

Nadzeya CHERKAS

*An Orthodox Comment on the WCC Framework**An interview with Pavel BUBNOV*

The ecumenical movement, born at the end of the XIXth century within the Western Christianity, is an objectively new phenomenon, which has never been faced by the Church. In the XXth century Christians from all over the world got involved. For the Orthodox Church ecumenism is a challenge as it puts forward questions that are not yet fully answered from the side of Church. While now within the Orthodox Church there are different opinions on ecumenism: from complete acceptance to sharp disagreement.

Thus, the problem that has appeared inside many Orthodox Churches, is not that theologians, laics or clerics do not agree with each other. Already the Apostle Paul said, "for there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you" (1Corinthians 11,19). The problem is rather that extreme representatives of one opinion accuse the adherents of the other opinion of heresy and call them apostates. Doing this, they destroy the unity of the Church, question the Church authority and instigate broad Orthodox circles to step on a slippery way of schism.

Sergij BULGAKOV wrote that we should not close our eyes when facing the fact that the differences and obstacles in our prayer meetings remain there. We could not unite ourselves in everything with our brothers and sisters. The Orthodox have difficulties praying with the Roman Catholics as well as with the Protestants. Do we have to somehow keep silent about these differences? Is it not a betrayal or damage of the Orthodoxy? Such dangers exist.

The position of the Orthodox in relation to the Protestant world is especially unfavorable because, for the sake of common prayer, the Orthodox have to belittle, to lose their fullness. We should know and understand that this is only a sacrifice of love and indulgence to infirmity, but not a denial or betrayal. And the silent, but real sorrow that we cannot unite in prayer must penetrate, more effectively than any preaching, into the hearts of our brothers and sisters as a quiet call of love.

But there could be a positive side of such communication. The Orthodox are proud of their liturgical richness in comparison with the often strict and simple rites in the Protestant churches. We should not close our eyes before the fact that this richness is not always realised and in some cases it turns into a set of regulations and rituals. On the contrary, the Protestant

churches with their relative liturgical simplicity, know a lively non-regulated prayer in which a human soul addresses God directly with the needs of the day and the present moment; it has its individual conversation with God.

Nowadays there is a need for serious theological discussion on the questions put to us by the ecumenical movement. Neither wrangle, nor mutual accusations, nor each other's discreditation, but a constructive dialogue could help the adherents of different points of view to give a sound Orthodox evaluation of the ecumenical movement. We asked the opinion of Pavel BUBNOV, a student of the Minsk Theological Academy and a former student of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches.

WHAT DOES ECUMENISM MEAN FOR US?

Orthodox Christians deeply feel the pain of divisions within Christianity. The unity of the Christian Church is God's will and our desire. We believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. We see the Orthodox Church as one who inherited the tradition of the Apostolic Church, who inherited the gift of Pentecost through the chain of ordination. As far as the ecumenical movement searches the Christian unity, the Orthodox Church participates in ecumenical activities witnessing the spiritual tradition of the Apostolic Church. We respect and accept all the faith and spiritual practices in different Christian confessions that comes from the Apostolic Church and we do not accept anything as normal that is not in the Spirit. The unity of Christians is our desire; this is the reason why the Orthodox participate in the ecumenical movement.

COMMON PRAYER OR ECUMENICAL WORSHIP:**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?**

Actually, the shift from ecumenical worship to common prayer changes nothing in the Orthodox attitude towards this issue. For Orthodox believers the term "ecumenical worship" was completely unacceptable. The term "common prayer" is the exact term, which is used in the canon rule that forbids Orthodox to pray with non-Orthodox Christians. Of course, this shift was provided in the World Council of Churches also by Orthodox activities and this shift has made a great difference. But concerning especially the Russian Orthodox Church, nobody could ever allow them-



selves to say that Orthodox representatives pray in an ecumenical worship. That was and is completely unacceptable. It seems that only these Orthodox representatives understand the difference and success of their efforts in WCC. Average Orthodox believers did not accept "ecumenical worship" as well as now they do not accept "common prayer."

CAN THE CHANGE OF "WORSHIP" INTO "PRAYER" BE SATISFACTORY?

Even if "prayer" is regarded as a private or individual matter, the adjective "common" completely clarifies this obstacle. The challenges to "common prayer" from the side of theology and, more precisely, ecclesiology are indeed still very touching for the Orthodox. The answers are very difficult to find.

WHAT FUTURE IS THERE FOR ECUMENICAL WORK?

In this situation we should continue to educate people, to try to clarify the meaning of Orthodox participation in the ecumenical movement. The future depends primarily in which direction the ecumenical movement would move. Recent ecumenical discussions are rarely theo-

logical. Many non-theological factors are in use when dealing with theological issues.

IS IT A STEP BACK IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT?

I think that this shift just showed what we had in real; it did not destroy something we had achieved. I always felt that very often in ecumenical meetings many achievements were actually not achieved. We should look to the truth and tell to ourselves: we should deeply consider everything we deal with in ecumenical relations and we should not like only the results, but the real things. We can receive everything from other traditions that is true, that is full of the spirit of the Apostolic Church. We can give to those who want to receive everything we have.

Nadzeya CHERKAS is a member of the youth group of the Belarusian Orthodox Brotherhood of Saint Vilnya Martyrs and she is responsible for the youth projects. She studied foreign languages and dreamed of building bridges between her country and the rest of Europe and the whole of the world. She is a member of the European Regional Committee (ERC) of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF).

WSCF EUROPE ACTIVITIES IN 2003

5-9 FEBRUARY 2003

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF/IN THE PROFIT-ORIENTED ENTERPRISES
Central European Sub-region (CESR)
Winter Seminar
Spišská Kapitula, Slovakia

13-16 FEBRUARY 2003

NON-VIOLENCE AS POLITICAL AND SPIRITUAL FORCE
Nordic Winter Meeting
Trosa, Vagnhärad, Sweden

7-9 MARCH 2003

OUR WITNESS IN EUROPE
Meeting of the Youth Sub-Group
Planning Committee
of the XIIth General Assembly of the
Conference of European Churches (KEK)
Paris, France

MARCH 2003

STRIPPING RELIGION AND CULTURE OF 'BLACK AND WHITE' THINKING
Unveiling the Impact of Dualistic
Thinking on Power Structures
Preparatory Committee Meeting in view
of the Theological Conference
Paris, France

4-11 APRIL 2003

ECUMENICAL LEADERSHIP
European Regional Committee (ERC)
Meeting
Tampere, Finland

11-18 MAY 2003

ROMA AND GADJE: THE CHALLENGE OF BEING DIFFERENT
The Contribution of Roma and Sinti

Peoples to Contemporary Culture
Solidarity Conference
Brasov, Romania

28 MAY - 1 JUNE 2003

ECUMENICAL KIRCHENTAG
Berlin, Germany

JUNE 2003

CONSULTATION FOR TEACHERS AND COURSE ORGANISERS
Lingua Franca (LF) Meeting

JUNE 2003

GLOBALISATION AND INTEGRITY OF THE BODY
Permanent Seminar on Gender Issues
Edinburgh, Scotland

21-28 JUNE 2003

RECONCILIATION
Nordic Summer Meeting
Oslo - Trondheim, Norway

25 JUNE - 2 JULY 2003

JESUS CHRIST HEALS AND RECONCILES. OUR WITNESS IN EUROPE
XIIth General Assembly of the Conference
of European Churches (KEK)
Trondheim, Norway

JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2003

LINGUA FRANCA COURSES
Central and Eastern Europe

JULY 2003

CENTRAL EUROPEAN CULTURE
Central European Sub-region (CESR)
Summer Seminar
Bialowieza, Poland

JULY 2003

AGAPE POLITICAL CAMP

AUGUST 2003

AGAPE THEOLOGICAL CAMP

28 JULY - 3 AUGUST 2003

COMING TO TERMS WITH HISTORY AND MEMORY IN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE
International Ecumenical Summer Seminar of ESG in cooperation with WSCF
Waldsiedersdorf, Berlin, Germany

SEPTEMBER 2003

WSCF AND THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT
DISCOVERING OUR ROOTS AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
European Regional Assembly (ERA)
Åland, Finland

SEPTEMBER 2003

EUROPEAN STAFF MEETING

OCTOBER 2003

REPENTANCE AND CONVERSION
European Regional Committee (ERC)
Meeting

4-10 NOVEMBER 2003

STRIPPING RELIGION AND CULTURE OF 'BLACK AND WHITE' THINKING
Unveiling the Impact of Dualistic
Thinking on Power Structures
Theological Conference
Paris, France

