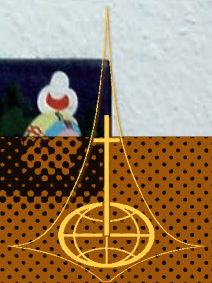


“Like Living Stones”

Lutheran Reflections on the One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church



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on the One Holy, Catholic,
and Apostolic Church

LWF Studies, 2010
December 2010

edited by
Hans-Peter Grosshans and Martin L. Sinaga

on behalf of
The Lutheran World Federation
—A Communion of Churches

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Introduction

Martin Sinaga

Over a number of years, the Department for Theology and Studies of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has undertaken a number of studies on the self-understanding of the church within the Lutheran community. As a first step in this process, the member churches were asked to reflect on the particular challenges in their contexts. The European churches identified secularization as one of the main challenges, the North American and Latin American churches issues arising from the strong ties to ethnicity, and the Asian and African churches the need to become more self-reliant. It became clear that the dynamic of the church's relationship to its context is one of the key elements of Lutheran ecclesial understanding.

The concluding remarks of the ecclesiology project are revealing and indicated that further study and reflection needed to be undertaken.

In the different contributions to the ecclesiological project..., which asked explicit questions about the relevance of church in society, and about the significance of the idea of communion, there is a common trend. It is a struggle to find an integrative understanding of the various expressions of life and tasks of the church...¹

Article VII of the *Confessio Augustana* provides a clear, sufficient, common basic understanding of the church:

the church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.²

This understanding of the church gives space for the existing plurality in the life of the churches, and is therefore widely appreciated in ecumenical circles.

¹ Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*, LWF Documentation 47/2001 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation), 492.

² "The Augsburg Confession—Latin Text—Article VII; Concerning the Church," in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 43.

The common understanding of the church as a *communio* is another important ecclesiological insight, affirming that the fellowship of Lutheran churches is grounded in Christ. Our unity in Christ should help us to transcend our differences and to become a fellowship in which diversity can be reconciled through mutual acceptance.

From a Lutheran perspective, everything depends on the deep understanding of communion as a gift. We are communion in Christ, and there is no more real or fuller communion through our deeds. Neither church structure nor social service is a condition for a fuller communion. They do not make communion a success. This religious perspective contains the power to address the problem of peoples' living together without illusion or desperation and to maintain human dignity in its social reality...This experience implies the unconditioned experience of community.³

This book is as part of the search for that integrative or common theological understanding underpinning the life of the often very diverse Lutheran churches and, furthermore, sheds light onto how Lutheran churches realize their concrete lives and histories.

Realizing the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church

The book *One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church: Some Lutheran and Ecumenical Perspectives*,⁴ examines the question of how the church can be the *locus* and space of God's salvific act in the world. Christ's coming into the world has endorsed the life of a community in which a reconciled space is carved out in the midst of worldly differences and contradictions. Therefore, we need to understand and experience how the church expresses itself as a social place to realize salvation, and not merely as an instrument to mediate that salvation.

The essays in this publication attempt to answer this fundamental question by suggesting that our faith in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church not only provides theological commonality among Lutherans, but also helps us to realize the social or "material" aspect of our faith. Moreover,

³ Greive, op. cit. (note 1), 18.

⁴ Hans-Peter Grosshans (ed.) *One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Some Lutheran and Ecumenical Perspectives*, LWF Studies 01/2009 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009).

it provides a strong ecclesiological basis for and a more visible manifestation or realization of our faith in the church.

Our belief in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church stems from our faith that the church is God's gift and the creature of the Word (*creatura verbi divini*).⁵ As the creature of God's Word, the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. While these four essential marks illustrate the church's dependence on God, they are also signs of God's intention and plan for the world.⁶ In other words, we can affirm that in the life of the church, God's gift and the human task intersect.

Isabelle Graesslé suggests that contemporary theology needs a sort of "breathing space" to invite a "lively imagination of the passage before us." This vision would be helped by a "moratorium" on the traditional marks of the church and in their place a focus on the church as marked by plurality, solidarity with the marginalized, contextuality and witnesses.⁷ This position formulates the challenge to overcome an overly simplistic understanding of the four marks of the church. Our faith in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church should be informed by and engage with the different realities because only then will we see to what extent our faith in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church is truly helpful.

The essays affirm that while holding dear to the faith that unites our churches, there are diverse and rich ways in which that faith is lived out. Introducing the theme of this book, Hans-Peter Grosshans examines the spiritual dimension of the church, as well as its visible manifestation and relevance in today's world.

In this book

Dagmar Heller questions why, despite affirming the oneness of the church, we nevertheless live it out separately and sometimes even in contradiction with one another. This succinct question is highly relevant, especially in light of our attempts to find ways to realize unity in the life of the church. Heller reflects on the many endeavors—in ecumenical as well as Lutheran

⁵ Gottfried Wilhelm Locher, *Sign of the Advent: A Study in Protestant Ecclesiology* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2004), 23.

⁶ *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 27.

⁷ Isabelle Graesslé, "From Impasse to Passage, Reflections on the Church," in *Ecumenical Review* 53 (2009), 28ff.

circles—to reach common understanding and unity. She points out that today's ethical questions, in need of a serious and common response by the church, challenge efforts toward unity and suggests that the dimension of love or *caritas* may be helpful in our search for unity.

If we believe that a spiritual dimension can maintain unity, then the church stands to benefit from the differences among its members. Guillermo Hansen argues in favor of celebrating the churches' many and various *charismata* (gifts), so that the church's body will grow out of a network of its vulnerable members rather than a homogenous power. Focusing on gender issues, Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen emphasizes that true unity can only be realized in dialogue with others. Only once the communion of Lutheran church is fully inclusive—accepting women and men in the ministry—will it be true to the *imago Dei*.

Stephanie Dietrich reflects on historical ecumenical agreements among Protestant churches in Europe. She clearly shows that unity is about reconciled diversity in which a space is opened up for mutual recognition and learning. On the basis of this unity, the European churches are moving toward becoming serving churches in the world. Dietrich is convinced that this European model can be applied by Lutheran churches worldwide.

Lutherans understand the second mark of the church, holiness, to be the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. Holiness flows from God's forgiveness, and is embodied by the church. Eckhard Zemmrich challenges the church fully to embody holiness, especially in contexts where corruption and conflict are rampant. A church that is to be believed as holy, must be believable as holy. Drawing on his experience with situations of conflict that have led to deep divisions within churches, Binsar Pakpahan stresses the need to experience true reconciliation within the life of the church if true healing is to occur. The church needs to practice forgiveness, because that is how it realizes a restorative communion.

Holiness, embodied in the life of the church, should bring the church closer to the neighbor. Therefore, as Thu En Yu affirms, holiness, if shared with people of other faiths, can bring about goodwill and friendship among neighbors. The work of the Holy Spirit opens the church up to movements that enhance spiritual gifts. According to Yonas Yigezu Dibisa, the charismatic movement will help Lutheran churches to uphold the whole body of Christ.

Christ's body has its universal or catholic identity; catholicity is realized through congregational worship. Through worship we sense the presence of the universal church. Elieshi Mungure reflects on how, in her local setting, worship has helped congregations to taste the universal Lutheran

communion. This catholicity, if lived out in its deeper sense, cannot be separated from the ongoing story of humanity. Tomi Karttunen reflects on the meaning of catholicity in light of the challenges posed by the internet and social networking.

A universal, catholic church must engage with the whole of humanity. Because the church is apostolic, it is called to bring the gospel of hope and compassion to the whole people. Milos Klátik underlines this important task from the perspective of a minority church. Since it is our task, together with our fellow “apostles,” to spread the gospel, further reflection on the church’s apostolicity is needed so that together, hand in hand as “apostles,” we can continue to work for the gospel. Theodor Dieter reports on the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue on apostolicity.

God brings God’s love to all people. The church is called to be part of the *missio Dei*. We are partners in God’s compassionate mission. Roberto Zwetsch proposes that apostolicity is today manifested in compassionate mission. As God works with love and passion, we should compassionately follow God’s mission and path. In light of today’s globalized world, this passion should manifest itself as presence. Wai Man Yuen posits that only if the church provides an “open table” of Eucharistic sharing, will the world see the sign of hope on earth, a hope embodied in God’s “living stones.”

This compilation of essays reflects on the theological meaning of the church. The authors affirm the common spiritual foundation of the Lutheran church as well as its rich manifestation in life. The articles, first presented in 2010 at a consultation in Münster (Germany), organized by the Department for Theology and Studies in cooperation with the Institute for Ecumenical Theology at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Münster, Germany, encourage continued theological reflection on how Lutheran churches throughout the world understand themselves and live out what they profess, namely, being the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

Introducing the Theme: The One Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church as Realized in Lutheran Churches

Hans-Peter Grosshans

In my German theological tradition, there is the saying that it is best for the church not to discuss itself. Rather, what needs to be discussed is the Triune God and God's creative, saving and redeeming work, or the nature of human beings, their salvation and hope. Frequently, discussions about the church within the church itself are not very inspiring and sometimes even rather annoying. Often we cannot see how the church is connected to our spiritual life and to God's creative, saving and redeeming divine work. Despite the church's divine origin and foundation and spiritual character, we often perceive and experience the church as merely human and "down to earth"—an organization like many others. Take, for example, the belief that the one holy church is to continue forever (cf. *Confessio Augustana*) because it is preserved by God and God's Word. Despite this assertion, the way in which the churches can continue to exist in their present organizational and financial form in the future, or how these would have to be further developed, are constant topics of discussion in our churches. Furthermore, issues related to staff, governing bodies, buildings, programs, public statements, organizational and financial matters are frequently debated. While this is necessary and important, the church is no different in this respect than other organizations, be they humanitarian, social or even sports organizations. The problem occurs when these pragmatic discussions lose sight of the spiritual character and life of the church.

The church: a worldly and spiritual organization

When discussing the church, what is at stake is not only how we define the church and to answer the question what constitutes church, but also to

examine how we perceive the church. One's perception depends on one's perspective. In that sense, we have to think about our perspective on the church. But there is more than one perspective on the church and, in the Lutheran tradition, there have been at least two.

From one perspective, the church is seen as one among other worldly organizations. Its specificity lies in the fact that it is a religious organization, responsible for the spiritual and ritual life of its members. Sociologists consider the churches to be fulfilling specific functions within people's social life and society in general. In respect to its function within society, the church is considered like all other religious organizations. The focus on the faith in the Triune God is their specificity only within the field of religions or religious organizations. Therefore, in respect of their role in society, the churches are more or less identical to all other religious organizations.

According to the other perspective—relevant in the Lutheran tradition—the churches are part of God's creative, salvific and redeeming work within the world. Parallel to the sociological question regarding the church's and religious organizations' purpose in society, the theological question would be how God perceives the church. In other words, God's perspective on the church. This envisaging, grasping, taking for real God's perspective is an essential part of faith. It is the true theological perspective on all that exists, be it spiritual or simply worldly.¹

From the theological perspective, the church is one of God's creative, reconciling and redeeming acts of salvation. This act includes individuals being reconciled with one another. One part of the gospel's life renewing agency is that individuals find that they are made whole, healed and hallowed. Moreover, those who live in God's presence are reconciled with one other and taken into the church. The church is there where God's salvation is enacted on earth. It is the earthly space, opened up by the truth of the gospel, the place where the faithful live reconciled with God

¹ The distinction between the visible and hidden (or the visible and invisible) church, which is characteristic for Protestant ecclesiology, expresses the difference of these two perspectives. We have to concede that the meaning of this distinction is not always clear in the various traditions of Protestant theology. Quite widespread is the misguided understanding of this distinction in the sense Huldrych Zwingli used it: within a crowd of believers, who come together to worship in a church, those who confess the Christian faith only with their lips are distinguished from those who confess the Christian faith with their lips and with their hearts. Because in the whole congregation, who together confess the Apostolic Creed for example, we cannot distinguish those who agree with the spoken words in their hearts, Zwingli called the communion of the believers in the heart the invisible church. Martin Luther did not use this distinction in the same sense. His point was that when distinguishing between the visible and the hidden church we perceive the one church in two ways: from an empirical perspective and a theological perspective. The divine reality is hidden within the empirical. See Hans-Peter Grosshans, *Die Kirche—irdischer Raum der Wahrheit des Evangeliums* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 59ff.

and one another. This earthly space of reconciled life is intended to draw in all of humankind.

If we look at the church—a worldly organization experienced in various ambivalent ways—from this theological perspective, we see that while living out communion constitutes church, the communion of the people of God, the church is part of the divine mission to reconcile people with God and with one another. Therefore, the church is part of a movement, initiated by God and directed by the Holy Spirit: people are gathered to be a communion, edified and then sent into the world. The movement of gathering *and* transcending, directed by the Holy Spirit, is characteristic for every church (that truly wants to be church). In this motion, every church is part of the sending of Godself to the world to fill God’s creation with God’s presence.

Therefore, every church serves God’s mission and thereby transcends itself. At the same time, the church has already recognized, albeit not fully, the goal of this movement and God’s mission, namely human beings living together in the presence of God.

Lutheran theology has always emphasized the distinction between the visible and invisible church. This was never meant to threaten the oneness of the church all Christians believe in and to establish two ecclesial realities: an empirical and a spiritual reality. Lutheran theology has always insisted that the church is one reality. Luther and his contemporaries criticized the Roman Church’s and its theology’s reductionist understanding of the church, whereby the church was reduced to an organizational form and to ritual actions, and claimed spiritual and even divine significance for this. This reductionist understanding of the church meant that the theological perspective on the church was more or less ignored as was its mission within God’s mission (gathering, edifying and the sending of God’s people). Therefore, Lutheran theology ascribed a more spiritual meaning to the church and had higher expectations regarding the spiritual significance of the church than Roman theology of the time. When Lutheran theology criticized the empirical Roman Church, it criticized a church that had lost its spiritual dynamics and had therefore reduced itself to a mere means of mediating salvation. According to Lutheran understanding, churches are more than mere means of salvation. If they celebrate worship, gathered in communion in the presence of Jesus Christ in their midst, they are themselves events of salvation.

In fact, for Reformation theology, the sixteenth-century Roman Church had added too many spiritual practices and rituals, doctrines and orders, far beyond the ecclesiological teaching of the New Testament, while lack-

ing spiritual significance because of being satisfied with its mediating role in the process of salvation. Moreover, in this the church missed its true character of being the gathering of people, reconciled with God and one another, as the communion of believers. For Lutheran theology, the church as the communion of believers is of highest spiritual significance.

The one holy, catholic, and apostolic church

The church's spiritual significance is expressed in a sophisticated way in one of the oldest and main creeds of Christianity, the Nicene Creed, as revised by the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. This truly ecumenical creed, which is shared by almost all churches, strengthens the understanding of the church as a spiritual reality, when it formulates (in the original Greek text), "We believe ... in ... the church." In accordance with the New Testament, "believing in ..." is normally used only in relation to the Triune God. When Christians confess with the Nicene Creed that they "believe in" the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, they express their trust in the church as the earthly space of the truth of the gospel and as the worldly body of reconciled existence of people with God and with one another in the presence of the Triune God.²

The churches have to examine the implications of their spiritual character for their life and organization and how their spiritual significance manifests itself in their very being and life. In the age of ecumenism, when churches no longer see themselves as rivals but rather as partners in common mission and the common endeavor to understand and live out the Christian faith, it seems to be appropriate to refer to the ecumenical Nicene Creed when discussing a Lutheran understanding of the church. This short text is the common ground of nearly all churches and therefore seems to be a good basis on which to develop specifically Lutheran insights into the being, nature and reality of the church. To be clear: the focus is not on a Lutheran insight into the being, nature and reality of Lutheran churches, but of the church. Lutheran ecclesiology defines the church and Lutheran churches realize the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.³ This is one way in

² Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, "Belief in the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church," in Hans-Peter Grosshans (ed.), *One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Some Lutheran and Ecumenical Perspectives*, LWF Studies 01/2009 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 21–32.

³ A first attempt to develop a contemporary Lutheran understanding of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, which includes voices from theologians from other denominations, can be found in, Grosshans, *ibid.*

which the Lutheran churches serve the whole communion of churches and contribute to the endeavor of every single church and denomination for a better and deeper understanding of the church, its spiritual significance and its real life and mission.

How Lutheran churches realize the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, remains an open question. The challenge is to make clear in what sense Lutheran churches realize the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church by referring to the biblical witness, the Protestant theological tradition and the present reality and practices. The main challenge here is an intellectual and spiritual one, namely to look at the Lutheran churches, and their history, from a truly theological perspective, that is, to perceive them in their present forms, lives and practices as a spiritual reality guided by the Holy Spirit and part of God's worldly mission. The next question pertains to how the Lutheran churches understand and realize the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. How do Lutheran churches concretely understand and live out oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity? Answering this question gives Lutheran ecclesiology its specific profile and contributes to interdenominational ecclesiological discussion. The endeavor to define more clearly in what sense Lutheran churches understand and realize the church's oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity contributes to the discussions on the ecclesiological profile of Lutheran churches and challenges the interdenominational discussions on ecclesiological questions.

Some churches, in more or less subtle forms, question whether the Lutheran understanding of the church is the true one and whether Lutheran churches are churches in the full sense. While such questions are raised by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, Lutheran churches are also criticized for staying too much within tradition and, because of that, for failing to live out the ecclesiological consequences of the scriptural witness.

Lutheran ecclesiology in dialogue

Within the Lutheran communion, many ecclesiological questions are under discussion. Frequently the Lutheran understanding of the church needs to be clarified. With regard to questions pertaining to structures and practices, historical arguments are only of limited use, especially there where the cultural background of certain ecclesial practices has lost its plausibility or feels foreign to those from different contexts. In such cases, the rationale for Lutheran ecclesiology and its grounding in the witness

of the Holy Scripture has to be explained. A clear understanding of the Lutheran concept of the church is necessary to answer such questions. Why do Lutheran churches truly claim to be church in the true and full sense? To be the body of Christ and the people of God? How do Lutheran churches realize what it means to be the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church? How can the contextual realities be incorporated into the ways in which Lutheran ecclesiology is developed and lived out?

These general spiritual and truly theological questions concerning the church have to be put into relation to central issues, questions and problems in contemporary Lutheran ecclesiology. Actual issues result not only from the theological and spiritual or from the self-defining and self-organizing processes within the Lutheran churches, but also from the relationship of the Lutheran church to other churches and religions (and their members) and the "world" in general. To illustrate the variety of ecclesiological issues, questions and problems, I shall refer to a few examples.

The relationship between the Lutheran church and other churches, especially the Catholic and the Orthodox churches (but also the Reformed or Free or Pentecostal churches), has resulted in discussions on the sacraments (especially on the understanding and practice of the Lord's Supper and baptism, as well as ordination and matrimony), church offices, episcopacy, authority and hierarchy in the church. On all these issues there is a distinct Lutheran teaching which is challenged by other churches.

One result of the relationship between Lutheran and other churches is the lively discussion on the whole concept of mission and what would seem to be appropriate forms of mission. This includes topics such as differences and similarities between mission, dialogue, tolerance, cooperation and partnership.

Furthermore, the Lutheran churches will have to discuss questions arising from their existence within and their relation to the "world." In this context, they have to define the church's role within the world, within humanity and within society. They have to find answers to the general question of how to perform and depict the presence of the Triune God in the world or, rather, how to respond to the presence of the Triune God in the world. This includes answering the question of how Lutheran churches relate the sacred and the profane, as well as their position vis-à-vis the state, society and secularization.

Many ecclesiological issues resulting from concrete problems as well as issues pertaining to the further development and self-understanding of the Lutheran churches need to be discussed time and again. With regard

to their doctrinal self-understanding, the Lutheran churches will have to examine general spiritual and theological problems and what soteriological role they ascribe to the church, that is, to their very being. These reflections must include discussions on the church's main activities and services, i.e., worship, pastoral care, education, mission, diakonia, and their respective roles within the Lutheran churches.

Furthermore, constitutional and structural problems need to be debated, because according to Lutheran ecclesiology there is not one specific model for the church's constitution and structure (governing bodies such as synods, bishops, headquarter, church courts, local congregations and regional church, etc.). Today's awareness that the Lutheran churches are part of a worldwide communion of churches raises the question as to how this worldwide communion of Lutheran churches is lived out and expressed institutionally, as well as how Lutheran liturgy is related to the respective contextual cultures.

One way of connecting and discussing these and other ecclesiological issues, questions and problems systematically is to use the oldest and most ecumenical ecclesiological expression in the Nicene Creed as a starting point to explain Lutheran ecclesiology. In doing so, Lutheran theology follows three methodological principles: being truthful to the Holy Scriptures; respecting the tradition; and considering present realities in the life of Lutheran churches.

The Nicene Creed realized in the Lutheran church

If the Lutheran churches realize the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church by confessing to the Nicene Creed, then how and in what sense are these four marks of the church manifest in their life?

Given the great diversity within Lutheran churches, there can nonetheless be a framework within which to relate certain realities within the Lutheran churches to oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. I posit that in these activities and realities the Lutheran churches realize the church's oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Intellectual openness is required in order to recognize this relationship and to perceive the four attributes of the church in the areas of the life of Lutheran churches as described in the following.

At the centre of Lutheran ecclesiology is the worshipping congregation, which is the body of Christ and the people of God. *CA VII* defines the

church as the congregation of all saints, that is, of all believers, in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments administered correctly. This worshipping congregation gathers in the presence of the Triune God. This divine presence is the same in all Christian worshipping congregations that by definition are the church. Therefore we can say that the presence of the Triune God is the universal identity of Christian worship all over the world and, consequently, the sameness of the church within the plurality of its emergence. According to classical Greek terminology, the sameness within a plurality of singulars is its catholicity.⁴ Similarly, according to Lutheran understanding, the church's catholicity is its sameness amid the variety and plurality of the church's concrete existence. Therefore, in the first instance, the church's catholicity is not to be understood as the church's universal, ubiquitous presence, but as the concentration of the church on Jesus Christ. In concentrating on Jesus Christ as the savior of the world, the church is universally the same. A church is concentrated on Jesus Christ, especially in worship, where Jesus Christ's salvific, redeeming, liberating and reconciling work, which brings people together and forms them into a communion, is concentrated. According to Lutheran understanding, the church's catholicity is realized in and through worship. Christian worship gives the church the mark of catholicity.

In worshipping, the church is specific and unique within the world in general, especially in its direct religious and secular contexts. The church's peculiarity, which distinguishes it from all other entities, communities and organizations in the world, is its belief in the forgiveness of sins, in the spiritual power of salvation and the renewal of life, and in its own existence as a social space of reconciliation with God and with one another. Such belief in the creative, saving and redeeming Triune God creates the freedom of a Christian and expresses itself in a life of gratitude whose signature is love. Thus, the church concentrates on all those who need to be cared for and reconciled. This results in a strong emphasis on diakonia as the joint effort to support people in need and to assist people in conflict. Therefore, diakonia can be perceived as realizing the holiness of the church. Diakonia, based on the belief in the forgiveness of sins and a result of gratitude, gives the church the mark of holiness.

The worshipping church, which is catholic and holy, has a specific mission in the world. In Paul's words, "[s]o we are ambassadors for Christ ... we

⁴ Compare *Aristotle*, *Metaphysics* 987 b 1–4 and 1078 b 17–32; also, *Aristotle*, *Second Analytics* A 87 b 30–33.

entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). In this mission and in its sending into the world, the church (the congregation of believers) stands in apostolic succession. Being in apostolic succession and sent into the world with its mission the church has the mark of apostolicity. The apostolicity of the church refers back to the apostles and their task. An apostolic church therefore needs to be truthful to the apostles and their witness as handed down in the New Testament. This calls the church to pursue the task of the apostles, who had been sent into the world to bring the gospel to everybody on earth. Therefore, according to the Lutheran understanding, the churches realize the apostolicity of the church in their mission, which is, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, to bring hope to a hopeless world—to all people.

Christian worshipping congregations all over the world are one, are the one church, the one body of Christ, the one people of God. The problem is how to express this unity, how to make the church visible and how to shape it. There are many possible ways to express this unity: joint liturgy; common creeds (to express the common faith) or common prayers (the Lord’s Prayer) or common sacraments and rituals or praying for one another (intercession); a common organizational structure to express unity (hierarchical or non-hierarchical, with bishops or presidents, with synods or councils or general assemblies). Another form of expressing unity is the sharing of finances and responsibilities. Finally, a further way of expressing and living out the oneness of all Christian worshipping congregations is through theology, in the sense of sharing understandings of Scripture and faith. In the Lutheran tradition, priority was generally given to theology to express, form and live out the church’s oneness and the unity of the various churches. Theology in the sense of communicating the Christian faith in all its dimensions—including the striving for a common understanding of the Christian faith—and in respect to all believers and churches is essential in Lutheran churches. All other forms to express and make visible the unity of the church are deficient compared with theology. Consequently, one can say that the church that forms its unity in the communication of the Christian faith has the mark of unity (or oneness). To conceive the unity of the church in the form of an organization, especially an hierarchical order, or in the form of common liturgies or an obligation to a common tradition, is clearly reductive.

The essays in this book are good examples of theology’s role within the church. Deeply spiritual, with intellectual sensitivity and critically reflective they contribute to the theological process that strives to realize the oneness

of the church by deepening a common understanding of the Christian faith and by bringing clarity. In this sense, this collection of essays, which is the result of a discussion process within the worldwide communion of Lutheran churches, is itself a contribution to the oneness of the church.

Confessing and Living out Unity from a Lutheran Perspective: Old and New Challenges

Dagmar Heller

The fact that Christians confess the holy, catholic, and apostolic church as one while living out their faith in different churches, separated from and at times even fighting one another, is, in itself, a contradiction that damages the Christian witness to the world. Therefore, the old question of what this unity means and how it can be achieved remains a crucial one. There have been many discussions within the ecumenical movement and numerous proposals have been made for models of unity and some agreements on what unity requires have been reached. For a long time, this discussion has concentrated on doctrinal questions related to ecclesiology, such as the sacraments and ministry. Over the last two or three decades, it has become increasingly clear that church unity is not only related to those questions, but that ethical ones—thus far considered as practical and to be handled in cooperation—increasingly threaten Christian unity, not only between but also within the churches.

In this article, I shall reflect on the question of unity from a Lutheran perspective, taking into account challenges resulting from the discussions with other churches as well as the new challenges arising from ethical questions. I will first look into the issue of unity as it has been discussed in the ecumenical movement, and then place the Lutheran concept of unity in relation to the wider ecumenical discussion. The third part will examine the new challenges for the unity of the church that have arisen from the field of ethics, and outline the aspects involved in this issue and what would need to be considered in any future work in this field.

Unity in the ecumenical debate

It seems almost banal to state that unity has been one of the most difficult questions Christianity has had to tackle. Obviously it has been a problem

from the very beginning, as we can see in the New Testament—the apostle Paul would otherwise not have had to call for unity (Eph 4:3f., etc.). Later, after each schism, efforts were made to heal the split such as the unsuccessful attempts in the eleventh century to heal the division between East and West and, in the sixteenth century, the split between Wittenberg and Rome. Roughly speaking, the reason for these failures was that each side believed to have the correct understanding of what constitutes unity. In other words, unity is only possible if the other side agrees.

This attitude changed with the modern ecumenical movement. Here, for the first time, churches came together on an equal footing. For example, the foundation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was only possible because the member churches were not asked to sign a specific understanding of unity; in fact, they were not even asked to recognize each other as church.¹ Only in this way were they able to sit together and to discuss such questions as, What is unity? What does unity mean? What does unity look like?

A brief overview of this common discussion shows the main issues at stake. Already in 1937, at the second World Conference on Faith and Order in Edinburgh, it became clear that the different understandings of unity are closely connected to the different ecclesiologies. Three main models of unity were distinguished:² (a) cooperative action; (b) intercommunion; and (c) corporate union. The first one means a "confederation or alliance of Churches for co-operative action."³ In other words, the concept of a federation, in which each member retains their own structure and independence, while aiming to work together in the social sphere and on practical questions. Consensus in doctrinal questions is not necessary. The second model goes one step further: The churches remain different organizations with their own structure and character, but share in eucharistic communion. This implies mutual recognition between the churches. The third model, also called "organic union," aims at one single body, or one organization. The idea is the "unity of a living organism, with the diversity characteristic of the members of a healthy body."⁴

¹ "The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches. The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches, Toronto 1950," in Lukas Vischer (ed.), *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963* (St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1963), 167–76. III.3: "The World Council cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the Church. It does not prejudge the ecclesiological problem.....no Church is obliged to change its ecclesiology as a consequence of membership in the World Council of Churches," 170.

² "Edinburgh, Second World Conference on Faith and Order, August 3–18, 1937, Final Report.VI, The Church's Unity in Life and Worship," in Vischer, *ibid.*, 61–65.

³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

These three main models do not always exist in a pure form in different churches; they overlap and are differently nuanced. What becomes clear is that they are connected with the different understandings of what the “church” is. This becomes clearer if we look at concrete examples: the model of organic union or corporate union is one which goes back to Anglican thinking in the 1870s and 1880s.⁵ It is not about a fixed uniformity, but about one single organism, an institutional and constitutional unity, in which there are no independent churches. This model is closer to the Roman Catholic understanding of unity than the others. One example of where this model has been realized are the united churches, such as the Church of South India or the Church of North India.

The model of intercommunion is a younger model, corresponding largely to Lutheran and Reformed ecclesiology. It has recently been realized in the Leuenberg Communion for instance. It is more than simply a eucharistic hospitality; it is a mutual recognition of churches, despite some theological differences.

The first model—cooperative union—corresponds to a type of church that appeared later in history. I am here referring to the so-called free churches, which came into existence as a reaction to the oppression by state churches and in protest against a unity that had been forced upon them. For these churches, unity is given and does not have to be created through doctrinal consensus. The diversity and variety of denominations is nothing negative, but rather a richness and a sign of the church’s vitality. Therefore, they are suspicious of the idea of a unified church. They presume that there is a spiritual unity of all believers and that therefore unity amounts to practical cooperation. Unity becomes visible primarily in the common, committed and permanent action of Christians and churches.

In 1937, Faith and Order opted for the model of corporate union,⁶ which included the federal principle as well as conciliar elements.

Against this background, further discussion on unity in Faith and Order and the WCC as a whole, tried to identify the characteristics and requirements for unity. In 1961, the Third Assembly of the WCC at New Delhi stated:

We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel,

⁵ Cf. Chicago-Lambeth-Quadrilateral, at www.anglicansonline.org/basics/Chicago_Lambeth.html

⁶ Cf. “Report,” in L. Vischer, *op. cit.* (note 1), 63: “The idea of “corporate union” must remain for the vast majority of Christians their ideal.”

breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.⁷

For the first time unity is being described in its nature and at the same time in its constitutive elements. There is a certain focus on the local level ("all in each place"), at which the "fellowship" has a "corporate life," which is visible in the common confession of faith, in the same gospel, in the common Eucharist, in common prayer and in a common life in witness and service. At the universal level, unity is expressed by the acceptance of members and ministries. Again, this looks very much like the Anglican model, but could also correspond to an Orthodox ecclesiology.

In 1975, at the Assembly in Nairobi, this was further discussed. On the basis of the work done by Faith and Order, the notion of "conciliarity" was introduced and the unity of the church was said to be "a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united among themselves."⁸ In other words, the idea of visible unity at the local level was retained, but the concept of conciliarity outlined more precisely what the relationship among these local churches might look like.

In more recent times, the term *koinonia* was emphasized. As we will see in the second part of this article, this was partly related to the discussion in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). This term was already used in earlier discussions, but it was made fruitful especially in the statement of the WCC's Seventh Assembly in 1991 at Canberra, Australia.

The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church in its fullness. This full communion will be expressed on the local and

⁷ Ibid., 144f.

⁸ David M. Paton (ed.), *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975, The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November–10 December, 1975* (London: SPCK/Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 60.

the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. In such communion churches are bound in all aspects of their life together at all levels in confessing the one faith and engaging in worship and witness, deliberation and action.⁹

Here the concept of unity is derived from the nature of the church: the church's nature is *koinonia*, communion. It is clear that, according to the New Testament notion of *koinonia*, unity is not about uniformity, but that difference or diversity and unity belong together. Furthermore, the notion includes—in the New Testament—an horizontal and a vertical dimension: the communion among human beings is inseparable from the communion between God and human beings. In concrete terms, the idea of corporate union at the local level has now disappeared. The element of conciliarity is kept at the local as well as at the universal levels. The other elements—Eucharist (baptism is added!), the recognition of ministries and common witness—are also retained. It seems that here the insight that faith and action are connected becomes newly relevant for the concept of unity.

The further discussion was incorporated into a text on ecclesiology, adopted by the WCC's Ninth Assembly in 2006 at Porto Alegre. The text entitled, "Called to be the One Church," is meant as "an invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue."¹⁰ While building on the previous statements on unity and retaining the elements mentioned there, this text emphasizes—more so than the earlier statements—diversity. "Thus (referring to 1 Cor. 12:4-7), as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to manifest its *oneness in rich diversity*."¹¹ Unity is being grounded in the Trinity: "The Church's oneness is an image of the unity of the Triune God in the communion of the divine Persons."¹² From this perspective, the consequence would be an emphasizing of mutual accountability.¹³ The one baptism is being highlighted as the starting point for belonging to one another.¹⁴

⁹ Michael Kinnamon (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit. Official Report Seventh Assembly World Council of Churches, Canberra, Australia, 7-20 February 1991* (Geneva: WCC Publications/Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 173.

¹⁰ Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, *God, in your Grace...*, *Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), 255.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 256

¹² *Ibid.*, 256.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

In brief, there is a certain consensus on the elements or requirements for unity: common sacraments, the recognition of ministries, common witness and service. Throughout the history of these discussions, there has been a certain shift from the emphasis on the idea of corporate union toward a more realistic idea of unity in diversity. Nonetheless, the question remains as to how much diversity is possible within unity or which issues are church dividing.

The Lutheran understanding of unity

It is important to note that for Lutherans, as for other Christian World Communions, the question about the unity of the church has two dimensions: What is unity within a confessional church or church family (i.e., the inner-Lutheran discussion)? What is unity with other churches/church families (i.e., the discussion within the LWF about the unity in the ecumenical relationships with non-Lutheran churches)?

Inner-Lutheran clarifications

With the beginning of the ecumenical movement, the question of unity imposed itself on the Lutheran churches in a very specific way. Since there was no Lutheran world church the question arose as to whether there is a difference between the unity we seek with all the other churches and the unity we seek among Lutheran churches. It was clear that the Lutheran churches had something more in common with one another than with other churches. And this "something more" is the *Confessio Augustana (CA)*.

CA VII reads,

It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.¹⁵

Since, for the church's true unity, it suffices that the gospel is rightly preached and that the sacraments are celebrated according to the Word of God, it is not necessary that all churches have the same church order. As Paul wrote

¹⁵ "The Augsburg Confession—German Text—Article VII: Concerning the Church," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42.

to the Ephesians, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:4–5).

On this basis, the common understanding of the gospel and communion in the sacraments is the basic expression of unity among churches. However, the church orders can be organized in different ways. The LWF’s member churches have long debated¹⁶ how this unity can be visibly expressed. They concluded that the LWF is a communion of churches, a *koinonia* of churches, recognizing each other’s preaching and the sacraments, and therefore in full communion.

The Lutheran understanding of unity in the ecumenical debate

This ecclesiological position is the basis for discussions on unity between Lutherans and other churches. The LWF has had certain difficulties with the emphasis on “corporate union” as it was developed in the WCC during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷ The idea of united churches at the local level would make confessional characteristics disappear. Since for Lutherans the consensus on doctrinal questions was a precondition for unity,¹⁸ it was clear that an organic union would be a threat to Lutheran identity, at least as long as the others did not join the Lutheran ecclesiology. This was explicitly not required for membership in the WCC. Therefore, it was necessary to find a way of bringing together confession and ecumenism.¹⁹ The term “communion of churches” appeared in the early 1960s, “It is our conviction that church fellowship among historical churches is the most fitting way in which to bring the integral unity of the church of Jesus Christ to expression and reality.”²⁰ Between 1974 and 1977, together with the other Christian

¹⁶ Cf. Michael Root, “Affirming the Communion: Ecclesial Reflection in the LWF,” in Jens Holger Schjörning et al. (eds.), *From Federation to Communion. The History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1997), 216–46.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, chapter 1.

¹⁸ Harding Meyer, “To Serve Christian Unity: Ecumenical Commitment in the LWF,” in *op. cit.* (note 16), 248–83, 251.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 252.

²⁰ “Nach unserer Überzeugung ist die Kirchengemeinschaft von geschichtlichen Kirchen...die gemäße Weise, wie die wesenhafte Einheit der Kirche Jesu Christi zum Ausdruck und zur Wirksamkeit zu bringen ist.” Ernst Kinder, quoted in Harding Meyer, *op. cit.* (note 18), 253.

World Communions, the LWF developed a "unity in reconciled diversity,"²¹ which was adopted by the 1977 Assembly of the LWF, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. According to this understanding, confessional differences do not simply disappear, even at the local level, but, rather, they are transformed in such a way that the historical opposition becomes a relationship of reconciliation in which the traditions mutually enrich each other.

At the same time (i.e., in the 1970s) another term appeared in the discussions within the LWF, namely *koinonia*,²² which was explicitly taken up in the statement of the 1984 LWF Assembly in Budapest, Hungary. "The goal of unity"²³ identifies the Trinitarian and eschatological dimensions, the communion in faith, the sacraments and ministry, common confession and witness, common worship and intercession for all humankind, variety and diversity, solidarity with the poor and oppressed and common responsibility for the world and society as basic elements.²⁴

We see here a clear interaction with the discussion in the WCC. The Budapest Declaration constitutes a development of the WCC's statement on unity (1961, New Delhi) and had an impact on the WCC's 1991 Canberra statement. Therefore we can say that the inner-Lutheran debate on unity has developed into a specific Lutheran understanding of unity in general which, in turn, has influenced ecumenical discussions on unity.

The challenges of living out unity

The question today is to what extent and how this theoretical reflection has been put into practice, and which challenges have arisen as a consequence.

There are two distinct ways in which the manifestations of communion within the Lutheran churches differ from those in churches outside the Lutheran family. This raises several questions. I am here referring to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) (formerly the Leuenberg Communion) on the one hand, and the Porvoo Communion (and similar agreements in North America) on the other.

The CPCE considers itself as a communion of churches of different confessions—mainly Lutheran and Reformed and including some Meth-

²¹ Ibid., 264f.

²² Ibid., 265f.

²³ Ibid. 273f.

²⁴ Ibid.

odist churches—which “affirm together the common understanding of the Gospel.... This common understanding of the Gospel enables them to declare and to realize church fellowship.”²⁵ The basis of this affirmation is *CA VII*. Although the CPCE is clearly a regional communion and not meant to be a worldwide body, it nonetheless raises the following theological question for the communion of the Lutheran churches in the LWF: What is the difference between the communion between Lutherans and Reformed in the CPCE on the one hand and the communion between Lutheran churches within the LWF on the other? Is there a difference in the nature of communion? Regarding unity at the ecumenical and international levels the even more important question is, Could the CPCE be a model for unity between Lutherans and Reformed at the global level?

The picture becomes even more complicated if we consider that there is another communion in which Lutheran churches are involved. According to its self-understanding, the Porvoo Communion is “a Communion of churches, ... that have signed an agreement to share a common life in mission and service.”²⁶ They include Lutheran and Anglican churches. The communion is based on a common agreement on the nature and purpose of the church, on its faith and doctrine, and specifically on the apostolicity of the whole church, on the apostolic ministry within it, and on the episcopal office in the service of the church. Thus, by signing the Porvoo Agreement, some Lutheran churches within the LWF affirm that “[a]postolic succession in the episcopal office is a visible and personal way of focusing the apostolicity of the whole Church.”²⁷

We have to note here that only some Lutheran churches were able to join the Porvoo Communion; the Lutheran churches in Germany for instance could not. While through the EKD they are involved in dialogue with the Church of England, they are unable to join Porvoo because of their communion with United and Reformed churches within the EKD. The question that arises here is in what way this causes a problem for the unity within the LWF? Are there now two different types of churches within the LWF? As Michael Root predicted in 1994, these two different types of agreements in Leuenberg and Porvoo “would parallel differences in ethos between the continental and Northern Lutheran churches and differences in polity: the continental Lutheran churches are mostly epis-

²⁵ Leuenberg Agreement, Art. 1, at www.leuenberg.net/daten/Image/Konkordie-en.pdf

²⁶ At www.porvoochurches.org

²⁷ The Porvoo Common Statement, at www.svenskakyrkan.se/porvoo/eng/iv.htm#p46, para. 46

copal-synodical and not in Episcopal succession; the Northern churches are more traditionally episcopal...."²⁸

In the meantime, some Scandinavian churches, namely the Church of Norway and the Church of Denmark became members of the Porvoo Communion and of the CPCE, thus showing that the two agreements are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Nonetheless, the question remains whether Porvoo could constitute a model for the whole LWF in its relationship with the Anglicans or even with other churches. The LWF is working toward making the Porvoo Agreement possible for the whole federation. The LWF's 2007 Lund statement, "Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church," seems to go in this direction. It reads,

(53) ...This unity of the faithful with God is an intimate unity, which consists in their participation in the inner communion of love between the Father and the Son (Jn 17:20-23), shared in the Holy Spirit. Christian unity should not only be regarded as goal of human effort. It is first of all a divine gift, to be received joyfully with faith and commitment. ...

(54) For Lutherans, the church is one in the common proclamation of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments (CA 7). Every worshipping congregation around word and sacrament is church in its theological and sacramental meaning. ...The communion that we seek ecumenically is made visible in shared forms of proclamation, which includes participation in the one baptism and the one eucharist, and which is upheld by a mutually reconciled ministry... We see here the ministry added to the proclamation of the Gospel and the sacraments. And the text goes even further by referring to the question of episcopal succession:

(56) The continuity of the Episcopal ministry is important for the apostolic mission of the church. To serve the continuity of the church's apostolic mission is the primary purpose and meaning of 'episcopal succession'. ...Continuity in episcopal ministry shall bear witness to the church's faithfulness to its apostolic mission, but is no guarantee thereof. ...

(58) Absence of this Episcopal succession does not necessarily mean that there has been a loss of continuity in apostolic faith. The possibility of recognizing that churches may be apostolic even if they have not preserved the sign of Episcopal succession is of great ecumenical significance, since the mutual

²⁸ Michael Root, "The Ecumenical Identity of the Lutheran World Federation," in *ER* 46/1994, 420-7, here 425.

recognition of ministers exercising episcopate ... is vital in ecumenical rapprochement among churches.²⁹

With this statement, the LWF recognizes that for some non-Lutheran churches the questions of ministry and the understanding of apostolic succession are crucial for the unity of the church. While for Lutherans talking among themselves this is not an issue, it has to be taken up in discussions with others. In other words, the Lund statement takes into consideration that ecumenical progress is not possible without solving the question of ministry. At the same time, the Lutheran position makes clear that episcopal succession does not guarantee apostolic succession. This is clearly the Porvoo solution, which says that “[t]he use of the sign of the historic episcopal succession does not by itself guarantee the fidelity of a church to every aspect of the apostolic faith, life and mission.”³⁰

It seems that there remain different ecclesiological features within the Lutheran churches, such as for example a document published by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) in 2003 in the aftermath of the debate provoked by the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. The VELKD states that “within Lutheran theology and the church different, if not opposite, understandings exist of the aim and method of ecumenical efforts.”³¹

In this document, the Lutheran understanding of unity is developed as follows: the emphasis is on the hidden church. The order of the church has to be organized according to the church’s mission. This order is not given, but part of the task and therefore a necessary element of the church. For the unity of the church, this means that unity is subject to faith and related to the invisible community of the invisible church. The visible churches exist as locally, regionally, nationally and confessionally different churches. Local, regional and national differences do not question confessional equality, while confessional differences result either from different accentuations and interpretations of the gospel or from contradictory interpretations of the gospel. Therefore, the question about the right understanding of the unity of Christendom can—according to Lutheran understanding—only be answered in the same way as

²⁹ Karin Achtelstetter (ed.), *Living in Communion in the World Today. 60 Years of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)—Documentation from the 2007 LWF Council Meeting and Church Leadership Consultation, 20–27 March 2007, Lund, Sweden*, LWF Documentation 52/2007 (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), 152–4.

³⁰ Op. cit. (note 27), para. 51.

³¹ VELKD, *Ökumene nach evangelisch-lutherischem Verständnis* (2003), at www.velkd.de/131.php?nummer=123&jahr=2004.

the question about what constitutes faith and the church. According to *CA VII*, this means that it is enough—but also necessary—for the unity of the church to agree on the right understanding of the gospel, i.e., in the preaching according to the Scripture and in the use of the sacraments according to their institution. There is no additional condition for unity.

According to the Lutheran understanding, the goal of ecumenism is the declaration and practice of church communion on the basis and under the condition of the "true unity" of the church, effected by God, which is given in a common understanding of the gospel, according to Scripture.³²

Unity between churches comes into being when the churches have a common understanding of the gospel, and there is a common understanding of the gospel when the churches deal with the gospel and the sacraments based on the fact that faith as well as the church is the work of the Holy Spirit.³³

The issue of episcopal succession is not even mentioned in this text, which would be understandable were the paper dealing with inner-Lutheran unity only. However, not to take up this question, which is brought into the ecumenical discussion by the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Orthodox, seems to claim an absolute truth for the Lutheran position. This, in turn, is contrary to what is stated in the same document, namely that in order to declare church communion it is not necessary that the partners give up their own confession.³⁴ As we have seen throughout the history of Christianity, affirming one's own position as the absolute truth makes further dialogue on unity impossible.³⁵ In other words, this could lead to a return to pre-ecumenical positions.³⁶

The tensions within the Lutheran family we find here challenge the communion within the LWF, especially with regard to its relationship with non-Lutheran churches. While for inner-Lutheran discussions *CA VII* suffices as a basis for unity, the ecumenical dialogue with non-Lutheran churches is a challenge—especially because it needs to be based on the presumption, that other positions could also be true. Within the LWF, we find two different responses that need to be clarified in their relationship to each other.

³² Ibid., 3.2.a, 9.

³³ Ibid, 3.2.b, 9.

³⁴ Ibid., 3.2.d, 9.

³⁵ Cf. Also Juhani Forsberg, "Luthers Schrift, Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis und die Ökumene," in Jari Jolkkonen et al. (eds.), *Unitas Visibilis*. Studia oecumenica in honorem Eero Huovinen Episcopi Helsingiensis (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 2004), 87–100, esp. 97ff., where he criticizes the VELKD paper.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, the beginning of chapter 1.

New challenges

More recently, new challenges have proved to be threatening for church unity. These challenges come from the sphere of ethics. Here I am especially thinking to the question of homosexuality as well as such bioethical questions as abortion or the use of stem cells for instance. We have seen how the Anglican Communion was under threat of breaking apart with regard to the issue of homosexuality; also the LWF has had to grapple with the issue. I would like to reflect on possible perspectives.

Ecclesiology and ethics

In the WCC's and LWF's statements on unity, ethics and ethical questions have not been mentioned. It seems as if ethics had nothing to do with ecclesiology and therefore with unity. But now, all of a sudden, they seem to have become even more church dividing than classical doctrinal issues. Is this only an impression, or is this true?

In order to be precise, we must acknowledge that the ethical side of Christian life has not been totally excluded in the above mentioned statements, but has been included in the term "common witness," which includes not merely preaching and teaching doctrinal questions, but is linked to a Christian way of life. This has never been reflected explicitly, except during the 1990s in a study by Faith and Order on "Ecclesiology and Ethics," which to a certain extent has influenced the recent study document on "The Nature and Mission of the Church."³⁷ In "Costly Unity," the study on "Ecclesiology and Ethics" describes the church as a "moral community" in two ways: on the one hand Christians struggle together for justice and peace, while on the other "[t]he memory of Jesus Christ, formative of the church itself, is a force shaping of moral existence."³⁸ The study links ethical issues and unity stating that, "[t]he being (*esse*) of the church is at stake in the justice, peace and integrity of creation process."³⁹ While admitting that ethics are important for the life of

³⁷ The World Council of Churches, *The Nature and Mission of the Church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005).

³⁸ Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra (eds.), *Ecclesiology and Ethics. Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4, "Costly Unity," article 5.

the church, Michael Root questions an "ecclesio-genetic power"⁴⁰ by asking the question, "Can anything other than the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments be ecclesio-genetic?"⁴¹

It is interesting therefore to see that in its further work on ecclesiology, i.e., the study document "The Nature and Mission of the Church," Faith and Order is taking up the question of ecclesiology and ethics, but does not go as far as "Costly Unity." "The Nature and Mission of the Church" states explicitly:

The Church does not rest on moral achievement but on justification by grace through faith....It is on the basis of faith and grace that moral engagement and common action are possible and can even be affirmed as intrinsic to the life and being of the Church.⁴²

Reality shows us that ethical issues can threaten church unity. "The Nature and Mission of the Church" continues,

There are occasions when ethical issues challenge the integrity of the Christian community itself and make it necessary to take a common stance to preserve its authenticity and credibility. Koinonia in relation to ethics and morals means that it is in the Church that, along with the confessions of the faith and the celebration of the Sacraments (and as an inseparable part of these), the Gospel tradition is probed constantly for moral inspiration and insight. Situations where Christians or churches do not agree on an ethical position demand that dialogue continue in an effort to discover whether such differences can ultimately be overcome—and, if not, whether they are truly church dividing.⁴³

Ethics in Lutheran theology

In order to find a Lutheran approach, we first need to ask, What is the place of ethics in Lutheran theology? The doctrine of justification is again the foundation of Lutheran ethics. This means, ethical reflections have nothing to do with salvation, but with life on earth. In other words, good works, which

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁴¹ Michael Root, "The Unity of the Church as a Moral Community. Some Comments on 'Costly Unity,'" in *ER* 46 (1994), 194-203, 201.

⁴² Op. cit. (note 37), 113.

⁴³ Ibid., para.,117.

effect salvation, are only the works of God; the good works of human beings are related to the well-being and shaping of life on earth. Ethics, therefore, are about what the human being needs for life. Therefore the basic criterion of ethics is that which supports life and the other needs for life?⁴⁴

This is affirmed by a recent LWF document on “Marriage, Family and Sexuality. Proposed Guidelines and Processes for Respectful Dialogue,”⁴⁵ which states,

The relevant conclusion to these deliberations can be found in Confession Augustana VII, where it is said that what is necessary for the true unity of the church is consensus on the gospel (...) and on the distribution of the sacraments. This is the only matter on which the church can be divided.⁴⁶

It goes as far as to state that “[t]herefore, we can differ on our judgments in this aspect of the worldly realm and still be able to maintain unity based on the gift of the gospel.”⁴⁷

Thus, according to the Lutheran understanding, ethics is not a list of prescriptions. Ethics are developed in dialogue, and therefore people can come to different results.

Limits of differences

A clear example of ethical questions becoming church dividing was the discussion on apartheid in South Africa, where it became clear for the LWF that the unity with those churches that supported apartheid was not possible. Not rejecting apartheid was understood as tantamount to denying the gospel.⁴⁸

This example shows that although at a first glance it seems as if ethical questions were not constitutional for the church and would therefore not affect church unity, closer reflection reveals that ethical questions may well affect church unity, since they are based on the understanding of Scripture.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hans G. Ulrich, “On the Grammar of Lutheran Ethics,” in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Lutheran Ethics at the Intersections of God’s One World*, LWF Studies (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2005), 27–48.

⁴⁵ Achtelstetter, op. cit. (note 29), 165–86.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁸ “Southern Africa: Confessional Integrity,” quoted by Michael Root, op. cit. (note 16), 231.

In the case of apartheid, discussions among the churches made it rather clear that apartheid was not in accordance with the "right understanding" of Scripture. With regard to other issues, this question is much more difficult to answer. What is the right understanding and the pure preaching of the gospel concerning homosexuality? Or concerning globalization? Or concerning the use of embryonic stem cells for scientific research?

A recent Faith and Order study process on "Moral Discernment in the Churches"⁴⁹ shows that the problem is not different ethical values or criteria, but that the differences lie in the different ways of interpreting Scripture,⁵⁰ and more specifically in the question of how to apply modern science and its findings. In the case of the stem cell discussion for example, the differences are about when, in the process of human reproduction, we are dealing with an actual life. In the discussions about homosexuality, the disagreement is about whether or not one is born homosexual. In the case of globalization the disagreement is on what is the best way of overcoming poverty. Therefore, for the further study on moral discernment it seems to be important to discover the driving forces behind these disagreements. We will not find any answers for most of these issues in the Bible. Therefore, in addition to the question of the "right interpretation" of Scripture one of the main questions seems to be, In what way should modern scientific knowledge be used and can it be trusted. This means that the question about the relationship between faith and human reason needs to be explored.

In all these questions, Lutherans claim the criterion to be the doctrine of justification. But in some of these modern ethical questions this is not a clear criterion, since it does not help for example in terms of which methods are appropriate for interpretation and which are not.

Reflections on further perspectives

Our reflections have shown that from a Lutheran perspective the questions in relation to the unity of the church are: What is the "right" understand-

⁴⁹ I am referring to four unpublished case studies (globalization in the WARC, homosexuality in the Anglican Communion, the discussion about stem cells in Germany between Protestants and Roman Catholics, proselytism in Russia), which were analyzed and discussed during the meeting of the Plenary Commission on Faith and Order in Crete in October 2009.

⁵⁰ The LWF document on "Marriage..." arrives at a similar conclusion: "The dividing lines are not drawn clearly by geography, but more so by *how* one reads the Bible, and what one emphasizes as the most important elements in the teachings of the Bible." Cf. Karen L. Bloomquist, "Embodiment Contextualizes Sexual Ethics," in Bloomquist, *op.cit.* (note 44), 77–85, here, 84.

ing of Scripture? What is the right relationship between faith and reason? In light of the ecumenical discussions, the criterion of justification proves not to be clear enough.

Concerning the unity of the church, the term *koinonia* may give some guidance. This New Testament term includes a vertical as well as a horizontal perspective. The vertical perspective, the communion with God, is characterized and qualified through “justification.” Justification, on the other hand, has implications for the horizontal aspect. It leads to care for the neighbor or, in other words, to Christian love.

If we are using the New Testament concept of *koinonia* as a model for unity, we also need to use its categories for our criteriology. In other words, the other side of justification is love, and therefore the criterion of justification needs to be complemented with the criterion of Christian love. The double command, as we find it in Matthew 22:37ff., is the central Christian criterion that has the same structure as *koinonia*: it links love of the neighbor with love of God and therefore covers both aspects.

Normally, love is used in terms of *caritas* and leads to *diaconia*. What I am proposing here is to explore the notion of love as a criterion for church unity and thus for communion in doctrinal as well as ethical questions. Love has different aspects and connotations, but for the issue of Christian unity, God’s love is the model. It is described in the most comprehensive way in 1 Corinthians 13. Moreover, one of the central issues is the giving up of oneself for the other as we find it in Philippians 2:1–11. While this would, of course, need some more exploration, we can ask, What would it mean for the unity of the church in doctrinal issues if churches were to meet one another in Christian love? What would it mean for the unity of the church in ethical issues? It would mean that for the sake of unity we do not expect others to agree to our own theological positions, but accept that the position of the other might also be “right” in a given context. It would mean that for the sake of unity, we do not have to break apart if we have different positions on ethical questions. Nevertheless, unity should not be kept at any price. There are limits to diversity within unity. One reason for breaking the unity would be if one of the positions were contrary to love—for example, if this position were to lead to oppressing a minority group in the church or in society or to marginalizing people.

The Making of Differences: Theological Discourse on the Unity of the Church

Guillermo Hansen

We are one, but we are not the same;
We get to carry each other,
carry each other; One...
U2, "One"

In his groundbreaking work, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Paul Ricoeur provides us with an entry point for our reflections on the themes of unity, church and theology. While Ricoeur does not refer to the unity of the church as such but to the reality of symbols and myth, he makes two affirmations that carry a lot of weight for our topic. First, symbols open up and disclose a dimension of experience that otherwise would remain hidden and closed, not existent. The unveiling and opening up of something that was not there before is the primary effect of the symbol—it participates in the power of the signified. Secondly, myth making—an articulation of symbols within a narrative structure—is always an antidote to distress, to the unhappy consciousness of a “lost” wholeness. If plenitude were to be experienced, it would be everywhere in space and time—no myth would be necessary. Since it is not, themes such as unity, wholeness and reconciliation are realities to be spoken of and acted out, precisely because they are not a given.¹ Unity—with the deity, with humankind, with nature or within a body such as the church—thus refers to a mythical consciousness that seeks to symbolize a completion and fulfillment because of distress and a constitutive lack of actual lived experience. It is as though behind any symbol, behind any myth in this case, the symbol of unity and the myth of the *ecumene*, lay a longing for and the imprint of sheer incompleteness.

In this paper, I shall attempt to reflect on the way in which theology, the practice of theology, brings to the fore a hidden dimension of the unity of the church, that is, its tendency to fall into a “solid” and “totalizing” disciplinary “technology.” In faithfulness to its subject matter, theology may find itself at odds with practices of normalization and governability of minds and bodies in the name of an ideal,

¹ See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 167–9.

claimed to be realized by the church. In a certain sense, this may seem anomalous: is not theology a function, a dimension of a total body? Can it be at odds with itself? Are we not to lift up the discourse on oneness, unity, universality and catholicity? Certainly, but we are supposed to do so on the grounds of a freedom bestowed by the gospel and a new freedom signified by the collapse of Christendom and what this disintegration has spawned: Eurocentrism, colonialism and the totalizing myth of modernity. The moment churches fall into the temptation of nostalgia, heritage sites, refuge or simply reaction,² theology needs to speak about a lack, a void, the cracks, in order to recapture the fluidity and networking aspect present from the inception of the church. It is precisely in these "lacks" and "ruptures" that theology sees a gift and not a curse, thus giving expression to a charismatic event in the midst of an eschatological rupture. I contend that the present global "disorder," the present demotic "swarming" of multitudes, provides an opportunity for reimagining new practices of unity and communication that result from the dislocation of our bodies and minds. It is as though the lack of strong social articulation, the slackening of "group and grid," loosens body and mind "control," encouraging thus new forms of relating and therefore of being.³

Before addressing some of the problems involved in the issue of the church's oneness and its unity, I shall lay out my basic theological premises for approaching this theme. I do so not for the sake of a deductive approach, but rather to clarify the dimensions that I will take into account as I approach the theme of unity and the church. I regard the following as the basic theological traits: (a) a biblical primary symbol as this emerges to unveil a new existence and practice in the face of veiled and opaque practices—Paul's metaphor of the body in 1 Corinthians 12; (b) a secondary symbol through which the church understood itself to be lodged—the Trinitarian understanding of being as a communicative relationship, as seen in Athanasius and the Cappadocians; (c) and finally, the regulative principle of law and promise as guiding a discursive practice that supports different levels of decentering and centering that Christian tradition identifies as the breakthrough of the *eschaton*—Luther's understanding of law and gospel. These instances should not be seen as concentric circles but overlapping dimensions. Therefore, I will not assume an essentialist view of unity, as if it were something given and a good to be preserved. Rather, I see unity as an eschatological event, an outbreak that sets in motion a dynamic of decentering and centering that has profound implications on the way in which we conceive and practice the church's alleged unity.

² Cf. Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Peabody, Mass.: Paternoster Press, 2002), 22–30.

³ Cf. Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 89.

In doing so, I follow up on one of the problems discussed at the 2009 global theological conference “Transformative Perspectives and Practices Today,” (Augsburg, Germany), that relates to the tension present in the notion of Lutheran theology and practices as “bounded openness”—bound by a code, open to the new postcolonial, post-patriarchal and global horizons. What binds? What opens? At the heart of this tension lies the fact that for the church to be church, it must be rule bound, and yet open and fluid; centered (in Christ) and yet decentered (by the Spirit). We can also consider different sets of categories such as the tension between hegemonic oneness and multiplicity, between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, between colonial totalizing thought and postcolonial cacophony, between the one and plurality, between being and becoming, between regularity and irregularity, between rules and formulations, between coherence and dissension or between universalism and particularism. As we shall see, the history of Christian discourse on unity has always echoed—critically or in acquiescence—larger social, philosophical and political concerns.

Theology, of course, situates itself in the order of discourse. By the word discourse, I mean, in the first place, the obvious medium for conveying theological content and meaning through verbal performance. Discourse, as a practice, is what I have called elsewhere the software of the church.⁴ Lutheranism, for example, is the discrete religious software of the church’s “mind.” It is a sign system, a culture with an historically transmitted pattern of meanings encoded in symbols and embodied in social organisms—the (Lutheran) churches. Since it brings forth a world through its discursive (and non-discursive) practices, its resilience is shown through the engaging of variables that bodies encoded by this “mind” have to confront. It is my conviction that the Lutheran “code” is versatile enough to connect the scriptural narrative with the narratives of our own lives, forging a “culture” that can only stay alive insofar as new and diverse “environments” are integrated within the web of belief that forms and builds a tradition. Thus, the main question that arises here is how the theological mind (*noûn Christou*) “ensouls” the body (church), and how this body in turn “hypostatizes” the mind as it confronts an ever-changing scenario.

But, secondly, as an order of discourse, theology also engages in a practice that is governed by a linguistic structure or set of rules that seeks to “order” and “unify” the world, to construct “universal unities” that may lead to very different results. At best, it may lead to what Foucault calls a “single system of differ-

⁴ See Guillermo Hansen, “Resistance, Adaptation or Challenge: The Versatility of the Lutheran Code,” in Karen Bloomquist (ed.), *Transformative Theological Perspectives* (Minneapolis/Geneva: Lutheran University Press/The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 26.

ences."⁵ At worst, to a homogenous space constructed on the basis of practices of normalization, thus muffling the regime of discontinuities, thresholds, ruptures, breaks and transformations that constantly challenge epistemological structures and social formations.⁶ While certainly Foucault's program is non-metaphysical, non-transcendent and non-theological and, therefore, inassimilable into a full theological view, it does raise the question as to how theology purports to be a discourse of unity and, furthermore, how it locates its "object" (God) within a narrative that may lead to practices of normalization or emancipation. It provides us with an hermeneutics of suspicion that questions the unitary discourses on transcendence in the name of this very transcendence. Or, rather, to point out that transcendence happens when a purported "unity" is unveiled and unmasked for what it is: an invented order, hiding instead of revealing.

Therefore, theological discourse—and therefore the unity of the church—will be largely determined by two phenomena: the extent to which theology is aware of ideological prejudices of language and, more importantly, the mode of (discursive) practice that is generated by and mirrored in the "object" of its discourse, God.

While the church's proclamation and practice may be said to represent a form of immaterial labor⁷—symbolic, relational, affective—which produces, catalyzes or manipulates feelings of well-being, satisfaction, excitement, redemption and communion for instance, theology may be said to be a discourse on the language (mind) of the church, confronting this church with its own unrealized and receding horizon, the Triune God. Speech systems transform the experience of the speakers but, at the same time, language is not an autonomous cultural agent, since its patterns are always related to a structure of social relations and psychological drives.⁸ The social relations constituting the body called church frequently mirror the way in which our (individual) bodies are shaped by cultural norms, political forces and economic asymmetries, thus stifling the revolutionary "technology of the self" embodied by and through the church.⁹ Therefore, theology,

⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Barnes & Nobles, 1993), 205.

⁶ Here I have in mind the efforts of the Vatican during the 1980s to discipline the Latin American church through its most prominent theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutierrez and Jon Sobrino.

⁷ Cf. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 108.

⁸ See Douglas, *op. cit.* (note 3), 22.

⁹ Cf. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (eds), *The Essential Foucault* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 146. Foucault understands these "technologies" as "specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves." Therefore, "technologies of the self...permit

as a peculiar “technology of sign systems” embedded within a larger network of a “technology of the self” (church), is what gives expression to the critical mind of a body always in (con)tension with the “technologies of production” (economy) and “technologies of power” (politics) that are the two main forces contending in the location or dislocation of minds and bodies.

I would like to approach the theme of the church as an embodiment of a particular technology of the self through a primary biblical symbol, namely Paul’s image of the body of Christ. I shall explore this trope, image, metaphor, symbol, from perspectives derived from critical theory, postmodern thought and epistemology, focusing on the theme of unity not merely set against the background of divisions and differences (as it is expounded in 1 Cor 12 and 13), but how this unity emerges at the crossroads of a particular “spiritual” technology in its interface with other technologies that encode the bodies and the self in different ways. Thus, the body (of Christ) does not appear as a homogeneous space, or even an hierarchical system of differences, but as a network of differences that makes a difference for its members, for the understanding of self and for the world.

The one and the multiple

As we know, organicist metaphors have been central in the ecumenical quest for unity.¹⁰ Throughout the history of Christianity, the trope of the body (of Christ), as seen in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians for example, has grounded powerful ecclesiological models and rationales. Nonetheless, the metaphor of the body as a linguistic trope is not Paul’s invention, but a resource found in classical antiquity as philosophers, poets and sages sought to grapple with the tension between unity and diversity of political and civil communities. In ancient literature, “body” was the most common allegory for unity—i.e., the fable of Menenius Agrippa (1 BCE), echoed by Xenophon, Cicero and Livy, perhaps the best-known example, surely known to Paul himself.¹¹

individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” I employ Foucault’s definition as a formal frame of reference, not as a material description of the “Christian” technology of the self as such—to which he devotes a lengthy consideration.

¹⁰ See, for example, Lutheran–Roman Catholic Study Commission, *Church and Justification: Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1994), 38–41.

¹¹ See James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul, the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 550. Also Arland Hultgren, “The Church as the Body of Christ: Engaging an Image in the New Testament,” in *Word & World* 22/2 (Spring 2002), 126.

I leave aside the unique spin Paul gave to this image that sets it apart from Greco-Roman corporate expressions (the body of Christ, into which we are incorporated through baptism and the sharing of the Eucharist; a defiance of the principle of territoriality signified by the *polis*), focusing instead on how the image of the body has been a constant reference for political metaphors in the West dealing with unity and diversity.

This shift is important for observing how it has influenced theological speech. First, as mentioned, theological language is never an autonomous cultural agent, since its patterns are always related to a structure of social relations. This is not only so because the church forms a new pattern of social relations, but also because speech maintains a solidarity which is already imbued with certain experiences of order and legitimacy. Second, turning more closely to the particular metaphorical image of the body, the Pauline image stands in the adjacencies of two basic poles mirroring each other: the social or corporate body, and the physical and individual bodies. As the British anthropologist Mary Douglas has demonstrated, the social body constrains the way in which the physical body is perceived; in turn, the physical experience of the body sustains a particular view of society. "There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other."¹² Strong social control demands strong bodily control—the type of movements, care, grooming, feeding, life span, pains it can stand, etc. And, vice versa, the weaker the social constrains (due to marginalization, gender, ethnicity, labor, etc.), the more slacking and bodily dissociation is approved. I shall return to this remarkable hypothesis, which in part sheds light on the situation in Corinth, where Paul referred to another type of body. The observation that the Pauline trope inserts itself between these two realities suffices; its metaphor is a novel discursive practice playing with the multiple and the one that deeply influences the image of the social body as well as the individual one.

Yet, inertia is one of the characteristics of human thinking and social configurations. It is interesting to observe how the metaphor of the body—once a metaphor for republicanism and assembly—was transformed into the legitimizing icon for an absolute if not totalitarian conception and thus serving a new order of discourse for disciplining bodies. Suffice it to remember the cover of Thomas Hobbes's first edition of the *Leviathan* (1651), showing the king's body towering over the earth, assimilating in his torso and limbs hundreds of small bodies, thus giving expression to the ruler as the embodiment of unity and sovereignty.¹³ In

¹² Douglas, *op. cit.* (note 3), 69.

¹³ Cf. Hardt & Negri, *op. cit.* (note 7), 330.

fact, this type of metaphor has largely come out of a more fundamental philosophical premise, namely Plato's distinction of the one and the many, which served to articulate other fundamental distinctions: order vs chaos, universality vs particularity. As the body is the ordering of "chaotic flesh," and the mind is the ruler and sovereign of the body, so the "one" understood in opposition to difference and multiplicity emerges as a powerful motif for directing the affairs of the world—whether religious, political, or familial. The bringing forth of oneness and unity, at least in the West, was thus not only launched as an ideal for society at large, but became "embodied" in the political realm through the figure of emperor, king, state, nation, people, class or party. And, as is well known from the ecclesiastical history grafted to the bowels of the Roman Empire, this model also emerged as a leading expression of Roman ecclesiology. Whether political or ecclesiastical, the multiple is always seen in opposition to the one.

This interplay between the one and the multiple, between being and becoming, has presented in classical and political philosophy the aporia of an impossible mediation between the universal and the particular—a fact churches are continually grappling with not only ecumenically but also confessionally and denominationally. As the political philosopher Ernesto Laclau argues,¹⁴ there have been two models for conceiving the relation between the universal and the particular within Western tradition. In classical philosophy, two things were always asserted: (a) the existence of an impermeable dividing line between the universal and the particular, an antagonistic and agonistic opposition; and (b) the universal can be grasped by reason, while the particularities defy the premise of universal reason. In this case, the particular is regarded as somehow "corrupting" the universal—as we can see in much of the ecumenical ideology of the World Council of Churches (WCC) before the 1990s, not to mention Roman Catholic ecclesiology.¹⁵ Either the particular realizes in itself (that is, elevates itself to) the universal—thus negating itself as particular—or it negates the universal by asserting its particularism—an impossible event since the very definition of particularities suppose the existence of a "universal" not yet attained. Classical philosophy did not contain within itself a sufficiently differentiated rationale to grasp a more complex and less antagonistic relationship between both.

According to Laclau, another possibility when thinking about the relation between universality and particularity is the motif of incarnation. Here lies the absurd and irrational claim that a body, in itself opaque and ordinary, becomes

¹⁴ See Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 22ff.

¹⁵ Cf. Vitor Westhelle, *The Church Event: Call and Challenge of the Church Protestant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 14ff.; here 28.

the medium for a universal, God—a connection that deifies reason altogether, for by postulating a finite body as medium of the universal, it automatically cancels particularity as well as universality. What interests Laclau is not so much Christianity as such, but what the incarnational model has spawned in the history of the West, namely, those movements and trends that after the Enlightenment claimed to be privileged agents in history and embodying a transcendental universality: nation, culture, race, class or party. Colonial Eurocentric thought is thus the natural corollary or merger of both the classical and the incarnational models.

Is Laclau's understanding of the incarnational model correct? I would posit that it is to the extent that from Augustine onwards this has been the recurring understanding of the church, a sort of continuing incarnation of the universal. Nonetheless, Laclau errs when he takes the historical and institutional embodiment of this church as the logical outcome of an agent (Jesus), whose particular body was the expression of a universality that is not only transcendent, but encrypted according to the logic of Greek metaphysical thinking. I shall return to this point later, as I will take up the gauntlet thrown down by Laclau: humanity's impossibility to realize the universal, yet its need for a universal horizon that allows for a certain communication between disparate bodies. In a sense, Laclau's own alternative to the problem of oneness and plurality, universality and particularity, was already dealt with in Paul's theology.

For the time being, Laclau's notion of humanity's receding horizon helps me to understand that discursive regimes are mounted on a previous reality, an economy of instincts, which may lead to disparate outcomes. When this economy acquires a social dimension, we face the problem of the tension between particularity and universality, as outlined by Laclau. His lasting observation is that the universal horizon—what we can term oneness—is always an intrinsic part of a particular identity as far as the particular is penetrated by a constitutive lack. This universal emerges not as some principle underlying and explaining the particular, but as an incomplete horizon suturing dislocated particular identities.¹⁶ In other words, the tension between particularity and universality is always receding, can never be (historically) solved. That is why the universal and all its cognates (oneness, unity, etc.) are symbols for a missing fullness and do not have any empirical content of their own.

This raises two sets of distinct yet related questions: what is the point of theology as a verbal performance, and what is the incomplete horizon that sutures the dislocated particular identity/particularity that we call church? A signifying system, because it is a system (a church, a tradition, a confession), inherently

¹⁶ Laclau, *op. cit.* (note 14), 28.

speaks about boundaries, about limits. Yet, at the same time, the acknowledgement of these boundaries presents us with a puzzle, the ghost of what lies beyond these boundaries. Herein lies the paradox: when we talk about the limits of a signifying system, it is clear that these limits cannot be signified per se, but show themselves as the interruption or breakdown of the process of signification itself.¹⁷ Boundaries give identity, a sense of unity, yet this identity always contains a crisis, a deficit, the threatening difference that lurks at the margins. Only an eschatological identity can digest difference irrupting into identity.¹⁸

The body of Christ

Theology is an integral moment of the church event. Its symbols catalyze an array of instinctual phenomena, unconscious and transcending, which leads to a certain conformation of psyche and (social) body. Therefore, the reality of unity is always mediated by a discourse, pitched to one or a series of symbols and metaphors. Yet, here is where the main question arises: Does theology simply baptize norms, habits and metaphors already found in society and culture, or does it embody a crisis of those by implanting another code or horizon as a new field, catalyzing a power that comes from beyond its margins? Is this beyond seen as a threat, or as a promise, a gift, grace?

Here we turn to Paul's motif of the body, which is of particular interest since it is interjected between two previous conceptions of body—the social and the individual—which sustain themselves in a mirroring effect. What are the characteristics of this body? In his trailblazing analysis of Pauline theology, John T. Robinson puts an interesting spin on our common organizational and hierarchical assumptions regarding the church which, we must remember, already has a previous history in classical antiquity as well as in Israel as people or assembly. Paul shifts the corporate image of the Christian community from that of the nation state (Israel) and the body politic (classical political philosophy), that is, from traditional boundary markers, to one in which the members are drawn from a multiplicity of backgrounds, united by a common allegiance (incorporation, “adoption”) to Christ. The unity in this multiplicity is signified by the notion of sharing Christ's mind (*nous*).¹⁹ What is important here is that members do not create the body by this allegiance, but rather that they are the expression of Christ's own body insofar

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁸ Cf. Westhelle, *op. cit.* (note 15), 116.

¹⁹ See Dunn, *op. cit.* (note 11), 551.

that they are ensouled by Christ's mind. Here is where Paul's genius comes to the fore: Paul advances a notion of body that reverses the classical ways of approaching unity and multiplicity. In a way, it constitutes a reversal of the principle familiar in Old Testament literature, where the remnant, or the one, represents the many. It is as though Paul sees in the old covenant a vicarious minority, gradually reduced by sin, embodying God's purposes and will for the whole world. This train of thought can be pursued in Romans, where the one (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Elijah, Isaiah, see Rom 4:9 and 11; other Old Testament figures are the Servant of Yahweh, Son of Man, etc.) is chosen on behalf of the many, a representation of the plurality. Yet, in Paul's account, Abraham's seed is reduced to one man, Jesus, who died for all, and now lives as a network of charismata, the church. Here this process is finally inverted. As Robinson asserts,

The principle of exclusion has been set in reverse. Henceforward, it is not the one who represents the many, like the Servant of Jahveh (Isa 42:1) or the Son of Man (standing for the whole "people of the saints of the most High," Dan 7:13–27). Rather, *it is the many who represent the one*....The many, to whom no limit can be put either of race, class or sex (Gal 3:28), now constitutes the one. Abraham's seed, the Christ, is still one, as the promise required...but it is a unity which is inclusive rather than exclusive, representative not simply vicarious.²⁰

For Paul, Christology is what encrypts ecclesiology, a new understanding of unity signified by a common mind as well as a diaconal engagement with each other as bodies. In other words, Paul's notion of the body implies a "software" (mind) as well as a "hardware" (body) whose unity is love. There are many ways in which the apostle conceives of this interplay between the many and the one, all pointing to a mystical, radical and novel recreation of identities, a technology of the self (being "in" Christ and Christ in us, possessing Christ's mind, growing and grafted into Christ, being with Christ, putting on Christ, Christ being formed within us, etc.). It can be said that Paul is referring to what Carl Gustav Jung termed the dynamic of individuation, the emergence of the archetype of the self as the fullness of human identity (New Adam). Yet, this individuation is a corporate one, of solidarity, of interdependency. So, here we are dealing with a confession, a new structure of the mind as well as the underside of this confession, namely a multiplicity of charismata, whose undergirding texture is love, intertwining bodies as a body (1 Cor 13).

²⁰ John T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1952), 61. Author's own emphasis.

This is why the most striking feature of Paul's image is the fact that it is a charismatic one, a confession of a pluralized body united by mind and service—more than a homogenized body headed by the One. The unity of the body is not external, but internal and enacted in and through multiple differentiations (charismata) by the Spirit, as well as by a common mind, Christ's (1 Cor 1:10; 2:16—*noûn kuríon/Christou*). What makes of this multiplicity a realized unity (or a unity in becoming) is love, which not only presupposes but also enacts differences. Thus, Paul does not advocate a sort of Cartesian model of the mind, autonomous from and capable of ruling over the body; rather mind and body are attributes of the same hypostasis (Christ) and they interact equally and constantly in the production of reason, imagination, desire, emotions, feelings and effects. We cannot speak of a unitary "agent" or "subject" any more, but of a multitude, a "swarm" that acts in concert, yet differently, outlining a pattern whose coherence is love.²¹

When dealing with the reality of a body that articulates itself charismatically, the first accent, of course, rests in the event or act of gracious giving—by Christ, by the Spirit. Charisma stands here for a concrete "materialization" of God's *charis*, a gracious giving. It is thus a divine, not a natural event. Precisely because it is divine it is multiple, differentiated, democratized. The multiplicity and variety of gifts are thus a witness to God's richness and *charis*—as seen in the gifts mediated by speech and praxis in Romans 12:3–8 (prophecy, teaching, exhortation, service, benevolence, leadership and acts of mercy), or in 1 Corinthians 12:8–11 (wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation). There is another dimension to the reality of the diversification of charismata that Paul points out, especially in his letter to the Corinthians. While charismata are to be used for the edification of the community, of the body, another remarkable emphasis is that none is to be considered inferior (vv. 14–20), or denigrated (vv. 21–26).²² As indicated by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek,²³ an important dimension of this rhetorical strategy is the subversion of social hierarchy in Christ's body. Paul states:

On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater

²¹ Cf. Hardt & Negri, *op. cit.* (note 7), 337. As shown also by the life sciences, especially biology and neurobiology, the human body itself is a swarm, a multitude organized. For example, decisions are not made by a "center" (mind, will, etc.) but by the configuration of the entire neural network in communication with the body and what lies beyond it.

²² See Hultgren, *op. cit.* (note 11), 130.

²³ See Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is Christianity Worth Fighting For?* (London: Verso, 2000), 116.

respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another (1 Cor 12:22–25).

Charismata thus point simultaneously to a gift that comes from beyond (fullness) and a fragmentary realization through persons (incompleteness) highlighting a constitutive individual lack, a lack that becomes the occasion for a new realization of the self as communion—where weaknesses are turned into strengths and vice-versa. What Paul expounds here is not just a novel reinterpretation of an ancient trope (body) applied now to the church, but a total recasting of what it means to be human. It is as though through the fragility and brittleness of persons sized by a charisma another dimension transpires and becomes visible: our vulnerable interdependence. Our weakness, our lack, is the occasion for the fullness and richness found in God. What is never complete in ourselves is given to us through a participation in communion with others in Christ. To be more precise, in the radical love that connects us and imports difference into identity.

Thus, Paul's notion of body, charismata and weaknesses in fact mirrors his understanding of the crucified Christ. The unity of this body is deeply intertwined with a reversal of a royal metaphor, transmitted through the antique symbol of the body, recasting classic conceptions of hierarchy and virtues. It is in fact a new technology of the self—the self that Christ is—which is realized through the diversity of charismata and the service to one another through a new network, the body, while the other ceases to be an object, particularly, an object of contempt and derision. We become the "place" for actualizing our creatural being, as *imago Dei*. Here, difference is not division, but the provision for unity. Otherness is not a threat to unity, but a condition for it.²⁴ What happens in me, in my consciousness (faith), also happens bodily between me and someone else (love). What happens there is Christ himself. But because that which is manifested is the body of a crucified Lord, it erodes our notions of potencies by proclaiming that the ultimate mystery of love is to remain incomplete, always dis-located from our natural boundaries: only an imperfect being is truly capable of receiving love and to love. As Luther states in his Heidelberg Disputation, "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it... Therefore sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive."²⁵

²⁴ Cf. John D. Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 5.

²⁵ Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation," theological thesis number 28, in Timothy Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 60. See also Zizioulas, *ibid.*, 304.

In patristic times, this understanding of unity was further elaborated through a new discursive strategy, a “mutation” of classical monotheistic principle as well as Hellenistic philosophical monism and Gnostic redemptive myths: the Trinity. While the primary concern was obviously the reality of God and salvation, the doctrine of the Trinity was a metonymy for the larger problem of unity and diversity, of being and becoming, the one and the multiple. The doctrine of the Trinity, as John Zizioulas argues, is rooted in the ecclesial experience, an experience of personal communion mediated by the sacraments—and the Word, we may add.²⁶ Athanasius, and especially the Cappadocians—the key interpreters of Nicæan doxology—crushed the notion of being and the one inherited from Hellenistic patterns of thought and the Roman imperial political model. This revolution occurred through the identification of personhood (relatedness) and hypostatic being, namely, that the reciprocal and mutual relationships of the persons are constitutive of God’s being. This being, therefore, is not a previous substance to which later some accidents are added, such as personhood. Rather, God’s *ousia*—and therefore oneness—becomes a predicate of God’s hypostatic relations. This is contrary to the view as found in Augustine, where *ousia* is seen as the *arché* and causal principle of deity. To be God is to be the *eschatos*, sheer unbound- edness, a future that is inexhaustible.²⁷ The unity and oneness of this God, thus, is an inviting and inclusive unity, open to human beings and the world. And this openness, this unity, is what Scripture refers to as love.²⁸

Trinitarian speech thus signifies the crisis of homogenizing and totalitarian discourses, for the very basis of its intelligibility lies in its underscoring asymmetry over symmetry, interdependence over independence, mutuality and reciprocity over linear emanation. Furthermore, it situates the ecclesial reality within the larger horizon of God’s Triune unity, the final consummation and fulfillment of all creation. The church as Christ’s body thus conforms to a network of charismata in fluid motion, in circulation, constituting self, and inaugurating a new economy of exchanges marked by a novel transactional quality, love. Yet this love is not just an attribute that has been substantially communicated to the church. Actually, this love is also what “hypostasizes” the very being of God. The body of Christ means that this Christ subsists and possesses a mode of existence constituted

²⁶ See John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in the Personhood of the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997), 16.

²⁷ Cfr. Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 164f.

²⁸ See Juergen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Crossroads, 1992), 87.

as being in the manner in which God also subsists as being: as a relationship of communion. In like manner, all that the Spirit touches is transformed into a relational being; this is why Christ's body is the relation between differences par excellence: it affirms and realizes otherness.

In sum, Paul's image of the body of Christ signifies a rupture and breakdown of the process of traditional religious and political significations. His charismatic conception denotes a network of differences that always intersect the other, especially the weak and debased, as the instance that creates an existential, political and therefore ontological jolt. The other is not a substance, a nature, but a mode of existence of the Spirit that conceals a unity as well as unveiling a lack, a missing fulfillment. The other appears as a revelation of the truth by the fact of his or her otherness as well as the place for the realization of being, communion. And it is precisely through communion that an individual becomes a person realizing their hypostatic being:²⁹ one "supports" one's identity and particularity not through a sort of antagonistic logic of equivalences ("Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" 1 Cor 12:4–6), nor by inducting the other within a system that only seeks to cancel the differences by "ordering" them hierarchically ("But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another," Cor 12:24b–25). Paul, it seems to me, would hardly agree with concepts of the "unicity" of the church guaranteed by an apostolic and hierarchical succession as portrayed in the Vatican's document *Dominus Iesus*.³⁰ That would be the worst example of gospel "plus."³¹

Thus, the trope of the body necessarily includes what Foucault referred to as the ruptures, differences and thresholds that always challenge any order-

²⁹ See Zizioulas, op. cit. (note 26), 106.

³⁰ See *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church* (2000), especially section IV, "Unicity and Unity of the Church": "The Catholic faithful are required to profess that there is an historical continuity—rooted in the apostolic succession—between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church: This is the single Church of Christ... which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (cf. *Jn* 21:17), commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule her (cf. *Mt* 28:18ff.), erected for all ages as 'the pillar and mainstay of the truth' (1 *Tim* 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in [*subsistit in*] the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him." At www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html, accessed 31 May 2010.

³¹ An apt term coined by Robert Bertram, in Michael Hoy (ed.), *A Time for Confessing* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 41.

ing of dispersed elements, any “unity talk” that in the name of universality obliterates particularity. The other always faces me as an other, as a mystery, which becomes the possibility of communion and personhood when this other appears neither as a threat nor as an occasion for my self-affirmation, but as a receding horizon of being—in Christ. It is as though Paul went beyond the (postmodern) logic of absolute difference (“All these [charismata] are activated by one and the same Spirit” 1 Cor 12:11) as well as the (classical and modern) notion of a homogeneous space. He does not need them, for in the end the Spirit itself signifies the ultimate depth of all riches, of all charismata, that is inexhaustible. Bearing witness to the Father’s mercy and coming reign, Jesus embodies a new space: the space of the Spirit. His body, his presence, becomes the locus for a new narrative that is not only about God, but also about how God crosses over into the bodies and minds of those who never expected to be considered “some-bodies.” To draw frontiers is an act of disenfranchising power; to trespass them is an act of divine imagination and love.

This is why Paul’s articulation of the body of Christ stands between the mirroring effects of the social and individual body.³² It actually interrupts the flow between both, creating a crisis or an apocalypse that necessarily has social and political effects. For Paul’s epochal contribution is to recast Christianity as a new technology of the self, the self that is Christ, consisting in a new conception of interdependence as this is played out in the reality we call church. It radically challenges other technologies that, as Foucault indicated, permit individuals to affect by their own means, or with the help of others, certain operations on their own bodies and souls—as in classic Hellenism and the mystery and Gnostic religions. Paul has interjected here a new “software,” the mind of Christ, that through the Spirit weaves a new tapestry of human flesh: this tapestry is now a body, and its inner consistency is (God’s) love. Christ, the mind or center, is not located at any spatial center, for it is also the circumference, the liminal and what lies beyond. But if what happens between me and someone else is the Spirit grafting us into a body through the other, this happening also alters the way in which the otherness of the social body as well as my individual physical body are represented. This body, therefore, is itself a multitude organized on the plane of immanence, standing between sovereignty (of the political body) and anarchy (of individual bodies). It constitutes a third bodily reality taking its own “place” in the world.³³

³² Douglas, *op. cit.* (note 3).

³³ Cf. Westhelle’s notion of the church as a third “hybrid” space, standing between locale and place. *Op. cit.* (note 15), 143.

Outcomes for the ecumenical being of the church

So we reach the last question: how is unity realized? Is there a particular Lutheran witness in this regard? One way to answer these questions would be to consider the model of "unity in plurality" as expounded, for example, by Oscar Cullmann³⁴—not far from other notions such "unity through diversity" and "reconciled diversity" as employed in many Lutheran circles. I am, however, not convinced that confessional families as such represent different charismata that other churches do not possess. Churches and confessions, certainly, constitute a networking of charismata, but we cannot point the finger at precisely which charisma is embodied in one or the other tradition. Yet these networks are always regulated by codes that allow certain discursive practices to circulate and therefore to orient the flow of charismata. Because a network also constitutes a system it implicitly proclaims that something else lies beyond itself: other networks of differences which, in turn, may appear as a threat or as a vocative event.

With this in mind, we can point to a theological tradition or, rather, a strategy of speech that is peculiar to Lutheranism in general—although not necessarily expressed in all Lutheran churches, and certainly not confined to them. Whatever expression it takes—law and gospel, demands and promises, command and new obedience—the point is always the same: the conformation of the body of Christ, the signals of the doings of the Spirit, the life of faith, are always an event where we are simultaneously "undone" and then "redone" through Word and sacraments weaving us into a new self. In this self that is Christ we are transformed, changed, turned and converted into one another in love (*verwandeln*),³⁵ which combines total freedom and total servanthood.³⁶ Article VII of the *Confessio Augustana (CA)*—all critiques against its minimalist definition notwithstanding—will always ring as a salutary decentering of the church's mundane ego that always stands between us and God, and between ourselves (uniformity of ceremonies instituted by human beings, which in Article XXVIII is directly linked to "ecclesiastical power" as represented by bishops). By denouncing the incoherence of subsuming under the notion of universality a particular embodiment of authority and practices, and not the gospel and the sacraments, it was a deconstruction of a false universalism.

³⁴ See Oscar Cullmann, *Unity Through Diversity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 9.

³⁵ "Also werden wir ynn eynander vorwandelt und gemeyn durch die liebe, an wilche keyn wandell nit geschehen mag." Martin Luther, "Ein Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Brüderschaften (1519)," in *WA 2/3*, 24–26.

³⁶ "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in Lull, *op. cit.* (note 25), 391.

It is my contention that the law/gospel code in Luther's hermeneutic is devised to guarantee a certain discursive practice that seeks to reproduce a sense of self that is "gained" by grace, as one's life and gifts flow into the circuitry and metabolism of Christ's body. The law as well as the gospel conform to an eschatological compound, signaling the breakthrough of a new life, where the antithetical tension ceases to exist and the split between subject and other subjects ceases to be antagonistic. This apocalyptic moment—to echo Northrop Frye—is the way in which the world looks after the "ego" that has disappeared.³⁷ In sum, law is the form by which theological speech is addressed as a strategy for decentering the ego (also regarding confessional traditions and churches), producing a crack in the mask of our persona-prosopon in order to unveil the true center of ourselves, Christ, within the new charismatic network of the Spirit, his body. This implies being taken into the very being of God, or rather, to let God practice God's own love in us.³⁸

This rhetorical strategy functions not only as a verbal declaration (*gratia*, the forensic inflection), but as making accessible to us the energies of life that are truly eternal (*donum*). It grants permission to live truly by "decurving" our lives by an inexhaustible promise. As creatures, curved in our own otherness from God, holding our breath, conserving energy for ourselves, we live within a threatening horizon, with opaque boundaries that signal the limits of our signifying activity. As a code, the law/gospel dynamic refers to the space, where the "event horizon" of our lives, curved in upon itself, is opened by a blast that we call Spirit. For that reason, it refers to how God comes alive to persons threatened by the margins—in psychological, spiritual, social and economic terms. It radically redraws the boundaries of God's domain in order to include those who were hitherto considered far from it. This is the body of Christ.

To be "undone" by the law in order to receive a new center of graced identity, that is to set things right, implies always a decentering of those fields that entrap us in a diabolical dance. The law is the unraveling of those scripts that numb and kill in order to receive a self truly, by faith, through the gospel. The language of the gospel, thus, is always received as we are forced into our own margins, margins from where a new centering takes place. And these margins—as Paul's image of the body conveys—are stretched to the point of overlapping with the social margins from where Christ meets us through the destitute, the marginal and the excluded (cf. Mt 25). Not surprisingly, the Eucharist signifies the breaking

³⁷ See Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt, 1982), 138.

³⁸ Cf. Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love: Martin Luther's Religious World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 64. Here Mannermaa refers to Luther's *Adventpostille*.

of a body for broken bodies (and minds), gathered now into a new redistributive community of social, spiritual and material goods.³⁹ This is something that theologies stemming from India (Dalit), Africa (Ubuntu) and Latin America (Liberation) have pressed upon the Lutheran code, ringing the same tones that we hear among feminist and critical theologies in the North.

It seems to me that when the church is seen as the event that emerges when space and bodies are carved out by the receding-and-yet-present God, the flow and counterflow of a Trinitarian God that never cease to create and call forth, then the tenor and scope of our speech strategies begin to mutate. First, it leads to examining the type of unity being realized in our own local churches, then to the nature of our global Lutheran communion and, finally, to the type of unity reflected in our larger ecumenical conversations. The three instances are actually three dimensions of "networks of communication," networks of affective, intellectual and social relationships—*charismata*. These church events are not isolated phenomena; they stand between the centripetal forces and sovereign project of nations and—more so in the present—empire, and the centrifugal and anarchic drives of individual minds and bodies.

The first level of unity, that of local and/or national churches, will certainly influence the way in which the second (confessional) and third (ecumenical) levels are addressed. Yet, this must not blur the fact that a different dynamics of "uniting" may be operative at these different levels and, furthermore, that it is the universal horizon of Christ's body—the network of *charismata*, of minds encrypted by the Word and bodies intertwined by the sacraments—that confers upon the local church and confessional tradition its ecclesial status. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that in the confessional documents we find a salutary relativization of any particularity—local, regional, territorial, or even "confessional"—that purports to become the universal. Whether one stresses Luther's definition in the Large Catechism,⁴⁰ or *CA VII*,⁴¹ it is clear that the assembly of all believers is defined by its relation to certain events brought to them (preaching and sacraments) constitutes the church.

³⁹ See this concept developed in Luther's "Sermon on the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods (1519)," in Helmut T. Lehman (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 45 ff.

⁴⁰ "I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit, in one faith, mind and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism." "Large Catechism," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2000), 437–78.

⁴¹ "The Augsburg Confession—German Text—Article VII," in *ibid.* 42. "The assembly of *all believers* among whom the gospel is purely preached"

Therefore, the fact that in local or confessional terms we may be said to be an expression of a “network of differences,” united by a common “faith, mind and understanding” (Luther), we do not shy away from acknowledging that our system of significations, implicitly includes the proviso that that which we signify (the body of Christ) does not begin or end with our own particular expression. The church’s charismatic nature, as well as the gospel’s universality, assume that a variety of “dialects” exist, and that our (Lutheran) “linguaging” is certainly not the only one conjugating God’s promises.

Thus we should not be offended by some statements by our ecumenical partners, as for example, when the Roman Catholic Church addresses those communities and traditions that are not in full communion with Peter and “are not Churches in the proper sense,” stating that “we believe that they suffer from defects.”⁴² I suggest that instead of quarreling about the same issues as during the Reformation, we must go ahead and confess the veracity of this statement, namely, that we do indeed suffer from “defects.” There is an incompleteness that is proper to the body if the body is to maintain itself as the body of Christ: it always needs to be nourished and conformed by something that comes from beyond its spatial-temporal boundaries. Fullness is not something the church possesses, but what the church witnesses to through the gospel. Therefore we have a sort of a “constitutive lack” and “defects”; but so does our partner. And this is a blessing, for only that which is lacking can be fulfilled—by God. Acknowledging and confessing this “defect” is the first step in realizing the unity of the body of Christ.

Nonetheless, the ecumenical dialogue about the unity of the church is not just at the level of comparing software, what we call doctrines, as important as this may be. There is a legitimate concern to probe each other’s understanding and interpretation of what the mind of Christ consists of. After all, meaning is always a result of negotiation, of exchanges in pursuit of sharing that which we have in common, and affects the way in which bodies and minds relate. But mind, as we saw, is always related to a body. Therefore, dialogue is also a matter of letting the body of Christ be, of slackening our orders of discourse to the effect of letting the dynamics of different charismata come together in novel and renewed synergies. This is messy, untidy, even disconcerting at times, yet it happens thanks to the new phenomenon of swarming multitudes that have erupted in the last hundred years or so through new and very different expressions of Christian communities and engagements.

⁴² See *Dominus Iesus*, op. cit. (note 30), IV, 17.

I have in mind not only the explosion of the Pentecostal churches, or the so-called "emergent churches," but also the "irreverent" practices of worship, spirituality and solidarity enacted at the grassroots level between members or communities belonging to "mainline" traditions—with or without the official sanction of ecclesiastical bodies. By trespassing old systems of signification, by sharing the Word and Eucharist and engaging in the pursuit of the common, they give expression to new ways in which the body of Christ is networked, loosening institutional corsets, giving room to the living gospel. That this happens mostly at the fringes of the classical "centers" (ecclesiastical, political, economic) should not come as a surprise: here the disciplining and ordering of discursive strategies have no effect. The irrelevance of power within the so-called emergent churches has broken automatic allegiances. Established traditions, theologians and institutions understandably get nervous with this, but the body of Christ is neither an institution, nor a society in the strict sense of the term. It is really the expression of a swarm without a "center," for Christ is mediated by a decentered and decentering network of charismata. The network, the body, is the center. Paraphrasing Foucault, we could say that theological discourse about the unity of the church would consist in "making differences," without privileging any center—for the sake of Christ.

Talk of unity, therefore, is best approached when we let our churches' experience be interpreted through the biblical witness, especially Paul's reference to the body of Christ. What we see there is neither a notion of unity cast at the expense of plurality (absolutism), nor a plurality devoid of unity (liberalism). What we have is a unity emerging from the overlapping operations of a common Spirit, shaped by the mind of Christ, stressing enacted difference and therefore, a universal horizon. This is why the unity of the church is a symbol for an incompleteness, signifying something that is yet to come in order for us to become. But precisely because it is a symbol, it needs to be spoken of and acted out.

One Body in Christ? Ecclesiology and Ministry between Good Theology and Bad Anthropology

Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen

I therefore, the prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (Eph 4:1–6).

Introduction

In this paper, I shall address the oneness of the church and ministry and endeavor to give some profile to the Lutheran church with respect to gender relations. The subtitle of my article points to what in many discussions about the participation of women in church and ministry has constituted a real problem: more emphasis has been put on bad anthropology than on good theology. It has been interesting, albeit frustrating, to witness how, whenever the discussion touches on gender, ecclesiology and ministry have been emptied of sober theological analysis. The subject has no longer been good theology, the *esse* of the church or ministry, but a dualistic anthropology according to which the “man” (as in male) is the normal in contrast to the “woman,” the abnormal “other,” who is subordinate, weak or even bad. A whole system of gender roles and hierarchies based on this dubious anthropology has been put in place in both church and society. According to this system, men are superior, exercising power over women, even when—as has been the case in Western culture since a bourgeois moral codex for women was developed in the mid-nineteenth century—it is argued that women are morally superior and have a higher moral status than men.

This situation can change radically, such as in Danish society and in the Danish Lutheran folk church. Parallel to the movement toward equality in the Danish

democratic welfare state, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark has developed into a community in which the acceptance of women pastors and bishops has become a *status confessionis*, questioned primarily only when it is violated. Since the ordination of the first women pastors in 1948, following a vehement debate rife with common gender stereotypes, the gender question with all its cultural constructs related to women and men has become secondary to the question of professionalism. So much so that the following anecdote is said to be true: A pastor, trying to find out if one of the confirmands has really been to the service in the neighboring church, asks if the pastor in that church was a man or a woman. The confirmand promptly replies, "I don't know." I never check. The anecdote mirrors a natural development in all sectors where gender differences have been transcended: gender differences become secondary or irrelevant once we have transcended them. What becomes important is the pastor's professionalism and authenticity.¹ Thus, as soon as the first women were ordained and practiced as pastors, the issue began losing momentum and the number of "protesters" decreased rapidly.

In the wake of the ongoing democratization of Western society and the church, the understanding of ministry developed considerably during the second half of the twentieth century. In Denmark, the fact that the ministry was opened to women was not only an intelligent response to an increasing need for a new understanding of ministry, but it also met the church's need to find a new way of being church. A folk church since 1849, the Evangelical Lutheran church was already an ecumenical institution hosting a wide array of different forms of "Lutheranism." Nonetheless, by the mid-twentieth century, an even greater wealth of diversity was needed in order to embrace its oneness. First and foremost, the inclusive understanding of ministry has led to a genuine humanization of the ordained ministry and, secondly, to a genuine democratization of the church, due to the comprehensive understanding of the church as the people of God.² In many ways, the inclusive one ministry is the true realization of creation theology, incarnation Christology and pneumatology since the Word of God (*verbum Dei*) is transmitted as both word and practice—in keeping with Luther's good theology.

¹ Cf. Isolde Karle, *Der Pfarrberuf als Profession. Eine Berufstheorie im Kontext der modernen Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Verlag Kreuz, 2008), 281–310, here 304. Grounded on e.g., Niklas Luhman's systemic theories, Karle points to how both the functions of medical doctors and pastors are connected with certain professional expectations, and how in the churches of the EKD pastors are assessed in relation to trustworthiness and competence, not in relation to gender.

² Cf. Luther, "Von den Konzilien und der Kirche (1539)," in *WA 50*, 509–853. In this treatise, Luther contrasts the ordinary Christian holiness of the church as the people of God with the papal *Ecclesiae Romanae sanctitas*, which is a special, higher sanctity that holds neither Christ nor the Holy Spirit. It is simply Roman, not Catholic and not at all Christian, as Luther has it (624–34).

One of the principles of Reformation theology is that the reformed church should always be in a process of reform. This calls for a theological interpretation that combines past and present. Interpretation is the new in light of the old, letting the present influence the understanding of the past, taking ever new phenomena that did not exist when the normative texts were written (for instance a developed ecclesiology or ministry), and to combine them with the universe or core message that is expressed in the texts. According to Gadamer, it is at this intersection between past and present that the “productive role” of interpretation arises. Interpretation is a process where the interpreter puts his or her presuppositions into play, and in which phenomena and themes, considered to have a central and especially important value, are sorted out and accentuated.³ In this process, arbitrary and subjective prejudices do not count.

History delivers central points that become and remain part of theology’s self-understanding. But history also delivers points that are not central to a theological self-understanding, and which may even become detrimental to the theological core. As the authors of the 2007 Lutheran World Federation report, *Marriage, Family and Sexuality*, put it, moral or ethical values are contextual and not at the core of the Bible. Therefore these values have always differed and today have to be secured and maintained through other means than in the past. Instead of letting different understandings of moral values divide Christians we should acknowledge them as part of worldly diversity.⁴ For Lutherans, the core of unity or oneness of the church is guided by the central message of justification for all in Jesus Christ by faith alone. Having this core enables Lutherans constantly to rethink and interpret Scripture and tradition in new ways that are adequate and timely.

What is it to be a Lutheran church?

For the past two decades, Lutheran churches around the world have been asking themselves what it means to be Christian or, more specifically, what it means to be Lutheran. The LWF has hosted a number of working groups

³ Cf. Gadamer’s idea of *Horizontverschmelzung*. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 45, where he stresses that the inevitable “distance between time periods, cultures, classes, races and even between persons” that can only be overcome by language: “The interpreter and the text each possess his, her or its own horizon and every moment of understanding represents a fusion of these horizons.”

⁴ The 2007 report, which also gives guidelines for dialogue on dividing matters, takes its point of departure in Luther’s doctrine on the two kingdoms as guidance for what are central theological matters and what are worldly matters. See www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/EN/Council_07-Task_Force_Report-EN.pdf

discussing the question of the Lutheran ecclesiological self-understanding and published a number of books resulting from this enriching discourse.

Although they grew out of the same confession, the ongoing discourse has taught us that Lutheran churches worldwide are very diverse, embedded in different societies. Major differences can be found between the postcolonial countries, with their strong cultural traditions, European countries with their strong secularity, and North American countries with their strong market orientation. Moreover, the churches are affected by the global community in various ways that challenge them to work out new models of being church in their particular contexts. While North Atlantic Christianity has been superseded by the multi-religious supermarket, Christianity in the global South has been dominated by radical evangelical movements. However, independent of societal or global influences, personal and individual differences should not be overlooked. How we understand tradition and read the Bible is very much influenced by our personal experiences, our individual psychology and our political convictions.

Whatever the differences and contexts are, they are evidence that the way of being church is not static and thus can be changed; in fact, they positively underpin the Protestant principle *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* out of which the Reformation grew. Being church is not a *status quo* but rather an ongoing process where time, place and not least persons are important factors.

Lutheran churches as one

Since its foundation in 1947 at Lund, Sweden, the LWF has in various ways given attention to finding a theological balance between identifying and maintaining the Lutheran tradition and the more recent critical concerns, mediating between continuity and change.

From association to communio

The LWF first defined itself as "a free association of Lutheran churches," finding its common doctrinal basis in "the confessions of the Lutheran church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism, a pure exposition of the Word of God."⁵ However, after considerable reflection

⁵ See Michael Root, "Affirming the Communion: Ecclesiological Reflection in the LWF," in J. H. Schjørring, P. Kumari, and N. Hjelm (eds.), *From Federation to Communion. The History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 217.

and inspired by the churches in the global South as well as ecumenical circles, the LWF moved toward an ecclesiology centered self-understanding based on the concept of *communio*. In 1990, following discussions that had commenced in 1979, the LWF at its Eighth Assembly decided to define itself as “a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the Word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship.”⁶

Within the ecumenical context the question that remains is, What does it actually mean to be a communion? The LWF has been asking how such diverse Lutheran churches can form a visible communion. In light of the fact that the churches, while claiming deeper unity, were even more diverse in the 1990s than they had been in 1947, what were the identity and self-understanding of the member churches that justified such a claim to unity? A series of ecclesiology projects were launched in order to try to answer these important questions. Following a more theoretical and dogmatic study on the church as communion,⁷ an international team of theologians from five different continents undertook a more empirical and ecumenical study on the Lutheran churches’ self-understanding.⁸ Based on meetings with representatives from local and regional churches, this study clearly aimed at widening the scope, so that the church as an actual and acting institution was seen in relation to society at large. Lutheran churches around the world were asked if they saw themselves as communities that were part of a communion, either in a countercultural sense (church as salt) or as conforming to society (church as mirror). The study showed that all churches on all continents lacked a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of being a communion. In fact, the churches’ understanding of communion was most often reduced to mere ethnicity and nationality, whereas ecclesial functions such as mission and *diaconia* were understood without the vision of *communio*.

Unity in diversity

It was rather shocking to discover the emphasis on ethnicity, culture or national uniformity at the expense of the universal gospel and its promise that Christ will be all in all, especially if we take into consideration the

⁶ Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation, adopted by the LWF Eighth Assembly, Curitiba, Brazil, 1990, article III.

⁷ Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion. Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology*, LWF Documentation 42/1997 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997).

⁸ Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*, LWF Documentation 47/2001 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2001).

coherence between the modern pluralistic society and the priesthood of all believers claimed by Protestants. All the more, since the principle of the priesthood of all believers has in so many ways been a contributing factor to promoting the freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of speech integral to the modern multicultural and multi-religious society.

Without going into the complexities of the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, we can say that the Protestant claim to freedom of conscience is reflected in modernity's individualism and democracy in contrast to theocratic feudalism. Furthermore, Protestantism to a certain extent anticipated a pluralistic society since it rapidly split up into a variety of denominations and confessions, a process that promoted the claims to freedom of religion as well as the individualization and privatization of Christianity. Why is this not reflected in the churches now, at least in Europe and North America?

What we seem to be witnessing today is that in defending pure doctrine, the various denominations and confessions forget the unity, apostolicity and catholicity of Christianity. In their preoccupation with confessionalism, many Lutheran churches have overlooked the positive side of their heritage of pluralism, inherent in Christianity from its genesis and reinstated in Protestantism. The Scriptures and the creeds of the early church reflect unity in diversity. The canonization of the collection of the very different texts in the Bible and the brief formulations of the ecumenical creeds of the early church are the result of hundreds of years of debates and compromises about what constitutes true Christianity. The compromises and the openness to very diverse interpretations of the same central message about salvation through Christ are ideal expressions of the oneness that like a prism emit a multitude of reflections. The same goes for the *Confessio Augustana (CA)*, spelled out in Article VII that the "one holy, Christian church" is "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel."⁹ Whereas "it is not necessary [for the true unity of the Christian church] that human traditions (*traditiones humana*), rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings (*ab hominibus institutas*) be alike everywhere."¹⁰ What appears to

⁹ "The Augsburg Confession—German Text—Article VII: Concerning the Church," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 42.

¹⁰ "The Augsburg Confession—Latin Text—Article VII: Concerning the Church," in *ibid.* 43. Note that the Augsburg Confession in its original texts consequently speaks of the "human" and the "human being," in Latin *humana* and *homo*, in German *menschlich* and *Mensch*, not about "man" as male. When the English translation constantly uses "man," this is the generic for "human being" not the gendered "man." If the original text had been focusing on man as gender (in contrast with woman)—which it is not!—the Latin text would read *vir* (in contrast with *mulier*), the German text *Mann* (in contrast with *Frau*).

be needed today is for the Lutheran churches to take up the challenge of the diversity represented by the priesthood of all believers in responsible dealings with the richness of life and the plurality of values that ought not to hinder our confession to the oneness of the church. From this starting point, we may then consider of what true oneness and communion consist.

One such point of departure would be the biblical testimony that all creation as one is very good (though not perfect!), created by God as it is, and that all humans are gifted with a special relationship with God as male and female in the *imago Dei* (Gen 1). This close relationship is underpinned when God breathes life into earth to form humanity and endows it with creative features such as the ability to name its world and to express itself through different sexual bodies and the complementary and mutual relationship of differences (Gen 2). Another would be the biblical testimony to humanity's common defectiveness and proneness to sin (Gen 3). Or, the biblical testimony that God sent Christ in human flesh (Jn 1:14: *logos* became flesh, *sarx*) to save all, because, as humanity sinned through one human being, the grace of God is given through one human being (*anthropos*, not *aner*),¹¹ Jesus Christ (Rom 5:15), and as death came through one human being, Adam,¹² resurrection comes through one human being, Christ (1 Cor 15:21–22). Alternatively, we could begin with the biblical testimony that Christ reconciled all enmity between humans in his fleshly body by creating in himself one new human being on the cross (Eph 2:15) and, as human being, Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and the human being (1 Tim 2:5). These biblical testimonies emphasize the oneness of humanity in creation, in the fall, in salvation and in the resurrection, as they emphasize the

¹¹ Note that Scripture in each of the formulations does not speak about the maleness of Jesus the Christ, but consequently emphasizes humanity: Christ takes on (human) flesh (*sarx*) and is sent as a human being (*anthropos*). In fact, no biblical text connects Christ with the gendered term man (*aner*). This point is much too often neglected, the maleness of Christ being overemphasized by one strain of tradition. But this has no univocal biblical bearing. That Jesus is a man and as the Christ is then endowed with masculine high titles of the Greco-Roman cultural context is another story that cannot carry the weight put on his and the apostles' maleness as opponents to women's ordination do. Some newer studies have focused on the construction of masculinity in the New Testament, most recently Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), which is an investigation into the construction of Jesus' masculinity. I, however, will maintain that when the New Testament texts actually operate with different terminology dependent on the actual context, this is not arbitrary. I trust the authors to have been such intelligent and conscious writers that the fact that Jesus is not called *aner* but consequently *anthropos* and that he is never enrolled in any direct man/woman dualities has the clear theological and Christological aim of expressing the universal salvation: Christ was *incarnated* and crucified as a human for the sake of all (human) creation/peoples (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Col 1:15–23; Mt 28:16). This is also the message of the Nicene Creed, which underlines the humanity of Christ by combining his in-fleshing (*sarxothenta*) with his becoming human (*enanthropesanta*) in contrast with his divine origin. It might also be worth remembering that the term *catholic* (Greek prepositional group: *kata holon*) in fact means "that which relates the whole/ as a whole"

¹² "Adam" means the "earth creation," made from the earth or soil, "adamah," as Adam was (Gen 2:7).

close relationship between God and humanity. In this close relationship with God, humanity—as created by God—is endowed with God’s holiness, one that is never taken away from it. Some may turn their heads away from God’s holy sight, but God’s holiness is never taken away from anyone.

As Lutherans, we believe that whenever we have faith in God, God is present.¹³ We believe that we are all sinners and justified only by way of God’s grace and through the faith that this is so (*CAIV*). To obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted (*CAV*), a service of the Word of God (*ministerium verbi divini*). This is why the priesthood of all believers is such an important principle in a reciprocal relationship with the ordained ministry that is called from among them to serve (*ministrare*) the Word, but not endowed with a *character indelebilis*. As creatures we are holy only by way of the holiness with which God endows all creation, whether lay or clergy. There is no bending of holiness—no one especially holy man or woman, no especially sacral clergy—for holiness belongs to God only. But all creation, “our daily bread,” is holy through God, and humans are only holy through the Word of God.¹⁴ If we recognize our oneness in creation, sin and salvation, then we will be able to act as one communion where sex, race and class are irrelevant.

Communio ecclesiology—church as fully church

In 1530, Luther wrote to the clergy assembled at Augsburg and asked them to prove it by means of deeds and fruits if they would make a claim to be the church.¹⁵ Like Melancthon in the *Confessio Augustana*, Luther strongly opposed the hierarchical feudal church that had taken Christ hostage while forgetting the people of God. Building on his principle of *sola scriptura*, Luther stressed the freedom and equality of all Christians. His critique is particularly harsh in his expositions on the ministry of the church at which point he is a critical adversary of the papal church’s hierarchy. Hence, one of Luther’s doctrines, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, not only reinforced the Scripture’s charter of equality and freedom (Gal 3:28) but also pointed to the future. Luther’s rediscovery of this participatory model of ecclesial life to which all are called to serve God and creation according to their specific gifts (1 Cor 12–14;

¹³ See Luther, “The Small Catechism (1529),” in Kolb and Wengert, op. cit. (note 9), 345–76.

¹⁴ Cf. Luther’s explanation to the first and fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer, *ibid.*, 356–57.

¹⁵ Luther, “Exhortation to All the Clergy Assembled at Augburg at the Diet in the Year 1530.” The text is found in *WA 30:2*, 268ff. For the English translation, see www.bookofconcord.org/exhortation.php.

cf. Rom 12) is central to most of recent theology and ecclesiology. The fact that in many churches this participatory model has been forgotten, neglected or even subdued may explain why more emphasis is placed on ethnicity than on being a communion as the aforementioned LWF document revealed.¹⁶

The ordination of women

In the twentieth century, the most significant achievement of Lutheran ecclesiology and indeed the church as a whole was the ordination of women pastors and bishops. This meant that one half of the God-created humanity, which for hundreds of years had been excluded from representing God's salvation and God's people for reasons that are neither biblical nor theological, was finally incorporated and included. With the inclusion of women in the ordained ministry, Lutheran churches have taken an important step toward oneness, mirroring a true catholicity in that the church as the community of all believers moved toward full *communio*.

The debate in Denmark

On 28 April 1948, three women were ordained pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark. Although a few women had already been functioning as non-ordained pastors since the 1920s, this was the first time that the Lutheran understanding of ministry was fully implemented in a larger Lutheran church.¹⁷ However important this historical event is, what is significant here is the preceding debate which reflected the schism between a more Roman Catholic understanding of tradition and ministry on the one hand, and a Lutheran understanding of Scripture and ministry on the other.¹⁸ The opponents to women's ordination referred to tradition, employing such formulations as "the early church" or "several hundreds of years of old apostolic tradition" and to "the Catholic Church" (including the Tridentine). When pointing to potential ecumenical problems these formulations functioned as unmediated slogans, and the maintenance of an old custom overshadowed the tradition of the gospel. The proponents of women's ordination pointed to the spirit of freedom and equality of the gospel, and to

¹⁶ Greive, *op. cit.* (note 8).

¹⁷ The small Lutheran church in the Netherlands seems to have ordained a woman already in 1929, cf. *Lutheran World Information* (August 2000), 15.

¹⁸ In the following exposition of the debate on women's ordination in Denmark, I draw on my book, Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (ed.), *Se min kjole. De første kvindelige præsters historie* [See my Dress. The History of the First Women Pastors in Denmark] (Copenhagen: Samleren, 1998).

the Bible as a message always spoken into the concrete situations of any given time. In the words of the respected ecumenist, Bishop Valdemar Ammundsen, Galatians 3:28 is "a fundamental Christian idea," expressing that

within the new Christian humanity, all are religiously equal without any advantages based on race, nation, social position and gender. From a Christian perspective, it is desirable that outer arrangements are shaped by the interplay between this fundamental principle and the practical matters of life.¹⁹

Therefore, such *adiaphora* as "who" can hold the ordained ministry would always be a questions of time and place. That the understanding of ministry is a question of tradition more than of Scripture, and that both tradition and Scripture are matters of continuous interpretation, was manifestly stated by the professor in Old Testament (and member of the Conservative Party), Flemming F. Hvidberg. Drawing on the central Lutheran teaching of Scripture, Hvidberg emphasized how the Bible is not to be read as a legal tome or an encyclopedia transmitting some "abstract, theoretical infallibility."²⁰ Rather, it is something much bigger, namely the gospel message (*kerygma*) spoken into every concrete historical time, as it was in biblical times so it is now. Concurrently, tradition must be regulated and not turned into frozen, a-historical rules allowed to block every ecclesiological renewal. Thus, according to Hvidberg, Lutherans cannot be tied to the "Catholic history of the past," but must look to the Reformation's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that "maybe ought to be implemented in another way than it has been hitherto, for example within the area with which we are now concerned."²¹ In other words, to be true to tradition the church and its doctrines have to change all the time, otherwise the church does not consist of living stones (1 Pet 2:5) but only fossilizations.

¹⁹ Bishop Valdemar Ammundsen in a letter to the church ministry in 1924. Author's translation from the citation in Marianne Rasmussen, "Da mænd blev til personer" [When Men Became Persons], in *ibid.*, 108–43, here 121f.

²⁰ Professor and politician Flemming Hvidberg's speech in parliament in 1947, here translated from the citation in Rasmussen, *ibid.*, 137f.

²¹ See also CA VII and XV, *Apologia* 7–8 and 28 on traditions versus Scripture. In the latter article on ecclesiastical power, the usually diplomatic Melanchthon sharpens the argument when he strongly emphasizes that "human traditions are pointless as acts of worship and therefore that neither sin nor righteousness" depend upon such matters, and that imposing such traditions invented by bishops is a burden to the church and making "a trial of God" (Acts 15:10). The climax of his argument against the Confutation is found in the formulation that what is central to the church is the Word of God which is "efficacious when human beings deliver it" (*per homines efficax esse*). Melanchthon underpins his formulation by this citation from Paul, "for freedom Christ has set you free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1). He eventually concludes in the important observation that even ordinances ordained by the apostles were changed by time! See Kolb and Wengert, *op. cit.* (note 9), 289, 291.

The central part played by the gospel in the Danish debate on women's ordination—at its height from 1918 through statutory legislation in 1947 until the first official ordinations in 1948—is noteworthy. Theologically this should be understood in the wake of the rediscovery of Luther's writings; ecclesiastically in the aftermath of two world wars. The shock after these two wars and the soul searching necessitated by them forced Europeans to change their worldview, often influencing both state and church polity. During the first half of the twentieth century, it became increasingly apparent that democracy had to be further developed, to embrace the full acknowledgement of the people as a whole—irrespective of gender, race and class—as responsible citizens and responsible and responsive church members.

At stake in ecclesiological terms was the message that liberty and equality are central to and inseparable from the gospel. Hence, the emphasis was put on the equality of all baptized believers and the coherent Lutheran understanding of baptism as the true ordination, thereby liberating the ordained ministry from its Babylonian captivity to an exclusively sacramental understanding of ordination, tied to an hierarchy of especially sacral males (*officium sacerdos*), which tends to safeguard salvation from the almost dispensable laity.²² Hence, on 28 April 1948, the ordaining bishop, Hans Øllgaard, referred to the women who were the first witnesses to Christ's resurrection and were thereafter commissioned to pass on the testimony to emphasize the egalitarian principle of Scripture. Øllgaard concluded by poignantly citing New Testament's charter of freedom:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:25–28).

The gospel had finally come to the church, as one of the ordained women so felicitously remarked.²³

²² Luther stressed this liberation of ministry from a Babylonian captivity in his exposition on the apostolic ministry. See for example "De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium (1520)," in *WA* 6, 484–574, "Dass eine christliche Versammlung oder Gemeinde Recht und macht habe, alle Lehre zu urteilen und Lehrer zu berufen, ein und ab zu setzen, Grund und Ursach aus der Schrift (1523)," in *WA* 11, 401–17; "De instituendis ministris (1523)," in *WA* 12, 180. Luther maintained this opposition to a sacral and hierarchical understanding of ministry in his late theology. See, for example, "Von den Konzilien und der Kirche," *op. cit.* (note 2).

²³ Johanne Andersen, "Som vi oplevede det. Erindringsbilleder" [As We Experienced it. Images from the Memory], in Pedersen, *op. cit.* (note 18), 233.

When liberty is paired with equality, this has to do with the Lutheran understanding of calling. Liberty paired with equality meant that the congregations could call not only a male but also a female pastor. In other words, it was a matter of distributing freedom and power to all church members, ensuring their true participation in *communio* and entrusting all baptized believers with the freedom to call pastors as well as to become pastors through the right calling (the *rite vocatus* of *CA XIV*). The gospel came and after 400 years of Lutheranism, a Lutheran church took seriously the Lutheran understanding of ministry as a *ministerium verbi*—not tied to the person in office but to the Word of God.

The debate in the LWF

During the latter half of the twentieth century, a growing number of Lutheran churches have followed the path toward full *communio* by including women in the ministry. In 1958, Denmark was followed by Sweden, in 1961 by Norway, in 1970 by the Lutheran Church of America and the American Lutheran Church (now the ELCA), in the 1970s by Brazil, in 1982 by Iceland and in 1992 Finland, to mention but a few. By 1983, seventy-five percent of the LWF member churches were ordaining women. Although the percentage has since decreased to about sixty-six percent due to the many new member churches that do not ordain women, there is progress. Of 140 member churches in 2010, thirty-seven do not ordain women. A few churches are discussing the issue, and some churches, while not ordaining women themselves, accept ordained women from abroad. Furthermore, an increasing number of women are being elected bishops.

Nevertheless, if we look at the Lutheran churches as a whole there is still a way to go. We have seen that too many churches still disregard their female members and treat them as secondary creatures only to be tolerated as laypersons or, when they ordain women pastors, regard them as not being on a par with men. This situation prompted the LWF to take up the question of women and the ministry of the church as a vital issue in the inter-Lutheran and ecumenical discussion on communion.²⁴ Thus, in 1983

²⁴ See *Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office. Statement by the Consultation on Episcopé Geneva, November 29–December 2 1982*, LWF Studies (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1983); *Women in the Ministries of the Church. Report from the LWF Workshop on "Women in the Ministries of the Church," Le Cénacle, Geneva, February 25–28, 1983*, LWF Studies (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1983); *The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry. Statement on the Basis of an LWF Study Project*, LWF Studies (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1983). These works were strongly inspired by the "Lima Declaration," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) which, together with the previous Accra paper (Geneva, 1974), made the question of women's ordination a status confessionis and gave the Lutheran churches further ecumenical impetus.

the LWF published a report affirming *CAV* on the ministry of Word and sacrament. The report affirmed that there is but one ministry and vocation of the church, and that from a Lutheran perspective “pastors perform their ministry of Word and sacrament as *instruments* of Christ.”²⁵ Through this formulation the understanding of ministry as a Christ representation (it being claimed that the Roman Catholic concept of *in persona Christi* demands male representation) is translated into a much more comprehensive understanding of ministry, namely as an *instrument* of and for Christ. In order to prevent the total clericalization of the church and sacralization of ministry at the expense of an ethically conceptualized ministry, the old definitions of church as “a holy priesthood” that is “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5) and of the people (the term *laity* derives from the Hebrew for people, *laos*) as “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9) are reinstated. The theo-logical question therefore is: if the whole people of God, ordained through baptism, are not the instruments of Christ, who then?²⁶

In 1984, based on several study reports on the understanding of ministry in the member churches, the LWF Assembly at Budapest decided that ministry considerations were to continue to be one of the LWF’s programmatic foci. Two goals were set: (1) to urge member churches that do not ordain women to take steps toward such action; and (2) to urge member churches that do ordain women to ensure equality in service. When, at the 1990 LWF Assembly at Curitiba, the LWF made the theological concept *communio* a Lutheran hallmark, it became obvious that the ordination of women is intrinsic to a “*communio* ecclesiology” constituted through baptism.

In 1993, the LWF published a study report on ministry, focusing on the much debated ministries of women and bishops, clearly stating that there is no need for developing a specific doctrine of ministry for women. Lutherans already have a theology of the one ministry: the participatory and inclusive notion of the priesthood of all believers, founded on the doctrine of justification through faith, with baptism being the constitutive factor:

Lutherans do not have or need to develop a theology of female ministry. Rather we have a theology of ordained ministry developed in relation to an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God and grounded in the Reformation understanding of justification through faith. The question of who may be ordained arises only after we agree on the theology of ministry. The primary

²⁵ *Women in the Ministries of the Church*, *ibid.*

²⁶ *The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry*, *op.cit.* (note 24).

must then be: is there any basis in our theological understanding of ordained ministry which prevents us from ordaining any baptized person who has the needed gifts and whom we are convinced is called by God? On the basis of our present understanding of Scripture and of the gospel, we are convinced that the ordained ministry must be open to both men and women.²⁷

Carrying the concept of communion constituted through baptism beyond abstraction, the LWF report goes straight to the core and questions any separations based on social and cultural distinctions within the church. In keeping with 1 Peter 2:5–9, Romans 12:1, and 1 Corinthians 12, the message is clear: in any church communion, in which baptism plays a significant role, such distinctions must be questioned, particularly the distinction leading to an exclusively male ordination. Parallel to the arguments for women's ordination in the Danish debate, the report emphasizes that Christ was perceived in accordance with the value system of his time, Galatians 3:28, the grand charter of freedom (expressing the total theology of Paul and the other New Testament writers), as well as the mission of the church, which is called to preach the gospel. These decisive factors point to an inclusive and open understanding of the ordained ministry evident from the "present understanding of Scripture."

With Scripture being the matrix, one should, however, also be aware that the *sola scriptura* principle can be an impasse in relation to the question of female ordination. Therefore, it is important to find ecclesiological and sociological reasons for actually ordaining women rather than finding biblical reasons for not doing so, especially because these reasons seem to be justified by an appeal to prevailing cultural values.²⁸ The 1993 report does not consider the problem of *sola scriptura*. Despite this, the report manages to separate the debate about women's ministry from any traditionally and culturally embedded convictions by placing it within the dialectics between history and eschatology. The argument is theologically based: as an eschatological reality existing in this world as a sign of God's kingdom, and given the mission to witness to that kingdom in word and deed in this world, the church must already now break down all barriers. The report thereby intelligently navigates between two possible eschatological errors. It omits the error of confusing the church with the kingdom and postponing the church's eschatological dimension to some fluffy otherworldly future. For God's kingdom has already broken into history through the incarnation

²⁷ *Ministry, Women, Bishops. Report of an International Consultation, Cartigny, Switzerland, 1992*, LWF Studies (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1993), 12.

²⁸ This was the forceful insight of *Women in the Ministries of the Church*, op. cit. (note 24).

of Christ who so manifestly preached the breaking down of old barriers, and through the sending of the Holy Spirit to the whole world. Therefore, barriers such as race, class, economic status, caste, or gender should have no place in a church understanding itself as a sign of God's kingdom. On the contrary, it is significant for the church's oneness that it challenges such hindrances. The great achievement of this argument is that, in a sober theological way, it refutes the well-known objection to equality within the church, according to which Gal 3:28 is to be understood as being only in God's kingdom, not in this world. This objection is false if the church—understood in eschatological terms—is instituted as the sign of the kingdom. This does not mean that there are no biological distinctions, but these are not hierarchically ordered. We are created by God as male and female; creational distinctions should be welcomed in the church as a gift and a blessing to all humanity rather than be treated as a curse put on half of humanity.

What characterizes the argument against ordaining women, which is merely implied by the LWF report, is the rigid distinction between history and eschatology on the one hand, and the blurred identification of the biological sex (female) with a fixed ontological and cultural gender (woman) on the other. While the distinction between history and eschatology is overemphasized in relation to women's character and position, the distinction between creation and fall, between the godly creation of both male and female and the human fall of both sexes equally, is totally forgotten. This furthermore escapes the sacramental and eschatological dimensions of the whole *communio* of all believers as a body consisting of members with so many creational and spiritual differences (Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12).

The 1993 report emphatically stresses the fact that a genuine and contemporary Lutheran ecclesiology requires the gifts of both sexes in the ordained ministry: "A church which today limits its ordained ministry to males blurs its nature as eschatological sign."²⁹ A statement that is further underpinned by the following unequivocal statement on the ecumenical implications of a Lutheran understanding of the ministry of all believers:

Any ecumenical conversation involving Lutherans about the church or its ministry will have to face squarely the fact that when another Christian World Communion recognizes Lutheran ministries, it will mean recognizing ministries exercised by both women and men.³⁰

²⁹ *Ministry, Women, Bishops*, op. cit (note 27).

³⁰ *Ibid.* (note 23), 17.

Finally, in accordance with its forerunner, the 1983 report, it stresses that in light of the Lutheran emphasis on the one office of ministry, the integration of women in the church should also include the office of bishop. Once the ordination of women has been implemented, there are no further substantive questions to be raised in an ecumenical context. Indeed, this is true when one takes the univocal argumentation within Roman Catholicism mentioned above into consideration.

One or two Scriptures, one or three successions?

In spite of the promising steps taken by the LWF and most of its member churches since the late 1940s, we still witness opposition to recognizing the participation of women in full communion and, as mentioned earlier, the LWF still receives members who do not ordain women. Despite scrutinizing the arguments against the ordination of women employed by this opposition, it is very difficult to find any theologically tenable substance.³¹ It is almost intrinsic to the question of women's ordination that the sober theological arguments to be found in other areas of theology are substituted by non-theological considerations.

The opponents to women's ordination usually claim that their arguments are based on Scripture and "the" tradition. Both are perceived as absolute and immutable categories. However, this perception soon blurs and in reality the two categories are intermingled with each other as with other factors. Such an absolutist understanding of Scripture and tradition does not lead to *sola Scriptura*, but to two Scriptures; and not to a living and continually changing tradition, but to two or three frozen traditions of apostolic succession.

First, perceived in scriptural terms, a strictly Lutheran understanding of Scripture is guided by a total understanding of the New Testament gospel which, in Luther's words, is "a talk about Christ, that he is the son of God

³¹ In 1994, the Lutheran Church of Australia became an associate member of the LWF. In 2000, a resolution to ordain women was narrowly defeated in this church at its national convention despite the fact that a two-thirds majority of its theological commission in the preparation had recommended that there should be no theological barrier to such an ordination. Cf. *Lutheran World Information* (August 2000), 15. This was fully in line with the Danish debate (see above), where the theological consultants saw no theological obstacles whatsoever to the ordination of women. In retrospect, it is evident that the Danish church's reluctance to acknowledge women's ordination was foremost a matter of time. Having turned democratic in 1901, its premodern attitude simply had to give in to its increasingly modern structures in accordance with the original Lutheran understanding of ministry. The same happened in the Lutheran Church of Australia, which in 2006 clearly stated: "Our culture has moved away from patriarchal societies of previous centuries to the extent that not having women pastors is now a barrier to mission." The statement clearly concludes that, "In our time and our society, faithfulness to Scripture requires the ordination of both women and men." See www.lca.org.au/resources/ctict/CTICRCasOrdinationWomen.pdf

and has become man for our sake, is dead and risen, made Lord of all things.”³² There is but one gospel, though different texts written by many apostles, and the four different gospels as well as the various epistles are poorly understood if they are read as legal books.³³ This is the *sola scriptura* principle, to read the New Testament as one gospel telling the story about Christ. In contrast, the opponents to women’s ordination hold a *sola pars scriptura* principle, a particular reading of Scripture according to which only a certain compilation of Bible citations is valid for women—particularly Genesis 2:18, Genesis 3:16, 1 Corinthians 11:7 and 14:34, Ephesians 5:22 and Titus 2:5—by allegedly substantiating female inferiority and a coherent exclusion from pastoral ministry. On the other hand, quite another compilation of Bible citations is valid for men—particularly Genesis 2:16–17, Galatians 2:9, Ephesians 5:22–33, and James 3:1—all claimed to give full divinity, the full Christ representation, to males and hence the exclusive right to the ordained ministry. This is a questionable exegesis as well as bad anthropology.

These references are not only partial but also very problematic and taken totally out of context. They do not convey any redemptive core, and sometimes they even contradict each other, as for example Paul’s apparent prohibition of women speaking in church (1 Cor 14:34) in contrast with the charter of equality and freedom (Gal 3:28) and his clear assumption that women actually say prayers and prophesy (1 Cor 11:5). Consequently, 1 Corinthians 14 cannot simply be understood as implying the denial of women’s active participation in the worship of the church as a question of principle. Such a partial reading of Scripture, without the gospel as the guiding rule, logically results in Scripture falling into two separate parts, gospel simultaneously turned into law: one law for men, another for women.

Second, from a strictly Lutheran theological perspective, ordination is not a sacrament, although the ordained ministry is both recommended and required for the sake of order (so for instance *CAV*) and requires the right calling (*CAXIV*). The concept of priestly ministry in a Lutheran context derives from baptism and thus applies to all Christians. It is the ministry of the Word, independent of the person who preaches. Therefore, when Lutherans attach specific importance to ordination, this constitutes a backlash in relation to Luther’s promising understanding of ministry as well as to the *ecclesia semper reformanda*.

Let me illustrate this with an example from Denmark. In the 1990s, in a letter to the bishops, a small group of conservative theologians demanded a

³² Cf. Luther, “Eyn kleyn Unterricht (1521),” in *WA* 10.1.1, 8–18.

³³ *Ibid.*

special, sacramentally or sacrally conceived ordination and the freedom "not in act (the handshake of *koinonia/communio* in Gal 2:9) to recognize the ordination of female pastors," who together with "the bishops and others who call women" they consider "heterodox."³⁴ However, such a claim is counter to the Lutheran understanding of ordination,³⁵ and the allegation of apostasy more in line with Donatism than with *CA VII* and *CA VIII*. The group furthermore argues that the Lutheran claim to freedom of conscience includes the freedom not to recognize fellow Christians, and it goes as far as terming the ordination of women the interruption of the apostolic succession of the early church. This is obviously absurd since the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, like most other countries that converted to Lutheranism, broke with the historic episcopal succession during the Reformation, while maintaining apostolicity to belong to the whole church through the gospel. The aim is quite clearly that of obtaining a "higher" ministry free from female pollution, and in reality a special male ordination would mean the reintroduction of an ecclesial hierarchy. Hence, these conservative theologians propose that, if they must tolerate a ministry for women, the ordination of women should be to a subordinate ministry of deacons solely, without the right to administer the sacraments.³⁶ The logical result of such a position is that we would have at least three lines of succession. Hierarchically ordered these would be: historic episcopal succession, "orthodox" Lutheran males, and "heterodox" males and females.

Unfortunately, the attitudes can also be detected in recent ecumenical texts ratified by Lutherans who seek *communio* with other confessions. Thus, in 1993 another reminder that women are considered a problem in relation to ministry was published: The Porvoo Common Statement between the Anglican and Lutheran churches in Britain and Ireland and in the Nordic and Baltic countries.³⁷ Since the purpose of the statement is that of reaching a common understanding, closer

³⁴ Letter of 18 June 1991 to the Danish Lutheran bishops from the very conservative wing of the Danish folk church, comprising six small associations and two small private institutions: Kirkelig Forening for den Indre Mission, Luthersk Missionsforening, Evangelisk luthersk Missionsforening, Kirkelig Samling om Bibel og Bekendelse, Fællesskabet Kirkelig Fornylse, Kristeligt Forbund for Studerende, Menighedsfakultetet, and Dansk Bibel-Institut.

³⁵ Interestingly enough, the group of theologians claiming a special ordination disagree with the vast majority of those they claim to represent. Among the members of the largest conservative movement, the Inner Mission, more than eighty percent were in favor of ordained women pastors already by the mid-1980s.

³⁶ See "Når præsten er 'køn.' Om de såkaldt teologiske argumenter i debatten om kvindelige præster" [When the pastor is 'sex/y.' On the so-called theological arguments in the debate about women pastors], in Pedersen, op. cit. (note 18), 189–222, here 206–14.

³⁷ In the following exposition of the Porvoo Common Statement, I refer to the original English version in David Tustin and Tore Furberg (eds.), *Together in Mission and Ministry. The Porvoo Common Statement with Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe* (London: Church House Publishing, 1993).

communion and pursuing a wider unity through the acceptance of one another's ministries, especially that of bishop, without reordination, the Porvoo Common Statement is of great importance in this connection. All in all, the statement dramatizes the battle over differing theories of episcopacy and the question of apostolic succession, and it succeeds in tying "ministry" to an understanding of the church as sent (apostolic), not treating it as an arbitrary locus. However, even though the joint declaration in itself does not explicitly mention female ministry as a problem, the comments to one of its paragraphs, clause b (v), certainly do. On the surface, clause b (v) sounds promising and totally inclusive. The aim of the clause is that of opening the way to a reconciled, common ministry (the administration of Word and sacrament and a common confessional foundation) by "welcoming ... persons episcopally ordained in any of our churches to the office of bishop, priest or deacon to serve, by invitation."³⁸ The clause ends, though, by opening the doors to the underlying problems as it continues, "and in accordance with any regulations which may from time to time be in force"³⁹ in the receiving church. What is hidden in this formulation is revealed in the comments adduced to it in the statement's "Foreword":

Clause b (v) makes clear that the interchange of ordained ministers must be "in accordance with any regulations which may from time to time be in force." This implies a realistic acceptance of certain restrictions which already apply within our communions, e.g. regarding the ministry of women bishops (and those ordained by them) or women priests in particular places...⁴⁰

The restrictions pertaining to women are stressed as a high priority regulation. Only thereafter follow requirements of "reasonable fluency in the local language, appropriate professional qualifications, state employment regulations, taking of customary oaths, etc."⁴¹

The absurdities in clause b (v) add up. First, the fact that all ministers ordained by a female bishop are included detracts from unity in ministry in favor of duality in ministry *ad infinitum et absurdum*. In fact, this means that also pastors ordained by a male bishop who was ordained by a female bishop are excluded from being welcomed in the "open" communion. The logical consequence will be not only the threefold ministry mentioned, but indeed an hierarchically

³⁸ Ibid., 30–31.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

ordered twofold or even threefold succession (a parallel to the aforementioned claim to specific ordination by Danish conservative theologians). The tragic irony is that the statement of openness is in fact diluted by the comment on exclusiveness. Second, the condition related to women pastors and bishops and all ministers ordained by them set by clause b (v) ought to be superfluous in a statement utilizing the terminology of acceptance, respect, invitation and welcome. It is a mystery why a joint declaration between churches—the majority of which ordained women at the time, and virtually all of which do so now—took such considerations into account. Third, the fact that the gender of the ordained minister or bishop stands out as more important than such central factors as the appropriate qualifications of a minister is totally absurd.

The foreword to the Porvoo Common Statement did not promote its reception in Denmark, for example,⁴² first and foremost due to the conditions related to women's ordination expressed in clause b (v). Where the statement seeks to rethink ministry positively "in seeking to unlock our churches from limited and negative perceptions" by giving it "a deeper understanding of apostolicity, of the episcopal office, and of historic succession as 'sign',"⁴³ the foreword again restricts it to limited and negative perceptions. Furthermore, it focuses on a certain understanding of episcopacy and the person in office, rather than on the whole people of God as communicating the gospel, the lay and ordained ministry together in the totality of the ministry of Word and mission. The person in office is thereby made more important than the function of office.

The church catholic

When Lutheran churches have discussed ordaining women, much concern has been shown for the church catholic and the "old tradition." However, this concern has only been directed toward the Vatican, while totally neglecting that within the Roman Catholic Church there is a debate parallel to that in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark, in the LWF and in various ecumenical circles. Especially after Vatican II (1963–1965), which called for an *aggiornamento*, members of the Roman Catholic Church were given new life and hope. To the great disappointment of a vast number of Catholics, instead a re-traditionalization

⁴² Denmark accepted the Porvoo Common Statement in December 2009, but did not ratify it until October 2010. Whereas the rejection of it in 1995 was grounded in a hearing through the church, the acceptance of it was not.

⁴³ *Together in Mission and Ministry*, op. cit. (note 37).

took place and resulted in a loss of hope for renewal.⁴⁴ Where people had hoped for the admittance of women to the ordained ministry, they instead received a ban on even discussing the issue. Where people had hoped for an opening of the church, they instead got limited communion as well as limitations in relation to other sacraments for various moral reasons. Instead of opening the church to people, frozen traditionalism yielded to the exclusion of people who deviate from the norm in such a way that, despite baptism and belief, they are not welcomed as active participants in full communion. While having a logical consequence, such a view of the church as an abstract idea, whether represented by a pope and *codex iuris canonici* or a bishop and a national church law, *de facto* results in the estrangement of the church leadership and the disintegration of the *communio*.

However, within the Roman Catholic Church a great number of Catholic scholars, men and women, have fought to liberate ministry and church from the medieval interpretation, which excludes women from ministry and separates lay from the sacral/sacramental clergy.⁴⁵ The various traditional declarations against any kind of actual power given to women that the Vatican has issued over the years in order to stop critical voices have met strong reactions from within, both from lay and clergy. Thus, when in 1977 the Vatican ruled out women ministers in its *Declaration of the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood* on the grounds of Christ's maleness, the immediate response came from scholars who knew both Scripture and tradition better than most, and who would not hesitate to acknowledge that the opposition to women was the outcome of male power arrogance, totally contrary to the teaching of Jesus and the early church.⁴⁶ In Elisabeth Tetlow's words:

There is nothing inherent in the character of Christian ministry as it is presented in the writings of the New Testament which would give reason for the exclusion of women. On the contrary, the New Testament portrays Jesus treating women as equal human persons. It also portrays women and men serving side by side in the various ministries of the early Church.

The later exclusion of women from the official ministry of the Church raises serious questions about the authenticity of such a practice. According to the evidence of the

⁴⁴ Cf. Martin Chase, S.J., "Gudsfolket - hvem er med?" [The People of God—Who is included?], in Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen (ed.), *Gudsfolket i Danmark* (The People of God in Denmark) (Copenhagen: Anis, 1999), 92–93.

⁴⁵ See for example, *The Case for Ordaining Women in the Catholic Church*, at www.womenpriests.org/care/patrons.asp which includes people from other churches.

⁴⁶ Leonard Swidler & Arlene Swidler (eds.), *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

New Testament, the exclusion of women from ecclesiastical ministry is neither in accord with the teaching or practice of Jesus nor with that of the first century Church.⁴⁷

Later, Catherine LaCugna compared her own Roman Catholicism with mainline American Protestantism in order to examine the theological assumptions attached to women's ordained ministry within the Roman Catholic Church. She put her finger exactly where I am putting it: on the sacramental understanding of ministry as well as on the Vatican's anthropology. LaCugna concluded that both were the results of a faulty theology, evident in the Vatican's resistance to women's ordination (as expressed in the 1977 Declaration).⁴⁸ This did not prevent Josef Ratzinger from publishing yet another document renouncing women's ordination, *On the Collaboration of Men and Women*, as late as 2004. The document—allegedly honoring motherhood and virginity—shocked most Catholics for its male arrogance. Leonard Swidler, one of the most faithful critics of the exclusive and sacramental ministry, wrote an open letter to his old study colleague Ratzinger, criticizing his distorted view on men and women.⁴⁹ Indeed, a bad anthropology very often leads to a faulty theology. A bad anthropology is not only a structural problem in the form of a sacral office, far removed from its members and people's daily lives, it is also a human problem in the form of power arrogance, misogyny and distorted human relations. The veritable tsunami of cases of abuse and the cover up of such is but one tragic example of that.

Many more critical voices have been raised from within the Catholic Church, from ordinary members as well as from theologians and priests. Some of the most prominent voices among Catholic scholars today, who criticize the undemocratic, patriarchal structures of the Roman Catholic Church, are perhaps Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Both critique the patriarchal church that excludes women from religious and institutional authority, for which purpose in the 1980s Fiorenza introduced the idea of *ekklesia of women*, a vision of a community of equals. In the 1990s, Fiorenza expanded the *ekklesia* idea to be a "theoretical space from which to struggle" to develop a

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Tetlow, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 131. Tetlow reaches her conclusion by way of a thorough study, which includes references to a range of the most prominent biblical scholars of the time. For another thorough study that exposed the construction of a special sacral male ministry during the Middle Ages, see Ida Raming, *Der Ausschluss der Frau vom priesterlichen Amt* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1973). This book has been republished in a revised and enlarged version, *Priesteramt der Frau. Geschenk Gottes für eine erneuerte Kirche* (Munich: Lit Verlag, 2002).

⁴⁸ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Catholic Women as Ministers and Theologians," in *America* 167 (1992), 238–48.

⁴⁹ Leonard Swidler, "Open letter to Josef Ratzinger," in *Catholic New Times* (12 September 2004), at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MKY/is_13_28/ai_n6245104/?tag=content;coll

democratic pluralism of discourses that deconstructs the essentialist dualistic thinking about the sexes that has been the very legitimization of patriarchal structures in church and society. Eventually, Fiorenza defined her *ekklesia* as something more than a vision, namely as an historical reality.⁵⁰

With such variety of perspectives within the Catholic Church itself, what kind of oneness are we looking for in ecumenical debates? With whom does oneness begin, and what does it aim at? Does oneness begin from above with central power and the system, or from below with the people of God? Is oneness obtained only when power systems agree without regard for the actual *communio*?

One body in Christ

During the twentieth century, Lutheran churches took the most positive ecumenical step since the sixteenth century when they opened the ordained ministry to women and thus included them in full *communio*. This inclusion is a sign of full respect for all of God's creation, both as a mandate to that half of humanity who happen to be born females to be called and ordained, and a mandate to the whole people of God to call and elect. The central foundation of this inclusion has been the gospel and the unity in Christ.

In contrast with this, there has been a preoccupation with episcopacy in various ecumenical dialogues and statements, the Porvoo Common Statement being only one example of that. No doubt, these dialogues have taken place as serious attempts to seek ecumenicity. However, it is high time that we chose "a non-spectacular ecumenical strategy."⁵¹ In light of the previous exposition, one might ask if too much weight can be put on agreements on the episcopal office at the expense of the priesthood of all believers, and on the threefold ministry (*munus triplex*) at the expense of the one ministry, that of the gospel. Ecumenical

⁵⁰ Both Ruether and Fiorenza are prolific writers. I shall here refer only to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001). Cf. her book, *But She Said. Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) and her article, "Patriarchale Herrschaft spaltet/Feministische Verschiedenheit macht stark: Ethik und Politik der Befreiung," in Angela Berlis et al, (eds.), *Women Churches: Networking and Reflection in the European Context. Yearbook of the European Society of Women in the Theological Research* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 1995), 5–28. Fiorenza stresses the importance of different rhetorical strategies in an *ekklesia* that is a heterogeneous, multilingual forum: the rhetoric of liberation, the rhetoric of differences (plural), the rhetoric of solidarity, and the rhetoric of vision, (23). In her *Wisdom Ways* this was then more historically based.

⁵¹ I borrowed this terminology from Anna Marie Aagaard, one of the outstanding ecumenists of the twentieth century. See her article, "The Church, the Churches, the Orthodox Churches, and the World Council of Churches: Notes on 'Ecclesiology and Ethics' in Conciliar Debate," in Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, Holger Lam, and Peter Lodberg (eds.), *For All People. Global Theologies in Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 159–73, here 173.

formulations and cooperation have been shaped according to the slogan, toward communion in witness, church life and diakonia. In practice this means that at some time—in an eschatological future—we may obtain communion when we have agreed theologically on baptism, Eucharist, ministry and justification. But first, there must be an agreement on episcopacy and on moral (and sexual) questions, and in practice communion is being drowned in the ocean of *adiaphora*.

The drowning in *adiaphora* especially applies to the debate on the ministry, which completely changes in character the moment the term woman is mentioned. The debate is no longer about the meaning of ministry, its essence and functions, but about the who of ministry. It becomes less interesting to discuss the theological content of ministry than to discuss an alleged inferiority and marginal position of women in relation to ministry. The focus shifts from ecclesiology and theology to a highly debatable anthropology, according to which men constitute a particularly favored race that has to complete the work of creation and salvation, which God apparently was not able to complete. This is a dangerous theology that makes the male God and God male while reducing God's creation and salvation to male chauvinism.

Rather, communion is about the common belief in Christ and the actual witnessing, celebrating and living together in the churches. A truly Lutheran and ecumenical ecclesiology is an ecclesiology from below, a church constituted as the communion of all believers and centered around Word and sacrament. In this respect, the minimalist definition of concrete church unity of CA VII expresses a viable ecumenical ecclesiology, because it focuses on the absolute center of being church unity. Keeping the Reformation standards of constant renewal of the "Great Christian Tradition" serves the Lutheran churches well. The alternative, to hold the church as an ideology in itself, where a set of frozen rules count more than the people of God, and where all individual differences and nuances are seen as threatening, is not appealing.

What threatens churches today is a totalitarian understanding of unity or collectiveness, whether ethnocentric or episco-centric, that desacralizes the individual members and empties the communion of believers of sacredness. Oneness/unity should not be confused with sameness/uniformity. Oneness is inclusive and open to differences, whereas sameness is exclusive and closed to differences. If the churches want to be taken seriously, they have to take the *communio fidelium* seriously, giving it back its God-given sacredness in all its diversity. The future of the churches is with the whole *communio*, with the mutually responsible ministry of lay and ordained, women and men, in their freedom to serve, to call and to be called. The oneness of the church is a given in and through the one and Triune God who created and saved the one humanity in its multitude and diversity.

The Unity of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Compatibility of Ecumenical Agreements: The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe as an Ecumenical Model for Communion

Stephanie Dietrich

Introduction

Almost all Protestant churches in Europe are member churches of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). Its basic document is the 1973 Leuenberg Agreement that marks the end of the over 450 years of division between the Lutheran and Reformed churches.¹ The final text of the “Agreement between the Reformation Churches in Europe” (Leuenberg Agreement) concluded a lengthy dialogue process, mainly between Lutheran and Reformed churches, which had begun after World War II. Astonishingly, this text, drawn up in the European context, was rapidly approved by the churches and, on 31 October 2003, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship changed its name to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

On the basis of the common understanding of the gospel, the signatory churches grant one another pulpit and altar fellowship and commit themselves to common witness and service at the local, regional and European levels, and to continued theological work. Today, 105 churches across Europe belong to the CPCE.

Besides the classical Reformation churches, these churches are the pre-Reformation churches such as the Waldensian Church and the Church of the

¹ At www.leuenberg.net/2730-0-16.

Czech Brethren, plus five South American Protestant churches emanating from the earlier immigration churches (Iglesia Evangelica del Rio de la Plata; Iglesia Evangelica Luterana Unida, Iglesia Evangelica Valdense del Rio de la Plata; Iglesia Reformada Argentina, Iglesia Evangelica Metodista Argentina). The seven Methodist churches in Europe joined the CPCE on the basis of a "Joint Declaration of Church Fellowship."

This article discusses the main aspects of the Leuenberg Agreement and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and its ecumenical model of "unity in reconciled diversity." I shall relate it to the discussion on the compatibility of ecumenical agreements in a North European context, especially the agreement between the Lutheran and Episcopal churches in Great Britain, Ireland, the Nordic and Baltic countries (Porvoo Agreement). I shall attempt to show that the Leuenberg Agreement might function as a model for church fellowship between churches of the Reformation era also in non-European contexts.

The Leuenberg Agreement as the basis of Lutheran–Reformed relations: main theological aspects

From an ecclesiological starting point, one might ask what kind of "communion," "community" or "fellowship" the CPCE represents. If "communion" is described as altar and pulpit fellowship, then the CPCE may well be understood as a communion, though not as one single Protestant denomination or one church. Ecumenically, it is obvious that the model of altar and pulpit fellowship on the basis of the agreement on basic doctrinal convictions along the lines of Article VII of the *Confessio Augustana (CA)*, is highly disputed. The English naming for communion, community and fellowship and its theological differentiation becomes somehow even more difficult in light of the fact that the translation of these terms into many other languages makes the connotation less differentiated. The German word "Gemeinschaft" and the Norwegian word "fellesskap," for example, cover all the three connotations in one word. Nevertheless, the terminological problems also include a theological problem concerning different models of ecumenism. Without having the possibility to elaborate on these highly interesting questions, one might at least mention the tensions concerning the understandings of unity given through an agreement on the basic aspects of Christian faith as mentioned in *CA VII*.²

² Cf. The Augsburg Confession—German Text—Article VII, in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 42. "It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It

If one underlines that certain aspects of church order, such as the historic episcopate for instance, belong to the indispensable nature of the church and thus have to be seen as a condition for communion, the CPCE cannot be understood as a communion in the full sense of the term. As will be elaborated later, referring to the discussions within Church of Norway on the compatibility of the Porvoo- and the Leuenberg agreements, one should be clear what, from a Lutheran perspective, is necessary (*necesse est*) for communion, what is sufficient (*satis est*), and what has to be seen as a result of a specific historic tradition and context and thus underlying changes according to the concrete needs and challenges the churches face in their contexts. Thus, the CPCE (calling itself a community) and the LWF (calling itself a communion) are comparable in as far as they offer communion between their member churches on the basis of *CA VII* leading to alter- and pulpit fellowship.

Former doctrinal condemnations no longer apply to today's teaching in the signatory churches of the CPCE and allow for altar and pulpit fellowship. This includes the mutual recognition of presbyteral ordination and the common celebration of the Eucharist. Of particular importance is the strong und indispensable togetherness of the declaration of church fellowship, based on our common faith and its visible realization in the churches' concrete existence. The Leuenberg Agreement underlines this by saying that, "It is in the life of the churches and congregations that church fellowship becomes a reality."³ Rather than a purely doctrinal agreement or theoretical concept, fellowship is the lived out and real relationship between visible parts. Fellowship is based on mutuality and visible unity, never on a declaration alone. All the same, the Leuenberg Agreement made clear that the signatory churches remain churches within their own tradition.

The division between churches that define themselves as Reformation churches could be overcome by means of doctrinal discussions among the churches of different denominations. Referring to the key statement of *CA*, the preamble to the Leuenberg Agreement confirms that "In the view of the Reformation it follows that agreement in the right teaching of the Gospel and in the right administration of the sacraments is the necessary

is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel. For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere."

³ Op. cit. (note 1).

and sufficient prerequisite for the true unity of the Church."⁴ In the second section of the Agreement, justification is affirmed as the "message of the free grace of God" and interpreted with reference to preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The third section removed the doctrinal disagreements relating to the Lord's Supper, christology and predestination, as these disagreements no longer reflect the current teachings of the signatory churches. The fourth section contains the core of the Agreement: the declaration and implementation of church fellowship with the confirmation that

In the sense intended in this Agreement, church fellowship means that, on the basis of the consensus they have reached in their understanding of the Gospel, churches with different confessional positions accord each other fellowship in word and sacrament and strive for the fullest possible co-operation in witness and service to the world.⁵

This church fellowship is manifested in shared pulpit and table fellowship, including the mutual recognition of ordination and the practicability of "inter-celebration" (reciprocal presidency over the celebration of communion).

The development of the CPCE since 1973: working methods

The CPCE serves to promote the unity and community of the Protestant churches through joint theological doctrinal conversations. Moreover, it represents the positions of Reformation churches on such important spiritual and social challenges such as the question of just war; the Christian understanding of freedom; the relationship of church, state, people and nation; discussions with the Russian Orthodox Church on human rights; and a study process on euthanasia. Among the various consensus papers resulting from the doctrinal discussion, the studies "The Church of Jesus Christ," and "Church and Israel," which were unanimously adopted by the 1994 General Assembly at Vienna and the 2001 General Assembly at Belfast respectively, deserve special attention. Current topics under discussion include, the Protestant understanding of ministry, ordination and episcopé and Scripture—confession—church. Other study groups are working on the new social challenges facing the Protestant churches, *ecclesia semper reformanda*, and questions pertaining to common

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

standards for theological education. The CPCE is also involved in dialogues with the Orthodox, Anglican and Baptist churches or church fellowships.

The CPCE deals with important political, social and ecumenical questions and works toward further developing the presence of the Protestant churches, especially at the European level. Therefore the 2001 Assembly underlined the importance of social ethics and the 2006 Assembly at Budapest affirmed the importance of the representation of a Protestant voice in Europe and a resolute stance of the church over against the political institutions in Europe. This is to be promoted without establishing a Protestant synod or block, which might have anti ecumenical connotations.

The CPCE has an intentionally loose organizational structure for the sake of flexibility. The general assemblies, which take place every six years, outline the future work, identify new subjects for theological conversations and elect the new council. The council, led by the presidium, is responsible for the work between the general assemblies. Since 2007, the secretariat, which operates under the direction of the executive committee, has been located in the head office the Evangelical Church of Austria.

Well aware of its limits, the CPCE observes the ecumenical scene and considers itself to be a step on the way toward the unity of the universal church of Jesus Christ in reconciled diversity. For this reason, it maintains working relations with the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Communion of Reformed Churches as well as with Anglican churches and the European Baptist Federation.

Compatibility of agreements: the example of Norway

The Church of Norway, a Nordic Lutheran folk church, subscribes to two bilateral theological agreements that appear to be mutually contradictory. On the one hand, the Porvoo Agreement between the Anglican churches of the British Isles and the Republic of Ireland with the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches of Iceland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania and, on the other, the Leuenberg Agreement.

Ecumenical partners from different denominations often wonder how it is possible or theologically reasonable for the Church of Norway to have bilateral agreements leading to communion with churches from the Anglican, Methodist, and Reformed traditions. Is this an attempt to “be friends with everybody” at the expense of theological honesty and clarity?

How does one cope with questions of compatibility between the ecumenical agreements? One of the core issues is the mutual recognition of ordained ministries, the understanding of episkopé and the historic episcopate. The compatibility of these ecumenical agreements should not be generalized, but must be elaborated against the background of the Church of Norway's concrete historical and contextual identity. In other words, the compatibility between agreements relies not only on dogmatic agreements, but also on the context and identity of the concrete churches involved in the negotiations leading up to them.

The Porvoo Common Statement is based on many dialogues and agreements and acknowledges that there is substantial agreement between Lutherans and Anglicans on the nature of the church and the goal of visible unity. The statement breaks new ground concerning the episcopal ministry and its relation to succession, spelling out a deeper understanding of apostolicity, the episcopal office, and historic succession as a sign of that office. It is especially this part of the report that opens up the way to full communion between the Porvoo churches.

In the light of all this we find that the time has come when all our churches can affirm together the value and use of the sign of the historic episcopal succession. This means that those churches in which the sign has at some time not been used are free to recognise the value of the sign and should embrace it without denying their own apostolic continuity.⁶

For the Church of Norway, as a Lutheran church, this includes the commitment to the sign of episcopacy; it values it as a necessary part of the church's life. From a Norwegian perspective, one might add that it is valued as a necessary part of the church's life and self-understanding, but it would not presuppose that one concrete way of ordering episkopé (through the historic episcopacy) should be made the condition for altar and pulpit fellowship in general. This was one of the main reasons why the Church of Norway found signing both the Leuenberg Agreement and the Porvoo Common Statement to be theologically consistent.

The arguments for the signing the Porvoo Common Statement as well as the Leuenberg Agreement have been based on the *CAVII*. These agreements have brought the churches involved into interconfessional church fellowship on the basis of a confessional definition of unity. The issue of compatibility has

⁶ At. www.porvoochurches.org/whatis/resources-0201-english-4.php#D

been raised mostly with regard to its basis in Scripture and the Confessions (namely the creeds of the early church, the *Confessio Augustana* and the Small Catechism), not so much with regard to the relation between episcopal and non-episcopal churches. The Church of Norway's approval of the agreements is premised upon the conviction that they properly express what, according to CA VII, is sufficient for unity in the church.

The Leuenberg Agreement leaves intact the binding force of the confessions within the participating churches. It is not to be regarded as a new confession of faith. It sets forth a consensus reached on central matters, one which makes church fellowship possible between churches of different confessional positions. In accordance with this consensus, the participating churches will seek to establish a common witness and service and they pledge themselves to continue their common doctrinal discussions.⁷

The Church of Norway participated in the first comprehensive confessional dialogue leading to the Leuenberg Agreement. The bishops' conference by and large accepted it as "sufficient for altar and pulpit fellowship" but took no action to sign it. There was a noticeable theological protest against the "Protestant unionist profile" of the agreement from some theologians, though it was not directed at the issue of the ministry of bishops or the historic episcopate. The reason for not signing was said to be a reluctance to let the State Ministry of Church Affairs sign a theological agreement. Further, there was virtually no Reformed presence in Norway. The decision to sign was made at the General Synod in November 1999, after two to three years of reconsideration in the deciding church bodies. The Church of Denmark signed the Leuenberg Agreement in 2001, but the other Lutheran folk churches in Sweden, Finland, and Iceland have not signed the agreement to date, mainly on account of theological objections.⁸

Against the objections of other Nordic Lutherans, the Church of Norway decided in favor of the Leuenberg Agreement as an example of "unity in reconciled diversity." Reconciled diversity acknowledges a legitimate diversity within a dynamic, not static, community, enriching rather than threatening unity. The CPCE emphasizes both reconciled diversity and unity. The challenge lies in the ability to balance unity and agreement on fundamental issues while allowing room for a diversity of churches and

⁷ Cf. op. cit. (note 1), para. 37 b.

⁸ See, e.g., the various Nordic contributions in Wilhelm Hüffmeier and Colin Podmore (eds), *Leuenberg, Meissen and Porvoo*, Leuenberger Texte 4 (Frankfurt: Lembeck, 1996). For the Finnish arguments against signing, see Tuomo Mannermaa, *Von Preussen nach Leuenberg. Hintergrund und Entwicklung der theologischen Methode der Leuenberger Konkordie* (Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1981).

people. Unity cannot be merely a minimalist theoretical agreement on certain doctrinal statements, but rather a fundamental, all-embracing unity that becomes visible in mutual accountability, openness, and a willingness to respect others on their own premises. Therefore, the model of unity is itself open to development.

The Leuenberg Agreement itself does not place much emphasis on the ordained ministry and the ministry of oversight, since the recognition of the ordained ministry was not the main obstacle to inter-Protestant communion.⁹ However, the topic has been one that has been constantly deliberated in the CPCE. In its ratification of the Leuenberg Agreement in 1999, the General Synod of the Church of Norway commented that "[i]n all our churches there are forms of pastoral oversight ('episkopé'). Such a function is necessary in all churches. The concrete structure and understanding of such a ministry of oversight may, however, vary."¹⁰ Thus the Synod regards the signing of the Leuenberg Agreement as a confirmation of the need for episkopé while recognizing that one particular form of episkopé is not a precondition for the existence of the church or for church unity, as seen from the perspective of *CA VII*. The Church of Norway recognizes that Reformed churches have structures of episkopé, even if they are presbyterian or synodical.

The different ecumenical agreements were signed in light of the commitment to seek church fellowship with other churches wherever possible and as part of the reconciliation of the diverse confessional churches in Europe. These decisions were not made for diplomatic reasons but in order to take seriously the "call to be one in Christ." This presupposes that the Church of Norway and other churches sharing the apostolic tradition in Word and sacraments are apostolic churches before common consecrations of bishops (e.g., with Anglicans). Secondly, it shows that the Church of Norway accepts the historic episcopal succession as a sign of continuity and unity of the apostolic church, as was its practice before the signing of the Porvoo Agreement. It should therefore be practiced in a more comprehensive, ecumenically significant and theologically reflected way, notwithstanding the common agreement between the churches on the validity of the ordained ministry. As far as the theme of historic episcopate has been

⁹ Since 1973, the Leuenberg churches have studied on issues of ministry, such as the *Neuendettelsau Theses* and the *Tampere Theses*, both published in Leuenberger Texte 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 1995), and the study "The Church of Jesus Christ," which is understood to have a binding character within the CPCE. *The Church of Jesus Christ: The Contribution of the Reformation Towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity*, Leuenberger Texte 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 1995).

¹⁰ At www.kirken.no/english/engelsk.cfm?artid=5895

explicitly or implicitly addressed in the discussions, there seems to be far-reaching consensus in the Church of Norway. This became evident in the *Signatory's Protocol by the Church of Norway on the Signing of the Agreement between Reformation Churches in Europe* (Leuenberg Agreement):

Against the background of the ecumenical agreements into which we have entered, it has become clear to us that both the meaning and the structuring of ecumenical church fellowship will vary according to context. In all our churches there are forms of pastoral oversight (“episkopé”). Such a function is necessary in all churches. The concrete structure and understanding of such a ministry of oversight may, however, vary. In the Porvoo Agreement, the Church of Norway has stated, together with the other Porvoo signatory churches, that fellowship in word and sacrament is made explicit through the ministry of oversight which is exercised by the pastoral ministry in the church and by the ministry of bishops on whom the ministry of oversight is bestowed in a particular way. Together, these are an outward sign of church unity.

Both through ecumenical dialogue and through our own church history we have learned to value this tradition. The role of the episcopal ministry in the Church of Norway has facilitated the achievement of church fellowship with Anglican churches. This does not for us preclude recognition of other churches which do not have an episcopal ministry, or the possibility of full church fellowship with such churches.¹¹

In accordance with *CA VII*, the basis for “church fellowship” is understood as the agreement on the use and understanding of the gospel and the sacraments. In other words, there is a necessary distinction between what is necessary for the being of the church and its unity, and what is important for the manifestation of the unity and life of the church. Thus, it is neither the demands of the episcopal churches nor critical questions posed by non-episcopal churches that have defined the Church of Norway’s ecumenical profile in this regard. Nonetheless, the encounter with these sister churches was the occasion to attempt, together with them, to be faithful to an ecumenical understanding of what it means to be an apostolic church. Far from being incoherent or self-contradictory, the fact that the Church of Norway is a part of both agreements is a witness against the temptation to form ecumenical blocks that would pit episcopal and non-episcopal churches against each other.

¹¹ Ibid.

Unity in reconciled diversity

The doctrinal basis of the CPCE points out two central elements which are the basis for the communion: first, the common understanding of the gospel, understood as the message of justification and the free grace of God; second, it includes a common understanding regarding the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, i.e., Eucharist and baptism. This describes the core of the CPCE's ecclesial identity. Nevertheless, considerable differences between the churches remain in terms of worship, spirituality and church order. While these differences are often profound, they are not factors that divide the church. Communion is given through unity in Word and sacrament. The model of "unity in reconciled diversity" is important with regard to the coexistence of Protestant churches and the role of churches in a multicultural Europe.

Balance of unity and diversity

The model of unity in reconciled diversity underlines the need of finding and maintaining a common basis for doctrinal agreement. The "*satis est*" in CA VII, provides the theoretical framework. Nevertheless, this model underlines and gives freedom to uphold one's own identity and culture. Diversity in itself is not a goal, but a natural part of being different churches in different contexts. In itself, this reconciled diversity does not threaten the fundamental unity in core issues and obliges the signatory churches to strive to deepen and strengthen the fellowship they have found. One of the important aspects that needs to be discussed is whether this model is in danger of becoming too static, in other words, that diversity in itself is a common good. Secondly, the unity must be one that not only serves as a declaration, but also as visible unity with a necessary impact on the living together of churches and people. The challenge lies in the ability to balance the unity and agreement on fundamental issues while giving space for a diversity that enriches rather than threaten the living together of churches and people.

Interconnectedness of common values, understanding and action

This brings us to the second point: the need for a close connection between declarations of unity, based on essential values, and the realization of this unity through a lived fellowship. It has become obvious that a purely theoretical acknowledgement of certain principles does not lead forward to a

lived fellowship and the engagement with one another. Both sides need to stick together. The churches should contribute by underlining the necessity to find common values and goals, rather than emphasizing their differences. Having declared this unity on core values and beliefs, this common understanding has consequences for the shared life of our churches. On the basis of their ecumenical experience, the will to find and define a common basis, and on this basis to be able to live in reconciled diversity, could possibly be one of the contributions of the religious communities in Europe

Space for development

It is important to underline that the model of unity in reconciled diversity is not a static model, but gives space for continued development. The unity achieved through the common acknowledgement of certain principles and values has to develop through continuous cooperation and the need for reconciliation between partners of different cultures and contexts. The unity between the signatory churches is not merely a minimalist theoretical agreement on certain doctrinal statements, but a fundamental, all-embracing unity that becomes visible through an attitude of mutual accountability, openness and the will to accept the other on their rather than one's own premises. Therefore, it is open for development and change and can never be a static model.

The concept of "unity in reconciled diversity" has been critically examined as to whether basically it is nothing but a confirmation of the *status quo* and really achieves no changes at all. Thus, the 1989 report of the Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission, *Toward Church Fellowship*, makes the following critical statement about the Leuenberg Agreement:

Theological agreement in itself is not enough; it must be translated into concrete situations, with its liturgical, spiritual, practical or organizational consequences. At the moment the Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe find themselves on this difficult path from the mere declaration to the realization of church fellowship.¹²

Nevertheless, an implementation presupposes a declaration. On this fellowship, the Agreement speaks of it "becoming a reality."¹³ The ecumenical

¹² At http://warc.jalb.de/warcjasp/news_file/9.pdf

¹³ Op. cit. (note 1), para. 35.

model of unity in reconciled diversity is not an organizational model nor does it necessarily result in the formation of unions. Rather, it describes a way at the beginning of which we can mutually recognize each other as church if, in our fundamental confession, we agree on the one truth of the gospel, yet express it in diverse forms. For the church fellowship of confessionally related churches, the model of unity in reconciled diversity has proven its worth. The Leuenberg Agreement has had significant consequences for the living together of its signatory churches in Europe.

Similar agreements between different churches shaped by the Reformation have been reached in other parts of the world, such as in the Middle East. It should be considered whether the Leuenberg Agreement and the CPCE can become models for agreement and cooperation in "witness and service."

The Leuenberg Agreement is shaped by its context. An ecumenical agreement today would possibly focus more on context and the visibility of church fellowship, rather than mere doctrinal aspects. Nevertheless, the Agreement helped the signing churches to overcome severe differences regarding doctrinal matters and became the basis for further cooperation in witness and service and the development of a self-understanding as a "worshipping community" and "serving community."

The preaching of the churches gains in credibility in the world when they are at one in their witness to the Gospel. The Gospel liberates and binds together the churches to render common service. Being the service of love, it turns to man in his distress and seeks to remove the causes of that distress. The struggle for justice and peace in the world increasingly demands of the churches the acceptance of a common responsibility.¹⁴

¹⁴ Op. cit. (note 1), para. 36.

The Holiness of the Sinner—the Credibility of the Church

Eckhard Zemmrich

A questioned identity

In August 2008, the window of my office at the headquarters of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), Jakarta, was shattered by a stone. More stones followed, smashing almost all the windows. What was the reason for such violence? At first sight, the municipal police (Satpol PP) had clashed with Christian students, who had sought refuge in the courtyard of the church's headquarters. Students and police threw stones at one another, damaging the PGI's building.

In the days that followed, the wider background of the conflict became clearer. A building next to the church headquarters, owned by the PGI, had been home to the Christian Students' Movement in Indonesia (GMKI). A few years ago, the land had been sold to the adjacent university—or at least so it seemed. It turned out that the sale was of dubious validity and there seemed to be evidence of corruption. Therefore, the PGI still claimed the land as its property. The case went to court, and the GMKI remained in their place, forming a living obstacle to the university's claim to the land. Evidence suggested that the aim of the violent clash had been to expel the students from the disputed land. The real problem therefore seemed to be corruption within the church, which, according to the organization "Corruption Watch," exists in one of Asia's most corrupt countries.

This is but one example of the church's sinning. There are other examples, the most prominent being sexual abuse and the support of war. It does not help to seek the excuse that it is only the members of the church who sin, not the church itself. According to the Bible, the church cannot be abstracted from its members. Otherwise, what church would that be? Or rather, Who, then, would be the church? Is it therefore difficult to understand why people ask, Is there no difference between the church and the rest of the world? Does Jesus not state, "You are the salt of the earth"

(Mt 5:13)? But, what if the salt does not salt—how can we dare to speak of the holy church as real?

Believing in the church as holy

From the beginning of its history, the church has had to wrestle with the following problem. The church, as God's chosen people, as those who are called out of the masses of the damned, as the tower of Christ built of living stones, this very church has had to realize that there was no clean space on earth, no immaculate community, no church office carried out only by worthy servants. The church as holy could not be "proven" empirically. The church as holy had to be believed. The doctrine reflecting on that problem was Augustine's doctrine of the visible and the invisible or hidden church. Lutheran ecclesiology followed this doctrine. The "Apology of the Augsburg Confession" speaks of the church both as "not only an association of external ties and rites, but ... principally an association of faith in the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons."¹

Does this not foster deception? How should we read the word of our Lord Jesus Christ, You are the salt of the world? or, You are to be believed to be the salt of the world? Are we right to distinguish the essence of the church from its existence?

In other words, does a doctrine of the church that does not really identify visible and hidden church nor take the visible church as a true manifestation of the hidden church seriously, does such a doctrine not necessarily result in laziness and docetism? Throughout the centuries, the manifold renewal movements within the church seem to have borne witness to that danger. At the same time, they also bear witness to the identity of "both churches" that cannot be denied within a church grounded in the Word incarnate and not in a transcendent Word of God.

Visible and hidden church are one, as body and soul are one. This does not mean that there is an inner dimension that has to do with God, and an outer dimension that has to do with the world. If we believe in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, then we must denounce this as a heresy. God is present not beyond and remote from this world, but in the midst of this world. God's presence in Christ, according to the Bible, is not like the

¹ "Apology of the Augsburg Confession—Article VII and VIII: The Church," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 174.

ripples on the surface of a lake, which cause just a playful reflection of light, but God's presence in Christ is like the powerful waves on a shore that change both water and land.² God really gets involved with us, as Philippians 2 stresses.

Therefore, the most radical, twofold challenge of Christian theology and its only real justification as Christian and not only theistic theology is to (1) identify the "essence" of faith within the "existence" of faith, without (2) separating that existence from its essence, both within the individual and the church. There is no essence "behind" or "beyond" our existence, but only within it. There is, in the last resort, no "either—or," but a "this as well as that." We cannot bear witness to God without participating in God through the Holy Spirit.³

Luther explained the meaning of this in terms of personal life with the formula: *simul iustus et peccator*, we are sinners and justified at the same time. The point of this differentiation is that only the justified can recognize themselves as sinners. Only light makes us aware of the shadow.⁴ Yet both are real at the same time. It is not sufficient to describe the tension that arises from both poles of this dialectical relation as a kind of bipolar state, such as the two sides of a coin that cannot be viewed at the same time. Our perspective is that of being the coin, as it were, so the challenge is to describe what is going on not from the observer's perspective, but from that of the participant. The language most apt to this is the language of process. Only if we comprehend the process of continuously becoming justified whilst being sinners will we be able to grasp its deep dimension, its *Tiefendimension*, the dimension of faith.⁵

How are we to deal with the tension that arises from and always remains within this identity, particularly in the present context? The problem remains: a church that is to be believed as holy, must be believable as holy.

² Christ is not only real for our "inwardness," as Kierkegaard puts it, but also for our bodily existence.

³ For a mature Trinitarian unfolding of this statement in recent times, see Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God. A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

⁴ Cf. for this order of recognition in Luther's work already his "Lectures on Romans," in *WA* 56, 346.

⁵ Let me illustrate this process by referring to a mathematical figure, the so-called Moebius strip. Both ends are not yet connected. It is an ordinary strip with a front- and a backside, with two surfaces ("the two poles of the dialectic," "the two sides of the coin"). One end, twisted and fixed to the other end, it then forms *one* surface only. There is no longer a front or back. If, not yet fixed to each other, one would write those poles of dialectic on each side of the strip ("sinner"—"justified" for individuals, "visible"—"hidden" for the church, for instance), and then forming the Moebius strip as just described, the dialectic poles start continually to change into each other. Yet this is only "real" as long as we continue reading, following the curved surface of the strip. Such it illustrates the qualified identity of the dialectics only discernable when viewed in a process from a participant's perspective.

The vital challenge of this identity can be sensed in the gospel verses: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48), "... so that the world may believe ..." (Jn 17:21).

What are the criteria for this? In dealing with the problem of identifying the true church, Luther himself provided criteria for the church to be believable as holy.

... as visible and true

While there had always been talk about true and false church, the discussion gained momentum in the sixteenth century. It was no longer about banning a visible church or churchlike community as had been the case with the great schism of 1054 for instance, when the church in the East denied that the Roman Church was true church, and the church in the West denied that the Orthodox Church was true church. Luther always recognized that the true church existed within the Roman Church, and he had no intention to establish a new one. According to him, we do not find the criteria that make a church true within the institutional aspects, but by looking at the realization of what the church is: preaching the Word of God purely for instance, or administering the sacraments rightly. It is worthwhile noting that what was in question was not representing but realizing those marks of the church, the *notae ecclesiae*.

It is noteworthy that Luther understood worship as taking place not only within the church but also in the world. We are reminded of Romans 12 when Luther talks about marriage or one's cross or suffering as a sign of the church, too, as a *nota ecclesiae*, for instance.⁶ Talk about the essence of the church is bound to be deficient if we focus on that which is invisible and takes place in worship (preaching of the Word, the sacraments). Luther thought in societal dimension. He did not mistake the Word of God as being for the soul only, but as a guide for responsible, social living and ruling.

Only one conclusion is possible from his distinction between true and false church within one church: the visible church matters if it comes to the question of true and false, of holy or unholy church. "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:16), fruits being *notae ecclesiae*. The doctrine of visible and hidden, of true and false church, was interpreted by Luther by

⁶ Cf. Luther, "Wider Hans Worst," in *WA* 51, 481–2.

referring to the discernible effects not only in Word and sacrament but in life and work. Therefore, even questions of structure and hierarchy matter when it comes to identifying the holy church.

Let me illustrate this. When, in the former German Democratic Republic, groups of peace and environmental activists sought shelter for their activities in the late 1980s, they were welcomed by Christian parishes throughout the country, despite the hostility of state and Secret Service that resulted from this. Pastors and parishes had realized that fostering peace, justice and the integrity of creation are of vital importance if the church wants to bear a believable Christian witness. Those church leaders, however, who tried not to provoke the state in order to safeguard the so-called peaceful coexistence, disapproved of this for a long time. One of the most dramatic examples occurred in the church in Pommern, in the northeastern GDR, where the mounting tension between the grass roots and the church leadership resulted in the only resignation of a bishop in the GDR ever.⁷ The cathedral in Greifswald had been restored at great expense during the 1980s. In 1989, when the opposition in the GDR had already gone public with its critique of the leaders, Bishop Horst Gienke invited the head of the state, Erich Honecker, to take part in the festivities surrounding the rededication of the cathedral. The event was broadcast live and would have been an excellent opportunity to articulate critique, since, by then, some opposition figures, including the church opposition, had already been imprisoned. Among them were also people from the Greifswald church. Nonetheless, Bishop Gienke merely thanked the political leaders and assured Honecker of the church's faithfulness to the leading Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). This and other events coupled with Gienke's resistance to listening to the opposition led to two speeches during a church synod and triggered a vote of distrust toward the bishop. One of the speakers, Rev. Oswald Wutzke, used the discernment between true and false church in a very Lutheran sense when he stated: "First, the show in the cathedral of Greifswald and second, Rev. Cyrus, captured in Berlin and surrounded by officers of the Secret Service, I ask the synod, Which one here is the true church?"⁸

Questions of structure (order) and hierarchy (obedience) matter when it comes to identifying the church as holy. This being prominently expressed in Article 3 of the 1934 Barmen Declaration which states,

⁷ Cf. Irmfried Garbe, *Die Bischofsfrage in der Greifswalder Landeskirche 1989*, unpublished manuscript.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

As the Church of pardoned sinners, it has to testify in the midst of a sinful world, with its faith as with its obedience, with its message as with its order, that it is solely his property, and that it lives and wants to live solely from his comfort and from his direction in the expectation of his appearance.⁹

... with and beyond Luther

Confessionalist Lutheran theology, focusing on the doctrinal comparison with others, tends to neglect the existential questions of identity out of which Luther's theology had grown. Those existential questions were handled as terms of doctrine. Furthermore, Luther's problems with the church and his positive attitude toward worldly sovereigns as superiors were accepted as a valid doctrinal solution regarding the relationship between the church and state. Lutheran theology did not take the implied dangers of the alliance between throne and altar, nor the birth and development of a democratic understanding of leadership in Central Europe seriously.¹⁰

As the fallen person before God is justified, so the church remains holy in detecting its weakness and failure: holy in failure, holy in penitence, and holy in trying new ways of living. Let me illustrate this with another example from Indonesia. In November 2009, the general assembly of the communion of churches in Indonesia took place in the remote area of Mamas, West Sulawesi. During the course of the consultation, one member church nearly left the communion of churches as a result of a conflict and rising tensions between the Christian Evangelical Church in Papua (GKI Papua) and the leadership of the PGI. The GKI Papua were determined to leave the PGI and publicly announced their resolve at the assembly. But then something amazing, something quite unlikely within a very patriarchal society such as Indonesia's occurred: in his function as head of the PGI, Rev. Andreas Yewangoe replied to the Papuas' very emotional speech and finally said, "I beg for your forgiveness." This made the difference. There was a scene of reconciliation, of hugging, and the GKI Papua remained within the PGI. This was the holy church in action, believed and believable—and very real.

⁹ Quoted from www.sacred-texts.com/chr/barmen.htm which follows the translation by Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 237–42.

¹⁰ Cf. for this problem and its context, Ulrich Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung*, 2nd edition (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1995).

What happened there could be described by applying well-known theological categories: it was a *kairos*, a breakthrough of grace, unavailable and unattainable. While all of this is true, it does not suffice in terms of doctrine if one wants to take seriously the one-and-sameness of the hidden and visible church, its holy and sinful existence, and its responsibility in the design of its life, its *Lebensgestaltung*.

... empowered and “enacted”

There are good reasons to state that not only the question of justification, but equally that of sanctification was one of Luther’s major concerns in his theology. Works such as “The Freedom of the Christian” or his “Treatise on Good Works” bear witness to this. Likewise, right from the beginning of his work until his very last lecture in 1546, the virtue of humility plays an important role in his understanding of Christian life. Practicing the faith is the duty and privilege of the holy, the sanctified life of a Christian.

Luther’s formulation, “*Christiana sanctitas est passiva, non activa*: the holiness of the Christian is passive, not active,”¹¹ does not contradict this. Although works can never substitute what is achieved by faith—justification—they inalienably belong to a Christian’s life. Justification, which makes the human whole and holy and free, cannot actively be made by oneself, but it enables one to enact this very freedom in spontaneous, faithful, responsible, disciplined and good acts. A kind of virtue is described thereby which does not come to life and growth through steady practice, as in classical virtue concepts, but which springs from the experience of liberation through Christ’s work.

Luther himself could draw on the analogy between the person as body and soul and the church as visible and hidden.¹² What I would like to suggest here is that it may be sensible to make use of this individual concept of sanctification for the being of the church. There is a reason for using an analogy for this, for both may be comparable in as far as the human person is a creature of God, and the church is the creature of God’s Word (*creatura verbi*).

¹¹ “Commentarius in Epistolam ad Galatas (1535),” in *WA* 40/1, 70, 1-2; Hans-Peter Grosshans, *Die Kirche—irdischer Raum der Wahrheit des Evangeliums* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 179.

¹² Cf. “Vom Papsttum zu Rom,” see Grosshans, *ibid.*, 106.

What is the benefit of such an analogy for a Lutheran theology? It may help to take more seriously the visible gestalt of the church as something that really matters and is worth wrestling with.

Therefore, in question here is a concept of virtue as the competence of a human being to do good works, an analogy to the competence of the church to teach purely, to administer the sacraments rightly, to live in Christ and to carry the cross.

In 2 Corinthians 3:5–6, Paul deals with this question for his person:¹³ "Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant...." There is no distinction between the competence in essence and in the existence of Paul's ministry, but a claim of its authority and glory in its "visibility" (3:6). Although its glory is not Paul's, but Christ's, not active but passive, Paul becomes enabled by Christ to act as he acts—with competence. To be sure, he also fails! But exactly because this is not "only" a matter of his existence, but of his whole being, it is also worthy of a despair which can be comforted by Christ alone (Rom 7).

In light of the above mentioned analogy, I would content that we should consider the church's—visible—existence likewise as being enabled, empowered by Christ, thereby enacting its essence in its existence. If it fails to do so—which undoubtedly will be the case—then this is a case not only for thoughtful reflection, but for passionate wrestling of its members, because it affects the church's holiness as believable—its very credibility.

One may conclude, therefore, that only if we take seriously the differentiated identity of the hidden and the visible church in Christ, will we be able to develop a concept of the church's holiness that does justice to the seriousness of the responsibility that the church has been entrusted with by Christ, for this world, and which can be enacted by the church in the holiness of the sinner, or, as Luther once put it, in "confident despair."

¹³ Cf. Mt 3:11; 2 Cor 2:16; 2 Tim 2:2.

Holiness and Reconciliation: The Challenge of an Ecclesiology of Reconciliation

Binsar Pakpahan

Introduction

The church is a place where God's love is expressed in the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation and healing are celebrated. Through faith we are gathered as body of Christ in the church. It is a place where we are reconciled not only with God but also with one another. However, stories of church conflicts are not unusual. We find separations there where we are supposed to be reconciled: *simul iustus et peccator*.

The churches in North Sumatra, Indonesia, have been growing in terms of synodical bodies. Since the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP) was first admitted as a member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1952, eleven more synods have been accepted, with the Christian Communion of Indonesia Church in Nias joining in 2002 as the latest member. While the growth in numbers can be seen as a positive development, most of the new churches are the result of divisions within the former churches.

Most of the churches in North Sumatra are today separated along linguistic and cultural lines. Churches such as the Gereja Kristen Protestan Angkola, the Pakpak Dairi Christian Protestant Church and the Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun are examples of how the HKBP spread because it was too 'Toba'.¹ Linguistic and cultural differences are often intertwined with power and money. According to some observers this has added to the divi-

¹These churches come from the Batak tribe. There are six sub-tribes of the Batak tribe, namely Karo, Pakpak or Dairi, Simalungun, Toba, Angkola, and Mandailing. They have their own languages and dialects. See Andar M. Lumbantobing, *Makna Wibawa Jabatan Dalam Gereja Batak* [The Meaning of Position Authority in the Batak Church] (Jakarta: BPK GM, 1996), 1; and Lothar Schreiner, *Adat dan Injil: Perjumpaan Adat dengan Iman Kristen di Tanah Batak* [Culture and Gospel: The Encounter of Culture and the Christian Faith in the Batak Land] (Jakarta: BPK GM, 2000). HKBP now mainly consists of Batak Toba people and uses the Batak Toba language as its main language. See Juandaha Raya P. Dasuha and Martin Lukito Sinaga, *Tole! Den timorlanden das Evangelium!* "Sejarah Seratus Tahun Pekabaran Injil di Simalungun, 2 September 1903-2003 [Forward: The Gospel to the East. The History of 100 Years of Mission in Simalungun](Pematang Siantar : Kolportase GKPS dan Panitia Bolon 100 Tahun Injil di Simalungun, 2003).

sion within the churches.² These multilayered factors contributing to church separations have sometimes resulted in different recollections regarding what had happened during the process of separation between the original and the new church. If this is so, then the question arises of whether the separated churches have really reconciled with one another and within themselves. Do churches that have experienced conflict in their existence still reflect holiness in themselves that reconciles people with God and one another?

The main focus of this paper is to investigate the relationship between holiness and reconciliation, especially when it is connected with the forgiveness of sins in the church, especially in those that have experienced conflict. Are these churches the natural result of the spreading of the kingdom of God or of the lack of understanding of what reconciliation is? How can churches that are in conflict still become holy and bring reconciliation? What is the relationship between holiness and reconciliation? What kind of ecclesiology can the church offer so that the Word can be preached, believed, confessed and acted upon in such a way that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica* can be shown?

The church's holiness

According to Martin Luther, there is a passive as well as an active holiness. Martin Luther understands that God alone is intrinsically holy and therefore the source of holiness.³ Human beings cannot become holy themselves, it has to be given to them. The church's holiness comes from Christ, the head of the church. Christ has made the church holy and therefore God considers the church holy. Through the church, we can glorify God because we have been made holy.⁴ Christ is the holy one and Christians are holy in Christ. Luther reflects on this relationship, saying, "Now just as God our Lord is holy, so his people are also holy. Therefore we are all holy if we walk in faith."⁵ Further, he explains that holiness in Christ is connected

² See Bungaran Antonius Simanjuntak, *Konflik Status dan Kekuasaan Orang Batak Toba* [Status of and Power Conflict within the Batak Toba People], third edition (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Obor, 2009). This book analyzes the cultural contribution of conflicts in Batak Toba organizations, including churches.

³ See Martin Luther, "Psalm 51:1," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 12 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 325; Martin Luther, "Sermons on the First Epistle of St. Peter," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 30 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 6. See also a very clear and concise explanation of the source of holiness in Martin Luther's theology in John W. Kleinig, "Luther on the Reception in God's Holiness," in *Pro Ecclesia*, vol. xvii, no. 1 (2008), 76–91.

⁴ 1 Pet 2:9; Eph 2:22; 3:21; Rev 1:6; 1 Cor 3:16.

⁵ *Luther's Works*, vol. 30, op. cit. (note 3), 32.

with the sign of baptism. “If you have been baptized, you have put on the holy garment, which is Christ.”⁶ In other words, holiness is a gift granted by the sign of baptism in Christ. This is the passive nature of holiness.

The second nature of holiness is an active one. Since we are made holy by receiving and being one with Christ, we will be energized by the Holy Spirit to do the work of holiness in our lives. Our outward actions will show the holiness that is inside us. This is the sign of the active holiness.⁷

The realm of holiness is not the only world Christians live in. Christians also live in the world with other sinners. This is why they are not free from sin. Even so, the holy life of believers in Christ demands practical holiness. David Yeago notes that it is here where Luther connects the church as agent of sanctification so that individuals remain holy.⁸

This means that the church acts as a holy assembly through which the Spirit actualizes sanctification. The Holy Spirit works constantly in the cleansing of sins and the renewal of life, so that “we do not remain in sins, but can and should lead a new life in all kinds of good works and not in the old, evil works, as the Ten Commandments of two tables of Moses enjoin.”⁹ The holy status that we have achieved is constantly being renewed under the Spirit’s influence through the forgiveness of sins. This enables us to live in the world with sinners.

Although the forgiveness of sins is part of passive holiness, it demands some sort of self-realization, a confession of sin. The church expresses the knowledge of its sinfulness when praying “forgive us our sins.”¹⁰ This means that the church acknowledges its past mistakes and asks for God’s grace.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ This is where Luther develops his *Heiligtum* for the church in “On the Councils and the Church” that consists of seven holy things: the Word of God, sacrament of baptism, sacrament of the Eucharist, office of the keys, office of the ministry, prayer and the holy cross. In reflecting about the importance of these holy things, Klenig says that, “apart from them [seven signs], there is no human holiness. They establish and uphold the holiness of the Christian church.” Kleinig, *op. cit.* (note 3), 84.

⁸ David S. Yeago, “Ecclesia Sancta, Ecclesia Peccatrix: The Holiness of the Church in Martin Luther’s Theology,” in *Pro Ecclesia*, vol. ix, no. 3 (2000), 340. Yeago notes that, “when Luther speaks of the Spirit’s work as ‘sanctification’ he refers inclusively to the saving work of the Spirit.”

⁹ See David S. Yeago, “The Office of the Keys: On the Disappearance of Discipline in Protestant Modernity,” in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Marks of the Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 97.

¹⁰ When Luther speaks about the church as a great sinner, it means that, as Yeago puts it, “the sin of this gathering of sinners is acknowledged and repented sin,” in *ibid.*, 345.

Thus, there is a close connection between self-realization and God's action. Because the church is the holy community of believers, it is asked to recall what it did by commission and omission and to ask for forgiveness. This act of self-realization is important in our further inquiry into this topic.

Reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins

The idea of holiness is connected with reconciliation through Christ and the forgiveness of sins. The church is made holy through its reconciliation with God. The church is considered as the place where reconciliation is concretely enacted. It is the center of God's saving work. The Spirit will enable the reconciled person to be reconciled with others. Thus reconciliation means the restoration of broken relations between God and creation and work through Christ's mediation and the promised forgiveness of sins. Reconciliation is a gift from God to God's creation.

This gift also makes demands on us. According to Hans-Peter Grosshans, "...the church is more than a mediator of our salvation. It provides a space of truth and freedom within our world, where we can be safe and reconciled with God and with one another."¹¹ Be reconciled with one another means being restored in the peaceful and trustful relation with our fellow human beings. Furthermore, "in the community of the church, the reconciliation of human beings with God is made real as is the reconciling of those who in our pluralistic postmodern societies are painstakingly set apart from one another."¹² This marks the close connection of holiness between the church and reconciliation with the world.

Reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins are closely connected. In Christian theology, forgiveness is an important step toward reaching reconciliation. In fact, the aim of forgiveness is reconciliation. Looking at the relation between the two, Gregory Jones says that, "Christian forgiveness aims at reconciliation and involves the task of responding to God's forgiving love by crafting communities of forgiven and forgiving people."¹³ Thus, forgiveness is an act that precedes reconciliation, removes the barrier of reconciliation, and whose aim it is to reconcile the community. Reconciliation is the ultimate goal of the whole

¹¹ Hans-Peter Grosshans, "Introduction," in Hans-Peter Grosshans (ed.) *One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*, LWF Studies 02/2009 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 12–13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³ I. Gregory Jones, "Crafting Communities of Forgiveness," in *Interpretation* 54.02 (April 2000), 122.

process. Thus, it is clear that reconciliation needs forgiveness. The Christian concept of forgiveness aims at reconciliation between God and human beings, between neighbors, and between human beings and all of creation.

Rodney L. Petersen, an American scholar in the areas of history, ethics and religious conflict, rightly sees three elements in Jesus' teachings about forgiveness. Forgiveness is the gift from God, the chief instrument is the sacrificial cult that Jesus then represented, and lastly it grows out of a realization of repentance.¹⁴ Thus, forgiveness is God's action toward restoring the relationship between God and humans because of human transgressions and sins. Grace is the foundation of forgiveness that reaches its climax in Jesus. Forgiveness is a step that has to be taken in order to be reconciled with God and others. In this step, God is the main actor of forgiveness. However, the restoration of broken relationships also takes place between God and individuals, God and the community, individuals and individuals and the community.¹⁵ As a response to God's restorative actions through forgiveness, humans are called to mirror God in taking those steps in their relations with one another. Reconciliation with God demands reconciliation with one another.

Recent findings in social science research on forgiveness have challenged the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation in Christian theology, and studies in psychology question whether forgiveness is necessary for reconciliation since research has shown that reconciliation can be achieved without forgiveness or vice versa.¹⁶ What does this mean? Let us take the example of a conflict between two groups within a church. Reconciliation without forgiveness would mean that one group—the one that has been hurt—decides to remain in communion with the second group without ever forgiving them. Forgiveness without reconciliation would mean that the group that has been hurt decides to stop working with the second group but at the same time is able to forgive them.

If we put this theory in the context of a conflict within a church that has resulted in an outright schism, then we have to ask if the church is really reconciled within itself. Further, has forgiveness take place? What actually

¹⁴ Rodney L. Petersen, "A Theology of Forgiveness," in Raymond G. Helmick and Rodney L. Petersen (eds.), *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation* (Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001), 14. Petersen is actively engaged in the ongoing research on forgiveness and conflict resolution from a theological perspective.

¹⁵ Read more about this elaboration on the restoration of relationship among three subjects, God, individuals, and communities, in M. Wayne Clark, "Redemption: Becoming More Human," in *ExpTim* 115, no. 3 (2003), 78.

¹⁶ Frans B. M. de Waal and Jennifer J. Pokorny, "Primate Conflict and Its Relation to Human Forgiveness," in Everet L. Worthington, Jr. (ed.), *Handbook of Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 17-32.

happened when the churches decided to separate as a result of conflict? How can they act out their active holiness as a mirror of their passive holiness? If the church members decide to remain separated, then have they been reconciled with their originating communion? If the church has managed to stay one church, then has forgiveness taken place?

The ideal situation for conflicting churches would be to have both forgiveness and reconciliation because ultimately the two cannot be separated in Christ or in Christian theology. This is not at all easy. Many conflicts have resulted in the separation into two if not three independent churches. If the churches as church act upon and act out their gift of holiness and become agents of reconciliation and guarantors of the forgiveness of sins, then why is it difficult for churches to reconcile? What are the challenges of reconciliation?

The problems of reconciliation

Charles P. Arand claims that in their theology the Lutheran churches, especially in the USA, have taken ecclesiology too lightly. Nonetheless, he suggests that one of the ecclesiological challenges is "how to organize the church within the world for the sake of the Gospel."¹⁷

The church as the communion of saints is one of Luther's great contributions to Protestant ecclesiology. He believes in the priesthood of all believers. The church begins with individuals whom the Spirit brings into communion with others in Christ. The Spirit works in the individuals just as the Spirit works in the church.¹⁸ While the Spirit works through the church as a mother who gives birth,¹⁹ we are also born from each other in the communion we share. According to Luther,

[w]e are all fathers and sons to one another, for we are born one from another. I was born of others through the gospel and now I give birth to others, who in turn give birth to others, and in this way this birth-giving continues to the end of the world.²⁰

¹⁷ Charles P. Arand, "What Are Ecclesologically Challenged Lutherans To Do? Starting Points for a Lutheran Ecclesiology," in *Concordia Journal* (January–April 2008), 157.

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 160. Arand based his view on the explanation to the third article of the Creed in the Small Catechism.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, "Ten Sermons on the Catechism, 1528," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 51 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 166.

²⁰ Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians, 1535," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 26 (Saint

Individuals do not come to faith apart from the community of believers in the church. This shows how strongly Luther felt about the priesthood of all believers and thereby the equal status and right of every person, while rejecting individualized faith.

Conflicts surface when different interpretations emerge. This should not be seen as a danger, but rather reflects the richness of theology. Different interpretations can lead to conflict, whether theological, institutional, or personal. When conflict emerges in a church, the word forgiveness is immediately mentioned. As the people who have been forgiven, we are also asked to forgive others and it seems natural that forgiveness take place in church conflict. This has certain consequences. Conflicting sides are often asked to forgive the other and sometimes to forget what happened in the past for the sake of the church's future. This is not the right attitude if we wish to achieve true reconciliation.

True reconciliation needs forgiveness but forgiveness calls for a process. Forgiveness is a gift from God who is willing to bear the cost of forgiveness in order to reconcile with humanity. Humans are called and enabled to forgive one another as a consequence of God's forgiveness. A Christian community is a community of forgiveness that enables forgiveness to be given and received at the communal level. However, often there is the fear that the process of forgiveness would be seen as "cheap grace." How can we avoid such cheap forgiveness, while at the same time healing conflicting sides?

Church as the communion of reconciled people

In the Christian community, forgiveness has always been a communal matter. As Jones says, it is "a habit that must be practiced over time within the disciplines of Christian community."²¹ Through the practice of forgiveness, the Christian community reflects God's restorative action; by doing so the Christian community becomes the communion of forgiven forgivers.

Thus, when conflict occurs within the church, the church becomes at the same time the agent and object of reconciliation. In addressing the conflict, the church should recall and remember truthfully what happened and repent of its sin. In this process, repentance has been seen as a way of rejecting the idea of "cheap grace." Bonhoeffer explains cheap grace as "the

Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 441.

²¹ L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 163.

preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession."²² Thus, Bonhoeffer sees confession as an important part of the process of forgiveness. This is the place for perpetrators to remember that they have wronged others and sinned against God. This is also the moment for victims to recall their memories and to forgive the perpetrator. Therefore, the first step to be taken in the process of reconciliation is to remember what happened and how it can be resolved. This process is also useful there where the role of victim and perpetrator is unclear. Through active remembering, conflicting sides will be able to hear and exchange facts and feelings about the past, thus giving perpetrators the chance to repent and victims the chance to forgive.

Martha E. Stortz sums up the important steps in forgiveness as follows: "Repenting, remembering, and reconciling are the three life-giving steps in forgiveness. They turn us away from their deadly opposites: revenge, amnesia, and recrimination."²³ Forgiving is not the same as forgetting because the act of forgiveness is actually about remembering. The challenge is how we can remember and forgive and not fall into hatred because of the painful past that lingers in our mind.

Even though remembrance is an important step toward real forgiveness, many people still choose to forget the past. They choose not to confront or talk about past injuries because it is too painful to remember. One of the temptations in forgiveness is the idea of letting go of the past by forgetting it. Despite all the challenges, remembrance in order to forgive is vital if real forgiveness is to be achieved. This demands that both sides lay their cards on the table, are willing to listen to others, and share the stories from all perspectives. This is not easy for the perpetrator nor for the victim. Nevertheless, while it is a road less travelled, it is important to be on the same track of forgiveness and reconciliation that our Creator God made possible in Christ and the Holy Spirit. An act of remembrance is important if we want to achieve actual and genuine forgiveness and reconciliation.

In the following, I shall refer to the situation in North Sumatra, where a number of churches decided to separate on account of an unresolved conflict. In the case of the HKBP and GKPS, both churches gave different accounts of how and why the separation had occurred. The two churches

²² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom*, transl. Edwin H. Robertson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 31.

²³ Martha E. Stortz, "The Practice of Forgiveness: Disciples as Forgiven Forgivers," in *World & World*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2007), 14.

are now independent. The past conflict lingers; both churches still have not reconciled their memory.

After six years of violent internal conflict (1992–1998), the HKBP decided to reconcile. Past events are not spoken about and reconciliation in the church is based on shaky ground. People who had been involved in the conflict still remember the pain, but prefer not to talk about it. The unwillingness to talk about the conflict results in wounds still in need of healing. The question is whether being silent about the past is the right manner to handle past conflicts.

In order to be truly reconciled, the past needs to be processed. The two churches handled the conflict differently. In both cases, reconciliation occurred but the wounds continue to fester. Memories ought to be recalled in the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. Through such remembering we honor what happened in the past without getting stuck. We acknowledge willfulness and victimization while, at the same time, learning from naming the demons that keep us from witnessing to Christ's way, life and truth.

The first step toward an ecclesiology of reconciliation is for churches that have suffered from conflict to be true to the past and true to a future as God's people. It is only after adopting such a stance and walking that humble path that churches can act as the body of Christ. It is not an easy task and path but a challenge that needs to be further explored.

A Cultural Hermeneutical Reflection on the Lutheran Understanding of the Church's Holiness

Thu En Yu

Introduction

There is today the need to reexamine the Christian concept of ecclesiology. For this exercise, we must ask ourselves the following questions: Should we stick to our old theology, policies and strategies? Are they still adequate in the Asian context? If not, what new ones do we need to formulate?

We need a new approach so that our church remains holistic. This calls for a cultural hermeneutical reflection on the meaning of the church. In such an attempt, we are rethinking the meaning of ecclesiology. In Greek, *ekklesia* means "an assembly of people with an objective." In Hellenistic Judaism, "*ekklesia* was used to designate assemblies of both political and cultic character ... the assemblies gathered both to praise God and to regulate the affairs of the community."¹ Hence, *ekklesia* is in essence a social as well as a religious community.

In the Bible, *ecclesia* is the body of Christ, the people of the Lord, elected because of God's loving kindness. The *ecclesia* must therefore conduct a ministry of love. Through such a ministry, the church manifests the essence of faith, hope and love, making it genuinely an ecclesiastical community that praises God and regulates the community's affairs.

As a religious and social community, the church has a social responsibility. We call this a *koinonia* or *diaconia* community, which is incorporated into the Asian culture of hospitality, totality, neighborliness and completeness in general and the Chinese cultural belief of *li* (rite) and *ren* (love). The Asian context of holiness is imbued with both phenomena.

¹ Peter C. Hodgson, *Revisioning the Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 25.

A theology of the church from the biblical perspective

The church, as a *koinonia* community, is a sharing community. To be a genuine *koinonia* community, the church must exist at the grass roots, understand people's problems and seek justice for them. The ecclesial community has to identify with the poor, the oppressed and those facing discrimination. "It is a community from ground level, from the bottom up, not from the top down."²

The church's mission is social as well as religious. Church and society are not two separate and independent entities; they are interdependent. The traditional concepts, misconstrued as a spiritual and physical dichotomy, actually indicate an interrelated body, never two separate parts. Human beings were not created to be separated into a physical being on one hand and a spiritual being on the other. Likewise, society includes the inalienable right of human life to coexist. Any attempt to separate sacred and secular matters, however innocent, not only diminishes the church's function within the religious sphere, but also neglects its social function. This concept of coexistence corresponds to Asian culture, which I shall refer to later.

Therefore, salvation is also holistic. The content of salvation is as much communal as it is individualistic. This aspect corresponds to the celebration of Passover, a joyous community festival celebrated by the Jewish people to mark their emancipation from political as well as economic bondage in Egypt. In remembrance of Christ's victory over sin and death, the believers in the early church celebrated the New Passover, or Eucharist, by partaking in the communion feast together and dedicating themselves to the alleviation of poverty. The celebration of the Jewish Passover and the Christian Eucharist can shed some light on the church's social obligation.

Diaconal work will lead the whole community to a new level of relationships. Such a new level of edifying relationships can be a vibrant and active communion, which is only possible in a reconciled community of peace and justice. This new phenomenon is none other than the kingdom of God or *basileia tou theou*. However, the meaning of *basileia* and *ecclesia* are interrelated. The consummation of *basileia* depends on whether or not the ecclesial community can join in the role of *koinonia*, thereby bringing faith, hope and love to society. In fact, according to the teaching of the Bible, *basileia* constantly challenges and transforms human relationships and social circumstances. For instance, by healing on the Sabbath, Jesus

² Ibid., 75.

challenged rigid legalism. In his discourse on not pouring new wine into old wineskins, he introduced the concept of the renewal of the heart. By washing the disciples' feet, he rendered a humble service to others. Jesus Christ commanded the disciples to learn and follow his example and to abide by his new commandment. For those who obey, Jesus said, "... the kingdom of God is among you" (Lk 17:21). Here Jesus introduces a new paradigm of holiness; being "holy" is neither being separated from nor superior to others. The church's "holiness" is its specific role in relation to society. "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 2:4) and, "[b]ear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2).

Yinyang philosophy

According to *Yi Jing*, or the Book of Changes, *yi* means change. Change is a natural phenomenon. The origin of the Chinese is the basin of the Yellow River. Since time immemorial, the Chinese have been living from agriculture. In an agrarian society, weather and livelihood are closely related; favorable weather brings bountiful harvests. Living in a natural environment, beyond their control, the people can only depend on the heavens and let nature take its course. Such a life has given birth to a profound philosophy of life, the philosophy of change, which Laozi (sixth century BCE)³ describes as *dao*. This *dao* is constantly changing, as Laozi says according to *Dao De Jing*,

The Dao that can be told of is not the Eternal Dao... The Speaker knows not; The Knower speaks not. Once, one speaks of Dao with human language and concepts, he/she conditions and limits the Dao within his/her criteria and conditions, thus distorting the original Dao.⁴

Nature works in wonderful ways: the four seasons—spring, summer, autumn and winter—rotating in sequence. Its impact on agriculture is inevitable and ever changing. In a constantly changing environment, people lead a life of hardship and struggle and can do little but submit to the supernatural and pray for the

³ Alternately as Lao Tzu.

⁴ Yeo Khiok-Khng, *What has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 198), 22.

unity between heaven and humankind and pursue geographical advantages as well as human harmony. Such cosmological efforts led to the evolution of a *yinyang* culture with its emphasis on adjustment and harmony.

Chinese culture abounds with touching stories of struggle, survival, creativity and salvation. Correspondingly, the Israelites achieved a similar feat in Egypt and the wilderness, guided by God's Word and protected by God's loving kindness. Likewise, it is possible for the Chinese to discover a theological powerhouse amidst the expansive cultural milieu that has evolved out of the Yellow River basin.

According to *yinyang* philosophy, the universe is epitomized in a *taiji* circle/diagram or the Supreme Ultimate, a symbol that reflects the creation and salvation of the Bible, especially the tenets of perfection, fullness and inclusion. *Yinyang* thought is dualistic. For example, it denotes the earth as *yin* and heaven as *yang*; the moon as *yin* and the sun as *yang*; female as *yin* and male as *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* exist in multiple, interlacing layers in an orderly manner, a state wherein each exists in the other's domain. "They are mutually inclusive and relative. *Yin* has part of *yang*, and *yang* has part of *yin*; or, *yin* is in *yang* and *yang* is in *yin*."⁵ When *yin* and *yang* unite and the universe is at peace then all creation is in harmony. These images symbolize creation and salvation in the Bible. This is indeed revealing in relation to God's transcendence and immanence, which in Asian culture symbolize harmony and completeness.

From the perspective of hermeneutics, the *yinyang*, Chinese philosophy and the Bible complement one another. In terms of the essence of being, the bipolar nature of *yin* and *yang* permits coexistence and complementarity; with *yin* in *yang* and *yang* in *yin*, it gives rise to the "logic" of an entity of one-in-two and two-in-one in harmonious coexistence.

Holiness imbued li (rite) and ren (love)

The meaning of honoring "good" and resisting "evil" in Roman 13:1–7 is used here to explain the Asian context of holiness imbued with *li* and *len*.

Romans 13 was written at a time when Roman Christians were under the sovereignty of the Roman authorities. Roman 13:1–7 is quite debatable, and according to some biblical scholars, the traditional rendition, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God" (Rom 13:1) would fit neatly with Rome's self-proclaimed

⁵ Yeo Khiok-Khng, op. cit. (note 4), 21.

traditional divine right to rule the world, since “belief in divine sanction for Roman conquest inevitably endowed the ideal of an eternal empire with a certain currency.”⁶ Is this statement not contradictory to what Paul taught earlier, where he seems to underline the non-conformity of Christians to the secular norms of this world (Rom 12:2)? After all, there are authorities that are not “instituted by God”.

This passage concerns the issue of tax and revenue. Tacitus recorded that direct taxes were levied on those living in provinces outside Rome, while indirect taxes were levied on all Roman citizens.⁷ When Paul exhorts Christians in Rome to pay both (Rom 13:6–7), he possibly had in mind recent immigrants or those who had returned from other provinces after Claudius’s expulsion were still liable to the direct taxes. That the authority “bears the sword” (Rom 13:4) most possibly reflected the real situation, since the Roman authorities did not hesitate to inflict severe punishment on those who violated their tax laws.⁸ In view of their vulnerable status, Paul advises Christians in Rome to react appropriately toward the abusive taxation imposed by the imperial authorities.

The tax issue was one of the many critical issues that Christians had to confront. Paul’s command “to love” stands in clear opposition to Roman taxation that was obviously deprived of love. Paul envisions a free and loving community when he appeals to Christians in Rome not to fall short of what they can contribute to peace, to love, to be on good terms with their neighbors, and relating to others with trust and respect on the basis of honesty and justice and, above all, with the overriding perspective of love. Again, this is the Chinese *yinyang* culture with its emphasis on adjustment and harmony. It is expressed in the communal aspect *ren-ren* and must start with *li*.

In Chinese culture, obedience in terms of willing submission to the law of the authorities is *li* and to do good for the community is *ren*. *Ren-ren* is highlighted in the community. It is not expressed in the moral but rather in the communal sense. Chinese Confucians emphasize consensus and unity in diversity. For Confucius, the practice of *ren* and *yih* must start with *li* from one’s family and extend to the community at large. In this sense, the

⁶ Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 66

⁷ Mikael Tellbe, *Paul between Synagogue and State: Christian, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians*, Coniectanea Biblica. New Testament Series 34 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), 179; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, World Biblical Commentary 38B (Dallas: Word Inc., 1988), 766.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

Chinese concept of community, which can refer to benevolent associations, dialect communities and religious organizations, can certainly help to bring about a paradigm shift in the meaning of the church in Asia.

For the prophet Amos social justice was at the core of religious life. Amos 5 points out that God was disgusted with the people's offering; instead, God preferred their deeds of justice. God refused the people's offering, not because there was anything wrong with the offerings per se, but God disapproved of the Israelites' selfishness. They assumed that they could seek God's favor by making great offerings and that God would not count their evils. But God questioned,

Yet day after day they seek me and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments, they delight to draw near to God. "Why do we fast, but you do not see? Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?" Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers" (Isa 58:2-3).

In Hebrew, the words "delight" and "pleasure" are synonymous. The people confused their own pleasure with that of God. The previous treatise had expounded that many embraced Christianity in order to change their identity in the pursuit of their own interests, including material and spiritual gains. Hence, it is necessary for the churches to reconstruct their theology.

Like Amos, the Book of Isaiah mentions that the people "seek God daily." In numerous other biblical texts, people's motives for and rites around offerings are wrong. Amos 4 speaks of people offering their sacrifices every morning and tithing every three days. According to 1 Samuel 1:3, sacrifices are to be made once a year, while Deuteronomy 26:12 stipulates that tithes every three years would suffice. Religious obligations of once every day or every three days become indulgences and are therefore a violation of the order of the covenant. Moreover, the elaborate and unnecessary formalities are merely superficial.

Ancient Confucian teaching admonishes humankind to treat one another with benevolence or *ren*, righteousness or *yi* and courtesy or *li*. It emphasizes human relations and justice and is thus a people oriented ethic. Are there similarities between the people based philosophy of Confucius and the practical theology of Amos? Herbert Fingarette points out that Confucian thought teaches us to treat others with courtesy and to practice loyalty or *zhong*, sincerity or *cheng* and forbearance or *shu*. Such moral excellence is not only social but also spiritual. According to Confucianism, the sacred moral

excellence of humankind has been sanctioned by the heavens or *tian*, and moral excellence distinguishes humankind from other animals.⁹ Since virtues are the mandate of the heavens. Human beings must not only be conscious of their responsibilities, but also pursue unity of knowledge and practice. “A human being is a benevolent person;” this is what Confucianism demands of humankind. Only if one leads a courteous and righteous life, then, according to Confucianism, one does not offend the heavens and humanity. Such persons are accorded the attribute “gentleman” or *junzi*, and the heavens entrust them with the tasks of cultivating their moral character, putting their family in order, ruling their country and restoring worldwide peace. It is especially so with royalty, who are required to discipline themselves and provide welfare for society and the nation. Therefore, the king of kings has a formidable and enviable task of maintaining harmony among humankind, the heavens and the earth. Such a superstructure is an intense and powerful concept of human ethic and social justice. Subsequent ethical relations are formalized in an hierarchy characterized by seniority, such as “the monarch behaves like a monarch, while the official like an official, the father like a father, and the son like a son.” In essence, every individual has their identity and the accompanying responsibilities. In practice, a perfect adherent would be accorded respect, love and support by all, hence the Chinese maxim, “Accord others respect and you will be accorded with respect; accord others love and you will be accorded the same.”

When human beings practice virtues, interpersonal relations are courteous and righteous; thus, the attributes of the heavens are manifested in the world. The heavens and human ethic promoted by Confucianism are akin to the God and social justice Amos advocates. God is benevolent, just and righteous; God also demands that people treat one another with love and righteousness. Similarly, if people are righteous and merciful, God's loving kindness is manifested among the people. Hence, God commands the people to “Seek good and not evil...” (Amos 5:14) and demands society to “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

Amos and Confucius based their human ethics and social justice on love. Benevolence in Confucianism and love and grace in the Bible have similar meanings. The Chinese character of benevolence or *ren* implies that harmonious interpersonal relations are founded on the essence of humanity; that is, love and virtue as the underlying principles for interpersonal relations in

⁹ Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 7; 42–47; 55.

accordance with courtesy and righteousness.¹⁰ The origins of love and virtue are to be found in God or the heavens. If human beings assume that a religious lifestyle and ceremony or rite can replace love and virtue, and therefore secure the acceptance of God or the heavens, then this is hypocrisy. Amos views it as sin.¹¹ Mencius, one of Confucius's students, considers that "if a person does not practice virtues, they are inferior to wild animals." It is evident that both Amos and Confucius duly emphasize ethical life and social justice, according them more importance than superficial religious life.

Thus, the Asian cultural element can be employed for the interpretation of ecclesiology. As it is taught in the Bible, "...But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pet 2:9). This "marvelous light" is,

there if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation ... All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, ...and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Cor 5:17–19).

Because of its healing and benevolent nature, the church is different but not separate from others. The former contributes to the holiness/wholeness of the church, while the latter contradict its nature. For the church is a community of faith, hope and love.

Muhibbah—Goodwill friendship

Many Asian minorities have a constructive tradition of goodwill friendship, such as, or example, the *muhibbah* of the Malay people in Malaysia and the neighboring countries. *Muhibbah* means goodwill or harmony—a friendship, almost amounting to a unity between cultures. This concept is used to ameliorate the relationships within society. It is a way of life for the Malays, thus in Malay, a *muhibbah* relationship indicates common social, economic and political well-being. It is expressed in the cordial treatment accorded to any person, especially to neighbors. Thus, neighbors are more

¹⁰ See Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, transl. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), vol. 1, 66–73.

¹¹ Cf. Amos 4:4–5.

than friends; they have a special relationship that cultivates a sense of unity, in short, neighborliness. Neighborliness is not confined to two persons, but encompasses the entire village or community. Neighborliness in a communal setting generates a state of harmony among the inhabitants. It is the didactic dyadic culture that binds the village or the community together, ensuring its well-being and coexistence.

A proper term to describe the primal vision of the ethnic minority in Asia is “communal” or “totality.” The relationship between the human being and the unknown, the individual and the cosmos, the person and the community, are inseparable. It is this wholeness, the unbroken circle, which makes life and prosperity possible and is considered sacred.

When the community is at peace and the harvest is successful, people believe that they are in good harmony with the unknown and the cosmos. Serious individual wrongdoing, such as killing or adultery, is not only a taboo, but offensive to the unknown; it will bring calamity to the whole community. In order to keep in harmony and prosperity, the human being is bound to an active reverence to the supernatural, the cosmos and the community.

This cultural characteristic, also reflected in communal decision making, results in a high degree of social responsibility. Common consensus makes communication and dialogue possible.

Originally, Asia was a communally orientated society. In such a society, the sense of individuality is completely surrendered. This Asian cultural perspective can shed light on the holiness of ecclesiology in the sense of *koinonia* and *diaconia*.

Conclusion

The love of God is all embracing and inclusive. God's loving kindness, *besed*, which is grounded in God's covenantal promise with Abraham that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3) is now fulfilled. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). In Christ there is no shame and no boasting. This is the essence of the church. For this reason, Paul said, “Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom 15:7).

Yinyang philosophy and *li* and *ren* Confucian teaching, can enrich Christian thinking and enhance the exchange between Christian thought and Chinese culture. For thousands of years, the principle of coexistence

and harmony of *Yinyang* and Confucianism has influenced Chinese culture, which emphasizes the pursuit of neighborliness and common values amidst differences. This is an important aspect of Christian theology that we cannot afford to overlook.

Communal cohesiveness and neighborliness in the spirit of true friendship with healing properties can enhance ethnic and religious harmony and should be used by the church as a powerful theological tool.

The Holy Spirit and the Holiness of the Church

Yonas Yigezu Dibisa

In biblical and theological terms, holiness is a complex issue. The Old Testament provides us with a wide perspective on holiness, emphasizing God's holiness and God's holy presence in the midst of the community of Israel, reflecting God's imperative demand of holiness on the community,¹ linking ethics and rituals and raising prophetic voices against injustices, etc. Holiness can be attributed to God alone. Nonetheless, this holy God demands that God's people aspire to holiness in spite of their deficiencies. God's holiness requires that God's people are obedient and faithful.

This article does not address the theme of holiness directly. Rather, I shall reflect on the Holy Spirit's spiritual ministry in the church—sanctifying and empowering God's people in worship and service to God and neighbor. Questions of liturgical style would inevitably emerge in any discussion related to Christian worship, particularly in light of today's charismatic realities, experienced also within Lutheran churches.

Worship: an act of gratitude and celebration

While human action is indispensable, worship is the Spirit's particular medium for communicating God's will and empowering God's people to glorify God. This raises certain questions. First, are Lutherans missing something worth having? Second, are Lutherans introducing new worship practices at the expense of their own doctrinal and traditional values? Third, could a balance be maintained between charismatic worship and a strictly outlined order of worship? Fourth, could there be any enriching harmony between Lutheran and charismatic styles of worship?

¹ "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:12).

Being in but not of the world

According to Luke, the early church started its ministry by radically rejecting the prevalent socioeconomic and political systems. Whether intentional or not, the motif of separation in the early church has had a symbolic bearing on the church's need to be different in the world. The early church did not withdraw passively. Rather, it exhibited its holiness by actively engaging and challenging the prevailing unjust systems of the time.

Moral and emotional separation was necessary for a community that understood its mission to be the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in word as well as in action. In the first place, this separation involved worship of praise, prayer, reading of the Scriptures, and the breaking of bread together.² Christian worship formed an holistic unit of spiritual, physical and social services. This reality evinced a vivid contrast between the believing and unbelieving communities: the believing community had a bird's-eye view of the contemporary world and the church prayed for and acted toward realizing God's kingdom on earth.

Holiness: God's gift through the working of the Holy Spirit

Luther attributes holiness to the work of the Holy Spirit, "that he [the Holy Spirit] makes us holy."³ In this sense, holiness is God's gift to the church and individual Christians. What does it mean to be holy and how can Christians tell that they are holy? As Lutherans, the response to such questions would have to reflect on Luther's famous formula that a Christian is at one and the same time righteous and sinner—"simul iustus et peccator."⁴

Christian holiness derives from the union with Christ, which believers experience through the reality of Christ's indwelling, by the workings of the Holy Spirit. This is a matter of faith. Believers access Christ's righteousness in grace through faith alone. Luther affirms this truth summarizing, "in all works of faith, our main concern must be to become worthy of Christ

² Cf. Acts 4:32–35.

³ "The Large Catechism (1529)," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000), 435.

⁴ Wilhelm Pauck (ed. and transl.), *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, The Library of Christian Classics: Ichthus Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 120ff.

and to take refuge under the wings of his righteousness.”⁵ Grace therefore bestows upon Christians the capacity to imitate Christ through active witness in the world.

Christian holiness is in part derived from baptism as integral to the Spirit’s work of uniting the believer with Christ. Having been assured of the sustaining grace received in baptism, Christians are sanctified and empowered to live a holy life in action, which Luther calls “giving evidence of faith.”⁶ Thus, sanctification of the Christian is nothing other than the completion of baptism.⁷ At this point, I am tempted to raise some issues in relation to baptism that my own church is currently grappling with in ecumenical contexts.

Most Lutherans are proud of Martin Luther. A friend of mine, a Lutheran and active church member, expressed his admiration for Luther, while, at the same time, not hesitating to critique what he calls Luther’s inconclusive doctrine on infant baptism. Since many Lutheran pastors and leaders encounter similar challenges, further reflection on infant baptism is needed.

The challenge posed by the growing Pentecostal movement—especially in relation to infant baptism—requires a deeper understanding of what Luther said and how his ideas speak to today’s context. For many, Luther’s flexibility becomes problematic. The question of faith, in particular, is critical. Paul Althaus observed that what Luther said about faith in relation to baptism was precise and straightforward, “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:16). Luther therefore does not deny that faith is necessary before baptism.

Affirming the reality of faith before baptism, Luther tried to formulate a different scenario on the basis of which faith could be available to infants before baptism, through others. This is problematic since Luther also believed that salvation is based entirely on personal faith, not on someone else’s. One could therefore conclude that no one who does not have personal faith is to be baptized.

Luther was convinced that all is God’s own working. As Althaus points out, Luther was not a puritanical biblicist. Thus, he does not demand that the validity of every doctrine and practice be established by an explicit scriptural command. In addition, Luther based his argument on historical

⁵ Ibid., 155

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 355.

theology, affirming that God has already approved of infant baptism by preserving it for so long.⁸

Obviously, conclusions based on scriptural and historical theology have a drawback. The situation will certainly continue to be problematic, particularly in the face of the very influential Pentecostal realities. Lutherans also have reason enough to grapple with the question of infant baptism in order not only to defend their conviction, but to benefit others so that they find God's grace that is received in baptism.

Do children receive the Holy Spirit at baptism even though they do not have faith at baptism? Luther presents historical evidence mentioning St. Bernard, Gerson and John Huss, all of whom were baptized as infants, but whose ministry constituted a significant spiritual revelation.⁹

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit—empowerment and sanctification

As a church that understands itself as being charismatic, Mekane Yesus is often asked two interrelated questions: Is Mekane Yesus really Lutheran and, secondly, is the charismatic movement compatible with Lutheranism. While the former is often asked by Lutheran partners who find Mekane Yesus to be more Pentecostal than Lutheran, the latter is posed both by Lutherans and Pentecostals who find it difficult to believe that Lutherans also experience charismatic manifestations. Mekane Yesus is committed to being Lutheran as well as charismatic. It has been blessed by the Holy Spirit. It is with this conviction that the church revised its book of worship (*Qidase*), rich both in theological and doctrinal terms as well as sensitive to charismatic expressions during worship.

Mekane Yesus's charismatic history testifies to the fact that charismatic experiences are spontaneous phenomena. Some charismatic Lutheran churches are discussing cause and effect. What is it that differentiates us from others (from those seemingly non-charismatic)? Are we glorifying God in a particular way, in both worship and our Christian witness within a given environment? Are our voices heard in society as much as in the sanctuary?

Charismatic Lutheranism does not encourage a total rejection of the world, as Pentecostals tend to do. In reality, charismatic Lutheran churches see their

⁸ Ibid., 359–65.

⁹ Ibid., 360.

growth come about through their holistic mission in the world. Mekane Yesus is a case in point. The underlying factor is passion for Christ, resulting from the Holy Spirit's empowering influence that generates an irreversible passion for God's mission, the proclamation of the gospel and diaconal services.

For Mekane Yesus, charismatic worship is consistent with what it stands for. For instance, ministers who offer healing prayers for the sick during services are mindful of the church's mandate, which is to address human needs holistically. In Mekane Yesus, we have witnessed God's miraculous response to prayers of intercession. Thus, being conscious of its dual responsibility, Mekane Yesus is always committed to addressing human needs in and outside the church. Dealing with human suffering through activities preformed by human beings as well as through prayers, intercessions and pastoral counseling, Mekane Yesus always endeavors to be faithful to its calling. Agne Nordlander refers to this in line with the Lutheran theology of creation and salvation,

God is fighting the evil with his two arms. With God's left arm, God is fighting against illnesses and diseases with the help of medicine, nurses and medical doctors, etc. God is concerned for the physical well-being of men and women created in God's image. With God's right arm, God can heal a sick person in what we call a supernatural way, through prayer and the laying on of hands. But it is God who is healing in both ways.¹⁰

If this is a reality in a church such as Mekane Yesus that claims to be strictly Lutheran, what would Luther and his contemporaries have said had they lived today? What sort of theology would they have formulated? As stated above in relation to infant baptism, Luther mentions certain charismatic individuals in connection with his argument for the validity of infant baptism (St. Bernard, Gerson, John Huss). "Even today there are many whose doctrine and life attest they have the Holy Spirit."¹¹ Given that Luther believed that, without the Holy Spirit, Christianity would be impossible, one could conclude that he is here referring to a particular and extraordinary experience in the lives of these charismatic individuals.

Christians are endowed with spiritual gifts of one sort or another. Charismatic Christianity differs in its expressive passion in love and ser-

¹⁰ Agne Nordlander, unpublished paper, presented at pastors theological consultation on the Charismatic movement.

¹¹ Althaus, *op. cit.* (note 7).

vice in the name of Christ. Most of all, charismatic Christians are more devoted than others to reaching out to others with the message of salvation. Moreover, charismatic Christianity seeks an experiential rather than a cognitive knowledge of God. Many churches today fail to pay enough attention to the spiritual development of their members and consequently face depleting membership.

The Lutheran misconception of the Pentecostal experience seems to have caused a spiritual deficiency. Arguably, the phobic response to Pentecostalism has, to a certain extent, created suspicion of all kinds of charismatic experiences that emerge in congregations. In some cases, Lutherans tend to approach the problem of Pentecostal and charismatic experiences by way of knowledge and research alone, such as exegetical analysis. Mekane Yesus did this during the early days of the charismatic emergence in its congregations. Eventually, a series of consultations and biblical reflections enabled the church to open its doors to a meaningful and biblically sound charismatic movement. Rather than a theological and exegetical strategy, what helped was the openness to and recognition of what God was already doing in the congregations. Larry Christen comments,

Given the worldwide spread and witness of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements since the beginning of the twentieth century, the church as a whole must consider questions not only of exegesis and systematic theology but also of the Spirit's strategy.¹²

Human beings are created with emotions, expressive responses and a spirit of gratitude to God and neighbor. When gathering in church for worship, people have to be allowed the freedom to express such feelings in ways that are acceptable culturally and contextually.

Experiences testify that the Holy Spirit does not follow a specific strategy, but rather catches and blesses the church by surprise. Above all, a spiritual outpouring in the church presupposes the individual believer's personal Pentecost. I contend that Pentecost is not to be identified solely with so-called Pentecostalism, but that it is every true Christian's experience that occurs as the Holy Spirit touches the worshipper's heart. It is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit who is always at work in the church, and whose presence would empower every Christian personally to experience

¹² Larry Christensen, *Welcome Holy Spirit; A Study of Charismatic renewal in the Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 83.

and celebrate God. Can we as Lutherans commit to prayerful attention to the Spirit's desire, while attempting systematically to understand the works of the Holy Spirit that are revealed in ways unusual in our tradition? Christensen comments that,

one of the great misconceptions that circulates around discussions of the Holy Spirit is the notion that we have everything that we state in our doctrines. The strategy of the Spirit is however calling the Church to experience more of what the doctrines talk about—to go beyond an intellectual belief.¹³

In light of the fact that theology's chief task is establish a relationship between humanity and God and the environment, the way in which this occurs in the twentieth-century church would need to be reflected upon deeply. This suggests the need for theological renewal, particularly in the area of preparation for the ministry. For instance, theological seminaries may need to focus more intentionally on spiritual formation, not only academic study. In general, Lutheran reflection on contemporary Christian worship has to take into account cultural and historical diversity. That is to say, today's realities are not in favor of dogmatizing Christian liturgy.

A gentle church, gentle worship: are Lutherans missing something?

Gentleness has to do with the strict adherence to the traditionally accepted worship order. In some cases—at least in the case of Mekane Yesus until the early 1980s—pastors and church leaders were more concerned with guarding traditional liturgy than prayerfully attending to the renewing revelation of the Holy Spirit. While accommodating charismatic practices in church worship, we have to be mindful of the richness of our liturgy. Nevertheless, a room for flexibility is always essential for the benefit of the believers in our care. As Musawenkosi Biyela believes that our liturgy must show an interest in all people in general and fellow Christians in particular in such a way that it contributes to the enhancement of every person's spiritual, social, emotional and material well-being.¹⁴ Furthermore,

¹³ Ibid., 84.

¹⁴ Musawenkosi Biyela, "In Spirit and Truth: Liturgy in Dialogue with Pentecostalism," in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism*, Theology in the Life of the Church, vol. 4 (Minneapolis/Geneva: Lutheran University Press/The Lutheran World Federation, 2008), 91ff.

he claims that liturgy is a drama with different scenes—each accompanied with bodily expressions—involving joyful expressions such as laughing as well as crying in petition and repentance.

How does Lutheran liturgy fit into the charismatic realities, or how does the charismatic experience fit into liturgically structured worship order? This calls for a liturgical renewal. African Lutheran churches in particular have to take the lead in this regard. Naturally, liturgy must develop within local cultural contexts. The cultural and social realities and the developing self-awareness in African societies would necessitate a fundamental review of the African Lutheran churches' liturgies.

In the first place, the church exists to glorify God in worship and service. Moreover, the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work is realized as the community gathers around the Word that is preached and the sacraments that are administered. However, when the worship *ordo* is given priority over the freedom of the people, worship becomes an ordinary gathering or social fellowship rather than the celebration of God's presence. Liturgy does not have to be the guardian of tradition—rather, it has to allow the worshippers to enjoy their own personal Pentecost during worship. Personal Pentecost is at times manifested in an emotional response, but that is not what it really does. It will bring the believer into a state of deeper faith, love, hope as well as repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation and, above all, to a deepened spiritual relationship with God. The sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit could be realized in this way as well as through the celebration of the holy sacraments.

The church has to be cautious of chaotic church worship—everything done in the church must concentrate on Christ, glorify God and benefit the worshippers. Pastoral attention is to be paid when such ends are not met. First of all, our liturgy needs to respond to the needs of the people. What do they want to do in order to glorify God and to enjoy the effects of the Holy Spirit. The church cannot be naturally silent; it is an active and dynamic talking body. Yet, one has to ensure that this is done in a gentle, orderly and, of course, a lively and joyful manner.

Sanctification as discipleship

The church's motivation for holiness may need to be construed on the basis of its relationship to the world. In effect, the church's mission is expressed in its active engagement with the world. It becomes the active agent of Jesus

Christ only when it is moved spiritually, and its faith expressed prophetically. Thus, it is known by its action rather than its structural presence. Several theologians have in the past characterized the church as a people whose task is limited to bearing witness to eschatological redemption alone.¹⁵ While such a perception tends to focus more on individual salvation and redemption, one could also relate it to a corresponding motive that points to one's responsibility for mission in the world.

All Christians as individuals and the church as a corporate body have a vocation to live out their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ: to proclaim the message of the kingdom both in word and in action.

According to Walter Hollenweger, the 1906 Azusa Street revival witnessed the breakdown of barriers such as race, gender, wealth and language that divided the society in those days.¹⁶ This, indeed, was the most profound sign of holiness, manifested in situations of impossibility, and the true actualization of God's kingdom.

Conclusion

Today's church is functioning in a world that is constantly changing. In the same way, the charismatic movement is also adding new dimensions to Christian worship, while posing serious challenges to established traditions and doctrines. In many parts of the world, Lutheran churches have new experiences as a result of charismatic practices.

The charismatic movement should no longer threaten Lutheran tradition. Rather, it could be an enriching resource if handled in a responsible and faithful manner. Of course, the unprecedentedly prevailing prosperity gospel that comes along with the charismatic movement is having a damaging effect on genuine charismatic practices. This is particularly true for the African churches.

There is a growing inclination among most Christians, including Lutherans, toward expressive forms of worship rather than the tightly outlined liturgical order. On the other hand, many Lutherans feel more

¹⁵ For instance, Karl Barth states that "the goal in the direction of which the true church proceeds and moves is the revelation of the sanctification of all humanity and human life as it has already taken place in Jesus Christ." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4, part 2: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

¹⁶ Walter Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 181–4.

at home with a strictly designed *ordo*. It is therefore necessary to seek a balance between a structured liturgical worship and so-called free worship. Most of all, reorienting the traditional worship order with a limited level of flexibility will have to be considered seriously, in order to benefit from blessings of charismatic worship.

The experience of Mekane Yesus could be a good example of the effort of creating convergence between the two. Instead of rejecting the charismatic experience, the church allowed its own liturgy to improve by including the charismatic experience. Similarly, the liturgy itself was structured in such a way that charismatic worship could be accommodated and developed so that it could become more beneficial than without such adjustments. Liturgy without charismatic experience and charismatic experience without liturgical leadership would hardly be effective, particularly in the African churches of the twenty-first century.

A Community of Faith and Love: A Lutheran Perspective on the Catholicity of the Church

Tomi Karttunen

The catholic nature of Lutheran ecclesiology

Only those things have been recounted which seemed to need saying. This was done in order that it may be understood that nothing has been accepted among us, in teaching or ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or the catholic church. For it is manifest that we have most diligently been on guard so that no new or ungodly doctrines creep into our churches.¹

The Lutheran confessional writings represent a distinct view of the church's catholicity. The Reformation started as a reform movement of the medieval Catholic Church. Using this as his starting point, the Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), regarded the main question of the Reformation to be one regarding the understanding of the oneness of the church. On the basis of their Lutheran identity, the Lutheran churches want to be catholic—the true and universal manifestation of the church of Christ. One implication of this is the existence of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) as a global communion.

The global understanding of the church and its mission leads to a positive attitude toward constructive ecumenical dialogue and convergence. Especially in contexts where the Lutheran churches are in a minority situation, where their identity seems to be threatened in one way or another, it has not always been easy to see the positive meaning of the term “the church catholic.” Mutual respect is one of the preconditions for constructive ecumenical work, and minority churches—even more so than the majority churches—can benefit from

¹“The Augsburg Confession—Latin Text—Conclusion,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 105.

the international cooperation that is one consequence of the church's catholic nature. In today's changing contexts, also Lutheran churches in majority situations are challenged in their understanding of the church's catholicity.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) is a majority church (79.6 percent of the population). Lutheranism is a part of the Finnish identity, which until recently has been relatively homogenous. Yet, there is a spirit of change in the air. Especially since the 1990s, Finland has relatively quickly become increasingly multicultural. Like in the rest of Europe, the ecumenical welcoming of migrants is vital, in practical as well as theological terms. The migrants' positive input can already be seen in, among other things, the fact that they challenge the privatized way of expressing Christian identity.

All this can be regarded as a positive challenge with regard to deepening the ecumenical understanding of the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The ELCF's ecumenical strategy until the year 2015, entitled "Our Church. A Community in Search of Unity," envisions that in 2015,

[c]hurch members are aware of belonging to the universal Church of Christ and regard ecumenism as an essential part of the Christian faith. ... Church members consider global responsibility for their neighbor and the whole of creation to be an essential part of the Christian life.²

Before we draw further conclusions, I would like to offer some reflections on the ecclesial concept of "catholic."

The term "catholic"—historically and today

In the New Testament, the term "catholic" does not have the same meaning as it has today. It originates from the Greek adverbial phrase *kath' holou*: "in general," "universal," "on the whole," or, on the other hand, "completeness." The inevitable dilemma between the local and the universal church can already be seen in the New Testament, when the number of Christians and congregations grew and the Christian faith was brought to new places in the Roman Empire. The ministry of bishop developed, and as early as the second century the term was used to distinguish the catholic epistles—used by the apostolic fathers—from the epistles for more local audiences. In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (8.1), the

² The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, *Our Church. A Community in Search of Unity. The Ecumenical Strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland until the Year 2015* (2009), at http://evl.fi/ecumenical_strategy.

universal dimension is explicated, “the whole catholic church throughout the inhabited world.” Bishop Ignatius brings more qualitative understanding in his Letter to the *Smyrnaens* (8.2), “Wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the catholic church.” The antignostic fathers then used the term in accordance with orthodox Christianity. The concept “catholic” was included in the statements of Cyril of Jerusalem in 350 CE and Vincent of Lérins before 450 CE and meant universality, orthodox doctrine and perfection for all humankind. However, the development of doctrine was not entirely excluded.³

The concept “catholic” began to become problematic after the division of 1054 when, in 1075, Pope Gregory VII stated explicitly that “whoever does not agree with the Roman Church is not to be considered Catholic.”⁴ During the time of the Reformation, this understanding and the counter-critique collided. The Anglicans and some Lutherans continued to approve the classical catholicity of the early church.⁵

The modern ecumenical movement was soon to refer to the early understanding of catholicity, before it was equated with the position adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. The ecumenical opening of the Second Vatican Council meant that catholicity was no longer simply identified with Roman Catholicism. Yet, the ecumenical potential of the decrees *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio* have not been fully exploited. However, in Lutheran–Catholic relations, such recent initiatives as the Swedish–Finnish Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue, *Justification in the Life of the Church*, have brought new inspiration.

As a Finnish Lutheran I shall try to formulate a Lutheran perspective to this question in discussion with three prominent theologians: Martin Luther, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Philip J. Hefner.

The church’s catholicity in Lutheran theology

Martin Luther: Sanctorum communion as participation in Christ

In light of the controversial situation during the Reformation, Martin Luther avoided the explicit use of the term “catholic” when he described the character of the church. However, he actually speaks of it: the apostolic gospel as the core

³ Peter Staples, “Catholicity,” in Nicholas Lossky, José Míguez Bonino, John Pobee et al (eds), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd edition (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002), 151ff.

⁴ Quoted according to *ibid.*, 152 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*

message of the church and its proclamation in the church as a communion of saints with a universal task. Luther did not want to be a particularist but to reform the contemporary Catholic Church so that it would more clearly manifest the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. For Luther, the church is a communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*). For instance, in the Large Catechism, he writes commenting on the third article of the Apostolic Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, one Christian church, the communion of saints . . ." ⁶

Although Luther's theological views have developed over time and in different contexts, it can be argued that his view on the fundamental structure of the church as a community has remained the same. ⁷ According to Luther, Eucharistic communion is a communion of love that comes into existence through divine love, through the presence of the Trinitarian God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. In Luther's writings from 1519 to 1521, his understanding is clear: in the Eucharist we are united with Christ, *unio cum Christo*, and incorporated in him as a communion of saints. We can see that this perspective is based on Luther's Christology, which points to the unity of the person of Christ and, analogically, a real union with Christ through faith. The union with Christ then makes possible the miraculous exchange (*commercium admirabile*) through which all things become common between Christ and his saints. ⁸

As a member of this communion of love through Christ, our task as Christians is to share the community of goods (*Gütergemeinschaft*) with our neighbors. That happens when we carry the burdens of our neighbors, both by making their ills our own and sharing the goods we have with them. For Luther, the image of the church as the body of Christ seems to be decisive. This can be understood theologically primarily in the sense of the sacramental *unio cum Christo*. ⁹ That is to say, Word and sacrament and the sacramental character of

⁶ "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord*, op. cit. (note 1), 384.

⁷ According to Peura, Armin-Ernst Buchrucker, *communio* had a real ontological (*seinshaften*) character in the writings of Luther 1513–1519, 1520–1523, 1524–1525 and 1528. In "the Lord's supper the church as the spiritual body of Christ affects a real, natural union or communion (*Gemeinschaft*) of being with Christ in the communicants. Baptism constitutes this communion, it is constantly bestowed afresh in the Lord's Supper, and thus incorporation in Christ is repeated and renewed." Peura notices the same kind of interpretation in Albrecht Peters's *Kommentar zu Luthers Katechismen*. According to Peters, Luther explicates the *communio sanctorum* with the idea of "happy exchange" both in his early sermons and in his later writings. According to Peters's interpretation, the ecclesiology of Luther's catechisms consists mainly of the self-giving and revealing of himself to believers. Jürgen Lutz presents the essential development in the Reformer's view of *communio* in his book *Unio und Communio*, which uses texts from 1519 to 1528. Cf., Simo Peura, "The Church as Spiritual Communion in Luther," in Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion*, LWF Documentation 42/1997 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997), 93–131, here 94–96.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 97–98.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 98–99.

God's Word are key. For Luther, the church is, after all, the creation of Word and sacrament, baptism and Eucharist, as well as the confession.

The ultimate aim of this gradual process is eventually to have the same form as Christ (*conformitas Christi*) on the basis of growth in the union with him and in communion with his saints. Likewise, in Luther's later writings, real participation through faith in the life of the Trinitarian God in Christ through God's giving of Godself in the church through Word and sacrament constitutes the *communio sanctorum*.¹⁰ Baptism is the beginning of incorporation into this communion, because the baptized person is incorporated in Christ and participates in him. The basis of this is that the Word of God enters into *unio* with the external elements of water, bread and wine, and in this way effects the salvation of Christians as members of Christ and his church.¹¹

From the perspective of ecumenical ecclesiology, this would mean that Christ is fully present in each local congregation, but only in relation to the other congregations of the church as the body of Christ. For Luther it was self-evident that the church of Christ is also meant to be visible, although the visible church was not perfect as a communion of pardoned sinners. Despite this, the true church is not a Platonic idea, but visible and hidden at the same time. Christian unity is not only the unity of faith in our hearts. Therefore, Lutheranism's ecumenical vocation and duty are evident. The church is created through the Word and sacraments. Thus, altar and pulpit fellowship with other Christians should be an essential task: not only with those who are close to us, but eventually also with those who are more distant. In his "Ten Sermons on the Catechism (1528)," Luther writes,

Christians should together become a single, true, spiritual body as having one head, Christ, and being in turn members. ... Thus Christians should be a community, as we pray in the Creed, "I believe in the Catholic Church, the communion of saints"—what one has the other has too... That too is signified in the meal. When we eat the sacrament, we incorporate Christ in ourselves and he incorporates himself in us.¹²

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100, 109–111.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 112–113.

¹² *WA* 30 I, 26, 26–27, 18 (according to Peura, *ibid.*, note 89, here abbreviated) "... Sic Christiani sollen zusammen werden ein einiger, rechter, geistlicher leib, ut unum caput Christum habeant et invicem membra sint. ... Sic Christiani sollen ein gemein volck sein, Ut in Symbolo oramus: 'Credo ecclesiam Catholicam, communionem Sanctorum,' was einer hat, das hat der ander auch ... Das ist auch bedeutet ynn dem essen. Wenn man das Sacrament isset, leiden wir Christum ynn uns und er sich ynn uns."

The aim of God's self-giving love is twofold: salvation and the realization of love, the Ten Commandments. We may conclude that, from the perspectives of faith and love, mutual sharing is not an *adiaphora*, but belongs to Luther's understanding of the church as a communion, as the church catholic in the sense of the creeds it represents. Yet, the situation became more challenging after several divisions between churches during and after the Reformation. First, I will discuss this theme with two prominent contemporary Lutheran theologians, Wolfhart Pannenberg and Philip J. Hefner, and eventually draw some further conclusions regarding the present situation.

Wolfhart Pannenberg: catholicity as the most comprehensive aspect of unity

In volume three of his *Systematic Theology*, Wolfhart Pannenberg points out that the four attributes of the nature of the church—one, holy, catholic, and apostolic—imply each other respectively. Nonetheless, the attribute "one" has a deliberate first position and the rest of the attributes are, according to Pannenberg, implications of the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.¹³

The apostolic sending of the church has universal relevance. The catholicity of the church is connected to the universal sending; thus universality is constitutive also of the church's catholicity. Pannenberg remarks that this should not be identified with the global influence of the church, nor with some kind of "world church." Typically he qualitatively distinguishes catholicity from eschatological consummation and eschatological verification of anticipatory theology. Thus, regarding one's own tradition as the only catholic tradition, as opposed to false traditions, constitutes a perverted catholicity. Genuine catholicity emphasizes knowledge of the preliminary character of one's own tradition and openness towards other traditions.¹⁴ Pannenberg writes,

So catholicity is understood as the most comprehensive aspect of the unity of the church, as the community of the Christendom of all previous periods and all present churches as well as openness toward the future of Christianity in light of the arrival of the reign of God, toward which the not yet Christian world is also going.¹⁵

¹³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie*, vol. III, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 442.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 444.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

Catholicity is concretely manifested in the local congregation and especially in the church's worship life. Pannenberg understands St Ignatius's formulation that the church is there where Christ is (*Ign. Smyrn.* 8.2), that in the Eucharist of every local church, where Christ is present, the universal church is present. Pannenberg's formulation thus seems to be a version of Eucharistic ecclesiology which, over the past decades, has been quite popular in ecumenical ecclesiological discussions and derives from the heritage of the New Testament and patristic theology. Pannenberg underlines that the fullness of the gospel in the proclamation of the Word and in the Eucharist is essential for understanding the concept "catholic." Thus, according to Pannenberg, the church's catholicity is not primarily constituted through a hierarchy; rather, it is manifested in the local churches and through their community. This unity is a "conciliar" unity of church leaders. Respectively, a bishop or pastor (priest) represents the whole church in their local parish.¹⁶

Pannenberg points out that apostolicity, catholicity, holiness and unity express the nature of the church as attributes of faith, but that these attributes do not function self-evidently as marks (*notae ecclesiae*) of the church. This is because Word (=gospel) and sacraments are the primary marks of the church. Moreover, even if a church could externally be characterized by these attributes in a very limited way only, it could still in faith confess the truth of those four attributes and long for the realization of them in the empirical reality. According to Pannenberg, in Roman Catholic *Kontroversialtheologie*, these four attributes have commonly been used as marks (*notae*) of the true church. Yet, in most recent Roman Catholic theology it has become more problematic to understand these marks as empirical criteria for distinguishing between the false and the true church.¹⁷ Both Lutherans and Catholics can nowadays underline the primacy of the gospel when thinking of the church's nature and mission.

While regarding the attributes of the church the gap between ideal and reality in terms of church unity is especially challenging, Pannenberg underlines

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 444–5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 445–6. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (811) underlines in a Christocentric and Trinitarian way that "...it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic, and apostolic..." and: "The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit" (820). According to the Second Vatican Council decree *Dei Verbum*: "...like the Christian religion itself, all the preaching of the Church must be nourished and regulated by Sacred Scripture." According to the Catholic Catechism the church is thus catholic, because "Christ is present in her" (830) and "because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race" (831). Moreover, every particular church, a diocese, is catholic as a "communion of the faithful in communion in faith and sacraments with their bishop ordained in apostolic succession," in communion with the Church of Rome (833–834).

the importance of the ecumenical task. As a sign of the unity of the church, he could even give the Pope a ministry that would be a human arrangement, not a divine institution. The Pope could also be understood as a special dimension of the church's ministry in serving the unity of the church. After all, as a result of the global media and the extent of the activities of the world's largest church, the Pope's influence extends further than the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁸

Pannenberg's contribution constitutes an ecumenical Lutheran interpretation of catholicity and the four attributes as interrelated concepts. What remains rather unclear is the relation between these attributes of faith and the visible church. This is understandable, considering the ecumenical intentions in light of the reality of divisions and various contexts and historically developed forms. In addition, Pannenberg ultimately understands the unity of the church theologically, visible only for the faith. He summarizes his communion ecclesiological point of departure as follows: "The one, through Jesus Christ holy, catholic church, dating back to the apostles, is manifest in every divine service in which the gospel is rightly taught, the sacraments are celebrated as well as in its apostolic sending."¹⁹

Thus, Pannenberg points to the connection between the Word and sacraments and the concrete communion of the faithful with ecclesiological attributes. From the perspective of ecumenical catholicity, the partial character of this kind of manifestation of catholicity is problematic, because—from a Lutheran point of view—altar and pulpit fellowship with the majority of Christians is missing. There is fellowship in Christian faith and prayer, but not unity at the altar. Nonetheless, our common Christian baptism unites widely and provides fertile ground for ecumenical work toward fuller catholicity and unity in diversity.

Philip J. Hefner: catholicity as the actualization of the identity of the church

Philip J. Hefner defines catholicity as follows, "Catholicity is the church's conviction that it can actualize its identity in every dimension of life and that

¹⁸ Ibid., 468–9. In the context of the 450th anniversary of the death of Philip Melancthon, 19 April 2010, regional Bishop Fischer brought up Melancthon's idea that the Pope could have a primacy of honor according to the human law if this would serve the unity of the church. See also the Swedish–Finnish Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue Report, *Justification in the Life of the Church. A Report from the Roman Catholic–Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland* (2010), subchapter 4.6.6 on the Petrine ministry in light of the primacy of gospel.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

such actualizations can embody the fullness of its identity.”²⁰ Although in his context Jesus was provincial, he did not think and function provincially but “reached out to people across the boundaries of his provincialism.” In this way, the universal and the particular walk hand in hand in the New Testament.²¹ The perspective is broadened from local to global without forgetting the local.

Hefner’s point of departure is that the church aims to “actualize the fullness of authentic Christian identity.” In doing so, as much Christian tradition as possible should be used—with “critical integrity.” What this “critical integrity” implies remains rather unclear.²² However, what is essential—ecumenically and dogmatically—is that the richness of the living Christian tradition should be included as widely as possible if it enriches the common Christian identity and consequently the mission of the church. This is what Hefner calls the “intensive thrust” of the catholic aspect of the church.

The “extensive thrust” of catholicity means the reaching out of the church to “all people at all times and in all places.”²³ This definition reflects Vincent of Lérins’s definition of the catholic church: “. . .the greatest care must be taken that we hold that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all.”²⁴

Hefner distinguishes between three forms of extensive catholicity: (1) spatial; (2) temporal; and (3) cultural universality. Spatial universality means “mission,” geographical outreach and evangelization. Temporal universality means the inclusion of all times, epochs and generations. Cultural universality is an expression of the relevance of the Christian message and church to all aspects of culture. The church should seek ways to relate to every dimension of a culture and cultures, not excluding any age group, gender, ethnic background, occupation, social and economic conditions, etc. The reality of cultural diversity challenges faith, ethics and various functions of the church. The core of this extensive outreach is the intensive side, the fullness of Christian revelation and Christian identity that ought to be expressed in a contemporary, incarnatory way. Catholicity combines openness to the present with the richness of tradition.²⁵

On the one hand, Hefner sees catholicity as being indicative, because of the given nature of Christian revelation that is present in the church’s traditions.

²⁰ Philip J. Hefner, “On the Church,” in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (ed.), *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 207.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Quoted according to Staples, *op. cit.* (note 3), 152.

²⁵ Hefner, *op. cit.* (note 20), 209.

On the other, catholicity is an imperative, because the church is continuously called concretely to express the fullness of Christianity through debate and critical self-appraisal.²⁶ Borrowing terminology from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's early academic works, one could say in more philosophical terms that in the Lutheran tradition God's acts and being are dialectically expressed in the church. The Holy Spirit actualizes what is realized in Christ and present in the church through and in the Word and sacraments.

Toward an ecumenical understanding of catholicity

Participating in Christ ecumenically today

The intention of the *Confessio Augustana* (*CA*) is to be a catholic confession as described above. The second global Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission, 1973–1984, concluded that the *CA* could be seen as the common confession of these churches.²⁷ Yet, this has not been recognized officially.

This point of departure can clearly be seen in the theologies of the above mentioned Lutheran theologians. Martin Luther understood the church as a communion of saints that participates in Christ, which can easily be combined with St Ignatius's view, "...wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."²⁸ Wolfgang Pannenberg emphasizes that the meaning of catholicity is the most comprehensive aspect of church unity. He saw its clearest manifestation in divine worship, where the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are correctly celebrated. Thus, he understands catholicity as a dimension of the church's theological nature; this brings with it ecumenical challenges. Philip J. Hefner distinguished between intensive and extensive Catholicism, with the inner core of the concept being the realization of the identity of the church, in which the fullness of the Christian revelation is brought into dialogue with contemporary contexts.

The dilemma regarding the gap between the term catholic as the attribute and the visible reality needs further attention. We shall come to the question of unity and ecumenical work. The catholicity of divine service is questioned from the perspective of concrete divisions and the missing

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Pirjo Työriñoja, "Ad veram unitatem. Luterilainen identiteetti Luterilaisen maailmanliiton ja roomalaiskattolisen kirkon välisissä oppikeskusteluissa 1967–1984," in *Studia missiologica et oecumica* (1994), 137.

²⁸ *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnaens*, 8,2.

altar and pulpit fellowship between many churches. My further reflections are based on documents issued by the ELCF.

The ELCF's ecumenical strategy²⁹ explains the aim of the search for unity as follows:

The objective of ecumenism is the visible unity of the Church. The visible unity of the Church of Christ presupposes agreement on the fundamental truths of faith and is visible in the joint celebration of the Eucharist, as a common witness and selfless service.

Church unity will be possible to achieve when there is sufficient doctrinal agreement between churches and when the sacraments between churches and the ordained ministry are recognized.

...Ecumenism is itself a movement arising from Christian faith, the goal of which is church renewal and church growth into unity, service and witness. Unity is not the result of human effort but ultimately a gift of the Holy Spirit. ...Spiritual life, faith and prayer are an essential part of ecumenism and church renewal.

...The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church believes and confesses that it belongs to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. Our Lutheran Church is the heir of the Catholic Church of the West and the continuator of its work...

According to the Augsburg Confession, what is sufficient for unity is agreement on gospel doctrine and the administration of the sacraments (CA VII). In the view of our church, what is sufficient (*satis est*) for Church unity – that is, doctrinal agreement – is also necessary (*necesse est*) to achieve unity. The objective of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church is not to aim at similarity in inter-church ecumenical relations. Agreement on the fundamental truths of faith is a sufficient requirement for church unity.

... Our closest contacts are with those who, like our church, represent and respect the common legacy of undivided Christendom and who hold to the classic interpretation of Christianity and sacramental ecclesiology.

In the 2010 report of the Swedish–Finnish Lutheran–Catholic dialogue, *Justification in the Life of the Church*, which continues the work that had resulted in the *Joint Declaration on Justification* (1999), the concepts of unity and fellowship are explained from a Lutheran perspective:

According to Lutheran convictions, it is necessary for true unity and community between individual churches that the Gospel is preached purely and the sacraments administered in accordance with the word of God (CA VII). This means unity in

²⁹ At evl.fi/ecumenicalstrategy.

the doctrines of the Trinity, sin, Christology, justification and the sacraments, and also recognition of the ministry. Thus, communion around the altar and in the pulpit between individual churches is based on communion in faith and sacraments.³⁰

Thus, the focus here is on Lutheran identity, understood as ecumenical catholic Christian identity and the basis for universal ecumenical cooperation toward visible church unity.

Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests that, at the universal level, unity would be the conciliar unity of church leaders and, respectively, that bishops and pastors represent the church at the local level. Martin Luther also wanted to discuss the challenges of the Catholic Church at a Council and prepared the Smalcald Articles for this purpose. Pannenberg does not address what concrete form the Council could take nowadays and what its authority would be. It would most likely be something more than the current global structures.

In the Lutheran churches, the episcopal structures and those of the congregations and synods are understood differently. However, over the last decades, the ministry of bishop has gained new relevance in many Lutheran churches. It is therefore necessary to pay some attention to the episcopal dimension when reflecting on the catholicity of the church from a Lutheran perspective.

The episcopal ministry in the service of catholicity

The 2002 LWF document, *The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church*, states that,

[b]y being specially charged to care for the communion of all worshipping congregations with the universal church, the Episcopal ministry has the specific task of safeguarding the true nature of the una, sancta, catholica et apostolica ecclesia that transcends the boundaries of space and time. By definition, ordained ministry particularly includes ordered service to the catholicity and unity of the holy and apostolic church.³¹

The document clearly understands catholicity as an essential part of the "true nature" of the church as a communion of worshipping congregations and as a

³⁰ Church of Sweden, Roman Catholic Diocese of Stockholm, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Roman Catholic Diocese of Helsinki, *Justification in the Life of the Church. A Report from the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland*, transl. Sr Gerd Swensson (Uppsala, Stockholm and Helsinki: Te Deum, 2010), para. 258.

³¹ The Lutheran World Federation, *The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. A Lutheran Statement 2002* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003), 14, para. 20.

part of the universal church, which transcends the boundaries of space and time. In other words, episcopacy is aimed at safeguarding the identity and unity of the church as the church of the incarnated, crucified and resurrected Christ.

The primary point of departure also here is the Word of God, the gospel, its proclamation in the Word, through the sacraments and in deeds of love. The document summarizes: "...A Lutheran concern with the nature of episcopal ministry is first and foremost an interest in its capacity to serve unity and continuity in the mission of the gospel."³²

In the Anglican–Lutheran Porvoo Common Statement, the episcopal ministry as a servant of catholicity and apostolicity in the life and mission of the church is expressed as follows,

The ultimate ground of the fidelity of the Church, in continuity with the apostles, is the promise of the Lord and the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the whole Church. The continuity of the ministry of oversight is to be understood within the continuity of the apostolic life and mission of the whole Church. Apostolic succession in the episcopal office is a visible and personal way of focusing the apostolicity of the whole Church.³³

According to the statement, historical episcopacy is not a guarantee of the church's fidelity but presents a permanent challenge to fidelity and unity.³⁴ The forms of the ministry of *episkopé* vary, but *The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church* affirms that "[t]he diversity of God's gifts requires coordination for the enrichment of the whole church. ... *Episkopé* thus serves the purpose of caring for the life of a whole community."³⁵ This is an essential dimension of the concrete understanding of the meaning of the church's catholicity—locally and globally.

Facing contemporary challenges to catholicity

Already in 1979, a committee of the General Synod of the ELCF, working with the renewal of the church order, stated that the church of Christ includes the whole of Christianity temporally and locally—the quantitative

³² Ibid., 21, para. 43.

³³ At www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/ecumenical/dialogues/lutheran/docs/porvoo.cfm#s10, para. 46.

³⁴ Ibid., para 47.

³⁵ *The Episcopal Ministry ...*, op. cit. (note 31), 15, para. 23.

dimension of catholicity—and includes divine revelation and the fullness of salvation—the qualitative dimension of catholicity. Historically, a local church should aim at expressing the given oneness and catholicity, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This is understood mainly as carrying out the church's missionary character among all people and all dimensions of life and to mediate without limitation the revelation of God and the message of salvation. This implies that the most important signs (*notae ecclesiae*) of the church, the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of sacraments, are to be made visible.³⁶

First, the church should be critically loyal toward the people, society and the state. Secondly, while demarcating the church from the rest of society is not essential, responsibility toward and sharing in the life of the people are. Thirdly, a more conscious church membership and a better understanding of the church's communal character are regarded as being vital.³⁷

A lot of work has already been done on these objectives, but changes take time and a changing context brings additional dimensions. For example, the ecumenical integration of migrants and migrant churches globally challenges the church's catholicity. For years the ELCF's church council, in cooperation with the dioceses and the Finnish Ecumenical Council, has supported the work with migrants. The aim is for the ecumenical integration of migrants to become an essential and natural part of the local parishes' work. In order to provide a more theoretical framework, a scientific seminar will deal with questions of migration from ecumenical and theological perspectives. One practical ecclesiological challenge for instance is how to open the parish structure—regulated by canon and state law—in such a way that there would be no unnecessary formal regulations preventing Christians, who have been resident in Finland for some time and feel at home in the church, or people who want to be baptized, from living fully in the fellowship of the Word and sacraments and becoming members of the church.

The ELCF has also developed different forms of interreligious encounter and cooperation—nationally and locally. The formal structure for practical cooperation between religions has been developed in cooperation with church representatives, the local Jewish and Muslim communities and the Finnish Ecumenical Council. Although ecumenism and interreligious encounter have different aims, their cooperation has taught us to understand more fully

³⁶ General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, *Report of the Committee on Church Order*, (1979), 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

the catholicity of the Lutheran faith and church life and that the unity of the church cannot be separated from the unity of humanity—not least for diaconal and missionary reasons. From the perspective of global mission, one of the major challenges in recent years has been that of integrating the work of our official mission organizations more comprehensively in the work of the church—nationally as well as locally. Both diakonia and mission are rooted in the essence of the church as the body of Christ with a universal, global calling.

The internet and other social networking sites pose certain challenges. Recently the ELCF has invested in the project “Spiritual life on the net” in order to educate church workers in internet based parish work, since especially young male adults can be reached more easily through the internet. The project can be seen as a new way of being present there where the people are. One could say that the ELCF’s general strategy until 2015, “Our Church. A Community of Participation,” reflects the recognition that we should and can realize the catholic nature of our church more fully. After all, catholicity can be described as partaking in the life and work of the Trinitarian God, our Creator, through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

When facing these and other challenges it is good to know that there is a communion of Christians, Lutherans and others, who are with you even when everyday reality is not always ideal and the sun might be behind a dark cloud. As is commonly known, Martin Luther counted the cross among the marks of the church. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer summarizes in *Life Together*,

The life or death of a Christian community is determined by whether it achieves sober wisdom on this point as soon as possible. In other words, life together under the Word will remain sound and healthy only where it does not form itself into a movement, an order, a society, a *collegium pietatis*, but rather where it understands itself as being apart of the one, holy, catholic, Christian Church, where it shares actively and passively in the sufferings and struggles and promise of the whole church.³⁸

³⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York : Harper & Brothers, 1954), 37.

Lutheran Catholicity in Worship: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

Elieshi Mungure

Introduction

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) belongs to the world-wide Lutheran community through, among others, its worship practices.

In worship, symbols of Christianity receive meaning and recognizable religious relevance. Lutheran worship emphasizes the preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments, baptism and Holy Communion. In these sacraments, the meaning and significance of the Triune God becomes evident.

I shall argue that any religious act is contextually rooted and practiced in such a way so as to be meaningful to the local community. There is overwhelming evidence that religious practice or acts respond to social demands. Practice focuses on the renewal or strengthening of the existing relationship between God the Creator and human beings, the created beings and the rest of creation. Worship becomes socially relevant, linking the material and physical worlds to the spiritual realm. In light of this, the standard worship practices prescribed by the North need to be reviewed.

While the origins of the church in Africa are, to a certain extent, lost in obscurity,¹ relevant sources such as biblical and historical traditions continue to provide us with useful insights related to the introduction and progress of Christianity in Africa.²

In this essay, I shall reflect on Christian worship or, more specifically, Lutheran worship, as constituting the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. I shall discuss the Christian doctrine of the Triune God as reflected in the communal

¹ John Parrat, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans, 1995), 3.

² See, for example, Acts 8.

participation of worship in the Lutheran church in two sections: (a) Lutheran catholicity and worship as revealed in the African communal aspects of worship with special reference to the ELCT; and (b) catholicity in Lutheran worship.

Lutheran catholicity in the ELCT: different traditions, one church

The ELCT is the outcome of a consensus reached between foreign and local missionary initiatives. The history of mission starts in the nineteenth century in several areas of Tanganyika (Tanzania). In 1963, the Federation of Lutheran Churches in Tanganyika, originally called the Foreign Mission Joint Boards, became the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanganyika, mainly because of efforts by local churches. These churches were: (a) The Lutheran Church of Northern Tanganyika in the north; (b) The Usambara/Digo Lutheran Church in the northeast; (c) The Uzaramo/Uluguru Lutheran Church in the east; (d) The Augustana Lutheran Church of Iramba/Turu, located in central Tanganyika; (e) The Evangelical Lutheran Church in North West Tanganyika; (f) The Iraqw Lutheran Church in the Northern Province; and (g) The Ubena/Konde Lutheran Church in the Southern Highlands.³

Today, with twenty dioceses scattered all over the country and about 3.5 million members, the ELCT is one of the fastest growing and strongest churches on the continent.⁴ It is founded on the famous Lutheran tradition of Word and sacraments as expounded in the *Confessio Augustana* (CA). Despite its social needs, the ELCT abides by the biblical foundations and operates within the authority vested in the Word of God and the theological reflection pertaining to mission. According to the CA, the church is the human witness to the gospel of Christ. The celebration of the sacraments is the means the Holy Spirit employs to create the church as the community of faith (CAV). Therefore, every local church gathered around the preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments is the realization of the universal church of all God's people.

"The church is the creature of the gospel of the Triune God who creates, reconciles, and renews the world."⁵ As was stated by the Seventh Assembly

³ See *Katiba* (ELCT Constitution 1964). Also, www.elct.org, refer to Frieder Ludwig, *Church and State in Tanzania: Aspects of a Changing Relationship* (Leiden: Brill NV, 1999).

⁴ At www.elct.org.

⁵ Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion*, LWF Documentation 42/1997 (Geneva: The Lutheran

of the Lutheran World Federation, Budapest, 1984, “the true unity of the church, which is the unity of the body of Christ and participates in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is given in and through the proclamation of the gospel in Word and sacrament.”⁶

Therefore, worship is an essential aspect of unity, where praying, confessing the creed and proclaiming the Word of God together with other Christians occur. The ELCT cherishes this unity in which its objectives are defined and implemented. This unity does not only interpret God’s will that the church should be one but also implies that it participates in the Trinity through God’s acts of creation, salvation and transformation. Apart from its symbolic significance, unity is an indispensable tool for the ELCT in fulfilling its prophetic call to announce freedom and salvation of all people.

The day-to-day life of the church is based on worship, instruction, the provision of education and health services, pastoral care and counseling. This is what explains the Great Commission, where Jesus sends the disciple to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). It is important to note that every activity carried out by the church is in one way or another instituted through worship. That is why worship is central to the church and realizes the universal identity of the church there where people come together to worship the Triune God.

The communal aspect of worship

The church as a community of believers is realized in the gathering of people for worship. While worship can take many forms, it is defined as an encounter where God seeks and is sought by the worshipping community. It is a personal experience, whereby God the Creator meets humanity.⁷ God’s mighty deeds are central to human beings’ responses in thanksgiving, praise and witness that characterize Christian worship. In African communities, any worship activity is meaningful when it is done in a group. The sense of communality is manifest in different expressions of worship because worship is not only about vertical but also horizontal relationships. Tanzania is experiencing changes that pervade almost all

World Federation, 1997), 15.

⁶ Carl H. Mau, Jr (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly, Budapest 1984, “In Christ—Hope for the World,”* LWF Report No. 19/20 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1985), 15.

⁷ Robert E. Webber, *Twenty Centuries of Christian Worship*, vol. II, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

aspects of life, including the religious landscape. The emergence of many Christian churches/denominations and proliferations of ministries continue to challenge the once extant unity of the church. One wonders whether the changes are caused by the inability to capture the meanings of various concepts of Christian theology in the African worldview.

For example, in his book *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and Building a New African Society*, Ka Mana questions the comprehensibility of Christian doctrines in the African understanding. He sets out to "quest for the origins and foundations from which meanings emerge, meanings which allow mankind [sic] or a community to understand and organize itself in the heart of history."⁸

Any society is thus organized around a concept of meaning and the principles of unity in relation to its future, transcendence and to the world to come. According to Mana,⁹ it is therefore possible and meaningful to develop three dimensions of meaning as a framework, with the help of which we can understand, reflect upon and present the African perception.

Expressions of worship

From the perspective of African (traditional) Religion, spirituality is part of an African expression of religiosity; one cannot separate religious from secular life. For Africans, life is sacred and hence religion or spirituality infiltrates every dimension of human life and experience.¹⁰

Life is meaningful when recognized as life lived in the community—to be a true human is to belong to one's own community. The ELCT, being aware of the above, has therefore to ensure that it keeps its communal identity.

People carry out worship for a specific purpose through prayer, confession, rituals, the reading and interpreting of Scripture, sacraments, sacrifice, sermons, chanting, devotional songs, dance, festivals, dining, etc. These expressions become more relevant to individuals and beneficial to society when done by and in the community.¹¹ For example, baptismal services, collective prayers or intercessions,

⁸ Ka Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and Building a New African Society* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See for example, John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Books, 1990). Cf. Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *The History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Parrat, op. cit. (note 1).

¹¹ Refer to Isaria Kimambo and Thomas Spear, *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Oxford: James Curry Ltd., 1999); Cf. Sundkler, ibid.

devotional songs, lamentations, the reading of the Word of God together and different religious feasts, including Holy Communion, influence the strengthening of communal cohesion and unity among Christians. All these expressions explicate the two pillars of worship, namely Word and sacrament.

African communities are held together by a culture in which knowledge is imparted by words of wisdom through riddles, legends, stories, poems, songs, plays, etc. In the African context, the spoken word is very powerful. That is why Scripture and sermon play such central roles in the ELCT. Jesus Christ is the gospel and its content; his saving act on the cross and subsequent resurrection constitute a reconciling ritual that correlates to reconciliatory rituals also found in the African context. This heals the broken relationship between God and human beings and creation. Thus, the Word of God constitutes the first pillar of worship.

Another pillar of worship related to communal life is the sacraments. African communality is vividly expressed in baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism, whether of a child or an adult, whether done by total immersion or by sprinkling only, is the only way to initiate and welcome a new believer into the community. This mark of initiation is very important, especially for African Christianity, since it resonates with the local initiation rites common in almost all African societies. Traditional rites served to incorporate the individual into society with the full right to be named, protected and to inherit from the resources of that particular society. In the African context, eating together means fellowship and commonality of the people who are partaking in such. In Christianity, it is the eating and drinking during Holy Communion that bring humanity into a strong fellowship with Jesus Christ. In doing so, the community is reminded of Jesus Christ's saving action once and for all.

In the Christian tradition, the story of the relationship between God and human beings expresses the love of God who seeks humanity. God's deep love did not abandon sinful humanity; God sent God's son to open up the way for a new communion. In this respect, we are reminded time and again in and by the church of the vital function of God the Creator, the redeeming acts of the son and the inspiring function of the Spirit.¹² It is only through God's love, manifested in the event of Jesus Christ, that Godly love finds its place in the understanding of the Trinity. In this case, the Holy Spirit is again the creative power of love that manifests itself in communal interactions (i.e., it acts as a shock absorber to reduce tensions in the community).

¹² Refer to Mana, *op. cit.* (note 8), 70–73.

Catholicity in the Lutheran context

Over the last decades, the concept of the unity of humanity has been a subject of discussion within in the ecumenical movement. In Africa, communal life, as expressed by Christians, includes a strong sense of sharing, expressed in the value attached to hospitality in times of sorrow and joy. The God we believe in is a sharing God; sharing is manifested in creation, redemption and sanctification.

According to Robert Webber,¹³ the basic principles of Christian worship may be ordered as follows:

Theo-centricity: We worship God whom we encounter through the mighty deeds of creation, redemption and sustenance. As such, my argument is simple: worship, as a Christian act, may take numerous forms. It is the content that matters. Worshipping God without believing in Jesus Christ as the resurrected Lord would be just "another practice." Christ did not claim to be God, but in the words of John 4:16, Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life," sent to the world by his father so that the world my "have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Worshipping God without believing in God, the heavenly father, as the Creator of heaven and earth would also simply be "another practice" as would be worshipping God without believing in the Holy Spirit, the sustainer and sanctifier of life.

Christological dimension: Worship takes place in the presence Jesus Christ; he is the gospel. In his book, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*,¹⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan draws the many faces of Jesus in light of the general history of the church and culture. Among the Jews, he was an eschatological prophet, a liberator for those struggling for their identity. For others, influenced by ancient Greek philosophy, he was the *logos*, the rational principle of the universe. During the Byzantine period, Jesus was the perfect icon of God, inspiring art and architecture. During the Reformation, Jesus was perceived as the Word of God who lives in the voice of the gospel. Pelikan wrote this in response to Albert Schweitzer's book, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*,¹⁵ in which Schweitzer states, "[e]ach successive

¹³ Webber, op. cit. (note 7).

¹⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ At www.earlychristianwritings.com/schweitzer/

epoch of the theology found its own thoughts in Jesus; that was, indeed, the only way it could make Him live.”

Throughout the centuries, the only way through which Jesus was reflected was through the witness of the Bible and the Word of God shared in worship. In one of his letters, Dietrich Bonhoeffer posed the question, *Who is Jesus Christ, for us Today?* This question is at the core of every Christian worship.

Through incarnation, God comes to humanity in order to redeem and restore the broken relationship between God and humanity (Jn 3:16, Eph 2:8–10). In short, we worship God in order to give thanks for giving us Jesus Christ for our salvation.

Let me conclude by quoting Mana when he says that Jesus has come to reestablish the broken relationship,

inscribing God’s purpose once more in the concrete fabric of human reality, by founding a dynamic of salvation which makes human beings once again capable of resembling the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as love, the Son gives to the idea of redemption, a clear and precise meaning: nullification of human destiny as failure, doomed to the determinism of evil and to the fatality of sin.¹⁶

The paraclete with a pneumatological character: Worship takes place in the community gathered by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to worship and rightly to reflect upon the Word of God. Claiming to have been filled with the Spirit divides one from the other. It is common that one church is divided because certain groups claim to have the Holy Spirit while others do not.

By firmly rooting God in the fabric of the world, the Spirit is the guarantee for and the permanent force behind what the son reveals. As breath, force, power and energy, constantly releasing what God proposed to humanity as a way of fulfillment, the paraclete has the role of transforming the divine plan into concrete action, clear commitment and institutional and social order.¹⁷

Theological implications of Lutheran catholicity in Africa

In light of the theological understanding of the priesthood of all believers, it is evident that the Lutheran churches advocate for a local and global communion. This is what is expected from the structures and expressions

¹⁶ Mana, op. cit. (note 8), 72.

¹⁷ Ibid., 72.

of the church's communal worship and life. However, the experience of worship in the church has shown that some aspects of Lutheran worship lack important elements of communality. The Lutheran tradition has long treated theological elements of communality such as creation, social interaction and spiritual transformation in various ways.

African Lutheran catholicity: Lutheran catholicity, as indicated in the priesthood of all believers, should reflect the holistic view of creation as a divine whole. This sense of divine whole is lacking in Lutheranism, because the emphasis with regard to the priesthood of all believers is on the justification of the individual as indicated in *CAVII* and *CAX*.¹⁸ This deficit can be made up for by looking at the African holistic view of creation as inseparable from its divine nature. John Mbiti emphasizes this idea, saying that "[a]nimals, plants, land, rain, and other natural objects and phenomena, describe man's [sic] environment, and perception of the universe..."¹⁹

The church is an assembly of those who believe in Jesus Christ. The members of this assembly have a mission to the rest of the world. One would then expect the churches to assume that the *missio Dei* is transmitted in a very transformative way to the whole world.

The church is called into the unity of God's people and to express and realize the transformation of humanity. I strongly believe that the church of Christ is in the world for the world to be a sign of realizing God's mission and an instrument of change.

African worship

In Africa and elsewhere, baptism is associated with a naming ceremony that questions the individual's identification with their family. This problem has not been sufficiently addressed by the Lutheran churches in Africa.

Moreover, liturgy and hymnody in worship are expressions of the church's identity. Praising must allow us to understand God, whom we adore, using our contextual framework. While undertaking every effort possible to preserve the unity of the church, we must see that the church becomes incarnated in people's way of life. For instance, some songs in the Lutheran hymnal strongly emphasize church unity. This is well understood by believers in every context. An example of this is "The Church's One Foundation:"

¹⁸ See Holze, op. cit. (note 5), 17.

¹⁹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heineman Educational Books, 1988), 92.

The church's one foundation, is Jesus Christ her Lord. She is his new creation, by water and the word. From heaven He came and sought her, to be His holy bride. With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one over all the earth. Her charter of salvation: One Lord, one faith, one birth. One Holy name she blesses, partake one holy food. And tone hope she presses, with every grace endured.²⁰

Other hymns may fail to drive home their message. They require extra knowledge to grasp their meaning and many Christians do not have in-depth knowledge of theology. Since many hymns were composed to suit a particular situation they may not fit every context. An example here would be "A Mighty Fortress is Our God:"

God's Word forever shall abide, no thanks to foes, who fear it
For God himself fights by our side,
With weapons of the Spirit, If they take our house, goods, fame, child or spouse,
wrench our life away They can not win the day,
The Kingdom's ours forever.

For an African to lose a child or spouse is a crisis, since that is where identity is found. The individual belongs to a community that begins in the family. Here I refer to the extended family. They may ask, What kind of God is this who does not even care for someone's relatives? On such occasions, extra theological contextualization is needed.

Judith Bangsund,²¹ a Lutheran scholar specialized in worship, reflects that "every event of Christian life is seen through the lens of Christ and his reconciling work, which is reflected through the church year." In other words, the church year should guide the selection of hymns to fit the Scripture texts and the context. Bangsund stresses that "selecting hymns for worship is an important task..."²²

Therefore, hymns must reflect people's situation according to their contexts. In trying to provide an answer to the above situation, the ELCT has worked hard on liturgical renewal and has included some songs with an African melody and referring to concrete situations. While these are some good initiatives, efforts need to continue to transform the hymnody into people's life experiences.

²⁰ *The Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1990). no. 369, verse 4.

²¹ Judith Bangsund, *The Song of the People: Hymnody and Liturgy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania*, Makumira Text Book Series, no. 8 (Usa-river, Arusha: The Research Institute of Makumira University College, 2007), 24.

²² Ibid.

Worship and reconciliation

If Holy Communion is a divine meal, celebrated in order to cleanse the sinner, and if it has a reconciliatory effect, then what happens to those who are excluded? For instance, in Africa, particularly in the ELCT, those who are under church discipline and children before confirmation are excluded from the communion table. How does the church consider the concepts of justification by faith and the communion of God's people?

A meal taken together is a sign of reconciliation and peace, and also of the hope that God's purpose in creation is being fulfilled. Furthermore, there are issues of justice: for example, everyone has the right to eat, and therefore the poor and marginalized are always invited. This is a sign of oneness, with peace and love being shared. The communal meal is a sign that the ritual has reached its climax and the peace-making process has been effective. If peace has not been restored, then eating is postponed until the following day to ensure that all the remaining grievances have been dealt with. This concept is not clearly captured in the Holy Communion as it is commonly practiced in the Lutheran church.²³

Concluding remarks

First, incorporating viable elements that encourage church unity is vital. Africa is rich in elements that could contribute to this goal. The inseparable sense of divinity and creation is an important theological premise for promoting ecumenical interaction. Moreover, revisiting ritual elements that encourage identity should always be reflected from a theological perspective. Second, Christian worship translates Christian faith and expresses it within the framework of the worshippers' cultural references and experiences. Third, materials on this topic, especially from the African perspective, are limited. This implies that there is a discrepancy in the way in which theological analysis is done. Intercultural hermeneutics is important in order to unravel this dilemma. Understanding different cultures from one's own cultural perspective is important to nurture catholicity.

²³ Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards and African Narrative Theology* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 2000).

Apostolicity

Milos Klátik

Listening to Johann Sebastian Bach's mass in B minor, one is struck by the wonderful rendition of the passage in the Credo "*et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam.*" Bach, cantor of Leipzig's Lutheran Thomaskirche, set to music the creed that was used in the Lutheran liturgy. This "Symbolum Nicænum,"¹ as it is referred to in the Lutheran tradition and which scholars now call the "Symbolum Nicæno-Constantinopolitanum," was adopted by the Council of Constantinople in 381. For the Council fathers, it was important to include the important "*apostolica*" among the marks of the church, thus enshrining apostolicity as a "common Christian tenet of belief."² "Reformation churches see apostolicity ... as the doctrinal conformity of the church with the gospel of Jesus Christ as witnessed by the apostles."³

The Lutheran church's *Book of Concord* places the three ecumenical creeds of the early church in first place among all the valid creeds.⁴ While, in the Roman Catholic tradition, the question of apostolicity always hinges on apostolic succession, the Reformers, because of "the painful experience of the conflict between the legitimate succession on one hand, and faithfulness to the gospel as witnessed in the Bible on the other," developed a new definition of apostolicity.

Hence, apostolicity is to be understood as the fundamental quality of the (hidden) church, the cornerstone of which is the gospel of Jesus Christ as witnessed by the apostles in the beginning and attested by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, whether a visible church teaches the gospel purely (*pure*) and administers the sacraments according to the gospel (*recte*) is a *signum ecclesie veræ* [sign of the true church] (CA VII).⁵

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 19ff.

² Wilfried Härle, "Apostolizität," in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* 1 (1998), 653f [unofficial translation].

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kolb, op. cit. (note 1).

⁵ Härle, op. cit. (note 2).

In the Lutheran tradition, the two marks of the church "*catholica*" and "*apostolica*" were not inconsequential. Early Lutherans were not willing to renounce the claim to being a *catholica ecclesia*. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *catholica* was not yet, with the adjunct "Roman," the description of a confession, but rather a mark of the one invisible church to which the Protestant church also laid claim.

When the Reformation confessions were being formulated, the first to be published was Martin Luther's 1528 "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," a comprehensive theological treatise on the Eucharist. What he affirms is definitive, for,

...by the grace of God I have most diligently traced all these articles through the Scriptures, have examined them again and again, in the light thereof, and wanted to all of them I now have defended the Sacrament of the Altar. I am not drunk or irresponsible. I know what I am saying and I feel what this will mean for me before the Last Judgment at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let no one make this out to be a joke or idle talk; I am indeed in earnest, since by the grace of God I have learned to know a great deal about Satan. If he can twist and pervert the Word of God and Scriptures, what would he not be able to do with my or someone else's words?⁶

This passage was taken up verbatim in the article "Concerning the Holy Supper of Christ" in the 1577 Solid Declaration.⁷ Luther succinctly concludes, "This is my faith, for so all true Christians believe and so the Holy Scriptures teach us."⁸ Luther wanted the assurance that his faith was in agreement with Scripture. His work as a biblical exegete would help him achieve that assurance. We should not overlook the fact that, in his reliance on Scripture, Luther kept in mind the important idea of his accountability at the time of the Last Judgment. He was fully aware that in the final instance he was responsible before God and, on the basis of this realization, declared his freedom and independence before human authorities. Scripture, as divine teaching, was confronted with human teaching, but the latter had to be subjected to the test of Scripture and the gospel witnessed therein. The "Formula of Concord" scrupulously examined this

⁶ Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper, 1528," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 360–1.

⁷ "The Solid Declaration: Article VII: Holy Supper," in, Kolb, op. cit. (note 1), 598.

⁸ Luther, op. cit. (note 6), 372.

from an hermeneutic point of view in the “Epitome Summary.”⁹ For this reason, later dogmatists distinguished between Scripture and a given confession, emphasizing that Scripture is the *norma normans* and a confession *norma normata*. All these considerations illustrate the Reformers’ conception of apostolicity. Of course, on the basis of new exegetical insights, we consider that a critical questioning or reexamination of the Reformers’ use of Scripture is necessary. To some extent, this does not contradict the fact that the apostolic gospel has been received through Scripture. For the Slovak Evangelical Church—which, in contrast to the Reformed church, includes “of the Augsburg Confession” in its name—the *Confessio Augustana* (*CA*), on which the Peace of Augsburg, a major legal instrument of the Holy Roman Empire, placed particular emphasis, has great significance historically—and still does today. The *CA* contains no article on apostolicity, even though Article I specifically emphasizes the *magnus consensus*. This “great consensus” defines the church’s teaching “concerning God” as contained in the Decree of the Council of Nicaea, and condemns all the heresies that the church had previously condemned.¹⁰ In this passage, the Articles of Schwabach, a prototype of the *CA*, wanted to emphasize that everything can be “clearly and powerfully proven”¹¹ in the Scriptures. The *CA*, however, does not explicitly make reference to Scripture, although it puts it into practice article by article.

What is apostolicity in theological terms?

If one were to search the content of the apostolic texts, it would become readily apparent that they contain the witness of what the apostles saw and heard and therefore wanted to bear testimony to. It also concerns Jesus’ promise and command to the apostles: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The promise to send the Holy Spirit is one thing; Luke already mentions it at the end of his gospel (Lk 24:49). The mandate to be witnesses is not limited to a particular place, but carries further from within to without. We note the places announced—first in Jerusalem, that is, the place where

⁹ Kolb, *op. cit.* (note 1), 486ff.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹ *WA* 30III, 178–82.

Christ would be crucified. This is the first place the apostles were sent to proclaim a message that no one was expecting, the place where they were more likely to encounter persecution than applause. The work of witnessing then moves on to "all Judea," that is, the land in which the apostles had lived with Jesus earlier. The third place is Samaria, a neighboring country that was very wary of anything that came out of Judea. The conditions were more problematical. We recall how scandalous Jesus' listeners must have found the parable of the merciful Samaritan, that he acknowledge the good deed of the Samaritan and present him as a model. The fourth place is very vaguely identified as the "ends of the earth." The Great Commission in Matthew is to "make disciples of all nations." The ends of the earth: in pre-Copernican terms that meant to the outermost edges of the world. We need not be disoriented by this historically determined outlook. What is meant is "into the whole world." So Paul went to Rome in the West, and other disciples went in other directions. In turn, their disciples went to even other places. In his funeral eulogy for Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon spoke thus: "It is both pleasant and profitable to ... consider the goodness of God, in sending useful teachers, one after another, that as some fall in the ranks, others may at once press into their places."¹² For Melanchthon, the series of teachers stretches back to the time of the Old Testament patriarchs; he names them in succession down to his time and concludes, "A more splendid light of the Gospel has been kindled by the voice of Luther. ... To that splendid list of most illustrious men raised up by God to gather and establish the Church ... must be added the name of Martin Luther."¹³ Carrying this statement forward, we can continue on to the missionaries Cyril and Methodius who received the title of "Apostles to the Slavs." Through them, the apostolic gospel was received by others among the Slavs and handed on. The apostolic gospel makes men and women witnesses so that they go forth to testify in the name of the risen Christ. At a time when the plurality of beliefs is often placed at the forefront and in which the value of differing cultures is raised against the Christian faith's claim to absoluteness, we must answer the question, What is a witness? In the Latin American context, it is customary to use the word *convivencia*. This is an important term. The witness does not merely come and deliver his or her message, but listens to what those to whom the message is addressed

¹² James William Richard, *Philip Melanchthon: The Protestant Preceptor of Germany, 1497–1560* (New York and London: Putnam's Sons, 1898), 383.

¹³ *Ibid.*

think and know. A witness does not ignore the insights of all nations, but has a mandate: a mandate received from the Lord to proclaim the good news. Thus, the witness comes to speak the truth as before a court of law. In the Slovak church, the memory of the experience of socialism is still quite fresh and in some biographies quite poignant. Faithful witnesses to the gospel came into conflict with the all-powerful state and its omnipresent controlling bodies. Other persons involved in the church sought to avoid conflict and made compromises. Our history contains examples of both. We must reflect about guilt as well as martyrdom within the ranks of our church. We are grateful that our church was not wiped out by socialist propaganda; that there were witnesses at the time who stood fast, refusing to bow to the interests of the state. Whether we could have acted differently in some cases remains an open question. Under twentieth-century Communism, the apostolic gospel faced a harsh challenge to survive and had people of confession to carry out the task of witness. We look back at this period with great respect.

Present challenges

Slovakia has joined the European Union and shares many problems with other modern European states. This does not imply that the situation is identical to that of Germany or other European countries. This has an impact on the life of a minority church such as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic. Of the overall population, 6.9 percent are Protestant, and 68.9 percent are Roman Catholic. Other minority churches include the Greek Catholic church representing four percent, the Reformed church representing two percent and the Greek Orthodox Church representing short of one percent of the population respectively. The fact that Slovakia has been an independent republic since its separation from the Czech Republic in 1993 and that there are ethnic minorities in Slovakia—nearly 10 percent of the population are Hungarian and 1.7 percent Roma—plays an important role in the way in which faith is practiced and determines the challenges to be faced and the ethical questions to be answered. The church belongs to the international communions of the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (former Leuenberg Church Fellowship) and takes part in exchanges of ideas with sister churches on questions of faith and love. Much of what we learn from sister churches

is similar to our own experiences, although some things are considerably different. We are challenged on the spot. Ethics is the application and implementation of the apostolic gospel, of the commission it contains and its command to love everyone, regardless of status or ethnic origin, and adapted to the specific conditions of a given place.

The 1.7 percent Roma portion of our country's population mentioned above translates into 380,000 persons. The church renders diaconal services to this group and devotes special attention to mission to the Roma. The church's main task with regard to ministry to the Roma is how the Word of God can be brought to the Roma and how we as loving Christians can help them. The Jewish community no longer appears in the overall official statistics nowadays, but in the past our church as a minority church exercised solidarity with the Jewish people as a religious minority. The victims of anti-Semitic persecution during the fascist period were often able to rely on the help of Protestant Christians and clergy. They received asylum in the form of a place to hide. As a result of such experiences, all theological positions aside, relations between the Jewish and the Protestant communities in Slovakia have traditionally been good. In light of the population figures, theological discussions on the relationship between Christians and the Jewish people are not high on our agenda. In Slovakia, the memory of the Holocaust is not comparable with what we hear and read about Germany. We certainly take part theologically in discussions on the topic in other countries, but we are not strongly involved personally.

Slovakia's immigration policy is restrictive. Therefore, there are nearly no Muslims in Slovakia at present and thus we do not need to devote much attention to this issue. There is a difference between fundamental reflection on relations with other world religions and dealing with urgent challenges in problem inner-city neighborhoods, as is the case in Germany.

A major challenge facing our church is determining where it stands with regard to different theological fronts. Feedback from Slovaks who emigrated to the USA also has theological implications for the course our church takes. We are asked to make a distinction between work based on the apostolic gospel and fundamentalism as it is practiced in many countries. In our church, Scripture has great value, but we strive to interpret it in light of the historical knowledge of biblical texts and not merely "unhistorically" transpose Scripture into the present time. Distinct dissociation with fundamentalism was necessary on a case-by-case basis, for the church cannot and will not take this route. The apostolic gospel came into the world at a specific point in history; it cannot therefore be understood and interpreted in an historically rigid way. It is according to this

approach that it is preached at worship services in our congregations. In our church, there is a distinct pietistic tradition that shapes the life of many of our congregations, but it must not and cannot become exclusive. Following the end of the Cold War, Pavel Uhorskai, who was of this tradition, was named presiding bishop. At first, he placed the church on a more pietistic course, but was not able to impose this point of view on the church as a whole. Whatever his view of our country's political past—he emerged from the underground to resume office after the fall of Communism—his pietistic focus did not strike a consensus in our church.

Similarly, it was also not possible to achieve a consensus in our church with regard to greater acceptance of pluralism, unlike various regional churches in Germany and Scandinavia. I ask myself, What do our church members want? Focusing on this question alone and basing all our ethical decisions solely on it would not be an application of apostolicity. Rather it would once again expose our church to the familiar old danger to which it had already been exposed several times in the past, under different attire.

Occasionally former Catholic priests who had married and therefore could no longer continue in the Catholic priesthood sought to enter the service of our Protestant church. However, the mere fact of being married and having a family did not make them Protestant. Of course, these persons had learned many techniques that could also be applied to pastoral care in our church, but experience has shown that thorough training and screening was required before entrusting to such persons pastoral responsibilities according to the apostolic order and that only proven men and women were suitable for ministry. Unfortunately, pragmatic, quick solutions have not proven at all successful in many cases. Whoever wants to enter the fellowship of our church and serve it must know its doctrines and practices. We are often asked, What is the apostolic witness in this situation and the urgent command it gives? We do not wish to set new norms, but to work within the apostolic tradition, with love and imagination, with openness to new questions and suggestions, while also *conservande et renovando* [preserving and renewing], being fully responsible to our day and age. We know of powerful temptations that lurk on the wayside, but we also know of the promises for faithful service. We do not wish to preserve only or to renew only, but, rather, to do both in practicing the apostolic tradition.

Let us mention briefly several challenges posed by present-day secularism. Homosexuality in our country is a topic that is only marginally discussed even in secular society. Our church is thus not at present challenged by this issue. Of course, we realize that our pastoral mandate includes these

persons, too, and that they must not be excluded. However, in our church it would not be possible to entrust a ministerial role to a person who openly declares their homosexuality.

We know that many marriages today end in divorce. We are trying to understand the circumstances that lead to this and accompany these people pastorally. It would however be unthinkable that ordained church leaders be divorced or seek separation. Betraying the early church image according to which the bishop embodies in word and deed what love demands, cannot, according to the teaching and practice of our church, be openly sanctioned by a decision on the part of the church hierarchy. Among us, there are not only irreproachable believers, including in the church hierarchy, but the apostolic order should be observed by us to the greatest possible extent.

Recently, the question has been raised whether we should discuss the topic of the "Bible in gender-neutral language." This has come to us from neighboring Austria. Gender is not actually a problem in our church. Women have been being ordained in our church for many years already, but these women pastors proclaim the gospel in congregations with their male colleagues and do not deal with the question of how feminist concepts can be incorporated into church work. Because of the socioeconomic conditions to which the life of the church was subject under Communism and in the post-Communist revival, the community of men and women had to deal with greater problems than issues specifically related to gender.

The world must not dictate to us what we may (still) teach in our church and what purpose Christianity serves, seen from an outside perspective. Our teaching and actions should focus on fulfilling the task commissioned by the risen Christ. We must bear witness to the gospel of reconciliation, and the pardon Christ obtains for humankind entangled in sinfulness. This should remain our guiding principle, including in encounters and dialogue with the powers that be. In a spirit of faith and love, we must meet all our contemporaries and always be prepared to be accountable before anyone who demands an "accounting of the hope" that is in us (cf. 1 Pet 3:15b). We therefore have a great task ahead of us in applying and implementing the apostolic witness here and now, and in our responsibility toward the Lord of the church, from whom we proceed and to whom we go in joyful gratitude.

On the Way to a Common Understanding of the Church's Apostolicity in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue

Theodor Dieter

While all churches confess the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, they disagree on the meaning of the attribute “apostolic.” This creates an ecumenical problem; in fact, it creates the basic ecumenical problem. The attribute “apostolic” is different from the church’s three other attributes, namely oneness, holiness and catholicity. Apostolicity places the church in history; it connects the church with God, who became a human being in history, and with Jesus Christ’s apostles. When it comes to the problem that one church is asked to recognize another community as a church (and vice versa), the decisive question to be raised is, Is this community an apostolic community? Does it exist in continuity with the apostles, with their mission and message? If the answer is positive, then this community can be called a church. In order to answer this question, two subsequent questions must be raised. First, Does the other community meet the requirements for apostolicity put forward by the respective church that is asked to recognize a certain community as church? And, the other way round, too. Second, What are the precise criteria for apostolicity? This is an especially complicated question since the various Christian communities have different criteria for apostolicity. Thus one can easily understand that it is not an easy task to come to a mutual acknowledgement of communities that claim to be churches.

In what follows, I shall report on a dialogical investigation of the concept of “apostolicity.” The dialogue partners were Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians—the members of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity—who met annually from 1995 through 2006. Both churches—Lutheran and Roman Catholic—have different understandings of apostolicity. Thus, the two churches have so far not mutually acknowledged one another, or, more precisely, the Roman Catholic Church does not feel entitled fully to recognize Lutheran churches as churches in the proper sense, since they do not meet all of

their requirements for apostolicity. Consequently, analyzing both understandings of apostolicity is a major ecumenical challenge. The findings of the Commission on Unity are contained in the report, *The Apostolicity of the Church*.¹

For both partners in dialogue, the appropriate starting point for developing a concept of apostolicity would be the Bible. Unfortunately, the New Testament only speaks of "apostles" (*apostoloi*) and the ministry of the apostles (*apostole*); the adjective "apostolic" does not refer to the church. Nevertheless, the New Testament has something to say with regard to the concept of the church's apostolicity, and we have to proceed in an hermeneutical circle. This means beginning with the understandings that have developed over the course of the history of the churches, identifying their elements and examining what the New Testament says about them. We are well aware of the fact that to a certain extent our analysis is shaped by our respective points of view, our traditions, experiences, etc. Nonetheless, bearing this in mind, we can attempt as much as possible to bring the Bible into the theological discourse. The report therefore begins with a detailed chapter on the New Testament foundations of the apostolicity of the church.²

After having explored the biblical foundations, the report continues with the systematic analysis by referring to the traditional understanding or misunderstanding regarding the difference and conflict. "One often hears that Lutherans see the church legitimated as being in apostolic succession *only by* its preaching and teaching of the gospel, with ministry playing no essential role. Catholics, on their side, are thought to hold that the unbroken line of rightful episcopal succession is *of itself* a guarantee of the apostolicity of the church. But both assertions are misleading" (n. 67). In order to show this, the report points out that "in the two traditions a larger complex of components [is important], in doctrine, worship, and forms of life and service, which together constitute apostolicity as an attribute of the church" (n. 68).

Concerning Luther's understanding of the church's apostolicity, the report explains that, "Luther called an apostle 'one who brings God's word' and understood the apostolic legacy wholly from the gospel and the commission to make it known. The church lives by the specific word coming to it from the risen Christ, through the apostles and the witnesses who follow. 'Where the word is, there is the church.'³ The church remains apostolic by proclaiming the

¹ *The Apostolicity of the Church. Study Document of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2006).

² *Ibid.*, 14–38.

³ "*Ubi est verbum, ibi est Ecclesia*," in *WA* 39/II, 176,8f.

good news concerning Christ who ‘has died for our sins and is risen for our righteousness’ (Rom 4:25). Thus, ‘where two or three are assembled, if only they hold to God’s word in the same faith and trust, there you certainly have the authentic, original, and true apostolic church’⁴ (n. 93). “The gospel word displays the power of the risen Christ by gathering and shaping the church as *creatura evangelii* (‘creature made by the gospel’),⁵ in which pastors, preachers, and all the faithful are called to continue the succession of witness to Christ’s saving Lordship. Christ, now at the right hand of God, rules visibly on earth through the preaching of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments in the church. Receiving the apostolic gospel in faith entails as well receiving the practices such as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the power of the keys, and mutual consolation, through which the message of Christ engages human life with divine power.⁶ By the apostolic word and practices, as Luther set forth in the Large Catechism (on the Creed, Third Article), the Holy Spirit is distributing, through the ministry of those properly called, the treasure of forgiveness of sin and sanctification acquired by Christ’s death and resurrection” (n. 94).

“Luther himself rarely spoke of the ‘apostolic church.’ But he understood the reality that we designate the church’s apostolicity as continuity in proclaiming the same message as the apostles and as continuity in practicing baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the office of the keys, the call to ministry, public gathering for worship in praise and confession of faith, and the bearing of the cross as Christ’s disciples.⁷ These are the marks of the church by which one can recognize it, since they are the means by which the Holy Spirit creates faith and the church. Among these marks, the gospel message, however, is the decisive criterion of continuity in practice with the apostolic church” (n. 95).

The decisive point in the presentation of Luther’s understanding here is the emphasis on the inner connection between the gospel and the practices by which it is communicated through history. “The aim of the Reformation was to re-establish continuity with the true church of the apostles by a new reception of the apostolic gospel and the practices bound to it. This entailed rejecting the misconceptions of the gospel and deformations of practice by which the church of the day had broken continuity with the apostles” (n.

⁴ “Commentary on Galatians, 1519,” in *WA* 2, 542; *LW* 27, 154. Smalcald Articles, II, 1.

⁵ *WA* 2, 430, 6–7, from *Resolutiones Lutherianae super propositionibus suis Lipsiae disputatis* (1519). Also, *WA* 6, 560, 33–35; *LW* 36, 107, *WA* 7, 721, 9–14; and 17/1, 100, 2–3.

⁶ Exposition of Psalm 110 (1535), in *WA* 41, 131; *LW* 13, 272; Smalcald Articles, III, 4 BC, 19.

⁷ See Luther’s defenses of the continuity of the Lutheran churches with the ancient church of the apostles in, “On the Councils and the Church, 1539,” in *WA* 50, 628–644; *LW* 41, 148–167, and “Against Hanswurst (1541),” in *WA* 479–487; *LW* 41, 194–199.

98). "The Reformation rejected what it found contradicting and obscuring the gospel in the church under the papacy, but its critique was not total, for Luther could say, '... in the Papacy there are the true Holy Scriptures, true baptism, the true sacrament, the true keys for the forgiveness of sins, the true office of proclamation, and the true catechism.'⁸ The Catholic Church possessed and was passing on the elements of the apostolic legacy which the Reformation was now using in correct ways" (n. 99).

How could Luther say this? He distinguished between the substance of a thing and its use. If someone uses something badly, the whole thing becomes bad for the person who misuses it; nevertheless, as Luther states, the substance of the thing remains. It is therefore not enough to have the elements that communicate the gospel mentioned before, but the use of them must be the right one, too. The document underlines that the existence of certain elements of apostolicity does not suffice, but that one needs the right configuration of these elements so that they correctly shape the apostolicity of the church.

The Council of Trent tried to respond to the challenge of the Reformation theologians. Where is the apostolic church to be found? The Council's theologians "responded to the immediate needs of controversy by developing an apologetical treatment of apostolicity, that is, a presentation of evidence to prove that the Roman Church is alone the *vera ecclesia* ('true church'), with rightful authority in teaching and a legitimate corps of bishops and presbyters. Later Catholic manuals of ecclesiology were dominated by apologetics, arguing from numerous external 'marks' or 'notes' by which to ascertain the true church of Christ, especially through the papal and episcopal succession in office from Peter and the other apostles to the present day" (n. 104). This focus on certain external marks made the different concepts of apostolicity irreconcilable.

Self-critically the Catholic theologians of the Commission state, "Post-Tridentine Catholic theology was narrowed by constraints of argument to give practically no place to the ecclesial endowments of Scripture, creeds, worship, spirituality, and discipline of life, which in fact shaped the lives of Catholics but which were also shared in different ways with Christians of the separated churches. [These were the elements mentioned above in the presentation of Luther's view.] Ecclesiology was dominated by concern with the formal issue of *legitimacy* in holding these and other gifts. Interior gifts appeared less important than the verifiable marks employed by an apologetics drawing on history. In the argument, the aim was to identify the institutional entity in which Christ's

⁸"Concerning Rebaptism, 1528," in *WA* 26, 156f, *LW* 40, 231f. Also, "Commentary on Galatians (1535)," in *WA* 40/1, 69; *LW* 26, 24.

truth is normatively taught, his efficacious sacraments administered, and a pastoral governance exercised in a legitimate manner, especially by reason of apostolic succession of Pope and bishops in a church assuredly still sustained by Christ's promised assistance" (n. 104). A long process of regaining a fuller concept of apostolicity on the Catholic side was needed before the Second Vatican Council could take an important step in this respect.

Vatican II not only recognized that there might be certain individuals outside the church who would be saved but also that "elements of sanctification and truth" (n.120) exist also outside the walls of the Catholic Church. These elements are not like isolated meteorites that accidentally fall from the sky; rather, they have an inner connection with each other and, what is more important, they are embedded and operative in communities of people that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, these bodies "have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation... (UR [= Unitatis reintegratio] 3" (n. 120).

There is an interesting correspondence between the "elements of sanctification and truth" that Vatican II recognizes outside the Catholic Church and the marks of the church that Luther mentions. "The church is apostolic by holding to the truth of the gospel that is embedded continually in practices coming from the apostles in which the Holy Spirit continues the communication of Christ's grace" (n. 158).

Both churches agree "that the gospel is central and decisive in the apostolic heritage" (n. 150). They express its content by referring to the creeds of the early church and to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ). Furthermore, they agree that the gospel is connected to a number of practices that the Holy Spirit uses to communicate the good news. At this fundamental level, both churches can mutually recognize the other's apostolicity. Nevertheless, this level of apostolicity does not fully comprise the complex reality of apostolicity.

The second chapter of the report talks about the gospel and practices through which it is communicated; these are elements of the church's apostolicity. The next step in the dialogical analysis deals with human beings who are involved in these practices of communication. This step is essential since the gospel does not preach itself and the sacraments do not celebrate themselves. Human beings are involved in the communication of the gospel. This involvement also belongs to apostolicity. Here, problems of the common priesthood of all the baptized in relation to the ordained ministry and the inner structure of the ministry are to be discussed.

Lutherans emphasize that by baptism and in faith we are united with Christ und thus participate in his priesthood. Therefore, all Christians belong to the spiritual estate and thus the medieval distinction between two classes of Christians—lay and consecrated—is overcome. We must note one common misunderstanding among Protestants, namely that the medieval distinction was not between priests and lay people but between people who lead a consecrated life and lay people. The former comprises not only priests but also monks and nuns. The fact that through baptism and faith all Christians are called priests does not mean that all Christians are pastors. While there are distinctions among Christians according to the different offices, “[r]egarding their state of grace and in view of salvation, there is no difference between those who are ordained and those who are not ordained” (n. 198). The Lutherans involved in this dialogue defended the view that the Lutheran Reformers were of the opinion that the ministry is instituted by Christ. In many passages, Luther speaks explicitly of the divine institution of the ordained ministry, such as in “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, 1520”: “I want to speak only of the ministry which God has instituted, the responsibility of which is to minister word and sacrament to a congregation, among whom they reside.”⁹ The Lutheran confessional writings state unequivocally that “[t]he ministry of the Word has the command of God and has magnificent promises,” and “the church has the mandate to appoint ministers.”¹⁰

Hence, ordination became decisive for Lutheran pastors, as the Lutheran members of the commission emphasized. Ordination started in Wittenberg in 1535. It took place when a man had received a call from a parish and after examination by the faculty, carried out by Bugenhagen, the regional bishop in Wittenberg. The ordination certificates stress the doctrinal agreement between “our church” and the “catholic church of Christ,” i.e., the whole church. Later it is repeatedly emphasized that according to apostolic teaching (Tit 1:5 and Eph 4:8–11) the office of teaching and administration of the sacraments is passed on to the ordinand through public ordination. In several certificates, reference is made to Canon 4 of Nicea, according to which a bishop has to be ordained by neighboring bishops. This means that the pastor’s ordination was modeled on the ancient bishop’s ordination in order to confess and safeguard the apostolicity and catholicity of their ministry.

⁹ LW 44, 176.

¹⁰ “Apology of the Augsburg Confession—Article XIII: The Number and Use of the Sacraments,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 220.

The Lutheran Reformers emphasized the unity of the office of ministry since both pastors and bishops serve the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Nevertheless, there had been a difference between local and regional ministries since the visitations of Electoral Saxony in 1528, where the office of a superintendent—one who has the oversight—was created. Nonetheless, the Lutheran Reformers had severe problems with bishops, because “most of the bishops adhering to the traditional faith did not allow evangelical preaching, but instead put obstacles in the way of priests and preachers who turned to the Reformation or even persecuted them, and refused to ordain reform-minded theologians. Melanchthon writes in the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, “The bishops compel our priests ... to reject and to condemn the kind of doctrine that we have confessed.... This keeps our priests from acknowledging such bishops. ... We have clear consciences on this matter since we know that our confession is true, godly, and catholic. For this reason, we dare not approve the cruelty of those who persecute this doctrine. We know the church exists among those who rightly teach the word of God and rightly administer the sacraments.”¹¹ As a consequence, a conflict developed for the Reformation between faithfulness to the apostolic tradition, that is, the gospel, or adherence to the traditional forms of transmission of office and of its integration into the hierarchically structured community of the church” (n. 213). This is a serious situation since elements that traditionally belong together in a complex concept of apostolicity, fall apart.

When the report comes to the Catholic understanding, it states the following concerning the common priesthood of all Christians, “Catholics and Lutherans are in agreement that all the baptized who believe in Christ share in the priesthood of Christ and are thus commissioned to ‘proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light’ (1 Pet 2:9). Hence no member lacks a part to play in the mission of the whole body” (n. 273). But when Lutherans pose questions regarding the Catholic understanding of the Lutheran office of ministry, Vatican II states that there is a lack of the sacrament of ordination or, as some Catholics would say more cautiously, there is a deficit in the Lutheran sacrament of ordination. In order to identify precisely the point of conflict, we have to acknowledge that the problem is “neither the differentiation nor the distinction between a more local and a more regional ministry, nor that ordination belongs to the regional ministry.” We have the ordination with the laying on of hands and the prayer for the Holy Spirit for the ordinand. As the Catholic colleagues

¹¹ *Apology*, Art. XIV, 2–4. BSLK 297, 11–19; BC 222f.

say, the difference is to be seen in the "Catholic doctrine that the practice and doctrine of apostolic succession in the episcopate is, together with the threefold ministry, part of the complete structure of the church. This succession is realized in a corporate manner as bishops are taken into the college of Catholic bishops and thereby have the power to ordain. Therefore it is also Catholic doctrine that in Lutheran churches the sacramental sign of ordination is not fully present because those who ordain do not act in communion with the Catholic episcopal college. Therefore the Second Vatican Council speaks of a *defectus sacramenti ordinis* (UR 22) in these churches" (n. 283).

Whereas the first level of the report's analysis deals with the elements of apostolicity, the second level addresses the persons who perform the communication of the gospel through the practices mentioned before. While both churches take the office of the ministry seriously, Catholics think that it is important for the apostolicity of the church that the ministries are integrated into the college of the bishops, who are supposed to be the successors of the apostles under the Pope, who is seen as the successor of Peter.

Nevertheless, the Commission on Unity challenges the Catholics, arguing as follows. If (1) it is the ministry's basic task to maintain the church in the apostolic truth of the gospel, and if (2) the Lutheran ministry has managed to maintain the Lutheran churches in this truth, as it is attested in the JDDJ, then we have to conclude that the Lutheran office of ministry is not null and void since it has done a good job throughout the centuries. Thus, one of the implications of the JDDJ should be that the Catholic attitude toward the Lutheran ministry should change and through this their perception of our apostolicity, too (cf. n. 288).

The third and last level of the dialogical analysis of apostolicity deals with what is the measure or touchstone according to which it is to be decided whether the communication of the gospel that is performed by the ministry of certain persons is actually the communication of the apostolic gospel. Thus we have the following sequence: the elements of the communication of the gospel (first level), the ministry of persons administering those elements (second level) and finally the touchstone for their ministry (third level). This touchstone is, of course, Scripture, but the traditional controversy is, (1) Scripture alone or Scripture and tradition? (2) Concerning Scripture itself, there are two questions, (2a) What is the precise content of Scripture? Do the Apocrypha belong to the canon? (2b) Who or what authorizes Scripture? Is it the church that gives authority to Scripture? (3) As we all know, Scripture is interpreted in very different, even contradictory ways. Who has the last word about scriptural interpretation? Is this the problem of the Magisterium?

Essentially, all these questions belong to a sufficient concept of apostolicity. I shall address these problems only very briefly.

What is the precise content of Scripture? Luther referred to the Hebrew canon of what we call the Old Testament, his opponents to the Septuagint canon. Modern exegetes stress that the Bible of the Apostle Paul was the Septuagint, and that one cannot understand the inner coherence of the Bible without taking the Septuagint as the Holy Scripture of early Christianity. Who or what authorizes Scripture? Luther's opponents argued that since it was the church that decided about the books that belong to the canon, it is the competence of the church (i.e., the Magisterium) to decide upon its interpretation. In the report, it is totally clear that also Catholics affirm that the authority of Scripture does not stem from the church, but that the church recognized which books had gained authority in its services, and finally put them together as the canon. Further, Catholics hold "in common with the Reformation that the Spirit-inspired biblical text has its own efficacy in conveying truth that forms minds and hearts, as affirmed in 2 Tim 3:17 and stated by Vatican II" (n. 409).

It is interesting to see that it is precisely the efficacy which we Lutherans stress so much that leads Catholics to emphasize tradition. They say, "But Catholics hold that this efficacy has been operative in the church over time, not only in individual believers but as well in the ecclesial tradition, both in high-level doctrinal expressions such as the rule of faith, creeds, and conciliar teaching, and in the principal structures of public worship. The saving truth of Scripture has come to expression in formulations which are both comprehensive of Scripture's witness to God's saving work and at times quite pointed on critical points of dogmatic clarification. Scripture has made itself present *in the tradition*, which is therefore able to play an essential hermeneutical role. Vatican II does not say that the tradition gives rise to new truths beyond Scripture, but that it conveys *certainty* about revelation attested by Scripture" (n. 410). This is what Lutherans would claim, too, with reference to their confessional writings. Thus there is a high degree of convergence on this matter, especially since Catholics say that Scripture is materially sufficient for Christian doctrine.

The remaining problem is the Magisterium. It is far from being solved. The report offers only a preliminary description of the task. In the Catholic Church, the Magisterium consists of the college of bishops under the Pope. Theology offers important services to the work of the Magisterium but the decisive body is the bishops' college under the Pope. Only a few remarks can be made here. Catholics argue that since there are innumerable understandings of

Scripture and the content of the apostolic gospel, there must be a final voice as otherwise the church would continue to be in uncertainty regarding what the apostolic gospel actually means. I think this is a strong argument. But there is also a strong counterargument. Who guarantees that the Magisterium's and especially the Pope's voice is actually the voice of Scripture and of Christ? It could be the highest point of subjectivity despite pretending merely to overcome the subjectivity of individual Christians. Catholics need a huge amount of confidence in the Holy Spirit that he inspires and guides the Magisterium in order to be Christ's voice. I do not have so much confidence. But, and this "but" needs to be taken very seriously indeed, Lutherans need at least as much confidence in the Holy Spirit as the Catholics, that through the often very unclear and unstructured processes of discussing doctrinal questions in the Lutheran churches they will finally remain in the truth of the gospel. The last part of the report is entitled, "Church Teaching that Remains in the Truth." Only history or maybe only Judgment Day will reveal which way of teaching and remaining in the truth of the apostolic gospel is the appropriate or at least the better and more effective way. We Lutherans should not be too confident that it is ours. Sometimes, the cacophony of Lutheran voices in doctrinal matters brings me close to depression and desperation. What does our claim to be a church that is apostolic mean if we cannot agree on the content of the gospel, its implications and consequences? One often hears, Catholics have the Magisterium, we Lutherans have Scripture. To put the problem thus is extremely naïve. We do not simply have "the" Scripture but we have our interpretations of Scripture, and the Catholic Magisterium also offers an interpretation of Scripture. If we say, "We have the Scriptures," we have always won the battle, because nobody likes to oppose Scripture. But if we see that we have our own understandings of Scripture, then we have to struggle with other interpretations of Scripture, and it is not clear from the beginning who will in the end have the more appropriate interpretation. Thus the unresolved ecumenical problem of the Magisterium is an enormous challenge for Lutherans. If they take this challenge seriously by reflecting on their ways of finding doctrinal agreement and making decisions, they can hope to establish a convincing alternative to the Catholic Magisterium. This would then be a very important contribution to the apostolicity of the Lutheran churches, while at the same time being an important contribution to the unity of the church. As mentioned at the beginning, separated churches have different understandings of apostolicity. Thus, the way to visible unity leads through the joint reflection on a common understanding of the apostolicity of the church.

Mission as Com-compassion

Roberto E. Zwetsch

I shall begin with a narrative in order to illustrate mission in the pluralist context of the world in the early twenty-first century. The story is set in the city of Isfahan, in southern Iran.¹ In this city, there existed a colony of very rich Christian Armenian artisans. A Muslim sovereign, wishing to possess the goods of these Christians, called together the leaders of the Armenian community and said to them:

I have read in your Holy Books that your Master told you: “If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will be able to transport a mountain to wherever you want.” I have decided therefore to test your faith and to verify that you are not impostors. I order you to choose from among you someone who has faith the size of a mustard seed and present him to me. If he cannot transport the mountain that is there in front, I will kill him and all the leaders of your community.

According to the legend, the Christians, terrorized by the words of the Muslim sovereign, carried out great fasts and penances up to the day set for the test. On that day, they presented to the Muslim an old monk, considered by the community to be holy. In front of the Muslim, the monk prayed,

Lord, my faith is not the size of a mustard seed! It is smaller than that [...]. That is why I will not be able to transport the mountain! Accept my death in penance for my little faith. [...].

Upon hearing such words, the Muslim chief was moved to compassion, forgiving the monk and the other members of the Christian community their lack of faith, which did not permit them to carry out the miracle promised by Christ.

When the man left, the Christians gathered to thank God for their salvation. Then the monk spoke,

Brothers and sister, it is possible that the greater miracle was the Muslim being moved to compassion because of our lack of faith than we being able to move the mountain [...] The divine mercy has forgiven our sin!

¹ Armindo Trevisan, *Menor que um grão de mostarda* (Porto Alegre: AGE, 2009), 125–7.

Reflecting on the monk's words, the community concluded that the moral miracle of the Muslim's compassion was greater than the physical miracle of dislocating the mountain.

This story was told by the Brazilian poet, intellectual and university professor Armino Trevisan, who in his recent book questions the foundational truths of his faith. In the conclusion, he reminds us of the answer, which a desperate father, in tears, gives to Jesus imploring him to cure his deaf and dumb son: "Immediately the father of the child cried out, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk 9:24).

Church as mission

In his article, "The Church," the North American theologian Philip Hefner defines the church as the community of God in Jesus Christ, which does not find its reason for being in itself, in its works or in self-justice. The church distinguishes itself from all other earthly communities in the fact that "it intentionally takes as its *raison d'être* the explicit witness of Christ-rationality as the key to understanding the entire process of nature and history."² For Hefner, mission permeates the church's whole doctrine. I conclude that it is impossible to define the church dogmatically without making explicit reference to mission. Based on the Trinitarian concept of God, Christian theology affirms that these three ways of being God unfold into the world in creation and in God's *missio*. Therefore, to participate in the *missio Dei* is to participate in the very being of God in his unfolding in the present and in the future as happened in the past and in the history of the people of Israel. Hefner also defines the human being as a cocreator, a privileged collaborator in God's action in the world. God calls the church into existence through his son Jesus of Nazareth and sends it into the world to proclaim his marvels, evangelize the poor and liberate the oppressed (Lk 4:18; Isa 61:1). The God of Jesus is, therefore, a missionary God who creates, sends out and sustains a people, a community that defines and understands itself as a "missionary community." To say church is to spell out the word mission and such a mission has no boundaries. It covers the family, the neighborhood and the whole world.

² Philip Hefner, "The Church," in Carl E. Braaten, Robert W. Jensen (eds), *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 189.

It is important to reaffirm two presuppositions for this community to participate in the *missio Dei* in faithfulness to the God of Jesus. First, mission is never a one-way street; it is always two-way, demanding a relationship of reciprocity between the one sent and those receiving the message of God. In mission there is no possibility to teach only or only to learn. We are companions on the journey and in solidarity with one another. We walk on the paths of the world with our eyes set on the common horizon of the kingdom of God. The church is at the service of this kingdom. What prevails in the *missio Dei* is the close relationship among those sent and those receiving the gospel which liberates and saves both, and in relation to which we are always learners.

The second presupposition is the assumption of the church's contextuality within culture and society. Hefner writes, "If a church reaches out beyond its own cultural borders, it is to assist other churches in their own mission, not to do that mission in their stead."³ This partnership in God's mission is truly revolutionary and opens up the possibility continually to renew the challenge of mission today. This is especially so in times of globalization and new challenges presenting themselves to the churches in a culture dominated by competition, violence, growing individualism and hedonism. As the Presbyterian missiologist Sherron K. George wrote, the mutuality present in God,

is the foundation and model for all practices in mission partnerships. The mutuality in mission is an exchange of gifts, a more horizontal than vertical relationship, which does not create dependencies nor exerts domination. Mutual mission is inherently cooperative [...]. Mutuality requires patience, openness, reciprocity and honesty.⁴

Recent church documents reaffirm the centrality of mission in the church's self-understanding. Pope Paul VI affirmed this theology in the famous apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 1975. In the 1982 document, *Mission and Evangelization: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, the World Council of Churches (WCC) likewise affirmed that the center of the church's vocation is the proclamation of the kingdom of God, inaugurated by Jesus, crucified and resurrected, and that dialogue and lending others a hand help

³ Ibid., 192.

⁴ Sherron K. George, *Participantes da graça: parceria na missão de Deus* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal; Quito: CLAI, 2006), 86.

humanity overcome their divisions and work together in freedom, respect and creative peace.

The Lutheran communion defined its comprehension of mission and ecclesiology in two important documents: *Together in God's Mission* (1988) and *Mission in Context* (2004). The main point in the first document is the understanding of mission beneath the sign of the cross, while in the second the concept of empowerment recovers the dimension of the Holy Spirit's action in mission, not as a power that serves to exalt the church, but rather to enable it to witness. The entire church, being missionary, will involve itself with the burning issues of its reality, having as its criterion the defense of life in all its dimensions. That is why mission is carried out as an accompaniment, in solidarity with the poor, with those without hope, the disillusioned and forsaken, to form with these people a life in communion with all that this implies. The model will always be the incarnation of Christ in the midst of a fragmented and violent world, in which the church itself goes through transformations never dreamed of before. The holistic mission covers the totality of human life and nature and is manifest in a journey of reconciling transformation or of restorative evangelization. In *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005), the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC once again reaffirmed that the church will only be coherent within itself if it is a witnessing church, which proclaims the will of God to save and transform the world.⁵ Another Latin American theologian, René Padilla, elaborated on the concept of holistic mission, stating that God's mission embraces the totality of human life in all of its dimensions, personal, psychological, spiritual, social, economic and environmental.

Mission as a journey of witness and incarnation is to take the way of the cross, the way God decided to act in the world through his son Jesus. In him and his ministry, God acted against sin and injustice and affirmed love and restorative and dignifying justice in spite of persecution and crucifixion. The morning of Easter, the sign of the resurrection given first to the women, invites us—in and through faith—to follow in Jesus' footsteps, wherever his Spirit reaches us.

It is in this broad context that I defend the comprehension of mission as compassion. In what follows, I shall briefly expound on what this means and what the consequences are of this perspective confronted with the many crises affecting us as churches and nations.

⁵ The World Council of Church, *The Nature and Mission of the Church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper 198 (Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 2005), para. 37.

Mission as compassion

In order to understand what mission means today, we need to talk about who God is since mission is *missio Dei*. Although a definition will never sufficiently describe who God is for us, we can make use of the biblical witness which narrates many experiences of the people of Israel and later of the community of Jesus with their God and our God. Jesus called God by a special name, which we find difficult to translate: *Abba*. It means that he had a very intimate relationship with God, who taught us to direct ourselves to *Abba* through this relation of proximity and trust: our father and, with the feminists, I believe we can say, our mother, counting on God's comprehension.

But there is more. For Jesus, God is the compassionate God.⁶ While according to the biblical witness there are many other characteristics that describe God, this one stands out in the prophetic sources and, above all, in Jesus. One of his sayings affirms, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). Compassion and mercy are the same here. Developing this thesis, I encountered six points that merit consideration. Such an understanding has crucial consequences for the mission of the church of Jesus today and, therefore, obviously for our Evangelical Lutheran churches spread throughout the world. In what follows, I will present these points and bring some examples of how compassion is today part of a relevant challenging of missionary practice. It is important to remember what Johann B. Metz already affirmed, namely that the person who suffers has unquestionable authority, because suffering touches the depth of each human being. This person speaks to those dimensions in which the human essence rules as pathos, care and essential compassion.⁷

Compassion as a summary of the gospel of God

The word compassion summarizes the gospel of God for today's world, transcending time and space, concepts and history.

God has compassion on us and is in solidarity with our misguidedness. In Jesus of Nazareth God brought Godself near to God's people who walk

⁶ Henri Nouwen et al, *Compassion—A Reflection on the Christian Life* (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 1983).

⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, "Im Eingedenken fremden Leids. Zu einer Basiskategorie christlicher Gottesrede," in Johann Baptist Metz, Johann Reikersdorfer, Jürgen Werbick (eds), *Gottesrede, Religion—Geschichte—Gesellschaft. Fundamentaltheologische Studien* (Münster: LIT, 1996), 3ff; see Leonardo Boff and Werner Müller, *Princípio de compaixão e cuidado* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2009), 25.

in this world as people gone astray, to lead us to God's kingdom of love, justice and blessedness. And this, in and through time.

God's compassion could be the translation of God's *missio* for modern and postmodern times, because we live in times when the objectivity of historical processes, the absurdity of the race for profit at any cost, the calamity of the destruction of nature, the insensitivity toward the suffering of millions of human beings, find no limits or remedy. In one word, we live in in-compassionate, hard and cruel times.

In light of current historical processes in Latin America, we perceive that the reality of a subordinate integration into the globalized world economy leaves little room for autonomous national alternatives as the proposals of a reinvigorated and democratic socialism so ardently desire. Faced with this situation and confronted with the insecurities regarding the future we need to seek a viable alternative. This search is not only political, economic and social, but also challenges the churches and their theological responses confronted with the signs of the times.

It will not be an easy task, however, to believe in compassion if we only consider the churches' witness. Their historical divisions, the inconsistency of their witness, war provoked by religious competition, the scandals corroding the credibility of the gospel of peace, justice and reconciliation, all of these are sufficient motives for disfiguring the gospel's promise. In truth, these cause the foundations of the churches, which confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master, compassionate and challenging, to tremble. That is why, without the presence of the Holy Spirit, which blows where it wills and transforms churches and people, there would be little to do. As José Comblin and other theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann wrote, it is in the power of the Holy Spirit that the church fulfills its mission.

The Spirit prepares the church in the midst of the nations. [...] That is why we do not need to head into mission already with a project of the church nor with an elaborated project of the gospel. [...] The Spirit reveals Christ to the nations. We announce him but we do not know how they will know him. What is important is that Christ be presented as he presented himself: through the paths of humility and the cross. Christ begins with poverty, in the midst of the poor. He presents himself as one without power. The revelation of Christ is the revelation of his cross, lived out as the real path. [...] The Christ of mission will not be human discourse about Christ, but a live and real presence of Jesus made man, poor and without power, in a way capable of touching the hearts of the poor of the nations. In this way, Christ and the Spirit are united in mission and only their unity makes mission possible at this time in the world.⁸

⁸ José Comblin, *O Espírito Santo e a libertação* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1988), 202f.

Without this power of the liberating Spirit of Christ, the church remains a purely human institution, limited in its historical perspective. It will not be able to carry out the vocation to which it was called. This is the challenge of the *missio Dei*.

The compassion of God is a sister to justice—the prophetic dimension of mission

After the crash of the world financial system in 2008, the cost of “saving” the financial system amounted to trillions of dollars. In the economy, distant from the real lives of the people, there is no room for cooperation, for care and for living out compassion. Today’s world seems to depend on the success of the main players on the financial markets. The rule of thumb is to privatize in good times and to nationalize in bad times. Could alternative ways be found, where reciprocity would be a criterion for human communal interaction. Could an alternative to capitalism maintain the right to life, today seriously at risk for more than two thirds of humanity and even for the environment.

In this context, the word compassion finds fertile soil in which to bear fruit. This is the argument the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist leader of Tibet, repeatedly affirmed during his trips around the world.⁹ Obviously, compassion by itself does not guarantee anything. Compassion needs to be translated into acts of will. Otherwise, it remains as a horizon of good intentions without historical incidence or perspective for the future. That is why I agree with those who defend that divine compassion only becomes historically concrete when associated with another central concept in the biblical witness, above all in its prophetic tradition. God’s compassion is the sister of justice. The biblical God is the God of justice.¹⁰ Just as there can be no peace without justice, we cannot comprehend God’s compassion if we forget to relate it to God’s justice. These two realities translate into what we can understand as the love of God, or *hesed*, central to the message of the prophet Hosea, as well as the word *rahmim*, which can be translated as having mercy out of love for someone.¹¹

⁹ See Dalai Lama, *Mitgefühl und Weisheit—Ein Gespräch mit Felizitas von Schönborn* (Zürich: Diaognes, 2006).

¹⁰ See Johann B. Metz, “La compasión. Un programa universal del cristianismo en la época de pluralismo cultural y religioso,” in *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología*, vol. 19, no. 55 (2002), 25–32.

¹¹ Ernst Jenni, Claus Westermann, *Diccionario teológico manual del Antiguo Testamento*, vol. II, (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1985), 957–66.

In the context of the Old Testament, these words are related to other verbs which point to the reality of the gospel of the grace of God as announced by Jesus. They are: be clement, be merciful, feel compassion, treat well, respect, console, change the destiny, help, be kind, magnanimous. All of these expressions indicate the special way in which God acts with regard to God's people. God's compassion contrasts with the other attitude of the same God: mercy is in exclusive opposition to God's wrath or substitutes it because wrath suspends the relation of the people with God. In Isaiah, the term merciful or compassionate is an attribute of God's. Only God is really merciful or compassionate with us. Whoever experiences such compassion has truly found paradise, as Luther affirmed in one of his autobiographical texts. Only compassion and mercy can overcome violence, *hamas* [Heb], and not force!

Compassion: the inseparability of judgment and grace

God's compassion only becomes real when God's justice is revealed and fulfilled. From the perspective of biblical theology, God's justice combines two inseparable dimensions: judgment and grace, condemnation and redemption, death and life. Death to sin that destroys human communal interaction and resurrection to a new life, in liberating grace and truth. Judgment reveals the depth of human sin and its separation from the source of life and of all that is sacred. The apostle Paul wrote: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). Grace is God's loving answer. God did not let death be the last word. Through Christ, God reconciled humanity to Godself, thus opening the doors of history to the new, the unheard of, the experience of life in its fullness.

Passion of Christ—passion of the crucified: seeking God sub contrario

Compassion points to another dimension of divine mercy and this has to do with suffering, *passio*, which remits us to the passion of Christ and, by extension, the passion of the crucified of this world. Can there be redemptive, liberating suffering? This is what the gospel of Christ announces: in his suffering there is, precisely, a gift and a promise. With the resurrection, God recovered Jesus from an unjust death and justice triumphed. Thus, the seeds of hope could once again sprout and grow. In spite of this, the cross is and will

continue to be a scandal. In theological terms, it can never be suppressed or diminished. The cross is an insurmountable scandal. That is why Christian theology is paradoxical. Leonardo Boff drew attention to this aspect:

God needs to be sought *sub contrario*. There where it seems that there is no God, there where it seems that God has left, there is God. This logic contradicts the logic of reason, but it is the logic of the cross. This logic of the cross is a scandal to reason and needs to be maintained thus, because only in this way do we have an access to God that we would not have in any other way. Reason seeks the cause of pain, the cause of evil. The cross does not seek any cause: there in the pain itself God is present. [...] [the cross] needs to be maintained as a cross, as darkness before the light of reason and wisdom of this world.¹²

This reflection on the cross and suffering are important in the context of compassion because one could easily fall into the *dolorismo* [the glorification of suffering itself], so typical of Latin American religiosity. The acceptance of suffering does not mean masochism; rather, in good Christian tradition, it means to struggle against evil and to resist sin and the fatality of life. Therefore, we pray as Jesus taught us, “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” The temptation of conformity, of giving into the meaningless of suffering and pain is real. Jesus’ prayer does not promise us life without temptation, but teaches us not to give into it.

In his inspiring book, *The Scandalous God. The Use and Abuse of the Cross*,¹³ Vítor Westhelle, a Brazilian Lutheran theologian teaching at Chicago, warns us that there cannot be Christian life other than at the foot of the cross and accompanied by the crucified of this world.

If God is hidden *in* the cross, then God partakes in the passion of Christ. If God is hidden behind the cross so that the divine immutability, majesty, and power are only veiled and not affected by the cross however, then God’s mystery is not revealed in the cross, not even under its opposite. The consequence of such an interpretation would lead us into the bosom of a mysterious and terrifying God. But if God were in that cross, we would have the notion of a God whose compassion reached such depth. The temptation is clearly to opt for “in” and shun “behind.” But are these really exclusive options? Should we

¹² Leonardo Boff, *Paixão de Cristo—paixão do mundo. Os fatos, as interpretações e o significado ontem e hoje* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1978), 136.

¹³ Vítor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God. The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

not recognize in God both the *fascinans* and the *tremendum*, as Rudolf Otto summarized the attributes of the holy?

This double sense to be found in Luther does not represent alternative options for interpretation. Both are valid [...]. God's hidden work is a way of naming in a radical way our experience of being abandoned by God as Jesus himself experienced.¹⁴

Westhelle suggests that even today Luther's theology of the cross is especially challenging because it leads us to a concrete living out of solidarity with those who suffer and cry out for liberation.

The challenge for us is to be able to discern, as Luther did, the places and times in which brokenness, the damaged life, the deep cutting crises are receiving a facelift from the high priests of the new global gospel, what the Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall calls the cult of "official optimism."

When we point to the cross of Jesus and the cross of the crucified, it is understandable that many of us, rapidly, mention the resurrection as the saving act of God who on that glorious morning overcame death, pain and the meaninglessness of history. But what we need to repeatedly learn is that the cross is not something transitory and discardable. Effectively, Jesus rose from the dead for our salvation and liberation. But if Jesus had not lived the cross until the end, our faith is in vain, if you permit me to rephrase a well known saying of the apostle Paul. As Christians it will be necessary to maintain a tense and creative relation between Passion Friday and Easter, without ever undoing the scandal of the grounding narrative, lest we miss the whole point.¹⁵

Compassion as an experience of liberation: *simul iustus et liberatus, semper liberandus*

Leonardo Boff demonstrates two things. First, that God, when assuming the suffering and the absurdity of the cross, did not accept this absurdity as his limit. He assumes the absurdity,

not to deify it, not to eternalize it but to reveal the dimensions of God's glory which surpass any light that might come from the human *logos* and any dark-

¹⁴ Ibid., 69.

¹⁵ Ibid., 59.

ness that might come from the heart. God assumes the cross in solidarity and love toward the crucified, toward those who suffer the cross. He tells them: although it is absurd, the cross can be the way to great liberation as long as it is assumed in freedom and in love.¹⁶

The second observation has to do with suffering that stems from the struggle against suffering, when the experience of faith takes place in the context of the mystery of the *passio liberationis*. This is about the suffering one experiences in the struggle against oppression and injustice, in the commitment to the liberation of the impoverished, victims of a system in which they no longer have a place. According to Boff, this suffering presents an incomparable level of human dignity. It is not sought but found on the path of discipleship. The same can be said of the suffering of those who are persecuted because of the gospel, or of the struggle for justice such as that of Mahatma Gandhi. This type of suffering can denounce the evil of the system dominating the world. It has the strange force of negating the system because it lives in the reality of divine love, of the strength of the future kingdom that proceeds from and leads to God, the force of non-violence, which in Brazil has been translated into the expression *firmeza permanente* [restless persistence]. Citing Boff once more,

That is why the one who suffers, the victim of the violence of the system, is free and jovial ... the truthful Absolute confers meaning to persecution and death. The world which God promised [...] is so real, so true, so fulfilling that no death, however violent, no torture, however inhuman, are destructive. Such a free and liberating attitude exasperates the agents of the system [...]¹⁷

This is why the witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed at the end of World War II, still resounds throughout the whole world. For us in Latin America, it is revealing that precisely the theologian who died because of his faith became the greatest witness of a gospel that apparently had been vanquished by Nazism.¹⁸

The encounter with the crucified God, in his passion, therefore, brings about a true experience of conversion, through which life in its entirety is reevaluated

¹⁶ Boff, op. cit. (note 11), 143f.

¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹⁸ See Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Los límites de la teología moderna. Un texto de Bonhoeffer," in *La fuerza histórica de los pobres* (Lima: CEP, 1980), 395–415.

and gains a new direction. This experience of grace, forgiveness and freedom frees the people of a past that enslaves and redirects life on a new basis. Boff explains this experience as a rooting oneself in God, as the foundation of the new being, as happened in the life of Jesus. Such a process of conversion is never finished since it is subject to the dialectic of the just/justified sinner. Lutheran theology calls this *sola gratia, sola fide*, which is translated into an historical experience where the oppressed is freed and becomes liberator. Boff defines this aspect of life in faith with the formula: *homo simul iustus et liberatus, semper liberandus*.¹⁹ The human being is simultaneously just and liberated, always liberator, based on the cross and on the hope which is born from it. "For in hope we were saved," wrote the apostle Paul (Rom 8:24).

Compassion: impassioned with the mercy of God

There is one last aspect in the expression compassion that I would like to address. God's mission includes a struggle for life. Resistance against God's love is permanent in this world, in institutions, including the churches, as well as in our individual lives. The dialectic of life is made up of shadows and lights and of sin and grace in such a way that, through faith, we are simultaneously just and sinners. Because of this, it is necessary to let oneself become impassioned with God's mercy. God loves humanity as a mother struggles for her sons and daughters. Only the merciful and clean of heart will know God, affirmed Jesus (Mt 5:7ff) Compassion is an attempt to demonstrate that mission has to do with the whole being of the people and of the church of God. Mission as compassion is a theme and a program, a warning and a challenge. It is recognition and hope.

The *Asívida* program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Colombia, which accompanies people affected by HIV and AIDS without any moral condemnation, is an example of the theology of grace and compassion that liberates and dignifies people. Furthermore, it is an example of the living out of compassion as the face of mission today.

A second example is the IECLB's 2008 Plano de Ação Missionária-PAMI [Missionary Action Plan]. The title of the PAMI is suggestive: *Missão de Deus—Nossa paixão* [Mission of God—Our Passion]. The IECLB's origins

¹⁹ Leonard Boff, *A graça libertadora do mundo* (Petrópolis, Lisboa: Vozes, Multinova, 1976), 187. See my article "Espiritualidade e antropologia: um diálogo com Leonardo Boff," in *Estudos Teológicos* (São Leopoldo, ano 38, 1998), no. 2, 141–55. For a systematic perspective on the Boff's Christology, see Luís Marcos Sander, *Jesus, o libertador. A cristologia da libertação de Leonardo Boff* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 1986).

are to be found in the immigration of evangelicals and Lutherans in the nineteenth century. The IECLB was founded in 1949. With this historic decision the church assumed the constitutive missionary dimension of a church. Since then it has sought to insert itself in the midst of the Brazilian people and culture. The current PAMI is not a magic formula but a plan of action that is slowly reaching congregations all over the country. PAMI has four axes which summarize the understanding of mission: evangelization; communion; diaconia; and liturgy. Three transversal dimensions permeate each axis, namely education, sustainability, and communication. The plan affirms that God called us to be God's partners in God's mission. In Jesus, God radically approached humanity. In and with him we are convinced of God's passion for the world. We are a people impassioned with the gospel and the message of the kingdom of God. If God's mission is our passion, compassion as the practical path of mission challenges us to a new and transforming commitment.

Periods of crisis lead to a renewal of mission. It is at the moments of the cross that we test the limits of our passion and fidelity. Paraphrasing the Uruguayan theologian Juan Luis Segundo, who affirmed the necessity of not only having a theology of liberation but a liberation of theology, I believe that mission is the instrument that God uses to liberate the church.

The Church—Opium of God’s People?

Wai Man Yuen

Introduction

From 1921 onwards, following the success of the Russian revolution, the Chinese Communist Party adopted Karl Marx’s view that religion is “the opium of the people” and used this statement to attack religion. During the Cultural Revolution in particular, Marx’s view on religion influenced the politics of the day and religion came under fierce attack. Traditional religions were regarded as being backward and Christianity as the tool of Western colonialism. However, since the opening up of modern China in the 1980s, religions have been flourishing. Over the past three decades, the cultural elements in religion have made a positive contribution to socialist China and religion is no longer regarded as a “drug” but rather as a “medicine.”¹ Having been defined as a “culture system,” religion is to a certain extent regarded as being “useful” to society.

But what did Marx really mean? For Marx, religion was an “opium” since he believed that religion was used to make people accept their plight—poverty and exploitation—despite the distress they experienced at the hands of their oppressors. The state and society produce religion in order to provide solace to those in distress, just as opiates provide relief to those who are physically injured. Consequently, religion is opium because it provides an illusion, a fantasy. Employing this notion, I shall argue that if the church loses its call in the global world, the church becomes like an opiate. Undeniably, globalization secularizes God’s people in the sense that the notion of freedom of the self seduces God’s people to seek their own individualistic objectives rather than the common good. How does the church satisfy my needs? Secularization relieves God’s people of the calling and the cross. As Emil Brunner affirms, the church exists by mission as fire exists by burning. In order to reclaim the church as a church-in-mission, I intend to show that without the theology of the cross

¹ Tao Feiya, “Drug or Medicine? China’s Experience of Marx’s Opium Thesis on Religion,” in *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, volume 2, issue 1 (June 2008), 59–75.

and the theology of sacraments, the church can never be apostolic insofar as mission is concerned. The apostolic church is always a missional church.

Globalization and the church today

The power of globalization is beyond measure and expectation.² According to Peter Berger, globalization is not driven by the economy only but also has a cultural dimension. In other words, economic globalization goes hand in hand with cultural globalization.³ For Berger, cultural globalization has four faces: the "Davos culture;" the "faculty club culture;" the "McWorld culture;" and "Evangelical Protestantism." I will use his definition of these faces of global culture as the framework of expounding on how they have impacted the church. I then intend to show how today's changing contexts challenge us to rethink the church's mission. Finally, I shall reinterpret *missio Dei* from the perspective of Luther's theology of the cross and sacrament.

Four faces of global culture and ecclesiology

Although the impact of globalization on culture highlights the tension between the issue of cultural hegemony and globalization, Berger indicates that global culture has four faces. Based on these four faces of global culture, I intend to show how they impact contemporary church culture.

"Davos culture" and "Yuppie church"

Referring to Samuel Huntington, Berger points out that the "Davos culture" is the culture of the élite. Economic globalization brings about élites whose lives cannot be separated from computers, intellect, cellular phones, airline schedules, currency exchange and such like. Due to their education and global experience, they value freedom, equal rights and the like, and share common beliefs about individualism, democracy and the market economy. Berger repeatedly emphasizes their "yuppification" or "yuppie

² Peter L. Berger, "The Cultural Dynamics of Globalization," in Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington (eds), *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11.

³ Peter Berger, *Four Faces of Global Culture*, at <http://bss.sfsu.edu/fischer/IR%20305/Readings/four.htm>.

behavior.” Their lifestyle tends to be comfortable, freedom seeking, stress free and elastic. A “Davos culture” forms a “yuppie church.”

Hong Kong is famous for its strong international links. In this highly globalized city, different types of churches, especially non-denominational churches have formed freely. They call themselves “Just Church,” “Community Church,” or “Free Church,” or such like. Most of their members come from around the world, working in Hong Kong as students, teachers or entrepreneurs. For them, church is just a group of people, believers and non-believers, gathered together to worship, irrespective of denomination, institution and tradition. Most of the churches rent a function room in an hotel where they meet every Sunday. The meeting place is arranged “Starbuck” style in order to provide a relaxed and cozy atmosphere during worship. Liberty is highly valued, not only in belief and practice, but also in forms of worship so that dulling uniformity and “vain repetitions” are avoided. Since worship is to be a soul-searching journey by the transforming power of the Word, it should be freewheeling: let the Holy Spirit run freely. These are typical “yuppie” churches. As Corwin Smidt indicates, “With this severance of individual spirituality from institutional religion and its collective authority, believers will increasingly exhibit personal autonomy, as individuals become more and more idiosyncratic and eclectic in forging their religious faith.”⁴ “Just Church” challenges the institutional church.

“Faculty club culture” and Chinese cultural Christians

For Berger, the “faculty club culture” is also an élite culture, albeit more academic in the sense that it is cultivated by intellectuals who are sociopolitical activists with the mission to promote feminism, environmentalism, ecumenism and the like. In other words, this “academic culture” has social and cultural dimensions. Cultural Christians in China can be regarded as one of the distinctive groups in this faculty club culture. While being strongly influenced by the values and ideologies of Western intellectuals, China’s cultural Christians are undergoing their own development.⁵ By

⁴ Corwin Smidt, “Religious Individualism, Religious Relativism, and Reformed Identity among Christian Reformed Church Members at the Turn of the Millennium.” Paper prepared for presentation at the 2006 Conference Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Reformed Communities, Princeton, New Jersey, July 9–12, 2006, 4, at www.calvin.edu/henry/ISSRC/Conferences/.../smidt-penning06.pdf

⁵ Li Pingye, “A Preliminary Analysis of Contemporary Chinese Intellectuals toward Christianity,” in *China Study Journal* (December 1994).

understanding cultural Christians in China, we can see how this global phenomenon plays out in China.

China's cultural Christians are Chinese intellectuals.⁶ They professionally engage in religious studies with a special emphasis on philosophical reflection. As China continues its journey toward modernity and postmodernity, many forces are competing to shape the twenty-first-century Chinese mind. In the 1980s, Chinese academics in the fields of literature, history, philosophy and the social sciences, attempted to rebuild their theoretical concepts in a more open context. Cultural Christians also seek to fill this ideological vacuum with the philosophical thoughts and cultural elements of Christianity and attempt to put Christianity on center stage of contemporary Chinese intellectual development. In fact, many of them are engaged in the development of Christian theology in the Chinese context.

Cultural Christians claim to be Christians because they accept and affirm the ideas and values of Christianity. But this group of Christians does not identify with any church and they do not attend church worship.⁷ For them, Christianity is not just a belief but an ideology. Being a Christian is a personal conversion, not necessarily being baptized. The notion of cultural Christians is based on Karl Rahner's concept of the "Anonymous Christian." The reason for not affiliating themselves to any church is political as well as personal. With regard to the latter, they are not satisfied with the teachings of the church and they do not believe in an organized church. Since cultural Christians are neither baptized nor have a church affiliation, their Christian identity has over the past decade been questioned by religious circles in Hong Kong. The questions raised are whether indeed they are "authentic" Christians, whether Christians should be churchgoers and what the difference is between their Christianity and traditional forms of Christianity. Their presence challenges the existence of the church. If in a globalized world Christians are beyond the church, then what is Christian vocation? Cultural Christians of the "faculty club culture" invite us to rethink the ecclesiology of call.

McWorld culture versus the traditional church

The name "McWorld" resonates with the USA and the term here implies popular culture. More specifically, Americanized pop culture. Berger

⁶ Yeung Heenam et al (eds), *Cultural Christians* (Hong Kong: ISCS, 2006).

⁷ Ka Lun Leung, "Cultural Christians and Christianity in China," transl. Stacy Mosher, in *China Rights Forum*, no. 4 (2003), 28–31.

indicates that the ideology behind popular culture opposes the “stodginess” of tradition. To put it differently, pop culture challenges the taboos of society. Why are taboos still needed in a world that knows no limits? Does political correctness constitute a quasi enforcement of taboos since it entails self-censorship coupled with social sanctions? Is the church also a kind of taboo enforcement? The McWorld culture challenges church unity because individual churches apply moral principles as taboos within but not beyond themselves. How can the church be unified? Do taboos help? Is the church unified through taboos or mission?

The Pentecostal movement and church as the opium of the people

Berger points out that the fourth face of globalization is the Pentecostal movement in Evangelical Protestantism. Its globalizing force captures the attention of sociologists and theologians alike. Increasingly, scholars regard charismatic Christianity as a global culture. Since the 1960s, Pentecostalism is one of the most active movements within Christianity and it is growing into a global religious phenomenon. According to Grant Wacker, today 525 million people around the globe identify themselves as Pentecostals or charismatics.⁸ Many researchers are exploring this rapid growth. According to contemporary spirituality, this life is the focus of our spiritual concern. Therefore, charismatics tend to focus on the quality of life with health and well-being becoming central pursuits.⁹ Religion, specifically Christianity, is no longer an eschatologically oriented religion. This world is our home and we are obliged to be concerned about this world. Good health and fortune are blessings from God. Through prayer, charismatics can experience divine healing and blessings. Moreover, when they pray they have intense and emotional expressions, which they regard as therapeutic and as God’s direct intervention in human situations, making whole that which has been broken, making the weak strong and the poor rich again. Hence, charismatics appear to compete with and borrow from the postmodern world of healing movements, New Age, materialism and pluralism and to promote health and wealth. Is the church the opium of God’s people? What is its mission?

⁸ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁹ Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

The impact of globalization on the church's mission

The church's mission defines its very existence. The Lutheran church confesses to being an apostolic church. The church is apostolic because it proclaims to the nations the Christ to whom the apostles and disciples bear witness. The church is apostolic because the church is a people sent. Hence, the church carries the vision of the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, the question of whether the mission of advancing God's kingdom is to find happiness in this or the next life challenges the church anew. In a secularized, market oriented and demand driven world, the church is by no means immune to this trend, and the churches have developed different ministries in order to meet the congregations' needs. But, which of our needs does the church fulfill? Mission therefore is not about how to bear witness to Jesus Christ but how to fulfill our needs. Mission becomes a consumer directed ministry. Since diakonia is an integral part of the Lutheran church's mission, mission intrinsically implies the restoration of God's creation. We are directed by the needs of the world that we serve humbly.

"Consumer directed" or "needs based" diakonia subtly influences the church in two ways: first, the church serves the needs of its members rather than those in need. Undeniably, the world needs to be healed and since God's people live in this world, they too yearn to be healed. Spirituality then becomes a movement alongside secularization. Due to the need to mend the soul, the church has become a "hospital" in the sense that the sending church turns out to be the mending church. The healing movement in the secularized world challenges our theology of the cross. How can the sick soul be healing the sick? In other words, how can the mending church be at the same time the sending church? The movement furthermore invites us to rethink the relationship between mission and discipleship. Secondly, since the Lutheran church recognizes diakonia as a core element of its identity, it serves the needy wholeheartedly and humbly. Diakonia is based on the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ who emptied himself and sacrificed himself for us. In this sense, love cannot be separated from the Eucharist, the symbol of Christ's love. The table of sacrifice and the table of charity are the two hands of diakonia. The table of sacrifice symbolizes a community critical of religious individualists. How can the Eucharist shape the church's mission? What is the missiological potential of this communion as constituted in the Eucharist?

Missio Dei and the theology of the cross

The theological notion of *missio Dei* challenges the church’s vocation. In a secularized world, the word vocation means work or career. However, for Luther vocation is the call to serve the neighbor.

Although I am an unworthy and condemned man, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully, with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.¹⁰

Luther situates his concept of vocation in the doctrine of justification. Justification frees us from self-interest and to act in the true interest of the neighbor. Christians are called to be servants to their neighbors because Jesus Christ offered himself to them. Just as Christ freely comes to our aid, so we ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and our works and “each one should become [...] a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.”¹¹ Thus God calls us to fulfill neighborly love in free responsibility. According to Luther, there are three basic orders in society: ministry, marriage (or family, including everything related to business and the economy) and secular authority.¹² “It is God’s will that there are distinctions of ranks,”¹³ and “it is God’s work to have distinct stations in the world, and that these make for right and righteousness and thus

¹⁰ Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian, 1520,” in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 333–77, here 367.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 367f.

¹² Martin Luther, “Concerning Christ’s Supper, 1528,” in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 364.

¹³ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Genesis, Chapter Forty-One,” in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 7, (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), 190.

preserve the peace."¹⁴ That is to say, God has established different kinds of orders and Christians are called to be in a particular status so that they "serve God and the world."¹⁵ In other words, vocation is God's call for every Christian to establish God's kingdom on earth. Every Christian belongs to an order and has a vocation. Vocation not only refers to one's occupation but to the whole of one's life. Since we are called by God to care for our neighbors, the calling transforms our attitude toward and understanding of our situation. Vocation cannot be seen as a worldly task but as worldly piety. There is no secular work for Christians. We are all called to fulfill our duties in our vocation so that God and our neighbors can be served.¹⁶ It is true that Luther often speaks about specific occupations, but the purpose of doing so is not to restrict vocation to occupation but to affirm that even the most mundane stations are places in which Christians ought to live out their faith. Hence, from Luther's perspective, every Christian is a missionary and there is no secular work that is disconnected from our missionary identity. We are called, as participants in the *missio Dei*, to be in different vocations but with only one purpose, namely to serve our neighbors wholeheartedly. Vocation liberates us from individualism and a self-seeking mentality and implies mission.

Insofar as vocation can be understood as participating in God's mission, Christians, no matter whether or not they are churchgoers, are the church-in-mission. The visible community of Christian believers refers to the tangible organizational institution of the church, while the invisible refers to the spiritual organism of the mystical body of Christ. According to Luther, the holy church in its relation to God is an article of faith and thus invisible. Therefore, the invisible church implies the inward and spiritual fellowship of true believers on earth and in heaven. All those who do not attend church are thus part of the universal church for they are also bearing the vocation of the cross. Vocation as mission brings us to a new understanding of universal ecclesiology. Where mission is, there is the invisible church; where the cross is, there is the church-in-mission. Mission unifies the church, both visible and invisible. Christians are called to different vocations and through various vocations, God's mission is pursued.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, "Psalm 111," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 13, (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 370.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, "A Sermon on keeping Children in School, 1530," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 252.

¹⁶ Allen Jorgenson, "*Crux et Vocatio*," in *Scottish Journal of Theology* (2009), 62:282–98.

Insofar as a church is in mission, that mission brings the cross to us. Mission invites us to trust that Jesus bears the cross for us. Through their vocations, Christians are the incarnational witnesses of the cross. The theology of *missio Dei* makes us realize the theocentric notion of mission. God’s “sending” also implies that God is a “compassionate” God. If Christians decide faithfully to take part in God’s mission, then they should be aware that while they are healers they are also broken and in need of mending. This is the theology of the cross. The missiological potential behind the cross is that the cross brings us to the reality that we are called to serve while needing to be served. The theology of cross reorients Christian life and leads to a new understanding of vocation. We are called to serve and to be served; we need to be healed and be healers. Mission therefore is not to accomplish something but to realize our struggles and to be willing to take up the cross as Christ struggled against the mission that God had given him. Mission brings us to the cross as vocation brings us to our neighbors. As Robert Scudieri says, “the cross gives us the reason for mission.”¹⁷

Eucharistic ecclesiology and the missio Dei

Eucharistic ecclesiology focuses on the local church, i.e., the visible church. For the Reformation churches, the true church is visible and recognizable in the right preaching of the gospel, the purity of doctrine and the right administration of the sacraments (i.e., baptism and the Lord’s Supper).

In this Christian church, wherever it exists, is to be found the forgiveness of sins, that is, a kingdom of grace and of true pardon. For in it are found the Gospel. Baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, in which the forgiveness of sins is offered, obtained, and received. Moreover, Christ and His Spirit are there. Outside this Christian church there is no salvation, or forgiveness of sins, but everlasting death and damnation.¹⁸

Luther firmly insists that the gospel, baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the three core elements that constitute the church. Without Word and sacrament, the church cannot exist. They are instituted by God and God’s

¹⁷ Robert Scudieri, “A Missiology of the Cross,” in *The Theology of the Cross for the 21st Century* (Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 57.

¹⁸ Luther, op. cit. (note 12), 368.

self-revelation. Church and sacrament coexist. Christians are sent into the world as Christ's presence in the sacrament.

The Eucharist bonds believers before the table, drawing them into the very mission of Jesus: the communication of the divine gift of love. The theocentric understanding of the Eucharist points to God's sacrificial love for us. The Eucharist then is God's gift to us, offered to us by grace. The Eucharist is God's act upon God's people in the sense that by partaking in the Eucharist and by accepting God's grace, we can develop a living relationship with the Triune God and receive the power of the Holy Spirit. According to Peter Scott,

in a particular situation in which the bread and wine are consumed, participation in the rite invokes the passion of Jesus, the pouring away of Jesus' life, and the restoration of community: of Jesus with God, with his disciples and with the marginalized.¹⁹

Celebration and communion identify the church as a place of hospitality. For Scott, the Eucharist reveals God's hospitality to us and thus the Eucharist is a social action which demands the church to extend hospitality to all.²⁰ Eucharistic hospitality transforms the believer from receiver to giver. Hence, partaking in the blood and body of Jesus, we are built up as one body and sent forth to embrace others sacramentally, just as we are embraced by God's sacrificial love. The sacrament that bonds the church to Christ enables us to bond with our neighbors and to bring them to Christ. A eucharistic community is a unified church sent. As Philip Sheldrake indicates, "the Eucharist implies a radical transformation of human 'location' such that it is no longer to be centered on the individual ego or a safe gathering of the like-minded but discovered in being a-person-for-others."²¹ To partake in the Eucharist then implies a relocation of the self, that is from self to Christ and then from Christ to others and finally from others to Christ. A unified church is always Christ centered because it is Christ who bonds us as a whole.

¹⁹ Peter Scott, "A Theology of Eucharistic Place: Pilgrimage and Sacramental," in Craig G. Bartholomew, Fred Hughes (eds), *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

²¹ Philip Sheldrake, "A Spirituality of Reconciliation: Encouragement for Anglicans from a Roman Catholic Perspective," in *Journal of Anglican Studies* vol. 6 (1) (2008), 122.

In speaking of the Eucharist, Luther insists on the unity of Word and sacrament. For Luther, Christ’s words are essential in the sacrament. God’s Word is a creative word that establishes the reality it promises and the believer who has faith makes the sacrament effective. In other words, the sacrament is in need of the Word and the Word likewise is supported by the sacrament. As believers gather around the table, Word and sacrament open us up in the sharing of the life of Jesus Christ. This understanding of the Eucharist encourages us to make shifts in our worship culture so that message and worship support the Eucharist. The Eucharist has the power to transform all those who participate. That is to say, in order emphasize the importance of the Eucharist in a Christian community, we need to move from being sermon centric to being table centric.

Being table centric does not imply that we put our faith in the sacred object itself, but in its transcendence. As David Torevell notes, “Liturgical and holy things became transmuted into mere objects which were only to be valued for their function in stimulating faith, not in themselves.”²² For Luther it was not the actual object or the act that made the divine present, it was the consecration using the last word and testament of Christ. In other words, it is words of institution that are the essential elements that make Christ present. Then the focus of the sacrament is on the word used with the rite but not the rite itself. Hence, the word transcends the rite. Without the support of the word, the rite cannot be transcended as the rite is a mere object. In this regard, the word supports the table. However, regardless of whether the word supports the table or vice versa, we cannot deny the fact that word and rite are the medium of divine presence. A missiological ecclesiology centered in the Eucharist helps recipients to realize that the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist calls them to make Christ present on earth. Eucharistic ecclesiology then is a missiology of the cross.

Conclusion

Globalization impacts human values, lifestyles, mentality and ideology. As the church is not a value-free institution, globalization challenges the church to rethink its own identity, since otherwise the church will be

²² David Torevell, *Losing the Sacred: Ritual, Modernity and Liturgical Reform* (London and New York: T & T Clark International, 2001), 69.

like "the opium of its people." It is my fundamental belief that the church needs both mission and the Eucharist for its own self-understanding and expression. A missional ecclesiology always interprets and transcends itself through the Eucharist. That is to say, through the Eucharist the presence of Christ affects us in such a way so as to empower us to make Christ present in the global world. In recognizing its missional and sacramental identity the church is apostolic.

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In this book, Lutheran scholars share insights into how faith in the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church not only provides theological commonality among Lutherans, but also helps realize the social aspect of the Christian faith.

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