Understanding the Gift of Communion

The Quest for a Shared Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion

A Reader

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

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Editor: Department for Theology and Public Witness

Design and Layout: Department for Theology and Public Witness
Office for Communication Services

Cover photo: © LWF/J. Latva-Hakuni

ISBN: 978-2-940459-38-4

Publisher: The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches
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Introduction

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a lively and engaged communion of churches. Its member churches share altar and pulpit fellowship and bring their spiritual and material resources together in order jointly to participate in God's mission in the world. This communion is alive because God calls it into being and sustains it. Living together as a communion of churches is a gift entrusted to the churches. In responding to God's call, the LWF has committed itself to the task of ongoing conversation and the realization of communion. As a gift, the communion is something we receive; as a task, it is something to which we commit ourselves to labor toward. Since its beginnings, the LWF has grown tangibly in ecclesial density. This is visible in its structures and its practices: it can be seen in the constitutional texts and governing structures, as well as in how it meets, works and celebrates together.

As the Lutheran communion journeys towards the Reformation Anniversary in 2017, the LWF wants to attest to what it means to be an ecclesial communion from a Lutheran perspective. One of the phrases that has become a marker of Lutheran ecclesiology is "unity in reconciled diversity." This implies that Lutherans have acknowledged that in their understanding of communion there is intrinsically a space for diversity and difference. This diversity, however, does not mean a complacent and static living side-by-side but, rather, a dynamic reality in which churches engage one another and see themselves accountable to one another. Maintaining the integrity of the communion where disagreements emerge between member churches has become a concern in light of how churches respond to certain ethical challenges. At all times and in every place, churches discern how faithfully to live out the message of the gospel in their context. As part of this process, they are called to review and examine cultural and socio-ethical paradigms in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Careful responses to the particular contexts are an important aspect of credibly communicating the message of the gospel. At the same time, the mutual accountability of churches in different contexts is part of their commitment to the catholicity of the church of Jesus Christ.

The biblical understanding of *koinonia*

The concept that informs the LWF member churches' relationships as both gift and task is that of communion, a word translated from the Greek *koinonia*. The concept appears to have gathered importance in terms of the self-understanding of early Jewish Christianity as it was slowly contextualized and imbedded in the gentile world. The concept finds its fuller usage in the Pauline letters, which itself is a reflection of the complexity involved in the translation of the gospel into the Gentile world. The new frontier for the propagation of the gospel from Jerusalem posed new challenges of identity. Hence, there was a need for establishing criteria as to who belonged to the community and who did not. While *ekklesia*, the starting point of those "called-out" among the Jewish people to be witnesses of God, defined the Jerusalem Christian self-understanding, it was the *koinonia* or *communio* of those gathered by the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ that tended to define the Gentile Christian self-understanding as part of the Greco-Roman inculturation and indigenization of originally Palestinian Christian faith even though this did not exclude the communion with Jewish Christians (e.g., Gal 2:9).

In earlier usage outside the Bible, the notion of *koinonia* was close to its root referring to that which is common as opposed to that which is "private." But this word underwent many changes, most of which depicted relationships to do with "participation" in the sense of common life and common goods. This concern for common life lost its appeal during the "golden age" of the Greeks. Paul, being influenced by both Jewish and Greek thought, reflects his adaptation in the Hellenistic cities affected by a new interest in new social entities such as "fellowships" (*synodoi*) in situations of rising individualism.[1] In these cultic communities, the notion of *koinonia* was slowly promoted.

For the LWF, Paul's notion of *koinonia* is of special interest as it demonstrates the formation of a body of relationships based on the invitation of the gospel and the fellowship at the table. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–25, the body and blood of Jesus Christ in and through the wine and bread of the sacrament becomes foundational in demonstrating and strengthening koinonia. The eating together of people of different backgrounds meant participation in Jesus Christ and implied new relationships with one another. This breaking down of ethnic bound-

[1] John Reumann. "Koinonia in Scripture: Survey of Biblical Texts," in Thomas F. Best and Günther Gassmann (eds), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia, Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, Faith and Order Paper 166 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1994), 36–69

aries that would have naturally stood between the different members of the *koinonia* is shown in the way that Paul confronts the party of Peter for discriminating against the Gentiles (Gal 2). We can also observe that later in Acts, the Hebrew and Hellenistic fellowship, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The notion of altar and pulpit fellowship within the LWF as a communion of churches comes from this basic criterion of apostolic tradition, mutual learning and sharing in the sacraments (CA 7). In this context, the various needs of the other become apparent and hence the need to establish structures to meet these needs in more just and equitable ways (Acts 2:44–47; 4:33). It looks as if the notion of communion or *koinonia* which finds its expression at the table of the Lord, also finds its full expression in the service to the neighbor. *Koinonia* is therefore presented in the Bible as both the act of God that moves people to God and to one another, and in a special way, this move results in meeting needs and upholding life.

The LWF Council initiates a study process

At its 2013 meeting, the LWF Council asked the General Secretary

> to engage member churches in further theological reflections on how to respect the autonomy of LWF member churches' decisions and express and deal with the resulting differences, while at the same time upholding their commitment to live and work together as a communion of churches.

The Council commended the document "Claiming the Gift of Communion in a Fragmented World," a reflection by the General Secretary in preparation for the 2013 meeting of the LWF Council.

A working group, comprising seven members representing different regions and areas of expertise, was appointed by the Meeting of Officers in late 2013 in order to begin this joint process of reflection. The members of this group are: Prof. Dr Guillermo Hansen (Argentina), Dr Minna Hietamäki (Finland), Dr Allen Jorgenson (Canada), Dr Annika Laats (Estonia), Bishop em. Dr Hance A. O. Mwakabana (Tanzania), Prof. Dr Elisabeth Parmentier (France) and Prof. Dr En Yu Thu (Malaysia).

The working group was tasked with preparing a study document on "The Self-Understanding of the Lutheran Communion" to be presented to the Council in 2015 and for use by the member churches. The study document would aim further to clarify and deepen the self-understanding of LWF as a communion and to respond to some challenging disagree-

ments between member churches within the communion. The study document is to be informed by the LWF's constitutional provisions and relevant theological documents pertaining to communion. Furthermore, it is to provide new and helpful insights for the future.

The working group held its first meeting 18—21 March 2014, in Bossey, Switzerland; a second face-to-face meeting to revise and finalize a draft text is planned for March 2015. The draft will be presented to the meeting of the Council in June 2015 and, if approved, ready for publication and distribution to the member churches by October 2015. During the drafting process, the regions will have the opportunity to engage in conversation on the understanding of communion at various leadership meetings during 2014 and 2015.

In order to enable continuing theological conversation on this topic, this reader includes contributions by the LWF General Secretary and members of the working group. The papers were first presented at the March 2014 meeting and focus on issues currently confronting the communion.

Martin Junge highlights the theological significance of the concept of communion and analyzes its impact in relation to contemporary global dynamics. Allen Jorgenson explores the depth of Lutheran ecclesiology in relation to original insights during the Reformation and his contemporary context in Canada. Minna Hietamäki describes how the concept of communion has been present in many of LWF's bilateral ecumenical dialogues, and emphasizes "mutual recognition" as a key concept. The importance of linking autonomy and accountability in relations between churches is further underlined by Hance A. O. Mwakabana. En Yu Thu explores the meaning of communion in a multireligious context and relates biblical narratives to Asian cultural perspectives. The challenges in dealing with disagreements are addressed by Elisabeth Parmentier, who proposes a strategy for how a communion of churches can meaningfully engage with these. Finally, Guillermo Hansen provides a reflection on the power dynamics between churches, explicates the cognitive dissonances and calls the churches to develop a "'communion' mind that participates in order to understand."

Claiming the Gift of Communion in a Fragmented World[1]

Martin Junge

It comes with Christ's path of incarnation: as a communion of churches, we don't live apart from realities and tendencies in our world, but are part of them. Touched by the "centripetal" force that reaches us as God's call to be churches in communion, we remain exposed to centrifugal forces that push us into fragmentation and withdrawal. As a communion we face a challenging *simul* (at the same time, simultaneously): being full citizens in this world in which we live, yet simultaneously expressing full citizenship of that world that is to come and is realized in Christ.

One of the topics that exposes us in particularly strong ways to this tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces is the discussion about family, marriage and sexuality, or the "Emmaus conversation," as I want to continue calling this dialogue process. Exhibit 10.4 of the LWF Council meeting in 2012 gives a solid retrospective view of the discussion process with its peaks of both anxieties and breakthroughs.

I have heard a lot of affirmation across the communion, and also among ecumenical partners regarding the important step of the Emmaus conversation that the Council undertook last year [2012] during its meeting in Bogotá, on behalf of the 143 LWF member churches. The Council came up with five important insights, later on communicated to member churches through a joint letter of the LWF President and myself:

[1] These reflections by the LWF General Secretary on the Emmaus conversation and its further direction were first presented at the meeting of the LWF Council, 13–18 June 2013.

1. Respectful and dignified dialogues on complex issues are possible
2. The unique situation of each member church has to be acknowledged
3. The LWF is a communion with many themes
4. The LWF communion as a whole should not take action on issues of family, marriage and sexuality
5. The LWF journey as a communion of churches continues.

A new situation in the LWF

Since its last meeting in Bogotá new elements have come into the picture, which require attention and discernment by the entire communion, and the LWF Council in particular. The General Assembly of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) at its meeting 27 January—2 February 2013 ratified previous decisions of the EECMY Council to sever relationships with Church of Sweden (CoS) and with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), following their decisions on same-sex marriage/partnership and ordination of same-sex ministers.

In its communication to these two churches, which was copied to the LWF, the EECMY declares the altar and pulpit fellowship relations to be discontinued, the partnership agreements between these churches to be terminated, and the development programs and projects to be phased out.

Immediate steps of the LWF and process thus far

The LWF Communion Office took immediate steps regarding the three churches directly involved in this decision, notably by:

- **Communicating**: the Communion Office sought and kept communication with all three member churches, convinced of the fact that this is where the LWF communion has to be right now: with its three member churches, talking with them and listening to them to secure accurate understanding (accompaniment).

- **Facilitating**: the Communion Office has provided an opportunity for direct interaction between the three churches concerned in order to begin to talk about how to actually understand and how to go about

this decision with its complex implications, convinced of the value of keeping direct interaction in times of struggle.

At this meeting, the EECMY reiterated information already shared previously that their decision was not directed at the LWF communion nor was it intended to affect the LWF.

Furthermore, the LWF Communion Office ensured communication with LWF Council members through regular letters informing them about both the decision and further developments.

The challenge

As this news of severing relationships has been spreading across the communion, we in the Communion Office have attempted to ensure fair and accurate communication with member churches through their already scheduled regional leadership conferences (Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, Africa), most of which I attended in person. We have listened carefully to input received at these meetings and discerned together with the communion leadership. Meanwhile, I have also received letters and phone calls from several leaders of LWF member churches expressing their views regarding this situation.

This significant reaction reveals the vitality and intensity of communion relationships in the LWF: a cut of relations among specific churches that are at the same time interconnected in global communion relationships doesn't go unnoticed. The pain of this cut and its resulting wound is felt by the entire body. It is thus far that the communion journey has taken us: relationships among individual LWF member churches are deeply interwoven into the fabric of communion relationships!

Hence, the cut of relations also brings challenging questions to the LWF as to the way it defines and understands itself: how would the discontinuation of altar and pulpit relationships among these three churches relate to the fact that—by the self-understanding and the definition of the LWF—these three churches are, as members of the LWF, in such altar and pulpit relations?

These questions can't be ignored or postponed. They have to be addressed in a proactive manner. And they have to be taken up by the LWF, so that the definition of who the LWF is, what it does and how churches relate to each other as a global communion remains in the hands of its 143 member churches through their existing processes and structures of discernment and decision making.

The way ahead

The immediate question before us now is about the path we should choose in order to address this situation. Bearing in mind who we are, the history we share and the vision we have just expressed for our shared journey as a communion of churches through the LWF Strategy, I believe that there is only one way possible for the LWF to choose: intense and deep dialogue in order to take up the clarification process that the situation at hand is calling for.

As a way to frame such a clarification and discernment process, let me offer the following principles that I propose should be guiding us:

Be who we say we are

- The LWF communion will address this situation in coherence with its own confessional identity, its theological self-understanding, its values, its "ethos," the approaches outlined in the LWF Strategy and the insights identified in Bogotá.

- The LWF communion is called to carry each other's burden (Gal 6:2). In coherence with its values, the LWF will therefore approach this situation with a strong focus on how to continue including, instead of how to begin to exclude.

- While deploying its best efforts to accompany the three churches concerned, the LWF communion of churches remains grateful and open for what God has done thus far, and what God does and will do in its midst as the communion continues living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world.

Offer process and accompaniment

- Time and space need to be offered and provided, and clear and credible processes outlined so that this issue can be addressed with diligence and determination.

- All three churches need the closest possible accompaniment by all relevant expressions of the LWF with a view towards a healing of relationships and reconciliation.

Move forward

- The nature of the journey from federation to communion is irreversible. It is not by undoing, but by furthering its journey as a communion of churches that the LWF communion of churches will be able to both address the pain resulting from the cut of relationships, and to respond to the questions that this raises.

Theology matters

Let me add to the principles outlined above some theological perspectives that I believe are of key importance as we journey further with these questions. By bringing these theological perspectives I want also to underline that the issues at hand require a strong theological approach (see: "Be who we say we are").

Three topics have surfaced in our analysis in the Communion Office, which I want to briefly point at:

1. **Autonomy and accountability:** As a communion we have not been able to dig deeper into the interrelationship between the constitutional reference to the autonomy of each of the LWF's member churches to take its own decisions, on the one side, and their mutual accountability as these same autonomous member churches respond together to the call to live and work together in communion, on the other side.
    - Indeed, this is not only an old question for the LWF, but a perennial one to Lutheran churches around the world. They too face this tension between decisions taken at synods, as dioceses and congregations have their own boards which retain the autonomy to uphold or not to uphold synodical decisions.
    - I believe a legal approach won't take us further if we have not addressed the deeply theological issue that would undergird whatsoever constitutional language. The Augsburg Confession with its almost 500 years offers tremendous wisdom for this question of accountability and autonomy. From there one can easily recognize that the issue of accountability and autonomy is ultimately also a deeply spiritual issue as it is only through patient accompaniment, which includes admonishment and affirmation, that this tension between a church that is both autonomous and accountable can be embraced.
    - Lately a question has been recurrently coming back to my mind: how did Peter and Paul go back to their respective congregations,

after their harsh discussions and gentle handshake in Jerusalem (Gal 2; Acts 15)? Did they simply pick up agendas where they had left them? And if not, why didn't they just continue with business as usual?

- And what about us, who come together as a Council? What are the structures and processes that allow us to accompany each other as we go back to our places and continue serving in our respective contexts, to which we are accountable as well?

2. **Contextuality and catholicity:** We are back to ecclesiological questions, therefore, which the LWF Mission Document "Mission in Context—Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment" laid out with prophetic vision:

> Faith is by nature incarnational, firmly committed to a time, a place, and a culture. As local congregations endeavour to engage in mission, they must seek a balance between locality and universality, for universality and particularity are inseparably connected with each other. Without the universal communion of faith, each local church is unable to find a genuine self-understanding in the local context. For the church in mission, therefore, catholicity or universality without contextuality leads to imperialism, and contextuality without catholicity leads to provincialism.[2]

- It is quite revealing actually, that it is the LWF Mission Document that has lifted up this important relationship between contextuality and catholicity with such clarity. Because it gives a missiological framework to this discussion, which I think, is very helpful for the LWF: it is because of the gospel that wants to be everywhere in this world, and finds its way to be everywhere, that the church, which we as Lutherans understand to be a creation of the Word (*creatura Verbi*) is to be contextual. The universality of the gospel calls for the contextuality of the church. Yet, this contextuality requires to be framed by catholicity. The LWF stands for holding together this dialectic relationship between contextuality and catholicity.

3. ***Communio sanctorum* or communion of the likeminded?** None of us have faith and are part of God's church because of ourselves. Lutheran theology insists on the *extra nos* (outside ourselves) character of faith,

[2] **http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-mission-context-transformation-reconciliation-empowerment** , 29–30.

of faith being beyond our control, but something into which we are brought (baptism), and which ultimately relates to God's action. Faith is a gift of God, not our own product.

- I believe that there is also such an *extra nos* in our being together as a communion of churches. Isn't to be in communion a calling, before it is a decision of ours? One may decide to join a federation, but a communion…? The LWF has moved beyond being a strategic alliance to respond to diaconal, missiological, theological and ecumenical challenges together, as it was in 1947, the year of LWF's founding, and has become a communion that sees itself called to be a "communion in Christ, living and working together for a just, peaceful and reconciled world" (LWF Strategy, vision statement).
- Hence, it is not like-mindedness that is the source and bond of our togetherness as a communion of churches. I believe that the LWF communion needs to resist the current tendency in our world to align ecclesial relationships along the criterion of like-mindedness, particularly around specific issues of ethics. Instead it needs to uphold the call for intentional and devoted stewardship of communion relationships, into which churches have been called on the basis of their shared confessional identity, thereby indeed struggling to discern what Scriptures and its powerful message of salvation is calling churches and this communion to be.
- I want to finalize these reflections reminding us of an important sentence in the LWF Strategy:

  > As a communion of churches we will find ways better to discuss the issues that potentially divide us – issues such as human sexuality and different interpretations of the Scriptures – in ways that honour both diversity of views on important issues and the more fundamental basis of unity among us. We will first of all rely on the power of Eucharistic worship and prayer.[3]

This is how 143 LWF member churches see themselves journeying together as they grapple with the centrifugal forces resulting from differences on issues of family, marriage and sexuality.

[3] **http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-lwf-strategy-2012-2017-lwf-communion-passion-church-and-world**, 21.

Where is the Church?

Allen G. Jorgenson

Introduction

The simplest of tasks are often the most difficult. This surely applies to that perennial assignment of giving definition to the church—this despite Luther's insistent assertion that even a seven-year-old knows what the church is: "holy believers and 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.'"[1] Alas, the history of the church is a chronicle of amnesia, and so the church not only shares holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, but also confusion, brokenness and sin. In what follows, I will explore the paradox called the church taking leave from my context as the necessary location out of which my theological reflection emerges. This leads me to Luther's treatment of the seven so-called marks, or relics, of the church in his 1539 "On the Councils and the Church," wherein I will explore Luther's contributions to placing the church.[2] In conclusion, I will attend to some themes emerging from the *Book of Concord*, and use these to point to church as the locus of host and guest, as a tent.

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[1] Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles (III.12)," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 324.

[2] Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church (1539)," in Eric W. Gritsch (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 41 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 3–178 (hereafter *LW)*; *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Bohlau, 1883–1993), Band 50: 509–653.

The question of context

On 9 March 2014, our seminary community made a visited the "The Nation of the Six Nations of the Grand River." It was not my first visit to this territory, nor will it be my last. I remain firmly committed to the principle that theologians cannot do justice to their discipline—be it systematic, biblical, historical, or practical—without attending to their locus of reflection. I do theology on a piece of land given to the Six Nations of the Grand River in the Haldimand Tract of 1784.[3] The reservation we visited that day constitutes about five percent of the land given to the Haudenosaunee people. The land where I live, where I work, where I go about my day-to-day business, is land lost to these people in many and nefarious ways. Consequently, I find myself indebted to my indigenous hosts, who have taught and continue to teach me much about life, the Creator, theology, the land and myself. Perhaps the most pressing lesson that continues to evoke wonderment in all that I do is an increased attention to place. In what follows, I will simply read Luther and the Confessions with an interest in the place, or the where of the church.

Luther's "On the Councils and the Church (1539)"

The context of Luther's text

The text emerges in the milieu of the Reformers' now defunct hope for a council to resolve issues between the churches of the Reformation movement and the Roman church. It is divided in three parts, and I will focus on the third. In the first part, Luther makes the case that church reform will not be accomplished by council decrees. The second part is a historical reading of the first four ecumenical councils as well as the council at Jerusalem narrated in Acts 15, illustrating their successes and more frequent failures. The final section of the treatise—that under discussion—outlines the so-called marks of the church as understood by Luther.

Who, what and where is the church?

In preparation for a closer exegesis of these marks of the church, I first consider Luther's bookends of this section of "On the Councils and the

[3] At **http://www.sixnations.ca/LandsResources/HaldProc.htm**

Church" as well as a thread that winds its way through this treatment. The text starts off as follows:

> Just as they scream about the fathers and the councils, without knowing what fathers and councils are, only to drown out our voices with mere letters, so they also scream about the church. But as for saying what, who and where the church is, they do not render either the church or God even the service of asking the question or thinking about it.[4]

This triad of what, who and where occurs again at the end of his treatment of the seven marks of the church.[5] The word "where" or "who" recurs throughout the text as each of the seven marks is introduced. This theme of "where" is both at the beginning and end of the text and also winds its way throughout the text.

One shrine and seven relics

Accompanying the seven instances of "where" in "On the Councils and the Church" is a description of what has often been called the marks of the church. These seven "marks" (translated as "spiritual possessions" in the American Edition) are identified in the German text with *Heiligthum* (in the first instance alone) and *Heilthum* (in all seven instances, including the first), which can be rendered as "shrine" and "relic" respectively.[6] The reader is invited to imagine entering a shrine, wherein seven relics are visited, the first being an image of the shrine itself. The text clearly moves the readers from place to place, wherein they see the following relics: the Word, baptism, communion, the keys, the call of ministers, prayer and the holy cross. In what follows, I join in this pilgrimage imagining how Luther's construal of the contours of the church might inform our own.

The Word of God

First, Christians have received the Word of God—*das hohe heubtheiligthum* or the "high and principal shrine." For Luther and Lutherans, the Word is the place where we begin. Yet, what do we understand "Word" to be? What is at the heart of the phenomenon of speech?

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[4] *LW* 41, 143; *WA* 50: 624, 8: " …was doch, wer doch, wo doch die Kirche sei…"
[5] *LW* 41, 167; *WA* 50: 644, 1: "… was, wo, und wer sie sei, die heilige Christliche Kirche…"
[6] *LW* 41, 149, fn 385.

During my sabbatical, some years ago, I visited a number of indigenous people under the aegis of the research question, What might Christians learn from indigenous spiritualties and worldviews? Upon hearing my question, more than a few First Nations interlocutors expressed pleasant surprise. Their experience of Christians was one of people who like to talk a lot, who have a lot to say and who are not very interested in listening. Lutherans might ponder such a response for a time, and then revisit and revise their understanding of a theology of the Word, recalling that hearing, and indeed silence, are part and parcel of speech proper. Without the space that makes hearing consonants and vowels possible, speech is a cacophonous chaos. The shrine of the word invites us to listen again, to be silent, to be people who listen and hear more than they talk.

Baptism

Baptism is described as a "*köstlich heilthum*"[7] or a costly relic. Luther affirms that where "you see this sign you may know that the church, or the holy Christian people, must surely be present."[8] It is not insignificant that Luther locates baptism immediately after the Word. Lutherans have a somewhat particular ecclesial role to play in pointing to the bath. Luther, here, presses the practice of baptism in an interesting direction when he notes:

> Indeed, you should not even pay attention to who baptizes, for baptism does not belong to the baptizer, nor is it given to him, but it belongs to the baptized.[9]

This strategy is repeated throughout the text. Ministers do not own what they give away. It belongs to the receiver. Likewise, the church in mission does not own what it passes on to those it encounters.

While we were visiting Six Nations, Bishop Mark MacDonald, the indigenous bishop of the Anglican Church of Canada, gave us an example of a Christian practice shared and then contextualized by gospel recipients. He spoke to us of the manner in which indigenous people across North America took the Christian practice of hymn singing and enculturated it in what became very popular gospel songfests. Attendance at these practices led by laity superseded morning prayer and Eucharist services in many communities, much to the consternation of the clergy. Bishop MacDonald noted how this gift of song, once given, is beyond the purview of the "givers."

[7] *WA* 50:630, 24.
[8] *LW* 41, 151; *WA* 50:630, 27–28.
[9] *LW* 41, 151; *WA* 50:631, 1–2.

The church, of course, knows well the seductive power of being a procurer of grace, of serving up salvation as if it were ours to dole out. Luther's treatment of baptism in this instance precludes such self-importance.

Sacrament of the altar

Luther tells us that the church can be found there where the sacrament of the altar is celebrated. This relic is, in like manner to baptism, transferred from its minister to its recipient. Luther highlights the unconditional nature of grace in his treatment of the altar, focusing on the character of the gift that is for the sake of the recipient.

The church, then, needs to be aware that it is holy because of what it receives, rather than because of what it is. The important thing about such a reception, however, is that each relic is an event of the church rather than a characteristic of the church.[10] "Where" cannot be nailed down—a faithful church is a church on the move. In fact, the motif of moving from relic to relic within the shrine—with the accompanying image of pilgrimage—positively demands the same. At one level, this is rather surprising, given Luther's more common disparagement of pilgrimage. Luther, however, is not unequivocal on this front. A pilgrimage properly taken is not to be looked down upon.[11] Such a pilgrimage is one in which we travel through the saints' hearts rather than tombs.[12] A pilgrimage properly taken, then, reframes the relic as something that is not held onto but entered into. Communion, as a relic, not only enters us, but we enter it to the end that we become what we eat: relics that exist as signs that the church is here, and now.

Keys

The church is also found there where the keys are exercised both privately and publicly. Luther names here the evangelical commitment to keeping confession and absolution alive and well in the Lutheran community. Luther notes that it is affirmed that God's people are there where one sees sins forgiven or reproved. It is important to underscore that his concern to contextualize this understanding of the keys is in contrast to his understanding of the practices of the papal church. In this section, he critiques the papal

[10] See Vítor Westhelle, *The Church Event: Call and Challenge of a Church Protestant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).
[11] *LW* 14, 6.
[12] Ibid.

propensity to meddle in the state. In so doing, he critiques the sense of entitlement infecting the church after the Constantine era: an enduring infection.

On our trip to Six Nations, we first stopped at the Mohawk Chapel, an important historic church that was established to provide ministry, by the Anglican church, to the people of the Iroquois Confederacy, which grew to be the Six Nations of the Grand River. We heard a bit about the important and earnest early work of the Anglican church in this area, and then travelled from there a few hundred meters north to the Brantford Mohawk Institute. This boarding, or residential, school has a storied history, which took an especially tragic turn in 1883, when the then Prime Minister, John A. MacDonald, moved a bill authorizing the creation of three residential schools in Canada. The *modus operandi* was drastic: remove children from their families and place them in institutions where speaking their language would result in punishment, and their indigenous wisdom and religious traditions would be replaced by the gospel, deemed to be the religion of civilization.[13] In order to facilitate this project, the government enlisted the churches, who not only did not question the project, but eagerly embraced it. Churches, it seems, are too often like other organizations in coveting power, or proximity to power. At the end of the nineteenth century, such power came to the established churches—Roman Catholic and Protestant both— on a silver platter. In hindsight, we recognize this to be a tragic moment of failure in the history of the church.

History cannot be reversed, but it can be confessed. The Canadian government did exactly that on 11 June 2008.[14] The churches have also issued apologies and bear witness in their confession that the church that values entitlement chooses the wide gate and the easy road that leads to destruction.[15] The relic of the keys reminds us of another way that takes us there where we need to be.

Consecration, call and office

Luther next tells us that the church is found there where the practice of consecrating or calling ministers and establishing offices for the administration of the gospel is evident. The energy spent on this relic is remarkable and speaks clearly of an open wound in the relationship—or lack thereof—between the communities of the Reformation movement and those of the Roman church. Luther's indictment of the papal church

[13] Cf. "They Came for the Children," at **http://www.attendancemarketing.com/~attmk/TRC_jd/ResSchoolHistory_2012_02_24_Webposting.pdf** .

[14] Cf. **https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649** .

[15] Matthew 7:13, 14.

for its hypocrisy, for feigning holiness while its priests lead dissolute lives, is unreserved. We can imagine him hoping that a new day was dawning. Yet, in my context, the history of the residential school system reminds us that the abuse that oozes from entitlement crosses denominational lines.

As we visited the Mohawk Institute on that Saturday, our tour began at the large front door, where we heard about the intake process of the school. Children who entered the school were given numbers, by which they were known throughout their time at the school. They never again heard their names aside from summers spent at home. We heard about the corporal punishment enacted on children when they spoke their own language. We heard about the horrid living conditions; this was an especially hard part of the day. We went up to the top (third) floor of the school, where we learned of hiding places in the institute. Children cherished small spaces in the rafters that were inaccessible to adult bodies. They used these spots, when they could, to escape the physical and sexual abuse inflicted on them by adults, acting in the name of the church on behalf of the government. The generational effects of this hell are well documented: abuse, addiction and suicide rates are high among our First Nations, but still these people raise their head in pride, still they teach their children their tongue, despite the repeated assertions that theirs is a savage non-civilization and they are an unsophisticated people with no-culture.

Sadly, the church has a long history of undermining the legitimacy of others, of their giftedness and their ministry. This relic of opening ministry is a balm to the wound of clericalism and pride, and an invitation to act with grace in the world.

Prayer

The sixth relic that Luther mentions is prayer, public praise and thanksgiving to God. He notes,

> Where you see and hear the Lord's Prayer prayed and taught; or psalms or other spiritual songs sung, in accordance with the word of God and the true faith; also the creed, the Ten Commandments, and the catechism used in public, you may rest assured that a holy Christian people of God are present.[16]

There is, in fact, something altogether unique about the Lord's Prayer: given by Jesus to the disciples, it is the exemplar *par excellence* of the nature of prayer as gift. It is an instantiation of the manner in which speech is first

[16] *LW* 41, 164; *WA* 50: 641.

given us so that the condition of the possibility of talking—with God—is, in the first instance, simply grace. This prayer is always fitting, and its location in the eucharistic prayer, wherein it finds a certain affinity with the words of institution, invites us to imagine these words as an echo of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord who graces us with this prayer.

The sacred cross

The final "where" of the church is the cross—the final relic. To be the church, according to Luther, is to be where the cross takes shape. The cross shaped church is nimble; on its toes and ready to go to the place where God is in solidarity with the suffering. The church is the community of the oppressed because it is where the oppressed are; in solidarity with the sidelined it is itself sidelined. My colleague, Mary (Joy) Philip, writes,

> By staying within our comfort zones, within our skin, we preserve ourselves, and at the same time deprive ourselves of experiencing novelty. Margins are the playgrounds of danger, death and menace. … Yes, the step that you take across the margin is risky, but it is precisely in taking this risk that you experience the eschaton.[17]

The church that is nimble has no pretensions for worldly power because its very boast is the cross; its delight is folly to the world. The cross is the last word and the first word just as the Word is first and last a word of the cross. A theology of the cross illumines the church at every turn.[18] We look now to the *Book of Concord* to consider this illumination.

The *Book of Concord*

"The Augsburg Confession (1530)"

In the *Book of Concord*, ecclesiology comes under discussion immediately after its treatment of "Justification." In section V we read (German text),

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[17] Mary Philip, "The Space in Between Spaces: The Church as Prophetic Pest/Parasite," in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.) *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections. Theology in the Life of the Church*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), 96.
[18] Timothy Wengert and Gordon Lathrop, *Christian Assembly: Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 106.

> To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel.[19]

We note that that this article attends to the "where and when" of the church, pointing to the manner in which the Holy Spirit animates this gathering. This reminds us again of the event nature of the church. Further treatments of the church are found in Articles VII and VIII, where we read that the church simply must and so will remain for all times and it is noted that agreement on ceremonies is not a mark of the church or its unity.[20]

Timothy Wengert's observation that Articles XXI through XXVIII in the "Confessio Augustana" were the only ones originally enumerated and preceded by a rhetorically complete text, which outlined the non-negotiable articulation of Christian confession, is apt here.[21] The definition of the church is part of a systemic whole that finds its focus in the gracious act of the liberating God. In a sense, a fuller treatment of the church awaited the later articulation of the theme of ecclesiology in "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope." It was composed by Melanchthon in response to a request by the evangelical princes in 1537 to have a statement that more fully addressed the question of the papacy.[22] I now turn to this text.

"The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope (1537)"

If the second half of the "Confessio Augustana" was meant to articulate an incipient understanding of ministry by the emerging evangelical confession,[23] we have in the treatise a more fully developed statement of what the church might look like, yet from an over-against perspective: this church will not locate its identity in a pope who exercises tyrannical power and feigns primacy.[24] We read,

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[19] *Book of Concord*, op. cit. (note 1), 40 (AC V.1–4).

[20] *Book of Concord*, op. cit. (note 1) 42 (AC VII.3): "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere." (German text)

[21] Wengert and Lathorp, op. cit. (note 18), 55.

[22] *Book of Concord*, op. cit. (note 1), 329.

[23] Wengert and Lathrop, op. cit. (note 18), 56.

[24] Of special importance for our study is the document's observation that lordship among the apostles was forbidden and that there was to be no preeminence among servants. The very office of the pope is the denial of these conditions and this error results in an exercise of power that is a tyrannical Lordship and primacy that is entitled. The antithesis of these,

> The bishop of Rome claims to be superior by divine right to all bishops and pastors. In addition, he claims to possess by divine right the power of both swords, that is, the authority to confer and transfer royal authority. Third, he states that it is necessary for salvation to believe these things.[25]

Host versus Lord

From the first of these three critiques, it is clear that the evangelical community has had its fill of papal protestations against their legitimacy on the basis of their severed relationship to the bishop of Rome. Melanchthon first addresses this critique by underscoring that Christ forbids lordship among the apostles.[26] This is understood as a function of the confession of Christ as Lord, yet its reach is broader. Christ as Lord lays the groundwork for Christian identity as servants.[27]

The image of the Christian as a servant is of some importance to counter what the Reformers deem to be a predominant image of lordship in the papacy, and so it commends itself wherever the church abdicates its serving capacity in favor of acting as an entitled Lord. I have spoken above of the manner in which this has occurred among the historic churches in North America in their treatment of aboriginal peoples of the Americas. John Ralston Saul, a Canadian philosopher, comments on the manner in which the indigenous peoples acted in precisely the opposite manner at the moment of contact with Europeans.[28] Europeans in the northern climates of the continent would not have lasted the first winter without the gracious hospitality of the First Nations. Saul speaks of the motif of the widening circle to characterize how the First Nations continued to make room—to make space—for the Europeans.

The church, too, is given the vocation of making space. To be a servant is the vocation of the church and, in a contemporary context the language of servant, might correlate to that of host, a task more difficult

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then, can serve as the backbone for an articulation of the constitution of the church. The church does not exercise lordship, but has the character of a pilgrim and so knows itself as a guest. Paradoxically, this same church is a serving church in its refusal of preeminence and so finds itself to be host. Those pilgrims who are without a place are given a place in the divine Host and so are hosts by participation in Christ.

[25] *Book of Concord*, op. cit. (note 1), 330.

[26] *Book of Concord*, op. cit. (note 1), 331 (TPP, 1).

[27] To be a servant is, of course, a somewhat troubling metaphor if taken as the sole coordinating motif of Christian identity. Balancing this image is the Christ as child, friend and citizen.

[28] John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008).

than first imagined—especially in the global North, where hospitality has become commercialized. Perhaps now is the time for churches that still know something of this ancient practice of hospitality to teach again this practice to churches that have lost it. Of course, it is not only an art to be a host: being a guest is an art in its own right. This leads us to the second critique.

Guest versus crusader

Melanchthon asserted that the claim of the pope to have the right to both swords was spurious. It is interesting to note the manner in which the rebuttal of this claim is framed:

> He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession, or dispose of the kingdoms of the world. Indeed, Christ said, "Go … teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." [Mt 28:19-20][29]

Melanchthon relates how this mandate "to go" was lost when the church began grabbing empires. Instead of being a people on the move, the church became a landlord. Instead of being a pilgrim people, the church became a crusading army. The pilgrim is, of course, the guest *par excellence*. He or she is dependent on the graces of the host, and instantiates the life of faith: living with open hands and hearts and learning to be with strangers as well as learning simply to be the stranger. The church is there where the church is guest, where it is estranged and so where it practices being on the edge, knowing that one cannot be a host without having first had the experience of being a guest. But how do we resolve, or perhaps endure, the paradox of being called to be both host and guest? We turn again to Melanchthon's critiques, and in so doing imagine what sort of place might accommodate both guest and host for a pilgrim people.

People of the tent

Melanchthon notes that the pope demands acceptance of his power and primacy as the condition for salvation. It is interesting to observe, as he critiques this claim, that Melanchthon regularly juxtaposes the role of bishop in Catholicism with pastor, or minister, in the evangelical com-

[29] *Book of Concord*, op. cit. (note 1), 335 (TPP, 11).

munity. The pastoral motif brings to mind the divine Shepherd, whom John describes as the Word who became flesh so as to dwell among us (Jn 1:14). The word for dwell in Greek (*skēnoō*) has etymological links to the Greek word for tent, or booth (*skēnē*).[30] The tent is a symbolically rich motif in the world of the Bible.[31] A tent evokes the church as a gathering at this hybrid space; the church at the edge; the church located at that liminal space; partly in, partly out, and so always on the periphery. To be a church in mission is, of course, to be where the least are to be found at the threshold of life, where the boundaries between guest and host are blurred as each embraces the other as gift.[32]

Conclusion

It is, sadly, the case that too many followers of the way want to replace pilgrimage with permanence; a tent with a citadel, forgetting that God is their mighty fortress, not the church.[33] We are not a fortress; we are a people marveling and wandering in a living shrine that houses lively relics that we share with others in the guise of guest and host. We are invited to tread the earth lightly, healing rather than etching scars on the planet. We have been called to be gracious guests, to be generous hosts; to be a people ever pilgriming to and within the living Word.

[30] Paul, too, speaks of the body as a tent.

[31] Cf. Marianne Moyaert, "Biblical, Ethical and Hermeneutical Reflections on Narrative Hospitality," in Richard Kearney and James Taylor (eds), *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 106: "According to David Ford, a tent is also connected with travel between places. It evokes the idea of the "in-between," of moving in between 'spaces.'"

[32] Cf. Ibid., 107: "A tent is by design a temporary shelter. It is open to the elements, temporary, insubstantial, in short, it provides little real shelter. Thus it reminds us of our reliance on the will of God in a hostile world. Ultimately, it is with God that we must look for shelter."

[33] Eberhard Jüngel observes that Lutherans like to sing "A Might Fortress is Our God" stridently, as if this hymn is an anthem. He reminds us that this hymn was meant to be sung lightly, with a lute. Cf. "A Sermon on Psalm 46," in *Consensus* vol. 31, no. 2 (Fall, 2005), 98.

Understanding Ecclesial Communion: A Survey of Documents Arising from Ecumenical Dialogues of the Lutheran World Federation

Minna Hietamäki

Communio and the Lutheran World Federation's ecumenical involvement—general remarks

In the ecumenical context *communio*, like its Greek counterpart koinonia, is an elusive concept. There are numerous theological explications of *communio* and several variations of a *communio/koinonia* ecclesiology.[1]

Communio/koinonia ecclesiology became the most prominent framework for approaching questions regarding the church. The discussion culminated at the Faith and Order World Conference in 1993 at Santiago de Compostela. Since then, all dialogue processes between the LWF and its partners from the Western ecclesial traditions have used the *communio* approach as is already visible in the titles of the joint reports.[2] One might

[1] See e.g., Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology. From Foundations through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2008).

[2] See e.g., the Anglican–Lutheran *Growth in Communion* (2002), the Lutheran-Reformed *Called to Communion and Common Witness* (2002) and *Communion: On Being the Church*

also suggest that since ecumenical dialogues are about the unity of the church, they focus on one or the other element of ecclesial communion, regardless of the theological approach or focus of a particular dialogue.

Since the early 1960s, the LWF's ecumenical orientation has concentrated on *communio* ecclesiology.[3] After the official decision taken by the Seventh Assembly in 1984 at Budapest to establish pulpit and altar fellowship across the communion, the member churches were offered theological resources to support further interpretation of what it means to be in pulpit and altar fellowship. In the volume containing the theological resources, *Toward a Lutheran Communion: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship*, the issue of altar and pulpit fellowship was placed within the larger framework of *communio* ecclesiology. "The Lutheran communion," the study states, "[is] a vital participant in the total *communio sanctorum*, actively joining the struggle to realize more perfectly the communion given in Christ."[4] Whatever the struggle of the Lutheran communion may be, it is related to the churches' wider ecumenical struggle to realize the already existing communion in Christ. The 1988 study also relates to the concept of recognition and the process character of reaching "full communion" raised in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue.[5] There where churches acknowledge their consensus in faith and recognize that the other church actualizes the church of Christ they arrive at a "point of no return."[6] Once the recognition of the other church has taken place it cannot, actually, be fully rescinded.

In the following, I shall highlight some of the central theological elements in the LWF's dialogues on the [unity of] the church. The emphasis is on how the dialogues deal with questions of unity, diversity, contextuality and catholicity. These questions emerge in different forms in the various dialogues. The main question I shall try to answer is how, in light of contextual diversity, churches still recognize each other as true churches. What facilitates recognition and what hinders it?

(2010) and the Lutheran—Roman Catholic *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (2012). Also Fuchs, ibid., 251–52.

[3] Eugene L. Brand, *Toward a Lutheran Communion: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship*, LWF Report 26 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1988).

[4] Ibid., 82.

[5] *Facing Unity. Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic–Lutheran Church Fellowship* (1984), at **http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/l-rc/doc/e_l-rc_facing.html**

[6] Brand, op. cit. (note 3), 86.

Mutual recognition in the church as *communio*

The distinction between "enriching" and "church-dividing" differences is part of everyday ecumenical language. Rather than using the language of "church-dividing" differences I would like to speak of "ecclesial recognition" because "full mutual recognition" has, since the beginning, been the ultimate goal of the modern ecumenical movement. I also believe that the idea of "ecumenical" recognition" might add helpful perspectives to the discussion on unity and diversity—not only between confessional families but also within them. There is a risk that we tend to assume that there is always unity within confessional families and that diversity only exists between confessional families. Whereas this perspective is readily offered by the ecumenical dialogues, the dialogues themselves at the same time challenge this idea. From an ecclesiological perspective, unity is never possible without diversity. If we think that the church is essentially a reflection or a consequence of the *koinonia* of the Triune God, then there is no question about the unity of the church being defined by internal diversity. The phenomenon of a "church-dividing issue" can be conceptualized as "non-recognition." As the Faith and Order document *The Church* states, "Visible unity requires that churches be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381) calls the 'one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.'"[7] This is true both between and within churches and/or ecclesial communions. "Non-recognition" means that a church or group is not or no longer able to recognize another church or group as a church. The concepts of recognition and non-recognition appear to me to be central to the question of upholding ecclesial communion. I shall briefly mention some dimensions of "recognition" that might be helpful.

- First, recognition entails mutuality. This means two things: ecumenically relevant recognition is not one-sided but entails that both the one recognizing and the one being recognized recognize the other. Mutuality also entails an understanding of a certain sameness of the one recognizing and the one being recognized. If both of us are churches we share something, despite our differences.

- Second, recognition implies the identification of something as (truly) something. This aspect of recognition might seem rather simple, as in identifying someone one knows in a crowd of people. "Identifica-

[7] *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper 214 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2013), para. 9.

tion" also raises serious questions regarding what is considered truly "authentic." What, for instance, represents "authentic Lutheranism"?

- Third, recognition effects a change in relationship of the two that can be described as respect. Respect normally implies granting the other the same rights one claims for oneself. It could also mean respecting the other's "otherness." There appears to be a difference in how we respect diversity between and within communions. Sometimes it seems as if we associate internal relations within our own communion with unity and relations between different communions with difference. It tends to be easier for us to recognize the other in another communion rather than within our own

- Fourth, recognition enables us to appreciate or respect the other. "Recognition" creates a communion where sufficient values and norms are shared to enable us jointly to agree on what is commendable and what is not. In other words, recognition creates a solidarity with a shared value horizon.[8]

I would also like to distinguish between three (or four) forms of recognition. One aspect of recognition could be referred to as "primary" or "basic" and conceptualized as an initial identification and affective experience of mutuality.[9] It is characterized by a basic experience of sameness ("this is a Christian person"). This kind of recognition is already implicit at the beginning of an ecumenical dialogue. The second aspect of recognition is characterized both by sameness and by otherness. It is more cognitive than affective by nature and deals with the respect of otherness in view of equality in dignity ("I have dignity as a Christian and the other has dignity

[8] The concept covers at least the following of Arto Laitinen's categories of recognition a) "recognition-identification of something as 'a something' at all," i.e., identifying a group as "a church" even if in a preliminary sense; b) recognition of norms and values, perhaps even propositions; c) recognition of oneself as oneself under new, changed circumstances; d) recognition of others similar to oneself ("Christians"). See Arto Laitinen, "Paul Ricoeur's Surprising Take on Recognition," in *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies* 2, no. 1 (July 07, 2011), 47.

[9] This kind of recognition is exemplified by the churches' conviction that despite separation a form of fellowship still exists between Christian communities. See e.g., The Lutheran–Roman Catholic document "Ways to Community" which states: "despite the division caused by our sin, the Spirit has maintained through its work in our churches a fundamental fellowship which constitutes the primary precondition for all our striving for the visible unity of the church." "Ways to Community (1980)," in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (Ramsey, NJ-Geneva: Paulist Press-WCC, 1984), pt. II, a.

in being a Christian; both of us have the same entitlements and obligations"). The third aspect of recognition focuses on the particularity of the other, which gives grounds for appreciation and esteem. It assumes that we partake in the same "community of values" which allows us to agree on what is commendable and what is not ("a particularly fine Lutheran church"). In ecumenical contexts there is a fourth aspect of recognition, which is the official declaration of churches with juridical/canonical repercussions for the churches.

With this brief introduction to the idea of ecumenical recognition I wanted to introduce a concept into the discussion on ecclesial communion that is widely present in ecumenical dialogues but not methodically used in analyzing the challenges of (re)gaining or dissolving an ecclesial communion. When the dialogues ask whether remaining differences are church dividing they are in fact questioning whether, things being as they are, they are able to recognize the other as a church.

Anglican—Lutheran dialogue

At the global level, the LWF's dialogue with the Anglican communion has been active since the early 1970s; regionally, between the Church of England and individual Lutheran churches, since the early twentieth century. The dialogue has resulted in agreements of various degrees of communion (including full communion) regionally. The Anglican–Lutheran dialogue on communion has focused on how to uphold communion within diversity, with a particular emphasis on the questions of *episcopé* and episcopacy, and the developments around these questions have facilitated the ultimate agreements that have been reached.[10]

Main theological themes

"Full, visible communion" is the "normal" desired state of the church. If it does not exist, the churches need to strive for it. Communion is not a static but dynamic state. It involves various elements that might have different emphasis at different times and in different cultural contexts. The more cultural elements the churches share the easier it is (at the psychological level) to recognize and/or experience communion.[11] The crucial question

[10] For a similar analysis, see Fuchs, op. cit. (note 1), 290–308.

[11] "Our common tradition of spirituality, liturgy and sacramental life therefore provides a ground for the mutual recognition of our Churches, sacraments and ministries." "The Report

is how to facilitate the continuous and needed process of recognition of the other church as the true church of Christ, even when the church has a very different culture or exists in a very different context. The Anglican–Lutheran dialogues suggest that we should take a look at a wide range of different aspects of being and acting as a church and actively uphold joint efforts to create possibilities for recognition.

The decisive word in the Anglican–Lutheran dialogue is "diversity," and the key realization the acceptance that diversity is part of upholding and manifesting unity. This approach was already apparent in the Pullach Report 1972 that among other things discussed the sources of authority. The list of the sources is diverse, covering the Scriptures, creeds, confessional formularies, tradition and theology. The basic approach is to relativize the relations between the individual churches in relation to the authority of Christ, as the supreme authority,[12] and also to the mission of the church.[13] Also, the reached unity must be manifested in a visible way, which, according to the Pullach Report, means the "recognition of churches in the practice of intercommunion and in the reciprocal acceptance of ministries."[14] Some ten years later, the Helsinki Report affirmed that the sought after fellowship is "based on mutual recognition of churches, sacraments and ministries" and "would provide new opportunities for sharing in each other's life, worship, spirituality, ministry and mission." [15]

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of the Anglican-Lutheran European Regional Commission," in *Anglican-Lutheran Agreements*, LWF Documentation 49 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004), 77, para. 31.

[12] "If both Churches maintain their fundamental unity in the recognition of the same supreme authority, then all unsettled disagreements remain only to be overcome through fresh obedience to that supreme authority. By no means should they be allowed to remain, unchallenged and undisputed, as permanent obstacles to that growing unity which both Churches recognize as the will and command of their one Lord." Ibid., 23–46, personal note by the Lutheran chair.

[13] "Then we seek to identify the major requirements for carrying out the mission of the Church in so far as they concern episcope or the ministry of pastoral leadership, cooperation, and oversight (Section II). These are doxology, continuity, disciplined life together, nurture, and faithfulness to the goal of human history given in Jesus Christ. We show how the office of bishop in the early Church sought to hold local churches firm in the koinonia or communion of the faithful in all ages (diachronic catholicity) and in all places (synchronic catholicity)." In "The Niagara Report. Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcope," in *Anglican-Lutheran Agreements*, op. cit. (note 11), 90, para. 7.

[14] "Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Conversations 1970-1972" (Pullach, 1972)," para. 53.

[15] Op. cit. (note 11), 92, para 15.

Communion and episcopacy

Since episcopacy was the central theme of the Anglican–Lutheran dialogue it is worthwhile to look at how the discussions on episcopacy dealt with the issue of diversity. Questions of diversity are very appropriately set within the context of the connection between the universal and the local. It is recognized that while the bishop is perceived to be the "focus of unity," the mere presence of a bishop "will not guarantee the preservation of *koinonia* between local and universal; nor will the absence of such a bishop entail its destruction." [16] I highlight this because while the Anglican–Lutheran dialogue strongly emphasizes episcopacy as a prerequisite for the proper functioning of the church as a communion, it is still relativized as a formal criterion in relation to the ultimate goal it is supposed to serve. Another issue worth mentioning is that the Anglican–Lutheran dialogue does not function only at the level of theological imperatives, but shows concern for the gradual nature of changes in real life. Therefore, the dialogue documents list various areas where the churches do recognize each other, irrespective of whether the unity is considered "full" or not.[17] The "Niagara Report," for instance, speaks of "sufficient faithfulness to the apostolic gospel" on the basis of which "we can recognize each other as sister Churches." [18]

The Anglican–Lutheran dialogue, being one of the most successful ones in terms of creating actual changes in the official relationship between churches, has also made significant efforts in describing the meaning of "full communion."

- First, "full communion" is an ecumenical term that can be applied only to a relationship between two distinct churches or communions. The churches or communions maintain their autonomy while still recognizing the other's catholicity and apostolicity and believing the other to "hold the essentials of the Christian faith." A full communion

[16] Op. cit. (note 14), para. 53.

[17] E.g., the Helsinki Report: "We recognize that in each other's churches there exists a sustained and serious commitment to the apostolic mission of the Church. We see ourselves already united by baptism in thankfulness to God for the gift of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and for the sending of the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge in each other's ministries of episcope the fruits of the presence of Jesus Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit, in the offering of sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, in the reflection of the faithful love of God towards the world, in care for the nurture and growth of all the faithful, and in commitment to the establishment of the kingdom of God in justice and peace for the whole earth." Quoted in op. cit. (note 13), 107, paras 73–76.

[18] Op. cit. (note 13), 108, para 83.

relationship includes both an element of sameness, "our church holds the essentials of the Christian faith and the other one, likewise, holds the essentials of Christian faith" and an element of difference or distinctiveness that creates the need for recognition in the first place.

- Second, "full communion" creates a space within which the members and the clergy of the other church are eligible to have full access to the life of the church (e.g., access to the sacraments, access to episcopal collegiality, etc.), according to their status or position. This means that if you are not under church discipline you are free to serve in churches that are in full communion. For example, while the recognition of ministries is a prerequisite for the interchangeability of ministries it is not a sufficient condition, because the actual exchange of ministers is "subject to church regulation."

- Third, the agreement necessitates the existence of "recognized organs of regular consultation and communication" in order to "strengthen the fellowship and enable common witness, life and service." A life in communion requires a commitment to shared decision making and—this I find is also implied—subjecting to the jointly made decisions.

- Finally, there is a requirement to "commit to another in respect of major decisions on questions of faith, order and morals." This requirement is very particular since it specifically mentions morals, which have very rarely been the topic of either multilateral or bilateral ecumenical discussions.[19]

Communion and Holy Communion

One of the crucial questions in ecumenical dialogues is when dialoguing churches have reached a stage in their relations that allows for mutual admission to the Eucharist. The Anglican–Lutheran dialogue has found various solutions to allow some forms of eucharistic sharing, even though the churches have not yet reached full communion. The general logic is that

[19] Op. cit. (note 11), 76f, paras 24-27. An exception to this is the recent document on moral discernment by the Faith and Order Commission, *Moral Discernment in the Churches. A Study Document*, Faith and Order Papers 215 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013). There is also one document in the Anglican–Roman Catholic dialogue: "Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church," *Information Service 85*, no. 1 (1994), 54–70. See also Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra (eds), *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997).

an agreed statement is a vehicle of consensus that (i) "provides grounds for decision making about a changed relationship between churches" and also (ii) "provide[s] a basis for mutual recognition of churches and members and thus allow[s] some degree of eucharistic communion."[20] The positioning of eucharistic communion in this logic appears at first confusing. It would appear that "some degree of eucharistic communion" is based on theological agreement but does not necessarily coincide with the "recognition of churches and members." The difficulty might arise from the use of "recognition" without additional qualification. "Full communion" assumes "full recognition."[21] Even before this, the dialogue assumes a form of recognition ("partial"/"initial"?) that allows conditional access to elements of full communion, for instance "limited eucharistic sharing"/"interim eucharistic sharing." The conditions mentioned here are the commitments to the goal of full communion and to the process of resolving remaining questions and to work together.[22] All Anglican–Lutheran dialogue agreements have consistently recommended that both eucharistic hospitality and forms of limited eucharistic sharing should be practiced as part of the ecumenical process of bringing about "full communion."

Lutheran–Reformed dialogue

At the global level, the LWF dialogue with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (from 2010 World Communion of Reformed Churches) has until today resulted in two published reports (1989 and 2002).[23] In terms of theological development, the global dialogues lean heavily on local and regional dialogue documents. Especially important is the Leuenberg Agreement (1973). The dialogue resulted already in the first report to call Lutheran and Reformed churches all around the world to "declare communion with one another."[24] The later documents are largely reports of various forms of rapprochement rather than new theological developments. This dialogue does not deal with the question of whether or not communion is possible

[20] Ibid., 77, para. 30.

[21] Ibid., 77. para. 32.

[22] Ibid., 78–78, para. 31.

[23] The third report was received by the LWF Council at its meeting in Medan, Indonesia, in June 2014. *Communion: On Being the Church. Report of the Lutheran–Reformed Commission between the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), 2006—2012*, at **http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-communion-being-church**

[24] Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission Report, *Toward Church Fellowship*, 1989, para. 79, at **http://www.reformiert-online.net/agora2/docs/14warctd.pdf**.

but rather how to move toward declarations of communion and how to advance in communion and to celebrate God-given unity.[25]

Main theological themes

The Lutheran–Reformed dialogue's understanding of ecclesial communion is soteriologically framed and formulated in a language very familiar to the Lutheran ear.[26] The estrangement of churches that "see that their teaching of the gospel is substantially in unity is a denial of the very meaning of grace." In other words, churches that fail to recognize each other as churches and share life in Word and sacrament, despite acknowledging the teaching of the gospel of the other church, fail to fulfill their responsibility of witnessing to "the unconditional character of the free gift of grace."[27] The "estrangement" or lack of communion is manifested in mutual condemnations, the failure to declare altar and pulpit fellowship, the unwillingness to accept each other's ordained ministries and the failure to pursue the opportunities that exist for expressing common faith, for example joint action on witness, service and mission.[28]

Questions of unity and diversity are approached through the *satis est* imperative of "Confessio Augustana," chapter 7. The agreement on "Word and sacrament" that ultimately bears the legitimate diversity encompasses an agreement on the gospel as the good news of Jesus Christ, justification by grace through faith alone, baptism administered in the name of the Triune God with water and the celebration of the Lord's Supper as the proclamation of Christ's reconciling death, Christ's presence among us and Christ's future coming in glory. Diversity is an essential element of the "richness of our unity in Christ." Non-divisive differences concern "various understandings of polity, worship and mission."[29] A distinction, though not separation, is also made between the church-constituting elements (Word and sacrament) and questions pertaining to structure and organization.[30] Diversity, which "compromises full agreement in the right preaching of

[25] Jeffrey Gros, Thomas Best, and Lorelei F. Fuchs (eds), "Called to Communion and Common Witness," in *Growth in Agreement III. International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998-2005* (Geneva-Grand Rapids, MI: WCC-Eerdmans, 2007), para. 26. For similar analysis, see also Fuchs, op. cit. (note 1), 211–16.

[26] The *satis est* of the "Confessio Augustana" is quoted on numerous occasions literally (though without reference). See e.g., paras 26, 51, 52, 63, 68 and 83.

[27] Op. cit. (note 25), para. 9.

[28] Op. cit. (note 25), paras 3–7.

[29] Op. cit. (note 25), paras 56–61, 64.

[30] Op. cit. (note 25), para. 68.

the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments makes church fellowship impossible." This kind of difference is church dividing and "an instance of illegitimate diversity."[31] This concerns also ecclesial structures and organization.[32]

The Lutheran–Reformed dialogues also exemplify a strong commitment to social justice as part of being the church: "Our common understanding of the gospel liberates and binds the churches to common service and common witness in the world." The church is demanded to accept the common responsibility to struggle for justice, human rights, peace and the care for creation.[33] This call has a strong anthropological and soteriological focus. "Our common confession of the gospel challenges any separation based on race, gender, ethnicity, or class […] we are justified not by who are what we are in the world, but by God's grace in Christ."[34] Based on their understanding of the church's constitutive elements, the churches are called to defy any form of separation and gradation of persons based on any accidental features.

Satis est?

Because the dialogue takes the theological possibility/necessity of communion for granted the main theological question becomes the concrete manifestation of communion or unity. The dialogue addresses a possible misinterpretation of the *satis est* principle and emphasizes that ecclesial communion needs structural expression. In other words, the communion needs to be visible. Mutual recognition is the starting point and implies a commitment to "work together towards greater visibility." "Visible communion" is treated as a synonym for "visible unity," which, on the one hand, requires visible structures while, on the other, does not necessitate that the structures are the same everywhere.[35] The *satis est* principle and the priority given to the proclamation of the gospel are interpreted as presupposing the reconciliation of believers. *Koinonia* (communion) as "reconciliation" is integrally connected to joint proclamation.[36] The text strongly emphasizes reconciliation, the sharing of gifts and common

[31] Op. cit. (note 25), para. 52.
[32] Op. cit. (note 25), para. 68.
[33] Op. cit. (note 25), para. 69.
[34] Op. cit. (note 25), para. 75.
[35] Op. cit. (note 26), para. 28.
[36] Op. cit. (note 26), para. 29. The text also recognizes that the emphases on either proclamation or koinonia differ in various churches.

service as a realization of communion. These elements are also strongly linked to taking a joint stand and engaging in joint efforts for justice.[37]

Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue

The Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue is possibly the most prolific of the LWF's bilateral dialogues. It is specific in the sense that the sixteenth-century mutual condemnations had created particular obstacles in Catholic–Lutheran relations. One could say that the dialogue has revolved around two major themes: the doctrine of justification and its relevance for the church and models and forms of unity. In other words, the dialogue has been ecclesiologically focused and the understanding of the church is one of the remaining issues to be discussed in the very last dialogue document.[38] The Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue is also the only dialogue that has, at a global level, reached an agreement that has changed the official relations of the churches (*The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*). The first phase of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue focused on the gospel and the church and stated: "The unity of the church can be a unity only in the truth of the gospel."[39] In the second phase, the dialogue concentrated on the two specific topics identified as challenges for unity, namely the Eucharist and ministry, and the models and forms of unity. The third phase had an explicit ecclesiological focus on the church as *communio*/*koinonia* and once again took up the issue of justification.[40]

The doctrine of justification and the church as communio

The critical function of the gospel

Already early on in the dialogue a joint understanding was reached regarding the gospel and its critical function. Furthermore, the close connection between the doctrine of justification and the doctrine of the church has been affirmed

[37] Op. cit. (note 26), para. 30.
[38] *From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig-Paderborn: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt-Bonifatius, 2013), 41, para. 96.
[39] "Report of the Joint Lutheran–Roman Catholic Study Commission on 'The Gospel and the Church' (1972) ('Malta Report')," in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, vol. 1972 (New York-Geneva: Paulist Press-WCC, 1984), sec. I, a.
[40] For a similar analysis, see also Fuchs, op.cit. (note 1), 276–82, 317–36.

throughout the dialogue up to the most recent documents.[41] The agreement was used when dialoguing over traditionally divisive issues such as the ministry.

Discussions have focused on the possibility of mutual recognition despite differences. One of the issues mentioned is the current lack of reciprocity of recognition. Whereas the Catholics have officially denied recognition of Lutheran ministries, Lutherans have never ceased to recognize the churchly character of the Roman Catholic Church and its ministries, even though, in the actual sense, an official recognition is lacking. From the Lutheran side, the characteristics of communion, the exchange of pulpits and common eucharistic celebrations, follow from the reached agreement on the understanding of the gospel and its consequences on proclamation, the administration of the sacraments and liturgical practice. [42]

The joint understanding of the critical function of the gospel of justification was strengthened through the dialogue. For example, this can be observed in *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2006), which deals with questions of how the church remains in truth.[43] The Lutheran paragraphs explain the importance of a "proper center" by pointing out that apostolicity is a complex reality with a multitude of elements. Also, the apostolicity of the church is not merely identifiable by the presence of "apostolic elements" in the church but they need to exist in "a pattern of their right shape, understanding and use." "To reform the church was to re-gather the elements of apostolicity around their proper center, so as to recover an authentically apostolic pattern of the marks of the church."[44]

Hermeneutical focus

The early dialogue (1970s) emphasized the mediatedness of the human experience and the church's human experience. How we think about or theologically conceptualize the church is influenced by "the world and how we understand it."[45] Consequently, the document affirms that while the "doctrinal disputes" are being "progressively overcome," the church structures, especially those related to the office of the church, continue to create barriers. "The task over against the world," the document states, "requires opportunities for freedom

[41] Op. cit. (note 38), para. 216.

[42] Op. cit. (note 39), sec. III, f.

[43] The Lutheran World Federation, The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church. Study Document of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006). See e.g., paras 107 and 110 for Catholic explication on "The Gospel and Episcopal College."

[44] Ibid., para. 127.

[45] Op. cit. (note 39), sec. II, a.

and public opinion within the church." A structure that would "enhance the importance of the priesthood of all believers" would provide such opportunities and thus "possibilities for the removal of major barriers to unity."[46] At the beginning, the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue focused on the churches' joint task to respond to the challenges in the world and the ecumenical opportunities that the challenges actually create. In other words, the emphasis is on the "prophetic function of the church" and, as a result, on freedom and public opinion in the church.[47] Later, when other ecclesiological themes were added to the dialogue, the hermeneutical emphasis appeared to weaken. Nevertheless, the stress on the relevance of the historical, geographical and cultural contexts for the church remains.[48]

Church as *communio/koinonia*

In its third phase, the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue increasingly referred to the church as *communio/koinonia*.[49] According to the Lutheran interpretation, *communio* is constituted of three elements: first, the common understanding and confession of the apostolic faith (confessional communion); second, communion in preaching and the sacraments (pulpit and altar fellowship) which, by implication, includes the third element, the ministry of proclamation and the administration of the sacraments (recognition of ministries).[50]

Communio ecclesiology brings out an even more explicit emphasis on Trinitarian theology and participation. The church's *communio* is both a divine and human reality, which is anchored in the life of the Triune God.[51] As a human reality, the church "embraces all the diversity of the human world."[52] The description emphasizes the unconditional acceptance and equality of all members:

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[46] Op. cit. (note 39), sec. II, c.

[47] Op. cit. (note 39), sec. III, c.

[48] E.g., in "Ways to Community" this is conceptualized in a language of gifts: "[The Holy Spirit] renews and unites the most diverse forms of teaching and piety, life-style and law, tradition and rite, and thus guides more deeply into 'all the truth' (Jn 16:13) and into full unity. Thus life together in Christ requires individuals as well as communities gratefully to recognize their talents, to husband them faithfully and to place the willingly at the disposal of the whole." Op. cit. (note 9), pt. I, d 2. and pt. II, b 1.

[49] "Church and Justification (1993). Understanding Church in Light of the Doctrine of Justification," in *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998* (New York-Mahwah: Eerdmans, 2000), para. 74; op. cit. (note 43), para. 191.

[50] Ibid., para. 89.

[51] Ibid., paras 49, 63, 65, 75.

[52] Ibid., para. 53.

> Within the Church as people of the New Covenant all social, racial and sexual divisions have in principle been overcome (cf. Gal 3:26-28). There are no privileges nor any precedence of some over the others (cf. Mt 23:8; Mk 9:35). In the world with its struggles for power, racial conflicts and social tensions, Christians are therefore in duty bound together with all people of good will, to contribute to reconciliation and peace. Like their Lord they are to care for the poor and the oppressed, to seek fellowship with them and to intervene publicly on their behalf. As witnesses to their Lord who is "the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:2 5) Christians should everywhere be a light of hope for all "who have no hope" (1 Thess 4:13).[53]

The church's spiritual and diaconal realities flow out of its sacramental reality as the body of Christ; each member has a distinct way of being a member of the whole body, which is given to them, "each one is needed and all need each other."[54]

The Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue speaks of "unity" as the characteristic of the church and "community" as the corresponding form of life for Christians. Community is given in grace through participation in the life of the Trinity and mediated by the Word, the sacraments and the ministry. It is realized in unity in faith, hope and love and characterized by visibility, diversity and dynamism. The Christian community not only participates in the life of the Trinity but also in the unity of all believers for the sake of the world.[55] Communion has three distinct but interrelated dimensions: the dimension of shared faith (i.e., "apostolic faith"); the dimension of sacramental communion (understanding and use of sacraments); and the dimension of service (structures of fellowship, especially ministry).[56]

Elements of *communio* and ways to community

The Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue proposes partial and more comprehensive forms of union. Partial forms of union are inadequate in relation to the shared understanding of unity but might be useful as transitional states toward more comprehensive union. Forms of partial union are: spiritual unity (lacking ecclesial structures and visible organization);

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[53] Ibid., para. 55.

[54] Ibid., para. 58.

[55] Op. cit. (note 9), pt. I.

[56] "Facing Unity—Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship (1984)," in *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998* (Geneva-Grand Rapids, MI: WCC-Eerdmans, 2000), paras 55–149.

fellowship-in-dialogue (commitment to dialogue without actual unity); fellowship-in-action (focus on common service) and intercommunion (occasional eucharistic hospitality).[57] The document then enumerates a number of more comprehensive forms of unity: organic unity (characterized by the surrendering of confessional identities in favor of a shared identity); corporate union (characterized by relative independence of churches under joint episcopal oversight); church fellowship through agreement (a contractual relationship based on shared faith); conciliar fellowship (mutual recognition of independent churches of their belonging to the church of Christ); and unity in reconciled diversity (including a positive appreciation of confessional differences which exist in a genuine church fellowship; recognition of baptism, ministries, eucharistic fellowship and common witness and service).[58]

The models are not mutually exclusive and describe "dimensions" or "visibly different degrees of communion." The three "partial" models of communion represent three dimensions that ideally should coexist: spiritual unity, commitment to dialogue and joint action. Even together they lack the aspect of ecclesial recognition. The latter forms of more "comprehensive union" are answers to very different questions such as, Can we retain our confessional identity? How do we make joint decisions? What is our communion based on? They do not provide an answer to the basis or elements of recognition even though some affirm that the model implies recognition of sacraments, ministries, etc. It would seem that each dialogue has a particular "ecclesiological" agenda depending on the relationship between the two particular churches.

Sacraments

What importance should the churches attribute to mutually recognized baptism as a foundation for ecclesial communion? The early intuition of the dialogue group was that although baptism does not create full altar fellowship, it does push the churches to "examine the question of whether the former exclusion of certain communities of baptized Christians can be rightfully continued today." The Lutheran interpretation here emphasizes the function of the Eucharist as having been given to people so that they may be received into a fellowship with God. Therefore "[a] celebration of the Lord's Supper in which baptized believers may not participate suffers from an inner contradiction and from the start, therefore, does not fulfill the

[57] Ibid., paras 8–12.
[58] Ibid., para. 16–34.

purpose for which the Lord established it."[59] Later, the dialogue asserts that "baptism is the entry into Christian life in the sense of participation in Christ himself."[60] Excluding a baptized member from communion is a barrier to the salvation of that individual and therefore not acceptable. The dialogue does not discuss temporary excommunication as a disciplinary measure. Therefore, the dialogue recommends the promotion of the "consciousness of the basic importance of baptism for both salvation and fellowship."[61]

The theological *locus* of the Eucharist as the source and sign of unity has been given different emphases in the diverse documents. Earlier in the dialogue the focus was more on the joint understanding of the saving gospel. In the document specifically discussing the Eucharist, the Eucharist has a more central role.[62] While the Eucharist is interpreted in the wider sense not only as encompassing the consecration and consumption of the eucharistic elements it is still the Eucharist that becomes the focal point of the communion, being also the definitive event of proclamation: "The Eucharist as a whole, that is not simply the readings and preaching, proclaims the greatness and mercy of God. Each of the elements in the service receives, appropriate to its nature, a particular significance."[63] The argument is based on the communion of those who share the Eucharist and who, by sharing the Eucharist, are partakers in God's promise. At a later stage, the relationship is defined further; a distinction is introduced between the audible word of gospel proclamation and the visible means of God's saving acts. Theologically, the foundation of the church is identified with the gospel while it is recognized that "the proclamation of the gospel as the imparting of grace and salvation does not take place only in the preached word."[64] The Holy Spirit "through faith in the gospel" creates the church as a communion of believers.[65] Both the audible, preached

[59] Op. cit. (note 39), sec. IV, b.

[60] Op. cit. (note 49), para. 56.

[61] Op. cit. (note 9), pt. II, b 2.

[62] E.g., "As Christ gives Himself to His people in the Eucharist His life becomes their life, His Spirit their spirit. From the event of the sacramental communion with Christ arises the enduring form of life of the ecclesial communion with Christ. (…) The Eucharist is thus at once the source and climax of the church's life. Without the eucharistic community there is no full church community, and without the church community there is no real eucharistic communion." In "The Eucharist. Final Report of the Joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commission (1978)," in Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (eds), *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, Ecumenical Documents II* (New York-Geneva: Paulist Press-WCC, 1984), sec. iv.

[63] Ibid., sec. v.

[64] Op. cit. (note 49), para. 39.

[65] Op. cit. (note 49), para. 41.

word and the visible signs manifested in the sacraments are ways for the believer to access the gospel.

Ministry

The dialogue on ordained ministry exemplifies an interesting ecumenical challenge. While the churches largely agree on the relevance and theological description of the ordained ministry, they continue to disagree on the application of the description. For instance, they disagree on whether what is said of the ordained ministry can be applied to women or not. What is striking is that there seems to be an agreement that the question of application is very much secondary to the theological agreement and that known differences in the area of application do not hinder the dialogue partners from voicing their agreement on ministry.[66] The ordained ministry is discussed in the context of proclamation and administration of the sacraments but also the use of authority. The Lutheran side systematically emphasizes the ministry's dependence on the proclamation of the gospel and the administering of the sacraments. Ministry is understood as a logical appendix to the necessary signs of the church, i.e., the Word and the sacraments.[67]

One of the recurring questions in the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue is the question of universal primacy and its necessity or desirability. The issue here is how much importance is given to the expression of the universal church at the global level. The Lutheran explication emphasizes the interdependence of local churches and the possibility of having a ministerial structure serving this aspect of the church.[68] The texts show that both churches have a teaching responsibility that reaches further than individual congregations. The teaching responsibility is tied to the whole church's witness to the faith, under the norm of the gospel.[69] The greatest challenge is posed by the question of ministry serving the unity of individual/local churches. The Lutheran side emphasizes that the *locus* of joint decision making is a council.[70] The sense of Lutheran communion has gradually strengthened, also in how it is expressed in the ecumenical

[66] "Ministry in the Church (1981)," in *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (Ramsey, NJ-Geneva: Paulist Press-WCC, 1984), sec. 2.3.
[67] Ibid., sec. 4.1.
[68] Op. cit. (note 39), sec. IV, a.
[69] Op. cit. (note 66), sec. 3.3.
[70] Op. cit. (note 66), sec. 3.5.

dialogues. In the early days, the Lutheran churches were in the first stages of realizing what it might imply to function as a worldwide communion of churches. Later Lutherans asserted that the LWF even has procedures for making joint decision on doctrinal issues.[71]

The mutual recognition of ministries is perceived as an essential element of "structured church fellowship." There are also degrees of recognition; at the basic level there is the recognition of "ministries as forms of the ministry instituted by Christ." This must be further developed into "a common exercise of ordained ministry."[72]

The dialogue also discusses the issue of the binding character of church law. This is an interesting topic since it moves the discussion from the more abstract theological level to the concrete ways in which the church governs its life. While Lutherans and Catholics differ on the extent to which the church/ordained ministry has the authority to make legally binding decisions there is a shared basic conviction that no church legislation can be binding in the way that it claims to be necessary for salvation. This would equate church law with the gospel. The doctrine of justification is the ultimate criterion for ecclesial legislation.[73]

Service

Mission is understood as God's activity in the world in which the church participates. Both Lutherans and Catholics affirm that God also works in the world outside the church. Lutherans explicate this in terms of the "two kingdoms." This is interesting as an example of how Lutherans, in this dialogue, conceptualized the relationship between ethics and the church as communion. As citizens of the *communio sanctorum* the appropriate behavior of Christians is characterized by the radical love of the Sermon on the Mount. Because sin prevails in the world "it is necessary to have a social order which checks evil, and which despite evil guarantees the best possible life."[74] The instruments of the "worldly kingdom" are not particularly Christian; they "can and must claim universality and prove themselves in human society."[75] The distinction between the two kingdoms is not the distinction between the church and the world. Lutherans emphasize that the church, too, is "a mixed company." The church is

[71] Op. cit. (note 43), para. 288.
[72] Op. cit. (note 56), para. 92.
[73] Op. cit. (note 49), para. 228.
[74] Op. cit. (note 49), para. 265.
[75] Op. cit. (note 49), para. 267.

oriented toward the kingdom of God, is at its service and there where the kingdom of God begins here on earth. Still, in this world, the kingdom is "hidden under the cross"; the members of the church cannot represent the kingdom of God in an unambiguous way. Only the constitutive marks of the church, the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments are unambiguous.[76] In the church as communion two sides need to be kept together:

> On the one hand there is the reality of the powers of the kingdom of God, especially in the proclamation of the word of God and the celebration of the sacraments as the means of salvation, but also in the reconciled community of sisters and brothers as the place of salvation. On the other hand there is the interim nature of all words and signs in which salvation is imparted, but also the inadequacies in preaching, worship and the serving community as these exist in practice among believers. To this extent the church always lives on the basis of letting itself be lifted up into the coming kingdom, remembering its own provisional nature. The earthly church will find its eschatological consummation only when the kingdom has come. Then when God's kingdom dawns the church will be consummated and all hiddenness fully revealed.[77]

Recognition and reconciliation

The Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue asserts that when a fundamental consensus with regard to faith, sacramental life and ordained ministry (and the non-applicability of condemnations) has been reached, mutual recognition should follow. Mutual recognition is ecclesially binding and implies that the church of Jesus Christ is actualized in the other church. Mutual recognition declares the will of the churches to relate to one another as churches and to live in full fellowship (communion). Churches have acquired an historical consciousness that allows them to acknowledge the persistent character of theological diversity (both historical and synchronical). The church as communion lives in a state of reconciled diversity. Both the church and reconciliation have their foundation outside the church, in Christ. Reconciliation is brought about by the mutual recognition of the apostolicity of the preaching and sacramental practice of the other church.[78]

[76] Op. cit. (note 49), paras 300–301.
[77] Op. cit. (note 49), para. 307.
[78] Op. cit. (note 43), para. 137.

> Thus a *differentiated consensus* is the form in which separated churches may come together, that is, in agreed confession with recognition that existing differences do not impede mutual recognition of the present-day continuity with Christian apostolic beginnings and do not prevent partnership in the apostolic mission.[79]

Lutheran—Orthodox

The Lutheran—Orthodox dialogue started in 1981 and is currently preparing for its sixteenth session. The most recent documents were published in 2011. Since its beginning, the dialogue has been conducted within an ecclesiological framework with a focus on salvation and with the "ultimate aim of full communion."[80] The dialogues have proceeded in roughly speaking three phases: the first phase (1980s) dealt with revelation, Scriptures and tradition; the second (1990s) with questions of authority; and the third (from 2000) with the mystery of the church.

Main theological themes

The Lutheran—Orthodox dialogue started with discussions on Scripture and tradition. An agreement was found by taking up the Lutheran notion of *sola scriptura* as an idea pointing to the divine revelation through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, which the Orthodox would articulate as "the Holy Tradition of the church."[81] The dialogues thus sought to look for convergences in the fundamental aspects of the authentic church. The dialogues then continued to discuss other aspects of authority in the church, including the ecumenical councils and authoritative dogmatic teaching on salvation.[82]

The Lutheran–Orthodox dialogue refers to the church first and foremost as a *mysterion* within which the *mysteria* (or sacraments) exist as means of salvation. It continues to describe the Word of God in its various theological contexts (Trinitarian *logos*, Jesus Christ as Savior, Christ as the incarnate subject of *mysteria*/sacraments) and to affirm the church's

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[79] Op. cit. (note 43), para. 138.

[80] *Report of the Lutheran–Orthodox Joint Commission* (Espoo, 1981), LWF, Executive Committee Minutes, 1982, exhibit 10.1.1., sec. 1.

[81] *Scripture and Tradition*. 4th Plenary (Crete, 1987), para. 11.

[82] *Authority in and of the Church*. 8th Plenary (Limassol, 1995); *Authority in and of the Church*. 9th Plenary (Sigtuna, 1998).

Christocentric focus.[83] The Lutheran–Orthodox dialogue affirms the church to be the body of Christ and its existence in history through the faithful being in communion with Christ and with one another.[84] The eucharistic focus becomes stronger toward the end of the dialogue. The latest report speaks of the "body of the incarnate Son of God, which constitutes the foundation of the church"[85] and of the "Eucharist as the proclamation of and participation in the mystery of Christ."[86] Believers are made into one body through the sacraments/mysteries, especially through the Eucharist. The Eucharist also motivates the church's diakonia, mission and evangelization.[87]

Ministry is discussed only very briefly from a Christocentric and sacramental perspective; the ordained minister acts *in persona Christi* so that when "ordained servants of Christ carry out their sacramental ministries in the church, Christ himself acts as the true high priest and chief liturgist."[88]

While the discussion on *communio/koinonia* in the Lutheran–Orthodox dialogue appears to focus principally on the participation in the *mysteria*/sacraments of the church, communion is also interpreted surprisingly broadly. The Eucharist brings the eschatological Kingdom of Christ into this world and therefore constitutes a "saving blessing" for the whole of the inhabited world, including both the natural environment and human society. The Eucharist is a sacrament of reconciliation because it unites believers at the Lord's table; the eucharistic elements are received as gifts of creation, offered back to the Giver and shared with others. This emphasizes both our dependence on the Creator and the responsibility toward creation.[89] At this point there is the first hint of the still remaining obstacles of unity: the relationship between the ordained ministry and the Eucharist.[90] The enumeration of possible obstacles continues in the more recent documents of the Joint Commission, including differences in confession (in preparation of the Eucharist), fasting, the degree to which the churches need to share liturgical practices and so forth.[91]

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[83] *The Mystery of the Church*. 10th Plenary (Damascus, 2000), paras 1–5.
[84] Ibid., para. 7.
[85] *The Mystery of the Church*. 15th Plenary (Wittenberg, 2011), paras E.1., 2.
[86] Ibid., para. E.1. 6.
[87] Ibid., paras E.1. 5, 6.
[88] *The Mystery of the Church*, 11th Plenary (Oslo, 2002), para. 3.
[89] *The Mystery of the Church*. 13th Plenary (Bratislava, 2006), para. 8.
[90] Ibid., para. 9.
[91] *The Mystery of the Church*. 14th Plenary (Paphos, 2008), paras 4, 5.3, 7.

Unity and diversity

Conceptually speaking the church, by definition is one: "All those who are joined to him [Christ] must be part of his body and it is impossible for one part of the body to be separated from the rest of the body (Eph 4:15-16)."[92] Unity is also "the express will of our Lord Jesus." At the same time, unity is not in contradiction with multiplicity "just as there is no contradiction between unity and Trinity in God."[93] The dialogue then proceeds to examine the four marks of the church: oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity and how these are understood in the Lutheran and Orthodox traditions. The Lutheran explications give some insights into how the Lutheran side conceptualized the distinction between shared and non-shared elements in the church. "Oneness" is explicated by means of the "Large Catechism's" description of the church that is "called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding…united in love without sect or schism (Second part, Third Article)," [94] the *satis est* of the "Augsburg Confession" and Luther's seven marks of the church: the Word of God, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the ministry, confession and absolution, worship and suffering (discussed in Luther's "On the Councils and the Church").[95] "Holiness" is referred to when the church is perceived as the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*), as a gift of the Holy Spirit. In this world the body of believers is a "mixed body" where "many hypocrites and evil people are mixed in."[96] "Catholicity" implies universality of the redemption offered in Christ. It encompasses unity in doctrine and "plurality in the local churches around the world." This joint assertion is explicated in Lutheran terms as "church catholic" being "people scattered throughout the entire world, who agree on the gospel, and have the same Christ, the same Holy Spirit, and the same sacraments, whether or not they have the same human traditions (Apology VIII.10)."[97] "Apostolicity" encompasses numerous acts of obedience to Christ's command whereby he sends the church into the world. In Lutheran terms, these are being "in succession to the Church of the apostles, teaching apostolic doctrine, preaching the gospel purely, and administering the sacraments rightly." The text recognizes differences among Lutherans in relating to historic succession.[98]

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[92] *The Mystery of the Church*. 15th Plenary, para. E.1., 3.
[93] Ibid., para. E.1. 9.
[94] Ibid., para. E.1. 9 a.
[95] *LW*, vol. 41, 3—178.
[96] Op. cit. (note 92), E.1. 10 b.
[97] Ibid., paras E.1. 11 and 11 a.
[98] Ibid., para. E.1. 12 b.

The issue of diversity surfaces in particular when Lutherans and Orthodox discuss the mission of the church. The church's mission is realized primarily in local churches[99] and its message must be communicated in the language and culture of the people addressed.[100]

Main questions

- What importance do we attach to baptism as the initiation into communion with Christ and entry into communion with other Christians? What entitlements come with baptism and what kind of fellowship does it create? What is recognized when a person is recognized as a baptized Christian?

- Is the Eucharist the consummation or source of communion? How do we take seriously that the Eucharist also creates communion? How do we relate to temporary or permanent excommunication? What kind of non-recognition is excommunication?

- The Word of God constitutes the church. The sacraments are the concrete means alongside the preached Word but they receive their justification from the Word. Justification is the criterion for right preaching. How do we avoid mixing law and gospel?

- Some ecumenical dialogue documents operate with (partly artificial) "grades of communion"; would this be acceptable/beneficial within communions as well?

- How do we conceptualize the difference between the church communion as a theological reality and church law? How do we use church law in the church to communicate the sphere within which Christians are recognized with all the rights and responsibilities that come with the recognition?

[99] Ibid., para. E.2., 4.
[100] Ibid., para. E.2., 8.

What do Autonomy and Accountability Mean in the Relationships Among Churches?

Hance A. O. Mwakabana

Introduction

According to one definition, autonomy means the power of self-determination and freedom from alien domination and constraint. In other words, it implies self-governance and self-direction. Therefore, an autonomous church is one that governs itself. Examples of specific responsibilities that fall within the autonomous powers of any local church might include the following: choice of its leaders; initiating and running its own programs; setting its own priorities with regard to its ministry; calling and ordaining men and women to the ministry; collecting and disbursing funds. Strictly speaking, none of the member churches of the communion has authority over another church. The three-self formula of the life and work of the church—viz. self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating—is closely identified with the concept of autonomy.[1] As we shall see in the next section, in our specific case, church autonomy must be seen in the context of each church being part of a wider fellowship—the Lutheran communion. Interdependence among member churches is at the center of the spirit of communion. And, most importantly, we must recognize

[1] For examples of the biblical basis for church autonomy, see Mt 18:15–17; Acts 6:3; 13:1–3; 1 Cor 5:1–13; Rev 2–3.

the Lord's authority over each autonomous member church within the communion.

Accountability is more or less synonymous with answerability. It has to do with taking responsibility for or being answerable to somebody for something. There is, or there has to be, accountability at the local level. The church must be accountable both to itself (as a faithful steward of the various gifts God has bestowed upon it materially and spiritually) and to others and to one another at that level. Furthermore, there is accountability at the global level in relationships between member churches within the communion, and corporate accountability of all member churches as one body—namely, the Lutheran communion. Most importantly, in the final analysis, the Lutheran communion—as one body at the global level and as individual member churches at the local and global levels—is accountable to God.

Autonomy and accountability as related concepts

Autonomy implies accountability. This is especially true when we speak of Lutheran identity or the self-understanding of the Lutheran communion. While each member church is autonomous, autonomy presupposes certain obligations that need to be fulfilled. In other words, each member church is accountable—both in its own local setting and in its relations with other member churches globally (bilaterally or through the Lutheran communion). There is autonomy as well as accountability and interdependence between the member churches. Any lasting self-understanding of the Lutheran communion cannot afford to ignore or neglect this fact. In the Lutheran context, we sometimes speak of autonomy being relational—in the sense that no one/nothing can claim to be totally autonomous. In other words, no one can say that they are not in need of anyone else among the members of the Lutheran communion. Each church's autonomy calls for accountability locally as well as globally. Each member church is its brother's/sister's keeper.

We can speak of different levels of autonomy and accountability of the member churches of the communion. For instance, at the local level autonomy implies that each member church is, in a certain sense, self-sufficient in economic, administrative, structural and spiritual terms, as well as with regard to matters pertaining to mission and doctrine. It must nonetheless be emphasized that whatever level of autonomy the church in a given local setting may have, it is accountable not only to the communion at large and, through the communion, to all other individual members in the communion, but also, even more importantly, it is accountable to the

Lord of the church. In that sense, it can rightly be said that no church is completely autonomous.

While an analogy drawn between autonomy and accountability on the one hand and the human body and its various body parts (members), on the other, may not be the best way of illustrating the relationship between autonomy and accountability, it can be helpful here to clarify the connection between the two concepts. "One body many members"–each member of the body is, in one sense, autonomous, and must not be interfered with. That is, an ear is an ear and functions as an ear; a toe is a toe and functions as a toe; a finger is a finger and functions as a finger. The other members of the body have to recognize and respect the autonomy and specific role of the other member of the body whose functions and roles cannot be confused with those of others. Yet, at the same time, the various members of the body are not meant to work against the specific roles and functions of any member of the same body. The autonomy and specific role of each member of the body are related to the other members of the body. When any one member of the body fails to perform its role properly, the whole body is adversely affected. For the proper functioning of the whole body, each member of that body has got to do its part in an atmosphere of freedom and a spirit of accountability.

The same is true for the Lutheran communion as one body with many member churches. As the Lutheran communion, the members of this body are each, in their own right, autonomous; yet, this freedom of being allowed to be completely itself should always be understood and exercised within the context of constant awareness of the individual as well as the corporate accountability to and for each other and, above all, before God. What this means in relations between the LWF member churches is that each member church must be mindful of its serious responsibility to ensure that such autonomy is always exercised responsibly and with a sense of mutual accountability to and for each other and, above all, to God. In this way, therefore, no member church should ever use its autonomous status as an excuse for absolving itself from accountability. On the contrary, as we have already pointed out, autonomy always entails accountability. It is important, therefore, always to bear in mind the fact that talk about accountability without reference to autonomy or vice-versa fails to do justice to the full meaning of either one of these two concepts.

Privileges and obligations

Autonomy does not give anybody license to do as they wish in every area of life and activity. Every member of the communion is required faithfully

to preserve that which cannot, and should not, be changed in order to preserve our Lutheran identity. This is especially so in matters of doctrine.

Autonomy and accountability imply carefully to listen to one another as members of one family. Part of our being in communion demands that we listen to voices from different directions, even if they are sometimes not easy to understand fully. There is furthermore the need sometimes to accept advice from one another.

Other Christian communions have discussed the issue of autonomy and accountability even more extensively. For our present purpose, we may draw on the discussions within the Anglican Communion which are of relevance to our topic.

> Autonomy is not an end in itself. For Christians, autonomy is always to be exercised for a higher purpose. In a communion of churches that autonomy should be exercised, in the words of the Anglican Covenant, with "accountability." Indeed, without accountability there is no communion, and a church that is unaccountable has by definition ordered its life outside the communion of churches.[2]

Each member church must give account of its many-faceted talents as any good steward should.

> Each part of the Church is called to submit an account of its stewardship of the Gospel to other Christians….Furthermore, because of human sin, ignorance and frailty, it is to be anticipated that omissions, mistakes or distortions may occur in any account given of the faith. As a result it becomes vital that the account each part of the Church gives to other Christians of its stewardship of the Gospel contains the possibility of openness to correction. Communion in the Church requires this mutual accountability.[3]

The self-understanding of the Lutheran communion could be further clarified if clear guidelines or a code of conduct were to be provided for all members of the communion. These would serve as a friendly reminder regarding the privileges and responsibilities—locally as well as globally—of each member church of the communion.

If no such guidelines or code of conduct is accepted and followed up, also at the local level, it is difficult to see how, in practice, the self-

[2] Anglican Institute, at **http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com/2010/04/communion-with-autonomy-and-accountability**

[3] Ibid.

understanding of the Lutheran communion can be sustained. A code of conduct would specify a number of things each member of the communion would be expected to abide by. The Lutheran communion's understanding of autonomy and accountability implies that within the communion we encourage one another and provide guidance, also at the local level, in matters pertaining to doctrine as well as practice.

Concluding remarks

There is a decided possibility of each local church going its own way—either deliberately or because of a lack of proper understanding of the subject. There are indications that for a number of LWF member churches this is indeed the case. In their teaching and preaching, law, rather than grace, is given prominence; the life of the church reflects much more what human beings can do for God than what God has and can do for human beings. Moreover, for a long time now precious time has been wasted dealing with matters pertaining to morality and church discipline within the church rather than inviting people into the grace of God.[4]

It is important that the members of the communion keep each other informed as they journey together in the communion. This is to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings between member churches. Some member churches will move faster than others in some aspects of their life and work; others will move more slowly than others in similar or other areas of life and activity. The two paces of walking should mutually enhance our Lutheran self-understanding.

- Our Lutheran self-understanding must lead to new, broader relationships among member churches—relationships that recognize each other's autonomy and accountability. Autonomy on the part of each member church of the Lutheran communion and of the communion as one body at all levels has to be measured and regulated by the sense of accountability. To cultivate relations between member churches at

[4] One such typical example of wasted time and opportunities is the manner in which the majority of the member churches in Africa have been dealing, without any success, with a pastoral problem imposed on them from the past, namely the problem of polygamy, whereby sinners who have heard and accepted the Good News of free grace and salvation in Christ have been refused Holy Baptism and acceptance into church membership, at the very moment they were ready to embrace this free gift of God—the argument for such refusal being that a polygamist is not "qualified" for the gift of God's free grace in Christ unless, as a precondition, he first drives all his additional wives away and remains with only one.

this level requires patience and understanding on the part of every member church of our communion.

- A careful exposition of the connection between autonomy and accountability among members of the Lutheran communion must avoid any possible interpretation by member churches in their respective contexts that would present the two as posing a threat to one another. I would suggest that any further reflection on our self-understanding as a communion must include both terms and clarify the meaning of each and the connection between them as well as their concrete implications.

- Retaining the autonomy/accountability language in the communion helps us to introduce discussion on other equally important terminologies, such as polity and ecclesiology. Keeping the two terms, autonomy and accountability, together saves us from giving others, both from within and outside the communion, the impression that we are trying to create a super church at the expense of local expressions of the Lutheran communion. These highly sensitive areas of concern require of us in the communion to tread carefully. We walk together spiritually, not only with Christ our Lord but also through Him with one another—through prayer and fellowship in its various dimensions. The Lutheran communion as a global entity, and in the form of its various expressions at the local and regional levels, could quite effectively enhance its self-understanding by capitalizing on the concepts of autonomy and accountability of each individual member church or regional body.

- It must be acknowledged that whatever levels of autonomy the church in a given place may have, it is accountable not only to the communion at large and, through the communion, to all other individual members in the communion but, more importantly, it is accountable to the Lord of the church. And in that sense, it can rightly be said that no church is absolutely autonomous.

The Self-understanding of the Lutheran Communion: A Malaysian Perspective

Thu En Yu

Introduction

We live in a volatile world divided by race and religion. As a consequence, the church is confronted by issues that it is still far from being able to address competently. A Christian theology of communion is a potential response to the increasingly complex issue of diversity and pluralism in a world in which cross-cultural responsibility for the social, economic and political well-being of society could be encouraged.

This paper attempts to explore the relationship between Christians and non-Christians in a multicultural, plural context such as Malaysia.

In a multi-ethnic and multireligious setting, what is our identity and social responsibility as Asian Christians? Can our religious faith help solve our existential problems? Asian Christians need to reassess how their faith functions in practical terms and how it should be confessed. When confessing the Christian faith in a non-Christian cultural environment, it is necessary to reexamine and re-explain its main theological themes, such as traditional conceptions of ecclesiology and missiology. The biblical story of the Tower of Babel is inspirational in this regard.

The tower of Babel

This story is profoundly significant since it provokes churches to give due emphasis to the need to develop a pluralistic theology in a pluralistic society. Furthermore, it helps the church to understand God's plan for creation which encourages inclusiveness rather than homogeneity. In view of this, we should celebrate and bless our multiracial society, just as we celebrate the variety of beautiful creatures in the universe.

The builders of the tower of Babel were intent on "making a name" for themselves (Gen 11:4). Therefore they started to build a tower that eventually was to reach the heavens. They used the power of the same language for their own purposes. As the narrative tells us, God became worried,

> Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech (Gen 11:6-7).

Since God's plan was a mandate to redress this erroneous concept, their dispersion all over the earth was a sort of blessing, albeit that people would need time fully to comprehend this. However, to this day, the world has not learned the lesson of the tower of Babel. This meaningful plan, created by God, is continuously undermined by narrow-minded ideologies.

Unity and solidarity have always led to confusing scenarios. Churches and communities mistakenly assume that internal unity equals solidarity. In fact, solidarity has a wider meaning: it suggests inclusiveness and unity in diversity. In God's abundant creation, the various ethnic and religious communities are to pursue justice, righteousness and a harmonious society; this, in itself, is a blessing from God. Unfortunately, due to selfishness and arrogance, humankind does not accept disagreement and blessing becomes judgment. It is not that God punishes humankind. Rather, humankind has courted self-destruction by engaging in enmity and division.

> The right kind of unity occurs only when the community encompasses the concerns of the entire world and encourages difference and diversity to that end. Proper unity manifests itself in an ability to live together without conflict, oppression, and having common objectives in tune with God's purposes for the world.[1]

[1] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in Leander E. Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 414.

Nowadays, churches are afraid of internal division, secularization and diversification. They therefore erect walls to protect themselves, and continue to move toward self-glorification. Incorrect as well as inappropriate dogmas, theology and identity are akin to a sacred force or magical power that undermines the incarnation of the church and frustrates the entry of the church into society.

Christian theology should assist the community to shift from its preoccupation with subcultures to that of a mainstream culture, exploring every opportunity to promote the interaction between human beings. In addition, Christian theology should advance the pursuit of a harmonious society that promotes coexistence and unity in diversity.

What constitutes a plural society and what does belonging to one another mean?

In the following, I shall use the Malaysian context as the background against which to develop my thoughts on the theme.

The Allah issue in Malaysia

In Malaysia, the relationship between Christians and Muslims is intricate and further complicated by religious, political and economic factors. Christians need to look at the issue with an open and understanding attitude.

During the colonial era, the churches exhibited the following shortcomings:

- Lack of indigenization: the churches reflected religion in a Western cultural garb that was alien to local culture, thinking and social structure.

- Lack of a universal outlook: the churches confined themselves to the middle and upper classes, avoiding the grass roots and therefore not identifying with the masses.

- Lack of multiracial sensitivity: the churches did not address social injustices, racial animosity, or economic imbalances, and hence contributed to perpetuating communal hostility and economic exploitation.

The root cause of the growing tension between both communities is mistrust. Since the advent of colonialism in Malaysia, Christians and Muslims have rarely interacted or participated together in dialogue. As a matter of fact,

incidences of contemporary religious animosity occurring elsewhere in the world always kindle hostility and suspicion between the factions in Malaysia.

The rationale behind the Malay Muslim's struggle to find an identity is understandable. Before independence, the Malays were the oppressed group in society, having been economically exploited, socially alienated and not educated in cultural and intellectual matters. After Malaysia had been formed in 1963, the Malays suddenly became the privileged group, protected by the national constitution.

This change reversed the roles of master and servant. The Malays, who are now the ruling class and in the process of liberating themselves, are imitating their former oppressors, namely, the British colonizers who had held political and religious power until independence in 1957. Religious polarization and communalism have led to distrust and suspicion. The political system has further perpetuated such reactions. In 1988, the unfettered and indiscriminate use of Draconian laws encouraged extremist Malays to infringe on the human rights of non-Muslims. With the tacit support of the federal government, some states ventured to prevent non-Muslims, especially Christians, from using certain Arabic biblical terms, such as *Allah* (God), *nabi* (prophet), *rasul* (apostle), *iman* (priest), *ulama* (theologian), *injil* (gospel), *dakwah* (mission) and *al-kitab* (Bible). The ban was subsequently lifted but the term Allah is still restricted for other religions.[2]

Naturally, Christians and other non-Muslims objected to such legislation, arguing that it contravened the article on religious freedom enshrined in the federal constitution. The restriction was abusive and inappropriate since these words had been used by Christians in the Middle East long before the birth of Islam.[3]

Christians need together to speak out against such an infringement of the constitutional rights of religious communities to profess and practice their faith. Nonetheless, I believe that the church needs to be more involved in the analysis of acculturation, communication, customs, ethnicity and competing values of our society. A theology of communion with a strong community aspect would be a starting point for a new relationship or a new hope for national integration.

In a multireligious society, how then should the churches confess their faith? Is it through the call to being incarnational? As Christ's representative on earth, the church assumes its identity through its incarnational ministry: this is the call for churches to commit themselves to serve the

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[2] Thu, En Yu, *Ethnic Identity & Consciousness in Sabah: A Christian Perspective in the Management of Communal Conflicts in Malaysia* (Kota Kinabalu: Sabah Theological Seminary, 2010), 159.

[3] MCCBCHS press release, Kuala Lumpur (April 1988).

community. The significance of the church's role in society is realized in its members emulating the example of Jesus, living among the masses and leading lives filled with grace and truth. Just as Jesus identified with the people, the church also must exist in their midst and identify with people through love, concern, deeds of righteousness and truly becoming their neighbours. Through this, the church can then assert its influence as salt and light, demonstrating its identity as one of loving kindness and justice.

If the church today continues to insist on its "original" identity then it would lose its identity. Complacency would render it incapable of reflection and unable to grasp any opportunity to change. This would then lead to an identity crisis. The church defines its identity itself. If it considers itself to be "holier-than-thou" and becomes ego-centric, it will eventually be cast aside by the people. Therefore, the church must not have a siege mentality but, instead, "be the first to be concerned with the world's troubles and last to think about its own happiness"[4]—only then can it reconstruct its identity on the foundation of the incarnation.

The church needs a fresh theology to transform itself to being an outward looking church so it becomes "a place where people learn 'discipline through disciplining,' and where they strive not for individual achievement alone, but out of love for God and neighbor."[5]

The questions under discussion are, In a multireligious and multiracial society, is there a possibility to mold a common religious identity? What is the basis of the people of God? Is it religion, race, or justice and peace?

Nation building in Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries is primarily based on Islam; the national and state constitutions safeguard the Islamic identity, preventing Muslims from being converted to any other religion. In this situation, how can Christians relate constructively to Muslims? How can Christians and Muslims respect and accept one another without demanding that one or the other has to convert? Where do we find shared spaces to explore our distinct identities?

Double identity and Yinyang philosophy

Double identity or double loyalty in the Book of Ruth

In what was a closed Israelite community, the Book of Ruth was revolutionary. In it, God does not emphasize the pedigree of blood relations. Rather,

[4] A Chinese maxim.

[5] Robert N. Bellah et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 214.

the faithfulness of human beings to God's covenant and the fellowship among all human beings are highlighted. The people of God are more than a biological entity; they form a community of faith. All those who enter into the covenant with God are God's people. The emphasis of the Book of Ruth is an ethnically open worldview, an inclusive social ethos founded on God's loving-kindness and the faithful belief in God. This provides a clear direction for achieving harmonious relations among the various communities of the Malaysian multiracial society.

In light of her loyalty to Naomi, Ruth embraced Judaism, "your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). There are scholars who commend her for spearheading a mode of dual identity and loyalty in dealing with communal and religious relationships.

The Book of Ruth stresses that the people of God are founded on God's loving kindness and the faithful belief in God. They are rooted in the promises enshrined in the covenant God made with God's people. God promises Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3). In interpreting this promise, the apostle Paul brings out its profound theological meaning. He says,

> And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you." For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed (Gal 3:8–9).

If churches can follow the model provided in the Book of Ruth and explore "justification by faith" and the theological and confessional position based on faith from the macroscopic perspective, it may help to pioneer a new direction in establishing Christian identity. Such an undertaking enables Christians to be faithful to their faith and at the same time to be good neighbors, that is, to extend the blessing of God to Abraham to all nations. The goal of establishing "a common religious identity" is still very remote. Nonetheless, in the process of exchange and mutual enlightenment, a pluralistic society of mutual trust and mutual affection can be established. This is also the minimum duty of Christians in the community.

In the face of common social issues such as poverty, social justice, racial discrimination in a multireligious nation, all religious communities must share responsibility and together confront the problems. When each religion approaches God in search of solutions to the problems, the mind of the followers of all religions in pursuit of deliverance is the same. If Christians were to understand the meaning of the "intersection of religious spirituality," then they would not underestimate the significance of the other religions to people's daily lives. The Book of Ruth highlights

God's grace and God's inclusive essence, and thus dismantles the pride and ignorance of humankind. If Christianity manages to mold a "common religious identity" with other religions in its efforts to help solve people's daily problems then, all, hand in hand, can collaborate to promote communal and religious peace, unity and national welfare. Through this, the Christian faith will touch the spirituality of the people and the Christian identity definitely will be recognized by the people. This is how we should envision the Lutheran communion in the today's pluralistic Asian societies.

Yinyang philosophy

According to *Yijing*[6] or the Book of Change (*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; favourable 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. This life has given birth to a profound philosophy of life, that is, the philosophy of change which Laozi[7] describes it as.[8] 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."[9]

Nature works in a wonderful way. The four seasons impact the way in which we live and in the ever changing environment, many people lead a life of great hardship. In the face of the struggle to survive, humankind can do little but submit to the supernatural and pray for the unity between heaven and humankind, pursue geographical advantages as well as human harmony. Such cosmological effort leads to the evolution of the yinyang culture with an emphasis on adjustment and harmony.

History indicates that Chinese cultural life abounds with touching stories of struggle, survival, creativity and salvation. The Israelites achieved a similar living feat in Egypt and in the wilderness, guided by the Word of God and protected by God's loving kindness. Likewise, it is possible for

[6] Alternately as I Ching

[7] Alternately as Lao Tzu.

[8] Alternately as Tao in Taoism.

[9] Yeo Khiok-Khng, *What has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 22.

the Chinese to discover a theological powerhouse amidst the expansive cultural milieu that evolves out of the Yellow River basin.

In Yinyang philosophy, the whole 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 where each exists in each 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."[10] When yin and yang unite the universe is at peace and creation in harmony. These imageries symbolize creation and salvation in the Bible. This is indeed revealing in relation to God's transcendence and immanent nature which, in Asian culture, symbolize harmony and completeness.

In terms of hermeneutics, the Chinese philosophy of yinyang and the Bible can mutually interpret and enrich one another. With regard to the essence of being, the bipolar nature of yin and yang permits coexistence and complement; with yin in yang and yang in yin, it then gives rise to the "logic" of an entity of one-in-two and two-in-one in harmonious coexistence.

Ethnic minorities in Asia also have a similar constructive tradition of holistic or coexistence philosophy such as the *Muhibbah* of the Malay people in Malaysia and the neighboring countries. *Muhibbah* means goodwill or harmony—a cross cultural friendship, almost amounting to fellowship between cultures. This concept acts 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 who relates especially to neighbors. Thus neighbors are more than friends; they have a special relationship that cultivates a sense of fellowship, in short, neighborliness. Neighborliness is not confined to two persons, but encompasses the whole 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.[11]

The following example illustrates recent developments in the Allah issue. In January 2014, the Malaysia Bible Society was raided and hundreds of the Malay Bibles were seized by the Selangor State Muslim Religious

[10] Ibid., 21.

[11] Thu, En Yu, *Muhibbah*, *The Christian's Ministry of Reconciliation in the Pluralistic Society of Malaysia*, Unpublished Dissertation (1995), 7.

authority. The incident was aggravated by the Selangor Umno (the major Malay political party) threatening to hold massive protests in front of Selangor churches against what they claimed was an attempt by Christians to usurp the Muslims' exclusive right to call their God Allah. Things came to a head when supporters of the Muslims Solidarity Group were called upon outside the church on 5 January, a Sunday, to rally outside the church against Christians using the Arabic word for God. The highest authority of the nation kept silence. The very fragile and tense situation cooled down somewhat when Mahathir's daughter, Marina (the former prime minister's daughter) with a group of Muslims lent her support to the Christians.

Expecting agitators, the parish priest and members of the congregation were pleasantly surprised when some twenty Muslims, led by Marina, turned up, holding flowers, during Sunday morning mass. It was overwhelming to see the *Muhibbah* spirit, the cross cultural friendship, extended by the Malay Muslims toward Christians. Marina declared that the word Allah, "belongs to all. If we believe that God is one, then the word is for all," she said to the people outside the church. The spirit of *Muhibbah* reflects the true Malaysian ethos and can inform our discussions on communion in the Asian context.

Traditionally Asian societies are communally orientated. In such a society, the sense of individuality is more or less totally surrendered. A communal habitation is traditional and private space as well as private belongings are small. The "haves" must take care of the "have nots." In such a traditional community, belonging is a common identity and public property. This Asian cultural perspective can shed much light on the one holy, catholic and apostolic church in the sense of communion.

How is Martin Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms reconcilable with coexistence and the holistic theology of the cosmos and the community? For Martin Luther, the two kingdoms doctrine is necessary in order not to fall short of what Christians can contribute to peace, love and to living on good terms with their neighbors. To a certain extent, the two kingdoms doctrine can be understood as a parallel perspective to the double identity or Yinyang philosophy that acknowledges the need for the coexistence of good and bad and spiritual and worldly in order to ensure a common good for all.

Luther tends to talk about the two kingdoms doctrine in three different ways. First, building on Augustine's two cities doctrine, he distinguishes between those who serve God and those who serve the devil. Second, he speaks of two governments appointed by God to govern the world in which these two groups are mixed together: coercive government by the sword to maintain peace and basic justice in the world, and spiritual government by the Word and Spirit to gather men and women into Christ's

kingdom. Third, Luther often speaks of two realms, by which he meant the outward realm of the body and life in this world, and the inward realm of the eternal soul. To be sure, contrary to popular impressions, Luther does not believe Christians can live and act as if they were not involved in the affairs of this world. He believes that believers are to live in love for their neighbors and as servants of Christ, although in a manner compatible with their earthly vocations. It is Luther who says that a Christian prince is a rare bird in heaven.

Conclusion

God works through the human context. The church must attempt to understand the will of God within the social and cultural contexts of the people. A theology that ignores its context is an empty religious illusion. The cultural mosaic in Asia necessitates a paradigm shift in ecclesiology. Such a shift calls for the church to be more prophetic, to be critically aware of reality, to work toward the transformation of society and people and to bring about justice and peace through mutual acceptance and mutual uplifting.

The reformation of the church 500 years ago was a call for the church to rediscover the biblical meaning of ecclesiology and seriously to take into account people's local contexts. In the diverse societies of Asia, churches cannot avoid the problems pertaining to religious pluralism and poverty. Various major religions influence and mold the religious beliefs and cultural practices of the great majority of Asians. Therefore, the theology of the church must reexplore the significance of all religions in the plan of God.

Thus, in their encounter with other living faiths, Christians need to be open, humble and willing to hear and to respect the views of others. This dialogical aspect is grounded in the Lutheran tradition. For Lutherans, dialogue is not an option but a necessity, a daily way of life. Thus the Lutheran communion in Asia has to be interpreted in light of the concrete living situation and culture of the people.

Dealing with Difference in Communion Relationships

Elisabeth Parmentier

Lengthy theological discussions have taken place throughout the process that led the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to declare itself as a communion of churches.[1] While the Christological, ecclesiological and spiritual dimensions of the relational understanding of the concept of *communio* have been largely explored, we nonetheless have to analyze how cultural and historical realities interfere with theological affirmations as societies undergo transformation. In the following, I shall therefore focus on the current difficulty facing the communion: the challenge of so-called "socio-ethical issues" which appear as theological issues.

Ethical unlike doctrinal issues are sometimes said to be not church dividing. Nevertheless, the famous affirmation that "doctrine divides but action unites" refers to the testimony and service for others in need, not to decisions about personal and ecclesial life. Church history proves that since churches are not only theological but also political and cultural institutions, their decisions may be quite different as soon as the their actual life is concerned. In spite of this, the ecumenical movement has focused on consensus in faith expressed in worship since, so it is believed, an affirmation of faith is not troubled by cultural and ethical differences. Nonetheless, today decisions linked to the needs of the present are given priority over questions of faith.

[1] At the Curitiba Assembly in 1990 the new constitution was adopted. Article III reads: "The Lutheran World Federation is 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", at **http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Constitution%20EN%20final_0.pdf**

Throughout church history we have seen that synods have declared themselves to be *in statu confessionis* (or *in casu confessionis*), "in a state of confession," when they have had to protest against a situation where the confession of the real Christian faith is in danger and believers must oppose it publicly and witness to their faith (e.g., the 1934 Barmen Declaration). Especially in this case, matters of indifference (adiaphora) become very important because they could create divisions. This is now the case with such issues as church order or matters of church life, and the so-called socio-ethical decisions.

The question we have to respond to is, Why, when and how can a socio-ethical decision hinder or even divide the communion? Herein lies another difficulty: such issues have to do with perpetually transforming societies, so that church traditions and ecumenical expertise cannot rely on the methodological instruments that have proven effective in the past, but have to break new ground.

Can history help? In the first part of this essay, I shall examine two prominent controversial issues in the history of the Lutheran and Reformed churches—apartheid and the ordination of women—in order to establish how the churches have dealt with these difficult situations in their recent history and, subsequently, analyze which criteria should be considered in the process of discernment between acceptable and non-acceptable differences.

The second part of this essay reflects on the most remarkable achievement in 1984 when the LWF was not only on its way toward communion, but a methodology was developed to help discern theological questions, i.e., the "differentiated consensus." The member churches of the LWF came mutually to recognize each other, because they recognize the faith they share, the gospel of Jesus Christ, which includes "reconciled diversity." Since 1999, this methodology has clearly shown its efficacy in relation to the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. For instance, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* affirms insights shared by both parties and recognizes reconciled differences in expression and understanding. I shall then attempt to answer the question as to whether such a methodology can also be applied to socio-ethical choices.

From fellowship to communion: Is commitment possible?

Different socio-ethical decisions facing the LWF member churches

The constitution, adopted at the 1947 Assembly in Lund, defined the LWF as "a free association of churches" that "shall have no power to leg-

islate for the churches belonging to it or to interfere with their complete autonomy, but shall act as their agent in such matters as they assign to it."[2] The Lutheran Confessions provide the shared doctrinal basis (Art. II of the constitution). While the first constitution did not require altar and pulpit fellowship, which had not yet been achieved between all member churches, it mentioned the shared purpose "to bear united witness to the Gospel." This implies a shared understanding of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The relationship between the LWF and its member churches is a subject that has been regularly discussed. Even if the member churches are in communion, the LWF, as an organization, at that time had to remain without ecclesial "quality," existing only to foster these relations. Different situations have challenged this fragile balance.

Ecclesiological discussions and constitutional changes at the Helsinki Assembly

The problem of the member churches' commitment to doctrinal convictions emerged with the question regarding the membership of the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod (LCMS) in the USA. Even if, due to theological disagreements and a decreasing interest on the part of the LCMS, this church body finally did not join the LWF, it was the reason for an important ecclesiological discussion in the Theology Commission (with Peter Brunner). At the Helsinki Assembly in 1963, the LWF moved towards stronger bonds of unity. Two changes modified the LWF's ecclesiological understanding. Article III of the constitution, the functions of the LWF, was reworded to state that the LWF "shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority," and that the LWF shall "further a united witness."[3] This formulation expressed the strong need for a united witness and it implied that witnessing would be the task of the churches. The second change was the addition in Article IV: that the Assembly could vote not only for the acceptance into membership, but also for the withdrawal or expulsion

[2] Article III.1. of the constitution of the Lutheran World Federation (as adopted by the LWF First Assembly, Lund, Sweden, 1947), see Jens Holger Schjorring, Prasanna Kumari, Noman A. Hjelm (eds), *From Federation to Communion. The History of the Lutheran World Federation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 527.

[3] The preparatory paper for these changes was, "The Nature of the Lutheran World Federation: Commentary on Articles II, III, and IV of its Constitution," Document 4, Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, July 30-August 11, 1963, Helsinki, Finland (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1963).

of a church.[4] In the course of these developments, it became possible for the churches of the LWF to decide together to discipline a member church.

Apartheid in South Africa

The 1970 Evian Assembly was dominated by questions related to human rights and apartheid, and member churches were requested to take a stand against racial discrimination in their own and in other churches. The member churches' autonomy did not imply complete independence; mutual admonition should be possible. Given the fact that the member churches had, through their membership, accepted some form of fellowship, the black member churches asked for a commitment to a common church life. Here it becomes clear that a socio-ethical issue was actually a theological one: a stance against apartheid was not optional, but required by the Christian faith.

In 1973, two black churches in Namibia asked the LWF's Executive Committee to implement the Evian decision calling for a Christian fellowship to put an end to racial and cultural segregation. In the Evian statement on racial issues, the Assembly had decided that "in the Lutheran church members of all races should be willing at all times to receive communion together" and that they should oppose racism. With this request of the black churches asking for engagement began the path toward greater "ecclesiological quality" in the LWF. The 1977 Assembly in Dar Es Salaam adopted a "Resolution on Southern Africa: Confessional Integrity." Paragraph 3 speaks of a *status confessionis* because the apartheid system challenges the common basis of faith:

> Under normal circumstances Christians may have different opinions in political questions. However, political and social systems may become so perverted and oppressive that it is consistent with the confession to reject them and to work for changes. We especially appeal to our white member churches in southern Africa to recognize that the situation in

[4] See Michael Root's commentary in, Jens Holger Schjorring et al., op. cit. (note 2), chapters 6–7 (Ecclesiological Reflection in the LWF and Ecumenical Commitment): "The amendments to Article III on the purposes of the LWF on the whole diminished any ecclesial status that might be ascribed to the LWF, but they also made clear that the LWF carried out 'churchly functions' and that the Doctrinal Basis was a basis for LWF authority to judge and, in a limited sense, discipline a member church. This latter amendment certainly heightened the ecclesial status of the LWF. In the long run, it was the amendment to Article IV that was the most significant of the amendments (…) It laid the basis for one of the decisive events in the evolution of the LWF, the suspension of the white churches in Southern Africa," 227.

> southern Africa constitutes a *status confessionis*. This means that, on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system.[5]

It becomes clear that the issue at stake is the brokenness of the worship community and of "confessional integrity":

> Confessional subscription is more than a formal acknowledgment of doctrine. Churches which have signed the confessions of the church thereby commit themselves to show through their daily witness and service that the gospel has empowered them to live as the people of God. They also commit themselves to accept in their worship and at the table of the Lord the brothers and sisters who belong to other churches that accept the same confessions. Confessional subscription should lead to concrete manifestations in unity in worship and in working together at the common tasks of the church.[6]

The first argument is that through their daily witness and service the churches show that the gospel has empowered them to live as the people of God. Furthermore, it is also important to note the significance of pulpit and altar fellowship, which appear as criteria for the discernment of such a *status confessionis*: the gospel must be lived, celebrated and witnessed together. The common confession of faith had to be expressed not only in word and celebration, but also in daily life.

The 1984 Budapest Assembly endorsed the resolution of Dar Es Salaam with a "Statement on Southern Africa: Confessional Integrity,"[7] appealing to the two "white" Lutheran churches in Southern Africa and in Namibia which had continued to affirm apartheid, to reject it "and to end the division of the church on racial grounds."[8] The argument was that a wrong reason had led to a division in the church, and that "those churches have in fact withdrawn from the confessional community that forms the basis of membership in the Lutheran World Federation," so that the concrete consequence was the suspension (not the expulsion) of

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[5] Arne Sovik (ed.), *In Christ – A New Community. The Proceedings of the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1977), Statement 56, 180

[6] Carl Mau (ed.), *In Christ – Hope for the World. Official Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation*, LWF Report 10/20 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1985), 179f.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

these churches. It was also presented as an appeal to the other member churches "to clear witness against the policy of apartheid…and to move to visible unity of the Lutheran churches in Southern Africa."[9]

Even without a binding authority, the LWF had taken a doctrinal decision that gave the fellowship a certain "ecclesial density," not in bureaucratic terms (or in the sense that the LWF would be a "super-church"), but in the sense that the fullness of the Lutheran church expresses itself also in its relationship worldwide, as a network of churches. This was also due to the role played by the LWF in ecumenical dialogues and its expansion to other continents: the sharing of resources and providing development assistance were added to pulpit and altar fellowship. In spite of this official decision, the member churches of the global North could not reach a consensus whether there should be sanctions against white Lutheran churches in South Africa. On the other hand, it created a common cause for the churches of the global South and Eastern Europe.[10]

Affirmations of communion at the assemblies in Budapest and Curitiba

The Budapest Assembly furthermore adopted a "Statement on the Self-understanding and Task of the Lutheran World Federation,"[11] which insisted not only on fellowship in worship, but also in service, witness and missionary and ecumenical tasks. The LWF was then defined as

> an expression and instrument of this communion. It assists it (the Lutheran communion) to become more and more a conciliar, mutually committed communion by furthering consultation and exchange among its member churches and other churches of the Lutheran tradition, as well as by furthering mutual participation in each other's joys, sufferings, and struggles.[12]

The fellowship is clearly manifested as a "communion" and the statement reflects the reality that had already been achieved.

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Michael Root considers that "the consciousness of a common Lutheran heritage no longer possessed sufficient dynamic to define common priorities against a shared background and a common obligation to the present, on the one hand, and diverse concerns and interests on the other," in op. cit. (note 2), 73f.

[11] Op. cit. (note 4), 176f.

[12] Ibid.

Of more importance is the adoption of the revised constitution by the 1990 Assembly in Curitiba according to which the LWF defines itself as a "communion of churches."[13] In such a communion, the *magnus consensus* becomes a prerequisite for together making decisions. This, however, raises a new and difficult question, What does it mean for the communion if such a consensus cannot be reached?

Different socio-ethical decisions in other communions of churches

The role of worship expressing fellowship is even clearer in the same discussion about apartheid among the Reformed churches:

The suspension of Reformed Churches of South Africa from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

At the General Assembly of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa in 1982, the General Council declared

> The Gospel of Jesus Christ demands, therefore, a community of believers which transcends all barriers of race – a community in which the love for Christ and for one another has overcome the divisions of race and color (…). The division of Reformed Churches of South Africa on the basis of race and color is being defended as a faithful interpretation of the will of God and of the Reformed understanding of the church in the world. This leads to the division of Christians at the table of the Lord as a matter of practice and policy, which has been continually affirmed save for exceptional circumstances under special permission by the white Afrikaans Reformed Churches (…) The churches which have accepted Reformed confessions of faith have therefore committed themselves to live as the people of God and to show in their daily life and service what this means. This commitment requires concrete manifestations of community among races, of common witness to justice and equality in society, and of unity at the table of the Lord. The Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk and the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk, in not only accepting, but actively justifying

[13] Article III: "The Lutheran World Federation is 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," at **http://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/Constitution%20EN%20final_0.pdf**

> the apartheid system by misusing the Gospel and the Reformed confession, contradict in doctrine and in action the promise which they profess to believe. Therefore, the General Council declares that this situation constitutes a *status confessionis* for our churches, which means that we regard this as an issue on which it is not possible to differ without seriously jeopardizing the integrity of our common confession as Reformed churches. We declare, with Black Reformed Christians of South Africa, that apartheid ('Separate Development') is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the Gospel, and in its persistent disobedience to the Word of God, a theological heresy.[14]

Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE): Commitment to women's ordination

Within the CPCE the same process of deepening the bonds of communion has been underway. In some ways the process is easier to handle because the European churches share a common cultural background. Since 1990, the CPCE has been preoccupied with the strengthening of the bonds of communion and affirming that mutual recognition among churches and the mutual sharing of Word, sacraments, ministry and service should lead to a common orientation in the life of the churches. In 2003, the "Leuenberg Fellowship of Churches" became the "Community of Protestant Churches in Europe," a misleading translation since that actually means the "Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe." Even if there is no shared structure for decision making, these churches are very eager to deepen their commitment.

From the beginning, there appeared to be a broad consensus in favor of the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry. Even the Lutheran Church of Poland, which did not ordain women as pastors, had deaconesses and accepted women as preachers. But, for the first time, a church that already had a tradition of ordaining women decided no longer to do so. The Church of Latvia, which had been ordaining women since 1975, followed Bishop Vanags's rejection of women's ordination and since 1993 has ceased to ordain women, even though the Latvian church abroad has continued to do so. With this withdrawal from an already existing tradition, would this church lose or terminate its membership in the CPCE? While no *status confessionis* was declared by the other churches, the most recent document adopted in 2012 by the General Assembly in Florence about

[14] Edmond Perret (ed.), *Proceedings of the 21st General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Ottawa 1982* (Geneva, WARC, 1983), para. I.

"Ministry, Ordination and Episkope" insists on the CPCE's commitment to women's ministry (para. 58).[15]

One other situation was even more complicated. When the Reformed Church in Poland decided to ordain women to the pastoral ministry, the Lutheran bishops' conference of the same country issued a statement forbidding Lutheran believers to participate in celebrations led by a woman. This was clearly a transgression of the Leuenberg Agreement, which requires mutual recognition: the ministry of a female Reformed pastor of a church of this communion has to be at least recognized by the others. A visit by leading persons of the CPCE (General Secretary Wilhelm Hüffmeier and President Jan Kiviit of the Estonian Church) to the Polish bishops finally led to a new statement, affirming that even if the Lutheran Church of Poland does not ordain women to the pastoral ministry, it nevertheless recognizes the ministry of women of the other churches of CPCE.

For the time being, four churches of the CPCE do not ordain women to the pastoral ministry, but their membership has not been under review since they do not reject the decision that has been made by the other churches.

It is interesting to note that in this situation a personal visit to the church leaders was more effective than a general discussion during or a statement by the Assembly; and it was possible to remind them of the basic recognition of the other churches, even if there was disagreement on this point. The Polish Lutheran Church accepted to recognize that the ordination of women in the other churches was not in contradiction to the gospel.

Basic agreement and difference

To what extent is difference in socio-ethical choices acceptable?

For the LWF as a communion the question is to what extent diversity is acceptable and possible without dividing the communion? As the LWF is based on the model of "unity in reconciled diversity," using the methodology of differentiated consensus, can such a differentiated consensus also be reached in socio-ethical issues?

Different studies of church statements and decisions show that there are numerous agreements in Lutheran processes of discernment

[15] Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich (eds), *Ministry, ordination, episkopé and theological education*, Leuenberger Texte 13 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 2013), 81.

on socio-ethical issues. These agreements include differences, some of which can be disturbing, but should not be divisive. I will try to see where differences in socio-ethics need to be clarified, and will point to three remaining questions.

The basic agreement is to be considered as the premise for the three agreements that follow. It is important to establish how these agreements include differences. They are to be considered as a space for different interpretations and applications. The trustworthiness of these interpretations and applications lies in the churches and their communion, and the difficulty will be to define the limits of this space.

Basic agreement: The gift of justification

There is basic agreement on the Reformation affirmation that the reality and gift of justification are the basis for Christian belief and life, and that Christian practice and good works define neither a Christian nor a church nor establish unity. Therefore, socio-ethical choices are not divisive as long as they do not endanger this confession of faith. Christians, therefore, do not have to define "a" Christian ethics, but see how they can act according to their Christian faith in changing times.

Between 1987 and 1992 the French Catholic-Protestant Dialogue Commission, "Comité mixte," dealt with ethical issues and concluded,

> The aim is not to elaborate a Christian ethics but, rather, together to find a Christian reflection on and practice of ethics. […] The task is conversion for the communion's sake. This conversion implies the reception of the other while remaining faithful to oneself—including a possible correction—and excluding the immediate rejection of the difference of the other.[16]

The Comité mixte was well aware of the interaction between ecclesial tradition and cultural elements, and the statement strongly affirms,

> These elements are secondary compared to the foundational event of salvation given in Christ. Christ's death and resurrection for us is the criterion of church life, ethics and the engagement of Christians in society. The shared affirmation of the priority of this reference is essential to ecumenism.[17]

[16] Comité mixte catholique-protestant en France, *Choix éthiques et communion ecclésiale* (Paris: Cerf, 1992), 48.
[17] Ibid., 80.

But, it is not possible to isolate socio-ethical choices from faith (the Ten Commandments and Luther's explanations thereof are part of the Lutheran confessional commitments).

Three differentiated agreements

This basic agreement has to be developed in three differentiated agreements:

First, among the LWF member churches there is a fundamental agreement on the model of unity as a communion in reconciled diversity. The differences appear in the importance attached to socio-ethical decisions. But these differences are acceptable as long as the churches' decisions on such issues do not contradict and endanger the confession of the Christian faith.

The Comité mixte also sees this difficulty:

> A consensus in ethics does not necessarily imply the same action or engagement. A difference in ethical engagement is legitimate when our diverse options and actions openly refer to the unique, foundational event.[18]

The difficulty arises from the influence of cultural and contextual realities, because these factors cannot easily be related to biblical and theological affirmations. Behind every contentious issue lies the competition between the common confession of faith and the obligation to the present (as has been said in the case of apartheid). Sometimes churches feel obliged to follow their society's ethical decisions or the pressure of public opinion becomes so strong that they fear being left behind. Cultural norms can be so strong that churches cannot resist them, or they consider such cultural identities or values to belong to their Christian identity.

In this case, it is the task of the communion to ask each church to explain the theological reasons for its decision. In the case of the conflict about the ordination of homosexual pastors or the blessing of same-sex couples, those churches that decided to accept such blessings should explain the reasons for this choice, whereas those who refuse it have to explain why they consider it to be wrong and in contradiction to the affirmation of faith. So each new situation of conflict requires that we define how being in accordance with the Word of God is to be interpreted.

Second, there is a basic agreement on the necessity of common decision-making authorities at different levels of the church. The differences appear in the understanding of the interplay between each individual

[18] Ibid., 81.

church and the regional/global level of the communion. To what extent should the decisions of a synod of a church be binding for other churches?

For all Lutheran churches, the authoritative norms that give guidance are clear and defined in an order of priorities: the Bible, the confessional writings, the synods and the conscience of the believers. In some cases, the synods also decide to leave the decision to the parish councils, which makes it even more difficult to find a common position.

The Lutheran churches are still in the process of trying to come to shared decisions. While such a process was successful with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (*JDDJ*) because it concerned the core of faith, in the global world communions there is as yet no reliable and clear process for common decision making regarding socio-ethical questions.

It appears that in many ethical decisions either pastoral care (divorce, euthanasia) or socio-political realism (war, weapons, ecology) have been most decisive. A possibility would be to indicate clearly the normative orientation and, at the same time, the possibility of pastoral care like in the Eastern Orthodox distinction between the tradition and the *oikonomia*.

A second possibility is the way in which the CPCE decided to handle the ordination of women: a church that cannot in principle agree with the decision of another church could nevertheless accept this difference as not church dividing, especially if the decision takes pastoral care into consideration and does not contradict the common affirmation of justifying faith. In respecting the decision of the other church, the church that does not take the same decision does not break the communion and remains in a fellowship of faith.

Third, there is a basic agreement that the biblical core of justifying faith is the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ who cannot be separated from his engagement, his life and preaching. However, regarding the churches' interpretation of this event, there are differences with regard to the authority given to the sola scriptura and to the confession, when they are to be put into practice in decisions concerning human existence and life together.

All churches agree that no decision can be made without biblical discernment. But what does this mean in case of questions that did not exist in biblical times (e.g., euthanasia)? Hermeneutical questions are debated in many church documents. All Lutheran churches affirm the basic authority of Scripture interpreted through the hermeneutical key of the gospel of the liberating grace given in Jesus Christ. While this helps us to recognize the liberation and forgiveness of sins, how far can this be clear in ethical discernment?

The cultural background is definitely important and the most difficult area to deal with. Churches agree that culture cannot become a criterion at the same level as the gospel or Scripture, but has not really been clari-

fied how it can be interrelated with them. How is it possible on the one hand to consider biblical texts in their own historical past context and, on the other, argue with biblical texts on ethical issues confronting us today?

For example, with regard to the question of the blessing of same-sex couples, the biblical understanding of the couple can by some be understood in he light of the importance of sexual difference, of Jesus' affirmation of Genesis 1 in Matthew 9, and the Epistles' teaching about marriage. By others, it can be understood according to such evangelical values as relations, responsibility, trustfulness, faithfulness, which are not dependent on gender. Both positions can be argued using the same biblical texts.

Sometimes, the deep divisions in biblical interpretation are supposedly linked to confessional or geographical contexts. But, actually, they are rather internal divisions, sometimes in the same church, between historical-critical readings and more conservative readings (and even these categories do not really fit). Today these models are even more complex. The churches have not yet found a reliable way to deal with these realities.

Is there a pattern for these decisions?

A 1993 study undertaken by Mark Ellingsen of the Institute for Ecumenical Research dealt with the divisive power of social issues. In *The Cutting Edge*, Ellingsen analyzes a vast number of church declarations from 1964 to 1990 on nine cutting-edge issues: racism, economic development, ecology, war/peace, marriage, abortion, genetic engineering, social justice, socio-political ideologies.[19] The author shows that churches employ arguments that are not characteristic of their denominational heritage.[20] This does not imply unfaithfulness of these churches to their heritage, because in each tradition there is more than one theological profile. Ellingsen argues that there is "a prevailing model" and "a supplementary model" in each tradition. So in Lutheranism, the two kingdom ethic would be the prevailing model, supplemented by the subordination of creation to redemption.[21] "Consequently, there is no reason to argue that the same theological differences should divide different confessional bodies when

[19] Mark Ellingsen, *The Cutting Edge. How Churches Speak on Social Issues* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993).
[20] Ibid., 137.
[21] Ibid., 142.

they do not divide a particular church."[22] Why ask more of the churches in communion than of one particular church?

Three remaining questions

What is the importance of socio-ethical decisions in the communion?

The first difficulty we should mention are the divisions that can occur within the same church. But what is at stake here is the mutual trust in the capacity of the parishes of the same church, and, to a larger extent, of the churches of the same communion to remain faithful to the gospel in their discernment processes.

It cannot be our aim to make one decision on socio-ethical issues that would be applicable to all churches, since contextual realities are such that certain decisions can have a positive effect in one context and a negative effect in another. The question is whether the churches trust one another so that, even if they consider alternative strategies, they are in the same process of commitment to the communion as a whole? Being in communion within one or the other church on the basis of faith means that each church is confident in its own and in the capacity of others to remain faithful to the gospel. Nevertheless, this trust must be visible through clear criteria concerning the truth of faith. The history of past decisions shows the importance of the common proclamation of faith, the sharing of the sacraments, the witness to the world, the service and the fruits in daily life. This process of discernment needs to be clarified.

When can a decision be interpreted as wrong doctrine?

The Lutheran churches agree that Christians are saved by faith alone. Good works are not necessary but this does not mean that bad works cannot destroy justification. If faith brings justification, remaining in wrong or sinful decisions could even destroy not only the confession of faith, but faith itself. According to the Confessions of the Reformation a sinful attitude leads to the loss of justification. In the translation of the Latin text

[22] Ibid., 143.

of Article XX: The Invocation of Saints of the "Apology of the Augsburg Confession,"[23] 2 Peter 1:10 leads to the affirmation:

> Do good works to persevere in your calling and to keep from losing the gifts of your calling, which were given beforehand, not on account of the works that follow, and which are now retained by faith. Faith does not remain in those who lose the Holy Spirit and reject repentance.

The German text reads, "Der Glaube und der Heilige Geist bleibt in denjenigen nicht, die ein sündliches Leben führen" (faith and the Holy Spirit do not stay with those who live a sinful life).[24]

What for some churches appears as a socio-ethical decision, made for pastoral reasons, is for others a theological matter, because this decision can destroy faith. For example, the blessing of same-sex couples has been approved by some churches in order to show that couples are accepted by God when they take seriously a commitment to sexual fidelity. For others, the issue is a doctrinal matter because the churches that bless these couples give a false teaching about the doctrine of marriage, and marriage is a matter of confessional witness in the Book of Concord. The ethical decisions are a result of the doctrinal affirmations. The churches that refuse to bless such couples do so because they cannot accept a blessing that leads to the destruction of faith and church. It is quite impossible to reconcile these two opposing interpretations and positions and it becomes a division about doctrine.

Who decides?

A further question remains: Who has the power to decide in a communion of churches? What does *magnus consensus* mean, within a church and between churches?

In view of the whole Lutheran communion the issue is much more difficult: a decision taken by some churches, or even a majority, should not become the norm for all the others: in a communion, churches that defend a minority position need to have the same voice and opportunities for expression as the others. In the event that some positions have been adopted by a majority, how can those who cannot agree be convinced to stay in the communion? For this reason, a real process of sharing the

[23] Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 237.
[24] *BSKL* 316, 23f.

difficulties and the possible reactions in a global communion has not yet been possible.

The communion will need to decide if a general position is possible and if pastoral exceptions are acceptable.

The call for conversion

Nevertheless, it appears that the importance of the conversion of all churches together towards Christ has to be deepened. In its famous document, *Pour la conversion des Églises* (1991),[25] the Groupe des Dombes, working on the concept of identity, distinguishes between three dimensions of identity: the baptismal (Christian) identity, the ecclesial identity and the confessional identity. The first is the basic Christian identity of the believer who accepts Jesus Christ as savior. The second is the participation in the life of the church, and the third is the concrete expression of this participation in a specific denomination. There is a tendency in many churches to focus on the denominational (and traditional) identity, suffocating the two others. This makes the participation in a communion of churches very difficult, because of the impossibility of mutual correction and enrichment by the gifts of the difference of the "others." But, actually, there is no better way than enrichment and mutual correction in order to find how to live together as the church. If the first identity is the core of the whole, all churches are to be converted, not to one another but together to Jesus Christ, and traditional and cultural decisions participate in rather than threaten this process.

[25] Groupe des Dombes, *Pour la conversion des Églises. Identité et changement dans la dynamique de conversion* (Paris: Centurion, 1991).

Faith, Culture and Power: Communio and the Church's Mind

Guillermo Hansen

Let the right one in

Since the 1980s the Lutheran World Federation has been grappling with the implications of the shift in its self-understanding as a communion of churches. The declaration of the Seventh Assembly at Budapest in 1984 opened the door to moving beyond the loose fellowship that came into being after World War II in response to the refugee crisis and the need to articulate a common voice in view of developments in the ecumenical world. Whereas a host of referents in the wider ecclesiastical and secular world were in place providing clear sociological and institutional criteria for the notion of federation, it is not apparent what the visible and concrete implications of a communion are. And, moreover, while the praxis of being a federation has matured into the theological affirmation of being a communion, we still live this communion within the structures and dynamics of a federation.

Ours is a soft, flexible and porous communion that largely hangs on the tethers of a declarative theological consensus enthroned by a huge pile of documentation and studies. Unlike other Christian expressions, Lutheranism never had the support of an empire, let alone a unified magisterium or a conference of bishops or international synod that coaxed, imposed or encouraged the development of a mind that could think in common within the ecology of the wider ecclesiological environment. As the confession of the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church indicates, the notion of communion functions as the horizon of the "invisible" church, which seeks to draw to itself the "visible" church.

Therefore communion belongs to a vocative or open identity that exists to the extent that subjects believe and hope for it.[1]

Communion is thus a horizon, a proposal, a theological and symbolic convention which has no material substance outside the minds of the actors who make up a group. The way in which we express this is by stating that communion is both a gift and a task. Its reality is virtual, yet one with a very strong causal power. One of the ways in which communion shifts from a virtual to an actual reality is through communication among churches, leaders, organizations, associations, agencies, theologians, congregations and members. In short, the expression of a mind that thinks in common but not necessarily the same. This implies a participation in the life of others, and vice versa. Communion exist to the extent that communication occurs, and in order for this to happen boundaries need to be flexible and porous to actualize an increasingly networked identity where participation in and relationship with the other is deemed central. When this takes place, a mind that thinks in common about the commons (faith) is forged. We shall return to this at the end.

I begin with this apparent connection between communion and communication (participation), with its obvious sacramental underpinnings, in order to pinpoint one of the predicaments that we face today, namely that of accountability between churches (or within churches, among synods and congregations) that share a fellowship in its symbolic order and a mutual recognition of its central practices (ministries), and yet seem to be following their own understandings or minds in response to variables faced in their contexts. This is particularly acute around issues pertaining to homosexuality, or more concretely, the admittance into the rostered ministry of persons living in monogamous same-gender relationships. Churches that endorse the latter are perceived by other churches (or by sectors within the churches) to be taking major decisions that apparently deviate from the set of norms that provided a template for such communion. Scriptures, doctrine or tradition are invoked in order to forestall innovations that are seen to jeopardize not only the communion, but the very essence of the church. Moreover, issues of an ethical nature that henceforth were considered to be of "second order" or pertaining to the "law" are now declared to be central for the unity and communion of the church. The American ethicist Robert Benne states that one could argue that, "the Christian doctrine of marriage is one of those

[1] Cf. Slavoj Žižek, *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (New York: Verso, 2012), Kindle Edition, location 2280.

central moral teachings that cannot be altered without threatening the unity of the church."[2]

Let us return to what preoccupies the family of Lutheran churches at the moment. The case in point is the resolution of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) that led to severing its ties with the Church of Sweden (CoS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). This estrangement cannot be reduced to the "ethical" issue of homosexuality, for the latter functions as a quasi placeholder for a host of issues ranging from cultural biases, economic interests and geopolitical developments to divergent hermeneutical responses and the disruptions unleashed by modernity; industrialization and post-industrialization; identity politics and the anthropological and psychological valuation of desire, to name but a few. Even though some of these factors will be mentioned below, I would like initially to focus on the exchange between the leaderships of the EECMY and CoS in order to highlight a short circuit in communication/participation. The documents indicate that the conflict is not only a matter of different opinions about a particular topic (homosexuality), but of communication as the power to participate in the other's self-affirmation.

In a letter addressed to the Archbishop of the Church of Sweden, Anders Wejryd, in December 2010, the president of the EECMY, Rev. Wakseyoum Idosa, expressed the following:

> With regard to the decision of CoS [Church of Sweden] on the right for blessing of registered homosexual partnership, earlier in 2006, we do recall that we had clearly declared the position of the EECMY with the message sent to you in our letter of January 11, 2007, and pleaded for the reconsideration of the decision passed, for the sake of the responsibility given to each of us, as partners, to guard the truth of the teaching of the Bible. As you may recall, we have also been discussing on how we could work together having our positions on this issue. However, we were not able to reach consensus. To our regret, however, the subsequent actions taken by the CoS in November of 2009 where the church adapted further policy on homosexual mirage (sic) and ministry practices which indicates that the CoS is continuing to pursue this decision *without considering the implication it has in her partnership relations with the EECMY*.[3]

[2] See **http://juicyecumenism.com/2014/09/01/churches-division-sex/**, accessed 9/15/2014. But one may ask: if sexuality and marriage matters have acquired such status, why not the global economic (dis)order?

[3] **http://kalin.nu/mekaneyesus2010.pdf**, 2. Authors' own emphasis.

While the language of partnership rather than communion is what is emphasized, here the point is clear. As an equal "partner" the EECMY claims its power and right to "guard the truth of the teaching of the Bible." The letter also briefly recalls the attempts to participate in the conversation of the CoS, ending on a note of disappointment in face of the fact that the CoS carried on with its own process without considering the implications for its partnership relations to the EECMY.

Two things need to be considered here. On the one hand we have the manifest issue at stake, the theme of homosexuality, to which we shall turn to below. Much more relevant to our subject however is the latent issue clearly reflected in the above paragraph, namely, the alleged disregard not only of the opinions of the EECMY on a particular issue, but the assumed selfishness in a decision taken by a singular church body. My point here is not to pass judgment, but to rescue and highlight the perceptual formulation of Idosa's letter as touching the very core of the problem of being a communion. What is implied is that communication is not just a matter of exchanging points of view, but of participating in the life and destiny of the other.

This issue comes to the fore in Archbishop Anders Wejryd's reply:

> The CoS has taken such points of view as yours seriously and we are aware of the ecumenical dimensions of our decisions. Our aim has been to be open about the process and provide information, in line with various ecumenical agreements…. We realize that some think that not enough has been done and that greater involvement of partners in the actual process has been expected. *However, it would have been difficult both in principle and on formal grounds for there to be direct involvement by partners in the process of decision making.* This also reveals an as yet unresolved problematic with discernment and decision making in fellowships between churches which is becoming increasingly evident in many ecumenical contexts. We have no intention of trying to push our interpretation on other churches.[4]

While there was certainly an exchange of information, the communication was doomed to failure since there are no organizational mechanisms that create an environment that presupposes the involvement of the "other" in the process of a church's reaching a decision. In other words, there is no way in which the "mind" of the EECMY can meaningfully interact with the "mind" of the CoS when their "bodies" (churches) pursue autonomous existences. Certainly the EECMY wanted to affect this process in

[4] **www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?di=789215**, 2. Author's own emphasis.

a way that presupposes a reactive hermeneutics that can be considered unacceptable. But the point here is that this short-circuit in communication reveals that to be in communion implies—among a myriad of other things—to "let the right one in"—to echo a popular Swedish novel and movie. It is to have the chance to affect the other and let the other affect one as a concrete actualization of a bond and relationship. This is what happens in a communion that communicates, one that is open to the influx of data and impulses beyond its immediate borders.

These epistolary vignettes clearly show the problem of declaring ourselves in communion while still practicing our federative template grounded in the autonomy of the church bodies. While communion requires a new dynamic of identity based on symbiotic communication, a federation is grounded in the principle of autonomy. There is no chance of developing a mind together. If anything, the case in point teaches us an important lesson, namely, that a communion is sustained by the dynamic flow of its communication that is at odds with the absolute autonomy that is presupposed by a federation of independent churches. If communion implies the acceptance of a new flow of communication, it also signals that power lies not so much in autonomy, but in the porous relationship with one another that allows this other to affect one's identity in a positive and constructive way. This is a claim to enact the power that comes with love. In this sense, the EECMY has posited a very important issue that is key for the Lutheran communion as a whole.

Yet this is as far I can go with the claims of the EECMY's leadership, for the selection of the "generative theme" around which this participation is tested leaves a lot to be desired. I am very supportive of the position taken by the CoS as well as the ELCA both in what pertains to bylaws regarding ministerial functions and their sensitive reading of a cultural and social context that has mutated our hermeneutical coordinates in relation to sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular. Still, as we read the exchange above, the question remains, Would a proper institutional mechanism of multilateral consultations have solved the problem? Or are we dealing here with a gap in understandings that reflects a deeper problem?

It is at this point that the issue of same gender relationships comes to the fore, however not as a cause of division but as its symptom. But a symptom of what? We have to go beyond a mere failure in communication due to imperfect institutional mechanisms and postulate the suspicion that the problematization of the ordination of persons of same gender orientation in committed relationships and the liturgical blessing of same-sex marriage is the symptom of a division that already existed and transcends the issue of homosexuality. Or, in slightly different terms, it is as though the diachronic identity that in this case binds two churches at the symbolic

level is synchronically actualized in ways that are mutually unrecognizable. In order to understand the symptomatic nature of this we need to examine two issues: on the one hand, the nature of sexuality that is engraved at the center of our theological symbolic order, which leads us to an exploration into the powers of the body. On the other, that divisions are inscribed in the way in which previously existing themes are mediated by theological language and hermeneutics through which the "mind" of the church not only maps its territory, but seeks to have a causal power in cooperation and/or contention with other powers in the world.

Bodies as nodes of power

Let us move to the "'symptom," namely, the controversy around homosexuality. The reality of homosexuality seems to be dividing the mind between churches and within churches. As stated, the matter is not that homosexuality is dividing the churches, but that the divisions existing between churches are expressed through the trope of homosexuality. An intriguing question is why sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, have become the contentious issues around which fundamental differences are expressed. Homosexuality stands as a sort of "generative theme," an iconic representation that has a powerful emotional impact on people's daily lives and with which everything that is relevant seems to stand or fall. But why can a particular dimension of finitude become the Procrustean bed that defines the right (in the sense of orthodox) mind of the church?

An initial approach must consider the place that sexuality had—and has—in the larger scheme of biological existence, for it mediates the basic condition for life, procreation. It also manifests a power that has been traditionally associated with the sacred—as the Genesis narrative clearly indicates in its Priestly version (Gen 1:27) by linking sexual differentiation and biological reproduction with the image of God.[5] But approaching sexuality only from the angle of its reproductive power would be tantamount to remaining merely at the level of "animality."[6] Human sexuality has a meaning that transcends its biological attributes, for it is the zero level from which the whole apparatus of symbolic thinking and thus culture arises. Without bodies, the very need for symbols would not exist. But once symbols emerge, bodies are no longer the same: they are now

[5] See Michael Welker, *Creation and Reality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 67f. See also J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: WmB Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 152–55.

[6] See Žižek's criticism to traditional Christian sexual morality, in op. cit. (note 1), location 9958.

suspended in a virtual web of symbols and significations which constellates new configurations of societal, political, economic and gender power.

As the anthropologist Terrence Deacon suggests, sexual selection seems to have driven symbolic communication as the need for exchanging information in the epochal shift from foraging to scavenging societies.[7] A form of regulating reproductive relationships by symbolic means (i.e., marriage) was pivotal for early hominids in order to take effective advantage of a hunting-provisioning subsistence strategy. Without symbols and language that refer publicly to certain abstract social relationships, our ancestors could never have organized in order to expand their chances of survival. And it was the use of symbolic abstraction and language that created a new evolutionary environment that acted selectively on brains—for example, the emergence of prefrontal structures. The mind did not arise from tricks concocted by a more evolved brain, but by the social construction of symbolic reference which, in turn, unleashed a sort of Baldwinian evolution, where a new (social) environment may determine selection because the abilities of learning and behavioral flexibility enable individuals to modify—not abolish—the context of natural selection. In other words, when some behaviors becoming important for subsistence spread within a population, it generated selection pressures on genetic traits that support its propagation. Both material (i.e, stone) and symbolic tools (i.e., words) ultimately turned the tables on their users and forced them to adapt to the new niches opened by them.

The above helps us to understand that the regulation of human sexuality, society, brain characteristics and the emergence of symbolic thinking (i.e., language and mind) are interwoven in a co-evolutionary drift that is responsible for the emergence of the symbolic species that we are, *homo symbolicus*.[8] This explains in part why we feel so strongly about sexual matters and the distress that may cause the disruption of the referential binary symbols (male and female) that hitherto has constituted the foundation of human existence. If power is not just the imposition of norms by force, but the internalization of such norms by the structuring of peoples' minds, then we can appreciate the political nature of symbolic constructions. Once language and symbolic reference emerge, new horizons arise that were not part of the original context that caused symbolic reference as such. While selective pressure around reproduction still persists, reproduction may shift in its signification and, with it, the whole array of symbolic thinking that once developed in function of the establishment of certain practices

[7] See Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain* (New York: Norton, 1997), 384ff.
[8] Ibid., 341.

and relationships. For example, the modern cleavage appearing between reproduction and sexual desire (where desire is not necessarily linked to the ultimate outcome of reproduction) is an operation that is parasitic on previous mechanisms that led to symbolic thinking and, in turn, creates the perception of new environments and possibilities that were hard to contemplate in former times. Thus a new (sexual) embodiment of identity became possible.

In the history of Western cultural and social developments this cleavage did not begin with gay and lesbian claims and demands, but with the women's movement during the 60s.[9] It signified a radical change of mind that both reflected and legitimized a new location of bodies in the cultural, social and economic realms. This heralded the dismantling of a millennial structure, patriarchy, for it carried a new configuration of power as mediated by bodies and their circumstances. Patriarchalism has historically permeated the entire organization of societies, from production to consumption, from politics to law, from culture to religion. Its roots lie in the asymmetric family structure as a basic economic unit of production and its orientation towards the socio-biological reproduction of the species. It is a structure of power, that is, it is not only embodied in particular material configurations (institutions) but is the expression of a certain structuring of a symbolic order regulating the emplacement of bodies.

Thus the unraveling of the patriarchal system started when market conditions placed women in a new role within the labor force—especially during times of war—outlining a different environment that led to a new consciousness. Women's work and thus autonomy not only began to undermine the legitimacy of men's domination grounded in their role as the main providers for the family, but also led to increasing control over their own bodies due to innovations in the areas of medicine and biotechnology. This led first to a crisis of the referential coherence of gendered symbols and then to a shift of the reference that these symbols enthroned. The sociologist Manuel Castells identifies this change as the most important revolution during the twentieth century, opening up the personal and gendered identity as the field of novel political definitions.[10]

It is important to note that these changes have not led to the disappearance of the family, but its profound diversification in composition and the emotional goals attached to these. New types of arrangements, characterized by networks of support, increasing female-centeredness of family units, succession of partners, etc., do not indicate a fading of

[9] See Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, vol II, *The Power of Identity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 192ff.
[10] See ibid., 194.

profound emotional and social ties, but new constellations where roles and power are rearranged along more egalitarian impulses. Therefore the struggle initially concentrated on women's rights unleashed a powerful shockwave: the calling into question of patriarchy also challenged heterosexuality as the exclusive norm for sexual desire. Soon other emancipatory movements emerged around the vindication of gay orientation and lifestyles that had a radical critique of patriarchal constellations in common with the women's movement. In this vein, lesbianism challenged the heterosexual male definition of women as sexual objects, and gay men dispensed with reproduction as the main rationale for human sexuality. These are not just sexual "preferences," but the forging of proactive identities that participate in the power of being in new social and cultural environments.

It is clear that these changes could have never been possible without the economic, social and technological trends of modernity—which manifest themselves differently around the world. Here we must ask ourselves about the particular contextual and environmental conditions that shape the location of our churches. Why is it that in certain contexts the church's mind has changed regarding the rights and status of women and persons of same sex orientation while in others it has remained steadfast in its classical binary and patriarchal injunctions? Is it simply a case of accommodating to "perverse" trends in culture and society, or responses to environments that are interpreted radically differently depending on social locations which in turn reflect creative or reactive adaptations?

This, of course, is not the whole story, for sexuality is not just a means for satisfying desire or reproductive success. Sexuality is also the expression or exponent of power, a symbol that communicates which and what type of relationships are considered to be desirable, expected or required. Furthermore, sexual symbolism—and gender construction—is not just a reflection of social and economic conditions, but an ideological enforcement of a certain construction of reality. For example, was not patriarchalism, at least in some regions, an "innovation" brought by the conflation of the biblical message and European bourgeois mores during the time of the great missions? Was it not functional to a strategy of colonial domination, which in part needed to defuse the power that women traditionally had in many of the "colonized" societies—especially in those economically structured around 'the "hoe" rather than the "plough"?

In effect, the situation is more multifaceted since sociological and economic dynamics are deeply intertwined with the symbolic construction of identity where sexuality, as a node of power, plays a central role. In today's world, many forces—material, symbolic and communicational—are on a collision course with the world(s) that once supported certain arrangements of power—with winners and losers. It is not the case that these

forces are always emancipatory, for most of the time they are either blind or aimless, or have been unleashed for other reasons—profit being one of them. In any case, they force present-day humanity into a reevaluation of given structures and symbols and demand a response that is codified as "identity"—a discrete claim to power.

The lingering challenge of identity

In our present world we face, on the one hand, the juggernaut of globalization with the restructuring of capital and labor coupled with the information, communication and technological revolutions. On the other, almost as a counterforce, we also live in the midst of powerful expressions of collective identities which challenge globalization and indiscriminate cosmopolitanism "on behalf of cultural singularity and people's control over their lives and environment."[11] In the midst of this, the question of identity, which results from the construction of meaning on the basis of cultural attributes that are given priority over other sets of meanings, is the articulation of a certain conception of power and a way to exercise it in view of these forces that can either be seen as a threat that one has to confront, or as an opportunity that encloses a new way of representing oneself in the larger tapestry of life. If identity is a process of selecting which traces need to be reproduced and passed over, and which one has to be assimilated and/or invented—by an individual in his/her psychological and sociological configuration of the self, by a culture, a society or a church—then sexuality is a key factor in this transmission and adaptation, for it is a nodal point that opens or closes those relationships that usually are considered to be the most significant in life.

At the risk of simplifying things one can say that of the present conflation of forces two polar strategies around identity which can be found in the global North as well as the global South.[12] The first is a reactive one which identifies trenches of resistance that are built on an essentialist reference to God, nation, ethnicity, family and locality. All these are categories that appeal to a millennial existence, to the memory of a collective, institution or groupings which perceives itself to be threatened under the combined and contradictory assault of techno-economic forces and transformative social movements. The second strategy aims to transform human relationships at the most fundamental level by embracing the possibilities of emancipatory stances hidden in forces that in principle may

[11] Ibid., 2.

[12] See Ibid.

seem bewildering and even menacing. Its aim is to reconfigure identities by redefining their position in society and to respond creatively to the new variables of life. We can call this a proactive strategy of identity. Of course these strategies refer to polar positions that presuppose the possibility of a myriad of hybrids in between, which is usually the case in any concrete example that one may think of. In any case, as tendencies that express both particular social locations as well as neuro-conceptual networks that are instilled since early childhood,[13] these are valid enough.

The above may help us to understand why the theme of sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, may have become a contentious issue for churches considering that the very edifice of human society and culture has, since time immemorial, been constructed upon a symbolic hierarchization of roles along binary sexual differentiations. Sexuality has been one of the places where the power of the body as the actualization of the power of being has been manifested—as in the case of reproduction and emotional/spiritual companionship. Thus a challenge to this symbolic order around proactive identities implies a challenge to the socioeconomic order and the ideological legitimation of this order—religion and churches—which confers an identity and place to persons. This is a challenge to patriarchalism, for sure, but also a challenge to the economic systems and ideological configurations that have at least functionally necessitated the support of patriarchal arrangements. In this scenario the church may feel itself threatened, certainly, but it must ask itself why. The fact is that centuries of domination have started to show its fissures and gaps, from which new forms of intertwining lives, of creating community, of loving, have emerged, many times as emancipatory practices, and many times just out of necessity or even by chance.

When sex "tickles" the church

The issue of sexuality is located at the center of a vast network of power, and any modification of it can only "compute" as it is integrated in the larger tapestry of symbols which—in the case that concerns us here—constitutes the identity of a religious tradition. Otherwise new behaviors and conceptions will be seen as an abnormality or virus that needs to be eradicated in order to maintain the integrity of the tradition in question and thus the power that the church exercises in a specific context. This is why

[13] The cognitive scientist George Lakoff analyzes the interaction of family values, cognitive structures mapped onto the brain, and political-ideological inclinations, in *The Political Mind* (New York: Viking, 2008), 75ff.

the task of hermeneutics is also a form of power, the power that emanates from including people or events in the history that God is telling about the world, the history of justice and love. Reactive religious proposals may seem at times heroic and epic, "counter-cultural" and daring, prophetic or even messianic. But it can also be seen as desperate strategies in face of the inability and failure—for whatever reasons—courageously to face the asymmetries that societies develop.

In this vein, the vociferous opposition to homosexuality has little to do with the defense of faith, or tradition, or Scriptures, but is a symptom of a deeper problem, namely, the hermeneutical inability to grapple creatively with the new conditions of existence in which relationships and power are called to change if the power of love is to be manifested in justice and not confused with the inertia of past practices and institutions. In other words, with the inability of weaving an identity able to embrace the new signs of emancipation that are no more nor less than new configurations of love and justice that touch not only upon intimate relationships, but reflect the larger struggle of political power in the wider world.

The failure of the church and Christians to accept homosexual love given in the framework of faithful and conjugal relationships reverts into a condemnation of homosexuality that is a reenactment of exclusionary categories inherited from a colonial and patriarchal past. It leads to scapegoat the innocent and marginalized, who now become the sacrifice that will legitimize the integrity of a symbolic universe that is under pressure for other reasons—cultural, social, economic and political. Thus the recourse to victimization in face of the emptiness of proposals for the church's life under the pressures of modernity cannot be disguised as a heroic resistance to the trends of the "West." As a matter of fact, the full recognition and inclusion of persons of same-sex orientation in the ministry and practices of the church is the result of a struggle for the dignity of every human being, not the accommodation to the surrounding culture (though some aspects of it may have spoken meaningfully to the church). It is an expression of a creative understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the midst of new configurations of love and justice. Its spirit is the same as the one that has motivated the post-colonial and liberationist demands voiced by many churches in the global South since the 70s.

If some churches have reached a new mind after a torturous debate and a careful process of evangelical discernment, how is this conclusion and process communicated to other fellow churches that have neither participated in the process, nor are inserted in a context presenting the same variables? That the theme of homosexuality is a symptom more than a cause of division leads to the unavoidable conclusion that the roots of the division lie in the divergence of strategies to adapt to and thus serve

contexts that are differently perceived and construed along different hermeneutics of power, justice and love.[14] It is a difference between proactive and reactive assertion of identities that respond with different strategies to fragments of our world. In other words, it has to do with different minds that have difficulties in understanding the other's point of view because they literally operate differently. This is where the notion and practices of being a federation of churches show its limitations, calling for a new way of relating our minds in light of a minimal common understanding of the grammar of our in relation to how we conceive and experience power.

If the thesis that the homosexuality controversy is a symptom more than a cause of differences is correct, then the question must be shifted as to what processes and what type of theological minds have led to such vast disagreements. Again, it must be noted that these disagreements are not limited to a North–South divide, but cut across every church and region. The urgent matter is not to achieve a sort of consensus on a particular topic (i.e., homosexuality), but to understand why these particular topics may for some achieve the status of a generative theme upon which the very identity of the church depends as a sort of *casus confessionis*. What has led to such positions that seem to bypass the distinction between law and gospel? And, conversely, how can an "innovation" in the understanding and practice of the church be communicated in such a way that all of those who share the same tradition can feel that the symbols and truths that they have in common have been thoroughly respected and considered, allowing even for different conclusions?

The analysis of such processes and conditions escape what can be addressed here. Suffice it to say that differences are insurmountable when the gospel is confused with a particular sociological instantiation, let us say, a particular social arrangement, misidentifying a form with its essence, contingency with transcendence. Virtually fundamentalist postures as the ones expressed by the positions or reactive leaderships seem to be a blatant case of profanation of the sacred. They impinge not just upon the particular regard, opinion or even doctrine that one may have of the "orders of creation," but on what constitutes the *promissio*, the gospel as such. Far from an antinomian or libertine posture, the matter is to resituate marriage and sexuality away from the mere enforcement of "morality" toward the context of that something that really frames and guides it, love—which is always above the institutions and orders, as Lu-

[14] Cf. Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954).

ther expounds in his Confession of 1528.[15] After all, love is the content of the law, and it is intrinsically a relational field whose form is justice. The problem is not the sexual mores (or sexual orientation, for that matter) per se, but how these may strengthen or distort our lives as creatures. This is a theological, not just a moral issue; it involves our understanding of a God who continuously creates calling us out of the entrapments of our reified conceptions and practices.

Reactive or proactive minds are not just about ideas, but they are patterns and paradigms of thought and action that are reinforced through particular environments and neurocognitive networks. Both coevolve, and the question is whether or not a family of churches can constitute a sort of environment for thinking in common matters pertaining to the common faith. It is as if the very reality of a globalized world demanded the emergence of a new mind which leaves behind both the colonial unilateral normativity and the contextualist necessary reactions, in order to advance into a normed and normative inter- and trans-contextuality as the main trace of a communion.

Which self needs understanding?

From the above it is clear that concrete differences around a theme such as homosexuality can only be navigated and thus negotiated through a "languaging" able meaningfully to inflect the core themes of a tradition from the perspective of the novelties or even anomalies that appear as cognitive dissonances. Addressing one another with the aim of gauging the degree of compliance and deviance from the point of view of a closed hermeneutic of Scriptures (or tradition), misses the point of how theological language works within a history, environment and God that are always on the move. If one of our pressing questions is about the self-understanding of the relationship that binds a particular family of churches, then the inquiry should not pursue a formal definition, i.e., what communion is, but how communion works in the midst of the pressures that churches have to face as bodies embedded in a shifting context. In other words, how a mind seeking a common sense of the faith emerges considering the different forces and concerns that churches have to face.

The issue is how the mind expressing the point of view of a particular church (or sectors within churches) can adopt a different perspective that is not immediately obvious to the primary location of such a mind. For example, how can a particular church understand the mind of another

[15] See Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," in Timothy Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 65.

church if their locations and hermeneutics are so divergent? To have another point of view is not something that comes easily; it is not inborn, but learnt, acculturated, fruit of a communicative praxis. The problem is how the mind can produce a representation of what it would be like to experience something from a perspective that carries deep dissonances with what was previously held. Thus communicative praxis is not expressed just by the intentionality of the actors, but needs the support and mediation of an environment where all feel responsible to tend to the commons—in this case, the common faith.

As a federation of churches the Lutheran communion leaned upon an identity cemented by a diachronic trajectory provided by Scriptures, confessions and, above all, the memory of the Reformation and its missionary expressions. This is what provided its symbolic traction. But the temptation is to reify this symbolic tradition as if it did not emerge from particular, synchronic moments. Yet (late) modernity and the post-colonial situation have offered new perspectival approaches that need to be assimilated if churches are to be in a communion that is expressed through the constant negotiation of relationships mediated by (theological) language. Otherwise the risk is to fall into total fragmentation. For example, local and regional adaptations that respond to particular challenges will be deemed as perilous innovation or difficult to understand if the task of communicating what common core beliefs look like when seen from a new perspective is not seriously engaged. Something "discovered" in a particular context can only claim universality retroactively, that is, can commend itself as a veritable expression of the faith held together after going through the task of charitable conversation and persuasion that is at the heart of the theological endeavor. After all, the "trick" of language is to come up with metaphors that draw closer what is unfamiliar to the familiar categories in which we already feel at home.

Returning to the example of the EECMY and the severing of ties with the CoS and ELCA the question that the LWF must pose itself is how it contributes to the emergence of a mind that can adroitly avoid any totalitarian, colonial and unilateral temptation and, at the same time, be the expression of the multiplicity of localities in which the church finds its actual place. A model of federation would stress the *de facto* autonomy of churches and a series of centers of "experts" that define how this mind is. A communion model, on the other hand, must seek to be the expression of a network of minds that constantly informs and communicates to the rest of the body the main traces of a theological paradigm that is attentive to changes and variables that are confronted in order to express its identity. If communication is deemed so important for a communion, the question is not only ***what*** is being communicated, but ***how*** it is communicated.

In part the rupture of this coordination of behaviors (communion) resulting in a split of the church's mind is the corollary of decades of neglect of the central role that theological reflection and theologians play with regard to the sanity and soundness of such a mind. Other global traditions have their regular conferences, networks, councils or synods that grapple with the integrity and novelty of its symbolic language for a new time—i.e., the *aggiornamento* of the Catholic Church through the II Vatican Council. In the case of Lutheranism, it is not clear what constitutes the instance that enacts a communal sense of the faith when something new has to be proposed. As theological actors we are either on our own or attached to locality for we do not have organic and regular spaces and networks where this sense of the common faith is negotiated on a global basis—although some bilateral mechanisms do exist and different programs of the LWF have attempted to move in this direction with much success. Yet these initiatives lack continuity and binding power due to their sporadic nature and limited mandate and resources. At best theologians speak for themselves or out of the context of their local churches, and the results of these endeavors lack the legitimacy of expressing a mind that expands though the constant negotiation around the meaning and influence of its symbols, codes and narratives. Only an organic, institutionalized and intentional theological conversation and network—plural and non-legislative—can create an environment through which all the churches that juridically compose a federation can awaken to a new sense of communion. I am not referring to highly valuable yet intermittent experiences such as the "Emmaus Conversation," but to a stable round table whose task and vocation is to give expression to a communal sense of the faith nourished by the challenges and concerns of local churches. This implies the creation of a "communion environment" that enacts a symbolic space able to mediate and relate minds that seek to think in common—a thinking that includes worship, prayer and affective relationships.

As we try to grapple with the idea of communion, Paul's image of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 comes to the fore. Usually we seek to undergird the interdependence of all the members, and in particular Paul's underscoring of a new ethics that places the weak and suffering at the center of the body's attention. But this coming to mind of an image often dispenses with another factor that is essential for a body to take place, that of the characteristics of a mind that is able to tend to the common without obliterating the differences between members.[16] Even when we come back to a very physical and visible phenomenon (i.e., the church as

[16] See my article, "The Networking of Differences that Makes a Difference: Theology and the Unity of the Church," in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* (51/1, Spring 2012); 31–42.

visible "body"), this phenomenon is only such as it is grasped by a mind galvanized by what is common. A certain mind is needed to bring forth a body originally traversed by insurmountable differences for mind is not merely a reflection on present and past events, but is the generation of a projected future self in context—that of Christ. If this is true, then we have to ask ourselves how this mind comes to be, or in more theological terms, how the mind of Christ shapes bodies, and how bodies manifest the Christ.

I believe that this can provide us with some insights as we attempt to understand our shifting consciousness from federation to communion. I would like to see this shift not simply as juridical and/or constitutional reform, but as the creation of a new communicative environment where our particular minds and patterns are required to participate and be participated. In order to understand the differences brought by these minds, we must have a understanding of the dynamic constellations of particular bodies, the churches as determined by the Word and conditioned by contexts. This will mark the passage of a "federation" mind that sought to understand without participating, to a "communion" mind that participates in order to understand.

ISBN 978-2-940459-38-4

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