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Institutional Forms of Contemporary Ecumenical Dialogue

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of ecumenism and the most important examples of its “institutionalisation”. It is stated that ecumenism considers doctrine, universal inter-church movement and proclaimed mission statement related to achieve Christian unity. It possesses at least theological, sociological and political determines. The World Council of Churches represents universal inter-church forum for dialogue and cooperation that lacks clear ecclesiological identity, but getting characteristics of typical international-political movement. The Conference of European Churches represents similar European organization. The Parliament of World Religions pretends to found and promote “global ethics” in order to accomplish pacifistic goals in the world.

Key words: Ecumenism, Ecumenical Movement, World Council of Churches (WCC), Conference of European Churches (CEC), Parliament of World Religions.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, “integration” also characterizes inter-Christian (inter-church) relations. Economic, socio-political, scientific and technological development, the growing “competitive” relationship with other religions and secularist (atheist and agnostic) view of the world, are the factors that influence attempts of “Church Unification” of Christians. In the “inner” sense, this refers to the

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obvious crisis of identity and impact of Christian values in the world, which can be rehabilitated only if historical antagonisms and divisions of the Christian churches are overcome. Only then the unification and reconsiliation character of original Christian values and principles, with positive consequences in the wider socio-political context, would come to the fore.

2. Ecumenism

The term “ecumenism” has the ancient Greek root (*oikoumene*), and the original geographical and civilizational-cultural determinant. It was pointing to a difference between known and inhabited world and “barbarians” from the surrounding regions, including territory, population and political and legal structure of the Roman (“universal”) Empire. Christianity gave him the theological (missionary and liturgical) meaning, using the attribute “ecumenical” to designate honorary titles of Bishops of the two major imperial cities (Rome and Constantinople), and joint councils of unified church of the first millennium.² In terms of essential (theological) and formal (political) disputes and opened church conflicts in the second millennium, the concept of ecumenism has lost its footing and practical impact. It was reaffirmed by the Protestant theology in the XIX century, starting from the need of overcoming their own divisions and denominationalism, by projecting the idea of the church “unification” and inter-Christian relations.³ The Protestants had started from the premise that, *the ideal and goal of unity of the Christian Church* would eventually be achieved through the joint missionary activities of its “devided parts”, especially in social and political domains. This would also set the stage for subsequent theological dialogue in the function of overcoming obstacles and doctrinal issues.⁴ Strategic initiative of Protestants, related to the Pan-Christian dialogue, was supported by the Orthodox Church in the early XX century, thus becoming “organic” part of the Ecumenical Movement.⁵ The Roman Catholic Church has also very actively, but informally in terms of

² Dragoljub R. Živojinović, „Ekumenizam: pokret za ujedinjenje crkava u Evropi dvadesetog veka”, *Bratstvo*, Vol. V, društvo „Sveti Sava”, Belgrade, 2001., p. 64; Radomir Rakić, „Ekumenizam”, in: *Enciklopedija političke kulture*, Savremena administracija, Belgrade, 1993., p. 283; and „Ekumenizam”, in: *Enciklopedija Pravoslavlja*, knjiga A–Z, Savremena administracija, Belgrade, 2001., p. 242.

³ Jean Boisset, *Protestantizam—kratka povijest*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 1985., p. 141.

⁴ Ibidem, str. 143.

⁵ Georgije Florovski, „O granicama Crkve”, in: Aleksandar Đakovac (ur.), *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, Hrišćanski kulturni centar, Beograd, 2005., p. 89.

membership, joined the global process of “integration of church” after its Second Vatican Council (1962-65).⁶

Ecumenism today includes *proclaimed goal, doctrine, strategic and interdisciplinary methodological approach and universalist church movement for dialogue and cooperation*. It is characterized by declaratory denial of aspirations for unification of the identity of member churches and the affirmation of the importance of their coexistence, mutual interaction and enrichment. Therefore, ecumenism is an influential and “powerful factor of its time.”⁷ It must be distinguished from the content of related terms such as „ecumenical contacts“, „participation in ecumenical contacts“, „ecumenist societies“ and „inter-religious dialogue“ (practical ecumenism), and “inter-confessionalism”, “inter-religious pluralism” and “tolerance” (ideological and theoretical concepts and assumptions).⁸ In this sense, *inter-confessionalism*, as opposed to ecumenism, involves the sacrifice of exclusive church principle criteria of pluralism of the church. This makes it, in theological sense, qualitatively different from the concept of “universality” (the essential theological identity). Since that it often suggests “leveling the minimum” or the relativization of religious “Truth”, inter-confessionalism is important, but insufficient determinant of ecumenism.⁹ On the other hand, the global integrative processes are conditioning its expressed “horizontalization”, in terms of a tendency to include the *inter-religious dialogue* in its content.¹⁰ Ecumenism is often associated, mixed or identified with the concept of *tolerance*, which has broader, more horizontal dimension from inter-religious dialogue. Tolerance, in fact, implies the coexistence of different religions and church communities which accept and respect each other, but in practical terms often have a passive or indifferent relationship, based on the indifference to the truth.”¹¹ In this context, it is important to know that the relation between the

⁶ „Dekret Unitatis Redintegratio” (UR), in: *Dokumenti Drugog vatikanskog koncila*, Kršćanska sadašnjost, Zagreb, 1970, pp. 207–228.

⁷ Nadbiskup Jorka u Engleskoj Viljem Templ, in: Dragoljub R. Živojinović, „Ekumenizam: pokret za ujedinjenje crkava u Evropi dvadesetog veka”, op.cit., p. 63.

⁸ „Osnovni principi odnosa Ruske pravoslavne crkve prema inosavlju–prilog”, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op.cit., 150.

⁹ Nikolaj Berđajev, „Vaseljenskost i konfesionalizam”, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 110.

¹⁰ Jakob Pfeifer, „Ekumenizam–međucrkeno–međureligijsko razumjevanje i(ili) svjetska globalizacija”, in: *Religije Balkana: susreti i prožimanja*, Milan Vukomanović, Marinko Vučinić (urs.), BOŠ, Belgrade, 2001., p. 54–55.

¹¹ Nikolaj Berđajev, „O fanatizmu, ortodoksiji i istini”, Internet: [http:// www.verujem.org/filosofija/savremena/berdjajev_fanatizam.htm](http://www.verujem.org/filosofija/savremena/berdjajev_fanatizam.htm), 23/11/2006.

Christian churches, bearing in mind that all of them are based on the Christological doctrine (teachings of Jesus Christ), does not, or should not be neutral in terms of value or be of passive nature. Inter-religious dialogue, however, implies dialogue of different religions, while ecumenism generally represents inter-church dialog.

In a thematic sense, ecumenism has at least theological, social, political and anthropological implications. It points to “bringing together of people and God” and improvement of “horizontal” relationships among the people, but also “approach to the state of peace” and prevention (rehabilitation) of political conflicts through recognition of ethical Christian principles. Ecumenism points to the possibility of overcoming of individual “limitations” through dialogue and acceptance of the value of “others”.¹² In practice, however, it is facing a number of obstacles and problems, out of which the most important are the patterns of thinking, belief and behavior, which are approached uncritically.¹³

It is important to know that the three churches (Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox) today, share different ideas and approaches about achieving generally accepted goal (Christian Unity). They are the consequence of their different church principles.¹⁴ They are specifically reflected in the proportion of different theological, socio-economic and political factors in “ecumenical” efforts and attempts of recognition of different forms of organizational structure of the “United Church” in the re-emerging. Therefore ecumenism implies, in practice, the church “rivalry”, or an attempt of promoting and establishing of their church principles, but certainly in terms of respect for the principles of pluralism of the church. In this context, the Orthodox (Eastern) Church insists on the “annexation” or “reunification” (reconciliation) on the basis of original theological criteria, while the Western Christians (Protestants and Roman Catholics) evidently advocate the “integration” (“union”) of theological, sociological and political factors.¹⁵

Ecumenism could be defined as *a set of interdisciplinary movements and activities* aimed at realization of “full unity” between the Christian churches

¹² Đuro Šušnjić, „Značenje i značaj dijaloga”, in: *2000 godina Hrišćanstva–istorija, kultrura, duhovnost*, Despotovac, 2001., p. 251; Milan Vukomanović, *Sveto i mnoštvo–izazovi religijskog pluralizma*, Čigoja, Beograd, 2001., p. 9; and Ratko R. Božović, „Uspostavljanje dijaloga na razlikama”, in: *Interreligijski dijalog kao vid pomirenja u Jugoistočnoj Evropi*, op. cit. pp. 128–133.

¹³ Đuro Šušnjić, „Prepreke na putu razumevanja, poverenja i pomirenja”, in: *Vera–znanje –mir*, Centar za istraživanje religije BOŠ–a, Belgrade, 2001, pp. 103–111.

¹⁴ Nikolaj Berđajev, „Vaseljenskost i konfesionalizam”, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op.cit., pp. 107–109; and Jacques Mercier, *Povijest Vatikana*, Barbat, Zagreb, 2001., pp. 129-135.

¹⁵ Anton Kartašev, „Ujedinjenje crkava u svetlu istorije”, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 43.

through dialogue and cooperation in the social (social), theological and politicological area. Its central thematical and methodological point is *inter-church (theological) dialogue*, despite emerging trends of “expansion of competencies” on the global ethical and political issues. The common denominator of the original, as well as the latter meaning of the concept of Ecumenism, are their “cosmopolitan” and unification determinants.

3. Ecumenical movement

“Ecclesiasticism” as a philosophy of life was brought into question especially during the XIX century. Intellectual circles and scientific achievements have redirected views of people who have come to believe that the accumulated problems of capitalist society can be solved by scientific and materialist approach. This period is characterized by a wave of pronounced social and societal differentiation, in which much of the rural population moved to cities, creating the working class. In the socio-anthropological sense, polarization and alienation of certain groups and individuals happened then, while in the field of political events, this period was characterized by gaining national independence. The aforementioned factors have contributed to the relativization of Christian and religious values and marginalization of social influence of the Church, because of the supremacy of “rationalist and subjectivist spirit.”¹⁶ The processes of decentralization and “fragmentation” of all forms of life were intensified.

This was reflected in the life of the Protestant churches, which were faced with the need to bridge the gap in the attitudes of their own “orthodox and liberal currents.”¹⁷ Among their representatives, the awareness that the survival of Protestant churches in these conditions depends on the regulation and improvement of their inner relations, began to mature. The first steps in this direction were undertaken by Lutherans and Calvinists, by their administrative attempt of unification in Lambeth in 1867. Protestant churches have, in particular since then, attempted to parallelly project the logic of unification to Pan-Christian level, even though during the XVII century they succeeded in establishment of dialogue with the Constantinople and Alexandrian Patriarchate at the highest level. Concrete results were achieved in the second half of the XIX and early XX century, by establishing numerous associations of inter-confesional character: “The Gospel Alliance”, “Anglican Orthodox Joint Commission”, “Universal Federation of Christian Student Associations”, “the World Alliance for Improvement of International Friendship through the

¹⁶ Hristo Janaras, „Problem jedinstva danas“, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 268.

¹⁷ Jean Boisset, *Protestantizam—kratka povijest*, op. cit., p. 141.

Churches,” etc.¹⁸ After the creation of a loose form of “church federation” in 1922, local churches in Germany achieved unity within German Evangelical Church in 1933. The same was with the Reformed Church in France in 1938.¹⁹ In the focus of these events was the idea of the unification of Christians under the “equal” terms, in order for the Christian Church to preserve “the leading and creative role in society.”²⁰ In order to accomplish this goal, it was necessary to contribute to the promotion of international cooperation in the broadest sense.²¹

As a milestone of shaping and establishment of the ecumenical movement in the ideological and conceptual sense, today we often consider the Conference of Anglican Bishops at Lambeth in 1897. At this Conference, as a fundamental principle of movement was proclaimed “dogmatic minimalism”, that is, common theological denominator of all Christian churches, which, as a cornerstone, would be the foundation for developing the future relations. It was considered that all the other differences could eventually be overcome, if they start from the aforementioned “minimum”. At this conference, the Bible, Nikean-Constantinopolitan Creed and “secrets” of the Baptism and the Eucharistia,²² were established as the foundations of Ecumenical Movement. The approach was actually based on today’s understanding of the concept of pluralism of the church, with the required tolerance and acceptance of the doctrinal differences for the sake of the “compromise of love”. This concept is known as the Protestant Branch Theory, in which the Christian Church is identified with a “branching tree” whose “branches” are the local churches as a partial manifestation of the whole. In this context the “fullness of Truth” can be achieved only through direct dialogue of its “parts”.²³

Today, as the first “institutional” example of the modern ecumenical movement is considered the meeting of *the International Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1910*, followed by establishment of the World Conference for Faith and Order and The International Missionary Council. Afterwards, in 1914, the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches was established, and in 1920 the World Movement on Life and Work.²⁴ Since it has primarily religious character, the special role in the work

¹⁸ Aleksandar Đakovac, „Kratki pregled istorije razvoja Ekumenskog pokreta“, Internet: http://www.verujem.org/teologija/djakovac_istorija.htm, 10/08/2006.

¹⁹ Hristo Janaras, „Problem jedinstva danas“, op. cit., pp. 268–269.

²⁰ Petar Čebić, *Ekumenizam i vjerska tolerancija u Jugoslaviji*, NIRO Mladost, Belgrade, 1988, p. 77.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² Sava Janjić, *Ekumenizam i vreme apostasije*, Sveti knez Lazar, Prizren, 1995, p. 8.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Hristo Janaras, „Problem jedinstva danas“, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 269.

of Ecumenical Movement, from the beginning, has belonged to its submovement “Faith and Order”, which deals with determination and theological denominations and framework of cooperation between member churches. On these assumptions their convergence and possible future unification would be based. In this sense, a compromise was achieved that dogmatic compromise has logical source in *the common faith*. The conceptual and creative ascent the movement achieved at its conferences, in the Haj Liu in 1931 and Wiesbaden in 1932.²⁵

Mastermind of the second submovement *Life and Work* was the Archbishop of Uppsala, Nothan Söderblom. He advocated the realization of the unity between the Christian churches, through creative cooperation in “areas of practical life”.²⁶ The concept was guided by the premise that the convergence of churches in the dogmatic area will be a logical consequence of joint involvement in solving of existential problems. This movement held the first conference in Stockholm in 1925, and in 1929 it grew into the movement of “The Ecumenical Council for the Practical Christianity” with its headquarters in Geneva. Since then, it advocates intensification of inter-church cooperation for the sake of peace and service to humanity. At the Congress of the movement in Oxford in 1937, the idea of creation of the World Council of Churches was conceived.²⁷ For the third submovement, „the International Missionary Council“ was only the forum for the coordination of activities of previously established missionary societies, which together “merged” into the World Council of Churches.²⁸

Despite the proclaimed differences in theoretical foundations, objectives and approaches, all three submovements’ activities were, most often, intertwined and complementary. One gets the impression that from the very beginning of the Ecumenical Movement, they had the same goal, which was strategically achieved through a three-way action. Bearing in mind the proclaimed goal, it was logical that the Ecumenical Movement was characterized by a pragmatic nature. In the most general terms, we can separate at least three stages of its development. The first was characterized by pronounced socio-economic, the second by theological approach, while the third approach involved both of the aforementioned two.²⁹ The terms

²⁵ Nikolaj Arsenjev, „Pokret ka jedinstvu hrišćanskih crkava“, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., pp. 80–81.

²⁶ Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, „Ekumenski pokret i tokovi u suvremenom svijetu“, *Pravoslavna misao*, godina XXII, sveska 26, 1967, p. 37.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Aleksandar Đakovac, „Kratki pregled istorije razvoja Ekumenskog pokreta“, op. cit., p. 7.

²⁹ Jovan Majendorf, „Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam“, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 144.

Ecumenical Movement and the World Council of Churches (WCC) are often identified, but they have some important differences. From today's perspective, it can be said that the Ecumenical Movement implies the historical development of the "ecumenical and theoretical" concept and its institutional forms and assumptions (movement), while the WCC symbolizes their practical synergy and implementation. The World Council of Churches represents institutional form of recognition of Ecumenical Movement - both ecclesiastical and inter-religious dialogue.

4. The world council of churches

The central place in today's Ecumenical Movement belongs to the World Council of Churches (WCC), the organization of ecclesiastically universal character, which was founded after the Second World War by the Protestant and Orthodox members. The Council has established by decisions on the unification which the movements "The Life and Work" and "Faith and Order" had jointly adopted on their world conferences, in Oxford in 1937 and Utrecht in 1938.³⁰

"The Rules" or the WCC Statute was adopted at the founding conference in Amsterdam in August 1948. It represented the joint effort of representatives of those two movements.³¹ This Assembly was attended by representatives of the aforementioned "International Council Mission", which was also later integrated in the WCC. The Conference was attended by 351 representatives of 147 churches and confessions from 44 countries.³² Almost all Protestant churches became members of the organization then, as well as Anglican and Old Catholic Church, Greek, Cyprian, Constantinople and Alexandrian Orthodox Churches, as well as Romanian Missionary Episcopate from America.³³ On the meeting, *the Resolution* was adopted, by which the WCC was defined as a "a fellowship of Churches which accept Jesus Christ as God and Savior", with the main goal of achieving unity through "God's love through Jesus Christ".³⁴ These principles, *de facto*, implied full respect for the principles of ecclesiastical pluralism and

³⁰ In this sense, the Romanian theologian John Brije uses the term "fusion", and Serbian theologian Đakovac the term "unification"

³¹ Jovan Majendorf, „Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam“, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 146.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ Jovan Brija, „Ekumenski pokret“, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 3. From 1952 to 1955, the same did the Antiochian and the American Orthodox Church.

³⁴ *The Toronto Statement (1950): The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches*, Internet: http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/toronto_wcc.aspx, 12/12/2006.

“equal cohabitation” between members, leaving open the space for their changes amendments. The resolution made it clear that the WCC “is not and must never become supra-church” in terms of theological concept of “One Holy Church” (*Una Sancta Ecclesia*), where each, even potential member had the possibility to actively participate in the organization, regardless of whether it is recognized, or it recognizes “religious” identity and status of other members.³⁵ On the other hand, confirmed and affirmed was the universal theological principle of the existence of only “One Church”, whose “leader is Jesus Christ”.³⁶ WCC was not given any supervisory functions in relation to the right of interference in the internal life of its members.³⁷ Obviously, the WCC life concept is based on a very broad and liberal understanding of the principles of ecclesiastical pluralism, with the apparent program assumptions which will cause the internal polarization of the “top” and the “base”. The most important cohesive factor and driving force of the Organization is an attempt to spread the impact of Christian ideals in the world (*missionary activity*), where important strategic role is including of as many members as possible into the composition of the organization.³⁸ In their relationship, it is particularly insisted on mutual *solidarity*.³⁹ The ultimate goal and outcome of the WCC remains *the achievement of Christian unity*, through interdisciplinary activities. This universalistic goal and approach necessary requires willingness of minority members to sacrifice theological identity, and existence and cooperation. Speaking in economic terms, all members should have the status of “shareholders”, which will enable success of the corporation.⁴⁰

At the founding Assembly in Amsterdam, however, a number of differences in perceptions and approaches of members have already come to the fore, not only at theological but also at political, economic and social levels. First of all, the crucial issue of the WCC was and remained the question of *church identity and foundation*, which is extremely difficult (throughout all these years even impossible) to define, because the church doctrine of each member has exclusivist character. Therefore, it is more accurate and factually grounded to say that WCC has “church significance” rather than “church character”.⁴¹ This indeed is confirms by the program basis on which it was established. Also, the

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 5–6.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ Jovan Romanidis, „Bogoslov u službi Crkve u ekumenskom dijalogu”, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 165.

⁴¹ Jovan Zizjulas, „Samopojmanje pravoslavnih i njihovo učešće u Ekumenskom pokretu”, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 245.

majority of Protestant members, hasve from the very beginning, pointed to “substantial” importance of engaging of WCC in social field, which led to reservation of Orthodox members, which insisted primarily on theological criteria of dialogue and cooperation. Also, a special problem for minority of Orthodox members was the application of the principle of majority decision-making, and consequent marginalization of their influence.

Tendencies in the development of WCC

In terms of significance of its decisions, *the Third General Assembly of the WCC in New Delhi in 1961* stands out. The founding Resolution from Amsterdam was amended with appendix which stated that “fraternal Church ... are together trying to answer a common appeal to the glory of the Trinity of God.”⁴² By pointing out the specific responsibility of the WCC in further development of mankind, the theoretical basis and presumption of its thematic and spatial spread of “authority” was created. It is estimated that the WCC should actively participate in solving of all the problems that go beyond the “narrow” state and political interests. It was considered that such direction would contribute to the achievement of the main goal – *the Christian Unity*.⁴³ In the strategy of universal and interdisciplinary spreading of influence of WCC, there can be recognized many common points with globalist and universalistic ideology of today. Among other things, from that analytical perspective one should undoubtedly consider a phenomenon of today’s “red integration”, in terms of the apparent causal relation. Also, the Assembly in New Delhi was characterized by an unprecedented “wave” of reception of new members into the WCC, especially Orthodox Christian: Jerusalem, Russian, Romanian and Polish church. In the next few years, the same did the Georgian (1962), Serbian (1965), Czechoslovakian (1966) and the Japanese Orthodox Church (1973).⁴⁴

Apparent strategic redirection of activities of WCC was initiated by Protestant members at the Fourth Conference of *the Department for Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963*. They had managed to vote for a position on which the ecumenical activities of the organization should have a primarily anthropological focus, describing it by phrases “from the Church to humanity” and “from God to man.”⁴⁵ It was adopted by the *Fourth General Assembly of*

⁴² Hristo Janaras, „Problem jedinstva danas“, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 270.

⁴³ „Generalna skupština hrišćana u Nju Delhiju“, *Glasnik Srpske Patrijaršije*, br. 2, Belgrade, 1961., pp. 87–88.

⁴⁴ Aleksandar Đakovac, „Kratki pregled istorije razvoja Ekumenskog pokreta“, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴⁵ Lukas Fisher, *Foi et Constitution*, par. 5,28, WCC, 1964; i u Jean Meyendorff, „Unite de l’Eglise–Unite de l’Humanite“, Louvain, 1971, *Truth*, 16/1971/3, p. 298.

*the WCC in Uppsala in 1968.*⁴⁶ If we bear in mind the original program policies and objectives of the WCC, this has greatly changed the unified “direction” of development of organization which caused intense internal differences, especially between the Protestant and Orthodox members. The tendency of their further polarization was especially present at *the Fifth Session of the General Assembly in Nairobi 1975* with the participation of over 2000 delegates. There were several reasons for this. First of all, the majority of Protestant members have for the first time openly expressed their intention to attribute to WCC in the future international political “responsibilities” and prerogatives, in terms of active participation in solving of global political issues. Thus, adopted and issued were numerous special announcements of a political nature, such as the assessment of the situation in the Middle East and East Timor, Angola and Jerusalem, on the issue of disarmament and the nuclear reactors in South Africa, the importance of the Helsinki Accords, Human Rights in Latin America, etc. In that context, Orthodox churches remained loyal to the attitude that the WCC, as a primarily *religious organization*, in its activities had to deal primarily with theological, and only in consequent sense, with wider socio-political agenda. Since then, within the WCC two thematically and methodologically profiled “wings” were actually created, with the international, political and theological aspirations.⁴⁷ Report of the Secretary General of the WCC Philippe Potter submitted to the Assembly in Nairobi, clearly pointed to the willingness of the organization to become an active subject in the process of solving of international political problems in the future.⁴⁸

On this occasion also the principle of majority decision-making was brought into focus. Its implementation has resulted in the complete marginalization of the influence of the Orthodox members. They did not stay overruled only in the event of any question of acquiring political prerogatives, but also in the appointing orthodox members in certain committees. For example, the Protestant delegates were then endorsed the appointment of an Archbishop of Constantinople Patriarchate, which was not the candidate of the mother church, which is why it said it would review its membership in the WCC.⁴⁹ This was repeated in the case of Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, whose proposals were rejected by the Protestant delegates.⁵⁰ These

⁴⁶ *Uppsala Speaks*, WCC, Geneve, 1968; i David Jenkins (ed.), *The Humanum Studies*, 1969–1976, WCC, 1975.

⁴⁷ Hristo Janaras, „Problem jedinstva danas“, u: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 279.

⁴⁸ Radomir Rakić, „Peta skupština otvorena molitvom“, *Pravoslavlje*, br. 213, 1976., p. 25.

⁴⁹ Jovan Romanidis, „Bogoslov u službi Crkve u ekumenskom dijalogu“, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 167.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

events have only confirmed the hypothesis of a deep internal crisis in internal relations of the WCC and the supremacy of the “tyranny of the majority” in the relation to the original principle of respect for church pluralism, which could not come to the fore.

Starting from the Protestant principle and premisis that evangelism and socio-political engagement are “equal part of Christian duty”, it can be concluded that the WCC has increasingly acquired the characteristics of international political movement.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it remains a universal forum for inter-church dialogue and cooperation. If it survives all the more pronounced internal polarization, WCC could become a significant factor in international relations, especially in terms of impact on the socio-political life of hundreds of millions of Christian believers in the world. The importance of this assumption should be viewed primarily from the perspective of facts related to the global trend of relativisation of ethical values, which is conditioned by secularistic and materialistic consumer society. The affirmation of Christian values through the WCC in that context could represent a really creative and positive contribution.

The organizational structure and the functional principles of the WCC

The World Council of Churches is, in the real sense of the word, “politically” structured. Its *General Assembly* consists of official representatives appointed by the churches. From the ranks of the General Assembly, members of the *Central Committee* are elected that in the WCC have the role similar to the executive power. The Commette governs the life and work of the organization in the accordance with the mandate of the General Assembly. Operational function in the selection of its members is carried out by the Comeette for Appointing, without consent of mother churches. The Central Committee will then elect the members of the *Executive Committe*, with the supervisory function in implementing the policy of the WCC. Finally, the Executive Committee appoints one third of the members of all *Commissions of the WCC*, second third is elected by the *General Secretariat*, and third officers and the staff of the organization under the guidelines of mother churches, which are also not binding.⁵² By electing the Central Committe, direct control of life of the WCC by church members is terminated, whose function is then be reduced to the initiatives and proposals. The work of the Organization has since then been directly implement through the above committees, where they are monitored

⁵¹ Tomislav Šagi-Bunić, „Ekumenski pokret i tokovi u suvremenom svijetu“, op. cit., p. 117.

⁵² Jovan Romanidis, „Bogoslov u službi Crkve u ekumenskom dijalogu“, in: *Pravoslavlje i ekumenizam*, op. cit., p. 163.

and controlled by Executive and the Central Committee.⁵³ One can observe that the WCC, in a certain sense, is “supra-church “ universalist organization.

A special place and importance in its work today takes the *Commission (department) on Faith and Order*, the successor of the same named movement of the early XX century. It continued to study the most important theological questions, in the function of finding a commonly accepted formula as a basis for improvement of theological dialogue of members. The Commission manages and coordinates the activities of comparative analysis of different Christian dogmas, stating the specific theological proposals on further activities of members. In terms of methodology, it insists on emphasizing doctrinal denominators, trying to differentiate “essential “ from “irrelevant “ dogmatic differences. It brings into dialogue those denominations whose positions are not too far away. For example, in late 1960s, this has referred to the Lutheran and the Reformed, as well as Orthodox and Non-Chalcedonian churches.⁵⁴ Specifically, the Commission prepares a joint weekly prayers for Christian unity and proposes establishment of a common date of Easter celebrations. Over the decades, on several occasions it has initiated the question of convening the General (“Ecumenical”) Council of Christian Churches, modeled on the councils of the undivided Church of the first millennium.⁵⁵ It’s work has always involved the most eminent theologians of member churches. In this sense, the Orthodox Church was represented by George Florovsky, John Meyendorff, Count Boris Bobrinski, and the many others. The World Council of Churches conducts its activities at the regional and local levels “simultaneously” and implements them through National Committees, which have primarily operational character. Each National Committee is a separate member of the WCC, which often results the “duplication” of membership of individual churches in the organization.⁵⁶

When it comes to the internal balance of power, it is important to stress again that the Protestant majority dominates undisturbed in work of the WCC, whose legitimacy and legality was provided by minority members’ initial approval of the principle of majority decision-making. Since there was no indication that the situation will soon change, on *the Seventh Session of the General Assembly of the WCC in Canberra in 1991*, Orthodox members jointly asked for “radical

⁵³ „Ekumenski (svetski) savet crkava“, 19. novembar 1963. godine, *SIV, Dokumenti Savezne komisije za verska pitanja*, Arhiv Jugoslavije, Beograd, fond 144, fascikla 67, pp. 1–4.

⁵⁴ Radomir Rakić, „Patrijarh srpski German posetio centar SSC u Ženevi“, *Glasnik Srpske Patrijaršije*, 1969., pp. 191–192.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ „Ekumenski (svetski) savet crkava“, *SIV, Domumenti Savezne komisije za verska pitanja*, op. cit., p. 4.

restructuring” of principles of functioning of the organization. As an alternative to finding new forms of relationships, they indicated to possibility of withdrawal from membership, but only on the basis of joint decision.⁵⁷ The Georgian Orthodox Church, however, has abandoned independently WCC in 1998, which caused disagreements within the Orthodox churches, but has not led to question of the common approach within the organization. The Executive Secretary for Faith and Order Peter Bouteneff said after the session of *the Eighth General Assembly in Harare in 1998* that the “partial boycott” of the Orthodox representatives would not significantly affect the work and decision making of the WCC.⁵⁸ This constatation implies that the Protestant majority has no intention to significantly change the course of their work.

Therefore, the World Council of Churches is facing today the gravest crisis of its own identity, as well as the challenge of survival. Although a sort of Protestant “Ecumenical nobility” kept his elitist position and influence, it is clear that the WCC in future will largely depend on its internal “democratization”, but also on a higher degree of harmonization of members in the theological field. The organization has so far undoubtedly achieved positive results, especially in the terms of convergence of the Western churches, and their familiarization with the position of the Orthodox Church. In this sense, the presence of Orthodox members is important for the WCC, because it affects the balancing of the relationship of theological and socio-political factors, consistent with the insistence that the WCC should remain a church organization with a specific social competencies. This position has a special significance in the global, increasingly secularistic (atheist, agnostic), and political and integrative conditions, which bring into question the church character of the WCC.

5. Conference of European churches

The Conference of European Churches is an association of 126 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old-Catholic churches, along with 43 associated organizations. It was established in 1959, on the foundations of principles of pluralism of the church and ecumenism, primarily in the function of ecclesiastical contribution in overcoming of common historical, cultural and

⁵⁷ „Odras sadašnjeg stanja ekumenizma–Naša delegacija na skupštini SSC u Kanberi“, *Glasnik Srpske Patrijaršije*, 1991., p. 79.

⁵⁸ “From a Report of the Harare Assembly by Peter Bouteneff, Executive Secretary of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches”, in: *The Thessaloniki Summit, May 1998*, Internet, [http:// www.orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/thessaloniki_roc.aspx](http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/thessaloniki_roc.aspx), 20/05/2007.

economic obstacles to cooperation on the European continent. The main objective of the CEC is also to “promote the unity of the Church” through “joint Christian testimony to European nations and institutions”.⁵⁹

Fields of activities of organization in thematic terms are various. As an association of churches, it seeks primarily to improve inter-church dialogue, where the most important role has *The Commission “of the Church in dialogue.”* It largely represents “European form” of the Comision for Faith and Order of the WCC. Members of the CEC signed the famous “Ecumenical Charter “ (*Charta Oecumenica*) in Strasbourg at the end of April 2001, which defined the framework, common criteria and guidelines of its activities in the function of “ecumenical” cooperation of members in “all areas”.⁶⁰ During the period of start of political integration of the continent in the early 1990s this has, as one of its main goals, the CEC has stated contribution to the spreading of influence of Christian values (Christianization) in such a process.⁶¹

The Conference of European Churches, like the WCC, also aims at extending of membership and influence. It was united with the European Ecumenical Commission on Church and Society (*EECCS*) in 1999, after which their *Joint Commission* deals with social, economic and environmental issues on the European continent. Since then, CEC, has took the position that the organization and all its members should be actively involved in the process of European integration. Even the intention was expressed that the organization should perform “ethical” supervision and control of European political institutions in certain subject areas. Thus, for example, the CEC is actively engaged in discussing of issues of social and political status of women and migrants in Europe.⁶² On the other hand, together with the Roman Catholic Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae (*CCEE*), the organization is seriously tackling the issue of more precise definition of the concept of European identity, especially in the context of the needs of the construction and improvement of relations with Islam, in order to achieve the coexistence of two religions and their believers in a common European home.⁶³

⁵⁹ *Conference of European Churches*, Internet: <http://www.ceckek.org/content/history.shtml>, 09/02/2009.

⁶⁰ *Charta Oecumenica, Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe – “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit“*, Internet: <http://www.ceckek.org/content/history.shtml>, 09/02/2009.

⁶¹ *Conference of European Churches, Current Concerns*, Internet: <http://www.ceckek.org/content/history.shtml>, 09/02/2009.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

In accordance with the Constitution of the Organization adopted in 1964, *the Assembly of CEC* is the most important subject in the process of making and implementing decisions.⁶⁴ Generally, it meets every six years, but in practice it happened more often. It consists of representatives appointed by the member churches, with members of *the Central Committee* with a mandate to manage the activities of the CEC in the period when the Assembly is in session.⁶⁵ Representatives of associated organizations sporadically attend meetings of the Assembly as *observers*. The first three Assembly of the CEC were held in Nyborg, Denmark in 1959, 1960 and 1962 and the last ones were held in Prague in 1992, Graz in 1997 and Trondheim in 2003.⁶⁶

Compared with the WCC, the CEC is based on almost identical ideological and theoretical assumptions and objectives, with a similar organizational structure. It seems that in relation to the WCC it has even more obvious political aspirations and goals, which can be explained by the nature of the moment in the process of European integration. The CEC also represents *forum for inter-church cooperation and dialogue*, but compared to the WCC, of the European and “regional” character.

6. Parliament of world religions

If under the ecumenism we also implicate inter-religious dialogue, for which there are more pronounced tendencies, its important institutional form represents *the Parliament of World Religions*. By its comprehensive aims, thematic aspirations and methods of their realization, it exceeds the WCC. Its two sessions, the Parliament held in Chicago in 1893 and in 1993. The last was attended by representatives of almost all world religions.

They agreed to an aspiration to “colorful fragments of religion as of the heavenly light” attempt to sum up in “heavenly white light of truth”.⁶⁷ The purpose of this “spiritual integralist” concept actually represented an attempt to synthesize the ethical aspects of world religions, in order to achieve the primarily pacifist globalist objectives.⁶⁸ For the sake of it, the importance of all known forms of religious and institutional forms is relativized to the extreme

⁶⁴ The Article 5.1 of the Constitution, in: *Conference of European Churches, Current Concerns*, op. cit.

⁶⁵ The Article 6.1., *ibidem*.

⁶⁶ *Conference of European Churches, List of Assemblies*, Internet: <http://www.cecekek.org/content/assemblies.shtml>, 09/02/2009.

⁶⁷ Sava Janjić, *Ekumenizam i vreme apostasije*, op. cit., p. 45.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

limits. The essence represented an attitude according to which spirituality not only is not inseparably linked to the dogmas, but they are the very ones that “limits” it.⁶⁹ Such a degree and example of religious relativism and extreme theological liberalism (anarchism) was not known in a theological theory and practice. In all this, not even the term “God” was used, as the representatives of the various religions were not able to agree on the content of its term.

The Final Document of the Session affirmed the attempt to create a new “global ethics” and the establishment of universal moral criteria as a basis for overcoming the binding constraints and keeping the creative dialogue of world religions. As factors of “universal ethics”, the document has defined non-violence, social justice, ecumenism, pluralism, feminism, political and human rights, by insisting on the abolition of all social, economic and gender discrimination in the world. To achieve these goals, it is necessary to conduct the “transformation of consciousness” or “delete” historical examples of inter-religious conflict, fanaticism and hate from the minds of people. In this process of moral transformation of the world, the significant role was given to the “global Christianity”.⁷⁰ The whole concept, along with positive aspects, has a certain psychosomatic guidelines.

The Session was remembered by an attempt of affirmation and establishment of an entirely new model of inter-religious relations in the world, that would be based on complete religious (dogmatic and institutional) relativism, syncretism and unified reducing of religions to ethical. However, the big question was whether this kind of unification of religious “diversity” can have pacifist consequences. It is more likely to have just the opposite effect.

7. Conclusion

Ecumenism implies an idea, a doctrine and a movement aimed at achieving the proclaimed goal of unification of Christian churches. In today’s sense, it has primarily missionary, “Western”, character, and interdisciplinary, at least theological, sociological (social) and politicological determinant. Although the concept is getting “more horizontal” content, its central point represents theological dialogue. Ecumenism should be distinguished from similar concepts, such as tolerance, inter-confessionalism, religious pluralism and inter-religious dialogue. Since it promotes inter-church and, indirectly, inter-religious coexistence, dialogue and cooperation, it bears the “potential” of significant instrument in prevention of social and political conflicts, as well as for overcoming their consequences.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 48.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 48.

The most important institutional forms of ecumenism today represent the World Council of Churches (WCC,) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC). In a broader sense, it refers to the Parliament of World Religions. The World Council of Churches is a universal forum for interchurch dialogue and cooperation, based on the principle of equal cohabitation of members. It does not possess a clear religious identity, and is characterized by interdisciplinary activity, expressed in internal polarization of Protestant and Orthodox members, and certain characteristics of the international political movement. Its deep crisis could only be overcome by finding new forms of internal relations, while the alternative would be withdrawal of Orthodox Christian from the membership. By their goals and methods, organization similar to it is the Conference of European Churches, an organization of European character. On the other hand, the Parliament of World Religions primarily seeks the establishment and global implementation of “universal” ethical principles, as result of synthesizing the ethical aspects of world religions, and in the function of achieving pacifist goals.

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