

COMMUNIQUÉ AT THE END OF THE SYMPOSIUM: "ORTHODOX APPROACH FOR A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS"

Given the affirmation of the Orthodox engagement in the inter-faith dialogues, expressed in a high ranking document of the Eastern Orthodox Church, such as the Synod of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches (see Message of their 2008 Synod), but also the "paradigm shift" in world mission toward an inter-faith dialogue, and in particular on the basis of a theological contribution by the Orthodox, the articulation, positive or negative, of an Orthodox "theology of religions" constitutes a responsibility of the Orthodox academic community to the Orthodox Church.

On the basis of the above explicit affirmation, as well as the theological concern of such a shift in world mission, expressed in the academic world, the Department of Theology of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece (AUTH), jointly with the Theological Faculty of Holy Cross Orthodox Theological School, Boston USA (HC), and the Centre for Ecumenical, Missiological and Environmental Studies "Metropolitan Panteleimon Papageorgiou" (CEMES), organised a series of scientific consultations aiming: (a) at the investigation of the problem of existence of, but also the responsible approach to, the living world religions (symposium 11.5.2012); and (b) at the heart of the contemporary theological missiological thinking, i.e. the need or the possibility of an articulation of a "theology of religions" (symposium 14-15.2013).

The thematic occupied also the concern of a post-graduate seminar on the subject at the Department of Theology of AUTH during the past academic year. Although the ambition of these scientific efforts was a scholarly research from the point of view of the Orthodox theology, they did not omit to also deal with the experience on the subject of other Christians.

From the *conclusions* of these consultations, organised by members of the WCC (emeritus prof. Petros Vassiliadis, former CWME commissioner and currently member of the PWE group, prof. Georgios Martzelos, member of the Central Committee, and Rev. prof. Emmanuel Clapsis, former Faith and Order chairman), most important are the following:

- Participation in the inter-faith dialogue does not mean acceptance that "all religions are the same".
- It does not undermine the universality of the truth of the Church, nor does it reverse her faith that Christ is "*the way, the truth and the life*" (Jn 14:6), and the apostles' belief that "*there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).
- The inter-faith dialogue does not endanger the fate of the inter-Christian dialogue, nor does it leads to syncretism.

- In accordance with the contemporary Christian mission theology the inter-faith dialogue is not simply an academic dialogue (*inter-religious* dialogue), neither is it related to a “comparative religion”; it is a dialogue with the *faithful* of the other living religions (*inter-faith* dialogue), and it should not lead to an anti-modern front.

The Orthodox faithful at the exercise of the imperative of mission should appear as reconciling and healing agents, and render their witness as “*servants of reconciliation*”, according to the biblical demand “*that God has reconciled us in Jesus Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation*” (II Kor 5:18).

This research effort examined in-depth the limits of “salvation in Christ”, and whether the other living religions are even legitimised at a minimal level. On the basis of the reciprocity that exists between the “economy of the Son” and the “economy of the Holy Spirit”, who “*blows where s/he wills*” (Jn. 3:8), it was investigated if one can exclude the other religions as points which the Holy Spirit acts upon. The research projected, however, the spectrum of theological investigation of the subject beyond Pneumatology to Christology, underlining that the theology of the “*spermatikos logos*” can constitute the foundation of a healthy Orthodox theology of religions that goes beyond the tension between *exclusivism* and *inclusivism*. It also underlined the prospects of the various “covenants” in the O.T., and the Gospel reports, with their climax in the parable of the last judgement (the magna Charta of Christianity), and mainly the teaching of Christ on *aphesis*, and the universality of the salvation in Christ as it is expressed in such biblical texts as the one presenting the descent of the resurrected Christ to the hell to teach all humankind.

The symposia came to the general conclusion, that both in the Bible and in the Patristic tradition there are elements that present the other religions as human constructions, but there are also other testimonies that while recognize Christ as the unique saviour of the world and his church as the ark of salvation, they accept the saving presence of God beyond the boundaries of the Church. From a theological perspective, and especially within the frame of the Orthodox tradition, it was argued that a synthesis of the two positions is possible; after all they constitute equally substantial elements of our Christian faith. For this reason any Orthodox formulation of a theology of religions should be based on the catholicity of the Christian tradition and not on selective elements that in most cases reflect personal phobias and ideological conservative or liberal perceptions.

As a final conclusion it was considered that from the viewpoint of Orthodox theology a “theology of religions” is possible, feasible, but also legitimate; it requires however further scientific theological investigation.

The totality of the scholarly papers of these international Orthodox inter-faith consultations will be published in the second issue of the 2013 scholarly journal of the Church of Greece "*Theologia*", and will be submitted accordingly to the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Greece.

From the Organizing Committee