

RESPONSE to

“Analytical Note UGCC and OCU: The Ecumenical Aspect of Training Seminarians and Prospects for Academic Cooperation. Based on the example of Kyiv Orthodox Theological Academy and Lviv Spiritual Seminary of the Holy Spirit”,

authored by the Institute of Ecumenical Studies, UCU, Lviv

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ON TEACHING ECUMENISM TODAY

The Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby phrased the importance of ecumenism compellingly in his address to the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, 6 September 2022:

“My simple challenge to all of us today, is to re-find the spiritual passion of the past for ecumenism; (...)

The world crisis must not be allowed to continue while the world church remains divided. At Pentecost God created a single new people. At the last day, Christ Pantokrator will come to judge us. We will have no answer to his judgement if we permit such a failure in this age of our divisions, such a failure in this age of climate change which threatens literally billions of our fellow human beings, of war and possible nuclear war.

We will have no answer to God, no answer except, *we were used to being divided.*”

In the Analytical Note on “The Ecumenical Aspect of Training Seminarians and Prospects for Academic Cooperation” (IES, Sept 2022) I am delighted to find a similar passion for ecumenism as to which Justin Welby refers. It is equally driven by unwillingness to accept the answer that “we are used to being divided”. Throughout the report I feel a sense of responsibility for improving theological education and pastoral formation so that they will contribute to healing and unity instead of to further fragmentation and division. The Analytical Note is timely, relevant to the context, asking the right questions and seeking a way into the future by solid and substantial research. It is a very hopeful sign that the researchers situate themselves in the general trend of theological education in Ukraine from ‘quantity’ to ‘quality’ and aim to contribute with their comparative study to further improvement. Let us hope that the war and its impact also on educational resources, among them qualified staff people, will not cause too much of a setback in this regard.

ON THE METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

Methodologically, a solid work is produced. Data are gathered from various sources such as church documents, statutory documents and curricula of the documents, interviews with

administrative staff and professors, student questionnaires, and student focus groups. The fact that only two seminaries were found willing to be part of the research in this stage doesn't need to be a disadvantage. Now the empirical research could be conducted in a more 'thick' and detailed way than perhaps might have been the case with a greater number of participating seminaries. As a pioneering study it has a high validity. It provides a methodology to be repeated periodically or to be multiplied in other contexts.

In students' papers I am used also to look at how they reflect on their own *positionality* in the research. Do they critically account for it? Do they reflect on how their positionality (as a believer, a woman or man, privileged or non-privileged etcetera) might influence the outcome of the study? Are they aware of their positionality and how it is related to the subject of the research, both in productive ways (insider information) as in possible hazardous ways (biases, wishful thinking)? The Analytical Note does not contain such a self-reflection of the researchers and how they coped with their positionalities. In this case in particular the confessional and institutional affiliations of the researchers should have been accounted for.

The report is insightful. I learned that although there are still trends of negative representation of other denominations, progress is made by professors who include various confessional perspectives in their teaching, use newer textbooks, or invite guest lecturers to let the denomination authentically be presented by an insider.

This reminded me of the main reason why in 2005 I was invited to come to teach in the Master Program of Ecumenical Studies at UCU. As for cooperation with the Netherlands, the rectorate of the university had a wish for a Protestant theologian to teach students on Protestantism, both in the West and the East. I have done so for many years until the master program ended in 2017. The courses were on the history and theology of Protestant churches, including the Protestant denominations in Ukraine. I also taught courses on mission studies, pastoral theology, modern theologians, human rights and Christian faith. In these courses I presented disciplinary approaches and themes from a Protestant perspective. Quite soon I understood that the cognitive way is not the best way to really engage with another tradition. Just as I attended divine liturgies of Greek-Catholic and Orthodox churches as much as I could, I took the students with me on church visits to Protestant churches, from the Baptists to the Mormons (doubt if they can be considered Protestant?) – and I am happy to learn from the report that this is still practiced in theological education. Additionally, I organized excursions to the Hungarian Reformed church in Zakarpattia, and to the Hungarian Reformed students in Transylvania, Romania, and they made a return visit to us. We received Dutch protestant students and Dutch church people. Every year one or two students of the master program Ecumenical Studies took part in a study abroad semester in Amsterdam (Bridging Gaps) where they were exposed to a multicultural, multiconfessional group of students from all over the world. I learn in the

report that studying abroad is still a major factor in acquiring ecumenical skills and attitude. And I'm glad to read that from both seminaries 50% of the students is positive or rather positive on studying abroad.

In the study abroad program in Amsterdam, also two students from the Orthodox Seminary of the Kyiv Patriarchate in Lviv took part. The intention was that they could gain some international experience, practice their English language, and come out of the isolation. This type of capacity building worked for the individual students, however for the students it was difficult to come back in the closed structures of the seminary and church, and to make their experiences fruitful. Now with the canonical status of the OCU and its expected membership to the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies much will hopefully change for the better.

Over the years I began to understand more and more that already my sheer presence, as a protestant pastor and professor, had a transformative influence on how the students looked at protestants in general and at female pastors in particular.

The report sometimes tends to overstress the cognitive competencies in ecumenism. In the recommendations, however, I read about the importance of gaining communicative skills and an interconfessional attitude through the live encounters in the classroom and through exposures outside, and about the opportunities of ecumenical learning in practical social action. I strongly support that.

ON THE CONCEPTUAL PART OF THE STUDY

The conceptual part of the study is well-based on contemporary scholarship and on up-to-date handbooks. However, there may be some flaws as well in the conceptual approach.

The authors state that they want to make "a primary assessment of the compliance of the educational programs of Kyiv Orthodox Theological Academy and Lviv Seminary of the Holy Spirit with the achievements of today's theological science and ecumenical dialogue." For such a qualitative and comparative research, one needs a *standard* by which to measure the achievements. But it remains rather open what the authors understand as the "achievements" of today's theological science and ecumenism, or what their own take on ecumenical theology is. I will give three examples where there might still homework might be done.

1. The concept of ecumenism that is at the basis of this analytical report
2. Relation between ecumenical theology and interreligious dialogues
3. How contextualized is the approach to ecumenism in the classroom

1.

The report could further elaborate on how to argue *in a theological way* for the need and importance of ecumenism in theological education and pastoral formation. I agree that getting to know other Church traditions positively influences the development of theology within one's own denomination (p. 3). And it helps as well building better relationships between churches and will impact the society. "Christian education that is not ecumenical is not truly Christian," the authors quote from the Faith and Order report on Ecumenical Education (1967). I agree on that. Yet how shall we theologically argue for it?

I would like to bring to the table here the concept of 'receptive ecumenism' as developed by Paul Murray (from 2008 onwards).¹ Murray highlights that ecumenism today is in its third stage. After the Life and Work Movement ("service unites, doctrine divides") and the Faith and Order Movement ("theology unites, praxis divides") now the time has come for Receptive Ecumenism. In Murray's view, formal ecumenism seeks to come to visible unity of the churches through Compromise, Convergence, and Consensus. See the multiple dialogue reports that have been produced over decades, yet hardly received in churches at a grassroots level. Receptive Ecumenism seeks to come to visible unity of the churches by asking "what is it that I need to learn and can learn from the other tradition?" It is not to change the other tradition but to be changed by the other. It is not about who has the best china tea, but about knowing your own wounded hands and hearts. It requires most of all a learning attitude and an openness to growth, change, examination of conscience and continual grace-filled conversion.

Murray writes: "Our traditions, as dynamic webs, are limited as well as life giving, wounded as well as grace-bearing: we need to show rather than to hide our wounds and to ask others to minister to us."

"(...) rather than worrying unduly about what learning others may need to do, each should take responsibility for their own learning, mindful of the adage that "We cannot change others, we can only change ourselves but changing ourselves will enable change in others".

Could this way of receptive ecumenism be, in a hidden way, at the core of your effort to assess the ecumenical dimension in seminary education? Could it function as a standard for assessment? Or are you still more working in the framework of the 2nd approach, type Faith and Order? Or do you use all three approaches alternately? Perhaps I can challenge you to make your analytical assessment of the seminary educational programs even sharper from a clear-cut theological approach to ecumenism.

¹ Paul D. Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*. Oxford: OUP, 2008.

For instance, are the newer documents from the Catholic and Orthodox side compatible with the approach of receptive ecumenism? I would say partly yes and partly no. They both stress mutual learning and enrichment, and the need to be open to other traditions. Yet on the other hand they demonstrate an approach to emphasize first particular “Catholic” or “Orthodox” positions on basic themes of ecumenism such as the understanding of unity, ecclesiology, the Eucharist, proselytism, or the ordination of women. They warn against slipping into denominational indifference. The Catholic ‘Guide for Applying the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism’ “stresses the need for an approach to teaching which would ensure a clear understanding of what is Catholic and what is not” (11). This singling out beforehand about what shall not be part of the encounter with the other, and shall not be integrated in a learning process because it is considered ‘timeless truth’ of the own tradition, doesn’t go along with the approach of receptive ecumenism, of which the primary aim is, according to Murray, “continuing ecclesial conversion, deepening and expansive growth within traditions.” For in the end it is the one living Tradition that calls us forward to unity in Christ.

2.

In today’s ecumenical theology the relationship to the field of interreligious dialogue is subject of discussion. How are the two distinguished, but also how are the two interrelated? For instance, can we leave the Jewish-Christian dialogue fully out of scope in ecumenical theology? Is there a sharp distinction to make? Do interconfessional and interreligious study need separate treatment in educational programs or not? I have not yet found how the researchers deal with this in their analysis of curricula or what they would recommend in this respect.

3.

A contextualized approach to ecumenism demands starting the teaching with topical issues, experiences and problems to investigate from there ecumenical dialogues as helpful resources.

From experience I learned how hard it is to engage students by teaching them interconfessional dialogue reports only. Why should they be interested in church reports on the doctrine of justification, Eucharist or whatever topic you name? Relevance comes when they are able to discover the value of these ecumenical conversations in relation to burning questions today or to real life experiences. Like questions of war and peace, of environmental crisis, of church and nationalism, of sexuality and gender in relation to the underlying theological anthropology. Or the lived ecumenism in Maidan or in volunteering for assistance to refugees or to ZSU. I learn that in your Ecumenical Summer schools you practice this model of problem- and practice-oriented learning. Would you recommend it to the seminaries as well? What are its potentials and limitations, what could be the advantages, what the drawbacks? Are seminaries ready to implement such a model of learning?

Summarizing, I offer you for the conversation following questions:

How do you see

- the connection or distinction between inter-Christian and interreligious dialogues in teaching ecumenism?
- the value of using the concept of receptive ecumenism as an integrative approach to practicing ecumenical dialogue, including in the classroom?
- the potentials and limitations of a problem- and practice-oriented model of learning in seminaries and in other places of theological education

Above all, I congratulate you, my dear colleagues, with this important and urgent research report and hope it will find its way to the leadership of seminaries. It is wonderful to hear that the research will soon be extended to other seminaries as well.