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ABSTRACT

**GENERAL PRIESTHOOD IN THE ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
AND IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE LEUENBERG AGREEMENTS**

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Key words: general priesthood, Leuenberg Agreement, Church, Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, unity in diversity

ABSTRACT

The work entitled “**General Priesthood in the Orthodox Theology and in the framework of the Leuenberg Agreements**” brings to light the Leuenberg theology on the one hand and the Orthodox theology on the other hand in order to present the relation of the two theologies strictly on the theme of general priesthood. This theme is of vital importance concerning the ecumenical dialogues, both from the past and from the future, because the recognition of the priesthood of all as being valid, means overcoming all the barriers preventing unity.

In the course of history we can see that there have been numerous ecumenical meetings where different chapters of theology have been discussed, according to the necessities of the times, in order to find points of convergence with a view to attaining a possible unity. Among these, one needs to mention as well the Leuenberg series of ecumenical meetings, which, beginning with the year 1994 and until now, have taken place every two years. The importance of these reunions consists in the fact that the 90 participant churches publish an agreement every two years, highlighting the common points of their theologies on different themes, and, moreover, underlining their agreement concerning the great chapters of theology.

The priesthood of all the believers is the point in which the theologies of all the Christian traditions are seriously put to the test, because finding a common point is practically almost impossible. The protestant world, in the framework of the Leuenberg Agreements, has tried to find convergence points first among the churches belonging to the CPCE solidarity, to have the possibility, after that, to raise the issue of an ecumenical dialogue between the CPCE and the Orthodoxy.

To understand the universal priesthood, it is not enough to content ourselves with the study of mysteriology and not at all with the expression “we are priests by baptism”. From an Orthodox perspective, to understand this extremely important part of theology, one needs to understand several chapters of theology, beginning with that of ecclesiology an ending with that of mysteriology, to see the relation to God of both the Orthodoxy and the Leuenberg Agreements.

For a correct understanding of the theology of general priesthood, it is necessary to know the great chapters of theology, for instance the ecclesiological chapter, mysteriology and the special relation between them.

The present thesis aims to present the two theologies first regarding the ecclesiological chapter and then to deal with the chapter of the Holy Mysteries in its profound sense. To be able to reach real conclusions on general priesthood, the thesis includes the full translation of three of the Leuenberg

Agreements to be able to realize a theological study comparing the two theologies, able to bring to light clear conclusions on the doctrine of the two traditions and on the relation between them.

The main ideas of this thesis presented comparatively aim to highlight the fact that the protestant general priesthood cannot and must never be considered the equivalent of the priesthood resulting from the Orthodox cheirotonia.

While in the Orthodox theology the general priesthood is received by the newly baptized by means of the Mystery of Chrismation, the Leuenber theology considers that it is received only by baptism. The two mysteries of the Orthodoxy by which man becomes a member of the general priesthood assures the participation of the newly-baptized to the union with Christ in the Eucharist and implicitly the participation to the life of the Holy Trinity, whereas in the Leuenberg theology the Chrismation is not recognized as mystery based on the consideration that baptism is enough for man to become a member of the general priesthood. According to the Orthodox theology, even though the Baptism and the Chrismation are united as ceremony, they are distinct mysteries, the first offering man forgiveness for the ancestral sin and for the personal sins in the case of an adult, while the second offers the general priesthood. The protestant theology understands things differently, affirming that baptism is sufficient to have general priesthood and consequently does not recognize Chrismation as sacrament. This is one of the points of divergence between the two theologies, because, from an Orthodox perspective, not recognizing Chrismation is equivalent to the absence of the universal priesthood.

A second problem emerging in the relation between the two theologies is that Protestantism makes no clear difference between general priesthood and cheirotonia-based priesthood, considering the priesthood acquired by baptism equivalent to that acquire by cheirotonia in the Orthodoxy. Here appear numerous misunderstandings, because this equivalence made by Protestantism has countless meanings and consequences.

The Orthodox theology and implicitly the Holy Fathers' writings present the meanings of the universal priesthood. Thus, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, speaking about universal priesthood, affirms: "We are priests by offering our whole being as a spiritual offering [in the Holy Spirit]"¹, while Saint Ecumenius explains the dignity of general priesthood saying that we are: "kings by having dominion over our passions, priests by the sacrifice of our bodies and prophets by instituting in the great mysteries"². The Orthodoxy has always supported its perspective according to which priesthood "is neither anti-hierarchic equalitarianism, nor clericalist tearing up of the unique body into two parts, but sacerdotal participation of all to the unique divine Priest by means of the two priesthoods"³.

¹Sf. Grigorie de Nazianz, P.G. 44, 1149 C, cf. P. Evdokimov, op. cit., p. 205.

²Sf. Ecumenius, P.G. 118,932 C.D., cf. P. Evdokimov, *L'Esprit Saint dans la Tradition Orthodoxe*, Paris, Les Edition du Cherf, 1969, p. 207.

³ P. Evdokimov, *L'Esprit Saint dans la Tradition Orthodoxe*, p. 197.

“The universal or the believers’ priesthood is related to the calling to give everything to God, to the calling to holiness. The believers’ priesthood needs to lead to an even greater likeness with God. It must be, just like Jesus, a total gift for the Father, not withholding anything for oneself, because only then He will give completely and will enter fully inside the believers, sanctifying them”⁴.

The unity searched for by the Leuenberg theology cannot be a full unity, and this is the reason why it affirms that: “An important contribution from the Protestant churches in this area is the conviction that the visible unity of the Church worldwide will be a differentiated unity. This is also valid for the structure of the ministry. Consequently, the hermeneutic task does not target a comprehensive ecclesial, but an overcoming of the differences, contributing to a more visible church unity”⁵.

At the same time, the Leuenberg theology claims that each human being must participate to the Church mission by their whole life. The ministries rely on Christ’s threefold ministry, receiving different charismas. “The ministries are renewed out of these charismas and the charismas in exchange are supported by the ministries”⁶. Those called by God to have special functions must be “endowed with holiness for the work of their ministry” and this edification of the Church is realized in an orderly manner⁷. This orderly understanding means, for the Leuenberg theology, that the ministries must not be understood hierarchically. These ministries are practiced as mutual ministry and do not have dominant rights.

Another basic idea of the Leuenberg theology and also an idea foreign to the Orthodoxy, is that “the Church is fully dependent on God’s grace, which is communicated specifically by the proclamation of the Evangel and the administration of the sacraments. From a reformed perspective, these two functions represent together the necessary, divinely instituted, signs of the true church (*notae ecclesiae*)”⁸.

A new difference between the two theologies is the idea used by Luther in the Catechism of Heidelberg, resumed and supported by the Leuenberg theology, according to which, from the entire human race, God’s Son is gathering his chosen congregation and is protecting it for the eternal life. This refers to what in the Orthodox theology is called predestination. God in His all-knowledge knows everything that is, yet predetermines nothing because He would contradict Himself by such a thing. The greatest gift given by God to man is freedom, the freedom lifting man up to the dignity of person able to receive God’ love, able to ascend, by his own determination and by the divine grace, to the deification according to grace. For this reason, in the Orthodox theology one cannot talk about a predestination of

⁴Pr. Gh. I. Drăgulin, Chipul preotului ortodox contemporan, in „Ortodoxia”, nr. 3 din 1973, p. 423;

⁵Amt, Ordination, Episkope – Ergebnis eines Lehrgesprächs der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa, ... p. 111.

⁶Vezi I Cor. 12 + 13, Rom. 12: 1 – 8; I Tim. 4: 14; II Tim. 1: 6. Cf. Material Resursă nos. 29 seqq. apud. Amt, Ordination, Episkope – Ergebnis eines Lehrgesprächs der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa, ... p. 116.

⁷Amt, Ordination, Episkope – Ergebnis eines Lehrgesprächs der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa, ... p. 117.

⁸Cf. CA VII; Confesiunea Geneva 1536, no. 18; Treizeci și nouă de articole Anglicane, Art. 19; John Wesley, Articole de credință Methodistă, Art. 13; LA 2.

those who are to be saved. Practically, the Leuenberg theology affirms that the Church is the community of people forgiven by God through the sacrifice of His Son, people who need to form a community of saints, yet not by the theandry between divine and human, but only by God's work.

A point of convergence is the main message of the Evangel, by which we confess that Christ is the author of our liberation from the slavery of sin and death, and the Church must preach this aspect by recognizing and confessing Christ, as the One uniting God with the people. According to a different order of ideas, the Church has its foundation in Christ, without Whom there can be no straightening of man. Here we must mention that this straightening of man is not realized under the form of a predestination but by a collaboration of man with the divine grace.

Another point of convergence between the two traditions is that God is present in His Church by the Holy Spirit in the work of preaching, baptizing and offering the Holy Communion, yet this convergence ends rapidly, because the Leuenberg document affirms that only these three elements are those by means of which God gathers the members of His Church, offering them salvation.

Regarding the Church as object of faith, the Leuenberg theology affirms that the Church must not be considered the equivalent of the historical churches or of their totality. In the protestant theology and implicitly in the Leuenberg theology, the Church is divided into two distinct parts, one unseen, object of faith, and the other one seen, historical, which can have different historical forms and expressions. Thus, the unseen Church is the community of God's Saints, specially chosen by Him for His Church, while the visible churches are historical institutions with different forms and traditions that can be changed any time. Moreover, seeing that the reconciliation of man with God and the perfection of mankind are divine attributes, it results that the Church cannot continue this work at all. The only work of the Church in the Leuenberg theology is to confess God's grace as salvation of the world.

The first part of this work deals with the most significant Leuenberg document entitled "Die Kirche Jessu Christi" – Jesus Christ's Church, and presents the common understanding of this chapter by the CPCE churches, which from this viewpoint agree all as one. The fact that the 90 protestant churches have agreed on this topic does not mean that they are also right and for this reason, in the first part of the thesis we presented in parallel the two theologies, out of the desire that the reader, beside the conclusions presented below, to be able to formulate his own conclusions.

Therefore, the document *Die Kirche Jessu Chiristi*, to lay the bases of the Leuenberg solidarity, makes the distinction between the Church fundament, form and mission. The foundation of the Church is defined as God's action, realized by Christ to save the human nation, while the Church is the believers' community. From here, it results that its form can vary depending on various factors. In other words, the unique Church manifests herself in history in many and varied forms. From the Orthodox perspective, the

foundation of the Church is the redeeming act realized by the embodied Son of God, by His Sacrifice, which He offered to God willingly, on the Golgotha. So far, there is agreement between the two theologies. The fact that the Leuenberg theology supports a thinking according to which the unique Church founded by Christ can take various forms in the course of history, due to the various geographic, political, social factors and especially according to the modality of interpretation of the Evangel, is a theology foreign to the spirit of the Orthodoxy.

The second part of this work deals with another agreement “Taufe im leben der Kirchen. Dokumentation eines orthodox – evangelischen Dialogs in Europa” – “Baptism in the churches’ life. Documentation of an Orthodox – Protestant dialogue in Europe”. The approach of this agreement is important because a correct understanding of Baptism could have favorable consequences regarding a possible Orthodox – Protestant, and at the same time could delineate a better understanding of the theology of universal priesthood resulting as a consequence of Baptism according to the Protestant vision and as a consequence of Baptism and Chrismation in the Orthodox theology.

This document considers as beneficial the mutual recognition of baptism as basic element of the unity of the churches. Concerning this topic, there are numerous points of agreement between the two traditions. The basic idea presented at the beginning of this agreement is that the baptism realized with water in the name of the Holy Trinity cannot be repeated. Here, the two theologies clearly express their agreement. A first difference brought to light regarding the baptism of the two traditions refers to the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which in the protestant theology includes the seal in the baptism, whereas in the Orthodox theology this seal is conferred in the Mystery of Chrismation, and is the basis of universal priesthood.

The part of the agreement supporting the unrepeatability of baptism supposes its mutual recognition, when practiced with water in the name of the Holy Trinity, yet this recognition suppose in the Orthodox theology also the recognition of the apostolic succession, for the one who performs the Mystery in the Church to have a valid cheirotonia.

The last part of this work deals with the general priesthood, comparing the Orthodox theology with the Leuenberg Agreement entitled Amt, Ordination, Episkope und theologische Ausbildung. The importance of this Agreement is highlighted by the ecumenical dialogues which raise, increasingly often, the problem of universal priesthood and of its mutual recognition. For both traditions, recognizing priesthood in its universality is not a problem, yet the real problems emerge when the Leuenberg theology considers the universal priesthood to be equivalent to the priesthood acquired by cheirotonia.

Many of the basic ideas of the above-mentioned Agreement converge with the Orthodox theology, yet only by half. Thus, while the text of the agreement affirms that the task of the Church is to transmit the Evangel by word in sermons, by Baptism and by the Eucharist, in the Orthodox Theology, beside these elements are also included the other Holy Mysteries, not recognized by the Protestantism, by which the main aim of the Church is realized, namely the transmission of the divine grace to her members.

A common point of the two theologies is visible when affirming the necessity of cheirotonia for the servant administering the Holy Mysteries. Yet, there appears right away the distinction between the two theologies, because the Leuenberg theology claims that serving after having received a cheirotonia is not at all different from the priesthood of the congregation, except for the fact that the latter has a mandate from the congregation to administer its sacraments. These services (ministries) are actually a mutual service where there are no dominant rights. Moreover, the text of the document affirms that the Orthodox theology misunderstands these ministries (services) and their cheirotonia, because the order of ministries proposed by the document *Die Kirche Jesu Christi* and accepted unanimously by the CPCE churches means no divine institution and no normative structure like the threefold ministry, but is just an order that can be changed any time, an order assuring that the three basic ministries are performed. The three ministries recognized by the CPCE churches, namely: ministry of the word and of the sacraments, diaconry and the ministry of the episcopate, are dedicated ministries (services) calling for a type of cheirotonia. Although the text of the document clearly affirms that there is no hierarchy whatsoever among the ministries, yet in one of the declarations it contradicts itself, affirming the ministry of the word and of the sacraments as indispensable to the church, and consequently in a way superior, because without it there can be no divine service. Then it comes back on this idea by a correction in which it says that the ministry of the word and of the sacraments is not superior to the other ministries, yet it is the visible sign of the existence of the true Church. The question that naturally comes to one's mind in this sense is: why is this ministry the visible sign of the true Church and not another ministry, since it has no superiority over the others?

Conclusion

The final conclusion of this thesis is that between the Orthodox theology and the Leuenberg churches solidarity there can and there must be ecumenical dialogues, yet, from the several conclusions drawn so far, the idea of unity is still far away, although there are some common ideas on baptism, the Church or the Holy Mysteries. The way to the future consensus will be long and hard given the many traditions with different theologies in the framework of CPCE, among which there is no full agreement. Maybe a real ecumenical dialogue will be possible only after the CPCE solidarity, namely the 90

churches included in it, shall have agreed not just on some theological fragments but on the whole theology. Practically, the CPCE churches do not share a single perspective theologically, but are rather, as the document states, as well, a gathering of churches of different traditions united in a solidarity that does not rely on the unity in Christ, but on compromise and negotiation, out of the desire that out of all the theologies present, by dialogue, a new theological thinking, a new Church, and why not, a new Christ may be created, able to reconcile them all. In a different order of ideas, a serious ecumenical dialogue between the Orthodox theology and the CPCE churches solidarity could be realized only after having reached an order free of division in CPCE, for this Leuenberg theology to be able, afterwards, to start an open and sincere dialogue with the Orthodoxy.

Leaving all these aside, a full unity between the Orthodox theology and the Leuenberg solidarity can be fully realized only by everybody's conversion to the Orthodoxy, the only one keeping the meaning of the Evangel unaltered, as it was left by the Holy Apostles of the embodied Son of God.

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