

Brief Note concerning the Eastern Orthodox Church and its contact with Lutheran Reformers

Source of Information: Augsburg and Constantinople, by George Mastrantonis. 1982, Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press.

The majority of books dealing with the 16th century Reformation barely mention the Eastern Church or, if they do, simply note that after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks (1453), the centers of Eastern thought and activity largely shifted to Kiev and (especially) Moscow.

This book offers information on contacts between European reformers and Constantinople in that century. The book is a translation of the correspondence carried on primarily between Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople (1572—1579) and Lutheran theologians at Tuebingen. The correspondence is dated between 1573 and 1582 and included Patriarch Jeremiah's response to/critique of the [Altered] Augsburg Confession that had been supplied to him in a Greek translation probably accomplished by Melanchthon himself.

As background information to this correspondence we are informed that earlier, in 1559, Melanchthon had sent a cordial letter to Patriarch Joasaph II of Constantinople (1555—1565). Joasaph even sent Deacon Demetrios Mysos to Wittenberg and the emissary stayed as Melanchthon's guest for about six months. Melanchthon is said to have expressed surprise that the Eastern Church has survived in Constantinople during the 100 years of Turkish domination.

Deacon Mysos was sent back to Joasaph with a Greek translation of the Augsburg Confession and a letter from the Wittenberg Lutherans to the Patriarch. However, there is no evidence that Mysos ever returned to Constantinople or that the Patriarch ever got the letter or translation. A dozen years of apparent silence followed.

Tuebingen, in particular Jacob Andreae and Martin Crusius, initiated the later series of correspondence, that is chronicled in this book. Professor Stephen Gerlach served as the messenger. Several exegetical and theological treatises were sent to Jeremiah II for his perusal and response, and there appeared to be a sincere desire to win the Patriarch to the cause of the Reformation.

Incompatibility of theology between the two parties became apparent early on. As might have been predicted, there were disagreements over the use of "filioque" and on the doctrines of original sin, free will, the priesthood, the relation of justification and good works, the invocation of the saints, and others. Ultimately the Patriarch asked that correspondence cease, since the Lutherans did not adequately honor the fathers (church tradition and dogma). The Tuebingen faculty assented and signed off cordially. Overall, it should be noted that the tone of friendliness and the desire to be helpful characterized the literary exchanges.

There is no evidence presented or information given on any continuation of correspondence after this series of communiqués.

Writer Mastrantonis offers a succinct and probably very accurate appraisal of why the relationship between Tuebingen and Constantinople eventually resulted in disappointment and closure. *"It appears that the Orthodox underestimated the importance of Scripture [to the Lutherans] and that the Lutherans underestimated Sacred Tradition [in the eyes of the Patriarch]* (p. 17).