

Ex oriente lux?

Recent developments in Eastern Orthodox Theology

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In his inaugural lecture as a professor of Systematic Theology at this university, Per Erik Persson started by quoting the famous words of Rudyard Kipling: "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." The inaugural lecture was entitled "East and West in Theology" and was given almost exactly 50 years ago, on March 9, 1963. Two years earlier, when being interviewed for the same post, Per Erik Persson had given another lecture, which testified to his early interest and deep knowledge of contemporary Eastern Orthodox Theology. The topic of the latter lecture was "The Problem of Synergism, as seen from the Perspective of the Theology of the Orthodox Churches".¹

"The Distinctive Character of Orthodox Theology"

We should not assume, however, that the young Dr Persson concurred with Kipling regarding the impossibility of a rapprochement between East

and West, theologically speaking. As a matter of fact Per Erik Persson, though firmly grounded in the Lutheran tradition, had set out to explore the possibilities for a dialogue between the three main branches of Christianity: Protestantism, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. In an unpublished manuscript, which was part of his application for the post, he had analyzed contemporary Orthodox theology. "Divine and Human. Studies on the distinctive Character of Orthodox Theology in Relation to Western tradition" – the title again might suggest that Kipling would gain the upper hand.² This, however, is not the case. Rather, Per Erik Persson in that manuscript argued persuasively that the "distinctive character" of Eastern Orthodox theology should be taken as a challenge and an invitation for a dialogue between East and West. From the perspective of the Roman-Catholic-Lutheran controversies on Faith and Works, Scripture and Tradition, Church and ministry, a quite different perspective opens up in Eastern Orthodox theology. Orthodox theology basically does not fit into Western concepts. It transcends our differences.

Basing his argument on Orthodox authors available in modern Western languages fifty years ago, Persson worked out very clearly, in the mentioned writings, the main critique of the

¹ Per Erik Persson, "Synergismens problem, belyst utifrån de ortodoxa kyrkornas teologi". In: *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 37 (1961), 236-47 (German translation in: *Materialdienst des konfessionskundlichen Instituts Bensheim* 1962, 81-87.) Id, "Öst och Väst i teologin". In: *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 39 (1963), 88-97.

² The unpublished manuscript was written in Swedish.

Orthodox over against Western tradition as represented by those Orthodox theologians. Among the authors referred to by Persson were a number of Greek theologians, active in the Ecumenical movement. Further, he referred to important Russian theologians in exile; notably Nikolaj Berdjajev, Sergei Bulgakov, Paul Evdokimov, Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky and Nikolai Zernov should be especially mentioned. The importance of the fact that Per Erik Persson around 1960 focused upon this vibrant Russian theology cannot be over-emphasized. The influence of Orthodox theology and tradition in the West and in the Ecumenical movement has increased ever since.

In addressing the topic of “recent trends in Eastern Orthodox theology”, I would like to take as my point of departure the type of Orthodox theology that Per Erik Persson analyzed in his writings fifty years ago. What was the concern of this theology? What are the main points of criticism over against Western theology and what options does it offer to overcome Western deadlocks in theology? To answer those questions it is of importance to also pay attention to the background and context regarding this type of Orthodox theology. We should also take into account the general ecumenical context fifty years ago on the brink of the Second Vatican Council. Departing from this, I would like to continue by comparing this situation and the concerns and critique of those Orthodox theologians with the development of Orthodox-Western theological dialogue in course of the last fifty years. Here I shall refer first to the official dialogues between Orthodoxy and the West. I will pose the question: to what extent did the issues that were so important to Orthodox theology and exerted influence upon the West fifty years ago play out in the dialogue between the Churches? Then, as a third part, I would like to come back to more contemporary Orthodox theology in the academic sense, pointing out some interesting developments that both confirm and call in question some of the concerns and theses of an earlier generation of Orthodox theologians.

East and West - The Controversy

Reading books by Greek or Russian Orthodox theologians in exile written before the 1960s or 70s, what immediately strikes you is the harsh polemics, first of all over against Roman Catholic and (neo-) Scholastic theology. It is not only that the old issues of the schism between East and West are repeated, especially the *filioque* and the Primacy of the Pope. There is heavy criticism especially towards such concepts as “created grace”, as well as a number of concepts and distinctions that were designed by Scholasticism and further refined in course of the Neo-Scholastic period. Critique is given over against Roman Catholic teaching on penance, including the distinction between venial and mortal sins, between temporal and eternal punishments, and further towards the teachings of Purgatory and Indulgences. This seems that Orthodox and Reformation theology are proceeding along the same lines of polemics. As Per Erik Persson points to in his writings on Orthodoxy, this however is not the case. Protestantism and Roman Catholicism basically share a common tradition, which makes up the context within which those controversies are worked out. If Roman Catholic theology is seen as the thesis, then Protestant theology, naturally, makes up the anti-thesis. Yet Orthodox theology is by no means the synthesis, combining elements from both. Rather it is of a quite different kind. This can be exemplified by the famous correspondence between the Wittenberg theologians and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the 1570s.³ The shared critique over against Rome did not result in the expected support of the Greek Orthodox towards Reformation theology. As a matter of fact the mentioned correspondence shows that there was not much common ground between the parties, and the Patriarch asked the Wittenberg theologians to end the correspondence. In connection with those contacts, the already existing Greek translation of the Augsburg Confession played a certain role. The difficulties in finding

³ Dorothea Wendebourg, *Reformation und Orthodoxie: Der ökumenische Briefwechsel zwischen der Leitung der Württembergischen Kirche und Patriarch Jeremias II. von Konstantinopel in den Jahren 1573-81*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1986.

Greek equivalents for words like *meritum* and *satisfactio* clearly illustrates the difference between East and West at the time. Merit and satisfaction, as we know, were not only concepts used in Scholastic teachings on good works and on penance, respectively. Here the Reformers rejected the use of the concepts. Yet, since the High Middle Ages the doctrine of Satisfaction of Anselm of Canterbury had become the leading idea in talking about the importance of Christ's death for sinners. Regarding this issue the Reformers basically took over medieval atonement theology, and this has remained the dominant tradition in most Western theology until recently.⁴

A further, highly interesting point, which Per Erik Persson focused upon in one of his lectures, is the problem of synergism. As is well known, in the 16th Century, there arose a controversy in Lutheran circles over synergism. This controversy emerged out of the very heart of the Reformation concerns. At stake was the teaching on Justification through faith alone, without works. Hence, although the *sola fide* from the very beginning was a main concern of the Lutheran reformation, the issue of faith and works, or grace and good works, remained controversial.⁵ What is more, however, this testifies to the shared tradition of the West in contradistinction to the East. The relation of grace and free will, between faith and works, had been on the agenda of Western theology since Augustine and the Pelagian controversy.⁶ Not so in the East. The Eastern teaching on grace and free will has a quite different shape. Although free will is affirmed even in fallen human beings, Eastern theology of grace was never "pelagian" in any sense. To quote Per Erik Persson: "The decisive line goes for the Orthodox not between divine and human activity or between divine or human works...It is rather that we on the one side find the *theandric*, divine-human activity and on the

other the works of sin and death, those latter being a deformation of true humanity".⁷

What has been said so far is clearly focused upon by the Orthodox theologians that Per Erik Persson refers to in his writings. Orthodox theology of the 20th Century has clearly worked out its profile in contradistinction to Western theology. It is not only that Orthodox theology transcends the dichotomies and controversies of Western tradition. When reading the writings especially of Russian exile theologians one easily gets the impression that this type of Orthodox theology needs to be seen against the dark background of Western tradition with all its unnecessary controversies and deadlocks. And as a matter of fact, this has been so to a great extent. Anti-Western emotions and certain resentment characterize much of 20th Century Orthodox theology.

The Role of (Neo-)Scholasticism and German Idealism

There is an historical explanation for this resentment which I will only be able to hint at in this lecture. Briefly stated: The polemics over against the West in 20th Century Orthodox theology is as much directed towards its own recent past as it is a critique of contemporary Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. As a matter of fact Western, especially Neo-Scholastic textbooks were used in Russian Orthodox schools after the reforms of Tsar Peter, and even so in Greece after its liberation from Ottoman rule. Academies and theological faculties were built up in Eastern Europe after the models of the West, and German idealism, as is well known, became instrumental in the Russian religious renaissance of the 19th Century. For some time Latin was the language of education in the famous Kiev Academy and other seats of learning within the Russian empire.⁸

⁴ On the *Confessio Augustana Graeca* and the problems of translating *meritum* and *satisfactio* see Wendebourg, 155-62.

⁵ See e.g. art. "Synergism", by Christian Link in *Religion, Past and Present*.

⁶ See Otto Hermann Pesch, Albrecht Peters, *Einführung in die Lehre von Gnade und Rechtfertigung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1981.

⁷ Persson, "Synergismens problem...". My translation. – On Pelagianism, historically and as label on the heresy, see: art. "Pelagius/Pelagians/Semi-Pelagians" in: *Religion Past and Present*.

⁸ See Aidan Nichols, *Theology in the Russian Diaspora: Church, Fathers, Eucharist in Nikolai Afan*

Most importantly, however, in this story is that Orthodox theology took over many of the concepts and distinctions of Scholasticism and applied them to its own doctrine, leaving out of course teachings like *filioque* and the primacy and infallibility of the Pope.⁹ It should be added here, that a certain influence of Reformed theology also occurred in Orthodoxy during this period. The most famous example is Patriarch Kyrillos Loukaris (1570-1638) whose theology was rather Calvinistic.¹⁰

This fact might come as a surprise to many a reader of contemporary Orthodox theology. As is so strongly emphasized, Orthodox theology is based on the Greek Fathers from Irenaeus up to Gregory Palamas. Yet, this emphasis on the patristic grounding and the heritage of Orthodox theology is something that needs a comment. On the one hand this is of course correct. Even in those days when influenced by Western textbooks, Orthodox theology always referred to and quoted the Greek Fathers. Yet, the way Patristic sources were used was quite parallel to the use of sources in Western textbooks, mainly as testimonies for the doctrines taught. This, however, is exactly what has changed so drastically in both East and West during the 20th Century. The Patristic renaissance encompasses both Western and Eastern theology. The renewal of Orthodox theology that is so clearly seen in the writings of exile Russian theologians has its parallel in the Catholic *Nouvelle théologie* of Mid-Century France. It stands out as an important fact that the main figures of this renewal on both sides were acquainted and had a fruitful exchange.¹¹ The

Ecumenical movement, of course, and especially the Faith and Order Conferences were important meeting places for Orthodox theologians living in the West with Protestants and even ecumenically engaged Catholic theologians. The conclusion from all this is that theology does not evolve in confessional isolation. 20th Century Orthodox theology to a great extent emerged and was formed in an effort to overcome its recent captivity to Neo-Scholastic theology and to reconnect to the Church Fathers. This, however, was done simultaneously and in vivid exchange with the same movement on the Catholic side.

The Retrieval of Tradition

20th Century Orthodox Theology, therefore, has to be situated within the general movement of Christian Theology of that Century towards retrieving patristic sources and overcoming the confessional divisions. Yet, this is not the whole story. There are additional factors that came to characterize especially the Russian exile theology of the mid-20th Century. I'm thinking now of the intellectual and theological renewal in pre-revolutionary Russia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century. This again is an example of exchange and influence between the West and the East that does not fit neatly into the picture of a self-contained Eastern tradition that you obtain from authors like Vladimir Lossky. The influence, namely of romanticism and German idealism is discernible not only in the so-called Sophiology of Vladimir Soloviev and his followers. Even the Slavophil movement, which emphasized the characteristic Slavonic mentality and thinking in contradistinction to Western is clearly inspired by romanticism.¹²

nase'v, 1893-1966. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1989, 3-16 ("Russian Scholasticism"). See also art. "Kiev. II. Theological Academy", in: *Religion Past and Present*. – On the reception and use of Scholastic theology in the East see also: Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Reading of Aquinas*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2012.

⁹ This applies especially to Metropolitan Peter Mogila 1596-1647. See art. "Mogila, Petr", in: *Religion Past and Present*.

¹⁰ See art. "Lucaris, Cyril", in: *Religion Past and Present*.

¹¹ See Andrew Louth, "The patristic revival and its protagonists", 188-202 in: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* ed. By Mary B. Cun-

ningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2008, esp. 191-93.

¹² See Nicolas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Harper&Row 1963; Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov*. *Orthodox Theology in a New Key*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999; Michael Plekon, "The Russian religious revival and its theological legacy", 203-17 in: *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* ed. By Mary

Prominent Russian exile theologians as Georges Florovsky, Vladimir Lossky among others, were clearly aware of this dependence of sophiology upon German idealism. They distanced themselves from this and criticized the influence of philosophy on both Scholasticism and on Sophiology.¹³

So, to summarize this part, 20th Century Orthodox theology was determined by polemics towards (neo-) Scholastic philosophy and theology on the one hand, and German idealism on the other. This led to an emphasis on the integrity of the Eastern tradition as formed by the Greek Fathers up to and including Gregory Palamas.

Regarding Palamas, it is well known that Orthodox theology of the 20th Century is characterized by a renaissance for his theology. The neo-patristic trend of contemporary Orthodox theology might to a great extent also be labeled Neo-Palamite. Although never totally absent from Orthodox theology since the endorsement of some of his teachings at local Byzantine synods of the 14th Century, Gregory Palamas did not play the key role as catalyst for the assumed opposition between Eastern and Western theology, as we have learned from Lossky, Meyendorff and others. The essence and energies distinction, connected to the doctrine of *theosis*, and hence the rejection of the Scholastic doctrine of created grace, is traditional. Yet, the role of Palamas as the pivotal anti-Scholastic and symbol of what is distinctly Eastern seems to be a creation of the 20th Century.¹⁴

B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2008.

¹³ See Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Orthodoxy, Postmodernity and Ecumenism: The Difference that Divine-Human Communion Makes", 527-46 in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. 42 (2007) and Brandon Gallaher, "'Waiting for the Barbarians': Identity and Polemism in the Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky". In: *Modern Theology* 27:4 (2011), 659-91.

¹⁴ Marcus Plested, in his *Orthodox Readings of Thomas Aquinas* shows that Palamas was much more open towards Western theology, especially Augustine, and towards Scholasticism than has been assumed in recent Orthodox theology. See Chapter 2 (Gregory Palamas and the Latin West). He also clarifies the position of Barlaam the Calabrian as being fiercely anti-

This adds further to the characterization of 20th Century Orthodox theology, which I have given. It should be added, further, that many contemporary Orthodox theologians trace the Palamite distinction of God's essence and energy all the way back to the Early Church, at least to the Cappadocian Fathers.¹⁵ This, however, remains doubtful from a historical point of view. Clear, though, is that the Palamite distinction was never received in the West.¹⁶

Contemporary Dialogues between East and West

Coming now to my second part on the dialogue between East and West during the last fifty years, what most strikes you is this: The topics that I mentioned earlier as part of the Orthodox polemics over against Roman Catholic or especially (neo-) Scholastic theology are rarely even mentioned in the official dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. This testifies to the common renewal of 20th Century Orthodox and Catholic theology. The concept of "created grace", which sounds so offensive to an Orthodox ear, does not play any role in contemporary Catholic theology. Concepts and distinctions within the teaching and practice of penance and other typically Roman Catholic doctrines, like e.g. purgatory, seldom surface at all in the dialogues. I take it that those Scholastic teachings and definitions have been re-interpreted in contemporary Catholic theology in

Latin and anti-Scholastic. See esp. 54-57, 67. – Although there was clearly a "redécouverte du palamisme dans l'Orthodoxie russe" (de Halleux, 782-83), Palamas theology was never totally absent from Orthodox theology. See Gerhard Podskalsky, *Griechische Theologie in der Zeit der Türkenherrschaft (1453-1821)*. München: C.H. Beck 1988, 36-46. Cf also Yannis Spiteris, *Palamas: la grazia e l'esperienza. Gregorio Palamas nella discussione teologica*. Roma: Lipa 1996.

¹⁵ Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God. ET*. Bedfordshire: The Faith Press 1963.

¹⁶ Neither was it formally rejected. See André de Halleux, "Palamisme et Scholastique", 782-815 in: Id. *Patrologie et Oecuménisme: Recueil d'études*. Leuven: Leuven UP & Peeters 1999, esp. 786-787.

a way that is acceptable to the Orthodox. One might label this a sort of differentiated consensus.¹⁷ Instead, the official dialogue between the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches focuses on Church and Sacraments. In this area, there is a basic agreement between the two parts on the sacramental structure of the Church. It leads to difficulties, however, when this basic ecclesiological consensus is concretized in terms of the local and universal Church, the issue of primacy, and so on.¹⁸

Regarding the issue of *filioque*, this old controversy does not surface much in bilateral dialogues, but has been subject to thorough discussion and investigation in multi-lateral ones. The literature on the subject is growing continually. Although this issue may in the end not constitute the main obstacle for communion between East and West – contrary to the opinion of Vladimir Lossky – there does not seem to be a final solution within reach for the time being.¹⁹

¹⁷ The term was coined in connection with the Joint Declaration of Justification between Lutherans and Catholics signed 1999, although the term does not appear in the Declaration itself.

¹⁸ The documents from the official international dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches are published in English in *Growth in Agreement Vol. I-III*. Geneva: WCC 1984-2007. See also: *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue*. Ed. by John Borelli & John H. Erickson. Crestwood, NY: St. Valdimir's Seminary Press 1996. For an update on ongoing dialogues see also the website of the Papal Council for Promoting Christian Unity, URL: <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/index.htm> and the Home Page of the Centro Pro Unione, URL: <<http://www.pro.urbe.it/new/eng/index.html#>>

¹⁹ On the *filioque* see especially *The Greek and Latin Traditions regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit*. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, URL: <<http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/pcuufilq.htm>> *The Filioque: A Church Dividing Issue?: An Agreed Statement By The North American Orthodox - Catholic Theological Consultation*, URL: <<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/Orthodox/filioque-church-dividing-issue-english.cfm>>. See also: Michael Böhnke, Assaad Elias Kattan, Bernd Oberdorfer (Hg.), *Die Filioque-Kontroverse: Historische, ökumenische und dogmatische Perspektiven 1200 Jahre nach der Aachener Synode*. Freiburg i. Br.:

Regarding Orthodox-Protestant dialogue I would like to start by making an observation regarding the role of the Anselmian doctrine of satisfaction, which was the target of much 20th Century Orthodox theology.²⁰ This critique, however, does seldom surface in the dialogues. As a matter of fact; starting perhaps with the observation of Gustaf Aulén in his study *Christus Victor* the re-orientation towards patristic soteriology has become a dominant trend.²¹ As dominant as the doctrine of satisfaction was until recently in Western theology, as absent it seems to be today. One might, however, take even a step further. It is not only that the Anselmian doctrine of satisfaction has almost disappeared from the horizon of Western soteriology. The Eastern alternative, so to speak, has become more and more influential. I am thinking now of the doctrine of *theosis*, deification, that characterizes Eastern soteriology. In recent years this doctrine has become a widespread theme in both Catholic and especially in Protestant theology. The “discovery” (although this is not really new) that even in Western tradition there is a traditional talk of “becoming Gods” has been focused upon. Articles, books and conferences on this theme in Western authors flourish, such as Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, Wesley, etc.²² To what extent this is a phenomenon that justifies the talk of a *doctrine* of deification within the Western tradition is an open question. Yet deification is clearly a liturgical and spiritual theme also in the West.²³

Herder 2011 (Quaestiones Disputatae 245) and A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2010.

²⁰ See e.g. Vladimir Lossky, “Redemption and Deification”, 99-103 in: *In the Image and Likeness of God*. New York 1974. – Paradoxically, the well-known Byzantine Nicholas Cabasilas took over parts of Anselm's redemption theory. See Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, 101-102.

²¹ Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*. 1931. Reprint: Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.

²² See the various contributions to: *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*. Edited by Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung. Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson UP 2007.

²³ See Gösta Hallonsten, “*Theosis* in Recent Research: A Renewal of Interest and a Need for Clarity”, 281-93

That Luther used the language of deification in his early writings is well known and is the point of departure for the so-called Finnish interpretation of Luther, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s stimulated by the bilateral dialogue between the Lutheran Church in Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church. Tuomo Mannermaa and his followers contended that Luther taught a doctrine of deification. Although Luther did not consistently use deification terminology throughout his life, as a matter of fact his doctrine of justification should be interpreted in ways that brings it closer to the Eastern Orthodox 'transformationist' perspective than was the case with the Luther of the German and Swedish Luther renaissance. A quote from Luther *In ipsa fides Christus adest* ("Christ present in faith") is frequently used by Mannermaa to characterize this type of "deification doctrine".²⁴ The Finnish-Russian Orthodox dialogue documents contain promising passages on the affinity between Eastern deification and Lutheran Justification doctrine, although no full consensus has been achieved. Other Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues also have taken up the theme, without any great break-through, however.²⁵

The "Neo-Patristic Synthesis" and "Christian Hellenism"

Coming to the third part of this lecture, I would like to first sum up the foregoing like this. It

in: *Partakers of the Divine Nature...* For the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *Theosis*, see e.g. Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers With God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis*. Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009.

²⁴ Originally published in Finnish and German, Tuomo Mannermaa's most important work is now available in English: *Christ present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.

²⁵ Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959-1994*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht 1997. See especially Chapter 7.2 (Soteriology). See further *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*. Edited and with an Introduction by John Meyendorff & Robert Tobias. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press 1992.

stands out as rather clear that in fifty years retrospective much of the old controversial issues between the Churches have lost their acuity. It is not only in the Reformation-Rome controversy that so many of the traditional problems have lost their acuteness and even their sense and adequacy altogether. The "differentiated consensus" characterizing the Common Declaration on Justification between Lutherans and Catholics could be used as a catchword for inner-Western relations. Although there is no full consensus in sight or even communion between the Roman-Catholic church and the churches of the Reformation, we do not any longer spill much ink on traditional issues like *Heilsgewissheit* (assurance of salvation), purgatory or transubstantiation.²⁶ The same applies, to a great extent, to the East-West controversies. I referred earlier in this lecture to the heavy criticism especially of the Russian exile theologians of the 20th Century over against teachings, concepts and distinctions of Scholastic and Neo-Scholastic theology. As regards specific teachings and concepts, it must be emphasized, that this critique is not relevant any more. Yet, on a more fundamental level, much of the criticism is still there, at least through the continuing influence of authors like Florovsky, Lossky and the Greek Christos Yannaras. Common to those authors, as to many others, is the view that Western tradition, and Scholastic theology especially, is a deviation from the Great tradition of the undivided Church. In practice this means the Greek Fathers. There are degrees and variations in this view on Christian history, as e.g. in the judgments on Augustine.²⁷ Yet, the basic concept is the same: The Greek Fathers are the norm for Orthodoxy. Georges Florovsky even turned the thesis of Harnack on its head and contended that there was in fact no Hellenizing of Christianity but rather a Christianizing of Hel-

²⁶ For a summary on the achievements of Western dialogues see: Walter Cardinal Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group 2009.

²⁷ See Aristotle Papanikolaou & George E. Demacopoulos, "Augustine and the Orthodox: 'The West' in the East", 11-40, in: Papanikolaou- Demacopoulos editors, *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 2008.

lenism. This Christian Hellenism then, according to Florovsky, remains normative for the Church even in the West. Florovsky also coined the label “Neo-Patristic Synthesis” for the type of theology that he wanted to promote as an alternative to the degenerated Orthodox theology of the post-Byzantine era. This program did not only build upon the slogan “Back to the Fathers” but also took issue with the influence of philosophy in Western theology. According to Florovsky the Greek Fathers Christianized and transformed Classical culture but were not really dependent on (foreign) philosophical concepts and assumptions. Not so Scholasticism. Here pagan philosophy got the upper hand and transformed Christian faith into a philosophical system.²⁸ Orthodox theologians like Lossky, Florovsky, Meyendorff and many others viewed the reception of Aristotelian philosophy in High Scholasticism with suspicion. This was a deviation from true tradition and might explain many of the aberrations and controversies of Western theology.²⁹ A point that best illustrates this verdict, and the impact it has had on contemporary Western theology is Trinitarian theology. The mentioned Orthodox theologians, followed today by the influential John Zizioulas, contend that traditional Latin Trinitarian theology takes as its point of departure the common essence or substance of the Trinitarian God. By way of meditation on the unity of God Western theology allegedly deduces the three persons from this unity, or more specifically from the inner relations of God as a unity of substance. A philosophical notion of

unity of substance comes into play here, the Orthodox theologians critically remark. In contradistinction to this the Orthodox theologians emphasize that the Greek Fathers meditated upon the triune God departing from the person of the Father.³⁰ This is a point especially important to John Zizioulas.³¹ Contemporary Western Trinitarian theology has taken over this view and frequently faults Latin tradition for following a false line of Trinitarian theology. Jürgen Moltmann, to take but one prominent example, consciously teaches a “social Trinitarian theology”, emphasizing the inter-personal communion as the important point of the doctrine of the Trinity.³²

Overcoming the Stereotypes

Recent scholarship, however, has questioned this whole picture of the contrast between Eastern and Western Trinitarian theology. It is not difficult to falsify the statement that Augustine or Thomas Aquinas “start” their Trinitarian theology from the essence of God. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of the “monarchy of the Father” which is often propagated as something specifically Eastern, has always been a common dogmatic assumption of East and West. It is further not the case that Greek theology in this sense would be thoroughly “personalistic”. Tendencies towards “essentialism” and “personalism” with regard to Trinitarian theology are to be found in both traditions.³³ Recent research offers two interesting insights in this connection. First, the view held by modern Orthodox theologians contrasting Eastern “personalism” with Western

²⁸ See Brandon Gallaher, “Waiting for the Barbarians’...”, esp. 663-68. Cf. also Brandon Gallaher, “Georges Florovsky”, in: *Key Theological Thinkers: Modern and Postmodern*. Edited by Staale Johannes Kristiansen and Svein Rise. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate 2013.

²⁹ Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, 4: “But the most startling development in the Orthodox reception of Aquinas is that while his first emergence into the Byzantine world after 1354 was met with remarkable enthusiasm across the political and theological spectrum, the majority of modern Orthodox commentators have, by contrast, united in proclaiming Aquinas a *very bad thing*.” Plested further shows to what a great extent Aristotle was used within what he calls the characteristic “Byzantine Scholasticism”.

³⁰ This is a commonplace in contemporary textbooks. Cf. the critical assessment by Bruce D. Marshall, “Trinity”, in: *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, edited by Gareth Jones. Oxford: Blackwell 2004.

³¹ See esp. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 2008, Ch. 2.

³² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. ET, San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row 1981.

³³ See André de Halleux, “Personnalisme ou essentialisme trinitaire chez les Pères cappadociens?”, 215-268 in: Id. *Patrologie et Oecuménisme: Recueil d'études*. Leuven: Leuven UP & Peeters 1999.

“essentialism” in fact has a Western origin. The Roman Catholic scholar Théodore de Régnon seems to be the one that introduced the idea in his *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* 1892-98. This does not mean, however, that de Régnon held a simplistic view on the difference between Eastern and Western Trinitarian theology. Rather, his thorough and subtle study has been subject to a simplifying reception.³⁴ The second matter that should be mentioned here is that recent scholarship on the Trinitarian theology of Augustine has falsified many longstanding theses of the textbooks, as e.g. that Augustine distanced himself from Greek Trinitarian theology and embraced a basically Platonic emphasis on divine unity. Further, the role of the so-called psychological analogy for distinguishing between the divine persons has been overstated, and the role of Biblical exegesis underestimated. Hence, the distance between Eastern and Western theology is growing more and more tight.³⁵

³⁴ The Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart writes: “The notion that, from the patristic period to the present, the Trinitarian theologies of the Eastern and Western catholic traditions have obeyed contrary logics and have in consequence arrived at conclusions inimical each to the other – a particularly tedious, persistent, and pernicious falsehood – will no doubt one day fade away from want of documentary evidence. ... It was, learned opinion generally concurs, Théodore de Régnon who probably first “discovered” the distinction between Western and Eastern styles of Trinitarian theology...” *Rethinking Gregory of Nyssa*. Edited by Sarah Coakley. Oxford: Blackwell 2003 (111-131: Bentley Hart, “The Mirror of the Infinite: Gregory of Nyssa on the *Vestigia Trinitatis*”. Quote from 111). See further Sarah Coakley, “Introduction: Disputed Questions in Trinitarian Theology”, *Harvard Theological Review* 100:2 (2007), 125-38, especially 132-33 on de Régnon. Cf. also Michael Barnes, “De Régnon Reconsidered”, 51-79 in: *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995).

³⁵ See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010, Id. *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2004. – Sarah Coakley writes (reference of foregoing footnote, 132): “Once the false wedge between East and West in this early period is removed, certain sorts of polemicizing about the innate superiority of one approach over the other becomes suspect, and we are

The place of Augustine in the view of the history of 20th Century Orthodox theologians, it should be mentioned here, varies substantially. Whereas the Greek theologian John Romanides, followed by Christos Yannaras, contends that the “fall” of Latin theology starts with Augustine, Vladimir Lossky and others reckon Augustine as a common Father of East and West. To Lossky it is Scholasticism that introduces the wrong lines of thought, although his respect towards St Thomas is great. Given this background, one of the most promising signs of the times within contemporary Orthodox theology is the interest in taking a fresh look upon Latin tradition. A conference held at Fordham University, NY City, in 2007, addressed the place of Augustine in Orthodox tradition and contemporary theology. The conference volume *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* is highly interesting.³⁶ From this volume one might learn that Augustine was always venerated as a Saint and a Church Father in the East, although he was not translated until the 13th Century. Paradoxically, one of the stout defenders of Augustine in the East happens to be the Patriarch Photios in the 9th Century, a vehement critic of the *filioque*. Yet, his polemics on that point did not ramify Augustine. Even more of paradox, it seems, is the fact that after Augustine’s major work *On the Trinity* had been translated into Greek in the 13th Century, the great Gregory Palamas pondered it thoroughly. Although Palamas and Augustine were not in full agreement, this fact shows the extent to which our prejudices on historical opposites might be of rather recent provenience.

The book *Orthodox Readings of Augustine* testifies to a trend in today’s Orthodox theology,

returned to the texts themselves with fresh eyes, and – by implication – with fresh possibilities for ecumenical engagement. The marked capacity of Western systematians, in recent years, to self-flagellate about the shortcomings of their own Augustinian tradition, and to prefer instead the ‘Eastern promise’ of so-called social trinitarianism, looks suspect indeed once the misreadings on which such a propulsion has been based are brought into the light of day.”

³⁶ Aristotle Papanikolaou & George E. Demacopoulos, editors, *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*. Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2008.

at least in the English-speaking world. A new generation of Orthodox theologians is on their way to revise much of the judgments of the generation of Lossky, Florovsky and Meyendorff on Western tradition and its influence on Orthodox theology. As I remarked earlier, that generation of Russian exile theologians, as well as Greek theologians, in practice were taking a standoff with their own recent history and tradition. They wanted to get rid of the influence of Neo-Scholastic manuals and German idealism. As regards the rejection of Neo-Scholastic theological conceptuality and the turn to the Fathers, that generation of theologians clearly succeeded in their efforts.

The Future of Orthodox Theology

Regarding the relation of Orthodox theology to Western thought and culture, however, this is different. The Orthodox theologians of the 20th Century made a huge effort to get rid of the influence of German idealism that was so prominent a feature of the Russian religious revival in the 19th Century, specifically of the so-called Sophiology of Vladimir Solovjov and others. Yet, the Oxford scholar Brandon Gallaher has recently shown that the neo-patristic synthesis of Georges Florovsky was in fact taking over notions and assumptions from the German idealism that he vehemently condemned in the guise of Soloviev's and Bulgakov's sophiology. Further, the Catholic Tübingen theologian Johann Adam Möhler, whose theology was influenced by Schelling and the romantics, in his ecclesiology influenced Florovsky directly. Even the renaissance of patristic studies cannot be disconnected from Romanticism, but was rather inspired by it. The return to the Fathers and Romanticism, therefore, cannot be disjoined in the way Florovsky and other exile theologians thought. Brandon Gallaher contends that Florovsky and much contemporary Orthodox theology build upon a false opposition between East and West. The renewal of Orthodox theology in the 20th Century was in fact accomplished by designing an Orthodox identity in opposition to the West. As in the poem by the Greek author Konstantin Kavafis, "Waiting for the barbarians", the

Greeks needed the barbarians as the enemy against which their own identity becomes clear. And Gallaher concludes that Orthodox theology

in its assertion of its Eastern Orthodox identity needs someone who can fulfill the role of barbarian. It needs someone, that is, against whom it can define itself, embodying everything that is negative. However, by affirming its difference through condemning its Western barbarians, modern Orthodox theology has not found a solution to its confusion, but has actually become more dependent upon the West. Its polemicism blinds it to the fact that it actually draws its identity from the Other.³⁷

Brandon Gallaher is not alone among younger Orthodox theologians in this analysis. His views are shared with many others, as can be exemplified by the mentioned "Orthodox readings of Augustine". A brand new book by the Cambridge scholar Marcus Plested, has the title *Orthodox Readings of St. Thomas* and points in the same direction.³⁸ A volume on *Orthodox Constructions of the West* will be published this year. To quote again of Brandon Gallaher:

The future of Orthodox theology is presently widely discussed by Orthodox theologians in the wake of Florovsky. It would seem that the resolution of the current discussions depends much on a frank acknowledgement that a common Christian identity for both East and West and an effective response to the various versions of modernity cannot be constructed from a theological synthesis that retains a romantic Byzantinism and an anti-Western polemicism, for this, as we have argued, inevitably hides a secret dependence on the West.³⁹

³⁷ Brandon Gallaher, "Waiting for the Barbarians'...", 679.

³⁸ Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*. Oxford: Oxford UP 2012. – This remarkable book shows the constant interest and high estimation of Thomas Aquinas in Byzantine and even in early modern Greek and Russian theology, notwithstanding doctrinal differences and with some exceptional detractors. The book also gives a fine overview over the development of Eastern Orthodox theology from the 14th Century up until recently.

³⁹ Gallaher, "Waiting for the Barbarians...", 680.

The recipe of Gallaher, then, is to openly acknowledge the dependence of contemporary Orthodox theology on the West. And so he concludes: "Quite simply, Western European thought has become Eastern Orthodoxy's heritage".⁴⁰

The Mystery of Divine-Human Communion

Drawing this all too brief overview on recent developments in Eastern Orthodox theology to a conclusion, I would like to come back to the question, asked by Per Erik Persson in the early 1960s: What is the "distinctive character" and contribution of Eastern Orthodox theology? The answer it seems to me, must be somewhat adjusted. As has already been emphasized, most of the specific concepts, doctrines and controversies dividing different Christian traditions that were still in focus fifty years ago is not that relevant any more. This does not mean, though, that Eastern Orthodox theology has lost its distinctive character. It stands out very clearly that the Orthodox churches have given a substantial contribution to the ecumenical movement, and a non-polemical one at that. The Orthodox tradition has acted as a reminder to churches of Western tradition of the common Christian heritage of the Early Church. The Eastern tradition has contributed to a renewal of liturgical theology and practice in the West, and has inspired a retrieval of early Christian spirituality. As regards theology, I am convinced that Eastern Orthodox theology will preserve its distinctive character even if it abandons its sometimes-harsh polemical rejection of all that is Western. The acknowledgement among younger Orthodox theologians of the dependence on modern Western ideas does not make Eastern Orthodoxy less attractive for dialogue. The overstatement of Eastern distinctiveness in relation to specific Western conceptualities and currents of thought does not make up the heart of Orthodox theology. Let me take two of the most widely read Orthodox theologians as example, Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas. Both are part of the neo-

patristic school and both tend to overstate the specifics of Orthodox theology in relation to Western. The revision of anti-Western judgments to which I have referred has clear consequences for both theologians. Lossky's radical interpretation of the apophatic theology of Dionysios the Areopagite and his strong emphasis on the Palamite distinction between the essence and energies of God do not really promote a rapprochement with the West. Neither is it typical for Orthodox theology, at least not historically. And yet, Lossky remains a great theologian, always worth reading. The latter would definitely apply also to John Zizioulas who is still living and publishing. His Trinitarian theology is heavily dependent on a radical interpretation of Cappadocian theology and in that sense not negotiable with Western, even in the new and revised understanding of Augustine. And yet, it serves his fascinating and creative concept of Personhood. Interestingly, Zizioulas' theology in contradistinction to that of Lossky, does not connect constructively to the Palamite teachings. To Zizioulas it is not so much the divine energies that accomplish the deification of human beings. Rather, Zizioulas grounds the deification in the Eucharist. The Eucharist further is the place and act in which human beings enter into communion with the Triune God. The mystical, apophatic theology of Vladimir Lossky that aims at the ascension to the unknowable mystery of God does not play any prominent role in Zizioulas. And so, as the Greek-American theologian Aristotle Papanikolaou has worked out in a study on the two theologians, Lossky and Zizioulas follow quite different lines of thought, although remaining within the same tradition.⁴¹

⁴¹ Aristotle Papanikolaou, *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 2006. As regards Lossky, his specific position stands out especially clear in chapter 1-4 of his *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. ET, Cambridge and London: James Clark 1957. Zizioulas' writings consists mostly of collections of articles: John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark 2011. See also his *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark 2008.

⁴⁰ Ib.

Papanikolaou also contends that the shared and basic assumption of both Lossky and Zizioulas and so of Eastern Orthodox theology in general is that of the mystery of Divine-Human communion in Christ. And this applies to all 19th and 20th Century Orthodox theologians, whatever differences there are. The emphasis on the realism of this communion and hence the emphasis on *theosis*, deification, makes up the distinctive character of Eastern Orthodox theology.⁴² This might not sound very specific. After all, the be-

lief in the incarnation of the Son of God, his cross and Resurrection are common to all Christians. And yet, the firm adherence to the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas of the seven ecumenical councils in combination with the realism of Divine-Human communion in the process of deification or *theosis* by means of the sacramental life in the Church, this still makes the Eastern Orthodox vision both appealing and challenging.

Summary of Peder Nørgaard-Højen, "Det kirkelige embedes væsen og opgave. Lutherske bemærkninger til en økumenisk kontrovers." (pp. 19-30)

The article comments the Lutheran-Catholic controversy on the *nature and mission of the ordained ministry* from a Lutheran perspective. This controversial issue does not cease to cause severe difficulties between the confessions, although the notorious divergencies between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism are in fact less significant and compelling than the actual quarrels in this area suggest. The different function of the concept of the priesthood of all believers does not prevent both confessions from agreeing on the necessity and mission of the ordained ministry, and – all detailed differentiations notwithstanding – even their visions of ordination as the ecclesial authorization to life-long proclamation of the Gospel in word and sacraments have so much in common that it appears to be difficult to maintain them as good reasons for abiding by the separated churches. The Catholic understanding of apostolic succession as episcopal succession over against the Lutheran as a succession in doctrine implies a corresponding difference in the view of the episcopal office that – perhaps more than many other controversial issues – threatens to divide Lutherans from Catholics. However, the question may be raised if the actually prevailing agreement regarding the crux of the matter is not so substantial that it should not be allowed to cause further divisions, but rather express the necessity of a means, by which the church is maintained in the truth of the Gospel. Such insight, in turn, paves the way in both churches for considering together the possibility of a universal church ministry, and provided the necessary conversion and will to unity it ought certainly be possible to fulfill the common mission of all churches within the framework of different, but reconciled and therefore not divisive structures and theological systems.

⁴² Cf also the conclusion of Gallaher, "Waiting for the Barbarians...", Gallaher 681.