

AN ORTHODOX PROGRESS REPORT ON THE LUTHERAN-ORTHODOX DIALOGUE¹

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This dialogue had a bumpy beginning. Nevertheless Bad Segeberg laid a more or less solid foundation and put us at the threshold of a common understanding of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. But the key to these Councils are the Eighth (879) and especially the Ninth Ecumenical Councils (1341) as explained in this writer's position paper at Paris, Moscow and now before you in print².

One must emphasize that acceptance of the Seven Ecumenical Councils does not in itself entail agreement in faith. The Franco-Latin Papacy accepts these Councils, but in reality accepts not one of them. In like manner there are Orthodox, since Peter the Great, who in reality do not accept the soteriological presuppositions of these Councils. On the other hand, those of the Oriental Orthodox, who have not been Franco-Latinised in important parts of their theology, accept the first three of the Ecumenical Councils, but in reality accept all Seven, a fact which has now become clear in recent agreements.

The determining element in the above fluctuations is the fact that the Carolingian Franks learned to interpret the first two Ecumenical Councils through the eyes of Augustine. Then the rest of the Seven became wagons of the same train drawn by the same locomotive. The bishop of Hippo had neither the slightest understanding of the Arian, Eunomian and Macedonian positions about the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, nor of the Fathers who opposed them. Neither he nor the Franco-Latins ever realised that each heresy condemned by the Nine Ecumenical Councils was an attack on the Biblical experience of illumination and glorification. In each case fallen man was imagined to be instructed and saved by a creature: a) either by a created Logos,

1. Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission Seventh Meeting, Sønderberg, Denmark, 4-11 July 1993.

2. «Church Synods and Civilisaion», Reprinted from *Theologia*, Athens 1992, vol. 63, Issue 3, July-September, pp. 423-450.

b) or by a created Spirit's created energies, or c) by a created Spirit/Angel. But Augustine's salvation by created grace, i.e. by his created glorifications in the Old and New Testaments or by his created Pentecostal tongues of fire, or by his fires of hell and outer darkness or by created heavenly glory, are all the same pagan realities. Indeed all these Augustinian creatures which reveal and save in both the Old and New Testaments come into and pass out of existence after each of their specific tasks has come to pass. The Council of 1341 condemned these teachings in the person of Barlaam the Calabrian, not knowing that this tradition was initiated by Augustine and was accepted by the Franco-Latin tradition. It was continued by the Reformers and is to be found in Bible Commentaries today.

The reality of the matter is that the difference between Augustine and Ambrose, who baptised the former, became the difference between the Franco-Latin and the Roman traditions, both East and West.

At Bad Segeberg we agreed that not only illumination or justification takes place in this life, but also that glorification or theosis does so also. The next step is to see both these stages of cure in the Old Testament and completed in Christ and Pentecost. This would be the basis for our going forward, since this is a fundamental presupposition in the Bible accepted and clearly expounded by the Fathers, especially by those of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

Illumination/justification and glorification/theosis in both the Old and New Testaments have nothing to do with mysticism. Both Luther and the Fathers reject spiritualities based on the soul's so-called liberation from earthly copies of transcendental realities and its quest for union with non-existent universals in the essence of God. The Fathers clearly reject universals and condemn efforts to unite with them as figments of the imagination and tricks of the devil. Here is a basic patristic foundation for agreeing with Luther's revolt against Franco-Latin monasticism. Many Orthodox assume that Luther's revolt against monasticism was an attack on Orthodox spirituality.

Luther's rejection of universals made the Bible the only basis of speaking authoritatively about God. But the Fathers go further by rejecting the identity of the words and concepts about God even in the Bible with God Himself. The inspiration of the Bible does not make it revelation itself, but a guide to glorification which is revelation. Even the words of Christ themselves are guides to and not themselves glorification or revelation. Christ prays that His disciples

and their disciples may see His Glory (John 17), but He does not describe His glory. The foundation of heresy is the confusion of the Bible with revelation whereby one tries to understand God by meditation and speculation on Biblical texts. Since all of one's words and concepts are from one's environment, such meditation and speculation ends up being a closed circle within createdness. Only by accepting the witness of the prophets that there is no similarity between the created and the uncreated and that «it is impossible to express God and even more impossible to conceive Him» that one submits to the cure of purification, illumination and glorification.

This raises the question about the validity of Systematic or Dogmatic theology and its distinction from Pastoral Theology and the relation of both to so-called Christian Ethics. Within the context of the cure of purification and illumination of the heart and glorification these theological disciplines do not really exist. The very fact that one's spirit must return to the heart emptied of both good and bad thoughts in order to be occupied only with prayer that the intellect may be occupied with its normal activities does not allow such divisions of labour. What is left is cure of oneself in communion with others as expressed in the gospel of Christ with which He Himself inspired His friends even before His incarnation.

The Allentown statement on Divine Revelation should be completed by the fact that «God, Whom no one has ever seen» (John 1:18), has indeed revealed Himself to the prophets of the Old Testament in His uncreated Messenger even before His incarnation. To see the Angel of the Lord is to see God Himself Who sends Him. «The only begotten Son, He Who is in the bosom of the Father, He reveals». As the prophets saw and heard God in His Messenger, so now also he who sees and hears His incarnate Messenger sees and hears God Himself. She who gave birth to Christ gave birth to God's Logos in the flesh. They who crucified Christ crucified the Logos Himself in the flesh. «He who believes in me does not believe in me but in him who sent me, and he who sees me sees him who sent me». (John 12:44-45). «Lord, show us the Father... He who sees me has seen the Father». (John 14:8-9). This identity between the uncreated Messenger of God in the Old Testament and the incarnate Logos in New Testament is the key to a correct appreciation of the Nine Ecumenical Councils.

From the viewpoint of both the Old and new Testaments and the Fathers correct faith in the Lord of Glory is not a religion, but the

rejection of religion. Religion is a sickness which confuses words and concepts taken from one's environment with God and transforms them into the idols that they are. This is exactly what most so-called theologians, pastors and faithful do. The faithful who are not a least in the state of illumination may seem better than members of other religions, but may be even morally worse. Such evaluations may be to the point within the context of the negative role religions seem to be playing today. A discussion and agreement about the dangers of *analogia entis*, *analogia fidei* and the fanatics they tend to breed within Christianity and other religions may be a helpful and useful corollary to this dialogue.

It would seem that we may be ready to examine whether *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola fide* want to say what may be described as the Patristic *Sola Pentecoste*.