

The Challenges Of Today's Pastoral Responsibilities Of Orthodox Theological Education

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My subject matter is very extensive and for many reasons it is not very easy to deal with it. I have gained my experience in local situations and hence I cannot speak for the entire theology. Nevertheless, I am happy to be able to launch upon this subject from my own point of view. I have been a teacher of theology and a theological meditator as well as a priest. Often it is hard for us to choose between these two, because one will suffer if the other receives more attention. Either one's theological viewpoint becomes obscured because of one's pastoral work or vice versa one's pastoral duties and pastoral responsibilities are infringed upon and even destroyed by one's theoretical and dogmatical theological viewpoint.

Orthodox Theological Education

I call genuine theological education *mystagogy*, that is, instructions given by the Holy Spirit. Theological education is the Holy Spirit guiding an individual into faith and in the faith of the Church. It is guidance into the mystery of salvation which is Christ First the concealed Christ, the Son of the Father, then the Christ who revealed himself unto the world, knowledge of whom can be passed onto others, can be felt in one's life, and about whom we can preach. When we talk about orthodox theological education we need to regard the total conception of the mystery of orthodoxy as our starting point. We cannot deal with theology in a manner similar to that used when dealing with some other object of knowledge, to which we can apply any method whatsoever. Theological knowledge must be placed in its own surroundings, the spirit of the Bible as expressed e.g. by the Gospel of John in the sacerdotal prayer of Jesus (John 17:3) "And eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." Consequently knowledge is life and life is knowledge, one cannot exist without the other. To know the Bible does not mean to have knowledge acquired by mere intelligence and reasoning. We need also the presence of intelligence renewed in the baptism. Intelligence in this kind touches the very mystery, which is unfolded only to the heart's understanding.

When we talk about knowing the Bible we need to remember the Apostle Paul's words in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: for man to know God, God needs to know man. This means that God is not the object of our knowledge but He will always remain its subject, always the One who touches man both from outside and from within.

Knowledge of Him comes to us as revelation but also through the inner movement of our spirit. God helps us to grow into the knowledge of the truth through our inner self.

Paul reminds us of the relation between knowledge and love. Let us not forget the eulogy of love in Corinthians chapter 13: knowledge without love is nothing. According to the Bible, knowledge means life, ignorance on the other hand, sinfulness, lies, denying God, death. This is why Christ himself is the real teacher. He is the mystagogue of His own mystery- He himself leads us to the knowledge of himself. Theological pedagogy doesn't lie outside its own sphere. Theological language is always pedagogical. If it were not so, we would need to be reminded of the Apostle Paul's words: " I thank God that I have a greater gift of tongues than all of you, but when I am in the presence of the community I would rather say five words that mean something than ten thousand words in a tongue." (1 Cor. 14: 18-19) "Meaning something" is here to be interpreted as "meaning something to the intelligence of the heart".

In this manner, the language of human theology works together with God's language, with God's pedagogy, with the Logos. To use Apostle Paul's words: we are co-workers with God.

Theology, which only uses man's language, is useless. Theology becomes something real only when the object of that language, Jesus Christ, himself speaks in us. Theological language is the renewed man working in co-operation with Christ's teaching within the Church. It is also man's own contribution to the heavenly work of repentance. If theology is truth, it elevates one's mind, it saves and cures and heals. God's word is refracted in the prism of man's heart and it will remain as the word of life, the word of healing which repairs all shortcomings and transforms.

I have put forth a few general ideas on theological education, or better put: on theological language. With it we can approach the secret of knowledge, God's secret. Theological language always means apprenticeship during which the teacher does not outwardly force his student to adopt ready-made truths but helps him to grow and open up to the realization of real truth.

We could call this theological growth in a man a new birth. We talk about the new birth, which takes place in baptism. In monasteries we also talk about a new birth, which is the result of a long and arduous process of self-denial. This ascetic road leading to Easter is the road which a monk and every Christian must tread.

Waking up to theology, and the end result of this awakening resemble each other. On one hand they belong to the Church, where an awakening to the realization of God leads to an awakening to theological thinking in one way or another. On the other hand, this awakening might require special charismas, which differ from each other in different people. I wish to stress this idea of orientation, this idea of an initiation. It goes beyond one's purely intellectual power of reasoning that we get from the dogmas of schoolbooks. To be initiated into the theology is to become familiar with the mystery of the living,

trinitarian God; it is to enter the mystery of Christ, to enter the mystery of Christ living and acting in us.

A rearrangement of man's being is a necessary part of spiritual change. When a person through baptism and Easter is transformed, Christ becomes the real inner being of man, which does not mean that man's own personality disappears or is diminished. The Apostle Paul writes (Gal. 2:20): "...and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me." Likewise in Phil. 2:5: "In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus." This does not mean that we should be analogous to Jesus, or in the terms of trinitarian theology, *homoousios*, but that our minds should be animated by Christ and by the example given by Him: His compassion, His mercy, His wisdom...

As we thus enter Christ's mysteries we are able to see the world and man through new eyes, through Christ's eyes. And not only do we see the world but we can also work together with Christ so that our contribution to today's world means doing and reflecting Christ's work, making His work more topical.

The Crisis of Orthodox Theology

Without wanting to make generalizations we can state that theological teaching suffers from a dramatic dichotomy: between theological knowledge and the life of the Church functioning in present-day society. In general we can say that rational scientism has deeply penetrated into our orthodox theological school and we have not yet been able to rid ourselves of what we can call the Babylonian captivity of theology. We can go even so far as to say that orthodox methodology, pedagogy and teaching are marked by rationalism, in other words, one can see in them the clash of intellect and righteousness, of theological knowledge and life. We often quote father Sergey Boulgakov who says that he received his theological inspiration from the bottom of the chalice.

This criticism of the orthodox theology as whole is a serious one and none of us can feel secure. Yet we have to express a few reservations on the question. I don't want to deny theology its due status at the expense of the Christian praxis I have outlined above. I would rather characterize the process of becoming a theologian as a very real commitment, a new birth, which requires a certain period of silence. Let us remember the half-hour's silence describes in Revelations. But this initiation, opening up one's visions, must not mean a separation from life, from the Church, from God or from men. Radically we have to pick out an intellectual and spiritual education: here I oppose the tendency which present-day students have of finding a short cut to a theological synthesis. If a potential theologian chooses this faster route he fails to experience that which is absolutely vital in the whole process of learning, namely, passing through night and death. One of a theological student's temptations, his drama, but at the same time one of his needs, is to pass through death and suffering, to walk in a tunnel where the steps are not easily found and where he can lose his sense of direction. It is precisely at this point that pastoral guidance is important to the theologian, as it enables him to maintain his faith. Accepting this passage through the dark in order to experience a rebirth, and at the

same time to maintain his knowledge of theology. This process is dramatic but necessary one. The entire end result of one's studies falls within a danger zone if one wants to escape the rigors of passing through death to a theological resurrection.

I would like to come back to the relation between theology and spiritual life. Advancement in theology is hazardous the person doing it as well as for others. If words lack spirit they will become obstacles, impregnable partitions, values in themselves, false gods. I am not merely referring to a scholastic system of doctrines which is easy to criticize- we should rather respect more the theological systems of the past. I regard the theological text books as a spring board with which we must strive higher just as we need to rise above words when praying.

This view of mine can be criticized, no doubt, but I compare it to psychotherapy. In therapy a person cannot be told to eliminate the inhibitions, the faulty action models and structural deficiencies to which he resorts. In theology, too, there are structures which are deficient but whose elimination would be risky. This is partly the problem which Vatican II faced as it tried to eliminate structures. Here we are not only dealing with the scholastic systems which we often justly stone, but with the fact, too, that criticism need be deliberated on. I refer to palamism, hecycasm, the theory of God energies, and the theory of transfiguration, and think about the wealth of heart anthropology. All this can become a system, gnosis, aesthetism. I feel that theological and liturgical as well as canonical aesthetism pose great dangers to orthodoxy. We easily use such concepts as God's light, transfiguration, silence, ascetism and fasting. We puff up about these things as many do about the external pomp of liturgy. And when this becomes the main object of our attention, iconic vestments and rites will become obstacles.

Theology has many prerequisites which- if not met- will become very real challenges from the people of God to theology, and from the world to the Church. These challenges will become judgements of the Holy Spirit as was the case with the saints in Laodicea in the Revelations.

The first prerequisite is humility. This word should emerge from God's silence in us. Let us remember Ignatius Antiochite's touching parable: Word emerging from eternal silence. I believe this concerns theology. Theology is also a language, which needs to emerge not from emptiness, or lukewarmness or intelligence but from a fullness, a wealth of silence. Theological language as well as the language of prayer must be replete with silence, to bring along silence, giving the desire to cease speaking. Not a desire to cease talking because we abhor what we hear but because we have this desire on account of God.

The second point is the necessity of fearing God. This brings to my mind what the Old Testament as well as the New Testament say about respecting God's name. One should not use God's name or names in vain. I think that the Jewish idea of not using God's name in vain applies to today's theology, too. God's name, Jesus' name and The Father's name are terrible realities, which quicken but also burn as consuming fire.

Thirdly, and this point has to do with the priest's work and theological pedagogy more than the first two: one must have regard for one's neighbour's inner rhythms- the neighbour being the one who is being taught God's word, regardless of whether this neighbour is a student of theology, a child, an adult, or God's people as a whole. We should have regard for God's name and for the appearance of divine life in our neighbour. This means that the use of theological terms must be carefully checked although it is at times important. It must not be rejected too easily and we shouldn't start simplifying theological matters. All this requires discretion. We need to detect the moment of spiritual awakening, the moment of maturing, and attention should be paid to the language used by each individual. And this is what we see in Christ's pedagogical mystery: parables, eye-to-eye teaching, last explanation, the pedagogy of farewell addresses and so on. Theological knowledge and understanding is a serious matter: theology needs to be taken seriously and we must not start too hastily criticizing the wrong theology, we must not slide into pragmatism, into viewing Christian life from a utilitarian point of view. Finally, there is the requirement of the finesse of theological language, when it is used in the service of truth but without excessive dogmatic hardness- I would go so far as to say without dogmatic terrorism. As there is canonical terrorism, so there is also dogmatic terrorism.

Pastoral point of view and theology

Theology is a very personal process, which at the same time involves the entire congregation. I have recently compared it to a biological process, to the growth of a living organism. Theology is conceived in one's heart; it grows, develops and bears fruit. Theology can also wither and die. There is also such a thing as the decadence of theology, not only time wise: there are people who are born into theology but who later on denounce it.

From a theological point of view, pastoral emphasis means the re-strengthening of living and life-giving theology, the knowledge of God and the theological knowledge of man as well as the knowledge of creation, the world and our physical world. For if we look at the world through God's eyes, God's spirit permeates everything, God's light permeates everything. Consequently the right theological process will enable us to understand the difference which exists between that which is holy and that which is unholy and help us to remember that nothing in itself is unholy, merely fallen. The pastoral meaning of theology necessitates the renewal of a living contact of theology with the Church and on behalf of the Church, for the building up of the Church, and in this connection we can of course talk about the relationship between theology on one hand and real life and the fate of local churches on the other. In Vatican II Western theologians spoke through Father Congar and said that we must *sentire cum ecclesia*, feel together with the Church. Theology needs therefore to find again this pastoral dimension, this organizational dimension, this "*sobornost*", a connection, which is tied to living Christian liturgical creation. Theology also means shared liturgical service. Theology is also collaboration with the divine pedagogue, the chief of the shepherds, as St. Peter calls

Christ in his first epistle. This means that pastoralism needs profound theological knowledge, which includes the Bible, the apostolic fathers, the synods of the Church, our entire spiritual tradition. On the other hand pastoralism includes the building up of man in the spirit of our orthodox tradition wherein the theological syntheses of the past are still topical and unchangeable and of importance in developing the new man today.

Theology is a collection of orthodox knowledge and wisdom and as a science it is quite precisely defined, objective. Quite often we find great pleasure in orthodox dialogue. This is the miracle of continual agreement, the miracle of profound theological encounter. We can read over and over again in orthodox publications about studies conducted by such orthodox scholars whose name we are encountering for the first time but who at the same time bring great happiness to us. It was not very long ago that I read in "Contact" an article written by a Romanian theologian, Father Galilu, where he defines redemption. This brought great joy to me. He talked about redemption as a sacrifice. It was a sacrifice by God in the sense that it had to do with God's love towards his creations. Thus we can feel that deep inside orthodoxy we are united, we have an ongoing miracle in the work of the Holy Spirit, which makes us meet each other. This encounter does not take place around the minimum of our common knowledge but around the maximum of the truth. It exists this theological maximization and in the absolute exactness of these studies (which is intellectual exactness but which cannot be set apart from the rigour and ascetism of man going towards the perfect Christ).

Pastoralism and theological training

Theological training is something very important and yet in our dioceses not much attention is paid to it. I would like to remind you of one point in Nikita Struve's analysis which he gave in a general assembly held in Finland 1964. He spoke about the great misery of today's theology. He talked about theological teaching and theology in general as one would about a poor beggar who nevertheless would be stared upon by the eyes of the Christian world. Among those plagues, which lurk for theology today and which destroy it are those, which have to do with theological training. I would first of all like to mention theological careerism, college careerism and pastoral careerism which all go hand in hand: the pursuit of diplomas and academic degrees nearly always weakens all desire to study theology for its own sake and to conduct theological research without selfish interests. I feel that our parochial hierarchy should especially supervise the training of its future priests and theologians. Unfortunately it is our bishops who are the cause of the theological under-development of our clergy. Theological reformation should start at top level. I have to add, though, that the difficulties which bishops face in directing the affairs of the dioceses are at times tremendous if not insurmountable from a human stand point.

Seminarians and theological students nearly always feel ill at ease, are even frustrated by the things I have mentioned. This frustration is nevertheless necessary because through frustration the student will encounter the whole of the Church. This

same frustration is a symptom of that tension which is part of a church in the world, that tension which is reflected in the life of the Church and the pursuit of theology. Frustration can therefore be a good influence but it can also lead to a loss of courage and faith. We are well aware of the cases where young men full of faith loose their faith for good in seminaries. I would call this loss of faith a protective reflex, self-defence in a person who is defending the most precious thing he has. A person like this has not been able to combine what is most precious in himself and what is most precious in itself. On the other hand, this can lead to resignation, which likewise is very serious. This can lead to dichotomy, conscious and unconscious acceptance of the status quo. This mediocrity is accepted- mediocrity of office, mediocrity of speech, mediocrity of grades.

The pastoralism of theological studies means that a student is helped to overcome a theological vertigo or theological night. Many things cause this vertigo: perhaps it is the vertigo of being in the divine abyss we behold, which can crush us as Pascal was crushed by the immensity of the sky full of stars. But there are also vertigos which are connected with spiritual difficulties: we are perhaps unable to overcome the scandalous past of the Church. This leads us to the problem of teaching church history. The teaching reveals the horrors and crimes of the past without being able to summarize and show the work of the Holy Spirit through man's sinfulness. This is true as far as the Old Testament is concerned. Reading church history can upset one as reading the Old Testament can, unless the Master helps us slowly and patiently and with tender care to put things in their proper places. Unless He shows the constructive work of the Holy Spirit regardless of human errors.

One can also loose heart when faced with the technicality of theological terminology. Doctrines and apostolic fathers follow each other as an impossible combination. Students are disturbed when they notice that their teachers cannot overcome the phase of technicality and analysis. We are all students of theology, something which is forgotten by us as we come to occupy a teacher's chair. Students of theology could probably come up with a long list of grievances but that could only be a great benefit to teaching which at times is unable to give anything about the reality of God, about the reality of man and about the reality of the Church. Here inner determination and faith are needed to help the student to avoid getting too confused. The instruction given has many gaps, which the student must learn to fill in through reading and through work- through thorough research. On the other hand, we can deal with the student's temporary and perhaps ultimate inability to overcome technical language, horrible historical aspects and in order to become a theologian.

We can see today's Christianity and the Church's historical insecurity. Theology cannot hide in the theories of various schools. Suffering is also pedagogy; it is the pastoralism of theology. In this manner theology passes through death and resurrection and is solidary with the death and resurrection of the entire Church. Theology cannot escape God's fire. There is a pastoral attitude towards a theological teaching of theological students but I would venture to say, too, pastoralism towards theology itself- it needs to be loved, it needs to be protected against extremes, it needs to be helped through the narrow gates of death and resurrection, it needs to be carried like a child

through God's fire. We need to harbour a tender- not a scornful- attitude towards theology, even if it should sometimes stray in the wrong direction.

In conclusion I would like to say that orthodox theology faces many questions. Questions are asked about training too, but theology in itself has no ready-made answers. We need to draw from the living forces of the Church, from the sources of the Holy Spirit, from the Holy Spirit. Theology will find its proper place when it draws on the Holy Spirit, upon God's people and upon the spirit of love, forgetting itself. The task of theology is three-fold: to spread the word of God to people, to spread the word of man within the Church and only after that by the power of the Holy Spirit, to spread people's views of God, the living God and not the God of the philosophers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus Christ.