

Константин Юрьевич Субботин

УДК 234.12

к. фил. н., магистр богословия, ректор, Теологический институт
Евангелическо-лютеранской церкви Ингрии
(дер. Колбино, д. 25а, Ленинградская обл.,
Всеволожский район, Россия, 188680)
subb_konstantin@yahoo.com

*ОСВЯЩЕНИЕ И ТЕОЗИС В КОНЦЕПЦИИ ОПРАВДАНИЯ
СЕРГЕЯ СТРАГОРОДСКОГО*

В статье рассматривается сотериологическая концепция Сергея Страгородского, выраженная в его магистерской диссертации «Православное учение о спасении». Автор сравнивает позицию Страгородского с тем, как употребляется понятие «обожение» в православной традиции, а также оценивает ее с точки зрения конфессионального лютеранского богословия. Показано, что объем понятия обожения выражен в его диссертации в терминах «освящение», «святости», «единства с Богом». Таким образом, Страгородский описывает спасение в терминах, близких по значению к обожению. С точки зрения конфессионального лютеранского богословия сотериологию Страгородского можно описать как смешение понятий оправдание и освящение. Для Страгородского оправдание не является внешним юридическим актом, но внутренним изменением. Страгородский описывает оправдание как длительный процесс, происходящий при участии воли человека — так, как в лютеранском богословии описывалось бы освящение. В статье проводится параллель между таким смешением оправдания и освящения и взглядами Озиандера, осужденными в Формуле Согласия. Кроме того, показано различное понимание обожения в восточнохристианском богословии и у Лютера.

Ключевые слова: теозис, восточное богословие, сотериология, конфессиональное лютеранство, оправдание, освящение

KONSTANTIN YUR'EVICH SUBBOTIN

PhD in Philology, master of Theology, rector,
Theological Institute of the Evangelical Lutheran
Church of Ingria (der. Kolbino, 25a, Leningrad region,
Vsevolozhsk district, Russia, 188680)
subb_konstantin@yahoo.com

*SANCTIFICATION AND THEOSIS
IN SERGEY STRAGORODSKY'S UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTIFICATION*

The article examines the soteriological concept of Sergius Stragorodsky in his master's thesis «The Orthodox Teaching of Salvation». The author compares Stragorodsky's position with how the concept of «deification» is used in the Orthodox tradition, and also evaluates it from the point of view of confessional Lutheran theology.

Despite the fact that Stragorodsky uses the term «deification» only once in his dissertation when quoting, the analysis of the concept of salvation in this and his other works, as well as the definition of theosis by renowned Orthodox theologians, suggests that the scope of the concept of «deification» is expressed in his dissertation in terms of «sanctification», «holiness», «unity with God». Thus, Stragorodsky describes salvation in terms close in meaning to «deification».

From the point of view of confessional Lutheran theology, Stragorodsky's soteriology can be described as a confusion of the concepts of justification and sanctification. For Stragorodsky, justification is not an external forensic act, but an internal change. Stragorodsky describes justification as a lengthy process that takes place with the participation of the human will — the way Lutheran theology would describe sanctification. The article draws a parallel between this confusion of justification and sanctification and the views of Osiander condemned in the Formula of Concord. In addition, it is concluded that the comparison of the concept of «deification» in Eastern Christianity and the way Martin Luther used this term also has no basis.

Key words: theosis, Eastern theology, soteriology, confessional Lutheranism, justification, sanctification

One of the most famous and thorough examination of the Eastern-Orthodox soteriology can be found in the Master of Theology thesis of the renowned Russian theologian — Patriarch Sergius Stragorodsky. His «Orthodox Teaching of Salvation» is recognized as a milestone in the history of Russian Orthodox soteriology and a marker of a shift from the «Western forensic approach», predominant in the Russian Orthodox theology before 19th century, to the «Eastern synthetic approach».

However, do we find a conventional «theosis» soteriology in Stragorodsky's work? And what can be an evaluation of his approach from the standpoint of Lutheran confessional theology? These are the main questions of consideration in the following article.

In the opening speech before the defense of his Master of Theology thesis Stragorodsky stated that the gist of the work is «the idea of the identity of bliss and virtue, moral perfection and salvation».

In his thesis he made use of the term God-likeness to describe the essence and purpose of Christian life. It is the article «Eternal Life as the Supreme Good», he even equated his notion of God-likeness with much more common theological term «theosis», that is deification:

Deification, therefore, a subjective God-likeness, an arrangement of oneself according to God, is conceivable only under the condition of striving for God, that is, striving for that actual communion with Him, striving not only to be homogeneous, but also to be one with God. Therefore, Jesus Christ, representing the state of a perfect man, says: «We (that is, the Most Holy Trinity) will come to him and make our abode with him (John 14: 23)». God-likeness is not a complete state in itself, but it will be complete when it becomes a communion with God¹.

Florovsky makes use of the term deification as a essence of patristic teaching of salvation: «The purpose of life is in communion with God, in deification <...> For this purpose, the hierarchy is established. Deification is the assimilation and union with God»².

Likewise in his thesis Stragorodsky quoted Theodoros of Edessa's use of the term deification (θεώσις) to describe the purpose of our life:

«The purpose of our life», says Theodoros, Bishop of Edessa, «is bliss or the Kingdom of heaven or Kingdom of God, which is not only that we are

¹ Страгородский С. Вечная жизнь как высшее благо // Богословский вестник. 1895. Вып. 2. С. 195–213.

² Флоровский Г. Византийские Отцы V–VIII вв. Минск, 2006. С. 78.

going to see, so to say, the royal Trinity, but that we will receive the divine influence, and take deification and find this influence of the completion and performance of all the flaws and imperfection»³.

Even though it is only once that Stragorodsky made use of the term «theosis» in his *opus magnum*, it appears to be consistent with his description of salvation as sanctification. Later, in 1935, Stragorodsky criticized the Bulgakov's sophiology also for reducing atonement to the suffering of Christ and excluding «the moral side of atonement, deification». The meaning of Bulgakov's atonement should be limited to this «equivalent» because the other, so to speak, moral side of the atonement, the renewal and deification of human nature and its elevation to the last «God is all in all», belongs, according to Bulgakov, to the cosmic process of the gradual «osofification» of the creature or the return to the deity of the created Sophia⁴.

«Deification» (θεώσις) is a soteriological term, which means the closest connection of a person with God. Ioann Popov defined this concept as follows: «The presence of God in a freely created qualitative certainty of a moral character (i.e., in a person) is his deification»⁵.

According to Hilarion Alfeyev, a contemporary theologian and the former chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church,

the idea of deification was the central point of the religious life of the East, around which all questions of dogma, ethics and mysticism revolved. To profess the faith, to keep the commandments, to pray, to participate in the sacraments, all this is necessary <...> to achieve deification, which is the salvation of man⁶.

John Meyendorff is also convinced that «it is the deification (θεώσις) that the patristic tradition of the Christian East considers to be the ulti-

³ Страгородский С. Православное учение о спасении. Казань, 1898 // URL: <https://pravbeseda.ru/library//index.php?page=book&id=92> (22.12.2023). С. 99.

⁴ Указы Московской Патриархии преосв. Митрополиту Литовскому и Виленскому Елевферию № 1651 от 7 сент. 1935 // URL: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Sergij_Bulgakov/osuzhdenie-uchenija-prot-s-n-bulgakova-o-sofii/ (12.04.2024).

⁵ Попов И. Идея обожения в древневосточной церкви. М., 1909. Т. 1 // URL: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Ioann_Popov/trudy-po-patologii-tom-1-svjatye-ottsy-2-4-vv/1 (12.04.2024).

⁶ Алфеев И. Таинство веры. М., 1996. С. 221.

mate goal of spiritual life. It gives the mystical character of Byzantine spirituality. Deification <...> there is <...> free and conscious communion with the divine life <...> Byzantine spiritual writers assert the need for a personal encounter with Christ, which leads to the deification of the whole person in anticipation of the universal bodily resurrection»⁷.

Valerie A. Karras in «Beyond Justification: Orthodox Perspective» gives an overview of theological prerequisites of the doctrine of deification: 1) Original sin understood not as a guilt but rather distortion of our nature; 2) the distinction between the notions of «God's image» and «God's likeness»; 3) the affirmation of free will⁸.

Oleg Davydenkov connects deification with redemption in a cause-and-effect relation. In his «Dogmatic Theology» he states that the main consequence of the redeeming feat of the Savior, in which the purpose of human existence is fulfilled, is deification. After Christ's redemptive feat, deification is partially available to us already in our earthly life. However, the final and most perfect deification fathers see in an eschatological perspective⁹.

Michael Pomazansky speaks about Christological aspects of deification, namely deification of humanity in Christ:

The human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ, through its union with the divinity, participated in divine qualities and was enriched by them. In other words, it was «deified». And not only the human nature of the Lord Himself was deified. Through Him and in Him our humanity is also deified, for «He also Himself likewise took part in» our flesh and blood (Heb 2:14), united Himself in the most intimate way with the human race, and consequently united it with the divinity¹⁰.

According to Pomazansky's «Orthodox Dogmatic Theology», the term «deification» does not mean the same thing as the term «God-Manhood», so that a person, who is «deified» in Christ, is not placed on the path to personal God-manhood. In the person of Christ

⁷ Meyendorff J. Jesus Christ in Eastern Orthodox Theology. New York, 1975. P. 145.

⁸ Karras V. A. Beyond justification: an Orthodox perspective // Justification and the future of the ecumenical movement / Ed. by W. G. Rusch. Collegeville, 2003. P. 115.

⁹ Давыденков О. Догматическое богословие. М., 2013. С. 312.

¹⁰ Pomazansky M. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology. Platina, 2014 // URL: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Sergij_Bulgakov/osuzhdenie-uchenija-prot-s-n-bulgakova-osofii/ (12.04.2024).

the human body and soul did not pass over into the divine nature, but were only united with it, united «without confusion or change». As John of Damascus put it: «For there never was, nor is, nor ever will be another Christ consisting of divinity and humanity, Who remains in divinity and humanity, the same being perfect God and perfect Man» (Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, Book 3, chapter 3)¹¹.

Pomazansky is very careful not to confuse grace-given sanctification of man and the restoration of the pre-fallen condition of man. When Soloviev stated that the first Adam united in himself the divine and human nature, in a way similar to their mutual relationship in the God-manhood of the incarnate Word, he violated this mutual relationship. If this is so, then the deification of man is not only a grace-given sanctification of man, but is a restoration in him of this very God-manhood, a restoration of the two natures. But this is not in accordance with the whole teaching of the church, a teaching that understands deification only as a receiving of grace. St. John of Damascus writes: «There was not and there will never be another man composed of both divinity and humanity, apart from Jesus Christ»¹².

Gnedich writes that Church Fathers expressed the authentic, typical only of the Eastern Christianity teaching of theosis: atonement as the deification and healing of human nature (raising it to its former ideal state). The researcher evaluates it as «a direct advantage of it over the Western externally legal idea of satisfaction». Gnedich insists that this opinion is also recognized by representatives of non-Orthodox researchers and cites Karl Holl in a study on St. Simeon the New Theologian (Enthusiasmus und Bussgewalt beim Griechischen Monchtum, 1898) who notes that the idea of satisfaction does not exist in Eastern theology¹³.

Vladimir Lossky opposed redemption and deification as a negative and a positive facet of the divine plan. Redemption, according to his *Orthodox theology*, is not the final goal, for the atonement that was made necessary because of our sins is not an end but a means to the only real goal: deification. Salvation itself is only a negative moment: the only essential reality remains union with God. When Lossky puts a rhetoric question «What does it matter to be saved from death, from hell, if it

¹¹ Pomazansky M. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Гнедич П. Догмат искупления в русской богословской науке. М., 2007.

were not to lose oneself in God?» it sounds very similar to Stragorodsky's exposition of salvation as the state of holiness.

Those who are tempted by the teaching of the *felix culpa* often forget that, in destroying the domination of sin, our Saviour opened to us anew the way to deification, which is the ultimate end of man¹⁴.

Sergey Bulgakov tends to distinguish theosis and redemption as two separate approaches. He speaks of the doctrine of redemption and deification as «two channels» that have been outlined in patristics since ancient times. Bulgakov admits that both of the approaches are equally valid. One shouldn't detract the preferable deification way «from the truth of the first one», *i.e.* redemption¹⁵.

Petr Gnedich quoted Stargorodsky letter (№ 2139 of 31 December 1935) in which he emphasized incompleteness of atonement without the following deification of the fallen nature:

Hence my remark that the redeeming power of Christ's sufferings is to be found in the banishment of sin. Of course, I do not mean here any mechanical banishment of sin and even less moral encouragement or encouragement of people to fight against sin. I mean the totality of the phenomena signified in our dogmatics by the renewal and deification of human nature, by the assimilation of the fruits of the atonement by individuals, and so on¹⁶.

In this letter Stragorodsky called deification «the real ground» or the way to correct and supplement the abstract propositions of the «legal», forensic theory of justification. It was the only way to avoid the extremes in its interpretation and not to forget the actual content of the explicit dogma in the process of reasoning.

Jaroslav Pelikan in his study of «*The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*» attempted to trace the concept of deification in the works of Maximus the Confessor. The definition of deification in his works as «a gift to those who believe in Him, namely eternal deification» stresses «the grace as essential to deification» but simultaneously suggests that «the free will of man is not excluded from participation in the process»¹⁷.

¹⁴ Lossky V. *Orthodox theology: An Introduction*. Crestwood, 1978 // URL: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/Vladimir_Loskij/orthodox-theology-an-introduction/ (12.04.2024).

¹⁵ Bulgakov S. *The Lamb of God*. Grand Rapids, 2002. P. 387.

¹⁶ Гнедич П. *Догмат искупления...*

¹⁷ Pelikan J. *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom*. Chicago, 1977. P. 11.

This concurs with what Lossky points out in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers. According to St. Basil, reported by St. Gregory of Nazianzus, God created man like an animal who has received the order to become God. To execute this order, one must be able to refuse it. God becomes powerless before human freedom. He cannot violate it since it flows from His own omnipotence. Lossky contrasts monergism of creation with synergism of deification:

Certainly man was created by the will of God alone, but he cannot be deified by it alone. A single will for creation, but two for deification. A single will raise up the image, but two wills make the image into a likeness¹⁸.

Lossky also looks at deification as a logical consequence of the relationship between Christology and soteriology: just like Christ has unity of person, our nature is authentically assumed by God and the incarnation is a «physical» restoration, there can be a real union between man and God. Otherwise, the whole doctrine of salvation loses its ontological foundation. «We remain separated from God. Deification is forbidden. Christ is no more than a great exemplar. And Christianity becomes morality, an imitation of Jesus»¹⁹.

Vladimir Moss is one of very few Eastern Orthodox theologians who does not only state the novelty of theosis economy of salvation but also points out the spiritual dangers of such an approach. According to Moss, deification or theosis, belongs to the new soteriological concepts that undermine the traditional Christian concepts of sin, redemption and the Last Judgment.

«God became man, so that men should become gods». This patristic dictum going back to the fourth century was rediscovered with enthusiasm by theologians of the twentieth century at the time that they rediscovered the teaching of the Holy Fathers, especially Saints Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas, on the divine light and uncreated grace²⁰.

In his *New Soteriology* (2009) Moss calls the new trend of soteriology, with its references to the divine light, uncreated grace and deifica-

¹⁸ Lossky V. *Orthodox theology...*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Moss V. *The new soteriology* (2009) // URL: https://www.academia.edu/10214003/THE_NEW_SOTERIOLOGY (12.04.2024). P. 74.

tion, a «revolution» in the teaching of the faith. From the moral angle it can be evaluated as a subtle spiritual pride.

The tragedy is that, in the new soteriologists, the loftiness of this vision is combined with a pride that is in its own way no less pharisaical. They become intoxicated by the goal rather than humbled by their distance from it. They forget that while the goal of the Christian is indeed to become a god, it was the premature desire to attain precisely the same goal in a manner contrary to God's will that led to Adam and Eve being expelled from Paradise²¹.

Moss argues that Orthodox dogmatics has a definite order of exposition, and each step must be fully and correctly understood before going on to the next step. In this *ordo salutis* a profound understanding of original sin requires a prior understanding of the original creation. The necessity of the Redeemer and of His sacrifice on the cross is incomprehensible if the true predicament of fallen mankind is not appreciated. The acquisition of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and especially her sacramental life is inconceivable without the economy of the Son that made it possible. And finally, deification and the resurrection of the dead presuppose the prior presence of the Spirit of life in those who are being saved in the church.

According to Moss, it is not only the patristic part of the tradition but also the liturgical texts and the prayer practice that disagree with the deification approach:

Is not that the church in her prayers cries out for nothing: «O Lord, save us!» not: «O Lord, deify us!» While we long for both salvation and deification, and while the two undoubtedly go together in the end, we cry out humbly for deliverance from sin before we ask for the still greater gift of glorification, as sinners for whom salvation is by no means yet assured. It is the new soteriologists' reversal of this relationship, and their concentration on the more «exciting» and exalted teaching on deification at the expense of the more basic and better-known teaching on salvation, that reveals that inner pride which is the cause of their heretical assault on the justice of God²².

Prominent Serbian Orthodox theologian, Justin Popović, described the ultimate goal, the whole purpose of the divine-human economy

²¹ Moss V. The new soteriology (2009).

²² Ibid. P. 76.

of salvation, as deification, dehumanization, christianization, trinitization by which «a person becomes god by grace» and grace as «the deifying, god-making power of the trinity Deity»²³.

As we see, there is no agreement or a clear doctrinal statement about the notion of deification among Eastern Orthodox theologians. However, one can conclude that deification is one of its characteristic features. It is mostly placed in the soteriological system as the goal or purpose of salvation, the way of salvation itself or as the second, subjective side of salvation, following the objective justification.

Stragorodsky implicitly described salvation in terms, similar to deification. One can observe that in Stragorodsky's thesis the volume of the term «God-likeness» correlates with the volume of the term «theosis»:

Godlikeness, which is the essence of true life, is unthinkable for a person if he remains only alone, that is, if he will go to the Godlike path only of perfection, regardless of God. Man can become like God only when God will be with him in a living union, in a self-conscious, sincere mutual communion²⁴.

In his thesis Stragorodsky expressed the volume of the notion «deification» in terms of «union with God»²⁵, sanctification, sanctity, holiness²⁶. The essence and the source of eternal life, according to Stragorodsky, is holiness. It is holiness that restores our likeness to God. The essence and the ultimate goal of justification is the change of the direction of the will and life of a person, it is in holiness²⁷.

Justification is <...> a moral entity. Its essence consists in changing the life of a person, a change that is only completed by grace, but it is produced by the will of a person²⁸.

Stragorodsky spoke of incompleteness of salvation and justification, because for him it is a continual process of sanctification. In his Master of Theology thesis he stated that «The state of the believer cannot be more than a threshold and preparation for salvation or justification, and is not salvation or justification itself». Stragorodsky explained justification

²³ Popovic J. God entered into the depths of Human life // URL: <https://pravoslavie.ru/100011.html>

²⁴ Страгородский С. Православное учение о спасении. С. 98.

²⁵ Там же. 237.

²⁶ Там же. С. 101.

²⁷ Там же. С. 202.

²⁸ Там же. С. 203.

through the language of union with God. This union with God implies turning away from sin or «giving up sin and turning to God»:

The man is sure that only God will save him, but let him stretch out his hand himself to take the right hand of God that helps him. It is not enough to wish, even if sincerely, life according to the law of God, it is necessary to begin it on your own²⁹.

Stragorodsky accused Roman Catholics and Protestants of confusing justification and sanctification. However, he himself made no clear distinction between the simultaneous acquittal act of God's mercy and the life-long process of sanctification that follows it. And even though Stragorodsky did not explicitly use the term deification, the way he described salvation corresponds with the content of this term.

The comparison of Eastern Orthodox teaching of deification and Stragorodsky's rendering of the doctrine of justification with Lutheran Confessions would not be full without relating to the usage of the term theosis in the works of Doctor Martin Luther.

The research of Martin Luther's mentioning theosis is associated with the name of Tuomo Mannermaa. His conjecture that Luther's view on salvation can be best described in terms of Eastern Orthodox concept of theosis led to establishing of the so-called The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther. It is important to note that Mannermaa stated that the external impulse for this new wave of Luther studies in Helsinki came from outside the boundaries of Luther research. It came from the ecumenical dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church that was initiated by Archbishop Martti Simojoki at the beginning of the nineteen-seventies³⁰.

Mannermaa's conclusions are grounded on interpretation of scarce fragments in Luther's sermons and his *Lectures on Galatians* of 1531/1535. Mannermaa pointed out that FC SD III cannot possibly intend to reject the doctrine of Luther's Galatians commentary, because Article III concludes with an express approval of that commentary: «If anybody regards anything more as necessary by way of a detailed explanation of this high and important article of justification before God, on which the salvation of our souls depends, we direct him for the sake of brevity to Dr. Luther's beautiful and splendid exposition of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians».

²⁹ Страгородский С. Православное учение о спасении. С. 237.

³⁰ Mannermaa T. Why Is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research // Union with Christ. Grand Rapids, 1998. P. 1–20.

Kurt E. Marquart in his article, «Luther and Theosis», investigates whether it is well vindicated by Mannermaa that Luther's «in faith itself Christ is present» speaks of Christ in us (*in nobis*) rather than Christ out of us (*pro nobis, extra nos*), and therefore resembles Osiander. Marquart drew the inference that these are two different types of indwelling that are implied by Luther and Osiander. The rejected fallacy is not that in «faith itself Christ is present», but that faith looks «also to his divine nature in so far as it dwells and works in us» for justification. In other words, it is rejected that faith justifies in so far as it produces inner renewal or sanctification. It is a question of «this indwelling» or «such indwelling», that is, Osiander's sort of «indwelling of God's essential righteousness» that is rejected. Luther's *in ipsa fide Christ adest* «in faith itself Christ is present» is quite untouched by the rejection of Osiander's fancies³¹.

It is the inseparable connection of a man and Christ, indwelling of Christ in a person only through faith that is explained in Luther's «Lectures on Galatians»:

Since Christ is now living in me, He abolishes the Law, condemns sin, and destroys death in me. These foes vanish in His presence. Christ abiding in me drives out every evil. This union with Christ delivers me from the demands of the Law, and separates me from my sinful self. As long as I abide in Christ, nothing can hurt me. Christ domiciling in me, the old Adam has to stay outside and remain subject to the Law. Think what grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me, thanks to that inseparable conjunction between Christ and me through faith!³²

There is no place for neoplatonic or palamism discourse here. Luther's concept of union with Christ or Christ's indwelling through faith implies imputing Christ's righteousness. It is not a gradual, life-long process of assimilation of God-likeness, but an instantaneous imputation of external righteousness of Christ that is expressed by Luther as «indwelling».

Whereas Eastern Orthodox understanding of deification parallels it to incarnation of Christ, Luther's exposition of «God-likeness» contrasts them. In his sublime comment on Psalm 5:2–3 Luther articulates the difference between Christ's mysterious incarnation and «divinization» of a sinner through Christ's Cross and faith. «This is the reign

³¹ Marquart K. E. Luther and Theosis // Concordia Theological Quarterly. 2000. Vol. 64. P. 201.

³² Martin Luther. Commentary to the Epistle to the Galatians / Trans. by Th. Graebner. Grand Rapids, 1949. P. 68–85.

of faith, in which the Cross of Christ holds sway, throwing down a divinity perversely sought and calling back a humanity with its despised weakness of the flesh, which had been perversely abandoned». It is the reign of God's divinity and glory He will conform us to the body of His glory, that we might be like Him, kings and sons of God like the angels.

Another important observation that Marquart made is Mannermaa's wrong perception of Christology in the Formula of Concord. The Finnish theologian ascribed to the separation of «the person (*persona*) and the work (*officium*) of Christ from one another. However, the Formula of Concord is consistent with Luther, viewing Christ's merit inseparable from His Person:

Our righteousness rests neither upon his divine nature nor upon his human nature but upon the entire person of Christ, who as God and man in his sole, total, and perfect obedience is our righteousness. Faith thus looks at the person of Christ, how this person was placed under the law for us, bore our sin, and in his path to the Father rendered to his Father entire, perfect obedience from his holy birth to his death in the stead of US poor sinners (FC SD III, 55, 58).

The result of Mannermaa's analysis is a surprising conclusion that «The subdivision into justification and sanctification, which established itself within later Lutheranism, is as such no central distinction in the theology of Luther»³³.

Donald Arthur Carson points out that it is the same idea of substituting the language of imputation and objective justification with the language of «union with Christ» that predominated the negotiations around the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*:

Many have pointed out that in the Joint Declaration of Lutherans and Catholics, the shocking element was not simply that both sides indulged in slippery language to mask substantial differences, but that when the Lutherans articulated their own position they managed to avoid all reference to imputation, preferring instead «union with Christ» language. But how is such language to be understood? Those with an inside track to the discussions assert that it was tacitly understood in theosis categories — which of course ends up sacrificing the Reformation understanding of justification altogether³⁴.

³³ Marquart K. E. Luther and Theosis. P. 203.

³⁴ Carson D. A. Vindication of imputation // Justification: what's at stake in the current debates / Ed. M. Husbands, D. J. Treier. Westmont, 2004. P. 72.

A thorough research of Martin Luther's understanding of «Christ in us» (*in nobis*) shows that it is fundamentally different from the theosis theory. The deployment of Luther's texts to prove coherency between Lutheran understanding of justification and Eastern Orthodox teaching of deification is a forced argument. An attempt to reread Luther's texts through the lens of theosis and the language of «union with Christ» presents a presupposition for such distorted interpretations of Luther's heritage as the New Finish School. It is also a prerequisite for compromising Lutheran theological identity in interconfessional dialogues with Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Stragorodsky's exposition of the doctrine of justification presented an attempt to equate justification and sanctification. In order to give such an approach a proper evaluation through the lens of the Lutheran Confessions it is necessary to state what is the confessional Lutheran view on the relation of sanctification and justification.

Johannes Andreas Quenstedt differentiates between a wide and a narrow sense of «sanctification»: the former including justification (as in Eph 5:26, Heb 10:10) and the latter identical with renewal in the strict sense (as in Rom 6:19, 22, 1Thess 4:3–4, 7)³⁵.

Franz Pieper defined sanctification in the narrow sense as «the internal spiritual transformation of the believer or the holiness of life which follows upon justification».

Pieper unfolds the idea of the relation between justification and sanctification in two ways. There is an inseparable connection (*nexus indivulsus*) between the two but also there is a certain order. Justification always precedes sanctification *ordine causarum et effectum*³⁶. That is consistent with the very clear statement of the Book of Concord:

For good works do not precede faith, neither does sanctification precede justification. But first faith is kindled in us in conversion by the Holy Ghost from the hearing of the Gospel. This lays hold of God's grace in Christ, by which the person is justified. Then, when the person is justified, he is also renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, from which renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works then follow (FC SD III, 41).

Another important aspect of Lutheran understanding of justification and sanctification is the explicit designation of the subordination

³⁵ Lutheran Cyclopedia // URL: <http://cyclopedia.lcms.org> (1.11.2020).

³⁶ Pieper F. Christian Dogmatics. St. Louis, 2003. Vol. 3. P. 7.

of man's activity and cooperation to God and His power. It is cooperation that is possibly only and as long as the Holy Ghost empowers it. The Lutheran Confessions ascribe the beginning of regeneration and renewal exclusively to the Holy Ghost acting through the means of grace, the Word and Sacraments. A man «can and should cooperate» with God in this process, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit and «still in great weakness». So the ability of a justified person to cooperate does not occur from our carnal natural powers, «but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Ghost has begun in us in conversion». The Lutheran Confessions render the Biblical teaching on regeneration in such a way that the renewal of a converted person is completely dependent on guidance of the Holy Spirit. «As soon as God would withdraw His gracious hand from him, he could not for a moment persevere in obedience to God» (FC SD II, 65–66).

Furthermore, the Lutheran Confessions emphasize man's inability to reach any sort of perfection or completeness of sanctification in the course of earthly life. There is plenty of Biblical evidence of limits to regeneration or renewal of a converted person. The understanding of imperfection of sanctification is one of the keys to its correct exposition. The Formula of Concord explicitly states that we receive only the first fruits of the Spirit, and the new birth is not complete. The combat and struggle of the flesh against the spirit remains even in the elect and truly regenerate men:

Every Christian experiences in himself that at one time he is joyful in spirit, and at another fearful and alarmed; at one time ardent in love, strong in faith and hope, and at another cold and weak (SD III, 68).

The question of sanctification is interconnected with the question of good works and their necessity for salvation, the question addressed in the Fourth Article of the Formula of Concord. It articulates with all the Biblical evidence that sanctification and good works are not necessary for salvation, denouncing George Major's affirmation as well as similar incautious statement of Melancthon in the Leipzig Interim.

We believe, teach, and confess also that good works should be entirely excluded, just as well in the question concerning salvation as in the article of justification before God (FC Ep. IV, 7).

There are several ways in which the doctrine of justification represented by Stragorodsky differs essentially from the Lutheran Confes-

sions. Firstly, in contrast to the Lutheran Confessions that describe justification as a judicial act of God which consists of non-imputation of sin and imputation of Christ's righteousness, Stargorodsky described the main point of justification as a «conversion of man from sin»:

...to believe that non-imputation is the essence of justification means to speak only of indispensable assumption of justification, but not of the very justification. It is certain that everyone who turns to God asks first for forgiveness and receives it; but it does not mean that in the moment of the sacrament in God Himself some special act of reconciliation with hitherto unloved sinner takes place; the change occurs in the person and it is in the reconciliation of him with God. Thus the main thing in justification — not Protestant pronouncing righteous, but conversion of man from sin to life according to God, a moral revolution. So indeed the Orthodox Church has taught and continues to teach³⁷.

Thus, justification does not take place outside of us but is rather described as an inner change, a voluntary mental alteration. The reconciliation comes from the new sinless state of a reborn man. «Voluntary suppression of evil is the most essential part of justification. It is, so to speak, the very way, by which the sins of people are absolved»³⁸. Stragorodsky stressed that forgiveness of sins does not take place «in an outward forensic way». Because, according to his thesis, justification should not be reduced to a change of God's attitude to a sinner. Justification is based on a fundamental mental change of a sinner himself, a new life orientation, completely opposite to the former. Justification implies that «the sin ceases to belong to the soul, it gets destroyed».

Secondly, unlike Lutheran Confessions that describe justification not as a long-drawn-out process, but something that occurs in a moment, not something partial but always perfect and complete, Stragorodsky perceived justification as a «path», spiritual development of what has been received in Baptism:

St. Macarius of Egypt says: the foundation of the path toward God is to walk the path of life with great patience, preparation, humility, spiritual poverty and meekness. This is how a man can obtain justification in himself and I imply the Lord Himself under «the justification». Here it is said about life after Baptism, but this life, as we will see it later, serves only the development of what was received at Baptism. When a man

³⁷ Страгородский С. Православное учение о спасении. С. 168.

³⁸ Там же. С. 183.

is baptized, he does not assimilate only what had been done by the Lord, but perceives by means of his decision the Shrine, i.e. life according to the will of God³⁹.

Here Stragorodsky equated justification and life in Christ. Justification is not an instantaneous act of acquittal but a continuous process of gradual regeneration. It is described through the terms «life in Christ», «walking in truth», «spiritual feat» and constant «spiritual fight». The core of this regeneration process is voluntary ascetic effort of a believer.

Thirdly, while Lutheran Confessions exclude participation of human will in justification, Stragorodsky stresses the importance of human will. In Stragorodsky's argumentation the engagement of free will in justification is the key to understanding of the beginning of a new life in a man which non-orthodox lack. Sergius attributed to Roman Catholics and Protestants such an understanding when the result of justification is so-called «self-moving righteousness», which comes unto man and begins to act in him besides, and even contrary to his consciousness and will. Stragorodsky characterized such an approach as «foreign to any laws of spiritual life».

Salvation and, in particular, justification for the Orthodox is a free moral state, although it can be done only with the grace of God. To be reborn by grace a man should facilitate his revival himself⁴⁰.

Stragorodsky's dealing with the term grace appears to be another fundamental contrast to Lutheran understanding. Grace occupies a secondary position in the system of Stragorodsky. It is always mentioned in the context of free will of a person. Grace is either kindling, assisting or completing man's voluntary efforts. Stragorodsky wrote that grace does «much» in salvation but it needed active participation of its receiver too. Sergius compares grace to an arrow that needs an archer to shoot it.

Salvation can't be an outer forensic or physical act, but must be a moral action; <...> it implies a person performing this action himself, although with the help of God. The grace, although it acts, although it does everything, but by all means from within freedom and conscientiousness. This is the very Orthodox basics and it shouldn't be forgotten in order

³⁹ Страгородский С. Православное учение о спасении. С. 188.

⁴⁰ Там же. С. 197.

to understand the teaching of Orthodox church about the very means of salvation⁴¹.

Stragorodsky views reconciliation as an act entirely dependent on human decision. In his Master of Theology thesis he repeatedly stated that it is not God, who never changes, that needs to be reconciled with a sinner and change His attitude to him. It is the sinner himself that needs to go through spiritual transformation and get rid of sin in order to reconcile with God. This original interpretation of reconciliation is renounced by the Book of Concord as well. The Apology declares that reconciliation does not depend on our merits. «Because if the remission of sins were to depend upon our merits, and reconciliation were from the Law, it would be useless. For as we do not fulfil the Law, it would also follow that we would never obtain the promise of reconciliation» (Apol. IV: 41, 42).

The Lutheran Confessions describe reconciliation as a mutual act based solely on Christ's merit. It is only due to Christ as Propitiator and only for His sake that God the Father may become reconciled to us. «The remission of sins is obtained by faith alone, when we comfort our hearts with confidence in the mercy promised for Christ's sake. Thus, therefore, we are reconciled to the Father, and receive remission of sins when we are comforted with confidence in the mercy promised for Christ's sake» (Apol. IV: 80, 81).

Sergius Stragorodsky's Master of Theology thesis of «The Orthodox Teaching of Salvation» contains an original understanding of the doctrine of justification that has very much in common with Antony Khrapovitsky's reception of this doctrine. It can be characterized as very much opposing the Lutheran Confessions as it described justification as an inner process and regeneration of the pre-fallen moral state of human nature that can be achieved by free will during earthly life. This perception of the doctrine of justification can be viewed as the foundation of Stragorodsky's teaching on salvation and is consistent with his regeneration/sanctification approach.

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