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THE EDICT OF MILAN

**THROUGH THE PRISM OF STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF
ORTHODOX THEOLOGY IN MACEDONIA¹**

By Ruzhica Cacanaska and Maja Angelovska Panova

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Abstract

This paper is an integral whole of three, seemingly different parts, each of which has the Edict of Milan as its main topic. The first part presents the historical data and key elements of the Edict of Milan which serves as an introduction into the research, which also serve as a part of the basic information that are pointed out to students. The second part of this paper points out how the anniversary of issuing the Edict of Milan--a date of utmost importance for Christianity--is being celebrated in the region. The third part contains an account of the sociological research carried out with the students at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Saint Clement of Ohrid”, a part of the “Saints Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje. As the latter is the main focus of the paper, we chose it as the title.

Introduction

This year is the 17th centennial anniversary since the issuing of the Edict of Milan. Christian religious collectives, via their current activities, a significant part of which is dedicated to and connected with a number of honouring and celebratory events as well as

¹ The present text is written for the round table “1700 Years of the Edict of Milan: A Sociological Perspective,” as a part of the project Sustainability of the Identity of Serbs and National Minorities in the Border Municipalities of Eastern and Southeastern Serbia, conducted at the University of Niš, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and supported by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

building new constructions, are permeated with recurrent mention and reminiscence of this important date in the general history of Christianity. The yearly activities of the Orthodox religious community in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as of a significant part of the secular institutions, according to the information in the media and the various websites, are directly or indirectly aimed at reminiscing, honoring and celebrating this date. The position of Orthodoxy regarding this exceptionally important act in the history of Christianity is reflected through the media, the chroniclers of contemporary life. This paper will note the main aspects of the platform of the Macedonian Orthodox Church – Archdiocese of Ohrid (hereafter MOC–AO) for celebrating this jubilee in Macedonia.

The text is an entirety comprised of three parts, each of which regards the Edict of Milan from a different point of view.

1. The first part pertains to the historical information; it states the key elements of the Edict of Milan itself, which also serve as a part of the basic information that was pointed out to the students – participants in the research, i.e. the focus-group, at the introduction into the interview.

2. The second part of this paper refers to the main events that are organized for the purpose of celebrating this important date. This part also includes parts of speeches referring to this occasion that were given by His Beatitude Stephen, the Archbishop of MOC – OA.

3. The third part of this paper includes an account of the sociological research carried out with the students at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Saint Clement of Ohrid”, a part of the “Saints Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje. The account of this research is structured according to the research questions which guided the research itself, followed by the basic data as to how it was carried out, and the concluding notes. The first two parts are a kind of introduction into the interviews and the discussions of the focus-group, placing the focus of this paper on the third part from whence the paper’s title is derived.

1. THE BASIC HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE EDICT OF MILAN

The Edict of Milan is a document/proclamation with which a tolerant attitude towards Christians and members of other religious orientations is, in effect, established. It is a result of

a political agreement between the emperors Constantine I and Licinius, signed in February 313 in Milan. With the Edict of Milan, Christianity gained a status of *religio licita* within the Roman Empire, and the Christian followers, now a protected religious group, gained the right to freely worship their God. In such circumstances, the dominant role of Constantine, seen through numerous clauses for restoration and protection of Christianity and its protagonists, becomes clear (Odahl, 2010 : 119). The Edict of Milan guaranteed the people freedom to worship as well as the legal rights of Christians, including their right to organize churches, carry out religious services, and the return of the confiscated properties. Even though Christianity did not yet have the status of an official religion, the significance of this document resides in the fact that it promoted a new term, one that is still being used, and that is – religious tolerance or respect towards people with a different religious orientation.

2. CELEBRATING THE 17TH CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY SINCE THE EDICT OF MILAN

In 2013, 1700 years since the Edict of Milan, there were a number of manifestations organized in Macedonia which indicates the great significance it was given by the Christian religious communities. The main celebration of the Edict of Milan is the event organized by the dominant Christian religious community in Macedonia, MOC–OA, that took place towards the end of September 2013 in the church “Saint Sophia” in Ohrid, which included a formal meeting and a holy liturgy. This part also included a range of major events organized for this occasion, as well as key excerpts from the speech given by the Archbishop of MOC–OA.

- MOC–OA began with its activities related to this occasion in the course of last year. In that respect, in 2012 (13th November 2012), a foundation-stone for the renewal of the church Saints Constantine and Helena was laid, and at the same time consecrated, near its authentic location on the Square Macedonia in the Center of Skopje. For that purpose, a foundation “St. Emperor Constantine” was established, through which funds will be gathered for its construction. There was media coverage of this event at which the highest state officials were present, and the Archbishop of MOC–OA, His Beatitude Stephen, pointed out in his speech that: *“The foundations for the renewal of this temple are laid on the eve of 2013 when the*

Christian peoples shall celebrate 1700 years since the Edict of Milan – an edict for freedom and the equality of Christianity with other religions in the Roman Empire, issued by the Emperor Saint Constantine”.

- As a celebration of this jubilee, a construction of the church “Saints Constantine and Helena” was started in Shtip.
- In his Easter missive, the Archbishop of MOC–OA, His Beatitude Stephen, highlighted explicitly the main message of the Edict of Milan:

“This year, we are celebrating 1700 years since the issuing of the Edict of Milan by the Emperor Constantine the Great in 313, which grants the Christians within the Roman Empire at the time, freedom and equality in practicing their faith. It is an event that should unify all Christians, and be our encouragement and reminder for strengthening and developing unity as well as overcoming our differences and misunderstandings that still exist among Christ’s followers. There is no better account for and practice of our faith than our unity, as He Himself says: ‘that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us, and that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me’. (John 17: 21)”.

- At the opening of the Third World Conference on Inter-Religious and Inter-Civilization Dialogue, on 9th and 10th May 2013 in Skopje, it was pointed out that the topic of that conference was “Freedom and Dignity – Basic Values in Inter-personal, Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Relations”, and that it also marked 1700 years since the Edict of Milan, that is to say 1700 years since Christianity was granted its freedom of expression. There were representatives of many religions present at the conference, amongst whom a significant number from the Orthodox world.
- The current positioning of the MOC–OA within the Orthodox family is, undoubtedly, the basis for many activities, or rather “inactivities”, which may be mentioned in this context. The current disputes and discord affect, no doubt, the formation of close relations and the contacts they have with other churches. What is characteristic and, of course, significant is the education of the students at a number of Orthodox faculties; the fact that monks from Macedonia stay on Mount Athos (Greece); the visits and contacts that the MOC–OA has with the Orthodox Churches of Russia, Romania, etc.; the several meetings that the President of Macedonia, Prof. Gjorge Ivanov, PhD, had with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew, as well as many other, mostly individual, contacts they have with their fellow believers around the world. In this context, what should be taken into account as well is the

work and the connections by the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Saint Clement of Ohrid”, which carried out a number of activities this year, amongst which are establishing cooperation with the Moscow Orthodox Academy, and the meetings with the four faculties of theology from Romania.²

- As regards the celebration of the Edict of Milan in the neighborhood, or to be exact in Serbia, or rather as regards the fact that representatives of MOC–OA were not invited for that occasion, the church dignitaries from Macedonia pointed out, in their statements, that it is a question for those that organized the celebration, and that they, as an Orthodox Church, shall celebrate this jubilee appropriately. The media informed that on account of this occasion, only a representative of the Catholic Church in Macedonia was present at the celebration in Nish.³

3. SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE EDICT OF MILAN

The main theoretical perspective, from the point of which the set subject of this research was approached, is the symbolic interactionism. According to it, the general religious socialization can be a “slow and gradual process” as well as a rather “dramatic” one (Anderson and Taylor, 2011: 323). In this paper, the accent is placed on the part of religious education of the priests founded in the educational process of their higher education. According to symbolic interactionism, religious knowledge, religious beliefs, as well as their interpretations are the key foundation for understanding the numerous forms of individual and social behavior.⁴ From this perspective, what can be seen is how religious knowledge, religious beliefs and interpretations are created and maintained, i.e. built and changed, depending on the social and historical context. At the same time, what is typical for symbolic interactionism is that this theoretical position allows us to see that some individuals or social groups can interpret the same document or the same belief differently. Religious socialization, in a wider framework, creates the basis for interpreting and selfinterpreting religious beliefs and knowledge, which can then be supplemented, reformulated, and sometimes even changed. Many believers and students remain faithful to their religions, but a part of them become passive or take a path to other religious communities. Sometimes, resources for shaping more

² Portal ПРЕМИН, www.premportal.com.mk. *Остварени средби со четири Универзитети и нивните Теолошки факултети во Романија*, 16.06.2013 (Accessed 18 June 2013).

³ It is stated in this information that he will “lobby” for MOC–OA to be invited to this celebration.

⁴ Religious beliefs can shape political behavior, more specifically positions and thoughts on important social issues.

and more novel units are created in the process of religious socialization; however, maintaining and deepening the already existing differences is quite often also present.

The principal subject of sociological research was to understand and analyse how much, when and how the students at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology systematically study the Edict of Milan, i.e. how well they are acquainted with it. Or more precisely, how do they understand and interpret it, and what were their positions and thoughts regarding its celebration in that year. In accordance with the established subject of this part of the research, the aim was to find out, comprehend and understand how the students approach the said subject and their reasoning with respect to it.

Why the Students?

With the return of religion to the public scene (Cacanoska, 2010), the interest for studying it began to increase and with it the number of students at the Faculty of Theology. Gradually, the increase in the number of students, as well as organizing them accordingly, created the basis for forming policies and practices according to which Orthodoxy in Macedonia can be imposed as an important factor.⁵ Having in mind the main characteristics of the young people (Djordjevich, 2001: 228–245), particularly of students (Mel, 1998/1999), as a progressive element of every collective, as fighters for and harbingers of changes for the better, as critics of contemporary circumstances,⁶ we believed that we can, by way of interviews (focus group interviews, individual interviews, and interviews by e-mail), find out, in the most appropriate way, their positions, understandings, thoughts and reasoning as regards the Edict of Milan and the benefits from it in contemporary times which might, to a certain degree, affect their further activities. With the interviews, we tried to discover the students' thoughts and interpretations regarding the Edict of Milan itself, focusing particularly on its influence on contemporary religious structuring and living. And, of course, it was

⁵ In 2012, the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Saint Clement of Ohrid", a part of the "Saints Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje, celebrated its 35th anniversary since its foundation. Today, this Faculty is part of the "Ss Cyril and Methodius" University, its status being an associate member. 1,332 students have been enrolled, 334 of whom have graduated.

⁶ This paper takes the students as being part of an incoherent group, or as a community that is, first and foremost, not treated as an organized and a coherent group but rather as a category or an aggregate consisting of persons according to their status. At the same time, the sometimes emphasized standards according to which the youth is studied, such as the "activistic" and "alternative" aspects of profiling and acting, is not specifically implied.

interesting to hear their perception of and thoughts on the year's celebration of the Edict of Milan, having in mind the position of the religious community of which they are members.

The main population that the empirical research is based on are the students at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology "Saint Clement of Ohrid". We decided to have the students as the focus group because it will be they who are going to become the future theologians and bishops, because they are the ones that will be dealing with the problems that Orthodoxy in Macedonia and throughout the world is facing, and because it is they who will eventually be in a position to contemplate and build their vision of activities, incorporating, of course, the intensive changes that accompany modern society. The conversations, whether in their introductory segment, during the interview or after it, suggest that some of them have already thought or talked about these and many other issues, especially those students who actively follow, by way of social networks, the various developments within the Orthodoxy.

The students, using the benefits of modern computer technology, interconnect more easily and simply, and approach the challenges from a different aspect. Their activism, supplemented with the modern tools in the social media, can color significantly their positions and actions. Part of the interviewees pointed out that, thanks to network connections, they find sympathizers and fellow believers who are members of other Orthodox collectives with whom they can have discussions and exchange experiences as they are not burdened with "our local" problems. On the other hand, it is significant that students detect, without any prejudice and hesitation, the critical points with both the Orthodoxy in general and their own religious community. They discuss about some of the problems openly, and in doing so they try, amongst other things, to give their own contribution towards overcoming the problems.

Basic Data on the Sociological Research of the Students

This paper is based on a cross-sectional research design (Bryman, 2012) for which, in order to gather empirical data, the following research methods are used: a focus-group (Bryman, 2012: 500–521) comprised of four participants; two semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012: 468–498) by e-mail; as well as four semi-structured interviews in person; at the same time, an analysis of the contents (Bryman, 2012: 288–308) of the information on

activities dedicated to this jubilee that the MOC–OA⁷ and the state institutions in the Republic of Macedonia had placed on their web pages, is also made. The gathered empirical data are manually processed.

The sample for interviewing was comprized of those students who had agreed beforehand to share their information, thoughts, discussions and remarks with the authors of this paper. We would also like to mention that it was a slow and difficult task to find students who would like to be interviewed on this subject. Some of them said that they were not well informed, but those who accepted were students that were remarkably well acquainted with the subject. Therefore the conclusions that we would draw with respect to this group of interviewed students, would not be representative of the entire student population at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology. In any case, those students who presented their positions stated that they usually discuss the issues that affect their religion with some of their fellow students, and that on several occasions they have discussed, via the social media, the current events and issues. The students who were interviewed in person said that after the announcement in the media that there would be no representatives of MOC–OA at the central celebration in Serbia, they had discussed this issue with their colleagues from the region, notably from Serbia.⁸

The students were guaranteed anonymity before they were interviewed or before the session with the focus–group began. The session with the focus–group was recorded, and their answers are concisely, partially or fully summarized or accurately presented as quotations in the final paper, but the anonymity of the students was maintained. Everyone who was interviewed agreed to an interview, and those interviewed in person asked not to be recorded. The interviews were carried out during the month of June 2013 by the authors of this paper.

The first part of this paper (“The Basic Historical Framework of the Edict of Milan”) served as the basis for the discussions with the focus–group. Then, the Edict of Milan in Serbo-Croatian and in English versions were sent to all of the students. And they were also given the link to the film “Pilgrimage to the Eternal City: Constantine and Helena.”⁹

⁷ Accessed 12 June 2013.

⁸ The participants in the focus–group pointed out to the contrary – that due to MOC–OA not being recognized by the Orthodox world, amongst other things, they do not have contacts with their Orthodox colleagues from the region and further abroad.

⁹ A Russian documentary film (2005), directed by Vladimir Khotinenko and presented by Nikita Mikhalkov. The film is subtitled in Macedonian and can be found on the blog *Svitok (A Scroll)* – a blog by Toni Petrushevski, the

The main research questions on which the list of questions for the focus interview, and the individual interviews, is based, are as follows:

- 1) When and how much do the students systematically study the Edict of Milan?
- 2) How do the students understand (interpret) the Edict of Milan?
- 3) What are the thoughts and positions of the students regarding this year's celebration of the Edict of Milan?

Empirical Results from the Sociological Research

A lot of data was gathered while carrying out the empirical part of the research, but only the results directly pertaining to the research questions, or more precisely those that directly correspond to the concrete research subject, have been included in this paper. In the transcript from the focus-group, it can be noticed that there are discussions regarding the problems which Orthodoxy in Macedonia, i.e. the region and even wider, is faced with, and that the key issues present in society, as well as in the religion as a whole, are also touched upon. A lot of additional data are acquired with the interviews as well.

Presentation of the empirical data is done according to the separate analysis based on the guidelines the concept of which was made in accordance with the main research questions. In presenting the results, we as authors believed that in order to convey the students' positions and thoughts more accurately, their answers and discussions should be presented in the form of quotations as often as possible.

1. When and how much do the students systematically study the Edict of Milan itself?

At the beginning and the introductory acquainting of the subjects with the topic, course and aim of the interview, the participants stated that the Edict of Milan is studied as a

archdeacon of the temple "Saint Nicholas" in Sveti Nikole. In the film, Mikhalkov narrates vividly some of the most important moments in the lives of Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, first and foremost in connection with the city of Rome.

separate unit of the curriculum at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Saint Clement of Ohrid”, in the subject History of the Christian Church in the second year of their studies. The attention given to the Edict of Milan is that of a document which preceded the adoption of the act on Christianity as a state religion, although sometimes the Edict of Milan is given the significance of the latter document. But, because of this year’s jubilee, some of the students gave it a little more attention.

Some of the interviewees feel that the Edict of Milan could and should be studied more because it is necessary to know more about the history of Christianity, which in turn would “contribute a lot more to its development” and would “diminish the likelihood of repeating the mistakes of the past that ... cost Christianity dearly”. Within the question about the way in which the Edict of Milan is studied, one of the interviewees stated that the above mentioned film had made a remarkable impression on him and that they could, “by using similar materials, activate the issue and discuss much more, and exchange ideas about the historical conditions that led to the Edict of Milan, as well as about the topics it had instigated.” Such knowledge would surpass the simple “memorizing of facts and will enable and encourage us to think more ... about the Edict itself and its historical significance...” explained the same student.

Some of the interviewees stated that besides studying this unit of the curriculum, they also followed the articles published in the media both within Macedonia and in the region, and because of that they know a lot of additional information. Some of that information they had discussed individually, but for some they took part in an active correspondence on the social networks. One of the subjects talked about his “zealous” online discussion with acquaintances from the neighboring countries, while another, who was interviewed via e-mail, sent us his extensive discussion with his “colleagues and fellow-believers” from Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and Greece, in which the “established positions” were highlighted, as well as the “awareness of the need for additional studying of the historical data basis with a particular emphasis on the Edict as an act of tolerance.” He also pointed out that they all study it in a similar manner as far as the historical facts are concerned, but that the problem is that later on, even though they start from similar historical basis, they interpret it “differently”.

Generally speaking, the Edict of Milan is given due attention in the systematic studying of the history of Christianity within the educational process at the Faculty of

Orthodox Theology. The subjects interviewed did not provide us with information that they as students have written separate papers, for example a term paper, that were directly related to the Edict of Milan. It is also important to mention that the students, besides the basis of the systematic study of the Edict, also follow what is written about it in the media, thus shaping their comprehension of it. The students acquire some of the information and the current events that are related to the Edict of Milan via social networks, but their influence “on our students is considerably smaller compared to the students of theology in the West”, wrote one of the students in his interview via e-mail.

2. How do they interpret the Edict of Milan?

In the immediate discussion with the participants in the focus–group, as well as in the individual interviews, it was pointed out that the Edict of Milan is a significant document, and that it brought radical changes in the positioning of Christianity within the society at the time, i.e. it was a precursor of proclaiming Christianity a state religion. Some of the interviewees feel that at times the Edict of Milan is interpreted as being just a “document,” which in fact diminishes its real power. “What its use value is”, says one of the interviewees, depends on “how it had actually regulated” the relations between different religions, that is to say how much space it had given to those that are different so they could develop their doctrines and their religious life. The interviewees, as well as some of the participants in the focus–group, think along the lines of how, in the period when Christianity was persecuted, it was obviously of utmost importance for “that persecution” to stop. In other words, the Edict is an edict of tolerance because all believers were guaranteed the right to choose and freely practice their beliefs. One of the interviewees stated in his reply that: “although everyone was given the right to practice their faith, ... still, the Edict of Milan had an additional function.... it provided the possibilities and resources for establishing contacts, dialogues and for familiarising with each other, and consequently for a cooperation of believers from different faiths”.

In the focus–group, the participants stated that the Edict of Milan definitely brought “drastic changes”, most of which were good. But after Christianity became a state religion, “there were no longer those true Christians that were ready to give their lives for it”, but they were now trying to use the religion so as to secure for themselves a better position in society. Before it was declared a state religion, Christianity had been much stronger, and the believers

had distinguished themselves with “their dedication and their love,” stated the participants in the focus-group in their discussion. But, after Christianity was declared a state religion—after it became “mandatory” (underlined one of the interviewees by e-mail)—the “passion for it” declined, concluded one of the participants in the focus-group. The Edict of Milan puts emphasis on freedom, but the question is how much it is respected, especially in the periods that follow. “With the Edict of Milan, it is not the external change in the relation between the church and the state that is of such an importance as is the internal change that takes place in the awareness of the Christians”, the participants in the focus-group point out. Because in the period immediately following the Edict of Milan, “the Emperor has an affinity towards Christianity and he accepts Christianity before his very death... A non-Christian”, it is pointed out in the discussion in the focus-group, “puts Christianity on a pedestal...” In the course of the history of Christianity, “the Christian ethics has been forgotten”, says one of the participants in the focus-group with whom the others agree. “There is less and less love amongst Christians themselves, and there is even less love for those who are not members of their religion,” concludes another participant in the discussion of the focus-group.

“It is all right to look back and celebrate these dates,” is what one of the interviewees has written in his interview by e-mail, “but not only in words—each of us should account for their own contribution to the faith.” More specifically, it is one thing to say something, and completely another to act on it. “In the course of the abundant Christian history, we can see the divergence between what is declared and what is done... It all becomes obvious...” explains one of the subjects in his interview in person. “Don’t all these conflicts and divisions on religious basis mean that the Edict is forgotten by those, in particular, who should respect it?” wrote one of the interviewees by e-mail in his reply.

In the focus-group, the participants touched on the subject of the relation between religion and politics in general, indicating the “mix” that this closeness results in. The interviewees mostly implied the great symbolical influence that the Edict of Milan had and continues to have on Christianity. But often, there are no “actions” behind the symbolism that would emphasize its meaning, “but rather various divisions and hidden goals that take it to completely different direction”, points out one of the interviewees. He arguments it by pointing out that “it is enough just to read the statements and comments of many church dignitaries from the Balkans and one would notice what is happening with the Edict of

Milan”. Most of the interviewees mentioned the modern day “weak spots” in the actions of Orthodox religious structures in the region, and so one of the interviewees asks a rhetorical question: “Could Constantine have imagined what would happen and how his desire for a dialogue would end in the twenty-first century...” But, many of today’s events in the “entire” Christianity, and consequently in Orthodoxy “are a result of a great deal of irresponsibility of the religious leaders who instead of ... teaching the believers about the faith, drag them to ... different directions...” It is therefore very important “to refer back to the Edict of Milan, only not just as to a historical document but as to an act that provided Christianity with new attire... stirred its development into a new direction and gave it great power. . .” Two other interviewees have similar positions and thoughts which they describe with the following words: “The significance of this document fades more and more with respect to today’s events, and sometimes it is not the best answer to refer back to it and ... to ... glorify it. . .”¹⁰

There is a note of criticism coloring the replies of the two students interviewed by e-mail, one of whom writes the following: “I want churches to be built, but my heart would be filled with joy if I saw those churches filled with people, if I saw harmony and love towards those close to us, if there was more concomitance . . . and unity among believers.”¹¹ He carried on explaining that only “then will I feel a worthy follower of the work created by Constantine, and which his mother Helena bestowed with her grace.” Another interviewee wrote: “Generally speaking, I sincerely feel that we, as believers and Christians, have not learned and have not drawn any morals from the historical lessons that we experienced and which are very well known to us all. . .”

There is a clear note of criticism in the interpretation of the Edict of Milan by the students interviewed who see it, first and foremost, through the prism of contemporary religious living which has, throughout history, been pervaded by numerous conflicts, divisions and “intolerance”. But, almost all of the students interviewed underline the symbolical significance that the Edict of Milan had for the Christianity itself.

¹⁰ One of the interviewees cites some of the media headings that have a particularly negative connotation.

¹¹ Together with the e-mail questionnaire, the subject sent back a few photographs where one can clearly see that very few Christians are “compassionate” about the pain the others feel, that they care about other people only declaratively...

3. What are their thoughts and positions regarding the celebration of the Edict of Milan?

Not inviting representatives of MOC – OA to the celebration in Serbia, “is for me a direct lack of understanding of what I believe Constantine has done,” said one of the interviewees. In addition, in his e-mail the interviewee wrote that: “Constantine was virtuous enough to recognize anyone who was of a different religious orientation, and here you have a politicization of the dispute. It is true that there is a lot of politics in the religion, but in the end all the politicians will tell you that the dispute should be resolved by the church elites.”

Most of the interviewees have a positive opinion of the activities of MOC–OA, who celebrates this great jubilee independently. “MOC acts appropriately by celebrating the Edict of Milan, the work of Constantine and Helena, independently and with dignity with many activities throughout the year... It is going to result in a beautiful structure that is being built in the center of Skopje, which will commemorate this great jubilee in a suitable manner.” Another student underlined the following: “MOC does not go around... complaining... to foreign embassies and to other churches for every action that affects us...” one interviewee by e-mail wrote in his interview.

The condition that MOC–OA finds itself in, contributes “to what is happening to us to take place”. Some see us as “moral victors” but “I believe that we should not always look at the others as being responsible for the current situation, but that we should also look for some responsibility for it within ourselves. We have allowed politics to infiltrate everything, even religion. . . We should abandon the political positions and turn towards the people, towards its religious enlightenment. Let us leave politics to the politicians and “carry out the work we have been called for.”

One of the interviewees elaborated his perspective on the set question quite impressively and convincingly: “As far as I know, for example, the mitres that are made at the Rajchica monastery are worn by church dignitaries from many Orthodox churches that do not recognize us. I know of a few colleagues who studied in Russia, others who have been on Mount Athos, and there are two acquaintances of mine from Serbia with whom I communicate from time to time, who say that “the non-Greek” block is always so close but never close enough to rising to the top of SOC (Serbian Orthodox Church), which would then

be inclined to overcome the dispute with MOC relatively quickly. I think that they would then show it in their action that they are for unity and neighborly relations.” Another interviewee indicated and explained his active communication with a friend from the USA who was an Orthodox Christian. He said that his friend finds the situation in the Orthodoxy in the Balkans illogical. That in his opinion, all of that reflects negatively on Orthodoxy as a whole. And that after only a couple of weeks he had spent here and in Serbia, he thought that we and the Serbian people are so similar in many ways that he wondered why doesn't that similarity make us closer brothers in faith.

Analysis of the answers in this context leaves an impression that most of the interviewees were not surprised by that fact that representatives of MOC–OA were not invited to the celebration in Serbia, and that it is absolutely all right for MOC – OA to celebrate this jubilee independently.

Concluding Notes

Today, after 17 centuries have passed since the Edict of Milan was brought, it is evident that it still “inspires” the life of the Christian churches. The students at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Saint Clement of Ohrid”, a part of the “Saints Cyril and Methodius” University in Skopje, study the Edict of Milan systematically and within the historical framework of Christianity. However, when this document is placed under the scrutiny of the student population, it acquires a specific dimension. As a summary, what can be pointed out is the fact that the students are acquainted with the Edict of Milan itself, but that in their answers they also stated their critical thoughts regarding its interpretations and, of course, its influence on the development of religious life throughout history and, in particular, today. What can be seen, in general, in the discourses of the students interviewed and the students-participants in the focus group is the comprehension and understanding of the Edict, built upon the many “problematic points” both throughout history and in contemporary religious life, indicating that if the Edict of Milan had been respected and “interpreted properly”, it might have regulated the religious life somewhat differently and thus all Christians could have benefited more from it. On the whole, the students interviewed addressed critically the significance of the Edict of Milan, indicating the great symbolical influence of its celebration today.

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