

# RESEPTIO <sup>1</sup>/<sub>09</sub>

KIRKON ULKOASIAIN OSASTON TEOLOGISTEN ASIAIN TIEDOTUSLEHTI



Dialogues between Orthodox and other CEC Member Churches

## RESEPTIO 1/2009

### II CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN CHURCHES: COMMISSION ON CHURCHES IN DIALOGUE

#### CONSULTATION ON DIALOGUES BETWEEN ORTHODOX AND OTHER CEC MEMBER CHURCHES

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ISSN 1235-8878

RESEPTIO/kirkkohallituksen ulkoasiain osasto, teologiset asiat  
osoite: PL 185, 00161 Helsinki, p. 09-1802287, kotisivu: <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/kuo/>  
toimitus: TT Tomi Karttunen, TM Tapani Saarinen (toimitussihteeri)  
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## Introductory words

In the Christian life of Finland, you can quite clearly notice the influence of both the eastern and the western heritage. We have two traditional folk churches: the Evangelical Lutheran and the Orthodox Church. In its response to the working papers of CEC for Lyon 2009 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland underlined that “the mandate of CEC covers the whole Europe and its vocation is to gather the churches of Europe, [...]”. It is the pleasure and honor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

to publish this documentary of the research project of the Dialogue commission concerning the theological dialogues between the Orthodox and the other member churches of CEC. You can find this bulletin also from our website: <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/kuo/reseptio.shtml>.

The Revd. Dr. Tomi Karttunen  
Executive Secretary for Theology  
Department for International Relations

## Päätoimittajan esipuhe

Kahden kansankirkon maana sekä läntisen ja itäisen kirkon perinteen kohtaupaikkana meillä Suomen luterilaisilla on erityinen intressi edistää reformaation kirkkojen ja ortodoksien välistä ekumeniaa. Vastauksessaan Euroopan kirkkojen konferenssin (EKK) Lyonin työpapereihin kirkkomme korostikin, että ”EKK:n mandaatti kattaa koko Euroopan ja sen kutsumus on koota Euroopan kirkot, mukaan lukien EKPK [Euroopan katolisten piispainkokousten kokous], yhteen”. Niinpä KUO:n teologisten asiain yksikön ilo ja kunnia on julkaista tiedotuslehdessään EKK:n ortodoksisten ja muiden jäsenkirkkojen välisten dialogien tutkimusprojektin satoa.

Työalasihteeri, TT Kaisamari Hintikka on toiminut EKK:n dialogikomission projektitutkijana 2007–2009. Pullachin konsultaation (2008) nyt julkaistava dokumentaatio on ikään kuin projektin välitilin päätös. Tavoitteiden täysimääräi-

nen saavuttaminen, kuten ekumeenisen metodologian kehittäminen, edellyttää kuitenkin työn jatkamista edelleen. Jo nyt on saatu kokoon arvokasta tietoa ja kokoavia näköaloja, joita voidaan käyttää tulevilla dialogeissa hyödyksi.

Suomalaisille lukijoille haluaisin erityisesti huomauttaa, että Reseptio on 1/08-numerosta alkaen luettavissa myös ulkoasiain osaston internet-sivuilla osoitteessa: <http://www.evl.fi/kkh/kuo/reseptio.shtml>. Tarkoituksena on panostaa tulevaisuudessa internetin kautta tapahtuvaan tiedonvälitykseen entistä enemmän. Tähän liittyvää palautetta voi toimittaa allekirjoittaneelle ([tomi.karttunen@evl.fi](mailto:tomi.karttunen@evl.fi)) tai kirjeenvaihtaja-sihteeri Minna Väliaholle ([minna.valiaho@evl.fi](mailto:minna.valiaho@evl.fi)).

Tomi Karttunen,  
teologisten asiain sihteeri

# Preface

Kaisamari Hintikka

Viorel Ionita

Less than fifteen years after the Second World War, the first steps were taken in theological dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Even though also theologically motivated, the cooperation between the two churches – living in countries which were still seen by many as enemies of war – can be understood as part of the joint effort of the European churches to heal the wounds of the war. In the same year 1959, the Conference of European Churches (CEC) was founded in order to bring together churches of the continent divided now by a very different kind of war. The Cold War was the context in which a variety of other dialogues, both at the national and international levels, were launched between the Orthodox Churches and the Churches of the Reformation. Each dialogue has taken place within a specific historical and political context, many of which have changed dramatically during the

last two decades. Even though in the framework of these dialogues the churches were able and willing to concentrate mostly on theological issues the dialogues were also affected by the historical and political context in which the discussions took place.

Some of these dialogues, like the process between the Russian Orthodox Church with the EKD on one side and with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland on the other side, discussed at length in the course of the 1970s and 1980s such contemporary issues as peace or reconciliation. These issues were nevertheless approached theologically, although they were at least supported by the political climate of that period of time. After the fall of Communism, in the process of European integration, new social challenges, such as common witness of the churches in contemporary societies, were taken into the agenda of the dialogues. It was not

only the discussion on socio-ethical issues that was affected by the time and place, but also the work on classical theological topics which was in interplay with the cultural and political backgrounds of the partners in dialogue.

When compared to the severe criticism which has occurred especially among the Orthodox Churches towards the international ecumenical organizations before but especially after the political changes in Central and Eastern Europe, it is noteworthy how the churches have been able to continue theological cooperation and discussion in the framework of bilateral dialogues. After these spectacular changes with direct influences on the life of the Orthodox Churches in that part of the world, these churches invested somehow more into their bilateral dialogues with other churches than in the multilateral dialogue promoted through the ecumenical organizations. The two forms of dialogue are actually not at all in competition with each other, but rather complementary. Since the late 1990s increasing attention has been paid to the so-called non-theological – cultural, political and social – factors of the dialogues among the European churches. Furthermore, many of the dialogues have been going on between the European churches for some decades as there was an obvious need to look back and evaluate what had been achieved thus far. Following the CEC General Assembly in Graz (June 1997), four consultations were organized between 1997 and 2001 in order to assess the results of the dialogues between the Orthodox Churches and the Churches of the Reformation. In these consultations a considerable amount of attention was paid both to the non-

theological factors affecting the respective dialogues as well as to the process of reception of these dialogues.

In July 2003, the Trondheim General Assembly of CEC recommended that the outcome of both bilateral and multilateral dialogues touched upon CEC member churches should be evaluated and focused in cooperation with other ecumenical bodies as well as communicated to the member churches. Based on the Trondheim recommendations, the Churches in Dialogue Commission (CiD) of the Conference of European Churches sought clarity on how to proceed in assessing the theological dialogues between the Orthodox Churches and the other member churches of CEC. Four goals were set for this process:

1. to explore the relationships between the bilateral and the multilateral dialogues;
2. to identify the central theological questions dealing with the dialogues, and thus, to establish indicators or criteria to measure their process;
3. to evaluate more carefully the methodology applied in the dialogues;
4. to clarify the prevailing processes or mechanisms of reception in different churches, as well as formulating methods, structures and concrete steps that could be taken to improve the reception of the results of the dialogues in different churches.

In this respect, the CiD set a project in 2007 to assess and look for good experiences of the dialogues between the Orthodox Churches and the other mem-

ber churches of CEC. Three different levels of dialogues were included in the evaluation project. Besides dialogues between the CEC member churches, four global dialogues (Anglican- Eastern Orthodox; Anglican-Oriental Orthodox; Old Catholic-Orthodox; Lutheran World Federation-Orthodox and World Alliance of Reformed Churches-Orthodox) and one local, Finnish Lutheran- Orthodox, dialogue were also taken into consideration. By including global, European and local levels in the evaluation, a wider perspective was sought not only to the theological discussions but also to the different mechanisms of dialogue, as well as reception of the different dialogues by the respective churches. Each dialogue was evaluated from the view point of the two partners in dialogue. The invited evaluators had not necessarily been delegates of their respective churches in this particular dialogue but were however asked to look at this particular dialogue from the view point of the respective partner in dialogue. Based on this material, a consultation was organized from 23–25 June 2008 in Pullach/Munich, Germany, in order to bring together the results of different dialogues and to assess their outcomes in relation to each others.

Even though the consultation was considered by the participants as indispensable and fruitful in bringing together the parallel lines and different levels of dialogues, it is clear that the objectives set in Trondheim were met only partly. The Pullach consultation managed to take stock of the material on dialogues but more work is needed in order to reach the level where deeper analysis and comparison can take place. Methods used in the dialogues were touched

upon in relation to certain dialogues but more profound discussion is still needed in relation to this topic. Furthermore, the aims and objectives of dialogues are not always pronounced clearly enough. There is no definite methodological pattern which should or could fit in every dialogue and the methods have varied from dialogue to dialogue. Sharing experiences and analyzing the methodology used can however open new and more fruitful approaches to future theological discussions.

On the basis of the evaluation it became evident that the reception process is very often left without attention in the actual dialogues themselves. Some of the dialogues – especially those between the Orthodox and the Old Catholics, the one between the Orthodox and Reformed as well as the dialogues of the EKD – are very well documented and their results efficiently published. However, in most of the dialogues included in the evaluation project the actual reception happened only at the top level of the churches and not at all levels of the church life. Thus, in its final communiqué, the Pullach Consultation paid attention to the fact that despite the consensus achieved in many of these dialogues, more attention should be paid to the communication of the results of the dialogues at all levels of the church life.

The evaluation papers presented at the Pullach Consultation on dialogues between the Orthodox Churches and other member churches of CEC in June 2008 are published now in this special issue of *Reseptio*, the information bulletin of the Unit for Theology in the Department for International Relations of the Evan-

gical Lutheran Church of Finland. The editors wish to thank all those who contributed to the consultation as well as to this publication.

\* \* \*

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# Consultation on Dialogues between Orthodox and other Member Churches of CEC Pullach, Germany, 23–25 June 2008

## Communiqué

*The Conference of European Churches Commission Churches in Dialogue invited theologians who are members of the Orthodox Churches and Churches shaped by the Reformation and reform movements to meet to evaluate past and current bilateral theological dialogues. Two observers from CCEE were also present. Participants met in the Pullach-seminary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany.*

*We are grateful for the hospitality we received in the seminary with its prayerful atmosphere. We discussed a series of papers (mentioned in the footnote) from both sides of each dialogue. The following dialogues were included:*

World Alliance of the Reformed Churches – Eastern Orthodox  
Lutheran World Federation – Orthodox  
Anglican Communion – Eastern Orthodox

Old Catholic – Orthodox  
Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) – Ecumenical Patriarchate  
EKD – Russian Orthodox Church  
EKD – Romanian Orthodox Church  
EKD – Bulgarian Orthodox Church  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland – Russian Orthodox Church  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland – Finnish Orthodox Church  
Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe – Orthodox  
The Communion of the Porvoo Churches – Orthodox.

## Common topics that we discussed

The accounts of the dialogues were positive in all instances. Topics covered included among others some aspects of Trinitarian theology, Christology and Soteriology. It is evident that ecclesiology is still a matter of division among traditions. In discussion we discovered that despite the convergence and consensus

achieved in certain areas, further steps could be taken to deepen that for a more fruitful outcome. We have taken notice that in most of our churches these positive outcomes have not been communicated to all levels of church life.

In discussion it became evident that even among ourselves we are not always fully aware of the ecclesiological self understanding of our dialogue partners. We realize that it is incumbent on us all in dialogues to begin to understand the other from his or her respective Church tradition.

We recognized that the dialogues and the subsequent documents produced were created within a specific time and political context; the context for many of these dialogues no longer obtains for all our churches. We can not ignore the contextual and social implications when a dialogue takes place. Many participants in the dialogue may not have been fully aware of these external factors.

There is a need to clarify the aim and objectives of each dialogue. The methodology adopted should not only be consonant with the intended aims of the dialogue but also involve a self critical reflection about the process. We are grateful that in the majority of cases the results are published. In many instances it could be possible for a subsequent dialogue to build on the previous outcomes to avoid duplication. The statements should always be published in the languages of all the participant churches.

More account must be taken than in the past of the fact that dialogue partners evaluate the respective importance of

theological questions in different ways. This can cause problems of ambiguity when the statements are read by others not involved in the dialogue. It has become clear that in some instances we read the same document in different ways and interpret terminology differently. This needs to be considered when the documents are being created.

It is imperative that the Churches represent themselves consistently with every dialogue partner.

The goal of deeper mutual understanding requires the dialogues to focus not only on traditional systematic themes but also on the liturgical life and witness of our Churches in contemporary society.

The danger of commitment to the dialogues becoming the narrow preoccupation of a few is to be avoided. It is recommended that the common statements adopted should also consider the appropriate means of their reception. The documents should clarify explicitly the ecumenical achievements of the dialogues. Awareness of the importance of and sensitivities involved in dialogues should make the process of reception more readily achieved.

### **Further questions and recommendations**

Do the outcomes differ if we are involved in “Conversations” rather than “Dialogues”?

In what ways can the participating Churches improve the current process of reception?

Each dialogue should consider the appropriate mode of reception in their respective churches for the agreed statements;

The participants of this consultation at Pullach recommend that the CEC continue this consultation process with regard of the bilateral dialogues.

*Pullach, 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2008*

# The dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the Lutheran World Federation

An Orthodox Evaluation

Viorel Ionita

The theological dialogue between Orthodox and Lutherans at the world level is to be considered in the broader context of the relationship between these two church traditions. Contacts between these two traditions started already in the century of the Reformation, first of all through the initiative of Philip Melancthon to send the *Confessio Augustana* to Constantinople in Greek translation and afterwards through the well known correspondence between the Lutheran theologians from Tübingen and the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremias II (1573–1581). The relationship between Orthodox and Lutherans was sometimes tensioned already during the 16<sup>th</sup> century mainly through the proselytising actions of some Lutherans among the Orthodox. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the relations between these two church traditions were improved parti-

cularly through their cooperation in the framework of the large Ecumenical Movement. The common experience of multilateral dialogue through the World Council of Churches at the world level as well as through the Conference of European Churches at the continental level, constituted a solid basis for the preparation of the official dialogue between the two families of churches.

This official dialogue was possible first of all due to the decisions taken at the Pan-Orthodox level. The first Pan-Orthodox Conference from Rhodes (1961) had defined the position of the Orthodox Churches towards the other Christian Churches around the globe as well as towards the international ecumenical organisations, particularly the World Council of Churches. In the document adopted at the Rhodes con-

ference the Lutheran Churches were mentioned in the chapter D, subchapter b under the heading “churches which are at a bigger distance from Orthodoxy”<sup>1</sup>. The fourth Pan-Orthodox Conference (Chambésy, Switzerland, 1968) recommended to the Autocephalous Orthodox Churches to start bilateral conversations with the Protestant Churches, specifically with the Lutheran ones, in order to help the preparation of the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue at the world level. Finally the first Pan-Orthodox Pre-conciliar Conference, held also at Chambésy in 1976, noted that many of the bilateral conversations between Orthodox and Lutherans, as well as the different exchanges at the academic level between theologians from both sides, registered considerable progress. Therefore this conference recommended to the Orthodox Churches to start the practical preparation for the official theological dialogue between Orthodox and Lutherans at the world level.

One of the difficulties this dialogue had to face from the beginning was the fact that LWF is not a church, but a federation of churches, which are not only Lutheran, but also united. The Lutheran delegates in this dialogue are not representing their respective churches, but the LWF, which is inviting and supporting them. On the other side the Orthodox Churches even as individual or autocephalous churches build together the one Orthodox Church. The Ortho-

dox delegates for the dialogue with LWF are nominated by their respective churches and supported by them. If the first category of delegates is responsible to the LWF, the second one is responsible to their respective churches. This aspect could have considerable consequences for the reception of this dialogue.

The theological dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the LWF began in 1981 in Espoo, Finland. The plan for that first meeting was to start with the theme called *Participating in the Mystery of the Church*. The members of the international Joint Commission wanted so to start addressing central ecclesiological questions right from the beginning. The two delegations discovered pretty soon that there are first a lot of methodological questions to be clarified. Therefore the meeting in Espoo, as well as the next one in Cyprus (Limassol, 1983) did not lead to any concrete result.<sup>2</sup> The first joint declaration in this dialogue was adopted at its third meeting in Allentown, PA. (USA, 1985) on the theme of *Divine Revelation*.

The first common statement of this dialogue is rather short (only 6 paragraphs) and constitutes a common point of view without nuances between the two traditions. One of the most representative paragraphs is the 5<sup>th</sup> one which states: “The holy scriptures are an inspired and authentic expression of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Athanasios Basdekis, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche*, Otto Lembeck Verlag, 2001, p. 125

<sup>2</sup> See the bibliography in *Orthodoxie im Dialog. Bilaterale Dialoge der orthodoxen und der orientalischem-orthodoxen Kirchen 1945–1997. Eine Dokumentensammlung*, hrsg. von Thomas Bremer, Johannes Oeldemann und Dagmar Stoltmann, Paulinus Verlag, 1999, p. 225.

God's revelation and of the experience of the church at its beginnings. In the church's ongoing experience of its life in Christ, in the faith, love and obedience of God's people and their worship, the holy scriptures become a living book of revelation which the church's kerygma, dogma and life may not contradict. Because through the guidance of the Holy Spirit the dogma of the church is in agreement with the Holy Scriptures, therefore the dogma itself becomes an unchangeable witness to the truth of revelation. Thus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, divine revelation is living in the church through Holy Scripture and holy Tradition<sup>3</sup>. This statement constitutes a good start for the dialogue between the Orthodox Churches, which value so much the Holy Tradition together with the Holy Scripture, and the Lutheran Churches, which value mainly the Scripture.

The second common statement was adopted at the fourth meeting of the Joint Commission in Crete (1987), on *Scripture and Tradition*. With this statement the dialogue addressed one of the most important differences in the theological approaches of the two churches. In this respect the Crete statement underlined that regarding "the relation of scripture and Tradition, for centuries there seemed to have been a deep difference between Orthodox and Lutheran teaching. Orthodox hear with satisfaction the affirmation of the Lutheran theologians that the formula

"sola scriptura" was always intended to point to God's revelation, God's saving act through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and therefore to the holy Tradition of the church, as expressed in this paper, against human traditions that darken the authentic teaching in the church"<sup>4</sup>. This is not only a substantial contribution to the clarification of how the two traditions consider the transmission of the apostolic faith throughout the centuries, but also a very good theological basis for this dialogue.

The third common statement was adopted at the fifth meeting in Bad-Segeberg, (Germany, 1989), on *The Canon and the Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*.<sup>5</sup> As for the understanding of the Scriptures in the two theological traditions the statement from Bad-Segeberg indicates that they "have one common holy scripture. We read it in our worship services; we use it catechetically. In the liturgy the reading of the gospel is always the conclusion and the high-point in a series of biblical texts. Jesus Christ is the centre of the holy scripture, the key to its understanding, the fulfilment of all of God's promises"<sup>6</sup>. In relation to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures the same statement underlines that the "question regarding the inspiration of the books of the holy scripture points back to the working of the Spirit in their production, that is to say, the inspiration of the authors, and points forward to the working of this same Spirit in the church who teaches how the

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin/lutortjointtext.html>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>5</sup> See *Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue. Agreed Statements, 1985-1989*, Geneva, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi>

scriptures are to be understood and leads the faithful to their goal”<sup>7</sup>.

The Bad-Segeberg statement constitutes the summary of all discussions in relation with what we would consider the introductory matters for this dialogue. With this meeting a considerable introductory work as well as methodological clarifications has been done so that the official dialogue could address from that point on more central doctrinal issues important from the view point of both church traditions. On the conclusions arrived at with regard to these topics, the third Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in 1986, in Chambésy, Switzerland, noted that “this dialogue has begun with favourable prospects, and (this body) hopes that both the academic and the ecclesiological elements will be equally emphasised and developed.”<sup>8</sup>

After intensive discussions, the meeting of the international Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission in Moscow (1990) proposed the theme *Authority in and of the Church*, which marks the beginning of the third stage in this dialogue. The theme proposed in Moscow was to be considered as an overall theme and to be dealt with through various sub-themes. The seventh meeting of the Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue (Sandbjerg, Denmark, 1993) discussed *The Ecumenical Councils and Authority in*

*and of the Church*. In relation to this subject the common statement underlines first that for both Lutherans and Orthodox “the teachings of the ecumenical councils are authoritative for our churches. The ecumenical councils maintain the integrity of the teaching of the undivided Church concerning the saving, illuminating/justifying and glorifying acts of God and reject heresies which subvert the saving work of God in Christ”<sup>9</sup>.

The eighth encounter of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission (Limassol, Cyprus, 1995) discussed the second subtheme of the overall topic about *Authority in and of the Church* and this was the question of the *Understanding of Salvation in the Light of the Ecumenical Councils*. After different common reflections on this topic, the final statement adopted in Cyprus concluded that “Lutherans and Orthodox still need to explore further their different concepts of salvation as purification, illumination, and glorification, with the use of synergia, which is the Orthodox teaching and tradition and as justification and sanctification, with the use of *sola fide*, which is the Lutheran teaching and tradition.”<sup>10</sup> The discussion at that stage addressed not only central doctrinal issues for both traditions, but also specific concepts which expressed the respective issues, such as *synergia* on one side and *sola fide* on the other side.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>8</sup> Grigorios Larentzakis, *Die Orthodoxe Kirche. Ihr Leben und ihr Glaube (The Orthodox Church: its life and faith)*. Graz: Styria Press, 2000, p. 201.

<sup>9</sup> [www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi](http://www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi)

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, see also The Revd Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita, *Short Presentation of the Orthodox-Lutheran Dialogues*, in *Reseptio*, Helsinki, 1/2006, p. 18–26.

We should also underline the progress of the dialogue in relation to these issues which were never discussed so deeply and openly by the two theological traditions together.

The question of the authority in and of the Church offered to this dialogue the best opportunity to make the link between the discussion on Scripture and Tradition and the approach of the Ecclesiology. In this respect the statement from Limassol stated: “Ecumenical councils are the epitome of biblical theology and they summarize main themes of the Holy Tradition. They are not merely of historical significance but are irreplaceable events for the Church’s life. Through them the apostolic faith and tradition, brought about by the saving revelation of God in Christ, was confirmed by the consensus of the gathered representatives of the Church led by the Holy Spirit”<sup>11</sup>. In this phase the topic of the nature of the church was dealt with only indirectly, through the issue of authority and from the perspective of salvation. However, this made it possible to reach a series of agreements, which can be very significant as basis for the further development of dialogue, precisely with regard to the discussion of ecclesiology<sup>12</sup>.

The third and final subtheme of the overall topic about authority in and of

the Church was: *Salvation: Grace, Justification and Synergy*, discussed at ninth meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission (Sigtuna, Sweden, 1998). The joint statement on this topic mentioned among others that “Lutherans, together with the Orthodox, affirm that salvation is real participation by grace in the nature of God as St. Peter writes: “that we may be partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) That happens through our participation in the death and resurrection of the Lord in His body, in Whom all the fullness of God dwells (cf. Col. 2:9). This is the way in which salvation is realized as purification, illumination and glorification, also referred to as deification (theosis). This terminology has not been central in Lutheran tradition. Lutherans prefer to speak of the sanctification in the body of Christ who is Himself present in the faith of the believers. Lutherans, together with the Orthodox, affirm the reality of the believers’ participation in the divine life, in which they grow by the grace of God”<sup>13</sup>. On this stage other important theological key concepts are brought into discussion and the progress in the clarification of these issues is considerable. The discussions in Sigtuna concluded the considerations on the theme about the *Authority in and of the Church*. At the same meeting the joint Lutheran-Orthodox Commission proposed another general theme for its

<sup>11</sup> [www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi](http://www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi)

<sup>12</sup> Michael Staikos, Metropolit von Austria, *Sola scriptura sine traditione ? Aktuelle Perspektiven über “Schrift und Tradition” im Ökumenischen Dialog, insbesondere zwischen der Orthodoxie und dem Lutherischen Weltbund*, in “Kirche : Lernfähig in die Zukunft ? ” Festschrift für Johannes Dantine zum 60. Geburtstag, hg. von M. Bünker und Th. Krobach, Innsbruck – Wien, 1998, pp. 49–66.

<sup>13</sup> [www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi](http://www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi)

further work which was *The Mystery of the Church*.

The first subtheme of the topic proposed in Sigtuna entitled *The Mystery of the Church: A. Word and Sacraments (mysteria) in the Life of the Church* was discussed at the tenth meeting of this dialogue held in Damascus (Syria, 2000). One of the first important affirmations in the Damascus document was that the “church as the body of Christ is the *mysterion*\* par excellence, in which the different *mysteria* / sacraments find their place and existence and through which the believers participate in the fruits of the entire redemptive work of Christ”<sup>14</sup>. We find in the same statement the explanation that the “*mysteria* of the church are grounded in the historical redemptive work of Christ, and as such they differ radically from Hellenistic, pagan and neo-pagan *mysteria* connected with magic. The word “*mysteria*” does not have the same meaning for the Orthodox tradition as the word sacrament. “*Sacramentum*” is the Latin translation of the Greek “*mysterion*” and it is from this Latin word that specific theological concepts have developed in the West. *Mysteria* refers to the ineffable action of the divine grace imparted in and through the specific acts performed in and by the church. Lutherans use the word “sacrament” in accordance with the Latin tradition in which these ineffable actions are the

means of imparting the saving grace that the Father gives through the Son in the Holy Spirit to the church for the salvation of the world”<sup>15</sup>. The significance of this statement is not only in relation to the discussion about Word and Sacrament, but also in relation to a deeper understanding of the *mysteria*/sacraments.

The second subtheme of the broader ecclesiological theme was the question of *The Sacraments (mysteria) as Means of Salvation*, which was discussed at the eleventh meeting in this dialogue (Oslo, Norway, 2002). The statement adopted in relation to this topic underlined that “salvation imparted by means of the sacraments must be appropriated personally, by faith and life in Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Lutherans have expressed this point by saying that the sacraments are objectively valid by the word and command of Christ, while they depend for their efficacy on the believer’s faithful reception. The language of “validity” and “efficacy” is not used by the Orthodox in this context. Lutherans and Orthodox, however, both seek to avoid two extremes, one of which would make the sacraments depend for their efficacy on the worthiness of the celebrant or administrator, the other of which would insist that the sacraments confer grace by the mere performance of an act”<sup>16</sup>. Although the dialogue addressed in this respect ques-

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*. In relation to the issue of *mysteria*/sacraments the LWF-Orthodox dialogue could have made use of the outcomes of similar Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues at the regional level, such as the dialogues of the Evangelical Church in Germany with different Autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Unfortunately this dialogue didn’t look into the results of other dialogues.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*

tions which were debated already in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the purpose of these clarifications was to indicate precisely the today teaching of the two church traditions in this respect.

The Oslo statement specified also that “Orthodox and Lutherans, discussing the sacraments on a preliminary basis, agree to give emphasis to the sacraments of initiation of the ancient church, that is, baptism, chrismation, and the eucharist. We also agree that baptism takes place with water, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It brings the forgiveness of sins, and is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ which incorporates the believer into the body of Christ as a member of the church. For the Orthodox this incorporation is completed through chrismation, in which the baptized receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For Lutherans, anointing with the Holy Spirit takes place within the rite of baptism itself, and finds its expression in the laying on of hands after water baptism”<sup>17</sup>. These remarks were a clear indication on what should be the next step in this dialogue.

The 12th Plenary of the International Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission (2004, in Durău, Romania, 2004) discussed the third subtheme of the ecclesiological overall theme namely about *Baptism and Chrismation as Sacraments of initiation into the Church*.

In the joint statement there was underlined that Orthodox and Lutherans “found that the three components of Christian initiation are to a large extent included in each other’s rites. These components find their fulfilment in the Christian’s full participation in the life of Christ and his church through eating his body and drinking his blood in the holy Eucharist”<sup>18</sup>. The 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of Lutheran – Orthodox Joint Commission (2–9 November 2006, Bratislava, Slovak Republic) discussed the fourth ecclesiological subtheme: *The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church*. In relation to this topic the final statement from Bratislava underlined that “Orthodox and Lutherans agree that the Eucharist is also a gift of communion granted to us by Christ. In this communion we are fully united with him and with the members of his body.”<sup>19</sup>

The fifth and final ecclesiological subtheme discussed so far in this dialogue was the issue of *The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church. Preparation, Ecological and Social Implications* (Paphos, Cyprus, 2008). Continuing the discussion from Bratislava on the significance of the Holy Eucharist, the Paphos statement specified that “Lutherans and Orthodox carefully prescribe how to celebrate the Eucharist properly. Currently, they do not share Eucharistic fellowship. However, both agree on many important aspects, such as care for the liturgy and its provisions (vest-

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, see also Pr. Prof. Dr. Viorel Ioniță, The 12th encounter of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, (Romanian), in “Vestitorul Ortodoxiei”, Anul XVI, Nr. 346, 30 Noiembrie 2004, p. 4.

ments for priests and altar, vessels, Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine, etc.). Because of their more elaborate liturgy, Orthodox have many and specific stipulations, e.g. use of leavened bread and red wine, times for the celebration, consumption of the sanctified elements at the end of the celebration, commemorations of Episcopal authorities, etc. While Lutheran practice may include some of these provisions, Lutherans do not consider complete ritual agreement a necessity. Nonetheless, closer agreement between the two traditions of liturgical practice would facilitate better understanding between Lutherans and Orthodox and help them to move closer to their mutual goal of joint communion<sup>20</sup>. These observations were meant to complete the achievements of the previous meeting in this dialogue.

As for the social implications of the Holy Eucharist, the Paphos statement mentioned that “Orthodox and Lutherans together affirm that their participation in the Eucharist challenges them to respond to the needs of the world as stewards of God’s grace. The Eucharist has an essentially communal character which manifests concretely the body of Christ, the church, which is sent to serve God’s salvific embrace of the whole cosmos. Christ is the gift *par excellence* to all believers, transforming all that exists. As receivers of that most holy gift, the believers are themselves transformed from receivers<sup>21</sup>. Although the statement mentioned some concrete actions taken by both traditions in rela-

tion to their social and environmental responsibility, the purpose of this debate was mainly to indicate to the relationship between the more specific and intimate life of the Church, which is expressed in the Holy Eucharist, and the responsibility of the same Church towards the whole creation. We should add that with the Paphos meeting the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission concluded its discussion around the general topic of the *Mystery of the Church* and recommended to continue its ecclesiological consideration this time in relation to the *Nature and Attributes/Marks of the Church*.

As a first point in our evaluation of the Orthodox-LWF dialogue we should underline the fact that a large number of theological questions, which could have appeared before as controversial or at least difficult between the two church traditions were clarified. This exercise showed that the two church traditions have much more in common as one could have supposed before this dialogue. In the same time we have to underline that this dialogue left open a large amount of questions in relation to the topics addressed. From the Orthodox perspective the consensus achieved in this dialogue is not complete and consequently not valid without the clarifications of all aspects of the respective doctrinal issues.

Secondly we have to indicate that the reception of this dialogue is still open. In our considerations we referred exclusively to the statements adopted at

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<sup>20</sup> [www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi](http://www.helsinki.fi/%7Eerisaarin/lutortjointtext.html#divi)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*

the different encounters in this dialogue. In order to have a complete view of this dialogue one should also use the papers which were presented by both sides at each meeting. Unfortunately, neither these papers nor some minutes or notes from the different meetings have been published so far. We should congratulate Prof. Risto Saarinen<sup>22</sup> from Finland for his great work of publishing all joint statements together and this is the only overall publication in relation to this dialogue so far. In the beginning of this dialogue the proposal was made that two different centres should be established to collect documentation in relation to this dialogue. The Evangelical Theological Faculty from Erlangen, Germany was supposed to take the responsibility for the Lutheran side and Espoo was supposed to do the same for the Orthodox side. Unfortunately these projects were not consequently continued. All these aspects are major obstacles on the way to the reception of this dialogue in the churches involved.

As for the methodology used in this dialogue we should first indicate that it tried to follow the model of consensus, convergence and open questions, a methodology very much appreciated by the LWF. This methodology is very helpful at least for a certain time in a dialogue, but if it tries to find out only what is in common and to leave aside what is different or even church-dividing, such a dialogue cannot lead to a

communion between the respective churches, as long as open questions which could be church-dividing are still pending issues. On the other side, this dialogue did not clarify its methodology from the beginning and this lack of clarity put the dialogue in the situation to change its original thematic direction. We should also refer to the fact that this dialogue never looked into a long-term agenda, although some overarching topics were suggested. Nevertheless, the specific theme of an encounter is decided only at the previous meeting of the Joint Commission. In this perspective the members of the Joint Commission have no idea which will be the theme of the next two or three meetings, or even worse; they cannot say which the long term aim of this dialogue is. We trust all these aspects will be taken into consideration for the benefit of this dialogue and in the end for the benefit of the respective churches.

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<sup>22</sup> He published also one of the best evaluation of the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues at all levels. See Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness. Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen, 1997.

# The Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission

Risto Saarinen

## 1. Evaluation of the Dialogue

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) conducts a global bilateral theological dialogue with Eastern Orthodoxy since 1981. The historical background of these conversations is found in diverse regional dialogues and in the contacts between the LWF and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, both of which started in the late 1950s.<sup>1</sup> In comparison with many regional dialogues, the global Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission has proceeded very carefully. I have described the twelve first years of this dialogue elsewhere<sup>2</sup>; in the present paper I will primarily evaluate the work of the Lu-

theran-Orthodox Joint Commission from 1994 to 2006.

From 1981 to 1993, the first phase of the dialogue dealt with introductory topics like revelation, Scripture and tradition and the significance of the ecumenical councils. Since 1994 the Joint Commission has been occupied with soteriology and the sacraments. Thus it has moved to a second phase of its work, namely discussions regarding the doctrinal content of faith.

While the Lutheran participants are nominated from among the member churches of the LWF, the Orthodox

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<sup>1</sup> See Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1997). All original English common texts from 1981 to 2006 can be found in my website: [www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin](http://www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin); German translations until 2000 have appeared in *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung*, Bde. 1–3, Hg. Harding Meyer et alii (Frankfurt: Lembeck 1983–2003.) All unpublished manuscripts are available at the Lutheran World Federation.

<sup>2</sup> Saarinen 1997, 179–209.

delegates represent all churches that are in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate as well as with the Patriarchate of Moscow. Lutherans thus lack the participation of Missouri-related churches, whereas the Orthodox delegation does not include some branches of American Orthodoxy. Greek theologians have been especially active in the Joint Commission; the Lutheran interest has concentrated on the areas in which local dialogues have taken place, in particular Germany, USA, Finland and Romania.<sup>3</sup>

The working procedure of the Joint Commission consists of plenaries and preparatory group meetings. The preparatory group meets every second year, presents first versions of discussion papers and drafts a proposal for a common statement to be discussed by the next year's plenary. Sometimes the preparatory draft has been completely rewritten during the plenary meeting, and always it has become significantly revised. Since the joint statements are written during the meetings, both parties must be able to have drafters who can draw together and formulate very rapidly the intensive discussions of both the preparatory group and the plenary.

### **Limassol 1995: Soteriology of the Ecumenical Councils**

The preparatory group of the Joint Commission came together to discuss "Soteriology" in Venice from October 5 to 10, 1994. On the basis of two preparatory lectures, first draft of a statement "Understanding of Salvation in the Light of the Ecumenical Councils" was written and sent to the participants. In this first draft the Lutheran doctrine of justification was presented as forensic and relational event. The draft is unclear of whether the Orthodox side approves of this description of salvation.<sup>4</sup>

The plenary then met at Limassol, Cyprus, from August 1 to 8, 1995. Finnish Lutheran bishop Kalevi Toiviainen criticized the draft because of its forensic and relational emphases. He also lifted up the view of Christ present in the faith of the justified person as an alternative which may serve as bridge between Lutheran and Orthodox soteriologies. Toiviainen's initiative thus brought the results of regional Finnish-Russian and German-Romanian dialogues to the Joint Commission.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For all regional dialogues cf. Saarinen 1997 and also Risto Saarinen, "Ostkirche und Ökumene am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts", *Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift* 18, 2001, 222–239. My above-mentioned website attempts at offering updated information on all Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues.

<sup>4</sup> Present were in Venice: Lutherans: William Lazareth (co-chair), Anna Marie Aagaard, Gerhard Krodel, Eugene Brand; Orthodox: John Romanides, Albert Laham, Gennadios Limouris

<sup>5</sup> Toiviainen, "Some Comments on the Paper 'Understanding of Salvation in the Light of the Ecumenical Councils'", Manuscript, LWF. Present were: Lutherans: Lazareth (co-chair), Aagaard, Ruth Albrecht, Karl Christian Felmy, G. Johnson, Georg Kretschmar, Bruce Marshall, Toomas Paul, Hermann Pitters, Tasgara Hirpo, Kalevi Toiviainen, Risto Saarinen and Eugene Brand. Orthodox: Spiridon of Venice (co-chair), Gennadios, Vlassios

A new draft was elaborated in which Toiviainen's proposals were taken into account. It was nevertheless extremely difficult to find common ground. This was not due to Lutheran accents but rather to the insistence of the Orthodox drafters who claimed that the threefold sequence of "purification, illumination and glorification" is the only acceptable characterization of salvation. This claim, put forward with great emphasis by John Romanides, did not seem to provide many points of convergence with the Lutheran doctrine of justification. For this reason, the final text of Limassol 1995 remains very general in its common affirmations.<sup>6</sup>

In this text one should first look at how Lutherans formulate their own doctrine. Justification is understood as forgiveness of sin and the gift of new life. As such justification becomes a participation in Christ present in faith. The believer participates in Christ and all his gifts in the church. (L9) This Lutheran description keeps the door open towards a sacramental and ontological understanding of salvation, as emphasized by the Orthodox churches. With a similar Lutheran move it had already been possible to formulate common statements in the regional dialogues<sup>7</sup>. But since this was not possible at Limassol, Lutherans were

rather disappointed with the outcome of this plenary.

Churches say together in the common statement of Limassol 1995 that salvation is understood as "liberation from the dominion of the devil and the restoration of our communion with God" (L6). The threefold structure of purification, illumination and glorification also appears in the text. It is presented as outcome of the salvific communion and understood in the light of several biblical texts. (L6) This was a compromise that receives some concepts of mystical theology while embedding them into a biblical framework.

#### **Sigtuna 1998: Justification, Theosis and Synergy**

The difficulties experienced at Limassol delayed the rhythm of the next preparatory meeting. After more than two years' interval it took place in Princeton, USA, from October 9 to 11, 1997. From the Lutheran side, Bruce Marshall had prepared an extensive background paper titled "Salvation as Justification and Deification", whereas the corresponding Orthodox paper by Vlassios Phidas dealt with "Synergy".<sup>8</sup> Marshall reviewed extensively the soteriological

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Phidas, Basil Anagnostopoulos, Albert Laham, Aleksei Osipov, Viorel Ionita, Crysanthos of Limassol, Romanides, Basil Doroszkiewicz, Chrystoforos of Moravia, Olavi Merras.

<sup>6</sup> In the following, the paragraph number of the text is given in brackets as follows: L = Limassol 1995, S = Sigtuna 1998, D = Damascus 2000, O = Oslo 2002, D = Durau 2004, B = Bratislava 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Especially in the Finnish-Russian and German-Romanian dialogues, see Saarinen 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Marshall's paper has later been published as "Justification as Declaration and Deification", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 4, 2002, 3–28. – Present were: Lutherans: Lazareth (co-chair), Aagaard, Marshall, Saarinen, Sven Oppegaard; Orthodox: Spiridon (co-chair), Chrysanthos, Gennadios, Phidas.

outcome of various regional dialogues. Thus his paper offered a theological support for the Lutheran view expressed in Limassol. The text of Phidas formulated many points of convergence regarding the difficult topic of salvific cooperation. With the help of these two constructive papers the Princeton meeting was able to draft a preparatory statement "Grace, Justification and Synergy". It was further developed and discussed at the plenary meeting in Sigtuna, Sweden, from July 31 to August 8, 1998.<sup>9</sup>

The Sigtuna meeting was an exceptionally constructive plenary in the history of the Joint Commission. It did not create much new, but the plenary was able to adopt the outline of Princeton text. Thus the Joint Commission finally received many of the soteriological insights of earlier regional dialogues. The common statement of Sigtuna was titled as "Salvation: Grace, Justification and Synergy".<sup>10</sup> In eight long paragraphs, a biblical outline of salvation history and the doctrine of grace is outlined. Sigtuna text emphasizes the human powerlessness and God's initiative in salvation. Grace is totally and fully the gift of God. Only the Holy Spirit can enlighten and strengthen the human will. (S4-5).

Concerning the paragraph on the interplay between God and the human will, in other words: synergy, it is stated

jointly that grace does not work out of necessity. Human beings can resist grace. The Orthodox side now also emphasizes the absolute initiative of God in the process of salvation. (S5) Both churches affirm the reality of grace as a participation in God. Lutherans are able to affirm the biblical meaning of theosis (2 Peter 1:4 and Col. 2:9). Traditionally, Lutheran theology does not speak about theosis but about sanctification or the presence of Christ in faith. Although Lutherans have not received the doctrine of theosis as such, the view of Christ present in faith can be employed as a theological parallel to the Orthodox understanding of salvation. In this sense both churches can affirm the reality of the believer's participation in divine life. In this context the theology of the cross is underlined. (S6-7).

For several reasons it may be said that the text adopted in Sigtuna remains the most important theological result of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission thus far. The Orthodox side presents the doctrine of theosis in such a manner that the Lutherans were able to understand it as a biblical view. On the other hand, Lutherans introduced the concept of sanctification, or the insight concerning the presence of Christ in faith, from their tradition and used it to argue that the Protestant doctrine of justification is not completely alien to the idea of participation in divine life. The Sigtuna text

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<sup>9</sup> Present were: Lutherans: Lazareth (co-chair), Kretschmar, Aagaard, Lars Eckerdal, Toiviainen, Eeva Martikainen, Albrecht, Felmy, Hirpo, Johnson, Paul, Pitters, Oppegaard; Orthodox: Spiridon (co-chair), Gennadios, Romanides, Phidas, Ionita, Osipov, Merras.

<sup>10</sup> Bo Holm, "Den luthersk-ortodokse dialog (1997-2000)". *Nordisk ekumenisk orientering* 3 (2002), 5-10, has published the English text of both Princeton 1997 and Sigtuna 1998.

employs biblical language and avoids stating anything on the extremely difficult issue of whether this participation exclusively consists of God's "energies", as the Palamitic version of Orthodox mysticism has claimed.<sup>11</sup>

### **Damascus 2000: Word and Sacrament**

The preparatory group met again at Khania, Crete, from October 9 to 13, 1999. It drafted a text titled "Word and Sacraments (Mysteria) in the Life of the Church". The draft was strongly revised at the tenth plenary meeting of the Joint Commission at Damascus from November 3 to 10, 2000.<sup>12</sup> This text also begins a new overall topic "The Mystery of the Church".

The Damascus text contains a general presentation of the concept of sacrament and a joint discussion concerning the Word of God. In the beginning, the biblical concept of *mysterion* is characterized and the church is described as the body of Christ. The grace of the sacraments is conceived as a free gift of God. (D1-3).

For the Lutheran participants it was of great importance that the Word of God

then becomes introduced in a manner that is both kerygmatic and trinitarian. Word and sacrament have their foundation in Christ. The sacramental grace flows from the sacrifice of Christ in Golgatha. (D4-5). When the believers confess the faith of the church and participate in the sacramental life of the church, a human response to the Word of God is performed (D6). In this dynamics of word and response the Orthodox idea of synergy also finds its expression. In this framework the word can be said to have a temporal priority in relation to the sacraments. But the text also states that word and sacrament are interdependent. (D6)

In spite of these convergences it was difficult in Damascus to achieve a more precise common understanding of the nature of the church and its ministry. In its final paragraphs the common text says that Lutherans and Orthodox understand the church as the body of Christ which is both a divine and a human reality. The church exists as a community of the faithful through the history. The Damascus statement confirms that the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments by the ordained ministers are essential for the life of the church. In the sacrament created things become

<sup>11</sup> See also the insightful analyses by Johannes Oldemann, "Rechtfertigung und Theosis im Kontext des ökumenischen Dialogs mit der Orthodoxie", *Catholica* 56, 2002, 173–192.

<sup>12</sup> Holm 2002 has published the English text of both Khania 1999 and Damascus 2000. – Present at Khania were: Lutherans: Lazareth (co-chair), Kretschmar, Aagaard, Saarinen, Oppegaard; Orthodox: Gennadios (co-chair), Laham, Phidas, Elpidophoros Lambriniadis. – Present in Damascus were: Lutherans: Lazareth (co-chair), Aagaard, Musa Biyela, Lars Eckerdal, Felmy, Kretschmar, Mickey Mattox, Pitters, Saarinen, Klaus Schwarz, Jeffrey Silcock; Orthodox: Gennadios (co-chair), Lambriniadis, Christos Voulgaris, Osipov, Ionita, Wsiewolod Konach, Merras, Saba Esber.

symbols of Christ's sacrifice and resurrection. When the text finally says that the sacraments enable a participation in the koinonia of the triune God, it becomes clear that the "symbol" comprises the reality of salvation. (D7-8).

The Damascus text employs the two background papers, "The Life of the Church in Word and Sacrament" by Georg Kretschmar, and "The Word of God and Sacraments in the Life of the Church" by Vlassios Phidas.<sup>13</sup> It was important for Lutherans that word and sacrament could be elaborated in a theological and, in particular, ecclesiological manner. The good experiences from Sigtuna, as well as the readiness of Lutherans to speak of salvation as participation in divine life, contributed to this state of affairs. But it was also evident in Damascus that the basic ecclesiological differences are not found in this topic, but rather in the churches' view of ministry. It is therefore understandable that the new general rubric, "The Mystery of the Church" still remains in the background.

### **Oslo 2002: Sacraments as Means of Salvation**

The preparatory committee met again in St. Petersburg from February 19 to 23, 2002. It commented the papers by Christos Voulgaris, "The Sacraments of the Church as Means of Salvation" and Jeffrey Silcock, "The Sacraments as Means of Salvation". It also prepared a draft "Mysteria/ Sacraments as Means of Salvation". Again the theology of ministry remained in the background; both the papers and the draft concentrate on the number and theological meaning of sacraments.<sup>14</sup>

At the eleventh plenary of the Joint Commission in Oslo, October 3 to 10, 2002, we were glad to see that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Church of Serbia were represented in the Orthodox delegation. The Orthodox involvement in our ecumenical dialogue was thus strengthened at the same time while many Orthodox exercised criticism at the ecumenical movement. The draft from St. Petersburg was almost completely rewritten in Oslo.<sup>15</sup> Some topics, for instance the eucharistic sacrifice, were extensively discussed in the background papers and in the plenary, but left unmentioned in the common state-

<sup>13</sup> Manuscripts, LWF archive.

<sup>14</sup> Manuscripts, LWF archive. Present were: Lutherans: Kretschmar (co-chair), Saarinen, Oppegaard, Mattox, Silcock; Orthodox: Gennadios (co-chair), Voulgaris, Osipov, Ionita, Laham, Lambriniadis.

<sup>15</sup> The final text of Oslo is available in English in and in German in *Ökumenische Rundschau* 52, 2003, 227–229. Present were: Lutherans: Kretschmar (co-chair), Oppegaard, Felmy, Esbjörn Hagberg, Marshall, Martikainen, Pitters, Roman Pracki, Saarinen, Schwarz, Silcock, Mattox; Orthodox: Gennadios (co-chair), Lambriniadis, Phidas, Laham, Aristarchos of Constantin (Jerusalem), Osipov, Vajko Spasojevich (Serbia), Ionita, Georgios of Arsinoe, Wsievobod Konach, Merras, Meletios Ulm.

ment. In spite of these limitations the statement was able to reach some interesting convergences.

The opening paragraphs outline the salvatory significance of sacraments and connect the topic with ecclesiology. A careful elaboration of eucharistic ecclesiology can be recognized. As in Damascus 2000, the church is described as mysterion and as the body of Christ. This time, however, the description is distinguished from the Roman Catholic view of the church as sacrament. (O1-2).

The *iure divino* character of ordained ministry is underlined. Although both churches can say that the ordained minister in some sense performs the office “in persona Christi”, it remains clear that different views of ministry underlie the common affirmation. (O3) Concerning the effect of the sacrament, however, a genuine convergence is achieved: both churches reject on the one hand the Donatist heresy and on the other hand the view that the sacraments would be effective by the mere performance of an act (*ex opere operato*). (O4-5).

The Oslo text also deals with the number of sacraments. Both churches affirm an open concept of sacramental reality and say that although a given number of sacraments – seven or two – is traditional, this need not be the only theological possibility. Salvation is, however, invariably connected with the sacraments, even though both churches affirm the freedom of God’s salvatory action. The text further emphasizes the importance of the three sacraments of initiation, baptism and the eucharist being the proper means of salvation. (O5-6).

Both churches affirm the real presence of Christ in the eucharist. The Orthodox do not say, however, that the body and blood of Christ are “in, with and under” the bread. Instead, they claim that after the epiclesis there is no more bread and wine, but the body and blood of Christ. This formulation does not mean an affirmation of transubstantiation, but it only emphasizes the reality of the change in elements. (O7) In spite of the expressed convergence on the issue of real presence, the eucharistic theology still needs to be developed in future discussions. The issue of sacrifice needs to be addressed; the Oslo formulations further allow for different interpretations of the real presence in the eucharist.

Although many tasks still remain, Oslo 2002 common statement brings the global dialogue more or less to the level achieved in some regional dialogues concerning sacramental theology. Both in Damascus 2000 and in Oslo 2002 the Orthodox participants have been able to approach the specific doctrinal issues of Lutheran sacramental theology. This mutual understanding is especially visible in chapters dealing with “*ex opere operato*” and the real presence. At the same time, the theology of ordained ministry remains open.

#### **Durau 2004: The threefold structure of Christian initiation**

In spite of the above-stated lacunas in eucharistic theology, the plenary in Oslo decided to discuss as its next topic “Baptism and Chrismation as Sacraments of Incorporation into the Church”. For this purpose, a preparatory meeting was held in Ierapetra, Crete from 1 to 6

October 2003.<sup>16</sup> The plenary meeting held in Durau, Romania, 7 to 15 October 2004, was given the task of elaborating the results of this preparatory meeting.<sup>17</sup>

The text approved in Durau understands the Christian initiation as threefold reality, consisting of “death with Christ, resurrection with Christ, and the sealing with the Holy Spirit”. Using Lutheran and Orthodox liturgical texts, the Joint Commission argues that water baptism in both churches comprises the two first elements. Whereas the Orthodox identify the event of chrismation in the immediate context of baptism as the third element of initiation, Lutherans say that in baptismal rite “the gift of the Spirit is connected with the laying on of hands and either a post-baptismal blessing or a prayer for the Spirit”. Lutherans thus continue the Western tradition but do not omit the third element, the sealing with the Holy Spirit, in their rite of baptism. (D 2,8).

The presence of this threefold structure in both churches allows the Joint Commission to say together that “the three components of Christian initiation are to a large extent included in each other’s rites”. (D 11) This argumentation may become ecumenically fruitful in the future. Whereas many Orthodox

churches traditionally hold that their approval of the validity of Western baptisms is only an “economical” emergency solution, the text of 2004 clearly move beyond this position and states a theological convergence with regard to baptism.

Even though a discussion of baptismal theology can be regarded as a necessary step in the deeper understanding of sacraments, one cannot avoid the conclusion that the treatment of ecclesiology and in particular the theology of ministry were again postponed. It is obvious that the most difficult problems are found in this area. Given the failure of regional dialogues to produce real progress regarding church and priesthood<sup>18</sup> it is understandable that the global Joint Commission hesitates to discuss the nature and purpose of the church.

### **Bratislava 2006: Eucharistic Sacrifice and Real Presence**

After the treatment of Christian initiation, the dialog returned to the eucharistic issues of Oslo 2002. The preparatory group met in Erlangen, October 8-13, 2005, and discussed the Lutheran papers prepared by Felmy and Hagberg and the Orthodox paper by Viorel

<sup>16</sup> Present: Lutherans: Kretschmar (Pres.), Martikainen, Mattox, Oppegaard. Orthodox: Gennadios (Pres.), Phidas, Ionita, Voulgaris.

<sup>17</sup> Present: Lutherans: Kretschmar (Pres.), Oppegaard, Stephanie Dietrich, Hagberg, Donald McCoid, Martikainen, Pitters, Saarinen, Schwarz, Silcock, Kenneth Appold. Orthodox: Gennadios (Pres.), Lambriniadis, Ishak Barakhat, Aristarchos, Irenej of Backa, Ionita, Georgios, Andrzej Minko, Nathan Hoppe, Mattias Palli. – The final text of Durau 2004 is available on [www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin](http://www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. e.g. Saarinen 1997, 261–263.

Ionita.<sup>19</sup> The plenary met from November 2 to 9, 2006 in Bratislava. The plenary also commemorated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dialogue.<sup>20</sup>

The plenary drafted and adopted a fairly long statement titled “The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church.”<sup>21</sup> Both sides agree that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice “once and for all” – *ep-hapax*. It is not the celebrant priest but Christ who offers and is offered as the sacrifice. (B2) The Orthodox regard the eucharist as sacrifice in the sense that the church brings the bread and wine which are united with Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit (B2c). This convergence in the ecumenically significant issue can be regarded as a clear progress from the formulations of Oslo 2002.

The Bratislava document also discusses the issue of real presence extensively. Lutherans and Orthodox agree that “in the Eucharist the bread and wine become Christ’s body and blood to be consumed by the communicants. How this happens is regarded by both as a profound and real mystery”. (B4) This consensus is differentiated by holding that while Lutherans speak of the real presence “in, with and under” the bread and wine, Orthodox profess a real change (*metabole*) into the body and

blood of Christ by the words of institution and the act of the Holy Spirit (B4a,b). The language of real presence and the language of *metabole* both presuppose that the bread and wine do not lose their essence in the sense of medieval doctrine of transubstantiation (B4c).

The Bratislava document also discusses the proper use of the eucharistic elements (B6) and underlines the believer’s proper preparation (B3). Lutherans are called to re-think their position with regard to the handling of the elements after the eucharistic service (B6c). The eucharistic sacrament is seen by both sides as an anticipation and foretaste of the coming kingdom of God (B7-8). The relationship of the Eucharist to the ordained ministry requires full discussion at a later stage (B9).

In sum, the Bratislava document can be regarded as a satisfactory treatment of the issues concerning sacrifice and real presence. The Orthodox statements concerning these two topics are particularly irenic; they proceed more or less to the level achieved earlier in the regional dialogue between the EKD and the Romanian Orthodox Church. Both parties part clearly distinguish themselves from the medieval Roman Catholic interpretations of these two topics.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Present: Lutherans: McCoid (Pres.), Oppegaard, Felmy, Wasmuth, Hagberg. Orthodox: Gennadios (Pres.), Ionita, Laham.

<sup>20</sup> Present: Lutherans: McCoid (Pres.), Oppegaard, Dietrich, Felmy, Hagberg, Martikainen, Pitters, Schwarz, Silcock, Appold. Orthodox: Gennadios (Pres.), Theodoros Meimaris, George Dragas, Hoppe, Ionita, Vaclav Jezek, Laham, Makarios of Kenya, Osipov, Palli, Rauno Pietarinen, Voulgaris

<sup>21</sup> After Damascus, Oslo and Durau, this was part D. of the overall topic “The Mystery of the Church”. The document is available at [www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin](http://www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Saarinen 1997, 252–254.

## 2. Assessing the Method

Many features relevant for the evaluation of the method, for instance, regarding preparation, authority and structures, have already been spelled out in part 1. above. I will therefore only make some brief remarks concerning the relative success or failure as well as the reception of this dialogue.

The work of Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission from 1994 to 2006 should be read against the sometimes very critical and many-sided background of wider ecumenical movement. The bilateral discussions described above may appear as tedious and old-fashioned. No participant of our dialogue would claim, I think, that decisive ecumenical breakthrough has taken place. But it is also evident that the second twelve years (1994–2006) of the Joint Commission's work has been more fruitful than its first twelve (1981–1993). Given that during the second twelve years the Orthodox have been critical of Western churches in many other ecumenical forums, it is encouraging to note that they have at the same time worked very constructively in the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission. Similar observations can be made concerning some regional dialogues as well.<sup>23</sup>

Of course this does not mean that we should be satisfied with the results of Lutheran - Orthodox Joint Commission. Many thematic items would have deserv-

ed a more profound and comprehensive treatment. But at least our dialogue has continued with some integrity and the participating churches have been able to draft modest common statements. There are not many other areas in which similar Lutheran-Orthodox cooperation has taken place. It may be possible to replace a theological dialogue with some other form of confidence-building cooperation. Church leaders should honestly consider such other forms of mutual contacts. But at least until Lutherans and Orthodox find other fruitful and long-standing forms of cooperation and common exercise of Christian faith, we are called to continue our doctrinal dialogue in this modest but nevertheless continuous and constructive fashion.

The reception of this dialogue has for the most part occurred among experts. The manifold simultaneous regional dialogues<sup>24</sup> between the Lutherans and the Orthodox have, however, significantly increased the local awareness of the bilateral relations between these two church families.

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<sup>23</sup> See Saarinen 2001.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to footnote 3, see my paper on regional Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues from 1994 to 2005, delivered in the CEC/ CiD group in Tallinn, June 2006. That paper will appear in the Festschrift for Eric Gritsch, Fortress Press 2008.

# **The Theological Bilateral Dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches**

An Evaluation from an Orthodox Point of View

Dorin Oancea

To begin with this evaluation will introduce some elements regarding the beginnings of this dialogue, followed by short presentations of the Common Statements the members of the Commission were able to agree upon. Finally I shall reflect upon the results and perspectives of the dialogue.

## **I. Historical Preliminaries**

The theological dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the WARC is aiming at restoring the visible unity between the Christian confessional families and groups, which are interested in surpassing the obstacles which have prevented them from sharing full communion in Christ. The Orthodox

Churches are very much interested in this dialogue because their partner is not the Western world as a whole, but the most radical of the traditional Evangelical Churches emerging from the Reformation, which tried to go back to the origins of Christian identity. The Orthodox Churches understand themselves in the continuity of those origins, henceforth the hope to come closer to visible unity with a Christian community by means of this dialogue. Actually the dialogue is important for both sides, because certain sensitive themes can be approached without the polemical edges which separated the Churches belonging to the Reformed tradition from the Roman-Catholic Church. Without these polemics some difficult problems can be approached, of ecclesiological nature,

for example, and by solving them one might discover important convergences or elements of consensus between these two major Christian families.

Historically speaking this dialogue started not a very long time ago, in 1988, but preliminary discussions had taken place as early as 1977 between Prof. T.F. Torrance, at that time moderator of the Church of Scotland, and the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios. After unofficial discussions in 1979, 1981 and 1983, the Ecumenical Patriarchate invited the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches to take part in this dialogue, an intention which was confirmed during the third Pan – Orthodox Preconciliary Conference in Chambesy, in 1986. A mixed commission for the theological dialogue was established between the different Orthodox Churches and the Reformed Churches represented by the Alliance. It was also decided that the Commission should meet every two years, being hosted by an Orthodox or a Reformed Church alternatively.<sup>1</sup>

As regards the content of the dialogue, in order to have a solid discussion foundation, the Orthodox accepted the proposal coming from the Reformed that it should deal with the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed, especially with its Trinitarian, Christological, ecclesiological and eschatological aspects. The two churches wanted to identify

some strong elements of consensus in the common faith of the first Christian centuries, in order to approach afterwards more difficult problems like priesthood and intercommunion with better perspectives to reach convergences. Following this line the first two meetings at Leuenberg (1988) and Minsk (1990) concentrated upon the Holy Trinity. The next two from Kappel (1992) and Limassol (1994) had a Christological content. This means that during this first step the dialogue dealt with the first two articles of the Nicene Creed. Ecclesiology became a theme at Aberdeen (1996) and was discussed afterwards during the following meetings in Zakynthos (1998), Pittsburgh (2000), Sibiu (2003) and Beirut (2005). The last meeting, which took place in Volos (2007) was dedicated to the last article of the Creed. It is necessary to have a closer look at the results of the discussions related to these themes.

## **II. The content of the dialogue**

The second part of my evaluation is dedicated to the different Common Statements the Commission agreed upon during its meetings. As we shall see some themes were dealt with in more than one meeting, some others required only one meeting to reach the much desired convergences.

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<sup>1</sup> For details regarding the historical background of the dialogue, see Thomas F. Torrance (Ed.), *Theological dialogue between orthodox and reformed churches*, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press Ltd, 1985, the *Introduction*.

## 1. The Common Statement on the Holy Trinity

We already said that the first two sessions were dedicated to the Holy Trinity. They were concluded with a Common Statement, but the Commission felt like publishing commentaries on the Statement. Some of the members had their own commentaries too. One of them belonged to Iain Torrance, the new leader of the Reformed side and at the same time the son of the theologian who initiated the dialogue. So many commentaries following the Common Statement are unusual, to a certain extent at least, and they show how keen the Commission was to avoid any misunderstandings related to this theme and to agree upon it in perfect agreement with the whole Holy Tradition. At the same time the theme was approached in a new manner. The members tried to formulate a new Trinitarian theology and this is certainly unusual for the great majority of the dialogues.

The Minsk document starts with a very encouraging statement and analysis in its different sections the Trinitarian doctrine. (It is obvious that the Commission members tried to stay in consensus with the doctrine of the Holy Fathers, quoted quite often, and this reflects an unusual openness of the Reformed side for the Orthodox theology.) First of all the statement underlines the unity of God, which cannot be separated from his triadicity, which also can be understood only related to the same unity. The next step is dedicated to each Person of the Holy Trinity, which is permanently understood with regard to the one action of God and to

his triadicity and the unity of his eternal and unchangeable essence.

A strong accent was laid upon the unity between the inner and outer triadic relations of the three persons. It was the main intention of this statement to solve the great difficulty related to Trinitarian theology, separating the Christian East and West. I mean by that the *filioque clause*. The major theological reflection of the commission succeeded to avoid the whole *filioque* problem, when dealing with Trinitarian theologian, i.e. that both traditions were able to agree with this result without giving up a centuries old identity. In order to avoid the above mentioned difficulty, a special attention was given to the problem of *perichoresis*. The Statement gives up the monarchy of the Father in favour of a monarchy of the whole Trinity, as a consequence of the perichoretic relations between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. This idea was taken over at Kappel, indicating the creative dimension of this theological dialogue.

The Reflexion from Kappel (Switzerland) gave two explanations to the Minsk declaration. First of all it dealt with the Trinitarian language normally used in Dogmatics. The starting point was the conviction that the reality of God surpasses all possibilities of human language, which means, for example, that traditional terms like *hypostasis*, *ousia* and *physis* are not being used with their original meaning anymore. Therefore they should not lead to a merely theoretical understanding of God's reality. Hence a conclusion of utmost importance: the Trinitarian doctrine articulated by the Commission is that of one God and

three persons and not of three persons and one nature. The uniqueness of God is not understood in terms of *essence*, or *ousia* as some abstract idea, but “One Being” of God does not refer to some abstract essence, but to the “I am” (*ego eimi*) of God, the eternal living Being which God is of himself.”<sup>2</sup>

The second important item which was taken over by the Reflection from the Statement links with the divine monarchy. In order to avoid the *filioque* difficulty, the Reflection introduces here a new argument, referring back to the authority of Church Fathers like St. Gregory the Theologian or St. Athanasius the Great: the monarchy belongs to all the three persons of the Holy Trinity and not to the Father alone. The idea is certainly interesting because it puts forward the ontological dynamics within the Holy Trinity, against allegations that Orthodox thinking is static in its essence. According to this pattern, each person takes part in the actions specific to the other two because of the communicational structure: the Holy Spirit does not proceed from the Father alone, but from the Father who is in perichoretical communion with the Son. Likewise, one should say that the son is not begotten by the Father alone, but by the Father who is in communion with the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand it seems to me that the characteristic attribute of the Father

to be the only *arche* in the Holy Trinity was neglected during these reflections and this was not necessary at all. The Statement brought convincing arguments for the Monarchy of the Holy Trinity, but it should have preserved the Father’s specific attribute of being the only *arche*. This exclusion also leads to certain difficulties related to the relation between the theological and the iconomical Trinity. Classical Orthodox theology did not agree with this identity and avoided the *filioque* difficulty by distinguishing the theological and iconomical Trinity. In my opinion this is one of the important difficulties put forward by this Statement and the Reflexion upon it.

## 2. The Common Statement on Christology

The Common Statement from Limassol comes with some important convergences in Christology. The convergences reflect the different ways for the two traditions to express similar doctrinary convictions. Anyway, this Statement required also two sessions, one in Kappel (Switzerland), the other one in Limassol (Cyprus).

One of the points of convergence was the connection between the doctrine on Trinity and the one on Christology. The two sides also underlined their different but compatible ways of approaching

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<sup>2</sup> **Agreed statement on the Holy Trinity**, in „The Greek Orthodox Theological Review”, vol.43, Nos. 1–4, p.224.

<sup>3</sup> Actually, the **Statement** does not include such an assertion, but it might have, according to the logic of the argument.

this connection. The Orthodox start from the history of salvation, as documented by the Holy Scriptures, interpreted by the Holy Tradition and experienced in Liturgy, whereas the Reformed concentrate upon the biblical history of Jesus of Nazareth.

Another important point of interest in Kappel and Limassol was the consensus regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Quite interesting was the assertion that, given the historical reality of Jesus Christ, the human is not altogether different from the divine: “The Incarnate Son as a concrete historical person demonstrates that human nature is not fundamentally foreign to God”.<sup>4</sup> This conclusion is based on the one hand upon the person of Jesus and on the other upon the existing communion between God and man, because in the case of an absolute difference communion wouldn’t be possible at all.

In this context of Christology this second Statement takes over an idea already present in the previous one: nature is not an abstract reality but “the reality of God”. In this understanding the union of natures in the person of Jesus Christ means “the reality of God assuming the reality of man in Jesus Christ, an orientation of God towards humanity and of humanity towards God, as experienced in the unity of his person and history”.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to see that the second declaration puts forward a somehow different under-

standing of nature, as a process: “the term ‘nature’ should not be understood statically, or abstractly ... this language directs us toward ... the reality of God assuming”. Actually it is not clear enough if nature itself is dynamic or the hypostatic union. One should remember that in the context of **nature** “statically” means „with no determinations”, whereas any “dynamical” understanding belongs to the **hypostatical** existence of God. Therefore, I think that the second understanding was probably intended because the process understanding of nature would exclude the fundamental distinction between an undetermined nature and the hypostatical determination expressed by the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This would also exclude the fundamental complementarity of nature and hypostasis, as it is present in the Capadocian model of an undetermined nature which cannot exist without a corresponding hypostasis, with determinations as expressed in the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This Statement from Kappel/Limassol was able to identify important elements of consensus and convergence, as already mentioned, but also recognized some divergences. For example the different understanding of the Holy Icons, which is directly related to Christology, according to the Orthodox tradition. The partners demonstrated their capacity to identify these problems and at the same time their willingness to approach them on another occasion.

<sup>4</sup> **Agreed Statement on Christology**, in „The Greek Orthodox Theological Review”, vol. 43, Nos. 1–4, p. 434.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 435.

### 3. The Statement(s) on the Church

Ecclesiology is certainly a most difficult problem, “a hot iron” (heisses Eisen) of modern theology, of ecumenical relations, and it was quite natural for the Commission members to deal with its different essential aspects during several meetings. They were organized in Aberdeen – Scotland (1996), Zakynthos – Greece (1998), Pittsburgh – USA (2000), Sibiu (Sâmbăta Monastery) – Romania (2003), and Beirut (2005).

*The meeting in Aberdeen.* The first session to concentrate upon ecclesiology was the one in Aberdeen, Scotland. I say “to concentrate” because the problem had been mentioned before.

In Aberdeen the Commission members were able to affirm a clear convergence with regard to Church as a gift of the Triune God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Therefore they were able to share the conviction that beyond its institutional dimension the Church has a sacramental character, so that one can hold an ecclesiology “from above” and “from below,” reflecting the two natures of Christ. This makes it obvious that the Church can be never separated from Christ, it is his Body. Another point of convergence was the distinction between the undivided Body of Christ and the believers who are incorporated into it through baptism. And it was exactly this problem of Baptism which demanded further reflexion during another follow up session.

*The meeting in Zakynthos.* This next meeting was organized in Zakynthos (Greece) and had as its main point of interest the “Membership of the Body

of Christ”, including the relation between the Church and the Holy Sacraments of initiation. This theme shows the readiness of the two churches, of the two commissions to approach a very difficult problem, which seems to separate the two traditions in a final way. It is not only a readiness to approach the problems, but also a willingness to solve those difficulties.

It seems to me that one of the most important ideas put forward at Zakynthos was the understanding of the Church as an absolute reality of communion with God and his creation. Therefore the Commission speaks about “a first Church” referring to the primordial communion between God and the angels, which was extended upon the reality of Paradise. In the context of original sin, this communion was lost, to a certain extent at least, but persisted in a disrupted form during the history of Salvation, within the old Covenant. It was achieved again and fulfilled in an absolute way in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At Zakynthos the relation between Christ – the second Adam, recapitulating the whole of humanity – and the Church as the place where the faithful participate in this reality lead to the question of the members of the Church. Who are these members? Is there an amount of unity amongst them, despite the differences separating the Christian denominations? The Communique was able to give an affirmative answer, stating that “Those who receive the Gospel and freely believe in it, through baptism are incorporated into the Church which is the Body of Christ. They are engrafted into Christ, put on

Christ, are regenerated in Christ, so that in him they may be restored to their true nature and fulfilled in the Church. What Christ has done objectively for all in and through his humanity is now appropriated by those who believe and freely submit to him as their Lord and Savior.” On the other hand the Commission was perfectly conscious that some problems need a more thorough approach and therefore it decided to deal with “Membership and Incorporation into the Body of Christ” during its meeting which took place in Pittsburgh (United States) in 2000.

*The meeting in Pittsburgh.* In Pittsburgh the Orthodox and Reformed succeeded to underline the common faith related to the unity between Christ and the faithful, which is the very essence of the Sacrament of Baptism, but they did not succeed to agree upon the Sacrament of Chrismation. For the Orthodox it means a special gift of the Holy Spirit, whereas the Reformed see this gift associated with the Baptism itself. Another difficulty was related to the Holy Eucharist, which is also a Sacrament of initiation together with Baptism and Chrismation, according to the Orthodox understanding, but which does not enjoy the same status for the Reformed.

During this meeting the Commission also dealt with another attribute of the Church, its Apostolicity, without being able to reach significant convergences. The Orthodox insisted upon the essential significance of Apostolic succession as continuous action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, leading from the Lord Jesus Christ through the Apostles to our times and giving power to all sacramental acts of the Church, i.e. also to

the sacraments of initiation – Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist. The Reformed see the apostolicity of the Church related not to the historical continuity of the orders but to preaching/hearing the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments.

While each of the partners expressed the full belief in the apostolicity of his Church, they appreciated together that a greater convergence might be possible, starting from an already existing consensus with regard to Trinitarian and Christological theology: “Both the Orthodox and the Reformed are certain that their convergence on the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity and Christology and their common acceptance of the Scriptures constitute a sufficient basis for building up greater convergence in the future by the Lord’s grace and inspiration.”

This last conclusion seems very significant to me because it puts forward the convergences already reached upon, the conviction that they are the starting point for new convergences in this matter, or in any other matter as difficult as this, the confession of one’s own present failure and the firm belief that any progress in these matters comes from God.

*The meeting in Sibiu (Sâmbăta Monastery).* It was dedicated to the holiness of the Church. The two sides agreed upon the fact that sanctity of the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit and has a Trinitarian foundation. A very interesting moment of this session, showing both convergences and differences referred to the saints. According to the Orthodox, they reveal the sanctity of the

Church, as the body of Christ, without any restriction of His unique saving work and of His being the absolute Mediator between God and man. The Reformed accepted the existence of a real communion between God and men after their departure from this earthly life, but were not ready to agree with their role as intercessors. Anyway, from an Orthodox point of view it was very important to notice this willingness to accept the reality of a communion between Christ and the departed. In Sibiu/Sămbăta the Orthodox could not escape the feeling that the Reformed refusal to accept the intercessory role of the saints is part of past misunderstandings within the Western Christian world and that one could reach an agreement starting from the line of argument based upon the idea of communion: communion with Christ, communion with the departed.

*The meeting in Beirut.* It was dedicated to the last attribute of the Church which had not been discussed during the previous meetings – its **catholicity**. One could say that Beirut was a meeting of numerous convergences and of almost no differences. It is worth mentioning some of those convergences.

Both Orthodox and Reformed agreed on the Trinitarian and Christological basis of understanding the catholicity of the Church: the life of Christ is at a deeper level the life of love and communion which constitutes a mode of existence in the Trinity and is now communicated and reflected on the human and cosmic level.

This communion is experienced by all the faithful and all the local communi-

ties in the Holy Eucharist and this is one of the major meanings of catholicity. This common understanding is being expressed by each of the two churches according to their own tradition. For the Orthodox „catholicity of the Church is the extension of the apostolic community as the concrete and historical manifestation of the mystery of Christ in all space and time and among all peoples. This extension is manifested in each of the Local Churches.” The Reformed are convinced that „the possibility of union with Christ is open to all human beings and this is one of the ways of understanding the meaning of the catholicity of the Church as stated in the Nicene Creed”. At the same time they also believe that „no local Church should claim the exclusive right to be called the Catholic Church”. Both sides share the conviction that „each local Church should be a true manifestation of the one Catholic Church”.

This intensive sense of catholicity must have an extensive dimension too and this one is achieved by means of mission, which aims at „summoning the whole world to be reconciled to God”. According to this understanding mission has nothing to do with worldly ambitions of power and domination, it is the extended „restoration of the image and the likeness of God to every human being in and through the Church”. Extended catholicity means the all embracing communion with God of all those who experience in the Church the reality of their image and likeness of God being restored.

It is also worth mentioning that the Commission members do not only identify these convergences regarding

catholicity but understand them as a means „to transcend past conflicts and misunderstandings”.

*The meeting in Volos.* The main theme was „Eschatology”, so that, by dealing with the last article of the Nicean Creed, this meeting concluded the common reflection upon it, without having exhausted the discussions upon it.

The meeting shared something very valuable with the one in Beirut, in the sense that it was also a meeting of convergences. One could say that the doctrine of the two churches is practically similar, although there are certain items which find different expressions in the different traditions. The Common Statement agreed upon notices, for example, that the universal presence of Christ is being experienced in the Orthodox tradition mainly in the celebration of the Eucharist, whereas in the Reformed tradition „the presence of Christ is encountered in the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments”. Another difference refers to the Orthodox conviction that the living are called to intercede for the departed, whereas the Reformed do not have this practice. One should notice that the Reformed had no objections against this Orthodox practice but said that they simply abstain from it. The

situation is similar to the one in Sibiu, with regard to the saints.

### III. A final reflection

My final reflection upon the results of the dialogue includes several considerations, regarding the process as a whole.

1. The first general evaluation refers to the dialogue as a whole: it has been extremely efficient and by that I mean first of all *the structure* of the whole process.

a. The dialogue was extremely well prepared, assuming the significance of such a task for the mutual understanding between the Orthodox and the Western tradition. Evaluating the first agreement on the Holy Trinity, Lukas Vischer was able to underline the importance of this enterprise not only for the participating churches, but for the ecumenical movement as a whole too.<sup>6</sup>

b. The dialogue process itself started from a thorough analysis of what was supposed to be a common belief – the Trinitarian and Christological articles of the Creed. The Commission obviously wanted to transform this supposition into a certitude, because it concerns the common heritage of the two traditions, the only element which can be the starting point for convergences regard-

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<sup>6</sup> Lukas Vischer in the *Introduction to the Agreed Statements from the Orthodox-Reformed Dialogue*, Geneva, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1998: “The dialogue with Orthodoxy confronts us with the deepest division in Christianity. To reach its ultimate goal the ecumenical movement must deal with and overcome this division. For the full communion of the churches, mutual recognition of the two traditions in East and West is prerequisite. Precisely for this reason it is imperative to explore the nature of this division.”

ing the time when Eastern and Western Christianity stopped having some essential things in common.

At this point the Commission was able to discover not only that certitude of a shared truth, but also points of disagreement, which need a future effort of deepening the mutual understanding.

c. The second step was dedicated to the major difficulties implied by ecclesiology. Difficulties because the whole process which led to the emergence of the Reformed Churches had a major ecclesiological dimension, different from the mainstream ecclesiological trend of the Western Church. During the several meetings dedicated to this problem the Commission articulated both convergences and differences, which were regarded not as obstacles impossible to surpass but as different ways to experience the true communion with God.

d. The third step included less difficult problems, with real possibilities of convergences so that the general feeling is that the dialogue moves along the right path.

The second way of being efficient refers to *the theological quality* of the dialogue. I do not mean by that the accuracy of describing one's own position, which is most certainly very important and at the same time expected, but especially the openness for new ways of approaching problems. I mentioned already the problem of the divine and human nature, of the dynamical character of nature, of the Trinitarian monarchy. The Commission members were able to find new ways for articulating their common faith by avoiding lines of argument

which would lead to differences. It is true that the results obtained should not be considered in opposition to verified models of expressing the Christian truth but as complementary to them. Under these circumstances they might become a significant contribution to the progress of Christianity towards its unity by means of a progress in theological analysis and experience.

2. The second point of evaluation considers the results of the dialogue from the point of view of future perspectives. In my opinion they show to which extent the different churches which came out of the Reformation, in this case the Reformed Church, for example, will be able to better understand certain elements of faith belonging to the older Christian tradition with which they did not agree within their original Western environment provided by the Roman Catholic Church. I mean, for example, the icons or the intercession of the saints. If the Lord wills, this will lead to convergences too. As a matter of fact one should mention a real humbleness of the Commission members, who clearly confessed that the progress in dialogue will be achieved first of all by the Lord himself and not through human efforts.

3. As I said during the second part of this evaluation, the Commission members did not succeed to discuss all the aspects of the Nicene Creed, they were perfectly conscious of that and recommended them for further discussions. I mention here only one of them as formulated by the Orthodox: "What is the Reformed view of the Virgin Mary? Does their reluctance to call

Mary the Mother of God imply a rejection of the *Theotokos*? Does it involve a separation of the two natures in Christ?" There are certainly similar questions which could and will be raised by the Reformed. It is obvious that the Commission members have a continuity of the dialogue in mind, although the first aim – the discussion of the Nicene Creed has been achieved. By taking over some of the problems never discussed or those which encountered certain misunderstandings during the dialogue the Commission will have enhanced chances to go a step further on the path leading to convergences, because it can build upon a large foundation of already attained convergences.

4. Keeping in mind these open questions coming from the past, we know that the dialogue will have to deal with other problems of the common faith too, important for the contemporary world. I don't think of transforming the dialogue in a reflection upon practical matters regarding modern life, although it might be necessary, but of theological themes which emerged in recent times. One of them is most certainly the relation between the different religions, which could have been dealt with during the last two sessions of the dialogue. When speaking about Catholicity of the Church and its Mission, in Beirut, or about the Eschata, in Volos, the Commission could have reflected upon this problem too, or at least it could have mentioned it. Nevertheless it is imperative to discuss it over, because the Christian communities cannot ignore the present interreligious reality and it would be a great enrichment to share opinions on such a matter during the proceedings of the dialogue.

5. One final remark about the theological models defended by the Commission members. This remark concerns both the Reformed and the Orthodox side. The members come from different churches and reflect a theological tradition specific to their confessional family and to their own church. An Orthodox theologian coming from Romania or Greece, for example, represents the common Orthodox understanding of one or another problem – let us say of Trinitarian theology – according to a Romanian Orthodox model of articulating the Orthodox tradition. In Romania we refer to Rev. Prof. Dumitru Staniloae as its most prominent representative. If the Orthodox members of the Commission (Greeks, Russians or whatever they are) are not familiar with his theological reflection, they might have difficulties with accepting it as a legitimate expression of the common Orthodox faith. Henceforth they start clarifying the problem amongst themselves and this is, I dare say, the worst possible investment of time and energy, which prevents the meeting to reach agreements which might be other way possible. The same is true with the Reformed members too: at a certain moment, for example, the Orthodox noticed so important differences between their partners' understanding of the present significance of Calvin, that they were not able to relate it to the Reformed identity known to them.

I think that the situation is similar in all multilateral dialogues. Therefore the suggestion, which might reach some of the people in charge with organizing them, to have previous consultations between the members of each side, maybe via internet, in order to make the meet-

ings even more effective. But looking back to this dialogue I am confident that the good work done up to now will be continued, so that the Commission members will succeed to use their experience to do what our churches, all Christian Churches expect from them.

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# The Dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Churches

Taking stock from a Reformed point of view

Michael Weinrich

In these reflections I shall take three steps. Firstly, it is a question of situating the dialogue with a few, broad strokes in the historical context of the ecumenical movement **(I)**. Then, I shall try to do justice to what has been achieved and to the present stage of the dialogue **(II)** in order, finally, against the background of some evaluation from the point of view of my Reformed tradition, to cast a glance at possible further developments **(III)**<sup>1</sup>.

## **I.**

Following the Second Vatican Council, at which the Roman Catholic Church had shown a decisive openness towards the ecumenical movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity (as it is called today) entered into numerous dialogues with the many churches “separated from Rome”. One result of this development was that the churches “separated from Rome” also began to conduct dialogues among themselves. The World Council of Churches in Ge-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. also, on the whole issue, *K. Blei*, Reformed Protestants and Eastern Orthodox in Dialogue, in: John W. Coakley (ed.), *Concord makes strength. Essays on Reformed Ecumenism* (The Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America, Vol.41), Grand Rapids/MI 2002, 137–158.

neva had already stimulated a general awareness that the minimum condition for overcoming the clichés and prejudices existing between the confessions was at least to begin to get to know one another. In addition to the ecumenical dialogues related to Geneva, a large number of bilateral dialogues came into being. Despite all their differences, what features do they have in common? How should the differences be assessed and what is their importance for mutual relationships? The Orthodox-Reformed dialogue which is to be examined here was part of this development and also has to struggle today with the difficulties which have confronted this variant of recent ecumenical developments at the latest since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The leading Scottish dogmatician, Thomas F. Torrance, who died recently, was able to persuade the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in the seventies to approach the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople with a request for an official dialogue with the Orthodox Churches on the international level. In 1977, as Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Torrance led an initial exploratory conversation on behalf of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches with the Ecumenical Patriarch, Dimitrios, and various representatives of the Greek Orthodox Churches in the Middle East. It was agreed that exploratory consultations would be organised with representatives and theologians from both churches in order to reflect together on the conditions for and feasibility of

a possible dialogue – the nature of the dialogue, its aim, content and method. These exploratory encounters with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople took place in 1979 (in Istanbul) and in 1981 and 1983 (in Geneva) and it was agreed to launch an official dialogue on the basis and within the framework of the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381) and the Christological decisions of Chalcedon. This corresponded to the prospects presented by Torrance at the first planning consultation: “The conversations could aim at a clarification of the understanding which East and West, in this case the Orthodox and the Reformed, have of their common foundation in the Alexandrian and Cappadocian theology, to which the Conciliar Statements [i.e. Nicaea-Constantinople and Chalcedon] are so heavily indebted.”<sup>2</sup> One particular problem which could only be solved here was the question discussed at the second and third exploratory consultations, namely the mandate and authority the delegates to the dialogue had to be able to start such an undertaking with an appropriate sense of its significance for theology and church policy. Following the positive outcome of these preparatory conferences, all the autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches were invited to this dialogue. The third session of the Pre-conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference had recommended the project in 1986. And the World Alliance of Reformed Churches had also nominated its delegates to the dialogue. The aim retained was modest, namely to clarify the differ-

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *T. F. Torrance, Theological Dialogue between Orthodox and Reformed Churches, Vol. 1, Edinburgh 1985, 11.*

ent approaches to basic aspects of the Christian creed. In 1988 the official dialogue then began on the Leuenberg near Basle and it was followed to date by nine more meetings – the latest in 2007 at Volos in Greece.

The content of the track followed by this dialogue started with the Trinitarian understanding of God and progressed via Christology (especially the understanding of the incarnation) and its relationship with creation to certain central aspects of ecclesiology and eschatology. The idea behind this was the importance for the dialogue firstly to make it possible to recognise the different ways in which the common basis was perceived before the obvious differences in ecclesiology and in the conception of the ministry related to it could then also be discussed in a meaningful way. Fundamentally, this also proved to be a suitable approach. The bibliography listed below provides further information about the issues discussed and the results of nine of the ten dialogue encounters. The documentation on the tenth consultation is not yet complete; the meeting took place in the autumn of 2007. Its discussion of the so-called “last things” concluded an initial examination of the Nicene creed. Although it is more than clear to all the participants in this dialogue that these ten consultations were far from sufficient to deal adequately to any extent with the depth and breadth of the content of this creed, or to produce a comprehensive evaluation of the convergences and divergences between the two traditions, it still seems meaningful to pause at this point and take stock of the results and their significance for the churches involved. It can only be beneficial in

every respect to give account to ourselves about what has been achieved and on the question of the most helpful way of developing a constructive approach for the relationship between these two church families. This is the sense in which the last sentence of the communiqué of October 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 from the recent meeting in Volos should be understood: “At the end of the meeting the joint commission adopted a common statement on Eschatology, noting that this completed a general review of themes from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, while also observing that discussion of the Creed was not exhausted.”

The significance of the Orthodox-Reformed dialogue resides precisely in the difficulty of its subject matter. It is connected with the deep divide between the tradition of the East and the tradition of the West which preceded the Reformation by one thousand years. Lukas Vischer has called this the deepest division in Christendom. In this sense, from the very beginning the dialogue had to discuss more than the obvious differences between the Orthodox and Reformed Churches. When evaluating what they have in common, assessing the differences and testing out the reliability of new bridges, it is a matter of contributing to overcoming the mutual alienation between the Eastern and Western traditions. In this respect, the Reformation Churches have a special significance because, irrespective of their internal differences, they are to a major degree the outcome of an impetus to lead the church back to its origins. In addition to the biblical witness, it was to the ancient creeds of the church, understood as based on the Bible, and

to the church fathers (and not only Augustine although he certainly had a special role) that the Reformers referred, not in order to establish a new church but to reunite it with the living sources that had nourished its life in the early centuries. Naturally, no one is able simply to represent the origins and every claim to originality is inevitably a construct to a considerable degree, but precisely in just this way Orthodoxy is a natural relative of the Reformation Churches since the preservation of and fidelity to the original tradition is a constitutive element of how the Orthodox understand themselves and order their lives. However, reference to this common feature is simultaneously a mention of a far-reaching difficulty which has so far hardly been tackled, because the ways of preserving and safeguarding are so many-faceted that merely examining the origins on a doctrinal basis offers only very limited promise and cannot do justice either to the nature of Orthodoxy or to the claims of the Reformers. I shall come back to this difficulty again at the end of my reflections. What needs to be emphasised here is the fact that the dialogue as such is a sign of a new mutual attention and of the recognition of common ties which transcend all the differences that need to be discussed.

## II.

The dialogue started its work by discussing the Trinitarian structure of the Christian understanding of God (1988 Leuenberg, 1990 Minsk and 1992 Kappel/Switzerland). This resulted in the drawing up of a common statement "On the way to a theological agreement

on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity" (1990) with an explanatory commentary "Significant features – a joint reflection on the statement on the Holy Trinity". The common basic principle is the fundamental recognition that God can only be known by God, i.e. God is not the confirmation of any kind of human perceptions of a higher being but rather a reality which can only make itself evident of its own accord. It is God's revelation of God's self in Father, Son and Holy Spirit to which our understanding and hence also our concepts have to respond even though they will never be able completely to grasp God's nature. As a non-biblical doctrine, the doctrine of the Trinity is an inevitable consequence of the fundamental New Testament statement that Christ is Lord. Christ is Lord as the Son of the Father and this is something which we can perceive through the Holy Spirit, i.e. again through God's own working. If, on the one hand, the unity of God is not to be endangered and, on the other, the divinity of the three modes of God's appearance are not to be graded, it is necessary to conceive of both together in the most harmonious way possible, as was attempted in the Early Church's doctrine of the Trinity. In the common statement on the Holy Trinity, the Orthodox Churches affirm together with the Reformed delegates from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches that they consider the Early Church's doctrine of the Trinity to be an appropriate understanding of the Christian faith in God. The Trinity understood as a unity with nuances must always be seen strictly as the mutual coincidence of trinity and unity. The common statement emphasises this balance between trinity and unity along the lines of

Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus and thus links the Eastern and Western traditions, because the Greek emphasis which moves from trinity to unity is complemented by the Latin emphasis on the movement from unity to three-fold expression. In this sense, the statement on the eternal Trinity of God underlines the complementarity between the conception of God as “three in One” and the conception of “One in three”. It is not so much a matter of the formula – the mystery of God is precisely not supposed to be defined by the doctrine of the Trinity but protected by it; what matters is the perception of its fundamental significance for all other statements made by theology; everything that can be said about God and God’s acts follows insights and rules which are covered by the doctrine of the Trinity. Ian R. Torrance compares the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity with the importance of grammar for a language<sup>3</sup>.

Even though the joint statement does not directly refer to the delicate dispute about the *filioque*, it does imply a recognisable pointer to understanding for a rapprochement between the Eastern and Western traditions. Whereas the Eastern tradition sees the three “persons” as one because the second and third persons both have their origin in the first – the divinity of the Spirit is rooted in same way in the Father as that of the Son –, the Western tradition focuses primarily on the equality between Father and Son; since the Son is God in the same way as the Father, the latter is

also the origin of the Spirit in the same way as the former. That is then the source of the mutual objections: the West accuses the East of considering the possibility of a relationship with the Father mediated by the Spirit to be conceivable while completely bypassing the Son. Whereas the East criticises the Western position for a one-sided fixation on Christology which leaves no room for the Spirit as such because the Spirit is somehow absorbed into Christology; and the consequence is then supposed to be that the consciousness of the Trinitarian nature of the understanding of God is overshadowed by Christology and thus generally emaciated and this, in turn, has led to an authoritarian usurpation of the Church and later of the Bible, because the reticence required by respect for the Spirit’s own role has been eliminated. The joint statement found a way beyond the conflict thus outlined when both sides recognised that the approach of their particular tradition should not be understood as exclusive. Although the two types of conception seem logically to be mutually exclusive, they are not in fundamental opposition and can certainly also be understood as complementary along the lines of the joint statement. Both approaches imply an important element of the truth and their logical incompatibility finally reminds us above all that we are dealing in any case only with provisional attempts at explanation limited by our own possibilities and which by nature can only do very partial justice to the true reality of God. What is really important is that, on both sides, the under-

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. T. R. Torrance, *A theological interpretation of the agreed statements on the Trinity and the incarnation*, in: *Agreed statements* (cf. bibliography below), 25–35, 28.

standing of the Holy Spirit continues to be consistently integrated into a Trinitarian understanding of God.

This applies in a comparable way to Christology as well, the subject to which the dialogue turned at its fourth consultation in 1994 at Limassol/Cyprus: "Joint Orthodox-Reformed declaration on Christology". In line with the different approaches outlined to an understanding of the Trinity, there are also different approaches to Christology in the East and the West. Whereas the East chooses the mystery of the incarnation as the key to understanding and thus emphasises the cosmic significance of the Christ event, the West concentrates on the redemptive importance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and hence the historical dimension of the Christ event<sup>4</sup>. This difference, in turn, has far-reaching consequences but should equally not be understood as a fundamental contradiction. What both understandings have in common is that their Christology is rooted in the eternal being of God and they emphasise Christ's truly human nature which in no way contradicts his equally divine nature (Council of Chalcedon). The tone of the joint declaration here emphasises that Christology in the Trinitarian perspective also leads to a deeper understanding of the Creator and creation, provided that the significance of the motif of the incarnation is taken into account in an appropriate way. While

the joint statement on the Trinity was concerned with the nature of God which cannot be distinguished from God's acts, in the Christological declaration the acts of God are at the centre of attention although they also must not be isolated from God's nature. God's omnipotence is defined by God's commitment to creation which is a reminder to us that we are created for the sake of our relation to God and to our fellow creatures. It is the fatherly love of God that determines both God's existence as Creator and the incarnation in which God becomes one of God's own creatures. To this extent, the mystery of God's creative work is revealed in a special way. The new creation places the old in a new light. It can be seen as an act of God's self-limitation in creaturely reality by means of which our understanding of the greatness and sovereignty of God is broadened and enriched. The resurrection of Jesus finally demonstrates the limitlessness of the love of God. That is a dimension which has been increasingly marginalised by the traditional substitutionary atonement theology of the West with its juridical emphasis although it certainly does not contradict it.

After this successful beginning, in its second phase the course of the dialogue naturally became more difficult because it then began to look at ecclesiology. Whereas, up to this point, it had concentrated on discussing the different

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<sup>4</sup> "... the Reformed understand who Jesus Christ is (in his two natures, human and divine) from what he does (in his threefold office, in his work of atonement), the Orthodox understand what Jesus Christ does (recapitulating human nature and the whole of creation) from who he is (in the personal unity of his two natures)." *K. Blei* (cf. Note 1), 152.

understandings of the foundation recognised as common, the challenge was now the opposite: to look for common points which could be identified despite the fundamental difference. Here it was clearly felt that the debate was not only about different ways of understanding but about different forms of existence which had also influenced the mentalities in different ways. Of course, the partners in the dialogue were aware that historical factors had played an incomparably greater part in ecclesiology than in other realms of theology, but this awareness was only of marginal significance in the dialogue. The complexity of theological, historical, cultural and psychological implications introduced a new tension into the dialogue to which it was in danger of succumbing at certain stages; this was certainly also a consequence of the fact that the method originally chosen for the dialogue was simply pursued without question. The documents on ecclesiology can hardly be described as documents of convergence but they do state the different starting points and list the common points of reference which could help in a meaningful search for some tangible convergence. In the process, at some points the dialogue came to some very risky conclusions which, on closer examination, constitute less of a clarification than a general levelling off – at least, that is how I see it from a Reformed point of view.

At the fifth meeting in 1996 in Aberdeen, the basic differences in the varying conceptions of the church's existence were the focal issue. The mystery of the sacramental reality of the church was compared with a church which draws its dynamics from the insurmountable tension between divine institution and

human inadequacy. Although the Orthodox and the Reformed are united in the fundamental definition of the Church as the body of Christ, the basic difference to which we have referred recurs immediately in their understandings of this image. The difficulty is connected with a different understanding of reality that should already have been examined in greater detail in the context of the discussion on the first and second articles of the creed but which was evidently not considered necessary then and has now proved to be an error. Whereas the Orthodox conception of reality is fundamentally ontological and cosmological in character, the Reformed approach to reality can better be described as historical and teleological. What is perceived by the one side as an expression of the being and glory of God is viewed by the other side as the great deeds of God in a history which is under God's control. Of course, one can maintain that these are two sides of one and the same reality, but at the same time it must be admitted that the difference gives rise to two profoundly different mentalities, each with a conception of its own particular life. It makes a considerable difference whether the eternity of God is perceived predominantly in being or in time; naturally the two always belong together but significant differences which need to be examined come to light at the latest when these mentalities then enter into existential conflict with one another in ecclesiology. The difference described in various ways in the published summary of the discussion could have indicated a productive dimension if there had been a clearer consciousness of the different dynamics in the two theological traditions.

The embarrassment reflected in the Aberdeen document then continued to accompany the dialogue as it continued, which is hardly surprising. The results of the encounters on Zakynthos (1998) and in Pittsburgh/USA (2000), in particular, make it clear that the combination of problems related to systematics was repeated, but this was not taken up as an issue for the dialogue. In certain of the formulations – especially in the document from Zakynthos – it is not quite clear who is really speaking, although it is obvious that some of the statements make sense only in relation to one of the two traditions. The joint declaration from Pittsburgh finally draws its remaining optimism above all from a reference back to the convergence noted earlier in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, to Christology and to the fundamental importance of the biblical witness. The discussion proved more productive, however, with regard to the characteristics named in the creed, especially Holiness (Sibiu 2003) and the Catholicity of the Church (Beirut 2005). However clear the remaining differences also on these questions may be, substantial points of contact can also be found here, which are more than polyvalent general definitions. The dialogue has shown that the Catholicity of the Church, in particular, comprises aspects which are of immediate and also practical relevance to the mutual relationship between the two churches. It is still clear that the differences have their roots in different understandings of the reality of the church and that this needs to be discussed in greater depth.

The last meeting at Volos (Greece) in the autumn of 2007 dealt with eschato-

logy with reference to the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the last judgment, as found in the creed. The joint statement emphasises broad agreement, on the one hand, although the discussion showed, on the other hand that obvious differences on these issues also existed within the two delegations, but that can be viewed more as a sign of the vitality of the debate than as opposition between the positions put forward. There can be no doubt that the fundamental significance of the resurrection of Christ in connection with the hope of the resurrection of the dead constitutes the authentic starting point for the church's development and thus also for its being. This sheds decisive light both on the understanding of the present and also on the perfection of the new creation which already started with Christ as the perspective of Christian hope. It seems to me characteristic of this statement that, despite its necessary brevity, it is really basically too long because it in fact lists a number of complicated elements of eschatology without really being able to provide a clear theological definition of them, so that the agreement reached here is also more a consent to a common agenda than the adoption of any common theological teaching.

### III.

To take up this question immediately, the special difficulties related to this dialogue between two traditions which have been fundamentally alienated from one another by their particular histories do not question whether dialogue makes sense; on the contrary, they indicate how necessary the dialogue is. The two

traditions which are meeting here represent two profoundly different conceptual worlds which have undergone a long and influential history to a large extent independently of one another. It would be a problematic ecumenical approach to maintain that observing far-reaching mutual estrangement constituted an argument against the importance of dialogue.

However, a dialogue of this kind, if it is to be conducted meaningfully in the long term, needs some critical self-examination which should be expected to name, analyse and then also evaluate the difficulties. It is possible that it may not make sense to start a dialogue by discussing the conditions for its possibilities and expectations but if, in the longer term, it is to be protected from producing its own new prejudices and alienation, it will not be able to avoid reflecting on its own historical and hermeneutical conditions. If this does not happen, it is condemned from the start to expend a tremendous amount of energy in order, time and again, to come up against similar if not the same barriers. The attraction of *déjà vu* experiences fades at the point where doubts arise about the productivity of the effort invested. It is not so much exhaustion caused by the debates on content but more a sense of weariness from repeatedly being confronted with similar combinations of problems which seem to set a limit to the dialogue. Going round in circles or a standstill are, however, not insurmountable events that inevitably result from the issues in the dialogue; on the contrary, they are the product of the communication process. This is not to imply that all problems could be easily solved by organising the

communication better or finding the optimum methodology. But it does mean that stagnation in the communication process can be overcome with the appropriate methodological instruments, and clear grounds must be given for a standstill on an issue. Since there is no clear, objective reason to be given for the standstill, its grounds must be sought in the methodology of the dialogue.

In the long term, it would be an underestimate of ecumenism if it were to be satisfied merely with engaging in mutual explanation of how each party understands itself. Ecumenism would be tided down to its prolegomena if it were to see its purpose only as one church describing its faith to another. In the long term, a comparison of traditions, which is essentially a conservative method, would remain a rather depressing business without a creative approach to its results, because there would be no real mutual relationship and only, at the most, the satisfaction of noting this or that parallel. If the different ways of handling such observations are not taken up as the subject in a dialogue, one can hardly expect any relevant reception of dialogue results to come about. And, without reception, a dialogue is of importance only for those who participate in it. This raises a desirable issue which the dialogue itself has so far not yet taken up.

In contrast to the climate of the world, one can observe a general cooling down of the climate in relations between Orthodoxy and Protestantism since the "Wall" came down. The Protestant Churches repeatedly find themselves – even in published statements – faced with massive accusations from certain

Orthodox Churches which cast doubt at least on the way in which dialogue has been conducted to date. Here one recognises the fragility of a mutual relationship beyond which the dialogue at its different levels has so far not yet really been able to go. In this connection, it has become clear that churches which enjoy an undisputed majority position in their countries are usually less inclined to mutual dialogue than churches in regions with a mixture of confessions<sup>5</sup>.

There has been repeated talk about a “Protestantisation” of the ecumenical movement. But the practical results produced by the dialogue thus far tend rather to point in the opposite direction. At the methodological level, there may perhaps be some “Westernisation” when progress in ecumenism is measured by the results of dialogues, and then also some “Protestantisation” when dialogues are confronted conceptually with the demand for self-critical, hermeneutical differentiation. However much a dialogue may also be an encounter between persons and between the traditions which they represent (and in this respect this dialogue was richly blessed with experiences), its purpose equally clearly goes beyond an encounter as such because it is clear that the encounter takes place with a specific task and will finally be assessed by the results connected with its stated task. But these

results do not come about automatically; what a dialogue can achieve, and what not, depends to a large degree on the leadership and methodology of the dialogue. As soon as one consents to enter into a dialogue, it is necessary also to explore its possibilities and breadth in order to make it possible to use this instrument to its best advantage. Even in situations where no thought is given to methods and hermeneutical approaches, methods and hermeneutical conceptions are involved but without being discussed, so one cannot exclude the possibility that different perceptions may constitute more of a mutual obstacle than a help. This dialogue – and certainly not only this one – has probably so far given too little consideration to such questions<sup>6</sup>.

As far as the content is concerned, as I understand it, one should also give account of the difficult relationship between truth and theology or dogmatic statements in the context of the complex of problems described. How close to the truth are theological statements which are expressed in human formulations about realities brought about by God? Another related question is that of the room really given to theology and thus to doctrine in the life of a church. This question is not insignificant when evaluating what can and should finally be expected from dialogues in practical terms. Concentration on theological

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<sup>5</sup> For example, I experience the dialogue which the Evangelical Church in Germany is conducting with the Orthodox Church in Romania as more flexible and theologically productive than the Orthodox-Reformed dialogue at the international level which has clearly been increasingly influenced by Greek Orthodoxy.

<sup>6</sup> In addition, there has been a lack of really professional accompaniment of the dialogue both on the Reformed and on the Orthodox side.

dialogue as a method must be seen in a realistic and sober way if ecumenism is not to succumb to an unfounded dependency on a monopoly use of a specific instrument.

Another problem, which is hard to handle but also essential, is the question of the reception of the dialogue in the respective churches. Our dialogue shares this problem with other dialogues, the results of which sometimes play no part beyond the publication of the documentation. At this point, I do not wish to engage in a detailed discussion of the issue although the time has certainly come to address this in all seriousness. Suffice it to say that the results of the dialogue appear to have been formulated above all for those who negotiated them (and also for a few experts who are working on the issues discussed). Even the bodies in the churches which are expressly concerned with ecumenism are often incapable of undertaking an appropriate evaluation of the consequences of dialogue results. As a rule, the documents adopted fail to formulate the relevance of the results so clearly that they enjoy the attention of those who were not participants in the dialogue. The results of a dialogue should be presented in a form which makes the decisive points of contact for reception explicit, so that the discovery of the objective ecumenical benefit does not just depend on the initiative of the receiving churches<sup>7</sup>.

The fact that it is ecclesiology, above all, which is the fundamental point of disagreement in the relationship between the Orthodox and Reformed Churches, can certainly be interpreted theologically in very different ways. In an Orthodox understanding, this would probably be seen as a sign of the fundamental distance between the two traditions which are still at the very beginning of their efforts to communicate. From a Reformed point of view, however, it could be claimed with some relief that it is *only* ecclesiology which divides us, whereas we can at least identify solid common points of agreement on central basic theological issues where we can also name important things we have in common. But, on closer examination, one cannot really consider either the Orthodox pessimism or the Reformed optimism to be correct because ecclesiology is certainly not something that remains unchanged; it is always also a logical reflection of what one thinks about the Triune God and God's historical dealings with humankind. What one can expect of human beings and their possibilities to grasp God as a present reality depends precisely on that approach. In this sense, one can certainly state that a hopeful common start has indeed been made, but that the dialogue has not yet really grown beyond this initial phase and that will also hardly be possible unless it examines itself self-critically and gives itself a productive account of its present situation.

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<sup>7</sup> It is possible that then responses to the results achieved would not turn out to be so random and embarrassingly inapposite as the three commentaries by Anna Case-Winters, O.V. Jathanna and Abtinio de Gogoy Sobrinho in the bibliography listed below edited by Lukas Vischer.

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# Considerations on the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue

Ioan Mircea Ielciu

## I. Introduction

Shortly after the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Church of England focused its eyes towards the Eastern Orthodox Church, the possessor of the treasury of true Apostolic Faith, establishing contacts of rapprochement and mutual acquaintance.

The causes leading to co-operation between the two churches are manifold. Among these we mention: 1) the main tendency of the churches in the Anglican Communion to return to the sources of the primitive Church and 2) the desire for unity of the two churches.

It is expected that all relationships and contacts at all levels between the two churches should bear fruit: a) through unity Anglicans should find themselves in a church of Apostolic origin; b) through co-operation and unity between Anglicanism and Orthodoxy the Christian Church in general would be strengthened

and c) through the union of the two “traditions” a complex religious moral living could be achieved and an important progress could be made in the field of theological study.

Within the framework of these contacts visible similarities have been discovered between the Church of England and the Orthodox Church. Among these, the following stand out: 1) the Episcopate; 2) the administrative organization of the two churches; 3) the universalistic feature (the geographic character) of both Anglicanism and Orthodoxy; 4) mutual desire for unity, etc.

At the various meetings between Anglicans and Orthodox throughout the centuries varied issues concerning the Faith were addressed (i.e. Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition, Revelation and Inspiration, Church, Holy Trinity, Sacraments, Ecumenical Councils, Creeds, Divine Worship, Veneration of Saints, Intercommunion, etc.) and certain doc-

trinal agreements were reached. In spite of these, there were also disagreements and other issues remaining to be discussed even at the present time.

Although Anglican-Orthodox relations between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries did not lead to the concrete results for both these churches, they did manage to clarify the doctrinal differences between these Christian communities and to anticipate a closer co-operation which could lead to their unity in the future.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and until the VII<sup>th</sup> decade, Anglican-Orthodox relations have been intensified and began to take shape in a series of official visits at the highest level, made by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Constantinople as well as in other capitals of Orthodox countries (e.g. Athens, Moscow, Bucharest, Sophia) and also the visits of the Ecumenical Patriarch and other church leaders in Great Britain. These contacts gave a positive development to the relations between these churches and prepared the beginning of official dialogue between them. The foundation of the Inter-Orthodox Theological Committee for the dialogue with the Anglicans and the Inter-Anglican Dialogues Committee was also a step forward made by these two churches in their attempt for unification.

The opinion of the Reverend Donald A. M. Allchin is that the aim of these Committees was “to attain a common statement of the inseparable Church’s faith.” Talking about the perspectives and the future of Anglican-Orthodox dialogue, he made a relevant statement: “On the one hand, I have to admit that

there are a lot of difficulties. Our intellectual procedures, the theological mentality, the historical background are often different. All these give me the feeling that the dialogue would not be an easy one. (...) This is the reason for which I personally believe that the reciprocal perseverance, the striving for agreement and first of all the power of the Holy Spirit would help us to materialize together an important thing for all Christian world, to find a way to form in today’s living terms the permanent truth which the Orthodox Church through its confession of faith and cult, always kept, as no another occidental church did it.”

These statements of the English theologians in connection with the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue represent a real guideline for the future approach of the problems and relations between the Orthodox Churches and the Communion of the Anglican Churches.

## **II. The Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue**

After a long preparation, beginning in 1966, the first official meeting of the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue took place in Oxford between 6–13 July 1973, with representatives of the Anglican Communion as well as of all the Orthodox Churches taking part.

At the end of the first session of the Anglican-Orthodox dialogue it was decided that the debates for “common doctrinal discussions” between the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church should be continued in three

sub-commissions, in 1974 and 1975, each commission having the obligation to discuss one of the three proposed subjects: 1. Inspiration and Revelation in Holy Scriptures; 2. The Synod's Authority; 3. The Church as Eucharistic Community.

The first sub-commission met in Gonia (Chania), Crete, on 1–6 July 1974. At the end of the discussions the following "axiomatic theses" were enunciated:

1. The Bible has a double character, being divine and human at the same time: it is God's word, exposed in human speech.
2. In its quality as God's word, the Bible is unique. Our approach to the Bible is through submission and obedience to the revelation of God Himself, given to us by Him through it.
3. We know, receive and interpret the Scripture through the Church and in the Church. The Church cannot ignore the results of scientific researches concerning the Bible, no matter from which side it could come, but it tests them.
4. The books of the Scripture included in the Canon are authoritative because the Church recognizes in them the authentic Revelation of God.
5. Any separation between Scripture and Tradition which would treat them as two isolated sources should be removed. Both are correlative. The Scripture is the criterion through which the Church examines the traditions to decide if they truly belong to The Holy Tradition or not. The Tradition completes The Scripture in the meaning that

it ensures the true interpretation of the Bible.

The second sub-commission which discussed the subject: "The Ecumenical Synods' Authority", took place at Ramnicu-Valcea, Romania, (9-14 July 1974) and took the following common decisions:

1. In the Orthodox Tradition the first seven Ecumenical Synods form a historical, theological and spiritual unity which centres on the teaching of Trinitarian and Christological Faith of the Church, with basic implications for ecclesiology. But, in Anglicanism it was believed that this wording was sufficiently expressed in the decisions of the first four Ecumenical Synods.
2. In the Orthodox Tradition, the 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod is considered as belonging to the synodical heritage, and its dogmatic content as deriving directly from the Synod's decisions that preceded it. The attitude of Anglican Churches is concerning this Synod inclined to be negative, partly because of the confusions concerning the historical circumstances in which it took place.
3. The Orthodox Tradition understands the Synods entirely as being supreme expressions of Church infallibility. In the Anglican theology it was usually discussed about the Church as being indefectible, this difference resulting from the Anglicans insistence concerning the recognition of human imperfection in the Church history and it is connected to the Anglican thinking between the "essential" and "non-essential".

The third sub-commission discussed the subject: “The Church as Eucharistic Community” and met on 8–12 July 1974 at Garden City (New York). It was concluded that there were many points of reciprocity and understanding between the two churches concerning the teaching about the Holy Eucharist. Then, the dialogue underlined the identity of Jesus Christ both with his mystical Body (the Church) and in the Holy Eucharist which acts in the Church. All the believers who receive the Saviour’s Body and Blood, become part of the unique Body of Jesus Christ (the Church) and a body with Him, they receive the forgiveness of their sins and they get everlasting life. The performer of the Holy Eucharist (the bishop or the priest) in his liturgical action has a double service: as Christ’s icon and as the representative of the community that works in the name of Jesus Christ for his believers.

The International Commission of the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue continued its debates during the following years. The positive results of the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue were set out in the *Moscow Agreed Statement* of 1976. This agreement can be summarized as follows:

#### *1. God’s knowledge*

God is immanent and transcendent at the same time. Through faith and obedience, the believers participate in divine life and are united with God in the Holy Trinity. The Orthodox Church makes a distinction between the divine essence *ousia* and the uncreated divine energies. While the divine essence remains beyond the human understanding and knowledge, transcendentally, through

the uncreated divine energies God is present in immanent and the believer is always in communion with the Heavenly Father. The Anglicans don’t use this distinction, but they try to explain that God cannot be understood and at the same time He is intelligible for people. If the Orthodox Church describes the plenitude of human holiness through the patristic expression *theosis kata charin* (the deification through grace), the Anglicans consider this speech as being “deceptive and dangerous”. However, they don’t reject the doctrine that this speech expresses; probably such knowledge could be found in their doctrine, too.

#### *2. The inspiration and the authority of the Holy Scripture*

The Holy Scripture constitutes a coherent whole, which includes the Divine Revelation, expressed in human speech. It is received and interpreted through and in the Church. Both the Anglican and Orthodox Churches make a distinction between the canonical books of the Old Testament and the non-canonical books (good for reading); however, the utility of the last is recognized for the spiritual construction of the believers. Also, both the Anglicans and the Orthodox use them at different services.

#### *3. Scripture and Tradition*

The Scripture and Tradition are the two sources of the Divine Revelation, which complete each other, and the Church can never define new dogmas which don’t have basis in the Holy Scripture and in Holy Tradition. From the Orthodox point of view, a truth of faith cannot be dogmatized if it has its basis only in the Holy Tradition, it is absolutely necessary to have its basis in the Holy Scripture.

#### 4. *The Synod's Authority*

Both churches agreed that the notions of Church and Scripture are inseparable, recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit not only in the Scripture and in the Church, but also in the Synods; although the Anglicans believe in a "hierarchy" of the Ecumenical Synods, emphasizing the first four except the decrees of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synods. However, a detailed research is necessary, on the Anglican side, of the problems concerning the last three ecumenical Synods and especially the 7<sup>th</sup> concerning the veneration of the icons; the deepening of the word "infallibility" on the Anglican side is also highlighted and that of "indefectibility" on the Orthodox side.

#### 5. *"Filioque" addition*

Concerning this addition, a distinction must be made between the problem of the Holy Spirit's origin ("that it sets out from Father for ever" – John 15, 26) which is different from that of sending in lime and that of the Holy Spirit's mission in the world (John 14, 26 and 15, 26). Because of this, and because the "Filioque" addition did not exist in the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed from the beginning, and because it wasn't introduced through the authority of an Ecumenical Synod, the Anglicans agreed that it doesn't belong to the Creed.

#### 6. *The Church as Eucharistic Community*

Concerning the Eucharist, it is declared again that between the two churches, there was a Common Agreement, achieved at Bucharest in 1935. This issue is further elaborated in the Common Declaration of the Anglican-

Orthodox sub-commission which met at Garden City (New York) in 1974. In the Moscow Agreement (1976) it is indicated that in the future the issue of the relationship between the priest and his bishop, as well as of the bishops between themselves should be studied.

#### 7. *The invocation of the Holy Spirit at the Eucharist*

The Holy Eucharist is the action of the Holy Trinity. The act of holiness of the Eucharistic elements includes the following: the content, the *anamnesis* and the *epiclesis*. Through the invocation and the descent of the Holy Spirit, as an answer to the Church's prayer, the bread and the wine transform in the Saviour's Body and Blood. The Anglicans consider that the culminating decisive moment of the sanctifying of Eucharistic elements can occur through the instituting words or through the *epiclesis*, while for the Orthodox it is only the *epiclesis*. "At Church's prayer, the Holy Spirit descends not only above the Eucharistic elements but also above the community and through the Eucharist the believers receive the forgiveness of their sins and they increase in obedience and holiness towards everlasting life."

The meetings in Moscow (July–August 1976) between the Anglicans and Orthodox lead to a better mutual knowledge of the two parts, bringing certain positive results in the doctrinal field in spite of the existence of some disagreements.

The agreements reached by the International Commission of the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue in the second stage were set out in the Dublin Agreed Statement of 1984. In its present

third phase, which began in 1989, the Commission has been examining ecclesiological issues in the light of our faith in the Holy Trinity, the Person of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

In 2001 at Volos, Greece, the Commission focused on the ordained ministry of the Church and approved an Interim Agreed Statement on Episcopos, Episcopos and Primacy. This was followed in 2002, at Abergavenny, Wales, by another Interim Agreed Statement, on Priesthood, Christ and the Church. There the Commission began to concentrate on an examination of the issues surrounding the ordination of women to the priesthood. The discussion of non-ordained ministry was also begun. Discussion on both issues continued in Addis-Ababa in 2003.

In "Priesthood, Christ and the Church", the Commission affirmed that there is only one priesthood in the Church and that is the priesthood of Christ. Since the Church is Christ himself extended into history, his priestly office is realized and extended throughout history in the life of the Church. The Commission has so cogently enunciated that the priesthood of Christ is the reflexion and the projection of the saving work of Christ. This priesthood of Christ is inextricably bound with Trinitarian theology. Only through the Spirit are we drawn into the economy of Son. It is through the Holy Spirit that the priestly work of Christ is present in the ecclesial life: "The priestly character of the Church is related in the Spirit to the priesthood of Christ".

It was also affirmed that through baptism, the human person enters in the priestly movement of Christ's self

offering and is configured within the ecclesial and thus Eucharistic Community to the priesthood of Christ. And so, the First Letter of Peter rightly understands the community of the baptized to be "a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ ... a chosen people (generation), a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (I Peter 2, 5,9). The Church is faithful to her priestly calling in the ministry of reconciliation, participating in the priestly self-offering of the Son to the Father in Spirit. This "Eucharistic life" of the Church includes sacrificial service to the world.

As the Commission has observed: "... from authors of the New Testament themselves, from their understanding and conception of Christ, we attest that Christian priesthood is directly related with Christ's ministry. If the Church is Christ Himself extended into history, equals Christian priesthood is Christ's priestly office realized and extended in every historic period of the life of the Church. It is, so to speak, the reflection and the projection of the saving work of Christ throughout the centuries."

It is also mentioned that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female (Gal. 3,27). "National, racial, socio-economic and gender barriers are overcome in the peace made by the blood shed on the Cross at the heart of the universe." Pertinent to the question of women, men, and the priesthood, Anglicans and Orthodox agree that within the baptismal and Eucharistic Koinonia of the Church as a whole, women and men share equally in the priestly character of the Church

which is fundamentally the priesthood of Christ.

In 2004, at Canterbury, the Commission received the first draft of an Agreed Statement on Lay Ministries in the Church and on the question of the ministries of women and men, including the question of ordination to the deaconate, presbyterate and episcopate. Consideration of this latter topic was postponed until further work could be completed on the presentations of Orthodox understanding of these matters.

Papers on Heresy and Schism were received from Professor William Green (on the Anglican side) and Basil of Sergievo (on the Orthodox side) and discussed by the Commission. The Commission went on to receive and discuss papers on Reception from Professor John Riches (on the Anglican side) and Metropolitan John of Pergamon (on the Orthodox side).

In his paper, Metropolitan John Zizioulas approached the problem of reception from two angles: the reception of the faith and the reception of the ecclesial structure. These must also be mutually received by the churches if unity among them is to become a reality.

Thus the theologians involved in the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue seem to be pre-occupied with the question of whether the ordination of women to the priesthood and the episcopate is a "heresy" or not, and tend to forget that the problem has to do mainly with the Church's ministry. The question whether this kind of ordination is "heretical or not, whether it contradicts

the dogmatic teaching remains open to discussion and to "an open process of reception." But the question whether such an ordination can be "received" in terms of recognition and "reception" of ministry affects the acceptance and communion of the ecclesial communities at the level of the actual life of the church, including such matters as sacramental communion. One may disagree with someone on certain theological questions, and still be in Eucharistic communion with him (this is not unusual among the Orthodox who often accuse one another of "heresy".) Questions of faith can be discussed for a long time, but matters of "order" and ministry must be "practiced"; as they affect reception in an immediate way.

The last meeting of the International Commission of the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue took place in the Holy Royal and Stavropegic Monastery of Kykkos, in Cyprus, from Thursday, June 2nd to Wednesday, June 8th, 2005, as guests of the Church of Cyprus and of the Most Revd Bishop Nikiforos of Kykkos, the Abbot of the monastery. The Commission wish to record their gratitude to His Eminence the Abbot, the brothers and staff of Kykkos Monastery for the warmth of their welcome, and to Bishop Vasilios of Trimithus who has organized and coordinated the many aspects of this meeting, together with the staff of the Ecumenical Relations Office of the Church of Cyprus.

The Commission consists of representatives of the Orthodox Churches and of the Anglican Communion. The dialogue began its work by exploring theological and doctrinal issues of concern for dialogue between the Anglican and

Orthodox Churches in 1973. Agreements reached in its first two stages were set out in the Moscow Agreed Statement of 1976 and the Dublin Agreed Statement of 1984. In its present third phase, which began in 1989, the Commission has been examining our understanding of the Church in the light of our faith in the Holy Trinity, the Person of Christ and the Holy Spirit. From 1989, the Commission has met on an annual or biannual basis, completing Statements on Trinity and the Church; Christ, the Spirit and the Church; Christ, Humanity and the Church (all 1998); Episcopate, Bishops, and the Church (2001); Christ, the Priesthood and the Church (2002).

In 2003, at Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, the Commission began its current round of study on the subject of the ministries of women and men in the Church, of questions of Heresy and Schism, and of Reception.

In Kykkos, the Commission completed the work on these Agreed Statements, and decided to meet next year to finalize the text of the complete cycle of Statements agreed in the current phase from 1989 to date in preparation for publication.

In 2006 the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue reached The Cyprus Agreed Statement entitled The Church of the Triune God. This report represents the fruit of the Commission's work and carries only the authority of its members, but it offered to the Anglican and Orthodox Churches the hope that, as it is studied and reflected upon, it will help Christians of both traditions to perceive

anew the work of the Triune God in giving life to His Church, and draw us closer to that unity which is His will for all the faithful.

Looked at from this angle, the ordination of women to the presbyterate is not as problematic from the view point of reception as the extension of this ordination to the episcopate would be.

All official theological dialogues, including the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, have as their ultimate goal the reception of our churches by each other in Faith as well as in ministry and church structure. This goal must be kept constantly in our minds in whatever we discuss, decide or do.

While we are content and glad that certain points of faith agreements have been reached between the Anglicans and the Orthodox, likewise we must be aware of the fact and see with clear eyes the obstacles hindering the union of the two churches. For this reason a joint effort is required both from the Anglicans and the Orthodox in order to break down all the obstacles that hinder the realization of union between the Anglican Communion and the Orthodox Church.

In conclusion we can say that the Orthodox Church is in favour of sacramental Communion with the Anglican Churches but only as a result of the restoration of full unity in the truth of faith between the two "families" of churches. Certainly, this seems to be extremely difficult at the present, even impossible, but there are hopes that on the one hand the Anglican wisdom and flexibility and on the other the Orthodox love and understanding will lead to the union of the

Anglican and Orthodox Churches. This will be an important step on the road to the unity of all Christians, desired by the Lord Jesus Christ (John 17,11 and 21).

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# Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue<sup>1</sup>

Paul Avis

At the end of January 2007 the International Commission for the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue (ICAOTD) launched the dialogue's third agreed statement at a ceremony at Lambeth Palace, London. Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, was present

as guest of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. The Archbishop and the Patriarch took part in a liturgy of thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey and this was followed by a celebratory dinner under the auspices of the Nikaeian Club.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper incorporates the work of the Revd Canon Hugh Wybrew, the Revd Dr Jonathan Baker and the Revd Thomas Seville CR. A document similar to the present one, but also including an extended commentary on the text of *The Church of the Triune God*, was provided to resource a debate in the General Synod of the Church of England in York on 4 July 2008. The debate was introduced by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams and Metropolitan John of Pergamon addressed the Synod. The following motion was passed unanimously:

That the Synod:

Thank the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue for the Cyprus Agreed Statement *The Church of the Triune God* and commend the Statement for study in the Church of England, where possible with members of the Orthodox Churches, and with other ecumenical partners;

Note the points raised in the commentary and assessment provided in the briefing paper on this statement, produced by the Faith and Order Advisory Group;

Welcome the degree of theological agreement between Anglicans and the Orthodox revealed in the Agreed Statement and encourage the continuation of dialogue in those areas on which agreement has not yet been achieved.

Completed in 2005 at the Monastery of Kykkos, the Cyprus Agreed Statement is entitled 'The Church of the Triune God', and its publication concluded the third phase of the Anglican-Orthodox international theological dialogue. Its principal theme is the doctrine of the Church, but it includes also a study of the ordained ministry of the Church, and deals with the thorny question of who may be ordained to it. It ends by examining the two related topics of heresy and schism, and reception in the Church. We return to the Cyprus Agreed Statement later.

### Twentieth-century background

While contacts between Anglicans and Orthodox go back several centuries, official discussions began in the 1920s, and were pursued through the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. It was in 1962 that Patriarch Athenagoras I and Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey agreed to take the first steps towards setting up a joint commission to examine doctrinal agreements and disagreements between the Anglican and Orthodox Churches. Each Church nominated its representatives, who in 1966 began meeting separately, at the wish of the Orthodox, to determine what topics should be on the agenda of the Anglican/Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Discussions (A/OJDD).

In the course of the earlier talks from the 1920s onwards a number of topics had emerged as outstanding between the two Churches. These were included in a list, drawn up by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which also contained matters to be examined at the beginning of the dialogue. These included Anglican

intercommunion with the Old Catholics. Anglicans wished the *filioque* and the Anglican understanding of comprehensiveness to be added, as well as pastoral, liturgical and spiritual issues. Such preparation for the dialogue took six years, and it was only in 1973 that the first full meeting of A/OJDD took place in Oxford.

### The First Phase of the Dialogue

The first phase of the dialogue nevertheless made some progress, despite a sense among some on the Anglican side that the dialogue was not viewed by the Orthodox as one between equals. Three sub-commissions worked on topics agreed to be priorities, and produced documents which were submitted to the full Commission in Moscow in 1976. Statements on 'The Knowledge of God', 'The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture', 'Scripture and Tradition', 'The Authority of Councils', 'The Filioque Clause', 'The Church as Eucharistic Community', and 'The Invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist', were revised, agreed, and published in the **Moscow Agreed Statement** of that year. Among the fruits of this first phase – in which the different emphases in the theological traditions of East and West were much to the fore – was that the Anglican members of the Commission agreed at Moscow to recommend to their churches the removal of the clause from the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed when they next undertook liturgical revision. They did so, however, for historical and ecumenical reasons, and were careful to pass no judgment on the Trinitarian theology involved in the debate.

The Moscow Agreed Statement registered a good deal of agreement on the topics discussed. It also noted areas of difference. 'The Knowledge of God' spoke of divine self-revelation and human communion with God. It noted that the Orthodox Church 'draws a distinction between the divine essence, which remains for ever beyond man's comprehension and knowledge, and the divine energies, by participation in which man participates in God.' Anglicans, it also noted, do not normally use this distinction, although believing that 'God is at once incomprehensible, yet truly knowable by man.' Nor do Anglicans normally speak of salvation as *theosis*, divinization by grace, although the doctrine that term seeks to express is to be found in liturgical texts and hymnody. On 'The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture' and 'Scripture and Tradition', both sides agreed that the two are correlative rather than separate sources of revelation. Scripture is the criterion of authentic Tradition, which completes Scripture in the sense of safeguarding the integrity of the biblical message. Both sides agreed too that Holy Tradition is 'the entire life of the Church in the Holy Spirit.' While in broad agreement about 'The Authority of the Council', Anglicans pointed out that their tradition distinguished the first four Councils from the last three of the ecumenical seven, and accepted the seventh in so far as it defends the incarnation. But while 'they agree that the veneration of icons as practiced in the East is not to be rejected, [they] do not believe that that it can be required of all Christians.' In 'The Church as the Eucharistic Community' and 'The Invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist' there was

agreement on the role of the Spirit in the eucharistic action, as in the whole life of the Church, and on the Church as community which becomes fully itself in celebrating the Eucharist, which in turn actualizes the Church.

But if the Moscow Agreed Statement was a positive achievement, there was a cloud on the near horizon. The Commission had agreed at Moscow to continue its work, still in sub-commissions, though meeting in the same place (in the first phase sub-commissions met separately). Three topics had been identified for study: 'The Church and the churches', 'The Communion of Saints and the departed', and 'Ministry and priesthood'. But the Orthodox were aware of Anglican debates on the ordination of women, and a resolution was passed, drawing attention to the existence of a grave problem: 'The Orthodox members of the Commission wish to state that if the Anglican Churches proceed to the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate, this will create a very serious obstacle to the development of our relations in the future. Although the Anglican members are divided among themselves on the theological principle involved, they recognize the strength of Orthodox convictions on this matter and undertake to make this known to their Churches.'

### **The Ordination of Women**

The second phase of the dialogue began the following year, when the Commission met in Cambridge. The Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, Bishop John Howe, reported on the present state of the ordination of women

in the several provinces of the Communion. It came as a shock to the Orthodox members, sometimes more aware of the Church of England than of the Anglican Communion as a whole, to learn that the ordination of women was already a fact in the life of some Anglican Churches. Some of the Orthodox wished to bring the dialogue to an immediate end; others wondered what meaning it could now have if it continued. It was agreed that a special meeting of the Commission should be held in 1978 'before the Lambeth Conference, in order, by expounding the Orthodox position, to enable their Anglican brethren to come to what, in their view, would be a proper appreciation of the matter. For the Orthodox the future of the Dialogue would depend on the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference.'

In 1978 the Commission duly met in Athens. For much of the time the two sides met separately, working on statements of their respective positions. The Anglican section of the Report recorded the variety of Anglican positions on the ordination of women: there were those who believed that it is 'in no way consonant with a true understanding of the Church's catholicity and apostolicity, but rather constitutes a grave deformation of the Church's traditional faith and order'; there were others who saw it as 'a proper extension and development of the Church's traditional ministry, and a necessary and prophetic response to the changing circumstances in which some churches are placed'; and there were those who 'see no absolute objection to it' but 'regret the way the present action has been taken and believe that the time was not opportune nor the method appropriate for such action'.

There was only one Orthodox position; and in view of the discussion of this issue in *The Church of the Triune God*, the following quotations from the Orthodox section of the Athens Report are worth noting:

We see the ordination of women, not as part of the creative continuity of tradition, but as a violation of the apostolic faith and order of the Church ... By ordaining women Anglicans would sever themselves from continuity in apostolic faith and spiritual life.

The ordination of women to the priesthood is an innovation, lacking any basis whatever in Holy Tradition. The Orthodox Church takes very seriously the admonition of St Paul, where the Apostle states with emphasis, repeating himself twice: 'But if we, or an angel from heaven, preaches to you anything else than what we have preached to you, let him be anathema. As we have already said, so I say to you now once more: if anyone preaches to you anything else than what you have received, let him be anathema' (Gal. 1: 8-9).

It was the lowest point in the dialogue.

### **The Second Phase of the Dialogue**

The Lambeth Conference of 1978 took account of Orthodox objections to the ordination of women, but recognized the right of individual Anglican Churches to make their own decision on the matter. The Orthodox members of the Commission were agreed that the dialogue should continue. In the light of

the decision of the Lambeth Conference, some thought the status of the dialogue should be changed, and continue only 'as an academic and informative exercise, and no longer as an ecclesial endeavour aiming at the union of the two churches.' Others thought it could continue as before. At a Steering Committee meeting in 1979 it was agreed that the dialogue should continue, but with a different approach to its work:

The ultimate aim remains the unity of the Churches. But the method may need to change in order to emphasise the pastoral and practical dimensions of the subjects of theological discussions. Our conversations are concerned with the search for a unity in faith. They are not negotiations for immediate full communion. When this is understood the discovery of differences on various matters, though distressing, will be seen as a necessary step on the long road towards that unity which God wills for His Church.

That decision relieved the Commission of the necessity of trying to solve the question of the ordination of women and other outstanding problems as a condition of continuing the dialogue. As a consequence the second phase of the dialogue, as the Introduction to the Dublin Agreed Statement said, was 'more free to explore together and understand better the faith we hold and the ways in which we express it.' The first paragraph of the Statement observed that the Joint Commission had tried in its discussion to keep in mind the link between theology and sanctification through prayer, and between doctrine and the daily life of the Christian community.

**The Dublin Agreed Statement** (1984) contained three main sections, 'The Mystery of the Church', 'Faith in the Trinity, Prayer and Holiness', and 'Worship and Tradition'. The first section looked at New Testament images of the Church, and at its four credal marks of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. With regard to unity it acknowledged that 'our divisions do not destroy but ... damage the basic unity we have in Christ.' It went on: 'Anglicans are accustomed to seeing our divisions as within the Church: they do not believe that they alone are the one true Church, but they believe that they belong to it. Orthodox, however, believe that the Orthodox Church is the one true Church of Christ, which as his body is not and cannot be divided.' The Orthodox conceded, however, that 'at the same time they see Anglicans as brothers and sisters in Christ who are seeking with them the union of all Christians in the one Church.'

That paragraph highlights a fundamental issue in all dialogues between the Orthodox and other Churches. One of the objections of many Orthodox to the World Council of Churches was precisely the use of the word 'Churches' in the plural, for to them there is only one Church. 'The Mystery of the Church' dealt at some length with another ecclesiological issue, the question of primacy. This is a crucial question in all dialogues involving the Roman Catholic Church. In the Dublin Agreed Statement Anglicans and Orthodox agreed that primacy, or seniority, should be understood in terms not of coercion but of pastoral service. A primate, at whatever level, had no right 'to intervene arbitrarily in the affairs of a dio-

cese other than his own.' They pointed out that neither the Ecumenical Patriarch nor the Archbishop of Canterbury claims a primacy of universal jurisdiction within their respective families of self-governing national or regional churches. On this point it was felt in some quarters that the Anglican members of A/OJDD were taking a rather different line from their colleagues on the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

'Faith in the Trinity, Prayer and Holiness' linked trinitarian doctrine with participation in the grace of the Holy Trinity, and went on to consider the nature of Christian prayer – one of the few dialogues perhaps to do so. A section on the *filioque* included a reaffirmation of the 1978 Anglican recommendation to exclude it from the creed, and noted that some Anglican Churches had already acted on it. 'Worship and Tradition' included an affirmation of the inseparability of faith and worship, and stated that 'all the saving truths of the faith are doxologically and liturgically appropriated'. There was a fine sub-section on 'The Communion of Saints and the Departed'; and with regard to icons another sub-section included the statement that 'in the light of the present discussion the Anglicans do not find any cause for disagreement in the doctrine as stated by St John of Damascus.' This represented a remarkable development in Anglican thinking: the Lambeth Conference of 1888 had said that it would be difficult for Anglicans to have closer relations with the Orthodox so long as the latter maintained their use and veneration of icons.

The second phase of the dialogue had

done useful work. An Epilogue to the Dublin Agreed Statement summed up achievements as well as issues still to be resolved. Prominent among the latter was the ordination of women. The Epilogue noted that 'We have failed to reach agreement concerning the possibility, or otherwise, of the ordination of women to the priesthood. The Orthodox affirm that such ordination is impossible, since it is contrary to Scripture and tradition. With this some Anglicans agree, while others believe that it is possible, and even desirable at the present moment, to ordain women as priests. There are however many related issues that we have not so far examined in any detail, particularly the following: how we are to understand the distinction within humanity between man and woman; what is meant by sacramental priesthood, and how this is related to the unique high priesthood of Christ and to the royal priesthood of all the baptized; what, apart from the sacramental priesthood, are the other forms of ministry within the Church' (Epilogue IV 103 (h)).

If the ordination of women was prominent among the issues still to be resolved, there was another on which it seemed agreement would be hard to achieve. It concerned, as the Epilogue put it, 'the account to be given of the sinfulness and division which is to be observed in the life of Christian communities. For Anglicans, because the Church under Christ is the community where God's grace is at work, healing and transforming sinful men and women; and because grace in the Church is mediated through those who are themselves undergoing such transformation, the struggle between grace and sin is to

be seen as characteristic of, rather than accidental to, the Church on earth. Orthodox, while agreeing that the human members of the Church on earth are sinful, do not believe that sinfulness should be ascribed to the Church as the body of Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit' (Epilogue IV 99 (d)).

The Epilogue expressed the view that none of the points of disagreement it mentioned 'is to be regarded as insoluble, but each is to be regarded as a challenge to this Commission ... to advance more deeply in its understanding of the truth.' It was a challenge taken up by the third phase of the dialogue.

### **An Interlude**

After the publication of the Dublin Agreed Statement there was a hiatus in the dialogue. An Executive Committee was set up to consider the direction in which the dialogue should continue. The ordination of women and the alleged doctrinal vagaries of some Anglicans continued to provoke strong feelings among the Orthodox and warm discussion among members of the Committee. A planned meeting of the full Commission in 1987 was postponed by the Orthodox: the dialogue was in danger, it seemed, of running into the sands.

But on both sides there was a desire to continue the dialogue, and both sides saw its goal as unity in faith and the restoration of unity. The Lambeth Conference of 1988 passed a resolution on Anglican-Orthodox relations. It 'encouraged the work of the Commission towards the restoration of that unity for which Christ prayed, particularly noting

its intention to address the question of ecclesiology which hopefully will include the increasingly significant concept of 'reception', the issue of ecclesial diversity and the inter-relationship between faith and culture in which it is expressed, believing that these are pressing issues which affect both our Communions...' (Resolution 6.4).

### **The Third Phase of the Dialogue**

The full Commission met again in 1989 at New Valamo. In the interval since 1984 it had been re-constituted, and provided with new co-chairmen. Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon had been appointed for the Orthodox, and Bishop Mark Dyer for the Anglicans. With these changes came a fresh approach and a changed atmosphere. That new start was symbolized in the new name given to the Commission: the International Commission of the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue (ICAOTD). The continuation of the dialogue was agreed, and by the time of the next full meeting in Toronto in 1990 the two co-chairmen were able to present a programme for the Commission's work for the next few years. It was decided to study together the doctrine of the Church, including a consideration of Christ and humanity and Christ and culture, and within that context to study the ministry of the Church, including lay ministries, and the relation of the ordained ministry to the high priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all the baptized. Two related issues, that of heresy and schism and that of reception of new ideas and practices in the Church, would conclude this new phase of the Commission's

work. In 1991 the new Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I gave his support to the dialogue, expressing his intention 'to continue with faithfulness the long tradition of fraternal relations with the Anglican Church'. He expressed too his 'desire to promote our theological dialogue until we achieve the unity of faith.' Thus encouraged the Commission worked harmoniously until its programme, initiated in 1990, was concluded at its meeting at the Monastery of Kykkos in 2005. The Cyprus Agreed Statement, 'The Church of the Triune God', is its fruit.

Throughout this third phase of the dialogue there was a sense, lacking perhaps in the previous two phases, that Anglicans and Orthodox were studying questions of common concern together. In their Preface to the published Statement the co-chairmen quote the view of a member of the Commission, who said of its work: 'Now it is a conversation of delight and illumination. Like all true conversations, it has had its moments of surprise and strangeness ... But then it is good to be drawn into a conversation which engages in profound and sustained reflection on what it is that makes the Church the Church and to affirm the hidden life of the Trinity at the heart of our communities.'

### ***Assessment of The Church of the Triune God***

*The Church of the Triune God* is a notable achievement, a tribute to the efforts of the participants and represents a

remarkable convergence. The agreement on the mystery of the church, so long a difficult area between Orthodox and Anglicans, is impressive and deserves a warm welcome. To place the dynamics of culture and mission, church and openness to time and change in the acceptance of us by the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit will repay long and sustained engagement. Some observations of a critical nature might be made, however, and they touch nine areas.

A. The theology of the statement is influenced strongly by the thought of John Zizioulas, one of only four out of 33 Orthodox participants who have been on the Commission since 1989 (perseverance is better on the Anglican side, seven out of 28). The writings of this great theologian have been widely appreciated. To ground the being of the church in the mission of Christ and the Spirit and so in the Trinity is something which reflects the best of both churches' theologising; to do so in such a way as to respond to the challenge of changes in culture on the one hand and the inter-related ministries of the church in the eucharist around the bishop on the other, is surely something to be welcomed. However, Zizioulas' approach has not been without its critics. The Trinitarian approach adopted here reflects an approach to the relation between the Trinity and the Church which has become popular in recent years, almost the house style in the English speaking world, and it has entered Anglican ecclesiology<sup>2</sup>. Yet the analogy between the life of God and the life of the Church

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<sup>2</sup> As in the *Virginia Report*.

may not be as firmly based as the statement assumes. For example, there is a tension between the discussion of God in the statement and the ecclesiological arguments that are based on this Trinitarian analogy. The first acknowledges that God is 'beyond our ken' and that there is therefore a limit to what one can say about the Trinity and the second bases arguments for a way of ordering the Church on the nature of the relations within the Godhead. It is not clear that these two approaches are compatible. Furthermore, there is an order in the persons of the Trinity which finds emphasis in Orthodox trinitarianism, but is less present in Western social models. It might have been appropriate to remark this, given the comparative strangeness to Western ears of the 'Father' as the *cause* of the processions. Issues which bear the mark of Zizioulas which may repay examination are: the relational ontology; the extent to which an occasionalism undermines the kind of community/ecclesiology which he and the Report seek to commend; the alleged link between filioquism and medieval decline; the fear of any abiding distinctions within the church.

B. At times, the statement makes judgments about Rome, a common dismissal of what is seen as the Roman Catholic view. There was no Roman Catholic observer to consult. To put this diplomatically, the judgments do not seem to be nuanced; to put it bluntly, this is gratuitous anti-papal polemic, which

should have no place in such a document, if anywhere at all. On the other hand, there is the recognition of the role of the church of Rome in a future united church. These views do not seem to be harmonised and one wonders about the appropriateness of using common fears of an absent third in order to further agreements<sup>3</sup>.

C. For the statement it is the Spirit who determines the identity of Christ. In II,14 it is conceded that this is an approach that "challenges views held by some Orthodox and Anglican theologians" who have viewed the Word rather than the Spirit as the source of Christ's identity and activity. This is a considerable understatement, for it seems to put to the side Anglicans such as Hooker or Andrewes in the classical period, Aquinas from an earlier age and Anglican writers of more recent times. In the statement, the Word is hardly if ever spoken in terms which describe it in relation to the Incarnation as active. This *may* be a sustainable view, but it cuts across a wide swathe of Western (and Eastern) Christology. It would be good to have further reflection on this rather important area. St Irenaeus famously compared the Spirit and the Son to the two hands of God<sup>4</sup>, but it would seem a curious way of correcting this imbalance to untie the left hand of God, only the to tie up the right one. It is surely right to treat of the Spirit and the Word as both active *ad extra* in the Incarnation and to recognise that the

<sup>3</sup> As one finds in the *Agreed Statement on Christology by the Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission* (2002) with respect to the absent Assyrians.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. *Adversus Haereses* V.xvii

Spirit has not had such a place in many Western expositions, but the presentation is indeed of the two hands of the Father, but with one tied firmly behind his back.

D. With respect to the glorified humanity of Christ (IV 13, 14), some might wonder at the measure of consistency attained here<sup>5</sup>. As noted above, the view of some Greek Fathers that human sexual polarity disappeared as part of this transfiguration is cited with approval, but with the observation that this does not entail “the destruction of human nature in its gendered form”. This approach to the person of Jesus Christ has implications for how the goodness of difference and of sexual identity is redeemed. Even allowing for the positive things said about difference here, some might wonder whether a glorified body of Christ beyond the human polarity of gender would be in continuity with the Jesus Christ who lived among us. Some might also ask in what measure is this view of the last things owing to Christologies with inadequate accounts of the true humanity of Christ?<sup>6</sup>

E. The account of the end of the incarnation, of filiation or of *huiosetheia*, is a fitting way of treating that for which Christ came, died and is raised, but in the light of the emphasis put in Western Christianity, and in particular Protestant, on the atonement, the lack of a

treatment of the nature of Christ’s work for our salvation and our need of the cross is something which needs to be remedied. Although it is not right to look for everything a report such as this, it is something which perhaps should have been treated, the more so as the language of the respective traditions can give the impression of wider divergence in substance than is in fact the case.

F. In general, the Anglicans seem to have been loath to cite their own teachers or to use their own tradition (not a new phenomenon among Anglican ecumenists). Almost all the Fathers cited are Eastern; there is one citation of Leo, none of Augustine, Ambrose, Tertullian, Cyprian, still less of St Thomas. This leads into a discounting of positions more typical of the Anglican inheritance and the owning of language and conceptuality more typical of Orthodoxy (e.g. energies, iconicity). These are not familiar to Anglicans as working concepts and they both need further exposition and critique.

G. The presentation of the subject of priestly order is likely to draw eyes away from more fundamental questions and it is important to note that this issue is not one which is discussed in order to move one side to another view, but in order to see whether such an innovation justifies continued division or merits rejection as heretical. As noted,

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<sup>5</sup> There is a sideswipe at the “origenistic belief that the body will be annihilated in the world to come”, but the view that was condemned in 553 is surely that the risen body, of Christ and of the redeemed, is ‘ethereal, having the form of a sphere’ (10th Anathema against Origen).

<sup>6</sup> It is perhaps interesting that neither side uses such views of the eschatology of the human body to argue either before or against the ordination of women.

the presentation of arguments is not the strongest part of the report, but not much should be made of this as it is not the point of the discussion. Some Anglicans will find it hard to hear the Orthodox side; some Anglicans will find it hard to hear their own side, and the same, to a very different degree will apply to the Orthodox. It is important that the present disputatiousness of the Anglican communion on this issue does not undermine the remarkable meeting of minds which this dialogue has achieved between the two parties, where before there was something approaching condemnation.

H. Running through the statement is a mode of presentation in which a positive assertion is qualified by a denial of a generality without any concrete example. This runs the risk of lending the argument an appearance of authority that it may not possess, or at least leaving it as master of the battlefield. A good example of this is the treatment of the apostolic succession. Apostolic succession is seen in terms of successions of churches represented by their bishops, “rather than as a succession of individuals with power and authority to confer grace apart from their communities” (15). Such a phrase seems unhelpful. No specific theologian or view is identified, and though there has been a view of a linear succession of ordination through

time as a sufficient condition for the existence of the church, this would be an eccentric one, even for an Anglo-Catholic, especially for a Roman Catholic. It risks minimising the role of sequential ordination in the apostolic tradition or suggesting that it is less important than it is. Clarification of this issue should have been included in the report, not least in the light of the caution in this regard from well-disposed Orthodox commentators to the Porvoo process<sup>7</sup>.

I. Such a way of presenting the argument means that an opportunity is lost to give a narrative to how we have come to be different and apart. How we have come to be who we are is not incidental to our lives as members of the Church, indeed to being the churches we are and a narrative might have avoided the contentious presentation of mediaeval decline from a golden patristic age. It would also have allowed the Orthodox to expand on how their bishops, in the diaspora Orthodoxy of Western Europe, fulfil the missionary role of the bishop, a role which is passed over in the statement. This is also the environment in which Orthodox are most likely to come across Anglicans and vice versa.

These reservations do not stand in the way of welcome to this report. The Orthodox have dealt with Anglicans as

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Bouteneff *The Porvoo Statement An Orthodox Response* in O. Tjorhom *Apostolicity and Unity: Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement* (World Council of Churches, 2003), pp. 231–244. This is a contrasting view to that presented at V 15: “... the Anglican-Lutheran Porvoo Common Statement recognised the succession of bishops as a necessary aspect of ecclesial life, but insufficient by itself without the succession of local ecclesial communities”.

a 'church', without saying so. Until recently, there were but a few signposts which Anglicans and Orthodox could use together and use them we did, but now a map has been found which both can read and understand.

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# Evaluation of the Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue (1975–1987)

Urs von Arx

1. Whoever sets out to evaluate the Orthodox – Old Catholic Theological Dialogue is bound to be confronted with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand the dialogue was concluded in 1987 in accordance with the program established in 1973. Within 12 years 26 consensus texts were produced on a series of theological topics that were bilaterally deemed necessary to be included in a joint articulation of what should be seen as reflecting the essential of the faith shared by the two churches. 25 texts under the headings of “The Doctrine of God, Christology, Ecclesiology, Soteriology, The Doctrine of Sacraments, Eschatology” manifest this common understanding, as is made plain from the recurring set phrase at the end of

each text: “In the view of the Joint Orthodox – Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on The Holy Trinity [etc.] represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches”. In the same way a final text articulates the shared “Presuppositions and Consequences of Ecclesial Communion”.<sup>1</sup> There is no other Orthodox dialogue with a Western church that was on face value as successful as this one.

On the other hand next to nothing has come out of it since the last plenary session of the Joint Commission at Kavala GR in 1987. The next step on the way to the final goal of the dialogue – ecclesial, i.e. canonical-liturgical communion – would have been an eva-

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<sup>1</sup> For the text editions, see U. von Arx, \*60. [Asterisked figures refer to the ‘Bibliographie zum orthodox-altkatholischen theologischen Dialog’ attached to this paper. Unlike the bibliography in Greek, contributions in Orthodox ecclesiastical journals in other Eastern and Middle European languages are far less well documented. I welcome any respective information.]

luation and, hopefully, a reception of the commission work by the mandating bodies of the two churches, i.e. the Heads of the Orthodox Churches (through the agency of the Ecumenical Patriarch) and the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference (IBC). I am not aware that this has been the case on the Orthodox part, and I know it has not been the case on the Old Catholic part so far.

The dialogue texts, however, have been submitted to the synodical bodies of most of the individual Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht (USA 1990, Austria 1991, Switzerland 1992, Germany 1994, Czech Republic 1997, Poland 1998, the Netherlands 1998).<sup>2</sup> With one exception, these bodies accepted the texts as a basis for pursuing the way to ecclesial communion; some of them added comments on how they understood this or that particular statement in the dialogue texts or on what they thought could be rephrased or amplified in order to make it more relevant to the contemporary situation, which, after all, is different from the time of the Fathers. The Old Catholic Church in Germany, however, asked for a number of changes in the dialogue texts themselves, including for example the admissibility of ordaining women to the priesthood or of eucharistic sharing before visible ecclesial communion. These are, of course, the catchwords for the main Orthodox criticism of Old Catholic ecclesiastical practise on which I shall say more later.

The dissentient response of the German church had prevented the IBC from making a common statement on the dialogue. In autumn 2007, however, the German synod amended its earlier verdict and no longer asked for a revision of the dialogue texts. Thus the IBC may now produce an official Old Catholic statement on the dialogue texts, on the basis of a common mind ascertained in a formal synodical procedure. This would be the second international Old Catholic response to the dialogue after the Statement of the International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference in 1988,<sup>3</sup> which set the model of later positive pronouncements of national Old Catholic synodical bodies: grateful acknowledgement of the common faith as it is witnessed to in the consensus texts; the wish to see certain passages on different ecclesiastical practice in East and West clarified; the theological conviction that ecclesial communion with the Orthodox is not bound to lead to a necessary termination of the Old Catholic ecclesial communion with the Anglicans. To this point I will come back later, too.

Let me add some comments. Firstly, the synods of the Old Catholic Churches comprise clergy and lay members. Although the Old Catholics duly published the complete dialogue texts – according to the wish of the Orthodox co-chair Metropolitan Damaskinos in 1987<sup>4</sup> – and made them available in a printed trilingual edition, theological expertise to evaluate them was naturally restricted

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<sup>2</sup> See U. von Arx, \*87.

<sup>3</sup> See Bericht, \*59.

<sup>4</sup> See Metropolitan Damaskinos, \*54.

to clergy conferences or to the teaching staff of theological faculties and seminaries. To a large degree, it depended on their attitude to the dialogue and on their effort to highlight the positive achievements of the consensus texts as well as areas of further common Orthodox – Old Catholic work whether or not the synods came to their decision. This may partly explain the diverging results of the reception process in the synods.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the reception process was overshadowed by another agenda which was much more burning for the average Old Catholic in the West European countries: the debate about the ordination of women to the priesthood.<sup>6</sup> As most of the Old Catholic faithful had a vague notion that ordaining women to the priesthood would rather constitute a setback in the Old Catholic – Orthodox relationship, no enthusiasm for the latter could develop.

Thirdly, the process of the beginning reception of the Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue texts, which was supposed to become the climax of a century-old relationship was not only overshadowed by the ordination debate, but both of them fell in a period which was marked by the greatest inner crisis

the Union of Utrecht ever experienced. The agreement of the Old Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany on eucharistic sharing in 1985<sup>7</sup> – which did not find the approval of the IBC and thus led to an unprecedented tension within the IBC and the member churches – was not so much the cause of the crisis, but rather the sign of what looked like the demise of mainstream Old Catholic tradition, a sort of eclipse of an earlier more or less unified ecclesial conscience. This is not the place to go into any details and attempt an explanation – all the more so as I think that the crisis has been overcome.

I have touched on what can be reported from the Old Catholic Churches as far as an initial response to the dialogue and its 26 consensus texts is concerned. I am not aware that something similar has happened on the Orthodox part,<sup>8</sup> but this may simply be due to my ignorance. 2. Let me now give a short evaluation of the dialogue 1975–1987, i.e. its results and its methodology. It is situated in a renewal of earlier official relations and theological exchange between Orthodoxy and Old Catholicism – a renewal launched by the First Pan-Orthodox

<sup>5</sup> This is particularly true for the decision of the German synod in 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Urs von Arx, 'Die Debatte über die Frauenordination in den Altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union', in: Wolfgang Bock and Wolfgang Lienemann (eds.), *Frauenordination. Studien zu Kirchenrecht und Theologie III* (Texte und Materialien der Forschungsstätte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft e.V. [FEST], Reihe A Nr. 47), Heidelberg 2000, pp. 157–200. See also, IBK-Sondersession in Wislikofen Juli 1997', in: *IKZ* 87 (1997), pp. 225–240.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 'Vereinbarung über eine gegenseitige Einladung zur Teilnahme an der Feier der Eucharistie' in: *Ökumenische Rundschau* 34 (1985), pp. 365–367. Among the many Old Catholic reactions I refer to the IBC statement of 1994 only – see below note 19.

<sup>8</sup> The Russian Church has issued an official comment on the texts of the first session 1975; cf. *Journal of the Russian Patriarchate* 8 (1976).

Conference at Rhodes in 1961.<sup>9</sup> From an Old Catholic perspective, the list of theological points to be clarified concerning the Old Catholic position which was drawn up by the Inter-Orthodox Commission in Belgrade in 1966 gave the shocking impression that there had been no clarifications and agreements reached earlier and the dialogue had to restart from scratch. In retrospect, the many queries coming from the Orthodox side initiated a concerted action of the IBC and the Old Catholic members of the planned joint commission, which resulted in a number of documents and articles that seemed to satisfy the Orthodox.<sup>10</sup>

So in 1973 the way was paved to draw up the program and the methodology. Two individual theologians from each side were to prepare a paper on one of the agreed topics; a joint sub-commission was to produce a single paper to be submitted to the plenary commission, which would finalize the paper and if possible pass it as a consensus text. The joint commission was soon filled with mutual confidence and great enthusiasm

and thus developed a dynamism that made it possible to conclude the work within 12 years. There is a further reason for this success: difficult points, which had not been cleared up before the joint commission first met (as, for example, the *filioque* issue), were not taken up later. Prime among these points was the Old Catholic – Anglican ecclesial communion. It is true that “The problem of intercommunion” figured on the list adopted in 1973 as the last item of the ecclesiology section, but it was – as well as other issues<sup>11</sup> – somewhat inexplicably dropped in the course of time, or possibly postponed for later consideration.<sup>12</sup> After the news about the German eucharistic agreement mentioned above had roused a storm of indignation among the Orthodox and embarrassment among the Old Catholic members meeting in 1985 it was decided that a final ecclesiological text should delineate a common understanding of the close relation between eucharistic sharing and ecclesial communion both presupposing a common dogmatic belief. I shall return to this text later.

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<sup>9</sup> See e.g. the (equivocal) statement of the First Pan-Orthodox Conference, Rhodes 1961, in: Constantin G. Patelos (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement: Documents and Statements 1902–1975*, Geneva: WCC, p. 72: ‘Advancement of relations with [the Old Catholics] in the spirit of former theological discussions and their stated intentions and inclinations to unite with the Orthodox Church [pros henosin meta tes Orthodoxou Ekklesias]’.

<sup>10</sup> See U. Küry, \*15, and Dokumente, \*18.

<sup>11</sup> The issue of the canonicity of the Old Catholic hierarchy was considered to be the object of an official pan-Orthodox pronouncement and was therefore not analyzed by the commission (see I. Karmiris, \*25, and W. Küppers, \*31). Other issues that the Old Catholics in 1967 had suggested for a joint consideration, but were not adopted, included the following: sacramental communion between churches without full dogmatic agreement; marriage of clergy after ordination, married bishops; see Dokumente, \*10 (pp. 65–67).

<sup>12</sup> In a way it was a wise decision not to tackle this thorny problem at the beginning of the dialogue, because this enabled the commission to start and proceed on relatively easy ground (Doctrine of God, Christology).

For the most part the 25 consensus texts are not very spectacular, but this, after all, was not the goal. A clear emphasis is put on the ecclesiological texts.<sup>13</sup> They witness to a common understanding of the local church around her bishop who is the first presider of the eucharistic assemblies, this local church, insofar as she is in communion with other local churches and in continuity with the apostolic faith, being a manifestation of the One Catholic Church. Communion and unity among the local churches are maintained by a process of synodality of the bishops as representatives of their local churches, a process that eventually includes the element of reception by what the Orthodox call the *pleroma*. What was hardly addressed was the synodical process within the local church and the participation of the laity as sacramentally fully initiated members of the body of Christ.

The most remarkable ecclesiological text is possibly the one that deals with “The Boundaries of the Church” (III/3), and this in view of the avowed fact of the still existing lack of visible unity of “the Church”. I quote a longer passage:

... Journeying through history, the Church of Christ has become divided into many Churches which disagreed with each other because the faith and doctrines handed down from the Apostles were debased. Today Chris-

tian Churches and confessions differ not only in unessential respects, but also do not teach the same in even fundamental points of Christian doctrine. This led among other things to the false and unacceptable theory that the true visible Church, the Church of the age of the Apostles and Church Fathers, no longer exists today but that each of the individual Churches retains only a portion, greater or less, of the true Church and that none of them, therefore, can be regarded as a genuine and essentially complete re-presentation of the true Church.

3. But from the day it was founded right down to our own day, the true Church, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, has gone on existing without any discontinuity wherever the true faith, worship and order of the ancient undivided Church are preserved unimpaired as they are reflected and formulated in the definitions and canons of the seven Ecumenical Synods and the acknowledged local synods and in the Fathers of the Church.

4. Our Joint Commission gives heresy and schism the appropriate significance and regards communities which continue in heresy and schism as in no sense as efficacious sites of salvation parallel to the true visible Church. It nevertheless believes that the

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<sup>13</sup> I skip interesting points in the other topical sections, so e.g. the interrelatedness of Scripture and Tradition in: ‘I/1 Divine Revelation and its Transmission’, para. 5. Cf. Peter-Ben Smit, ‘The Old Catholic View on Scripture and Tradition: A Short Study of a Theological Organism’, in: *IKZ* 97 (2007), pp. 106–123.

question of the Church's boundaries can be seen in a larger light. Since it is impossible to set limits to God's power whose will it is that all should find salvation and come to know the truth and since further the Gospel clearly speaks of salvation by faith in the unique Son of God – "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life" (Jn. 3:36) –, it can be considered as not excluded that the divine omnipotence and grace are present and operative wherever the departure from the fullness of truth in the one Church is not complete and does not go to the lengths of a complete estrangement from the truth, wherever "God Himself is not called in question", wherever the source of "life, the Trinity, is sincerely proclaimed and the mystery of the divine economy in the incarnation is acknowledged" (Petrus III of Antioch, Letter to Michael Cerularius of Constantinople 14 – PG 120.805,808).

I offer two brief comments. Firstly, this perspective opens a way to consider the ecclesiality of communities other than one's own; unfortunately it is not spelt out in detail what this could mean for their ecumenical pilgrimage. Secondly, compared with a passage in the Anglican-Orthodox Dublin Statement of 1984 dealing with the fact of divisions there is no Orthodox self-reference as being "the one true Church of Christ, which as his Body is not and cannot be divided".<sup>14</sup> I do not mean to say that this conviction has simply been given up in our text, but it is interesting to see that in a consensus text, as is typical for the Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue, any wording that in the last resort "unchurches" the dialogue partner has been avoided. This (partial or total) "unchurching" would be implied wherever the notion "only we" is operative. I think that in the process of a dialogue where two partners seek to recognize and then acknowledge ecclesial communion already existing in the triune God, an *epoché* of judgment is preferable, if not spiritually required.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue. The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984*, London: SPCK, 1985, p 11.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Urs von Arx, 'Unity and Communion, Mystical and Visible', in: Urs von Arx / Paul Avis / Mattjis Ploeger (eds), *Towards Further Convergence: Anglican and Old Catholic Ecclesiologies*. The Papers of the Anglican – Old Catholic Theologians' Conference, Leeds, 29 August – 2 September, 2005 = Supplementary issue to IKZ 96 (2006), pp. 140–173, here p. 168. See also the critical remarks of Olivier Clément, in: *The New Valamo Consultation. The ecumenical nature of the Orthodox witness*. New Valamo, Finland, September 24–30, 1997, Geneva: WCC, s.a., pp. 27f. For a recent Orthodox discussion, see Grigorios Larentzakis, 'Die eine Kirche und ihre Einheit. Aspekte aus der Sicht der orthodoxen Theologie', in: *Konsultationen zwischen der Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen (KEK) und der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE) / Consultations between the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)*, Wittenberg / Phanar, 25.–27.6.2004 / 27.–30.4.2006, ed. by Michael Beintker et al. (Leuener Texte 11), Frankfurt a.M.: Lembeck, 2007, pp. 29–69, here pp. 33–40 [English translation: pp. 70–105, here pp. 73–79].

Two further observations may be added. The texts often refer to the Eastern and – to a lesser degree – the Western fathers, but never to any modern bilateral or multilateral theological dialogue. This may be partly explained by the fact that the Old Catholic – Orthodox relationship antedates the Faith and Order Movement as well as the various bilateral dialogues of the last 40 years and that it aims at ecclesial communion between the two churches. On the other hand the expectation was sometimes expressed that this dialogue could serve as a model at least for a rapprochement between what is still called East and West.<sup>16</sup> I wonder how much this is a realistic assessment beyond dialogues conducted between churches of a – phenomenologically speaking – catholic type, since here many issues that turn up in a dialogue with churches having passed through the Western Reformation do not appear on the agenda. But be this as it may, the Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue texts are a little isolated within the field of worldwide ecumenical conversations: to my knowledge they have hardly influenced other dialogues nor have they taken benefit from them. Whether this applies to other texts analyzed in this consultation remains to be seen.

It has often been criticised in academic Old Catholic quarters that the consensus texts when referring to the Ancient Church or to the Fathers make dubious historical statements, reflect a traditional

textbook perception of the past and seem to vacillate between a descriptive and prescriptive mode of speaking without making a sufficiently clear distinction when drawing consequences for the present or the desired common future.<sup>17</sup> Again the general goal of the texts that lies beyond them should not be lost out of sight, and due benevolence should be paid to the specific genre of texts that are often – and not only in this case – the result of commissions putting together passages from different authors and traditions.

3.1 Let me return to the two or three issues I postponed for later discussion. As noted above the agreement on eucharistic sharing between the Old Catholic and the Evangelical Church in Germany caused some turbulence in the commission and gave rise to the final text on ‘Ecclesial Communion: Presuppositions and Consequences’. What this text states corresponds in my view to the traditional Old Catholic position that eucharistic communion requires the same faith and that divided churches cannot re-establish eucharistic communion during continuing separation without being forced to have recourse to the conception of an already existing invisible unity which the eucharist proclaims (and possibly mediates). Eucharistic communion, then, is no longer *the* sign and manifestation of *concrete visible* unity in the Spirit-given reality of Christ.<sup>18</sup> The indissoluble connection

<sup>16</sup> Thus Metropolitan Damaskinos (Papandrourou), the co-chair of the Joint Commission since 1981, on various occasions, so in: *Episkepsis* 14 (1983), no 302; \*57.

<sup>17</sup> For an otherwise sympathetic Anglican voice in this vein, see J. Robert Wright, \*75.

<sup>18</sup> The concept of growing together in steps, as it is often advocated in Western churches, usually sees eucharistic sharing as the first step and ministerial sharing or interchange as

of eucharistic and ecclesial communion as a principle is clearly expressed in an IBC statement of 1992, which offers a clarification of the issues raised by the eucharistic agreement.<sup>19</sup> It does refer, however, to an Old Catholic practice of administering Holy Communion to individual baptized members of other churches who share the faith of the Ancient Church and believe in the real presence of the eucharistic Christ. And it stresses that this practice is to be considered as “an application of the principle of *oikonomia*, i.e. an attitude that exclusively serves pastoral needs and spiritual aid”.<sup>20</sup> Thus Old Catholic theology makes a distinction between eucharistic sharing between churches that are united in *ecclesial* communion on the one hand and administering the eucharist to *individual* baptized members of still separated churches on the other. In the latter case the question of the ecclesiality of these separated churches remains open.

It cannot be denied that this practice may obscure the inherent relationship

of eucharistic and ecclesial communion, as it has been restated as an Old Catholic theological principle by the IBC. One should not forget, however, the extreme diaspora situation of Old Catholics wherever they are. A great portion of them live in mixed marriages, and in terms of extended families I think nearly all of them must be denominationally mixed. The only alternative would be to retreat into an ecumenical and consequently social ghetto (without enjoying the moral support of knowing that there exists a more or less monolithic block of co-religionists in ‘mother’ countries).

3.2 In the last phase of the official Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue the issue of eucharistic sharing in a situation of ongoing ecclesial division was mixed up with the issue of what was still termed “intercommunion” between the Old Catholic and the Anglican churches;<sup>21</sup> a more appropriate term in the modern ecumenical context would be “ecclesial communion”.<sup>22</sup> The formal theological basis of this communion between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of

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the last and therefore – apparently – as the distinct sign of visible unity and communion. This seems to me an odd (and clerical) reversal of values. Cf. also the ‘Conclusions of the 38th International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference, Elspeet NL, August 29, 2003’, in: *IKZ* 93 (2003), pp. 209f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. ‘Eucharistiegemeinschaft und kirchliche Einheit’ in: *IKZ* 84 (1994) 62–63; this appears to be a partial amendment of the statement of the 26th International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference at Leuven B, September 1987, in: *IKZ* 77 (1987), pp. 207f.

<sup>20</sup> It may be doubted whether this intention is really observed if in some Old Catholic churches or parishes there is an express general invitation to individual members of other churches in good standing who happen to be present.

<sup>21</sup> See above all ‘The Decisions of the Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference on the Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement, Chambésy, Switzerland 1986’, in: \*53 (pp. 9f.); Metropolitan Damaskinos in his opening address of the 6th plenary session in 1985. in: *Episkepsis* 16 (1985), no. 344.; idem, \*54.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Harding Meyer / Heinz Schütte, ‘Abendmahl’, in: Hanfried Krüger et al. (eds.), *Oekumene Lexikon. Kirchen – Religionen – Bewegungen*, Frankfurt a.M.: Lembeck / Knecht,

Utrecht and the worldwide Anglican Communion is the so-called Bonn Agreement of 1931. It runs like this:

1. Each communion recognises the catholicity and independence of the other and maintains its own.
2. Each communion agrees to admit members of the other communion to participate in the sacraments.
3. Intercommunion does not require from either communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion, or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.

The same formula has been used in 1965 when the IBC declared the Old Catholic Churches to be in communion with the Philippine Independent Church (and two other churches on the Iberian peninsula, which since 1980 are under the metropolitan authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury and thus belong to the Anglican Communion).

The wording of para. 3 of the Bonn Agreement makes it clear that ecclesial communion presupposes a common dogmatic faith (“all the essentials of the Christian faith”).<sup>23</sup> However, these “essentials” have never been specified or analyzed in any detail. This is a weakness of the agreement, which cannot be excused from being ambiguous.<sup>24</sup>

Another problem is given by the recent fact that various national Anglican Churches are now in full communion with other churches in the same global region. A notable example in Europe is what might conveniently be called the Porvoo Communion, embracing the four Anglican Churches of the British Isles and six Nordic and Baltic (Lutheran) Churches (1994/95). There is no extension of this communion to the Union of Utrecht. This entails a rather strange consequence in terms of liturgical symbolism: Since the 1930s Old Catholic bishops have often been invited to lay on hands at episcopal consecrations in the Church of England; now they do this together with bishops of churches with which they are not in

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1987, pp. 2–10, here p. 6f.; Geoffrey Wainwright, Art. ‘Intercommunion’, in: Nicholas Lossky et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: WCC, 2002, pp. 586–589.

<sup>23</sup> See also Bishop Léon Gauthier (Bern), the then Old Catholic co-chair of the Joint Commission, in an interview on the problem of Old Catholic ‘intercommunion’ with other churches and confessions: “Notre réponse demeure ce qu’elle a toujours été: l’intercommunion que nous avons avec les Eglises de la communion anglicane repose sur la reconnaissance commune de la catholicité, donc sur la reconnaissance d’une même foi catholique présente dans les deux Eglises ... Donc pour nous la foi précède l’intercommunion, elle ne la suit pas” ; cf. *Episkepsis* 4 (1973), no. 81.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Harald Rein, *Kirchengemeinschaft. Die anglikanisch-alkatholisch-orthodoxen Beziehungen von 1870 bis 1990 und ihre ökumenische Relevanz. Vol. 1: Allgemeine Einführung. Die anglikanisch-alkatholischen Beziehungen*, Bern: Lang, 1993, pp. 93–449.

communion, although according to tradition the liturgical act would precisely manifest such a communion.<sup>25</sup>

This highlights a certain dilemma on the Old Catholic part: In their perception Anglicans represent a church that has been *especially* close to Old Catholicism and its ecclesiological and ecumenical vision since early times, and Old Catholic – Anglican (mostly British) ways of exchange from theological consultations to youth meetings on an international, national and parochial level have witnessed to this commonly held conviction for decades. This is certainly not (or no longer, if ever) the case in Anglican perception: In their ecumenical dynamism of the last decades they have established agreements with other churches that elicit much more interest and offer many more possibilities of theological and ecclesiastical exchange; they are surely not to be blamed for that,

taking into account the global (in)significance of Old Catholicism.

However, what has been said about the especially close relationship between Old Catholicism and Anglicanism – and this, I repeat, in Old Catholic perspective – is only one side of the medal. The same must be said in view of Orthodoxy. There is an obvious historical reason for this Old Catholic assessment. The post Vatican I ecclesiastical organization of Old Catholic Churches in German speaking countries was coterminous with a factually trilateral initiative to find ways for a reunion of Christians on the common basis of the Ancient Church. The starting point was in September 1872, when representatives of the Old Catholic movement and of Orthodox and Anglican ecclesiastical associations met at the Congress of Cologne and set out the principles of the common work.<sup>26</sup> This eventually led

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<sup>25</sup> See the IBC statement on this problem, in: *IKZ* 94 (2004), pp. 140f. The ‘transitivity’ of communion was not unknown to the Old Catholics in 1931, where this issue was discussed, but not integrated into the text of the Agreement; see the German version of the minutes in: U. Küry, \*35 (p. 477). This point is missing in the English version of the minutes; cf. ‘Report of the Meeting of the Commission of the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Churches held at Bonn on Thursday, July 2, 1931’; in: *Lambeth Occasional Reports 1931–8*, London: SPCK, 1948, 1–38, here pp. 26f. Concerning the rarely discussed problem of transitivity cf. e.g. ‘Facing Unity. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue (1984)’, in: Jeffrey Gros et al. (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1982–1998*, Geneva: WCC / Eerdmans: Grand Rapids MI 2000, 443–484, here 476 (paras. 146–148).

<sup>26</sup> These associations were the *Anglo-Continental Society* and the St. Petersburg branch of the *Society of Friends of Spiritual Enlightenment* (Obščestvo ljubitelej duhovnago prosvješćenija). Their representatives took part not as delegates of their respective churches, but with express knowledge of their ecclesiastical authorities; among them were the Rt Revd Edward Harold Browne, Bishop of Ely; the Rt Revd William Rollinson Whittingham, Bishop of Maryland; Protopresbyter Ivan Leontovič Janyšev, Rector of the Theological Academy of St. Petersburg; Colonel Aleksandr Kireev, Secretary of the St. Petersburg branch of the said Society. For the text of the “Principles”, see U. Küry, \*35 (p. 462).

to the Bonn Reunion Conferences of 1874 and 1875, organized and presided over by Ignaz von Doellinger.<sup>27</sup> For various reasons this trilateral enterprise was discontinued, but it was somehow engraved in the Old Catholic consciousness. This may be seen from the list of Orthodox and Anglican representatives who had participated at the International Old Catholic Congresses since 1890 and even more so from the fact that up to the 1970s Orthodox and Anglican representatives were often even invited as speakers to address a specific topic within the permanent subject of the Old Catholic ecumenical vision: rapprochement and even communion between those (three) churches who in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were deemed to be the Catholic wing of the then Ecumenical Movement.<sup>28</sup> Last but not least, the Bonn Agreement of 1931 was an element in a clearly tripartite set of

Anglican, Orthodox and Old Catholic conversations agreed upon in the wake of the Lambeth Conference of 1930.<sup>29</sup> It remains a mystery why Orthodox reservations against the theological presuppositions of the Old Catholic – Anglican Agreement in June 1931 were apparently not discussed three months later in October 1931 when the first (nearly pan-) Orthodox – Old Catholic Conference met and came to such conclusions that many of the participants on either side thought that ‘sacramental communion’ should be possible. Thus it came as a somewhat grievous surprise for Old Catholic bishops and theologians to learn after 1966 that Metropolitan Germanos (Strinopoulos) in a Greek journal had already in 1932 expressed his concern about the theological basis of Old Catholic – Anglican ‘intercommunion’<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> A reprint of the proceedings is now available in: *Bericht über die 1874 und 1875 zu Bonn gehaltenen Unions-Conferenzen. Herausgegeben von Heinrich Reusch*. Nachdruck der Ausgabe in zwei Bänden von 1874 und 1875, mit einer Einführung von Günter Esser (Geschichte und Theologie des Alt-Katholizismus. Schriftenreihe des Alt-Katholischen Seminars der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn. Reihe A: Quellen 2), Bonn: Alt-Katholischer Bistumsverlag, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> In the last decades the nature of the Congresses has changed: They no longer serve as sometimes rather theological or academic platforms in the service of long standing ecumenical projects of Old Catholicism, but are much more places in the format of a ‘Kirchentag’ (with a still significant Anglican and a weakened Orthodox presence).

<sup>29</sup> See my unpublished contribution ‘The Historical Background to the Bonn Agreement’ (originally a paper delivered at the Conference to mark the 75th anniversary of the Bonn Agreement, Leeds 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. his ‘Mysteriake Koinonia metaxy Palaiokatholikon kai Anglikanon’, in: *Orthodoxia* 7 (1932), pp. 82–88; 117–121. He was the co-chair of the Orthodox – Anglican and of the Orthodox – Old Catholic Commission, which met in October 1931. An early controversy about incompatibilities of [Evangelical] Anglican with Old Catholic and Orthodox teaching can be found in: J. Janyschew, *Ueber das Verhältniss der Altkatholiken zur Orthodoxie*, Wiesbaden: Bechtold, 1891, esp. p. 27; idem, *Ist die Glaubenslehre der anglo-amerikanischen Kirche wirklich orthodox-katholisch? Ein Anhang zu dem Aufsatz: ‘Ueber das Verhältniss der Altkatholiken zur Orthodoxie’*, Berlin: Stankiewicz, 1892. The trilateral relationship was never without problems; sceptical observers may speak of an age-long Old Catholic illusion...

When towards the end of the official dialogue the Old Catholic faithful began to suspect – whether correctly or wrongly – that ecclesial communion with the Orthodox Church would require a rupture or modification of the communion with Anglican Churches,<sup>31</sup> they were not in a position to understand what to them (not theologically trained) looked like an impossible choice: It hopelessly interfered with their perception of the supra-local ecumenical aspirations of traditional Old Catholicism; it did not fit their expectations of what was the way forward in an ecumenical age; and last but not least, the majority of them had for years experienced much more of an Anglican – Old Catholic than an Orthodox – Old Catholic affinity, because there had been far more opportunities for meeting, exchange, common action and prayer with the former than with the latter. This is unfortunately still the case, although now Orthodox Christians predominantly no longer live as dispersed refugees or guests in Western countries, but in consolidated parishes and large numbers. It would be wrong to suggest that the Joint Commission failed to squarely address and analyze the details of the *theological* basis of the Anglican – Old Catholic ecclesial communion; this would have implied to speak about an

absent third party. The Orthodox members rather expected the Old Catholics to take the necessary initiatives or to give a satisfying explanation. The IBC Statement on ‘The Relations of the Union with other Churches’ of 1993 – if it was really known to them – would not have answered all the queries.<sup>32</sup>

4. It would be premature to conclude that what looked like a successful dialogue has come to a dead end. But the entire process is in need of spiritual and theological oxygen. Basically there are two ways forward.

4.1 On the one hand theologians may discuss and study the two points that were – correctly or not – identified as the main obvious obstacles to ecclesial communion: the ordination of women to the priesthood (which became an issue only after 1987) and the nature and presuppositions of Old Catholic – Anglican (and IFI) ecclesial communion.<sup>33</sup> This is done by an Orthodox – Old Catholic Working Group that was jointly constituted by the Ecumenical Patriarch and the IBC, after an Old Catholic delegation, led by the Archbishop of Utrecht, had visited the Patriarchate in September 2003 and asked for a revitalisation of the century-old relationship.<sup>34</sup> The Working Group

<sup>31</sup> Cf. e.g. Metropolitan Damaskinos, in: \*54; \*57; \*58; \*66.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Die Beziehungen der Utrechter Union zu anderen Kirchen’, in: *IKZ* 83 (1993), pp. 250–254. Some paragraphs now look rather dated anyway.

<sup>33</sup> Apart from this, the Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference 1986 referred to ‘difficulties of the Old Catholic Church to fully introduce into her life and put into practice the agreed doctrinal texts’, cf. above note 21. Old Catholics still do not know for certain what exactly this evaluation has in mind. It may have to do with the Western practice of sacramental initiation; cf. U. von Arx, \*97 (pp. 674–678).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *IKZ* 93 (2003), p. 266; *Episkepsis* 34 (2003), no. 629.

comprises three members of each church,<sup>35</sup> and it has met four times so far.<sup>36</sup> Due to a number of technical difficulties it could not do much more than present reasons, objections and queries with respect to either position concerning the ordination of women and – as far as possible – clarify the theological basis and the (often exaggerated) extent of official ‘intercommunion’ established by the Union of Utrecht.<sup>37</sup> But without a more differentiated hermeneutical approach to these issues and the socio-cultural presuppositions of the argumentation on either side, this investigation will hardly shed new light on what seems to be a deadlocked situation.<sup>38</sup>

A further field of investigation has been left untouched so far, although it might present considerable interest to other dialogues as well. Para 8 of the final text ‘Ecclesial Communion: Presuppositions and Consequences’ delineates a common task which somehow would have to break new ground instead of rehearsing old issues:

The liturgical and canonical consequences, which result from ecclesial fellowship, will be elucidated and regulated by the Church on the basis of the tradition of the undivided Church. This fellowship does not signify uniformity in liturgical order and ecclesial practice, but rather embodies an expression of the fact that the historically legitimated development of the one faith of the ancient and undivided Church is preserved in each of the participating Churches. This fellowship also does not require the subjection of one Church with its tradition to the other Church, for this would contradict the reality of the fellowship ...

4.2 On the other hand, wherever Orthodox and Old Catholic parishes are in the same place they could organize regular meetings to provide a platform for better mutual knowledge or for discussing burning ethical issues.<sup>39</sup> The Old Catholic – Orthodox relations have overwhelmingly been confined to en-

<sup>35</sup> Metropolitan Jeremias (Kaligiorgis), Chambésy CH (co-chair); Metropolitan Maximos (Agiorgousis), Pittsburgh USA; Prof. Vlassios Phidas, Athens GR/Chambésy CH; Bishop Joachim Vobbe, Bonn D (co-chair); the Revd. Prof. Urs von Arx, Bern CH; the Revd. Oliver Kaiser, Hannover D. Metropolitan Maximos was appointed on the assumption that the Polish National Catholic Church in USA and Canada was still a member of the Union of Utrecht and would delegate a representative into the Working Group. As the PNCC terminated membership in the Union late in 2003, there was no point of his travelling to Switzerland, and he did not take part in any session. The Orthodox side was reconstituted in April 2008: Metropolitan Michael (Staikos), Vienna A (co-chair); Prof. Grigorios Larentzakis, Graz A; Prof. Konstantinos Delikostantis, Athens GR.

<sup>36</sup> 17 February 2005, Chambésy; 24 November 2005, Bern; 16/17 April 2007 Chambésy; 11/12 December 2007, Chambésy.

<sup>37</sup> Papers were submitted by Professors Phidas and von Arx.

<sup>38</sup> A certain start was made with the non-official Orthodox – Old Catholic consultation, organized with the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Utrecht under the auspices of Metropolitan Damaskinos (Papandreou) and Bishop Hans Gerny in 1996, cf. U. von Arx / A, Kallis, \*81.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. A. Kallis, \*96. See also for a Dutch example A. Berlis, \*91.

counters of bishops and theologians; why not find new ways of exchanges for the faithful of both churches who now live in the same society and are often confronted with challenges for the faith (orthodoxia, orthopraxis)? The latest resolution of the International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference of 2007 has issued such an invitation to the Old Catholic side.<sup>40</sup> This might establish ways of dialogue on a level that cannot be neglected if ecclesial communion concerns the pleroma of the church and its reception, not just experts of an academic process, which might sometime be in danger of becoming an end in itself.

5. The papers presented at the Pullach Conference prompt me to make a short concluding remark. All the bilateral dialogues that were under review evidence a clear theological commitment. And more than once it was said – from Orthodox and non-Orthodox – that the

final goal of the dialogues is the visible unity of the Church. Broadly speaking, the issues discussed in the dialogues concern trinitarian theology, soteriology, ecclesiology etc. And the dialogues are expected to go on.

Now, from the point of view of the Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue, it may, perhaps boldly, be said that most issues of this kind have been dealt with and are no longer considered to be an obstacle to the establishment of ecclesial communion. A stumbling-block of an apparently church-dividing character, however, is the ordination of women to the priesthood.

Since all the CEC churches that entertain dialogues with the Orthodox, ordain women,<sup>41</sup> it may be asked how, in the long term, this affects the seriousness of the bilaterally stated goal of these dialogues.

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<sup>40</sup> “The ecumenical vocation of the Union of Utrecht and its member churches is firstly to apply and deepen, in the context of the local Church at the level of parish communities, that which has been theologially clarified and achieved together with the Anglican and Orthodox Churches. To this end the International Bishops' Conference is called upon to pass a resolution that each national Church develops a concept to encourage selected Old Catholic parishes to establish contacts with Orthodox and Anglican parishes or deepen existing relations and so form Places of Encounter and Co-operation. With this aim in mind each national Old Catholic Church would take up appropriate contact with the Episcopal leadership of the respective Orthodox and Anglican parishes.” Cf. *IKZ* 98 (2008), pp. 3f.

<sup>41</sup> This issue has been, though not finally, addressed in the remarkable report: *The Church of the Triune God*. The Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue 2006, London: Anglican Communion Office, 2006. I wonder whether the Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Church of England has quite recognized the indirect and thus rather adroit way of dealing with the theological presuppositions of the issue; cf. The Council for Christian Unity: Faith and Order Advisory Group, *The Church of the Triune God*. Briefing Paper for members of the General Synod, GS 1706, pp. 23–25 (<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/gs1706.rtf>).

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### **Appendix: Bibliographie zum orthodox – altkatholischen theologischen Dialog (ab 1961)**

*IKZ = Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift (Bern)*

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# The Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue

## Estimation of the Present Stage

Ioan-Vasile Leb

### Introduction

As well known, the Old Catholic Church was born as a reaction to the new papal dogmas defined at the Council Vatican I of 1870: the papal infallibility and the jurisdictional primacy of the Bishop of Rome, by which he considered himself the leader of the entire Christian world and the last instance of appeal.<sup>1</sup> As they refused to accept these dogmatic innovations, the challengers set up a separate Church, keeping the Catholic fundamentals and eliminating the renewals,

having become “Catholicism without Rome”.<sup>2</sup> Having taken the expression *Id teneamus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*<sup>3</sup> of Vincent of Lerin as their basic principle, the Old Catholics considered themselves a sort of bridge between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, so that since the Congress of Munich, of 22–24 September 1871, they hoped in a reunion both with the Eastern Greek Church and with the Russian Church, “whose separation was done with no basic reasons and based on no dogmatic

<sup>1</sup> J. Fr. von Schulte, *Der Altkatholizismus*, Giessen, 1885, reed. Aalen, 1965; Urs Küry, *Die altkatholische Kirche. Ihre Geschichte, ihre Lehre, ihr Anliegen*, in col. *Die Kirchen der Welt*, Bd. III, Evangelisches Verlagswerk Stuttgart, 1966; Ioan-Vasile Leb, *Ortodoxie și vechi-catholicism sau ecumenism înainte de Mișcarea Ecumenică*, PUC, Cluj-Napoca, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Victor Conzemius, *Katholizismus ohne Rom. Die altkatholische Kirchengemeinschaft*, Benziger Verlag, Zürich, Einsiedeln, Köln, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Rauschen, *Des heiligen Vinzenz von Lerin Commonitorium*, in „Bibliothek der Kirchenväter“ (BKV), Bd. XX, p. 19 and p. 9, nota 1; Marinus Kok, *Vincenz von Lerinum und sein Commonitorium*, in „Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift“ (further on IKZ), 52, 1962, p. 75–85.

difference not to be overcome.”<sup>4</sup> They have also taken into consideration the Anglicans and Protestants, so that before long we would attend a first encounter between the representatives of these confessions, in Bonn, in 1874.

In spite of all the difficulties present – as the Old Catholics had hardly been set up as a Church – their relations with the Orthodox Church in view of their union have always been a priority in their ecumenical strategy. Orthodoxy represented for them the guarantee and support for the purpose. The Orthodox Church, in her turn, manifested, from the very beginning, a vivid interest for the Old Catholics, as she saw in them the possibility of re-establishing the Old Undivided Church in the West.

The Orthodox-Old Catholic relationships influenced positively both parts. On one hand, the Old Catholics found support in Orthodoxy and, on the other hand, the Orthodox were determined to discuss more intensely with the Old Catholic theologians and to better study

their teaching of faith. The results of this confrontation materialised in the many theological-scientific works that the Old Catholics, as well as the Greek, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Serb, Czech, Polish, Finn and more recently the American Orthodox drafted.

Considered from the point of view of the commitment of the two Churches, the history of the dialogue between them can be divided into two great phases, namely an *unofficial* one and an *official* one. It is not appropriate to present here the history of the relations between the two Churches, on which lots of researchers insisted.<sup>5</sup> Yet, we remember the fact that the results of the unofficial discussions allowed the Joint Commission for the Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue to function with very good results. However, a rather long period was necessary for the two Churches to start the dialogue. We remember here especially the union conferences from Bonn, from 1874 and 1875, the exchange of reports between the Commission from Sankt Petersburg

<sup>4</sup> I.V. Leb, *Ortodoxie și vechi-catolicism...*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: C. Oyen, *Chronologisch-bibliographische Übersicht der Unionsverhandlungen zwischen der orthodoxen Kirche des Ostens und der altkatholischen Kirche der Utrechter Union*, IKZ 57 (1967) 29–51; Ioan-Vasile Leb, *Ortodoxie und Altkatholizismus*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, “Babeș-Bolyai” Universität, Cluj-Napoca, 1995; Idem, *Ortodoxie și Vechi-Catolicism sau Ecumenism înainte de Mișcarea Ecumenică*, PUC, Cluj-Napoca, 1996; Harald Rein, *Kirchengemeinschaft. Die anglikanisch-altkatholisch-orthodoxen Beziehungen von 1870 bis 1990*, 2 B-de, Peter Lang, Bern, Berlin, New York, 1993/1994; Urs von Arx, *Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis*, Bern, 1989; J. Finsterholz, *Ignaz von Döllinger*, Styria Verlag, Graz, Wien, Köln, 1969; Peter Neuner, *Döllinger als Theologe der Ökumene*, Paderborn, München, 1979; Ignaz von Döllinger, *Über die Wiedervereinigung der christlichen Kirchen. Sieben Vorträge, gehalten zu München im Jahr 1872*, Nördlingen, 1888. Soon these speeches were translated into English (1872) and French (1881). Friedrich Heinrich Reusch, *Bericht über die am 14., 15. und 16. September zu Bonn gehaltenen Unionskonferenzen. Im Auftrage des Vorsitzenden Dr. von Döllinger*, Bonn, 1874, p. 33–50 (further on *B.I.*).

and Rotterdam, as well as the implementation of the inter-communion between the two Churches. It was also necessary that the world should pass through two world wars to be aware of the need of mutual rapprochement in view of re-establishing church unity. It was, finally, necessary to have collaboration within the Ecumenical Movement and in the Pan-Orthodox Conferences so that the atmosphere of collaboration should allow the beginning of the inter-church dialogues. This is why after much effort for preparing, the *official dialogue* – between the 14 Orthodox Churches and 8 Old Catholic Churches, members of the Utrecht Union – could start in 1975 through the meeting of the first *General Assembly of the Joint Orthodox-Old Catholic Theological Commission*.

After overcoming the first obstacles, the dialogue unfolded at three levels: certain theologians of each part were commissioned to prepare the concept of a text for a certain theme in the dialogue agenda established in 1973, conveyed then to a joint sub-commission; then, the sub-commission drafted the common text that was to be submitted to the Joint Commission; this one discussed, if it was necessary, modified the project and approved the final text that was to be signed by all the members of the commission. Finally, the text was submitted to the leadership of the two Churches. Every text was drafted in the two official languages: Greek and German, both versions having been submitted to the

members of the Joint Commission. In 12 years time (1975–1987), the following common texts were discussed and signed: **I. Teaching About God (Theology): I/1 *The Divine Revelation and Its Transmission*; I/2 *Canon of the Holy Scripture*; I/3 *The Holy Trinity*, **II. Christology: II/1 *The Incarnation of the Word of God*; II/2 *Ipostatic Union*; II/3 *Mother of God*; III. Ecclesiology: III/1 *The Being and Characteristics of the Church*; III/2 *Unity of the Church and the Local Churches*; III/3 *Boundaries of the Church*; III/4 *Authority of the Church and in the Church*; III/5 *Infallibility of the Church*; III/7 *Necessity of the Apostolic Succession*; III/8 *The Head of the Church*; **IV, Soteriology: IV/1 *Saving Work of Christ, our Lord*; IV/2 *The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and Salvation*; V. The Holy Sacraments: V/1 *The Sacraments of the Church*; V/6 *Sacrament of the Holy Unction*; V/7 *Sacrament of Priesthood*; V/8 *Sacrament of Wedding (Marriage)*; **VI. Ecclesiology: VI/1 *The Church and the End of the World*; VII. Church Communion. Premises and Consequences.********

The seventh General Assembly of the Joint Commission held in Kavala, Greece, in October 1987, ended the dialogue as it had been scheduled.<sup>6</sup> It should be mentioned that at the end of every text the following things are mentioned: “The text above, on .... renders, according to the Joint Orthodox – Old Catholic Commission, the

<sup>6</sup> *Dokumente zum orthodox-alkatholischen Dialog*, IKZ 1/1988, 78. Jahrgang, Bern 1988, p. 49–62

teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches”<sup>7</sup>, emphasising in this way the common official character of the texts.

### Study and Perspectives

Therefore, at present, the leaderships of the Orthodox Churches and of the Old Catholic Ones own 26 texts, which identify a large Orthodox – Old Catholic consensus. Although the theological work ended, there remained “serious problems unsolved”. His Eminence Metropolitan Damaschinos Papandreou reminded them ever since October 1986, in Chambesy, that: “do the theological agreements we reach engage the Churches we represent? How can they be included in the church life without risking schism? Do we refer to the mutual relationship between the bilateral and multilateral dialogues and, if so, what are they? For example, can an agreement between the Old Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church concerning the church authority or the head of the Church relate the official dialogue between Orthodox and Roman Catholics? What may be the theological and ecclesiological consequences of the statements of the Old Catholic Church and of the Anglican Communion of

1931 for our dialogue, or moreover, what does the “*Bonn Agreement Concerning Inter-communion*” (1931) represent for us?”<sup>8</sup>

Although the Joint Commission formulated answers to these questions, “the question still refers to the way in which these answers will be included in the teaching and life of the two Churches of ours.”<sup>9</sup> And, although this task exceeds the competence of the Joint Commission, as it is up to the officials of the Churches participating in the dialogue to treat it, the activity of the dialogue must be “completed through a responsible report, submitted to the Churches and showing the methods worthy to be taken into consideration, in order to turn to good account the necessary theological consensus needed for the ecclesiastic communion”<sup>10</sup> According to His Eminence Metropolitan Damaschin, such a report drafted by every group must “reflect the spirit prevailing during the discussions of the seven General Assemblies of the Theological Commissions of the Theological Commission and be the result of the common texts which we all signed together”.<sup>11</sup>

In this sense, every report must take into consideration the following six points:

<sup>7</sup> Stefan Alexe, *In sprijinul dialogului teologic ortodoxo-vechi-catolic. Texte comune ale Comisiei teologice mixte ortodoxo-vechi-catolice. Traducere și prezentare de...*, in “Ortodoxia”, 1–2/1978, p. 5–12 (and the following issues); Urs von Arx, *Koinonia...*, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Damaschinos Papandreou, *Discours prononcé le 18 octobre 1987*, in “Epispepsis” nr. 387, 1.11.1987.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*

“1. to turn to good account, the ensemble of the commission’s work, pointing out the common thesis adopted on every theological difference, as they have been included in the text;

2. to use especially the theological content of the common texts, referring to the official theological purpose, that is the re-establishment of the ecclesiastic communion between the Old Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church;

3. to underline the patristic infra-structure of the method the commission followed in its work and especially in the drafting of the common text of every theme;

4. to suggest the need and way of including the theology of the common texts into the official education and in the church life too, so, in the catechesis and rite. In order to do that, *the common texts must be published in several languages<sup>12</sup> in order to make possible their progressive inclusion in the life of the local Churches;*

5. to point out clearly the difficulties present beyond the common texts for restoring the ecclesiastic communion between the Orthodox Church and the Old Catholic Church, such as the sacramental inter-communion of the latter one with the Anglicans, the agreement between the Evangelical Church of Germany and the Old Catholic Diocese

of Germany in view of their participation in the Eucharist, the agreement of some Old-Catholic theologians in Louvain (1987) and

6. to express the common conscience and desire of all the members of the Commission concerning the possibility of our Churches to turn to good account the theological work of this commission in view of re-establishing the unity that will enrich the spiritual experience of the two Churches.”<sup>13</sup>

Then, while pointing out that “the end of the session of the Theological Commission established the conditions for following our common way to the ecclesiastic communion”, His Eminence drew the attention to the fact that according to the discussions had, “any unilateral digression or application of the common theology would neutralise the work the Joint Commission done with so much effort”. Then, when referring to the Old Catholics, His Eminence said: “We understand the difficulties of the Old Catholic Church, but it is difficult for us to accept that diaconia may develop harmoniously without consequently referring to the basic principles of our faith, even to those we formulated and signed together in all the common texts of our dialogue, thanks to the criteria of the patristic tradition of the Old Church.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> These texts have been translated and published into Romanian by Rev. Prof. Ștefan Alexe, member of the Joint Commission, published in *Ortodoxia* magazine, at the same time with the works of the respective assemblies.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13–14.

The successful end of the theological dialogue between the Orthodox and Old Catholics gave the Orthodox hierarchy the hope that the Joint Commission “would have a positive multi-directional influence, so that the effort for unity should be turned to good account in the Church with the same spirit of love and mutual understanding that guided our dialogue.”<sup>15</sup> So, this is the only dialogue carried out up to the end so far, according to the plan established together. Then, very important is the fact that according to the opinion of the Joint Commission, every text renders “the teaching of the Orthodox Church and of the Old Catholic one”, as they are texts of theological consensus concerning the dogmatic tradition of the two Churches, although there are still a few differences. Finally, here we have the only dialogue in which all the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches participated, engaging them to the same extent in the support of the effort the Joint Commission made in view of achieving the church unity.<sup>16</sup>

Unfortunately, the hope His Eminence Metropolitan Damaskinos expressed, remained only a desire, as instead of implementing the results of the dialogue, new problems appeared which stopped the reception process of the common texts and generated many questions on the future of the mutual relations.

Yet, we must mention the fact that these texts expressed a large consensus at the time the dialogue ended. Taken separa-

tely, each of these texts may be both shortened and enriched. This is why, in spite of the consensus reached, there still were, just from the very beginning, discussions concerning the formulation of some of these texts. For example, text I/1, *Divine Revelation and Its Transmission*, was unanimously approved due to the clear expression of the common teaching in this regard, based, first of all, on texts of the Holy Scriptures, and of the Holy Fathers as well as on the decisions of the Inter-Orthodox Commission for the Preparation of the Holy Great Synod of 15–18 April 1971. Very important is the stress laid on the close relationship between the Holy Scripture and Tradition, pointing out that the Scripture and Tradition are not different expressions of the divine revelation, but ways of expressing one and the same apostolic Tradition. This is why it is out of question to talk about the superior aspect of one of them compared to the other, as both of them have the same power for faith. The Holy Scripture is understood through Tradition, and Tradition keeps its purity and the criteria of its truth through the Scripture and in those included in the Scripture. The Church keeps and interprets the apostolic Tradition and conveys it unchanged to the next generations.<sup>17</sup> It is important to underline this consensus concerning the relation between Scripture and Tradition, as, at a certain moment in time, the Old Catholics used to emphasise the importance of the Scripture from a Protestant point of view. A special agreement was also

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Urs von Arx, *Koinonia...*, 24–25.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, ip. 47.

established in the second text I/2, *The Canon of the Holy Scripture*, on which there were a series of discussions. In essence, the text does not include any difference to separate the two Churches. For example, besides a few inversions in the books of the Old Testament and the absence of the Anaghinoskomena books, the text comprises just the Bible books the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church drafted in 1982. Here we find the boundaries of the canon of the writings of the Old Testament, presented differently in the Eastern Church and in the Western One, even from ancient times. All these things were caused by the differences between the Judaic canon and that of the Septuaginta. The West stressed the difference between the fully canonical books (soon after called “inspired”) and the apocryphal ones (which did not belong quite to the inspired writings).<sup>18</sup> But this text did not refer to this issue, or to any other one. It rather tends to an equalising position, to be used in the ecumenical dialogue. But it specifies the following: “The canonical books are characterised by the special authority that has been uninterruptedly recognized by the Church; but it gives special honour to the Anaghinoskomena books too (that is books good for reading) which have belonged to the canon of the Holy Scripture from ancient times”.<sup>19</sup> A large consensus has also been established on

text I/3 *The Holy Trinity*, in which the unity and identity of the divine being are specified. Although rather short for the issues it treats, this common text establishes in a concise precise manner the points of teaching of the two Churches. We remark especially the specific position towards *Filioque* addition. If for quite a long time this was a point of disagreement between the two parts, as the Old Catholics did not want to remove it completely from the Creed, the common text condemns not only its not canonical character, so the formal part, but also the error it made in the understanding of the teaching on the Holy Trinity, so in the material part. By doing this, the Old Catholics made an important step to their rapprochement to Orthodoxy, observing the same teaching of the undivided Church. In this context, this common text, together with the other ones, constitutes a real benefit for the rapprochement of the two Churches.

But not everybody was completely satisfied. For example, the Commission for the Inter-church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church reacted through a detailed letter on the common texts of the first meeting of the Joint Commission, asking for an exhaustive treatment of the issues. That meant the resumption of the entire work unfolded till then. This is why the commission

<sup>18</sup> W. Kuppers, *Orthodox-alkatholischer Dialog*, IKZ, 66/1976, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Further on the remark of the Old Catholics is mentioned concerning the Esdra books (Vulgata III Esdra; Slaona II Esdra) and Maccabees: these two books are not rejected by their Church, but they are not included in the Old Catholic collections of the Bible books coming from the Latin tradition. The International Conference of the Old Catholic Bishops was to explain this point, Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 26; Urs von Arx, *Koinonia*...p. 48.

decided not to implement this letter, and the respective issues to be resolved within the process of reception, especially since the changes required were not considered essential. But a tougher reaction came from the Old Catholics, through Prof. Christian Oeyen who, although a member of the Joint Commission, strongly criticised especially the assertions concerning *Filioque*, refusing to sign certain texts. Even special meetings were needed in this regard, without reaching a consensus, which fact proves the difficulties present among the Old Catholics.<sup>20</sup> The great fear of Prof. Oeyen was that the majority of the Old Catholic members of the Joint Commission, wishing to achieve communion as soon as possible, were inclined to give up their own ecclesiology in order to accept the Orthodox one. But the other ones' answer was that the respective texts referred only to the Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue, not to the entire ecumenical dialogue.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the texts express the common teaching of the undivided Church, which the Orthodox part

proposes to the other confessions with whom they have dialogue.

Similar reactions have been registered on some other texts too, but mentioning them would exceed by far the limits of this study. As far as we are concerned, we think that according to the way they are drafted, the common texts mean a great benefit for both parts. The fact that the further evolution of the events exceeded or even created difficulties to the dialogue, does not diminish their value. On the contrary, the dialogue should be resumed just to discuss this new evolution, as we are faced with a confuse situation, through the inter-communion of the Old Catholics with some confessions presenting serious gaps in the dogmatic teaching.<sup>22</sup>

We mentioned above only the issue of the Old Catholics' relations with the Anglicans, with the Lutherans and the women's ordination,<sup>23</sup> all of them generating disagreements even among the Old Catholics. And, although many pro and against articles and studies were

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<sup>20</sup> See H. Rein, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 170–171; Ioan-Vasile Leb, *Relațiile ortodoxo-vechic-catolice, bilateral și în cadrul Mișcării Ecumenice*. Doctorate Thesis, Bucharest, 1985, p. 210–213 (and the German version, p. 254–256).

<sup>21</sup> H. Rein, *op. cit.* p. 172.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the document signed on 29 March 1985 with the Evangelical Church of Germany is short and lacunary, stressing the Reformed teachings. Here they speak only of four ecumenical synods, salvation only through faith is stressed, rejecting good deeds, only Baptism and Eucharist are emphasized, without remembering the other Holy Sacraments, having been in clear contradiction with the Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue documents. All this makes us wonder how imperative these texts are. On the other hand, the Anglicans' inter-communion with other neo-protestant confessions, such as the Methodists, put us in the same confuse situation.

<sup>23</sup> The latest information we have in this regard is the ordination of Ms. Anne-Marie Kaufmann as priest, on 21 May 2005, in the Old Catholic Church in La Chaux-de-Fonds/Switzerland. Cf. *Présence mensuel des paroisses catholiques-chrétiennes de Suisse romande*, Supplément nr. 3/2005, p. I–III.

written, there is no full consensus within the Utrecht Union yet,<sup>24</sup> a fact proved by the position of the Old Catholic Church of Holland.<sup>25</sup> Neither must we forget that among the Old Catholics there are tendencies of rapprochement to the Roman Catholics. We remember here only the document signed in 1999 by the Roman Catholic Bishop Karl Lehmann and by the Old Catholic one, Joachim Vobbe, both of them from Germany, concerning the mutual acceptance of the priests from one Church in the service of the other one. Here we have a strange situation of the Old Catholics as on one hand they accept the Reformed minimalism and, on the other hand, the Roman Catholic maximalism. Very strange is the position of the Roman Catholics too, who prove a really aggressive conservativeness through the papal documents, but which are implemented in a suspect relativism in Germany. In this context, a new discussion of these problems would be neces-

sary, taking into account both the “Dominus Jesus” encyclica, and the new affirmations of Pope Benedict XVI. This is why one should expect the Old Catholics to clarify their own inner problems first, and then to talk unitary with the Orthodox. Last but not least, consensus is needed in regard to the ordination of women, a problem that divided the Utrecht Union again, as the efforts made within the conferences from Levadia (Greece) and Konstancin (Poland) in 1996, did not have a special echo in the two Churches.<sup>26</sup> Then, the presence of some ecumenical documents as BEM (1982), Porvoo Common Statement (1992) or Niagara Report (1987) makes their common debate a must as they raise a series of problems concerning the apostolic succession, the achievement of church communion and, implicitly, of the Christian unity.<sup>27</sup>

Besides, the reception of the common texts turned out to be very difficult, if

<sup>24</sup> Here are a few articles on the theme: *120 Session der Nationalsynode der Christkatholischen Kirche der Schweiz 7 und 8 Juni 1991 in Liestal*, p. 98–105; *121 Session der Nationalsynode der Christkatholischen Kirche der Schweiz 12 und 13 Juni in Starrkirch/Dulliken*, p. 83–103; Urs von Arx, *Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis*, Beiheft zur IKZ, 79 Jahrg (1989), 4 Heft, 259p.; Urs von Arx und Anastasios Kallis (ed.), *Bild Christi und Geschlecht*, “Gemeinsame Überlegungen” und Referate der Orthodox-Alt-katholischen Konsultation zur Stellung der Frau in der Kirche und zur Frauenordination als ökumenischem Problem, 25 Februar – 1 März 1996 in Levadia (Griechenland) und 10–15 Dezember in Konstancin (Polen). Sonderdruck IKZ 88 (1998), Heft 2, 334p.; Urs von Arx, *Der orthodox-altkatholische Dialog. Anmerkungen zu einer schwierigen Rezeption*, IKZ, 87 (1997), Heft 3, p. 184–185; Idem, *Eine verpasste Chance*, IKZ, 87 (1997), Heft 4, p. 292–297; Idem, *Neuer Aufbruch? Bericht über die Anglikanisch – Alt-katholische Theologenkonferenz von Guildford*, 1993, IKZ 84 (1994), 2 Heft, p. 66–76.

<sup>25</sup> See H. Rein, *op. cit. passim*.

<sup>26</sup> Urs von Arx & Anastasios Kallis eds., *Bild Christi und Geschlecht. “Gemeinsame Überlegungen” und Referate der Orthodox-Alt-katholischen Konsultation zur Stellung der Frau in der Kirche und zur Frauenordination als ökumenischem Problem*, Sonderdruck IKZ 88 (1998), Heft 2.

<sup>27</sup> Martien Parmantier (Ed.), *The Ecumenical consistency of the Porvoo Document*, Amersfoort, 1999.

not almost non-existent, so that, there are voices who wonder, with good reason, if this dialogue has still any perspective. That is because, when leaving aside the discussion of these texts among the Old Catholics – where there were even very hard critical comments on them<sup>28</sup> – in the Orthodox literature they were debated only accidentally.<sup>29</sup>

It is true that one of the major causes, which influenced this state of things was the fall of the iron curtain and the liberation of the Orthodox countries from the bondage of communism, as these ones had to re-organise themselves in order to live a new life, in freedom. Some time seemed to be needed for decanting and identifying their own positions in various fields of life, in which the Churches were called to tell their opinions.

But a rather long time passed, so that the Orthodox – Old Catholic talks should be resumed, this time at inter-church level. In this sense, the publication of these texts in the language of the Churches participating in the dialogue is a must, so that they should be known within the parishes too, as well as of some works to popularise the results of the bilateral discussions. It is also necessary to resume the mutual exchange of students, professors or

priests, or to begin a programme of visits of the hierarchs or between communities, in order to have mutual knowledge and overcome the present stagnation. It is quite strange the fact that the number of the scholarships of study diminished, instead of increasing. These are only a few of the possibilities at hand for both churches, which make us affirm that this dialogue can overcome the present difficulties and contribute to smoothing the way to inter-church rapprochement. In this sense, we fully agree with Prof. Urs von Arx when he emphasises the need of implementing the texts “on the spot”<sup>30</sup>, to make them known to the faithful, so that wherever there are communities of the two Churches, they may know each other better and cooperate in the way Christian unity needs. Obviously, the Old Catholics should resolve their inner problems in order to resume the talks with the Orthodox on the differences existent. And they should do that in a most coherent way.

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<sup>28</sup> Abraham Rudolph Heyligers, *Die Wiedervereinigungs-verhandlungen zwischen der Altkatholischen Kirche und der Orthodoxen Kirche des Ostens als ökumenisches Problem*, Diss., Strasbourg 1983; Chr. Oeyen, *Ekklesiologische Fragen in den orthodox – altkatholischen Kommissionstexten*, IKZ, 79 (1989) 237–265; Herwig Aldenhoven, *Charakter, Bedeutung und Ziel der Dialogtexte*, in *Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis*, 27–44; Franz Jörg Staffenberger, *Der orthodox-altkatholische Dialog*, Diss. Theol. Graz 1994, p. 238.

<sup>29</sup> Georges Tsetsis, *The Bilateral Dialogues of the Orthodox Churches. Problems arising from the Reception of their Agreed Statements*, in “Orthodoxos Forum”, 9 (1995) p. 231–241; Ioan-Vasile Leb, *Ortodoxie și Vechi-Catolicism*, Cluj-Napoca, 1996, p. 330.

<sup>30</sup> Urs von Arx, *Koinonia...*, p. 25.

# Evaluation of the Dialogue between Representatives of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and Orthodox Theologians

Orthodox Position

Ciprian Burlacioiu

## 1. Introduction

Since 2002 the Protestant-Orthodox dialogue has been enriched by a new dimension: a new theological dialogue has been initiated. Orthodoxy was represented by theologians from various autocephalous churches which are members of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). On the other side were Protestant theologians representing the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). The organisers were CEC and the CPCE.

Three consultations have been held so far, at two-year intervals. The first took place on Crete, 28 November – 1 December 2002, the second 25–27 June

2004 in Wittenberg, Germany and the third 27 March – 2 April 2006 in Constantinople. At all these meetings the main theme was the doctrine of the Church. The working method characteristically involved pairs of presenters, one from each side. Some of the papers to be presented were available to these co-presenters before the consultation, so that they could prepare their own papers as responses. During the meetings, the plenary discussions played an important role. The debates were very lively and contributed a great deal to the content of the consultations. The results were written up as joint communiqués in which the most important points in the debates were included.

The task of evaluating this dialogue is structured as follows: first, reflection on the context in which it took place; second, focus on the different ecclesiological aspects of the debate; third, presentation of problems concerning the sacraments, with a particular focus on baptism; fourth, a concluding overall evaluation of the dialogue and the prospects for future possibilities.

## **2. Remarks on the context of the dialogue**

From the Orthodox viewpoint, this dialogue is considered something new. There are various reasons for this. Previous relations through dialogue had been structured as follows: in some dialogues, individual Orthodox Churches met in bilateral relationships with churches of various confessions; in others, all Orthodox Churches together met as dialogue partners with other confessional families, such as the Lutheran World Federation or the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. In addition there is cooperation through the World Council of Churches (WCC) or through regional ecumenical organisations such as CEC. This dialogue with the CPCE is different from these previous models. This is due to the mixed structure of the CPCE, which is not regarded as a church in either the Orthodox or the Protestant view. It is rather an alliance of the many Protestant Churches in Europe.

This fact has consequences for the dialogue. First of all, it is not considered as an “official” dialogue between churches. These are conversations between professional specialists, ex-

ploring together the possibilities for future ventures. Thus there is no pressure to adopt a final document at the end that represents capacity for consensus but also remains true to the confessions represented. Nevertheless, this action is taken seriously by the Orthodox side because of the way the committee was constituted; it was chaired by a bishop and included well-known theologians as members. Secondly, however, this form leads to difficulties with the reception of the results. They will have less influence than other ecumenical papers and initiatives beyond the circle of the participants themselves.

It is worth noting that in the case of this dialogue, Orthodoxy has shown flexibility with regard to the new realities within European Protestantism; the creation of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship/CPCE (1973), the Scandinavian-Anglican Porvoo Communion (1993), and to a lesser degree the Meissen Declaration (1988), have transplanted Orthodox-Protestant dialogue in Europe into a different church scene. These relations among Protestants and Anglicans, which bring with them completely new theological content, have moved European Orthodoxy to participate in this new form of dialogue.

## **3. The doctrine of the Church**

The dialogue was mainly devoted to the doctrine of the Church. The organisers’ idea in planning it thus was, rather than comparing isolated items of doctrine from the theology of each side, to let the doctrinal context of each side be the central consideration. And the doctrine of the Church was regarded as the place

where confessional identity can be most completely seen.

In the Orthodox tradition, ecclesiology is relatively new as a systematically organised doctrine. Not until the interconfessional contacts between Orthodox Churches and other churches in the 19th and more so in the 20th century were Orthodox theologians moved to reflect systematically on the position of their own church in the context of pluralistic societies. Traditionally, this topic has been regarded as the question of “Orthodoxy” as opposed to “heresy”. At least by the end of the 20th century, the increasingly pluralistic societies of the different traditionally Orthodox countries, but also the presence of Orthodox Christians in other geographical areas, made it necessary to consider the conduct of Orthodoxy towards other churches. Practical matters have confronted not only Orthodoxy, but in the same way all churches with the problem of living and working together with other churches or confessions.

However, this practice-oriented perspective was not possible until theological decisions had first been taken. Such questions had to be clarified as, whether the other churches are *churches in the real sense*, whether their ministries are valid, whether these ministries administer valid sacraments, and whether a change of confession represents a problem. Theological enquiries were

undertaken into mutual recognition, church order and structure, apostolicity, catholicity, and the unity of the church. These issues – apart from church order and structure – also determine the coordinates of this new dialogue between Orthodox theologians and representatives of the CPCE.

### 3.1 The essence of the Church

The document for discussion at the first consultation on Crete in 2002 was the study *The Church of Jesus Christ [Leuenberg Text 1, 1995]*. One of the chapters of this study is entitled “The Essence of the Church as the Communion of Saints”. In a paper, Michael Beintker referred to this study and presented the Church as “founded on Jesus Christ alone”.<sup>1</sup> He regarded as equally important the distinction between the ground and the form of the Church, which was recorded as a principal theme of ecclesiology. Consequently, a further distinction was made between divine and human actions in the Church. “What makes the Church to be the Church in the first place and precedes all human reactions and actions, is the justifying, liberating action of God which is witnessed through the preaching of the gospel and celebrated through the sacraments.”<sup>2</sup> This statement points to the importance of the *Confessio Augustana* VII for the Leuenberg Agreement in particular and for the Protestant

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Beintker, “The Study ‘The Church of Jesus Christ’ from the Protestant Viewpoint” (Paper presented in Crete 2002), at the *Consultation between the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF) on the Question of Ecclesiology* (hereafter cited as Leuenberg Texts 8), Frankfurt/M. 2004, pp. 73–88.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 78.

Churches in general. The logical conclusion here is that “invested with the authority of God” cannot be attached to the church as an institution.<sup>3</sup>

From the Orthodox perspective, Grigorios Larentzakis notes on two occasions<sup>4</sup> that to define the Church, what it is according to its essence, is difficult and appears to be impossible. There are two reasons for this: first, the Church is a mystery; second, it is a living thing, not a theory, and as the body of Christ it is beyond any definition. As stated clearly in the communiqué from the 2004 Wittenberg consultation, the word *mysterion* is, for the Orthodox side, the appropriate expression for the reality of the Church.

The statement about the work of God as the foundation of the Church is to be affirmed, from the Orthodox viewpoint. Equally worthy of affirmation is the conception of the Church as the body of Christ. The preaching of the gospel and the sacraments underline the pneumatological dimension of the Church, and through it the Church lives as a community. The only problematic statement in the study *The Church of Jesus*

*Christ* is the one about the Holy Spirit as “the power of community originating from the Father and the Son”<sup>5</sup>, which indicates a view including the *filioque*. However, the question remains open as to whether the principal ecclesiological theme of distinguishing between the ground and the form of the Church can be reconciled with the concept *mysterion*. This calls for reflection on the role of justification for the Church, especially since, in the Protestant view, this doctrine is *articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae*. Larentzakis regarded the theme of justification as specifically anchored in the dispute between the Western churches, and drew the conclusion that this doctrine “is [not] congruent with the Orthodox view”.<sup>6</sup>

A clarification of the Protestant distinction between the visible and the invisible Church is also indicated. Larentzakis interprets the statement in the study,<sup>7</sup> about the Church as the object of faith and as a visible community, as a perichoretic view. The Church is not limited to its social reality, but rather is a work of God and of human beings. As Christoph Marksches<sup>8</sup> emphasised, this – although it is often falsely inter-

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Grigorios Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship: Remarks from an Orthodox point of view” (paper presented in Crete 2002), in *Leuenberg Text 8*, pp. 117–140, here p. 117; and “The One Church and Its Unity. Some considerations from the Viewpoint of Orthodox Theology” (paper presented in Wittenberg 2004), in *Consultation between the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) on the Question of Ecclesiology* (cited hereafter as *Leuenberg Text 11*), Frankfurt/Main 2008, pp. 70–105.

<sup>5</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I, 1.3, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship”, p. 110.

<sup>7</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I, 2.2.

<sup>8</sup> Christoph Marksches, “The One Church and its Unity” (paper presented in Wittenberg 2004), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 105–118, here p. 110.

preted among Protestants – does not mean in any way that the Church is separate from the body of God. Again, Luther’s distinction between a true and a false Church refers only to the visible Church.

### 3.2 The boundaries and the unity of the Church

Three papers from the Protestant side<sup>9</sup> discussed, directly or indirectly, the boundaries and the unity of the Church. Beintker mentioned the *notae ecclesiae* (which Markschie also mentions, as “characteristics of the true Church”), according to the *Confessio Augustana* VII as criteria for unity. Markschie described Martin Luther’s position, in which Luther refuses to consider the other confessional parties as being the Church, because he “saw in them that the word [of the gospel] was being obscured or not preached at all”.<sup>10</sup> Risto Saarinen took up the theme in more detail. He observed in Protestant theology a certain anxiety in the face of formal criteria for the catholicity of the Church, and spoke of an “‘internalism’ or ‘spiritualism’”, although this is not carried through consistently. However, the *notae ecclesiae* remain necessary as “outward sign”. On the basis of WCC

ideas of unity, Saarinen drew the conclusion that there is a tension in Protestant theology between the local and the universal dimension, between one’s own identity or autonomy on one hand and unity on the other. This makes it possible to speak of “different ‘ecclesial densities’” and the distinction between “Church [as] autonomous entity” and “church community”.<sup>11</sup>

This set of problems was discussed in three papers by the Orthodox side.<sup>12</sup> Larentzakis had already noted at the Wittenberg meeting that, for Orthodox theologians, the question of the boundaries of the Church can be answered in two possible ways: on one hand, many would identify the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church” with the Orthodox Church; on the other hand, the Orthodox Church is seen in the continuity and continuation of identity with the church of Christian origins. In the case of identification of the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church with those of the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”, the direct granting of divine grace by the Lord to those outside its canonical boundaries, heretics or schismatics, is not accepted. This raises the question as to whether any church can exist outside the Orthodox Church. This question is answered

<sup>9</sup> Beintker, “The Study ‘The Church of Jesus Christ’ ....”; Markschie, “The One Church and its Unity”; Risto Saarinen, “Unity and Catholicity of the Church” (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuvenberg Text 11*, pp. 164–180.

<sup>10</sup> Markschie, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Saarinen, “Unity and Catholicity of the Church”, pp. 174–175.

<sup>12</sup> Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuvenberg Church Fellowship” and “The One Church and its Unity”; Konstantinos. Delikostantis, “Identity as Communion. Basic Elements of Orthodox Ecclesiology” (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuvenberg Text 11*, pp. 198–213.

positively with documents from various Orthodox authors: such a church is conceivable where the unity of the faith and, very closely bound up with it, the apostolic succession are present. The Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference in Chambésy in 1986 recognised “the factual existence of all churches and confessions”<sup>13</sup>, but did not draw any practical consequences from this. In the same way, the patriarchal encyclica from 1920 onwards, addressed “to all churches of Christ everywhere”, and the efforts, which are to be taken seriously, of Orthodoxy together with all other churches to restore *koinonia*, are to be assessed as factual recognition. It should nevertheless be pointed out that there is no standard and official Orthodox position on the issue of the boundaries of the church. No pan-Orthodox synod has declared itself on the subject.

This issue is closely bound up with aspects of salvation. As is well known, the Church has always regarded the eternal salvation of schismatics and heretics as impossible. Today, however, the debate on the boundaries of the Church can no longer be carried out within this paradigm of schismatic heresy. As new approaches in Orthodox theology maintain, today we should speak more of a general schismatic situation. It is not that there are schismatic persons, but rather the historical churches with their divisions represent

the schismatic condition of the one undivided Church. If we do not forget this, we have an opportunity for *metanoia*, repentance and overcoming the chaos. We have an example of the way to conduct a meaningful debate on the boundaries of the Church in the words of St. Gregory of Nazianzus. He wonders who is “in” the Church and who is “out”. “Just as there are many among us, among our fellow Christians within the church, who are not really with us because in their way of life they have alienated themselves from the Body in which we share, just so there are many who are outside, not part of us, but who have attained faith through their way of life, and they are lacking only the name, since they already possess the reality.”<sup>14</sup> Here, other criteria for the boundaries of the Church are noted.

The *koinonia* within the Trinity, for example as described in the Gospel of John, Chapter 17, serves as a model for the unity of the Church. This *koinonia* is made possible by the bond of love. This model makes of the Church “the immanent which contains the transcendent within itself; it is communion with the divine Persons of the Trinity, who are full of infinite love for the world, and in this the church finds itself in an unending movement of self-transcendence in love.”<sup>15</sup> Only the form of unity following the example of the Trinity can be the model for the unity of the Church. As a concrete model for unity, a “fede-

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<sup>13</sup> Larentzakos, “The One Church and its Unity”, pp. 70–105.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, quoted on p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Dunitru Staniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik II*, pp. 162–163, quoted in Larentzakos, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 97.

rated community of autonomous church structures”<sup>16</sup> is proposed, which allows for the diversity of ways of expressing the faith. But simple coexistence and tolerance of others, in a context of hospitality, cannot be the goal of efforts toward unity. The unity of the Church is to seek more than unity, and not to affirm the status quo of today’s confessional divisions. Konstantinos Delikostantis took as his model the ecclesiology of the Eucharist. The unity of the Church takes place in the Eucharist, which is “also the foundation of the unity of local churches in a global church. Since all local churches draw their being as churches and catholicity from the Eucharist, they cannot be thought of apart from their unity with one another.”<sup>17</sup> Just as a true Eucharist overcomes the divisions in a place, in the same way it bestows on a local church unity with other church communities in the world. The office of bishop also, in Orthodox theology, is only properly understood in the perspective of the eucharistic gathering. In this way, synodality becomes the framework for the unity of the Church.

It is not the overall picture of ecclesiology which is problematic for dialogue. Theologians on both sides have emphasised that the representations of their dialogue partners can very well be reconciled with their own theology. For example, the trinitarian, christological and pneumatological dimensions of the Church are unanimously upheld. Difficulties arise, however, when the content of some expressions such as “unity in

diversity” – correct on both the Protestant and the Orthodox side – have to be made concrete and precise. This is not a quarrel over concepts, but rather about clarifying the possibilities for putting the theoretical consensus into practice.

### 3.3 The understanding of the classical “*notae ecclesiae*”

So that there will be no ambiguity about terminology, we are speaking here about the classical *notae ecclesiae*, as they are named in the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Protestant theology also speaks of *notae ecclesiae*, or marks of the true Church and of church unity, with reference to the criteria mentioned in *Confessio Augustana* VII; the [right] preaching of the word and [the right administration of] the sacraments. However, Protestant theology does not dispute the high value accorded to the ecumenical *notae*. Since the preceding paragraph has already spoken of the one Church, we now turn to the other three: holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

#### 3.3.1 Holiness of the Church

According to the Orthodox understanding, the Church owes its holiness to the God the Three in One as the source of life and to Jesus Christ as head of the Church. This is where the trinitarian and christological dimensions of the Church are visible. The act of worship is carried out in the Church through the working of the Holy Spirit through *mysteria* and

<sup>16</sup> Larentzakis, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 98.

<sup>17</sup> Delikostantis, “Identity as Community”, p. 202.

through the word of God. Human error and individual guilt are nevertheless not excluded. The Church is therefore not the assembly of the saints, but rather of sinners praying to God for their salvation.

Although the holiness of the Church was not a main theme for discussion, in both Crete and Wittenberg it was felt to be a point of dissent. The Protestants joined Martin Luther in calling the Church “the greatest sinner”. According to the Orthodox understanding, however, such an undifferentiated statement about the Church as the divine organ of worship was unacceptable. They asked how we can think of the Church in which we *believe* as “the greatest sinner”. This lack of agreement remains.

### 3.3.2 *Catholicity of the Church*

Two papers<sup>18</sup> presented in Constantinople lifted up catholicity as a central theme. For the Protestant side, Risto Saarinen lectured on the various models of catholicity as found in texts of the World Council of Churches. He observed that Protestant theology shows a reticence towards global structures, which conceals a tension between the local and universal dimensions. He concluded that “For these reasons, many Protestants tend to favor the model of ‘catholicity of each local church’, because it is a complacent solution to the problem of Christian universality.”<sup>19</sup>

Saarinen also presented a relevant evaluation of two contemporary Protestant representations of ecclesiology. First he quoted from Hans-Peter Großhans, who regards catholicity as an effort to preserve one’s own historical identity and ascribes a central role to “re-formation” in upholding catholicity. His vision is that the Church is the earthly space for the truth of the gospel. This also lends emphasis to the importance of its presence in time and space. Saarinen also brought into the debate the analysis of K. Vanhoozer, who sees the canonical Scriptures as the standard and guarantor of unity. Protestant theology differs from Roman Catholic or Orthodox theology in that neither the tradition nor the teaching authority of the church is the standard for interpreting the Scriptures, but rather the church itself. This brings about a sort of “soft identity”, which according to Paul Ricoeur is seen as “ipse-identity”. “In Ipse-identity, we do know who you are even though you sometimes adjust your change views and react to new situations. Ipse-identity is not pluralism, but a non-identical repetition of central practices.”<sup>20</sup> Thus he assumes that there can be, consciously or unconsciously, changes in the interpretation of Scripture.

The Orthodox side addressed the theme of catholicity of the Church in two presentations. Larentzakis saw this attribute as an avoidance of any limitations on the Church. “The quantitative and qualitative *catholicity* of the Church is therefore above confessional consid-

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<sup>18</sup> Saarinen, “Oneness and Catholicity of the Church”: Delikostantis, “Identity as Community”.

<sup>19</sup> Saarinen, “Oneness and Catholicity of the Church”, p. 155.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 162.

rations.”<sup>21</sup> Delikostantis, too, understood catholicity more in a qualitative than a quantitative sense: “Orthodox” should point to the qualitative dimension of catholicity and complete the spatial understanding of the concept. The place where catholicity is made manifest is any eucharistic gathering. The model for the local church is the eucharistic gathering with the bishop presiding. Through it, the importance of the Eucharist for the catholicity of the Church is made visible, and the ontological equality of all bishops becomes the sign and guarantor of the catholicity of every local church: no particular church can be the source for the catholicity of all churches. The local church is therefore identical with the Church universal. Synodality plays an important role in this. “Without synodality, unity risks being sacrificed in favour of the local church. But a synodality which suppresses the catholicity and integrity of the local church can lead to ecclesiastical universalism.”<sup>22</sup>

Although there are no direct contradictions to be found between these presentations, one can see how different the emphases are. The Protestant side accords an elevated status to the Scriptures for the catholicity of the Church. The Orthodox positions begin with the eucharistic dimension of the Church. The relation between local and universal also is expressed differently. These differing statements can be inter-

preted in different ways: on one hand we can see, by this means, a legitimate diversity of theological visions; on the other hand, views are being expressed which, while they do not contradict one another directly, can indicate differing basic theological models. For example, one can wonder whether the expression “local church” has the same meaning in Orthodox and Protestant theology. Further theological clarification will continue to be needed in this area.

### 3.3.3 *Apostolicity of the Church*

The apostolicity of the Church was not a focus of the discussion. However, this theme was included by means of brief remarks in the context of the other *notae ecclesiae*.

Larentzakis began with a point in the study *The Church of Jesus Christ*: “The Reformation understanding of the apostolic succession is the constant return to the apostolic witnessing.”<sup>23</sup> It is in the interest of the study to reject a purely mechanistic, legalistic and magical succession through the laying on of hands only. In response to this idea, Larentzakis emphasises rightly that in the Orthodox understanding it is not just the laying on of hands which effects the apostolic succession, but rather the laying on of hands within the eucharistic *synaxis* and in connection with the creed: “The laying on of hands is necessary in the sacramental act of consecra-

<sup>21</sup> Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship”, p. 122

<sup>22</sup> J. Zizioulas, “The Church as Communion”, an offprint from *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 38, 1994, No.11, quoted from Delikostantis, “Identity as Community”, p. 203–204.

<sup>23</sup> *The Church of Jesus Christ*, I, 2.3, p. 122.

tion, not in itself, but rather as a sign and symbol, and only in the context of the existing prerequisites for faith and for the Church.”<sup>24</sup> The bishop therefore stands, not as individual guarantor for the apostolicity of his church, but always in his presiding role in the eucharistic assembly, without being isolated from the people and in community with the other bishops. A bishop has no right to exist on his own. “There is in fact nothing that warrants the dignitaries or even the bishops remaining in the true faith within the Church. There are bishops and patriarchs and popes that have renounced the true faith ...”<sup>25</sup>

Although apostolicity and the apostolic succession have not been adequately discussed in the context of this dialogue, a difference in relation to the criteria for apostolicity can be noted. The guarantee of apostolicity through the historical office of bishop is firmly rejected by Protestant theology. On the other hand, Protestant theology as well as Orthodox understands apostolicity as faithfulness to the apostolic witness. In order to move forward on this issue, the issue of the office of bishop and synodality must be discussed directly, all the more because Protestant theology has asked whether the Protestant churches are lacking something, with regard to apostolic succession, and if so, how can this *defectus* be remedied.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Sacraments/*Mysteria*

The final session of the consultation in Constantinople in 2006, with two papers presented,<sup>27</sup> was devoted directly to the problems of baptism and indirectly to the wider, complex theme of the sacraments/*mysteria*. The inclusion of this topic seemed to make sense, for two reasons: first, in the earlier consultations the dialogue partners had emphasised the importance of the sacraments for their own theology; second, a debate on baptism was inevitable in the context of the issue of mutual recognition as churches.

The Protestant side had repeatedly pointed out the necessity of mutual recognition as churches. This should be the first step on the way to church unity. Baptism accordingly became a fundamental issue. The Orthodox practice, customary in many places, of “re-baptising” non-Orthodox Christians who wanted to join the Orthodox Church, was problematic. Other practical difficulties such as baptism within mixed marriages and the confession of godparents in Orthodox baptisms also were catalysts for this debate.

From the Orthodox side, as always, the view was being heard that recognition of non-Orthodox baptism cannot be undertaken in isolation, but only in the

<sup>24</sup> Larentzakis, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Larentzakis, “Ecclesiology in the Leuenberg Church Fellowship”, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> Markschie, “The One Church and its Unity”, p. 128.

<sup>27</sup> Hans-Peter Großhans, “Baptism – a Sacramental Bond of Church Unity. A contribution from the Protestant perspective on mutual recognition of baptism between Protestant and Orthodox churches” (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 242–267; Grigorios Larentzakis, “Baptism and the Unity of the Churches. Orthodox Aspects”, (paper presented in Constantinople 2006), in *Leuenberg Text 11*, pp. 294–319.

context of its ecclesiology, since the main interest is actually recognition of one another's churches. And in the Orthodox view, precisely the question of the aim of recognising baptism was very important: "What outcome we want? Do we want "coexistence and cooperation between our churches", "proper relations between churches of different confessions", or the "visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in the one faith"?<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.1 Baptism

It was soon apparent that there was a common position on the term *mysterion*, as being more theologically appropriate than *sacrament*. However, this will not be readily accepted by Western theology.

For the Protestant side, Hans-Peter Großhans' paper recalled a statement in the final communiqué of the theological dialogue between the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2004. This statement affirmed that, although the two churches do not have a relationship of church communion, they nevertheless recognise one another's baptism, even in case of a person's change of confessional membership. This provided a solid basis for the discussion.

The two papers presented the content of baptism with similar words and arguments for its importance both for the individual person and for the church as community. Differences in the presentations may be observed, where Larentzakis presents baptism in the context of Orthodox sacramental life: "...Baptism in the Orthodox Church does not take place in isolation. Baptism is administered together with *chrismation*, an unction signifying confirmation, so that the two sacraments are accepted and respected as two, but at the same time are regarded as an inseparable unity. When these two sacraments are administered, one cannot tell where one ends and the other begins."<sup>29</sup> In this sacramental unity, the Eucharist is also included and given to the person being baptised as part of the same liturgical act. This Orthodox ecclesiological context shows that the question of baptism cannot be regarded in isolation, and that other themes come together here: "For example the relation between baptism and confirmation, the Holy Eucharist and the ministry. The inner relationship between these and among all sacraments in general is a given, so that it is not possible to isolate them. Even a mutual recognition of baptism which is only a matter of canon law, without the greater context of the other sacraments and of ecclesiastical reality itself, does not seem very meaningful."<sup>30</sup> Thus we cannot yet speak of a final clarification of the question of baptism.

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<sup>28</sup> Larentzakis, "Baptism and the Unity of the Churches", p. 298.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 312.

## 5. Overall Evaluation

The problems around baptism point to many fundamental difficulties. Although Orthodoxy has granted that it in fact does recognise the baptism of other churches – and this is occasionally given clear expression, as in Constantinople in 2004, in the bilateral dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the EKD – we cannot speak of an explicit recognition which would have theological consequences. From the Orthodox side, we are right to have asked, with what aim in mind and in what context such recognition should take place. If it is only for the sake of coexistence and cooperation between our churches, or for proper relations between churches of different confessions, nothing much has been gained beyond the ecumenical state of affairs today.

The entire dialogue actually faces the same dilemma. Since it began as an unofficial “conversation among theologians”, this dialogue has largely remained unnoticed beyond the circle of its participants.

With respect to the dialogue so far, it can be observed that we keep coming back to many of the same questions from the ecclesiological context of problems. This is because of a certain

lack of receptivity on the part of the dialogue partners, and the fear of betraying one’s own position. In addition there is the fact that the given framework and the status of this dialogue were not clear to all participants from the beginning. All these elements could, in many instances, have given the impression of stagnation. Nevertheless, a certain maturity can be observed in the presentations in Constantinople in 2006. The effort was made – even when the theological positions were not the same – to carry on a constructive discourse and thus to outline some points of convergence. Further discussion sessions can be expected to confirm this positive development. In this regard, reading the Church fathers together, as Christoph Marksches proposed in Wittenberg, could be a meaningful exercise.

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# Evaluation of the dialogue between the CPCE-Churches and the Orthodox Churches of CEC

Consultations of Crete 2002, Wittenberg 2004  
and Istanbul 2006

Friederike Nüssel

## 1. Introduction

In 2002 the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) started a series of consultations on ecclesiology between representatives of Protestant, Orthodox and Old Oriental Churches in Europe. The idea to have an Orthodox-Protestant dialogue was developed by both sides, CEC and CPCE. Both organisations felt that a dialogue on a European level would be needed to strengthen interconfessional relations between European churches

and to support the growing together of European countries thereby.

The focus on ecclesiological questions was chosen for several reasons. First of all, in reviewing previous dialogues between Orthodox Churches and Churches of the Reformation, both sides realised that ecclesiological issues had “never received sufficient attention” (LD 8, 13)<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, it seemed to be reasonable to benefit from the fact that in 1994 the CPCE had adopted a study document on ecclesiology titled “The Church of Jesus Christ”, which was explicitly

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Hüffmeier/Viorel Ionita (Eds.), Consultation between the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (LCF) on Ecclesiology, Leuenberg Documents Vol. 8, Frankfurt am Main 2004 (Abbreviation in the continuous text: LD 8, page).

intended to be discussed in ecumenical dialogues, as the subtitle indicates: “The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity”. The third reason for an ecclesiological focus resulted from the fact that the text of the study document “The Church of Jesus Christ” was recognized to be “strongly influenced by the *conversations among Protestant Churches and dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church*” (LD 8, 13). Therefore, the CPCE felt that it would be necessary to discuss the study document with Orthodox Churches in order to explore the impact of the ecumenical approach recommended in the study document for the dialogue with the Orthodox Churches. CEC and CPCE have successfully established a consultation-process by organizing three meetings in Crete 2002, in Wittenberg 2004 and in the Phanar in Istanbul 2006<sup>2</sup>. A fourth consultation is planned for November 2008 in Vienna.

## 2. Aim, Method, Participants

### Aim:

At the first consultation in Crete, CEC- and CPCE-members affirmed that ecumenical dialogues between Orthodox and Protestant Churches should serve as an instrument to overcome differences dividing the church and to allow churches to mutually share the Eucharist. Both sides agreed that it was inevitable to discuss differences referring to

the interpretation of the Christian faith as expressed in Christian doctrine. It was regarded not only as an option but as a duty to initiate ecumenical dialogues on theological questions.

### Method:

In order to gain a proper basis for discussing theological differences both sides agreed that a deeper mutual understanding of the different church traditions and the liturgical practice of churches would be needed. Therefore, at each consultation four *papers* were presented and discussed – two papers from the Orthodox side and two papers from CPCE-members. The aim of *discussions* was to identify convergences, divergences and items in need of further clarification. The instrument of a final *communiqué* was used to sum up results of the consultation and to inform the public about it.

Both sides agreed to start the dialogue on ecclesiological questions by discussing a concrete ecumenical approach. Therefore, it seemed suitable for the first consultation to take the CPCE-study document “The Church of Jesus Christ” as a basis for discussion in order to identify ecclesiological convergences, to define major ecclesiological differences and to investigate possibilities of increasing mutual understanding. For the second and third consultation the topics of ecclesiology and baptism were chosen without reference to a certain document.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Beintker/Martin Friedrich/Viorel Ionita (Eds.), Consultations between the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), Leuenberg Documents Vol. 11, Frankfurt am Main 2007 (Abbreviation in the continuous text: LD 11, page).

Participants:

a) First consultation: moderated by Prof. Dr. Ionita and President Dr. Hüffmeier, eight delegates from both sides; one advisor (Prof. Dr. Frieling); one observer (Rev. Dr. Charles Hill); three members of staff (Prof. Dr. Ionita, General Secretary Rev. Dr. Clements, President Hüffmeier); two interpreters.

b) Second consultation: moderated by Prof. Dr. Ionita and President Dr. Hüffmeier, eight CPCE-delegates and nine delegates from Orthodox Churches; two advisors (Prof. Dr. Frieling and Rev. Canon Dr. Hill); one guest: PD Dr. Grosshans; host: Propst Siegfried Kasparick; four members of staff (President Dr. Hüffmeier, Rev. Dr. Christine-Ruth Müller, General Secretary Rev. Dr. Clements, Prof. Dr. Ionita); two interpreters.

c) Third consultation: moderated by Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima, Prof. Dr. Michael Beintker; twelve delegates from Orthodox Churches, eleven delegates from CPCE; two observers (Rev. Dr. Repo from Porvoo-Communion, Prof. Dr. Nüssel from CEC's Churches in Dialogue Commission); three members of staff (Prof. Dr. Ionita as study secretary, Rev. Dr. Christine-Ruth Müller, OKR Rev. Udo Hahn), two interpreters.

From this list one can easily see that the constellation of delegates was modified each time. At the third consultation most of the Orthodox participants were new.

### **3. The first consultation in Crete 2002**

The first consultation was held from 28 November to 1 December 2002 at the Orthodox Academy of Crete. Four

lectures referring to the Leuenberg-model of church fellowship and its ecumenical impact were given, two by CPCE-delegates, two by members of Orthodox Churches.

Papers:

The consultation process was initiated by a survey of the theological dialogues between Orthodox Churches and the Churches of the Reformation presented in a paper by Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita. He pointed out that Orthodox Churches were among the founders of the ecumenical movement, realising that ecumenical efforts for unity were a duty against Jesus Christ. With respect to former dialogues, Ionita clarified that there had been a lack of open confrontation while core questions of ecclesiology had been avoided. Accordingly, he stressed the necessity to have an open discussion of controversial questions and different ecclesiological approaches. As Ionita indicated, it was an indispensable precondition for Orthodox Churches to agree on the understanding of the nature of the church in order to obtain church fellowship. At the end of his paper Ionita points at the aim of the dialogue: "Through the exchange of thoughts at this consultation, the LCF should test its ecclesiological basis with new partners who stand outside the Reformation tradition. The Orthodox theologians, for their part, should familiarise themselves with a church fellowship which has come about as a result of theological dialogue. In this way new ecumenical perspectives can be opened for both sides" (LD 8, 39).

In a second step President Dr. Wilhelm Hüffmeier gave an introduction to the Leuenberg Church fellowship, ex-

plaining the ecclesiological idea and the foundation process, the tasks and objectives of the Fellowship. He alluded to the fact that Christian unity is based on Christ and defined as unity in truth given by Christ himself. Since Christians cannot bring about unity by themselves, the CPCE conceives unification as a result of unity given in and by Christ, thereby differentiating between unity and unification. As Hüffmeier explained, the Leuenberg Agreement (LA) conceives a consensus in understanding the gospel as a necessary condition for the churches to declare and exercise church fellowship consisting in table and pulpit fellowship as well as in the mutual recognition of ordination. According to the LA, it is not necessary for a church fellowship to agree and adapt a certain set of confessions. If churches agree on their understanding of the gospel, this is sufficient for declaring church fellowship.

In the third paper Prof. Dr. Dr. hc. Michael Beintker commented on the study document “The Church of Jesus Christ” from a Protestant perspective. He demonstrated that multilateral and bilateral ecumenical experiences had led the CPCE to reflect ecclesiological issues. “This entailed the hope of understanding the ecumenical dialogues specialised in ecclesiological or ecclesiology-related particular themes on the horizon of the basic doctrine embracing them” (LD 8, 77). Beintker explained the distinction between the foundation, shape and mission of the church developed in “The Church of Jesus

Christ”, demonstrating the constructive impact of the relation of foundation and shape, as origin “gives rise to shape” (LD 8, 81). Furthermore, he elucidated the document’s interpretation of the essential attributes of the church and its concept of church fellowship as based upon the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation concept of unity, today being articulated as “unity in reconciled diversity” (cf. LD 8, 85-88).

In the fourth paper Prof. Dr. Grigorios Larentzakis commented on the CPCE-study document from an Orthodox point of view. With respect to the ecumenical task declared in the *Charta Oecumenica I, I* he said that an ecumenical perspective could only be achieved on the basis of an including ecclesiology. In his commentary on “The Church of Jesus Christ” he mentioned important convergences with Orthodox convictions like the trinitarian and christological foundation of the church (cf. LD 8, 121f) and the fact that apostolicity cannot be guaranteed by historical succession of bishops (cf. LD 8, 122f). As a major difference he pointed out the Protestant understanding of the church as the “greatest sinner” (LD 8, 122/126; cf. WA 34/I, 276, 8–13). With respect to the issue of sacramental life Larentzakis stressed that this problem needed to be discussed apart from the context given by classical controversies between Catholic and Protestant theology (cf. LD 8, 128f)<sup>3</sup>. One of the most crucial questions Larentzakis raised referred to the possibility of a church fellowship among churches who maintain their

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. LD 8, 129: “if the Leuenberg Church Fellowship wants to be an ecumenical model, it must free itself from the restrictive and overwhelming problems of the West”.

doctrinal and confessional convictions (cf. LD 8, 131). In contrast to this he pointed to the fact that the *Charta Oecumenica II,6* (cf. LD 8, 131) regards a consensus of faith as a necessary part of ecumenical endeavour. Referring to the concept of unity as reconciled diversity Larentzakis asked for a definition of “the borders between necessary unity and legitimate meaningful and necessary plurality” (LD 8, 131f). Finally, since the doctrine of justification is addressed as the key-concept for an adequate understanding of the gospel in “The Church of Jesus Christ”, Larentzakis offered some helpful remarks on this topic from an Orthodox point of view.

#### Results:

Both sides agreed “that overcoming doctrinal condemnations is an indispensable prerequisite for church unity” (LD 8, 15). With respect to the study document “The Church of Jesus Christ” (CJC) both sides agreed that the origin of the Church was the Word of the triune God. Accordingly, the divine origin of the Church is “the source of its effective power” (LD 8, 14). They pointed out the unifying work of the Holy Spirit and “the pneumatological dimension of the gospel’s living witness” (LD 8, 14). Furthermore, both sides could agree on the CJC’s explanation of the apostolicity of the Church: “According to the understanding of the Reformation, the manner of practising the apostolic succession is the *continuous return to the apostolic witness*. This obligates the church to the authentic and missionary witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in faithfulness to the apostolic message ...” (CJC I, 2,3).

Among the controversial points the Protestant characterisation of the church

as sinful was mentioned. Furthermore, the question was raised whether a common understanding of the gospel was a clear and sufficient criterion for developing an ecumenical model of church fellowship.

#### 4. The second consultation in Wittenberg 2004

The second consultation was held from 25 to 27 June 2004 in Wittenberg. Whereas at the first consultation the Protestant concept of ecclesiology and its ecumenical impact had been discussed, the second consultation concentrated on the Orthodox ecclesiological understanding of the nature of the church and the Orthodox ecumenical vision in order to identify ecclesiological convergences, controversial issues and matters in need of clarification. As this consultation was shorter than the first one, only two papers were presented.

#### Papers:

At the beginning of the consultation President Dr. Wilhelm Hüffmeier gave an introduction reviewing convergences and differences that had been discussed at the first consultation. He explained the impact of Wittenberg as a place where the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation in Germany commenced. Moreover, he pointed to the particular context of Europe and its challenges for all Christian churches. With respect to the task of the dialogue he said that mutual understanding of different thinking and language traditions and a common reflection on the apostolic message and the early church tradition should lead to “the attempt to pave the way for

further steps towards more practical cooperation on already acknowledged and familiar common grounds” (LD 11, 27). In concrete, he indicated that “mutual acknowledgement of baptism in the name of the triune god” could serve as “an important link of church unity in faith and love“ (LD 11, 27).

As a basis for discussing Orthodox ecclesiology Prof. Dr. Grigorios Larentzakis offered an extended paper on “The One Church and Its Unity”. First of all, he stressed that there is no “exact and exhaustive definition which expresses the essence of the church in itself” (LD 11, 72) due to the fact that the church is conceived as a mystery. Second, he discussed the boundaries of the church and named the belief in the triune God as an “absolutely necessary” (LD 11, 79) criterion for a church being a true Christian church. Since the church is founded in the very being of the triune God, “the *koinonia* of the churches, the *communio ecclesiarum*, and the relationship between the universal church and the local churches and their unity” (LD 11, 81) is dependent upon the Trinity, too. In a third step, Larentzakis explained the christological, pneumatological and historical dimension of the existence of the church. With respect to the existence of the church in history he stressed that “the church is not a rigid organisation, but rather a living *organism*” (LD 11, 86). Correspondingly, he supported a dynamic understanding of the church tradition and the principle of “sola scriptura” as developed in the international Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue (cf. LD 11, 86-88). In a fourth step, Larentzakis analysed the Orthodox understanding of the four essential attributes of the church. With respect

to the unity of the church he regarded “the divisions into many churches [...] the scandal which damages the credibility of the church, both in its own bounds and outside in the non-Christian world” (LD 11, 89). With respect to the apostolicity he explained that the apostolic succession was necessary to preserve the true apostolic church, but it “must not be understood in a legalistic and static way, as a direct line consisting only of the laying on of hands from bishop to bishop, in isolation from the church to which each belonged” (LD 11, 91). As Larentzakis stated, the laying on the hands has to be understood “as a sign or symbol” (LD 11, 92) referring to the continuity of the apostolic faith of the church. Furthermore, he explained the relation of local church and universal church conceiving the universal church as a communion of local churches. In a fifth step, Larentzakis stated that the Orthodox desire for the unity of the church would not entail uniformity, but rather “unity in the essentials of the Christian faith, diversity in the forms of expression of this faith and practice of the Christian life” (LD 11, 95). In order to clarify the concept of unity he referred to the trinitarian, soteriological dimension expressed by Jesus in John 17:21 as well as to Jürgen Moltmann’s interpretation (LD 11, 99).

With the second paper, Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Christoph Marksches responded to Larentzakis’s lecture. Being an expert in patristics, Marksches suggested that a common reading and inquiry in the patristic tradition could support ecumenical reflections (cf. LD 11, 119). Referring to Larentzakis’ interpretation of “unity in diversity” as a “terminological diversity in expressing the one faith”

(LD 11, 119f), as realised by some church fathers, Markschie's recommended that this "impressive combination of interpretative accuracy and tolerance should indeed serve as a model for ecumenical dialogue" (LD 11, 120). After reflecting Larentzakis' explorations of the boundaries of the church in the light of the distinction between visible and hidden church (cf. LD 11, 121-125)<sup>4</sup>, Markschie's pointed at three major points for further reflection, each of them concerning the Orthodox explanation of *notae ecclesiae* presented by Larentzakis: the problem of the *filioque*, the problem of ministry, culminating in the problem of women's ordination, and the problem apostolic succession (cf. LD 11, 127-129). Referring to Larentzakis' reflections on the ecumenical vision he hinted at the idea that the concept of church fellowship proposed by the CPCE could be somehow specified in the light of the Orthodox model of autocephalous churches.

#### Results:

Both sides agreed that ecclesiology "can only be dealt with properly within the context of the doctrine of the trinity, the context of Christology, pneumatology, soteriology and theological anthropology" (LD 11, 16). With respect to the existence of the Church both sides affirm that the universal Church "exists as a community of equally valid local churches, without any overriding importance or subordination of any of these churches" (ibd.). Most importantly,

the idea of love realised by the immanent being of the Holy Trinity as existing in mutual perichoresis was taken as "an important impulse for the understanding of the unity of the Church" (ibd.). Whereas both sides declared to agree "on the basic meaning of the four essential attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church" (ibd.), they pointed at differences concerning the interpretation of those attributes. The most important one refers to the interpretation of the holiness of the Church and the question whether the Church can be addressed as a sinner. The summary of the discussion in the communiqué indicates that during the discussion of ecclesiological differences in conceiving the nature of the Church, a growing mutual understanding of guiding ideas behind those differences was achieved.

### 5. The third consultation in Istanbul 2006

For the third consultation CEC- and CPCE-representatives were invited to the Phanar Greek Orthodox College in Istanbul from 27 to 30 April 2006. In a first part of the consultation, the members discussed the issue of catholicity and unity of the Church again. The second part concentrated on the doctrine of baptism and liturgical questions with regard to the celebration of baptism. Like in the first consultation four papers were presented, two of them referred to

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<sup>4</sup> In order to overcome misunderstandings with regard to the distinction between visible and hidden church it is important to acknowledge the close relation of Luther's distinction to the Augustinian understanding stressed and explored by Markschie's (cf. LD 11, 122, esp. footnote 12).

ecclesiology, two papers gave an introduction to the issue of baptism.

Papers:

In his introductory paper Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima appreciated the fact that Protestant Churches in Europe had been able to establish church fellowship. He also asked some questions referring to the intention of the Leuenberg Agreement and pointed to a lack of christological-trinitarian and ecclesiological reflection in the document.

The first paper given by Prof. Dr. Risto Saarinen explored the unity and catholicity of the Church from a protestant perspective. First of all, he investigated the issue of the church's catholicity in the so-called unity statements of WCC (cf. LD 11, 150–156) and demonstrated how the local element of catholicity disappeared step by step. Furthermore, he stated a similarity between the explanation of the catholicity of the Church in "The Church of Jesus Christ" and the document of Porto Alegre 2006. In a second step, Saarinen argued that the WCC-statements "reflect certain tensions present in the self-understanding of the churches as well as in the models of unity employed in ecumenism" (LD 11, 150, cf. 156–160). Thirdly, he related the new WCC-text to contemporary Protestant positions as presented by Hans-Peter Grosshans and Kevin Vanhoozer.

In the second paper Prof. Dr. Konstantinos Delikostantis explained basic elements of Orthodox ecclesiology. At first, he reflected ecumenical practice and advised theologians to be apophatic (cf. LD 11, 200). Secondly, he explored

the fact that the Orthodox understanding of the Church based upon the Eucharist, because the Eucharist is understood to be "the ground of the catholicity of every local Church" and "the foundation of the unity of local Churches in a global Church" (LD 11, 202). Accordingly, the "theology of episcopate is also centred on the Eucharist" (LD 11, 203). The Church is conceived as *koinonia*, *communio*, existing as a community of believers and as a community of local Churches and their bishops organizing itself within collegial structures (cf. LD 11, 204). "Church unity must be expressed in such a way as not to affect the integrity of the local Church. On the other hand, the identity of the local Church must of course be realized in such a way as to ensure the unity of all local Churches in the global Church" (LD 11, 205). Finally, he demonstrated how within the Orthodox tradition and teaching the Church is understood as a place of freedom. "Ecclesial being, being a person, is the gift of liberated, concrete freedom" (LD 11, 209f).

The third paper by PD Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans reflected on baptism as a sacramental bond of church unity, intending a contribution from a Protestant perspective on the mutual recognition of baptism between Protestant and Orthodox Churches. In a very systematic way Grosshans developed a theology of baptism, explaining the institution of baptism, the understanding as a sacrament, the salvatory meaning of baptism and the role of ministry and liturgical elements in the celebration of baptism within the service, thereby distinguishing between indispensable liturgical elements and addi-

tional elements (cf. LD 11, 261-264). With regard to the Lima-Document's description of the ecumenical significance of baptism Grosshans said: "The sacrament of baptism is only really understood when it is recognised that it *brings about* the unity of the people of God" (LD 11, 265). Accordingly, one "way of *expressing* the unity of the people of God could be the mutual recognition of baptism between the denominations, which would, unmistakably and before the whole world, symbolise this basic agreement of the churches on their unity endowed by Jesus Christ and made reality and expressed in baptism; and also bear witness to the reconciliation and renewal of mankind in our world brought about by Jesus Christ" (LD 11, 266). By pointing out the impact of common baptism for "a joint mission of all Christian churches in Europe" (LD 11, 267) Grosshans actually indicated a crucial aspect of how ecumenical encounter on a European level could support the growing together of European countries.

Finally Prof. Dr. Grigorios Larentzakis presented an extended paper on the Orthodox view on baptism and church unity. He started with a review of the difficult ecumenical situation of Orthodox Churches within the WCC, nevertheless affirming that "the Orthodox Church remains consistent regarding the necessity of ecumenical theological dialogue, and it will keep to this position, so that we will find answers that we can share" (LD 11, 297). Secondly, Larentzakis referred to the relevance of baptism in the Orthodox Churches of past and present times, explained the intimate connection between baptism and confirmation and demonstrated the

liturgical order of the administration of baptism. In a third step, he presented prospects for an efficient ecumenical development. First of all, he pointed at the fact that in ecumenical encounter, Orthodox Churches acknowledge the existence of other churches as churches. In order to deepen ecumenical dialogues, he recommended ecclesiological clarifications referring to the theological understanding of sacraments, to the connection of baptism and confirmation and to the role of ministry in particular. Furthermore, he pointed out the necessity of sharing one faith by confessing the creed of the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381, and suggested to reflect on the understanding of schisma and heresy. In the end, he explained the ecumenical vision of Orthodox Churches: "In no case do we seek uniformity, of a rigid unity, purely contractual or based on ecclesiastical law; nor a unity that represents a return, or any kind of subordination. Orthodoxy calls for the restoration of *unity in the essentials* of the Christian faith, as it must be recognised and confessed by all Christians and all churches together, *in the diversity of the different dimensions* which do not touch on the essentials and which cannot be discussed individually here. This means the unity of the One Church in the diversity of the autonomous, federal, polycentric administrations of regional churches, in the liturgical diversity of many liturgical rites and liturgical orders, and in the diversity of forms of expression of the same content of the Christian faith. This is the will of the Orthodox Church, this is what it calls for and supports unceasingly, and this is what it also expects from the other churches in the ecumenical movement" (LD 11,

318). Referring to John 17:21, Larentzakis stated: “Thus the will of Jesus is made plain, that the original picture and example for church unity is the unity, the *koinonia* of the three divine Persons through the bond of love, and that the goal of this unity is also *koinonia* with the three divine Persons” (LD 11, 319).

#### Results:

In the discussion both sides agreed that the catholicity of the Church may not be separated from its oneness, holiness and apostolicity and “that the relationship between unity and catholicity has to be found in the local church” (LD 11, 137). Catholicity – expressing a dimension that transcends the locally visible life of the community – is fully realised and “manifested through communion in the Eucharist with other local churches” (ibd.). Furthermore, it was possible to state commonly “that the connection between the local churches is guaranteed by means of synodality” (ibd.).

Concentrating on the issue of baptism both sides agreed “on the fact that baptism with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot be repeated. It presupposes true faith of the church as well as of the individual candidate” (LD 11, 138). While taking place in a particular local church, baptism “also brings about a catholic dimension” (ibd.). Referring to the salvatory effect of baptism, both sides affirmed that baptism “effects – through the Holy Spirit – cleansing from sin, rebirth, incorporation into the body of Christ and adoption as a child of God” (ibd.). The pastoral challenges arising from interconfessional marriages were acknowledged. With respect

to the essential elements of celebrating and administering baptism a consensus was stated.

Regarding the ecumenical vision, both sides agreed that unity should not be understood as uniformity.

At the consultation in the Phanar, the delegation was received for an audience with the Ecumenical Patriarch His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, who encouraged the delegation to continue the consultation process.

## 5. Spirituality

At all consultations, participants came together for common prayers every day. Furthermore, they mutually shared spiritual experiences by attending the Holy Liturgy at the Orthodox Academy in Crete and at the Valoukli Monastery in Istanbul for the feast of the Life-giving source of the Mother of God.

## 6. Résumé and recommendations

The consultations dealt with a number of topics in a very coherent way. Starting from discussing the Protestant model of church fellowship realised in CPCE, the discussion went on to the understanding of the nature of the Church and finally ended up with the concrete issue of baptism as the initiation into becoming a Christian and joining a Christian church. Accordingly, in the third consultation the question of an official mutual recognition of baptism was insinuated. Since in Germany an official recognition of baptism was signed by

the Roman-Catholic Church, Protestant Churches and some Orthodox Churches, it appears reasonable to investigate the conditions and implications of an official recognition of baptism on the European level.

It proved to be good practice to start the first consultation with an overview of former Protestant-Orthodox dialogues in order to remember the ecumenical aim and initiative, to reflect the progress achieved and to analyse the present situation<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, it was very helpful at the beginning to focus on an ecumenical document elaborating the ecumenical vision of one party. Along with this, both sides offered substantial introductions to their confessional tradition, their teachings and their church life. Thus, the consultation process helped with a deeper mutual understanding.

In the discussion, it became evident that members of the Orthodox delegation missed a confessional and liturgical uniformity within the Church Fellowship of CPCE while they appreciated the trinitarian, christological and pneumatological foundation of Protestant ecclesiology. In the second consultation the idea was mentioned to compare the model of church unity of CPCE with the community of autocephalous churches within Orthodoxy. It might have been fruitful and innovative to discuss this idea a little further. However, it was made obvious by the Orthodox papers that the issue of church fellowship cannot be discussed apart from

the sacramental life of the church. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to focus on baptism in the second half of the third consultation, because baptism offers individual redemption within the community of the Church as the body of Christ and therefore is a vehicle of unity.

For the next consultation one may hope that the issue of baptism will be discussed again. There ought to be enough time for a mutual interrogation regarding the relevance of baptism within the life of the churches and for a deepening of the mutual understanding of the celebration of baptism in both churches in order to avoid wrong ideas, which might cause scepticism and misunderstandings. Furthermore, the relevance of a mutual recognition of baptism for Protestant and for Orthodox Churches should be discussed and compared. For Protestants, it might be helpful to learn about the meaning of the Orthodox distinction between the recognition of baptism *kat'oikonomian* and *kat'akrubeian*. For Orthodox members of the delegation, it might be interesting to learn about the practice of baptism as part of a process leading to confirmation and participation in the Holy Supper.

With regard to the *modus operandi* of the consultations, it appears to be wise to initiate a more detailed documentation of the discussions subsequent to the lectures. This might enhance the productiveness of the dialogues, as a lot of controversial issues but also common features are specified more precisely

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<sup>5</sup> LD 8, 29–39.

and discussed more openly here. A distinct elaboration of the differences and convergences between the churches in a paper as they are seen by the respective lecturer could also help to avoid superficialities and to further the intensity and accuracy of discussion. Therefore, a clarification of certain terms used by either of the parties respectively seems to be required in order to overcome misconceptions and advance towards a better understanding of one's counterpart. Especially the exact content of the ideas of "faith consensus", "essentials" and "apostolic succession" as well as an unambiguous definition of sacraments, ministry and the visible and invisible church would be helpful for the deepening of the ecumenical dialogue.

Looking at the consultation process altogether, one may say that the Orthodox-Protestant encounter on a European level focusing on basic ecclesiological questions is a promising endeavour that should be continued. The progress is supported by the fact that all documents of the consultations have been published in due course in English and German. This is a very important precondition for the reception process within the churches.

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# Theological Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and Porvoo Communion

Ionut-Alexandru Tudorie

One of the most recent theological dialogues initiated by the European Churches Conference is that among the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Porvoo Communion. First of all, the idea is very attractive at the documentary level, because such an *encounter* introduces for the Eastern Orthodoxy the new realities and ecclesiastical changes from the Western Christianity. Secondly, for an Orthodox theologian, an open dialog with Christian *otherness* is interesting because it challenges to a careful research and argumentation to its own ecclesiastical basis.

The case being that the dialogue partner of the Orthodox Church is not a simple local Church, but a communion of churches by a very recent date (too little known in the Orthodox world) in the first introduction of this report some brief information about the Porvoo Communion will be presented.

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For a historian, having Northern Europe as his main area of research – especially in this year (2009) – the city of Porvoo (Borgå in Swedish) is not only the name of a Finnish small town situated near Helsinki, Finnish capital, but also the place of a well-known Legislative Assembly of four Estates (nobility, clergy, burghers and peasants) of Russian occupied Finland, called *Diet of Porvoo* (*Porvoon maapäivät*, March–July 1809). This historical event has marked the establishment of semi-autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland under the Russian authority of Tsar Alexander I, when the representatives of the Estates swore allegiance in the Porvoo Cathedral (29<sup>th</sup> of March, 1809).

On the other hand, for a theologian, the name of Porvoo is closely linked with an important theological agreement

finalized in the fall of 1992 at Järvenpää (Finland).<sup>1</sup> Fruit of a theological dialogue initiated back at the beginning of the 20th century,<sup>2</sup> this agreement was signed and successively ratified by ten Anglican and Lutheran local Churches: Church of England, Church of Ireland, Scottish Episcopal Church, Church in Wales, Church of Sweden, Church of Norway, Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland, Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Iceland, Estonian Evangelical-Lutheran Church and Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Lithuania. Although they have participated in the dialogue, both the Church of Denmark and Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Latvia have not ratified the agreement.

The joint declaration by the end of the document contains the following points: mutual recognition *as churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ*, and – most important – mutual acknowledgement of ordained ministries, including the Episcopal ministry (§ 58A). On the basis of these *acknowledgements*, some practical *commitments* were added,

applicable to all the signatory churches: the acceptance of other Churches' believers as their own members; mutual admission of ordained persons from a bishop to serve without re-ordination, in bishop, priest or deacon places, according to their status before; the invitation of bishops from other Churches to participate at the laying on of hands in the Episcopal ordination; the establishment of structures for conciliation and consultation concerning the most important issues of faith, constitution, life and action (§ 58A).

As you may find it, this agreement and the ecclesial communion that followed it is not only interesting because it implies a number of approximately 50 million believers, but also because, for the first time in the history of theological dialogues, it is been talked about possibility of interchangeability of ministries between Churches that represent two different confessional families: Anglican and Lutheran. Especially for this reason Porvoo Agreement has been viewed as a *breakthrough* in the ecumenical movement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of this agreement is available in: *Together in Mission and Ministry: The Porvoo Common Statement with Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe. Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican Churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches* (GS 1083), Church House Publishing, London, 1993, pp. 1–33. Also, are available different other translation in Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish, Estonian, Icelandic, Welsh, German, Italian and French of this English official text.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed presentation of this previous dialogues between Church of England and Lutheran Churches from Northern Europe see: Vilmos VAJTA (editor), *Church in Fellowship: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship among Lutherans*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1963, pp. 177–221 (without any reference to the dialogue between Church of England and Evangelical-Lutheran Churches from Latvia and Estonia).

<sup>3</sup> See the initial discourse of prof. Ola TJØRHOM in: „Porvoo-rapporten – et mulig økumenisk gjennombrudd?”, *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke*, 64. Årgang (1993), Hefte 3, pp. 173–188 [republished in English in: *One in Christ*, vol. XXIX (1993), no. 4, pp. 302–309; *Pro Ecclesia*, vol. III (1994), no. 1 (Winter), pp. 11–17; *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 46 (1994), nr. 1 (January), pp. 97–102].

The result is surprising, especially because there are well-known differences in perspective between the two Christian traditions, especially on Episcopal ministry, which would normally ask for the invalidation (non-acknowledgment) of the sacramental ordination. More specifically, in this issue the Anglicans insist on the normative nature of Episcopal history and tactile apostolic succession, while the Lutherans emphasize the *intention* to return to the Church's life in the first centuries, showing large reserves to the idea of the concentration of decision-making's authority in the hands of a single person, seated in this function for a indefinite period. However, we should emphasize that *some* Lutheran churches in the Northern Europe (especially the Church of Sweden, and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Finland, Estonia and Latvia) have managed that during the Reformation period to keep the line of apostolic succession, the Episcopal ministry being perceived more as a sacramental ministry and not a managing one.

Thus, from this bivalent reality, stemmed the need to avoid the obligation of normative character of succession (*successio manuum*) using over-evaluation *intention* of ensuring the continuity of the apostolic church (*successio sedis*): „At the time of the Reformation all our churches ordained bishops (sometimes the term *superintendent* was used as a synonym for bishop) to the existing sees of the Catholic Church, *indicating their intention to continue the life and ministry of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*. In some of the territories the historic succession of bishops was maintained by episcopal ordination, whereas elsewhere on a few occasions

bishops or superintendents were consecrated by priests following what was believed to be the precedent of the early Church. [...] The interruption of the Episcopal succession has, nevertheless, in these particular churches always been accompanied *by the intention and by measures to secure the apostolic continuity of the Church* as a Church of the Gospel served by an episcopal ministry. The subsequent tradition of these churches demonstrates their faithfulness to the apostolicity of the Church.” (§ 34)

Porvoo Communion became visible and operational since the fall of 1996 when there were three special communion celebrations (Trondheim, Tallinn and London). Although during this period (1996–2008) we may see a gradual increase of the relationship between the 10 signatory Churches (a notable number of Lutheran priests have chosen to serve in Anglican churches; common strategies for re-evaluation of diaconal ministry), however there were distinguished views in total disagreement: the participation of Churches in the Porvoo Communion (ecclesial communion with a Episcopal structure) as well as in the Leuenberg Communion (ecclesial communion without Episcopal structure – see the cases of Norway, Estonia and Lithuania); ordination of women for Episcopal ministry; acceptance of marriage between persons of the same sex; etc.

To distinguish more clearly the interest generated by this agreement in Europe, it should be stressed that the theological document signed in Porvoo was presented and analyzed in special conferences organized by both the Leuenberg Communion (6–10 September 1995, Lieb-

frauenberg – France)<sup>4</sup> and the Old Catholic Church (30 August – 4 September 1999, Wislikofen – Switzerland).<sup>5</sup> A comparative analysis between the theology found in the Porvoo Agreement and the teachings of the Old Catholic Church reveals at least one major difference: Episcopal service is not an optional for existence of the Church – as shown in the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, but Episcopal service is indestructible connected to the existence of Church being the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic – according to the faith of the Old Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup>

The attempt of the Anglicans to approach the Lutherans led to ambivalent expressions of faith (it is a kind of *ecclesiastical diplomacy!*), and gave birth to critics both from conservative Anglicans (who perceive it as a derogation from the principle of historic succession in the episcopate)<sup>7</sup> and from evangelical Lutherans (who perceive the implementation of this declaration as a dangerous approach to the Roman Catholic position and as something that raze their own ecclesial identity).<sup>8</sup>

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The initiative of the Conference of European Churches to propose the opening of an **unofficial theological dialogue** between representatives, both laymen and clergy, of the different Orthodox Church, on the one hand, and the Anglican and Lutheran Churches from Porvoo Communion, on the other hand, falls within the trend of deepening the latest results of the theological dialogues in Western Europe. Also, is good to know that between Orthodox Churches and Church of England (Anglican) and Church of Sweden (Lutheran) has been a very fruitful dialogue and cooperation during the first part of 20<sup>th</sup> century. That means that now it is a new opportunity for the Orthodox Church to reopen in a very different context some of its **very old ecumenical relations** at least with some of the Churches from Porvoo Communion.

Within this dialogue, so far, there were held two joint meetings: the first was held between 1–4 December 2005 at Järvenpää (Finland) – exactly in the

<sup>4</sup> The papers are available in: Wilhelm HÜFFMEIER & Colin PODMORE (editors), *Leuenberg, Meissen and Porvoo: Consultation between the Churches of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship and the Churches involved in the Meissen Agreement and the Porvoo Agreement (Liebfrauenberg-Elsaß, 6. bis 10. September 1995)*, coll. *Leuenberger Texte*, Heft 4, Verlag Otto Lembeck, Frankfurt am Main, 1996

<sup>5</sup> Some of the papers are available in: *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 90. Jahrgang (2000), Heft 1/429 (Januar-März).

<sup>6</sup> See the article of Prof. Martien PARMENTIER, „Die Altkatholische Ekklesiologie und das Porvoodokument“, *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 90. Jahrgang (2000), Heft 1 (Januar-März), pp. 30–49.

<sup>7</sup> See the position of John HUNWICKE, „Letters: The Porvoo leap“, *The Tablet*, vol. 249, no. 8057 (7 January 1995), pp. 15–16; no. 8060 (28 January 1995), p. 111; „Porvoo or not Porvoo?“, *New Directions*, vol. I (1995), no. 2 (July), pp. 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> See the articles of Tom G.A. HARDT, „The Borgå (Porvoo) Common Statement“, *Logia*, vol. VII (1998), no. 3 (Holy Trinity), pp. 45–52; Kjell Olav SANNES, „Karakteristikk og

same place where the document was finalized – and the second took place between 27–30 March 2008 at Brâncoveanu Monastery / Sâmbăta de Sus (Romania). At both meetings, in addition to representatives of the three confessional families (Orthodox, Anglican and Lutheran) have been invited also observers from the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), Armenian Apostolic Church and Church of Denmark.

### Järvenpää meeting

Each of the said two meetings was opened with an informative part, including presentations on the results of the international theological dialogues between the three Christian traditions. Thus, in this direction, during the meeting in Järvenpää were presented three special essays, which have provided to the commission members all the information they needed on Orthodox-Anglican dialogues (Ioan Mircea Ielciu), Orthodox-Lutheran (Viorel Ioniță) and Anglican-Lutheran (Matti Repo). The transition from the introductory part to the main topic of the meeting was designed by an overview of the structure of the Porvoo Communion and some

concrete examples of joint action of all the Churches involved in this community (Stephanie Dietrich). The last two essays were dedicated to the main theme of this first meeting („Since one of the characteristics of the Porvoo Agreement is among others the bishop’s ministry, the consultation may like to focus its discussion on the bishop’s ministry as element of the Church unity.”)<sup>9</sup>

Thus, were presented a series of reflections on ecclesiology of Porvoo Agreement from an Anglican (John Hind) and Orthodox perspective (Ionuț-Alexandru Tudorie). The Anglican ecclesiology portrayed in this document is positive and could be concentrated in the following phrases: „There is a single mission, temporally rooted in the uniqueness of the apostolic tradition, historically mediated. Full partnership in this mission requires unity in faith, sacramental life and ministry. A shared Episcopal structure is seen as evidence rather than a requirement. Meeting around these characteristics has enabled mutual recognition as *sister churches*. Although what that implies is not theologially spelt out, it clearly suggests that the One Church is not so much a single organization but an organism with interrelated members, communities as well as individuals.”<sup>10</sup>

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vurdering av *Porvoo-erklæringen* som økumenisk dokument”, *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke*, 68. Årgang (1997), Hefte 2, pp. 83–96; Ingolf DALFERTH, „Amt und Bischofsamt nach Meissen und Porvoo”, *Materialdienst des Konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim (MD)*, 47. Jahrgang (1996), nr. 5 (September/Oktober), pp. 91–96; nr. 6 (November/Dezember), pp. 111–118 [republished in German and English in: *Visible Unity and the Ministry of Oversight: The Second Theological Conference held under the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany, West Wickham, March 1996*, Church House Publishing, London, 1997].

<sup>9</sup> All the papers from Järvenpää, including the *Communiqué*, were published in: *Reseptio*, 1/2006, pp. 3–72.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John HIND, „Some Anglican Reflections on the Ecclesiology of the *Porvoo Common Statement*”, *Reseptio*, 1/2006, p. 56.

On the other hand, the Orthodox position towards the ecclesiology of this document revealed a number of notable differences: “The Orthodox ecclesiology, when relating to the apostolicity of the Church, stresses both the unaltered preservation of the revealed teachings and the apostolic succession. [...] Thus, in the Church there is both an *external transmission* of revealed teachings and an *internal transmission* of the gift of hierarchy. Consequently, in the Orthodox ecclesiology the apostolic succession is strictly linked to the historic succession of bishops. To the contrary, the Porvoo Agreement states that historic succession should not be perceived as a *guarantee* of the apostolicity of the Church, but as a *sign* or *means of continuity between many others*. [...] For any Orthodox, historic succession is much more than a *sign* through which *the Church communicates its care for continuity in the whole of its life and mission, and reinforces its determination to manifest the permanent characteristics of the Church of the Apostles* (§50): this episcopal succession is one of the main and permanent characteristics of the Church.”<sup>11</sup>

Also, during this first meeting of the joint commission were fixed three main themes of the following consultations. Thus, *a)* the compatibility between Orthodox ecclesiology and the one presented in the Porvoo Agreement, *b)* the relationship between ministry, mission and succession, and *c)* the Holy Spirit: creation and growth inside and

outside the Church were considered by the theologians invited at Järvenpää as the most interesting general themes that will be detailed during the dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and Porvoo Communion.

### **Brâncoveanu Monastery / Sâmbăta de Sus meeting**

The second meeting of this joint commission was held between 27–30 March 2008 at Brâncoveanu Monastery / Sâmbăta de Sus (Romania). Due to many objective reasons **many of those who participated in the first meeting (especially the Orthodox participants) of this dialogue could not be present at this date**. The information part from the beginning of this second meeting provided background data on the latest results of the Orthodox-Lutheran (Stephanie Dietrich) and the Orthodox-Anglican (Ionuț-Alexandru Tudorie) international theological dialogue.

The central theme of the meeting at Sâmbăta de Sus was: **The compatibility of the understanding of the Church in the Porvoo Common Statement and the Orthodox understanding of the Church**.<sup>12</sup> The four essays that were planned to include the theme mentioned were grouped as follows: *Nature of the Church in the Orthodox Ecclesiology* (Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima) and *The True Church of Christ and the Concept of Church in the Porvoo Common Statement* (Samuel Ruben-

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ionuț-Alexandru TUDORIE, „Porvoo Common Statement from an Orthodox Perspective”, *Reseptio*, 1/2006, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Until now the papers have not been published.

son); *Can Christian Unity be attained? Reflections on Church Unity from the Orthodox Perspective* (Václav Ježek) and *The Concept of Church Unity in the Porvoo Common Statement: Unity and Diversity* (Bishop Michael Jackson).

The first two papers sought to detail a series of aspects surrounding the nature of the Church from two different traditions: Orthodox and Lutheran. Thus, the Orthodox ecclesiological teaching is both simple and complex at the same time: “[The Church in the Orthodox perspective] Is the Church of the Triune God, the Church of Christ, the Church of the Fathers, the Church of the Saints, and the Church of the people of God. It is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. Perhaps the best and clearest *eikon* of this manifold perspective of the Church is to be seen in the seal of the holy *prospora*. Here we have the Church in focus in the personal, the historical, the theological, and the anthropological dimensions.” (Metropolitan Gennadios) On the other hand, following the comments of Martin Luther, the Lutheran answer is: “Luther understands the Church as the people of God, the faithful through the ages. The Church is a living, praying and believing body. It is made up by those who believe in the Lord, since it His people. [...] In this sense it is an eschatological reality, the fulfillment of the prophecies. [...] Secondly and consequently Luther insists on the Church being in its essence a hidden reality, something invisible, something that is being revealed in this world in a hidden manner, not understood or grasped fully, neither by those inside or those outside. It is a *mysterion*, a secret. [...] As a consequence Luther is careful not

to identify the Church with the individual Christian or a group of Christians. The Church is not an association of a group of people that may agree or not agree. It is a unity of hearts filled with the Spirit, a unity that isn’t and cannot be threatened by diversity. As sinners its members are constantly called to repentance and to a return to Christ. We are still not what we are called to be. The Church is, however, already the rule of Christ, is already what it will be forever.” (Samuel Rubenson)

The last two papers focused on Church unity, and a confessional equilibrium could be noticed in the Orthodox and Lutheran presentations. According to the Orthodox presentation, the main cause of the lack of unity in the Church is the lack of Christian love: “disunity is not merely the consequence of the lack of intellectual and theological unity, but primarily a lack of love. But this does not mean a lack of love only between two people or two groups, but sometimes the inability to respond to love, and the failure to assent to love.” Also, “ecclesial unity cannot be achieved merely on theological grounds. This is proven by the fact that on numerous occasions, when the Church attempted to achieve unity purely on theological grounds, this has often ended in the opposite result. This of course happens when theology is divorced from the life of the Church of which it is merely a reflection.” (Václav Ježek) The Anglican viewpoint is nothing but an attempt to apply the *unity in diversity* concept to the ecclesial reality of the Porvoo communion. Thus, “central to the understanding of diversity in the Porvoo Common Statement is the realization that diversity itself is not a

deficient form of being for those who don't *do* unity. In fact, for Porvoo, unity has built into it a need for diversity not only in the community of God the Three in One and One in Three but also in its mode of expression as dynamic rather than static unity. [...] The bonds of communion form the unity but also support the diversity of the Porvoo Communion. But there is a recognition that a type of diversity exists which goes beyond the tolerable. [...] What is particularly important about Porvoo is that there is not an enforced uniformity but an openness to discern more about visible unity as the churches live *into* the new relationship, [...].” (Bishop Michael Jackson)

The following two meetings of the commission will have as main themes: the relationship between ministry, mission and apostolicity; the Holy Spirit: creation and growth inside and outside the Church. Following the debate on these themes, set since Järvenpää, an ample evaluation of this dialogue will become possible and very probably an official dialogue would be initiated.

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### Conclusions and Suggestions

This dialogue managed to **introduce** to the Orthodox theologians who partici-

pated at the two meetings one of the most interesting theological documents ratified over the last years. Also, these meetings were an excellent opportunity for a **much lively dialogue** than the one within international bilateral dialogues, where ecclesiastical diplomacy sometimes requires a certain position which annuls one's own opinion.

Aside from the notable differences in viewing the only theme debated so far, it is remarkable to notice the **engaging attitude** and the openness for dialogue of all those who were privileged to participate at least at one of the two meetings. A special concern for the staff of the Conference of European Churches should be in relation with the **Orthodox participants**: there is a need of continuation from a meeting to another. If we are starting from the beginning at every meeting it will be difficult to go further.

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# A Brief Review on the Eastern Orthodox-Porvoo Dialogue 2005–2008

Matti Repo

## Introduction

The CEC Eastern Orthodox Churches and the CPCE Protestant Churches opened a series of theological consultations in 2002. A year later, the Policy and Reference committee of the CEC General Assembly in Trondheim underlined the importance of theological dialogue between the CEC member churches, particularly between the Orthodox and other member churches. Special emphasis should be laid on questions of Christian unity, Ecclesiology, ministry and theological education.

As the new CEC Central Committee gathered in December 2003, it recom-

mended that the consultations between the Orthodox and the CPCE Churches should be continued and the Porvoo Churches be invited to take part in them. Accordingly, a representative from the Church of England was sent as an observer to the second Orthodox-CPCE consultation in Wittenberg in 2004. In the same year, the recently established new CEC Commission on Churches in Dialogue recommended a similar, but separate series of consultations between the Orthodox churches and the churches in the Porvoo Communion to be initiated. So far, two meetings have been held, one in Järvenpää, Finland in December 2005<sup>1</sup> and another in Sambata de Sus, Romania, in March 2008<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Documentation: Communiqué. Conference of European Churches. Eastern Orthodox – Porvoo Consultation. Järvenpää, Finland, 1–4 December 2005. <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/EasternOrthodoxPorvooCommunique.pdf>. All papers published in *Reseptio* 1/2006, pp. 4–72.

<sup>2</sup> Documentation: Communiqué. Conference of European Churches. Second Eastern Orthodox – Porvoo Consultation. Sambata de Sus, Romania, 27–30 March 2008. <http://www.cec-kek.org/pdf/CiDProvooStatement2008.pdf>. Papers given in the consultation are not yet published.

### **A Preliminary Remark**

As a matter of fact, both of the two series of consultations between the Orthodox churches and the churches of the Reformation should not be regarded as official dialogues between the churches. They have not been agreed upon by the respective decision-making bodies in the churches, and the delegates have not been authorized to make binding agreements, but to merely represent the theological tradition of their own church. Such consultations between persons of different theological schools or confessional families may nevertheless prove fruitful in promoting mutual understanding and convergence. A binding character does not only emerge from authorized decision-making, but also from the reception of the results of a dialogue in the churches. In the end, ecumenical development might very well be more dependent on the reception in the everyday teaching of the churches than on the frontline dialogue of specialists. However, the CPCE and the Porvoo churches, as well as the Orthodox churches, have sent highly skilled theologians and academically trained clergy and church leaders to the consultations to make the discussion as advanced and relevant as possible.

It is not possible to evaluate the Orthodox-Porvoo consultation process fully at this initial stage. The two meetings have only been able to cover a small part of topics identified to be in need of clarification. At this point, only a preliminary review with a superficial analysis can be offered. However, even such an effort might point to relevant questions and assist the churches in their further strivings for Christian unity.

### **“Protestant Churches” or “Churches of Reformation”?**

In a dialogue where more than one family of Reformation Churches are discussing with the Orthodox or the Catholic Church, certain limits of language are very soon met. It is not always easy for the Orthodox or Catholic representatives to find an appropriate name for the counterpart. Attempts to use categories like “Protestant” or “Evangelical” or “Reformation Churches” are used in order to cover a whole group. Sometimes these categorizations are accurate; sometimes they only manage to articulate a prejudice on the dialogue partner. If one possesses a vague idea of “Protestantism”, this idea can be stretched and applied to all other churches than the Orthodox or the Catholic Church. Consequently, the dialogue partner might feel rather uneasy if characterizations emerging from encounter with Pentecostal or Charismatic groups are used to describe a Lutheran church only because they all are “Protestant” churches by some measure, no matter how radically they might differ in their doctrine, tradition and constituency.

From the point of view of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, there is no such a general group as “the Protestant Churches”; there are churches of different confessional families who all have their roots in the undivided apostolic and catholic Church, but who have received the apostolic and catholic tradition through the Reformation. According to some theologians, the whole of Christianity can be categorized in just a few “megablocks” (eg. the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Protestant and the Charismatic), but these generalizations

might as well harm any serious theological dialogue by blurring the picture and preventing from learning. The dialogue partners need to be aware of more exact differentiations in order to understand each other. Far too often, such requirements are not met before the consultation, and getting to know the partner only starts in the actual dialogue itself and occupies most of the time needed for theological debate.

Coming from a Nordic family of Lutheran Churches with a particular history and an emphasis on the continuity of the Church, I don't consider my church a "Protestant Church"; definitely not in any "general protestant" sense without differentiation. On the other hand, the consultations between the Orthodox and the CPCE Churches deliberately seem to be based on an assumption that the churches of Reformation are theologically so close to each other that it is appropriate to call them all "Protestant Churches". However, the theologians involved in the CPCE nevertheless do argue on the basis of their own respective church tradition, which, in turn, is either Lutheran, Reformed or belongs to some other particular Reformation tradition, although the community itself considers all member churches "protestant" in a general sense.

The same cannot be said about the Porvoo Churches. The churches in the Porvoo Communion are either Lutheran or Anglican. None of them is "Protestant" in a general sense, rather, they all confess the Apostolic and Catholic faith in its Lutheran or Anglican form, and they all have preserved the episcopal order and the sacramental worship of the Church. This is very important to

note, and I find it more appropriate to call these churches either Anglican or Lutheran or "Porvoo Churches" for the sake of convenience, but not simply "Protestant Churches".

Another important difference to the consultations with the CPCE Churches is that the Porvoo Communion is not an organization, but a family of churches. It is not an ecumenical agency; it doesn't have any decision-making body, no general assembly nor central committee; neither office, staff nor membership fee. It only exists as churches in communion, who have committed themselves to common life, to joint sacramental worship, mission and ministry, in order to serve and to witness. The Porvoo Churches only act together for common aims in joint projects if the contact persons arrange any activities together, and if the church leaders or the presiding bishops agree on them.

### **Overall Topic: Ecclesiology**

In connection with the simplified characterization of "Protestantism", another assumption is easily made, namely that of denominationalism. It is sometimes assumed in the dialogue that the churches of Reformation are believed to be intrinsically denominationalist, i.e. they are content with the ecclesial diversity and consider it natural and legitimate. Up to a certain point, this is true of the Porvoo churches, too, but only in relation to their historically developed contextual, cultural and ethnic differences, not to the apostolic doctrine they share. Both the Lutherans and the Anglicans can refer to their historical confessional writings from the Reformation era, ac-

ording to which it is “enough to agree on concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments”, whereas it is considered “not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere”.<sup>3</sup>

It has to be remembered that the above quoted seventh article of the *Augsburg Confession* was originally not intended to articulate a full ecclesiology of a present-day protestant church, but attempted to frame a *modus vivendi* for the congregations of Reformation inside the Catholic Church. What was a minimum for maintaining unity in the Catholic church of the 16<sup>th</sup> century cannot be turned into a basis of ecclesiology and then refined in this minimal form into a sole criterion for reclaiming the lost unity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A good number of basic assumptions that were still normative during the Augsburg Diet will fall out of picture; among them, the continuity in the episcopal ministry.

Both the Lutherans and the Anglicans in the Porvoo Communion agree that the episcopal ministry occupies a vital position in ecclesiology. While not being directly part of the apostolic doctrine or of the Gospel itself, episcopacy is closely related to keeping the true faith and passing it on to new generations. The episcopal ministry or the oversight of the bishops exercised in personal, collegial and communal

dimensions is elementary to the being of the Church. It is the service of the apostolic mission of the Church. The Porvoo Churches agree on the historic episcopate and value the laying on of hands in historical succession as a “sign, not guarantee” of unity and continuity and a sign of the Church’s trust in God’s faithfulness to his people as well as the Church’s intention to be faithful to God’s initiative and gift.<sup>4</sup>

When opening the consultation between the Eastern Orthodox and the Porvoo Churches in 2005, Prof. Dr. Viorel Ionita referred in his introduction to this particular characteristic of the Porvoo Churches. He supposed that the first consultation, which carried the overall topic of “Ecclesiology in the Porvoo Common Statement”, might like to focus its discussion on the bishop’s ministry as an element of the Church unity.<sup>5</sup> It was assumed that at this point the Orthodox and the Porvoo Churches might find common understanding capable of carrying them further into ecumenical convergence than the other consultations between the Orthodox and the CPCE Churches had been able to reach so far. While being a relevant suggestion, based on the concept of unity in the Porvoo Common Statement, the consultations in 2005 and 2008 did nevertheless not focus on the bishops, but remained on a more general level of ecclesiology.

<sup>3</sup> Augsburg Confession (1530), VII. Cf. Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith (1571), XIX.

<sup>4</sup> Porvoo Common Statement, 43–48.

<sup>5</sup> Viorel Ionita, Background and aims of the consultation. – *Reseptio* 1/2006, 8–10.

### **The Global Lutheran, Anglican and Orthodox Dialogues**

The two consultations have each followed the same scheme. Both of them have been opened with an update on the dialogues between the Orthodox and the Anglican and between the Orthodox and the Lutheran churches. This update has provided the participants with an opportunity to locate the present consultation in a wider network of theological discussion. However, not particularly much has been made use of the framework of global dialogue. The outcome of the dialogues of the Orthodox Churches with the Anglican Communion or with the Lutheran World Federation has unfortunately not had any noticeable impact on the consultations between the CEC Orthodox and the Porvoo Churches.

An introduction into the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue that had led up to Porvoo was given in the first consultation, but not much of its content flowed into the discussion. This was rather lamentable, since many of the ecclesiological questions at stake had already been discussed in the global dialogues. It has to be asked, why these introductions have played such a minor role in the discussion that has followed them, although they were intended to assist the consultation. Perhaps it only is due to the fact that so few of the participants have been sufficiently aware of other dialogues and their methodology.

Another feature of the consultations is that representatives from the Porvoo Churches have not only operated on a purely theological level, but have also attempted to explain what it means for

them as churches of different traditions to live out their recently established communion. This has proven rather challenging, since on the one hand, it has not been fully clear to the Orthodox party that Anglicans and Lutherans are distinct traditions and not simply “protestant”, and on the other hand, they have been able to reconcile their differences through theological dialogue. In the consultations, the theologians of the Porvoo Churches have nevertheless taken their arguments from their own theological tradition, not only from their joint agreement.

The Porvoo Churches have reached mutual understanding in their crucial questions of faith and order and entered into a communion in mission and ministry, in sacramental worship and in episcopal imposition of hands in each other’s consecration of bishops. They have become, to put it in the words of a previous stage in the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, *interdependent*, yet remaining *autonomous*. The mutual sharing of resources, clergy exchange, consultations in vital questions of pastoral challenge, and other areas of common life, have all been raised as examples of living in communion, not as an end to theological debate nor as explications of the agreement signed by the Churches. In this way, ecclesiology has not been made a subject of solely theological debate in a document, but it also has been exemplified as the theological framework in which the churches fulfill their common mission in everyday life together.

### **Do the Porvoo Churches Have a Common Ecclesiology?**

Taking the differences in the Lutheran and Anglican traditions seriously, one has to ask, whether such a thing as a “Porvoo ecclesiology” really exists. It is not clear in what sense this concept has been used in the consultations. Do the Porvoo Churches represent a common ecclesiology, and if they do, can this joint ecclesiology be read from the Common Statement? To make things easier, let it be assumed that the Common Statement presents a unified Porvoo ecclesiology. But even under this precondition, it has to be asked, where in the Statement such a common understanding is to be read – in the paragraphs which attempt to express the common faith in doctrinal sentences, or in those in which the churches commit themselves to live out their communion? Is the “Porvoo ecclesiology” a description or a declaration?

In the first consultation in Järvenpää 2005, two papers were given to analyze the ecclesiology in the Porvoo Common Statement, one by Bishop John Hind and the other by Assisting Professor Ionut Alexander Tudorie.<sup>6</sup> The two papers represented two different interpretations on the meaning of the Statement. The first of these attempted to highlight the substance of the Statement from an Anglican point of view, by referring mainly to the long paragraph 58 in the Declaration part of the Statement and by putting special emphasis

on the commitments instead of the mutual acknowledgements. Bishop Hind only briefly quoted the Statement’s description of the Church, a “portrait of a church living in the light of the gospel”, derived from the Scriptures (para. 20) and lifted “not only the content but also the method of this ‘portraiture’” up. The latter paper by Asst. Prof. Tudorie sought to point to the problems and weaknesses of the Statement’s theological methodology that make it a vague basis for unity. Tudorie came to the conclusion that the Porvoo Agreement is not agreeable from an Orthodox point of view. Hind surpassed the doctrinal definitions of ecclesiology in the Statement since “scholastic treatises *de Ecclesia* often run the risk of reducing the Church to a set of propositional definitions and thereby of missing its essential quality as *mysterion*”, whereas Tudorie warned that “during the process of building unity the doctrinal issues should not be superficially treated”.

For Bishop Hind, the first commitment in the Porvoo Declaration, to “share a common life in mission and service, to pray for and with one another, and to share resources”, indicated that there is “a single mission, temporarily rooted in the uniqueness of the apostolic tradition, historically mediated”; and that “full partnership in this mission requires unity in faith, sacramental life and ministry”. For Asst. Prof. Tudorie, the Porvoo Agreement was only possible because of the “subjective interpretation

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<sup>6</sup> John Hind, Some Anglican Reflections on the Ecclesiology of the Porvoo Common Statement. – *Reseptio* 1/2006, 50–60; Ionut-Alexandru Tudorie, Porvoo Common Statement from an Orthodox Perspective. – *Reseptio* 1/2006, 61–72.

of a neutral ecumenical terminology” and of the “use of the syncretic method” promoted by the BEM and of the “compromising or relativization of the Episcopate’s absolute character”. – I feel tempted to state that the two evaluators unfortunately spoke past each other. They could have found more in common if they both had worked on a more focused topic. The arguments in both of the papers emphasized unity in doctrine and in the episcopal ministry; the parties nevertheless aimed them against each other. Surprisingly enough, it was the Porvoo theologian who emphasized the Church as a *mysterion* unfolding in the liturgical life, and the Orthodox theologian who sketched his ecclesiology primarily by means of unchangeable doctrine and strict historic episcopate.

### **Outcome of the first consultation in Järvenpää 2005**

The consultation in Järvenpää was nevertheless very productive in identifying areas of common interest for a closer look. One reason for this was the group work which was carried out in two parts. First, the participants named three large areas for further study:

1) The compatibility of the understanding of the Church in the Porvoo Common Statement and the Orthodox understanding of the Church; 2) ministry, apostolicity and mission; and 3) the Holy Spirit: creation and growth inside and outside the Church.

Each of these broad areas covered four subthemes that were further discussed in another group session. A joint text of three sections was drafted on the basis of the second group discussion. The first section concentrated on the Trinitarian basis of Ecclesiology, on the concept of visible unity, on the limits of diversity, and on the four marks of the Church. The second section pointed to the common witness of the Church and to the “apostolic life, mission and ministry”, whereas the third section discussed the Church’s role in the renewal of the whole creation as well as the work of the Holy Spirit “outside the boundaries of the Church”.<sup>7</sup>

They expressed a theological richness in very short and dense sentences. It was thus decided that the upcoming second consultation will take the first part under closer scrutiny, whereas the two other sections will be postponed. In due time, they shall serve as a starting point for the third and fourth consultations.

### **Second Consultation in Sambata de Sus 2008**

The second consultation gathered in Sambata de Sus, Romania in March 2008. Again, after short updates on the global dialogues, four papers on the two main topics were presented: “The true Church of Jesus Christ” and the “Concept of unity”. First, a paper written by Metropolitan Prof. Gennadios of Sassima on the “Nature of the Church in the Ort-

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<sup>7</sup> Communiqué. – *Reseptio* 1/2006, 4–7.

hodox Ecclesiology” was presented by Prof. Viorel Ionita. The paper lifted up the notion of the Church as one and many at the same time: “Orthodox ecclesiology operates with a plurality in unity and a unity in plurality.” According to the Metropolitan, it is impossible for Roman Catholic and “Protestant ecclesiologies” to speak of “the Church and the Churches”, which is theologically and canonically correct for the Orthodox ecclesiology but cannot be grasped by the Catholic claim to universal jurisdiction and the Protestant notion of denominationalism.

The second paper, given by Professor Samuel Rubenson, also discussed the ambiguity of the Church and the churches, taking into account that the Church is a divine reality but also sent to the world, in which she “shares the brokenness of human community in its ambiguity and frailty”. Rubenson elaborated on the Lutheran concept of the Church as a *congregatio sanctorum* which is a concrete worshipping community gathered around the word and sacraments, but the true nature of which is hidden and only apparent to the faith. The Church cannot be identified with what is seen; neither with the people gathered to worship nor with the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments themselves. The Church “consists of those who are already partakers of divine nature, although this is not fully revealed”. Professor Rubenson made reference to Martin Luther’s lectures on the Psalms and on his concept of the *verborgene Kirche* (“the Hidden Church”). Rubenson reminded that the Greek fathers had also avoided giving an all too narrow dogmatic definition on the Church in

their polemical writings, but instead, used biblical images to describe what takes place in Church. For example, in the hymns of Romanos the Melodist, the Church is identified with God’s saving acts. The Church’s liturgy is *anamnesis*, an actualization in remembrance of what has happened, through which the biblical story becomes an interpretation of what is happening now. The two other papers by Dr Václav Ježek and Bishop Michael Jackson highlighted further the concept of unity in both Orthodox and Anglican traditions. Dr Ježek wanted to distinguish the Christian unity and secular ideals of political unity by pointing to the faith in the one God as the theological basis for the former. The unity of the Church is lived out in the holy liturgy and in love; it goes hand in hand with the spiritual life of an individual but also with that of a corporate body. Unity cannot be restored plainly on the grounds of a theological dialogue; rather, it results from “love and life in Christ”.

Bishop Jackson discerned between the traditional Anglican and Lutheran understandings of unity. Roughly speaking, the former tend to think in terms of organic unity and the latter in terms of reconciled diversity. In the Porvoo Statement, however, the two concepts are recognized as distinct but not incompatible. The Porvoo agreement does not over-prescribe the structural shape of unity. Instead, the Churches have committed themselves to a common mission and ministry in a diversity which corresponds to the many gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the Church. Consequently, the role of the bishops in the Porvoo Churches is to maintain unity but also to minister in diversity.

### **The Outcome of the Sambata Consultation**

Despite of the well-prepared papers and presentations, the discussion in Sambata had difficulties in rising over certain obstacles and misunderstandings. A fundamental difficulty was faced in clarifying the distinction and interconnection between the one Church of Christ as divine reality and yet as manifested in her present cultural and theological diversity. It was pointed out that the Porvoo representatives could join in most of the theological statements on the Church presented in the paper of Metropolitan Gennadios; but it was asked, whether that was an image of the Church as manifested in her present reality in history or an image of the Church in her eschatological fulfillment.

As in Järvenpää two years earlier, the theological concept of the Church and her unity on one side and the practical diversity and divisions between local and national Churches seemed surprisingly difficult to reconcile. The Orthodox representatives asked, how can the Porvoo Churches remain separate if they are in communion as they say; the Porvoo representatives, on their part, responded by a similar question on how can the Orthodox claim they are only one Church and yet we know there are five different Orthodox national Churches in Dublin, or fourteen in the whole of Sweden, even with five bishops. It was reminded in the discussion that there is no Orthodox Church in its Irish or Swedish expression.

The Communiqué from Sambata nevertheless lifted up several points of mutual

understanding in ecclesiology. Together it was affirmed, that “the true Church of Jesus Christ is One, Holy, Apostolic. It is manifested in the local Eucharistic community, where the Word is preached and the sacraments administered, under the oversight of the bishop or his representative.” ... “Furthermore, we can join in affirming that the Holy Trinity is both the source and the model of an appropriate diversity in unity, and of unity in diversity, in the life of the Church.” However, this model based on the Trinity was not elaborated deeper, but only identified as an area for further study, as was also the “relationship between the inner, mystical reality of the Church and the particularity of historical churches”.

Certain key elements in a common understanding of unity were nevertheless noted. Both traditions could agree that “full, visible unity would require at least the total mutual recognition of ministries; a common theological basis; a corresponding, coherent liturgical and sacramental life; and full continuity with the living tradition of the Church”.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It seems that the Orthodox and the Porvoo Churches can affirm a lot of fundamental ecclesiological convictions together. However, these truths have not been too easy to reveal and to recognize. A lot of energy has been needed in the dialogue to overcome some basic, often false assumptions. The two consultations have only started to show the way to mutual convergence. For various reasons, the Porvoo Statement has not

yet been able to provide material for common understanding with the Orthodox Churches, nor a model or an impulse for the other dialogues between the Lutherans or Anglicans and the Orthodox. It has to be reminded that the Porvoo Declaration carries the title of “Towards closer unity”; it does not speak about a “full communion” but instead, shows the way to joint mission and ministry. As such, it has become as a basis for unity between Lutheran and Anglican national Churches. Attempts have been made to compare their unity to the one existing between the different autocephalous Orthodox Churches.

Somewhat different from them, however, the Porvoo Lutherans and Anglicans are growing into only one Church on the local and national level, as various immigrant groups from different countries and languages integrate in their new country of residence. The Orthodox immigrant churches, for their part, seem to remain distinct from each other in

their new context, all according to their different national and jurisdictional backgrounds. In my Diocese in Tampere, there is an Anglican congregation ministered in English by Lutheran clergy under my oversight, although the congregation jurisdictionally is part of the Church of England Diocese in Europe and falls under the oversight of the Bishop of Gibraltar. This kind of “dual oversight”, however, has to be considered only a temporary solution on the way towards closer unity under the one Lord Jesus Christ.

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# The Dialogues of the Evangelical Church in Germany with the Orthodox Churches

A Preliminary Review

Reinhard Thöle

The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) can look to four official dialogues that have been held with the patriarchates of Moscow, Constantinople, Bucharest and Sofia. These have been designed either as 'theological discussions' or 'bilateral theological dialogues'. The dialogues came about in different contexts and used different theological roads but are nonetheless a unity as far as their approaches and results are concerned. They share that they are characterised as church meetings, containing elements of a doctrinal dialogue just as much as meetings on the parish level, with institutions of church services and with academic life. That the commissions shared in the liturgical lives of the local churches has become just as natural as the morning and evening offices which the delegations held in alternation. Care was taken

to offer space for an exchange on issues and worries about the recent life of the church below the level of an official talk; the ecumenical situation of each side could be addressed and possible irritation deflected. Representatives of the local churches and of those churches with whom each side is in a state of communion were also invited. The members of the dialogue commissions were officially appointed by the sending churches; the EKD did so for one term of office. The agenda of the dialogue was not worked through according to a previously fixed systematic theological scheme but for each dialogue determined on the basis of the recommendations of the past meeting. A change of generations can be detected in the composition of the delegations. New members who complemented experienced long-term participants were not always

able to enter the thrust of the previous talks and usages easily. The heads of the delegations changed as well. The dialogues always considered themselves to be in the context of the talks which took place between the world-level denominational federations and the pan-Orthodox Orthodox Churches; their results were adopted even down to individual phrases. The meetings with the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Bucharest Patriarchate could be held in German.<sup>1</sup>

The attempt of a review is primarily based upon the communiqués of the dialogues, as these were officially accepted by the supreme church authorities after the individual meetings, thereby receiving an official approval. This acceptance by the church authorities was also the reason for their publication. This preliminary review is also based upon the 'Joint Reports' in the dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate in 1995, with the Bucharest Patriarchate in 1998 and with the Constantinople Patriarchate in 2002, which had been intended as a kind of evaluation of the place of the dialogue. It is not by coincidence that these 'Joint Reports' came about in the period after the political turnover in Eastern Europe and in a period in which there was talk about a

crisis between the Orthodox and the other member churches in the World Council of Churches. It became evident that the long-term dialogues between the Orthodox Churches and the EKD, which had been held in an atmosphere of mutual trust, were able to overcome the crisis on the level of the WCC at least to a certain degree.

It is worthwhile also to have a look at the genre of the communiqués of the dialogues. While in the beginning of the dialogues they were sometimes no more than a short summary of the discussion in accordance with the minutes of a participant which no-one confirmed or decided upon,<sup>2</sup> or a recapitulation with a summary of the talks,<sup>3</sup> a basic shape of the communiqués began to emerge at all dialogues containing the frame of the talks, a short version of the papers of the individual members of the delegations and a more profound shared theological balance of what had been expressed jointly as well as the different theological accents of both sides. One could even say that the joint work on behalf of the communiqués of the dialogues could be regarded as a dialogue-in-dialogue, for it was at this point that unanimously and to the outside world a description had to be given as to what was talked about in greater freedom at

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Klaus Schwarz, Die Dialoge der EKD mit den orthodoxen Patriarchaten, in: Reinhard Thöle (ed.), *Zugänge zur Orthodoxie* (Göttingen 1998) 261–278, and Reinhard Thöle, Die Dialoge der EKD mit den orthodoxen Kirchen, in: *Kirchliches Jahrbuch 1992/93* (Göttingen 1995) 57–80.

<sup>2</sup> At the theological dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the EKD 1969, in: *Dialog des Glaubens und der Liebe*, Beiheft Nr.11 zur *Ökumenischen Rundschau* (Stuttgart 1970) 50–56.

<sup>3</sup> At the theological discussion between representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the EKD 1959, in: *Tradition und Glaubensgerechtigkeit* (Witten 1961), 9–12

the theological discussions. The revaluation of the communiqués can also be regarded as a revaluation of the dialogues for the churches involved. It goes so far that at the last dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the EKD, the communiqué was prefaced with a quotation from Holy Scripture and the introduction was chosen, ‘Gathered together in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [...]’<sup>4</sup>

A good example of the basic theological and emotional mood in which the dialogues were held is a statement of the ‘Joint Report’ of the 1995 dialogue between the Moscow Patriarchate and the EKD which is also true for the other dialogues, ‘Even if we have not yet reached the official ultimate objective of all theological dialogues in the contemporary ecumenical movement, i.e., the full mutual recognition as churches in liturgy, doctrine and ministry, we nonetheless believe that our two churches have been linked in a spiritual pilgrimage which has left behind the former mere side-by-side and even more so the former position against each other. We are as yet unable to present an ecclesiological formula for the spiritual, ecclesiastical and theological change in our mutual relationship. But

we cannot deny that something new has come about between our churches which will not be without effects on our self-understanding as churches’<sup>5</sup>, and at another place, ‘We have reached theological rapprochements which have given rise to the hope for a comprehensive understanding.’<sup>6</sup> This fits a statement by the former head of the foreign office of the EKD, Bishop Heinz-Joachim Held, who loved to emphasise that the churches involved would no longer stand at the beginning of their dialogues, but on a theological level would still be at the beginning.

### **The bilateral theological dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the EKD**

The dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate began, after preparatory visits, officially in 1959 with the meeting in Arnoldshain. Next to the theological discussions, the burdens of the century in the relationship between the two people needed to be dealt with. This beginning meant both an example in reconciliation between the churches as well as a principle opening of the Russian Church to the ecumenical process.<sup>7</sup> Twelve meetings took place until 1990

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Communiqué of the fourteenth meeting in the Bilateral Theological Dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the EKD, Schloss Oppurg (Thuringia), 10–15 October 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gemeinsamer Bericht an die Leitungen der Russischen orthodoxen Kirche und der EKD über den Stand des bilateralen theologischen Dialogs in: *Bilateraler Theologischer Dialog EKD/Russische Orthodoxe Kirche 1998 und 2002* (Hermannsburg 2004) 211–224, here 214f.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 213.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Gerhard Besier, Zum Beginn des theologischen Gesprächs zwischen der EKD und der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, in: *Evangelische Theologie* (46,1986) 73–90.

in the so-called Arnoldshain Talks. The Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (BEK) began a series of dialogues of its own, the Sagorsk Talks in which the shared situation of the churches in their socialistic political environment was also an issue. Seven meetings took place until 1990. After the German unification both dialogues were joined and continued by the EKD and the Moscow Patriarchate in Bad Urach. Five Bad Urach meetings took place until 2008.

The balance of classical theological issues includes:

*Holy Scripture and Tradition:* ‘There is unanimity that tradition must not be contrary to the Biblical witness to the saving acts of God in Jesus Christ which was promised by the prophets of the Old Testament and whose fulfilment is witnessed to by the apostolic scriptures of the New Testament. Rather, the agreement of the tradition in our churches with Holy Scripture is the essential criterion of its genuineness. The issues remain to be solved as to what the criterion of accordance with the Scripture means in detail and what is to be understood by binding tradition.’<sup>8</sup>

*Baptism and new life:* ‘Our two churches agree in interpreting the sacrament of Holy Baptism as an event of new birth through which we enter into reconciliation with God, receive the gift of new life from God and become members in the mysterious Body of Christ. [...] Baptism is once and for all and cannot

be repeated. Both delegations agree that baptism, as exercised by both churches, is a God-given sacrament. The recognition of the apostolic succession in the Church is essential for the recognition of the sacraments in it. This necessitates the still more detailed discussion of the essence and boundaries of the Church. [...]’<sup>9</sup>

*Eucharist and Sacrifice:* ‘We believe that, according to the teaching of the apostles, Jesus Christ, the heavenly high priest, always intercedes before God for us sinners in virtue of his once-for-all sacrifice on the cross and that, with praise and thanks of the Church, in a mysterious way is himself “he who offers and is offered”. [...] We share the belief that the Church and the Christians following Jesus Christ have been called to a life of sacrifice and self-abandonment, by virtue of their participation in the mystery of the Eucharist. We have not been able to agree as to whether the Holy Eucharist is a sacrifice which is offered to God by the Church in its faith in Jesus Christ, and whether the Eucharist has atoning power.’<sup>10</sup>

*Justification and faith:* ‘Salvation or justification from faith is both a once-for-all divine act of grace to us through which we become Christians, and a further grace-filled happening to us through which, in the community of the Church, we are led to a life in Christ and remain in Christ and grow. There is further need for clarifying the issues of the quality of faith which leads to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 217.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 218.

salvation, and of the significance of the judgement of the works at the end of days for Christians, as witnessed to by Holy Scripture.<sup>11</sup>

*Sanctification and the saints:* ‘The holiness of the Church and of its members grows from the communion with its head, Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. We share in the experience that there have been individual men and women in the history of the Church and even in our time in whom the holiness, granted by Jesus Christ, shines forth in a particular way. We could not agree on the issue whether the saints should be invoked for their intercession before God and how they are remembered in the right way. The issue of the holiness of the Church could also not be dealt with.’<sup>12</sup>

*Church and ministry:* ‘There is the royal and common priesthood of all baptised on the one hand, and the special ministry of the priests or pastors, ordained to it by the Church according to the command of the Lord, on the other hand. However, the special ministry must be clearly distinct from the royal or common priesthood of all baptised. It cannot be immediately deducted or based in it as it is founded upon the special pastoral ministry of Jesus Christ. But the ordained ministry and the royal priesthood of all baptised are not opposed to each other. They relate to each other. ... However, the following important issues remain to be clarified in this context: – whether and how the

ordination has a sacramental character; – how the apostolic succession is to be understood in view of the mutual recognition of the ordination; – who the bearer of the Episcopal ministry in the Church is and therefore has the authority to ordain.’<sup>13</sup>

The Joint Report calls attention to the following problems:

– How do we read, interpret and preach Holy Scripture, the authoritative word of God for the Church, today? – What do we understand by the binding heritage of the old undivided Church and the Western Reformation, resp., for the rapprochement and unification of the churches in our time? – How do we understand the holiness of the churches and their boundaries? – Why do we walk on different roads concerning the ordination of women? – How do we see the relationship between Church and society, Gospel and culture, faith and nation and how do we shape it in the light of our theological experiences? Practical theological issues of fundamental importance to which we need to return again and again should be understood better: the relationship between Scripture and Tradition as far as content and experience are concerned; the cooperation of Word and Sacrament in the liturgy of the Church and the understanding of the essence of the liturgy; the essence of the Church and of the special ministry in it and its significance for God’s acting; the significance of the historical experiences for the way of the Church and, linked to it, the issue as to

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 219.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 220.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 220f.

which different ways God has led the individual churches.<sup>14</sup>

The dialogues Bad Urach II in Minsk in 1998, Bad Urach III in Mühlheim in 2002, Bad Urach IV in Moscow and Sergiev Posad in 2005 and Bad Urach V in Lutherstadt Wittenberg in 2005 focused more on the reality of the churches in the secular world and in the European context.

The following can be stated as consensus, after the example of the above-mentioned summaries.

*Christian values and secular society:* 'It needs to be the aim to agree on a shared understanding of the spiritual life in Christ. The Christian understanding of the values must partly be defended in the present European society and partly be brought to new ethical values and ideas.<sup>15</sup> Concepts like liberty, responsibility, human dignity and human rights need to be developed from the Biblical and church tradition for Christians. These concepts cannot simply be taken in an uncritical manner from different justifications and contexts. The churches have the task to oppose all tendencies if and when people and groups abuse concepts like liberty and human rights for their own purposes. The churches

also have the task to remind the state of its duty to protect liberty and human dignity for all people and to shape the law accordingly.'<sup>16</sup>

### **The bilateral theological dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the EKD**

The discussions between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the EKD began in 1969 as 'dialogue of love and unity' (Patriarch Dimitrios I). They could be regarded as resuming the contacts which in the sixteenth century the Reformed theologians Martin Crusius and Jakob Andreae from Tübingen had had with Patriarch Jeremiah II.<sup>17</sup> The events of the Second World War in Greece were not excluded in this dialogue. That a big Greek Orthodox metropolis could come into existence in Germany after foreign workers had been recruited added special weight to the dialogue for Germany. A speciality of the dialogue is that representatives of the *Diakonisches Werk*, which from the beginning of the so-called immigrant workers movement had taken responsibility for those coming from Greece, had also taken part in the talks

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 222f.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Kommunique des bilateralen Theologischen Gesprächs zwischen der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche und der EKD vom 17.04. bis 22.04.2005 in Moskau / Sergiev Posad, in: *Sechzig Jahre nach Kriegsende – Christliche Werte heute*, Beiheft zur ÖR 80 (Frankfurt 2007) 13–23.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kommunique des bilateralen Theologischen Dialoges zwischen der Russischen Orthodoxen Kirche und der EKD vom 22. bis 28. Februar 2008 in Lutherstadt Wittenberg. Manuscript, here 4–6.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Eugen Hämmerle, Tübingen und Konstantinopel, in: *Blätter für württembergische Kirchengeschichte 1983/84*, 201–210.

and added issues of social responsibility. There have been fourteen meetings up to now. The 2001 joint report to the church authorities evaluates twelve of these.<sup>18</sup>

There are, among others, the following summaries in the classical fields of theology.

*The Holy Scripture and Tradition:* ‘The Scripture is bedded into the early tradition of the Church and can therefore not be separated from Tradition. Scripture and Tradition have since the beginning of the Church been in close relationship. The function of Holy Scripture consists in serving the authenticity of the living experience of the Church by defending holy Tradition from all temptations of falsifying the faith, not by undermining the authority of the Church, the Body of Christ.’<sup>19</sup>

*Holy Scripture and Proclamation:* ‘The liturgical use of Holy Scripture and its explication in preaching leads to the issue of reading Holy Scripture in common. The Evangelical theology finds an essential approach to exegesis in the historical critical method which gives an expression to the text with its inherent intention as a partner in its own right. The participants in the discussion agreed that this exegetical method must not be isolated from the spiritual reading. Even for theology nowadays, the hermeneutical exegesis of Holy Scripture is insepa-

rably linked to the hermeneutical tradition of the Fathers of the Church and, for the Evangelical Christians, also of the Reformers.’<sup>20</sup>

*Word and Sacrament in Divine Service:* ‘Lutheran understanding regards the Word event in the liturgy as more than a form of linguistic mediation of opinions or information. Rather, God’s word is experienced as a power, even as the presence of God Himself. As living voice of the Gospel awakening faith, Christ works in the word through his Spirit. Here can also be seen the bridge to an understanding of the sacrament as *mysterion*, i.e., a happening in the Spirit, that has not been shaped by Western categories. Where the Holy Spirit is experienced as God’s presence that brings forth life and faith, this can lead to a new ecumenical understanding of Word and Sacrament.’<sup>21</sup>

*Eucharist and Priesthood:* ‘As far as participation of the ordained ministry in the threefold ministry of Christ is concerned, “opinions that approached each other” were held. The relationship of the common priesthood of all believers to the ordained ministry remained open. The Orthodox position emphasises the permanent authorisation which the minister receives through the ordination during the eucharistic assembly. Epiclesis and laying-on of hands are constitutive for the “apostolic succession”. The Reformed position also em-

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ein Dialog der Liebe und der Einheit, in: *Studienheft 27* (Hermannsburg 2003) 321–333.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 324.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 325f.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 326f.

phasises that the minister receives a lifelong vocation through prayer (epiclesis) and laying-on of hands at the ordination. But it is not the historic continuity since the apostles that is decisive but the faithful handing-on of the apostolic faith in the community of the whole Church.<sup>22</sup>

*Theosis and Justification:* The special significance of pneumatology is emphasised among the theological fundamentals of the dialogue, and the doctrine of salvation is referred to under the aspect of justification and *theosis* with its *synergeia* concept. The Reformed reception of the ancient dogma stresses the view that, like in the coming of Jesus Christ, in the work of the Holy Spirit, too, the Triune God reveals and communicates Himself totally and in the innermost to Man; it is not the powers of the mind and the abilities of human subjectivity that can save. Following the Fathers of the Church, the Orthodox tradition emphasises on the other side the changing and activating transfiguration and *theosis*.<sup>23</sup>

The thirteenth meeting at the Phanar in 2004 and the fourteenth meeting at Oppurg Castle, Thuringia, in 2004 yielded the following points:

*Baptism and recognition:* 'Baptism is God's own and lasting work in which He grants the believer His grace. Holy Baptism is administered in the Name of

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Although there is as yet no communion between our churches, we mutually regard the members of the local churches as baptised and oppose a new baptism in the case of a change of denomination.'<sup>24</sup>

*Significance of the councils and confessions:* 'Both the Creed of Nicea and Constantinople and the Reformed Confessions and the Barmen Theological Declaration have come about in historical situations in which there was need to defend the apostolic truth against false doctrine and aberration. According to Evangelical understanding it is and remains God's word alone that is the sole guide and rule of all doctrine. The Orthodox Church emphasises the unity of the revelation and shapes the form of its doctrine in consensus and continuity with the faith handed on from the beginning. There was agreement that conciliarity and synodality of the Church is fundamental for all levels of the life of the Church. This holds also true vis-à-vis the restoration of the unity of the Church.'<sup>25</sup>

The dialogue stresses in several documents the significance of the ecumenical Creed of Nicea and Constantinople (381) in its original version and demands that this confession receive a fixed place in the liturgical services of the Evangelical Churches.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 327f.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 328–330.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Die Gnade Gottes und das Heil der Welt. Beiheft zur ÖR 79 (Frankfurt 2006) 14.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Kommunique der 14. Begegnung im Bilateralen theologischen Dialog zwischen dem Ökumenischen Patriarchat und der EKD, Schloss Oppurg/Thüringen 10.–15 Oktober 2007 Manuscript, 7.

### **The bilateral theological dialogue between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the EKD**

The so-called Goslar Dialogue was begun in 1979. Invitations were also always issued to representatives of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and of the Reformed Church in Romania. Since 1995 theologians of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolis, founded in 1994 for Germany and Central Europe, have also taken part. Since that time the head of the Orthodox delegation comes from them. It should be noted that the commissions of both sides include representatives who were able to study the life and theology of the other church while they were students. That is why a great personal and objective closeness of all those involved has grown. Some evaluations consider this dialogue as the theologically ‘most successful one’.<sup>26</sup> It is also the dialogue that has been followed up by the most studies and research work.<sup>27</sup>

Eleven meetings could be held until 2006. The 1998 provisional balance looked back to eight dialogue sessions.<sup>28</sup>

*Spirituality of the dialogues:* ‘The theological dialogue itself could be understood and experienced as a “spiritual

event’’. In this sense the spirit of repentance was asked in the beginning, for it is in the sense of repentance that the sin of separation can be overcome. That is also the reason why it became normal in the course of the discussions to commemorate and pray for the heads of the other churches and also the present heads of their delegations at each eucharistic service.’<sup>29</sup>

*Scripture and Tradition:* ‘The fact became of great importance that in this dialogue, a distinction could be made between normative Tradition with a capital-T (“Holy Tradition”) and church tradition. There was consensus that the hermeneutical discussion was not yet sufficient. The real use of the Scripture in both churches has never been an issue of its own. Orthodox theology is inclined to interpret an individual Biblical text from the whole of Holy Scripture, whereas Protestant exegesis rather uses the individual text as a starting point and asks about the whole of Holy Scripture.’<sup>30</sup>

*Sacraments in theology and practice:* ‘We further agreed upon the interpretation of the presence of Christ himself in the sacramental acts as well as his real presence in the Eucharist and vis-à-vis the ecclesial character of the sacraments. Accordingly, the sacraments are

<sup>26</sup> Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness* (Göttingen 1997) 154.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Constantin Patuleanu, *Die Begegnung der rumänischen Orthodoxie mit dem Protestantismus* (Hamburg 2000) and Nicolae Manole, *Ekklesiologische Perspektiven im Dialog zwischen den orthodoxen und reformatorischen Kirchen* (Münster 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Dialog der Annäherung im Glauben, in : *Studienheft 24* (Hermannsburg 1999) 137–148.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 139f.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 141f.

gifts of God that render the existence of the Church possible and can be administered only within the Church, which is why the Church has a sacramental character. “Ordinary minister of this sacrament (i.e., confession) according to Orthodox doctrine and practice is solely the bishop or ordained priest who needs an additional episcopal charge (*cheirothesia*) for this. In the Evangelical Churches, too, the administration of the ministry of the keys is one of the fundamental duties of the ministry to which there is an ordination.” There are differences in our churches concerning the issue of the number of the sacraments. There was the shared opinion, however, that Jesus Christ himself is the real sacrament.<sup>31</sup> *Salvation in Jesus Christ*: ‘In a specific sense as final perfection of the communion of Man with God, “*theosis*” means what in the Evangelical tradition is described as sanctification of Man. The essential distinction between Creator and creation is not at all challenged here. Concerning the problem of *synergeia* clarification was reached that in the Orthodox tradition no independent human work for their own salvation is meant but the work of love to which the Holy Spirit enables the baptised making them “co-workers of God” (1 Cor 3.9).’<sup>32</sup>

*Communion of the saints*: ‘Both partners in the dialogue agreed that the *communio sanctorum* means a continuously renewed being in Christ, comprising

Man in his totality including his relationship to the world. This is the foundation of the mission into the world as an essential mark of the Church to proclaim his Gospel, to hand on his forgiveness and reconciliation, being an agent of His reign in the Holy Spirit. In our two traditions the saints who have run their course before God are also included in the prayer for the world and for each other which are a spiritual dimension of the mission of the Church.’<sup>33</sup>

The following can be stated from the ninth meeting in Herrnhut in 2000, the tenth meeting in Cluj-Napoca in 2002 and the eleventh meeting in Eisenach in 2006:

*Social responsibility*: ‘The reign of God is a future which meets us already as presence in the Church, but only as first payment. The Church is at service to this world and lives out its missionary duty in it. The mission of the Church is a constitutive part of its essence. The love that has discovered its social and solidary dimension is expressed in the political commitment of the Church for justice and reconciliation.’<sup>34</sup>

*Unity of the Church*: ‘For the Orthodox Church unity of the Church in the sense of recognising a historical church as Church of Jesus Christ in the full sense and simultaneously beginning a *koινωνia* with it which also includes eucharistic communion is linked to four con-

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 142–144.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 145.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 146.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Die Kirche, ihre Verantwortung und ihre Einheit, Beiheft ÖR 75 (Frankfurt 2005) 20.

ditions in particular: to the principal agreement concerning the rule of faith, the sacraments, the threefold ministry and the authority of the Church. For the Evangelical Churches it is sufficient for the true unity of the churches to agree in the pure and unadulterated proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation promised us by him as well as in the right doctrine and practice concerning the sacraments. According to Evangelical understanding there is, next to the Biblical tradition, also a tradition in the period after the New Testament which is indispensable for the faith of the Church and agrees with the Biblical witness. Both in the Orthodox Church and in the Evangelical Churches decisions are alive which have been taken in the early Church concerning the issue as to what is to be regarded as binding.<sup>35</sup>

*Significance of the councils:* ‘The ecumenical councils are a gift of God to His Church. Holy Scripture had a special authority in all seven ecumenical councils. Because the ecumenical councils have kept the apostolic Tradition and agree with it – this holds also true for the fifth, sixth and seventh ecumenical council – they are in force also in the Evangelical Church. The reception of the individual decisions, however, happened in different ways in the East and the West. The ecumenical councils are together regarded as an expression of catholicity and therefore as authoritative by our theological traditions. In the Evangelical Churches

the doctrinal definitions of the seven ecumenical councils are also recognised, the first four holding a decisive weight and the Creed of Nicea and Constantinople have a fundamental significance.<sup>36</sup>

### **The theological discussions with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the BEK and the EKD**

The Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (BEK) initiated talks of their own with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in order to render the local contacts in the parishes easier and also to give a sign of solidarity with the Bulgarian Church which faced a difficult situation at home. Four meetings of these ‘Herrnhut Talks’ took place, until in 1992 the discussions were continued by the united EKD in Reinhardsbrunn. As the situation in the Bulgarian Church was marked by internal schisms for a longer period after the political turn, there has not yet been a continuation of this dialogue. There has not been a joint evaluation up to now. The following can be stated from the reports:

*Proclamation in the liturgy and sacraments:* ‘The discussion showed far-reaching agreement in this encompassing understanding of liturgical proclamation. In view of the sacraments the following was in particular held for the understanding of baptism. As to the foundation of the baptism of infants it is agreed that the vicarious faith is

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Ibid. 159.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Kommunique der 11. Begegnung im bilateralen Theologischen Dialog zwischen der Rumänischen Orthodoxen Kirche und der EKD, 1.–7.4. 2006 in Eisenach, Manuscript, 6.

approved of as a precondition for the efficacy of baptism.<sup>37</sup>

*Sources of faith:* 'Both sides expressed the tradition of the Church has to be questioned anew each time as to whether it agrees with the apostolic tradition as founded in Holy Scripture. When the canon was established, the Church, led by the work of the Holy Spirit, separated authentic from inauthentic tradition. The tradition from outside the Bible can only exist insofar as it agrees with the internal and substantial witness of Holy Scripture, something however that is not the sole criterion for the Orthodox side.'<sup>38</sup>

*Ministry in the Church:* 'Both churches regard themselves as churches in the apostolic succession. They understand apostolic succession as keeping the Gospel of Christ and the faith in Christ as well as the right tradition (proclamation) unadulterated. For both churches this necessitates a church order for handing on the ministry. The ministry and the common priesthood are related to each other, none is possible without the other.'

*Ordination of women:* 'After the Evangelical Church has rediscovered the spiritual power of women in the life of the community this century, it has called women to the ministry for some decades now. It also practices since that time the full admission of women to all forms of church and liturgical acts, including the administration of Holy Supper. The

Evangelical Church wishes not to do without the ministry of women any longer. The Orthodox Church also appreciates the service of women. Women are active on all levels of church life, up to the liturgy (e.g., also for preaching). The Orthodox Church regards itself unable, based on Holy Scripture as well as Holy Tradition, to admit women to the administration of sacraments (except for emergency baptism). That is why women are not ordained to the ministry.'<sup>39</sup>

## Observations

**Uniformity of results** One could as well do again a systematic review of the results of all four dialogues. We will refrain from it here, for such a result shines already through the existing results. The four branches of the dialogue basically reach a uniformity in their results, despite their different contexts, expressions and approaches.

**Surprising theological closeness** Mulling through the distillation of the results, one realises that the present ecumenical, but also controversial situation of the churches is described in similar phrases. We need to realise first that a surprising theological closeness can be detected in all areas which, based on the centuries-long controversial polemics and lack of communication between the branches of the Church, could not necessarily be expected. Members of the delegations often ex-

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Herrnhut, *Studienheft 26* (Hermannsburg 2002) 27.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 91.

<sup>39</sup> For both paragraphs, *ibid.* 235, 238.

pressed surprise and relief in the course of the talks as to the closeness of fundamental theological contexts, once old stereotypes and prejudices had been left behind. Orthodox and reformed theology share in finding deep agreement and similarities in the basic faith of the Church, even if in the concrete shape of the faith they went on different roads.

**Artoclasia communion** A liturgical and therefore ecclesial communion has grown in the dialogues. A communion in prayer and shared welcome in the liturgy is possible, without eucharistic fellowship. The celebration of artoclasia according to eastern tradition was held at some of the meetings. This celebrates and describes the liturgical and ecclesial communion fittingly as communion in faith and love on the road to eucharistic fellowship.

**Strangeness** If there were at times controversial moods at the dialogues, however only occasionally, they may from our observations be explained not only by recent protocol or organisational weak points, but also from some insecurity in the background. This consists in the fact that, despite jointly declared theological foundation and also some human closeness, no church communion can be stated; that is why it may in the end be unclear whether, despite a basic consensus that is aimed at, the ecclesiological basic dissent is deeper than feared. This includes the question whether in the area of the practice of faith strangeness could sufficiently be removed. Issues of liturgical

theology and piety have up to now been dealt with only in a complementary way. They should be given special consideration.

**Ecclesiological expectations** Not everything that has already jointly been stated can have immediate consequences in church life and politics. Unlike in the dialogue of Western churches, partial consensus does not lead to mutual partial recognition as churches. On the other side learning processes, deep encounters and fellowship may be a chance if and when ultimate definitions could not be reached or existing canonical norms are secretly considered to be superior to a theological dialogue. Different sensibilities require much mutual respect so that there are no unintended mutual misunderstandings and injuries due to ignorance.<sup>40</sup>

**Political expectations** The dialogues are not held in a paradise cleared from politics. Evangelical authorities love to expect quick theologically definable progress which is also regarded as recognition of Evangelical church life. That is the reason why outsiders sometimes see the dialogue with unconcealed scepticism. Orthodox authorities must not rarely take anti-ecumenical moods within their own ranks into consideration. They may ultimately expect less from the dialogue but have more staying power for it. However, the dialogues have reached the best possible results in ecumenical discussions and in strategic considerations.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Reinhard Thöle, Die Beziehungen der EKD zu den orthodoxen Kirchen, in: *EKD Ökumene und Auslandsarbeit* (Breklum 2000) 75–81.

**Reception** The publication of the dialogues which often needed to be bilingual has not rarely limped behind the meetings for a long time. It has not yet found the due place in academic theology. There has been too little research work on the dialogues and Evangelical-Orthodox issues, and secondary literature is hardly available. The basically scholastic agenda of Western dialogues and the dominance of the dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church have diminished the interest in the dialogues with Orthodoxy.

**Compatibility** It is only natural that the dialogues are about the search for a common theological and spiritual language, and it is legitimate that the shared truths find a special expression. Nonetheless it needs to be reviewed on the Evangelical side whether the results of the dialogues are compatible with the results of the dialogues which Evangelical Churches have expressed vis-à-vis other partners, and whether the findings of the dialogues are compatible with the theological positions and liturgical formulas used within the EKD and its member churches.

**Outlook** For the Churches of the Reformation as well as the Orthodox Churches ecumenicity is not only a duty or function of the churches but also part of the identity and essence of the churches. The dialogues are held according to the promise and prayer of Christ. When Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch visited Germany in the autumn of 1997, he said to the EKD, 'Your task in the dialogue is to wake up the pneumatological dimension of the Orthodoxy. Our task is to remind you that true prophetism is sacramental.'<sup>41</sup> Our dialogues have covered quite a bit on this road already.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Reinhard Thöle, Theologische Nähe zwischen orthodoxen und evangelischen Kirchen entdecken, in: Anastasios Kallis, *Die orthodoxe Kirche* (Frankfurt 1999) 499.

# Assessment of the Dialogue between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany (1979–2006)<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Benga

From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany has been carried out within several theological commissions and at different levels<sup>2</sup>. The earliest theological dialogue between an Orthodox Church and EKD was initiated in 1959, between the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Russian Orthodox Church<sup>3</sup>. A series of other dialogues

were carried out in the following years, the most noteworthy of which are: 1967 – the Orthodox and the Lutherans in America, 1969 – the Ecumenical Patriarchy and EKD, 1970 – the Russian Orthodox Church and the Lutherans in Finland, 1979 – the Romanian Orthodox Church and EKD, 1981 – the dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation, at a world-wide level.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I discussed this evaluation with my students in the university year 2007/2008. I want to thank especially Tamara Guzun, Mihai Dobre, Andone Cristinel and Alexandru Barna.

<sup>2</sup> *Orthodoxie im Dialog. Bilaterale Dialoge der orthodoxen und der orientalischem-orthodoxen Kirchen 1945–1997. Eine Dokumentensammlung*, in Verbindung mit Miguel María Garijo Gueembe (†), herausgegeben und bearbeitet von Thomas Bremer, Johannes Oeldemann und Dagmar Stoltmann, Paulinus Verlag, Trier, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> This is true only if we choose to ignore the dialogue initiated in Romania in 1949 by the Orthodox Church and the Protestant Churches.

<sup>4</sup> On all these dialogues, but also on other national or regional dialogues, see : *Orthodoxie im Dialog*, p. 225–296 and 312–474.

Within the theological dialogue between EKD and the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC), initiated in 1979 by the EKD, eleven sessions of discussion have been held so far. The first one took place in Goslar, in 1979, and the last one in Eisenach, in 2006. Precautions against the communist authorities in Romania led the participant theologians to avoid tackling social and political issues until the early 1990s, and focus mainly on theological issues, which “eventually changed into a chance for this dialogue”<sup>5</sup>. While the seventh (1995) and the eighth (1998) meetings tackled issues concerning the ministry of the churches in a secular society, and their responsibility in the process of European integration, the ninth meeting (2000) focused on the fundamental issue of ecclesiology, which is currently still under debate. In 1998, a first assessment of the dialogue was carried out and passed on for analysis to the two churches; the assessment synthesized the main theological agreements reached in the course of the dialogue.

Prof. Dr. Viorel Ioniță and Prof. Dr. Constantin Pătuleanu have already made substantial assessments of the dialogue between ROC and EKD, and identified four categories of theological issues approached in the discussions: the relation between Scripture and Tradition, the Holy Sacraments, Christology and Ecclesiology.

Pondering upon this assessment, after carefully perusing the texts, I have noticed that anybody can infer whatever they want from the final statements of the bilateral theological dialogue between ROC and EKD. One can easily note the manifold differences between the two denominations, as well as the manifold similarities and agreements. Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut criterion which can establish how far we can go in our consensus, in order to reach the unity of faith. While it is easier for the evangelical theology to identify the criterion and the ultimate limits of the unity of faith, the Orthodox theology finds this difficult, if not impossible. The unity among the Orthodox Churches is expressed in the unity of the confession of faith, of the worship, and in the unity of canons. If approaching these three aspects in the dialogue with any Christian faith is the sole aim and measure of unity, then all the agreements reached so far meet this prerequisite only partially.

In the present assessment I have analyzed the final reports of each round of discussions<sup>6</sup>, considering them to be the synthesis of the issues approached, accepted by the two churches at the highest level. Starting from their statements, I have pondered on the major issues submitted to assessment, as formulated in the reports, and I have synthesized them into the three large cate-

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<sup>5</sup> Prof. Dr. Viorel Ioniță, „Dialogul teologic bilateral dintre Biserica Evanghelică din Germania și Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, in: Dr. Constantin Pătuleanu, *Teologia Ecumenică. Istoria și evaluarea dialogului teologic bilateral dintre EDK și BOR, cu publicarea comunicatelor finale*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> I have used the Romanian translation done by Dr. Constantin Pătuleanu, *Teologia Ecumenică*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2003, p. 134–245.

gories promoted during the dialogue: agreements, divergent points, and open issues. Apart from this, I have also laid down personal points of view on the results achieved. I have not dedicated a separate analysis to the theological dialogue between Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR, and then EKD, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church,<sup>7</sup> because the five rounds of discussions focused only on issues debated with the Romanian Orthodox theologians<sup>8</sup>. However, I have paid close attention to and emphasized those major points of consensus or disagreement which were not marked out in the dialogue with ROC.

Before assessing the dialogue between ROC and EKD, I took a glance at the theological correspondence carried out by Constantinople and Tübingen between 1573–1581, in order to be able to assess the contemporary dialogues, as compared to the theological discussions between the Orthodox and the Lutherans in the age of Reformation.

### **1. Assessment of the dialogue between Jeremiah II, Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Lutheran theologians in Tübingen (1573–1581)**

It has been justly argued that the ecumenical dialogue between the Orthodoxy and Lutheranism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is nothing but the continuation of the one initiated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> The theological dialogue carried out at a very high level between the Evangelical Church and the Orthodox Church started as early as the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Lutheran theologians in Tübingen debated on the major issues of the Christian theology together with Jeremiah II, Patriarch of Constantinople, and with other Orthodox theologians present at the Ecumenical Patriarchy at that time. The dialogue was carried out between 1573–1581<sup>10</sup>, and represents the most profound meeting between Orthodoxy and

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<sup>7</sup> The dialogue between The Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (BEK) and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, initiated in 1978, knew four meetings by 1986, the fifth and last one taking place in 1992, between the united EKD and BOC. Due to internal problems of BOC, the theological dialogue was brought to an end, and the BOC withdrew from the ecumenical forums at the end of the last century.

<sup>8</sup> The five topics of discussion in the dialogue between EKD and ROC were: Preaching today (1978); The source of Faith (1981); Baptism and Eucharist (1984); Ministry in the Church (1986); The dogmatic and social aspects of Confession and Repentance (1992).

<sup>9</sup> This was the belief of the interorthodox commission which prepared the dialogue with the Lutherans in 1979. See: Theodor Nikolau, Zur Diskussion über die Confessio Augustana aus orthodoxer Sicht, in: „*Una Sancta*“ (Zeitschrift für ökumenische Bewegung), Band 35 (1980), p. 154.

<sup>10</sup> Although it was officially over in 1581, the personal relationships between some of the participants in the official dialogue continued after 1600, too. The number of letters exchanged between Tübingen and Constantinople was remarkably high. Apart from these three answers of each party, tens of other private letters were exchanged between the participants in the dialogue. The theological answers of Patriarch Jeremiah II and of those

Lutheranism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>11</sup>, as well as the most important episode of the Orthodox-Lutheran theological dialogue which preceded the ecumenical dialogues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

The Lutheran theologians in Tübingen dispatched the *Confessio Augustana* to Constantinople, asking for an answer concerning the statements of faith which it contained. Each party issued three official answers, covering hundreds of pages.

The Greek theologian Ioan Karmiris was the first to systematize the points of agreement or disagreement between the Lutherans and the Orthodox in that time:

**Points of agreement between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy:** 1. The authority and inspiration of the Holy Scripture, its translation in the language of every nation; 2. God and the Holy Trinity, in general; 3. The original sin and its transmission to all human beings;

4. Man is the source of evil, not God; 5. The two natures of Christ; 6. Only Jesus Christ is Head of the Church; 7. The second coming, the final judgement, the afterlife, the eternal rewards and punishments; 8. Reception of Communion under both forms; 9. Rejection of papal indulgences, of the thesaurus of Saints, of the purgatory fire and of the clerical celibacy.

**Points of disagreement:** 1. The Holy Tradition; 2. Filioque; 3. Free will; 4. God's eternal predestination; 5. Righteousness; 6. The number of Sacraments; 7. Baptism by sprinkling or immersion; when to administer the Confirmation and the Holy Communion to the baptized; 8. The meaning of the transformation of the Holy Eucharist and the use of azyme bread; 9. The infallibility of the Church and of the Ecumenical Councils; 10. The cult, the holidays, the invocation of Saints, the worship of icons and relics, fast, as well as different church traditions and practices.<sup>13</sup>

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in Tübingen, as well as some other private letters were included in: Acta et Scripta Theologorum Wirtembergensium, et Patriarchae Constantinopolitani D. Hieremiae: quae utriq; ab Anno M.D.LXXVI. usque ad Annum M.D.LXXXI., de Augustana Confessione inter se miserunt: Graecè & Latinè ab iisdem Theologis edita, Witebergae, M.D.LXXXIII. An Orthodox assessment of the dogmatic importance of the answers of Patriarch Jeremiah II and of the importance of this dialogue for the relations between Lutheranism and Orthodoxy was made by Magistrand Ică I. Ioan, *Importanța dogmatică a Răspunsurilor Patriarhului Ieremia al II-lea*, in: „*Orthodoxia*“, XIII (1961), Nr. 3, p. 368–392.

<sup>11</sup> This is what the Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky remarked: „It was the first systematical exchange of theological views between the Orthodox East and the new Protestant West.“ Georges Florovsky, *Patriarch Jeremiah II and the Lutheran Divines*, in: *Christianity and Culture*, Volume two in the *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1974, p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> See: Gerhard Podskalsky, *Die Kritik der lutherischen Theologie in der griechischen Orthodoxie vom 16. Jahrhundert bis in unsere Zeit – ein geschichtlicher Überblick*, in: „*Catholica*“, Band 22 (1968), Nr. 3, p. 201.

<sup>13</sup> The points were taken from Fr. Conf. Dr. Ștefan Sandu, *Primele contacte ecumenice dintre ortodocși și luterani. Răspunsurile Patriarhului Ieremia al II-lea către teologii luterani din Tübingen (1573–1581)*, Editura IBMBOR, București, 2001, p. 117–118.

Most of these agreements and disagreements are still valid today, with other new ones joining them. Prof. Dorothea Wendebourg bemoaned the lack of consequences related to the consensus about the Holy Trinity and Christology<sup>14</sup>, within the dialogue mentioned above.

The theological assessment of the answers of Patriarch Jeremiah II led some theologians to list them among the symbolic books of the Orthodox Church, among the “Statements of Faith” of the Orthodox theology<sup>15</sup>. Even if they were accepted among the “Symbolic Books” or “Statements of Faith” of the Orthodox Church, these answers do not have the same importance as the resolutions of the seven Ecumenical Councils, but only a smaller one<sup>16</sup> and are not the expression of the faith of the united Church of the first millennium<sup>17</sup>. Their value lies in the fact that they are “the first post-patristic ‘Summa’ of the

(Orthodox – a.n.) doctrine for non-Orthodox Christians”<sup>18</sup>.

The assessment of the Answers of Patriarch Jeremiah II also bears consequences on the ecumenical dialogue of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The more normative their statements are for the entire Church, the more we have to take into consideration in our contemporary dialogues the position towards Lutheranism adopted in these “Answers”. However, the Orthodox Church has taken no official position towards “The Answers of Jeremiah II” so far, rather, only individual theologians have attempted to assess them.

From what has been said so far, we can conclude that at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the ecclesiological differences between Orthodoxy and Protestantism were mostly identified; however, they have remained unsolved ever since.

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<sup>14</sup> Dorothea Wendebourg, *Reformation und Orthodoxie. Der ökumenische Briefwechsel zwischen der Leitung der Württembergischen Kirche und Patriarch Jeremias II. von Konstantinopel in den Jahren 1573–1581*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1986, p. 208.

<sup>15</sup> Among the theologians who listed the answers of patriarch Jeremiah II among the Statements of Faith, are I. Karmiris, I. Mesoloras, Ioan I. Ică and Nicolae Chitescu. Cf. Ioan Ică, „Die heiligen Sakramente im Leben der Kirche in den orthodoxen Glaubensbekenntnissen des 16./17. Jahrhunderts“, in: *Die Sakramente der Kirche in der Confessio Augustana und in den orthodoxen Lehrbekenntnissen des 16./17. Jahrhunderts. Zweiter Bilateraler Theologischer Dialog zwischen der Rumänischen Orthodoxen Kirche und der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland vom 24. bis 26. Oktober in Jassy*, Herausgegeben vom Kirchlichen Außenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, Verlag Otto Lembeck, Frankfurt am Main, 1982, p. 70.

<sup>16</sup> See: Dorothea Wendebourg, *ibid.*, p. 399–400.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor Nikolau, „Zur Diskussion über die Confessio Augustana aus orthodoxer Sicht“, in: *Una Sancta* (Zeitschrift für ökumenische Bewegung), Vol. 35 (1980), p. 156.

<sup>18</sup> Gunnar Hering, „Orthodoxie und Protestantismus“, in: *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*, Akten I/2, 31/2 (1981), p. 839.

## 2. Assessment of the ROC – EKD dialogue

### 2.1 The relation between the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition/traditions

Both churches confess the normativity of the Apostolic Tradition, expressed in written form in the Holy Scripture, and acknowledge a compulsory explanatory church tradition or a prolonged living tradition (C, I, I). One such example is the Niceo-Constantinople Creed. The difference between the two churches lies in the fact that „for the Orthodox Church, the compulsory tradition of the first eight centuries is deemed part and parcel of the „Apostolic Tradition”, together with the Holy Scripture, whereas for the Evangelical Church, the Tradition of the old church is considered a church Tradition”<sup>19</sup>.

Although the Lutherans have understood the principle *sola scriptura* to have a very open meaning<sup>20</sup>, a thorough assessment of all the statements related to the Holy Scripture leads to the same *sola scriptura*. They acknowledge “a prolonged, living Tradition”,<sup>21</sup> apart from the Apostolic Tradition, but the criterion underlying such an acknowledgement is the conformity with the Holy Scripture. The Orthodox meaning of this living Tradition is that, apart

from the Holy Scripture, there are many other truths of faith, which are not found in it, but have been preserved as part of the Apostolic Tradition, completing the Holy Scripture (e.g. the perpetual virginity of Mary, the Assumption).

Consider, for example, the resolution of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicea (787) to give worship to the Saints, to the Holy Relics and to the Holy Icons. For the Orthodox Church, it is a part of the Holy Tradition of the Church. The Evangelical Churches do not acknowledge this resolution as part of the Holy Tradition, but only as a simple church tradition. The same is valid for other resolutions of the Ecumenical Councils, as well. Some are acknowledged, some are not. The criterion underlying this choice is not very clear. Also, neither of the two parties provides a definition of the living tradition, of the church tradition and of the Holy Tradition. There are no clear cut criteria to distinguish one from the other.

The dialogue with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church distinguished several terms which had to be considered: the Apostolic Tradition, the compulsory Church Tradition, closely connected with the former, but within which we have to set apart different oral traditions, hagiographical reports, as well as local church practices<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Constantin Pătuleanu, *Teologia Ecumenica. Istoria și evaluarea dialogului teologic bilateral dintre EDK și BOR, cu publicarea comunicatelor finale*, Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, Craiova, 2003. (C I, I).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness. Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994*, Göttingen, 1997, p. 142.

<sup>21</sup> Dialogul apropierei în credință III, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Bericht – Herrnhut II – V, 7 in: Herrnhut. *Theologische Gespräche mit der Bulgarischen Orthodoxen Kirche*, hrsg. von Rolf Koppe, Hermannsburg, 2001.

On the other hand, the Orthodox Church itself has to delimit the Holy Tradition from all the other church traditions, ridding itself of such general statements as “that which has been believed by everyone, always, and everywhere” (St. Vincent of Lerin) or “the Holy Tradition comprises all the resolutions of the Ecumenical Councils, as well as all the teachings of the Holy Fathers”, without defining and presenting them clearly. Leaving these things unclear will burden the theological dialogue.

These facts make it obvious that the debate on the Holy Scripture – Holy Tradition has only begun, with just a few important aspects being emphasized. A much clearer consensus on this issue would be very beneficial for the other theological issues, because they are all founded on the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition. The deficiencies are not related only to the above mentioned aspects, but also to the lack of reflection upon certain principles of scriptural hermeneutics, which have

proved to be a stumbling stone ever since Patriarch Jeremiah II.

## 2.2 Salvation in Christ – Soteriology

The issue of salvation was discussed within three meetings between ROC and EKD, which took place between 1985 and 1991. The greatest accomplishment of these meetings was that of finding “a major compatibility between the two visions on man’s salvation in Christ”, as well as of clarifying certain terms and concepts (theosis, righteousness, sanctification, synergy), specific for one or the other of the two traditions, which the other party looked at either in a biased or a negative way. The compatibility between the two theological traditions also lies in the way they both assume Christ’s role as Saviour in the Church, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In *table I* I have described some of the agreements and different emphases in the field of soteriology:

Table I

AGREEMENTS	DIFFERENT EMPHASES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Having the Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers as solid grounds, our theological and liturgical traditions can describe this mystery of <b>salvation</b> in Christ using different expressions and images. We all speak about <b>reconciliation with God</b> (C IV, II, 2).</i></li> <li>2. <i>Both churches speak about man’s <b>sanctification</b>, meaning the renewal of the human nature assumed by Christ (C IV, II, 3).</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The concept of <b>theosis</b>, so important for the Orthodox Church, is not used in the Evangelical theology, although it is firmly supported by the Christmas songs of the Evangelical Church. On the other hand, the term <b>justification</b>, so important for the reformatory theology, is less anchored in the Orthodox worship, although the entire worship is marked by the prayer for the forgiveness of sins</i></li> </ol>

3. Through **righteousness**, the believer assumes the gift of reconciliation with God and renewal in (subjective) Christ, as a new life. Through **faith**, which is shown by good deeds, man is included in this reconciliation and becomes a new creature (C IV, II, 3).
4. The two concepts – **righteousness and theosis** – are based on the Holy Scripture (C V, II, 2).
5. **Man's righteousness and sanctification, that is assuming the fruit of Christ's work of salvation, are accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit in Church** (C V, II, 3).
6. **Righteousness and the new life are closely connected. Sanctification (theosis) has its origin in the Holy Spirit, through whom the Triune God Himself is present and active in each believer** (C V, II, 4).
7. **The life of the believer is marked by a permanent struggle against sin, and a sustained effort for sanctification** (C V, II, 4).

- and for the help of God's grace (C IV, II, 2).
2. The Orthodox theology uses the concept of **theosis** for man, whereas the evangelical theology uses the concept of **justification** or **sanctification** (C IV, II, 3; C V, II, 1).
  3. The theology of **righteousness** resorts mainly to St. Peter and the Apostle's language, whereas the theology of **theosis** is based on johannine expressions (C V, II, 2).
  4. The Orthodox theology makes a clear distinction between **theosis**, in a restricted sense, in which God only leads the Christian, after death, to perfection through communion with Christ, and **theosis** in a larger sense, which is the way to man's sanctification here on Earth, in his struggle against sin. In the Evangelical theology, the term **righteousness** usually refers to God's entire saving work in the baptized and righteous man (C V, II, 2).
  5. The Orthodox theology sees the work of the Christian on the way to his sanctification as a "synergy" of the believer with Christ, through grace. In the evangelical theology, this term is not usual, as the word "synergism" bears a negative connotation (C V, II, 5).
  6. The evangelical theology emphasizes the forensic nature of **righteousness**, whereas the Orthodox Church lays accent on the ontological nature of **righteousness**, manifest in renewal, without excluding its forensic dimension (C V, II, 6).

The assessment made in 1998 emphasized the fact that the two partners “have gone the furthest in soteriology. The two theological traditions have come to ascertain that, despite differing terminology and emphases, they confess a common faith, in the person and saving work of Jesus Christ”<sup>23</sup>.

We need to further improve this issue in our dialogues with other partners, in order to reveal other new clarifications, to discuss the different methods of interpreting the Holy Scripture, with regard to soteriology, as well as to pay specific attention to the context in which our theological and spiritual traditions were shaped, with our minds always set on the exemplary images of the Saints worshipped in the two spiritualities<sup>24</sup>.

### **2.3 The Holy Sacraments in the theology and practice of our Churches**

One major aspect we have to bear in mind is that the doctrine of the Sacra-

ments and their administration belong together, that is, we cannot approach the theology of the Holy Sacraments without referring to their ritual and theological significance. Thus, one of the fundamental aspects of the dialogue between Orthodoxy and Lutheranism has been reached, because it has been noticed that a theoretical clarification of the issues is not sufficient, and because, for the Orthodox Church, the ritual of administration is not a part of *adiaphora*, of secondary issues to salvation. In other words, it is all about the relation between *lex credendi* and *lex orandi*, which are inseparable in Orthodoxy.

In order to be able to assess the agreement on the Holy Sacraments of Baptism, Confession, Eucharist and Holy Orders, based on the final Communiqués between 1979–2002, I have attempted to systematize the consensus, divergent points and open issues reached within the dialogue, as presented in *table 2*.

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<sup>23</sup> Dialogul apropiat...

<sup>24</sup> Cf. C V, IIIc.

Table 2

**BAPTISM**

Theological consensus	Divergent Points	Open Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baptism brings the remission of sins (C III, II, 2; C V, II, 4); even Adam’s sin (C VI, II, 2).</li> <li>• Baptism is considered a Holy Sacrament (C III, III, 7; C VI, II,2; C VI, II, 5).</li> <li>• Baptism brings the renewal of the baptized (C III, III, 8; C VI, II, 7).</li> <li>• Baptism initiates man’s sanctification on Earth (C V, II, 2; C VII, I, 5).</li> <li>• Baptism confers the gift of the Holy Spirit (C V, II, 4; C VI, II, 3).</li> <li>• Baptism initiates salvation; man becomes a follower of Christ (C VI, II, 1; C VI, II, 3, 4).</li> <li>• Baptism pours forth „life in Christ“ (C VI, II, 2).</li> <li>• Baptism is performed in the name of the Holy Trinity (C VI, II, 2).</li> <li>• Baptism is a new creation; it is participation in the death and resurrection of Christ; it is birth by water and Spirit (C VI, II, 2).</li> <li>• By Baptism, man becomes Saint, in the larger sense of the word (C VII, I, 5).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need to administer Confirmation and Eucharist immediately after Baptism (C VI, II, 7).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The phrase “life depends on Baptism” (C V, II, 4).</li> <li>• The meaning and significance of Confirmation (C VI, II, 7).</li> <li>• The different ways of performing Baptism in the Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church remain an open issue (C VI).</li> </ul>

## CONFESSION

Theological consensus	Divergent Points	Open Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confession brings forgiveness of sins (C III, II, 2).</li> <li>• The ecclesial nature of Confession (C III, II, 2).</li> <li>• Forgiveness is given by Christ, not by the church minister. Confession is made to Christ (C III, II, 5; III, 8).</li> <li>• Confession has a therapeutic nature, too (C III, II, 6).</li> <li>• Confession is instituted by Christ (C III, II, 2; III, 8).</li> <li>• Forgiveness is conferred in faith, through the word and prayer of the church minister (C III, III, 8).</li> <li>• Confession is usually made in front of the ordained minister (C III, III, 9).</li> <li>• Confession renews the new life conferred through Baptism (C V, II, 6; C VI, II, 6).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although during the Reformation, Confession was generally considered a Sacrament, the Evangelical Churches do not consider it a Sacrament (C III, III, 7).</li> <li>• In special situations, confession can be made in front of another person, rather than the church minister (C III, III, 9).</li> <li>• In the Lutheran Church, there predominates the common Confession, with a common absolution given by the church minister (C III, IV, 10; IV, 13).</li> <li>• The Lutheran Church emphasizes the redemptive nature of absolution, while the Orthodox Church emphasizes the therapeutic one (C III, IV, 11).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confession as a Sacrament (C III, III, 7).</li> <li>• Receiving the power to bind and to loose (C III, IV, 13).</li> <li>• The forms of confession: private and common (C III, IV, 13).</li> </ul>

## EUCCHARIST

Theological consensus	Divergent Points	Open Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The real presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist (C II, II, 2).</li> <li>• The existence of the Epiclesis (C I, II, 7; C II, II, 2).</li> <li>• The Eucharist is considered a Sacrament (C III, III, 7).</li> <li>• The Eucharist is preceded by Baptism and Confession (C III, III, 8). The Eucharist is “the meal of the baptized” (C VI, II, 6).</li> <li>• The fundamental importance of the Eucharistic liturgical assembly which constitutes the Church (C VII, I, 4; C X, II).</li> <li>• Christ offers Himself Eucharistically through bread and wine (C VII, I, 4).</li> <li>• The relational nature of the Church lies especially in the Eucharistic communion (C IX, I).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Epiclesis occupies a different place and has a different meaning in the liturgical service (C II, II, 2).</li> <li>• The need for private confession prior to receiving the Eucharist (C III, IV, 13).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpreting the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice (C II, II, 2.2).</li> </ul>

## MINISTRY

Theological consensus	Divergent Points	Open Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The need for Holy Order to administer the Sacraments (C II, II, 4.2; C III, III, 9).</li> <li>• Christ Himself and His Church work in the Holy Order C II, II, 4.2).</li> <li>• Only the baptized can receive the Holy Order (C VI, II, 6).</li> <li>• All the members of the community are, like priests, in a direct relationship with God (C X, II).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the Orthodox Church, the sacramental priesthood has a greater importance for the unity of the Church (C X, III).</li> <li>• The Apostolic succession – basic element of the life of the Orthodox Church and its absence in the Evangelical Church (C X, III).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holy Order, in general (C I, III, 5; C X, VI).</li> <li>• The importance of priesthood, of the canonical church service, concerning the correct administration of the Holy Sacraments</li> </ul>

As far as the Sacrament of Baptism is concerned, one can easily notice the similarities between the two doctrines, except for the necessity to receive Confirmation immediately after Baptism. Within the dialogue with the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, the two delegations stated that, despite the differences of ritual, “both Churches mutually acknowledge each other’s Baptism.”<sup>25</sup> This was the first time the two Churches had ever mutually acknowledged a Holy Sacrament, but we have to identify the theological reflections which led to such acknowledgement.

The issues concerning the number of the Holy Sacraments, their ritual of administration, as well as the need for sacramental priesthood for their administration remain open. One can easily notice that the number of divergent points and that of open issues related to the number of consensuses is far smaller in the case of Baptism and Eucharist, which EKD, too, deems among the Sacraments. The most problematic of all the Holy Sacraments remains that of the Holy Order, where the divergences are major, and refer to the Episcopal Apostolic succession, as well as to the sacramental priesthood, as fundamental elements of the Church. Given the essential role of the Sacrament of Holy Order, on which all the other Sacraments depend in the Orthodox view, we can conclude that the dialogue in this direction closely connected to ecclesiology has to continue.

The dialogue between BEK and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church identified

four theological directions which need further study and clarification: the sacramental nature of ordination, the three ranks of church hierarchy (*die hierarchische Stufung des Amtes*), clarification of the content of the Apostolic succession, and the issue of women’s ordination<sup>26</sup>.

#### 2.4. Ecclesiology

The issue of ecclesiology has been more thoroughly discussed beginning with the seventh dialogue on the “Communion of Saints” (Selbiz, 1995). A consensus was reached regarding the different definitions of the Church, thus, the Church is not the work of man, but the work of God exclusively, constituted through the descent of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ is the stone on which *communio sanctorum*, which includes both the living and the dead, is built through the Holy Spirit (C VII, I, 4; C X, III). The Church is the communion of life and love between the Triune God and man, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit; it is a recent divine-human reality of history; the founding of the Church is closely connected with the Kingdom of God, that we already experience in the Church, but only as a promise of the things to come (C IX, III). We also agree on the social and political role which every church has to assume (C IX, I).

The major difference in ecclesiology lies in the fact that the Orthodox Church identifies itself with the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of Jesus

<sup>25</sup> Bericht – Herrnhut III in .

<sup>26</sup> Bericht – Herrnhut IV.

Christ, while EKD sees itself as part of the One Church. From an Orthodox point of view, there cannot be *koinonia* between our Churches, because this would also imply the Eucharistic communion.

The tenth dialogue (Cluj-Napoca, 2002) laid down the principles which can lead to church unity in ecclesiology. The Orthodox Church imposed four conditions: the fundamental consensus concerning the rule of faith (*regula fidei*), including the acknowledgement of all seven Ecumenical Councils; the acknowledgement of the Seven Sacraments; the sacramental priesthood (the Apostolic succession) and the Episcopal authority in the Church. EKD imposed only two conditions: the unaltered preaching of the Word of God and the correct administration of the two Sacraments. However, these conditions require further specifications and delimitations, as well as criteria to acknowledge them as fulfilled.

Another major conclusion concerned the fact that the Orthodox Church acknowledges some form of ecclesiology in the Evangelical Churches, while the latter see the essential elements of ecclesiology incarnate in the Orthodox Churches, according to the Gospel.

The eleventh meeting (Eisenach, 2006) focused on one of the four conditions imposed by the Orthodox Church, necessary for the fulfilment of church unity, and had as topic of discussion *The Ecumenical Councils and the Catholicity of the Church*. Although many fundamental agreements were reached, and it was stated that the Ecumenical Councils are founded on the Apostolic

Tradition, having validity in the Evangelical Churches, too, it was noticed that their resolutions were differently received in the East and West. After the meeting, at the end of which most of the conclusions were formulated separately for the Orthodox and the Evangelical Christians, the two Churches cannot be said to have reached a theological consensus regarding this issue, as the reception of the theology of icons and aspects related to canons remained outside discussions.

It was suggested that the next meeting should consider the outcome of other dialogues, too, as well as tackle the issue of the Apostolicity of the Church or the ministry.

## 2.5 Eschatology

As far as Eschatology is concerned, the consensus between Orthodoxy and Lutheranism was already reached in the 16th century, with the rejection of the doctrine of Purgatory. Although the issues of eschatology, of the Last Judgment, of the state of souls in the afterlife and the resurrection of the bodies remained undiscussed, statements of full consensus about Eschatology were made throughout the dialogue. Thus, within two of the meetings, it was stated that together we are waiting for Christ's coming in glory, as well as for the Kingdom of God, in which He will fulfil and perfect everything He has begun within and with us here on Earth (C IV, II, 3, 10). Moreover, we all acknowledge the transitory nature of the earthly form of the one Church of Christ, as well as its fundamental orientation towards perfection in the Kingdom of God (C X,

III). Nevertheless, the dialogue has to be focused particularly on Eschatology.

### Conclusions

As far as the major theological issues are concerned, we have to point out that, apart from the consensuses already ascertained in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, within the dialogue carried out between Jeremiah II, Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Lutheran theologians in Tübingen, namely the almost full agreement related to the Holy Trinity (although Filioque has not been discussed yet) and to Christology, several new issues have been added, such as Soteriology and other aspects concerning the Holy Sacraments and ecclesiology. The other topics of discussion led mainly to the dismantling of certain prejudices, as well as to an exact knowledge of each other's teaching; several aspects need further thorough debate, as they were merely stated. Although it appears that the issues related to the relation between the Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition led to a substantial agreement, the concept and terms were not clearly defined, and this remains a major requirement of the future, because the agreement on this aspect can lead to further essential theological agreements between our churches. Another key issue of the dialogue is ecclesiology, within which the debate on the Sacrament of Holy Order will play a central role for the future theological agreements between our churches.

Topics such as secularization, the relation between church and state, involvement in the social issues, and other topics related to the relation between the church and the world, enjoyed an almost

unanimous agreement, so that the dialogue has to be focused on purely theological issues.

The reception of the dialogue has not been assessed yet, at least within ROC. However, it is certain that until several years ago, not even the final communiqués of the discussions were translated into Romanian. Due to the outstanding contribution of Prof. Dr Viorel Ioniță and Prof. Dr Constantin Pătuleanu, this was done five years ago, together with a detailed presentation of the dialogue. At present, all the volumes edited by EKD, which contain the reports, discussions and final communiqués of the dialogue between ROC and EKD have been published. The reception of this dialogue within the church is extremely limited, because most of the priests and students of theology in Romania have not even heard of it. The only means of disseminating the information are the courses of ecumenic taught by Fr Prof. Dr Viorel Ioniță and myself at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Bucharest. The same thing is valid for other faculties throughout the country, where professors who take part in these dialogues teach similar courses. Given that ecumenism has often been defined as a dream and an adventure of the Christians all over the world, I conclude with a line of the Romanian Christian poet Radu Gyr, who said that "the real defeats occur only when dreams are abandoned".

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# The Theological Dialogues between the German Evangelical Churches and the Russian Orthodox Church

A General Assessment (1959–2008)

Andrei Eliseev

The history of the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany begins in 1959 at Arnoldshain, in West Germany. In 1974 it continues with the Federation of Evangelical Churches in East Germany in Zagorsk, Russia. Finally, both branches of these dialogues are joined together in 1992 in the so-called Bad Urach Dialogue, which counts five meetings so far. All together there were 24 meetings.

## Scripture and Tradition

In both churches the Holy Scripture is recognized as basic witness of the Revelation. It is unanimously accepted that the Tradition cannot contradict the biblical witness to the salvation deed, accomplished by Jesus Christ, according to the prophets and described by the

apostolic writers of the New Testament. Both churches recognize that life and actions of the Church should conform to those of the apostolic age (Arnoldshain-I). The apostolicity of the Church is discerned by its following the unique norm of the apostolic tradition (Zagorsk-I).

A question remains: what does Tradition *sine qua non* mean, and what is the meaning of that criterion of conformity to the Scriptures?

## Baptism and a new life

Both churches state that baptism, as it is performed in both traditions, is a God-given sacrament, which makes the persons baptized true members of Christ's Body (Arn. III & Zag. VI). However, for the recognition of this

sacrament in both churches, a recognition of the apostolic succession is required. That is why the question of the boundaries of the Church needs to be furtherly discussed.

### **Eucharist and Sacrifice**

Both churches recognize that the Holy Eucharist was established by Christ for us, so that we are sure, by receiving the Holy Gifts, in the koinonia, participation and reconciliation with God. They confess that they receive not just bread and wine, but Jesus Christ Himself together with His blood and body, as He has promised in a prayer. There is also a common confession of the uniqueness of the sacrifice done by Christ on Golgotha as a sign of His obedience to the Father. There is, however, no agreement for both sides, to which extent the Eucharist is a sacrifice given by the Church on to Christ and to which extent it brings its propitiatory force to the persons departed.

### **Justification by faith**

The churches state that the salvation or justification is received by the grace of believing in redemption, accomplished by Lord Jesus Christ. It is not done by means of good deeds. It has become clear throughout the dialogues that the salvation or a justification has its place in the Church as community of the faithful. It means that it cannot be separated theologically or in charity practice from a salvific action of God upon humankind in word of God or the sacraments, to which people respond by faith and observance of the command-

ments. A clarification is required for the question about the concrete content of that faith which leads to a salvation, as well as the question about the last judgment according to deeds (Jn.5,24).

### **General assessment**

The dialogue lacks reception in the respective churches. It is necessary that the topics are discussed within the churches themselves, not only among the direct participants but theologians of a wider range.

There are little references to other Orthodox-Evangelical meetings. It is probably an Orthodox problem, but we have to see whether there are the persons who assure the coherence of multilateral conversations.

Many important topics are discussed without a systematic approach, so that they need to be reviewed again and in a new context of developing EKD tradition and church practices.

A clear predominance of socio-political matters was evident in the past. The subjects need to be discussed in a way that could be understandable and relevant for a larger church audience. A practice of common interpreting of the Holy Scripture proved to be very successful.

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# Evaluation and Reception of the Dialogues between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church

Juhani Forsberg

## Introduction

Finland has traditionally been a very monolithic Lutheran country. After the Reformation the Church of Sweden also covered Finland, the eastern part of the Kingdom, and was an Evangelical Lutheran State Church for centuries. Later it became more of a “Folk” Church, even today having 82% of its population in its membership.

Already at the time when Finland came under Christian influence, it was a region where the Roman Catholic West and the Orthodox East were competing in this northern European wilderness. The Western form of Christianity became dominant, but traces of Eastern Christianity in the Medieval Era have also been found in the western part of the country. Later historical develop-

ment resulted in a situation, where the Roman Catholic Church and, since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Evangelical Lutheran Church became predominant, and the Orthodox Christians remained as an object of proselytism or were compelled to go to exile. When Finland became part of Russia in 1809, the Orthodox Church became an official factor in the religious life of Finland, but the Lutheran Church could keep its confessional status. After Finland became independent in 1917, the Law of Religious Freedom was passed in 1923, and since then the two “Folk” Churches, the Lutheran and the Orthodox, have been living side by side. Due to the same Law, other religious communities were permitted to exist and gather, or the people could choose to remain outside of any religious community.

During the years 1917–1939 the Orthodox parishes were mainly found in the Eastern part (Carelia) of Finland, but when Finland lost these territories to the Soviet Union after World War II, the Orthodox Christians were scattered throughout the country. Since then, Orthodox Christianity and spirituality began to become more familiar also to the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF). Step by step, it was no more seen as “the church of Russians” but as a national autonomous Orthodox Church in Finland under the jurisdiction of Constantinople. Since World War II, mixed or ecumenical marriages between Lutheran and Orthodox Christians also became more common than internal Orthodox marriages. It was the factor at the grass root level which brought the Orthodox and Lutheran traditions much more in contact with each other than any other development.

Contacts between the ELCF and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) were very unusual during the post-war era 1944–1960. When the ROC joined WCC in 1961, the representatives of the ELCF began to meet bishops and other representatives of the ROC in international ecumenical gatherings. The beginning of more regular bilateral contacts took place at the end of 1960s.

## **The Dialogue between ELCF and OCR**

### *The background and beginning of dialogues*

In the 1960s, Archbishop Martti Simojoki (ELCF) and Metropolitan Nikodim, who was the ecumenical authority of the ROC, participated in several multilateral ecumenical meetings. The first contact between ELCF and ROC took place when Simojoki visited the Estonian Lutheran Church in 1964. The following year, Simojoki met Nikodim in Leningrad, and in 1967 Simojoki made an initiative to begin bilateral doctrinal discussions between the ELCF and the ROC. The suggestion was approved by the ROC, and the preparations for the first meeting were put forward.

The formulation of Simojoki underlined the nature of this dialogue as *doctrinal discussions*. His intention was that in our bilateral relations we should concentrate on the *content of Christian faith*. Only thus it was possible to avoid superficial general conversations or only reflecting political trends of a given time. The dialogue was initiated at the time of the Cold War. The ROC was controlled by the Soviet regime. Finland and the Soviet Union had a Treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance, which limited the political free play scope of Finland, which maintained its neutrality in international affairs. The general political situation was totally clear for the ELCF from the very beginning, and I believe that it was also clear to the ROC. This political reality did not determine the theological content of dialogues. Maybe the only

result of it was that the question of peace remained a permanent theme on the agenda. The dialogues have always been very representative in both sides: the president of the ELCF delegation has always been the Archbishop of Turku, and the president of the ROC delegation has been a bishop who has also been a member of the Holy Synod. In addition to the ecclesial hierarchy, academic theologians have been members of both delegations.

The dialogue meetings between ELCF and ROC started in 1970, and since then the delegations have gathered regularly, mostly at three-year intervals, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989, 1992, 1995, 1998, 2002, and 2005. The languages of the dialogue have been Finnish, Swedish and Russian with interpretation. All papers have been translated into both languages, but only a part of them are also published in English.

#### *The venues and themes*

The theme of each dialogue meeting has been a double one: the first concentrates on a question of the Christian dogma (1) and the second is an ethical theme (2). The places and themes of the meetings have been as follows:

Turku 1970: 1) The Eucharist as the Manifestation of the Unity of believers, 2) The theological basis of the peace mission of the Church.

Zagorsk 1971: 1) The Eucharist as Sacrifice 2) Justice and Violence.

Järvenpää 1974: 1) The Eucharist and the Priesthood 2) The Peace mission of

Christian Churches today. Also under discussion in Järvenpää was a third missiological theme, which was caused by the controversial WCC conference in Bangkok 1973/1974 "Salvation today": 3) The Christian doctrine of salvation (in the New Testament and in light of the Bangkok mission conference).

Kiev 1977: 1) Salvation as justification and deification, 2) Salvation and the Kingdom of Peace.

Turku 1980: 1) Faith and Love in Salvation 2) The theological Foundation of the Churches' Work for Peace.

Leningrad 1983: 1) The Church as the Body of Christ ("Eucharistic Ecclesiology"), 2) Peacemaking Work of Churches today.

Mikkeli 1986: 1) Holiness, Sanctification and the Saints, 2) Peacemaking as the Work of Churches (Sermon on the Mount/God's Will for Peace).

Pyhtitsa 1989: 1) Creation (the first Article of the Creed), 2) The Human Responsibility for God's Creation.

Järvenpää 1992: 1) Confessing the Apostolic Faith today, 2) Apostolic Teaching and Witness in the Life of the Church Today.

Kiev 1995: 1) The Mission of the Church Today, 2) Peace and Nations after the Cold War.

Lappeenranta 1998: 1) Freedom of a Christian, of Church and of Religion, 2) Church and State.

Moscow 2002: No special theological or ethical theme. Evaluation of earlier dialogues.

Turku 2005: 1) The Christian Understanding of Human Being in today's Europe. Salvation, Faith and Modern Social Realities.

There is consensus on both sides to continue the dialogue.

The *method* of the dialogue between ELCF and ROC has followed the same model from the beginning: Two or more speakers from both sides have first presented their papers on the given theme (mostly the titles of the papers express some slight "modulations" of the main theme). The papers are discussed thoroughly in the plenary. Then smaller groups have prepared a draft for common theses, which are then discussed and adopted in the plenary. It is important to note that the theses are not only summaries of the discussions, but they are meant to express the common opinion of both parties. The theses are accordingly expressions of a *consensus*, or at least of a *convergence*. In a certain sense they are also witnessing the common *faith*, even though they do certainly not represent the authority of creedal documents of the participatory churches.

#### *The appearance of topics*

We list here the theological topics (*italics*) given by Prof. Viorel Ionita for the evaluation of the dialogues. Even though his list was not intended to be all-embracing, it can be helpful for drawing a first rough sketch of the appearance of themes in the dialogues between ELCF and ROC.

1. *The relation of scripture and Tradition/traditions* (not as topic, but included always)
2. *Schism and heresy* (1995)
3. *Doctrine of God*
4. *Christology*
5. *Pneumatology*
6. *Anthropology* 2005
7. *Soteriology*
  - *Justification/Theosis*; 1970, 1974, 1977, 1980
  - *Faith and Sanctification* 1980, 1986, 2005
8. *Ecclesiology (Concept of the Church; Apostolicity)* 1983, 1992
9. *Sacraments*
10. *Baptism*
11. *Eucharist* 1970, 1971, 1974
12. *Ministry* 1974
13. *Eschatology*
14. *Ecumenical vision and ecumenical problems*
15. *Pastoral challenges (like inter-confessional marriage, baptism, and conversion)*
16. *Ethics, social questions*
  - *creation*, 1989
  - *peace*, 1970, (1971), 1974, 1977, 1988, 1983, 1986, 1995
  - *justice*, 1971
  - *ecology*, 1989
  - *freedom of religion*, 1998
  - *situation in Europe*
17. *Reception (if discussed as a substantial theological topic)* 2002
18. *Non-theological factors (e.g. political, historical, sociological context affecting the dialogue)*

At least one topic should be added to this list:

19. *Mission of the Church* (Mission work of churches, Proselytism), 1974, 1995

*Preliminary observations  
of the selected topics*

Already at first glance, it can be noticed that the classic *Trinitarian* and *Christological dogmas* are not chosen as the subject of the dialogue. This does not mean that they were treated as secondary or that they had not played a fundamental role in the dialogue. Quite the opposite, the importance of the doctrinal tradition of the early Church has been a self-evident basis, not only for the Orthodox churches but also for the genuine Lutheran confessional tradition, which the ELCF has also always strived to represent.

Secondly, it is important to realize, that *soteriology* has played a central role in the dialogue between ELCF and ROC. The deepest reason for that must be seen in light of the fact that the question of salvation (justification) was at stake, when the Lutheran churches emerged within the late medieval Roman Catholic (semi-pelagian) spirituality. Furthermore, Eastern Orthodoxy did not in its own history debate the question of “grace and works” in the same way as Western Christianity had done since the controversy of St. Augustine and Pelagius. And finally, some top representatives of the Neo-Protestant theology (e.g. Adolf von Harnack) maintained that the Lutheran doctrine on justification was “diametrically opposed” to the Orthodox concept of deification (glorification/theosis). Already here, there were enough reasons to put the question of salvation under closer scrutiny. Thirdly, attention should also be given to how the *sacraments* are dealt with. The general concept of *sacrament* (or *mysterion*) was not studied and dis-

cussed. *Baptism* is also omitted as a topic, even though it could be suggested that consensus could be nearer here than on any other question. The very first dogmatic theme of the whole dialogue series was the *Eucharist*, which in Orthodoxy is traditionally seen as the *crown* of unity and which is possible to reach only when all other obstacles have been removed. In its own way, the ELCF also shares this order; at least it has never seen the Eucharist as a *means* to unity.

Fourthly, *peace* has been a constant topic of the dialogues until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It has been suggested that this was a necessary condition put forth by the Soviet regime for the participation of the ROC. Without taking a stand on the truth of this thesis, it must be noted that *peace* has been a central topic of the ecumenical movement from its very beginning and that in the dialogues between ELCF and ROC, this topic was always discussed from the theological point of view. It was very important for the ELCF to avoid making a statement which could be interpreted as a one-sided standpoint in an international political conflict.

Finally, it is very difficult to find out why exactly just the chosen themes are put on the agenda. Nevertheless, some general statements can be made. 1) The topics have been chosen in preparatory discussions, and no partner has ever “dictated” the theme. 2) The topics are not accidentally selected, but they are evaluated as important by both sides, and they belong to the central thematic content of ecumenical discussions in general.

### *Three types of evaluation*

#### *a) Theological evaluation*

The most accurate analysis and evaluation of the dialogues between ELCF and ROC so far has been made by Risto Saarinen in his study "Faith and Holiness. Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994" (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1997). Dealing with the dogmatic topic, Saarinen divides the years 1970–1994 into five periods (pp. 21–79): 1) The Eucharistic Discussions (1970–1971), 2) Finding the Soteriological Profile (1973–1975), 3) The Innovative Phase (1976–1980), 4) Extension and Fragmentation (1983–1989), 5) New Ways, New Hopes (around 1992).

Without going into the details of every period in Saarinen's analysis, it is easy to realize, that periods 2 and 3 are, according to him, theologically the most important in the dialogue. In those years, the *soteriological* question on "justification-theosis" was articulated and developed, and this topic was still continued in the years of "Extension" but then declined into a "Fragmentation" at the threshold of the dissolution of Soviet Union. Saarinen depicts the outline of discussions and debates around the soteriological theme, which has been identified as a *controversy* in the Protestant tradition but which can genuinely be seen as different but not contradicting expressions of the same faith. Saarinen summarizes: "... never before was the notion of deification officially received in the way it was done in Kiev" (1977). Later, the theme of deification was taken onto the agendas of other Orthodox - Protestant dialogues.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the evaluation of the Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues from the Finnish Lutheran point of view. Still in the case of *deification*, it is interesting to also mention two Orthodox statements. Firstly, the doctrinal discussions in the 1970s were also considered as important and fruitful on the Russian side, when Patriarch Pimen, in his address on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the re-founding of the Moscow Patriarchate (1978), described the spiritual-doctrinal character of ELCF as "Orthodoxy" (Saarinen, 48). Secondly, in the context of the dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), the Greek Orthodox theologian Grigorios Larentzakis evaluates the discussion on justification and theosis and says that it gives hope to the impression that the evangelical and orthodox theologies are possibly nearer to each other than generally hitherto assumed (Larentzakis, Beiheft zur Ökumenischen Rundschau 79/2006 p. 90).

In the context of deification, the question of the *cooperation* between God and man also emerged in the dialogue between ELCF and ROC, which led to a suggestion (Karl Christian Felmy) that the Finnish Lutherans had perhaps "accepted the intention of the synergism represented by the Orthodox tradition. This notion was also discussed among Finnish Lutheran theologians later. The Finnish participants responsible for the wording adopted in Kiev in 1977 refuted the accusation of synergism in the meaning which is disregarded in the Lutheran confessional writings or by Luther himself. On the other side, even the positive content of cooperation in

the Lutheran confessional tradition is often neglected for fear of false synergism. With concentration on the Christological aspect of salvation, too little attention was certainly paid to the *anthropological* question of salvation. The next dialogue meeting (1980) tried to fulfil this task by choosing “Faith and Love as Elements of Salvation” as its theme.

The *anthropological* question as such was first taken up on the agenda in the last dialogue meeting in Turku 2005. The theme of the meeting was “Christian anthropology in Europe Today. Salvation, Faith and the Modern Society”. In his greeting to the meeting, Patriarch Alexei II expressed his deep appreciation of the knowledge and understanding of Orthodox doctrine and tradition shown by the theologians of the ELCF. According to the Patriarch, “this dialogue (between ELCF and OCR) is one of the most fruitful bilateral negotiations in which the OCR has participated” (the Communiqué of Turku 2005, translation from the Finnish text by JF; the documents of the meeting are not published in English; the Finnish texts in *Reseptio* 2/2005). Without going into detail about the theological content of the mutually adopted theses on the “Christian concept of man”, it can be generally observed that the theses express an anthropological view in which both the freedom of the human being in creation as well as his bounded will after the Fall are expressed in a way which avoids aggravating some expressions of both

traditions (in Lutheranism, the depravity and incapability of the human will after the Fall; in Orthodoxy, the capability of the human will also after the Fall). A remarkable convergence on one of most difficult doctrinal question between Lutheran and Orthodox traditions has been reached in the theses of Turku 2005.

*b) The evaluation of the dialogue by ELCF*

At the turn of the millennium, the ELCF published a short general evaluation<sup>1</sup> of the dialogues with the Russian Orthodox Church in which it stated:

*“The importance of the negotiations.* The importance of the doctrinal discussions can be summarized in following points:

- 1) At the turn of the millennium, the ELCF summarized its evaluation of the dialogue between ELCF and ROC
- 2) The doctrine and the spiritual life of both churches have become more known in participating churches.
- 3) Doctrinal agreements have not been achieved, but neither had such agreements been set as immediate goals for the negotiations. Nevertheless, there a convergence has developed between different doctrinal traditions. Such convergence has been achieved, especially in the soteriology.
- 4) The negotiations have promoted

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<sup>1</sup> The Finnish text to be found at <http://www.ev1.fi/keskushallinto/>

the self-understanding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and thus they have also indirectly contributed to other dialogues.

- 5) The representatives of the ROC have learned to know the original character of the ELCF as a Lutheran folk Church and realized that the Lutheran confession is not identical with general Protestantism.
- 6) The negotiations have supported the re-building of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ingria.
- 7) The negotiations have promoted scholarship exchange between ELCF and ROC.

The dialogue meeting in Moscow 2002 concentrated as a whole in a common evaluation of the dialogue. The documents of this meeting will be published in English in 2010. Thus far, the communiqué and lectures are published in Finnish in *Reseptio* 2/2002. In the documents of Moscow 2002, the evaluations of the past dialogue are expressed in quite general language as a growth of mutual understanding. Perhaps the Finnish side was inclined to see more convergence than the Russian speakers as a result of the negotiations.

*c) Theology or Politics?*

Especially after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been some discussion among a few of the younger scholars about whether the background, the starting point, the objectives and the goals of the dialogue between ELCF and ROC has been as theological and ecclesial as indicated by the official information of

both churches, or whether other motivations “under the theological and ecclesial surface” should also be sought. This question arose at the same time after the end of the Cold War, when opinions in the political discussion in Finland began to emerge that the official politics of Finland which had consciously underlined the “neutrality” of Finnish foreign policy, were, in fact, more “consent” politics favouring the Soviet Union. “Finnlandisierung/finlandization” was the German-origin key word of the western characterization of Finnish foreign policy. “Lying on his face and crawling” before the Soviet Union was the most popular abusive expression used in the debate. This debate goes on in academic research as well as in the every-day discussion.

At the turn of the millennium, the Department of International Relations of the ELCF initiated and financed research on the Finnish – Russian dialogues and expressed its wish that the person appointed to this task should be an academic scholar outside of the officials who had prepared the dialogue and participated in it. A young Estonian church historian, Riho Saard, was appointed to do the work, and in 2006 he published the book which was based on his research, “*The Great Drama of Love*” – *Doctrinal negotiations between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Cold War Era*. Argo 2006, 240 p, Language: Finnish, with an English Summary pp. 202–223. The research is based on archive materials, manuscripts and interviews of persons who participated in the preparations and meetings of the dialogue.

It is not possible here to analyze, evaluate and debate the results of Saard's book in detail. On the one side, it contains important information especially from the background of Orthodox dialogues in 1950s and 1960s. The author has also interviewed several persons (Finnish Lutheran theologians) who participated in the negotiations. Unfortunately, many statements of the book are not based on a careful analysis of sources and are expressions of tendency to interpret the role of (hidden) political motives on both sides. He is following here the propagandistic thesis of Dr. Arto Luukkanen, a younger Finnish researcher, who has stated that the bilateral doctrinal discussions between ELCF and OCR were only a "smoke screen" for other contacts with the "churchly ambassadors" of the Soviet Security Service KGB (p. 14–15). This thesis is not based on sources, but on the hermeneutical starting point that all religious statements in themselves hide political or social motives which are more important than what literally has been said.

The Finnish Lutheran theologians and church leaders were, of course, not so naïve that they had imagined that the dialogue could happen in a political vacuum. From the very beginning they were conscious of the possibilities that the theological contacts could *also* promote the *détente* in the time of Cold War, and thus, for instance, promote better living conditions for the Finnish origin Lutheran Church and its congregations in the Soviet Union. In fact, this was also one additional result of the negotiations. The Finnish party was also from the very beginning, at least in principle, aware of the fact that the

Soviet regime was informed of the negotiations through (at least some) representatives of the ROC. In formulation and adoption of theses concerning peace, the Finnish delegations were always prepared not to sign texts which could be interpreted in favour of any competing parties of the Cold War.

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# Evaluation on the Dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland

Pekka Metso

The national-level dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) and the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF) has been going on since 1989. During these 20 years, the partners have come together in nine sessions, the latest held in January 2009.<sup>1</sup> The two parties characterize the purpose of the dialogue as a threefold task: 1) *to deepen mutual knowledge*, 2) *to eliminate misunderstandings* and 3) *to support the atmosphere of Christian love and unity*.<sup>2</sup> The task is compactly expressed

as *koinonia*, which denotes “community, communion, participation, sharing, partnership and solidarity”.<sup>3</sup>

Archbishop Johannes, the chairman of Orthodox delegation 1989–2001, pointed out in the very beginning that as a local Orthodox church the OCF has no authority to take significant ecumenical steps without pan-Orthodox approval.<sup>4</sup> Despite such a limitation, the dialogue has been characterized by the two parties as an important one.

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of the sessions is given in the appendix. The 10th session, hosted by OCF, will be held in 2010. The two topics are: “Interpretation of the Bible in the teaching of the church” and “Ecology and reasonable living”.

<sup>2</sup> *Communiqué Mikkeli 1989* 1993, 9; *Communiqué Valamo 1990* 1993, 62. *Communiqué Joensuu 2007* (ACAKF). See also *Johannes* 1993a, 13; *Huotari* 1995, 7; *Toiviainen* 1993, 63; *Vikström* 1993, 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Communiqué Kouvola 1996* (file 76, ACAKF).

<sup>4</sup> *Johannes* 1993a, 13. The same idea is repeated in *Johannes* 1993b, 65.

## Background information

The two churches in dialogue are the two national churches in Finland. For centuries the churches have existed and operated within the one nation. Soon after the independence of Finland (1917), the state secured the OCF in 1923 with a similar status to that of the ELCF. Long historical co-existence and good relations between the ELCF and the OCF preceding an official dialogue were emphasized in the opening speeches of the first session.

However, the two churches are not equal partners when it comes to potentiality and facilities, nor to the general existence as national church: the OCF is a minority church with 1% (ca. 60 000 members in 2008) of the population, while the ELCF is the sovereign majority church in Finland with 82% of the population belonging to it (ca. 4,4 million members in 2008). The OCF encountered huge challenges during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (establishing national Finnish orthodoxy after withdrawal from Moscow Patriarchate, deportation of 70% of Orthodox population from the territories handed over to USSR after WWII and setting up the church anew in diaspora). Besides, a siege mentality and prejudices towards the Orthodox Christians – in everyday life and official church relations alike – in a predominantly Protestant country labelled the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To some degree these attitudes still affect

life of the OCF and its members. Nevertheless, from the late 1960s onwards, ecumenical relations began to improve significantly. Thus, establishing the dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF bears first and foremost witness to the advancement of an ecumenical atmosphere in Finland. Within the ELCF, a liturgical renewal movement, reviving Eucharistic practices and a growing interest towards classical spirituality, and doctrinal theology from 1980s onwards have also contributed to the process.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the ELCF since 1970, in which the OCF was involved as an observer, naturally paved the way for bilateral dialogue between the two traditions, also on Finnish home ground.

The importance and connections with the international level of ecumenical dialogues has been repeatedly emphasized during the dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF. Both parties have been engaged with various international dialogues before entering their local dialogue. The 1989 communiqué states: “Now the question is one of dialogue on a Finnish basis between the two Finnish national churches. At the same time the churches in question represent not only Finnish Christianity but also the churches’ doctrinal legacy. It a question of a meeting of the Eastern and Western traditions.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the dialogue has from the beginning very been much aware of its interconnections with the

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<sup>5</sup> Orthodox influence on Lutheran theology and practices is highlighted by Bishop Huotari in *1999 opening speech of Bishop Huotari* (ACAKF).

<sup>6</sup> *Communiqué Mikkeli 1989* 1993, 9.

world-wide Orthodox – Lutheran dialogue.<sup>7</sup>

### Methods and material of the dialogue

The dialogue sits in two-day sessions with two themes on the agenda. Representatives from both delegations present thematic papers respectively as bases for further discussion. From the fourth round onwards (1993), one of the themes of a session has been doctrinal and the other socio-ethical. Similar division is already seen in the second round (1990). Presumably, such structural method was adopted from the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the ELCF.

Even though the dialogue has not produced downright theological statements, the process and its theological results have become more elaborated in the communiqués over the years. *Communiqué Mikkeli 1989* concentrated almost entirely on pointing out the good rela-

tions between the two churches and prospects for the dialogue. The process of the actual negotiation was not described, nor the nuances of the two traditions signalled. Already during the arrangements for the second round in 1990, a desire to orientate the dialogue into a theologically more explicit direction was expressed by the two chairmen.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, a more accurate description of the respective emphasises can be detected in the *Communiqué Valamo 1990*. From the third round (1991) onwards, the length of the communiqués has grown significantly (even up to four single-spaced pages), thus giving more room to present the views of the two traditions and points of convergence. In *Communiqué Joensuu 1999*, yet another new method was adopted: the main content of the papers presented during the negotiations are summarized quite broadly in the communiqué. Common opinions and/or disagreements are compactly presented after the summary of the papers. A similar structure was taken in the communiqués of 2001 and 2007.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Communiqué Mikkeli 1989* 1993, 9; *Communiqué Valamo 1990* 1993, 61; *Johannes* 1993a, 13; *Huotari* 1995, 7. In words of Bishop Kalevi Toivainen, the chairman of Lutheran delegation 1989–1991, “we are moving, on the one hand, on the familiar ground of our relationship, and on the other, on universal ecumenical ground.” *Toivainen* 1993, 65. Due to historical presence of Orthodoxy in easternmost parts of Finland (North Karelia) Bishop Huotari characterized ecumenism as an attribute of East-Finnish identity which could even contribute internationally to processes of encountering different cultures. Furthermore, Huotari maintains that while ELCF as majority church is involved more thoroughly in the life of the people as a whole, OCF has had an effect mainly on the media and cultural life. *1999 opening speech of Bishop Huotari* (ACAKF).

<sup>8</sup> In his letter to Archbishop John from May 1990, Bishop Toivainen suggests that from the second session onwards more accurate statement with points of convergence and divergence should be produced. The suggestion was approved by Johannes in his response from June. (file 76, ACAKF).

<sup>9</sup> While in *Communiqué Oulu 2001* and in *Communiqué Joensuu 2007* both themes of the session are presented in the described manner (summary of papers – converges/divergences), in *Communiqué Joensuu 1999* it is only the socio-ethical section that is formulated in such a format.

### Doctrinal topics of the dialogue

The dialogue had covered various doctrinal topics. Ecclesiology and the question of authority of doctrinal and canonical tradition were given dominant roles in the early phase of the dialogue. In 1989 and 1991, ecclesiology was on the agenda under the following titles: *The relationship between the church and the people as a theological and historical issue* (1989) and *The church as a worshipping community* (1991). More recently the dialogue returned to ecclesiology in the 7<sup>th</sup> session (2001) with the theme *Prerequisites for the unity of the church*. The question of doctrinal and canonical authority was discussed in 1989 under the title *The authority and significance of ecumenical councils*, and again in 1990 with the theme *The relation between doctrine and the canons and the ecumenically binding nature of the canons*. It is quite possible that the theme of canonical authority and the authority of ecumenical councils was introduced onto the agenda at the suggestion of OCF, while the rest of the doctrinal issues represent the common Christian tradition of the two churches.

Other doctrinal themes include anthropology (*Our churches view of man and the present day*, 1991), Christology (*The incarnation in the liturgical tradition of our churches*, 1993), sacraments and ministry (*The universal priesthood*, 1996 and *Sacraments and sacred rites*, 1999), soteriology (*Sanctification and striving*, 2007) and inter-faith dialogue (*Encountering other religions*, 2009).

The doctrinal aspect of the dialogue has mainly focused on compact explication of the basic convictions and terminology of the two traditions. Based on hundreds of years of co-existence in Finland, the two churches already know each other and their respective theological fundamentals quite thoroughly. The doctrinal conclusions of the dialogue, therefore, barely transcend the level of reciprocal theological knowledge of the views of the other church existing before each session of the dialogue. Thus, the doctrinal contribution *per se* of the communiqués is modest. The resonance is rather on the common witness and ecumenical mentality laid bare in the communiqués. Obviously, both parties have willed to promote substantial unity in their present state of diversity. When voicing their traditional views, the emphasis is put on common conclusions. As an illustration of such mentality, three notions are made.

Firstly, regarding sanctification, the ELCF emphasizes the importance of the revival of Eucharistic practices and spirituality centralised around the sacrament of Lord's body and blood. In proportion, the OCF accentuates proclamation of the word (or rather the Word) as a central act of the church.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the traditional focal element of the other tradition is considered to be of a primary nature within one's own tradition.

Secondly, sacramental life and practices seem to form a common ground for the two traditions. Sacramental theology is

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<sup>10</sup> *Communiqué Joensuu 2007* (ACAKF). As stated above, there is a growing liturgical interest within ELCF.

highlighted repeatedly in several sessions: it is connected, e.g., to soteriology (and more specifically to sanctification), the unity of the church and diaconia.<sup>11</sup> Of the sacraments, it is the Eucharist that is given a pivotal role. The ELCF and the OFC understand the unity of the church as structural communion based around a common Eucharist. It is emphasized that co-existence of the churches in functional undertakings cannot satisfy the need for more profound unity.<sup>12</sup>

Thirdly, despite theological like-mindedness on several doctrinal issues, the OFC and the ELCF are not willing to abandon their traditional terminology and approaches. For example, the OFC describes sanctification through sacraments as deification, while the ELCF sticks to her traditional view of it as communion with truly present Christ. Whenever common witness is openly stated, the two churches in dialogue yet presume that their traditional forms of spirituality are to be maintained.<sup>13</sup>

When the above themes are compared with other bilateral dialogues involving

the Orthodox Church, it can be detected that the dialogue between the ELCF and the OFC has discussed similar topics as the world-wide Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue. The ecumenically binding role of the canons of the ecumenical council, however, appears to be an unique topic.

### **Socio-ethical and pastoral topics of the dialogue**

National special characteristics are echoed in the socio-ethical and pastoral topics addressed by the dialogue. There are two groups of themes in this category: 1) themes that have aroused interest due to their topical national stature in the Finnish society, and 2) themes more strictly innate from within the relationships of the two churches.

The first category bears evidence to the will of the OFC and the ELCF in using their status as forces in society to explicate common statements on issues currently discussed widely in society. *Freedom of religion as a basic right in Finland* (1993), *Work, unemployment*

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<sup>11</sup> Such a mindset is crystallized in the statement that “the aim of the churches is a living unity of prayer and worship with the content of faith (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). Of this consists the most characteristic language of the church when she speaks to the man who seeks for his identity and is exhausted by the modern way of life. Works of love are the most influential way to meet his needs.” *Communiqué Helsinki 2009*.

<sup>12</sup> *Communiqué Oulu 2001* is the best example of the dialogue’s reflection on the relation between the Eucharist and unity of the church.

<sup>13</sup> *Communiqué Joensuu 1999* (ACAKF); *Communiqué Joensuu 2007* (ACAKF). These suggestions are not accurately connected to any ecclesiological solutions made jointly by the dialogue. ELCF has emphasised reconciled diversity (“*sovitettu erilaisuus*” in Finnish) as the Lutheran model for the unity between churches. However, organic unity is explicitly (and implicitly) maintained by both churches as the ultimate goal of ecumenical enterprise. One should not therefore interpret the idea of maintaining one’s traditional concepts and practices as direct or indirect reference to *tropos*-ecclesiology as an ecclesiological solution suggested by ELCF and OFC based on their dialogue.

and human dignity (1996), *The diaconic role of the church in the life of the society* (2001), *Violence in family and close relationships* (2007) and *Languages of faith: How does the church meet a modern man?* (2009) all exemplify such an ambition. Some of the themes also share international ecumenical tendency, like the 1999 social subject *Churches – Hope of the world*. The theme of hope anticipates the millennium 2000 which the Christian churches in Finland celebrated jointly under the theme “Millennium 2000 – Year of Hope”. Similarly, discussion on violence in 2007 relates to the WCC decade against violence.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, linkage to nationally relevant current issues is the main motivation. An economical recessionary period in the 1990s is the root for discussion on unemployment and human dignity.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a topical national debate on the affluent society motivated churches in 1999 to explicate a common view of the Christian churches based on the theology of creation as metapolitical advocates of hope.<sup>16</sup> In addition, different forms of violence (e.g. within family) are burning pastoral and social concerns nationally. During the negotiations on violence, it was emphasized that the churches must also

awake to recognize their complicity in supporting (whether consciously or unconsciously) structures and mentality that enables the existence of violence and different forms of repression.

In sum, the two churches act as one Christian voice in these socio-ethical matters, thus presenting a common declaration. The two churches clearly intend to lean on to each other when they confront challenges of the common societal reality. Whenever references to nuances in socio-ethical teaching of the two traditions are made, the focus is still in the joint effort and common witness.<sup>17</sup>

The second category actually consists of one major theme, i.e. intermarriage. The topic was introduced in 1990 (*Orthodox – Lutheran intermarriage as a pastoral issue*), and is of utmost importance at least to the OCF.<sup>18</sup> Of all the marriages of the Orthodox population in Finland, approximately 96–98% are currently intermarriages. One hundred years ago the number was around 10%. Since the vast majority of the Finnish population are Lutheran, most non-Orthodox spouses of the OCF members belong to the ELCF. Intermarriages force the OCF to face various problems

<sup>14</sup> ELCF has also launched her own project against violence. The project coordinates the ecumenical week against violence.

<sup>15</sup> The two churches emphatically declare that human dignity cannot be estimated by economical profit. Promoting solidarity and justice is based on their common view on the nature of the ministry of all the faithful. Yet, ELCF and OCF were not willing to make any political solutions to unemployment. *Communiqué Kouvola 1996* (file 76, ACAKF)

<sup>16</sup> *Communiqué Joensuu 1999* (ACAKF).

<sup>17</sup> E.g. in questions of diaconal responsibility and obligations. *Communiqué 2001 Oulu* (ACAKF).

<sup>18</sup> Lutheran Archbishop John Vikström highlighted the problem already in his opening speech of the first session of the dialogue in 1989. He pressed that the dialogue must also openly face practical problems. *Vikström 1993*, 11.

such as: a) almost every married member of the OCF cannot receive the Eucharist together with his/her spouse (and oftentimes children as well), b) a significant number of progeny of the Orthodox are not baptized as Orthodox and become members of another church, c) families of the members of OCF are often met with interior and exterior tensions caused by, e.g., minority-majority arrangement, unfamiliarity of Orthodox practices, experience of not being able to share the sphere of spirituality etc., d) by the demand of Lutheran kin, many members of the OCF are not buried according to their own, but by the ELCF tradition, e) since canonical restrictions prevent intermarried clergy candidates to become priests, there is a potential shortage of suitable candidates for the priest-hood.<sup>19</sup>

Of all the accomplishments of the dialogue, the practical pastoral suggestions explicated in *Communiqué Valamo 1990* concerning intermarriage are probably the most noteworthy. The two churches give three recommendations:

1. Prior to the marriage ceremony (taking place either in the Lutheran or Orthodox church), there should be a pastoral discussion on the nature of Christian marriage and issues relating baptism of

children and their religious education.

2. Local parishes of the two churches should support the prayer life of both traditions in homes and participation of the entire family in the services in both churches.
3. All the children in one family should be baptized as members of the same church. In addition, early childhood religious education should be according to the tradition s/he is baptized in. Later on, the ecclesial tradition of the other parent should be introduced.

The issue of the intermarriage is not only a concern of Christians belonging to the OCF. Other minority churches in Finland live in the middle of similar pastoral reality as well. In the 1990s there were joint ecumenical projects, run by the Finnish Ecumenical Council, relating to mixed marriages. On the one hand, two publications (from 1994 and 1999) provided information for clergy and families alike on marital legislation and different practices of marriage ceremony in Christian churches in Finland.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand practical, spiritual and social challenges in mixed marriages were dealt with in 1995 in the *Ecumenical Family Book* (in Finnish). Even though these projects are not directly connected with the dialogue at

<sup>19</sup> Some of the above problems (and others as well) are presented in *Merras* 1993. With his study on Lutheran-Orthodox intermarriage Bishop Huotari has significantly contributed to the awareness of problems caused by mixed marriages. *Huotari* 1975. See also *Huotari* 1993. The resonance of the effect of mixed marriages on OCF was strongly voiced by Archbishop John in his opening speech of the 1990 session. *Johannes* 1993b, 66.

<sup>20</sup> *Entering Marriage as an Ecumenical Encounter* 1994 (in Finnish); *Ecumenical Handbook of Wedding Priest* 1999 (in Finnish).

hand, it is evident that the OFC and the ELFC have interacted within the two projects, at least partly, based on their initial sharing of concern on the intermarriage.

### **Results and achievements of the dialogue**

Achievements of the dialogue between the ELFC and the OCF can be assessed, firstly, on the level of specific themes and, secondly, on the more general effect of the dialogue. Of the individual achievements, three outcomes deserve to be emphasized:

- The input on intermarriage can be considered as one of the most significant outcomes of the dialogue. *Communiqué 1990 Valamo* attests that the churches did not only manage to discuss a delicate problem that influences their members' everyday lives and the Orthodox-Lutheran relations at the grass roots, but also proposed practical solutions to it. The magnitude of this achievement is enhanced by the broad ecumenical significance – both nationally and internationally – of the issue of mixed marriages between Christians of different traditions.
- Secondly, the tendency to speak as one voice on socio-ethical

themes bears a special importance. The ELCF and the OCF have managed to give together a genuine Christian witness on contemporary domestic issues.

- Thirdly, the discussion in 2001 concerning the prerequisites for reaching the unity of the churches deserves to be highlighted as an ambitious theological effort, which resulted in restating that organic unity culminating in one Eucharist is the goal of the ecumenical movement.

With regard to the general effect of the dialogue, two aspects need to be highlighted, one being a local one and the other an international one. When assessed locally, the dialogue has given a concrete form to wilful and eager-minded interaction of the two Finnish national churches. In other words, the dialogue as such already is a noteworthy ecumenical symbol. However, when assessing the significance of the dialogue, one finds it easy to agree with Archbishop Johannes, who in 2001 stated that even though the dialogue has proven to be important for local unity, it has not managed to take such *theological* steps that in reality would have changed the attitudes of the two churches of each other.<sup>21</sup>

Taken as a whole, the national dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF has also aimed to contribute to the international

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<sup>21</sup> *Communiqué Oulu 2001* (ACAKF). In 1990 Johannes had already demanded realism in setting the goals for the dialogue. According to him, the dialogue could take small practical steps. *Johannes 1993b*, 65. Nevertheless, in *Communiqué Joensuu 1999* (ACAKF) progress in mutual openness and trust is highlighted as an actual result of the dialogue.

bilateral dialogues between the two traditions.<sup>22</sup> International interconnection is enhanced by the project of publishing the documents of the dialogue in English. However, papers and communiqués only from the first four negotiations (1989–1993) are available in English. The publishing project has been pending since 1996. This might indicate that an awareness of the interconnection of the national dialogue with the global one have diminished since the mid 1990s. Nevertheless, there are references to global Orthodox-Lutheran dialogues in the communiqués, speeches and other material produced by the dialogue also after 1993. The magnitude of the local ecumenical witness has at the same time, however, been emphasized in the most recent sessions. Even though one might suggest that the original vision of broad ecumenical

significance has become constricted, the shift can also be taken as a sign of a grown awareness of the importance of the national dialogue itself as a meaningful purpose on its own.<sup>23</sup>

The local dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF has yet maintained its close relationship with the international Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue. Several representatives of both sides are (or have been) involved either with other ongoing Orthodox-Lutheran dialogues or other dialogues.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, processes and influences of international dialogues come across efficiently to the dialogue between ELCF and OCF. Such interaction is illustrated by the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation of the Orthodox Churches in the WCC, which included both a Lutheran and an Orthodox member also

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<sup>22</sup> Despite Archbishop Johannes in 1989 and 1990 spoke for the importance of the dialogue and expected good prospects, even internationally, in 1993 he spoke much more demurely. He suggested that the purpose of the domestic dialogue could be reconsidered since the international Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue had more profound theological weight and ecclesial authority. *Johannes 1995*.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. in *Communiqué Oulu 2001* (ACAKF) and *Communiqué Joensuu 2007* (ACAKF) the definition of the importance of a local dialogue by Bishop Huotari in his opening speech of is cited: the ecumenical inter-confessional importance is referred to, but the emphasis of the importance is put more on national and pastoral aspects. Furthermore, the international relation, especially to WCC, is highlighted in the communiqué of 2007.

<sup>24</sup> At least the following representations should be mentioned. Of the Orthodox delegation: Metropolitan Ambrosius (Orthodox-Catholic Joint Commission and Special Commission on the Orthodox participation in WCC), Olavi Merras (Orthodox-Lutheran Joint Commission), Pekka Metso (Orthodox-WARC) and Rauno Pietarinen (Orthodox-Lutheran Joint Commission). Besides, Heikki Huttunen has over the years had several significant mandates in various WCC and other ecumenical bodies and Mrs. Aino Nenola is currently representative in the Faith and Order Commission. Of the Lutheran delegation: Risto Cantell (ELCF-Russian Orthodox Church), Juhani Forsberg (ELCF-Russian Orthodox Church), Bishop Voitto Huotari (ELCF-Russian Orthodox Church and Special Commission on the Orthodox participation in WCC), Eeva Martikainen (Orthodox-Lutheran Joint Commission and ELCF-Russian Orthodox Church), Antti Raunio (ELCF-Russian Orthodox Church) and Bishop Kalevi Toiviainen (Orthodox-Lutheran Joint Commission).

involved with the dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF.<sup>25</sup>

Unused opportunities provided by the two spheres of the dialogue – domestic and international – are consciously referred to in the communiqué of the latest round of the dialogue: “We are aware that our Lord’s will anticipates more comprehensive fruition both between us [i.e. the two churches in dialogue] and Christians throughout the world.”<sup>26</sup>

To put it briefly, the dialogue cannot be characterized as a success story when it comes to downright theological results. When compared with the very task of increasing mutual knowledge and eliminating misunderstandings, which was set up by the two churches in the beginning, the dialogue, nevertheless, can be said to have attained its goal.

### Reception of the dialogue

Reception of the dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF can be assessed on two levels: within the partners of the dialogue and in the Finnish ecumenical reality.

Firstly, without purposeful underestimation, one cannot but state that the reception of the dialogue within the two churches has proceeded with little success. It can be argued from the Orthodox standpoint that the infrequent sessions of the bilateral dialogue have been of minimum consequence when compared with the effect – both negative and positive – of the everyday ecumenical encounters with the ELCF. When it comes to the ELCF, the message in the communiqués hardly penetrates into the realities of local parishes, especially in the areas of Orthodox diaspora where there are but a handful of Orthodox Christians in range of hundreds of kilometres.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the dialogue has intentionally promoted an ecumenical reception in Finland. Observers from the Roman Catholic Church and the Finnish Ecumenical Council have been invited to all sessions of the dialogue. A link to wider inter-church relationships and dialogues has been established through the observers with a hope to affect “the whole of Christendom and all the people of God in our country.”<sup>28</sup> The Finnish Ecumenical Council, especially the Division of Doctrinal Issues, is the main mediator in a broader national ecume-

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<sup>25</sup> Bishop Voitto Huotari acted as a co-moderator and Metropolitan Ambrosius was a member of the Steering Committee. Archbishop Johannes has proposed that OCF benefits from the knowledge and understanding of Western Christian tradition. *Communiqué Oulu 2001* (ACAKF). Experiences of the representatives of OCF in various ecumenical engagements indicate that they have managed to serve as mediators between Protestant and other Orthodox churches.

<sup>26</sup> *Communiqué Helsinki 2009*.

<sup>27</sup> In 2001 Archbishop Johannes stressed that the churches should take more pains with making the results of the dialogue known among their members. *Communiqué Oulu 2001* (ACAKF).

<sup>28</sup> *Johannes* 1993a, 14.

nical reception of the dialogue. The extent of the ecumenical reception is more or less limited to an awareness of some representatives of other Christian denominations in The Finnish Ecumenical Council that there exists such a project as the dialogue between the ELCF and the OCF.

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#### APPENDIX

The sessions of the dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland 1989–2009

- I MIKKELI September 28<sup>th</sup>–29<sup>th</sup> 1989
  - The relationship between the church and the people as a theological and historical issue
  - The authority and significance of ecumenical councils
- II UUSI VALAMO October 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> 1990
  - The relation between doctrine and the canons and the ecumenically binding nature of the canons
  - Orthodox – Lutheran intermarriage as a pastoral issue
- III JÄRVENPÄÄ October 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> 1991
  - The church as a worshipping community
  - Our churches view of man and the present day

- IV IISALMI September 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> 1993
  - The incarnation in the liturgical tradition of our churches
  - Freedom of religion as a basic right in Finland
- V KOUVOLA March 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> 1996
  - The universal priesthood
  - Work, unemployment and human dignity
- VI JOENSUU April 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> 1999
  - Sacraments and sacred rites
  - Churches – Hope of the world
- VII OULU December 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> 2001
  - Prerequisites for the unity of the church
  - The diaconic role of the church in the life of the society
- VIII JOENSUU February 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> 2007
  - Sanctification and striving
  - Violence in family and close relationships
- IX HELSINKI January 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2009
  - Encountering other religions
  - Languages of faith: How does the church meet a modern man?

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Communiqué Kouvola 1996  
Letter of Bishop Kalevi Toiviainen to Archbishop Johannes, May 24<sup>th</sup> 1990  
Letter of Archbishop Johannes to Bishop Kalevi Toiviainen, June 19<sup>th</sup> 1990

- b) 0230 The dialogue between the Finnish Orthodox Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church 1999–2007  
1999 opening speech of Bishop Huotari  
Communiqué Oulu 2001  
Communiqué Joensuu 1999  
Communiqué Joensuu 2007

# The Discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish Orthodox Church, 1989–2007

Kalevi Toiviainen

## **The historical background of the discussions**

As a result of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the Catholic Church in Finland, with all its local parishes, became Lutheran. However, during the early Middle Ages, the Orthodox faith had been rippled throughout the easternmost part of the country, Karelia, where a few Orthodox monasteries and some parishes had been founded. When Finnish Karelia followed the destiny of the rest of Finland in 1617 and was appended to the Kingdom of Sweden, part of its Orthodox population fled to Russia. Some Finnish Orthodox remained in the eastern parts of the country, and in 1939 the eastern Karelian parishes by the border still had an Orthodox majority population. Besides these, Orthodox parishes were founded in larger cities, e.g. Helsinki and Turku, during the

years when Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian empire in 1809–1917.

As a result of the civil war which ended in 1918, Finland broke away from Russia and gained its independence as a State. After the war, the status of the Orthodox Church also had to be re-considered. During the so-called years of suppression, the Orthodox Church had gained a bad reputation due to its role in the State's Russification policy which was supported by its Russian bishop. Now, however, the Orthodox Church was expected to become a national church, even though it still had a new Russian assistant bishop in January 1918.

As a result of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Orthodox archdiocese in Finland had lost its contacts with the

Moscow Patriarchate, and its canonical status needed to be reorganised. Such being the case, the Finnish minister of education and representatives of the Orthodox Church negotiated an agreement in Constantinople in 1923. It stated that the Finnish Orthodox Church was no longer part of the Moscow Patriarchate, but was removed and placed under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople as an autonomous church. Since Assistant Bishop Serafim could not speak Finnish, he was gradually released from his duties in the course of the following year. As the result of these alterations, the Orthodox Church in Finland became a Finnish national church, and it was recognised as a folk church by the State and had the same rights and duties as the Lutheran Church.

The everyday life of the church was, however, more strongly affected by the change, which conjoined the winter (1939–1940) and the continuation (1941–1944) wars. During these years, about 420 000 Finns, among them two thirds of the Finnish Karelian Orthodox population, were forced to leave their homes. As a result of this, the Orthodox population, which thus far had lived in a relatively coherent area, was now scattered all over the country. The Lutheran majority of the evacuees faced the same destiny, but the Orthodox were expected to settle in districts which were usually dominated by Lutherans. At any rate, the role of those evacuated was not an easy one, but the Orthodox believers, who were often regarded by the local inhabitants as foreign elements, had the most difficulty. The Lutheran migrants integrated into the local Lutheran parishes, but the Orthodox generally needed to find new congregations in their new

home districts. In the post war situation, they were depending on the financial support of the State, which was at the same time struggling with financial difficulties in resettling those evacuated from the areas assigned for the Soviet Union, rebuilding what was destroyed during the war and paying indemnity for its former enemy.

Only in 1950 did it become possible to pass a law on the reconstruction of the Orthodox Church in Finland. It is noteworthy that the law was passed by the Parliament, the generality of which was Lutheran. According to the law, the State paid the church buildings, chapels, graveyards and rectories of the 14 new parishes to replace the former Karelian ones.

Already at this time, conditions existed for the coexistence of the two churches. Both the Lutheran and the Orthodox churches in Finland had for centuries shared the joys and sorrows of their people. In Karelia especially, the churches and their believers had lived as neighbours and learned to know each other well. Even though the churches as such were not in dialogue, the local contacts between Lutheran and Orthodox clergy had become more frequent. The official dialogue between the two churches began only after the Evangelical Lutheran Church had launched its dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church in 1970, and as a result, it suggested that similar negotiations should also take place with the Orthodox Church of Finland.

The negotiations between the Finnish Orthodox and Evangelical Lutheran Church are characterized by the fact that

they are two national churches working in the same country. For centuries both have been integrated into the history and national life of the Finnish people. They have approximately the same public position. For this reason, the churches feel that they have had to bear a common responsibility in serving amid the same people. Their voice is requested, and their assistance is expected in the area of values of life. Therefore, they share a common concern for issues of pastoral care, church teaching and the ethics.

### **The structure and the topics of the discussions**

Metropolitan John (Johannes) was elected as the Archbishop of Karelia and all Finland in 1988. Soon after this, he replied positively to the invitation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland presented already few years earlier, and the two churches were able to start the dialogue. Both churches selected their own delegations and hosted the negotiations in turn. There were some changes in the composition of the delegations between the rounds of negotiations, but the chairpersons were standing. Archbishop John acted as the head of the Orthodox delegation in the first three rounds as well as in 1996, whereas in the other rounds the delegation was led by Metropolitan Ambrosius. In the first three rounds, the Lutheran delegation was led by Kalevi Toiviainen, the bishop of Mikkeli, and after his retirement his successor Bishop Voitto Huotari. Besides the delegations, the Ecumenical Council of Finland sent its observers to the discussions. The Orthodox Church

in Estonia sent its observer to the meeting held in Joensuu in 2007.

In each round of discussions two themes, agreed in advance, have been under discussion. Each theme has been studied in two papers presented by respective partners in dialogue. Besides this, the delegations have participated in prayers according to the tradition of both churches. In each round, a joint communiqué has been published. Thus far, the communiqués and other documents of 1989–1993 have been published in English (see the list at the end of the text).

The places, dates and themes of the meetings are as follows:

#### *Mikkeli 1989*

The Authority and Significance of Ecumenical Councils;  
The Relationship between the Church and the People as a theological and historical issue.

#### *Valamo 1990*

The Relation between Doctrine and the Canons and the ecumenically binding Nature of the Canon;  
Marriage between Orthodox and Lutherans as a pastoral issue.

#### *Järvenpää 1991*

The Church as a worshipping community;  
Our churches' view of man and the current day.

#### *Iisalmi 1993*

Freedom of religion as a basic right in Finland;  
The incarnation in the liturgical tradition of our churches.

*Kouvola 1996*

Universal priesthood,  
Work, unemployment and human  
value.

*Joensuu 1999*

The sacraments and the holy services,  
The churches and the hope of the  
world.

*Oulu 2001*

The preconditions (sine qua non) of  
the unity of the church;  
The diaconal task of the church in  
the society.

*Joensuu 2007*

Sanctification (Theosis) and striving;  
Violence in families and in close  
relationships.

### **The general nature of the negotiations**

The discussion between the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church of Finland are carried out by two churches living in one social context but in two different ecclesiastical traditions. They share the same pastoral responsibility of the people among which they live and a majority of which belong to these churches. Under these circumstances, they are facing common pastoral problems. Since these problems are common, they can be discussed together. Moreover, the ways they are seen and solved by one tradition may turn to be useful for the work of the other tradition as well.

The same possibility to learn from the other tradition relates to the matters of dogma as well. Discussions with another

tradition lead to a better understanding of oneself, but they also clarify what is characteristic to one's own confession. It is a well-known fact that the ecumenical dialogues have increased the awareness of our own confession in the Finnish Lutheran Church.

The partners in dialogue both belong to their respective denominations as well as to the larger ecumenical community, the World Council of Churches. Under these circumstances, they have both confessional and wider ecumenical responsibility. Therefore, the question arises whether the local churches can build a basis to a wider interdenominational dialogue. Besides the fact that they are bound to be faithful to their own confessions, local churches are also ecumenically obliged to look for something that, under favourable conditions, may help the churches to find a common way forward.

Topics brought out in the discussions – such as religious freedom, intermarriages, unemployment and violence in close relationships – are topical with each passing day. Besides the general affect, they are of great pastoral importance in the domestic life of Finnish families. Most of these questions touch upon every human being, irrespective of the denomination to which he or she belongs, and are thus of common nature. Some questions again come up, especially when the members of a family come from different denominational backgrounds. Therefore, a certain familiarity as well as adaptation to the Finnish context is characteristic to these negotiations – and similarly a necessity for their success.

The discussions between local churches strive towards the common witness of all churches “so that the world may believe” (John 17:21). Their importance for the local people arises from the fact that there has been and still may appear mutual misunderstanding, prejudice as well as misinterpretation between the two churches and their believers. On the other hand, good mutual connections strengthen a positive impression of Christian faith among those who have become estranged from it, and increase the mutual understanding and respect among their respective members.

### **The fruition of the objectives**

In the beginning of the negotiation process, the churches became aware of the necessity to grab the topical questions of everyday life, questions which both churches were facing and thus responsible for. These tasks are especially related to the pastoral task of the churches within Finnish society and which are rising from this particular context. Especially since 1993, the social-ethical and pastoral view points have become central for the negotiations. Already in 1990, the churches wanted to grab the topic of inter-marriages and problems they are causing. The questions relating to work or unemployment have become commonplace, but also painful in Finnish society, especially after the decline of the 1990s. Unemployment has been equally faced by members of both churches. Under these circumstances, it was natural to discuss these questions in the negotiations of 1996. Furthermore, the churches have not been avoiding facing a discussion on violence, one of the most regretful problems of Finn-

ish society. The issue was taken upon in the negotiations of 2007 in relation to the WCC’s Decade for Overcoming Violence. All the above mentioned topics have been topical as well as typical for Finnish society, and thus, mutual for both churches. The discussions relating to these questions have shown that the churches have been willing to take seriously the problems arisen from their operational environment.

Besides the topics typical for the Finnish context, the churches have also discussed themes specific or distinctive to both traditions, such as the idea of human being, the ministry of the church, sacraments, liturgical life and understanding of the laity. Many times, these themes have been touched upon relating to a topical or practical context. From the view point of dogmatic questions, it would, however, be realistic to say that the meaning of these negotiations for the global or even for interdenominational dialogue has been rather limited. It can hardly be expected that a Lutheran or an Orthodox local church takes the liberty or even has the opportunity to take major ecumenical steps which would lead to a world-wide ecumenical breakthrough. It is something we all are expecting, but it is also something we all have thus far been disappointed with again and again. We need to confine ourselves to modest aims on the level of the local discussions – which is, however, not a meaningless fact.

Besides the modest universal relevance, the dogmatic dialogue of the local churches is also restricted by a limited reserve of theological expertise. Such being the case, these kinds of negotia-

tions challenge the ecumenical readiness of the churches as well as the theological teaching in the universities and churches.

The discussions have regularly dealt with a dogmatic or liturgical theme. The importance of the liturgy for the Orthodox Church served as a fruitful background for the Lutheran Church, especially at the time when the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church was preparing a liturgical reform. Liturgy has, however, not been just a topic discussed in the meetings, but a common prayer has always been an inseparable part of the programme of the discussions. Similarly, sharing the spiritual life has deepened the understanding of each others' doctrinal content according to the principle of *lex orandi – lex credendi*.

In an ecumenical dialogue, it is crucial to be aware of one's own confession – a fact that distinguishes a dialogue from activities of alliance ecumenism indifferent to dogmatic questions. Interaction with another tradition opens up one's own traditional awareness. However, it is at least as essential to try and find overarching theological themes that may have been lost over the decades. Thus, ecumenical discussion at its best is like digging a common treasure hidden under decades of misdevelopment. Finding the treasure helps us to understand not only our own, but also each other's confessions. Such being the case, e.g. Luther is not an argument in ecumenical dialogues in general, and especially not in Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue, unless we are able to show how he is connected with the Catholic tradition of the undivided church. When the Lutheran party in 2007 appointed

that reading the Catechism can support Lutheran meditation and prayer, it may have been a viewpoint that was understandable for those coming from an Orthodox tradition.

The ecumenical significance of the canonical tradition is a theme taken up by the Orthodox. It has been difficult for a Lutheran to understand how referring to the tradition of the church can form an indisputable argument when discussing e.g. the ministry of the church. However, the tradition is fundamental also for the Lutheran understanding of faith, and it cannot be defeated by the slogan *sola scriptura*, because it is understood correctly only if remembered that *scriptura numquam sola* – for the Gospel has always been understood within and on the basis of a tradition. It may also be easier for a Lutheran than for an Orthodox to refer to the viewpoint addressed by the WCC Faith and Order conference in Montreal in 1963 stating that tradition should always be tested as well. The early Lutheran insight was that everything that is accordant to tradition does not necessarily refer to Christ, “the author and the perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). The importance of ecumenical talks is to help us to overcome a situation where we all read the Bible separately in light of our own traditions.

Assessing tradition is only one small detail amongst the difficulties the churches in dialogue are facing. If anything, these negotiations are locally reflecting the fact that on the journey to overcome the greatest ecumenical obstacle – mutual understanding and recognition of the ministry – we are still at the very beginning. A local dialogue

is not able to solve problems like this, but it may help the process in recognising the problems. With this in mind, the Evangelical Lutheran and the Orthodox churches in Finland have chosen not to crystallize the discussions in the form of a thesis, but have considered the process as an exercise in mutual understanding and tolerance.

(English translation Kaisamari Hintikka)

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## In this issue

The 12<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Conference of the European Churches, held in Trondheim July 2003, recommended that the outcome of ecumenical dialogues touched upon the CEC member churches should be assessed more closely. As a result of this, the CEC's Commission Churches in Dialogue launched in 2007 an evaluation project on the dialogues between Orthodox and other CEC member churches. In the framework of the project, the CiD organized in June 2008 a consultation in Pullach, Germany, to collect surveys and evaluations from twelve different dialogues on global, European and local level. Each dialogue was observed from the viewpoint of both partners in dialogue.

This issue contains all the papers presented at the Pullach consultation, as well as a general bibliography including documentary and research material on the dialogues which were included in the evaluation project.

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