

CHRISTIAN LIFE: Bible, Catechetics & Liturgy

SCRIPTURE

Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Ps 119,105).

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you (Jn. 14, 26).

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1Corinthians 11, 23-25).

OPENING PRAYER

Loving Father, we thank you for having given us Jesus, your Son, the Eternal Word. Through Him grant us the grace to know You as the one who loves us. He lived among us, died for us and rose to give us new life. He formed a community of His disciples and taught them to live as brothers and sisters. Help us to know your word, share his teachings and celebrate His memory. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Christian Life is founded on the three pillars:

1. Bible
2. Catechetics
3. Liturgy

The Bible, which is the manifestation of God's eternal love for humanity, invites us to a life of faith. In and through Catechetics this faith is nourished and shared. This very faith is celebrated in the Liturgy.

Being a Christian means first and foremost having an authentic personal encounter with the Risen Christ. Such an encounter leads him/her to a decision to commit one's life to Christ through the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism, thereby becoming a member of the community of the loving disciples of the Lord Jesus.

He/she continues to live this life of discipleship by listening to God's Word, discerning His Will and witnessing in loving service. This life of faith is further nurtured and nourished through the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

Strengthened by the Word of God, the Teachings of the Church and the Sacraments, he/she proclaims the good news through word and deed and fulfills the command of Jesus, by making disciples.

PART 1: TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH

1.1 Scripture

- ❖ The Council has solemnly declared that *The divinely revealed realities, which are contained and presented in the text of sacred Scripture, have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit* (Vatican II; Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*,11).

- ❖ *While in the Church we greatly venerate the sacred Scriptures, yet Christian faith is not a "religion of the book," but Christianity is the "religion of the*

Word of God,” not of a “written and mute word, but of the incarnate and living Word” (See, BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful, on the “Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church,” Verbum Domini 9; Vatican 5-26 October, 2008).

❖ Quoting St Jerome the Vatican II Council forcefully reiterates that *“Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ” (Dei Verbum, 25).*

- i. Therefore, *the ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of sacred understanding about God.* All ministries of the Word – pastoral preaching, catechesis, and all forms of Christian instruction, are properly nourished through the Word of Scripture (See, *Dei Verbum*, 132).
- ii. Therefore, *access to Sacred Scripture should be open wide to the Christian faithful (Dei Verbum, 22), in order to gain “the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ.”*
- iii. *It is important that the faithful be taught to acknowledge that the root of sin lies in the refusal to hear the Word of the Lord, and to accept in Jesus, the Word of God, the forgiveness which opens us to salvation (Verbum Domini, 26).*

❖ *God, the inspirer and author of the books of both testaments, in his wisdom has so brought it about that the New should be hidden in the Old and that the Old should be made manifest in the New (Dei Verbum, 16). The New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament. As an old saying puts it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 129).*

❖ Prayer to God is an inseparable part of Christian Life and to this effect the Vatican II reminds us *that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred*

Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For, “we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles” (Dei Verbum, 25).

- i. Greater emphasis be given to the importance of the Word of God, its attentive hearing, and the faith-filled and prayerful reading of the Bible, that is, *lectio divina* (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 76; cf. 86).
- ii. Pope Francis, in *Evangelii Gaudium* says, “There is one particular way of listening to what the Lord wishes to tell us in His Word and of letting ourselves be transformed by the Spirit. It is what we call *Lectio Divina*.
 - It opens with the reading (*lectio*) of a text..
 - Next is meditation (*mediatio*).
 - Following this is prayer (*oratio*).
 - Finally, *lectio divina* concludes with contemplation (*contemplatio*) (*Verbum Domini*, 87).

❖ The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church (See, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" presented by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to Pope John Paul II on April 23, 1993 as published in *Origins*, January 6, 1994 specifies on

- hearing the Word of God from within our own cultural situation;
- identifying the present situation that is highlighted by the biblical text;
- drawing from the biblical text the meaning that clarifies our present situation in a way that enables us to live according to the “saving will of God in Christ”.

- ❖ Pastoral Priorities of the CCBI at Vailankanni, February 2013 in keeping with the latest trend of Vatican documents spell out directives to train priests and seminarians to prepare Scripture-based homilies, and also directs promotion of *lectio divina* and other forms of Gospel sharing at various levels: neighborhood, family, youth and catechism classes (See, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, XXV Plenary Assembly, *Pastoral Plan for the Church in India* Vailankanni, January 2013, *Instrumentum Laboris*,10).

We can clearly see then how important it is for the people of God to be taught and trained to the right approach to the Scripture which lead them to live a wholesome Christian Life in the spirit of the Scripture. In short, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council clearly emphasize the mandatory knowledge of Scripture among the faithful. This knowledge is not to be conceived as a doctrine but the medium of the living relationship between the Father and the Christian through the *lectio divina*, which includes the regular reading of the scripture, accompanied by prayer and meditation.

1.2 Catechetics

Catechesis is an education in the faith of Christian doctrine to children, young people, and adults which includes generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian Life (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi tradendae*, 18). The fourth general assembly of the Synod of Bishops has stressed that all authentic catechesis should be Christ-centered (*Catechesi tradendae*, 5). This Catechesis takes places in 3 loci:

- the family;
- the school;
- the parish;

- ❖ **Rediscovering the centrality of God's Word is catechesis.**

- Luke's description (cf. Lk. 24,13-35) of the disciples who meet Jesus on the road to Emmaus represents a model of catechesis centered on "the explanation of the Scriptures," an explanation which Christ alone can give (cf. Lk. 24,27-28), as he shows that they are fulfilled in his person. *The hope which triumphs over every failure was thus reborn, and made those disciples convinced and credible witnesses of the Risen Lord* (cf. *Verbum Domini*, 74). The Christian community has received from God the specific task of making the memory of Jesus alive in every culture. This living mission develops gradually unfolding God's plan. It manifests itself in the faith experiences of both individuals and the community. It is expected that this exercise eventually results into Christian witness and service. (cf. *Mission Day, June 20, 2009, VJTR 73/10*).
- **Knowledge of Biblical personages, events and well-known sayings thus should be encouraged; this can also be promoted by the judicious memorization of some passages which are particularly expressive of the Christian mysteries** (*Verbum Domini*, 74).

- ❖ **A Biblical approach to Catechesis** needs to be in line with the **Tradition of the Church**. Pope John Paul II exhorted that Catechesis will always draw its content from the living source of the Word of God transmitted in Tradition and the Scriptures (*Catechesi tradendae*, 27).

- In similar vein Pope Benedict exhorts, *that Catechesis "must be permeated by the mindset, the spirit and the outlook of the Bible and the Gospels through assiduous contact with the texts themselves; yet it also means remembering that catechesis will be all the richer and more effective for reading the texts with the mind and heart of*

the Church,” and for drawing inspiration from the two millennia of the Church’s reflection and life.

- **Catechetical work always entails approaching Scripture in faith and in the Church’s Tradition**, so that its words can be perceived to be as living, just as Christ is alive today wherever two or three are gathered in his name (cf. Mt. 18,20). Catechesis should communicate in a lively way the history of salvation and the content of the Church’s faith, and so enable every member of the faithful to realize that this history is also a part of his or her own life (*Verbum Domini*, 74).

Catechesis performs the functions of helping humans make this communion with God a reality, and of presenting the Christian message such that the highest value of human life is safeguarded (See, *General Directory of Catechesis*; Rome, 1971; *General Directory of Catechesis*, 23).

- ❖ A well-meaning and well-balanced Biblical approach to Catechism also correlates the Word of God with Marian prayer. Keeping in mind the inseparable bond between the word of God and Mary of Nazareth, Marian prayer is encouraged among the faithful, above all in life of families, since it is an aid to meditating on the holy mysteries found in the Scriptures. A most helpful aid, for example, is the individual or communal recitation of the Holy Rosary, which ponders the mysteries of Christ’s life in union with Mary. *The Synod also recommended that the faithful be encouraged to pray the Angelus. This prayer, simple yet profound, allows us “to commemorate daily the mystery of the Word Incarnate. It is only right that the People of God, families and communities of consecrated persons, be faithful to this Marian prayer traditionally recited at sunrise, midday and sunset”.* (*Verbum Domini*, 88).

1.3 Liturgy

All sacraments and sacramentals draw power from the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 61). It is basically in the sacraments that we encounter the risen Lord.

Liturgy is celebrating the Paschal Mystery by way of full public worship, which is performed by the Church, that is, **by Jesus who is the Head together with his members, that is the faithful**. Liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7).

Liturgy is the celebration by the community of believers that prays and sings, recalls to our minds the promise of Jesus, “where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18,20). Experiencing His presence in the liturgical celebrations, which gives glory to God and affects the sanctification of the people, occasions us to listen to His word through which He speaks (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church rightly observes that Liturgy is therefore the privileged and appropriate place for catechizing the People of God. “Catechesis is intrinsically linked with the whole of liturgical and sacramental activity, for it is in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that Christ Jesus works in fullness for the formation of men.”

Liturgical catechesis aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ by proceeding from the **visible to the invisible**, (that is) from **the sign to the thing signified**, (which is the movement) from the **‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries.’** This catechism

which aims to serve the whole Church in all the diversity of her rites and cultures, will present what is fundamental and common to the whole Church in the liturgy (*Catechesis of the Catholic Church, 1074 – 1075*).

*Although the sacred liturgy is principally the worship of the divine majesty it likewise contains much instruction for the faithful. For in the liturgy God speaks to his people, and Christ is still proclaiming his Gospel. And the people reply to God by song and prayer... And **the visible signs which the sacred liturgy uses to signify invisible divine things** have been chosen by Christ or by the Church (*Sacrosanctum Concilium, 33*).*

Earlier about five decades ago the Continental Episcopal Conference held in Calcutta had spelt out that *Christian prayer is a prayer within the community of those who have accepted the Gospel. Christian prayer is centered on the Eucharist, source and summit of a worship that is uniquely “sacramental” and “ecclesial”*

(Federation of Asian Bishop’s Conference, Second Plenary Assembly, *The Life of the Church in Asia, Calcutta 1978*).

*The spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray to his Father in secret. Furthermore, according to the teachings of the apostle, he must pray without ceasing (*Sacrosanctum Concilium, 12*).*

In this regard the Council declares that *The Divine Office, which is the prayer of the Church, is the source of piety and nourishment of faith for the community.*

Recitation of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. This could only lead to greater familiarity with the Word of God on the part of the faithful. (*Verbum Domini, 62*).

*The **importance of silence in relation to the Word of God** play a vital role in deepening as well as interiorizing it both during the Liturgy of the Eucharist as well as other services in the Church (*Verbum Domini, 66*).*

PART 2: LIGHT & SHADOW SITUATION

2.1 Light Situation

2.1.1 Bible

- ❖ A well-organized Bible School, in English, for the laity.
- ❖ There also exists a systematically conducted Bible School in Bengali at Prabhu Jishu Girja and at Blessed Mother Teresa Church, Matkol, Dum Dum.
- ❖ A three-year certificate course for the laity on theology, in collaboration with Morning Star Regional Seminary, Barrackpore.
- ❖ Regular Bible courses are conducted in different zones of the Archdiocese of Calcutta, by the Biblical Apostolate of Archdiocese and the Regional Biblical Commission.
- ❖ Centrality of the Bible brought to the fore by Catechetical renewal of the Neo-Catechumenates, S.C.C. and Charismatic groups.
- ❖ Bible Conventions are conducted regular in the Archdiocese.
- ❖ Schools, Parishes and Youth movements organize Bible Camps, Bible Quizzes, Bible Seminars, etc. to promote the love and knowledge for the Bible.
- ❖ Trained personnel are available to conduct Biblical classes and seminars for each of the above-mentioned programs.

- ❖ The Bible has been made popular in the community due to Sunday School in our Parishes.

2.1.2. Catechetics

- ❖ Reconstitution of the Catechetical Commission has brought in renewed zeal and various activities in promoting this ministry.
- ❖ There exists a well-organized Catechetical institute – Nitika – run by the Salesians.
- ❖ Nitika organizes training programs for Catechists and especially for the Youth.
- ❖ The Bengali Catechetical animation team, constituted at Prabhu Jishu Girja, promotes catechetical formation of the laity in Bengali.
- ❖ The Catechetical Commission has adopted the Filipino version of the Catechism Text Book Series (F-CTBS) for the Bengali speaking Catholic students of our Archdiocese.
- ❖ Efforts are made by the Commission to study and implement the Bengali Catechetical version of the *Bangla Khristo Dhormo Shikkha* from Bangladesh.
- ❖ The new Catechism book in Bengali has been printed recently with the help of *Christo Pujon Prokashoni* (PJJG).
- ❖ Various training workshops are conducted in the different deaneries and parishes of the Archdiocese to train catechists, teachers and parents.
- ❖ Systematic efforts are made to instruct Christ's faithful on various catechetical and doctrinal issues during the novenas, in order to deepen their faith.

2.1.3. Liturgy

- ❖ The Liturgical Commission conducts seminars on liturgical music, in accordance with the new Roman Missal, in English.
- ❖ Various other seminars and workshops are conducted to revitalize liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations in the Archdiocese.
- ❖ Nitika has recently published an excellent and comprehensive hymnal "Sing To The Lord" (fourth edition) in accordance with the new Roman Missal.
- ❖ Liturgical Seminars for the Religious Superiors are conducted in various convents.
- ❖ The "Bible Diary" has helped people to participate better in the Eucharistic celebrations.
- ❖ We have an Archdiocesan Choir, which comprises of talent singers from various Parish choirs.
- ❖ We have good choirs in various parishes to support liturgical singing.
- ❖ Parishes have enthusiastic Altar Servers, with the young girls showing great interest in serving at the altar.
- ❖ Efforts are being made to publish hymnals in different languages: Bengali, Hindi and Santali.

2.2 Shadow Situation

2.2.1. Bible

- ❖ Due to lack of biblical education, the vast majority harbor incorrect concepts on Biblical passages, especially the difficult ones.
- ❖ People, on the whole, do not seem to be much interested in knowing and understanding the Word of God.

- ❖ The Catholic Church and its leaders not having given sufficient emphasis on the Word of God has prompted a section of the people, to turn to Pentecostal groups for a better understanding of the Word of God.
- ❖ The Catholic Church has put greater stress over the Sacraments than in the promotion of the Word of God, in Christian life.
- ❖ Our Pastors do not promote sufficiently the love for the Word of God, among the people.
- ❖ Bible Study and Prayer Groups are not promoted in our Parishes.
- ❖ Lack of resource persons, especially in the local vernacular.
- ❖ The Word of God is not read regularly in individual families.

2.2.2. Catechetics

- ❖ Religious education needs to be better planned, organized and implemented.
- ❖ Sunday School suffers due to lack of supervision by the Parish clergy, lack of trained teachers, without a prescribed syllabus and text books and with no monitoring system in place.
- ❖ Hardly any trained Catechism teachers in parishes/probably the same in some schools.
- ❖ Catechetical activities cease to continue any more with the conferring of the Sacrament of Confirmation and the completion of class X.
- ❖ Very few pastoral centers or offices to coordinate the faith formation work. Existing ones are sometimes incompetent or inadequate.
- ❖ The laity largely, are not motivated, animated; or given training in religious matters / advanced catechesis / church administration (*diploma, degree*), etc.
- ❖ A total absence of family Catechesis.
- ❖ Most parents and elders are not able to guide or counsel new generation children because of lack of proper understanding of faith which is reflected among the youth themselves.
- ❖ There does not seem to exist, in most parishes, pre-Baptismal catechesis.
- ❖ Similarly, various ministries like Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, are not promoted.
- ❖ The 7 steps of the Rite of adult Christian initiation are not followed.

2.2.3. Liturgical

- ❖ Ministry of Lectors has not received sufficient importance in the Diocese.
- ❖ The proclamation of the Word of God is not often clear and audible due to lack of preparation from the part of lectors, who tend to take it casually.
- ❖ Liturgical celebrations often tend to be mechanical and ritual exercises.
- ❖ Our Priests do not make liturgical celebrations interesting and participatory.
- ❖ The Laity do not take an active part in the liturgical celebrations, due to a poor understanding of the liturgy by them. Partially because, they are not instructed in the meaning of the parts of the Liturgical celebrations and the significance of the signs and symbols involved in it.
- ❖ Prayer of the faithful which is the prayer of the local community is not formulated according to the needs of the community such as
 - i. Children
 - ii. Youth
 - iii. The old/physically or mentally challenged members
- ❖ Priests often conduct a non-educative, slipshod liturgical service that is, not being able to give guidance to the depth of liturgical significances, guide the choir, or create a meaningful environment, sometimes hurried, and disregarding recently announced liturgical norms.

- ❖ No celebration of the liturgy for the individual sectors of the community
- ❖ Not infrequently, Priests deliver poor sermons.
- ❖ The understanding of the Parish as a community of the disciples of the Lord Jesus is lacking. As a result, Churches tend to become mass-centers.
- ❖ The understanding of the Eucharist is missing.
- ❖ Time and again, due to the domination of the choir and its concert-like performance, liturgical singing loses its community participation and the spiritual experience of the liturgy.

Part 3: SETTING GOALS

- ❖ To build a faith community with adequate literacy of the Bible and the Liturgical celebration of its faith content through correct and effective catechism.
- ❖ To strengthen and nurture the faith through a well-formed family life, catechesis for all (children, youth and adults, etc.), training of catechists, better participation in the liturgy, liturgical catechesis, study of Word of God, promotion of moral principles and formation of conscience.
- ❖ To promote the involvement and participation of the laity in faith formation transforming them to be genuine seekers and disciples of Christ leading them to be ardent evangelizers

PART 4: ACTION PLAN

4.1 Bible

- ❖ Establish centers of formation where laity and missionaries can be trained to understand, live and proclaim the Word of God.
- ❖ Organise Bible-based study and Prayer Groups in the Parishes in various languages.
- ❖ Train lay people interested in the study of the Word of God, in centers like NBCLC, Potta, Divine Retreat Center, etc. to help in conducting the above-mentioned activities.
- ❖ Encourage every family to have a Bible.
- ❖ Provide Children's Bible with illustrations and songs.
- ❖ Strengthen our English and Bengali Bible Schools in the city and other Deaneries.

4.2 Catechetics

- ❖ Build a sustainable network for the purpose of faith formation for Parents, Children, Youth, elders with a common methodology and syllabus.
- ❖ Train all our Sunday School teachers.
- ❖ Make Sunday School attendance obligatory in all our Parishes and Mission stations.
- ❖ Conduct regular Catechism classes in all our Catholic schools.
- ❖ Have separate syllabi in the Parishes and Schools for teaching Catechism.
- ❖ Encourage our Catholic school teachers to help in the Sunday Schools in the Parishes.
- ❖ Organize pre-sacramental catechesis for all the Sacraments.

4.3 Liturgy

- ❖ Establish specialized institutions for biblical studies to ensure a solid understanding of theology and an appropriate appreciation for the concerns in which they carry on their mission.
- ❖ Promote and establish various ministries in the Archdioceses, such as Ministry of Hospitality, Lector, Acolytes and Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.
- ❖ To have Parish Liturgical Teams (PLT) in every Parish and impart necessary formation periodically.
- ❖ Organize workshops on sacred music and liturgical singing.
- ❖ Promote good choirs in our Parishes that would support liturgical singing by the entire worshipping community.

PART 5: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

5.1 Bible

- ❖ Do you have a copy of the Bible at home? Do you have a regular reading of the Bible? If yes, how has this influenced your life? If no, what is preventing you from reading the scriptures?
- ❖ Do you attend any regular course or seminars on the Bible? If no, how do you seek more light on the scriptures?
- ❖ Which verse of the Bible has influenced you/your family? Which teachings of the Bible do you find most difficult to follow?
- ❖ Do you have a *prayerful reading* or *lexio divina* of the Bible? If yes what are the steps or methods that you follow?
- ❖ Do you have regular family prayers? What prayers do you pray? Do you have a personal family prayer? Would you like to share it?

5.2 Catechetics

- ❖ Do you ensure your children attend Catechism classes? How often do you take time to discuss what was taught in Catechism classes with your children, as compared with the regular school studies?
- ❖ While Faith formation is a direct responsibility of the parents, in what way do you help your children grow in their faith and express it in their daily life?
- ❖ Do you have trained Catechism teachers in your parish?
- ❖ Do you have trained Catechists in your parish? What do you think would be their role?
- ❖ Our Christian faith centers around the death and resurrection of Christ. What do you draw out of this statement? Is it reflected in the Catechism classes? Does it help you grow stronger in your faith? Do you celebrate it meaningfully as a community?

5.3 Liturgy

- ❖ The Eucharist is the source and summit of all our liturgical celebrations, do you like the way it is celebrated in your parish? If not, suggest ways and means for a more vibrant celebration.
- ❖ Do you actively participate in the liturgical celebrations and imbibe lessons for your daily lives? If not, what prevents your active participation? What will help you participate more meaningfully?

- ❖ Are you satisfied with the way the other Sacraments are celebrated, especially without proper pre-sacramental catechesis?
- ❖ Do you think there is a need for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in your Parish?
- ❖ According to you, who is a good Catholic? Specify the characteristics of a good Catholic.

CONCLUSION

The preceding pages have amply demonstrated the fundamental need of the three pillars of Christian Life, viz. Bible, Catechetics and Liturgy to grow in Christian faith. As we have seen, it is in and through the Word of God, we encounter the Risen Lord, we share this faith-experience in Catechesis and celebrate it in the liturgy of the community of believers. It is hoped that our prayerful reflections and deliberations on this particular concern will revitalize the entire Christian community and invigorate the other aspects of Christian life.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Mary our Mother, you were the First Bearer of the Word of God. You not only treasured and pondered on this Word but also gave Him to us in flesh and blood. We thank you for this most precious gift. Help us to imitate you in listening to this Word, communicating it to the world and celebrating it in our lives.

We earnestly pray that you accompany us in fulfilling the mission of your Son in and through the Pastoral Plan of the Archdiocese of Calcutta. Amen.

ANNEXURES

BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005).

BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful, on the "Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," *Verbum Domini* (Vatican 5-26 October, 2008).

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Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Inter Oecumenici*.