 countries, including Orthodox and other representatives from Central and Eastern Europe. In its assessment of the challenges facing Ecumenical Theological Education the consultation pointed to the „dramatic changes in institutions for theological education particularly in Eastern Europe (which) demand new attention and a counterpart in the WCC”. It acknowledged „that the particular challenges of theological education institutions in Eastern Europe, both of Orthodox and Protestant/Catholic churches, had received little attention during this conference and deserve more deliberate focus in the future working period of ETE.” Therefore, after the Harare Assembly in 1998, the WCC, in a conscious effort at regionalizing its programmatic work in ecumenical theological education, appointed a consultant for the region of Central and Eastern Europe in the person of Fr. Vladimir Fedorov from St. Petersburg who had already been present at the consultation in Herrnhut in 1980. The work and the experiences of Fr. Vladimir, which will be reflected in his contribution later today, will form an important background for this present meeting.

The Conference of European Churches, on the other hand, which had in earlier years kept a directory of European institutions of theological education, and thus facilitated an initial process of networking and exchange, recently has acknowledged the importance of theological education in any effort of strengthening the spirit of ecumenical cooperation among the European churches. Thus, it

has organized two consultations of Theological Faculties in Europe in 2002 and 2006. The Final Declaration of the first consultation of July 2002, recommended as a concrete step to convene „Europe-wide consultations on theological issues and education regularly every two to three years; setting up partnerships between different educational institutions independently of the confessional ties of each; and finally, as a long-range goal, the creation of an Ecumenical Conference of European Theological Faculties, Colleges and Institutions.” The 2nd consultation, meeting in 2006 at Graz under the theme „The Challenges of Theology in a Pluralistic Europe” discussed in particular the Bologna Process as an ecumenical challenge to develop new forms of cooperation and the consequences for the mutual recognition of academic achievement. It specified and strengthened the earlier recommendation and agreed that a permanent body be established called the „Conference of Theological Formation, Faculties and Colleges in Europe” to be based in Graz. It also proposed to create a web-site to facilitate exchange and to set up a planning committee to implement these recommendations. Neither of these two consultations, however, seems to have given particular attention to the issues regarding theological education arising specifically in Central and Eastern Europe.

Further, the *Charta Oecumenica* of 2001 which was prepared jointly by CEC and the CCEE declares in section 3 „Moving towards one another”: „It is important to acknowledge the spiritual riches of the different Christian traditions, to learn from one another and so to receive these gifts. For the ecumenical movement to flourish it is particularly necessary to integrate the experiences and expectations of young people and actively encourage their participation.” The *Charta* then adds the following commitment:

- „to overcome the feeling of self-sufficiency within each church, and to eliminate prejudices; to seek mutual encounters and to be available to help one another;
- to promote ecumenical openness and co-operation in Christian education, and in theological training, continuing education and research.”

These commitments find an echo in the third recommendation of the final message of the 3. European Ecumenical Assembly at Sibiu in 2007 which says: „We recommend finding ways of experiencing the activities which can unite us: prayer for each other and for unity, ecumenical pilgrimages, theological formation and study in common, social and diaconal initiatives, cultural projects, supporting society life based on Christian values.”

Our consultation here at Sambata Monastery, thus, is the first intentional effort to focus on the ecumenical challenges facing theological education in Central and Eastern Europe.

I. Central and Eastern Europe as an ecumenical region with regard to theological education

In spite of the initiatives mentioned before, the issue of theological education in Europe has not received much attention in ecumenical discussion. The respective efforts of the WCC through the TEF, the PTE and more recently the ETE focussed primarily on assisting churches in the Southern hemisphere to develop processes and institutions of theological education. The forms and traditions of theological education in the historic Protestant churches in Europe and in North America initially served as the model and provided the standard for curriculum and faculty development. With the second mandate of the TEF the concern for contextualization emerged which subsequently led to new forms of theological education, especially the new model of theological education by extension. Through the PTE the understanding and practice of theological education was opened up beyond the traditional processes of forming future pastors and priests as professional leaders of Christian communities. Theological education was now seen as an ongoing process involving the whole people of God, clergy and laity, enabling and supporting them to assume multiple forms of ministry in church and society. The central concept of „ministerial formation” provided the focus and guideline for ecumenical efforts in this field since the early 1980s.

The consultations at Herrnhut in 1980 and at Oslo in 1996 showed clearly that the processes of theological education in Europe had remained largely unaffected by these new orientations in theological education. The traditional focus on academic training for pastors and priests was still dominant, conditioned by the institutional needs of the historic Protestant churches and of their understanding of the role of theology in the life of the churches. Both at Herrnhut and at Oslo interesting case studies were presented also from Europe about new endeavours trying to appropriate the perspective of theological education for the whole people of God. However, they remained an exception and did not challenge the traditional format of theological education as an academic discipline. While it was recognized that the situation of churches in Central and Eastern Europe was significantly different from that of the churches in the Western part of the continent, no effort was undertaken to analyse more closely the specific needs of the churches in this sub-region in terms of theological education.

With the exception of Greece, all the countries in this region until 1989/90 had lived under communist governments which left a profound mark on the life and witness of the churches. Theological education in most countries was strictly controlled and limited by government restriction and there was little if any room for educational efforts beyond the formal processes of training future pastors and priests. Poland and the former GDR represented somewhat special cases for the

Protestant and Catholic churches respectively. But most churches faced difficulties defending even the most basic arrangements for theological education.

Things changed fundamentally after the end of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe. Most of you have experienced these rapid developments in your own life, first as young Christian people, then as students and now as lecturers and professors of theology. There is no need for me as an outsider from Western Europe to describe these changes in detail. What is important in this present context is the fact that in these past almost 20 years the region of Central and Eastern Europe has begun to assume a profile of its own which is clearly different from the European West and calls for more focussed ecumenical attention

The most significant feature is of course the fact that Central, and even more Eastern Europe are marked by the strongest Orthodox presence among all ecumenical regions. The Orthodox churches in Russia, Belo-Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Albania and of course Greece represent the largest Orthodox constituency worldwide. All of them have experienced a remarkable revival after the end of communism and have faced the need to rebuild their structures and services to respond to the growing number of faithful. In many ways their experience during these two decades is comparable to the development in the growing Christian churches and communities in the Southern hemisphere, the main difference being that the Orthodox churches were carriers of an old tradition of theological education which now had to be adapted to the new social and political circumstances. New academies, seminaries and monasteries were opened up and in some countries, especially Romania and Bulgaria, theological faculties were re-established in State universities. The most important challenge was- and still is – to develop forms of theological education for a generation of young and older people who have had little or no Christian socialization.

The Catholic Church in Poland and the Protestant churches in the former GDR had been able to maintain most of their institutions of theological education even during the time of communist rule. For the Protestant minority churches in Central and Eastern Europe the new situation presented challenges and opportunities. In Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and in Transsilvania autonomous faculties or academies had been maintained and could regain academic recognition. New academies or faculties for the training of pastors and teachers of religion were opened in Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia and Russia for the Lutheran churches. The Baptist churches meanwhile have established 14 seminaries in Central and Eastern Europe with the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague serving as the central academic institution. The United Methodist Church has made major investments in order to strengthen facilities and faculties at the Russia United Methodist Theological Seminary and the Baltic Theological Seminary – and to support training institutions

in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Hungary. All of these institutions concentrate efforts on training clergy and teachers of religion for the immediate needs of their growing communities. Contacts and exchanges of students and teachers beyond the own context are largely limited to cooperation with other institutions within the same church family.

Ecumenical relations in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have suffered for a long time from the same restrictions and the political pressures imposed by the communist governments. In the Czech Republic and in Slovakia, in Poland and Hungary, Estonia and Romania, as well as Serbia (and Montenegro) ecumenical councils exist (in some cases already for decades). All of them include the Protestant and Orthodox churches and some cases also, as observers, the Roman Catholic Church. In the majority Orthodox countries, on the other hand, no structures for ecumenical cooperation have so far emerged, with the exception of the Ecumenical Association (Aidrom) in Romania. This reflects the difficult relationships between majority and minority churches which in some cases have developed into open tensions. Points of conflict have been the practice of evangelistic outreach by some of the Protestant communities as well as the formulation of new state legislation regarding the recognition and status of religious communities. On the whole, both majority and minority *at.* churches are primarily concerned to strengthen their own structures and profile, in the case of the Protestant minority churches often relying on assistance from partner churches of the same denominational family in Western Europe and North America. Denominational solidarity and the search for public recognition take precedence over ecumenical cooperation. This has consequences, of course, for the place of ecumenical relations in the field of theological education. This state of affairs is by no means limited to the region of Central and Eastern Europe. In fact, we observe almost everywhere that denominationalism is beginning to affect theological education which has always been an indicator of the self-understanding of the respective churches.

One final point should be added which also relates to the recommendations of the 2nd consultation organized by CEC in 2006: Most of the countries in Central Europe have meanwhile become members of the European Union, thus creating a new line of division between Central and Eastern Europe respectively, affecting in particular the countries with an Orthodox majority. Students and teachers from institutions of theological education in Central Europe can – in principle – move freely within the EU, participate in academic exchange programmes and progressively experience the impact of the so called „Bologna Process” of creating Europe-wide standards for accreditation and recognition of academic achievements. The predominantly Orthodox institutions in Eastern Europe, i.e. in Russia, Belo-Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, and Georgia risk being disconnected

from these newly emerging European networks, thus creating special challenges for ecumenical cooperation.

II. The challenge of ecumenical learning²

The theme for this opening lecture places the reflections about the future of theological education in Central and Eastern Europe under a very specific perspective: i.e. the challenge of ecumenical learning. Why „ecumenical learning”, and not ecumenical education or formation? Is „learning” in this context only another term for those more familiar concepts? Does the emphasis in this formulation lie primarily on „ecumenical” or on „learning”? And: where is the challenge? Does it refer to the unresolved question of how to introduce the new reality of the ecumenical movement and the emerging common tradition between the churches into the existing forms and curricula of theological education, or is there more to it?

If we look at the conditions of theological education in Central and Eastern Europe with these questions in mind, there is the obvious challenge to catch up with a process that began in other parts of the world, and especially in Western Europe and North America, following the 2ⁿ Vatican Council, but from which they were largely excluded due to political circumstances. I refer to the fact that ecumenical formation had increasingly been introduced into curricula for the training of candidates for the ministry. A growing number of seminaries and theological faculties in those years had established chairs for the teaching of ecumenics and academic institutes for ecumenical research, particularly focussing on the developing network of bilateral dialogues between different church traditions. Part II of the Ecumenical Directory, issued in 1970 by the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, is devoted entirely to the issues of ecumenism in higher education and offers special guidelines for introducing the ecumenical dimension into programmes of religious and theological education. To my knowledge no other church has taken up the ecumenical challenge with regard to processes of theological education with similar seriousness.

Meanwhile, however, we observe a reversal of these efforts to introduce elements of ecumenical teaching and research into the existing programmes of theological education. Almost everywhere, the ecumenical dimension in theological education has been weakened again, and even formerly interdenominational theological schools or coalitions of different denominational theological institutions

² In the following I have drawn from and adapted earlier writings on the subject; cf. esp. *Fifty Years of Ecumenical Formation: Where are we? Where are we going?* in: ER 1996/4, 440ff, and *Ecumenism in Transition. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC/Geneva 1991, esp. 2Iff, 108f.

are being dissolved in favour of a renewed denominational orientation. It is perhaps indicative that this development was hardly discussed and analysed during the Oslo conference on the viability of theological education. It is increasingly being taken for granted again that, prior to ecumenical encounter and dialogue, the participants need to be firmly rooted in their own tradition. While ecumenism is still being acknowledged as a dimension of all parts of theological education, and while interdenominational cooperation between the different theological disciplines has become an accepted practice, there is less and less emphasis on ecumenical formation in the sense of an intentional initiation of candidates for the ministry into ecumenical discussion.

It was significant, therefore, that the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches provided a new impulse and challenge by publishing in 1993 a study document on „Ecumenical Formation: Ecumenical Reflections and Suggestions”³. The document opens with a strong reminder of the „ecumenical imperative”, i.e. the call to unity which reaches beyond the unity of followers of Christ and embraces the missionary vocation, nourished by the „eschatological vision of the transformation and unity of humankind” (Nr. 1). After long periods of disobedience to this basic imperative, the churches have begun to respond again to the call to unity, but the spirit of ecumenism needs nurturing. „Ecumenical formation – the document affirms- is an ongoing process of learning within the various local churches and world communions, aimed at informing a guiding people in the movement which – inspired by the Holy Spirit – seeks the visible unity of Christians” (Nr. 9).

Ecumenical formation is then described as a process of exploration, education and learning. „The language of formation and learning refers to some degree to a body of knowledge to be absorbed. That is important; but formation and learning require a certain bold openness to living ecumenically as well” (Nr. 12). It therefore goes beyond formal educational programmes and takes place „in the daily life of church and people” (Nr. 13). Nevertheless, the document insists „on the strategic importance of giving priority to the ecumenical formation of those who have special responsibility for ministry and leadership in the churches” (Nr. 13).

Since ecumenical formation is an essential part of „the process of building community in the one household of God” (16), it must be „rooted in an ecumenical spirituality and in a praxis of learning in community. It must „endeavour to eliminate polemic and to further mutual understanding, reconciliation and the healing of memories” (22). The search for true community should include the openness for dialogue with people of other faiths and should „promote the cause of freedom,

³ Published in: *Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. Seventh Report*, Geneva-Rome 1998, 53ff.

human rights, justice and peace everywhere, and thus actively (...) contribute to a renewed movement towards human solidarity in obedience to God's will" (24). For, the churches are called „to render a common witness to all humankind by pointing to the vision of the new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1)" (26).

This study document can be read as a concise summary of ecumenical discussions on the importance of processes of formation and learning in response to the ecumenical imperative. It tries to hold together the task of ecumenical formation for those with ministerial and leadership responsibilities and the processes of learning which take place in everyday life and are directed towards building up the true community in the one household of God. While it strongly affirms the ecumenical imperative of the call to Christian unity, its vision of ecumenism reaches out to the renewal of human community under the eschatological perspective of a new heaven and a new earth.

However, the synthetic character of the study document tends to cover up the tension between two different understandings of the process of education which has been present in the ecumenical discussion for the last more than 80 years. On the one hand there is the dominant conception of education as a formalized and institution-based process by which people are being introduced into the traditions and order of a given community; on the other hand we have the understanding of education as the process of empowerment for a holistic and responsible life that is able to integrate new and conflicting experiences and to connect them with what is considered reliable and trustworthy. Already an early working definition of ecumenical education by the WCC Central Committee in 1957 draws attention to the fact that ecumenical education could no longer be limited to imparting knowledge about the history of efforts for Christian unity or about the development and growth of the ecumenical movement. Rather, ecumenical education at its core should aim at nurturing understanding for this comprehensive ecumenical process that embraces unity, mission and renewal of the churches, leading to active engagement and informed participation. It is the ultimate aim of the process to enable the churches to be truly church; realizing and living out the ecumenical commitment of one's own church then becomes even more important than appropriating information about the growth of ecumenical consensus.

The new concept of „ecumenical learning", which has its place in this tension between different conceptions of education, emerged gradually in the late 1960s and early 70s in response to the broader international discussion about formal vs. non-formal processes of education on the one hand, and to the widening of the ecumenical vision to embrace not only the unity of the people of God but affirm God's promise for the future of the whole inhabited earth. The concept was meant to express the insight that the ecumenical movement itself had to be understood as an open and ongoing process of learning. Ernst Lange, German theologian and, as a former associate general secretary of the WCC, one of the early

pioneers in the discussion on ecumenical learning, underlined this insight in an article in 1971 by affirming: „From the very beginning the biblical promise has been an ‘ecumenical’ promise. The Christian conscience must adjust itself to the larger household to which it was called from the beginning and towards which it was oriented all along, the household of the inhabited earth. It must appropriate its new, even its original sense of time and of the world as a whole. This is a programme of learning in the most comprehensive sense of the term”⁴. For him ecumenical learning aimed at liberating Christian communities from the limitations of their parochial mentality and empowering them for participation and change. Ecumenical learning in this sense is learning by experience rather than by appropriating information. The decisive learning experiences take place in dealing with conflicting experiences in everyday life. According to a statement by the Evangelical Church in Germany dated 1985, ecumenical learning is „about crossing frontiers and involvement in action; it is about learning together with others and making connections; it includes intercultural learning and is an integrated process”⁵.

In the further discussion, ecumenical learning was developed into a methodology to nurture ecumenical awareness on all levels of the churches’ life. However, more and more it tended to become once again a way of introducing ecumenical content into the work of Christian education at all levels, especially information about global problems and their interconnectedness. People were taught to „think globally and to act locally”; however, the local action corresponding to the global thinking very rarely was an integral element in the learning process, let alone its starting point – as the theory would have it. But ecumenical learning without participation tends to become reduced to the transmission of information and knowledge unrelated to the actual experiences of people. It is important, therefore, to move beyond the abstraction of the local and the global. Ecumenical learning does not mean absorbing items of information about global problems. Rather, it means – using the language of Ernst Lange – to enter into the reality of the larger household of God’s oikoumene which is in itself an interconnected web of small and very small households that are dependent on one another. The process of learning begins with experiencing the distinctive difference of another household, another community, and its aims at discovering and establishing connections. Precisely the experience of conflicts and contradictions, the discovery that everyday life situations are not all at the same stage of development, can set off processes of ecumenical learning. The attendant uncertainty and the threat to one’s traditional identity can be transformed through the hope of Christian faith

⁴ E. LANGE, *The Malaise in the Ecumenical Movement. Notes on the Present Situation*, in: ER 1971/1, 1-8, quotation translated from the German by KR. p. 8.

⁵ *Ökumenisches Lernen. Grundlagen und Impulse*, Gütersloh 1985, 17.

into productive enthusiasm for learning. Learning ultimately means, as was affirmed by Philip Potter in his report as General Secretary to the Vancouver assembly of the WCC, to experience the goodness, truth, righteousness and peace of God, as they have become visible in Jesus Christ, and, by entering into this global context of all life, to contribute to the world's becoming the one household of God⁶. The basic biblical model for ecumenical learning is walking in the way of Jesus who transformed the love of the neighbour in one's own group into the love of the enemy, who dared to address God as the Father of all humans, and who through offering up his own life laid the foundation for a renewed human community among those who are divided from one another on the basis of race, class, gender, language, culture and tradition.

It should be obvious from this brief summary of earlier discussions on ecumenical learning that the concept stands for a challenge that goes to the core of the life of Christian communities in their relationship with God, with one another and with the world around. The concept has helped to interpret the process of ecumenical renewal as a process of learning that is ongoing and does not have a definitive end. It challenges the tendency to consider the identity and tradition of one's own community as something to be preserved and defended against influences from outside by pointing to the fundamental insight that all Christian identities and traditions have been shaped by processes of continuous learning and exchange. Relationships with others are built into the process of identity formation from the beginning either as a positive value or as a perceived threat. Ecumenical learning challenges the Christian communities to discover and acknowledge their relatedness to one another – their „catholic” character – and to shape and transform these with the aim of manifesting the true *koinonia* to which they are called in Jesus Christ. The challenge thus transcends the tension between the different conceptions of education, but the question whether and how the churches respond to the challenge will have consequences for the ways in which they shape their activities in the field of education, including in particular theological education.

III. Consequences for the future of theological education in Central and Eastern Europe

In order to spell out the challenge of ecumenical learning for the future of theological education in Central and Eastern Europe we have to return to the admittedly very general description of the situation which was given before. In a preliminary way one can discern three different and largely unconnected profiles of theological education.

⁶ *Gathered for Life. Report of the Vancouver Assembly 1983, WCC/Geneva 1983, 200.*

There is, first, the particular tradition of theological education in the Orthodox churches. While some local Orthodox churches have adopted the Western academic model of theological faculties integrated into state universities with a priority focus on the education and training of teachers of religion, most of the Orthodox churches have maintained the classical system with a basic seminary education for priests who during their period of training are integrated into the spiritual and liturgical discipline of a monastic community, and a church related theological academy for the advanced training of those who are to assume wider leadership responsibilities in the church. Orthodox theological education is directed towards introducing candidates into the living tradition of the church, its liturgy and its patristic heritage. It is intentionally and intimately linked with the ongoing life of the church as a worshipping community but so far has been very hesitant to open itself up for processes of genuine ecumenical exchange with other forms and traditions of theological education. In some Orthodox churches new forms of theological education also for lay people have been developed. But generally, theological education focuses on the needs of the churches for future priests.

In several addresses and articles Petros Vassiliadis from Thessaloniki, an active participant in the debate about ecumenical theological education, has articulated challenges for Orthodox theological education, focussing especially on the need to hold together the demands for catholicity and contextuality⁷. Affirming the eucharistic vision that is at the centre of Orthodox self-understanding he draws out the implications for theological education: it „should always refer to *communion* as an ultimate constitutive element of being, in other words it should have relevance for the *relational* dimension of life, and therefore be in continuous and dynamic dialogue, not only in the form of theological conversation among Churches or Christian communities in order to promote the visible unity of the one body of Christ, but also with people of other faiths, even with the secular world (...). Theological education in the Orthodox world can only survive, it can only be of some real service to the Church, if it decides to deal with current issues, without of course loosing sight of the past; if it focuses attention in a substantial way on history, without denying its eschatological orientation. Christian theology (...) is about the struggle to apply the eschatological vision of the Church to the historical realities and to the social and cosmic life.”⁸ He then mentions a list of emerging issues which demand more attention by the Orthodox in the 3^r millennium but comes to the conclusion that „in most Orthodox theological institu-

⁷ cf. P. VASILIADIS, *The Future of Theological Education in Europe*, in: *Oikoumene and Theology. 1993-95 Erasmus Lectures in Ecumenical Theology*, ed. by P. VASSILIADIS, Thessaloniki 1996, 11-24; P.V., *Theological Education and Orthodox Issues for the 3^r Millennium*, in: „Ministerial Formation”, July 2000, 15-21.

⁸ P. VASSILIADIS, *Theological Education and Orthodox Issues* (...), loc. cit. 19.

tions there is no such thing as ecumenical theological education". He observes with particular concern a „dangerous shift towards fundamentalism, to such an extent that some circles within Orthodoxy seriously consider, and even press in the direction of, abandoning any ecumenical effort, even withdrawing from all multilateral and bilateral fora of ecumenical dialogue."⁹ These observations by an ecumenically committed Orthodox colleague should help to clarify the challenge of ecumenical learning as described before.

The second profile is represented by the forms and institutions for theological education in the historic Protestant minority churches, especially those of Lutheran or Reformed Tradition. They have maintained or restored the system of academic theological education for future pastors at theological faculties, e.g. the Comenius Faculty in Prague or the Latvia University at Riga, or at church-sponsored academies like in Estonia, Hungary or Poland, reflecting and honouring the central role of theology as an academic discipline for the self-understanding of the churches of the Reformation, but also in the Roman Catholic Church. Given the fact that this has remained the dominant tradition among the large Protestant churches in Western Europe which have generally neglected the challenges of ecumenical learning, the much smaller churches in Central Europe have so far concentrated their efforts on rebuilding and strengthening their institutions in order to meet the same standards of excellence in academic formation and research. Some of the institutions have begun to enter into relationships of ecumenical cooperation and exchange, e.g. through the „Societas Oecumenica", the European association for ecumenical studies. Special institutes for ecumenical studies exist in Budapest, Lviv, and Prague. However, the challenge of ecumenical learning so far has had only limited impact on theological education in these churches. The efforts of the Federation of Protestant Churches in the former GDR to reconsider in a fundamental way the relationship between theological education for future pastors and for lay-people, to develop a new understanding of ministry embracing the role of pastors and the task of community-based education (Gemeindepädagogik) and to reconceptualize accordingly the structures and processes of ministerial formation remained without lasting effect due to the unification of Germany and the termination of the framework of the Federation of Protestant churches. This experiment could have served as a model also for other Protestant churches in Central Europe who are facing the same missionary challenges and who are trying out new forms of theological education preparing people for the different ministries in the church.

This leaves as the third profile the shape of theological education among the evangelical communities, especially those of Baptist or Methodist tradition, but including also the more recent communities of Pentecostal and charismatic

⁹ *Ibid.* 20.

background. Theological education in these churches traditionally takes place at church-sponsored seminaries or bible schools. It is community oriented rather than responding to abstract academic standards and integrates a strong missionary and evangelistic thrust. The existing frameworks for ecumenical cooperation with other churches do encourage some exchanges also in the field of theological education, especially with other Protestant churches. But generally the strong emphasis on denominational identity does not leave much room for integrating an ecumenical dimension into the curricula for theological education.

If this brief survey is reasonably fair, we understand the nature of the challenge of ecumenical learning for theological education in Central and Eastern Europe. What is at issue is not only the addition of elements of ecumenical theology into the curricula of theological schools and seminaries, but the question to what extent the basic orientation of theological education reflects the fundamental relational nature of being church, its vocation to live as a true *koinonia* in relationship with God, with other Christian communities and with the wider human community and the world as God's creation. The understanding of ecumenical learning that was affirmed in the final report of the Herrnhut consultation on „Theological Education in Europe” in 1980 still holds true: „We understand ecumenical learning not as a separate part or sub-division of theology, even if for the time being attention may need to be drawn to it in specific ways if it is not to suffer neglect. It is a dimension of all theology and theological education. It has to do with the readiness to experience and take account of other confessions of Christian faith, other religious traditions, and other social and cultural realities, in order to see things whole. It has to do with local and concrete issues, not parochially but in the awareness of the whole inhabited earth and in the perspective of unity in Christ”¹⁰

The same Herrnhut report then goes on to underline that theology should be understood as an activity of all God's people „in the light of God's revelation and in active obedience, which constitutes the mission of the Church in the world (...). Theology is the corporate work of a community in which a certain style of relationships becomes extremely important (...). The corporate nature of theology is but one reflection of the corporate nature of the Church's ministry. Therefore, theological education must be made available for and engage all the people of God”¹¹.

The report concludes with a number of recommendations specifically concerning the ecumenical perspective in theological education. These recommendations remain valid even almost 30 years later and might serve as an indication of practical steps to begin responding to the challenge of ecumenical learning.

¹⁰ *Theological Education in Europe. Herrnhut*, October 1980. PTEAVCC 1980, 13.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 13f.

- „We recommend that institutions of theological education consider the appointment of persons who will not only offer courses in ecumenics but work with the whole educational community to ensure global, interfaith, and interconfessional perspectives in all courses and programmes.
- We recommend that information about other churches and their traditions be given an important place in theological education and that wherever possible this information be presented in person by representatives of those churches and traditions.
- We recommend that wherever possible firsthand experience of the liturgical and spiritual life of other Christian traditions be provided.
- We recommend that, as a means to ecumenical awareness, students and teachers be encouraged to learn other living languages and to engage in dialogue with persons of other cultures.
- We recommend that opportunities be sought to enrich the learning resources of institutions by exchange of faculty members and students from different traditions and educational centres within Europe and beyond”¹².

While it is obvious that the challenge of ecumenical learning reaches beyond the forms and structures of theological education and goes to the very self-understanding of the churches as a community of learning, it should be clear as well that theological education plays a significant role in assisting the churches to respond to the ecumenical imperative. I hope that this consultation can initiate a process that will bear fruit in the years to come.

Wyzwania dla ekumenicznego wymiaru teologicznej edukacji w XXI wieku

Streszczenie

Artykuł Konrada Raisera stanowi zapis wystąpienia w monasterze Sambata w Rumunii na konsultacji pt. „Przyszłość Edukacji teologicznej w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej”. Konferencja ta sytuuje się w ciągu konsultacji odbywanych na przestrzeni ostatnich kilkunastu lat przy wydatnym zaangażowaniu Światowej Rady Kościołów. Dotychczas jednak tematyka edukacji teologicznej nie była stawiana na pierwszym miejscu.

¹² *Ibid.* 16.

Konsultacje przeprowadzone w Herrnhut w 1980 r. i w Oslo w 1996 ujawniły w krajach Europy Środkowej i Wschodniej tradycyjne struktury edukacji teologicznej, nastawionej na kształcenie duchowieństwa. Do 1989/90 kraje tego obszaru – z wyjątkiem Grecji – poddane były reżimowi komunistycznemu. Ścisła kontrola państwa nie pozostawiała miejsca na inne formy edukacji teologicznej, jak przygotowanie przyszłych księży i pastorów. Nieco lepiej wyglądała sytuacja edukacji teologicznej w katolickiej Polsce i ewangelickiej NRD. Europa Wschodnia, o przeważającej obecności kościołów prawosławnych otrzymała po 1990 r. impuls do gwałtownego rozwoju tłumionej wcześniej edukacji teologicznej. Posiadając wielowiekowe tradycje w tej dziedzinie, kościoły te musiały ją jedynie adaptować do nowych warunków. Otwierano nowe akademie, seminaria, a wydziały teologii zostały przywrócone do państwowych uniwersytetów.

Podobny rozkwit przeżyły katolickie i protestanckie instytucje edukacji teologicznej. W krajach o większości katolickiej i protestanckiej już dawniej istniały, albo też po okresie przełomu 1990 r. powstały Rady Ekumeniczne, zrzeszające Kościoły prawosławne i protestanckie, niekiedy także Kościół rzymskokatolicki na zasadzie obserwatora. Niestety, z wyjątkiem Rumunii ciała takie są nadal nieobecne w krajach o większości prawosławnej.

Odnotować należy fakt wzmocnienia edukacji teologicznej w Kościele rzymskokatolickim po Soborze Watykańskim II, dzięki zapisom *Dyrektorium ekumenicznego*. Wiele otwarcia wniósł też dokument studyjny grupy Watykan–Geneva z 1993 r. pt. *Formacja ekumeniczna. Refleksje i sugestie ekumeniczne*. Stwierdzić jednak trzeba, że rozwój edukacji ekumenicznej w Kościele katolickim pod koniec XX wieku zbiegł się z umacnianiem się tendencji do konfesjonalizmu, ujawniającej się w nawet od wielu lat działających wielowyznaniowych teologicznych instytucjach edukacyjnych.

Ostatnia część artykułu poświęcona jest wytycznym na przyszłość dla edukacji teologicznej w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. Wyzwaniem dla teologicznej edukacji w prawosławiu, wciąż nastawionej głównie na kształcenie jedynie duchowieństwa, jest otwarcie się na potrzebę teologicznej interpretacji współczesności oraz na zaangażowanie ekumeniczne.

Wyzwaniem dla kościołów protestanckich, które zachowały tradycyjne nauczanie akademickie nakierowane na potrzeby własnych konfesji, jest rozwijanie już istniejących instytucji edukacji ekumenicznej w kontekście teologii ekumenicznej. W przypadku protestanckich wspólnot ewangelikalnych, formy edukacji teologicznej nastawione są głównie na udział szerokiej publiczności i mają charakter ewangelizacyjno-misyjny.

Na zakończenie artykułu Autor przytoczył zalecenie raportu z Herrnhut (1980) i konkludował: „Edukacja teologiczna odgrywa istotną rolę wspomagającą Kościoły w odpowiedzi na imperatyw ekumeniczny”.