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CONTRIBUTION OF THE EASTERN-ORTHODOX TRADITION
TO THE FORMATION OF THE DIALOGICAL CIVILIZATION

I. What is dialogical civilization?

II. How to advance to it? Basic principles of the dialogue of civilizations

III. The dialogue of religions and the Eastern-Orthodox contribution to this dialogue

First of all, I would like to express my full support of the basic ideas of our Forum. Today all positive scenarios of global development assume the necessity of profound changes in the principles, which determine relations in human communities on all levels. And surely what needs to be changed in the first place is the principles of relations between communities of the biggest, global scale which are religions, cultures and civilizations. Using the concept of axial time or axial epoch by Karl Jaspers, philosophy of Professor Tu, the initiator of our meeting, calls modern civilizations *axial-age civilizations*. Their mutual relations are based on principles of competition and struggle of strategic interests, struggle for natural resources and spheres of influence. Such relations imply unavoidable confrontations and generate crises and conflicts permanently. Nowadays, in the conditions of globalization, these conflicts are fraught with global clashes of civilizations which carry the threat to the existence of all human kind. Globalization also brings forth a whole list of other global dangers and risks such as economic and financial crises, ecological degradation, technogenic catastrophes, terrorist and extremist trends and so on.

At the same time, however, intense search for alternatives to the existing type of global institutions and their relations takes place. We want to find a different kind of civilization based on new principles. Reflection upon these principles persuades us to approve the main idea of this forum: in the new architecture of global community that should be created the leading role must belong to the dialogue between civilizations, and a new type of *dialogical civilization* should emerge that will replace the old type of axial-age civilization. What is dialogical civilization? Obviously, every such civilization is supposed to be involved into a many-sided dialogue (or polilogue, as the specialists put it), which implies that each participant of this dialogue should contribute his own vision and version of dialogical civilization. Thus philosophy of Professor Tu presents us the project of dialogical civilization in the Confucianist perspective. Correspondingly, I see it my duty to consider the idea of dialogical civilization in the perspective of modern European thought and especially of the Eastern-Orthodox and Russian spiritual tradition.

The dialogue is a great theme of modern culture and one of key concepts of contemporary philosophical and political thought. In the last decades many dialogical ideas and theories were propounded and many dialogical processes and practices took place in spiritual, cultural and social life. The most substantial theoretical contribution to this development was provided by the *school of dialogical philosophy* which represented one of main trends in Western thought in the middle of the 20 c. It included two independent parts or wings, German and Russian. The main figures in the German wing were Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Ferdinand Ebner and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy called often *die Philosophen des Miteinander*, philosophers of togetherness. In the Russian wing, the leading figure was Mikhail Bakhtin whose works became extremely famous and popular in the West to the end of the 20 c.; the contribution of Vladimir Bibler who lived a bit later is also important. These thinkers had different spiritual backgrounds (Judaism,

Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy), but they all stated the prime importance of the dialogue in the constitution of both society and human person.

Dialogical philosophy has elaborated a specific vision or model of reality as determined by principles of dialogue and communication on all its levels. In this vision, man's consciousness is dialogical and participative. Individuals always share their personal lived experience with each other and participate in the lived experience of their fellow-beings. Human thinking is also supposed to have dialogical and hence verbal nature which implies the rejection of the metaphysical conception of pure thought. In the same vein, human personality is considered as constituted in the actualization of its relation to the Other or the dialogical relation *I – Thou*. Such conception of personality means that social dimensions are already present in the deepest foundations of human person and its inner world. Basing on this conception, dialogical philosophy comes to the important statement: *participation is a necessary condition of any autonomy*. This general principle makes social and anthropological levels of reality interconnected most intimately so that the Dialogical Man is the true Aristotelian *Zoon Politikon*. In political theory, dialogical philosophy propounds the principle of *democracy of universal participation* as the key principle for the system of society. It also puts forward a sophisticated dialogical conception of culture treating entire human culture in its totality as a united creative universe. All inhabitants of this universe are represented by their works, and notwithstanding their belonging to different epochs, all these works are supposed to be in a certain implicit or virtual dialogue, the structure of which is determined by a special dialogical logics (dialogics). In this sense, Plato, Confucius, Kant, Heidegger e. a. as well as all local cultures are engaged in a virtual dialogue between them, and the mission of culture as a living creative organism is to turn permanently this virtual dialogue into actual.

Besides dialogical philosophy, there were two other big fields where dialogical ideas were elaborated and exploited: the theories of *dialogue of cultures*, which produced significant results in philosophy of culture and philosophy of education, and studies and practices of *dialogue of religions*. Undoubtedly, it is very desirable now to reassess and unite all these different fields of dialogical thought and ways of promoting the dialogical view of man and society. And we agree easily that the conception of dialogical civilization is a very adequate framework that is capable to embrace all the heterogeneous dialogical contents. Indeed, the described principles of dialogical philosophy can be considered as a kind of theoretical basis of dialogical civilization, which lets us see its nature and its main properties. In an obvious way, dialogue of cultures and dialogue of religions find also their place in the framework of dialogical civilization. Foundations of any civilizational community are formed up by its religion and culture. Thus what the advancement to dialogical civilization demands is exactly the stimulation and cultivation of these two basic dialogues, dialogue of cultures and dialogue of religions. We conclude that the conception of dialogical civilization represents a vast and promising framework, which can serve as the next stage of development of dialogical thought.

Of the two basic dialogues, dialogue of cultures is more many-sided and manifold, it includes many particular dialogues such as dialogue of states and state structures, of social groups and organizations, of ethnic and professional communities and so on. On the other hand, dialogue of religions is more fundamental and to a certain degree it represents a precondition of the successful development of dialogue of cultures. "The basis of any culture is formed by its approach to the greatest mystery that is the mystery of God", – the Pope John Paul II said[1]. Moreover, cultural practices are institutionalized and belong to the social level of reality while religious and especially spiritual practices are directly connected with the personalistic and anthropological level, which is of prime importance for global processes. For these reasons, in

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[1] Pope John Paul II. The speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations, 5 October 1995 // Documentation Catholique, XCII (1995), 920.

this short presentation I shall concentrate on dialogue of religions, and then, more specifically, on the creative potential of Eastern Christianity in this dialogue.

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Turning to dialogue of religions, we should remember, first of all, that the Age of Enlightenment has created the general conviction that religions are the most undialogical formations, they separate more than unite human communities, and their mutual relations are marked by permanent hostility, conflicts and wars. Such a view claimed to be a scientific conception and was supported by a large collection of facts and arguments. Nevertheless it is very biased and one-sided. Relations of religious and spiritual traditions demonstrate opposite trends as well proving that attempts of contacts and dialogue as well as striving for mutual harmony and accord have never ceased. Gradually such attempts turned into systematic strategy and approximately since the mid-19th c. dialogue of religions becomes a full-fledged and uninterrupted process. As for the earlier periods, it is worth to mention some important episodes, in which many features of the future dialogue of religions take shape. Being here, in Dengfeng, I surely must open the list of such episodes with the famous "unity of the three teachings", Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, achieved in the medieval China and flourishing especially during the Sung dynasty in the 10-13th cc. In Europe, in the mid-15th c., the great philosopher and theologian Nicolas of Cusa produces the Latin treatise *De Pace Fidei* (On the Peace of Faiths) presenting rich argumentation in favor of essential accord of all existing faiths. In the 16th c., there was a very interesting episode in India, when Emperor Akbar of the dynasty of the Great Moguls preparing a big religious reform decided to erect a huge building outside of Deli called Ibadat-Khana and summoned to this building representatives of all Hindustani religions including Christianity. Regular meetings and discussions in Ibadat-Khana, starting in 1574, went on for not less than four years: it is known that the Jesuits from Goa took part in them in 1578. In a curious way, the modern period of dialogue of religions opens with a quite similar episode. It was the so called Parliament of Religions that took place in Chicago during the World Exhibition in September 1893. Its organizers tried to draw in clergy and believers of all existing religious faiths, cults and groups in order to discuss plans of the great unification of all religious life of the mankind within some Universal World Religion. Of course, such utopian unification was never achieved, but discussions and resolutions of some 200 delegates gathered together marked the start of a new period when inter-religious contacts and dialogue took gradually organized forms and regular character.

Today the dialogue of religions is a vast field, in which many regional and global organizations and institutions (such as, for example, the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, the International Council of Religious Leaders, the International Conference of Religions for Peace and so on) are working actively. I shall not dwell on their activity, however, my subject being more theoretical. Theoretical aspects of the dialogue of religions have been first analyzed systematically by Paul Tillich who published in 1962 the first contemporary monograph on this theme, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*. There he formulated a set of principles of inter-religious dialogue, which became later well-known and influential under the name of *Tillich's Platform*. Here are the principles.

"The dialogue between exponents of different religions is based on a number of postulates. First, it is supposed that both partners recognize the value of religious standings of the other side… so that both of them agree on the importance of the dialogue. Secondly, it is supposed that each partner is capable to uphold his religious views with due competence so that the dialogue represents a serious comparison of opinions. Thirdly, it is supposed that a certain common

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ground is present, on which both dialogue and confrontation are possible. Fourthly, both sides are supposed to be open to criticism of their religious foundations. If all these conditions are met, <…> such encounter of two or several religions might be very fruitful and if the dialogue goes on, it might even bring forth historical consequences." [2]

Studies by Tillich and other Western theologians such as Karl Rahner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer or our contemporary the Pope Benedict XVI helped to clarify the nature and mechanisms of inter-religious interactions and elaborate strategies for inter-religious contacts. These scholars belong to modern Western and for the most part protestant culture, and their studies are unavoidably influenced by the basic attitudes of this culture and by the experience of big protestant activity of organizing contacts and dialogue between Christian confessions in the framework of the Ecumenical Movement. In my works on dialogue of religions I show that this Western and chiefly protestant approach corresponds basically to a certain model of inter-religious dialogue, which has its merits, but also its shortcomings, and I try to formulate another model rooted in different religious experience that belongs to Eastern-Orthodox spiritual tradition.

The core of the Western model is a principle that is best formulated in arithmetical terms: in the encounter of religions, the space of the dialogue between them must be determined by the "biggest common divisor" of all the participants, i.e. the sum of everything they have in common, the set of all postulates, rules and facts that they all accept. The principle means that all discussions must be based on this common fund only, while all subjects and problems, on which the partners in dialogue diverge, must be excluded. The task of each encounter and of all the dialogical process is to display and accentuate the common elements, bring them to the forefront, discuss them comprehensively and draw the maximum of available conclusions. The main result of such a process should be the agreement between all the participants that it is the common elements, the "biggest common divisor", that should determine their mutual relations. Hopefully, such agreement must secure the harmonious character of these relations.

Trying to estimate the potential of this model, we see at once drastic limitations, which it puts on the space of the dialogue. Indeed, all specific distinctions of the participants, all their views, opinions and positions, which are not shared by all the others, are *a priori* excluded. The participants lose their individual traits and are compelled to act as averaged and formalized subjects. Evidently, it implies the danger of reduction and primitivization of not just the topic discussed, but all the sphere of spiritual life. Such a dialogue ignores all the profundity of spiritual experience, and all its concrete features since they are highly specific and different for each partner. There are practical shortcomings too: if the space of the dialogue is limited to the extreme and its contents are restricted to a set of the most general statements or even commonplaces, the fruits of such dialogue cannot be rich. This dialogue can hardly achieve any real rapprochement between its participants or produce some important conclusions or implications. Bringing forth not many changes and imposing not many obligations upon the partners, this kind of dialogue cannot have any profound influence on the situation. However, it is still capable to abate the worst trends of mutual intolerance and aggression, mobilizing the potential of mutual accord and generating doubts about the rightness of extremist tendencies.

This model remains one of principal tools in present-day practices of inter-religious as well as international relations. Our description makes it evident, however, that it is very desirable to have some other models as well. One of possible alternatives, which originates in spiritual experience of Eastern Christianity, is the ***model of dialogue based on the paradigm of personal communication***. The Western or protestant model does not obey specific laws of this paradigm. Actually, it represents each dialogical partner by a restricted list of his characteristics and positions so that the dialogical process is essentially nothing but the comparison of these lists or

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[2] P. Tillich. Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions // Id. Theology of Culture. Moscow, 1995. P. 425. (My back translation from Russian).

the automatic process, which could be called by the IT term *communication of protocols*. It differs cardinally from face-to-face communication of living persons who possess their own unique personal and spiritual experience. Now we shall point out the most relevant differences, and this will bring us closer to the alternative model.

The following fact is of the key importance: in the impersonal formalized contacts, any difference between the partners divides and separates them, that's why all differences are excluded from the space of dialogue in the protestant model; but in the personal communication it might be completely wrong because such communication often follows the rule "opposite poles are attracted to each other". It is undisputable that personal communication and rapprochement are not based on identical and coinciding features only. Of course, the differences can provoke mutual estrangement, repulsion, hostility, but in the personal face-to-face communication they are perfectly able to produce the opposite effect too, arousing mutual interest, sympathies and even active attraction. Then there is one more important fact. Personal communication can involve, in principle, any contents of the inner world of its partners including the structures of their personality and identity, and for this reason such communication can create real closeness, profound and stable ties between them. In contrast to this, formalized communication excluding mutual differences surely cannot create such ties because it cannot involve the structures of human identity, which carry the uniqueness of human person. Human contacts based on such communication are superficial, and human person cannot express his/her specific individuality in them.

Thus personal communication provides the alternative to the formalized "communication of protocols" used in the protestant model of inter-religious dialogue. The space of personal dialogue is maximal, in contrast to the space of formalized dialogue, which is minimal. It is more meaningful and profound kind of communication and it opens to its participants the opportunity of virtually complete self-realization. But inter-religious dialogue is a social practice that involves large communities rather than single individuals. How can this practice use the mechanisms of personal communication? Now the time is short, and I just mention briefly two principal ways or strategies.

One of them is actively cultivated in present-day inter-confessional contacts between Christians. In this sphere many kinds of collective interaction and intercourse are practiced, which are informal, unofficial and un-institutionalized. Although such contacts are collective, due to the key condition of informality, communication in their process can remain essentially personal, without turning into the formalized mode. Such interactions are usually triggered by genuine interest toward partner's personal experience and outlook, and they have reached such popularity today as to visibly affect the global situation and atmosphere of inter-confessional relations. A striking example of such phenomena is given by the annual meetings in Taizé (France), which attract many thousands of Christians of all confessions, but nevertheless retain the character of personal encounters and direct exchange of personal spiritual experience. Evidently, this kind of contacts is a priori possible in the inter-religious sphere too, but an important precondition must be taken into account. My openness to the Other and my readiness to exchange personal and spiritual experience with him/her is possible only if I have the *trust in the genuineness of the Other's spiritual experience*. In the recent period such trust increased very noticeably in inter-confessional relations between Christians; but it is still a hard and problematic task to reach this trust between different religions.

Another way is suggested by the basic structure of religious experience that is manifested most visibly in the case of the Eastern-Orthodox Christianity. Religious experience represents a very complicated and heterogeneous body, but in well-developed world religions this body contains a central element or a generating core, in which the essence of the experience is concentrated. This core is *spiritual tradition*. In my works I formulate the rigorous concept of spiritual tradition defining the latter as a *community devoted to the cultivation of a certain spiritual practice*. Spiritual practice is, in its turn, a special anthropological practice or mystical

and ascetic art whose goal is to produce and preserve identically the specific experience of the striving for and the union with God or Absolute principle of the religion in question. These definitions imply that spiritual tradition is a very special tradition. All traditions reproduce and translate some kind of experience contained in values, ideas, institutions and, as a rule, it is social and institutionalized experience. But spiritual tradition reproduces the experience of spiritual practice, which is personal and anthropological; and hence the contacts of such traditions can have the nature of personal communication.

In fact, the analysis shows that spiritual practice is most intimately connected with personal communication and structures of human personality. As a rule, such practice represents an anthropological process of the ladder type divided into steps ascending to the final goal of the practice, which is actual ontological transformation of human being. Analyzing the Eastern-Orthodox practice called *Hesychasm*, I found that in this case the steps of the Spiritual Ladder can be interpreted as anthropological and personological formations of increasingly rich structure, organization and differentiation. Each of these formations has its own type of personal communication and these types also form up a *sui generis* ladder or hierarchy of more and more profound and differentiated forms of communication. In the case of hesychast practice, these forms gradually approach the paradigm characterizing Trinitarian Divine being. This paradigm is called *perichoresis* (lat. circumincession) or going round, and it describes timeless process of permanent mutual exchange of being, like usual communication is the exchange of information. Evidently, it is communication *par excellence* that can be called ontological or absolute communication: it is the form of communication, in which communicated and exchanged contents reach absolute completeness. This form of communication characterizes Divine being, which is considered in Christianity to be personal (hypostatic) being, and according to Orthodox theology, communication is not just one of aspects of Divine personality, but His mode of being and His true definition.

Higher forms of communication generated in spiritual practices manifest themselves in many ways. We can see them, for example, in the Master – Disciple relationship. The literature of hesychasm (and of other spiritual practices too) demonstrates amply that in this relationship disciple's inner world becomes open to the master who can see all of it and help the disciple to reach its radical transformation. Another manifestation is directly related to inter-religious dialogue. As said above, in a dialogue based on personal communication it is possible that differences and divergences of partners don't destroy the dialogue, but, on the contrary, stimulate it and provide food for it. Due to this an interesting and important phenomenon emerges, which I call the *encounter in the depths*. It is such a contact of spiritual traditions, in which their profound interaction takes place, and as a result of this interaction, they exercise influence on each other and adopt some elements of each other practices. These elements belong to deep structures of spiritual experience, which are not common, but different in both traditions; and evidently, no contact following the model of formalized impersonal communication could produce such encounter. They are rare and valuable events, in which two radically different spiritual worlds, out of the depths of their experience, become capable to see and appreciate the profundity of the experience of each other and exchange elements of this experience. Main examples of them include the contacts of Hesychasm and Sufism in the Middle Ages and, of course, "the unity of the three teachings" in China, the important episode that we mentioned already and must mention here again.

Special attention and priority granted to personal communication in Eastern-Orthodox tradition become even more noticeable and develop additional aspects in Russian spirituality and culture. There is a rich collection of narrations by foreign, mostly Western, visitors to Russia telling about their meeting with an unusual phenomenon, the so called "Russian conversation". It is a very special dialogical art cultivated in personal and private contacts in Russia. In a surprising and mysterious way, the dialogue becomes quickly intense and intimate, it touches upon the deepest strings of human personality, and thus it creates unprecedented human warmth

and closeness between partners. Human ties born in such dialogue are strong and lasting. The best examples of the Russian conversation can be found in classical Russian prose such as Dostoyevsky's and Tolstoy's novels.

The phenomenon of the Russian conversation is not openly of religious nature, but nevertheless it is deeply rooted in Russian Christianity, which always places personal communication to the forefront. As I said, the hesychast ladder of spiritual ascension (or, more correctly, holistic ascension since all the human being is involved) includes the hierarchy of ascending forms of communication. Russian hesychasm added some new form to those that were practiced formerly. It was the far-going extension of the ancient monastic practice of spiritual eldership, the typical example of which is the Master – Disciple relationship. In the traditional form, it was a kind of a close contact of an experienced monk, the elder (*geron*, in Greek), and younger monk or novice; but in the new form elders, the well-tried hesychasts, started to have contacts with any lay people who came to them asking for their advice and help in all sorts of situations. Emerging in Central Russia in the mid-19th c., this practice became soon immensely popular since it turned out that the elders possessed incredible clarity of vision making perfectly open to them all inner reality and all the problems of any person who came to them. What was still more important, the elder was able not just to see the Other's problems and pain, but to share them and load himself with them in a quite palpable way, providing very real help. The key to this ability was the gift of Christian love inseparable from the higher stages of spiritual ascension and felt deeply in any contact with the elders. Vivid description of elders' practice in their most famous centre, the monastery Optina Pustyn', is presented by Dostoyevsky in *Brothers Karamazov*. From Russia this practice spread to other Orthodox countries, like Greece and Serbia, and nowadays, notwithstanding the period of the Bolshevik persecutions, Russian eldership continues to be a living tradition.

Summing up, I repeat again that Eastern-Orthodox tradition maintains special priority and importance of anthropological and personological dimensions of reality, and, in the first place, the importance of personal communication. It developed particularly rich culture of personal communication and created specific forms of it, extending considerably its means and horizons. All this should be of interest and value for the big problem of advancing to dialogical civilization. This civilization should also pay full attention to anthropological and personological problems; sympathy and compassion, human dignity and the autonomy of human personality must be recognized as values on the global level. Eastern-Orthodox tradition can make a valuable contribution to the fulfillment of these tasks. In particular, the specific features of Russian spirituality and culture such as the "Russian conversation" and the Russian eldership could enrich means and strategies of the dialogue of civilizations.

In conclusion, it is worth to stress two significant points. First, the position of Orthodox spirituality, though it concentrates on man and his tasks, does not mean the old style anthropocentrism, which opposed man to nature and stated his unrestricted and egoistic dominance over it. Man is considered as a cosmic creature who is endowed with a cosmic mission included into his constitution, and love to all creation, all living creatures, is one of the basic principles of Orthodox spirituality. Thus dialogical culture of Eastern Christianity includes ecological principles and develops its own ecological philosophy. Second, the primacy of the anthropological and personological level in Eastern Christianity is not an individualistic principle. It is the principle concentrating on personal communication, and such communication presumes community and creates human ties. And due to it, the Eastern-Orthodox and Russian traditions have the unique ability to bring human warmth and sympathy into the dialogue of civilizations.