

Theological Education In The Patristic And Byzantine Eras And Its Lessons For Today

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The writings of the New Testament contain the first and most authoritative model of the nature and purpose of Christian **learning**. The Lord Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, acted as a **rabbi**, or teacher, and his followers were called “disciples”, not only during His lifetime, but also during the first expression of the Gospel throughout the Mediterranean region. There are many examples of the use of the term “disciple” as a synonym of “Christian” in the book of Acts: (“Some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple”. Act. 21:16; cf. also many examples in Acts 9 and 10). The early Christian community saw itself as a school, receiving instruction from one single Master.

However, the teachings which was coming from Jesus was not like the teaching of scribes, **because** it had authority (Matt. 7:29). This authority came from the identity of the Teacher, and from the purpose of His ministry. Jesus Christ was not simply the founder of a new philosophical, or moral trend; He was the Son of God, who had assumed humanity to bring it back to eternal life in God, from which it had fallen- through Him. This is the reason why the disciples of Jesus were not only called to memorize, or assimilate His teachings, but also to become **witnesses** the mighty works performed by Him: His death, His resurrection, His ascension to heaven. What He did was incomparably more decisive than any of His particular teachings. This is the reason why the dignity of being simply a “disciple” of Jesus is surpassed by the title given by Christ himself to his apostles: “You are **witnesses** of these things” (Luke 24:48). The follower of Christ does not simply learn a doctrine, he is appraised of facts, which had been ascertained and had been witnessed to.

Indeed, the apostolic teaching upon which the Church is built, is about what Jesus **did**, and what the disciples **saw**: “That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled” (I John, 1:1). The apostles were chosen to become witnesses of historical events, and particularly the Empty Tomb and the Resurrection. These events are **saving events**, but we- the disciples of Jesus in the following centuries- know about them through the witness of the apostles.

Indeed, Christ did not write anything, and the elaborate technology of registering human speech, which is so familiar to us today, did not exist at His time: we know of Christ of His works and teachings, only through the disciples He has chosen, i.e. through human meditation, which on the Day of Pentecost, was sealed by the Spirit “making fishermen to become theologians” (ribari bogoslovchi pokada- stikheron of Pentecost). Through the **Church**, established by Jesus Himself, when He called His disciples, and continued, by the power of the Spirit throughout the centuries of human history, we also are becoming “disciples”.

These preliminary remarks about the first Christian generation are necessary for us to understand what the teachings of theology **really** means and implies. But also as shown to us by the example of the apostles themselves, teaching implies not only communication about doctrines and events, connected with Christ, but their interpretation in a way which would become accessible to various societies and cultures. “To the Jews, I become as a Jew”, writes St. Paul, “that I might win Jews; to those who are under law, as under the law; to those who are without law, as without law, etc., that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I become as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” (I Cor. 9: 21-2).

So the very origin of the Christian faith makes all Christians to be “disciples” of the One Master, but it also implies that they- and particularly those who receive the particular teaching/ charism- become teachers of others. The very nature of the Church is somewhat similar to that of a school, although the relationship between the master and the disciples is a relationship of intimate communion; through the Holy Spirit, Christ teaches, but He also gives the power to teach; He appoints apostles, prophets and teachers (I Cor. 13:28) who are entrusted with the task of bestowing not their own ideas and their own wisdom, but the same “apostolic” truth about the Resurrection of Christ- in ways and forms which might contribute to the building-up of the Body of Christ.

1. THE POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCH

Everything we know about the life of the early Christian church in the first and second centuries indicates that teaching occupied a central place in the life of each local community, and that it was determined by the sacramental, or eucharistic understanding of the church. Candidates for baptism, or catechumens, had to be prepared for entering the community: this was the first essential level of the teaching ministry. The apostles who were the original witnesses of Christ, were not living anymore, but the community itself was still made-up of “disciples”, who had to be taught. This teaching was normally performed within the framework of the eucharistic celebration, by the one who occupied, at the assembly, the place of the Lord Himself; the teaching consisted in readings from scripture and in homiletic commentary by the “president” (proistamenos), or celebrant of

the Eucharist, who eventually was universally designated as the “bishop”. The event of the Pentecost was continued in the Church; the Spirit of Truth was invoked and continued as “the Comforter”, who was teaching the disciples “all things” (John 14:26).

It does appear that, in the early church, the instruction of catechumens- as well as the more general task of witnessing for the Christian faith to the outsiders- belonged not to the bishops but to a special order or “teachers”, or **didaskaloi**, invested with a **charisma** (I Cor. 9:21), and fulfilling a role similar to that of professional theologians today. Liturgical preaching within the eucharistic assembly was the function of bishops while the teachers addressed themselves to outsiders. It is often thought that such writings as **The Epistle of Barnabas** and the **Letter to Diognetus** were written by “teachers”. Indeed, these documents of the second century are distinct in style and content from such clearly “internal” documents as the **Letters** of St. Ignatius of Antioch. The author of the **Letter to Diognetus**- who is perhaps the founder of the Catechetical school of Alexandria, Pantainos- calls himself a “teacher of the gentiles” (Chapter 11).

These particular teaching functions of the **didaskaloi** were distinct from the solemn homily of the bishop within the eucharistic community. St. Justin Martyr writes how “on the day which is called the Sun’s day there is an assembly of all... and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the teacher was finished the president (proistamenos) gives a discourse admonishing us and exhorting us to imitate these excellent examples” (Apol. 1, 67). Thus, teaching was inseparable from the eucharistic celebration: each church in communion with all the other churches, was preserving the apostolic faith, and that faith was expressed by the bishop at the assembly of the whole church from the Eucharist. The bishop was endowed with a “certain **charisma** of truth” (St. Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. IV, 26, 2), but this was not a personal privilege of infallibility, but a function to be fulfilled within the church and for the church, for only the church as a whole was seen as the guardian of the apostolic faith. “For to the bishops”, writes St. Irenaeus, “the Apostles committed the care of the church which is in each place, which has come down to our own time, safeguarded without any written documents.” (ibid IV, 33, 8). The teaching function was inseparable from the episcopate, and it was unthinkable to conceive of “apostolic succession” in a mechanical way without being faithful to the **doctrine** of the apostles. The bishop sat on the **chair of Peter** (cathedra Petri), according to the famous expression used by St. Cyprian of Carthage: the **chair** of true teaching. He was not infallible, but liable to judgement by his colleagues and by the whole Church, but he sat on the chair precisely in order to exercise the **charisma** of teaching, which was seen as inseparable from his role as celebrant of the Eucharist.

This integrated view of Christian teaching is an essential legacy left to us by the early church. Teaching theology in the Orthodox Church is not an independent scholarly occupation: it is a creative act of transmission, of interpretation, of pastoral care. This is why the same St. Irenaeus, after describing the charisma of the bishops in terms of a gift to discard false traditions, corruptions, and heresies, reminds us immediately of “the

special gift of love, which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy, surpassing all other spiritual gifts” (ibid, IV, 33, 8). This precisely is the reason why the most perfect framework of teaching was the eucharistic assembly- the covenant of love.

This is, most probably, the reason why the third century church has known some tension between the sacramental structure of the **ecclesia**, and the activities of at least some **didaskaloi**, or “teachers”.

Already under its leadership of Clement, the catechetical school of Alexandria, established in a major intellectual center and playing the role of a bridge between the Hellenism and Christianity, seems to have acquired a certain detachment from the actual life of the Church. Its teachings became less “ecclesial”. My intention here, of course, is not to condemn the legacy of Clement, and particularly that of his great successor, Origen. Without them Christian theology would not have conquered the pagan world, and all the great Fathers of the fourth century recognize their indebtedness to Origen’s thought. I only want to say that all great creative endeavors imply risk-taking, and Origen was not afraid of some risks. Under him, instead of a school training catechumens, the Alexandrian **didaskaleion** became a Christian university with free enrollment: “Innumerable heretics and a considerable number of the most eminent philosophers listened to him with close attention, as he instructed them not only in theology, but to some extent in secular philosophy too” (Eusebius, Eccl. Hist. 6, 18).

Origen’s critics challenged his right to teach, since he was not an ordained presbyter. Times had changed and the New Testament title of **didaskalos** (“teacher”) was not considered as authoritative enough. The teaching function had to belong if not exclusively to bishops, at least to presbyters. It would actually soon disappear altogether, with the understanding that, since the bishop could not possibly be expected to bestow all the teaching required by the large membership of big city churches, presbyters- who already shared government and administrative functions with him- should be entrusted with teaching. Actually, in the same historical period, presbyters became regular celebrants of the Eucharist, as the original local churches, headed by bishops, were split into “parishes”.

This trend implied some “clericalization” of the teaching functions in the Church, although- as we will see later- there would be countertrends also, especially in the East. However, we should note, for our own benefit, that the tension between an “ecclesial” teaching rooted in the Eucharistic assembly, and the free-lancing intellectual pursuits of the Alexandrian **didaskaloi** did reflect real problems: problems of methodology, of approach to theology. On the one hand St. Irenaeus had written: “Our opinion is congruous to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist supports our opinion” (Adv. Haer., IV, 38, 5). On the other hand, for Origen, what really mattered was to find some consistency

between Christianity and Neoplatonism, so that the entrance of Greek intellectual into the Church might become possible.

Such a tension is inherent to the Christian thought whenever it struggles with historical change, with mission, with making itself understood by people, whose cultural or ideological presuppositions are not Christian.

The remarkable thing is that the tension, and potential conflict between bishops and **didaskaloi** was historically overcome in the fourth century, when, in the persons of the great Cappadocian Fathers, the bishops themselves acquired the abilities and the concerns of the **didaskaloi**, sifting through Origen's ideas, preserving his commitment to a synthesis between Christianity and contemporary Greek thought, but abandoning those points in his system which really contradicted biblical revelation and adopted instead the subtleties of heathen Greek wisdom. The Fathers succeeded in establishing a true synthesis between the **Apostolic Tradition**, kept within the sacramental episcopal succession of the Church and the needs of the mission addressed to the Greek world.

Our task today consists of course in following their example and placing ourselves firmly in their tradition. However, this cannot be achieved simply through imitation, or by repeating statements made by the Fathers centuries ago. To be truly faithful to the spirit of the Holy Fathers, one must fully identify our understanding of the faith with the unchangeable permanent content of the Christian tradition, as handed down from the apostles. However, our witness to that faith would be ineffective, if we did not also address it to **our contemporaries**, and, therefore, formulated it in the light of the problems faced by contemporary humanity.

In the fourth century, the Fathers of the Church faced the task of having Christianity accepted by the Greco-roman civilization. The intellectual and cultural achievements of that civilization were glorious, and an educated person raised at the Academy of Athens, found it difficult to seek Truth in the Bible- produced by an obscure and small "barbarian" nation of the Jews- whose inferiority seemed obvious. Nevertheless, the Fathers had to make Greeks read and understand the scriptures, discover the uniqueness of the messianic hopes and, finally, their fulfillment in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostle John had already identified that obscure Messiah of the Jews with the **Logos**, "Through Whom all things were made" (John 1:3), - a notion familiar to Greeks. The Fathers of the fourth century built on that basis, and expressed in Greek and for Greeks the great biblical truths about the Trinity and the Incarnation. They fought heretics, who- in most cases- were failing in understanding the content of Scriptures and were allowing philosophical categories to control Christian thought. The Fathers- at least some of them- did not use this failure by some Christians to use philosophy in a proper way, as a pretext for withdrawal from the intellectual milieu of their times. Such a withdrawal would have meant a betrayal of the Church's mission. On the contrary, they succeeded where others had failed. They left us with a coherent

theological synthesis on the Trinity (Theologia) and on the meaning of salvation (oikonomia), which is not a betrayal- as Protestant liberal theology of the nineteenth century affirmed- a form of “hellenized Christianity”, but, on the contrary, a real triumph of Christian thought in converting “the mind” of the Hellenic world to Christ.

This patristic synthesis was a creative one. It implied, on the part of the Fathers of the Church, a real love, a real concern for the world, which Christ came to save- the concrete world of their time. Indeed, each generation of Christians is being sent to a world, which has changed, which is different from the world known to previous generations. The task of those who teach, or those who learn theology must therefore necessarily include two imperatives:

- to convey the sense of identity and continuity of the apostolic doctrine maintained by the Church without any change or alteration;

- to express this doctrine in such a way that it may become comprehensible to **living people**- those people in the midst of whom the Church lives and whom she is called to save.

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Each one of these two imperatives implies its own dangers and temptations.

The easiest way of maintaining the unchangeable faith of the Church is a blind and frozen conservatism in expressions and in attitudes, as if there was no difference between the one Holy Tradition of the Church, and the many “human traditions” accumulated through centuries. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself warns us against holding such traditions, as ends in themselves, while laying aside the commandments of God (Mark 7:8). Such blind conservatism leads the Church to become a museum, ineffective in its mission to concrete, living human being, and therefore favoring the goals of those who would gladly see it disappear.

But the other imperative- that which leads theologians to update their teachings, to constantly address their attention to contemporary issues- involves the temptation of “modernism”, of forgetting the continuity of the Orthodox Tradition, of being dominated by those immediate and passing fads, which- particularly in contemporary western society- often destroy intellectual and spiritual stability of Christians.

In trying to define what is the legacy of the Fathers to our own time, one should therefore be aware of the two imperatives and also of the temptations inherent to them. We have to remain faithful to the **content** of tradition, but also be able to convey it to our contemporaries in a new way, without betraying it, as free heirs and spiritual children of the patristic age.

2. THE PATRISTIC LEGACY

It would be obviously impossible to define in a few sentences the nature and significance of patristic theology. But it is possible to point at some basic affirmations, made in the patristic era, which should contribute today to the foundation of our teaching of Orthodox theology.

1. The first of such affirmations is the “theocentric” nature of man. With St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who described man as possessing the Holy Spirit of God, as the most essential and highest element of his natural being; with St. Gregory of Nyssa, who identified the “image of God” in man with freedom- a trait which allows man to share in the life of the One who is alone truly free, God; with St. Gregory Palamas, who insisted that man, because of his direct affinity with God, was higher than the angels themselves, we indeed possess a patristic consensus, which explains what the Fathers meant when they defined man’s destiny by the word “deification” (**theosis**). “God became man, so that man might become God”, wrote St. Athanasius of Alexandria. The Orthodox faith implies the rule of man over creation. The progress of science and technology which today endows man with frightening powers over matter, over energy and, perhaps soon over the cosmos itself, is rooted in man’s having been created in the image of the Creator, and being therefore potentially allowed to share God’s power over created nature. But, because the image of God also implies freedom, it involves **responsibility**. Man is called to reflect the image of God, not to assume God’s place; to share in God’s goodness, not replacing it with his own will; to exercise God’s power, not playing with nature as an egocentric and capricious child. Man misuses his powers constantly, and in our own times, threatens to destroy the whole of human civilization in an atomic catastrophe. But in the midst of the tragic a misguided history of mankind, stands the Person of the God-man Jesus Christ, and the reality of His body, the Church, to manifest for “those who have ears to hear and eyes to see” the true meanings of the image of God in man. Someone who does not see the truth of Christ is also blind to the nature of man in general. This is manifest in the fact that, so often, when man denies the One true God, he creates new pseudo-gods; being “theocentric” by nature man seeks absolutes, either the One True God, or one of the innumerable and always re-emerging substitutes for him.

2. A second patristic affirmation which stands as the permanent center of our faith is that **God is Trinity** and, therefore, God is Love (I John 4:8). He could not **be love**, if He was alone: love is always a relationship, and God is that love which unites eternally the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Uniting the three divine persons by nature, that divine love is, by the power of grace, becoming accessible to men. The Lord says: “Father, I desire that they also whom You have given the way be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (john 17:24).

This implies that the deification, or **theosis**, which we mentioned as the first patristic affirmation, does not destroy the human person, the human freedom. It does not absorb man within a Buddhist impersonal divine absolute. Life in God is interpersonal

relationship, without which there is no love, and God **is love**. Furthermore, the Trinitarian nature of God has direct implications for what it means to become Christian and to live a Christian life in the concrete circumstances of our “fallen” world.

If the ultimate destiny of man lies in interpersonal relationships within the very life of God, the initial movement of what we call **our faith** is also necessarily a personal act. A Russian philosopher liked to say: “One is not **born** a Christian; one **becomes** one. For centuries, Christians- and particularly Orthodox Christians- have succumbed to the temptation of taking the Christian faith for granted: they saw it as part of culture; identified with national legacy; solicited and enjoyed its protection by the state. We are now paying a high price for those illusions.

For, indeed, illusions these were. The Holy Church always believed that one could **baptize** only living persons, on the basis of their personal faith (or on the basis of an assurance, given by sponsors, that such a faith will be communicated to them, and nurtured in their lives). Only a person can participate in the sacraments of the church, because only a person can respond to God’s love and share in His communion. Even when the church blesses, or sanctifies inanimate objects, she does so in order to replace them in their original and proper relation with God and allow human persons to use them according to the will of God. This is the case, for example, when we bless water so that it may become- for us men- “the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan, the fountain of incorruption, the gift of sanctification”. But the Church cannot sanctify an institution- such as the State; or even a particular ideological trend, or a philosophy. These impersonal realities do fulfill their own function in this world, in which as Christians, we are sent as Christ’s disciples, but they do not possess divine attributes. If “sanctified” or “deified” they become idols.

A servant of God is baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”: he then enters into communion with the Persons of the Divine Trinity, and in the communion of the Holy Church, which, on earth, anticipates and foreshadows the new relationships- God-established and God-willed- which will constitute the peace and joy of the Kingdom of God.

3. THEOLOGICAL SCHOOLS

Called to make a presentation on the patristic and Byzantine legacy in terms of our Orthodox theological education, I have so far spoken of the early church, when- for obvious reasons- the young Christian community was only searching for ways of making its witness known to an old and proud society, shaped by Hellenism. In order to understand how and why it succeeded, the basic theological presuppositions of the

Orthodox understanding of man's destiny and of the nature of the Church, had to be recalled to mind.

This was necessary not simply out of historical interest. For indeed I am convinced that, in our world today, a constant reorientation of our minds towards the very roots and foundations of the Christian hope, are more necessary than ever before. We live in a world, which is often designated as "post-Christian", in the sense that while it recognizes the **historical** importance of Christianity in shaping its present state, it does not consider anymore that Christianity is also the foundation of the future. This "secularism" takes different forms in various societies, but its pervading reality is a decisive fact for all of us.

Contemporary Orthodox theological schools were organized in the context of the encounter of **Orthodoxy with the West**. They all originally adopted Western curricula and methodology. The first such school was the famous Academy established in Kiev, in the seventeenth century, by Metropolitan Peter Moghila. The Western orientation of the Academy was symbolized by the fact that its teaching was in Latin, and that its programs were closely patterned after the Jesuit schools of Poland and Lithuania. This Latin orientation received a deservedly critical evaluation later, when Orthodox theology came of age and began to discover its scriptural and patristic sources. Fr. George Florovsky, in his classical books on **The Ways of Russian Theology** spoke of a "Western captivity" of Orthodox thought. However, looking at Moghila's academy and at its tremendous influence, following the introduction of its methods into Russia during the reforms of Tsar Peter I, one must recognize also that Orthodox theology could not have developed fruitfully if it had not been reoriented towards the problems of the modern world, if it had remained frozen in purely ritualistic and repetitive forms. The inoculation of Western ideas and methodology was made much too brutally- as was also the case with the Petrine reforms in general. The minds and hearts were not ready for an immediate digestion of such a massive dose of Western ideas. Major mistakes were made. But, eventually a true spiritual and intellectual encounter- similar in many ways to the confrontation which had occurred between Christianity and Hellenism in the third and fourth centuries- did take place. An Orthodox theology, using Western methods, but preserving the content of Tradition, as preserved in the Liturgy and the patristic writings, emerged gradually in the nineteenth century. The impressive figure of Metropolitan Philaret (Drozdov) of Moscow is rightly seen by Florovsky as the very symbol of that transition between a period of intellectual servitude to Western ideas, and the new epoch of a free, unconstrained revival of Orthodox tradition. The encounter with the West begun by Moghila, was an inevitable historical step away from isolation, and in the direction of assuring that Orthodox theology remains a living witness to the unchanging truth of Christ in the modern world.

In the nineteenth century, the Orthodox countries of the Balkans- Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania- had the possibility both to regain their national freedom and to organize their church life in a new way. They also established theological schools, also

following the Western models. In most they adopted the German pattern of establishing Theological Faculties, within the structure of State sponsored Universities. However, the separation between Church and State, which occurred after World War II, necessarily implied that the organization of theological schools be clearly separate from the universities. Today, only Greece preserves the nineteenth century model at its Theological Faculties in Athens and Thessaloniki.

The adoption of the Western system of education in Orthodox theological schools implied one major temptation: to reduce theology to the status of a **scientific discipline** among many. Indeed, since the beginnings of medieval scholasticism, theology was defined, as a discipline which, as other disciplines, used the methods of Aristotelian logics, with the only difference that it could adopt Divine Revelation- Scripture and Tradition- as legitimate (and necessary) premises of scholarly thought. Of course, theology was considered in the Latin West, as the crown of all sciences: the other disciplines, particularly philosophy, were to be seen as ancillary (**philosophia ancilla theologiae**). But the method of reasoning was to remain always the same: rational knowledge was the only legitimate form of knowledge. God's existence could be rationally proven. Heresies could be shown to be nothing but rational absurdities. The Scriptural description of the origin of the universe could be used as scientific evidence by naturalists. The **magisterium** of the Church issued decrees, which were to be accepted as propositional rational truths, and serve as bases for further theological discourse.

We had seen earlier that the patristic tradition has left us with a different understanding of man and different vision of man's approach to God. The way to know God truly does not consist in a rational appropriation of **concepts about him**, but in a real communion, which involves the mind, as well as the soul and the body. It is this communion which restores man's true humanity, as God created it, as He loves it. Indeed, He created man "in this image and likeness", which means- according to the Fathers- that communion with God and growth in God is **natural** to man. Without such communion man loses his integrity, as a human being: he is incomplete, mortal, ignorant and blind. By assuming humanity, by dying on the cross and by rising from the dead, the Son of God has restored the original and true humanity.

Can and should our contemporary schools- originally created according to Western Latin or Protestant models- develop this patristic tradition of theology? Of course, they can and they must.

First of all, the Fathers themselves, as we have noted earlier, were recognized as "Fathers" by the Church, precisely because they expressed Christian truth in the language of their time, using categories of Greek philosophical thought whenever this was possible, studying at the Academy of Athens (St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian), adopting the literary and poetical style of their time, which is preserved, even today by the Church, particularly in its liturgical hymnography.

On the other hand, for us today, it is obviously impossible to develop Orthodox theology without using fully the achievement of Western Scholarship and Western methodology, but without being enslaved by it. This implies, of course, that our theological schools are aware fully of those achievements, and are able to use them critically. The Fathers have not accepted Greek concepts without purifying them, without transfiguring them from within, without rejecting forcefully those presuppositions which were incompatible with the Christian revelation (cf. particularly the condemnation of Origenism). So today, an uncritical acceptance of a scholarship, which developed outside the Church, which is based on secular, rational determinism, would be catastrophic for Orthodox theology. In the Biblical field particularly, there is no way in which one can understand the true meaning of the sacred text, if one does not admit that God acts in history not only through that natural order which is studied by natural scientists, but also directly, occasionally transcending that order and manifesting His power a Creator and Savior. However, Western scholarship can also teach us- in a perfectly acceptable and enriching way- how to distinguish the various literary genres found in the Bible: history, poetry, parables, which are understood precisely as such, when the Church reads, interprets and exalts Scripture, as the Word of God. Also, the very accessibility of **Patristic** writings today, is due to the work of Western scholars, not to speak of the rich secondary literature produced by Roman Catholic authors concerned, as we are, with restoring the Tradition of the Fathers within contemporary Christian thought.

However, while affirming our continuous indebtedness to Western scholarship and methodology, our theological schools must be Orthodox schools, endowed with the capacity of discerning criticizing and sifting Western ideas, in order to be able to experience and to teach the substance of the Orthodox faith- about God, man and the created world. This faith is contained in scripture, but was also expressed by the Fathers and preserved within the great Byzantine tradition, which has been transmitted to other cultures as well. Perhaps, the most tangible way in which this Tradition is kept today in the Orthodox Church is the **Liturgy**: the direct and corporate experience of the Kingdom of God, manifested in the Eucharist, in the other sacraments, in the whole liturgical **order** (taxi), in the specific understanding of Scriptural texts when they are used in worship, in the rich legacy of Byzantine hymnography, which preserves, sometimes in almost literal paraphrases, the exact doctrinal message of the Fathers.

Faithfulness to the Orthodox tradition of worship has preserved the Orthodox faith in the Balkans and in the middle east during the long centuries of Ottoman rule- at a time when there were no theological schools nor theological scholarship. Even today, the same function of liturgical worship is emphasized by the Church of Russia, and, in fact, experience by the Orthodox Christians in the Soviet Union, as the main expression of Church life, including teaching and learning about the faith. Already, almost one thousand years ago the envoys of Prince Vladimir when they witnessed the liturgy at St. Sophia in Constantinople wondered whether “they were in heaven or on earth”, and their

experience was decisive in their choice of a new religion. Their wonder and their experience is still alive today.

It seems, therefore, that one of the most essential factors in the life of our theological schools is the rootedness of their respective academic communities in the Tradition of the Orthodox faith, as it is maintained in the tradition of worship. Marginalization of liturgical worship, when it exists, is a sure sign of Westernization in the wrong and dangerous sense. If worship is only an expression of piety, unrelated to **real** Christian life, separate from theology and peripheral to the main activities of a theological school, there is no way in which it can play the role, which it had played for centuries in the Orthodox Church: that of being the expression of a truly Orthodox “mind” (phronema), that of transforming the Church from being a simple human gathering into the body of Christ, and, therefore, transforming a school- normally seen as a place for intellectual exercises only- into a true workshop of Christian life, a center from which the tradition of the Church radiates to dioceses and parishes, helping the episcopate and the priests to teach and to preach the Truth.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary centers of Orthodox theological education are pursuing their mission within different societies. An outside observer may easily develop the impression that there is between them little unity and little common inspiration. But this impression would be a superficial one. In spite of our weaknesses and all the barriers which separate us; in spite of differences in language and background, the unity of tradition and, basically, the same approach to the principal elements of theology and Orthodox experience are a fact which I personally keep discovering again and again, when I am given the opportunity of visiting theological schools in various Orthodox countries. Humanly speaking- in terms of quantity and, even, critical quality- our theological literature is perhaps, not as strong as it should be. And, nevertheless, its rootedness in the patristic tradition, the fact that it is consistent with the early Christian preaching, its message about the destiny of man, called to communion with God is sufficient to unite us all and also to make the Orthodox witness so significant to many outsiders.

The initiative taken by “SYNDESMOS” in organizing this second consultation of Orthodox Theological Schools gives us the opportunity to realize better the unity of our “roots” and, therefore, the undividedness of our future. To discover again and again to live this unity is an experience particularly precious to those of us who have been called to bring the message of Orthodoxy to the Western world. In America today we constitute a small minority within a society which has been religiously pluralistic since its inception and has become today very secularized. We are aware of the responsibility which lies upon our shoulders to remain faithful to Orthodoxy, but also to be able to express not as a

sectarian and “closed” exotic doctrine, but as the Christian Truth for today. Theological education is essential for us, but also the prayers and the cooperation of all those who are engaged in Orthodox theological education throughout the world. This is why we are particularly grateful to “SYNDESMOS” for having brought us all here together in this city from where- in 1793- the first Orthodox missionaries left for the American Continent, and for giving us this opportunity for further cooperation between Orthodox theological schools.