

AUTHORITY IN AND OF THE CHURCH:

B. UNDERSTANDING OF SALVATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS

(Agreed Statement)

At the 5th Joint Commission Meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue in Bad Segeberg, Germany, 1989, it was decided to continue the work of the dialogue under the new theme, "Authority in and of the Church." This theme, with special reference to the Ecumenical Councils, was discussed and elaborated with an agreed statement at the 7th Joint Commission Meeting in Sandbjerg, Denmark, 1993, and it was agreed that the "Understanding of Salvation in the Light of the Ecumenical Councils" be the theme of the 8th Joint Commission Meeting in Limassol, Cyprus, 1995.

I. The Mystery of God and Formulations of Dogma

1. The Triune God is the mystery "in whom we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This mystery, revealed in Jesus Christ through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is continuously lived and experienced in the Church. The doctrinal formulations of the seven Ecumenical Councils are expressions of the continuity of the apostolic faith in the life of the Church, and guides to the Christian life. These formulations enable the faithful rightly to worship, praise and witness to the glory of God.

2. The mystery of God should not be confused with formulations of doctrine in relation to the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. These doctrinal formulations are necessary pointers on the narrow path, helping the faithful avoid heretical deviations and idolatry which identify theological speculation with the substance and essence of God and with the persons of the Holy Trinity. "It is impossible to express God and even more impossible to conceive Him" (St. Gregory the Theologian, *Oratio Theologica* 2,4).

3. Both the orthodoxy of our doctrine and the reality of our participation in the Body of Christ are manifested and tested in an ecclesial life of love and prayer, a life of which it can truly be said in the words of St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

4. As Lutherans and Orthodox we affirm that Christians, led by the Holy Spirit, grow through faith in the experience of God as a mystery, nurtured by the liturgical life of the Church, by the apostolic faith, by prayer, and by sharing in the fellowship of the local Church (cf. Acts 2:42).

5a. We agree on the doctrine of God, the Holy Trinity, as formulated by the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople and on the doctrine of the person of Christ as formulated by the first four Ecumenical Councils. The Fathers of the four Councils rejected the Arian and Eunomian notion that the Logos, the Angel of the Great Counsel (Is. 9:6 LXX) was created before the ages, and insisted that the Logos is "homoousios to Patri" (give Greek). They also rejected the

Nestorian notion that the One born of the Virgin Mary was not the Logos himself and that the Logos only dwelled in the One who was born of the Virgin Mary. In short, the Fathers of these Councils affirmed that he who was born of the Virgin Mary is God by nature and not just by the will of the Father, and that he became homoousios with us in his humanity. The union of the divine and human natures in the hypostasis of the Logos is, according to the Council of Chalcedon, "without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation." The Ecumenical Councils which followed continued this teaching and applied it to new challenges to the faith. The Fifth Ecumenical Council accepted as orthodox two theological terminologies in the confession of the one Lord Jesus Christ. The Sixth Ecumenical Council affirmed the two natural wills and energies, with their natural properties, of the one person of the Logos incarnate. The Seventh Ecumenical Council drew conclusions from the affirmation of the hypostatic union in Christ in order to confirm the veneration of icons.

5b. We agree in these fundamental teachings, confessing Jesus Christ, the Logos who for us and for our salvation (soteria) came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and who for our sake was crucified, raised and exalted to the right hand of the Father; he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

5c. We affirm that between Pentecost and the final Parousia the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, "whom I (Jesus Christ) will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father" (Jn. 15:26), calls, gathers, enlightens and glorifies believers in the Body of Christ.

5d. We affirm that the saving work (oikonomia) of the Triune God encompasses all of sinful humanity. "God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself," and through the ministry of reconciliation he challenges all people: "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:19-20).

5e. These are the dogmatic foundations of apostolic and orthodox teaching in the church about salvation.

II. Justification and Glorification as Descriptions of Salvation

6. The language with which the Ecumenical Councils and the Fathers of the ancient Church expressed and clarified the biblical witness on salvation is the privileged, unique and irreplaceable Christian language. According to their understanding, salvation in both the Old and New Testaments is our liberation from slavery to sin, the devil and death, and our participation in the life of Christ, who destroyed death by his death and gives life to those in the tomb. In this context justification (dikaiosis) is liberation from the dominion of the devil and the restoration of our communion with God. Those who are justified are glorified (Rom. 8:30) in the Body of Christ, the Church. By baptism and participation in the other mysteries (sacraments) of the Church, the faithful are raised to a new life of righteousness in Christ, together with all the prophets and saints of the Old and New Testaments. God gives them, in the Holy Spirit, the power to pass through purification and illumination of the heart and arrive "with all the saints" (Eph. 3:18) at glorification (Mt. 17:2; Jn. 17:22, 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 1:4). In this life, glorification may have various forms and be experienced for various durations, and in the next life will go from glory to glory without end.

7. The teaching of the Ecumenical Councils and the Fathers - as also Holy Scripture - has to be transmitted from generation to generation in all human languages, for God wills that all human beings come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). In the New Testament the one mystery of salvation is expressed in different but essentially complementary terms such as sanctification, justification, redemption, adoption, liberation, glorification etc. In interpreting the apostolic teaching on salvation, our two ecclesiastical traditions developed different emphases.

8. For the Orthodox Church, salvation is a gratuitous gift of God offered in Jesus Christ to all human beings (1 Tim. 2:4; Jn. 3:17), which they must both freely choose (Rev. 3:20) and work for (1 Cor. 3:13, 15:58; Phil. 2:12). According to St. Paul, this is synergia (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1). Once this gift of the divine grace is accepted by faith, Christ truly becomes the doctor of the souls and bodies of the faithful in the Holy Spirit, through the Word of God and the mysteries of the Church. He purifies their hearts (Ps. 50/51:10, Acts 15:9) and constantly renews their minds (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16), leading them from illumination/justification (2 Cor. 4:6) manifested by prayer in the heart (Rom. 8:26; Eph. 5:19, 6:18; Col. 3:16) and keeping of the commandments (1 Jn. 3:22), to glorification (Jn. 17:22; 1 Cor. 12:26). The Orthodox Church does not hold that humanity inherited the guilt of the sin of Adam and Eve and is therefore worthy of eternal damnation, or that God chose from those thus guilty certain ones only to be saved without personal merit, or that Christ died on the Cross only for them, or that Christ loves only those sinners who are destined for heaven, or that God had to be reconciled to humanity by Christ's crucifixion.

9. Lutherans understand the saving work which God accomplishes in Christ through the Holy Spirit primarily through the concept of "justification." For Lutherans, justification is God's gracious declaration of the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and at the same time the free gift of new life in him. Through the liturgical life, preaching, and sacraments of the Church, the Holy Spirit enables us to have faith in the gospel - that is, in God's gracious promise of forgiveness and new life. This promise is received by faith alone (sola fide); this means that salvation is by Christ alone, and not by any human works or merits. In faith Christians entrust themselves entirely to God's grace in Christ for salvation. In this way they enter a new relationship with God, as St. Paul says: "since we are justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Justification is a real participation in Christ, true God and true human being. In the Church, the believer by faith participates in Christ and all his gifts, and so has a share in the divine life. The presence of Christ in faith genuinely effects the righteousness of Christ in us, and leads believers to the sanctification of their lives. In this way, believers work out their salvation in fear and trembling, trusting that God in Christ is at work in them, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

10. Lutherans and Orthodox agree that the Ecumenical Councils of the early Church are a specific gift of God to his Church. The Councils are an authoritative inheritance through the ages because they keep prophetic and apostolic truth, and provide guidelines for the purification and illumination of the heart to glorification in Christ for the salvation and justification of humanity throughout the ages.

11. 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.

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