

Preliminary PM regarding
between NORDPLUS
and THEOBALT for initiatives in Russia

2003 0124 cooperation

Jonas Öhman after initial discussions with both parties

SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES TAKEN BY NORDPLUS IN THE BALTIC AREA

NORDPLUS is a joint organization between the Scandinavian faculties of theology, primarily set up for enhancing of the possibilities for students to study at theological faculties in other nordic countries.

The role as coordinator has been transferred between the faculties, at present Helsinki university is in charge for the network. Mirja Pulkkinen is the name of the coordinator.

Since the middle of the 90-ies an additional task has been provided, namely to try to establish connections and fora for cooperation with the institutions for theological higher education in the Baltic countries. This has resulted in mainly the following:

- Arranging of a number of student conferences whereas students from Scandinavia and the Baltic countries have been able to meet and discuss various themes of theological relevance
- Arranging of an intensive course in Tartu for which students received academical credits
- Involving of Germany (Kiel) as a partner in the efforts

A number of future initiatives are being planned.

It has been noticed that there are difficulties in establishing of a long-term base for cooperation with the catholic-oriented institutions in Latvia and Lithuania. This has been taken under consideration.

IMPLICATIONS AND PROPOSALS REGARDING RUSSIA

In the beginning of this year a study trip was made by NORDPLUS to St Peterburg together with a delegation from Helsinki university and the Finnish lutheran church. This was a first effort to try to establish a relationship with academical institutions within the Russian orthodox church and furthermore with some of the minority churches of lutheran origin.

It was noticed that great difficulties are at hand for the accomplishing of this task in a similar way as in the Baltics. The main reasons are, in a simplified form and without any kind of ranking of the difficulties, mentioned below.

- A very centralistic form of management with very little ability within the framework of the organization for students to participate in international activities
- A low interest for real cooperation as expressed from higher officials
- Lack of funds
- The language problem
- Very diverse theological approaches

Having the above in mind a proposal for a possibly initial project for opening up for future cooperation has been outlined and informally discussed. The main idea of this project would be to provide a meeting point for young theologians from Scandinavia, Russia and, as an intermediary, students from the Baltics. The main theme for such a meeting would NOT be theological but rather dealing with the leading of languages. Whereas the Scandinavian

students would learn Russian the Russian students would be given a possibility to learn English. The imagined results of such an initiative could be the following:

- Making of a possibility for young representatives of the theological traditions respectively to meet without focusing upon the theological differences but rather upon other mutual interests, such as language leading and communication
- Creating of a "window" for further personal contacts, an essential ingredient when trying to establish long-term cooperation
- Increasing of the interest for the theological traditions respectively, possibly leading to some kind of future exchange activities
- Finding young people willing and able to improve their mutual communication skills when it comes to the mastering of the languages English and Russian
- Getting attention from the involved parties with reference to the somewhat⁴⁶unorthodox" approach to cooperation
- Providing a possibility to Baltic students and institutions to function as an intermediary with their ability to speak both languages (this ability has decreased during the last years but there are doubtlessly enough students capable of this)

PROJECT DETAILS IN BRIEF

- The initiative would in this form be presented as a cooperation project between THEOBALT and NORDPLUS
 - The time for such an initiative is proposed to August, this year or the forthcoming.
- As a place for this Gotland, with its symbolic location in the middle of the Baltic sea area, has been proposed. An appropriate length of the course would be 10-12 days. • The costs for such an initiative are estimated to between 15 - 20 000 EUR.
- Proposed number of participants: 6-8 from Scandinavia and Russia respectively. • Origin of participants - Scandinavian theological departments and theological institutions in St Peterburg area, such as the Spiritual Academy
- Funding may be applied for among others at the Nordic Council (middle February) and the partner churches in Scandinavia.
- As project coordinators are proposed the following persons:
 - Mirja Pulkkinen for NORDPLUS
 - Jonas Öhman, as course leader
 - Ragnar Svenserud for THEOBALT

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