

**WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
International Inter-Orthodox Consultation
on**

**The Ecumenical Movement in Theological Education
and in the Life of Orthodox Churches
Sibiu, Romania, 9-12 November 2010**

COMMUNIQUE

...Love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches, so that they should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as being a part of the household of Christ and "fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ" (Eph. 3:6).

*Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (1920):
"To the Churches of Christ Everywhere"*

At the initiative of the of the World Council of Churches, with the blessing of H.B. Patriarch Daniel of Romania and the gracious hospitality of H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Laurentiu of Ardeal, with the collaboration of the Orthodox Theological Faculty "Andrei Saguna" of Sibiu and with H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (Ecumenical Patriarchate) serving as moderator, representatives from various Eastern Orthodox Churches (Ecumenical Patriarchate, Patriarchate of Alexandria, Patriarchate of Antioch, Moscow Patriarchate, Patriarchate of Romania, Patriarchate of Bulgaria, Church of Cyprus, Church of Greece, Church of Poland, Church of Albania and the Orthodox Church in America), from Oriental Orthodox Churches (Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church), from the Conference of European churches (CEC) and theological institutions met in Sibiu to reflect on and make proposals concerning *"The Ecumenical Movement in Theological Education and in the Life of Orthodox Churches."*

The main purpose of the meeting was to consider how the Orthodox Churches and theological schools have been involved in the modern ecumenical movement from its very beginning, and what steps forward they might take today.

Indeed theological institutions through their professors, educators and graduates, have played a crucial role for the Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement, and they have contributed significantly in:

- (a) developing an ecumenical ethos within the Orthodox Churches, by participating in ecumenical gatherings as representatives of their Churches;*
- (b) articulating an Orthodox theological discourse responding to the major issues and challenges included in the ecumenical agenda;*
- (c) assessing the developments within the ecumenical movement and keeping their Churches, their colleagues and their students regularly informed; and*
- (d) teaching ecumenical studies in educational institutions at different levels.*

Theological educators are entrusted by the Churches with the ecumenical-theological formation of the next generations of clergy, church leaders and experienced staff involved in ecumenical work. The future involvement of Orthodox Churches in the ecumenical movement largely depends on the methods, levels and – most crucially – inspiration that theological education will equip future generations.

Thirty hierarchs, priests, university professors, and lay men and women, gathered at the Orthodox Theological Faculty “*Andrei Saguna*” in Sibiu, Romania, 9-12 November 2010 to address this topic.

Conference Proceedings

The Consultation opened in the Chapel of the Orthodox Theological Faculty “*Andrei Saguna*” with a Te Deum service celebrated by H.E. Metropolitan Laurentiu and with the participation of all members, including the Professors and the students of the Faculty. Metropolitan Laurentiu then welcomed the Consultation very warmly. He underlined the important role played by the historical Theological School with its predominant academic and spiritual personalities and teachers of ecumenical theology such as the late Metropolitan Nicolae Bălan, the late Metropolitan Antonie, Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Fr. Ioan Bria, all of blessed memory, and many others. He spoke as well about the Faculty’s contribution to ecumenical theology and learning over many decades.

Metropolitan Gennadios conveyed the paternal wishes and patriarchal blessings of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and wholeheartedly thanked Metropolitan Laurentiu for his generous hospitality. He greeted the participants and expressed the hope that this encounter would become another occasion to further strengthen the existing fraternal links between the Orthodox Churches and that it would enable them to act and speak in a coordinated way as they reflect on the issue of ecumenical education and the

deeper participation of the Orthodox Churches in the ecumenical movement. In addition, he mentioned that we are gathered in a historical place, Sibiu, which three years ago as one of the cultural capitals of Europe, a crossroad of cultures and history, a bridge between East and West, had the great privilege to host the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in 2007. The Metropolitanate of Ardeal has a long history of hosting ecumenical gatherings and meetings and this is due to the fact that it has always been open to promoting and facilitating dialogue among the Christian Churches. Metropolitan Gennadios concluded by pointing out that regardless of the unresolved difficulties the Churches face in ecumenical dialogue concerning issues of an ecclesiological, theological and moral nature, they should deliver a clear common witness to the world and to secularized society. This could be done on the basis of the common denominator that is faith in the Triune God and in the saving action of our Lord Jesus Christ. In this way Churches could become agents for renewal and co-builders for the construction of society in whatever part of the world God has placed them.

Along with the discussion and various presentations, the program included prayer and visits to the famous Museums of traditional glass icons.

The conference opened with presentations by Mr George Lemopoulos (Deputy General Secretary, WCC) on *“Orthodox Participation in the Ecumenical Movement: Some Questions to Theological Education for Today and Tomorrow,”* Very Rev. Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita (Interim General Secretary of CEC) on *“The Graz Process and the Implications for Orthodox Theological Institutions,”* Rev. Dr Dietrich Werner (Ecumenical Theological Education coordinator, WCC) on *“Ecumenical Perspectives in Theological Education in Orthodox Contexts,”* and Rev. Dr. K.M. George on *“Theological Education in the Oriental Orthodox Tradition and the Ecumenical Movement,”* (presented in his absence).

On the last day in the main Hall of the Theological Faculty two keynote addresses were presented by H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima *“The Ecumenical Movement in the Life of the Orthodox Churches”* and Very Rev. Dr John Jillions (Orthodox Church in America), *“The Future of Orthodox Theological Engagement: Traditionalist, Mainstream or Prophetic?”*, with the participation of Professors of Theological Faculties teaching ecumenical studies from all over Romania. The session raised challenging questions for discussion and further reflection.

Input From Participants

The Consultation invited participants to present a reflection on the following questions:

(1) *how are ecumenical studies taught in different Orthodox Churches?* There are different ways of teaching ecumenical studies in Orthodox theological institutions. In some countries ecumenical studies are taught as an independent discipline, while elsewhere they are combined with other theological disciplines (e.g. dogmatics, mission) or are included as part of Church history.

The conference also explored different teaching models in order to learn from each other, but also suggested the development of a common model for teaching ecumenical studies.

Each Church is the arena where the results of the ecumenical movement are shared, thought about and debated. The Consultation considered how participation of the Orthodox Churches in the ecumenical movement is presented at the different levels of the Church. This includes how it appears in the Church press and other publications, and how the ecumenical commitment of Orthodox Churches is determined by their contextual reality and “*local ecumenical involvement*”.

(2) *the future of ecumenical studies and ecumenical engagement in Orthodox Churches.* There has been an Orthodox involvement in the modern ecumenical movement for approximately one century. This involvement provides a certain ecumenical experience that helps us to look to the future. At the same time there are new and burning challenges facing the Orthodox churches as well as the ecumenical movement.

Participants presented the position and experience of their Church in responding to these questions, and this was followed by discussion.

Observations and Suggestions

Inter-Christian and inter-faith issues are at the heart of a lively debate within the Orthodox Churches and touch many aspects not only of theological education, but of global, national, community, family and parish life. While these debates can become polarized, they also reveal a healthy tension between faithfulness to what has been received from Holy Tradition in the past and discerning where the Holy Spirit may be leading the Churches in the present and future. However, while the reports and discussions demonstrated a number of positive developments in the Orthodox Churches and theological schools concerning relations with other Christians and other faiths, there remain serious gaps to address.

1. There is a broad official agreement among the Orthodox Churches concerning the general direction of Orthodox ecumenical engagement. However, at many levels of Church life there is a wide diversity of opinion among the Orthodox concerning inter-Christian and interfaith issues. This demonstrates that there is as yet no unanimous Orthodox theological understanding of how to relate to other Christians and other faiths. Orthodox Churches should use their theological faculties and seminaries as academic laboratories to generate discussion on acute issues debated in ecumenical circles. An attempt should be made to engage all Orthodox voices in this, especially those who may be most opposed to dialogue. Synergy between Church leadership and theological schools is necessary for the meaningful and credible witness of our churches in society today.
2. Adopting a self-critical approach to its own ecclesial life, in a spirit of humility, is essential for authentic Orthodox dialogue and engagement with other Christians and the faithful of other religions.
3. The Orthodox Churches have profoundly benefitted from the ecumenical movement. It has allowed them to overcome possible temptations to isolation, to meet other Christians and each other and to strengthen fraternal relations, to be introduced to the living thought of other Christians, to explore their own Orthodox mind and voice, to engage in reflection on major global events and social changes, to follow developments in Christian missions worldwide, and to engage in common work for the material and moral betterment of humanity as a whole.
4. In order to improve the level of inter-Christian and inter-faith studies in Orthodox theological schools, to promote understanding and eradicate prejudice, the general level of theological studies must be raised. It is through an objective academic approach and critical analysis that the aims of the ecumenical movement can be better understood and received by Orthodox students of theology. High-level Orthodox theological education was emphasized as testimony to the catholicity of Orthodoxy and a corrective to sectarianism.
5. It was agreed that the study of other Christian churches, other faiths and the ecumenical movement only in the framework of comparative or even polemical apologetics, although still widely practiced, is insufficient for an academically balanced understanding.

6. There is a clear need to develop appropriate, fair-minded, non-polemical Orthodox resources and methodologies for teaching about other Christian churches, other religions and the ecumenical movement.
7. Orthodox theological schools should seek out faculty members from the theological schools of other Christian churches and other religions to present their own perspective on their faith and to interact, dialogue, discuss and debate with Orthodox students and faculty. Visits of Orthodox theological students to the places of worship and theological schools of other churches and faiths should be encouraged.
8. Careful analysis of the particular inter-Christian and inter-faith issues facing Orthodox Churches in specific contexts will mean that the exact shape of ecumenical education will differ from place to place. Even within a single Orthodox Church there can be vastly differing needs in this regard.
9. The importance of including theological students as future pastors and teachers of the church in the process of ecumenical theological reflection, education and exposure was underlined.
10. It is necessary to prepare an Essay book about the history of the ecumenical movement from the Orthodox point of view to be introduced as a part of the teaching curriculum in our theological schools and seminaries.
11. The activities of the WCC, regional ecumenical organizations, national councils of churches and bilateral dialogues must be publicized more thoroughly in local church publications, TV and radio stations, websites etc..
12. Conferences and seminars about inter-Christian and inter-faith dialogue should continue to be organized on national, local, regional and continental levels with attention paid to more effective communication about these meetings to the clergy and faithful of the churches.
13. Initiatives are needed for the training of Orthodox teachers, clergy and laity to be involved competently and with dedication in inter-Christian and inter-faith conversation and activities on behalf of the local Orthodox Churches.
14. Theological institutions should be encouraged to support events on a local and parish level that engage as many people as possible in the Week of

Prayer for Christian Unity and other inter-Christian and inter-faith initiatives, including visits to other places of worship. They should also encourage initiatives in organizing common Christian and interfaith ministries addressing social problems and protecting human rights and democracy.

15. More opportunities should be created for Orthodox from as many local Churches as possible to serve in staff positions in ecumenical organizations.
16. The ground-breaking 1920 encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, *“Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere”* made special mention of the role that theological schools could play in promoting greater mutual understanding:
 - by relationships between the theological schools and the professors of theology; by the exchange of theological and ecclesiastical reviews, and of other works published in each church.
 - by exchanging students for further training among the seminaries of the different churches.

This encyclical was produced in collaboration with the faculty of the Patriarchal Theological School at Halki. The consultation expressed the hope that Halki would soon be re-opened so that it could be allowed to once again make a contribution to efforts of inter-Christian and inter-faith collaboration and reconciliation.

17. The Consultation strongly recommends that the WCC in collaboration with Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology (Boston, USA) coordinate a meeting in the near future to bring together representatives of all Orthodox theological faculties and schools and seminaries of theology to continue to make progress on collaboratively addressing these issues of ecumenical education.