

## Per Erik Persson – A Symposium

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This issue of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* is comprised of the papers given at the Per Erik Persson symposium held at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University on February 11th 2013. The symposium was supported by the Oscar and Signe Krook Foundation and by the Royal Society of Letters at Lund University.

### *Introduction to the Symposium*

Per Erik Persson, was born on February 16th 1923. After studies in Theology and Philosophy at Lund University he earned his Doctorate of Theology there in 1957 and became *Docent* of the Faculty in the same year. From 1963 until his retirement in 1989 he held the chair of Systematic Theology or Dogmatics at the said faculty. 1980-83 Dr. Persson served as the deputy vice chancellor of Lund University.

The papers given at the symposium in honour of Per Erik Persson focused on the main topics of his theological study and scholarship. As the subject for his dissertation Per Erik Persson chose the theology of Thomas Aquinas, a rather unconventional choice in the context of “Lundensian Theology” of the 1950s. At that time, most doctoral students in systematic theology started their careers with a Luther study. And as a matter of fact, no one of the professors at that time had specialized in Thomas Aquinas or in medieval theology generally. The inspiration came from the Danish theologian Kristen Einar Skydsgaard, who had lectured in Lund for a semester during Persson’s time as a student. Skydsgaard acted as an informal supervisor during the time of his dissertation work, and Persson spent an academic year in nearby Copenhagen, where Skydsgaard was a professor. The dissertation of 1957 was entitled *Sacra doctrina : en studie till förhållandet mellan ratio och revelatio i Thomas' av Aquino teologi* (Lund : CWK/Gleerup 1957, *Studia theologica Lundensia*, 15). The English translation was published in 1970 (*Sacra doctrina : reason and revelation in Aquinas*. Oxford : Blackwell). The first two papers of the symposium, by Drs. David Burrell and Anna Bonta Moreland respectively, focus on the place and reception of the “Sacra Doctrina” in contemporary Thomas Scholarship. An anecdote, told by Professor Persson himself, might add further to the importance of his Thomas research. At a Faith&Order Meeting in the 1970s Per Erik Persson met the late Avery Dulles, prominent Catholic theologian and later Cardinal. When hearing the name of the Swedish theologian, Dulles commented to him: “Your Thomas study is always on my desk”.

The third paper of the symposium is dedicated to the ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics. This has always been a main concern and interest of Professor Persson. Perhaps we could discern the influence of Skydsgaard even behind this. Skydsgaard himself was a Lutheran observer at the Second Vatican Council. However, Per Erik Persson got acquainted with Roman Catholic theology in the early 1950s, not only through his Thomas research but also by spending a semester at the *Institut Catholique* in Paris. That was one of those cold winters when the charitable work of Abbé Pierre saved many lives in the freezing metropolis. Further, Persson had the opportunity to get to know the important Catholic ecumenist Yves Congar, who at that time had been censured by the Vatican authorities but later became a leading theologian of Vatican II. Paradoxically, while Persson was in Paris to study Aquinas, Congar at the time concentrated on Luther research.

After the council the first official international dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics started in 1966 and resulted in the so-called Malta report in 1972. The dialogue committee among whose members was Per Erik Persson, achieved a substantial amount of consensus. Another member of the committee was Walter Kasper, who later became the cardinal prefect of the Papal council for promoting Christian Unity. In terms of ecumenical engagement much could be added. Yet, most importantly, Per Erik Persson for many years was a member of the Faith&Order commission, as well as of the official Lutheran-Baptist dialogue. Professor Persson has shown a consistent engagement and interest in ecumenical dialogues until this day. In his paper, Dr. Burckhard Neumann from the Roman-Catholic Johann Adam Möhler research institute in Germany, focuses on the status and prospects of Lutheran-Catholic dialogue today.

After his doctoral dissertation on Thomas Aquinas Dr. Persson turned to study the concept of "Repraesentatio Christi", the priest as representing Christ in his ministry, especially in recent Roman Catholic theology. This resulted in a monograph published in 1961: *Kyrkans ämbete som Kristusrepresentation: en kritisk analys av nyare ämbesteologi* (Lund: Gleerup. *Studia theologica Lundensia* 20), translated into German in 1966. The aim of the study was to explore the Catholic theology of the priesthood and especially the concept of *Repraesentatio Christi* and further, to compare this with the use and reception of similar lines of thought in Anglicanism and in the Church of Sweden. One of the basic issues was the role and relevance of this type of theology within a Lutheran theology of ministry. The critical analysis of this book must be understood against the background of the controversy over the ordination of women within the Church of Sweden around 1960. Hence the book became the subject of heated discussion even in Swedish newspapers at the time. In the fourth paper of this symposium the theology of Church and Ministry is addressed from a contemporary ecumenical and Lutheran perspective by Peder Nørgaard

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Given his study on Thomas Aquinas as well as his engagement in ecumenism, it does not come as a surprise that Per Erik Persson early on became interested in Eastern Orthodox theology. Orthodox theologians were part of the ecumenical movement from the early 1920s onwards, and their books were published in Western European languages. The Faith&Order conference in Lund 1952 brought orthodox theologians to the town, most notably perhaps the famous Georges Florovsky. Yet, even on this point, Persson's choice of subject for a third monograph was unconventional in the golden days of Lundensian Theology. In the last paper of this symposium, I will take as my point of departure the unpublished manuscript on Orthodox theology that Per Erik Persson wrote just before becoming appointed as a professor. The paper focuses on the development of East-West dialogue and on recent trends in Orthodox theology.

The papers of the symposium clearly illustrate the main fields of study and interest of Professor Persson. Yet, everything cannot be covered. The topics of the around 20 dissertations that he has supervised encompass a wide range of subjects. Also, Persson has written several textbooks, among which the introduction to contemporary theology in 1970 *Att tolka Gud idag: debattlinjer i aktuell teologi* ("Interpreting God today – trends in contemporary theology") is most widely read. Further, a wealth of articles, minor books and studies are listed in the bibliography of the 1989 Festschrift: *In unitatem fidei: festschrift till Per Erik Persson red: Per Frostin ...* Lund: Teologiska institutionen, Lunds Universitet 1989 (Religio 29). A complementing list of his publications after 1988 is included in this issue.

In addition to the papers relating to the scholarship of Per Erik Persson, we are happy to publish also a talk given at the end of the symposium by the long-time friend and colleague of Per Erik Persson, the former University Chancellor, Professor emeritus Carl-Gustaf Andrén. Among other things, Andrén focuses upon the important work done by Per Erik Persson in several governing and administrative bodies of this university and his engagement in policy discussions on research and higher education.

By publishing the papers and talks from the Per Erik Persson Symposium, the editorial board of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* honours its longtime editor (1969-1990). This issue is homage to an internationally renowned scholar and an esteemed teacher. In the spirit of Per Erik Persson it is intended also as a contribution to ongoing theological study and dialogue.