

World Council of Churches
Education and Ecumenical Formation

July 2000



*Participants of the Consultation on "Orthodox Theological Education and Ecumenical Themes"
at Pendeli Monastery, Athens.*



This quarterly journal aims to encourage sharing and cooperation among all who are working for the renewal of the churches through programmes of ministerial formation. All correspondence regarding MINISTERIAL FORMATION should be sent to the address below. Submission of relevant articles, reports and news is welcomed. Items in this journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the WCC and its programme on Education and Ecumenical Formation (formerly Programme on Theological Education).

P.O. Box 2100, 150, route de Ferney, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

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Cover photo: Participants at the Consultation on Orthodox Theological Education and Ecumenical Themes, Pendeli Monastery, Athens, Greece, 6-9 February 2000.

LETTER FROM STAFF

Dear friend and colleague,

The April issue of *Ministerial Formation*, No. 89, included the report on the “Consultation on Orthodox Theological Education and Ecumenical Themes” held in Athens, Greece in February this year. In this issue we print some of the papers that enriched our time together at Pendeli Monastery as we continue to promote ecumenical consciousness and spirit in the life and mission of theological institutions and churches.

We also continue to bring to our attention the contributions of women theologians in ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation. We are especially pleased to read about Christianity and theological education in Japan and welcome the news of the creation of the Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan.

In our efforts to increase opportunities for women from the South and Central and Eastern Europe to undertake theological education and ecumenical formation, we invite you to participate in passing the word about the Sarah Chakko Theological Endowment Fund. For many of us theological educators, theologians and church leaders, we know first-hand that scholarship grants are vital in facilitating theological education. We therefore hope that you will prayerfully consider making a personal and/or collective contribution towards the Fund.

Once again through the celebration of Ascension and Pentecost in the church calendar, we are reminded of our calling to participate in the works of the Holy Spirit of sharing the Good News. May our Merciful God guide us in our lives and ministry.

Nyambura Njoroge

Françoise Faure

Marijke Haworth

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

His Beatitude Christodoulos, is the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece.

Mr. Georges Lemopoulos, is the Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and a member of the Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate).

Prof. Petros Vassiliadis, is Professor of New Testament and Missiology at the Theological School of the University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

Prof. John Klentos, is Professor in Orthodox Studies at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) and Assistant Director of Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute at the GTU.

Prof. Michel Nseir, is the Executive Secretary of Association of Theological Education Institution in the Middle East (ATIME) and Professor at St. John Damascus Institute of Theology, Lebanon.

Rev. Jean Mayland, is an Anglican Priest and the Coordinating Secretary for Church Life at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

Dr. Howard Gregory, is an Anglican Priest and the President of the United Theological College of the West Indies, Jamaica.

Dr. Hisako Kinukawa, is a Professor of New Testament at the International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo, Japan and the Co-director of the Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan.

Ms. Marijke Haworth, is a member of the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A. and an Intern with the Education and Ecumenical Formation Team assisting in the campaign for the Sarah Chakko Theological Endowment Fund.

**MESSAGE OF WELCOME
BY HIS BEATITUDE, ARCHBISHOP CHRISTODOULOS
OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE**

*To the Participants in the Inter-Orthodox Consultation on
“Orthodox Theological Education and Ecumenical Themes”
(Pendeli Monastery 2-9, February 2000)*

It is indeed a great pleasure for me, as Archbishop of Athens and All Greece to welcome you, the distinguished Professors of Orthodox Theology participating in this Inter-Orthodox Consultation on “Orthodox Theological Education and Ecumenical Themes”, to the Apostolic Church of Greece, the Pauline See of Athens and the Historic Monastery of the “Dormition of the Holy Theotokos” of Pendeli.

Indeed, I believe it to be especially significant that a Consultation on Orthodox Theological Education and Ecumenical Themes should take place in the Apostolic Church of Greece, the First European Church to receive the Gospel from the Apostle to the Nations, St. Paul, and especially this year, as we celebrate the beginning of the New Millennium. Our Church has organised its official Millennium Celebrations around the Personage of St. Paul and His Missionary activities in our Country.

And what more appropriate a setting for a Theological Consultation than Athens, not only the centre of wisdom and learning of the Ancient World but also the place where St. Paul preached his sublime Theological Sermon proclaiming to the Athenians and to the World at large that which they worshipped as unknown: the One True God “*in Whom we live, we move and have our being*”. (Acts 17, 22-31).

Nor is it without significance that your Consultation is to take place within the environs of the Historic Monastery of Pendeli, dedicated to the Dormition of the All-Holy Theotokos. Not only was Pendeli Monastery, as all Orthodox Monasteries, a centre for Theological learning and preservation of Orthodox Tradition and Worship; it was also the site of a “Secret School” where during the Dark years of the Turkish domination, when the teaching of the Greek language and the Christian faith was forbidden, its monks secretly gathered the young Greek children at night and taught them how to read and write their mother tongue, using the Liturgical books of the Church as text books.

Such is the milieu in which your deliberations are to be carried on. Deliberations on Orthodox Theology and Ecumenical Themes, organised by the team on Education and Ecumenical Formation, Cluster on Issues and Themes of the World Council of Churches in conjunction with the Society for Ecumenical Studies and Inter-Orthodox Relations based in Thessaloniki. Deliberations dealing with such important subjects as “*The Ministry of the Theologian*”, “*Contextual Issues and Orthodox Theological Education*”, “*Orthodox Involvement in Regional Theological Associations*”, “*Ecumenical Theological Education and Orthodox Issues*”, “*Ecumenical and Education Formation Team*”, at a time when the WCC and the Orthodox churches are engaged in an on-going dialogue aimed at not only up-grading the Orthodox presence in the WCC, but also securing for Orthodoxy an equitable voice and participation.

One cannot deny that in our times, Education in general, and theological formation in particular, are facing many and varied challenges. These stem not only from outward factors, cultural, environmental, political, global, but also from inner elements as well. Hence, the concentration by Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) on the viability and sustainability of Theological Education and Formation. Without wishing to enter deeply into this matter, I should like to simply point out, from an Orthodox perspective,

that it is wrong to relegate Theological Education to the simple transmission of theoretical knowledge, thereby falling into the pitfall of turning Theology into a philosophical and abstract discipline, similar to the Scholasticism and Rationalism which has plagued Western Theological thought for the past centuries. For Orthodoxy Theology is life, life in Christ, life in His Body, life in the Church. It is experiential, not rational or speculative. Emphasising the complete “*otherness*” of God, it rejects “*analogia entis*”, proclaiming with St. Gregory the Theologian, “*it is impossible to conceive God and even more impossible to express Him*”. God can only be lived and experienced. Theology cannot be viable if it can not be rooted in the experience of God, if it is not born in the Church and does not lead one to catharsis, illumination and theosis. Should this not be the case, then its impact and influence will out of necessity be weak and sorely limited. And certainly one cannot be a true and genuine teacher of Orthodox Theology, if his life is devoid of this experience. He will never be able to convince his audiences about the truth of what he teaches nor will he be able to lead his students to illumination and deification which is union with God and life in His life, for one cannot give that which he does not possess. Orthodox Theological Education can be effectively advanced and forwarded only if those who serve it are “built up on the foundation of Christ’s Apostles and Prophets, and firmly rooted as a plant of truth in His Catholic and Apostolic Church” (Service of Holy Baptism: Preparatory Prayer of the Priest).

With these few thoughts in mind, I once again welcome you to our Church, to our City and our Country. I invoke upon all of you God’s Blessings, His illumination and guidance in your important deliberations for the advancement of Orthodox Theological Education. May they help in furthering our witness to Christ and proclaiming His saving Gospel to all men.

***SPECIAL COMMISSION
ON ORTHODOX PARTICIPATION IN THE WCC
Reflections after the Inaugural Meeting, in December 1999
Georges Lemopoulos***

The intention of this presentation is to provide information about the creation of the *Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC* and the inaugural meeting of this Commission. Not more than a simple discussion-starter, it aims to facilitate the task of this consultation in considering here some of the emerging fundamental issues.

Reporting about a meeting that took place recently is usually an easy assignment. Yet, when referring to this first meeting of the Special Commission, two facts rather complicate the task. First, the reasons that led to the creation of this Commission have deep roots in the history of the ecumenical movement, as well as in the long history of Orthodox participation in the Council. Second, in this inaugural meeting the Commission has simply constituted itself and launched its work without entering really into the substance of the issues at stake.

The background

In April 1998, an inter-Orthodox meeting was convened by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Thessaloniki, Greece.¹ This meeting came as a response of the Eastern Orthodox Churches to the request of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Church of Serbia, as well as to the withdrawal of the Georgian Orthodox Church from the membership of the WCC (1997).

The Thessaloniki meeting attempted an initial evaluation of the situation. In a positive spirit, the report stated that participants in the meeting were “unanimous in their understanding of the necessity for continuing their participation in various forms of inter-Christian activities”. In a rather critical spirit, the report expressed concern about “certain developments within some Protestant members of the Council that are reflected in the debates of the WCC”, lack of progress in theological discussions, and the perception that the present structure of the WCC makes Orthodox participation increasingly difficult. In a challenging spirit, the report urged that a Commission be created to discuss “acceptable forms of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement and the radical restructuring of the WCC”.

The Thessaloniki meeting was followed by the withdrawal of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church from the WCC (1998). Obviously, some Orthodox Churches were experiencing internal tensions, due in large part to groups who stand against the ecumenical movement. The critical attitude of the Orthodox, however, was also due to a sharpened perception by Orthodox churches of problems related to the structures of the WCC and to the way the Council functions.

Shortly after Thessaloniki, at the pre-assembly of inter-Orthodox meeting held in Damascus, representatives of Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches evaluated the situation in which Orthodox churches find themselves. They pointed to “the need for change which would enable a more effective presence and witness, together with a more constructive and engaged participation of the Orthodox”.²

All these happened before the 8th WCC General Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. In view of this increasing Orthodox “malaise” and critique, the WCC initiated a process of intensive consultation with its Orthodox and other member churches. This process culminated in the decision of the Assembly to create a *Special*

Commission on Orthodox participation in the WCC. According to the Assembly resolution, the Commission was established “to study and analyze the whole spectrum of questions related to Orthodox participation in the WCC, recognizing that many of these concerns are of importance to other member churches as well”. The Commission was given the mandate “to devote a period of at least three years to studying the full range of issues related to participation of Orthodox Churches in the WCC, and to present proposals about changes in structure, working style and ethos to the Central Committee for decision”.³

A very natural question would be, what is “special” about this Commission?

- *Its composition.* Dr Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the WCC, observed that for the first time the WCC had created an official body with equal participation from the Orthodox churches and from the other member churches. He also ventured to say that never before in its 50 years of history has the WCC taken its Orthodox members churches as seriously as with this decision of the Harare Assembly.⁴
- *Its specific task.* For the first time an official body was created including Orthodox and Protestant representatives of member churches to discuss together *about* the Council as a fellowship of churches. In most of the previous attempts emphasis was rather on negotiating *with* the WCC as an institution.
- *Its potential.* The fact that the Commission is composed of an equal number of representatives from two ecclesial and theological traditions; the shared conviction of its members is that ways should be explored for making decision by consensus rather than by majority vote; the clear indications that what is frequently considered as “Orthodox concerns” are of an equal importance to other member churches as well; are only some of the elements that can contribute towards creating a new ethos and style for the WCC. Indeed, the Commission could be seen as a unique opportunity for elaborating, testing and experiencing together this new ethos which will be beneficial to the whole ecumenical movement.

The Orthodox preparatory meeting

Before entering into dialogue with their partners, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox members of the Special Commission held a preparatory meeting at the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate (Chambésy, Geneva, 2-4 December 1999). At the end of this preparatory encounter, preliminary proposals were forwarded to the Special Commission for further consideration.⁵

Orthodox participants have first referred to *the WCC as a structure*. They suggested: “to broaden the structure of the WCC, so that in the spirit of a ‘true fellowship of churches’ a presence and participation of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches in the WCC ‘on equal footing’ is guaranteed”. This would require, the proposals suggested, to consider the fragmentation of Protestant churches, also reflected in the membership of the WCC, and thus to reinforce the character of the Council as an institution serving unity and not the preservation of Christian fragmentation. Related to this are a number of issues with regard to the criteria of membership, as well as the decision making and voting procedures in the WCC.

The Chambésy proposals also considered the issue of *parallel ecumenical structures*. The report recalled that there have already been discussions at various levels, considering the possibility to create a Forum of Churches and Ecumenical Organizations and that, from the Orthodox side, the Russian Orthodox Church elaborated a structural model which was submitted for further discussion.⁶

The preliminary proposals recommended *an evaluation of the reasons that led some Orthodox churches to withdraw from the WCC*. There was recognition that:

- These reasons are manifold (e.g. conservative and fundamentalist currents within Orthodox churches; developments in the WCC considered by some as institutional deviations, etc.);
- Each Orthodox Church may have its own reasons (e.g. different sensitivities of hierarchs, clergy and flock; internal tensions and rivalries, etc.);
- Orthodox churches may deal with the root causes of some problems (very often caused by internal situations) in different ways.

These reasons, however, stated the paper, should be also examined by the WCC. The Council should ask itself: what is the degree of its own responsibility in those cases, and what should and could the Council do to heal this situation?

Two specific proposals of the Chambésy report seem to be of particular importance, especially for Orthodox theologians involved in the ecumenical movement and their role:

- The first proposal is to take into consideration and to assess anew *the ecumenical documents of fundamental significance and weight* on which the consensus of Orthodox churches has already been expressed (e.g. the Toronto Statement of 1950; the Baptism Eucharist Ministry (BEM) document and the written reception of it; the Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) document and the responses to it).
- The second proposal refers to the issue of *terminology*. The deeper meaning of terms, their correct interpretation and application is of extreme importance both for the Orthodox participation in the WCC and the ecumenical movement. The fellowship of churches, the visible and invisible unity in the church and among the churches, the councils of churches or the councils of “families” of churches, coexistence and cooperation of churches, are only some of the terms that should be constantly dealt with.

To what extent does Orthodox theologians struggle with these terms and notions? To what extent have Orthodox theologians developed a “common understanding” of responses or interpretations occasionally offered by their churches? To what extent documents mentioned above or key issues on the ecumenical agenda became part of the curricula in Orthodox theological education?

At the beginning of my presentation I referred to the fact that many issues should be considered in the perspective of time, i.e. within the framework of their long history. Here I would like to underline the dimension of an in-depth approach. As Orthodox theologians you should consider your primary duty to view critically dominant theological or cultural paradigms that guide the ecumenical movement. You should also bring creatively your theological and spiritual vision for the ecumenical movement and your constructive contribution to it. The lack of an integrated Orthodox approach vis-à-vis the ecumenical movement and the WCC does not ease the situation. If all expectations from the Special Commission are simply put on the shoulders of its members alone, there will be few chances to reach the expected results. If Orthodox theology continues to offer a contribution which more often sounds as a “reaction” rather than as an expression of genuine ecumenical concern, there will be little chances to influence the contemporary ecumenical movement that evolves rapidly within a rapidly changing world.

The inaugural meeting of the Special Commission

The Special Commission held its inaugural meeting in Morges, Switzerland (6-8 December 1999). Composed by 60 members, appointed by the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches, and representatives

from the other member churches of the WCC appointed by the Central Committee, the Commission was chaired by two co-moderators, Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesus (Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Bishop Rolf Koppe (Evangelical Church in Germany).

The Special Commission has come together with the awareness that its task should not simply be to accommodate “Orthodox concerns”. As Catholicos Aram of Cilicia, Moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC, has stated “by seriously responding to the concerns and challenges coming from the Orthodox churches, the Special Commission should review the structures, the procedures and the agenda of the Council by making them more responsive to the new realities and needs”.⁷ With this understanding, the four areas identified by the Special Commission for intensive work during the next year are the following:

- the organization of the WCC (membership; representation in governing bodies; decision making);
- the style and ethos of life together in the WCC (staying together in prayer, worship and discernment of the will of God; creating an open space for sharing theological and ethical convictions; shaping and owning together the Council’s agenda);
- theological convergences and differences between Orthodox and other traditions in the WCC (exploring together the depth of serious theological and historical differences; describing to one another different theological approaches on fundamental issues; describing the different theological approaches to the social and ethical dimensions of our common faith); and
- existing models and new proposals for a structural framework for the WCC that would make possible meaningful participation by Orthodox churches (proposals emerging for expressing ecumenical fellowship; options for restructuring the organizational framework of the WCC; models of “Forum” and their relationships to the structure of the WCC).

The way forward

In spite of objective difficulties and contextual changes and challenges affecting Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement, there is an unequivocal expression of Orthodox commitment to Christian unity and of Orthodox interest in and for the WCC.

Certainly, the Thessaloniki report constitutes a severe critique of some aspects of the life and work of the Council. At the same time, however, it stresses the fact that there is a unanimous expression of the necessity for continuing Orthodox participation in various forms of inter-Christian activities.

Certainly, there are Orthodox theologians who are cautious if not hostile vis-à-vis the ecumenical movement. In various occasions, however, Orthodox theologians have clearly stated that “the unity of the church is not for us an option but an imperative, in fact a divine command” and affirmed that “progress was made toward Christian unity especially since the early years of this century, both in the context of the WCC and in other fora”.⁸

Certainly, some Orthodox churches raise fundamental questions about their participation in the ecumenical movement and in the WCC. Yet, for other Orthodox churches this participation constitutes an imperative as they live and witness side by side with other Christian sisters and brothers.

These are, I believe, issues that Orthodox theologians should consider seriously. Objectively, these issues should be on the “Orthodox agenda”, independently of negative or positive developments in the ecumenical movement or in the WCC.

Let me bring this presentation to an end by pointing to some specific challenges that I consider of particular importance. They constitute a natural bridge between the inner life of the Orthodox churches and their participation in the ecumenical movement. Reading between the lines of these challenges, one will identify issues that have been already included in the agenda of the Special Commission. Because of their “double character”, I share these challenges with you, raising some questions with regard to your role as Orthodox theologians.

- *inter-Orthodox challenges*: Among many other challenges that Orthodox churches would have to consider seriously as part of their own life and witness, I would mention here only three:
 - “(...) groups of schismatics, as well as certain extremist groups within the local Orthodox churches themselves are using the theme of ecumenism in order to criticize the church leadership and undermine its authority, thus attempting to create divisions and schisms within the church. They also use non-factual material and misinformation in order to support their unjust criticism”.⁹ What is the role of the Orthodox theologian and the contribution of Orthodox theological education with regard to this painful situation?
 - So far Orthodox churches have joined the membership of the WCC as local-national churches. Today, some Orthodox churches argue that they should maintain the present status, others that Orthodoxy should be represented as “one” universal church or as a “family” of churches, and yet others point to the need of looking for new ways of being related to the WCC as a “fellowship of churches”. What would be the advice of Orthodox theologians to their churches? How could you contribute to this important Orthodox concern and fundamental ecumenical issue?
 - For over thirty years Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches have been engaged in theological dialogue. Through this dialogue churches have come to see that they share the same faith. In many situations, churches have grown closer through cooperation in all aspects of ecclesial life. What is the role of an Orthodox theologian today in contributing to the full unity and communion between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches?
 - *An ecclesiological challenge*: The CUV study process has naturally led to key issues which would need subsequent study and clarification. Some of them are of an extreme ecclesiological and ecumenical importance. What is the nature of the fellowship or koinonia which is still the aim and not a given reality? This major ecclesiological challenge was stressed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in its response to CUV and has been incorporated to the final document. What could be proposed today by Orthodox theologians as a response or as a further contribution to this challenge?
- *a missiological challenge*: Some of the negative components of globalization (an increasingly free market both in commodities and thoughts; erosion of cultural boundaries, etc.) have created a new missiological context. For many, related to this phenomenon is the practice of proselytism (as a renewed form of cultural and religious expansionism). Both fundamentalism and confessional protectionism could be better explained in the light of these developments. Furthermore, the ChambÈsy proposals have strongly criticized all attempts towards a “universalization of the ecumenical movement”, as well as towards the “globalization of the ecumenical idea”. Is there a way for Orthodox theologians to develop the understanding of “catholicity” both as a fundamental missiological principle and a solid ground on which the ecumenical movement could build?

Conclusion

I know I have raised too many questions addressed to Orthodox theologians and I spent little time in doing the same with regard to questions that should be addressed to the WCC. My intention is not to detract your attention from issues that you will anyhow raise during the discussion. I rather wanted to

affirm that the future of the “Special Commission”, i.e. the future of “Orthodox participation in the WCC”, is also in your hands and will largely depend on the responses you will elaborate as a genuine Orthodox contribution to the ecumenical movement.

¹ Evaluation of New Facts in the Relations of Orthodox and the Ecumenical Movement, Thessaloniki, Greece, 29 April-2 May 1998, in : Fr Thomas FitzGerald and Peter Bouteneff (Ed.), *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope – Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Harare*, Geneva, WCC/Orthodox Task Force, 1998, pp. 136-138.

² Cf. Fr Thomas FitzGerald and Peter Bouteneff (Ed.), *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope – Orthodox Reflections on the Way to Harare*, Geneva, WCC/Orthodox Task Force, 1998, pp. 3-49.

³ Diane Kessler (Ed.), *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the WCC*, Geneva, WCC, 1999, p. 160f.

⁴ Konrad Raiser, The Goals and the Agenda of the Meeting, Address to the Opening Session, in: Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, Inaugural Meeting, Morges (Switzerland), 6-8 December 1999, pp. 8-11.

⁵ Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesus, Preliminary Orthodox Proposals for an Unimpeded Participation in the WCC: A record of the Proposals emerging from the Preparatory Meeting of the Orthodox Participants, in: Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, Inaugural Meeting, Morges (Switzerland), 6-8 December 1999, pp. 12-17.

⁶ Cf. the October 1999 issue of the *Ecumenical Review* entirely devoted to the theme “Orthodox Participation in the Ecumenical Movement”. The proposal of a new structural model is presented Metropolitan Kyrill of Smolensk.

⁷ Catholicos Aram I, Moderator of the WCC Central Committee, For a Creative Orthodox Protestant Dialogue – Address to the opening session of the Special Commission, in: Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, Inaugural Meeting, Morges (Switzerland), 6-8 December 1999, pp. 3-7.

⁸ Cf. Two reports, respectively from Iasi and Boston, in: Fr Thomas FitzGerald and Peter Bouteneff (Ed.), *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope*, respectively in pp. 130-135 and 147-150.

⁹ Evaluation of New Facts in the Relations of Orthodox and the Ecumenical Movement, Thessaloniki, Greece, 29 April-2 May 1998, in: Fr Thomas FitzGerald and Peter Bouteneff (Ed.), *Turn to God, Rejoice in Hope*, pp. 136-138.

**THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
AND ORTHODOX ISSUES FOR THE 3RD MILLENNIUM**

Petros Vassiliadis

Almost 4 years ago the ETE stream of the WCC called a major Global Consultation on the viability of our theological education, particularly in its ecumenical dimension. This consultation of the ETE, which was held in Oslo, Norway (5-10 August 1996) was meant to provide an ecumenical forum, where various insights and persons from around the globe could mutually critique, challenge, and reaffirm the present state of ecumenical theological education. But it was also meant to clarify its task for the years ahead.¹ Almost at the same time WOCATI (World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions), held in Nairobi Kenya (27 June-3 July 1996) its second General Assembly with similar aims.² Both these major events on Theological Education were in fact conducted with the awareness of the tension between *contextuality* and *catholicity*; and in both of them the “ecumenical vision” was well rooted in the original planning in such a way as to direct the attention towards how ministry and theological formation processes can further the unity of the Church according to our Lord’s last will that “*may all be one*” (John 17:21) for the sake of the unity and renewal of humankind and indeed of all creation.

One of the most important affirmations in both these major events, which took place almost at the end of the turbulent and divisions-creating second millennium, was the direct (WOCATI) or indirect (ETE) acknowledgment that the classical approach to *theology* is more and more seriously challenged from various quarters. Some may not openly admit it, very few could deny that the old understanding of theology is no longer valid, at least it has run its course.

Ever since the beginning of medieval scholasticism, and even after the Enlightenment, theology was defined as a discipline which used the methods of the Aristotelian logic. Rational knowledge was, and in some cases is still, considered as the only legitimate form of knowledge. Theological education, thus, gradually shifted away from its eucharistic/liturgical framework, i.e. away from its ecclesial, community, local context.³ The rational understanding of God and humanity had in fact led to a *knowledge*-centered and, especially in the West, to a *mission*-oriented theological education. Even today most Theological Institutions around the globe and across denominational boundaries, the Orthodox ones included, have been structured in such a way as to educate Church ‘leaders’, not the entire people of God; to equip priests, pastors or missionaries with the necessary means to preserve and propagate certain Christian truths or ethical norms, and in some cases even to defend old-fashioned institutions, not to build up local eucharistic communities. They lost, in other words, the *community*-centered and *liturgically/eschatologically*-oriented dimension of theological education.

Gradually, therefore, all those engaged in the planning of theological education unconsciously lost sight of the most significant parameter that really makes theology viable: The very often forgotten truth that *theology* is the real conscience of the living Church; that theology is first and foremost the voice of the – sometimes voiceless – Christian community and one of its most fundamental tasks; even further: that theology is neither a discipline for young people at the end of adolescence, nor a prerogative of the professionals, be it clergy or academics, but the task of the entire Christian community, the whole of *laos tou Theou*, who according to the well celebrated 1848 encyclical of the Orthodox Patriarchs is the only guardian of the Christian faith.⁴

Consequently, little – if any – attention has been given to the fact that theological education is a worldwide enterprise fundamental to the mission of the Church, not in its institutional character,⁵ but in its

eschatological awareness of being a glimpse and a foretaste of the *Kingdom of God*, the proleptic manifestation of this ultimate reality that should always determine our approach to historical realities.

This vision of the Kingdom, which is so prominent in the Orthodox liturgical tradition, was unquestionably rediscovered and reinforced in modern times through the theological reflections within the ecumenical movement. And this awareness created for a moment an unprecedented enthusiasm among the deeply divided Christianity that the centuries-long divisions of the Church might find some sort of an agreed solution; that the given by the Triune God unity might be restored. Unfortunately the momentum, created with the establishment of WCC and reaching its climax in the 60s with the historic event of Vatican II, did not have an equally optimistic follow-up. Ironically, the ecumenical optimism and enthusiasm towards the goal of the visible unity of the Church was interrupted at the very moment an important achievement in the field of theological hermeneutics was reached with the affirmation at a world level, and a wide application as a method from the 70s onwards, of *contextuality*, i.e. with the recognition of the *contextual* character of theology.

This great achievement has in fact created an unbridged psychological gap between the traditional Churches and the new and most vibrant younger Christian communities, especially of the South. The main reason for this unexpected, and at the same time unfortunate, development in the ecumenical movement was the complete negation of any stable point of reference. In the post-Uppsala period, culminating at Canberra,⁶ and finally coming to the “tension” WCC-Orthodox relations in Harare,⁷ all authentic criteria in the search for unity and the ultimate truth were in practice abandoned.

There is no question, of course, at least on my part, that it is impossible to make a case for the *unity of the Church*, while being indifferent to the *unity of humankind*. Today it is a common view in ecumenical circles that we can definitely speak of “differing, but legitimate, interpretations of one and the same Gospel”.⁸ It has become a slogan that “*every text has a context*”, a context that is not merely something external to the text (theological position, theological tradition etc.) that simply modifies it, but something that constitutes an integral part of it. None can any longer deny that all traditions are inseparably linked to a specific historical, social-cultural, political, and even economic and psychological context. All these mean that the traditional data can no longer be used as a rationale for an abstract universal theology that carries absolute and unlimited authority. Finally, through contextuality, in contrast to classical approach to theology, we are no longer concerned whether and to what extent the theological positions we have to take today, and the affirmations we are asked to make, are in agreement with the *tradition*, but whether these positions have any dynamic reference and relation at all to the given contemporary conditions. All these achievements were further reinforced in post-modernity, which focuses attention on the particulars, the peripherals, the minorities, completely disregarding the unifying elements in all considerations, the ecumenical ones of course included.

At this point I would like to open a parenthesis and remind ourselves of the real cause of the crisis, which modern Orthodoxy experiences vis-à-vis the WCC and the ecumenical movement in general. Perhaps not all theologians in the West engaged in ecumenical dialogue are aware that the real theological rift – after almost a generation of positive contribution of renowned Orthodox theologian to the ecumenical discussions – occurred early in the ‘70s, when the late Fr. John Meyendorff warned against the danger of the ecumenical movement loosing the momentum and coherence and its determination for the quest of the visible unity, if contextuality were to be adopted in ecumenical discussions, and become the guiding principle in future theological education.⁹ His reservations, I must confess, were proved right, despite the fact that twenty years later an Orthodox Theological Institution, the Theological Department of the University of Thessaloniki, in cooperation with the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, have attempted to

clarify the relationship between Orthodox theology and contextuality, and in fact positively assessed the somewhat contextual character of theology.¹⁰

It is my firm conviction that the future of ecumenical theological education lies on reconciling these two currents of modern ecumenism; Orthodox theological institutions must immediately start a process in order to soften the existing antithesis between contextuality and catholicity. To be honest, I doubt very much whether there is a single Orthodox Theological Institution, that takes contextuality seriously into consideration. I have elsewhere¹¹ argued for this need, and my modest contribution today will focus mainly on this extremely important task of theological education. After all, even the future of the ecumenical movement depends to some extent on the willingness of the ecumenical partners to work towards a *synthesis* between the legitimacy of all contemporary local/ contextual theologies on the one hand, and the necessity – in fact an imperative, and not simply an option – of a core of the apostolic faith on the other.

In my contributions to both the ETE consultation in Oslo and the 2nd General Assembly of WOCATI in Kenya I argued that theological education, in order to be able to survive, but also to give life and lead to renewal the Church and the society at large, must have a *common point of reference*. Otherwise, I pointed out, we run the danger to view any local context and experience as authentic expressions of our Christian faith.¹² Nikos Nissiotis, a leading figure in theological and ecumenical matters of this Church and of the Theological School of Athens, my *alma mater*, had earlier pointed out that one cannot exclude the possibility of a universally and fully authoritative theology, perhaps even on the basis of the transcendent anthropology of contextual theology;¹³ and this is but one suggestion that leaves open the possibility for making corrective readjustments to contextuality and reconciling it to catholicity.

Let me illustrate this issue a little more. It is argued with strength that the most important and necessary perspectives in contemporary theological education are both catholicity and contextuality: *catholicity*, in the sense of the search for a coherent, ecumenical, global, and catholic awareness of the theological task, and *contextuality* as the unique expression of it in the various particular contexts. Coherence is important in that it expresses the authenticity and distinctiveness of different contextual theologies, as well as the need to bring these contextual theologies into inter-relationship with others.¹⁴

Of course, the way in which this coherent, ecumenical, global, and catholic perspective is to be achieved, is not an easy task. And central in this respect is the concept of *unity*. In other words, for theology to seek for a coherent, ecumenical, global perspective requires the recognition that Christian theology, no matter how many and varied be its expressions, must have a *common point of reference*, a unifying element within all forms of ecumenical theological education and ministerial formation. It is necessary to focus upon the issue of unity in both general terms and in the specific ecclesiological use of the term as the ongoing search to restore the given unity of the Church. This includes consideration of the unifying and saving nature of the Christ event, continually re-enacted through his Body, the Church, in the life-giving and communion-restoring Holy Spirit. After all, theological education is a worldwide enterprise fundamental to the mission of the Church.

This given unity of the Church does not necessarily mean a strict unified structure, but it is given expression to a *broad understanding of Christian tradition*. Such an understanding affirms not only the centrality of Christology, but also the constitutive nature of Pneumatology, i.e. the normative nature of a Trinitarian understanding of Christian revelation. This Trinitarian understanding affirms the ultimate goal of the divine economy, not only in terms of Christ becoming all in all both in an anthropological, i.e. soteriological, and in a cosmological way, but also in terms of the Holy Spirit constituting authentic communion and restoring the union of all.

The communion God seeks and initiates is not only with the Church in the conventional sense, but with the whole cosmos. Thus the unity of divine revelation, as represented in the broad understanding of Christian tradition, is for the entire created world, not only for believers. This understanding of unity is important to keep in mind as it challenges a potential distortion wherein unity is identified with the maintenance of denominational loyalty. This in turn can be an exercise of oppression, excluding the suffering people from salvation and from the community of the people of God, insisting in most cases on strict juridical boundaries.

This understanding of unity in ecumenical theological education informs and challenges all expressions of contextual theology. It does not locate the unity inherent within Christian theology with any ecclesiastical or doctrinal system, and recognizes the varied forms of human and social existence. In this way, it is congruent with the methodologies and goals of contextual theology. However, it also challenges these theologies in pointing out the indispensability of the Christian tradition as that which gives expression to the given unity of the Church. This is usually referred to as *unity in time*.

In my view, the main reason of the inability of modern Christianity to overcome the existing “theological misunderstandings” is the issue of the *criteria of truth*. And this is due to the inability to reconcile contextuality with the text/logos syndrome of modern Christian theology. It is time, I think, to distance ourselves as much as possible from the dominant to modern scholarship syndrome of the priority of the texts over the experience, of theology over ecclesiology, of kerygma and mission over the Eucharist. There are many scholars who cling to the dogma, imposed by the post-Enlightenment and post-Reformation hegemony over all scholarly theological outlook (and not only in the field of biblical scholarship or of western and in particular Protestant theology), which can be summarized as follows: what constitutes the core of our Christian faith, should be extracted exclusively from a certain *depositum fidei*, be it the Bible, the writings of the Fathers, the canons and certain decisions of the Councils, denominational declarations etc.; very rarely is there any serious reference to the *eucharistic communion event*, which after all has been responsible and produced this *depositum fidei*.

The importance of Eucharist, and of the “eucharistic theology” (more precisely of the “eucharistic ecclesiology”)¹⁵ in the ecumenical debate has only recently been rediscovered and realized. The proper understanding of the Eucharist has been always a stumbling block in Christian theology and life; not only at the start of the Christian community, when the Church had to struggle against a multitude of mystery cults, but also much later, even within the ecumenical era. In vain distinguished theologians (mainly in the East) attempted to redefine the Christian sacramental theology on the basis of the Trinitarian theology. Seen from a modern theological perspective, this was a desperate attempt to reject certain tendencies which overemphasized the importance of Christology at the expense of the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit. The theological issues of *filioque* and the *epiclesis* have no doubt thoroughly discussed and a great progress has been achieved in recent years through initiatives commonly undertaken by the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church; but their real consequences to the meaning of the sacramental theology of the Church, and consequently to theological education, have yet to be fully and systematically examined. Theological education should no longer treat the Church either as a cultic religion or as a proclaiming/confessing institution.

The Eucharist, interpreted from the perspective of the “Trinitarian theology”, is not only *the* Mystery of Church, but also a projection of the inner dynamics (love, communion, equality, diaconia, sharing etc.) of the Holy Trinity into the world and cosmic realities. Ecumenical theological education, therefore, and ministerial formation should focus not so much on a doctrinal accommodation or only on organization and structure (Faith and Order), or even only on a common and effective mission of the Church(es), but

also on a diaconal witness with a clear eschatological orientation. In other words on a “*costly eucharistic vision*”. Theological education in order to be authentic has to be determined by what Fr. Ion Bria expresses with the words “Liturgy after the Liturgy”.¹⁶

With such a *costly eucharistic vision*, which of course has to undergo a radical eucharistic renewal,¹⁷ our future theological education will definitely develop gender sensitivity.¹⁸ It will also articulate a new paradigm to equip the whole people of God. And it will allow an innovative, experimental, people-centered approach to knowledge and education. Finally it will ensure that the processes of formation be relevant and renewing to individuals and communities of faith.

After all, our theological education can no longer be conducted *in abstracto*, as if its object, God (cf. *theo-logia*= logos/word about God), was a solitary ultimate being.¹⁹ It should always refer to a Triune God, the perfect expression of communion, and a direct result of the eucharistic eschatological experience; an experience which is directed toward the vision of the Kingdom, and which is centered around the communion (*koinonia*), thus resulting in justice, peace, abundance of life and respect to the created world.

What comes out of such an affirmation is self-evident: theological education should always refer to *communion* as an ultimate constitutive element of being, in other words it should have relevance to the *relational* dimension of life,²⁰ and therefore be in a 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.²¹

Paulo Freire in his celebrated book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1971, has rightly criticized the traditional forms of pedagogy, the “banking” concept of education as he called it, because it became a powerful agent in preserving the *status quo*, which many experience as oppressive and dehumanizing. Freire suggested a new form of education, the “problem-posing” concept, which is dialogical in nature, whereby both the educator and the educated become partners on the journey of searching for the truth. The importance to theological education of this dialogical approach is that it promises an atmosphere of creativity, but above all liberates humankind from all kinds of oppression, spiritual and physical.

In view of all the above 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 losing sight of the past; if it focuses attention in a substantial way on history, without denying its eschatological orientation. Christian theology, after all, is about the right balance between history and eschatology.²² It is about the struggle to apply the eschatological vision of the Church to the historical realities and to the social and cosmic life. To recall a famous dictum of Fr. Al. Schmemmann, theology and the Church exist not for themselves but for the world.²³ A number, therefore, of emerging issues demand more attention in the 3rd millennium by the Orthodox. These issues are global in their impact, impinge upon most particular societies, and are of central importance to contemporary theological task:

a. Spirituality, human rights, especially the rights of women; b. Economies of countries *vis-à-vis* the Divine economy, with special consideration to levels of international debt; c. The growth of materialism and the consequent marginalization of religious values; d. Intolerance coupled with the increasing ethnic and religious conflict; e. Bio-ethics, AIDS epidemic etc.; f. The integrity of creation in view of the spread of arms and the incidence of war, and especially the ecological crisis; g. Issues associated with the fullness and future of human life and human communities.

Needless to say that the list is indicative and by no means complete.²⁴

I feel obliged, before I end my presentation, to state clearly and with all honesty, that in most Orthodox theological institutions there is no such thing as “ecumenical theological education”. And I state this, with all awareness that in the past 50 years “Orthodox theology has had profound and pervasive influence upon ecumenical discussions”.²⁵

There is no doubt that the Orthodox Church, with the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, has played an important role in the ecumenical endeavor of the past; there is no doubt that her participation in the WCC, the main forum of the multilateral ecumenical dialogue, has been vital in almost all areas of its activities; and above all, the Orthodox Church’s ecumenical commitment has now been officially, and I would dare add synodically, pronounced on a pan-Orthodox level by such high-ranking fora as the 1986 3rd Preconciliar and the 1992 Meeting of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches. However, what George Florovsky, a leading Orthodox ecumenist, believed 50 years ago can hardly be subscribed by most of our theologians. On the occasion of the establishment of WCC in the 1st General Assembly of WCC in Amsterdam, Florovsky made the following bold statement: “It is not enough to be moved towards ecumenical reconciliation by some sort of strategy, be it missionary, evangelistic, social or other, unless the Christian conscience has already become aware of the greater challenge, by the Divine challenge itself. We must seek unity or reunion not because it might make us more efficient or better equipped...but because unity is the Divine imperative, the Divine purpose and design, because it belongs to the very essence of Christianity”. Today Orthodoxy’s ecumenical awareness and commitment is seriously challenged. That is why I make a plea that all Orthodox theologians, who are seriously concerned with the visible unity of the Church – in other words, who authentically pray “for the union of all”, or to put it more boldly, who are committed ecumenists – should unite their forces to protect the ecumenical character of Orthodoxy .

There are, of course, quite a number of excuses: the growing dissatisfaction from the results of the ecumenical dialogue so far; the necessity for Orthodoxy – which has come out of the ashes in Eastern and Central Europe, where the bulk of her faithful traditionally live – for a time of recollection and search for identity. What, however, cannot be tolerated is the 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. Even the term “ecumenism” arouses reactions and suspicions among many Orthodox, not to mention that even the official theological dialogue of the Orthodox Church with the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches in some circles is still being disapproved, at least failed proper “reception”. All these are mainly due to a number of inherent perennial problems, which obviously need to be openly addressed. And this is exactly the task of the Orthodox theological education.

¹ Cf. J. Pobee (ed.), *Towards Viable Theological Education*, WCC Publications Geneva 1997.

² More on this in my article “The Future of Theological Education in Europe,” *Oikoumene and Theology: The 1993-95 Erasmus Lectures in Ecumenical Theology*, EKO 11, Thessaloniki 1996, pp. 11-24.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Moltmann in his 1994 address at the annual meeting of the AAR/SBL (sponsored and edited by ATS as an occasional paper under the title *Theology and the Future of the Modern World*, 1995) rejected any connection between theology and the Church, but he bases his argument on a clear-cut distinction between Kingdom and Church (the latter understood in institutional rather than in ecclesial terms), a distinction that does not exist in Orthodox theology. In addition, Moltmann reacted to the old Bathian (and E.Brunner and P.Tillich) “cultural protestantism”. In other words Moltmann’s suggestion that theology is accountable and related only to the Kingdom of God, hence his proposal for a “public theology”, does not deviate from our

position. Fr. E. Clapsis has already started teaching at Holy Cross a course on “public theology” from an Orthodox perspective.

⁵ Cf. the negative consequences for theological education of an institutional understanding of the Church in K. Raiser, “The Importance of the Ecumenical Vision for Theological Education and Ministerial Formation”, in J. Pabee (ed.), *Towards Viable Theological Education*, pp. 54-60.

⁶ More in my “Orthodoxy and Ecumenism,” *Oikoumene and Theology*, pp. 149-179, esp. pp. 163ff.

⁷ See D. Kessler (ed.), *Together on the Way. Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, WCC Publications Geneva 1999, p. 152.

⁸ See *New Directions in Faith and Order: Bristol 1967. Reports-Minutes-Documents* (FO II 50), WCC Publications Geneva 1968, p. 41.

⁹ Cf. the Presidential Address (J. Meyendorff’s) at the Louvain conference, perhaps the sole meeting in the history of the WCC not to publish official reports (in John Deschner ed., *Faith and Order Louvain 1971: Study, Reports and Documents* (FO II 59) WCC Publications Geneva 1971, pp. 184ff).

¹⁰ More on this in the papers of the 1992 Bossey-Thessaloniki Consultation, published in *Kath’ Odon* 4 (1992) in Greek. Also in my “Orthodoxie und kontextuelle Theologie,” *ÖR* 42 (1993), pp. 452-460; cf. also n. 6 above.

¹¹ “A Response by Petros Vassiliadis”, in J. Pabee (ed.), *Towards Viable Theological Education*, pp. 66-72.

¹² Cf. K. Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Study of the Methodological Development in the Commission on “Faith and Order” of the World Council of Churches*, Bangalore 1981, pp. 393ff; also K. Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition*, WCC Publications Geneva 1991.

¹³ Nikos Nissiotis, “Ecclesial Theology in Context”, in Choan-Seng Song (ed.), *Doing Theology Today*, Madras 1976, (minutes of the Bossey conferences, 101-124, p. 124. Cf. also the special issue of *Study Encounter*, Vol. VIII No. 3 [1972]).

¹⁴ Cf. I. Bria, *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition: The Ecumenical Witness and Vision of the Orthodox*, WCC Publications Geneva, 1991, pp. 46ff.

¹⁵ P. Meyendorff has recently assessed the results of the implementation of the eucharistic renewal in his Church (cf. his article in the 1996 vol. of *SVTQ*).

¹⁶ I. Bria, *The Liturgy After the Liturgy*, WCC Publications Geneva, 1997.

¹⁷ Cf. my *Eucharist and Witness. Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Witness of the Church*, WCC Publications/Holy Cross Press Geneva/ Massachusetts, 1998.

¹⁸ I feel obliged here to mention the entire work of Kyriaki FitzGerald, especially her latest book on the order of Diaconesses.

¹⁹ Cf. C. Scouteris, *The Meaning of the Terms “Theology”, “Theologize”, “Theologian” in the Teaching of the Greek Fathers and Ecclesiastical Writers up to the Cappadocians*, Athens 1972.

²⁰ Cf. J. Zizioulas’ address to the 5th World Conference of Faith and Order “The Church as Communion,” in T. F. Best-G. Gassmann (eds.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, WCC Geneva 1994, 103-111, esp. pp. 105ff.

²¹ I recall with gratefulness Fr. K. M. George’s two recent presentations in Thessaloniki on this subject.

²² The theme “Eschatology, Church, Society” is approached in my article with the same title, to be published in the *Irenikon*.

²³ Cf. his *Church-World-Mission*, SVS Press Crestwood, 1982.

²⁴ Some of these issues are taken from my article “The Future of Theological Education in Europe”.

²⁵ From the conclusions of a recent assessment by T. FitzGerald, “Orthodox Theology and Ecumenical Witness: An Introduction to Major Themes”, *SVTQ* 42 (1998) 339-361, p. 360.

**THEOLOGY IN PARTICULAR EDUCATIONAL
AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS**

John Klentos

Educational Context

The Graduate Theological Union (GTU) was founded in 1962¹ primarily to engage various theological schools in “co-operative programs of study” and to combine the resources of several theological schools with those of the University of California, Berkeley.² Shortly thereafter, its Dean extolled the value of this scheme by observing that “we are immersed in a situation in theological and university education where the older isolation is neither defensible nor desirable.”³

Today the GTU is comprised of nine seminaries from a wide range of theological traditions as well as ten affiliated centers intended to supplement students’ educational experiences either by offering alternative perspectives or by fostering dialogue between theological understandings and other scientific or cultural insights. In total, 150 faculty members offer over 600 courses each year.

Member Schools

- American Baptist Seminary of the West – American Baptist Churches in the USA
- The Church Divinity School of the Pacific – Episcopal Church
- Dominican School of Theology and Philosophy – Roman Catholic
- Franciscan School of Theology – Roman Catholic
- The Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley – Roman Catholic
- Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Pacific School of Religion – Interdenominational with ties to the United Church of Christ, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and United Methodist Church
- San Francisco Theological Seminary – Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Starr King School for the Ministry – Unitarian Universalist

Affiliated Centers, Institutes, and Programs

- Center for Ethics and Social Policy
- Center for Hermeneutical Studies
- Center for Jewish Studies
- Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences
- Center for Women and Religion
- Institute of Buddhist Studies
- New College for Advanced Christian Studies
- Pacific and Asian-American Center for Theology and Strategies
- ***Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute***
- School of Applied Theology

Spatial distances have been overcome (almost all schools and centers are within close walking distance), library resources have been consolidated into a single collection, and classrooms are pooled. No single group dominates the others. Exposure to scholars and students from other theological traditions has become the norm. Religious tolerance has been transformed into an interconnectedness dependent on human and scholarly interaction, creating an atmosphere where “the enterprise of exploration and

affirmation for the sake of truth may find new perspectives.”⁴ Ministerial and Theological graduate students are encouraged to take classes offered by different faculties; doctoral students are expected to “define a research agenda which can help to rebuild ties to other disciplines” within the larger, secular university.⁵

Areas of Study

- Old Testament and New Testament Studies
- Historical Studies
- Systematic and Philosophical Theology and Philosophy of Religion
- Ethics and Social Theory
- Religion and Psychology
- Art and Religion
- Homiletics
- Liturgy
- Cultural and Historical Study of Religions
- Christian Spirituality

Cultural Context

Located across the street from the University of California, Berkeley, The Graduate Theological Union was literally at the epicenter of the political upheaval of the 1960s and 70s that rocked American society and culture, aftershocks of which can still be felt around the world. The *struggle for civil rights* instilled a deep respect for and acceptance of all people, regardless of race, social standing, or gender. The *peace movement* solidified the role of theology in social and political issues. *Free speech activism* impressed the importance of allowing all voices to be heard, no matter their opinion.

Diversity and *plurality* are, perhaps, the best ways to describe the cultural context in which the GTU “does” theology. *Ethnic diversity* is instantly noticeable. California itself has a significant population of Latinos. Berkeley, as a city, has a vibrant African-American community. A majority of students at the University are of Asian heritage. Anglo-Americans, naturally, tend to dominate. *Economic diversity* within the Berkeley community also conditions the theological agenda. Because of its fine academic reputation, the University attracts wealthy students from around the world. As a public university, many middle-class students are able to attend. Furthermore, its temperate climate, liberal reputation, and accepting attitude make it a haven for the homeless. *Religious diversity* is another hallmark of our cultural context. As anyone familiar with the American religious scene would expect, there is an overabundance of Christian churches, many affiliated with particular denominations, but many completely independent. Even among denominational churches, however, the common practice is to value freedom and autonomy over denominational fidelity. The large population of international students studying at Berkeley has resulted in a very influential Muslim presence. Our location on the Pacific Rim insures that Asian religious traditions are very well represented. One interesting result of the 1960s and 70s is the existence of many New Age religious groups which have a tendency to metamorphose over time. A few have even come to adopt all the external characteristics of Orthodox Christianity. Because San Francisco is just a few minutes away, there is a high degree of *sexual diversity* in the local culture. We have reached a point where feminist hermeneutics is an indispensable part of the theological endeavor. Phenomena such as goddess worship and “womyn’s spiritual quests” in the wider community are sure to have an impact on our own theological agenda. The gay-lesbian-transgender community is visible and strong. So strong, as a matter of fact, that the Summer School regularly offers courses in theology and biblical studies from a homosexual perspective, gay and lesbian spirituality, and “Queer preaching.” Even among heterosexuals, trends such as body-centered theology, transcending “body-shame,” and “healing touch” are on the rise.

Given this multifaceted academic and cultural context, the question arises: How does this situation affect the study, teaching, and learning of Orthodox Theology?

Orthodox Educational Programs

From the very first days of the GTU, Catholic and Protestant academics realized that a truly ecumenical theological experience would be impossible without a vibrant Orthodox presence. The Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute was founded to provide opportunities for non-Orthodox students to encounter our theological and liturgical tradition and to offer support for Orthodox students who are constantly faced with non-Orthodox traditions.

At present one full-time and one part-time professor are able to offer only six courses a year, often reaching a very limited number of students. The Institute also sponsors two annual lectureships, which attracts a rather large number of students and faculty, allowing them to hear from world-class Orthodox scholars. In the future it would be ideal to have several professors, with areas of specialization directly related to each area of study at the GTU.

Specific issues

Probably the most immediately noticeable issue in Orthodox Theological Education in this particular context is a very *uneven background* among students. In a single classroom the professor must attempt to teach people who have never before encountered Orthodoxy, Orthodox Christians who are incredibly well-read in the faith, and people who grew-up in the Orthodox Church and have developed a mass of misinformation which masquerades as theological proficiency. Even more frustrating is the student who has encountered one aspect of Orthodoxy (e.g., iconography or the *Philokalia*) and thinks that he or she is an expert in all things Orthodox. Due to the configuration of their degree programs, by the time students have completed an introductory survey, they do not have sufficient time to pursue in-depth study of their specific interest.

Within an ecumenical framework, students examine theological concepts closely, juxtapose them with other theological constructs, and sometimes challenge the Church's ancient teachings and practices. In short, Orthodox theology comes under the microscope of *critical analysis*. This is very pleasant when dealing with issues of Christology or Trinitarian theology – when the Cappadocian Fathers or St. Athanasios present a corrective to some modern theologies. But it becomes a bit more uncomfortable when discussion turns to social justice issues such as feminism (e.g., ordination of women), gay and lesbian rights (e.g., same-sex unions or ordination of active homosexuals), or community activism. At times, pious Orthodox would prefer to disengage from this type of theological conversation rather than explore the boundaries of theological certainty.

Because ours is a pluralistic scholarly community of theologians and secular academicians (at times not discernibly Christian), it is relatively easy to lose sight of *the theologian's goals* and to accept a vision that is little more than “a fundamental interfaith curiosity.” Even when engaged in academic work, Orthodox should strive to praise God's glory (Eph 1:12), to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48), to grow from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18), and to “become gods and children of God.”⁶

This is especially difficult in an environment which affirms the *equality of all faith-experiences and belief-systems*. In practice, it is not unusual for the individual to become source, focus, and canon of religious experience. An Orthodox student recently told me that he was “uncomfortable” with the concept

of *theosis* as presented by Sts. Gregory Palamas, Symeon the New Theologian, and Nicholas Cabasilas. He preferred Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*. Frequently non-Christian religions, "fringe groups," and "splinter theologies" are set on par with Orthodoxy and are used to judge the value of Orthodox theology. Sometimes, when the integrity and vision of the Faith is defended, Orthodox Churches are sometimes seen as exclusivist, ossified, restrictive, constrictive, and triumphalistic. Another Orthodox student commented in class that he appreciated, for the most part, the writings of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, but that he was upset by Fr. Schmemmann's "goose-step spirituality"! What was it that earned this comparison with Nazi stormtroopers? Simply his affirmation that "we are *Orthodox* and that ours is the *true Church*."⁷

Particular Challenges

Teaching Orthodox theology in the context of the GTU is at once exhilarating and challenging. I see five challenges in particular:

- 1) How do we react to other religious traditions (both Christian and non-Christian) without denigrating Orthodox Christianity? Is it possible for us to function within a vision of ecumenism that goes beyond toleration of others, beyond even esteeming others, and requires affirmation of others? Perhaps it may be helpful to revive St. Justin Martyr's affirmation that "there seem to be seeds of truth among all people"⁸ and to say with him "you all are our brothers and sisters, come to know the truth of God."⁹ This leads to....
- 2) What can we do to present Orthodoxy in a way that affirms its uniqueness while maintaining a degree of humility?
- 3) Is it possible to study Orthodox theology using an historical-critical hermeneutic? How can we acknowledge that our teachings and traditions developed in particular, concrete cultures without sliding down the slippery slope into treating the Faith as a purely human construct? Akin to this is...
- 4) What methods can we utilize to separate divinely-revealed, salvific truths from residue of past societies? Simply put: what in our theology is transcendent truth and what is temporal? Is it possible to peel away the accretions of bygone cultures, behold the core theological truth, and place it in a setting appropriate to – indeed formed of – our modern culture? Non-Orthodox students of theology are attempting to do just that; is it feasible – not to mention profitable – to engage in such exercises ourselves?
- 5) How can the truths of Orthodoxy be incarnate in today's society? How can our Faith dwell among *today's* women and men (cf. Jn 1:14)? How can our theological work follow Christ, who himself interacted with sinners, ministered to the disenfranchised, loved the untouchables, showed mercy to adulterers, ate with alcoholics, and was crucified among criminals? How can we, as Orthodox theologians respect the plurality of our culture and address the needs of our brothers and sisters without sacrificing the pearl of great price or administering a lethal injection of "relevance"?

Especially in today's polycentric society it is important to heed Christ's command to "love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves"(cf. Lk 10:27) and to pray that the Holy Spirit teach us in every hour what we ought to say (cf. Lk 12:12).

¹ A thorough account of the socio-economic factors behind theological education in this period can be found in Judith A. Berling, "Theological Consortia: The Creative Space Between Church and University" in Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa (ed.), *Religious Studies, Theological Studies and the University-Divinity School* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992) 171-196.

² In 1999 *US News and World Report* ranked UC Berkeley the best public university in the United States.

³ John Dillenberger, “The Graduate Theological Union in the San Francisco Bay Area,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 33 (1965) 49.

⁴ Dillenberger, p. 50.

⁵ Berling, p. 188.

⁶ Nicholas Cabasilas, *The Life in Christ*, I,26.

⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979) 123. Italics in original.

⁸ *First Apology*, 44.

⁹ *Dialogue* 96.2.

**ASSOCIATION OF THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTES
IN THE MIDDLE EAST(ATIME)
AN ECUMENICAL ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP EXPERIENCE
IN THE MIDDLE EAST
*Michel Nseir***

I – Introduction to the Association

The Association is composed of the Theological and Academic Institutes of the Christian Churches in the Middle East. Its membership includes twenty theological institutes from Egypt (12), Lebanon (6), Syria (1), and Iraq (1). (cf. annex 1 for the complete list).

The ATIME functions as an association and holds a General Assembly every year. It is called the ‘Regular Meeting’. It includes the Deans and Directors of the member Theological Institutes. The Association elects a president and an executive secretariat composed of an executive secretary and his assistants. The president must be one of the deans and the secretariat must be composed of members of the academic staff from the theological institutes. (cf. annex 2 for the list of the board).

The Association keeps a distinct and privileged relationship with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC): its executive secretary is member of the “Faith and Unity” Unit. He has the right to give his opinion, but not to vote. Reciprocally, the Director of the Unit attends the regular meetings of the Association and can give his opinion with no right to vote. In addition, whenever invited or needed the executive secretary and his assistants attend the meetings of the rest of the units and programs of the MECC. Finally, it is noteworthy to mention that the funds of the Association are deposited in the bank account of the MECC and set aside in its accounting books under the Association’s name.

II – Goals

The constitution of the Association as formulated and ratified in September 7, 1997 in Abi Talat, Alexandria, set the goals of the Association as follows:

- 1) Working to strengthen the brotherly relationships between the members.
- 2) Encouraging the spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding among the academic bodies and among the Institutes themselves.
- 3) Exchanging information and creating forums for discussions between the members of the Association.
- 4) Studying the relationship between the Theological Education and the present situation of the Churches and their growth.
- 5) Improving the Theological Education and supporting the Theological Institutes to achieve this goal.
- 6) Supporting and financing the publication of theological material.
- 7) Establishing brotherly relationships with similar Associations outside of the Middle East.

III – Brief History

The Association was established in 1967 under the name of the “ Association of Theological Education in the Near East” (ATENE). Its first executive secretary was Rev. Jean-Michel Hornus. In 1972, Dr. George Bibawi succeeded Rev. Hornus and worked on opening new horizons to the Association. He helped a lot in encouraging the translation and the publication of Patristic writings. The Association

published as well an index of most important Manuscripts found in the Theological Libraries. In a regular meeting of the year 1980, the name of the Association was changed to the “Association of Theological Institutes in the Middle East” (ATIME), and Rev. Father Jean Corbon was elected as executive secretary. A new phase of close cooperation started with the MECC. Father Corbon worked on establishing close relationships among the Theological Institutes, and he introduced an independent student activity on the local level within ATIME (Lebanon/Syria and Egypt). He also worked hard to translate and publish Patristic texts with which he enriched the Arabic Libraries. He also organized an almost yearly event of Theological Professors meeting in Cyprus. In June 3, 1992, the Association elected Rev. Father Elias Khalifé as its executive secretary.

IV – The Activities of the Association

Regular Meetings (Deans and Directors):

The byelaws of the Association indicate that there must be at least one regular yearly meeting to discuss the internal affairs and programs of the Association, and to review the student activities and to plan for the future. These meetings, besides their formal and legal aspects, constitute a unique occasion and a unique forum where all the deans get to better know each other and where bilateral and multilateral cooperation and relation take shape.

Five meetings have been held from 1995 to 1999 in the following locations:

- 1) Monastery of Anba Bishoy, Wadi Natroun, Egypt (5-8 November 1995)
- 2) Monastery of Our Lady of Light, Feitroun, Lebanon (12-15 September, 1996)
- 3) Saint Verena Building, Abou Talat, Alexandria (6-7 September 1997)
- 4) Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand, St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology, Lebanon (22-23 September, 1998) where a new committee was elected (cf. annex 2)
- 5) Mar Ephrem Institute of Theology for the Syrian Orthodox – Mouarrat Saidnaya, Damascus (2-6 September, 1999)

Meetings of Professors:

Most of the meetings of professors happen on the local level. They meet to discuss a certain theological topic related to their teaching specialty. They also discuss the curriculum material and its content, desiring to bring closer the different teaching methods used. Many meetings of this kind were held in Egypt and in Lebanon for the Professors of Holy Scriptures, History, and Systematic Theology. The only regional meeting during this 5 year period was held in Wadi Natroon, Egypt (1994). It dealt with the teaching methods and the different curriculums.

Student Meetings:

The students are organized in semi-independent local leagues that are constituted by two members from every school. Every league elects a president, a secretary and a treasurer. The league meets monthly to organize events and intensify its activities. It is often under the direction of the executive secretary of the ATIME or his assistant executive secretaries. The activities of the league are centered on the following subjects:

- 1) A general meeting of all students of theology for one day in a chosen institute of theology. In this meeting, discussions are held about topics that have a common interest among all churches. The students are divided into discussion groups that meet to come out with shared conclusions.

- 2) The Week of prayer for Unity: In addition to their effective participation through choirs and other activities organized by the MECC, the students, by their personal initiatives, hold music festivals that involve many of the theological schools.
- 3) The students organize common trips to different locations such as Syria and Jordan during which they get to know each other more and they familiarize themselves with the local Christian population of those areas.
- 4) The students locally publish news and pamphlets in which they include their articles and interview with professors, and of course the activities of their schools.
- 5) Finally they organize once a year a day of sports activities.

ATIME has organized two regional meetings for all students of theology, one in Feitroun, Lebanon on the subject of Jehovah Witness and another in Saint Verena Building, Abu-Talat, Alexandria about the “Role of Youth in the Life of the Church in Light of the Changes of the Third Millenium.”

A first local ‘Global Gathering’ has been organized in Syria, last year (17-22 November, 1999) between theological students from all institutes in Lebanon and Syria. 70 students (60 from Lebanon and 10 from Syria) debated for a full week on the issue of “Medias and the Church: A Pastoral Perspective”.

The same event will take place this year in May in Egypt for representatives from the theological institutes and seminaries in Egypt. A few students from Lebanon and Syria might participate to give their input on the same issue.

Global regional meetings are important events for the students. They discover their diversity and learn to respect its specificity. Such meetings are organized when funds are available. This last year we launched the idea of a kind of ‘Summer University’ on a local level.

Meetings of Librarians:

The Association was very much aware of the important role of Librarians in the Theological Institutes. It worked on encouraging their participation within its life and activities for a better coordination and cooperation. This idea found a positive response from the Librarians in Lebanon and Egypt. Three meetings in Egypt and two in Lebanon resulted in the following:

- 1) Introducing to all librarians the cataloguing systems used by the different Institutes.
- 2) Looking for ways to have more collaboration among libraries.
- 3) Emphasizing the exchange of bulletin and journals among the Libraries.
- 4) Working on computerizing the Libraries in order to relate them by Internet.
- 5) Facilitating the use of Libraries by all the students of Theology.

Publication:

The translation of Patristic Texts and their publication was and still is in the foremost of the Association’s interest. The financial situation however did not help to advance these projects. Thus the publication program was limited to support the translation cost of the following Patristic Texts:

- 1) The Theological Articles of St. Gregory the Theologian.
- 2) “In That God is Inconceivable” by St. John Chrysostom.
- 3) “In the Incarnation of the Word” by St. Athanasios the Great.

In addition, the Association has published a Directory that includes a brief history about each institute and a brief description of its programs.

The Week of Prayer for Unity

The Association encourages the member Institutes to participate in the activities and prayers organized for this occasion by the MECC. Also, the students and choirs of these Institutes participate in lectures and radio interviews that are held during this week.

The Participation in the Works of the “Faith and Unity” Unit of the MECC

This is done not just by the participation of the executive secretary of the Association, but also by the participation of certain Institutes’ professors in presenting research papers to be discussed and evaluated.

Visits to the Theological Institutes

One of the functions of the executive secretary is to visit the member Theological Institutes to coordinate between them and prepare for the conferences, meetings, and other activities. In addition, the executive secretary facilitates the relations among the Institutes that do not belong to the same family of churches.

V– Future Vision

At the end of this brief presentation, I would like to raise some of the issues and wishes that ought to help produce a common witness within and among the Theological Institutes. The improvement of the Association’s role relies essentially on the firm support from the Churches themselves. But it also relies on the strong cooperation between the Deans and Directors of the member Institutes and Academies.

Empowering Research and Intellectual Work within the Association

This will help building a deeper and more serious dialogue among Churches. The meetings of Professors on local and regional levels have proved their usefulness. It is normal for these meetings to be accounted for in the regular budget of the Association, so that a regional yearly meeting takes place in order to conclude the series of local meetings.

It is also very useful to put to practice the idea of a “Summer University” for the theological students on a regional level, if possible.

Thirdly, it is inevitable to create a common fund in which all member institutes participate, for the purpose of publishing Patristic Texts that are a common heritage among all Churches.

Strengthening the work and cooperation with the “Faith and Unity” Unit

In doing so, the purpose is not just to open up the cooperation by having the Executive Secretary attending the regular meetings of the Unit. It is also by deeper discussion on the choice of subjects and by the

participation of the Theological Professors in the ecumenical discussion among the churches in the area, and on all levels.

**Strengthening the Academic Cooperation
among the Institutes**

This ought to happen through the following:

- 1) Establishing a post-graduate research program common to all institutes.
- 2) Producing a single Library Card that can be used by the students of any of the member institutes to use the related libraries without restrictions.
- 3) Acquiring funds to allow the Theological Libraries to purchase and subscribe to specific publications.
- 4) Acquiring funds to allow the Theological Libraries to be connected on the Internet.
- 5) Working more effectively on the principle of professors' exchange among the different families of Churches. This principle was established in the regular meeting of 1994. The association has witnessed some positive experience in this regard.
- 6) Organizing conferences to discuss and to study the curriculums of the Institutes.
- 7) Intensify the number of meetings among professors with the same field of study.

ANNEX 1
List of the member theological institutes

In Egypt:

- The Clerical and Theological Institute of the Coptic Orthodox Church – Anba Roueis, Abassieh, Cairo
- The Clerical and Theological Institute of the Coptic Orthodox Church – Alexandria
- The Clerical and Theological Institute of the Coptic Orthodox Church – Deir El-Mouharrak
- The Clerical and Theological Institute of the Coptic Orthodox Church – Tanta
- The Clerical and Theological Institute of the Coptic Orthodox Church – El-Menia
- The Clerical and Theological Institute of the Coptic Orthodox Church – El-Belena
- The Clerical and Theological Institute of the Coptic Orthodox Church – Shbin El-Kom
- The Higher Academy for Pastoral and Theological Studies in the Orthodox Coptic Patriarchate – Anba Roueiss, Abassieh, Cairo
- The Human Sciences and Theological Institute for the Coptic Catholics – Maady, Cairo
- The Catholic Institute for Religious Studies – Sakakini, Cairo
- Evangelical Institute of Theology – El Abassieh, Cairo
- Evangelical Institute of Theology – Alexandria

In Lebanon:

- The Armenian Orthodox School of Theology – Bekfaya, Matn
- Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology – University of Balamand, Balamand
- The Near East School of Theology – Beirut
- The Higher Academy for Religious Studies – Saint Joseph University, Beirut
- Saint Paul’s Institute of Philosophy and Theology – Harissa
- The Pontifical Faculty of Theology – University of the Holy Spirit, Kasslik, Jounieh

In Syria:

- Mar Ephrem Institute of Theology for the Syrian Orthodox – Mouarrat Saidnaya, Damascus

In Iraq:

- Babel Institute of Philosophy and Theology – Baghdad

ANNEX 2
ATIME’s structures and goals

The regular meetings of the Association include the Deans and Directors of the member Theological Institutes. The Association elects a president and an Executive Secretariat composed of an Executive secretary and his assistants. In its last regular meeting in September 22-23, 1998, at Balamand, the Association elected new officers for the next three years. The new officers are as follows:

- Rev. Dr. George Khawam, President (Saint Paul’s Institute of Philosophy and Theology – Harissa)
- Michel Nseir, Executive Secretary (Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology, University of Balamand, Balamand)
- Rev. Dr. Boulos Rouhana, Assistant Executive Secretary (The Pontifical Faculty of Theology – University of the Holy Spirit, Kasslik)
- Dr. Rasmi Abd El Malek, Assistant Executive Secretary (The Coptic Theological Institutes)
- Rev. Dr. Moufid Jameel, Assistant Executive Secretary (Evangelical Institute of Theology – El Abassieh, Cairo)

**ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

Jean Mayland

My name is Jean Mayland. I am an Anglican Priest and since January 1 of this year I have been Coordinating Secretary for Church Life at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Immediately prior to that I was for three years Associate Secretary for the Community of Women and Men in the Church. For three years before that I was Ecumenical Officer in the Diocese of Durham. Previously, for ten years I was lecturer and tutor on the Northern Ordination Course which was (and still is) an Ecumenical Course preparing people for Ministry in the Anglican and Methodist Churches with occasional students also from the Lutheran Church and the Old Catholic Church.

While working for the Northern Ordination Course, I taught Old Testament and Liturgy. Course members from all the Churches studied Old Testament together. Discussions about interpretation, authority etc showed as many differences within denominations as between. So far as Liturgy was concerned, most of the teaching was applicable to people from all the Churches. We discussed the nature of worship, its philosophy, nature, purpose etc. We also learnt together about the history of the development of liturgy and studied historic texts of eucharist and baptism etc. We also learnt about the approach to worship today of our various Churches and the development of liturgical reform and renewal. In addition to this common teaching there was a certain amount of separate teaching about specifically Methodist Worship and Liturgy and specifically Anglican. This took place at a residential week-end. I taught the Anglicans while someone else taught the Methodists.

At our Residential week-ends we followed a careful worship pattern. This tried to meet different traditions and tastes while also giving a variety of new experiences. Some people appreciated this very much while others felt that their particular needs of traditions had not been adequately catered for. Problems sometimes arose over the Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion. The Course and the College in which we met had been designated as Local Ecumenical Partnerships where the rules about Eucharistic sharing were governed by special ecumenical canons. Most people were happy about this but we did have some 'high church' Anglican ordinands who were not willing to receive communion from a Methodist Minister and this caused pain and grief to the Methodists.

In addition to experiencing the difficulties of living ecumenism in this way there were also small sections in the curriculum about the history of the ecumenical movement and the ecumenical instruments in the United Kingdom. The experience of training with people from other churches gave an opportunity for learning about and being more open to other denominations. In spite of this some students remained insensitive to minority denominations and some did not feel any commitment to work ecumenically.

From 1975 to 1991 I was a member of the Central Committee of the WCC. From the Stirling Assembly of the Conference of European churches (CEC) to the Prague Assembly I was Vice Moderator of the Study Committee of CEC and from Prague to Graz I was Moderator. From 1986 to 1990 I was President of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. All of these responsibilities gave me both wider insights into the Ecumenical Movement and also opportunities to learn first hand about the Orthodox Churches and also to experience Orthodox Worship. I tried to take every opportunity to share my experiences with students, in formal teaching, informal conversations and in the 'Quiet Mornings' which we had each Sunday, which many students used to say were the most memorable part of their whole training.

In the Liturgy Course we studied the Orthodox Liturgy and we also used to take students to participate in the Greek Orthodox Liturgies in Manchester.

After my visit to Tbilisi in Georgia we invited two Orthodox Theological Students who had been former nuclear scientists to visit us in York and to participate in the Summer School of the Northern Ordination course where they both learnt much and also contributed a great deal to the understanding of the other students. The Course now has a base in Mirfield in Yorkshire and the current lecturer in Liturgy, a Methodist has strong connections with the Orthodox Church in Romania and there are student links. These links are encouraged by the Archbishop of York, Dr David Hope. The Principal of the Orthodox Seminary in Iasi spent a sabbatical at Mirfield.

In my current position as Co-ordinating Secretary for Church Life at CTBI one of the areas of my responsibility is Theological Education. In this part of my work the aim is to assist the Churches in growing together to develop their ministerial training. This would involve both having modules on the ecumenical life but also training together so that it becomes normal to work together.

In England there has been set up an 'Ecumenical Strategy Group for Ministerial Training'. The background to the formation of the Strategy Group were the moves in each of the denominations during the late 1980 and early 1990 to reshape the patterns of and provision for ministerial training. In the Church of England some Colleges (such as Chichester and Lincoln) had been closed and some of the smaller part-time Courses amalgamated. It was recognised that the actions of one denomination increasingly had effects on ecumenical partners, and the concepts of regional groupings or clusters were becoming increasingly important

The Church of England had therefore formed a Board of Ministry Steering Group which included representatives of the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. The Steering Group's Report in 1996 proposed setting up new ecumenical procedures, the first task of which would be the checking of a broad vision for training which was emerging against the ecclesiological, educational and financial realities of the current situation.

As a result of all this the Strategy Group was set up and its terms of reference agreed by the Churches. Most of the meetings of the Group are of the various denominational groups plus representatives of CTBI and Churches Together in England (CTE), but once a year they are joined by church leaders who chair the various committees or other decision-making bodies in the various denominations.

This Group has developed the practice of giving news of developments in the various denominations, sharing examples of good practice in training, supporting one another in confidence as a peer group, sharing important matters of concern with each other in confidence. In 1999 the Strategy Group became a Co-ordinating Group of CTE. Its membership is therefore open to all member Churches of CTE. The Greek, the Russian and the Oriental Orthodox Churches are all member Churches of CTE but so far they have no representatives on the Strategy Group. This is largely because the numbers of priests in training is so small.

The Strategy Group is in process of formulating some 'Guidelines for Ecumenical Good Practice'. The first draft of these was written by my predecessor Rev Dr Cohn Davey and Rev Kenneth Howcroft of the Methodist Church. Dr Davey and Dr Lesley Husselbee led a workshop on these at a conference in October and they are being further revised. One of the key issues that emerged from the workshop was the fear that many students seemed to have that if they became too involved ecumenically during training this would harm their deployment prospects in their own denomination!

The Group are also planning a first Ecumenical Conference for Teachers in Theological Education at the Sutton Bonnington Campus in the University of Nottingham. Its title is 'Working Ecumenically - Stormy Waters or Safe Haven?'

Part of my task is to encourage people to come to the conference from Churches which are not yet members of the Strategy Group and that includes the Orthodox Churches. I also want to get people there from Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Then we may get similar bodies set up in those nations and find some ways of linking between them. It is more difficult as the situation in those nations is very different from that in England. In Scotland for example the Church of Scotland bases its teaching in a number of Universities. The Episcopal Church does its training non-residentially by courses and distance learning while the Roman Catholic Church just has one Seminary.

In addition to this co-ordinating work, my predecessor Dr Davey was involved in a special project with Orthodox Theological Students from Albania. This project arose from a CCBI Delegation to Albania and its churches in 1995. The delegation recommended that one way to follow up that visit might be through exploring the possibilities of sharing resources for Theological Education. It was established that the Albanian Orthodox Church had three main priorities in this area; short term scholarships for post-graduate students of theology to study English, with a view to equipping them better to serve as staff members at the Orthodox Seminary in Durres; short-term scholarships to train librarians from there ; and the provision of books for the library.

Early in February 1998 an appeal was sent to the Principals of Theological Colleges and Courses in Britain and Ireland for assistance with the priority needs identified by the Albanian Orthodox and Protestant Theological institutions. Money and offers of help were forthcoming.

Archbishop Anastasios of the Albanian Orthodox Church nominated Jorgo Papadhopuli and Alfred Bushaka to come to St Michael's College, Llandaff and Trinity College, Bristol for the autumn 1998 to attend English language courses at Cardiff University and the Language Institute on site at Trinity College respectively. Both St Michael's, Llandaff and Trinity College, Bristol are considering a return visit to Albania by a group of staff and students.

In the autumn of 1999 a new Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies was opened in Cambridge and the first study weekend was held there. It is hoped that the opening of this centre and the provision of the weekend courses will lead to a greater understanding of the theology and gifts of the Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Anthony of the Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain has for forty years followed a policy of openness and a desire to share the riches of Orthodoxy with all who wish, without in any way being involved in proselytism. One of the fruits of such openness has been the use of English for such purposes ,which has become established in the Diocese of Souroza. Other manifestations of this openness are the veneration of British saints, and also the holding of services and the painting of icons dedicated to these saints. The early life of the Church in Britain is also commemorated in various ways, and Russian Orthodoxy is helping to put people back in touch with the traditions and experience of that church.

CTBI has been involved with the Russian Orthodox Church in this through some aspects of the end celebrations of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-98) and through informal theological education in voluntary groups. A Russian Orthodox woman was commissioned by CTBI to paint an icon of St Hilda for the four nations conference to mark the end of this Decade. This

conference was held in Durham in April 1998 and the icon became the centre of the spiritual life of the Conference. Edith Reyntiens, who painted the icon, gave workshops at the Conference and in a number of places since. She has helped to give a greater understanding of Orthodox Spirituality and Iconography.

In November 1999 I organised a weekend Consultation at Ushaw College (Roman Catholic) Durham to explore the meaning of the saints, sanctity and holiness within our various traditions. Mrs Gillian Crow, the Diocesan Secretary of the Russian Orthodox Church spoke of the Orthodox doctrine and practice. We all went to the Chapel of the Castle College at Durham to join in the monthly celebration of the Orthodox Liturgy by Archemandrite Ephrem.

In the afternoon we attended Evensong in the Anglican Cathedral of Durham after which the icon of St Hilda was dedicated in a newly restored chapel to St Hilda within the Nine Altars Chapel behind the shrine of St Cuthbert. After the dedication hundreds of people came to light candles by the icon. Not so many years ago candles in church were a source of division. Now they have come to be used by people of all traditions. They were a light in the darkness and a symbol of the unity of our diverse prayers just as the icon of St Hilda is a source of inspiration for people from many traditions.

Abbess Hild or Hilda was a Mother of the early undivided church. Maybe she can be a symbol and an inspiration of the unity which we seek today.

Let my last words be those of Edith Reyntiens the painter of the icon.

“The recognition that Mother Hild does not die but lives in the Resurrection of Christ, is the reason we revere her. We learn from her life and example how to live in the Resurrection of Christ. That is the purpose of the icon.”

**UNITED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
OF THE WEST INDIES (UTCWI)**

Howard Gregory

This paper seeks to outline the nature of the Orthodox Church presence in the Caribbean, especially Jamaica, indicating that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is the particular expression in this context. It seeks also to discuss aspects of our College's life as an ecumenical institution and the way in which our ecumenical agenda is pursued generally, and in particular, in relation to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Finally, a brief comment will be offered on ways in which the Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) can facilitate the ecumenical enterprise and agenda in our College.

Background

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which forms part of what is known as the Oriental Orthodox Churches (i.e., the Egyptian, Armenian, Ethiopian and Syrian Orthodox Churches), is a founding member of the World Council of Churches. It also has membership in various bodies such as the All-African Conference of Churches, the Caribbean Conference of Churches and the Jamaica Council of Churches. The Church observes the principal tenets of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The Ethiopian Monk Priest, Abba Mandefro (now Archbishop Yesehaq) and other Ethiopian prelates established the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica, in May 1970. It falls within the Western Archdiocese of the Church of Ethiopia. In Jamaica there are some six branches of the church found in Kingston, St. James, Portland, Westmoreland and St. Catherine. There is a misconception among some Jamaicans that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is a Rastafarian Church. This misconception may have been precipitated by the fact that many Rastafarians associate themselves with the church because of its African origin and its links with Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Salassie.

At the time of arrival the church had no meeting place for its liturgical services. In the spirit of ecumenism and as an expression of its historical links with the Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Diocese allowed the Church the use of its main church building in the city of Kingston, the Kingston Parish Church. This was to remain the centre of its worship and liturgical life until the Church was able to acquire lands from the Government of Jamaica and establish its own church and administrative headquarters at Maxfield Park in Kingston.

Upon the appointment of Abuna Paulos there were many protests within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica. The view expressed here was that the Churches Canons prevented the appointment of any other Patriarch once the existing Patriarch is capable of carrying out his duties and is not ill. Consequently, members here have pledged allegiance to Abuna Merkorious who, at the time, was in self-imposed exile in Kenya. This position however, conflicts with the argument that Merkorious resigned and the Canon authorised the election of a Patriarch to fill the vacant seat. The local Orthodox community experienced a schism over this issue. The St. Mary's Anglican Church then opened its doors to the faction, which remained in communion with the world-wide body. Legal proceedings concerning leadership and ownership of the property continue.

As a member of the World Council of Churches and the regional Caribbean Council of Churches, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church also enjoys membership in the Jamaica Council of Churches where it is represented by the section in communication with the Patriarch.

The United Theological College of the West Indies and its Relation to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The United Theological College of the West Indies, which is unique in its ecumenical base and size among such institutions in the Caribbean region, has sought to provide a place of theological education and ministerial formation for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica as it does for other denominations. To this end, the College has been involved in the education of several of the ministers who have served in this denomination. Indeed, as a church which caters to persons on the margin of mainstream society, persons with a strong sense of racial/ethnic identity as black persons, and who are generally within the lower socio-economic strata of the society, the Church has not been able to fund the full cost of education for its ministers at times. Accordingly, the College has often provided scholarship assistance to these students beyond the level usually offered to other students, in order to assist in the growth and development of this Church.

In addition, the College has provided a forum for ecumenical dialogue and cooperation with the Church over the years of its existence in Jamaica. On the occasion of the visit of the Patriarch Theophilus Abune to Jamaica in 1973, his itinerary included an official visit to the College at which he was provided with the opportunity to address the Faculty and students and the neighbouring St. Michael's Seminary of the Roman Catholic Church. As a student of the College at the time, it provided me with the first opportunity for exposure to the Church in a first-hand way.

Since that time there has been a subsequent visit by a Patriarch and the College has hosted a conference of the Church, and in the latter part of 1999, had an open forum of Faculty and students to which His Grace Archbishop Abune Thaddaeus was invited to address the gathering on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He was accompanied by several priests of the Church who enjoy close fraternal relations with the ecumenical community in Jamaica.

Within the last two years, an offer has come from an Ethiopian Orthodox priest of Jamaica to teach a course on the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the College. This offer has been endorsed by the denomination and has received the approval of the Faculty of the College. As soon as the priest completes his process of re-settlement to Jamaica, a process so far delayed by personal and family concerns, the course will be offered to senior students of the College as an elective.

Ecumenical Theological Education

The United Theological College of the West Indies is affiliated with the University of the West Indies and functions as the Department of Theology in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the Mona Campus. The University of the West Indies is spread over three campuses located in separate island territories of the Caribbean and related to each of the other campuses are three Theological Institutions also affiliated with the University:

- St. John Viancy, a Roman Catholic Seminary related to the St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad;
- Codrington, an Anglican College related to the Cave Hill Campus in Barbados;
- St. Michael's Theological Centre a Roman Catholic institution adjoining the UTCWI which together with UTCWI is related to the Mona Campus.

Generally, all these institutions follow the same courses of the University, and sit the same examinations in accordance with its regulations. While teaching provides exposure to a range of perspectives on subjects taught, doctrinal positions are usually avoided. This approach makes provision for students to demonstrate a knowledge of their own denominational position and ecumenical perspectives but the examination questions or the method of teaching cannot require students to answer from any single doctrinal position.

The regular timetable of the College provides for weekly denominational classes which each Warden (denominational appointee) conducts and which all students under denominational sponsorship are required to attend. It is here that the distinctive elements of denomination doctrine and practice are taught. While this approach to teaching in an ecumenical institution allowed the creation and continued existence of the College over thirty years, it has not allowed the deeper exploration of ecumenical concerns, which centres on the difficult issues of doctrine and polity.

While we continue to hail the UTC's existence as a tremendous ecumenical project which allows for sharing of human and material resources among a wide spectrum of denominational groups and the provision of a dynamic community within which people live, study and worship together in ways which allow for denominational diversity, nevertheless we have come to recognise the need for us to take further steps in the ecumenical enterprise.

One way in which we have sought to do this is to hold a number of open fora when the entire community of student and faculty come together to listen to papers presented from denominational perspectives on specific issues to be followed by open discussions. It is in this kind of context that the document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) was shared within the life of our community.

Since assuming the office of President of the institution in 1990, I have taken the position that the time is right for some bold new steps to be taken in the direction of ecumenical learning and the promotion of ecumenism within the constituency we serve. To this end, it was decided to launch a Lectureship in Ecumenism Studies in honour of the Revd Dr Philip Potter, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and former Lecturer of the College. The incumbent lecturer will teach designed courses.

While some international funding has been sought and received, the financial base of the lectureship is still not at the desired level, but the decision has been taken to proceed with filling the position, and to that end, a search committee has been established. While we hope to attract a suitably qualified person who has studied in the area of Ecumenics and Mission Studies, we recognize that it will be necessary to draw on various persons from diverse denominational backgrounds and experiences in order to allow for the most comprehensive ecumenical perspective on the issues to be covered in the course.

The WCC and Ecumenical Theological Education

The World Council of Churches is the foremost expression of ecumenism within the modern world and needs to be recognized as a repository of ecumenical resources, initiatives and personnel for the promotion of *ecumenical theological education in our world*. While it is true that some of this is accessible through the work of the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, nevertheless there is need for accessibility to persons from our region so that we can develop the human resources that would be readily available to assume responsibility for projects like our Lectureship in Ecumenical Studies. Hopefully, the information technology will allow access to academic institutions like our own which seek to offer serious academic reflection and action in the area of ecumenism.

At another level it is desirable that the World Council of Churches through the ETE seeks to provide financial support through direct contribution or networking to ensure the viability of programmes in ecumenical theological education. In a climate in which many regional and national ecumenical institutions are undergoing serious financial and programmatic changes, there needs to be a stable base of support for institutions of ecumenical theological education that will continue to keep alive ecumenical accomplishments of the past and the vision of the future.

***FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES:
ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN JAPAN***

Hisako Kinukawa

I – Context

A feminist perspective on ecumenical theological education in Japan cannot begin without first looking at the context in which that perspective is situated. We cannot run away from our contexts if we want to take a holistic approach to doing our theologies. The contexts in which we live always involve a variety of relationships, both internal and external, beginning with those between body and mind, personal and group. Additionally, these may be relationships or encounters with cultural traditions and may be with other religions.

Second, our faith commitment plays an important role as we choose particular relations out of numerous options for molding our theologies. Once we have begun to shape our theology, we begin to find what which is distinctive about our Christian faith. From that vantage point we may begin to assess the meaning of the faith to which we have committed our lives. If that faith commitment asks us to follow doctrines which do not seem appropriate for our lives and contexts, we may find ourselves in a dilemma. Here again, we may eventually find ourselves re-imagining and re-constructing our Christian faith. As more women and men engaged in working for the full participation of women and men in church and society begin this process of conscientization, critical reflection, and then re-construction from a feminist perspective we find that that process is both a challenge as well as a hope.

Consequently, those engaged in making their faith commitments meaningful for their lives may find themselves moving into a third stage in their faith development. As feminists enter into that third stage, they begin to create a feminist perspective appropriate for their own particular context and circle of relationships, both cultural and personal. In examining that process in a more particular way in this essay, we shall look at the emergence of several new ecumenical endeavors and conclude by looking in depth at the creation of perhaps the newest expression of ecumenical theological education in Japan.

Christianity in Asia: A Brief Overview

A distribution map of world religions says the Christian population is greater than that of other religions of the world. However, when it comes to regional distributions, the ratio varies. In Asia only 7.9 % of the populace belongs to Christian churches while in Latin America 97 %, in Europe 75 %, in Oceania 65 %, and North America 54 %. In Africa, where Islam has had a powerful influence, Christians amount to little more than 30 % of the population.¹

It can easily be explained why Asia has the smallest number of Christians in comparison to other regions, for Asia is known as the birth place of all the major world religions. Asian countries that have been exposed to religions besides their indigenous religions have become multi-religious in the course of their long histories.

Even Christianity was born in the western-most part of Asia, but what was unusual about Christianity was its way of spreading. Other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and even Islam spread primarily toward the east from their birthplaces. Christianity was the one exception that moved from the western end of Asia further westward, though there were a few anomalies. For instance, we find Christian churches

in India which trace back to the Apostle Thomas, and Nestorian missionaries promulgated the gospel in Persia, in Afghanistan, and finally reached into China in the 7th century.²

When Christianity arrived back in Asia through western missionaries, it was already westernized. By then the Bible had become the norm for judging other cultures and Christian converts were asked to abandon their traditional cultures and indigenous religions. An interesting speculation would be what difference would have been brought to the history of Christianity if Paul had taken the gospel in the other direction, toward the east, instead of to Rome. What then would have happened to Christianity as it moved into the multi-religious countries of Asia?

Westernized Christianity, with its highly cultivated monotheistic conception of religion met an unexpectedly strong resistance in Asia where other religions had had their histories for a long time. Asia, consisting of so many countries, is not monolithic. The historical backgrounds of each country offer clues to how Christianity has been accepted. In the Philippines, almost 90 % of the populace are Christians following the hardship of several centuries of Spanish colonization. The Christian faith supported the people as they went through the struggle to be free from Spanish rule and the subsequent control of the US. In Korea, the number of Christians increased remarkably during and after the colonization by Japan. Almost 50 % of the population is said to be Christian. In other countries, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam have gained most of the population. Therefore, the ratio of Christians is very low: Hong Kong 10 %, India 2.4 %, Indonesia 8 %, Sri Lanka 8 %, Thailand 0.5 %, etc.³

Japan, which is located at the east end of Asia has been a kind of terminal for various religions expanding eastward. As each religion was enculturated and indigenized in the course of passing through different countries and being accepted by the people, it could not avoid being transformed once again when the Japanese accepted it. Culture, history, social structure, and even economic status affect people's spirituality and their understanding of a particular religion. What was distinctive about Japan when its people encountered new faiths? How were they adjusted to Shintoism and other indigenous faiths? What happened to the Christian faith when it was brought into Japan with its more than 1500 years of history with other religions?

Christians in Japan

In Japan the ratio of Christians has never been more than 1 % of the total population since 1549 when Francis Xavier, a Portuguese priest, first arrived. Nowadays the statistics say 0.9 %. It means you may not meet another Christian if you are among 100 people in the general public. Actually you will feel very much a minority and hidden if you come to visit Japan as a Christian, where, on its small land a little smaller than the state of California in the USA, more than 120 million souls, half of the US population, live.

Among about one million Christians, 60 to 70 % are women. Women have been the backbone of the churches in Japan. For the last few years I have been a member of a university church affiliated with International Christian University (ICU). ICU was founded after Japan's defeat in the Second World War with donations from Christians in North America as well as Christians in Japan. ICU claims the Christian faith as the spiritual foundation of its liberal arts education that seeks peace and justice. All the faculty members are asked to confess the Christian faith. ICU church is non-denominational protestant, open to anyone. Most members are highly educated and middle class, with much interest in social justice and world peace. ICU students are involved in activities which nurture their spiritual growth in and through the church.

Even there, women members amount to 290 out of 462; or 63 %. The ratio has not changed much in its 50 year history. Maybe the ratio itself should not surprise us, but what does surprise us is that it was only a few years ago that the church finally decided to invite a woman pastor to serve the church. The decision was made when my spouse and I returned to live on the ICU campus to fulfil my spouse's work as president of ICU. Till then, the congregation had three pastors, but all were male. Seemingly the idea had never occurred to the members or staff to hire at least one female pastor.

Maybe this is not a surprise because the trend has been so normal in our churches. Using the opportunity of the senior pastor's retirement, I suggested they hire a woman pastor and recommended a young woman. Certain things have been noticeable, following her appointment. Women have felt more at ease in seeking counseling from her. They have heard issues directly connected with them mentioned in her sermons. They have learned that women were also active in the time of Jesus and throughout church history though their stories might be hidden in the records.

In situations like the above, it is not easy for women to find a church if they feel called to be a pastor. One of my friends, the wife of a pastor, finished her seminary education and waited for the school to assign her to a church. The school then told her that she already had a church – her spouse's – and she was supposed to become his aid! Another young friend has served for nearly a decade in a church which has only five members. There are almost 9,000 churches in Japan including both Protestants and Catholics, but the congregations that have more than 100 members are few and most women pastors, especially single women, are assigned to small sized churches which cannot support their pastors.

ICU church is a member of the United Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ). The annual report (1999, p. 255) says that there are 305 women pastors working in churches out of 1874 pastors in total. That means only one woman is found among 20 pastors. I do not know how many women are serving as senior pastors, but we can imagine not many.

It was only in March, 2000 that the National Christian Conference of Japan passed a proposal that men and women should be equally represented in its general assembly and council. When I attended a council meeting representing the NCC Women's committee to support the proposal, I saw only one woman among 30 council members in addition to one woman who was a vice chairperson.

Theological Schools

In Japan there are about 100 schools which offer theological education to prepare pastors and priests. At one of the UCCJ seminaries, Tokyo Union, only 12 % of the students are women and no full time female faculty teach the main theological courses. Though it is said the number of female students has been increasing, it will be hard for both the school and women students to find places to serve, as more churches tend to put preference on married male pastors. Some other schools have a higher ratio of women students in their theology departments, like Kansei Gakuin University with 39 % and Doshisha University with 54 %. Although the number of women students seems to be increasing, there are few women faculty at any school. Feminist theology courses, if they are offered, are taught by feminist theologians employed as adjuncts.

Thus the prospect for women in ministry or theology is not so bright, even though there are quite a few who feel it inevitable for women to be more involved with churches as well as with theological education. There is another factor that does not help this unfortunate situation. That is the decrease in the number of children, which directly affects school financial circumstances. Almost all the colleges and universities

are working on their infrastructures. The theology department is usually the first to be diminished, which results in fewer openings for women.

One way to break down the male-centeredness in churches is to raise the consciousness of lay women and men. Grassroots transformation may have more impact upon the reformation of churches. If churches change, theological schools and their sense of authority will also be seriously questioned. Because of the situation described above, I had to pursue my way of doing theology outside the educational institutions while teaching a course or two at different colleges as an adjunct. Before explaining what I may have contributed to ecumenical formation in theological education in Japan, I would like to analyze the spirituality the Japanese people have nurtured in their long history with different religions.

An Illustration

In the past few years, I attended six weddings of my nephews and nieces. Five of the six couples had their weddings in Protestant Christian churches. Pastors of the churches gave the new couples a message celebrating their marriage and confirming their love as they created new homes. The couples promised their union with positive affirmations. Soon a baby arrived to one of the couples. On the 30th day after his birth, they made a visit to a Shinto shrine to get him blessed by a Shinto priest. The visit is believed to protect babies from evil incidents. On his buggy, hangs a tiny cute bag. It is made of a high quality traditional Japanese cloth and inside is a charm especially chosen for him. The bag was a gift from his grandparents, who purchased it at a Shinto shrine. It is expected that the young family will make additional visits to Shinto shrines at his third and fifth birthdays for celebrating his growth and praying for his health in the years to come. His grandparents have their tombs at a Buddhist temple, so when they hold funerals, they will ask Buddhist priests to take care of the dead.

When Buddhist temples have their festivals, people around the temples have the opportunity to carry portable temples on their shoulders and walk around the streets to invite more fortune upon their daily lives. The couple will take their baby boy to see the procession on the main street. They will discipline him according to the Confucian teachings with which they were also disciplined by their parents. Confucian teachings have changed their contents as time has changed, but the basic mentality of most parents has its foundation in these teachings. Since his mother had her middle and high school education at a Christian school, she has a Christian spirit deep inside. The young couple used to visit Buddhist temples on New Year's Eve, when Buddhist temples toll their bells 108 times, beginning just before New Year's Day, to send off evil spirits that may have brought misfortune upon the people. Millions of people visit the temples and contribute small amounts of money. After visiting the temples, they make New Year's visits to Shinto shrines where they can buy arrows and other items that are said to act as talismans for their household if they keep them in the corners of their homes.

As we consider this young couple as an example, we may ask if this way of living should simply be called syncretism or if we should say that they are only following social conventions without a particular spiritual interest. Or can we see any reflection of spirituality in this? It is not unusual here for people to express dual or multiple affiliation with different religions. Therefore the statistics of adherents of Buddhism and Shintoism together can often exceed the total population. It seems that the Japanese people have adapted what is most convenient from each religious tradition and lived with these modifications so long that it has become almost meaningless to tell which custom comes from which religion.

II – Faith Commitment

A Brief History

Christian missionaries from the USA and Europe arrived in Japan in the late 19th century 250 years after the closure of Japan to the outside world. The missionaries had to confront a multireligious society in which Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism and other religious practices were fused in people's lives rather than being separated from one another. There was even a period when Buddhist temples were institutionally combined with Shinto shrines. The relation between Buddhism and Shintoism was doctrinally linked by a theory that suggested that the kami of Shinto were the protectors and phenomenal appearance of Buddhist divinities who represented the purest original form of divinity.⁴

It is interesting to hear that Buddhist sutras were chanted before the altars of Shinto kami, and many Buddhist priests made pilgrimages to the Ise(Shinto) Shrine to perform ascetic practices. This happened during the feudal period when Buddhism was protected by the power of the times, the Shogunate. The Buddhist priests kept records of all births, marriages, deaths, travel, and changes of residence. Thus Buddhist temples played the role of local government offices. The Shinto priests occupied lower positions compared to Buddhist priests, and had less administrative authority until 1868. Then an estimated 74,642 Shinto shrines and 87,578 Buddhist temples existed. (Compare the numbers with the 9000 Christian churches of today.) “The great majority existed as one component within a temple-shrine complex, in which temple and shrine functioned together as a single cultic center. The complex was generally controlled by Buddhist clergy.”⁵

The Meiji era began in 1868 and with it a new form of Shintoism, the State Shinto, became predominant under the Meiji government which promoted a policy of building one shrine in every village. It is interesting to see that both religions sought a way of co-existing instead of alienating each other, even though the two were not free from the political influence given by the power of the time.

In the Japanese culture, each religious tradition has its own role in different phases of people's lives and in different aspects of society, as illustrated by my relatives' story above. We might say that people grow up in an inclusive cultural and religious milieu shaped by the interaction and fusion of different religious practices and teachings. These religious practices are often viewed as social conventions, but we cannot ignore the fact that those religious practices and teachings play an important role in the formation of world views or life-orientation in people's minds. Such a religious milieu can be described as very ecumenical even before we set up the agenda of ecumenical formation. In fact at the level of grassroots movements, we do not need to make much effort in forming an ecumenical movement.

Theological Education

Needless to say, the mainline Christian theological schools have not necessarily done their education with such an understanding as this. Most theological professors had their theological training in Europe or in the USA. Academia has not succeeded in breaking down the barriers that were created by developing theological education in similar ways as it was done in European and North American countries. Theologians in Japan tried to make Christian theology distinctive from other religions, yet quite often overlooked or failed to analyze people's reality and the needs from the people's side.

For the last two decades or so, a new stream of doing liberation theologies has begun to emerge. Liberation theologians are still a minority group and are scattered in different theological schools where they have produced books from their new perspectives. More are serving in churches.

Not to be forgotten is that one common characteristic of the religions that support the multireligious culture of Japan is their discrimination against women. The idea that women are to be subordinate to men, which supports a patriarchal society, is also acknowledged in these multireligious beliefs. Women have unknowingly long been kept down by androcentrism. In addition, a society like Japan that takes its first priority in keeping harmony among groups has in addition, victimized individuality and creativity. This is the reason the country is described as highly group-oriented.

My primary spiritual foundation and orientation are rooted in the traditional multireligious heritage and praxis of Japan. It may be a particularity of Japan that a person does not usually belong solely to a single religion. As I explained earlier, these religions have not been assimilated into one another, but have co-existed in diverse ways. My own life has been formed in a multi-logue with these different religions and has been enriched by their spiritual component.

I was not born into a Christian home nor am I a born-again Christian. My confessing the Christian faith was a commitment, and not a conversion in the sense that I changed my religion. The spirituality of other faiths has infused my being since I was in my mother's womb. I see different faiths as relational to one another and this perception shapes the kind of methodological perspective I bring to my interpretive work with Biblical texts. Without an interfaith perspective, my theology cannot find its legitimacy.

The Non-Church Movement

In March 2000, the United Board of Higher Education in Asia held a conference in Tokyo which was co-sponsored by the International Christian University as part of the commemoration of ICU's 50th anniversary. Every participant was asked to write a short article on the impact Christian higher education had given to their life. My spouse started out his article as follows. "I have had no occasion to be educated in a Christian institution. My pre-school years were spent at home under Confucian disciplines given by my parents whose lives were deeply influenced by Buddhism. When I started my primary school, education was controlled by a system based on the State Shinto. Thus Confucianism, Buddhism and the State Shintoism soaked into my soul without raising any question, contradiction, or difficulties. The teachings of the three religions fused together in my mind, body, and soul." Then he describes his encounter with a Christian professor at a state university where he studied mathematics. Influenced by the professor, he became a Christian. He writes, "The professor was a member of the Mu-kyokai (Non-church church), founded by Mr. Kanzo Uchimura, and is a form of indigenized Christianity. In its simplest expression, it is the Christian faith grafted into the soil of Confucian spirit. When I think about the multi-religious background in which I was nurtured in the early days of my life, I can understand why I was attracted to the Non-church Christian faith. Kanzo Uchimura was of the class of warriors. The spiritual foundation of the warrior class (Bushi-do) was found in Confucianism."

Mu-kyokai (Non-church church) was started by Kanzo Uchimura in 1898, who tried to form his own theology as a Japanese Christian, independent from foreign missionaries. It is remarkable to see him doing a contextual interpretation of biblical texts from his own perspective in the beginning of the 20th century. He wrote many volumes of biblical interpretation which have been referred to by many theological students. The "Mu" of "Mu-kyokai comes from a concept found in Zen Buddhism which means nothingness. In other words, it signifies the reality of total oneness: the oneness with no boundaries. Therefore it can imply an ecumenical inclusiveness of faith. However, the Non-church looked to Bushido (the way of warriors) for its indigenous link with Japanese spirituality. Bushido expresses the basic spirit that supported the feudal age of the Shogunate. The warrior's moral code of Bushido was formulated on

Japanese traditional thoughts about purity by Shintoism, enlightenment by Zen Buddhism, and filial piety by Confucianism.

The warrior spirit of paying one's full loyalty to only one lord was a close match with the Christian faith which advocated loyalty to only one God. This was an excellent way of indigenizing the Christian faith in Japanese spiritual soil. However, Bushido was monopolized by men and the Non-church is not an exception when it comes to discrimination against women. The Non-church has never registered its members, but it is said the church has about 2000 adherents today.⁶

I encountered the Non-church faith when I was a student at ICU and committed myself to the church. What attracted me most was its emphasis on interpretation of biblical texts. After staying in the circle of the Non-church for 20 years, I eventually had to emancipate myself from its theology, which was discriminatory against women, and its tendency to keep faith separated from social justice issues.

For more than two decades, the majority of my praxis of doing feminist theology has been done outside the institutions of theological education and the established churches. This way was the most practical as well as the only way I could choose to work on ecumenical formation.

I understand ecumenism (oikoumene) as "the whole inhabited earth," meaning that our earth is conceived as a place where all the creation resides together seeking peace and justice for all. Oikos, household in Greek, gives the sense of one family. I would like to note that women have been most closely related to the places where a family or families establish their lives together, and thus might offer special insights on ecumenism.⁷

III – Feminist Theological Perspective

The Initial Stirrings

Since the beginning of the 1980s, Christian women in Japan have been organizing themselves in different groups, partly influenced by the UN International Decade for Women, and since then have continued on their own journey of theological studies and praxis. To illustrate, we formed the Association of Women Doing Theology in '84, Japan/Korea/Korean-resident in Japan Women's Forum of Theology in '87, and the Conference of Church Women in '88. These groups have been an important foundation for many women, enabling them to step out from the boundary of their home churches and join international ecumenical programs and movements. The groups worked with other groups such as the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) and the Christian Women's Temperance Union for pursuing the human rights of those suffering in and outside Japan, including the "comfort women," and for social justice issues throughout the world.

The distinctive characteristic of all these women's groups formed in the last two decades is found in their spontaneousness and less organized way of keeping the group identity and integrity. This way has functioned well and many women have been mobilized.

While participating in these programs and holding various workshops on feminist theology and Biblical interpretation from a feminist perspective, I have kept one dream swelling in my heart for the last ten years. That was to found an institute of feminist theology where women and men who are interested in advocating such a perspective can get together, further our study academically, and integrate it with the work of ministry.

While my dream was still half asleep in the bottom of my heart, I had an experience one might call a precursor to what would take place in the future. While I was writing my Dissertation/Project at San Francisco Theological Seminary (SFTS) in San Anselmo, CA, USA, I met a Korean woman, Sook Ja Chung, who graduated from the same program at the same time as I. We often talked about our dream to open up more opportunities for Asian women to study feminist theologies. Our dream was expanded to envision holding such a program as we had experienced at SFTS somewhere in Asia. The plan was supported by SFTS' Advanced Pastoral Studies program directed by Walter Davis, and Dr. Letty Russell and Dr. Shannon Clarkson were invited as teaching staff. In 1993, Sook Ja Chung and I managed to give birth to a Doctorate of the Ministry group of 14 women from Korea, Japan and the Philippines. We gathered together on the ICU campus in Tokyo and the group started its doctoral study. This became the first group of SFTS' Doctor of Ministry Program with International Feminist Emphasis, which was later followed by more international groups.⁸

Then, before my long awaited dream came true, I participated in founding the Congress of Asian Theologians (CATS), first as a member of its originating committee and then serving as a member of the continuation committee since 1996. This experience gave me a basic understanding of how to organize an ecumenical conference. It was also very fortunate that I could attend the Women's International Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians' Conference held in Costa Rica in 1994 to learn about the justice work concerning the world-wide web of violence against women which enabled me to keep my theology open to diverse feminist theologians throughout the world, especially those women who suffer and are oppressed because of neo-colonialism and globalization. When I attended the International Committee Meeting of the World Day of Prayer Committee held at Cape Town(1999), I was deeply impressed and most encouraged by the earnestness shown by the participants from the countries where Christians are a minority. Groups such as these are exceedingly important in the countries of Asia where Christians represent a significant religious minority, in offering opportunities for the various denominations and faith communities to work together instead of against one another.

In Japan, several years ago I met a Baptist woman and a Catholic sister who shared their deep concern to hold ecumenical women's worship gatherings. After informal yet enthusiastic conversation in prayer for several months, we began having worship services for women. Each time the service begins with community building and sharing followed by a liturgy created for that meeting by one of the members. The group then shares tea and conversation about the issues brought to the meeting in a joyous eucharistic celebration. We have met once a month for the last three years and now number over 20 women, representing different Protestant as well as Roman Catholic denominations. The group is named The Women's Prayer Circle. The years with this Circle have been helpful for nourishing my vague idea of the Center we would one day start and for and shaping the plan into a concrete structure.

Birth of the Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan

The Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry began to materialize as an ecumenical institution when my colleague-to-be returned to Japan from the USA. More than ten years ago we had shared the same dream and promised to materialize it sometime. We began working on the idea, purpose, structure, and programs of the Center. It took almost a year before we had the inaugural meeting of the Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan. Prior to the inauguration, we held three preparatory meetings with 26 women and men participating in those meetings. We formed a serving committee of seven women and seven men to work for the Center. We put our purpose in two sentences: "The Center's intention is 'doing theology' through integrating Christian theology and ministry from feminist

perspectives. In doing this, we hope to listen to voices of the marginalized, especially those of women, and to participate in global and interreligious dialogue.”

The inaugural meeting was held on January 22, 2000. We had a program of four speeches followed by a discussion open to the floor and then a tea-party. Sixty-two women and men participated from throughout the country.⁹ My co-director, Dr. Satoko Yamaguchi, mentioned in her speech that the desire to found a center began to grow in us separately, about 15 years ago. She continued, “At that time, a growing number of church-going women were beginning to express the questions they held about a church tradition that discriminated against women. When these women gathered to talk, it became clear that many women harbored on-going questions toward the minister’s sermons and Bible studies. However, a number of women thought that such doubts were a sign of faithlessness. At the same time, ministers who met church members’ resistance when they tried to introduce new perspectives to their theology and ministry were also feeling the pain.”

We expressed our feminist perspective in the Center’s constitution as follows: “We use the term ‘feminist’ for two reasons. First, we choose it rather than ‘women,’ because our basic stance is political and sociocultural, yet not one that sets men against women. We discern the structures of patriarchy at the root of discriminations based on sex, race, class, etc., and take up the challenge to transform our society. While sharing this basic stance, we seek to be fully inclusive and to respect diversity, across sexual and other biological differences.” Secondly, “our choice of the term ‘feminist,’ rather than more general words such as ‘human liberation,’ is also intended to make it clear that we understand ‘women’s’ experiences typically reflecting those of the marginalized, as ‘others,’ throughout the history of patriarchal societies. Just as situations at the margins are diverse, so, too, are women’s experiences. We thus intend to take diverse lived experiences of both women and men who stand in compassion with the pain of others/women as our point of departure for diverse forms of critical reflection and action at the Center.” (The flyer of The Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan, 2000)

Responding to the statement, one speaker said from her experience of ministering with college students, “Thinking about bridging between theology and ministry from a feminist perspective means to eliminate not only barriers between men and women, but those between men and men, women and women, between ethnic groups and nationalities, over sexual orientation, cultural differences and economic class. We need a ministry that will open the way to eliminate these barriers and to set its goal in building a community of fellowship that is based on reconciliation, healing and love.” Theology cannot stay inside the academic ivory tower separate from ministry. And the ministry cannot find its way without finding the words of good news that reach the hearts of the listeners.

Beyond the Boundaries

A sociologist voiced her concern, “I have found the lines dividing theology and ministry, theology and other disciplines, ministers and lay persons blurring in these past few years. Asians I’ve met are saying that it is difficult to do theology without awareness of the problems created by economic structures and political oppression in Asia. The world we live in is so complicated that it does not allow us to close ourselves in a neatly divided room such as theology and ministry. In fact the need for theology and ministry is found in the middle of our daily lives, where, for example, we are faced with serious environmental and bio-ethical issues affecting the core of our existence.”

A male theologian raised a question about what alternative metaphors can be used in place of the traditional phrase “God the Father” after sharing his hope that the Center will function for both women and men to experience their independence as well as interdependence.

A male pastor, referring to the way the eucharist has been held in churches said, “we need to search our conscience deeply to ask whether we are in line with the essential quality of Jesus’ total ministry when we sanctify this table in exclusive association with the sin-redeeming death of the one, incarnated Son of God and make it available, conditionally, only to the baptized.” He continued, making it clear how he is connected with feminist theology, “This is where my interests overlap with the direction of feminist theology. In other words, it strives to maintain a constant, critical and watchful eye on the forces of centralization and marginalization, and to realize a human life and social way of being that is both open and inclusive. I also believe this leads to a stance that wholeheartedly values and protects diversity, and contributes to active dialogue among many religions.”

The new Center has just taken its first step toward a future of many dreams. The first seminar was very fruitful. A stimulating report on feminist hermeneutics was made on the creation stories. The second is scheduled for May, 2000. Mary Magdalene will be the center of our discussion. We have started planning an intensive seminar to be held in July, 2000. It will be a countrywide conference including a place where participants may stay overnight and share their theologies and concerns in depth. The theme will be “Questioning ‘God the Father.’”

Thus my report on forming an ecumenical theological institute is not even an interim report. It is just a report on its beginning, yet I have a strong feeling that the Center will grow and contribute in opening a new horizon to theology and ministry. Yet I would hope that this examination of a new group in formation will yield some clues to ways in which a feminist theological perspective might influence ecumenical theological formation. One would hope that these clues might be fruitful not just for those working on these issues in Japan, but for others seeking to work together in ecumenical, interfaith or interreligious contexts. Viewing and analyzing codes, symbols, stories, rituals, and even social conventions in our multi-religious societies may help us see expressions of the divine in previously unrecognized or unacknowledged places. Interfaith dialogue, intercultural encounters, interactional interpretations of social, political, and economic relations in history all help us experience the richness of the gospel as well as make us open to multi-logue with other faiths. Then, last but not least, we might see possibilities for overcoming various discriminations that were unfortunately caused by all these religions, including the Christian faith. I would like to keep dreaming until our Center becomes one of the lighthouses for bringing unity among different religions and enabling collaborative work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

¹ *Christian Year Book 2000* (Tokyo:Kirisuto Shinbun Sha, 2000), 110-111.

² Kwok Pui-lan: *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 1-4.

³ Internet Homepage: www.odci.gov/cia/publicatvis/factbook/rn.html:CountryListing .

⁴ Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State 1868-1988*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 14.

⁵ Hardacre, 13-15.

⁶ Hisako Kinukawa, “My Story,” in *Women Moving Mountains: Feminist Theology in Japan* by Asia Women Resource Center, forthcoming.

⁷ Hisako Kinukawa, “Toward a Household of Unity in Christian Faith from a Feminist Perspective,” *CTC Bulletin, Asian Movement for Christian Unity*, vol. XV, no. 2, 1998.

⁸ For more stories and information on the program, refer to *Ministerial Formation*, vols. 74, 86, 88, World Council of Churches, Education and Ecumenical Formation.

⁹ On the inaugural meeting, refer to *Newsletter* No. 1 Center for Feminist Theology and Ministry in Japan, February, 2000.

**TRANSFORMING ROLE OF SCHOLARSHIPS:
SARAH CHAKKO THEOLOGICAL ENDOWMENT FUND**

Marijke Haworth

At the Decade Festival celebrating the end of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), prior to the World Council of Churches Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1998, women and men gathered to reflect on the theme “Your Story is Our Story.” By doing so, they invoked the transforming impact of their personal stories as theology. Understanding and owning these stories as women in the tradition of Christianity and in the context of a community of theologically trained and lay women provide sources of empowerment to many who have supported and sustained the body of ecumenical saints in the midst of inequality and suffering.

For years prior to the Decade Festival, women gathered and shared their stories of being in the church. Midway in the Ecumenical Decade some women began to dream of ways that the spirit of the Decade could continue to bear fruit. They communicated their ideas with one another and discussed the importance of ecumenical theological education and ecumenical leadership development for women.

Thus it was an important moment when the Sarah Chakko Theological Endowment Fund was launched at the Decade Festival, prioritizing theological training for women from the Southern Hemisphere and Central and Eastern Europe. Named for Sarah Chakko, the first woman president of the WCC, this fund seeks to restore hope for those women who strive for theological education but who do not have the resources or time to be away from their families for long periods. Sarah Chakko, an Indian woman in the Orthodox Syrian church, knew her vocation was to teach women. She was a “pioneer in the Asian Christian women’s movement”, who sought “new status and new opportunities for hard work and the challenge to grow.”¹ As chair of the Women’s Commission, she “inspired a whole generation of women across the World, encouraging them to embark on ecumenical ventures.”²

Thus, the Sarah Chakko Endowment Fund sponsored and supported by the Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) Desk of the WCC, continues in the spirit of such an ecumenical leader. The fund seeks to raise capital funds of \$3 million US Dollars in five years from individuals, churches, denominational women’s desks, theological departments, networks, theological associations, regional ecumenical councils and other organizations interested in funding women’s theological education. The income from the Fund, about \$150,000 per year, will be provided as scholarships for women to study for Bachelor degrees in Theology or its equivalent in their home countries, the International Feminist Doctor of Ministry degree at San Francisco Theological Seminary, and to attend ecumenical seminars such as those offered at Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland.

The task of fundraising for scholarships, especially those that affect the lives and contexts of women are essential to ecumenical formation and leadership empowerment. Issues of access to funds and opportunities for theological education for women during this period of globalization is central to help change women’s lives in the global village. The gathering of women for this task involves new models, acknowledgement of diversity, renewal, and transformation³.

The priority for an endowment fund over our past practice of doing advocacy at random from year to year gives us the possibility to rely on a long term funding plan so that we can have funds available to give to more women than before. Once we have done the work of developing the endowment fund, it will free up administrative time to resource application. In the past, few women have benefited from the

existing WCC scholarships which only provide grants for Masters or Ph. D. in case of faculty development. Providing scholarships for Bachelor degree in theology for women will mean making it possible for more women to aspire for further studies, which is necessary, especially for the teaching ministry. There is only a handful of women teaching in theological institutions in the South Hemisphere and Central and Eastern Europe. We have already received about \$90,000 in donations from mission boards, individuals, and women's organizations.

In reading past issues of *Ministerial Formation*, I was struck by how many women have been inspired by theology and the practice of ecumenism and the increasing number (slow but steadily) of women leaders in their churches, national ecumenical bodies and theological institutions. Theological education then, is not something that is outside the context of women's daily work, but is what they are doing on a daily basis without knowing it. The importance for women then, who are already working together in a faith context, is to understand their roles in the ecumenical community.

Nyambura Njoroge in her July 1999 article for *Ministerial Formation* on the International Feminist Doctor of Ministry Programme, reflects:

This is one of many educational opportunities that need to be available to women in countries in the Southern Hemisphere if they are to develop their leadership skills as theologians, teachers, pastors and administrators in many churches and ecumenical organizations. It makes its contributions to the on going work of leadership development by providing a form of theological education that is far less expensive than many residential degree programmes... Such a degree is appropriate for those who are seeking to develop their theological skill in a context that takes ministry seriously as the primary locus of their learning. The degree is designed to strengthen the work of women engaged in a variety of ministries and to provide them with the academic research skills they need if they wish to begin their work as scholars and writers. Such a programme is usually not available to women in their own countries, and provides access to feminist theological research for those who have the background for advanced theological studies in English⁴

Shannon Clarkson and Letty Russell, the architects of the International Feminist D.Min Programme, have reflected on the impact it has had on those women who have completed the courses and dissertations. Many have returned to do mission or social work ecumenically in their contexts, continuing to use the scholarly skills they learned in the programme.

The hope the Sarah Chakko Fund will give to women is a gift of God for the people of God. We hope that you support us in honoring Sarah Chakko and future women leaders in the ecumenical movement by contributing to the endowment fund, by sharing the enclosed brochure with friends, church groups, theological schools etc .

¹ M. Kurian *Sarah Chakko: A Voice of Women in the Ecumenical Movement*. Christhava Sahithya Samithy. Thiruvalla, Kerala 1998. p. 13.

² Ibid. p. 18. Pauline Webb. *She Flies Beyond*, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1993.

³ Letty M. Russell, Education as "Transformation: Feminist Perspectives on the Viability of Ministerial Formation Today," *Ministerial Formation*, Geneva: WCC Publication, No. 74 p. July 1996.

⁴ Nyambura Njoroge, "The International Feminist Doctor of Ministry Programme" in *Ministerial Formation*. Geneva: WCC Publication, No 86 p. 45 July 1999.

Tribute to Marlin VanElderen
1946-2000

The unexpected and untimely death of Marlin VanElderen has left his colleagues in the World Council of Churches deeply shocked and has provoked a flood of messages of sympathy from all parts of the worldwide ecumenical community. None of those who worked with Marlin or knew him only as an excellent editor and lucid writer has remained untouched by the news of his passing away in the early hours of 12 June 2000 (Pentecost Monday) after a massive heart attack.

For nearly twenty years, Marlin VanElderen had been on the staff of the WCC. After an initial one-year period, from September 1980 – August 1981, when he served as an interim editor for WCC Publications, he was officially appointed in October 1982 as magazine editor for the WCC monthly magazine *One World*. He remained in this position until October 1993 when he was made *chief editor* for all publications of the WCC, a responsibility which he held until his death. In addition, during the months leading up to the Harare Assembly, he served as acting director of the Communication Department until the arrival of the new director in January 1999.

However, this brief record of his official functions within the WCC cannot do justice to his unique contribution to the life and work of the Council. When he first came to the WCC, he was already an accomplished editor with Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company in Grand Rapids (USA), the city where he grew up. Raised in the spirit of the Christian Reformed Church, he was educated at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, where he already began to manifest his gifts for writing and editing. He acquired his professional skills with Wm. B. Eerdmans who, since the 1970s, had been a frequent co-publisher with the WCC. Thus Marlin VanElderen came into touch with WCC publications even before joining the staff.

For more than half of the twenty years' existence of the WCC magazine *One World*, Marlin VanElderen served as its editor. Through his choice of title stories, the continuous discovery of new and creative contributors, the collection of short clippings and vignettes from around the world, and particularly through his thought-provoking and incisive editorials, he succeeded in making *One World* a widely appreciated source of up-to-date information and reflection about the ecumenical movement. It pained him more than anybody else when, in 1995, *One World* went out of existence, an early casualty of the financial problems faced by the WCC.

However, even while the regular editing of *One World* was his main responsibility until 1993, his unique gifts as a writer and editor had become a very valuable asset for the WCC. Thus, in 1990, looking forward to the Canberra Assembly (1991), he wrote a special book for the *Risk* series, *Introducing the World Council of Churches*, which, even ten years later, has remained a reliable and thoughtful presentation of the history, purpose and activities of the WCC in the context of the wider ecumenical movement. During the same period, together with T.K. Thomas, he formed the team which co-ordinated and completed the editing of the first *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, which since then has become an indispensable source of information and stimulation for ecumenical research and discussion.

It was natural therefore that after the retirement of T.K. Thomas, Marlin VanElderen should be made chief editor of WCC books and managing editor of the *Ecumenical Review*. Two major projects stand out during these last seven years, and his premature death has turned them into a legacy of Marlin VanElderen to the WCC and the ecumenical movement as a whole. The first of these is the preparation of a third volume of *The History of the Ecumenical Movement*. A first effort to carry forward the historical account

beyond 1968 had to be abandoned in 1984. The positive echo encountered by the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* served as encouragement for a second attempt for which Marlin VanElderen took the overall responsibility together with a group of editors, including John Briggs, Mercy Oduyoye and Georges Tssetis. In 1997, the manuscript was essentially assembled, and the volume was to be published in time for the Eighth Assembly at Harare. The need to assume the leadership responsibility for the whole department obliged Marlin to set the editing task aside. He finally managed to return to it in the weeks just prior to his death. While he now will no longer see the volume in print, this book will remain his lasting gift to the ecumenical movement. His comprehensive grasp of ecumenical developments during this turbulent thirty-year period made him the uniquely qualified editor for a work which will mark the transition of the WCC and the ecumenical movement into a new historical phase.

The nature of this transition became the focus of the second major project during these last years in the life of Marlin VanElderen. In 1989, the Central Committee of the WCC had initiated a reflection process about a *Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC*. From the beginning, Marlin was centrally involved in giving direction to this process; first by organizing and then interpreting the results of a major consultation on this topic, and then by developing a questionnaire to stimulate the direct participation of member churches in the reflection. When in 1995 the decision was taken to orient the process towards the preparation of a major policy statement for the Eighth Assembly, marking the 50th anniversary of the WCC, Marlin VanElderen naturally moved into the role of the chief drafter of what became known as the *CUV Document*. His unflinching sense for the integrity of the WCC as a “fellowship of churches” enabled him to find the language which provided a new orientation for the WCC after a long period of critical self-assessment. The clarity of his perspective which transcended the defensive struggles of particular interests, as well as his unquestioned loyalty to the ecumenical cause, also made him the indispensable drafter of the outlines for the new organizational structure of the WCC.

For many years, Marlin VanElderen has carried a burden which was more than what he should have been allowed to assume. His modesty and his unrivalled competence again and again placed him in situations where expectations turned naturally to him. In many ways he became not only the living memory but the conscience of the WCC in search of a new self-affirmation. His particular gift to ask the necessary (and sometimes uncomfortable) questions at the right time allowed new answers to be formulated. His professional ethos as an editor made him prefer a place in the background, never seeking personal recognition for himself. His gift and his passion was to enable others to express and manifest clearly their convictions about the ecumenical vocation.

As a colleague, he inspired trust and reliability. Whatever had passed his editing touch could be trusted as a consistent exposition which was to be taken seriously. In a very special way, he was both tender and strong, caring selflessly for others and maintaining at the same time a firm orientation towards the task at hand. He could listen attentively for a long time – and take notes – while others would exhaust themselves in talking. When he finally intervened, he would often limit himself to a brief pointed observation, to a penetrating question or to a remark loosening up the situation with his wonderful dry sense of humour. In a quiet way and drawing on his inner strength he helped decisively to establish a sense of integration and coherence.

Marlin Van Elderen will be remembered with profound gratitude as a colleague and friend. His premature death leaves a gap that will not be filled for a long time. He had become the most articulate interpreter of the WCC in the process of transition. This process is unfinished, as the legacy of his life has remained incomplete. The final words of his essay *Introducing the WCC* now take on the character of a charge for those who have been privileged to work with him and who will have to carry the unfinished task forward.

“Is the ecumenical movement moving? If so, some may be tempted to say, it moves very slowly. Thus, paradoxically, the WCC calls for both patience – recognition that in ecumenism, as in mountain-climbing, progress is slower the closer you get to the top – and a constant renewal of the ‘holy impatience’ with the status quo that led to its formation in the first place.” He had both – patience and holy impatience, and as we remember him, we should not lose sight of either of the two.

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary, WCC

A fund has been set up in memory of Marlin, and, if desired, contributions may be sent to the Marlin VanElderen Fund for the Development of Ecumenical Literature. Post Office account: Ccp 12-572-3, or Bank account: UBS Geneva, number 240-695149.00A.





How you can help:

- **Spread the word.** Distribute this brochure widely among potential contributors among your colleagues, contacts and networks. If you need additional copies, contact the person mentioned on the back - or have the brochure photocopied locally. If your organization has a newsletter or periodical, place an article or announcement about the Fund in your next issue. And publicize the Fund through what is often the most effective means of communication: word of mouth.
- **Make a financial contribution or pledge.** The Sarah Chakko Theological Endowment Fund will be financed not only by large grants from institutions but also by individual gifts made according to each person's means - carrying on a tradition of many modest contributions by which women have supported much of the churches' outreach and service.
- **Identify women students who could apply for support and appropriate theological education programmes.** It is hoped to make the initial grants from the Fund in 2002.
- **Express solidarity with women pursuing theological education.** Offer them encouragement; include them in your intercessions.

For more information contact:

Nyambura Mjoroge
Executive Secretary
Ecumenical Theological Education
World Council of Churches
P.O. Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 791 61 11
tel. direct 791 61 93 / 61 08
fax +41 22 791 64 06
e-mail: mn@wcc-coe.org
cc: fd@wcc-coe.org

Cheques should be made out to the World Council of Churches, and sent to the above address. Bank transfers can be made to the accounts listed below at UBS Geneva. For other methods of payment, please contact Nyambura Mjoroge for further information. All payments should be clearly marked **for the Sarah Chakko Fund**.

UBS
P.O. Box 21600
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland (Swit: UJISWCHZH12A)

Account numbers:
CHF: 240-695149.00 A
USD: 240-695149.60 X
EUR: 240-695149.61 D
DEM: 240-695149.70 L

Sarah Chakko

Theological Endowment Fund

55

Sarah Chabba Theological Endowment Fund



In every part of the world, the number of women following courses of theological education is growing. Yet especially in countries of the South, financial limitations prevent many dedicated and qualified women from equipping themselves for service to and leadership in their churches.

This wealth of human resources combined with a scarcity of financial means was observed by the teams visiting churches and women's groups around the world during the Ecumenical Decade - Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998). During the Festival in Harare, Zimbabwe, which marked the end of the Decade in December 1998, a step was taken to address this: the inauguration of the Sarah Chabba Theological Endowment Fund.

Named for an Orthodox educator from India who was the first woman president of the World Council of Churches, the Fund honours the numerous women who have offered their gifts of leadership to the church and the ecumenical movement - in their local contexts, on the national and regional levels, and through global ecumenical bodies. Its aim is to enable similar contributions from women in the decades to come.

The Fund will give special emphasis to making it possible for women to enroll in theological education programmes and initiatives that take account of women's theological and ecumenical creativity.

Over a five-year period the Sarah Chabba Fund is seeking to raise a capital endowment of US\$3 million from both individuals and institutions. It will be administered by an advisory group of women staff from three international church organizations in Geneva, with regional advisors. Income from the Fund will be used to support three types of theological formation for women, both lay and ordained.

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- **Bachelor of Divinity** (or equivalent) degree, usually undertaken in one's own country or continent, in an ecumenically committed seminary which is sensitive to women's theologies;
- **International Feminist Doctor of Ministry** - a 3-year degree programme administered by San Francisco Theological Seminary, designed for theologically trained women who are already filling leadership positions in their church and community;
- **Short-term ecumenical seminars** such as those offered by the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey.

Sarah Chabba 1905-1954



Born in a devout Syrian Orthodox family in South India, Sarah Chabba once said her only theological training came through listening to her mother read the Bible aloud in their home. Her formal studies were in history and education - at Queen Mary's and Presidency College in Madras and later at the University of Chicago and the University of Michigan.

After receiving a master's degree in Madras, Sarah Chabba was appointed to teach history at Isabella Thoburn College, an ecumenical school under US Methodist auspices in Lucknow, North India. The school - where she was named principal in 1945 - would be her home for the rest of her life, though she travelled widely in Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East.

Active in the Student Christian Movement and the YWCA, she was one of a small team sent by the Indian SCM on a mission to university students in China in 1946. At the first assembly of the World Council of Churches (Amsterdam 1948), it was Sarah Chabba who presented the report of the study committee on women; and during 1950 and 1951 she took leave from Isabella Thoburn to work full-time for the WCC's Commission on the Life and Work of Women in the Church. In 1951 she was named to succeed T.C. Chao of China as one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches - the first woman to hold this position.

Returning to Lucknow in 1951 (where she organized the 1953 meeting of the WCC Central Committee), she was named by her church as a delegate to the WCC's second assembly (Evansville 1954). She had begun to prepare actively for this when, in January 1954 during a basketball game with some students, she suffered a fatal heart attack.