

Orthodox Theological Education And Parish Life

“Let your light shine forth : Orthodox Theological Education in the modern world”

Vth International Consultation of Orthodox Theological Schools,

Halki Theological School, Turkey, August 14-20, 1994

Bishop Makarios of Riruta
(Patriarchate of Alexandria)

Whenever we look upon the subject "Orthodox Theological education and Parish Life", we can but accept that it has been always timely, and that, even more today, it is the particular concern of the three great confessions of Christianity. Roman Catholics and Protestants alike are after a new type of theology which, they think, will give an answer to the modern needs of the world, whereas the Orthodox Church, emerging from a long period of inactivity, is beginning to reveal itself in a new perspective and trying to define its relations with the world anew.

But, what is theology and what is its nature? Today, we need to answer this question more than ever as clearly as possible. We also ought to explain what is not theology.

"Theology" must not be confused with religious faith nor with theological science. Of course, religious faith cannot be complete and clear without some measure of understanding of the realities of the faith on the part of the believer, nor without some approximation by the believers to the influences and spiritual challenges of their environment. But, this is not theology; for the latter presupposes conscious and systematic effort. Nor must theology be thought synonymous with theological science, which can be indifferent to the real content of the faith, or even atheistic. It is impossible for theology to be worthy of its mission without theological science, which by the use of commonly accepted methods throws historical, psychological, moral and social light on the subject being interpreted. This manifold analysis of religious statements by theological science is the indispensable link with the ways of thinking, the problems and the needs of each age. Therefore, theological science is indispensable; but, be that as it may, it is not the same thing with theology, for the latter has divine revelation as its starting point and its guide, not only formally, but essentially. And the combination of the two factors of faith and theological science constitutes theology proper.

In general terms the work of theology is exegetic: in essence it is nothing else but the development and interpretation of the original *kerygma*, the theoretical expression of the Church's central reality about redemption in Christ. Therefore, we must say that theology's principal characteristics are twofold: the interpretation and elucidation of the faith is the first, and the second is the projection of the faith to every age — in the language which that age understands — and the defense of the faith against the world's attacks. Both these things are impossible for theological science without the element of "faith". To do its work, theology presupposes both the existence of religious faith on the one hand, and of a scholarly

theological science on the other. But immediately one might say that this is the work of Dogmatics or Apologetics. However, this observation is not correct; of course, dogmatic and apologetic theology are theologies of excellence, when Dogmatics is no longer confined to interpretation of the Christian faith of past ages and when dogma does not present itself only in the categories of the first six centuries, but also according to our way of thinking; and when Apologetics is not defending itself against shadow enemies nor basing its efforts on the naivety of others.

Having said these remarks about theology in general, we now need to consider a serious problem of contemporary Orthodox theology, to wit, the problem of relations between the school of theology and liturgy, a problem first recognized by the late Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in the seventies. Fr. Schmemmann had stressed that the theology and the liturgy of the Orthodox Church were in a deep crisis which is mainly provoked by the rupture produced between theology and liturgy in the post-patristic period. The authentic and healthy relationship existing, according to the Fathers, between Christian theology and the liturgy as an experience *sui generis* of the Church was destroyed first of all by western scholastic theology. As a result of the influence of this theology upon Orthodox theology this relationship was also compromised in the Orthodox Church with serious consequences for the life of the Church in general.

Now, let us examine what this crisis of relations between Orthodox theology and liturgy consists in, according to Fr. Schmemmann's analysis, and how it is set forth nowadays. "Whatever its 'key' or orientation may be", said Fr. Schmemmann, "Orthodox theology seems to be deeply alienated from the Church, its life and needs. Although it is taught in the official church schools, its influence upon the students disappears often on the day when the diploma is received. It is understood as an intellectual game ignored completely by the people of God - clergy and laity alike. Today in our Church professional theologians are a certain "lumped proletariat" and, what is even more tragic, they seem to be happy with this situation. Theology is no longer consciousness or awareness of the Church, its reflection about itself and its problems. It has ceased to be pastoral and does not give to the people of God the knowledge of God, which is the true content of eternal life. It is a theology alienated from the Church, and a Church alienated from theology; this is the first dimension of the crisis today."

Concerning the crisis of liturgy, Fr. Schmemmann describes it in the following terms: nominalism, minimalism, and lack of influence on the actual life of Christians. Liturgical nominalism implies that the forms and rites initially expressing the existential spiritual experience of the Church, remain frequently mere forms, deprived of any content because of the want of such experience in the liturgical and practical life of the Church and Christians today.

The minimalism is an assortment and abstract reduction in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church consistent with the criteria, which have nothing to do with the *lex orandi* of the Church.

As maintained by him, the liturgy remains the home, the *sancta sanctorum* of the Church; it is the principal, if not the sole occupation of the Church. However, a deeper study also manifests here a very serious extremity which cannot be solved with unduly quick and superficial liturgical reforms, although many are in favor of that today. The first feature of

this crisis is the increasing nominalism of liturgical life and practice. Despite a seeming conservatism, and even archaism, it is difficult to understand this practice as the expression of a genuine *Lex orandi* of the Church. Whole and essential layers of liturgical tradition, whilst being faithfully preserved in the liturgical books, gradually disappear from practice, or are symbolically preserved and transformed so that it is no longer possible to recognize them. In the Eucharist and Sacraments, liturgical cycles and celebrations of feasts, rites of benediction and sanctification of life, we find everywhere the same scenario: only some elements are retained, whereas others are rejected; the selection, however, of what is to be retained is not based on the *Lex orandi*, but on considerations utterly alien to them.

However more serious — Fr. Schmemmann continues — is the fact that the liturgy, whilst being central among the activities of the Church, has practically lost its links with the other aspects of Church life. It has ceased to inform, to mould and to guide the ecclesial consciousness and the world-view of the Christian community. One can be profoundly attached to the ancient and colorful rites of Byzantium and Russia, to see in them precious relics of the past, to be conservative in liturgical questions, and at the same time to be unable to see in them, within the entirety of the *Leitourgia* of the Church, a vision of life embracing everything, a power allowing one to judge, to inform and to transform the totality of existence, a philosophy of life shaping and challenging all our ideas, actions and attitudes. As in the case of theology, one can mention also an alienation of the liturgy from life — the life of the Church and of individual Christians. The liturgy is limited by the temple, but outside this sacred place it has no influence or power. All other church activities, be it on a parochial or even diocesan level, are based more and more on merely secular presuppositions and reasons, as well as on different 'philosophies of life' adopted by declared Christians. The liturgy is neither explained nor understood as having something to do with 'life', as being a 'type' of this new life which is to challenge and renew the 'old life' in and around us. A liturgical pietism, supported by sentimental and pseudo-symbolical liturgical rites, leads in fact to a growing secularism, spreading out everywhere. In the understanding of the faithful, the liturgy became first of all something sacred *per se*, thus making the real life which begins outside the sacred doors look even more 'profane'.

This double crisis of theology and liturgy figured above is presented as a contradiction between the foundations and the life which should be grounded on these foundations. "The life of the Church", said Fr. Schmemmann, "was always rooted in the *lex credendi*, the rule of faith, theology in the deepest sense of the word; and also in the *lex orandi*, the rule of the cult, the *leitourgia*, which always makes the Church what it really is: the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Today, nevertheless, an alarming estrangement of the 'real' Church from its two fountains of life is being rapidly developed".

In order to remedy this condition, two things are necessary: a liturgical criticism of theology and a theological criticism of the liturgy. This means that all theology should become liturgical, not in the sense that the liturgy should be the only 'object' of studies, but in the sense of having the ultimate criterion in the faith of the Church as it is manifested and communicated in the liturgy, in this vision of catholic (global) experience, which is lacking in theology because of its alienation from the liturgy.

Indeed, under the spell of western post-patristic theology, orthodox theological schools accepted, most frequently without any serious criticism, the western manner of

organizing theological education as autonomous disciplines, leading to an atomization of theology.

If in the Roman Catholic Church this atomization is mastered through the principle of a hierarchical *magisterium*, understood as an external authority for theology, in the Orthodox Church this atomization can be subdued only when theology is rooted in the *leitourgia* of the Church, which is a global vision of its lived faith. Thus, theology is always an invitation to taste and see, a proclamation and a pledge, carried out in communion, a vision of life. The scriptural exegesis, the historical analysis, the doctrinal studies join eventually in the celebration and prepare it: it is an act of witnessing the mystery and of participating in it, in this 'epiphany' of life, of light and of knowledge; without this all words remain inevitably 'human, absolutely human'.

But all this assumes a conversion not only of theological methods, but also of the theologian himself, who after adopting the prestige of the discipline and the intellectual integrity, and after adopting humility characterizing any rational genuine endeavor, should learn how to enter the joy of the Church. He must rediscover the most ancient language of the Church, the language of the *leitourgia*. He must become not only a student of the faith of the Church, but first of all its witness.

Having mentioned in passing the global experience of the liturgy, we ought to dwell more on the topic of the globalization of Orthodox theological education. Globalization is the Church's universal mission to evangelize the world. It involves very much the ecumenical co-operation between the various manifestations of the Church throughout the world, dialogue and co-operation between Christianity and other religions, and solidarity with the poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice.

Several positive steps have been taken so far and their furtherance is hoped to contribute much more in the future. They include:

a) Missionary movement: some countries with few priests have been provided with more priests from those countries which had more. This fostered globalization of Orthodox theological education — countries like the United States, Greece, Finland and others have provided missionaries for African countries.

b) Ecumenical movement: this has been the offspring of the missionary enterprise. There have been many missionary conferences and organizations in order to discuss how far the Orthodox Church has gone in seeking unity among the world's churches, and this has helped the other churches and the Orthodox in particular to be aware of one another's actual distinctiveness.

c) Another way through which globalization of Orthodox theological education has been achieved is the study of the world's religions and the development of academic and theological inter-faith dialogue. World religions here means a new recognition of various faiths, not simply as the local circumstances faced by mission, but as traditions with global sweep and power. It is when the Orthodox Church begins to study and understand the teaching of other religions that she can globalize her education.

d) Another point concerning the globalization of Orthodox theological education is the struggle of Christians against racial and economic injustice, political oppression and discrimination. In such a struggle, Christians find themselves in solidarity with others across religious and ideological boundaries. So, this would help more people to enter religion; a good example is the Mao Mao story in Kenya.

e) Radio programs. Through the radio, Orthodox theological education can reach to almost all corners of the world.

However, there are several problems facing the globalization of Orthodox theological education. The principal ones are:

- i) Enculturation
- ii) Worship
- iii) Interpretation of the teachings of Orthodox theology to people of other denominations
- iv) Human relations and co-operation between priests and lay people
- v) Catechism by lay people
- vi) Language, and especially translating the liturgy into local languages

But since our topic is 'Orthodox Theological Education and Parish Life', we ought to define 'what is a parish'. A parish is the smallest unit of Christians within the Church under the pastoral care of a priest. It may also mean or refer to a local Christian community or even a local Church. We shall here use the word 'parish' to refer to a local Church.

The first historical reference to the term 'parish' (*enoria*) comes from a letter of St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th century AD) to Flavian: "And somebody having made known that he lived near the parish of the hills..." (PG 46, 1001A). In this text a distinction is made between the terms 'parish' and 'church', the latter being identified with the term 'Diocese'. St. Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, mentions the term 'parish' under the meaning of a small area where Christians were living: "he lived in the parish of Eleftheroupolis in Jerusalem, near Hebron" (PG 41, 6770). What we call a parish nowadays, in New Testament times was expressed with the term 'church', as the fraction of the one local church under the bishop into 'parishes' under presbyters is a much later phenomenon.

Most theologians agree that the Church came to be in two stages, namely to do with an organization and to do with people. When we refer to its organizational level we have in mind definite beliefs to be held, sacraments to be celebrated and leaders to be followed. This organizational level has Jesus as its base.

As a human community the Church is centered on Jesus of Nazareth, the One who lived and died and was risen from the dead. Because Jesus is a divine figure, then it is right to say that his Church has a divine origin. Its formation was God's initiative. The people who make the Church were called by God. The term 'church' derives its meaning from Hebrew, Greek and Latin words.

The Church as a human community came into being because of the interest people had; because the people had to seek association with others who had the same interest; they,

eventually, set up institutions or organizations to realize their goals. All this was based on the person of Jesus.

Jesus' teachings drew people and made them have interest in him. They were enriched by their experience of the person, life and fate of Jesus of Nazareth and their spirits were enlarged by his spirit. Also, Jesus' teachings and deeds drew people together, seeking one another's company and associating with one another - for example, they prayed together. Moreover, the people who were interested in Jesus availed whatever structures or institutions which would help them understand him better. If Jesus had not a community, it would quite literally have founded itself.

Knowing from the above that both the Church and the parish are basically people, has many important implications. There are 4 important elements that play a vital role in the life of a parish.

Firstly, knowledge about Jesus exemplified in the teachings of the parish, which have various sources like the New Testament and the symbolic teaching manifested through the Divine Liturgy and the dogmas and doctrines which the Church holds.

Secondly, within the parish we have the so-called participants, who are the real lights of the parish, provided they participate wholly in the eternal salvation of mankind through the radiation of God-given virtues, which enable them to be good Christians. All parish members, including the priest should strive to follow Jesus.

Thirdly, we, as members of a parish or of the Christian community in general, have been commissioned to serve the parish in any capacity even if we have not received the sacrament of Holy Orders. This brings us to the understanding of the role of a lay person in the parish.

The fourth point to note is that people should view a parish as their family or community of which they are members. There may arise some criticism in the parish but that should not deprive anyone from being an equal and full member of his/her parish.

Sometimes the sacrament of Holy Orders has been misunderstood by many Christians in the Church. This is because the other four sacraments, namely Baptism, Chrismation, Repentance and the Eucharist seem to have overshadowed it. But it should not be forgotten that without this sacrament of Holy Orders it would be virtually impossible for the other sacraments to be officiated; that without bishops, priests and deacons no church can function properly.

Baptism or entry into the Church is the first of all sacraments. It is the first stage of a person's initiation into the Church, and this official entry into the Church is its first aim and effect. It is also a sacrament of remission of sins. Though the sacrament can be administered, in extreme necessity of course, by any Christian, however the most appropriate person to administer it is a bishop or a priest.

It is rather difficult to distinguish between the significance and the effects of baptism and chrismation, since even in the early Church they were administered together.

Nonetheless, the sacrament of chrismation has a greater emphasis on the bestowing of the Holy Spirit on the initiate.

Membership in the Church means full participation in the Eucharist offered on behalf of all. The Eucharist is not just a simple meal, it is a family table for those who belong to the community of Christians, the church or parish. This participation in the Holy Eucharist is symbolic of sharing family life with its common concerns. All said, then, participation in the holy sacraments brings companionship in the parish and partners in the tasks therein.

The parish ought to be a body that serves the community. It has been a common misconception that only those ordained have this task of service. We must realise however that the task of service is the one that brings partnership of both the clergy and laity.

The unity of believers is the term I may use in order to bring out the element of partnership in the Church's ministry. The Church cannot function without this unity. Everyone is called to be a partner in the Church's ministry only through unity, i.e. when the Church is functioning as one body.

The Church is the body of Christ, it is a community of people who wish to imitate and follow Jesus their Saviour. In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul is using the imagery of the Church as the body of Christ, functioning as a human body, because the Church is made from many members, each one having a different function to perform. But this image brings or refers to an intimate living union, which Paul saw existing between the Church and its head the risen Christ.

Since Jesus stood in the world as the one who serves, it follows that the Church, being the community which centres on Him, must be seen to be a serving community, one committed to performing a service.

The clergy have undoubtedly their own special role in carrying out the Church's ministry, but in the long run, it is also the duty as well as the responsibility of all members who have received the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, Repentance and Eucharist, to get involved in the Church's ministry.

The mission of Christ is summed up in the Galilean ministry, about which St. Matthew the Evangelist relates that '*Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people*' (Mt 4:23). On that account it is right to say that Jesus came to bestow the Kingdom of the Father on earth so that the wounded, the neglected and the despised would attain human dignity again. That dignity was lost when, as a result of sin, man became alienated from God. So, by restoring the relationship between man and God, Jesus restored men to their pre-fall dignity.

Since the earthly ministry of Jesus focused on the sinful and even on the outcast, his whole life made him associate with such people. That was not because he condoned sin; it was rather as a result of compassion, of a need to know their suffering, of a desire to solve their problems that he had to associate with them. This compassion was expressed in his work of healing, of forgiveness, of sharing meals with the wounded and hurt ones. In this way

it turned out to be an invitation to enter in faith into a companionship with God, an offer of salvation imparted by God.

The kingdom that Jesus served was a kingdom of situation rather than of territory. It is the situation in which God not evil reigns. This is why Jesus always used the phrase that he is doing the will of Him who sent him. The kingdom or situation for which Jesus worked and which he served is really one in which human community in its fullest reality exists, the church, the parish. It is one of real companionship, companionship among people together with God.

Through the sacrament of baptism all members of the Church are called to service. And moreover the Church, being the body of Christ, has an obligation to be at the service of the reign of God in the world. This ministry should extend far outside the church building and the liturgy into all areas of life which affect the community.

The ministry of the church extends beyond proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. It should imitate Jesus as the servant bringing the face of compassion and confronting all issues affecting the way of life in a parish. The Church needs a whole variety of gifts and talents and a whole community of people using these gifts together as partners in the service of the Kingdom. We should have members who deal with the sick and the aged and who visit those in prison, some who deal with the young and make them grow in the faith, some to be involved with married couples, etc. When people use their gifts in this way, the local church shall really be the body of Christ in that part of the world today.

There is a need for gifts and talents in the Church to be cultivated, recognized and also timed, since some of them change according to age: what the gifts of a young person will have to bring to the community will most likely be different from those of a retired person. What is important is that each one sees that baptism is a call to service to the Kingdom of God, that each one understands what that Kingdom means and that each one uses in its service whatever gifts are given.

The parish liturgy has to be related to and be in continuity with the life of the parish. When being celebrated it is in other words furthering the reign of God in the area. The liturgy is the summit of Church life, it is the celebration of the life in the Church; without it the life of the parish would be boring. The liturgical life of the Church should be a source of experience and theological witness. In the words of St. Irenaeus of Lyon, "Our doctrine confirms the Eucharist and the Eucharist in its turn confirms our doctrine" (*Adv. Hoer.* IV,18,5). In the eucharistic liturgy the Church proves to be the eucharistic consciousness of the whole cosmos.

When we employ the example of a parish in Corinth, we do not actually borrow the plan for organizing contemporary parish life. Rather the life of that church will capture for us something of the atmosphere and the spirit which pervade it, and in that way will inspire us in our vision for the parish today.

The atmosphere in the parish of Corinth was very much that of a ministering community and a community of ministers. However, the parish at Corinth was engulfed in trivial issues concerning ranks and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul had to come in rather

strongly and clarify the situation by using symbolic gestures, like that of the body. Four points are brought in very clearly by St. Paul.

The first deals with the diversity of functions. Paul makes it clear that the well being and effectiveness of the Church in a place like Corinth depends on many people performing many different functions in a coordinated way (1 Cor 12:4-5,9).

Mutual respect, as the second, points to the attention worth paying by the official leaders in the Church. Because the Church is a body it would be wrong for some members to disregard the other as insignificant.

The third deals with self-regard. Despite the fact that some members, eg. the priests, have important functions to perform, still they cannot be whole in everything (1 Cor. 12:17).

And the fourth one is all about irresponsibility or opting out of responsibility (1 Cor. 12:15-16).

The oneness of the body is guaranteed in its functions through the variety of its organs - that is Paul's model for life in the church of Corinth, and indeed in any parish. Paul focuses mainly on service rather than rank, and on action rather than office in the community. But when Paul was dealing with these issues he had in mind that fellowship through the liturgy was a way of life in the community.

A priest as a member of a Christian community is an equal partner in the ministry of this calling, as other members from the time of their calling that is baptism. The priest is the official preacher of the word of God, administers the sacraments, officiates at funerals and generally is the one who blesses in the name of the Church. A priest cannot do all these functions without undergoing the sacrament of ordination to this priestly ministry; yet he is sometimes assisted by the deacon, and where we have a shortage of ministers (something we experience often in East Africa), lay people may exercise some of his functions. This does not imply that then he fails to be the official leader of the parish; rather he acts in his capacity as an overall official leader and coordinator in the parish.

The priest is above all the pastor of the local church. He shepherds the rational flock, being shepherded himself at the same time, by the only true Pastor, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Besides, the sheep which he is taking care of are not his own, but Christ's. "Feed my sheep", said the risen Lord to the apostle Peter. This commandment has the meaning of spiritual guidance, which is the procedure of salvation: purification from passions, illumination by the sanctifying and saving grace of the Holy Spirit, and Union with God in the uncreated Light of the Heavenly Kingdom (*theosis*). This work, unique and eternal as it is, requires absolute commitment and continuous care. This is why St. Paul says that pastors "watch for our souls as men who must give an account" (Heb 13:17).

The parish priest accordingly exercises the role of the spiritual father of the community in the sacrament of confession. He is given the respect of an elder in the community, the members of which he should endeavor to reconcile with God.

The major task of the parish priest, when dealing with the community in which he is a leader, is to inspire and co-ordinate activities in the parish. He should oversee his parish and aim at maintaining unity within it. He also must have a vision in his service to draw out, draw upon and draw together the gifts, talents and leadership qualities in the parish. In this way he will be an equal partner in the parish life.

Many challenges will face the priest as a leader in the parish. To start with, we have the participatory style of leadership which involves inviting people, promoting group discussion, listening to various issues and afterwards having to clarify them, identifying a lack of information, reminding the group of its agreed mandate. Consequently, the priest ought to be sincere, respectful and willing not only to teach, but also to learn.

The Divine Liturgy is of paramount importance in the life of the local church, as it contains the mystery of our faith. The celebration of the Eucharist is the supreme ecclesial celebration of the risen Christ and of communion with Him. Mainly for the celebration of the Eucharist the Church accomplishes itself as the body of Christ and the experience of the coming Kingdom. Now, the reason why the local church needs to express and celebrate its identity is because most commonly it is made up of different people or families with different preoccupations and concerns. So, in order to bring out this most needed identity, they have to be together for an occasion.

Parish members can express their identity as Church through common projects, the founding of the parish and, furthermore, through the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist makes us recall the birth of the Church through its founder Jesus Christ and the handing over of Jesus' instructions to perform the Last Supper in His remembrance. In this way we are reminded of belonging to the one Body with the same interest and therefore a need for associating with one another. When sharing or celebrating this holy meal we actually bring about companionship, a demonstration of shared life in the service of the Kingdom.

If our faith is to be a united one, then it is desirous for us to understand and appreciate one another in thought and deed. It is wrong to think we can anticipate the needs of those unknown to us. Therefore, a serious and intended dialogue is needed among all Orthodox to comprehend the oneness in which they partake, yet still recognize and respect the diversity of Orthodoxy.

A very enlightened writer who participated in preparing A Light on Our Path - Pastoral Contribution to the Synod for Africa, says "People have their own deeply traditional ways of praying, of speaking to God, of relating to God. All these should enrich their Christian life. Communities have their traditional ways of receiving people into the community, their rites of passage, whether naming, passing to adult status, marriage and family rites. In the trusting atmosphere of a small community, it is possible to reflect on these ways and see which of them or what elements should be incorporated into Christian life. Communities have their own ways of reconciling when there has been offense or conflict. Why not incorporate these ways, full of meaning for a people, into their practice of sacramental reconciliation?"

'For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart' (Heb 4:12)

Theological education and Pastoral Life must extend their influence into, and create awareness in, every community amongst the other communities around them. There should be a growth of knowledge, a deepening of understanding in other faiths and creeds in order to build a firm peace and to exhibit a real love for one another. The story of the Good Samaritan illustrates how a good man loved a stranger, one not of his own, and in so doing he showed his love for God. As for example regarding the Church in Africa, there are local African religions and Islam. This is not to prepare for war, but mutual recognition and respect and love in a peaceful co-existence. In face to face exploration of our respective creeds, we are more likely to find more in common, than distinctly dissimilar and incompatible.

Through closer ties with others in the world community, strides can be made in resolving the conflicts in the world and overcoming the economic and social abysses which separate so many in the depths of hopeless poverty and indifference to the plight of human suffering, whether in the undeveloped or in the developed world. Many of the ills of mankind come from the unwillingness, the ignorance of and the weakness of faith in God to adhere to the teachings of the Beatitudes which sum up the suffering of mankind.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Mt 5:3-12).

No separation can be made from the Truth of Christ which is the very basis of theological education and pastoral life. Without a living commitment to the Word, there is no theology and no pastoral life, only a void of eternal nothingness.

The African perspective

'Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. And He said to them, "Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. And wherever they will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them"' (Luke 9:1-6).

Such was the commandment of Our Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples, whom at Pentecost the Holy Spirit inspired as the Apostles of Christ's way. From that day down to the very day in which we live, Apostolic Succession has retained the vitality of the Orthodox Tradition and Faith. Throughout the time of its history, keepers of the Tradition have helped

to record, clarify and organize the Faith as we know it today. Theology is the study of God and Religion in relationship to mankind. In the case of the Eastern Orthodox Church, theology is more than dogma, rituals, canons, customs ... it is the living Way of Christ. One cannot isolate Orthodox Theology to the confines of a Sacred Science to be protected by the few and kept secret from the many.

'Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven' (Mt 5:15-16).

Yes, Orthodox Theology is like a light-reflecting diamond. It has many aspects, and many facets, yet it remains the diamond it is. Since Orthodoxy is a living faith, its teachings must be within the existence and context of the learner, the believer. Orthodox Theology is not the property, nor the prerogative of the scholar or the academic. It is an essential part of the very belief of the faithful, no matter if they are literate or not.

'Having been built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, and in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the spirit' (Eph 2:20-22).

The Light of the Faith is for all and it must be understood by all, whether clergy or laity.

'That they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they may also be one in Us, that the world may believe You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me, I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know You have sent Me and have loved them as You have loved Me' (John 17:21-23).

The theme of this discourse is Orthodox Theological Education and Parish Life, with emphasis upon Orthodox in East Africa. 1 Peter 4:10 will be our guideline: *'As each one has received a gift, minister to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.'*

The essence of theological education worldwide must be the same: the imitation of Christ is eternal, unchangeable, truth pure and clear. However, the conditions and circumstances are not the same throughout the world. This, therefore, presents challenges and opportunities to theological education, thence to parish life, in different manners and alternative modes. Central to theological education is the training and preparation of the priesthood.

'You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet 2:5).

In many parts of the world, there is a cosmetic interest in theology. People study to know about religion, no more, no less. It becomes an academic subject and perhaps satisfies an aesthetic taste. People of such nature have the luxury to learn, yet no commitment for which that learning is acquired.

It is important to examine the type of institution which should be designed to meet the needs of the Orthodox Church, regardless of its setting. There are many commonalities, the most fundamental being of course the Praxis of Jesus Christ, the ultimate point of reference.

The star of direction, consists in the four points of the Holy Cross: *liturgia*, *martyria*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*. Whatever else may be included in theological education, these four crucial points must be the centre-piece from which all else radiates. There exists no Orthodoxy without these truths of the faith.

Briefly, *liturgia* is the public service/worship of the priest and people. It is to praise God and to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with God and with all the people. It is a critical dimension of the whole praxis of the Orthodox Church.

Martyria is witness both in the sense of the personal level of an individual and the communal level. It is an expression of both word and deed.

Koinonia is communion. The ecclesiastical community comes into unity and harmony with the human community. It involves the active participation of all, the laity and clergy and it is commitment to collective responsibility. Its most valuable tool is the dialogue among its members in search of the will of God; an instance of sharing different views and experiences of human interactions.

Diakonia is service. This is not confined to charity in the sense so often seen today, where lip-service, or nodding condescension to a 'cause' is paid, but it is rather an experience of real evangelization based on a commitment to the imitation of Christ, through justice, human liberation and caring.

'What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warm and filled", but you do not give them the things that are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead' (James 2:14-17).

If the above are the references of our faith, then what kind of people do we look for to prepare for the royal priesthood? What criteria are essential to appropriate selection? Here, again, there is a common tie among the pan-Orthodox world. The qualities looked for are the same. The prospective candidate for the seminary and future priesthood must have the following credits.

He must have a living faith made alive by the Holy Spirit and grounded in Jesus Christ. He must be committed to Christ and convinced to his core that he gives himself, totally and unconditionally to Christ. He must have accepted Christ. This does not mean that he is the perfect Christian, because one does not exist, but he must be willing to struggle towards Christian perfection. He must realize that the seminary/theological institution is not a stepping stone on a ladder of social advancement or economic security. It is a place of becoming ready to return to the world to give an example of the life of Christ and show the Light to others. A guideline might be:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me, to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' (Luke 4:18-19).

There are some harmful drawbacks in planning for a serious priestly training, especially in the developing world. Often, the human resources available to the seminary are few and sometimes limited in their scope of contribution to the training of priests. While some of the leaders/teachers are very well qualified in their respective fields, others are not, and therefore they are utilized to fill gaps, which might become a greater burden sometime hence, rather than doing without their services at all. Sometimes, in the preparation of the priesthood, the candidates are kept so far removed from real life, that while they become able to operate within this little world, they are unsuited for the world of reality. They, by nature of the limitations of their religious training in a confined setting, are incapable of living and working in the underdeveloped world, either as priest or layman. There are those who seek the priesthood in order to escape from the world. While in the seminary they may be exemplary candidates, they cannot exist outside the seminary.

The desire and vocation to imitate Christ commences usually from the family and the childhood environment in general. If the family takes an active and constructive part in the praxis of Orthodoxy, the child will do likewise. If the parish priest is in the true sense a priest, then this vocation grows, the light begins to shine. The parish priest has an important role to play through encouragement, teaching and understanding. Customarily, yet not always, the first witness to the suitability of the candidate to the seminary is the parish priest.

Situations and circumstances vary from place to place. Here in Africa, the situation is compounded by many handicaps. Not all African families are Christian, nor even united in the same denomination. In some families every member belongs to a different sect. Parish priests are relatively few in number. They are not able to achieve the closeness necessary to guide and to counsel a young man towards a religious vocation. The Youth Associations are unevenly distributed and of too varying degrees of advancement or development to be of any help. Such is the extent of poverty and lack of employment, that the youth are driven by force of circumstances to seek even daily bread in the seminary. They have lacked nurturing in their faith and have been motivated by survival rather than belief, to seek nourishment within the confines of the seminary. It is a very complex task to identify the truly religious candidate.

Further complications arise in a Patriarchal Seminary in a continent as large as Africa since there is among the candidates a wide variety of languages, ethnic/cultural backgrounds and levels of faith. This alone requires new perspectives as one must look at each candidate with a sense of social justice and equality; deal with him not only in the sense of his person, but also of his ethnicity. Since many of the candidates come from such varied social, ethnical, political and economic backgrounds one must examine each case individually and try to see how this candidate can adjust to a fresh and mixed situation or experience which is totally new, without any previous standards to go by.

'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love' (Gal 5:6).

This therefore requires that those involved in the moulding of the priesthood here in Africa must have a deep understanding of the mixture of cultural backgrounds, in order that the candidates may come to understand that their ethnic identity does not hamper, nor deny their priesthood because it is the example of Christ's love which pervades all. This is no simple matter, one in which a few words are spoken, and thereafter discarded.

'But, speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love' (Eph 4:15-16).

Each candidate or prospective priest is a unique person, unlike any other. He has a name and a face. This is sometimes forgotten or relegated into an obscure corner because the essence and appearance of the priesthood overshadows it.

'If someone says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?'" (1 Jn 4:20).

Ordained and unordained ministries have to be recognized.

'And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you.' (1 Thess 5:12).

It is very important to recognize each being as unique, not as a replica. His vocation must be nurtured in his period of training and preparation. He must be disciplined and he must learn self-discipline. The discipline must be clearly understood to be effective in moulding the character. Self-discipline must have a purpose which is positive and productive. The spiritual father and guide and his spiritual child must make manifest this teaching regarding their relationship together and their relation as one with God.

'Therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long suffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.' (Col 3:12-14).

It is an absolute must that spiritual direction be made available to encourage prospective seminary candidates and the candidates for the priesthood. These spiritual fathers must have in abundance such qualities of intellectual competence, be spiritually and doctrinally sound, have a psychological fitness, be truly dedicated to Christ and be perpetually in motion in the living charity of Christ. Such spiritual fathers are better able to understand themselves in a mature and believing manner.

The Ministry of the Word, the Holy Gospel, is a central part of the priesthood, and whilst meaning and understanding are important in order to interpret for the flock what Christ

imparts, it is critical that the candidate be able to deliver a sermon in a positive and constructive way, in a context of meaning to the listener who will take up the Word and pass it on to others. Some of the finest sermons on paper turn into a fiasco in the deliverance because the speaker does not know how to speak. The technicalities of public speaking cannot be ignored. In the study of the Holy Scripture, questioning must be encouraged, not as a tool of opposition to the teaching, but as a means of clarification of true understanding. For example, Psalm 22(23), *'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures.'* if this text is delivered as it is to the people of Greece, where shepherds have been a reality throughout their history, then the text has a meaningful portrayal of what is presented. However, what happens to the one who lives in an island in a tropical sea, where no sheep have ever existed? What does it mean to lie in a green pasture to the one who lives in the brown desert? A teacher needs to find a way to interpret this beautiful psalm, retaining its vital message, but within the framework of understanding by the one who hears and who is to be nourished.

The minister of the faith, the priest should himself be a master of prayer. Praying is not done only in formal worship, but in private too. The priest who leads a life of prayer sets an example for those who follow him and leads them to pray, both formally and informally. Prayer is suitable to all times and in all places. Prayer is done within the Liturgy, Vespers, or Matins, but one can pray at any time, for example whilst scrubbing a floor, digging in a field, harvesting fruit, or caring for a baby or the sick. Prayer is the living expression of the Word.

The pastor of a parish must be fully responsible for the care of the flock in which God entrusted him, upon the laying of hands. He must be accountable for both himself and his people.

'Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain, but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away' (1 Pet 5:2-4).

The believers must be taught their role in this life in Christ, through the Holy Eucharist and the Holy Scripture, but in real terms, not in terms beyond their ken.

'Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy, and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you' (Heb 13:17).

The Good Shepherd, in the manner of Jesus Christ, is a master of dialogue and respect whether dealing with the greatest in the land or the very least. He must stand up for and defend human dignity. The Good Shepherd must be taught skills of good leadership. The key guidelines are Christ's directives through his disciples and apostles:

'Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one Body and one Spirit, just as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you

all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph 4:1-7).

These directives in following Christ's way are not meant for the priest and laity alone. They commence with the very apostles of Christ, the Hierarchs, who must set the tone of spiritual unity and love. They must be an integral active part in the life of the Church, not something or someone heard of from afar, but a very real presence among the clergy and the laity, known to all by the goodness of his being the Good Shepherd.

'Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.' (Mt 20:28).

In whatever manner a course of action be taken, we must all be aware of the divine hand of Providence which belongs to God and which will always meet the needs of His people and His Church. The Hierarchy must be the Light of Christ, such as the lighted candle which announces the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their leadership must emphasize spiritual formation and growth. It must represent human maturity, having a sense of modesty, charity in speech and action, filled with patience and self-control... like a calm stillness which is filled with the warm and penetrating glow of the Holy Spirit.

In preparation for the priesthood very careful consideration must be given to ensure a high standard and high quality of instruction in the truths and traditions of the Orthodox Faith. This is not rote learning, but a type of learning whereby the learner comes to understand the precepts of the faith in a live way. He must gain the ability to investigate and observe these truths and be able to demonstrate them in the context of human knowledge. There must be the sound instruction of the philosophy and theology of Orthodoxy, but taught in such a manner as to bring them near, not as some distant colonial viewpoint.

The future priests must live an essentially simple and quiet lifestyle, but with adequate necessities for life. Through the simplistic life, the imitation of Christ becomes very real, yet the danger always remains that this simple life must not be one of overprotection; the ordained priest will live within the world and therefore he must be able to withstand the pressures of the modern world and be able to lead the faithful within it. Attention must be paid to aspects or vision of the real world. One cannot teach brotherly love without some kind of realization of what is happening in Rwanda and Bosnia. The priest in his quiet world of learning the way of Christ, must learn to become, as Christ, the shelter for the believers.

'Imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministry of the saints. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.' (2 Cor 8:4,9).

It is a common belief here in Africa, and elsewhere in the world in the broad spectrum of religion, that mission means only financial support and that missionaries from the developed world are the dispensers of wealth. This thought is erroneous. True, there are many places in the world where missionary activity is performed, sometimes intensively and with great zeal. The collapse of Communism in many countries where Orthodoxy is predominant has been great and other areas have received a new form of neglect. One cannot contest or

even protest against the good will of the pan-Orthodox community to reach out a helping hand to brothers and sisters in great need. Assistance is needed. The needs are very great, but with time and changes come new emphases and expressions of those needs. The mission centres and the missionaries in the world must assess the needs of those whom they wish to aid. Those who request help must learn to prioritize their quests for aid. There are many material needs, which as illustrated in the Epistle of James show something right, yet there are spiritual needs which concern both the giver and the given. It has to be two standards that do not rightly reflect the teachings of Christ.

Though seldom thought of as a need, a very important need in the mission fields is to help the local church itself to become truly Orthodox and truly a self-sufficient and self-supporting community within its own surroundings. Little heed is given to the stand of the indigenous Church, where advertently, or inadvertently members of the local church are led to believe that they are recipients of donations from abroad by right, as if their poverty was visited upon them so that affluent Orthodox abroad may fulfill their obligations of the concept of *diakonia agapis* through them. This is wrong and misdirected thinking. Orthodox of the developed world have their own needs too, according to the plan of God. Orthodoxy is an unchanged faith given of His own free choice through His Crucifixion and Resurrection by the Lord Jesus Christ 'for all and on behalf of all'. This is why in the Divine Liturgy the priests pray, 'Divided and distributed is the Lamb of God, Who is divided, yet not disunited; Who is ever eaten yet never consumed, but sanctifies those who partake thereof'.