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Calian's "Theology Without Borders: Encounters of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Tradition" - Book Review

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Book Review

Carnegie Samuel Calian. Theology Without Boundaries: Encounters of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Tradition. Philadelphia: Westminster/John Know Press, 1992.

Sam Calian practices what he preaches in this slim volume. That is, his writing embodies what he advocates: "a psychologically undogmatic, open-ended, and joyful style"(p.40) of Christian confession and theologizing. He warns himself and all of us in his Preface against any "supernatural congeniality", but then goes on to practice almost every other kind. Our new historical context of global "village Christianity" requires him, and the boundless nature of God's gracious Spirit" enables nothing less.

Theologically, this entire discussion might be characterized as a meditation on the boundless grace of the Holy Spirit, who as the "universal bishop of the oikoumene" guides the church toward "pneumatic consensus" in their interpretation of ecumenical councils(chap. 1); and who in the larger context for this ecclesiological work, has guided the whole historical process from the beginning toward the realization of that unity in diversity which is the gift of "catholicity in its fullness" (chap. 2). Despite the "fragmented theologizing" in "yesterday's world" we, therefore, may and must "work in and through the Holy Spirit toward the vision of one church acting in harmony within the world"(chap. 8).

Calian celebrates God's grace historically in his fascinating study of the ecumenical efforts of Patriarch Cyril Lucaris and his "Eastern Confession of the Christian Faith" in the seventeenth century, which responded dialogically to the protestant reformation(chap. 4). He also discerns such grace in the secularized spirituality of Nikos Kazantzakis, because he is convinced that "the search for an abiding spirituality transcends tradition, institution and geography"(chap. 7).

Calian's confidence in the universal work of the Holy Spirit in his basis for advocating a "theology without boundaries". Though I basically share this theological perspective and ecumenical praxis, Calian has a greater confidence in the Spirit's guidance of contemporary technological developments than this reviewer can muster. He writes that the theologian should join the technologist as "creative partners under the Lord of universal history and of the cosmic process, whose ways are manifest in the very forms and energies of life"(chap. 8). The Orthodox perspective he critically analyzes(pp.76-77), which resists some aspects of technology as a western form of secularism, also seems to me to have something more to say for it than Calian expresses.

All committed to ecumenical relations with Orthodox churches, however, will find much benefit in 1) Calian's analysis of the role of the ecumenical councils in the history of our church relations(chaps. 1 and 2) his advocacy that theologians of the reformation help the Orthodox in the nascent criticism of the "history of transmission of her traditions", while learning from them not to reduce revelation to history(chap.2 and 3) his support for the Orthodox as they recover from a period of harassment and move from a defensive to a critical stance, which might affirm both human finitude and freedom as scripture and

tradition are interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit(chap. 4) his articulation of "tradition, time and truth personified" as the triangle of eschatological hope that grounds a spirit of openness and a theology without boundaries(chap. 8).

The value of this book is then primarily theological, or so it seems to this theologian. Those readers primarily interested in church society relations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, however, will probably be disappointed. Though there are some interesting allusions to such issues scattered throughout, only one chapter is devoted to this concern. Even here Calian's primary interest is the history of the relations of the Balkan churches' with Constantinople. Due to the fact that all of his discussion of the modern period relates to the time before the fall of the communist governments, little of it is now relevant, except the general perspective that secularization and urbanization require Orthodoxy to overcome its ghetto mentality and any continuing attempt to maintain their identity through isolation.

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