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THE NUMBER AND AUTHORITY OF THE ECUMENICAL COUNCILS IN THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION

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ABSTRACT: Whilst Bullinger's CHP accepts the decisions of the first four ecumenical councils, no description has been produced concerning their criteria. Based on the common features of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon, the Apostles' Council of Jerusalem would fit the pattern, with one exception: it had neither been convened nor supervised by secular rulers. Why did the strongly Bible-oriented Reformers fail to 'renumber' the ecumenical councils starting with the one in Jerusalem, as they did e.g. with the Decalogue or the sacraments? Apparently, they acquiesced in the already established state of affairs to appease the contemporary secular powers, whilst preserving Chalcedon's Christological and soteriological heritage.

KEYWORDS: Second Helvetic Confession, Apostolic Council, ecumenical council, Bullinger, Swiss Reformation, church and magistrate

The *Second Helvetic Confession* (*Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, hereafter: CHP) adopted very early by Scottish and Hungarian Reformers (in 1566 and 1567 respectively), mentions the Early Church Councils in its second chapter concerning the interpretation of the Bible as well as in Chapter 11 dedicated to the person and work of Jesus Christ. These Councils appear to define the historical-doctrinal framework of the CHP's Christological and soteriological teaching:

> And, to say many things with a few words, with a sincere heart we believe, and freely confess with open mouth, whatever things are defined from the Holy Scriptures concerning the mystery of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are summed up in the Creeds and decrees of the first four most excellent synods convened at Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon – together with the Creed of blessed Athanasius, and all similar symbols; and we condemn everything contrary to these. And in this way we retain the Christian, Orthodox and Catholic faith whole and unimpaired;

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knowing that nothing is contained in the aforesaid symbols which is not agreeable to the Word of God, and does not altogether make for a sincere exposition of the faith [Et ut paucis multa huius causae dicamus, quaecunque de incarnationis Domini nostri Jesu Christi mysterio definita sunt ex Scripturis Sanctis, et comprehensa symbolis ac sententiis quatuor primarum et praestantissimarum synodorum, celebratarum Niceae, Constantinopoli, Ephesi et Chalcedone, una cum beati Athanasii symbolo, et omnibus his similibus symbolis, credimus corde sincero, et ore libero ingenue profitemur, condemnantes omnia his contraria. Atque ad hunc modum retinemus inviolatam sive integram fidem Christianam, orthodoxam atque catholicam: scientes, symbolis praedictis nihil contineri, quod non sit conforme verbo Dei, et prorsus faciat ad sinceram fidei explicationem.] (CHP XI, 18, trans. by Philip Schaff).

The above conclusion of the CHP's Christological and soteriological chapter is worthy of our attention. The signatories are promoting the regular, yet from a theological perspective not entirely justifiable tradition, according to which 'the first and most excellent synod' of the Christian Church was held in Nicaea in 325, during the time of Constantine the Great. Of course, with this affirmation we do not intend at all to diminish the importance of the Council and Creed of Nicaea. Nonetheless, from a theological perspective it is undoubtedly justified to begin the numbering of 'ecumenical' councils, i.e. of ecclesiastical gatherings representing Christian believers living in every part of the inhabited or contemporarily known world, and expressing their universal faith both in time and space, with the assembly of the Apostles in Jerusalem as described in Acts 15. In this paper we intend to investigate the question of the authority of Early Christian Councils in the sixteenth century.

It adds to the peculiarity of the issue at hand, that the exact criteria of an 'ecumenical' council were never properly defined with precision during Early or Mediaeval Christian times. To quote only the most obvious example: on the one hand, there were no western participants at the Council of Constantinople in 381, which had been intended and convened by Theodosius I to be a regional council, i.e. restricted to the eastern part of the Empire, yet it ultimately became labelled as 'ecumenical', despite later criticisms brought against it from the West because its third canon had labelled Constantinople as the new Rome. See e.g. the *Tome of the Easterners* addressed to the Council of Rome in 382, which labels the Council of Constantinople of the preceding year as 'ecumenical synod' (οἰκουμενικὴ σύνοδος). The text of the *Tome* is in Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 9, 13 (Theodoret 1954, 293).

On the other hand, the Roman Council of 382, undoubtedly designed to be ecumenical and presided over by Pope Damasus, never became elevated to this status, even though the Easterners sent three delegates there. The three eastern emissaries, namely Cyriacus, Eusebius and Priscianus brought the *Tome of the Easterners*, the

letter in which the fathers gathered again to Constantinople in 382 declined the invitation to the council of Rome due to various reasons, yet authorised these three to be their representatives at the Roman council. See Theodoret, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 9, 9 (Theodoret 1954, 291-292).

Furthermore, if we consider the story of the *two councils* held in 431 in Ephesus, the dilemma increases. As it is known, from among these two separate priestly gatherings the one presided over by Cyril of Alexandria came to be labelled as 'ecumenical', yet the most important theological document, i.e. the *Antiochene Formula*, which ultimately became the *Formula of Reunion* and thus the basis for reconciliation in 433 between the opposing parties, had been produced by John of Antioch's *conciliabulum*, i.e. 'the little synod', more specifically by Theodoret of Cyrus. The text of the *Antiochene Formula* is part of the letter of the members of the *Conciliabulum* sent to the emperor via the *comes* John see (ACO I, 1, 7, 70, l. 15-22). In his letter addressed to Theodoret (ACO I, 4, 153-154), John of Antioch implies that the Bishop of Cyrus was in fact the author of the *Formula*. [For a more detailed discussion of this issue see Bright (1903) II, 338; Mandac (1971); Pásztori-Kupán (2006), 11-16.]

In addition, Cyril's council did not only fail to provide a commonly agreeable theological expression of faith, but at its sixth session held on 22 July 431 rather forbade emphatically the production of any credal formulae, thus attempting to block all fruitful discussion and progress in the following manner:

> The holy council determined that nobody is to bring forth, write, or compose any other creed apart from [or "beside"] that which was determined by the holy fathers gathered in Nicaea together with the Holy Spirit. [ὥρισεν ἡ ἁγία σύνοδος ἑτέραν πίστιν μηδενὶ ἐξεῖναι προφέρειν, ἢ γοῦν συγγράφειν, ἢ συντιθέναι παρὰ τὴν ὁρισθεῖσαν παρὰ τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων τῶν ἐν τῇ Νικαέων συναχθέντων σὺν ἁγίῳ πνεύματι.] (ACO I, 1, 7, 105).

A meticulous and incontrovertible clarification of the genre of 'ecumenical council' happened neither during the age of Reformation, nor in later times until the present day. The horizontal and vertical, i.e. geographical and temporal universality of the Church, however, would demand from an ecumenical council to represent not only the Christian believers of the inhabited world, but also to connect with its teaching to the truths that had been uttered and accepted by those who walked before us in faith during the time of grace. Additionally, if we were to examine the common features of Church Councils labelled as being 'ecumenical' throughout the history of Christian doctrine, then the following aspects seem to be fundamental constituents of this 'universality': 1. a theological problem in need of a solution, and thus the necessity to express the faith; 2. the gathering of representatives of Christendom, who debate the

problem and reach a consensus; 3. the ascertaining of the result (by putting it in writing), and presenting it to the entire Christian community, i.e. to all local churches.

The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem is in possession of all the aforementioned aspects, yet in the relevant literature and by the very numbering of the 'ecumenical' councils (Nicaea being constantly referred to as 'the first'), speaking in strictest terms, it is not 'ecumenical'. The apparently astute workaround, by which one should call this gathering of the first Christian leaders in Jerusalem as the 'apostolic' rather than 'ecumenical' council (thus considering it, so to say, to be 'above' the others), is in fact a hardly convincing attempt to circumvent the actual problem. One should note that the term 'apostolic' rapidly became a standard epithet of the Christian Church and of various offices in the earliest centuries (see e.g. the endings of ancient credal formulae or expressions like 'apostolic see', 'apostolic tradition', 'apostolic succession' etc.), so it hardly carries any extra weight when applied to the Council of Jerusalem, exactly because this application is not and has never been exclusive. Thus, the apparent elevation of the gathering of the Apostles in Jerusalem from among the so-called 'ecumenical councils' does not emphasise, but rather weakens the importance of the decision that had been taken there. Let us remember only the still lurking theological dissensions concerning the relationship between the two covenants, the elected status of a community, a group or a nation and other related themes, which – at least according to Acts 15 – had been clearly and adequately solved there and then. So, the question remains: what prevents the Council of Jerusalem to be 'ecumenical'?

Taking the idea one step further, in our effort to discover every common attribute by which a synod can be considered 'ecumenical' indeed, we find that the Council of Jerusalem still lacks a peculiar feature by comparison to the others: namely, that it had not been convened at the initiative of any secular power, and political rulers or their representatives were not involved in its proceedings. The opportunity, however, was there, since Cornelius, the Roman centurion, who had been baptised together with his household by Peter (Acts 10:1-48), the event which brought about the theological dilemma in the first place (Acts 11:1-18), even before the dissensions in Antioch (Acts 15:1-2), was the representative of the contemporary secular authority. Nonetheless, in Acts 15 there is absolutely no mention of Cornelius being either at or around the place of the Apostles' meeting, despite the fact Peter unmistakably alluded to the centurion's conversion and baptism together with his household during the council's proceedings (Acts 15:7-9). The Apostles' Council could thus exemplify an archetype or paradigm for the idea of an 'ecumenical' council, which would be entirely different from all the others organised since 325 with imperial involvement. Could this be the very essence of the problem?

The importance of the above question cannot be disregarded even if we analyse the reception of the ecumenical councils from the perspective of the sixteenth century. The Reformers gained a certain reputation by applying biblically founded corrections to various church doctrines even in cases when they had to go against some long-established traditions, which they considered as being theologically objectionable. In short, becoming 'unpopular' amongst the contemporary Roman Catholic theologians was the least of their worries. Yet, they did not disturb the already established order or sequence of 'the first synods' e.g. by labelling the Apostles' Council as 'the ecumenical council No. 0', albeit from their own theological perspective this would have been fully justifiable, similarly to the well-known *solus/sola* formulae. This is peculiarly interesting in the case of CHP itself, since in its second chapter the signatories themselves emphasise as a basic principle that not only the individuals (e.g. the Church Fathers), but even the councils themselves, including their definitions and canons (*conciliorum definitiones vel canones*) can be subjected to biblically-based corrections:

> Wherefore we do not despise the interpretations of the holy Greek and Latin Fathers, nor reject their disputations and treatises concerning sacred matters as far as they agree with the Scriptures; but we modestly dissent from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to, the Scriptures. Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter; seeing that they all, with one consent, will not have their writings equated with the canonical Scriptures, but command us to prove how far they agree or disagree with them, and to accept what is in agreement and to reject what is in disagreement. In the same order also we place the decrees and canons of councils. Wherefore we do not permit ourselves, in controversies about religion or matters of faith, to urge our case with only the opinions of the fathers or decrees of councils; much less by received customs, or by the large number of those who share the same opinion, or by the prescription of a long time. Therefore, we do not admit any other judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided. So we do assent to the judgments of spiritual men which are drawn from the Word of God. [Proinde non aspernamur sanctorum Patrum Graecorum Latinorumque interpretationes, neque reprobamus eorundem disputationes ac tractationes rerum sacrarum cum Scripturis consentientes: a quibus tamen recedimus modeste, quando aliena a Scripturis aut his contraria adferre deprehenduntur. Nec putamus, illis ullam a nobis hac re iniuriam irrogari, cum omnes uno ore nolint sua scripta aequari canonicis, sed probare jubeant, quatenus vel consentiant cum illis, vel dissentiant, iubeantque consentientia recipere, recedere vero a dissentientibus. Eodem in ordine collocantur etiam conciliorum definitiones vel canones. Quapropter non patimur, nos in controversiis religionis vel

> fidei causis urgeri nudis Patrum sententiis aut conciliorum determinationibus, multo minus receptis consuetudinibus, aut etiam multitudine idem sentientium, aut longi temporis praescriptione. Ergo non alium sustinemus in causa fidei judicem, quam ipsum Deum, per Scripturas Sanctas pronunciantem, quid verum sit, quid falsum, quid sequendum sit, quidve fugiendum. Ita judiciis nonnisi spiritualium hominum, ex verbo Dei petitis, acquiescimus.] (CHP II, 2-4, trans. by Philip Schaff).

During their consistent application of the above *sola Scriptura* principle, the Reformers managed to introduce and establish quite significant changes within the ecclesiastical practice. If we limit our list only to the issues concerning numbers: the reduction of the seven sacraments to two based exclusively on Biblical arguments or the renumbering of the Commandments within the Decalogue were both quite serious and bold actions carried out steadfastly despite Rome's harsh criticism. In comparison to these, the renumbering of the ecumenical councils by inserting the Council of Jerusalem before that of Nicaea would have been justified, together with a significantly less resistance from Rome, due to the conspicuousness of the biblical example. And yet, it did not happen. It is difficult to imagine that the very question simply did not occur to the signatories of CHP, the more so since they upheld the primacy of Scripture even against the decisions of the councils. Failure to do so is strange also because Calvin himself discusses the Early Church Councils in a separate paragraph in his commentary on Acts 15:2, and although he does not label the Council of the Apostles as being 'ecumenical', as the context bears witness, he regards it as the ideal example, whilst complaining about certain synods held later, even referring to Gregory Nazianzen's 'grievous complaint' about them:

> To the same end were all holy synods assembled since the beginning, that grave men, and such as were well exercised in the Word of God, might decide controversies, not after their own pleasure, but according to the authority of God. This is worth the noting, lest the Papists pierce any man with their loud outcries, who, to the end they may overthrow Christ and his Gospel, and put out all the light of godliness, thrust upon us Councils, as if every definition and determination of men were to be counted a heavenly oracle; but if the holy Fathers had their sitting at this day, they would cry with one mouth, that there was nothing more unlawful for them, neither did they mean anything less than to set down or deliver anything without having the Word of Christ for their guide, who was their only teacher, even as he is ours. I omit this, that the Papists lean only unto untimely Councils, which breathe out nothing but gross ignorance and barbarism; but even the best and most choice must be reckoned in that number, that they may be subject to the Word of God. There is a grievous complaint of Gregory Nazianzen extant, that there was never any Council which had a good end.

> What excellency soever did flourish and was in force in the Church, it cannot be denied but that it began to decay a hundred years after; therefore, if that holy man were now living, how stoutly would he reject the toys of the Papists, who, without all shame, most impudently bring in the jugglings of visors instead of lawful Councils, and that to that end, that the Word of God may pack, so soon as a few bald and foolish men have set down whatsoever pleased them? (Calvin 1844, II, 33, trans. by Christopher Fetherstone)

The reference to Gregory Nazianzen's opinion about the gatherings of bishops expressed in his *Epistle* 130 *to Procopius, prefect of Constantinople* written in 382 is indeed spot on. In his own words,

> If I am to write the truth, my inclination is to avoid all assemblies of bishops, because I have never seen any Council come to a good end, nor turn out to be a solution of evils. On the contrary, it usually increases them. You always find there love of contention and love of power. (Gregory 1964-67, II, 19-20).

From the Reformers' perspective we have all the necessary ingredients in Calvin's above exposé to renumber the 'ecumenical' councils: the absolute primacy and exclusive authority of the Word of God is upheld, the example of 'all holy synods assembled since the beginning', where grave men, 'well exercised in the Word of God' decide controversies, yet 'not after their own pleasure', but according to God's authority. Admittedly, this excellency within the Church 'began to decay a hundred years after', moreover, even the very complaint of a famous holy Father of the fourth century is recorded concerning the fact that he had never seen a good end of any synod. Considering that Gregory Nazianzen in his letter to Procopius in fact referred particularly to his experiences at the so-called 'second ecumenical council' (!) of Constantinople of 381, where he stepped down as patriarch of Constantinople and leader of the Council, we have here an entire arsenal of arguments to justify the ornamentation of the Council of Jerusalem with the 'ecumenical' epithet. And lo, even Calvin shuns to state the obvious.

Returning now to our main theme, on the one hand the signatories of CHP defend 'the Orthodox and Catholic faith' (*fidem Christianam, orthodoxam atque catholicam*), thus connecting to the universal faith labelled 'Orthodox' in the East and 'Catholic' in the West. On the other hand, they consider the basis of this faith to rest within the credal formulae of the councils deriving from the 'sacred Scriptures' (*ex Scripturis Sanctis*), yet fail to mention the Council of Jerusalem as the archetype of all councils. Furthermore, in defence of their own Catholicity, apart from a confession attributed erroneously to Pope Damasus (the creedal formula originally annexed to

CHP and ascribed to Damasus is not his work, although the famous pontiff had a confession of his own, see Hahn 1897, 275), they quote the very decree of Emperor Theodosius the Great issued on 27 February 380, entitled *Cunctos populos*, and attach it to their confession, a decree by which the emperor himself defines the correct and universal, i.e. Catholic teaching, and enumerates its legitimate representatives – at least from the Emperor's perspective, namely Damasus, Bishop of Rome and Peter, Bishop of Alexandria. The Latin text of *Cunctos populos* is in *Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 1, 1 – 2, 1 (http://www.ancientrome.ru/ius/library/codex/theod/liber16.htm; also in Sozomen, *Hist. eccl.* 7, 4).

Theodosius issued another decree immediately after the Council of Constantinople (on 30 July 381) to confirm its decisions, in which he mentions by name all the important bishops considered to be the pillars of orthodoxy in the following order: Nectarius of Constantinople, Timotheus of Alexandria, Pelagius of Laodicea (in Syria), Diodore of Tarsus, Amphilochius of Iconium, Optimus of Antioch (in Pisidia), Helladius of Caesarea (Basil's successor), Otreius of Melitene, Gregory of Nyssa, Terentius of Scythia and Martyrius of Marcianople (today: Veliki Preslav, Bulgaria) (*Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 1, 3 http://www.ancientrome.ru/ius/library/codex/theod/liber16.htm).

Accordingly, the biblical precedent, otherwise so characteristic of the Reformation and the Reformers, is omitted, but the reference to the secular authority that convened the Council of Constantinople in 381 is included as a justification for the authors/subscribers of the creedal formula. Without drawing any far-reaching conclusions from the above, it is perhaps permissible to assume that the very fact that the Reformers needed the support of secular authorities (including rulers, princes, cantons, magistrates, etc.) just as much as their Early Church predecessors did, may have played a role indeed in the compilation of the CHP's appendix.

Nonetheless, the question may arise that if the Council of the Apostles in Jerusalem could/should be called ecumenical, is it relevant to the main themes and teachings of the later ecumenical councils, especially in terms of Christology and soteriology, or, as it was called in the Early Church, concerning the οἰκονομία? Is it precisely because of God's 'house rules' regarding our salvation that we need to deal with this issue?

The answer is undoubtedly positive, moreover: it is of utmost importance. For the events described in Acts 15 are not simply about the reconciliation or some kind of compromise between the *religious practices* of Christians of two different origins or backgrounds, i.e. Jewish and Gentile. This is merely the surface. The real stakes are much higher, since they affect the quality of Jesus Christ's role as universal Saviour directly. In other words: if Jesus is indeed the Saviour, is his work of mediation alone sufficient for the full redemption of any Christian person, having a Jewish or Gentile

background, or not? If so, then the 'Gentiles', the 'nations', the 'Goyim' do not need to observe any special religious precepts or rules rooted in the Old Testament for their salvation. But if, as Christians, they do need to obey, for example, the Mosaic or Pharisaic ritual observances for the purpose of their salvation, then it follows inevitably that Jesus Christ is not the perfect Saviour of Gentiles in his own right, if these Gentiles do not become Christians by becoming Jews (Proselytes) first. And at this point there can be no compromise, for the very essence of the Gospel is at stake. This is in fact the crucial question: is Jesus really the Christ, the Son of God Almighty, being Himself divine or not? The Council of Jerusalem of the Apostles is therefore not tangentially, but cardinally and directly related to the teaching of *ordo salutis*.

We hear the overture of the synodal decision precisely from the lips of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, who had been reassured by Peter's explanation concerning Cornelius and his household: 'So then God has given the Gentiles also repentance unto life!' (Acts 11:18). This is the first level: the Gentiles, the Goyim also have a God-ordained way to Him. The next insight is then stated by the Apostolic Council itself: the way of the Gentiles leads to God directly through Christ, the perfect Saviour, and not through Judaism. The four conditions of Acts 15:29 are therefore in no way some human addition to Christ's perfect redemptive work, but are intended, on the one hand, to strengthen the morals and perseverance of Christians with Gentile origins (see the requirement to abstain from eating food sacrificed to idols and from fornication, including cultic prostitution, which could cause serious problems, especially in the Greek churches), and on the other hand, to avoid scandalising the Jewish Christians (by abstaining from blood and strangled animals). [For the personal, familial, kinship/friendship-related and social difficulties of non-Jewish Early Christians, see Hurtado 2016, 52-58, and 87-94].

According to the Synodal Epistle, if non-Jewish Christians abstain from these things, they 'will do well' (εὖ πράξετε – Acts 15:29). The latter two conditions are formulated not so much to put an end to a supposedly ongoing Gentile custom (for, e.g., who amongst the sound-minded Greeks would have appetite for a strangled animal?), but rather to satisfy the sensitivity of Jewish Christians: in this case, the Gentile Christians must take account of the weakness in faith of the Jerusalemites by not offending them with a behavior which, while it may be indifferent in their own (e.g. Greek) tradition, is a religiously reprehensible act in the eyes of their fellow believers of Jewish origin. If this were not the aim of the whole decision, then the vision of the Apostle Peter, which is the immediate precursor of his visit to Cornelius, and its lesson: 'What God has cleansed, do not call unclean' (Acts 10:15), would lose its point and meaning. God's redemptive and purifying work, fully accomplished in Christ, needs no additional human-religious 'cleansing' whatsoever.

This teaching, which is reminiscent of the Heidelberg Catechism's responses to Questions 29–31, summarized by following the words of the Apostle Paul, those of John, and those of Luke in Acts, is found in the CHP's chapter on Christ (the text is excerpted):

> For we teach and believe that this Jesus Christ our Lord is the only and eternal Saviour of mankind, yea, and of the whole world, in whom all are saved before the law, under the law, and in the time of the Gospel, and so many as shall yet be saved to the end of the world. […] We believe, therefore, that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as our fathers were. (Acts 4:12; 10:43; 15:11!). […] Wherefore we do plainly and openly profess and preach, that Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer and Saviour of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and looked-for Messiah, that holy and blessed one whom all the shadows of the law, and the prophecies of the prophets, did prefigure and promise; and that God did supply and send him unto us, so that now we are not to look for any other. And now there remains nothing, but that we all should give all glory to him, believe in him, and rest in him only, contemning and rejecting all other aids of our life. For they are fallen from the grace of God, and make Christ of no value unto themselves, whosoever they be that seek salvation in any other things besides Christ alone (Galatians 5:2-4). [Docemus enim ac credimus, hunc Jesum Christum, Dominum nostrum, unicum et aeternum generis humani adeoque totius mundi esse Servatorem, in quo per fidem servati sint, quotquot ante legem, sub lege, et sub Evangelio salvati sunt, et quotquot adhuc in finem usque seculi salvabuntur. […] Credimus ergo per gratiam Domini Jesu Christi nos servatum iri, sicuti et Patres nostros. […] Unde pleno ore profitemur, et praedicamus, Jesum Christum unicum esse mundi Redemptorem et Salvatorem, regem et pontificem maximum, Messiam verum et exspectatum illum, inquam, sanctum benedictum, quem omnes legis typi et vaticinia prophetarum praefigurarint atque promiserint, Deus autem praestiterit ac miserit illum nobis, ut alius porro non sit ullus nobis exspectandus. Nec restat iam aliud, quam ut omnes omnem gloriam Christo tribuamus, in ipsum credamus, et in ipso solo adquiescamus, omnibus aliis vitae praesidiis spretis atque abiectis. Nam gratia Dei exciderunt, et Christum inanem sibi reddunt, quotquot salutem in alia re ulla, quam in uno Christo quaerunt.] (CHP XI, 14-15, trans. by Philip Schaff).

One cannot fail to notice that one of the key phrases of the argument is a summary of Peter's statement made in the house of Cornelius (Acts 14:43) and then emphasized even more specifically at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:11): 'We believe, therefore, that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as our fathers were'. There is no way, then, that Bullinger, or the signatories, who, while writing the CHP and quoting the crucial words of Peter at the Jerusalem Council,

could not have had in mind the New Testament paradigm of the ideal ecumenical council. This is true especially since the passage on the acceptance of the four famous Early Church Councils comes just after the above paragraph in the CHP, so the parallel is self-evident. Since the history of doctrine teaches us not only to pay attention to the expressions and details contained in the creedal formulae, but also to those that are absent, the omission of the reference to the Apostolic Council as the true prototype for any ecumenical church gathering also indicates that the signatories of the CHP accepted, at least tacitly, the practice of ecclesiastical assemblies and councils convened by secular authorities or did not raise serious objections to it. This appears to be supported also by the following statement in Chapter XXX of the CHP concerning the duties of secular magistracy:

> The chief duty of the civil magistrate is to procure and maintain peace and public tranquility: which, doubtless, he shall never do more happily than when he shall be truly seasoned with the fear of God and true religion—namely, when he shall, after the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord, advance the preaching of the truth, and the pure and sincere faith, and shall root out lies and all superstition, with all impiety and idolatry, and shall defend the Church of God. For indeed we teach that the care of religion does chiefly appertain to the holy magistrate. Let him, therefore, hold the Word of God in his hands, and look that nothing be taught contrary thereunto. In like manner, let him govern the people, committed to him of God, with good laws, made according to the Word of God, and let him hold them in discipline and in duty and in obedience. [Ejus officium praecipuum est, pacem et tranquillitatem publicam procurare et conservare. Quod sane nunquam fecerit felicius, quam cum fuerit vere timens Dei ac religiosus, qui videlicet ad exemplum sanctissimorum regum principumque populi Domini, veritatis praedicationem et fidem synceram promoverit, mendacia et superstitionem omnem cum omni impietate et idololatria exciderit ecclesiamque Dei defenderit. Equidem docemus religionis curam imprimis pertinere ad magistratum sanctum. Teneat ergo ipse in manibus verbum Dei, et ne huic contrarium doceatur, procuret, bonis item legibus ad verbum Dei compositis moderetur populum, sibi a Deo creditum, eundemque in disciplina, officio, obedientiaque contineat.] (CHP XXX, 2, trans. by Philip Schaff).

The care of religion (*religionis curam*) is therefore primarily (*imprimis*) the responsibility of the sacred magistrate (*ad magistratum sanctum*). The Constantinian model thus continued to be a working paradigm for the Reformers both in the Swiss cantonal system and under the princes of feudal societies to such extent, that they did not question on biblical grounds the magistrate's competence or jurisdiction to supervise the church and the issues of faith. Being the children of their own time,

and perhaps also being in the need of the benevolence of the various magistrates supporting the cause of the Reformation, they deliberately did not wish to reinterpret the order, which had been in place for twelve centuries, on theological grounds. The omission of a specific reference to the Council of the Apostles as an archetype is thus hardly accidental: it is rather a tactful respect for the sensibilities of the magistrate(s) and ruler(s) who clung to their power and their new ecclesiastical influence, whether Lutheran or Helvetic. This is clearly reflected in the title of 'bishop of necessity' (*Not-bischof*) given by Luther to the princes who supported the Reformation (for details see e.g. Lewis 1953 and Schnetter 2002, 8-11), but also in the following statement by Bullinger, the author of CHP:

> I see, for example, that many people are of the opinion that the care and maintenance of religion is a matter for bishops alone, not for kings, princes and senators. However, the Catholic truth teaches that taking care of religion pertains maximally to the magistrate. [...] We shall show, by a few ancient examples, that the rulers of God's people, Joshua, David, and others, were indeed Christians (!), and that the examples derived from them and set for Christian princes are valid. I also refer to the prophecy of Isaiah, which shows that the function of kings in the church is the same as that of the kings of old in the so-called Jewish Church [i.e. in the Old Testament]. [Video enim multos in ea esse sententia quod cura et ordinatio religionis ad solos pertineat episcopos, non etiam ad reges, principes ac senatores. Veritas autem catholica docet curam religionis maxime pertinere ad magistratum. […] Nos autem ostendemus paucis priscos illos populi Dei principes Josue, Davidem et alios revera fuisse Christianos, idcirco valere exempla quae ab illis ducuntur et aptantur Christianis principibus. Adiiciam et Isaiae vaticinium, ex quo appareat idem esse adhuc in ecclesia regum officium, quod fuit priscorum regum in ecclesia quam appellant illi Iudaicam.] (Bullinger 1557, 62^{r-v}).

It is interesting to observe that Bullinger, being himself accustomed to such a secular and ecclesiastical government (i.e. a Swiss town council and church presbytery/consistory), which had been presided over by governing bodies and not individuals, still contrasts 'the bishops' with 'the kings', 'princes' and 'senators', and – perhaps to counterbalance the autocracy of (Roman Catholic?) bishops – decides in favor of the latter concerning ecclesiastical affairs, i.e. 'the care and maintenance of religion'. He does this instead of referring to the legitimate governing body within the Church (especially in Switzerland) – the synod or presbytery – for which, once again, Acts 15 would provide the necessary and appropriate theological basis. Here we can witness the emergence of the medieval (i.e. Roman) 'Catholic' truth and not of the 'universal/Catholic truth' (*veritas catholica*), as it had been used by the first leaders and Fathers of the Early Church. Similarly, the analogy of the religious role of Old Testament

kings, labeled here as being 'Christians indeed' (*revera fuisse Christianos*) is rather unfortunate, since both during the time of the united Jewish kingdom (e.g. Solomon) and after the separation of Israel and Judah, religious life was usually infected by the corruption of political leadership, as the very prophets mentioned by Bullinger clearly bear witness. In this respect, the theologically legitimate guardians of the Old Testament 'Church' were, with a handful of exceptions, not the kings (and in many cases not even the priests!), but rather the prophets. By analogy, in the New Testament, this role was played not by rulers, still less by the priesthood in Jerusalem (see e.g. the roles played by Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Caiaphas, and John the Baptist respectively), but by the disciples, apostles and elders. One can only speculate why the author and signatories of the CHP did not cling in this regard to the principles of Scripture, which they had nonetheless followed faithfully in many other respects.

We shall touch only briefly on our second issue. Even if the CHP and the Reformers in general did not renumber the ecumenical councils, they nevertheless adopted only the first four of the six (or seven) Early Church assemblies traditionally labeled as being 'ecumenical'. The reason for the rejection of the seventh (Nicea, 787) is quite obvious, since the veneration of holy images and icons was legitimized then and there. The question of the Councils of Constantinople of 553 and 680-681 is somewhat more complicated. On the one hand, the behavior of Emperor Justinian, who practically imprisoned Pope Vigilius for eight years and forced the condemnation of *The Three Chapters* against the explicit will of the Bishop of Rome and his well-founded theological objections, was unworthy of a Christian ruler who 'cared about religion'. Rome protested for a long time not only against the manner of the proceedings, but against the very theological concept of the Council as a whole (see e.g. Jackson 1892, 26-27).

Moreover, the Council of 553, in accordance with Cyril's prohibition at Ephesus in 431, did not formulate a creed or a definition: the only thing those Fathers were able to produce were some anathemas, by which they attempted to discredit the whole Antiochene tradition, one of the indisputable precursors of Helvetic Reformation, especially concerning Christology and soteriology. Theodore of Mopsuestia was condemned in person, together with his entire oeuvre, whilst Theodoret of Cyrus was condemned for his works 'against true faith and against saint Cyril' (*Definitio capitulorum quintae synodi que congregata est sub Iustiniano Constantinopoli* in ACO IV, 1, 130–136). In this way, Justinian's Council clearly favoured the Alexandrian Christology, which in many respects represented a backward step towards the problematic 'Word-flesh' model and gave a new impetus to the idea of *communicatio idiomatum*, which had been strictly limited at Chalcedon in 451 (see e.g. Pásztori-Kupán 2006). All these developments led to the bizarre fact that when, much later, Maximus

the Confessor had to dissolve the arguments of Monotheletists and Monoenergists, he could rely almost exclusively on the Christological arguments of those Antiochene theologians, who had already been condemned in the middle of the sixth century. The Swiss Reformers could have unreservedly accepted the decrees of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, but much less those of the Fifth. The CHP gives the reasons for accepting the first four synods ('nothing is contained in the aforesaid symbols which is not agreeable to the Word of God, and does not altogether make for a sincere exposition of the faith'), but does not consider it essential to justify the omission of the other two (or even three). It is reasonable to assume that according to them, from the Fifth Council onwards, elements have already appeared which either were in disagreement with the Word of God or did not provide a clear explanation of the faith. From the perspective of the Reformers, and indeed from that of the Christology of Chalcedon, this is practically the case with the Council of 553. Bullinger's explanation below is therefore merely another attempt to avoid a pointless discord, rather than a theologically sound argument:

> The fifth [council] was assembled under the emperor Justinian in about the year of our Lord 552 [553] against Theodore [of Mopuestia] and all the heretics. The sixth was under Constantine, son of Constans, in the year of our Lord 682 [680-681]. 289 bishops were assembled against the Monotheletists. However, nothing was decided at these [*nihil tamen definitum est in his*] which is not found in the creeds of the four previous councils [*quod non reperiatur in symbolis superiorum quatuor conciliorum*]. (Bullinger 1557 *Praefatio*. See also Tőkés 2006, 289).

A discussion of the differences between the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the Council of Constantinople (552) is outside the scope of the present study. However, they are evident not only at the theological level, but also, for example, in the completely unjustified re-condemnation in 553 of the theologians (e.g. Ibas of Edessa, Theodoret of Cyrus), who had been rehabilitated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. In conclusion, Bullinger and the signatories of the CHP, presumably out of respect towards contemporary secular rulers who championed the cause of the Reformation, did not consistently follow through with the otherwise justified renumbering of the ecumenical councils on the basis of the *sola Scriptura* principle, nevertheless, they still rooted their Christological and soteriological views explicitly in the theological tradition of 451, and silently turned away, as it were, from the decrees of the Council of 553, which represented a serious division in comparison to the unifying force of the *Chalcedonian Definition*.

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