

ADDRESS

To the Assembly of Bishops of the Lutheran Church of Sweden
Attended by the King of Sweden
(Uppsala Cathedral, 1 October 2019)

Your Majesties, King Carl Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden,
Right Reverend Dr. Antje Jackelén, Archbishop of Uppsala and Primate of the
Church of Sweden,
Your Eminences,
Your Graces,
Dear brothers and sisters,

It is with particular spiritual joy that we address all of you gathered here for the Assembly of Bishops of the Lutheran Church of Sweden in this historic town of Uppsala, which has served a major role in the life of your local Church through the ages, as well as in the peregrination of the Ecumenical Movement in the twentieth century.

The Orthodox Church has been engaged in dialogue with the Lutherans since the beginning of the Reformation. In the year 1573, twenty-seven years after the death of Martin Luther, Lutheran scholars of Württemberg sent a copy of a Greek version of the *Confessio Augustana* to our predecessor, Patriarch Jeremias II of Constantinople, in order to share with him the main doctrines of the Reformation. We are all aware of the outcome of that remarkable effort.

In 1981, exactly four-hundred years after the cessation of the correspondence between Tübingen and Constantinople, the official theological dialogue began between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation. This dialogue was understood as a continuation of the above-mentioned exchange in the sixteenth century, and aimed to establish a “full communion” between the Orthodox and the Lutherans. It is a blessed coincidence that the delegates of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation are currently meeting in Albania, from September 24th - October 1st, to discuss the topic “The Place and the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church.”

For the Orthodox, it is very important that Lutheranism emphasizes its roots in the ancient Christian Tradition. It is with satisfaction that today we register the fact that through eucharistic ecclesiology, which is grounded in the Bible and the early Church Fathers, new possibilities open up for our conversation concerning the Church. Another benefit of the Ecumenical Movement is the growing interest in Martin Luther’s thought within Orthodox theology. Luther’s

concept of Christian freedom is receiving increasing attention from the side of Orthodox theologians. His Reformation appears as a movement for the actualization of genuine Christian tradition in the West. The well-known Orthodox theologian and clergyman, Fr. John Meyendorff, reminds us that the Reformers “did not reject the Catholic tradition of the Church,” but only its “one-sided and distorted form.”

The Ecumenical Patriarchate followed with great interest the debates and publications during the Luther decade (2008-2017), and participated in the celebrations honoring the five-hundred anniversary of the Reformation. It is our conviction, as we mentioned in our address at the University of Tübingen in May 2017, where we received an honorary doctorate from the Evangelical Theological Faculty, “what threatens our identity is not openness, but sterile introversion and reticence. Stagnation or a rejection of dialogue are the result of a false evaluation of our own identity and of the significance of the exchange with others, which can quickly lead to the idealization of our individual characteristics and to all kinds of distortion.”

Orthodox and Protestant Christians must continue with our joint meetings and conversations, also giving careful thought to the rising sensitive anthropological and ethical problems. We must advance our conversation with theological seriousness, in the spirit of *φιλία* and solidarity, without theological minimalism, but always giving a common Christian witness to the world and pursuing the goal of unity. Our theological faculties must become places of ecumenical learning and encounter. We need young theologians who possess an ecumenical commitment and interest in dialogue. We must ensure that our faithful are informed about the results of our ecumenical dialogues, the existential, cultural and social significance of Christian ecumenicism and its contribution to peace, reconciliation and solidarity.

Your Assembly is gathered here today to address, among other topics of importance, the issue of Christian education. Religious education is essential not only for the spiritual development of the human person, but also for an appropriate understanding of the human condition. For instance, one cannot approach art and literature, science and society—our entire civilization—without also possessing an adequate knowledge of the Christian faith, ethos and culture. Furthermore, someone who does not possess an ample knowledge of his or her own religion, cannot relate and communicate properly with people of other faiths and civilizations. As our contemporary world experiences an increase in violence linked with religious fundamentalism, one has to remember that the best antidote to this “morbid religiosity” is precisely an adequate education, and even more so, a proper religious education.

Education has always been a preoccupation of the Christian Churches. In the twentieth century, the separation that occurred between the Church and State in

most European countries took the educational system away from the Church. Secularist tendencies have tried and continue to try to erase any reference to faith and religion in education. And this has now become a serious preoccupation for most Christian Churches. The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, which convened in Crete in June 2016, has affirmed the following in its Encyclical:

In our time, new tendencies can be observed in the realm of upbringing and education in regard to the content and aims of education as well as in the way that childhood, the role of both teacher and student, and the role of the contemporary school are viewed. Since education relates not only to what man is, but also to what man should be and to the content of his responsibility, it is self-evident that the image we have of the human person and the meaning of existence determine our view of his education. The dominant secularized individualistic educational system that troubles young people today is of deep concern to the Orthodox Church. (Encyclical, 9)

The Council also underscored that the aim of education is not limited only to the transmission of intellectual knowledge, but must also transmit values and address the spiritual formation of the younger generation. Our Churches must respond to the challenges of the signs of times by properly educating our faithful. This past June, the Ecumenical Patriarchate organized its third Halki Summit dedicated wholly to the theme of “Theological Formation and Ecological Awareness.” In this spirit, at this Summit, we suggested that theological schools and religious seminaries ought to be the appropriate setting and venue for sowing the necessary seeds to educate and motivate aspiring parish clergy, community leaders and theologians. The academic curricula of educational programs must incorporate environmental issues.

Beloved in the Lord,
Dear friends,

With these humble thoughts, we wish you fruitful deliberations and insightful discussions, as we reiterate our desire for solidarity and cooperation. It is our conviction that the world is truly in need of common action and common initiatives, as well as of a common Christian witness and of a constructive inter-faith dialogue. May the Comforter and Spirit of Truth come and abide in you, inspiring all of you in your God-pleasing service.

Thank you for your attention!