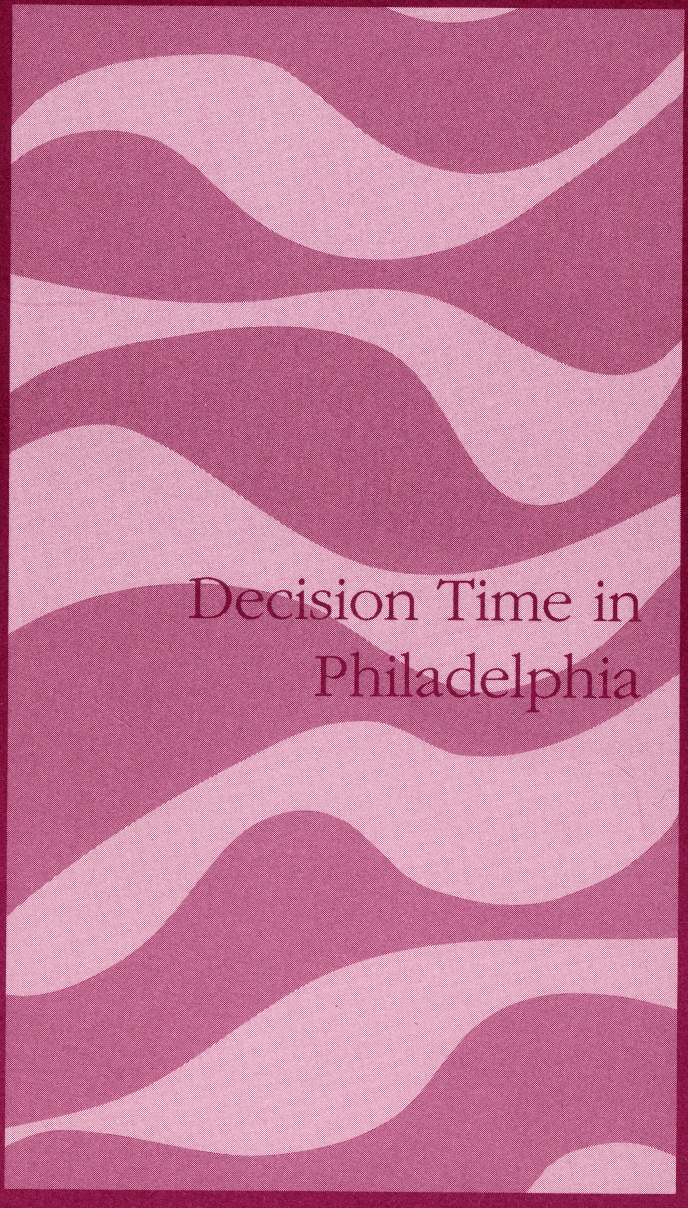
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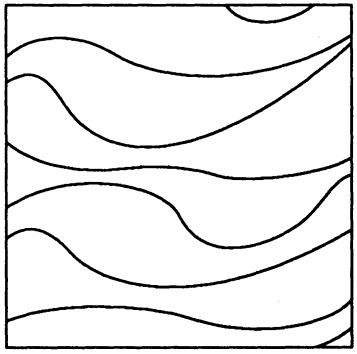
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Decision Time in Philadelphia

At its churchwide assembly in Philadelphia, this August, the ELCA will consider resolutions declaring "full communion" with the Episcopal Church (The Concordat of Agreement) and three churches of the Reformed tradition (The Formula of Agreement) and lifting the condemnations directed toward Roman Catholics in the 16th century with regard to the doctrine of justification (The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification). Reaction to these proposals within the ELCA has ranged from fervid advocacy to sharp dissent to widespread apathy. No one in the know doubts, however, that the ELCA is at an ecumenical crossroads and that the way it handles these decisions will greatly affect its internal unity and its witness to the world.

Currents, therefore, is pleased to present in this issue essays by two distinguished Reformed and Lutheran theologians that attempt to lay out what is at stake in this debate. These essays comprise the Hein-Fry lectures, that are annually delivered at the eight ELCA seminaries and also experienced recently at various other outposts in the church by satellite hookup. **Gabriel Fackre** (pronounced fack-er) and **Michael Root** are positive toward these developments although Professor Fackre's church, the United Church of Christ, is really only involved in one of these decisions. But neither writes here as advocate; rather, each tries to assess what led to these proposals, what theological issues are involved, and how they might affect the mission and ministry of the church.

In his first essay, **Gabriel Fackre** describes what Lutherans have to contribute to the other churches through their special understanding of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Lutherans insist on the "haveability" of God (Bonhoeffer), the fact that God is graspable in his word within the church and available in finite media (*finitum capax infiniti*). Still, they, too, disagree among themselves on where this promise of divine solidarity is kept (in sacramental or magisterial conduits, in confessional givens, in the experience of the forgiven sinner, in inerrancy, or in social activism). Lutherans have no illu-

sions about the depth of the Fall and its continuing effects on the believer (*simul justus et peccator*), a point much needed by our dialogue partners. The haveability of God is held at the communion rail, only in frail, reaching hands.

Then in a second essay, **Gabriel Fackre** speaks of the word that Lutherans must hear from others about God's sovereignty and about sanctification. There is always also an unhaveable characteristic of God, with new light and truth not overturning, but not confined to, past doctrinal statements. Reformed, Anglican, and Roman Catholic communions have been open to new confessions or significant reinterpretations of the old texts. Lutherans have resisted additions to or reformulations of the Book of Concord. But can those finite documents really convey the infinite without addition or change? All Christian churches, Lutherans too, believe in sanctification, but our ecumenical partners remind us that progress in the Christian life is more than human presumption, and that believers need the law's mandates and guidelines (third use). Those outside Lutheranism often see our tradition of two kingdoms, the unchallengeability of society's orders, and our understanding of the Fall leading to an uncritical acceptance of the status quo. Reinhold Niebuhr believed that "Christ in us" is inextricable from "Christ for us," and that grace is both power and pardon. As long as the respective assertions about justification are not reduced to solidarity and simultaneity, or sovereignty and sanctification, a rare moment of mutual teaching and learning is possible.

Finally, **Gabriel Fackre** turns to the ecumenical implications for the congregation, understood in both its doctrinal and contemporary empirical dimensions. Sometimes, in a perverse reversal of the Westminster Confession, it seems that the chief end of God is to glorify us and to be useful to us indefinitely. The Search Institute has given the ELCA low marks in faith maturity, growth in faith maturity, and congregational loyalty. Still, the author finds evidence of confessional identity growing in congregations and among pastors, and the 1997 decisions may offer ELCA congregations the opportunity to host desperately needed conversations about fundamental Christian teaching. Under the umbrella of national bilateral agreements, there should be a measured implementation in locales, according to the discernment of common theological faithfulness. Where there is no theological seriousness and response on the part of congregations involved in the 1997 agreements, no local implementation of the overarching agreements will be appropriate.

Michael Root asks some basic questions in his first essay about the unity of the church, which is constituted by a common event: the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. But this unity in word and

sacrament creates unity in faith. It is thus a reality within the hearts and lives of believers and not simply a matter of public events. Unity is not static, but occurs within a movement: the movement of Christ and the Spirit through word and sacrament, received by faith and at work in the common life and mission of the one church they create. The communion we are given is to be lived out in a common life of communion or fellowship. It is a self-contradiction if we find that we cannot deny that other communities are realizations of the one church of Jesus Christ, and yet we do not live a common life in communion with them. We should have a bias in favor of proposals that open the way to life in communion. Hence, the burden of proof rests on rejecting such proposals, not accepting them. Are the proposals true to the gospel and true to our time?

In his second essay, **Michael Root** seeks to identify criteria for judging ecumenical proposals. Can we carry out together with another church regularly and in a comprehensive range of situations those activities we believe are essential to the identity of the church as church without violating our understanding of the identity of the church? Lifting the condemnations on Roman Catholics does not mean there is total agreement on justification—Catholics see other doctrines playing a role in judging what the church teaches, and Lutherans, who put so much stress on justification, try not to isolate it from other teachings of the church. Catholic doctrine denies that the tendencies and desires of the "old person" within us can rightly be called (damning) sin as long as the person remains joined to Christ. While Lutherans and Reformed still have disagreements about the Lord's Supper, the crucial issue, as always, is the dependability of the external word. If some feel that the differences in this area hinder communion, they need to state how the differences make a common eucharistic life impossible without compromising the gospel. The Concordat asks the ELCA to make changes for the sake of unity and hence has evoked the sharpest debate. If the Concordat is approved, the ELCA will remain in fellowship with the non-episcopal churches of the Lutheran World Federation, and it will also have full communion with the non-episcopal Reformed churches. Central to the Concordat is the proposal that the two churches will recognize and accept each other's ordained ministries from the outset. Lutherans have tended to view issues as essential or adiaphoral. Might there be a third category in relation to historical succession: non-essential but nevertheless normally normative?

Michael Root's third essay seeks to define what difference these decisions make. Which is the greater anomaly: a lack of communion with those we cannot but recognize as churches, or the variations and tensions that will come

with any proposal for communion beyond the most easy and innocuous? The question is whether a common life in communion with the churches of the Concordat and the Formula will violate the integrity of the church because communion with the mainstream of American Protestantism might lead to an erosion of the classical core of Christian belief within the ELCA. What we have learned from ecumenical dialogues is that the larger context of the church and its life does not weaken that which is distinctively Lutheran, but it provides the context in which the richness of the Reformation comes to light. The perspective and attitude with which these proposals are adopted or rejected will make a significant difference to the shape of our future.

So, finally, it's not a matter of passing or rejecting proposals at a church-wide assembly, but it's about faithfulness to the gospel and its call for unity. One might vote yes and demonstrate such faithfulness or one might vote no in similar faithfulness. While I will have neither voice nor vote at Philadelphia, it is my hope that these articles will help you decide what to vote for... or at least what to pray for.

Faithfully,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Gifts Given: Solidarity and Simultaneity

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An ELCA theologian of evangelical catholic persuasion has been heard to say: "We are hammering on the door of Rome so we can get in and reform it!" Beneath the whimsy, there is an interesting argument. The rationale for a will-to-union is to *teach the other something*. Robert Jenson believes Lutherans can address a deficiency in the Roman Catholic Church. He says what that is in his important work, *Unbaptized God*.[1]

Let's substitute for "union" the more modest "full communion," and more modest still, "old condemnations not applicable," and relate this pedagogical mandate to all the upcoming ELCA ecumenical decisions: Lutherans have things to teach the Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Reformed Churches. And it's worth asking at the same time: does the ELCA have something to *learn from* Rome, Canterbury and Geneva?

The discussion of the decisions has circled around the question of sufficient commonality of doctrine, enough to go forward with the three proposals, differences not being "church-dividing." Commonality *is* necessary for these steps. Necessary, yes—but is it sufficient? What of the mutual teaching possibilities, of mutual corrections, or perhaps even complementarity? As one of the dialogues expressed it: 1997 can be the occasion for *both* "mutual affirmation" (based on discernible commonalities) *and* "mutual admonition" (based on discernible warranted differences).[2] Could it be that the opportunities for mutual learning, possible in one or another or even all the proposals, are so compelling that a No to one or another or all of them would constitute a missed opportunity? Could "mutual affirmation" have an even deeper meaning than the acknowledgment of commonalities, having to do instead with affirming the others' gifts? Would the failure to take any or all of these steps be an act of mutual impoverishment?

Where there is vigorous discussion of the three proposals in the ELCA the focus is on the historic episcopate, or the UCC and its problems, or Rome and its magisterial claims, or.... While all of these are germane, I believe the questions of mutual fructification represent another entry point.

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[1] Robert W. Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[2] Keith F. Nickle and Timothy F. Lull, eds., *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 8, 30, 39-40, 66, and *passim*.

The Hein-Fry committee appears to have had something like this in mind when it posed these questions in the invitation letter to the 1997 lecturers: *What gifts and insights do each of us bring...? What gifts for witness and mission...? What are the theological, confessional and pastoral concerns?*

My lectures follow these leads. Do the partners have "gifts"—charisms—to offer one another? Are the partners like Corinthian body parts that must hear the Pauline counsel: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'" (1 Cor 12:21)? And as at Corinth, identifying the gifts of each—if such there be—requires also a realistic look at the "theological, confessional and pastoral concerns," the worries of and about each. My first two lectures will enter the discussion about the decisions by way of charisms and concerns, gifts and admonitions.

The committee asked us also to address "the impact within our congregations." The place of the congregation needs this kind of attention in ecumenical negotiations. I want to give it the importance it is due by devoting a lecture to that subject, within the framework of charisms and concerns.

The theme of mutuality in teaching and learning is actually a thread in the study documents behind the proposed partnerships. While much effort is given to making the case for sufficient commonality to view the differences as not church-dividing, a move beyond this crucial but minimalist approach is also discernible. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic and the Lutheran-Reformed dialogues especially lend themselves to this second step—of mutual teachability—because of the collisions of the sixteenth century on identifiable disputed questions, as argued in the *The Condemnations of the Reformation: Do They Still Divide?*, the still-in-process *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, and the Lutheran-Reformed *A Common Calling* with its predecessor documents.[3] While Lutheran and Episcopal questions arise from separate developments rather than direct confrontations, the notes of mutual learning and even complementarity are also found in the *Concordat* and its predecessor and successor studies.[4] In passing, it is worth noting that critics of one or another proposal also focus on these themes, but do so as an occasion for *attacking* the proposals.[5] George Lindbeck, discussing the learned and comprehensive critique by Gottfried Martens of lifting the

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[3] *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* ed. Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 38, 40, 52, 68-69 and *passim*; Lutheran World Federation/Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Working Document, English translation) (Geneva, 1996), 7-8; *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today*, ed. Keith F. Nickle and Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 29-30, 39-40, 44-45, 49, 66.

[4] See the summary observations in "Preface," *Implications of the Gospel: Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, Series III*, ed. William A, Norgren and William Rusch, Study Guide by Darlis J. Swan and Elizabeth Z. Turner (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1988), 9. Focus on mutual learning appears in the essays of David S. Yeago, R. R. Reno, and George R. Sumner in *Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat*, ed. Ephraim Radner and R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 206-23, 76-92, 95-110.

[5] Thus: *Outmoded Condemnations?* by the Faculty of Theology, Georgia Augusta University, Göttingen, trans. Oliver K. Olsen with Franz Posset (Fort Wayne, IN: Luther Academy, 1992), 14-15, 22-23 and *passim* pinpoints "the hermeneutical key" of complementarity as a chief culprit in the proposal to

condemnations points to this refrain, but argues Marten's failure to see the differences as "complementary concerns rather than conflicting practices and as 'salutary warnings' rather than as anathemas."[6]

While the identification of gifts and admonitions is a route into the 1997 decisions, it also has long-term "implications... for witness and outreach," as the ELCA title of these lectures phrases it. A more complete organism—one with all the *charisms* Christ intends for his Body—means giving fuller witness to the Gospel, and in consequence, an outreach enriched by a greater wisdom of the Body, a mission rendered more faithful. Further, if I am right about the nature of the special Lutheran charism, the struggles *within* the ELCA emerge as varying interpretations of that gift. Can these internal partisanships also benefit from the counsel of "mutual affirmation and mutual admonition"?

As noted, admonition presupposes common *affirmation* based on necessary commonalities. I have argued in detail elsewhere about these shared convictions as they relate to the Lutheran-Reformed encounter, but they will they emerge here in an across-the-board admonitory context.[7]

Justification: solidarity and simultaneity

Well, what *is* the special Lutheran charism? My answer is that of an outsider, but one in long conversation with the ELCA in one of the dialogues, in a vigorous cyberspace conversation on all three proposals preparatory to these lectures, and perhaps most of all, in struggling with my own mixed lineage that includes the Lutheran and Reformed roots of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in which I served as a pastor and teacher for twenty years, and in back of

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declare the condemnations inapplicable to the present teaching of the respective churches. Missouri Synod critics of the Lutheran-Reformed proposal take the same tack, identifying the foe in just those terms in the work by The Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Lutheran Seminary, "A Review of 'A Common Calling,'" *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 57:3 (July 1993), 191-213. A recent editorial in *Lutheran Forum* approves the lifting of the condemnations but rejects full communion with the Reformed on the same grounds as the Göttingen faculty attacked the ending of the condemnations, asserting that the case for "complementarity has been unconvincing," differences being "not a matter of complementarity but contrast" (Ecumenical Options: A Consensus of the Editorial Board," *Lutheran Forum*, Lent, 30:1 (February 1996), 5.

[6] Lindbeck is commenting on Gottfried Martens' *Die Rechtfertigung des Sunders—Rettungshandeln Gottes oder historisches Interpretament Grundentscheidungen lutherischer Theologie und Kirche bei der Behandlung des Themas 'Rechfertigung' im oekumenischen Kontext* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1992) in "Martens on the Condemnations," *Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. X, No. 1 (Spring 1996), 59-66. See also Gerhard Forde's "Response," *Ibid.*, 67-69.

[7] I have argued the case for "commonality" as well as mutual corrigibility elsewhere. See "Summary Observations" in *The Leuenberg Agreement and Lutheran-Reformed Relationships: Evaluations by North American and European Theologians,* ed. William G. Rusch and Daniel Martensen (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 125-32; "Mutual Conversation, Consolation and Correction," *Dialog* 29: 2 (Spring 1990), 88-91; "What Lessons Does the Consultation Suggest for the Future Work of the E.L.C.A.?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 28:3 (Summer 1991), 472-4; "Call and Catholicity," *Pro Ecclesia* I:1 (Fall 1992), 20-26; "Response to Chapman," *Lutheran Forum* 27:3 (August 1993), 18-19; "Pleading the UCC Case," *Forum Letter* 25:9 (September 1996), 6-8; "The ELCA and the UCC," *Dialog* (April 1997, forthcoming).

that a Syrian Orthodox and Baptist upbringing. May God "the giftie gie us to see ourselves as others see us."

To ask a Lutheran about the heart of the matter is to hear: *justification by grace through faith*, the "article by which the church stands or falls." Surely "justification" is the word Lutherans must speak to the church catholic! All constituencies of a wider Lutheranism, and all the intra-ELCA partisans, return ever and again to it. Yet, a case could be made that the doctrine of justification is central for others in the Reformation family, often described as its "material principle," the authority of Scripture being the "formal principle." So *Invitation to Action*, a joint North American Lutheran-Reformed document:

> Both Lutheran and Reformed traditions confess this gospel in the language of justification by grace through faith alone. This doctrine of justification was the central theological rediscovery of the Reformation; it was proclaimed by Martin Luther and John Calvin and their respective followers.[8]

And "evangelicalism," as the word is used widely today, claims the same defining characteristic, albeit as radically subjectivized in a "born again" experience.[9]

While there may be this wider affirmation of the centrality of justification, I shall argue that justification is still the special gift brought by Lutherans to the church catholic, but justification understood in a *special Lutheran way*. The particularity of this charism has to do with Lutheran convictions about *how* justification comes to us.

Over time in Lutheran theology, piety and practice, two "how" refrains appear: (1) justifying grace comes where promised as *haveable* (the word is Bonhoeffer's), a "condescension Christology" expressed in the assured continuing divine *solidarity* with us; and (2) the alien righteousness so conferred is upon those who are *simultaneously* sinners and justified.

To ask a Lutheran about the heart of the matter is to hear: *justification by grace through faith...*

In historic struggles between Lutherans and others, these emphases of "solidarity" and "simultaneity" came to be formulated in familiar Latin watchwords: *finitum capax infiniti*, the finite as capable of [bearing] the Infinite; and *simul iustus et peccator*, at the same time righteous and sinner. These "motifs" of *haveability* and *simultaneity*—justification cum *capax* and *simul*—are a Lutheran gift to the church catholic

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[8] "Joint Statement on Justification," *Invitation to Action: The Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue, Series III, 1981-1983*, ed. James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 9.

[9] See the writer's entry, "Evangelical, Evangelicalism," *Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; London: SCM Press, 1983), 191-2.

Recent Reformation-Roman Catholic dialogues might even suggest that the Roman Catholic tradition can be added to those who, in some sense, give pride of place to justification, willing to say that the doctrine of justification always retains a special function... as the touchstone for testing at all times whether its proclamation and its praxis correspond to what has been given to it by its Lord. (*The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*, 69.)

and a needed word to be heard by the ELCA's proposed ecumenical partners. The *capax*, having less current visibility in Lutheran self-definition than the *simul*, will receive more attention.

Divine solidarity

In *Act and Being*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says:

> God *is there*, which is to say: not in eternal non-objectivity... [but] "have-able," graspable in his Word within the church.[10]

Bonhoeffer is challenging the early Barth, making use of the Lutheran christological *capax* teaching. As Bethge describes it:

> Bonhoeffer suspects here [in Barth] the old Extra-Calvinisticum which does not allow the glory of God to enter entirely the world. *Finitum incapax infiniti*, the Calvinists say. Bonhoeffer protests with Luther against this all his life. *Finitum capax infiniti*....[11]

Stated or presupposed here are the familiar Lutheran refrains of: (1) the rejection of the Calvinist "beyond"—*extra Calvinisticum* (the teaching that after the Incarnation, the eternal Son was not restricted to the flesh); (2) the interchangeability of the properties of the divine and human natures of Christ (*communicatio idiomatum*); (3) the finite as capable of the Infinite. While these are christological themes, they often appear in sixteenth century Lutheran-Reformed debates on the eucharist. My contention will be that the last formulation, *finitum capax infiniti*, is not an intrusive or irrelevant "philosophical principle" but a way of expressing the special Lutheran understanding of how justification comes *now* to us.[12] Thus in *Act and Being* Bonhoeffer traces the line from Lutheran condescension Christology into the church and its sacraments, citing the earthy language of Luther:

> It is the honour and glory of our God... that, giving himself for our sake in deepest condescension, he passes into the flesh, the bread, our hearts, our mouths, entrails, and suffers also for our sake that he be dishonourably (*unehrlich*) handled, on the altar as on the Cross.[13]

Remember the "thereness" of the God who risks Presence among us, the bloody God of the cross and altar, the God who has, in Bethge's words,

> bound himself socially in vicarious acting... the historical faithfulness of God [that] includes temporality, historicity, involvement....[14]

Be wary of mesmerisms with the divine sovereignty, ones that distance God from

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[10] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. Bernard Noble (NY: Harper and Bros., 1961), 90-91.

[11] Eberhard Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," in *World Come of Age*, edited with Introduction by Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 36-7. At the same time, Bonhoeffer's friendship with, and debt to, Karl Barth cannot be overstated. The recent discovery of some early Bonhoeffer letters gives added corroboration of the latter. See Wallace Alston and Michael Welker, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Previously Unpublished Letters to Paul Lehmann," *Theology Today* 53:3 (October 1996), 289-98.

[12] As in the otherwise excellent study of the "extra Calvinsticum" by David Willis-Watkins who too quickly dismisses it as a "philosophical principle" while at the same time exploring the importance of the divine sovereignty in Calvin's thought to which the *non capax* points. See David Watkins, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called Extra Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 2-4.

[13] Martin Luther, WA 23.157, quoted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 81.

[14] Bethge, *World Come of Age*, 37, 38.

the finitudes of time and space! Don't let the focus on the majesty of God obscure the humiliation of God in Christ and all his benefits.

The *capax* so understood is God *with us* in church, sacraments, proclamation, present in things tangible, tasteable, audible. Christ, the Son of the Father, is in solidarity with us, unambiguously available by his grace and choice—not brought by, nor kept from us, by our works—but by the promise of the one trustworthy Promise-Keeper. Hence the importance of the "is"—"this *is* my body"—that gives assurance to the terrified conscience. If in the sixteenth century "the major function of justification by faith was... to console anxious consciences terrified by the inability to do enough to earn or merit salvation,"[15] then the availability of God in finite media is crucial. This saving grace *for me*, personally, is also corporate, *for us*. Whatever else the *satis est* of AC7 means, it gives the firm assurance that in these accessible, rightly used means of grace—Word and sacrament—the saving promises of God are unfailingly kept.

The Lutheran-Reformed document, *A Common Calling*, basic to the current proposal for Lutheran-Reformed full communion, shows how divine solidarity comes to the fore in what it calls Lutheran eucharistic "emphases." They all circle about the "have-able": the assertion of (1) "the bodily presence of the complete Christ" and thus the rejection of "the dissolution of the presence into a merely internal reality brought about by a subjective act of faith... memorialism"; (2) "the link between the Lord's true body and the elements, saying that the Lord is present, given and received 'in, with and under' bread and wine" and with it the rejection of the sacrament as "spiritual symbolism"; (3) "that even unbelievers or unworthy recipients eat and drink the true body and blood of Christ (*manducatio impiorum*)" and with it the rejection of "the dissolution of Christ's objective presence into a subjective construction"; (4) the "interchange of properties (*communicatio idiomatum*)" assuring "the presence of the divine and human in the Lord's Supper" and the rejection of "a Nestorian division of the one Christ into two, of whom only the divine person is present in the Supper"; (5) the assertion of the "ubiquity of Christ's human and divine natures after the resurrection and ascension... to explain the simultaneity of the Lord's bodily presence in many places at one and the same time" and with it the rejection of "a local circumscription."[16]

> For Lutherans, as Martin Heinecken asserts: "The central issue is... that the finite is capable of the infinite."

My contention is that in these eucharistic formulas, with their christological backdrop, and wider import in the *finitum capax infiniti*, a Lutheran witness is made to the divine *solidarity* with a fallen world through its finite mediums, not only vis à vis the

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[15] "History of the Question," *Justification by Faith (Common Statement), Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, VII*, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 23.

[16] Quotations are from *A Common Calling*, 46-47.

Reformed tradition, but to the church catholic. For Lutherans, as Martin Heinecken asserts: "The central issue is... that the finite is capable of the infinite."[17]

Lutheran admonitions

Several American church historians—Winthrop Hudson, a Baptist, and Mark Noll, a Presbyterian—have both noted the importance of what Noll calls "the Lutheran difference." Noll sees it as a challenge to the pervasive anthropocentrism and works-righteousness of both his own evangelical constituency and of mainline religion in America. He says Lutherans never let us forget

> that *God* saves in baptism, that *God* gives himself in the Supper, that *God* announces his Word through the sermon, that *God* is the best interpreter of his written Word—these Lutheran convictions are all but lost in the face of American confidence in human capacity.[18]

Here is the divine solidarity, the *capax*, God's promise kept to be *with us*.

Interestingly, the various areas Noll mentions correspond to constituencies within Lutheranism that gravitate toward one or another mode of haveability: sacraments celebrated, Word proclaimed, Word written. I shall return to these internal Lutheran divisions. Yet, Noll's overall point is telling: non-Lutherans need to be admonished about the divine solidarity "in, with and under" ecclesial *givens*.

Striking a similar note, Methodist pastor Paul Stallworth declares that we must look to Lutherans for "fire in the belly" to resist cultural seductions.[19] If the Triune God is inseparable from "the givens"—life together in Word, sacrament, creed and confession—then "hands off" this Body of Christ, you ideologues![20] Episcopal defenders of the Concordat strike the same note, citing the importance of the Lutheran stress on doctrinal integrity.[21] In fact a case can be made that it has been the Lutheran concern for the haveable sedimentations of *doctrine* that accounts for the high level of theological concern and conversation in all the bi-laterals in which they have been involved, with that influence spilling well beyond its own ecumenical agenda.

The importance of the testimony to the divine solidarity, of course, comes crystal clear in the eucharistic controversies, and specifically the legitimate critique of

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[17] Martin J. Heinecken, "Christology, The Lord's Supper and its Observance in the Church," *Marburg Revisited: A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions*, ed. Paul C. Empie & James I. McCord (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 90.

[18] Mark Noll, "The Lutheran Difference," *First Things*, Issue 2 (February 1992), 39. Earlier Hudson had written in the same vein, speaking of the Lutheran emphasis on the relationship of grace to a confessional tradition, a surviving liturgical structure, and a sense of community, which, however much it may be the product of cultural factors, may make it easier for them than most Protestant denominations to recover "the integrity of church membership" without which Protestants are ill-equipped to participate effectively in the dialogue of a pluralist society." Winthrop S. Hudson, *American Protestantism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 176, quoted in Carl Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 2.

[19] Paul T. Stallsworth, "Time of Crisis, Time to Confess," *Lutheran Forum* 27:3 (August 1993), 50-53.

[20] Nicely illustrated in South Africa and Namibia, according to one observer where the Lutheran Churches refused to allow ideology to compromise their witness and challenged the status quo. (Letter from Christopher Niebuhr, July 14, 1996.)

[21] As in the comments of R. R. Reno in "The Evangelical Significance of the Historic Episcopate," *Inhabiting Unity*, 91.

Zwinglianism. No haveable Presence in this memorialism! The assurance of justification itself is compromised if we cannot believe Christ's own word: "This *is* my body."[22] The finite bread *is* capable of receiving the Infinite, and the promise of Christ kept. It should be noted, as John Williamson Nevin details in *The Mystical Presence*,[23] that the doctrine of the Supper found in Calvin and in the Reformed Confessions consistently asserts that Presence, although one in which the Holy Spirit enters to bring the glorified humanity of Christ to the communicant, reflecting thereby the stress on the divine *sovereignty* in the Reformed tradition, rightful companion to the divine *solidarity*, a subject to be explored in my second lecture. But here we underscore the cruciality of the Lutheran charism as an integral part of the body of Christian teaching and practice.

Lutheran admonitions are especially in order in the present dialogues. To the Reformed partners the question must be put: Has your implacable stress on the divine sovereignty led you to the determinisms of predestination, on the one hand, or universalism, on the other? Have you so focused on the divine majesty in your understanding of the church, the sacraments, and Scripture that the promise of the holy God to be among us has been denied and these arenas left to the devices of good works? Has your featuring of imperatives instead of indicatives (your "always reforming" slogan) sacrificed the perennial truth of the ecumenical creeds and Reformation confessions to the quest for change and novelty?

To the Episcopal/Anglican partner some of the same questions must be put, together with: Has your trust in the historic episcopacy to secure the apostolicity of the church, and your relegation of the Articles of Religion in *The Book of Common Prayer* to the status of "Historical Documents of the Church," not diminished the importance of apostolic faith, as might be argued by the departure from it of some in the very historic episcopacy that is presumed to guarantee apostolic faith? (The 1996 revisions of the Concordat that add the specifics of doctrinal agreement reflect that concern, and thus testify to the needed mutual admonition.)[24]

The importance of the testimony to the divine solidarity comes crystal clear in the eucharistic controversies...

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[22] So, for example, Luther's indictment of the "fanatics" in "The Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ—Against the Fanatics," and "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper" in *Martin Luther's Basic Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 314-40, 375-404.

[23] John Williamson Nevin, *The Mystical Presence and Other Writings on the Eucharist*, Lancaster Series on the Mercersburg Theology, Vol. 4, ed. Bard Thompson and George Bricker (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966).

[24] For the revision see "Agreement in the Doctrine of the Faith," in "Official Text," *Concordat of Agreement, Lutheran-Episcopal and Lutheran-Reformed Ecumenical Proposals* (Chicago: Office of the Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1996), 7-8. Other discussion of this matter includes O. C. Edwards, "The Concordat of Agreement and a Common Calling in the Context of Faith and Order and COCU," *Ecumenical Trends* 23:8 (September 1994), 1.

And to the Roman Catholic partner these questions must be put: Has the defining revelatory "haveability" in Scripture been compromised by the ever-new development of doctrine under the aegis of a privileged magisterium? And related to that, what of the current unclarities in the *Joint Declaration on Justification* on the status of justification by faith as either "*the*," or only "*a*," criterion that "orients all teaching and practices"? (The latter is the present wording, while earlier Lutheran-Roman Catholic documents spoke of "the.")[25]

An intra-Lutheran excursus

The Lutheran witness to the *thereness* of God takes different forms. Current differences within the ELCA can be traceable to varying views on justification that align with this motif, including the ecumenical preferences of one or another constituency.[26] A much-commented-upon division within the ELCA, of course, is between "evangelical catholic" and "confessional" Lutherans. While historical, sociological, and geographical factors enter the picture, differences here can also be interpreted as variations on justification-cum-*capax*, a disagreement based on *where* the promise of justification is kept: in tangible conduits, sacramental and magisterial, or in confessional givens? In visibilities or audibilities? Or in the context of debates about the apostolicity of the church, does the latter depend on apostolic ministry or apostolic doctrine?[27]

Episcopal observer R. Reno recently tracked these intra-ELCA differences (with his own 1997 agenda) juxtaposing an evangelical catholic *capax* (relying on Robert Jenson and Eric Gritsch's interpretations in *Lutheranism*) to what he calls the "radical and dialectical view" represented by Gerhard Forde. Concerned that the latter devolves into "dialectical explosions," Reno holds instead that

> the unconditional promise of justification creates and presupposes important conditions which are entailed by the very logic of God's unconditional love.... The gospel promise is not a dialectical instance of self-destructing mediation. Instead the evangelical catholic view affirms a real presence which simply *is* divine.... Justification involves a rebirth made possible by a *permanent* and *triumphant* divine presence on *this* side of the divide.[28]

Justification, so understood, comes to us "in carnal form," which means:

> The evangelical and catholic theologian must be open, in principle, to the possibility that the historic episcopate might be the soteriological condition of the gospel.[29]

Reno rightly perceives the function of the *capax*—the haveability of justification

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[25] See the discussion of this by Joseph H. Burgess, "On Lifting the Condemnations," *Dialog* 36:1 (Winter 1997), 64-65.

[26] As discussed for example by Carl Braaten in *Justification: the Article by Which the Church Stands Or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 10-18.

[27] While in principle tending toward one or the other partner in full communion, evangelical catholics can have their reservations about the Concordat and confessional Lutherans about the doctrinal seriousness of the Reformed. On the former see Leonard Klein's evangelical catholic lament about the Episcopal Church in "Justification and Moral Authority," *Lutheran Forum* 30:3 (September 1996), 6-7. On the latter, see G. G., "Reformed and Episcopal Ecumenics: Death and Sickness Unto Death," *Dialog* 36:1 (Winter 1997), 5.

[28] R. R. Reno, "The Doctrine of Justification: Lutheran Lessons for Anglicans in Search of Confessional Integrity," *Pro Ecclesia* III:4 (Fall 1994), 469-70, 471-72.

[29] Reno, 474.

through "ontological presence... temporal location... carnal form"—in its evangelical catholic expression. And he rightly distinguishes it from another Lutheran interpretation of the *how* of justification. However, Reno's dismissive treatment of "dialectical explosions" fails to recognize that Forde's view is a Lutheran variation on the divine solidarity associated in his case with the audibilities rather than the tangibilities, the "Word proclaimed" rather than the episcopacy continued.

Yet a twofold typology does not exhaust Lutheran variations on the motif of *capax*. Lutheran pietism locates the continuing and justifying divine solidarity with us in the believing heart: God is "there" in the *experience* of the forgiven sinner, the "blessed assurance," the happening of grace *pro me*.[30] In yet other theological constituencies within a wider Lutheranism, the inerrancy of Scripture's autographs is the locus of the *capax*. And further, can the vocal social activist constituency in the ELCA be understood as very much in the late Bonhoeffer tradition? Here the "haveability" of the suffering God is through participation in the sufferings of God in the sufferers of this world, the outworking in Bonhoeffer's theology of the *capax*, argued convincingly by James Burtness some years ago.[31]

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[30] In "evangelical" Lutheranism, justification is inseparable from the personal knowledge of being all known and all forgiven. Both sacramental fidelity and doctrinal purity are necessary, but not sufficient. The final ramparts of the fortress are in the heart, not on the altar or in the catechism: "you must be born again."

But there are open gates in this fortress that make for a pietist ecumenical agenda, too open for the "catholic" and the "confessionalist." The spyglass of these critics spot down drawbridges, a desire too quickly to find a commonality in the heart with others who are sacramentally or doctrinally suspect. The often-cited showcase in North America of this presumed indifferentism is "Smuckerism," and in Europe the Prussian Church preacher, Schleiermacher, the "Moravian of a higher order" in whom unionism and pietism joined to dissolve the disciplines of doctrine and governance.

While "existentialism" is worlds away from pietism, both make the move to interiority. What is true must be true *for me*. Kierkegaard's struggle against "the crowd," including the "Christian crowd," and the self-forgetfulness of the speculative thinker has clear continuities with deeply self-involving Lutheran piety. Lutheran Bishop Grundvig, for whom the "haveability" of Christ was inextricable from the church and its objectivities, was a predictable target for SK, reflecting the different location of the *capax* in varied Lutheran traditions. On Kierkegaard's assault on the "objectivities" in both church and culture see the writer's "The Concept of Alienation in the Thought of Kierkegaard and Marx," University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation, 1962.

[31] James Woeffel asserts the linkage between the Lutheran *capax* and Bonhoeffer's later theology of the secular: "Here is the key to Bonhoeffer's whole theological method, *including the final "non-religious interpretation of religious concepts."* James W. Woeffel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology: Classical and Revolutionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 141.

James Burtness in an important essay on the relation of Barth to Bonhoeffer follows the train of the Lutheran condescension Christology in Bonhoeffer from *Act and Being* through *The Communion of Saints* and *Life Together* to *Ethics* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* (James H. Burtness, "As Though God Were Not Given: Barth, Bonhoeffer, and the *Finitum Capax Infiniti*," *Dialog* 19 (Fall 1980):249-55. I am in debt to John Godsey, Barth and Bonhoeffer scholar, for his thoughts on this subject and for directing me to this important article. Richard Bliese, who has done significant work on Bonhoeffer, has also been of help in showing me the Lutheran cast of Bonhoeffer's thought. Burtness argues that the "new standpoint" for interpreting the

If this is a correct reading of Lutheran variations on justification, it has implications for the controversies within the ELCA today. Is it a plea for intra-Lutheran ecumenicity, an occasion within its ranks for both "mutual affirmation" and "mutual admonition"?

Simultaneity

Justification in Lutheran interpretation is inseparable from the motif of *simul iustus et peccator*. While the haveability of Christ is assured *in* one or other of the means cited, God's resolute grace comes to us *as* receiving sinners. Our continuing rebellion cannot turn aside the unconditional "in-spite-of" Agape. Justification is by God's grace to sinners not by the good works of purported saints. The struggle with sin *persists* in the life of the redeemed. The insistence on the simultaneity of sin and justification is a measure of the profound Lutheran realism about the human condition. However acknowledged, as a new heart... predisposition... orientation, Lutherans have no illusions about the depth of the fall and its continuing effects in the journey of the believer.

Astringent realism about the human condition expresses itself not only in this area of subjective soteriology, but also in the Lutheran distinction in the public sphere between law and Gospel, in its view of the orders of preservation, "the left hand of God," and the masks of God. In all these cases, the continuing state of the fall so asserts itself that it must be exposed by the law and restrained by the divine orderings and actions.

How important this charism is for Christians innocent of the ambiguities of the Christian life! Or for any painter on the larger canvas of human life who knows nothing of chiarascuro! The Lutheran eye sees the night that attends the light. All assumptions of untrammeled advance, whether the perfectionisms of the pious or the utopianisms of the political, need the Lutheran caveat. Simple juxtaposition of saints and sinners, again whether pious or political, requires the Lutheran witness to the persistence of sin in the presumed righteous and therefore the rejection of the manichaean "us and them" of sectarian Christianity and the secular ideologies of the right or left, not infrequently in alliance in the Religious Right and Religious Left.[32]

Lutheran tradition, mentioned as such by Bonhoeffer in *Act and Being*, moved to a point of view in *Ethics* that "embraces the *capax* totally and unreservedly and recklessly expands its use from Christology and the Lord's Supper to a vast vision of God" (Burtness, 252). The *Letters* carry this interpretation further, as on May 5, 1944: "What is above the world is, in the Gospel, intended to exist for the world—I mean that not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystic, pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of creation, and of the incarnation, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Greatly Enlarged Edition, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 286. Burtness comments: "If the finite is, because of God's condescension in Jesus Christ... that... is the kind of talk that drives one to Christ (and thus to God and the world" (Burtness, 254).

If the finite *world*, like the bread and wine, is capable of bearing the incarnate Christ, then there in *its* own mode, as in the eucharist and its own mode, we are called to "participate in the sufferings of God." Those who put high on the Lutheran mission agenda the call to worldly witness and solidarity with the sufferer, whether explicitly or not, keep company with Bonhoeffer in appropriating and reinterpreting the Lutheran *capax* tradition.

[32] So the argument of the author's *Religious Right and Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983).

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This gift/admonition is needed by all three of the dialogue partners where: (1) the accent on *sanctification* in the Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditions encourages elitist illusions about the spiritual life, a too simple distinction between saints and sinners or theologies with Pelagian or semi-Pelagian drift; (2) the accent on sanctification invites illusory hopes for personal or social history; (3) emphases on "works of love," "merit," and talk of the cooperation of a free will in the processes of salvation lead easily and historically to "works-righteousness"; (4) the accent on the inseparability of church order from Christian faith in the Reformed, Roman Catholic and Anglican (whether it be congregational, presbyteral, or episcopal) traditions obscures the ambiguity of ecclesial institutions. In all cases, the Lutheran eye sees better than most the temptation to fuse too quickly the Not Yet with the Now, to take possession of what is only given out of divine mercy. And in matters of public history, the law/gospel distinction, the differentiation between orders of creation and redemption, the wariness the church *qua* church engaging the political powers and principalities with the vocation of the Christian *within* those structures as alternative, are variations on the Lutheran realism about the persistence of sin in human life.[33]

There may well be another Lutheran deployment of the *simul*, in matters epistemological as well as soteriological. So Pannenberg's assertion:

> Dogmatics may not presuppose the divine truth which the Christian doctrinal tradition claims. Theology... must treat it as an open question and not decide it in advance.... Even the question of God's reality, of his existence in view of his debateabilty in the world as atheistic criticism in particular articulates it, can find a final answer only in the event of eschatological world renewal....[34]

—or Ronald Thiemann's comparable declaration about the modesty appropriate to revelatory claims of "knowledge":

> The justifiability of one's faith and hope in the trustworthiness of a promiser is never fully confirmed (or disconfirmed) until the promiser actually fulfills (or fails to fulfill) his/her promises. Until the moment of fulfillment the recipient must justify faith and hope on the basis of a judgment concerning the character of the promiser... consequently we live

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[33] The historic strategies of church-world encounter can be described as intra-institutional, counter-institutional, and para-institutional. The Lutheran doctrine of vocation expresses the first, the ecclesial social action predispositions of Reformed and Roman Catholic traditions the second, and the left-wing Reformation traditions the third. See, Gabriel Fackre, "IBM and the Incognito Christ," unpublished manuscript, Greenleaf Center.

[34] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 155.

> in a situation in which there can be no indubitable foundation for knowledge and thus in which both belief and refusal to believe can appear to be justified.[35]

Can it be said that here two Lutheran theologians of rather different persuasion (who make no reference to one another in their works on revelation) transpose the soteriological simultaneity of righteousness and sin into an epistemological simultaneity of trusting doctrinal assertions, but making no claim that they are knowledge? Influenced,

Here may be a *kairos* for witness to justification by grace through faith that entails a have-ability—yet one held, as at the communion rail, only in frail reaching hands.

of course, by other considerations—Pannenberg's commitment to a universal rationality and Thiemann's anti-foundationalism—nevertheless eschatology seems to function here for both as a counsel of modesty and recognition of ambiguity, kindred to the same cautions concerning the "having but not having" of *simul iustus et peccator*.[36] Also interesting, and possibly related to this question, is the fact that both Pannenberg and Thiemann have had important roles in the preparatory documents for two of the three ELCA proposals, Pannenberg on the condemnations and Thiemann as a Lutheran member of the four-year study team that prepared *A Common Calling*. Both reflect an ecumenical openness that coheres with their epistemological modesties.

Conclusion

The proposed new relationships are a teaching moment for the ELCA to bring its charism and concerns to its ecumenical agenda. Here may be a *kairos* for witness to justification by grace through faith that entails a haveability—yet one held, as at the communion rail, only in frail reaching hands. It certainly a needed Word for the three partners which Providence has put in long twentieth-century conversation with the ELCA. If possible, may that gift and admonition be gracefully given. And may the charisms and concerns of those same partners be gracefully received—the subject of my next lecture.

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[35] Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 154, 155.

[36] Another Lutheran, Soren Kierkegaard, attacked the epistemological certainties of Hegel and other nineteenth century offerers of false security with a comparable understanding of the a faith that "treads water over fifty thousand fathoms." How this Lutheran refrain of epistemological struggle, modesty, and ambiguity comports with the assurances of *capax* earlier discussed is not clear, and why the Pannenberg-Thiemann observations are posed as questions.

Gifts Received: Sovereignty and Sanctification

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In the first lecture we listened for a word that others must hear from the Lutheran tradition, the twofold word of haveability and simultaneity, the *capax/simul* interpreting *justification*. Now we turn to a word Lutherans must hear from others. It has to do with justification by faith in the context of the majesty of God *over us*, and the effects of the justifying grace of God imparted *to us*. These emphases are not precluded by the Lutheran charism, as the thread of mutual admonition in the documents behind the present proposals indicate. Indeed, the stewardship of *sovereignty* and *sanctification*, as I shall describe them, includes those ecumenical partners with whom the ELCA is now in conversation.

As noted in the first lecture, the legitimacy of mutual admonition presupposes mutual affirmation on basic commonalities. If *justification by grace through faith* is the article by which the church stands or falls, its demonstrable presence must be established as a precondition for steps proposed. The ELCA has every right to ask for explicit evidence of that premise in their partners' texts and traditions. I reference these formal commitments in this footnote.[1]

[1] The twentieth century exchange between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on the doctrine of justification produced this "Common Statement" in the seventh round of the dialogue in North America: "It is only because Catholics and Lutherans share fundamental convictions regarding justification that they can be in increasing accord on criteria of Christian authenticity and accept justification as an *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* protective of the *solus Christus*...." Paragraph 155, "Common Statement," *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, VII*, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph H. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 70. December 1998 is the date set for adoption of the more wide-ranging and binding "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" now in a 1996 draft that has been declared by a joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic drafting group "adequate basis for future modifications" (Agenda, Meeting of the LWF Council, Geneva, Switzerland, 24 September–1 October, 1996, 2).

For the Episcopal Church, Articles XI-XIII of its "39 Articles" set forth standard Reformation teaching on faith and works, with

For all the textual evidence, faithfulness to this article (as well as to other articles of basic Christian faith) is under serious erosion in the churches that formally espouse it. We are all in the same boat and there is no safe ecclesiastical harbor. However, the determination to retrieve the classical heritage shown by today's neoconfessional and centrist movements (to be discussed in lecture 3) converges exactly with the return to foundational texts and traditions in the 1997 proposals and is cause for hope that what we say is true in principle, is also increasingly true, in fact.[2]

Sovereignty

An improbable alliance of Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Anglican traditions has been noted by Robert Jenson in the earlier cited *Unbaptized God.* It emerges as a shared criticism of certain Lutheran teachings (illustrating the flawed doctrine of God in western Christendom, according to the author). For example, in the Reformed–Roman Catholic statement on the Real Presence there is a "specific if polite shared opposition to Lutheran innovations"[3] expressed in the counterpoint assertion that

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Article XI dealing specifically with justification: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings." "Articles of Religion," *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 870. While now defined in the *Book of Common Prayer* as an "historical document," the present status of which is unclear, the newly revised version of the Concordat endorses this statement: "We share a common understanding of God's justifying grace, i.e., that we are accounted righteous and made righteous before God only by grace through faith because of the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not on account of our works or merit. "Concordat of Agreement," *Lutheran-Episcopal and Lutheran Reformed Ecumenical Proposals*: Documents for Action by 1997 Churchwide Assembly (Chicago: Office of the Bishop [Department of Ecumenical affairs] of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1996), 8.

All the Reformed Churches (PCUSA, RCA, UCC), reflecting their confessional documents, and after churchwide study, endorsed at their highest judicatory level the "Joint Statement on Justification" which asserts: "For Christ's sake we sinners have been reconciled to God, not because we earned God's acceptance but by an act of God's sheer mercy.... Those trusting in this gospel, believing in Christ as Saviour and Lord, are justified in God's sight. Both Lutheran and Reformed traditions confess this gospel in the language of justification by grace through faith alone." "Joint Statement on Justification," *Invitation to Action*, ed. James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 9. Those dubious about UCC confessional lore will want to read Charles Hambrick-Stowe's "Justification by Grace Through Faith: Views from the United Church of Christ," *Lutheran/Reformed Church Dialogue and the UCC* in *New Conversations* 10:2 (Winter/Spring 1988), 42-47, one of the papers written for re-entry in 1988 of the UCC into the present negotiations. That same issue of *New Conversations* includes other essays on the United Church of Christ as a confessional church and on UCC polity.

When all is said and done about ecclesial texts and traditions, whether as historical or contemporary documents, we are reminded by the Lutheran and Catholic authors of the Common Statement "that in both of our churches the gospel has not always been proclaimed, that it has been blunted by reinterpretation, that it has been transformed by various means into self-satisfying systems of commands and prohibitions" (*Justification by Faith*, 74).

[2] See the writer's overview article, "The Church of the Center," in the forthcoming April 1997 *Interpretation*, an issue devoted to the developing centrist/neoconfessional movements in mainline Protestantism.

[3] Robert W. Jenson, *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 130.

> the realization of the presence of Christ... is the proper work of the Holy Spirit, which takes place... as the Church calls upon the Father to send down the Holy Spirit to sanctify.[4]

This coheres with a similar Anglican opposition to Lutheran premises in the Anglican-Roman Catholic eucharistic agreements:

> It is the Lord present at the right hand of the Father and *therefore transcending* the sacramental order, who thus offers to his church, in the eucharistic signs, the special gift of himself.[5] (emphasis added)

We find here a strong accent on the divine *sovereignty*, and the attendant work of the Holy Spirit to relate that to us, as a common eucharistic refrain of the ELCA's conversation partners, one juxtaposed to the Lutheran stress on the divine solidarity with us, as in its teaching on ubiquity.

Of course, sacramentology is not soteriology. But views of the eucharist do have a direct bearing on *how* justifying grace is understood to come to us. Thus we return to the central theme of justification by faith, but this time read it in light of the partners' common accent on the "above and beyond" rather than the "in, with and under."

The shared emphasis on the divine sovereignty occurs again in the way historic confessions and creeds are viewed by the partners, also carriers of the message of justification. Although described in different ways—from the "*semper reformanda*" of the Reformed heritage to the "development of doctrine" in Catholic traditions—the note of *unhaveability* is common to Reformed, Anglican, and Roman Catholic, a stress on "*new* light and truth" not overturning, but not confined to, the past doctrinal sedimentations. In these traditions, the sovereign God is always above or out ahead calling the church to a reconsideration of its most prized inheritance.

Confessions in the Reformed tradition

Commenting on the different understandings of confessions, Karl Barth declares:

> To our fathers the historical past was something which called not for loving and devoted admiration but for careful and critical scrutiny.... There are documentary statements of their beliefs... but... our fathers had good reason for leaving us *no* Augsburg Confession authentically interpreting the word of God, *no* Formula of Concord, *no* "Symbolic Books" which might later, like the Lutheran, come to possess an odor of sanctity.... It *may* be our doctrinal task to make a careful revision of the theology of Geneva or the Heidelberg Catechism or of the Synod of Dort or... it *may* be our task to draw up a new creed....[6]

Indeed, Barth speaks of these things in the same breath as the Reformed accent on the divine sovereignty, the "*Deo soli gloria*" and thus its "resolute refusal to deify any created thing... its *finitum non est capax infiniti*..."[7]

A Common Calling, the Lutheran-Reformed document that grounds the 1997 proposal of full communion, makes the same kind of distinction between Lutheran and Reformed views, but does so in the context of ecumenics rather than polemics;

> Since Lutherans have effectively elevated the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the sixteenth century above later statements of faith, they have declined to add new documents to their confessional corpus.... By contrast,

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[4] Jenson, *Unbaptized God,* 130.

[5] Jenson, 130.

[6] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1928), 229, 230.

[7] Barth, *The Word of God,* 231.

While the deposit of dogma is considered "irreformable," the contextuality of its form is acknowledged and new interpretations allowed and expected.

> the Reformed communities have shown greater willingness to develop new confessions in response to contemporary problems and issues... asserting the principle *reformata semper reformanda*....[8]

The contrasting Reformed tradition can easily be seen in all three present conversation partners, each with their history of new confessions and statements of faith that seek to re-contextualize historic Christian beliefs. However, the Reformed efforts in reformulation are not, in *A Common Calling*, polemicized, but placed in the setting of the counsel of "mutual admonition," arguing for each as a corrective to the reductionist temptations of the other.

Development of doctrine in the catholic tradition

Roman Catholic. Avery Dulles summarizes the view of his church on the development of authoritative Christian teaching:

> Since John Henry Newman wrote his great *Essay on the Development of Doctrine* (1845), the idea that dogma "develops" has gained general acceptance in the Catholic church.... When a pope or ecumenical council defines a dogma, the resulting definition is a human formulation of revealed truth. Catholics accept such teaching as irreversibly true and in that sense irreformable.... [But] it is always possible to plumb the truth of revelation more deeply and to express it more aptly in relation to the needs and possibilities of new times and situations.[9]

This assertion is reflected in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* under the heading "Growth in understanding of faith":

> Thanks to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the understanding of both the realities and the words of the heritage of faith is able to grow in the life of the Church.[10]

Comparably, Richard McBrien notes that *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 1973) is an important commentary on the Roman Catholic understanding of the development of doctrine, asserting that:

> Not every dogma was originally expressed in the best form. A dogma can reflect "the changeable conceptions of a given epoch (*Mysterium Ecclesiae*)" and "the expressive power of language used at a certain point in time." (*Mysterium Ecclesiae*)[11]

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[8] *A Common Calling*, 29.

[9] Avery Dulles, "Faith and Revelation," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Vol. 1*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 124.

[10] Paragraph 94, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, English translation, 1994), 29.

[11] Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*: Study Edition (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981), 71, 841.

While the deposit of dogma is considered "irreformable," the contextuality of its form is acknowledged and new interpretations allowed and expected. And more, the formulation of *new* dogma has and will take place, always, of course, within magisterial constraints.

Anglican. No statement on the re-forming of 16th century confessions and catechesis appears in the *Concordat* equivalent to the statement cited earlier from *A Common Calling*. However, as noted, "The Articles of Religion," the doctrinal standards of the first (1549) *The Book of Common Prayer*, are located in the section of the current *The Book of Common Prayer: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* described as "Historical Documents of the Church."[12] In the section immediately preceding the latter, appears "An Outline of the Faith Commonly Called the Catechism," showing additions to the doctrine found in "The Articles of Religion," arguably developments from trajectories within The Articles.[13] Other than a comparison of this sort from within documents, there is no official statement on the development of doctrine in the Anglican communion.[14] Much evidence of the internal development discernible in doctrinal sections of *The Book of Common Prayer* can be adduced from the actual writing and practice of Anglican theologians—from reflections on Newman's famous essay and its implications to arguments for not only the development but the "remaking" of doctrine.[15] Thus in both the texts and traditions of the Episcopal Church, USA, the call for *aggiornamento* found in the Roman Catholic tradition also appears.

For all the differences in how the three traditions strive to protect doctrinal faithfulness over time—from return ever and again to the Word that addresses the Chris-

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[12] *The Book of Common Prayer: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).

[13] New accents not precluded by earlier formulations, but arguably development of themes earlier only implicit, included, for example, twentieth century theological concerns about the created order and the struggle for justice and peace, as reflected in the additions of God's intention as "harmony with creation" and "we are called to enjoy [creation] and to care for it in accordance with God's purposes," "revelation to Israel... to love justice, to do mercy, and to walk humbly with their God," the commandment "to work and pray for peace... to be kind to all the creatures of God," Christ coming so that "we may live in harmony with God, within ourselves, with our neighbors and with all creation"; a postmortem view of salvation (with religious pluralism in mind?) as the interpretation of Christ's descent into Hades: Christ "went to the departed and offered them the benefits of redemption; the "ministry of the laity... the ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given to them, to carry on Christ's reconciliation in the world." *Ibid.*, 845, 846, 849, 855.

Another aspect of the development of doctrine observable in comparing "An Outline of Faith" with "The Articles of Religion" is the diminishment and even disappearance of certain articles in the latter, as, for example, those on "sin" (IX, XV, XVI), salvation alone in Christ (XVIII), predestination and election (XVII) and, troubling for the Lutheran-Episcopal *Concordat*, "justification" (XI, XIII).

[14] For a landmark Anglican struggle with these issues see Owen Chadwick's *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957). For an "evangelical Anglican" study of the issues and argument for development, see Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979).

[15] As in Maurice F. Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978).

tian community to a magisterium privileged to discern that Word, or in the conceptual warrants for doctrinal change, ever-reforming or ever-developing, they share a readiness for additions to—or significant reinterpretations of—received texts. This distinguishes them functionally and formally from the Lutheran tradition's doctrinal self-definition in terms of a sixteenth century Book of Concord to which no addition has been made, and from Lutheranism's suspicion of any effort at reformulation, as in the *variata* of the Augsburg Confession.

The partner commonalities here can be seen as the work of the same accent on the divine reserve about givens, the unhaveability of God, reflected in the shared eucharistic teaching on the divine transcendence and the necessary connecting work of the Holy Spirit. Yet rather than interpreting this difference as an unbridgeable chasm, the long ecumenical exchange of the ELCA with disparate traditions points toward a "mutual admonition" in which each pole, at the least, cannot afford to ignore the warnings by the other of reductionist temptations, and at most, learn something new from a neglected counterpoint.

Lutheran learnings

I want to say briefly how the gift of its partners might be given to the ELCA—here the gift of sovereignty, later the gift of sanctification—but also look to some examples of mutuality, one in mission and another in a theologian who models "complementarity." First, to a case in point of the Lutheran need to hear the word of unhaveability, of the *non capax* of its partners in conversation.

A showcase of the unqualified deployment of the Lutheran *capax* can be found, I believe, in mode of argument by some Lutherans in their opposition to lifting the condemnations and to the Lutheran-Reformed *A Common Calling*. The parallel between the premises of the document *Outmoded Condemnations?* by the Göttingen Faculty of Theology[16] (responding to *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*[17]) and those of "A Review of 'A Common Calling'," by the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary,[18] is striking. Indeed Robert Preus played a role in the publication of the former and is one of the authors of the latter.

Outmoded Condemnations? rightly identifies, formally, a crucial Reformation assertion: "...the critical role of the Scripture over against the church is of the highest basic significance."[19] Yet, *functionally*, throughout the document, final appeal is made to a document of the church, *The Book of Concord*. This is in notable contrast to both the Lutheran-Roman Catholic and Lutheran-Reformed theological work which assessed respective ecclesial views on justification and the sacraments by biblical norms. Thus *Outmoded Condemnations?* demands exact conformity with the language of sixteenth century texts:

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[16] Faculty of Theology, Georgia Augusta University, Göttingen, *Outmoded Condemnations? Antitheses Between the Council of Trent and the Reformation on Justification, The Sacrament and The Ministry—Then and Now*, trans. Oliver K. Olson with Franz Posset (Fort Wayne, IN: Luther Academy, 1992).

[17] *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* ed. Kurt Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

[18] The Department of Systematic Theology, "A Review of 'A Common Calling,'" *Concordia Theological Review* 57:3 (July 1993), 193-213.

[19] *Outmoded Condemnations?*, 4.

> The hidden commonality which determines the complementarity behind the statements of both sides in the document is only presupposed and accepted on the basis of contemporary hermeneutical reflections, but not demonstrated on the basis of texts to be interpreted. If one works with the hermeneutical category "complementarity," one must first of all show that the texts themselves contain this focal point from which the divergent sides are developed.[20]

The same point is made in the rejection of *A Common Calling*:

> By acceding to this assumption, the Lutherans have, in effect, surrendered not only their understanding of the confessions as permanent statements of the truth, but also the claims which these confessions make for themselves as authoritative doctrine derived from the Scriptures as the Word of God.[21]

In both criticisms, the final court of appeal is the language of "the texts," the 16th century "texts themselves." How is this faithful to the stated "critical role of Scripture against the church"? Rather, it is the assumption that the Lutheran confessions constitute a finite medium capable of receiving the Infinite, carrying forward in a body of written words the Word incarnate. A doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture is a predictable corollary of the sacrality associated with written words, and such is found in these same quarters. In both cases, the needed emphasis of the Lutheran tradition on the *resource* role of Confessions in interpreting Scripture (the sole source of Christian teaching—*sola scriptura*)—needs to hear the counsel of *unhaveability* from its ecumenical partners. Indeed, the interpretation of historic confessions and condemnations as embodying mutually needed "emphases" and "concerns" in both the books reviewed is just that kind of proposal to bring together the "haveable" and the "unhaveable," continuity and discontinuity. It is no accident that Pannenberg and Thiemann, with their eschatological understandings of doctrine, have had important roles in writing the preparatory documents associated with both the lifting of the condemnations and the Covenant of Agreement.[22]

Sanctification

> Of course sanctification is involved in justification, so far as the latter is the real and essential beginning of sanctification. Nevertheless sanctification is to be distinguished from justification.... justification is an act of God outwith man, by which God assigns to him an alien righteousness; whereas sanctification is an activity of God in man's inward part.[23]

So Heinrich Heppe summarizes the refrain of the Reformed confessions, catechisms and statements of faith, past and present. Reformed theology from Calvin forward put an emphasis on grace as power as well as pardon, growth in the Christian life as well as declaration of the unmerited favor of God toward the sinner. The righteousness of Christ is imparted as well as imputed to the believer, a *becoming* holy as well as, forensically, being declared holy.

Correlated to the promise of grace in our "inward part" is the call to obey the

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[20] *Outmoded Condemnations?*, 14-15.

[21] "A Review of 'A Common Calling,'" 197.

[22] For a way of incorporating their eschatological interpretation of revelation, see Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 1997), 217-23.

[23] Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics.* Revised and edited by Ernst Bizer. English trans., G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 565.

A new self *theologically* comes to be in justification, and with it *anthropologically*, a new self in sanctification.

imperative, as well as joyfully receive the indicative, a "grateful obedience" as it is often described by the Reformed. Sanctification and its demands entail, therefore, without question, a "third use of the law" with its function of claiming and guiding the justified sinner in the life of good works.

The doctrinal statements of all the ELCA partners make a place for sanctification so understood. Thus the Westminster Confession:

> These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness... their ability to do good works is not at all from themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ.[24]

And in the *Articles of Religion*, after "by Faith only" comes:

> Albeit the Good Works which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring necessarily of a true and lively Faith, inasmuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by fruit.[25]

Important differences exist between Reformation (Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican) and Roman Catholic understandings of both justification and sanctification. However, on the matter at hand, Roman Catholicism joins Reformed and Anglican traditions in a stress on the grace at work in "the inward part" that makes for growth in the Spirit with its corresponding call to obedience:

> The Holy Spirit is the master of the interior life. By giving birth to the "inner man," justification entails the *sanctification* of his whole being.... Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love.[26]

In the Roman Catholic–Lutheran discussions on justification, it has been acknowledged that there is "a clear difference" between an understanding of grace as

> an objective *reality* on God's side "*outside ourselves*," and on the other hand as a *reality in the human soul*, a "quality" intrinsically "adhering" in the *human soul*...[27]

with the counterpoint doctrine linking

> the righteousness of the believer with the righteousness of Christ *extrase* ("outside himself"), in which the believer participates, and yet at the same time [seeing] the justified person, as far as he himself is concerned, as still a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*, at once righteous and sinner)....[28]

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[24] *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1647, XVI, 2, 3.

[25] *The Book of Common Prayer*, 870.

[26] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1995 and 2000, 483, 484.

[27] *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*, 47.

[28] *Ibid.*, 47.

But Lutherans speak of "sanctification," too. After canvassing the history in and beyond Lutheranism of separating justification and sanctification, especially so in conceptions of the *ordo salutis*, Gerhard Forde in *Christian Dogmatics* declares,

> Only one way remains open: to grasp justification and sanctification as a dynamic unity in the light of the eschatological nature of the divine action. Justification by faith means the death of the old and the resurrection of the new. Sanctification is what results when that is done to us.[29]

A new self *theologically* comes to be in justification, and with it *anthropologically*, a new self in sanctification.

> If justification is unconditional and total, it explodes into love and good works. If not, it simply leaves the self to contend with its own righteousness and despair.[30]

Thus, Lutherans also hold to sanctification, as is reiterated in all the documents preparatory to the current decisions.[31]

However, the warnings against the *ordo salutis*,[32] the denial of sanctification as "progress," the construal of the Christian life as a never-ending struggle, the questions raised both about a "third use of the law" and the language of "cooperation," the historic Lutheran challenge to the Roman Catholic view of "infused grace"—all point to a different reading of sanctification. The difference lies at two points:

1. The decisiveness of justification both before God and in the depths of the new person—from "the death of the old to the rebirth of the new"—is such that "the spontaneity and *hilaritas*... of faith"[33] will "explode... in good works." To the extent that there is a new self, how can it not evidence the fruits of that newness? The new self does not need to be told what to do (no domineering "third use of the law"), for it does spontaneously (sanctification) what its new state (justification) entails.

2. Yet the old self hangs on:

> The simultaneity of sin and righteousness as total states is the *actual* situation revealed by divine justification. The divine act itself shatters all human presumption about progress and process. God has something else in mind.[34]

To the latter assertion, the question comes from the ELCA partners: Is all belief in "progress" in the Christian life only "human presumption"? And to the former another question must be put: Is the spontaneity and *hilaritas* a too-simple assumption about the *haveability* of a new state of being, one innocent of the needs of the law's mandates and guidelines in the life of the believer?

Lutheran learnings

Where *simultaneity* is asserted unqualifiedly, "mutual admonition" from ELCA partners must be heard:

1. The stress on the persistence of sin in the life of the justified can become *the* characterization of the Christian life. When this emphasis alone is heard, the *possibilities* of advance in the Christian life as war-

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[29] Gerhard Forde, "Justification and Sanctification," *Christian Dogmatics, Vol. II*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 430.

[30] Forde, 434.

[31] As in 4.7, "The Good Works of the Justified" in the working document of *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 7.

[32] "The attempt to set it forth as an 'order'... is disastrous." Forde, 428.

[33] Forde, 427.

[34] Forde, 407.

ranted by sanctifying grace are muted or missing. The reminder of these possibilities is the gift given by the self-defined sanctification traditions of the three ELCA conversation partners.

2. The trust that justification is in "dynamic unity" with sanctification in such wise that good works flow spontaneously from the new state can obscure the mandate that goes with a divine sovereignty, always beyond, claiming the believer for further steps on the journey. The reminder of this distance—the *non capax*—is the gift brought by the stewards of the *sanctification*, now in the imperative mood, stressing the importance of the third use of the law.

But let us cast these admonitions differently by seeing how they may work in conjunction with counterpoint Lutheran admonitions.

Mutualities in mission

Where one, or some, or all, of the proposals are accepted by the ELCA, significant new possibilities in mission open up. As mentioned in my first lecture, the receiving of a partner's charisms and concerns carries with it fuller Christian teaching within the church. The same is true in mission beyond the doors of the church. A case in point is the deepening of the church's *social mission*. Stewart Herman has sought to show this in a paper on Lutheran critical appropriation of the Reformed theme of "covenant."[35] Here, I will speak about it in terms of the motifs under discussion.

The outworking of sovereignty and sanctification in the social mission of the three Lutheran partners can be seen in their respective histories of church involvement in efforts at systemic change. The sovereignty of Christ over the marketplace and countinghouse, as well as the church and the soul, and the associated imperative for Christ's church, *as church*, to set up signs there to his regency, mark these three traditions as "world-formative" in intention (Nicholas Wolterstorff's words). And sanctification in the same traditions reinforces that intention, by giving hope that genuine social change can be achieved. Where the Lutheran tradition of two kingdoms, the unchallengeability of society's orders, and the radicality of the fall leads to an uncritical acceptance of the status quo and a retreat to personal or ecclesial interiorities, the partners' witness is a needed word.

While this ecclesial momentum in and hope for secular structures are gifts to be received, the giving goes both ways. Lutheran sobriety about sin knows of the corruptibility of every system and every presumed social advance, as well as the sin in every ecclesial effort at transformation, as in the theocratic impulses of Geneva, Canterbury, and Rome. Further, its accent on the divine solidarity is a worthy testimony to the role of social systems as stabilizing orders of preservation, which also exist to set bounds to human sin. Solidarity makes its witness to others also in the Lutheran doctrine of vocation which looks to the individual Christian believer to be "a Christ to the neighbor" *within* the structures and orders of society.

When the accents we have been examining are seen to be mutually corrective rather than intrinsically conflictive, the social mission of partnered churches could bring together: (1) two historic Christian approaches to social change—the systemic "counter-institutional" tradition of the ELCA partners, and the "intra-institutional" Lutheran tradition of Christian vocation within social-political systems; (2) the im-

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[35] Stewart W. Herman, unpublished and untitled draft, 12/10/1996.

petus to church involvement in systemic change and hope for advance therein, yet the realism about what, in fact, can be achieved in society and a proper self-criticism of the church itself as an agent of change.

Reinhold Niebuhr: the meeting of mutual admonitions

The "Lutheran Reinhold Niebuhr" is a not uncommon description of this influential twentieth century theologian. Thus "Niebuhr for the 90s? Toward a Lutheran Revival" is vigorously argued in the *Lutheran Forum* by Mark Ellingsen.[36] Yet Langdon Gilkey can say,

> Because it was in a humanistic, moralistic, and optimistic culture that Niebuhr emphasized sin and justification, he was mistaken as "merely a Lutheran" who separated law and gospel so far as to be unable to bring them together again. No interpretation of Niebuhr could be further from the truth.... As with Calvin, justification in Niebuhr is teleological, leading to a more fruitful moral and political existence... all the Calvinistic moral and political passion and implicitly moral and political teleology in time was in him.[37]

Gilkey is echoing in this "teleology in time" the Reformed admonition vis à vis sanctification. However, such was never in Niebuhr separated from the Lutheran caution that every pious and political advance is subject to corruption. Here is an example of ecumenical complementarity.

Niebuhr's effort to bridge historic differences reflects his own ecclesial history, a factor often ignored in the interpretation of his theology and ethics.[38] Raised in the Evangelical Synod of North America and influential in the merger of that church with the Reformed Church in the U.S. in 1934,

> Lutheran sobriety about sin knows of the corruptibility of every system and every presumed social advance, as well as the sin in every ecclesial effort at transformation...

he was shaped by their three symbols, the Augsburg Confession, Luther's Small Catechism, and the Heidelberg Catechism. His explicit criticisms of both Calvinism and Lutheranism reflect this familiarity with them and his effort to learn from this laboratory of coexistence. Yet other aspects of his ecclesial history may also have a bearing on the three ELCA conversation partners: Niebuhr's Anglican spouse, Ursula (deceased January 10, 1997), and his later growth in appreciation of aspects of the Roman Catholic tradition.

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[36] Mark Ellingsen, "Niebuhr for the 90s? Toward a Lutheran Revival," *Lutheran Forum* 27:2 (May 1993), 40-43. See also the positive response by Todd Murken, "The Atonement in Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of History," 10-13.

[37] Langdon Gilkey, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of History," *The Journal of Religion* 54 (1974):384.

[38] A point I argue in my introduction to his life and thought, *The Promise of Reinhold Niebuhr*, Revised Edition (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994).

Correction and complementarity

In a key section of the second volume of the Gifford lectures, Niebuhr explores "Grace as Power In, and as Mercy Towards, Man."[39] For Niebuhr, the Christian life is grounded in *Christus pro nobis*, the mercy of God declared in Christ, the pardon offered to sinners accomplished on, and declared by, the cross. Justification is the unmerited favor of God received in faith. *Christus in nobis* is inextricable from *Christus pro nobis*. Saving grace is power as well as pardon, a new self with the possibilities of new growth and under the mandate to live in accord with the self's new state.

The "paradox" in Niebuhr's language of both/and is regularly destroyed by reductionist readings of the Christian life and of human history.

Concurrent with Niebuhr's probes of imputation and impartation in the Christian life, is the transposition of this partnership to the public sphere. Thus the assurance of grace as favor toward the sinner has its counterpart in the confidence that God will accomplish the divine purposes in public history, not penultimately where the struggle goes on without end, but ultimately, as expressed in the biblical images of the resurrection of the dead and a new heaven and a new earth. All is of grace as "favor" and not human works, in both the redeemed self and the eschatological society. It can only be so, for sin persists, and every stage of history is subject to its corruptions. Yet within history, as within the Christian life, grace is at work in the possibilities of advance, a grace of both gift and demand, with their indicatives and imperatives.

The "paradox" in Niebuhr's language of both/and, of what he describes a "having and not having," is regularly destroyed by reductionist readings of the Christian life and of human history. Thus in an historical setting of "optimism" and "moralism," Niebuhr brought to the fore the Lutheran *simultaneity of sin*. Regarding personal Christian life,

> the theologies which have sought to do justice to the positive aspects of regeneration have usually obscured the realities of sin which appear at every new level of virtue.[40]

So Niebuhr's respect for the profundity of Luther:

> The saints are always intrinsically sinners; that is why they are declared righteous extrinsically... we are sinners in reality but are righteous in hope.[41]

"The theologies" that have obscured this realism are those that accent *sanctification* in both the Christian life and in history at large. They run from "sectarian" to Roman Catholic. Also Calvin, developing "his own doctrine of sanctification... arrives at

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[39] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol II: Human Destiny* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), 107-26.

[40] Niebuhr, 125.

[41] Luther, *Works*, ed. Ficker, II, 104, 105, 176, quoted by Niebuhr on 124-125.

conclusions hardly to be distinguished from Catholic ones."[42] In all cases, the problem is that

> the Christian, in whom sin is broken "in principle," claims that the sins which remain are merely incidental "carnal desires" without recognizing that the sin of self-love is present in its more basic form... no longer subject to the paradox of having and not having it.[43]

Here we have "the Lutheran Niebuhr" asserting that, while in a new context that Lutherans have called *peccatum regnatum*,[44] a mighty struggle with even this "controlled sin" goes on in the life of the justified. This Lutheran emphasis is a corrective to the sanctification traditions, as in Calvinism, where there is assumed the presence of a "*prevailing inclination*... to submit to his will"[45] with its tendency to perfectionism, moralism, self-righteous fury and legalism. And in Niebuhrian transposition from self to society: history's genuine steps forward (his Reformed bequest) are accompanied by commensurate temptations and corruptibility that preclude the utopianisms and fanaticisms of automatic-progress theories.

But what of the mutuality of admonition? Niebuhr's admonishments of Lutheranism grow out of the sanctification and sovereignty aspects of his thought. In the

> Lutheran Reformation... the conscience is made uneasy about the taint of sin in all human enterprise; but the conviction that any alternative to a given course of action would be equally tainted, and that in any case the divine forgiveness will hallow and sanctify what is, really only eases the conscience prematurely.[46]

Grace is growth in and possibility for, as well as mercy toward, the believing sinner. In the same way, history itself has "indeterminate possibilities" obscured by the Lutheran emphasis on the persisting sin uncovered at "the ultimate level of religious judgment." The profound insight into universal corruptibility, when the only note struck, fails to incorporate "the prophetic note in Scripture" that distinguishes the worse from lesser sins, as in "the rich and powerful, the mighty and noble, the wise and the righteous," and thus "imperils and seems to weaken all moral judgments which deal with the 'nicely calculated less and more' of justice and goodness as revealed in the relativities of history,"[47] temptations of Lutheranism, related as they are to its two-kingdom ethic and separation of law from gospel.

As well as recourse to the sanctification traditions in criticizing both Luther and "orthodox Lutheranism," Niebuhr deploys the accents of the *sovereignty* traditions to defend the role of radical imperatives in both personal and public life. He thus faults Lutheranism for quietistic tendencies that derive not only from a too exclusive use of the *simul* in its view of society, but also the unqualified application there of its law-gospel distinction, its doctrine of orders, and its "left hand of God" ethics. In the motifs we have been examining here, it might be said that the Lutheran *capax* is too easily affiliated with the socio-political givens, especially so the political "powers that

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[42] Niebuhr, 199.

[43] Niebuhr, 200.

[44] "Controlled sin," as in the explanation of the new state in Appendix 1 of the *Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification*, citing the commentary of a Joint Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany, *Agenda, Meeting of the LWF Council*, (Geneva, Switzerland, 24 September–1 October 1996), 13.

[45] *Ibid.*, 200.

[46] *Ibid.*, 196.

[47] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 1* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1945), 222, 221.

be," with warrants sought in Romans 13. The corrective of *sovereignty* means that radical demands of Christ extend over the socio-political givens and are not limited to the believer or church. Thus Niebuhr challenged Luther's assertion that in the civil order "nothing *must be known* concerning the conscience, the Gospel, grace, remission of sins, heavenly righteousness or Christ himself; but Moses only and the works thereof,"[48] declaring

> the Kingdom of God and the demands of perfect love are... relevant to every political system and impinge on every social situation in which the self seeks to come to terms with the claims of other life.[49]

Niebuhr gave credit especially to the later Calvin and later Calvinists (Cromwell) for working out the public claims of the divine regency, as in movements for democracy and social justice. However, expressing their insights as a corrective rather than a replacement of Lutheran sobriety about what may be achieved in the public realm and the function of the orders as the restraint of sin, he spoke of them as discovering that it was "as important to place the ruler under the judgment of God as to regard him as an instrument of God for checking individual sin."[50]

Niebuhr's accent on the divine sovereignty is also, arguably, at work in his critique of Luther's confidence in an "ecstatic" faith that needs no urging to bring forth the works of love. Niebuhr judges that Luther's "Christ-mysticism" prompts him to declare that the soul of the believer is "so united with Christ that all his virtues flow into it,"[51] thus failing to see the need for the imperatives of law in the Christian life. But this criticism can also be seen as stemming from a Reformed accent on the divine sovereignty not contained in, but transcending and claiming from beyond the finite medium of the believer's heart through the third use of the law.[52]

Conclusion

Where the theme of mutual instruction and admonition appears in the preparatory documents, it is sometimes observed that the historic teachings of the respective churches on controverted questions do not reject what other churches affirm, but do reject what those churches deny. That is, in our theses at hand, insofar as the respective assertions about justification are not *reduced* to the accented motifs of what we have called *solidarity* and *simultaneity*, or *sovereignty* and *sanctification*, a rare moment of mutual teaching and learning is possible. Well said. Yet, in addition to that, can Lutherans and their partners accept the proposition that "the other" is *also* right in the different motifs it *affirms*? So considered, "mutual affirmation" takes on a deeper meaning that the discernment of necessary commonalities. It means also the affirmation of the others' charisms and concerns, and readiness to receive them. This year and next will tell the story of whether we are ready for such a step toward a church truly "catholic, evangelical, and ecumenical."

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[48] Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, II*, 192.

[49] *Ibid.*, 192.

[50] *Ibid.*, 221.

[51] *Ibid.*, 185.

[52] On the function of the Reformed sovereignty in Niebuhr's theology on this point as well as others, see the writer's "Reinhold Niebuhr as a Reformed Theologian," in *Reformed Theology in America*, ed. David Wells (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985).

The Congregation and the Unity of the Church

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The *satis est* of the Augsburg Confession plays a prominent role in ELCA ecumenics. In the quest for fresh entry points to the discussion of the 1997 votes, I want to examine Article VII from the point of view of *the congregation.*

What is the church?

> ...the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word.[1]

Formally, this definition has to do with the church universal, the community of believers that was, is, and will be, over time and place and into eternity. Functionally—by associating "assembly" with preaching and sacramental acts—*church* in Article VII means the historical *congregation.* Luther has that locale in mind in the *Large Catechism* when he explains the Creed's "holy Christian church":

> The word *ecclesia* means an assembly.... we who assemble select a special place and give the house its name by virtue of the assembly. Thus the word "church" (*Kirche*) really means nothing else than a common assembly.[2]

The Holy Spirit "calls" and "gathers" believers into the church catholic and "enlightens" and "sanctifies" them in the same through the Word preached and sacraments celebrated in local assemblies... in living congregations. Augustana so interpreted, and Luther so appropriated, return us to the New Testament givens, the congregations with whom the apostles corresponded—Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and those over whom the angels hovered, Smyrna, Sardis, Laodicea—gatherings brought to be by the Holy Spirit, but not without the tares among the wheat.

The focus on the congregation is not some Protestant primitivism, as a study of trends in Roman Catholic ecclesiology will

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[1] Article VII [The Church], *The Augsburg Confession* (German translation), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church,* trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert Fisher and Arthur Piepkorn (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 32.

[2] Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism, The Book of Concord,* 416.

show. So the important words of ecumenist George Tavard, speaking at a gathering on the ELCA ecumenical agenda and interpreting the ecclesiological implications of the second Vatican Council:

> Where it finds the Eucharist, it finds the church.... The Reformation focussed attention on two marks, notes, or signs, of the church: "where the Word is preached and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel." This was in fact an amplification of the definition of the church by Thomas Aquinas: The church is the gathering of the faithful (*congregatio fidelium*). Aquinas and medieval theology in general did not define the church by the hierarchy or *magisterium*, This is a later point of view, typical of the Counter-Reformation.... Defining the church by the faithful implicitly raises the question of what makes the faithful? They are faithful because they have heard the Word of God in the Holy Spirit, and they have been led by it to Christ, present among us in the Eucharist.... The fundamental ecclesiology is that the church is the communion of the faithful, gathered in Christ through the Holy Spirit.[3]

The congregation of Word and sacrament is a form of church life close to the heart of the Great Tradition.

Congregations are the focus of new attention today. Their durability, influence and growth are factors in this fresh interest. While denominations downsize and vaunted paraparochial experiments disappear, the "body of 'people who regularly gather to worship in a particular place'" [the definition of a congregation by historians Wind and Lewis][4] survives, and in many places gives evidence of vitality. A new discipline of "congregational studies" emerges and vigorous institutions appear to service and "transform" congregations, e.g. the Alban Institute.[5] What are the ecumenical implications of the congregation, understood in both its classical doctrinal and contemporary empirical significance?

Such a question converges with the rising chorus of voices that are asking for new approaches to ecumenism, ones that go beyond the current denominationally-grounded efforts, as in Mark Heim's suggestions for a new start based on the realities of diverse traditions rather than denominations, or Teresa Berger's plea for a contextual ecumenism.[6] Rather than juxtapose alternative ecumenical entry points to current ones, however, I want to ask how an "ecumenism from below" based on the reality of the congregation might fructify hard-won advances in denominationally-oriented ecumenics, especially bilaterals. Specifically, what import would the recovery of a congregation-grounded reading of Augustana VII have for 1997 decisions?

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[3] George Tavard, "Ecumenical Perspectives on the Leuenberg Agreement," *The Leuenberg Agreement and Lutheran-Reformed Relationships*, ed. William G. Rusch and Daniel F. Martensen (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 121, 122. In a similar vein, see also Susan K. Wood, "Communion Ecclesiology: Source of Hope, Source of Controversy," *Pro Ecclesia* II:4 (Fall 1993), 424-32. See especially: "There is a density of ontological realism here that extends not only to the sacramental realism of the presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine, but also a sacramental realism of the church, for where the Eucharist is, there is the church. There is an intrinsic relationship between the historical Christ, the sacramental Christ and the ecclesial Christ." (425)

[4] *American Congregations*, Vol 1: *Portraits of Twelve Religious Communities*, ed. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.

[5] Note especially the writings of Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church* and *Transforming Congregations for the Future.*

[6] S. Mark Heim, "The Next Ecumenical Movement," *The Christian Century* 113:24 (Aug. 12-21, 1996), 780-83; Teresa Berger, "Ecumenism: Postconfessional? Consciously Contextual?" *Theology Today* 53:2 (July 1996), 213-19.

To answer that question I want to begin by taking a frank look at the theological state of affairs in American congregations.

Ecclesial realities

"A Pallid but Personable Faith?"—asked the *Time* headline about a 1980 report on what North American congregations sought in their clergy.[7] Similar assessments and much sharper indictments of mainline Protestant faith and theology have been familiar themes since. Leander Keck said it as well as any in his widely-read Beecher lectures. In many mainline congregations

> the theocentric praise of God has been displaced by anthropocentric utilitarianism. What matters most is that everyone get something out of the service, as the phrase goes.... In this inversion, the living God, whose biblical qualities like jealousy and wrath have been tamed, has been deprived of freedom, and having been reduced to the Great Enabler, has little to do except warrant our causes and help us fulfill our aspirations.... The opening line of the Westminster Confession is now reversed, for now the chief end of God is to glorify us and to be useful to us indefinitely.[8]

Keck believes the decline of mainline denominations is related to this anthropocentric turn:

> Something is indeed amiss when a major denomination loses 245 members a day for more than twenty years, an aggregate of 2 million persons. Nor is it irrelevant that for every person from a nonreligious background who joins a mainline church, three leave for no church at all.[9]

If mainline congregations are captive to their culture and on the decline, what of the fast-growing "evangelical empire"?[10] According to one of its leading theologians, David Wells, contemporary evangelicals are hostage to the same anthropocentrism. Describing it as a "self-piety," dramatically illustrated in the success-oriented feel-good mega-churches, he says:

> Christian beliefs have mostly been retained, but they are not allowed to encumber the search for new forms of spirituality, technique and community.... The powerful vision of a humanity corrupted by sin being released to stand before God in all his glory... is now dying. It is being edged out by the small and tawdry interest of the self in itself, the self standing in the inner counsels of its own piety, the one hand bargaining with the other....[11]

On these matters, what of the congregations involved in current bilateral negotiations with the ELCA—for example, the UCC, PCUSA, and ECUSA? We have some specific data on them. The Search Institute's recent study of "Effective Christian Education" in North American congregations rates the UCC as next to the lowest of the denominations surveyed in "Faith Maturity," and lowest in "Growth in Faith Maturity," with the Presbyterian Church, USA the next to the lowest in "congregational loyalty."[12] In a similar vein, Loren Mead's compara-

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[7] *Time* (September 29, 1980), 85.

[8] Leander Keck, *The Church Confident* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 34, 35.

[9] Keck, 21-22.

[10] I am using "evangelical" in the sense designated in lecture 1, the 16th century Reformation principles, formal and material, intensified and internalized through the movements of pietism, Wesleyanism, the Awakenings, revivalism and modernists-fundamentalists controversy.

[11] David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids:Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 110, 185.

[12] Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Elkin, *Effective Christian Education: A Summary Report on Faith, Loyalty and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1990), 41.

tive studies show the pattern of decline of the denominations with whom the ELCA is contemplating communion, those covered in his research being the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and UCC Churches.[13]

And the ELCA? The same studies are revealing. In the Search Institute findings the ELCA is the very lowest in "Faith Maturity"—just underneath the UCC, next to lowest in "Growth in Faith Maturity," and lowest in "congregational loyalty"—just beneath the Presbyterians. In the Mead studies, the ELCA follows the general pattern, prompting the author's comment:

> Note that the curves are relatively congruent in shape and direction. They go up and down at similar points along the scale of years.[14]

George Lindbeck's observation is to the point. He says that the ELCA is

> swayed by the same current fashions and is not notably better rooted in the historic faith... the ELCA like other denominations, appears to be capitulating to the *Zeitgeist* and losing the struggle for confessional integrity for the foreseeable future.[15]

For Lutherans and others who might look to the historic episcopate as a bulwark against this cultural accommodation, Episcopal theologian Philip Turner's study of the same is instructive:

> The history traced above suggests a disturbing possibility, namely that forms like the historic episcopate, or the shape of the liturgy or the *Augsburg Confession* can remain in place yet be ignored or subverted or denied from below. If doctrine and discipline can be ignored or subverted in this way, and if the moral tradition that makes oversight and discipline possible falls into decline, the much to be desired ecumenical event of full communion between the ECUSA and the ELCA, may still leave the question of the apostolic succession in its proper sense unresolved.[16]

What is to be done? I believe there are some road signs to the way out of captivity. Ironically, they point back to the same location that illustrates the problem: the congregation.

Counter-signs

The groundbreaking Wind-Lewis study of the history of representative North American congregations demonstrates the chameleon-like tendencies of congregational life over time, too quickly adapting to cultural forces and accommodating regularly to society's premises and values. However, the same study shows that the congregation as worshipping community with a transcendent Referent provides traction against a slide into cultural givens, a finding consonant with Barth's observation that believers each Sunday are not allowed to forget that they are accountable to Another. And more, the same study shows that the congregation is the principal steward of the church's theological identity. Peter Berger, well-known for his early indictments of local

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[13] Loren Mead, *Transforming Congregations for the Future* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1994), 3-5.

[14] Mead, 5.

[15] George A. Lindbeck, "The Church Faithful and Apostate: Reflections on Kansas City," *Lutheran Forum* 28:1 (Lent 1994), 12.

[16] Philip Turner, "Episcopal Oversight and Ecclesiastical Discipline: On the Decline of a Practice," *Pro Ecclesia* III:4 (Fall 1994). The post-modern "Rave Mass" conducted recently in the basement of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, Matthew Fox preaching, is an example of Turner's point. See *Forum Letter* 24:3 (March 1995), which rightly links it with similar examples in both the UCC and the ELCA.

For all its manifest flaws, this assembly [the local congregation] is the basic bearer of the promises of God to this people of God.

congregations,[17] said subsequently:

> What the church is all about is that one old story of God's dealings with [us], the story that spans the Exodus and Easter morning. When all is said and done the Christian community consists of those people who keep on telling this story to each other....[18]

Continuing the narrative metaphor, the congregation is the basic locale for telling and celebrating the Christian story. Here is the place where, in season and out, the Word is preached and the sacraments administered, and by the grace of God, rightly so. For all its manifest flaws, this assembly is the basic bearer of the promises of God to this people of God.

Evidence mounts of the refocus today in congregations on that Story, a countercurrent to the Babylonian captivity earlier noted. Preaching is enjoying a small renascence, and with it the growing use of the lectionary and its requirement to attend to the whole Tale. The teaching of Christian basics as well as the growth of Bible study groups—even a revival of catechesis—comes further to the fore as laity press for understanding their identity vis à vis the ideologies and religious passions of the hour.[19] Thus both the form of the congregation with its defining marks of *kerygma* and *leitourgia*—Word and sacrament—and the biblical and doctrinal content now increasingly in evidence in many congregations, are countervailing signs among us.

The pastor and the reclaiming of faith

Within congregations the office of pastor is established for special responsibilities:

> *Presbyters* serve as pastoral ministers of Word and sacraments in a local eucharistic community. They are preachers and teachers of the faith, exercise

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[17] Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday & Co., 1961).

[18] Peter Berger, "A Call for Authority in the Christian Community," *The Christian Century* LXXXVIII:43 (October 27, 1971), 1262. For the heated 1960s debate on the viability of the congregation, see the writer's argument for its necessary role in "telling the story" in "The Crisis of the Congregation: A Debate," in *Voluntary Associations*: Essays in honor of James Luther Adams, ed. D. B. Robertson (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), 275-98.

[19] On the return of theology to Christian education see the issue "Theology and Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal* XV:3 (Spring 1995). On the revival of catechesis, see the symposium on the subject as it pertains to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in *Theology Today* 53:2 (July 1996), 148-76. The interest in catechism goes well beyond the Roman Catholic Church, as for example the work in the PCUSA in this country and the EKU in Europe on a new catechism, and the plans of the Confessing Christ in the UCC to develop a catechism for congregations. On the concern for basics in congregations see Dorothy and Gabriel Fackre, *Christian Basics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994, fourth printing).

> pastoral care, and bear responsibility for the discipline of the congregation to the end that the world may believe and that the entire membership of the Church may be renewed, strengthened and equipped in ministry.[20]

The life of the congregation and the ministry of the whole people of God require a special stewardship of the church's theological identity, and thus the ordination to ministry of Word and sacrament, and the regular telling and celebrating of the Christian story in the midst of a local people and place by the local pastor.

It is no accident that the erosion of theological identity earlier cited has produced a counter-movement among *pastors*. These "presbyters" are at the forefront of movements of "reclaiming the faith" in mainline denominations, efforts described variously as neo-confessional and "centrist" (Christ, not the ideologies of left and right as "center," and the doctrinal "centralities" retrieved). Whether structured in movements, or appearing as an emerging mindset, centrist/neoconfessional ferment is a direct challenge to the mainline church accommodation to culture. Note the recent commentary on this development: Jack Rogers' description and interpretation in his recent book, *Claiming the Center; The Christian Century* current tracking of "center" developments; the Lilly Foundation's sponsorship of the three-year research project of D. Jacobsen and W. Trollinger, "Re-forming the Center"; the journal of Bible and theology, *Interpretation*, devoting its April, 1997 issue to "the center."[21] The ELCA was one of the first North American churches to create a platform for neo-confessional voices, as in its "Call to Faithfulness" conferences. This phenomenon has implications for ecumenism and specifically for ELCA relationships.[22]

The confessional/center development is to be distinguished from the "biblical renewal" movements that appeared in mainline denominations in late 1970s, the latter often triggered by culture-war issues such as homosexuality and abortion and tied to inerrantist or infallibilist interpretations of Scripture.[23] In contrast, the former are focussed on *theological* issues and *doctrinal* reference points that give the church an independent identity, and therefore strive not to be defined by culture-war questions with their Left-Right polarities. This does not preclude strong social justice commitments in the neoconfessional/center movements, but they do not follow party lines, striving for the freedom under the Word that marked the Barmen declaration whose cadences appear regularly in these circles. Further, the schismatic tendency to which the movements of the 1970s were, and continue to be, prone is disavowed by confessional centrists who strive to make their witness within existing structures. Many "ecumenical evangelicals," however, are

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[20] "Ministry," *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Pamphlet No. 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982), 27.

[21] Jack Rogers, *Claiming the Center* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995). Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger, Jr.'s "Evangelical and Ecumenical: Re-forming the Center," *The Christian Century* 111:21 (July 13-20, 1994), 682-3 is a commentary reflecting their Re-forming the Center project. The April 1997 issue of *Interpretation* includes an overview article by this writer, and essays by Jacobsen, William Abraham, and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen.

[22] There is an interesting overlap of leadership in these movements and a vigorous commitment to one or another, or all, of the proposed ELCA partnerships.

[23] For the characteristics of, and distinctions within, evangelicalism, see the writer's *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993).

associated with the confessional/center movements and mindset, finding unity with "evangelical ecumenicals" in a common focus on foundational Christian teaching.[24]

To explore the significance of this kind of grassroots neoconfessionalism, I draw on my own experience in the "Confessing Christ" movement in the United Church of Christ that involves over a thousand pastors. Its 1993 invitation letter strikes characteristic notes:

> We believe that the future of our Church depends on faithfulness to the one word of the Triune God, Jesus Christ, whom we are "to hear and which we are to trust and obey in life and in death...." We are deeply concerned... that the commitment to "listen for God's Word in Holy Scripture" and "in our rich theological heritage" [declarations of a recent UCC General Synod] is often neglected in our Church. We view this indifference to Scripture and debilitating amnesia as a threat to the Gospel.... We believe we here give voice to the concerns of the *often-silent center* of our Church.... To that end we invite you join us in dialogue about the meaning of that heritage... where we can *reaffirm* this faith, *reclaim* its biblical roots, *retrieve* its historic resources and think together about the controverted questions within our Church and the culture.[25]

Sent to 450 who had taken part since 1984 in grassroots theological colloquies begun at a UCC conference center on Cape Cod (Craigville), 400 pastors appeared at three regional gatherings to express their support. Since then a national steering committee has formed, many more regional meetings have been held on controverted questions (the Re-imagining Conference, the Jesus Seminar, religious pluralism, inclusive language, the baptismal formula, etc.), eight regional centers established, a catechism project launched, publications produced including a detailed theological critique of *The New Century Hymnal*, and a Confessing Christ Ecunet meeting with over 5000 notes. The framework for these activities is a Statement of Principles in which Confessing Christ pledges to

> listen for God's Word in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and in our rich theological heritage. Central to the United Church of Christ, which baptizes in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is its faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This faith is grounded in the authority of Scripture and is expressed in the ecumenical creeds, in the confessions and covenants of our Reformation traditions, in the Preamble of its Constitution and in the prayers, worship and public witness of the Church.[26]

When the grassroots pastor movements are ranged alongside the reach toward theological integrity in many congregations, a pattern emerges: *ad fontes!* Back to the sources of who we are as confessing Christians in a culture with other regnant premises and perspectives. Their purpose is not to escape from the modern world, but to root Christian witness in and to culture in classical Christian identity, rather than be defined by society's ideologies.

The similarity between the doctrinal commitments developing in congregations and among pastors and the foci of the three ELCA ecumenical proposals is notable. In all cases, the drive is to "first principles": justification, the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, the nature, mission, ministry and sacraments of the church, the authority of Scripture and role of tradition.

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[24] Distinctions made in Fackre, *Ecumenical Faith in Evangelical Perspective, passim.*

[25] "Confessing Christ," letter to 450 pastors, September 30, 1993, 15 signatories.

[26] *Confessing Christ Statement of Principles.*

These are critical loci in Christian doctrine.[27] The direction of re-grounded congregations and pastors converges with the bilateral ecumenical agenda at the point of recovery of fundamental frameworks and thus the challenge to doctrinal indifferentism. Attention to the fundaments as required by the ecumenical agenda of the ELCA finds a natural ally in congregations and pastors re-interrogating the Great Tradition as a way to resist cultural captivity.

> Doctrinal authenticity is inextricable from ecclesial catholicity.

Further, the very accent on confessional identity developing in congregations and among pastors is of a piece with the Lutheran charism explored in my first lecture, the concern for sound teaching in the church. Non-Lutheran historians Mark Noll and Winfred Hudson had it right in their earlier cited comments on Lutheranism as steward of doctrinal integrity. The nature of the long discussions associated with all three proposed ELCA partnerships, and the specifics of the agreements, all highlight the importance of Christian doctrine, and as such, constitute the giving of a Lutheran gift to the ecumenical enterprise. And now the neoconfessional developments in congregations and among pastor-led movements return to these same foundations.

The case I have sought to make in my first two lectures for the giving and receiving of charisms and concerns reinforces the importance of retrieving the tradition *ecumenically*. The integrity of Christian doctrine—its wholeness—is in direct relationship to the catholicity of the church. To rephrase the Vincentian canon: Christian faith is what is held to be true always and everywhere *that the church is together*. Doctrinal authenticity is inextricable from ecclesial catholicity. The retrieval that secures Christian identity requires, therefore, a life together of the Christian community, one based on attention to shared basics the fullness of which is contingent upon the various parts of the Body bringing their charisms to one another in Corinthian mutuality.

The heightened significance of congregations, their ecclesial centrality in the stewardship of Word and sacrament, and the evidences in them, and among their pastors, of doctrinal renewal suggest the importance of a local venue for a doctrinally grounded ecumenism. Congregation-wise, this could mean strengthened bonds in local communities, new relationships that give shared *faith* commitments the high visibility they are due, an enlarged circle of support for a foundational Christian identity and the needed complementarity of charisms.

What would that life together look like in a *locale* of committed congregations and pastors involved in the 1997 decisions?

1997 decisions and intra-congregational relations

As we took a frank look in *general* at the actual state of the faith in local congregations, any scenario touching local contexts for ELCA partnership must face squarely the facts of congregational and pastoral life and belief life in *particular* cases. I will confine my remarks to the decisions that propose "church fellowship"—ELCA, Episcopal, Reformed—although they may have

implications also for congregations that want to explore the ecclesial fruit of the mutual lifting of Roman Catholic-Lutheran condemnations. The implementation of the churchwide agreements presupposes that the partners do, in fact, assent to the doctrinal core on which the agreements have been premised, and that the congregations involved are, in fact, communities in which the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. What if that is *not* the case? Given the doctrinal disarray earlier detailed, this can surely be anticipated in the local particularities of the proposed partnerships. At this point, the congregation and the pastor come center stage in ecumenical negotiations.

There are some important contextual considerations acknowledged in the past and present joint documents of those involved in the 1997 decisions. In both the Covenant of Agreement and in the Concordat, there is no relaxation of the partners' theological standards for pastoral ministry. Exchange of ministries made possible by the agreements does not mean abandonment of patterns of belief established in a given national church and thus in a local congregation. The ELCA will still require adherence to its confessions for Episcopal priests or Reformed pastors who might seek calls, and vice versa. The same is true for "altar fellowship" and why it is so important to the ELCA, and to many of the rest of us, to be clear that its proposed partners hold to the Real Presence in the eucharist, and thus that those welcomed to a local altar/table be admonished about this assumption. While the national denominational texts and bilateral documents assert enough doctrinal commonality to warrant the exchange of clergy and common communion, *in principle*, the application, *in fact*, especially so in local congregations, brings into play the specificity of a church's doctrinal norms.

The appropriateness of this kind of contextuality, as it related to congregations in regions, was acknowledged in the 1982 agreement between the Episcopal Church and the three Lutheran Churches that had participated in the LED I and II. Leaders of regional dioceses and synods were encouraged to implement the national agreement on "Interim Sharing of the Eucharist" when

> appropriate in particular situations where the said authorities deem that local conditions are appropriate for sharing of worship jointly by congregations of the respective Churches.[28]

After the recent Righter decision in the ECUSA, and the continuing deep differences in that church, "local conditions" cannot be ignored in *when and where* an approved national Concordat can, in fact, be implemented.

The realism about the need to maintain present doctrinal standards in each church, and the reality of diversity in local circumstances, connects with a working assumption in bilateral and multilateral covenants. Assumed in many calls to "church fellowship" are two stages of decision-making: formal ratification, and subsequently what is variously described as "realization," "actualization," "reception." The distinction has to do with factors of finitude in implementing official agreements: the need for soaking time and pedagogy, and of course, the fact of inertia. However, discretionary

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[27] On the current surge in the writing of systematics, see the issue "The Resurgence of Systematic Theology," *Interpretation* Vol. XLIX, No. 3 (July 1995).

[28] "Toward Full Communion," in *"Toward Full Communion" and "Concordat of Agreement" : Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, Series III*, ed. William A. Norgren and William G. Rusch (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 12.

factors are also implied. Even where denominations are purportedly connectional and disciplined, the deterioration of confidence in national structures is such that a *de facto* freedom is everywhere to be seen, as in the withholding of funds and much resistance to corporate denominational agendas and decisions. Add to this the other realities of rampant "culture-Protestantism" and the neoconfessional counter-movements' response, and another kind of "church fellowship" begins to suggest itself. It might look something like this: Under the umbrella of national bilateral agreements (stage one), let there be a *measured* implementation in locales (stage two), according to the discernment of *common theological faithfulness*. When and where there is reason for "mutual affirmation" and also readiness for the sharing of charisms and thus "mutual admonition," let church fellowship go forward in fact, as well as in principle. Doctrinal circumstances therefore are the condition for the actualization of ecumenical agreements. Thus the fair question: In this local context, can congregations and regions, in good conscience, *actualize* the formally declared concord?

Such a measured discretionary second stage would coalesce with concerns of the neoconfessional movements to bring theological integrity to the foreground of church attention. Indeed it would encourage the kind of theological soul-searching that all our churches so desperately need.

Whatever the formal agreements, the fact is that bilaterals do work just this way. The Leuenberg Concord is a case in point. While there have been denominational signatories, its actual implementation has been affected by the factors of both finitude and discretion, and carried out with the same contextual caution as is here proposed.[29]

The congregation-sensitive approach to ecumenical proposals that I am exploring does honor the place of national churches and does not accede to a current "neocongregationalism" scornful of supra-parochial structures and wedded to a trendy cultural localism. Tony Campola, who as a Baptist knows the dangers of a church defined solely in terms of local autonomy, argues that denominations are carriers of the classical Christian identity regularly ignored by the booming mega-churches so easily taken captive by their surrounding culture.[30] But more than pragmatically considered, the church, this Mercersburg theologian believes, is the Body of Christ, an organism born at Pentecost sustained by the Holy Spirit corporately over time through Word, sacrament and ministry, only fully expressing empirically what it is ontologically when having a true life together in Word, sacrament and ministry. "Denominations," transient forms on the way to that larger communal reality, however, are serious covenantal attempts and anticipations of that hoped-for unity, and in those denominations under the glass here, are carriers of a Word, sacrament and ministry that steward classical Christian identity. The doctrinal foci of these 1997 agreements are witness to that custodianship. Thus congregations, and their new visibility, must be seen for what they are, *cells* within the Body of Christ, not mistaken for the Body as such. Here we have given attention to *healthy* cells, worries about malignancy, and some

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[29] On the struggle to find a life together subsequent to the declaration of concord see *Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft Gemeinschaft reformatorischer in Europa, Die Kirche Jesu Christi, Sacramente, Amt, Ordination*, Leuenberger Texte, Heft 1, Heft 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 1995), English translation included.

[30] Tony Campola, *Can Mainline Churches Make a Comeback?* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995)

hopes for how the healthy ones can contribute to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ.

The Lutheran charism in the local community

What would the convergences of currents of congregational and pastoral concern for sound teaching, the 1997 proposed partnerships, and the Lutheran doctrinal charism mean in a community of local congregations? I close with a scenario, intentionally "blue sky," as futurists argue the benefits of stretching the mind by considering the daring dream.

Here is a community with ELCA, Episcopal, Reformed (take your pick—RCA, UCC, PCUSA), and Roman Catholic congregations, representing the varied conversation partners. All the congregations are active in the local council of churches and their pastors in the ecumenical ministerium. These associations do many good works, but doctrinal digging and work on the foundations of sound teaching enriched by the ecumene of charisms is not one of them. The absence of such is an ecumenical invitation for building the Body of Christ in this place. Whatever else is entailed for a local ELCA congregation by any or all of these 1997 agreements, certainly in local communities and among congregations and local pastors, the ELCA congregation is a natural host to the desperately needed theological conversation about fundamental Christian teaching. If the agreements are approved in 1997, important documents of shared belief are put in place, and an enriching complementarity made possible. A local community in which the partnership congregations really did care about the things worth caring about—justification by faith, the Triune God, the Person and Work of Christ, the Real Presence of Christ in the eucharist, the witness and outreach of the church—would become the locus for rare in-depth exploration of and witness to catholic faith, with commensurate enrichment of mission in all of its senses. Indeed, the exciting and eye-opening conversation that produced the studies behind, and the documents of, 1997 could be re-lived in and among local congregations and local pastors. An ELCA congregation with the Lutheran charism could be the catalyst of this kind of local congregational life together. It would find a ready reception for that initiative in partner congregations and pastors where theological renewal now goes on apace. That kind of deep-level sharing would be the natural context and catalyst for the eucharistic hospitality and clergy inter-relationships to one degree or another entailed in the various proposals. Where there is no theological seriousness and response on the part of other congregations involved in the formal 1997 agreements, no such outreach is in order and no local implementation of the overarching agreements appropriate. But I am focusing on the dream here not the nightmare, the possibility of a significant step forward toward the unity of the church in local assemblies where the Gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. "Mutual conversation and consolation" has a special Lutheran resonance. Why not a life together among as well as within faithful congregations? "Some speak of things that were and ask, 'Why?' I dream of things that never were, and ask, 'Why not?'"

What Are We Doing? The Unity of the Church and the Unity of the Churches[1]

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What are we doing? And why are we doing it? Why has the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America used up so much of its theological time and energy since early in this decade debating and soon deciding the three ecumenical proposals before us: the Concordat of Agreement which would establish full communion with the Episcopal Church (hereafter, simply "the Concordat"), the Formula of Agreement which would establish full communion with three Reformed churches (hereafter, simply "the Formula"), and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in which the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches around the world would state that neither today condemns the other's teaching on justification (hereafter, simply "the Joint Declaration")? What are we in fact seeking in all this? And are we seeking what we should be seeking?

In this lecture and those that follow, I want to examine three basic and simple questions: What are we doing? Should we do it? and What difference does it make? Although I will make no effort to hide the fact that I support all three of the proposals, I will not be presenting arguments directly for or against them in these lectures. That is not their function. Rather, I want to focus on the more comprehensive background questions about the nature of our ecumenical efforts. In dealing with the proposals before us, it is important both to debate their details and to keep these larger questions in mind. In the debate about the proposals so far, I fear that we have sometimes lost ourselves a bit in the details; that we have begun to miss the forest for the trees. We need to see the proposals both in light of our

[1]These lectures are here printed essentially as they were delivered at Luther Seminary, February 25-26, 1997. They may be revised for the later presentations at Wartburg, Philadelphia, and Trinity Seminaries.

total understanding of Christ, Spirit, and church and as a part of a larger process within which our decisions this summer are only one moment.

In this first lecture, I want to ask some very basic questions about the unity of the church and the communion we are seeking. In this lecture, I will remain at a rather abstract level and will say very little about the specifics of the proposals themselves. In the second lecture, I will turn more directly to the theological details of the proposals and ask about the criteria by which we might judge their acceptability. In the last lecture (which will be shorter in order to permit greater time for response and discussion) I will ask some general questions about the promises and dangers these proposals contain for American Lutheranism as it looks forward the next century.

The gift of unity and the pursuit of unity

Back then to the question I began with: What are we trying to do? A simple—and, I believe, true—answer is that we are seeking to live out the unity of the church on the basis of the truth of the gospel. As soon as one makes this rather simple statement, however, a problem arises. There is a unity which we appear to lack. At its 1991 Assembly in Canberra, the World Council of Churches adopted a statement on "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling," *koinonia* being the Greek word usually translated as communion. This ecumenical statement reflects a widespread consensus on the essential shape of that unity we are seeking: The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation."[2] This unity we do not today have with many communities we nevertheless recognize as churches. We are not able to share the Eucharist with the Orthodox; Lutherans and Baptists do not have a mutual recognition of baptism; Catholics do not recognize Lutheran ordained ministries; and while we are approaching ever closer to a widely accepted joint confession of the apostolic faith, we are not yet there.[3] In America, Lutherans are themselves still separated in churches which cannot together celebrate the Lord's Supper. A unity we should display is clearly missing.

And yet, we repeatedly confess that we believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. The Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession states that "the one holy Christian church will be and remain forever." Oneness, unity, is essential to the church as the body of Christ and so is a characteristic the church cannot lose and still be church. In the face of divisions in the Corinthian church, Paul asks, "Has Christ been divided?" (1 Cor 1:13) and he expects the answer to be "no." In 1 Corinthians 12, a chapter focally concerned with unity, Paul tells his addressees: "you are the body of

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[2]World Council of Churches, "The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling," in *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993*, ed. Günther Gassmann. Faith and Order Paper, no. 159 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993):4.

[3]See Faith and Order Commission, *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*. Faith and Order Paper, no. 153 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991).

Christ" (v. 27) and that body cannot be divided. As is said in the letter to the Ephesians, "there is one body" (4:4).

In addition to that unity we sense is lacking, there is also a unity which cannot be missing if there is any church at all. In relation to this unity, all we can do is accept it or leave it; we cannot destroy it. Christ has promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church (Mt 16:18), and thus it is a matter of our faith that a united, holy, catholic, and apostolic church will always exist, not because of our effort, but as a gift of God's grace. There are the divided churches, but there is also, there must be, the one, undivided church.

How do we understand the relationship between the unity our churches seek and the unity we must already possess if we are churches at all? Here is I think where we must begin when we ask: "What are we doing?" We will rightly understand and pursue the unity we lack only when we understand it in the context of the unity which is God's prior and gracious gift in Christ and the Spirit.

What unites the church?

What in fact unites the church? What holds the church together? Typically, unity is a matter of various things or persons being united by something, by some common characteristic or some common interest, or perhaps, to put it another way, united in something, some common cause, something in which persons feel themselves bound together, unified, one. What are the bonds that hold the church together? My answer will have three steps, unified in a single trajectory. Crucial for the scheme I am proposing is both the ordered distinction of these three steps and their ultimate unity. I will not be describing three unities or three forms of unity, but one unity.

1. Unity in Word and Sacrament. When Lutherans ask in an ecumenical context what unites or unifies the church, the discussion never goes on very long without a quotation of the 7th article of the Augsburg Confession and its *satis est* clause, which I will quote in full:

> Our churches also teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. For the true unity of the church it is enough [*satis est*] to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere. It is as Paul says, "One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," etc. (Eph 4:5, 6).

We seem here to have a straightforward and simple answer to the question of what unites the church. The unity of the church is constituted by the common presence of a common event or activity: the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Where these activities occur, then the bonds that hold the one church together are present.

Lutherans are convinced that this statement is true. But why word and sacrament and not something else: bishops, the pope, or a common experience of being born again? The answer of the Reformation was that the church, like justification itself, is a gift of grace, not the product of human works. Crucial for the ecclesiology of the Lutheran Reformation was the conviction that justification and church go together. Justification is bound up with our being "in Christ;" I share in the righteousness of Christ and so am justified because I am in Christ and Christ in me by faith and baptism. But to be in Christ is to be in his Body, the church. Justification and the reality of the

church are inseparable. If that is so, then those events that constitute and communicate justification are identical with those events that create the church and bring the individual into the church. Justification is communicated by the gospel proclaimed in word and sacrament and by nothing else. The church also, then, is constituted by the events of word and sacrament.[4]

If we say that word and sacrament constitute the church, they must also constitute the church's essential characteristics: its holiness, its catholicity, its apostolicity, and its oneness, its unity. Where the word is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered, there the bonds exist which unite this community with all other communities and there the one catholic church is present. Where word and sacrament are lacking, then those bonds do not exist and we have something else than the one church, whatever else may be present—good works, deep religious conviction, solidarity with the poor and oppressed, moving experience, or, if one likes, correctly ordained pastors or bishops. We should note how strong a doctrine of the church is implied in the statement that word and sacrament alone are truly constitutive of the church, for in saying this, the Augsburg Confession is implying the inseparability of the justification of the sinner and the coming to be of the church. This connection between justification and church is the unmovable foundation of Lutheran ecclesiology.

A foundation, however, is not yet a building. The Lutheran tendency is to stop at this point, not only to say no more, but to accuse anyone who does say more of somehow betraying the Reformation. But to stop with the statement that the church is united by common word and sacrament is unsatisfactory in a variety of ways. It is logically unsatisfactory, because it confuses two kinds of statement. It is one thing to state what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for the one church to exist. Broadly speaking, that is what Augustana 7 does. It is something rather different to describe what the unity is which word and sacrament creates. The unity for which word and sacrament are the necessary and sufficient conditions is far richer than just the events of word and sacrament. It is theologically unsatisfactory to stop with word and sacrament, because word and sacrament are not self-

To grasp the unity of the church we need to follow the trajectory taken by the work of Christ and the Spirit.

[4]On ecclesiology within the CA, I find the best study to be Bernhard Lohse, "Die Einheit der Kirche nach der Confession Augustana," in *Evangelium—Sakramente—Amt und die Einheit der Kirche: Die ökumenische Tragweite der Confessio Augustana*, ed. Karl Lehmann and Edmund Schlink. Dialog der Kirchen, vol. 2 (Freiburg i. B.; Göttingen: Herder; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982). More extensive arguments in support of what is said in this lecture about the CA can be found in Michael Root, ""Satis Est': What Do We Do When Other Churches Don't Agree?" *Dialog* 30 (1991):314-24; Michael Root, "Conditions of Communion: Bishops, the Concordat, and the Augsburg Confession," in *Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat*, ed. Ephraim Radner and R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 52-70.

enclosed events, events that begin and end in themselves; they are events that communicate Christ and the Spirit, who are then active in the lives of individuals and in the life of the community they create. To describe the unity of the community means talking about more than word and sacrament, even if what we describe always remains dependent on and constituted by word and sacrament. To grasp the unity of the church we need to follow the trajectory taken by the work of Christ and the Spirit.

2. Unity in faith as a personal reality. The next step in this trajectory can be seen in Melanchthon's expansion of Article 7 in the Apology. He states: "the church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly [*principaliter*] an association of faith and of the Holy Spirit in men's hearts."[5] His emphasis here falls on faith as that which associates people in the church, and faith not simply in terms of its content, but as a reality in the heart.

There is of course no tension between unity as constituted by word and sacrament and unity as an internal personal reality in faith. The significance of Word and sacrament is that they communicate Christ and the Spirit. Christ and the Spirit do not remain simply external to the self, but come and dwell in the believer. Faith is emphasized as that by which the believer receives Christ and the Spirit. It is this receptive role of faith that is the basis for the Lutheran insistence that we are justified by grace through faith (and not through, say, love).

Unity in word and sacrament creates unity in faith. As Luther put it: "where there is the same gospel, there is also the same faith...."[6] Because faith is dependent on word and sacrament and effected by them, when one lists what is constitutive of the church and its unity, one can speak as the Confession speaks, one can speak simply of word and sacrament. But if one wants to give a full description of what the unity of the church is, one must go on and speak of faith. Unity is not something simply external to the self. Persons are bound together in Christ's body. When pressed by the Roman Catholic Confutation to expand on what had been said in Augustana 7 about the church and its unity, Melanchthon took up this more internal unity:

> We are talking about true spiritual unity, without which there can be no faith in the heart nor righteousness in the heart before God. For this unity, we say, a similarity of human rites, whether universal or particular, is not necessary. The righteousness of faith is not a righteousness tied to certain traditions, as the righteousness of the law was tied to the Mosaic ceremonies, because this righteousness of the heart is something that quickens the heart. To this quickening human traditions, whether universal or particular, contribute nothing; nor are they wrought by the Holy Spirit, as are chastity, patience, the fear of God, the love of our neighbor, and the works of love.[7]

The unity constituted by word and sacrament is inseparable from the faith which receives them. It is thus a reality within the hearts and lives of believers and not simply a matter of public events.

3. Unity in a common life of love and mission. But can we stop here, can we say simply that the unity of the church is unity in word and sacrament and in the faith which receives and is effected by word and sacrament? I believe we need to take a third step if we are to take into account the full

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[5]Apol. 7.5.
[6]WA 7.720.
[7]Apol. 7.31.

range of what the Reformation had to say about the church's unity and, more basically, if we are to be true to the reality of faith and of the church.

In the Large Catechism, when Luther explains the phrase "I believe in the holy catholic church," he states: "This is the sum and substance of this phrase: I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism."[8] The church has not just a common faith, but a common mind and understanding and is united in love. The word for "united" here, *einträchtig*, is almost identical to the word used for unity in word and sacrament in Augustana 7, *einträchtiglich*. In the Smalcald Articles, Luther states: "the church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ, and by having all the bishops equal in office (however they may differ in gifts) and diligently joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc."[9] Here it is not just unity of doctrine, faith, and sacraments that joins together the leadership of the church, but also unity in prayer and works of love. The quotation I gave above, in which Luther says that the same gospel produces the same faith, reads in full: "where there is the same gospel, there is also the same faith, same hope, same love, same spirit, and all things are truly the same."[10] Again, unity is realized in more than just a common faith, but in a more comprehensive unity of persons.

Nor are these just slips of the overproductive pen of Luther. In the Apology, Melanchthon addresses the right interpretation of Col 3:14, which speaks of the "love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." Against Catholic interpretations which would relate this love to justification, Melanchthon insists that Paul is "talking not about personal perfection but about fellowship in the church. He says that love is a bond and unbroken chain linking the many members of the church with one another.... Paul is speaking of unity and peace in the church."[11]

What are we to make of these remarks, of which there are many more, about love as a bond of unity?[12] How are they consistent with the insistence that word, sacrament, and faith are the foundations of the unity? It is clear that for Luther, to say that we are one in faith in the heart is not to say that we are one in only one aspect of who we are. Faith is a fundamental and determinative orientation of the entire self. As such, faith is, as Luther said, "a living, busy, active, mighty thing."[13] Faith is not just something that happens in our heads. In faith occurs nothing less than the death of the old person and the birth of the new. As ever active, faith is lived, realized in daily life, or it simply is not. A life of faith does not just express faith, although that way of speaking is not simply wrong; it is in the life of faith that faith is realized as what it is, as a living relation to and within Christ.

The active character of faith has implications for unity in faith. We again must

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[8]LC 2.51.

[9]SA 2.4.9.

[10]WA 7.720.

[11]Apol. 4.232ff.

[12]I made a more comprehensive study of such texts in Michael Root, "Die Einheit der Kirche in Christus, im Glauben und in der Liebe: Ekklesiologische und ökumenische Fragen," in *Der Heilige Geist: Ökumenische und reformatorische Untersuchungen*. Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie, Ratzeburg, vol. 25 (Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1996): 157-68.

[13]AE 35:370.

follow the trajectory of the work of Christ and the Spirit in the church. Christ and the Spirit come by word and sacrament and are received by faith. The unity of believers in Christ by word, sacrament, and faith is then lived out in a far-reaching unity. Again to quote Luther: "Among Christians, however, all these things are one and the same and are shared by all: the Word, faith, worship, religion, the sacraments, Christ, God, the heart, the feelings, the soul, the will."[14] Love is the typical term Luther uses to describe this wider common life. In his Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, the Holy Mass, he says: "Christ, in order to prepare for himself an acceptable and beloved people which should be bound together in unity through love, abolished the whole law of Moses."[15] In a discussion of Acts 1:15-26, Luther states: "Here Christ shows incontestably that all apostles were created by him alone and are equal. This ought also to make all bishops equal and unite them, not under one authority and sovereign power as the pope's partisans deceitfully suggest to us, but in the unity of faith, baptism, love, and the Spirit, so that they would be one people, as St. Paul teaches in Eph 4."[16]

> Love must not be separated from or put in place of unity in word and sacrament or in faith.

The reference to Ephesians 4 here is helpful. This text is often in the background of statements from the reformers on the unity of the church; you will remember that it was cited at the end of Augustana 7. Ephesians 4 also grounds the unity of the church in the unity of what we receive: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." But this grounding does not hinder the author of Ephesians from also speaking about love as maintaining unity. The chapter begins: "I therefore ...beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (vv. 1-3). Later in the chapter, the integration of Christ's gifts in the actual life of the church is clearly related to unity. The gifts are to work together "until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." The whole body is said to be "joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped" (v. 16). Unity is in the Lord and lived out in the concrete life of the church.[17]

The total picture begins to become clear. Unity is not static, but occurs within a movement: the movement of Christ and the Spirit through word and sacrament, received

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[14]AE 27:91.

[15]AE 35:80.

[16]AE 32:74.

[17]A similar interpretation of the ecumenical implications of Ephesians 4 can be found in Ernst Kinder, "Basic considerations with Reference to Article VII of the Augsburg Confession," in *The Unity of the Church: A Symposium*, Papers presented to the Commission on Theology and Liturgy of the Lutheran World Federation (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1957), 59-73.

by faith and at work in the common life and mission of the one church they create. I have used the language of trajectory to emphasize this character of movement. Both the ordering and the unity of this trajectory are important. The ordering is crucial if the evangelical character of the ecclesiology I have been presenting is to be maintained. If the existence and unity of the church are to be understood as strictly a gift of grace, parallel to justification, then the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament and its reception in faith must be fundamental. Love must not be separated from or put in place of unity in word and sacrament or in faith. Luther was scornful of those who thought a unity in love could substitute for a unity in faith.[18] A common life in love is a third moment in the trajectory I have been describing as the living out of unity in word, sacrament, and faith.

The unity of this trajectory also must not be lost. The unity of the church is realized in the entirety of the process described by this trajectory. That unity in faith and in the life of faith follows from unity in word and sacrament does not mean that unity in faith and the life of faith are themselves dispensable. They are themselves an aspect of what is meant by the unity of the church. Thus Luther and the Confessions can speak of love as not merely an expression of unity but as itself "a bond and unbroken chain linking the many members of the church with one another."

The most striking witness to the reformers sense of the unity of this trajectory can be found in the Wittenberg Articles of 1536.[19] These articles, written in negotiations between representatives of Henry VIII of England and the Wittenberg theologians, including Luther, are little more than a paraphrase of the Augsburg Confession. Nevertheless, without any sign of an intention to deviate from what was said at Augsburg, a small variation is introduced into the *satis est* clause of Augustana 7. The tenth of the Wittenberg Articles (on church order) states that it is taking up what is discussed in articles 7 and 15 of the Augsburg Confession, but makes a subtle change: it states: "It is sufficient for the maintenance of true unity that there be unity in the right teaching of the Gospel and in the correct use of the sacraments and that people live in love with one another in accordance with Gospel, as St. Paul says: 'One faith, one baptism, etc.'" Without any sign that they are conscious of changing the content of Augustana 7, they add a common life in love to word and sacrament as what is sufficient for the true, spiritual unity of the church. For the reformers, there was no separation of unity in word and sacrament and unity in a common life of love and mission. One leads to the other. To stop at word and sacrament is to cut short the word of Christ and the Spirit.

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[18]E.g.: "The concord of love... is to be subordinated to the concord of faith or of the Spirit. For if you lose this, you have lost Christ; and once you have lost Him, love will not do you any good." AE 27:107.

[19]Both the Latin and German original of these articles and an English translation can be found in *Documents of the English Reformation*, ed. Gerald Bray (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 118-61. The article cited is on p. 142ff. Only after completing this lecture did I discover that the "bond of love" as a third *nota ecclesiae* was taken up into the Worms Book and became a controversial point in the negotiations leading up to and at Regensburg (see Georg Kretschmar, "Die Wiederentdeckung des Konzeptes der 'Apostolischen Sukzession' im Umkreis der Reformation," in *Kirche in der Schule Luthers: FS Joachim Heubach*, ed. Bengt Hägglund and Gerhard Müller [Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1995], 231-79). These discussions require more research on my part, but I do not believe they should change my argument.

Life in communion

I want now to use this theological picture of unity realized in a three step trajectory to return to my earlier question: how we understand the unity we are seeking in relation to the unity we are always already given.

The unity we are always already given is that unity constituted by word and sacrament and received in faith, that unity the Apology refers to as inseparable from faith in the heart and righteousness before God. Any community which one can describe as church is a realization of this one church. This unity can already be described as communion, as communion in the foundational elements of salvation.

The unity we are seeking is unity in a common life of love, a common life of witness and mission with other churches. Peter Brunner, one of the most profound (and most unjustly neglected) Lutheran theologians of the mid-twentieth century, wrote eloquently about this move from given unity to concrete common life.

> That which is valid for the Holy Spirit drives to realize itself in concrete existence. The Spirit presses toward corporeality. Therefore, the given spiritual unity of the holy catholic church [*sancta catholica ecclesia*] works with the necessity of a *dynamis* of the Holy Spirit on the form and corporate life of the local churches [*ecclesiae*].... We must recognize that the unification of the church is realized [*sich realisiert*] through an abundance of actually lived, concrete, historical, and of course, constitutionally formulated relationships and forms of expression.... To the continually realized and indestructible unity of the church in the spiritual body of Christ corresponds the koinonia of the churches of God on earth. There is also a completely legitimate plurality of churches. But all local churches [*ecclesiae*] in the whole world should stand in a concrete, actually lived, constitutionally effective koinonia.[20]

The communion we are given in word and sacrament and received in faith is to be lived out in a common life of communion or fellowship. As both a theological and a social reality, this life in communion has a structure. As a theological reality, this common life focuses on the foundations of what joins us: the one faith, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and, in a subordinate way, the ministry which serves them. The focus which gives theological structure to our common life is the common witness to the one gospel and a shared participation in the sacraments. As a social reality, this common life inevitably takes on an institutional form; what Brunner referred to as a constitutionally or legally effective koinonia.

The various descriptions of "full communion" or of the unity we seek are attempts to spell out the basic shape of this communion which lives out the communion we are given. At the beginning of this lecture I cited the description given by the World Council of Churches at its 1991 Assembly. Let me cite now the 1984 Lutheran World Federation statement on "The Unity We Seek." It follows the same trajectory I have been outlining:

> The true unity of the church, which is the unity of the body of Christ and participates in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is given in and through proclamation of the gospel in

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[20]Peter Brunner, "The Realization of Church Fellowship," in *the Unity of the Church: A Symposium*, Papers presented to the Commission on Theology and Liturgy of the Lutheran World Federation (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Press, 1957), 17-18. Translation altered. German original: Peter Brunner, "Die Einheit der Kirche und die Verwirklichung der Kirchengemeinschaft," in *Pro Ecclesia: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur dogmatischen Theologie*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1962): 225-34.

> Word and sacrament. [Again, true unity is this unity we are given.] This unity is expressed as a communion in the common and, at the same time, multiform confession of one and the same apostolic faith. It is a communion in holy baptism and in the eucharistic meal, a communion in which the ministries exercised are recognized by all as expressions of the ministry instituted by Christ in his church.... It is a committed fellowship, able to make common decisions and to act in common.[21]

There is today a widespread ecumenical agreement on the essential elements of life in communion: a common confession of the faith (not just a recognition that we each confess the faith but the possibility of stating it together); a mutual recognition of baptism; the possibility of celebrating the Lord's Supper together; mutual recognition of ordained ministries, implying a mutual availability of clergy; and whatever common structures of action and decision making that are necessary to carry out common mission. This listing of elements is not yet a concrete model of unity; much is still left open. Yet it does provide, I believe, a basic picture of what it is we are seeking. In 1991, the ELCA officially adopted a very similar picture of the communion we seek in its ecumenical policy statement.

As I noted at the beginning of this lecture, it is this unity of a common life in worship and mission that we lack with many other bodies we have come to recognize as also churches of Jesus Christ. What is the significance of this lack of unity? On the one hand, it is true that this common life is not in a strict sense necessary to the true, spiritual unity of the church. There may be historical occasions when many aspects of this common life are made impossible. Obviously enough, when many ethnic German Lutherans in the Soviet Union were exiled to central Asia under Stalin and cut off from the world for decades, their churches could not enjoy a common life in communion with other churches. This oppression could not destroy, however, their essential unity with the church of Christ. As long as they gathered around the gospel, there the one church of Christ was present, there they were one with the saints of all times and places. This is precisely one aspect of what it means to say that the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's church. The only way to destroy the one church is to take away the one thing truly and unconditionally necessary: the proclamation of the word.

On the other hand, however, this common life in communion is not dispensable in the sense that we are free to dispense with it when it does not suit us. Because this common life in communion is not strictly necessary in an unconditional sense does not mean that it may not be mandatory in many situations. When such a common life is possible, it is a practical denial of our unity in Christ to reject it. All communities which are churches are one. Not to live out that oneness is then to live in self-contradiction. Our present situation, in which we find that we cannot deny that other communities are in fact realizations of the one church of Jesus Christ and yet we do not live a common life in communion with them, is precisely one of self-contradiction. This self-contradiction is most pointed when we recognize that we and others both celebrate the one Supper of the Lord and yet we cannot celebrate it together. Here a failure to live out our common relation to the Lord

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[21]Lutheran World Federation, Seventh Assembly, "The Unity We Seek," Assembly statement in *Budapest 1984: In Christ—Hope for the World*, Proceedings of the Seventh Assembly, Lutheran World Federation. LWF Report, no. 19 (Geneva, 1985), 175.

must place a question mark next to the assertion that we are truly one.

Much emphasis has been put on the possibilities for mission that the proposals before us will (or will not) open. I would not deny the importance of such matters. Nevertheless, I believe we should seek to establish such relations of communion with other churches even if such possibilities of common mission appeared meager. Or rather, better put, what mission is centrally about is witness, and part of our witness is directly about the unity and reconciliation we have been given in Christ. Living out our unity is not just a means for carrying out our call, it is an aspect of the call itself. If the descriptions of the nature of a life in communion made in texts like the LWF statement on "The Unity We Seek" or the ELCA Ecumenical Policy Statement are correct, then we are obliged to seek such a communion with other bodies we recognize as churches. As the international Anglican–Roman Catholic dialogue put it: "Those who have received the same word of God and have been baptized in the same Spirit cannot, without disobedience, acquiesce in a state of separation."[22]

This obligation does not automatically mean that we should adopt the proposals before us. There can be good arguments for rejecting specific proposals. (Within the LCA, I myself opposed the proposal for full altar and pulpit fellowship between the Lutheran and Reformed churches in the mid-1980s, arguing for a slower approach.) Perhaps there are good arguments against the proposals we are now considering. In the next lecture I will address the question of the criteria I think we need to apply in making ecumenical decisions. If what I have said in this lecture is true, however, then our present situation of division is deeply unsatisfactory, and when we are able to recognize the one church of Jesus Christ in another community, we should have a bias in favor of proposals that will open the way to life in communion with such a body. In other words, the burden of proof rests on rejecting such proposals, not on accepting them.

Conclusion

In this lecture, I have remained rather abstract. I have tried to set a very general background for our ecumenical discussions, derived from basic considerations about the church and its unity. The unity of the church is, I believe, given in the proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament, received in faith, and lived out in the common life of love and witness. In the various descriptions of communion, fellowship, or visible unity to be found in recent ecumenical documents, we have attempts to spell out more concretely what shape this common life should take.

I began with the question: What are we trying to do? We are not trying by our efforts to create the unity of Christ's church. That unity is a gift of grace inseparable from our unity with the Risen Christ himself. Rather, we are seeking to live out that unity in a way appropriate both to the gospel and to our time and conditions. What we must decide is whether the Formula, the Concordat, and the Joint Declaration are in fact true to the gospel and true to our time. These will be the subjects for my second and third lectures.

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[22]Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "Final Report," in *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer. Faith and Order Paper, no. 108 (New York: Paulist Press; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), Intro, para. 9.

Should We Do It? The Question of Criteria

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In my first lecture, I sought to provide a framework for understanding what we are trying to do ecumenically. We are not seeking to create the unity of the church; we are seeking to live out the unity we are given in word and sacrament in a comprehensive life in communion with other churches with which we are one in Christ. Ecumenical proposals, such as those before us, are proposals for how this might be done.

I argued that the nature of unity as already given means that when we are able to recognize another body as church, we should be prejudiced in favor of communion with them, if such is possible. Because we are already one, we are called to live out that unity. The burden of proof is on rejecting, not on accepting, a proposal for communion with a community we recognize as a church.

Experience shows, however, that the acceptability of ecumenical proposals is rarely self-evident. Because ecumenical relations touch our sense of identity, ecumenical proposals tend to call forth passionate debate. We can make this debate more rational if we have some clear sense of the criteria by which we might decide on the acceptability of ecumenical proposals.

Criteria for judging ecumenical proposals

We undoubtedly need a variety of criteria. Some criteria will be practical: how much can a particular church take on in a particular period of time; how should the growth of a particular relation be paced; how do we preserve a consistency in our relations in various directions; how do we not foreclose future ecumenical possibilities? Lutherans, however, have notoriously stressed more conceptual and immediately theological criteria. If the church is constituted by the right teaching of the gospel and administration of the sacraments, then an unconditional necessity for fellowship is a shared understanding of what the gospel is and how it is embodied in preaching and the sacraments. With greater consistency than perhaps any other Christian tradition, Lutherans have focused their ecumenical efforts on doctrinal dialogues as the most important precondition for entering life in communion. The most important criterion of the acceptability of ecumenical proposals has been said to be agreement on the gospel, in word and sacrament. It is this theological criterion that I want to focus on

One must not forget that ecumenical agreement is not about the relation between two abstract theological systems...but about the possible relation between two churches.

in this lecture, with explicit reference to the proposals before us.

To say that a condition of communion is agreement on the gospel in word and sacrament is deceptively simple. Problems arise as soon as one asks: what sort of agreement? Agreement on the fundamentals, on the "chief parts of Christian doctrine," as the Formula of Concord says at one point?[1] Or agreement on "doctrine and all its articles," as the Formula also says?[2] American Lutherans have been and the ELCA and the Missouri Synod still are divided on the question of the sort of agreement presupposed by church fellowship.

A bit of reflection should make clear that the consensus we seek in ecumenical dialogues must not be a consensus on every theological detail. We are seeking only that consensus needed for the common life to which we are called. This life does not require agreement on every disputed point. There have always been what one might describe as school differences in the church, and my experience of seminaries is that there are usually differences within schools. Harding Meyer has helpfully described the sort of agreement we are ecumenically seeking as an internally differentiated consensus.[3] In relation to each topic, we must ask: On what aspects of this topic do we need agreement? The differentiation is not between topics requiring agreement and those not; the differentiation is in relation to each topic, it is internal to each topic. Even if the doctrine of justification is the article by which the church stands and falls, we do not need to agree on every aspect of justification in order to say we are in fact preaching the same gospel rightly.

But how do we know when we have reached an adequate consensus? In an article in the *Festschrift* for George Lindbeck I proposed what one might call a pragmatic ecclesiological criterion, describing it in what I hope to be a confessionally neutral way, that is, in a way that is not itself specifically Lutheran.[4] One must not forget that ecumenical agreement is not about the relation between two abstract theological systems (as if modern American denominations could be identified with theological systems), but about the possible relation between two churches. The question is: Can we regularly and in a comprehensive range of situations carry out together with another church those activities we believe are essential to the identity of the church as

[1] Cp. SD, Summary Formulation, 15.

[2] Cp. Ep. 10.7.

[3] Harding Meyer, "Ecumenical Consensus: Our Quest for and the Emerging Structures of Consensus," *Gregorianum* 77 (1996): 213-25.

[4] Michael Root, "Identity and Difference: The Ecumenical Problem," in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

church without violating our understanding of the identity of the church? If we can, then there are no church-dividing differences between us; or better put, no communion-hindering differences. Each party to an ecumenical proposal must ask itself this question. Let me elaborate:

The decisive question about any proposal should be: Will it structure a relation within which two or more churches can carry out a common life in communion so that they might regularly, not just on special occasions, and in a comprehensive range of situations, not just in certain limited cases of chaplaincies or ecumenical conferences, carry out together whatever each views as essential to the identity of the church as the church without either side violating its own understanding of the identity of the church? If we believe that what is crucial to the identity of the church is the evangelical preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, the question is whether we can carry out these activities with another church on a regular basis in a way that accords with our understanding of the fundamental integrity of these activities. In short: Can we together do everything essential to a common life in Christ? Can we regularly hear Reformed or Anglican preaching as the preaching of the gospel without protest? Can we participate in a Reformed or Anglican Eucharist on a regular basis without violation of conscience? Can we together order the ministries which serve the Word? Can we regularly carry out the mission of the church within the structure of the proposed relation without compromising that mission? If the answer to such questions is yes, then I believe we are obligated to accept the proposal for communion. If one feels that a proposal is unacceptable, then one should be able to specify at what point the proposal in question proposes a common activity that cannot be so carried out without violation of the church's identity as church.

My description of this practice-oriented criterion has been very brief and perhaps rather opaque. I hope it will become clearer as I proceed. In this lecture, I will ask how this criterion applies to the traditional doctrinal issues involved in the three proposals before us. My primary goal is to clarify what the precise issue is in each proposal. In each case, I want to state as clearly as possible what the decision before us is. In the final lecture, I want to ask the far more difficult question about the whole enterprise of doctrinal agreement as the basis for church fellowship among contemporary American Protestant denominations.

Justification, presence, episcopacy: the dogmatic questions in the three proposals

The three proposals before us are textbook examples of internally differentiated consensus. None of the proposals claims that all traditional disagreements have now been eliminated. Each seeks to outline a central framework of theological agreement, within which the remaining disagreements can be seen as not blocking communion. The central doctrinal question in relation to each is whether in fact the remaining disagreement is communion-hindering or church-dividing; that is, whether the remaining differences mean that we cannot lead a common life in communion without violating what we believe to be the church's essential identity. I will analyze each proposal in turn.

1. Justification and the Joint Declaration. Let me begin with in some ways the simplest example, but in others, the most difficult: the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification involving the churches of

the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.[5] Since this text reached its final state only this month and early drafts were not widely distributed, I should describe it a bit.[6] On the basis of the doctrine of justification as a whole and for a series of individual controversial points, the Declaration spells out a framework of agreement followed by a presentation of the differing ways each side then goes on to elaborate the details of a specific issue. Sometimes these are differences of emphasis; sometimes they are straightforward disagreements. In either case, the claim is that our present agreement about the doctrine of justification itself and its place within the whole of Christian teaching is such that this doctrine no longer need block communion between Lutherans and Catholics.[7]

> An example of differentiated consensus in the Declaration is the continuing sinfulness of the justified person.

U.S. Lutheran–Catholic dialogue on justification and especially the German Lutheran–Reformed–United–Catholic discussion on the doctrinal condemnations of the sixteenth century, the LWF and the Vatican over the last four years have been working toward a common declaration that would declare a "consensus on the basic truths of the doctrine of justification" and also, on the basis of this consensus, declare that the various Reformation-era condemnations of each other's teaching on justification do not today apply. The Declaration itself is meant to summarize and focus the wide ranging discussion of justification in the various Lutheran–Catholic dialogues. Attached to the Declaration is an appendix of sources, quotations from the various dialogues keyed to the various sections of the Joint Declaration. This appendix is an integral part of the text.

The Joint Declaration claims to represent an internally differentiated consensus in just the sense I earlier noted. Both for the

Unlike the Reformed and Episcopal proposals, the Joint Declaration will not lead immediately to fellowship. This difference makes the task of evaluation in some ways simpler; practical issues do not intrude in the same way. It also makes that task more difficult, or at least more abstract. The pragmatic criterion I have proposed lacks a point of contact if pragmatic consequences do not follow. We must then ask a somewhat hypothetical question: viewed in abstraction from other, outstanding differences, would the remaining disagreements on justification prove an obstacle? About each remaining disagreement, we must ask, what might be evangelically at stake here? Does this or that aspect of the Roman Catholic teaching on justification which we do not share distort the actual communication

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[5] All references will be to paragraph numbers and will be included within the text.

[6] The next to the last draft can be downloaded from the ELCA web site; I presume the final version will be posted there in the near future, or perhaps already has been. It will be mailed to all delegates to synod assemblies. For the sake of full disclosure, I should say that I was a member of the committee that carried out the last two revisions of the Declaration.

[7] See here esp. #40.

of the gospel as saving truth and justifying promise?

Let me highlight two aspects of the Joint Declaration as examples of the sort of question we must ask. First, an important but slippery difference between Lutherans and Catholics has been the role of the doctrine of justification within the totality of the church's teaching and practice. In what sense is the doctrine of justification the center of the Christian message which can then be used as a criterion to judge all that the church says and does? A paragraph of the Joint Declaration addresses this question:

> The doctrine of justification... is more than just one part of Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other. It is an indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ. When Lutherans emphasize the unique significance of this criterion, they do not deny the interrelation and significance of all truths of faith. When Catholics see themselves as bound by several criteria, they do not deny the special function of the message of justification. Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ, who is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5-6) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts. [#18]

This paragraph adopts a specific ecumenical strategy. It elaborates a common conviction, that the doctrine of justification is a necessary criterion of the church's teaching and practice, and then seeks to allay the anxieties each has about the other's more specific teaching. When Catholics see other doctrines as also playing a role as criterion, they are not denying the special role of the doctrine of justification; when Lutherans stress the unique role of this doctrine, they are not isolating it from its interrelation with other teachings of the church.

If one believes that this agreement is insufficient, one should be able to say what communion-hindering distortion of the gospel would follow from the continuing disagreement. (It should be noted that the Joint Declaration addresses only the status of the doctrine of justification as criterion, not its concrete application to areas of teaching and practice such as authority or ministry.[8])

A second example of differentiated consensus in the Declaration is the topic which proved the most difficult in the writing of the text, the continuing sinfulness of the justified person. The text notes that Lutherans and Catholics agree, first, that in baptism the person is truly justified and united with Christ; second, that the justified person continues to have desires which stand in objective contradiction to God and with which the Christian must struggle; third, that these desires do not themselves separate the faithful person from Christ; and fourth, that the justified person remains dependent on forgiving grace throughout his or her life. Lutherans, however, go on to say that this internal struggle means that the justified person does not love God with an undivided mind and heart. This person, even while justified, must still be called a

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[8] For a survey that shows that Lutherans and Catholics have widely agreed that the doctrine of justification is such a criterion, but not on its concrete application, see Harding Meyer, "Der Text 'Die Rechtfertigung des Sünders' im Kontext bisheriger ökumenischer Dialogdokumente zur Rechtfertigung," in *Lehrverurteilungen—kirchentrennend? II: Materialien zu den Lehrverurteilungen und zur theologie der Rechtfertigung*, ed. Karl Lehmann. Dialog der Kirchen: VeröFfentlichungen Des öKumenischen Arbeitskreises Evangelischer und Katholischer Theologen, vol. 5 (Freiburg i.B.; Göttingen: Herder; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 296-325.

sinner; and, since the judgment of God relates to the person as a whole, a sinner as a whole. The contradiction to God within the self must thus itself be called sin. Catholics, however, insist that baptism, if it truly justifies, regenerates, and unites with God, must remove anything that would itself lead to damnation, and, second, so define the word "sin" that it is strictly applicable only to that which in fact leads to damnation. Catholic doctrine thus denies that the tendencies and desires of the "old person" can rightly be called sin as long as the person remains joined to Christ.

When the question is raised, Can the God-opposing desires of the justified person rightly be called sin? Lutherans and Catholics give directly contradictory answers. While this difference is partly attributable to differing definitions of the word "sin," it also points to broader differences in theological anthropology. The Joint Declaration claims that in light of the agreement I have outlined, this disagreement need not itself block communion. If one were to disagree with this conclusion, one would need to show how the remaining disagreement leads to a fundamental distortion of the proclamation of the gospel.

The question we must ask ourselves in relation to the Joint Declaration is then, Do the remaining disagreements constitute an obstacle to a common proclamation of the gospel? The claim of the Declaration is that they do not.

2. Real Presence and the Formula of Agreement. Unlike the Joint Declaration, the Formula of Agreement with the Reformed churches and the Concordat of Agreement with the Episcopal Church both would establish full communion among the churches involved. Evaluation is thus more complex, since a variety of practical factors must be taken into account. While complicating matters, however, this practical dimension also provides a context within which one can apply the pragmatic criterion to which I have been referring in a more realistic way.

As proposals for fellowship, both the Concordat and the Formula presuppose a comprehensive agreement in the gospel. Both texts have been modified in recent months to strengthen their claims for a general doctrinal agreement. So far, when the debate over the Formula and the Concordat has addressed *what* the churches hold (rather than *how* they hold it), the debate has not centered around the adequacy of the content of this general agreement in the gospel. Rather, it has tended to focus on certain specific and relatively traditional controversial issues. In the next lecture, I want to return to the question of how the churches hold their doctrine. In this lecture, I will look at the specific issues in each proposal that have elicited debate.

In this lecture, I am only looking at the more traditional doctrinal questions. Between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, various issues have been disputed and at times have been held to be church dividing: the place of the law in the Christian life, the nature of the unity of Christ's two natures, the relation between divine grace and human response, the relation between God's intent to save and the non-salvation of the lost, the possibility of truly accepting and then losing grace, the New Testament basis of a particular church order. On some of these issues, the positions of the churches have changed and so the disputes have become moot; some other remaining differences, for example in relation to how to do social ethics, are rarely today asserted to be an obstacle to fellowship. The difficult issue has remained the Lord's Supper.

A long series of Lutheran-Reformed dialogues has made clear that the official

The decisive evangelical issue is not directly the relation between Christ's body and blood and the eucharistic elements...[but rather] the dependability of the external word.

teaching of the Reformed churches rejects a Zwinglian reading of the Supper as a memorial meal at which the primary actor is the congregation which remembers. The remaining difficulty has rather centered around the interrelation among three things: the presence of Christ in his body and blood, the elements of bread and wine, and the reception by the communicant. Historically, the Reformed have usually held that the difference over this interrelation is not in itself a hindrance to communion. The Lutherans have been the ones who have seen here a problem that must be settled. We must again ask, What about the Reformed position might lead one to think that a unity in the Lord's Supper would be impossible without compromising what we understand to be the evangelical heart of the celebration? I believe we must here both take seriously the concerns of our Lutheran forebears, which cannot be reduced to mere hairsplitting over the mode of Christ's presence, and also take seriously the solution to the problem picked up by the Formula from the European Leuenberg Agreement among Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches. In a few minutes, I can only in a very summary way address the complex issue of the presence of Christ in the sacrament. I would argue, however, that the decisive evangelical issue is not directly the relation between Christ's body and blood and the eucharistic elements. Rather, the crucial issue is the dependability of the external word. Can I receive the bread and wine with the assurance that, regardless of my internal state, I am receiving the saving body and blood of Christ? An understanding of the presence of Christ that undermines the possibility of looking away from one's own state and looking toward the promised presence is deeply problematic, not because it might make some metaphysical mistake about the mode of presence, but because it undermines the communicant's confidence in the external word of the sacrament.

Herein lies the Lutheran worry over the classical Reformed doctrine. In the interest of rejecting certain late medieval practices (which the Lutherans wished also to reject) and of preserving what they understood to be the integrity of the human nature of the risen Christ, the Reformed came to an understanding of the nature of the presence of Christ in the Supper which denied (or seemed to deny) that those who received without true faith had in fact received Christ. The problem can be seen in what is, in this respect, a good Reformed document, the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, number 29 of which bears the title: "Of the Wicked, which eat not the Body of Christ in the use of the Lord's Supper." If I must have true faith to receive Christ, then the call to look away from my own internal state and concentrate on the promise of Christ's presence would seem to be endangered.

Like the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, which settled the differences over the Sup-

per between the Lutherans and the Upper German cities, including my present home city of Strasbourg,[9] the 1973 Leuenberg Agreement in Europe represented a breakthrough not so much in its definition of the relation between Christ and the elements as in its focus on the question of who receives Christ.[10] The relation between Christ's body and blood and the elements is described in the Agreement simply by means of the preposition "with." More decisively, it affirms, first, that Christ "gives himself unreservedly to all who receive the bread and wine; faith receives the Lord's Supper for salvation, unfaith for judgment" (18) and second, that "we cannot separate communion with Jesus Christ in his body and blood from the act of eating and drinking" (19). These statements are quoted and affirmed in the Formula.[11] The relation between Christ and the elements is addressed only obliquely; the emphasis falls on the assurance that to receive the elements is always also to receive Christ. In this way, the Lutheran concern is addressed.

The traditional dogmatic question we must decide in judging the Formula is whether this agreement suffices. If one accepts that the evangelical concern in the dispute with the Reformed over the Supper is as I earlier described it, a concern for the dependability of the external word, then this agreement should suffice. If one believes that a communion hindering difference still exists in this area, then, again, one needs to state how the remaining difference makes a common eucharistic life impossible without compromising the gospel.

Episcopacy and the Concordat of Agreement. Even more than Lutheran–Reformed dialogue, Lutheran–Anglican dialogue in the twentieth century has focused on a single topic as potentially blocking communion: episcopacy. On the first day of the first Lutheran–Anglican dialogue of this century, the Anglican–Swedish dialogue of 1909, one of the Swedish participants, Bishop H. W. Tottie, recommended moving immediately to the question of episcopacy, since that is where the difficult issue lay.[12] The difficulty, of course, lies not with episcopacy itself; the majority of Lutherans in the world today are members of churches within which some ministers are titled "bishop." Rather the problem lies most immediately in the significance of the presence or absence of the office of bishop structured and understood in a certain way.

Various national and international Anglican–Lutheran dialogues have shown that

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[9] The original Latin of the Wittenberg Concord is in CR III, cc.75ff.; an English translation can be found in Henry E. Jacobs, *Historical Introduction, Appendixes and Indexes,* vol. 2 of *The Book of Concord, or the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1908), 283-90.

[10] The Leuenberg Agreement can be found in *An Invitation to Action: A Study of Ministry, Sacraments, and Recognition,* The Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue Series III, 1981-1983, ed. James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 61-73. Paragraph references will be given in the text.

[11] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Lutheran-Episcopal and Lutheran-Reformed Ecumenical Proposals,* Documents for Action by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1996), 21. The citation is at the end of the section "Differing Emphases: The Condemnations."

[12] *The Church of England and the Church of Sweden,* Report of the Commission appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Pursuance of Resolution 74 of the Lambeth Conference of 1908 on the Relation of the Anglican Communion to the Church of Sweden, with Three Appendices (London: Mowbray; Milwaukee: Young Churchman, 1911), 7.

Anglicans and Lutherans affirm much in common about ministry in the church. Anglicans and Lutherans agree that the office of ministry is divinely instituted and thus the church is not free to do away with it. Anglicans and Lutherans agree extensively about the primary tasks of this office. The difficult issue between Anglicans and Lutherans has been the ministry of oversight and thus the nature and importance of episcopacy.

Again, on this issue the Concordat represents an internally differentiated consensus. The Concordat claims an agreement that episcopacy in a succession of laying on of hands can be a desirable sign but not a guarantee of the unity and continuity of the church. In the period of intense negotiations between 1530 and 1541 over a possible settlement of the impending schism of the Western church, the Saxon Lutherans consistently expressed a willingness to accept the traditional episcopal structure for the sake of unity if the Catholic bishops would permit the preaching of the gospel and the reform of church practice along the lines indicated in Part II of the Augsburg Confession. This willingness is confessionally enshrined in the Augustana, the Apology, and the Smalcald Articles and thus has some sort of authoritative status for contemporary Lutherans. If the Concordat is adopted, episcopacy in succession would move from being a theoretically possibility for the ELCA to being a reality in the process of enactment. Thus, unlike the Joint Declaration and the Formula, the Concordat asks the ELCA to make certain changes for the sake of unity, unity not just with the Episcopal Church but also possibly with other churches in the future. It is thus not surprising that among the proposals before us, the Concordat has elicited the most vehement debate. One question we must ask ourselves is whether the total package of the Concordat, both its movement toward unity and the changes it represents, is desirable.

Unlike the Joint Declaration and the Formula, the Concordat asks the ELCA to make certain changes for the sake of unity...

As a differentiated consensus, however, the Concordat does not remove all differences and the most vehement theological debate about the Concordat has centered on implications of the remaining difference in the relative importance Anglicans and Lutherans ascribe to episcopacy in succession. At this point, I think we must very carefully describe this difference and the possible problems it creates. Perhaps this difference represents a reason to reject the Concordat, but we should be clear about what we are rejecting.[13]

The remaining difference seems to me the following: For Anglicans, the office of bishop in succession as a sign of unity has

[13] My analysis here is made in greater detail and with an argument that the conditionality implied within the Concordat is acceptable to Lutherans in Michael Root, "Conditions of Communion: Bishops, the Concordat, and the Augsburg Confession," in *Inhabiting Unity: Theological Perspectives on the Proposed Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat*, ed. Ephraim Radner and R. R. Reno (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 52-70.

Central to the Concordat is the proposal that the two churches will recognize and accept each other's ordained ministries from the outset.

such an importance that they will only enter a relation of full communion with churches which are at least moving toward the common possession of this office. Lutherans, however, even those Lutherans in churches with an episcopacy in succession, do not place such an importance on episcopacy. The Swedish and Finnish Lutheran churches, the other Nordic churches which have adopted the Porvoo Common Statement and thus have adopted a succession of episcopal consecrations as a sign of unity and continuity, the various Asian, African, and Latin American churches with an episcopacy in succession are all in full altar and pulpit fellowship with the non-episcopal Lutheran churches. The Concordat does not eliminate this difference: the Episcopal Church will remain in fellowship only with churches with a commitment to entering episcopal succession; the ELCA will remain in fellowship with the non-episcopal churches of the LWF and will be in communion with the non-episcopal Reformed churches if it adopts the Formula.

Why might one think that this difference makes the Concordat unacceptable, since it does not require the ELCA to take up the Episcopal Church's understanding of episcopacy? The problem raised by the Dissent Report to the Concordat centers on the question: Does the Episcopal Church in the Concordat make episcopacy in succession a condition of communion, i.e., something that must be present for communion to be established? If so, then accepting the Concordat would involve accepting that something other than word and sacrament is necessary for the unity of the church and thus denying the basic ecclesiology of the Augsburg Confession. Any adequate discussion of the problem raised by this question must distinguish differing ways one might see episcopal succession as a "condition of communion."

First, one might see episcopal succession as necessary for communion because one thought that ordination by a bishop in succession was a condition for the valid or authentic exercise of the office of ministry. Someone ordained by anyone other than a bishop in succession might then be doing very important work, but they would not be carrying out the divinely instituted office of ministry. If one held such a belief, then one could recognize and accept the ministry of persons ordained in another church only if the ministers of that church were ordained by bishops in succession.

Such a belief would make episcopal succession an essential element in the strict sense of the divinely instituted office of ministry. It would seem to make episcopal succession necessary for unity at the very first step in the trajectory I discussed in my earlier lecture, unity in the right preaching of the word and celebration of the sacraments. Lutherans have found this sort of conditionality deeply problematic. It would seem to undercut the decisive connection between church and justification by grace I elaborated in the previous lecture; it would seem to make something beyond the gospel proclaimed in word and sacrament neces-

sary as foundational for the church and thus also necessary for salvation. When Lutherans have discussed and rejected episcopal succession as a condition of communion they have usually been thinking of this sort of conditionality.

The Concordat clearly does not imply, however, this sort of conditionality. Central to the Concordat is the proposal that the two churches will recognize and accept each other's ordained ministries from the outset, without anything that might be interpreted as a new ordination. Any Anglican who really believed that ordination by a bishop in succession is strictly essential to the divinely instituted office of ministry could not consistently accept the Concordat.

As my description of the difference that remains even if the Concordat is adopted should make clear, however, I think one must admit that there is another sense in which for the Episcopal Church and all Anglican churches, episcopal succession is a sort of condition of communion, at least as something toward which the churches in communion are moving. Such a condition does not concern unity at the first step in the trajectory I outlined, unity in the true preaching of word and celebration of the sacraments, but can only relate to unity at the third step, unity in the actual living out of communion in a common life. Two things need to be said about this conditionality.

First, the Concordat in no way implies that the ELCA would now or at any time in the future adopt the policy of the Episcopal Church. The ELCA is free to remain in full communion with non-episcopal churches.

Second, the reasons one might have for such a conditionality should be noted. One possible reason, the reason put forward by one of the most important Anglican ecumenical documents, the Lambeth Appeal of 1920, is a belief that the reunion of Christendom will not occur without a ministry recognized by all the churches and that only a ministry in episcopal succession stands any chance of being universally recognized.[14] For such an argument, the reason for insisting on a willingness to enter episcopal succession as part of the total set of relations which go to make up communion would not be an insistence that episcopal succession was essential to a valid ordained ministry. The insistence would rather have to do with the contextual necessities of a movement toward a common life which could take in not only Anglicans and Lutherans, but also, at some time in the future, also the two-thirds of the Christians in the world who belong to the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

I would not argue that the position of the 1920 Lambeth Appeal is the only possible reason an Anglican might have for taking up the Anglican position implied in the Concordat. What seems to me clear, however, is that the Anglican position implied within the Concordat is not the position Lutherans have usually seen as blocking communion; it does not view succession as strictly necessary for a true ministry of word and sacrament. It thus does not view succession as necessary for the true unity of the church referred to in Augustana 7. The Anglican position is one that sees some structures as having evolved within the common life in communion in such a way that, while they are not necessary to salvation and thus not strictly necessary for the existence and unity of the church, they are gifts which they strongly wish to preserve, which they even might feel themselves obliged to preserve. Anglicans here

[14] Lambeth Conference 1920, "An Appeal to All Christian People," in *The Six Lambeth Conferences: 1867-1920*, ed. Randall Davidson (London: SPCK, 1928), 28.

The Concordat does imply small but not insignificant shifts in our understanding of the relation between episcopacy and other forms of the one pastoral office...

can be seen as challenging the Lutheran tendency to classify all aspects of the church into two and only two categories: the absolutely essential and the strictly adiaphoral. The Anglican position, especially as it has evolved in recent ecumenical and official statements, implies a third category: the nonessential but nevertheless normally normative. The question before us then is whether this more limited, contextual form of conditionality is so radically unacceptable that it forces us to reject the Concordat. I have argued elsewhere that I believe this conditionality is not itself grounds for rejecting the Concordat, but that is an argument for another day. What I want to stress here is the analytical point about what the Concordat actually says and implies. It is this that we should accept or reject.

I have focused on the conditionality question because that is where the published Dissent and a significant amount of debate has focused. Of course, even if this issue is settled, there remains the question whether the changes for which the Concordat calls are changes we believe are either in themselves good ideas or at least acceptable in the pursuit of unity. The Concordat does imply small but not insignificant shifts in our understanding of the relation between episcopacy and other forms of the one pastoral office and in our understanding of succession as a sign but not guarantee of unity and continuity in mission. If one believes that these changes are in themselves desirable, as I do, they of course form no obstacle to accepting the Concordat. If one does not find them desirable, then one must make a judgment whether their undesirability is outweighed by the contribution the Concordat would make to the advancement of the unity of the church. Such a judgment is a matter of discernment, of weighing various considerations against one another. Such judgments are notoriously difficult.

The task I have set myself in this lecture has been a limited one: to outline an admittedly abstract criterion for assessing ecumenical proposals and then to apply that to the way the proposals before us handle the traditional doctrinal issues that have been seen as church-dividing. These issues have received much attention so far in the debate, but they are not the only issues. I will broaden my perspective a bit in the next and final lecture.

What Difference Does It Make? The Ecumenical Decisions and the Future of American Lutheranism

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In my first lecture, I sought to present a general picture of what we are seeking ecumenically. In the second lecture, I discussed the nature of an ecumenical agreement as an internally differentiated consensus, a consensus on those aspects of a topic on which we need to agree to live in communion. This understanding of consensus was closely tied to the criterion I presented to judge ecumenical proposals: Will a proposal allow the churches regularly and in a comprehensive range of situations to carry out together all those activities they believe are essential to the identity of the church as church without violating their understanding of the identity of the church? Within the lecture, I applied that criterion to the proposals before us to allow us better to see how they handle the traditional doctrinal issues that have been seen as church-dividing.

In the course of introducing the proposed criterion, however, I remarked that ecumenical proposals are always proposals for communion between actual churches, not between theological systems. If that passing remark is taken seriously, it represents a challenge to what I then did in the remainder of the lecture. I proceeded the way we often proceed in ecumenical discussions. Not only did I limit myself to the traditional doctrinal issues, I spoke as if the churches had clearly defined doctrinal positions which could be plausibly treated as *the* teaching of the church in question. I thus focused on the wording of various texts and confessions, following a regularly repeated axiom of ecumenical method, that one deals

A national resolution can remain a dead letter if it is not taken up by the faithful.

with the official teaching of churches, not with anecdotal evidence of what this pastor or that bishop may have said or done.

But if communion is a relation between really existing churches, then is such an approach adequate? Must we ask not only what the churches hold, but how they hold it? The ELCA, the Roman Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church, and the United Church of Christ may all formally subscribe to the classical christological affirmations of Nicea and Chalcedon, but what is the lived reality of that formal affirmation? What does the formal affirmation tell us about what we will in fact encounter in any particular congregation or parish? Of course, unless we wish churches to operate like police states, we should not expect complete uniformity. But has a sort of doctrinal relativism set in within American Protestantism (and here the Episcopal Church is Protestant) which makes the affirmations of traditional doctrine close to meaningless? It is one thing to recite the Creed as the truth; it is something apparently similar but deeply different to recite the Creed as "true for me," which generally, when analyzed, turns out to mean not true in any meaningful sense.

If communion is between really existing churches, then how the churches hold what they teach can be as important for communion as what they teach. Yet here we enter an area where it is very difficult to get accurate bearings. How do we gauge how a church, even our own, holds its teachings? Exaggerated talk of the general apostasy of the mainline churches is easy to dismiss, but there is a real problem here. In relation to the proposals before us, this problem takes at least two forms. First, there is the specific problem of the polity of the UCC and, to a significant but lesser degree, of the Episcopal Church. Second, there are general worries about doctrinal relativism. I will address both these problems in turn and, in relation to the second, I want also to address very general worries that adopting the ecumenical proposals might mean a loss of Lutheran identity and specificity. Throughout this lecture I want to keep in mind the criterion I proposed in the last lecture: Do the problems I will be discussing stand in the way of a common life in communion in keeping with the integrity of the church?

Polity and authoritative decisions

First, we cannot ignore certain questions that deal with polity and the sort of commitments the churches involved in these proposals can make. All three proposals presume that the churches involved are capable of making binding statements about what they teach and binding commitments about what they will do in the future. Different churches have different procedures for carrying out such actions. The Roman Catholic Church can authoritatively affirm the Joint Declaration only at the world level, i.e., by an action of the Vatican, while the LWF is dependent on a series of actions by its member churches. The Presbyterian Church will need not only to vote on the Formula at its General Assembly, but also will need to poll its presbyteries.

In all churches, there will need to be a process of reception, that is, a process by which the various bodies within the churches—agencies, congregations, synods, dioceses, seminaries—make these decisions their own. Reception is inevitably non-uniform. Decisions made at the national level may be taken up enthusiastically by some persons, ignored by others, actively resisted by yet others. Of course, reception can also fail. A national resolution can remain a dead letter if it is not taken up by the faithful. This unavoidable unpredictability of reception should not, however, call into question the proposals themselves.

A more complex question has to do with the nature of the authority of the church body making the decision. The complication arises with the United Church of Christ and, to a lesser degree, but one we still must take into account, the Episcopal Church. The polity of the UCC is not congregational in the sense that, say, the Southern Baptist Convention is congregational. Rather, the UCC describes its polity as "covenantal." The UCC defines itself as "composed of Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, and the General Synod."[1] Within the UCC structure, each Local Church, that is, each congregation, possesses an "autonomy" that is "inherent and modifiable only by its own action." One aspect of this autonomy is the authority "to formulate its own covenants and confessions of faith" (II.15). Thus, viewed constitutionally, a decision in favor of the Formula by the national General Synod of the UCC is, strictly speaking, binding only on the General Synod itself.

Nevertheless, the UCC Constitution also states that "actions by... the General Synod, a Conference or an Association, should be held in the highest regard by every Local Church" (II.16). John Thomas, the Assistant for Ecumenical Concerns to the President of the UCC, has argued that while the General Synod cannot make constitutionally binding decisions for every level of the UCC, the UCC has shown itself able to make genuinely "effective" ecumenical decisions, decisions made by the General Synod and then received by the local churches, conferences, and associations. The UCC has in fact entered into communion with the Disciples of Christ and with the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany and has been an active member of the Consultation on Church Union.[2]

The Formula lays great emphasis on "the binding and effective commitment" each church would make in adopting the Formula. In adopting the Formula, the churches would "declare... that they are fully committed to A Formula of Agreement, and are capable of being, and remaining, pledged to the above-described mutual affirmations in faith and doctrine, to joint decision-making, and to exercising and accepting mutual admonition and correction."[3]

This pledge does not settle every question, but it seems to me that it is very hard to ask for more from the proposals before us. The question to be decided here is not one about constitutions but about the realities of church life. If the UCC has in the recent past been capable of making and maintaining ecumenical commitments, then the question seems to me settled, even if we might wish that the process by which these com-

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[1] The Constitution of the United Church of Christ, Art. II, para. 5. All further references to the UCC Constitution will be included within the text.

[2] John H. Thomas, "United Church of Christ Reflections on Questions Regarding Proposed Full Communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America," unpublished paper (1996), 5-6.

[3] Formula, p. 22.

mitments were made were more juridically neat. (I would note that the LWF has the same problem in an even more acute form in affirming the Joint Declaration.)

Voting on these proposals will be only one moment in a larger, complicated process.

Even if one judges that the polity question is not an insuperable obstacle for the Formula, the dispersed authority within the UCC and also within the Episcopal Church raises another question. At the moment, neither the UCC nor the Episcopal Church has a binding national policy on the ordination of gay and lesbian persons living in committed, long-term relationships. Most definitely in the Episcopal Church and, as far as I can tell, also in the UCC, this decision is left to regional bodies, which decide these matters differently.[4] This variation within the churches does not directly call into question either the Formula or the Concordat. Even if one is opposed to the ordination of non-celibate gay and lesbian persons, that does not mean one rejects the validity of their ordination in the strict sense, and thus this variation does not call into question the mutual recognition of ministries among the churches. In addition, the mutual interchangeability of clergy for which both proposals call (or, I think better put, mutual availability of clergy) is always said to be subject to the discipline of each church. The proposals leave the churches free to exercise their own moral discernment in accepting or not accepting the ministry of any particular person.

Nevertheless, it is one thing to say that the mutual availability of clergy is limited by such disciplinary matters as knowledge of confirmation material or ability to pass a Greek or Hebrew test. It is another when mutual availability is limited by a disagreement on important ethical questions. As I have argued from the first of these lectures, we are called to a common life in communion. This common life in communion implies a common exercise of the divinely instituted office of ministry. At what point do disagreements about the Christian life, of which ordained ministers are called to be examples, block such a common life and ministry? Hard and fast answers are hard to come by. Disagreement about, say, the ministry of divorced and remarried persons would not appear to me to block communion. Disagreement over an issue such as racial discrimination in ordination, however, should block communion. Disagreement on the ethics of sexual orientation falls somewhere between these two, but it is difficult (at least for me) to say just where. On the one hand, if the criterion we are applying is whether a difference makes it impossible to carry out the essential activities of the church together without violation of conscience, then differences here at least border on the communion-hindering. On the other hand, the UCC and the Episcopal Church have so far lived with such differences within the much closer life of a single denomination.

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[4] For the Episcopal Church decision on this matter, see The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America in the Court for the Trial of a Bishop, *James M. Stanton, Bishop of Dallas, et al., Vs. The Rt. Rev. Walter C. Righter (1996).*

I have raised these issues because I believe they point to an important aspect of the proposals before us. Voting on these proposals will be only one moment in a larger, complicated process. First, a positive vote from the various church assemblies will not have the same meaning in each case. I believe we must recognize that the UCC will need to go through a non-juridical (and thus somewhat hard to define) process of affirmation by its local and regional bodies. With all the churches, the proposals will create a structure which we will need to grow into if the new relation is to have a true life. Second, the realities created by a positive vote may not be uniform in relation to all areas of some of the churches. With the Episcopal Church and the UCC and perhaps others as well, variations that go beyond the inevitable differences in local engagement and enthusiasm may mean that communion is full and easy in some parts of the country, but strained, even in certain senses limited, in others. If we adopt the proposals, we must be ready to live with such local variations.

This inevitably unfinished aspect of the proposals before us should not, I believe, in itself block their adoption. If communion is a true common life in Christ and the Spirit, it will not spring fully grown from the mind of a national convention. It must be realized in the actual life of the church in its various aspects. This realization may not always be easy and it may not always proceed without anomalies. The question we must consider, however, is which is the greater anomaly: a lack of communion with those we cannot but recognize as churches, or the variations and tensions that will come with any proposal for communion beyond the most easy and innocuous? The 1988 Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops described our situation well: "Throughout history Christian divisions have developed gradually and untidily. We should not expect the healing of these divisions to happen tidily or all at once."[5]

Relativism and admonition

A readiness to move forward even though the way ahead has within it certain foreseeable anomalies also is relevant to the more general issue I raised earlier, the worry that adopting these proposals is at the very least an exercise in doctrinal relativism and at the worst a total surrender of any Lutheran distinctiveness over against a contentless American culture religion. I described the question earlier as one not so much about what the churches hold but how they hold it. It makes a significant difference whether one affirms a set of religious beliefs and practices as in some way, however inadequately, true, or one affirms them as a useful set of heuristic devices which have a liberating or therapeutic effect. The question is not simply the reasons one has for holding certain religious beliefs and following certain religious practices, but how they are held. If they are held instrumentally, as a means to something else, rather than for reasons intrinsic to those beliefs and practices, then the nature of those beliefs and practices changes. They become moments in the pursuit of something else. American religious life, especially among the mainstream Protestant churches, certainly seems to have become increasingly instrumentalized (although one should note that one can find this trend also earlier in American religious history[6]). That for which specific beliefs and practices becomes in-

[5] Lambeth Conference 1988, *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988*, The Reports, Resolutions & Pastoral Letters from the Bishops (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1988), 144.

strumental may still be described in broadly religious ways: as spiritual fulfillment or a right relation with God. But that goal is described in ways relatively independent of the specificity of Christian belief. Piety, even spirituality, may prosper, but the faith subtly changes.

How beliefs are held makes a significant ecumenical difference. Let me contrast two ways of looking at ecumenical agreements. In an address welcoming the new relation between the Lutheran and Episcopal churches in 1982, Episcopal Bishop John Spong of Newark said that ecumenism teaches us that

> the church of the future will have to learn to embrace relativity as a virtue and to dismiss certainty as a vice,...to accept the fact that all of us are pilgrims on a journey into the pluralism of truth, and none of us has the final answer.... When the Christians of the world can do this, then perhaps in that larger community of faith, worshipers and believers will include the Jews, the Muslims, the Buddhists, the Hindus.[7]

Here is one ecumenical vision: no one has the final answer and so we must abandon all claims to a truth that might exclude other religions' truth claims. Ecumenical dialogue and relations are in the end indistinguishable from interreligious dialogue and relations.

I would hope that it is clear that in these lectures I have been pursuing a different vision, one that does not flow from a general skepticism about final truth claims, but rather flows from very specific claims: that in the Christ who comes to us graciously in word and sacrament we—that is, Lutherans and many other Christians—are one. Because we are one, we should seek to live out that oneness not just in informal and *ad hoc* ways, but in an institutionalized, structured, ongoing common life. Such an ecumenical vision does presuppose that it might be the case that Lutherans have not always and everywhere gotten everything quite right. Such a vision does relativize Lutheran claims, in the sense that it insists on seeing them in relation to the wider Christian tradition which contextualizes, enriches, and sometimes corrects them. But such a vision is not an abandonment of the notion of a final truth. It rather assumes the final truth who is Christ and whose body in the world is more than just the ELCA or just the Lutheran churches and the Lutheran tradition.

The differences between these two visions of ecumenism, the church, and its teachings are difficult to grasp and settle in terms of ecumenical texts. Ecumenical dialogues have yet to find a way of addressing this issue. But what is the possible significance of this problem for the proposals before us? Let me return to the criterion I have been proposing. The question is whether a common life in communion with the churches of the Concordat and the Formula will violate the integrity of the church because communion with the mainstream of American Protestantism (and in this respect, again, the Episcopal Church is Protestant) will lead to an erosion of the classical core of Christian belief within the ELCA? Will a common life with churches, most of which have been closer to the mainstream of American Protestantism than the Lutheran churches, inevitably mean the decline of American Lutheranism into being "just an-

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[6] See the fascinating piece from 1946 by H. Richard Niebuhr, "Utilitarian Christianity," in *Witness to a Generation: Significant Writings from* Christianity and Crisis *(1941-1966)*, ed. Wayne H. Cowan (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1966), 240-45.

[7] John Shelby Spong, "Hope and Fear in Ecumenical Union," *Christian Century* (1983): 581.

other American Protestant denomination" with no theological or doctrinal substance?

Two things need here to be stressed. First, there is no reason why the proposals must or even should contribute to such a decline into relativism. The texts themselves have had the usual effect of bilateral ecumenical dialogues, namely, a renewed attention to certain basic Christian affirmations, e.g., about justification, the Eucharist, and the church. The two proposals for fellowship have both had added to them in recent months catalogues of common beliefs to make the doctrinal affirmations on which they rest even clearer. Some have been worried by the perhaps misleading language of the mutual interchangeability of clergy and the provision of the Concordat that would not require a subscription to the Lutheran confessions from Episcopal priests who might serve within the ELCA. But neither the Formula nor the Concordat need imply any change within the normal discipline of the ELCA. Recognition and mutual availability of clergy does not mean that bishops and synodical committees must give up the normal screening procedures by which they seek to control who exercises ordained ministry within the area for which they have responsibility.

The second thing that must be said, however, is that the proposals themselves do not and cannot guarantee whether their effect will be to weaken or to strengthen the doctrinal commitments of the churches involved, including the ELCA. The crucial question here may not be whether we adopt the proposals, but what attitude we take to them if adopted. If we adopt the proposals in the belief that now there are no significant differences between Lutherans and others, that there is no future struggle in which to engage, then it is certainly possible that adopting the proposals will have a detrimental effect on life in our churches.

Adopting the proposals would mean being ready to listen and learn from others, but it need not mean retreating from fundamental Lutheran commitments.

But I see no reason why we must take such an attitude in adopting the proposals. It is equally possible to adopt the proposals in the conviction that we are called to life in communion with those with whom we share in Christ and the Spirit through word and sacrament. Because the proposals presuppose an internally differentiated consensus, differences still exist with these churches. Because we might judge these differences not to be church dividing does not imply that these differences are not important. Just here the model of mutual affirmation and mutual admonition offered by A Common Calling is helpful. I certainly hope that Lutherans will have something distinctive to say and contribute in relation to the foundations of social ethics, to eucharistic and baptismal piety, to ecclesiology, and most importantly to justification by grace through faith for the sake of Jesus Christ. Adopting the proposals would mean being ready to listen and learn from others, but it need not mean retreating from fundamental Lutheran commitments. It would rather mean that we are to press commitments in a broader context.

If we adopt the proposals, we would open up a new path for Lutherans within American Christianity. The precise route of that path cannot be mapped out in advance. On the one hand, it may be that certain branches of the path turn out to be dead ends. It may be that we will discover, despite carefully developed proposals, that we cannot live a common life with certain bodies without violating what we consider to be the integrity of the church. No proposal can guarantee that such will not occur. On the other hand, new branches of the path may open up. If we adopt the proposals before us, we should then move on to consider the proposal we already have from the dialogue with the Moravians for full communion and also, I would hope, move rapidly toward a new round of discussions with the Methodists that would also, if possible, produce a proposal for communion. The process that would be begun by adopting the proposals now before us is inherently unpredictable.

The proposals, especially the Concordat, call for small but not insignificant changes in how we do certain things and how we understand ourselves. In the process of realizing a common life with other churches, we should expect further change. I would hope that this change would not mean a loss of Lutheran distinctiveness, but rather a shift in how we understand that distinctiveness. What should be distinctive about Lutheranism is not some possession unique to ourselves, but rather a particular perspective on what we all have been given, the one word and mission of Christ and the Spirit. The relative isolation that has typified much of American Lutheranism since the mid-19th century has in some ways served us well. But what we have learned from ecumenical dialogues is that the larger context of the church and its life does not weaken that which is distinctively Lutheran, but provides the context in which the richness of the Reformation comes to light.

I included in the title for this lecture the phrase "the future of American Lutheranism." We need here to be realistic. Adopting or rejecting the proposals before us will not by itself decide the future of American Lutheranism. I do not believe that either adopting or rejecting the proposals will either itself save or destroy the ELCA. Yet the adoption or rejection of these proposals, and even more the perspective and attitude with which they are adopted or rejected, will make a significant difference to the shape of our future by determining the context within which certain aspects of that future are determined. Will we live out our relation with other Christians in this country within a comprehensive structure of relations of communion with a significant range of churches; will we turn in only one direction, perhaps Anglican and Catholic or perhaps Reformed and Methodist; or will we seek some form of common life that is less structured, more *ad hoc*, and probably more limited? At least this much is at stake in the decisions we must make this summer.

In these lectures, I hope I have shed some light on the issues we need to think about in making up our collective mind. I pray that we will make these decisions with our eyes firmly fixed on that which is prior to our decisions, on the gift we have received in Christ, who is the one head of the one body, against which neither the gates of hell nor our foolishness will ever prevail.

Book Reviews

The Kingdom of God. The Message of Jesus Today. By John Fuellenbach. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995. xi and 240 pages. Paper. $20.00.

The kingdom of God was the central focus of Jesus' teaching. Fuellenbach advances the thesis that the kingdom of God offers a coherent vision, goal, and call to contemporary Christians. Part One reviews the political, eschatological, and ethical implications of kingdom in the Old Testament and Apocalyptic literature. Part Two examines the range of ideas Jesus associated with the kingdom of God and clarifies their theological and ethical implications. Part Three explains the connections between the kingdom and (1) the person of Jesus, (2) the Holy Spirit, and (3) the church. The text concludes with an analysis of the Lord's Prayer as summary of Jesus' kingdom message.

Religious books tend to be scholarly or inspirational; this one is both. Christians reading this book will find their faith renewed and their commitment to the gospel revitalized. It would be an excellent choice for adult discussion groups willing and able to read a substantive text. However, this should not be taken as an endorsement of every aspect of Fuellenbach's presentation.

Fuellenbach recognizes that the term "kingdom" has patriarchal connotations but does not consider "reign" a suitable alternative. He adopts Joachim Jeremias' understanding of "Abba," although he knows recent studies question Jeremias' conclusions. Though schooled in the insights and questions that arise from critical approaches to the Bible, he appeals to and applies the canonical gospels as if they provide historical evidence. There are residues of some traditional Christian anti-Judaic premises as Fuellenbach emphasizes Israel's infidelities and fails to nuance references to salvation history. His claim that Jesus "was put to death by his own people" (p. 223) is a serious distortion. Studies of the general polemics in the gospels and the particular problems in passion narrative call such statements into question as a legitimate opinion.

This is an important study, commendable for recognizing that secularization (not to be confused with the ideology of secularism) is a blessing, a sign of the times that promotes "communion in difference in a religiously pluralistic world" (p. 22), insisting that the kingdom of God should not be equated with the church, and—above all—Fuellenbach's conviction that the kingdom Jesus proclaimed not only embraces God and humankind, but incorporates all creation. That has significant theological and ethical implications for ecological theology. This text warrants a serious reading and working through the opinions that many readers may not share with the author.

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Compassionate Ministry: Theological Foundations. By Bryan P. Stone. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996. Paper. $17.00.

Bryan P. Stone brings years of pastoral service in inner city Fort Worth to his teaching at Azusa Pacific University and the Bresee Institute for Urban Training in Los Angeles. It shows in the clarity of vision and theological depth of this book. Already the author of a critical study on the Christology of Juan Luis Segundo, Stone integrates a liberation perspective into a theology which can ground congregational ministry in the practice of justice. This is a theology in service of those who suffer, particularly those who suffer under the oppression of others.

The organizing theme of the book is "compassion." Each of the six chapters contributes to a sustained case for congregations to see their mission in terms of "compassionate ministry." An action-reflection method undergirds this theology. In the movement from the practice of

ministry to theological reflection, Stone articulates the importance of spirituality and imagination. The most fundamental decision in compassionate ministry is commitment to side with the suffering, which Stone relates to the preferential option for the poor.

Restoration of the image of God is the final goal of God's salvific purposes. Racism and institutional violence are among those powers which work to steal our humanity. Stone illustrates this point with reference to the situation of three women on welfare. Freedom, creativity, and community characterize lives where the image of God has been restored, in which work and sexuality regain their created goodness.

The God who intends such salvation is a compassionate God, the God of Jesus. One must distinguish this God from false portrayals as lawgiver, controlling power, "divine goodie-giver," or sentimental love. According to the abundant witness of Scripture, to know Jesus' God is to do justice. Faith in God leads dynamically to compassionate deeds. Stone argues explicitly against works-righteousness in formulating his version of faith active in love.

In a chapter on Christology, Jesus is identified as "the compassion of God." Not only was Jesus human but a human born in poverty and dying in disgrace. The kingdom of God for which Jesus stood was a compassionate kingdom. The kingdom comes as a gift which frees us for participation in the liberating praxis of Jesus. When Paul speaks of life "in Christ," he means a life lived in freedom from sin and for "a new way of acting toward our neighbor" (p. 86). Sin opposes this new life in Christ and becomes manifest not only individually but also in social structures. The liberty Jesus brings both restores our individual humanity and creates a new community.

In the longest chapter of the book, Stone develops an ecclesiology based on the image of church as "liberation community." This image competes for our allegiance with many others, such as "building," "business," "amusement park," or "hospital." The marks of this church are charity, empowerment under the cross, and justice. The church must call society to repentance, resist idolatry, and advocate on behalf of victims. The church celebrates at worship in anticipation of God's transformation of the world. Christian community is holistic and inclusive; it finds its unity in diversity.

The final chapter explores the meaning of "compassionate evangelism." Stone is pointed in his criticism of evangelism which is based upon a body-soul dualism, favors personal over corporate salvation, sees this life only "as a test," and is predominantly other-worldly. Instead, compassionate evangelism focuses on the salvation of this world. Both the Hebrew idea of shalom and Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God need to guide our thinking toward a fuller understanding of salvation and an approach to evangelism which honors both the personal and corporate dimensions.

This book helps to lay solid theological foundations for compassionate ministry. It is serious theology: informed by the practice of ministry, yet not a compilation of anecdotes. The examples chosen from pastoral experience always serve the purpose of clarifying a theological point. It would be especially valuable to leaders of congregations wishing to better integrate social ministry into the mainstream of congregational mission.

Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary

The Big Small Church Book. By David R. Ray. Cleveland OH: Pilgrim Press, 1992. xi and 233 pages. Paper. $14.95.

One central conviction appears throughout the pages of this book: small churches are just fine the way they are. Ray repeatedly asserts, without apology or excuse, that small churches are the right size to do all that God calls a church to do. Everything in *The Big Small Church Book* revolves around this central conviction.

The meat of the book begins in chapter 2. The chapter is called "A Small Theology." Ray takes us through the Bible and shows us how God has always used small groups to accomplish God's work: Israel, prophets, apostles, etc. Simultaneously, Ray offers a critique of the North American culture's idea of success by which many churches and pastors evaluate themselves. North American culture generally asso-

ciates "big" with success. More money and more people spells success. This is a dangerous attitude for small churches because it leads to low self-esteem, apathy, and an unrealistic vision for the future. For the pastor of a small church, this is a destructive way to evaluate the successfulness of ministry.

Ray asserts over and over again that a small church is going to look, feel, and act much differently than a big church. Pastors must avoid the mistake of trying to turn the small church into a little "big" church. Ray devotes chapters to important topics that apply directly to the life of small churches: worship, education, caring, mission, and maintenance. When one takes congregational size and resources into consideration, these things can be done effectively.

In chapter 10, Ray describes the profile of a successful small church pastor. Ray draws on Lyle Schaller's book *Getting Things Done*. The number one way the pastor should understand his or her role is that of shepherd. Another thing that the small church pastor should bring to the congregation is commitment: plan to stay for a while. Don't use the congregation as a stepping stone to something bigger and more glorious.

I found *The Big Small Church Book* to be very honest. Ray writes with 20 years of experience as a parish pastor of three different small congregations. He resists the temptation to paint a rose-colored picture of the small church. Ministry in small churches is challenging for several reasons: finances, limited people resources, devastating potential of conflict. At the same time, small churches provide an intimacy and cohesion within the body of Christ that simply cannot be found in larger congregations.

I recommend this book to pastors and lay leaders for a keen insight into the nature and structure of the small church, regardless of whether it is in the rural, small town, or urban setting. This book should be required reading for last year seminary students who generally go into small churches when they enter ordained ministry. If we pay heed to half of the information and wisdom contained here, we will go a long way toward effective ministry.

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Sagerton, Texas

Jesus the Wisdom of God: An Ecological Theology. By Denis Edwards. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995. xiv and 208 pages. Paper. $18.50.

With any subject in a bandwagon phase, such as religion and the environment, much that is written is ephemeral. Edwards' contribution, however, will last. With environmental concerns in view, he suggests an approach to the fundamental topics of Christology and the Trinity from the biblical wisdom tradition.

The author, a Roman Catholic priest from Australia, begins by noting concerns about the environment, with attention to the rain forests, and sketches the scientific understanding of the cosmos in which we participate. We need, he argues, a fully ecological theology: We can know the Trinity only with adequate Christology, and we know the Word made human only if we understand humanity in its relationship with nature.

Edwards examines Israel's wisdom tradition, and especially Sophia, "the Wisdom Woman," in Proverbs, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Sophia functions in this literature as an agent of revelation, creation, and salvation. Scholars take different positions on how realistically we are to understand Sophia. While not claiming that she is a divine hypostasis in the Old Testament context, Edwards sees her as God's self-communication in creation.

Echoes of these Sophia passages are used in several books of the New Testament to speak about Jesus. Most do not use explicit wisdom language, but this is found, significantly, in 1 Corinthians. Christ crucified, foolishness to normal ways of thinking, is God's wisdom for us. The Christ hymn of Colossians makes clear the radically ecological character of this wisdom by which "all things" are reconciled to God. The material universe is thus not a "launching pad" for a more spiritual state of existence, but will be transformed through the resurrection (p. 86).

Edwards then moves to understandings of the Trinity. The relational character of reality suggested by ecological science and the wisdom tradition urges models of the Trinity as persons in relationship rather than those stressing the divine nature. Such models are found in the

western tradition in Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure. The discussion will be helpful for those who have assumed western trinitarian thought to be monolithic from Augustine until the twentieth century.

Edwards then turns back to the world, reflecting on the place of humanity and theological guidelines for "ecological praxis." Throughout, he keeps good balance, avoiding the shrillness of some environmental theology while not hesitating to criticize naively anthropocentric and utilitarian approaches to nature that the church has too easily condoned in the past.

This is an ambitious and thought-provoking project. I would ask if it is not too easily assumed that Wisdom in creation makes it possible to know God from nature: The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom. But the debate over natural theology is an old one, and it helps to have another angle from which to view it. That can be said of the whole book: It provides a fresh and clearly presented approach to old and fundamental questions about the relationships among God, humanity, and the rest of creation.

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Briefly Noted

I & II Chronicles. By Sara Japhet (Westminster/John Knox, $50). J. has written a long and wise commentary that can be described as a contemporary classic. Here a lifetime of scholarship comes to a climax as she writes with a measured voice, with sound judgment, and with particular attention to literary characteristics and theological emphases. Her early proposal that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are *not* one unified history has come to prevail in wide reaches of biblical scholarship. Chronicles, in her view, is not a theodicy for a specific crisis, but an attempt to find general principles which govern the history of Israel. The origins of Israel's election lie embedded in the creation of the world, not in the sphere of history. The Chronicler believes that the system of retribution is a concrete manifestation of God's justice, and that the ultimate cause of human misfortunes lies in the free choice made by human beings. For each pericope she prints out the text of the RSV and then provides notes to the Masoretic Text, notes to the RSV, an analysis of structure, sources, and form, and a verse by verse commentary. RWK

Harpercollins Bible Dictionary. Edited by Paul J. Achtemeier (Harpercollins, $45). First published in 1985, this revised, 1996, edition draws on some 193 Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish scholars who are part of the Society of Biblical Literature. About 100 new articles have been added, and much of the bibliographical, archaeological, and cartographical information has been brought up to date. 78 pages have been added. If you are looking for the best one volume Bible dictionary, look no farther. RWK

Sharing Heaven's Music. The Heart of Christian Preaching. Edited by Barry L. Callen (Abingdon, $18.95). These essays are in honor of James Earl Massey, Dean and Professor of Biblical Studies Emeritus at Anderson University School of Theology. Many of the great names in contemporary theology and preaching contributed essays to this Festschrift—Achtemeier, Buttrick, González, Long, Mitchell, O'Day, Willimon, and many others. Massey, a prince of African American preachers, is also a concert pianist, who received his call to preach while sitting in church memorizing musical scores. His former president remarks, "Preaching has been Massey's passion—to study it, write about it, teach it, but most of all to do it." RWK

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Preaching Helps

The Day of Pentecost—Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, Series B

Cretans, Arabians, and Pentecostals

All sorts and conditions were touched by the Spirit on Pentecost, as God put into action a plan to reverse the effects of Babel, where babbling tower builders had arrogantly thought to scale the heights of heaven. The Spirit taught them a new language, or did the Spirit provide them with new ears? Was it a miracle of speech or of hearing? In either case tongues and ears were involved. People began to speak and listen to one another, and their chatter, says Luke in his account of Pentecost, was neither the whining of victims nor ethnic boasting. It was all praise of the mighty deeds of God.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War with a great Eastern empire pitted against the Western powers, the world did not break through to serenity. Instead, old ethnic and linguistic rivalries revived, and the ancient tribalization of humankind resumed with deadly passion. Peoples seem unable to speak peace to their neighbors. They do not hear the voice of a common humanity in the language of the other. And so a babble of confusion rises up once more, celebrating centuries-old wounds and resentments, rather than a pentecostal chorus of tongues praising God's mighty acts.

This installment of Preaching Helps is the product of a very modern linguistic community, a band of friends who since seminary days have constituted themselves a cyber-community, speaking and listening to one another via e-mail and the Internet. They serve as pastors and seminary educated laity in ministries throughout the United States, in the inner city and in rural congregations, on large multiple staff parishes and in clinical work or parenting or graduate school. Acting as cyber-ring-master, coordinating the effort, is the **Rev. Philip Ruge-Jones**, a graduate student at LSTC who serves also as visitation pastor of Central Lutheran Church, Edgerton, Wisconsin. He writes that this joint project is a reminder of the great diversity of ways that Christian people approach text and context in order to discover therein the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's identify the people behind the voices in the First Readings and Pastoral Reflections: **Nancy Curtis**, pastor of St. James Lutheran Church, New Haven, IN, and LutherLink sysop #3; **Cheryl Danielson**, chaplain at Mille Lacs Health System and Mille Lacs Academy in Onamia, MN; **Cynthia A. Fisher-Broin**, associate pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran in Northfield, MN; **David D. Grafton**, pastor of Zion Lutheran, Ridgefield, NJ, and Director of the North Jersey Christian-Muslim Project; **Hollie Holt-Woehl**, associate pastor of House of Hope Lutheran, New Hope, MN; **Randall Holt-Woehl**, stay at home dad and member of House of Hope; **Margaret S. Johnson**, pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran, Eagle River, WI; **Julie A. Krahn**, pastor of Peace Lutheran, Belmont, WI; **Lisa L. Nelson**, pastor of Wiota Lutheran, South Wayne, WI; **Laura Puumala Berdahl**, pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran, Brainerd, MN; **Lori Ruge-Jones**, pastor of First Lutheran, Janesville, WI; **Steven R. P. Weston**, pastor of First and Immanuel Lutheran Churches, Warren, MN; **Jeff Whillock**, who wrote his contribution while pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran in rural Aitkin, MN, and now associate pastor of St. John American Lutheran, Cedar Falls, IA; **Jan Wiersma Halverson**, associate pastor of Our Saviour's Lutheran, Arlington Heights, IL, and graduate student at the University of Chicago; **Kyle Wiersma Halverson**, pastor of Zion Lutheran, Chicago.

Added to each Sunday's offerings is a very brief "Probing the Text" offered by **Pastor Lucy Kolin** of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Oakland, California.

I know how easy it is to get out of touch with people, even good friends, to stop writing and calling, to cease speaking and listening. Therefore I am astonished that so many people, living at such great distances from one another, could nevertheless work together so effectively on a common project. I want to thank all of them, and a special word of gratitude to the coordinator, Phil Ruge-Jones. When he delivered the packet of materials to me, he sent along this re-wording of an old prayer: "May the words of our keyboards and the meditations from our hard drives, be acceptable in your sight!"

What can I say? Maybe just say "Amen" and wish all of you good listening and good preaching.

Pentecostally Yours,

Robert H. Smith
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The Day of Pentecost
May 18, 1997

Psalm 104:25-35, 7
Acts 2:1-21
Romans 8:12-17
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

First Reading

In the texts assigned for this week we see the Spirit forming bridges over various chasms. She joins together what is desperately disparate: God and humanity, people from this nation and that, the old covenant and the new, the life of Jesus and the Jesus who yet lives. Foundational in the work of the Spirit is the bringing together of God and humanity. The Spirit moves in two directions in order to span the divide between humanity and God. John reminds us that the Spirit, having been unleashed by Christ's death and resurrection, comes to us from God's side to testify to the graciousness which resides within God. Having brought us this truth, the Spirit leads us into all truth (Jn 16:13,14). On the other hand, Paul speaks of the Spirit from the human side. The Spirit brings our words back to God. She enters into our weakness, and therein utters a deep, groaning sigh that sums up the peril and perplexity of fallen creaturely existence (Rom 8:22,26). This divine two way traffic offers hope to the waiting faithful.

In the Acts text, we see the bridge of the Spirit stretching between divided isles of humanity. The faithful women and men were accustomed to devote time to prayer, fellowship and reflection on the Jesus story (Acts 1:14). Once again they are "all together" (2:1), the Spirit comes among them and the Word spreads like wildfire. The flames of the Spirit hover over "each" of the men and women gathered (2:3). The community experiences the bridging of the Spirit over the chasms of gender, age, and language. The Old Testament text which the author cites suggests that those speaking included sons and daughters, young and old, both male and female slaves (2:17,18), The Spirit's "tongues" (*glossai*) of fire equip them to speak in other "languages" (*glossai*). And at the heart of the text the writer of Acts leads us on a full tour of "every nation under the sun" (2:5). Even as our Sunday morning readers stammer through that long list of places, we recall that people from each of them heard the Spirit-seized faithful speaking eloquently in "their own language" (*dialektos*) (2:6,8). Despite all human divisions, a profound unity is created. Yet let us recognize the uniqueness of this unity. More often than not, worldly powers create unity through enforced singularity, through the destruction or denial of local particularities and dialects. But the Spirit embraces those same eccentricities, speaking of the mighty deeds of God to each in the language of their heart. The Spirit is the evangelical bridge that binds us together even in our diversity, even as she also binds us to God. When the community gathers to share the story of the mighty deeds which God has done, the Spirit comes to give us a share in those same deeds. PR-J

Pastoral Reflections

Pentecost is one holy day that is approached with much ambivalence, by preachers and laity alike. What exactly is a spirit, anyway, and what about the Spirit of God? This lack of comprehension may be complicated by our previous rendering of this person of the Trinity as the "Holy Ghost"—Don't ghosts have to do with death, and aren't we to be scared of them? It is more helpful for preaching to focus on the Spirit as the stuff of life that God gives to all of us, the *ruach* of God which was breathed into the first earth creature; the *pneuma* which blows through the

bodies and hearts of God's people. It is this Spirit which speaks to us, calling us each by name (good baptismal image, if this is your confirmation day), calling us in God's name, speaking to our hearts in a language that each of us can understand. The miracle of Pentecost is not that the people were smart enough to hear, but that the Spirit touched them in a way that made sense to them.

In conversations about ministry with people of other cultures, I am occasionally asked, "Why do we have to have church in that language? Why can't they learn English if they're going to live here?" I am struck by a certain arrogance, and fear, which lie behind this question, as I think of grandmothers in nursing homes who still recite the Lord's Prayer in German, Norwegian, or Danish. In my experience, most of these people also know the prayer in English, because they do live here. Yet in times of trouble, or when they are just drifting off to sleep and are not concentrating fully, their prayer slips into the language of their heart, the language in which they first learned about God's love–and God understands and hears their prayer.

As preachers we must also remember that there are cultural differences within our own congregations, based on gender, age, economy, and experience. What words do we need to use in order for the listeners to know the love of God?

The Pentecost story reminds us that as God came to earth in Jesus, in the form of a human who could be understood and experienced, so also God now comes to us in ways that we can understand. God wants us to know the love God has for all people, for the community, for the body of Christ with all its diverse and various members. Without the Spirit speaking to our hearts, we cannot understand one another; the story does not make sense. Without this Spirit breathing in and out of our souls, we are dead, nothing but clay. This God who created with words speaks us into being, speaks life into us, that we might carry the Life forth, speaking the name of Jesus, breathing the love of God to God's people. The Advocate speaks in the voice of the people who bear the mark of Jesus. In the name of Christ we interrupt thoughts of ghosts and death to speak a message of new life. Filled with the Holy Spirit, let us begin to speak as the Spirit has given us ability. LR-J

The Holy Trinity
May 25, 1997

Psalm 104:25-35, 7
Isaiah 6:1-8
Romans 8:12-17
John 3:1-17

First Reading

Like Pentecost, Trinity Sunday is met with ambivalence of its own. Here in the lessons for the day, we encounter ambivalence as well. We read both of *God as one* and also of *God as not just one*–but as "God," "Spirit," "Abba, Father," "Jesus," "the LORD," "the voice of the LORD," and "Christ." This tension between *God as one* and *God as not just one* is not only in the lessons—this tension is the powerful heart of Trinity Sunday. The following comments seek to enflesh the power of this dynamic tension.

Each of the assigned lessons presents a glimpse of God and more strikingly of the relationships between persons of God and people of the earth. Isaiah's vision of the Lord is poetic, dynamic and filled with music. The glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, and the power of the Lord blots out sin and bids guilt depart. Enigmatically the voice of the Lord asks, "Who will go for *us*?"

In the lesson from John we peek in on Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus knows not whence the Spirit/wind (*pneuma*) comes or where it goes, nor does he comprehend the One who stands there before him. He knows that Jesus is somehow "from God," but he doesn't see the very presence of God there with him. Nicodemus again misses the point when Jesus links one's ability to see the kingdom of God with being "born from above" (*gennethe anothen*). To be born from above is not to repeat the event of one's birth, but to be adopted as a child of God—not born of the flesh of one's mother, but by the generative power of the Spirit. Through the life-giving power of the Spirit, one is born from above as one comes to faith in Jesus, who himself came from above. This coming to faith is a new birth, because through it one enters into a new relationship with God, a relationship that is eternal life.

For those whose eyes are opened by the Spirit to see their adoption, their identity is no longer rooted in physical origin or familial relationships, but in spiritual relationship with God. Rooted in relationship with God through Christ, one lives boldly. It is a bold thing to cry "Abba! Father!" (*abba ho pater*). It was bold in Paul's day, for calling to God in such a personal way presumed a close and intimate relationship with God. And it is bold to cry "Abba! Father" now in a world of gender sensitivity and acute awareness of the pain inflicted by some fathers upon their children. Yet I do not think it is appropriate to toss out the gift of our adoption, the gift of crying "Abba," for we need this powerfully profound intimacy with God.

Any term of sufficient intimacy to convey the sort of relationship we have with God as adoptive children is also a term that will remind other children of God of the ways that their own lives have been bruised and battered by another intimate relative named by that same term. If we seek do away with all language that is offensive or painful, we will also eliminate the language we need to communicate the powerful, dynamic, relational intimacy that we have with God in Christ Jesus. To surrender fatherly language is to allow Feuerbachian projections of our own experiences to be victorious, and thus limit our experience of the power of the God to redeem even our wounded intimate relationships and families.

The Holy Trinity is a theological response to the revelation of God, an attempt to make sense of the mystery of God–especially as the divine persons distinguish themselves from one another. Jesus can speak of God separate from himself, and of his oneness with the Father. Jesus speaks of the Spirit, that active dynamic force, that powerful disembodied person, separate yet united with himself and the Father. Holy Trinity as an attempt to make sense of God as revealed to people of faith throughout the ages–and not just any God, but the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Isaiah and Nicodemus and Saul. Not just any God, but the God we know in Jesus Christ, who was given for you out of the love of the Father, and is revealed to you in the power of the Spirit, the God who adopts you as a beloved child. JW

Pastoral Reflections

What must God do in order to convince us to follow and serve? For Isaiah, it was unclean lips or sin that stood in his way. For Jeremiah, it was his youth. For Moses, it was his poor speaking ability. God burned away Isaiah's sin with the fire of a live coal. And the seraph said to him, "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out" (v. 7). That bold statement reminds us of the public absolution of our sin during worship as God uses another ritual to remove the obstacle of our sin.

We all need to hear the word which brings forgiveness, just like Isaiah needed to hear the word of the seraph before he could follow. As Christians, we cling to our baptism in much the same way that Isaiah relies on this act of cleansing. We could just as easily say with Isaiah, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a person of unclean lips" (v. 5). This is true, and our "live coal" is the water of baptism.

We are washed clean in the baptismal water, made new by the Word, and adopted by God. We are still sinners, but we have been radically changed, having been joined to God in Jesus Christ. We are made new by this relationship. When we open our mouths to say, "Here I am; send me," it is that new child of God who speaks. Yet it is only because we are joined to God in Christ that we can say, "Send me" (v. 8).

Paul claims that this adoption, this intimate relationship, frees us from sin and makes us "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17). And Paul reminds us that being adopted by God, and inheriting all that God has, necessarily includes suffering for Christ's sake. We are heirs, Paul continues, "if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him." This suffering is not something we seek, but something we experience nonetheless, and in suffering, we know Christ.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that this relationship with God opens our eyes to the kingdom, for "no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Even Nicodemus sees that Jesus could not do these signs without being with God, "for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God" (Jn 3:2). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism makes way for adoption into God's family. This relationship, begun in baptism, opens the doors to the kingdom of God.

The Gospel writer announces that "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that world might be saved through him" (3:17). Jesus came to create, not to destroy. Through Jesus, God has done a new thing; God has come to us so that we might know God as a life-giving mother or father and God might know us as God's own sons and daughters. LLN

Probing the Texts

[Jesus said:] "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the dominion of God without being born from above... no one can enter the dominion of God without being born of water and Spirit" (Jn 3:3,5). We believe that with God, there are no premature births (in Baptism), but always the possibility of late bloomers. LK

Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 1, 1997

Psalm 81:1-10
Deuteronomy 5:12-15
2 Corinthians 4:5-12
Mark 2:23–3:6

First Reading

The apostle Paul finds himself in the middle of a controversy regarding the ministry he offers to the congregation of Corinthians. They have been wooed away by other leaders who come off far more impressively than does Paul. His speech is not striking, but marked by stuttering; his presence does not command attention as they would wish; he does not draw them out into a glorious life of super spirituality. Paul does not seek to defend himself by appealing to personal gifts which they may have overlooked. He takes their negative appraisal of his abilities and turns it into a commendation of his call. "We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that the extraordinary power belongs to God." His own fragile nature becomes a means for the fullness of God's grace to be revealed. In a series of oppositions Paul then makes clear much of what it means that the servants of Christ are clay pots. The world will afflict, crush, perplex, persecute and strike them down, but God's glory is revealed as God struggles against the perils of the world giving the faithful life. By God's grace they are not crushed, driven to despair, forsaken nor destroyed. Lest we take words like "afflicted" too abstractly, we do well to recall Paul's frequent prison sentences and his near death experiences. The forces of evil were concrete enough for Paul and one can assume that a community among whom not many were wise, powerful or noble by the world's standards also knew concrete affliction when it met them daily. That their struggles were concrete should not surprise us; what should catch our ear is that experiences of God's grace were equally concrete. The death that came knocking daily did not surprise Paul. For as a servant of the crucified Christ, he could expect to "carry in the body the death of Jesus," and he willingly did this that "so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies." It is not in jars of bronze or iron that God is manifest, but in clay jars always in danger of breaking.

The lesson from Mark also speaks of the presence of God in the midst of the afflicted. Whether one recalls the hungering disciples or the man with the withered hand, once again the life of Jesus is found in the midst of clay vessels. And lest those "pots" break, Jesus breaks the venerable Sabbath traditions of the elders. In the midst of emptiness, he seeks to satisfy; in the presence of brokenness, he brings restoration. God comes in the middle of all that impedes the divine ruling, that life might come again. Today's psalm confesses this divine dynamic of life poetically: "In distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder." PR-J

Pastoral Reflections

A friend of mine (actually one of the other contributors in this issue, Nick Fisher-Broin) used to illustrate Paul's point visually for kids at a camp where we worked. He would take a clay pot and tap it with a hammer. Soon it would become cracked, broken and apparently useless. It might seem wiser to use a stronger, more resilient pot, one made of metal or at least plastic. But Nick would then glue the pieces together and make the pot whole again. "The funny thing is, this broken and cracked pot is exactly what is needed for its plants to have life. The cracks allow for oxygen to reach the roots." Of

course, Nick was not giving us a lecture in horticulture; he was inviting us to see God's presence in the middle of our cracked and broken, yet also forgiven lives.

As humans we often long, like the Corinthians, for the unbroken presence of God, for eloquence unhampered by stammering, for gifts that will draw us into a glorious life of super spirituality. We want to be vessels of bronze. We try to work 80 hours each week; we want to find faith with no remnant of doubt; we want our own venerable traditions to protect us from the risk of announcing the gospel in ways appropriate to a new day's needs. The problem with such a quest is twofold. First, such unbroken affirmation is only possible by an act of incredible denial of our own "secret places of thunder." This is neither wise nor healthy. But the second and more grave problem is that in turning to such illusive safety, we are actually turning from the God revealed in Christ Jesus. For God has heard the thunder, and thus has entered the storm. God's glory is not to be found finally in unbroken security, but paradoxically in the cross. For the One who chooses to work through *our* brokenness, has experienced that brokenness in flesh and blood. And if God's greatest work could happen in such a place, we can be sure that God comes to us, cracked pots and all, to bring life to us and, through us, to our neighbors. The glory of God is life, health and salvation for you this day. PR-J

Probing the Texts

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?'" (Mk 2:4). Did God violate the sabbath by raising Jesus from the dead? Does God break the rules by justifying the ungodly? LK

Third Sunday after Pentecost June 8, 1997

Psalm 130
Genesis 3:8-15
2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1
Mark 3:20-35

First Reading

On the literary surface, Gen 3:8-15 is part of a myth or a fable that answers basic human questions like "Why does a snake have no legs?" "Why does a woman have pain in childbirth?" "Why does man have to work hard for a living?"

From one point of view, the Yahwist had a less developed view of God than we now have. God had more human and less Godly characteristics: The humans heard him walking in the garden, and he was not all-knowing. God seems not to know where or why Adam and Eve are hiding from him. On the other hand, the questions God asks may be more of seeking relationship than seeking information. And what about the snake? Does it represent Satan, or abstract evil, or the evil spirits like those Jesus has to face in the reading from Mark?

Demons and spirits are a very real part of Mark's world. The ministry of Jesus is greatly consumed with casting out evil spirits. In Mark 3, Jesus' authority is presumed by the scribes to come from Beelzebul because of the power he has over the spirits. Jesus points out the irrationality of this assumption. It would not make sense for the authority *to* cast out evil spirits to come *from* those same evil spirits.

Some aspects of Jesus' behavior may suggest possession by evil spirits. One morning before light (evil thrives at night) he goes out into the wilderness, where the unclean spirits live. He has extended conversation

with unclean spirits (like the Gerasene demoniac) before casting them out. The demons themselves recognize him even though humans have a hard time doing so.

Is Jesus possessed by a spirit? Yes, by the Holy Spirit! It is a case of mistaken identity to think Jesus has an unclean spirit. The religious leaders had been trying to find Jesus guilty of some sin (2:16, 18, 24; 3:2, 6), but Jesus says all sins and blasphemies (he is eventually accused of blasphemy) may be forgiven but not the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It is blasphemy to say that the divine Holy Spirit which was driving Jesus' actions is an unclean spirit or that his motives are impure or against the will of God. RH-W

Pastoral Reflections

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "So we do not lose heart." How many of us have been with people who have lost heart? As pastors we are in the "heart" business, so to speak. We are at the "heart of joy" when a child is born and brought before the baptismal font. We are at the "heart of trouble" when we are called to the scene of an accident involving a parishioner. We are at the "heart of love" when we perform a wedding service. We are at the "heart of pain" when we bury a dearly loved parent, grandparent, spouse, or child. Pastors deal with the highs and the lows of the heart of those we are called to serve. Sometimes we who are in the heart business lose heart. We wonder if we will ever meet a confirmation student who cares to learn what we have to teach. Members divorce each other, making us wonder if we are making any difference in premarital counseling. And why even bother to preach on unity when the women's group is fighting with the council over what color to paint the kitchen?

"Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day." I look over the residents of the nursing home every time I go in and I see those who can no longer walk, are unable to feed or dress themselves, and do not recognize their own children. I watch the body as it ages and I see that our outer nature is wasting away even though advertising agencies spend billions to tell us we can prevent aging by purchasing this or that product.

But among the nursing home residents are those whose inner nature is being renewed day by day, those who find comfort and strength in worship, Bible study and prayer. I know an 80 year-old nursing home resident whose legs were amputated above the knees five years ago. His hands are so crippled with arthritis he can hardly hold a pen to sign his name. Three years ago his wife died. At that time his faith life came crashing down. His wife had been the one who took the reins of faith in the family. She made sure the family attended church and the children were present at Sunday School. When she died, he began to take the reins of faith for himself. So now he reads his Bible faithfully every day. He attends a small group Bible study, and he worships every Sunday. Some would look at this old man with no legs and crippled hands and think he is past his prime, but spiritually he has never been healthier. Even though his outer nature is wasting away, his inner nature is being renewed day by day. For he knows that if the earthly tent he lives in is destroyed, he has a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. HH-W

Probing the Texts

"...so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God" (2 Cor 4:13–5:1). What would our ministries and congregations look like if every member responded—in service, prayer, worship, and financial giving—with an increase of thankfulness for God's immeasurable grace? LK

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 15, 1997

Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14
Ezekiel 17:22-24
2 Corinthians 5:6-10 [11-13] 14-17
Mark 4:26-34

First Reading

In Mark's contribution for this week we have two "kingdom parables." Keeping in mind that "kingdom of God" refers not to a place but to the state of affairs that exists when God is king (*basileia tou theou* = "God's rule"), we might paraphrase Jesus' saying as, "When God rules, it's like this:..."

The first picture Jesus gives of the kingdom is one of seed growing while the farmer sleeps. Farming is hard work, and modern American farmers know a lot about how to get plants to grow and produce abundantly. But there is still something inherently mysterious about the growing of a plant. And no matter how hard farmers work, they can't *make* plants grow. The plants do that by themselves. At the core of the process is something over which farmers have no control and which is beyond their understanding.

The kingdom of God is like this, Jesus says. We, the seed-sowers for God, might be very hard workers (sometimes too hard) and we might diligently study every insight of the church-growth researchers, but the spread of the kingdom of God is still inherently mysterious and beyond our control. We must be careful not to take too much credit for church growth or for the spiritual maturity of our congregations, nor take too much blame for their decline.

In the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus depicts the kingdom of God as something that starts very small and grows very big, something whose true nature is revealed to be radically different from its initial outward appearance. Who would have guessed that the movement started by that poor, wandering Galilean would, in less than 300 years, become the official religion of the empire that tried to stamp it out?

No doubt the evangelists remembered these parables in particular because they were being borne out before their eyes. The church in the late first century was preaching a countercultural message–just some words. Words are a very small thing compared to the might of Rome or the venerable traditions of the rabbis. Even so, people were coming into the "kingdom" and the church was growing.

Jesus' parable of the mustard seed echoes Ezekiel's image of God taking a small cutting from the top of a cedar tree and making a new mature tree grow from it. A very small thing becomes something in which "winged creatures of every kind" make their home. In context, Ezekiel's parable seems to be about the remnant of Israel that will be saved and returned to the promised land. There is a subtext of eschatological reversal in Jesus' mustard seed parable, but Ezekiel makes that theme explicit in verse 24.

These themes of God's kingdom being mysterious and beyond our control and of the true nature of a thing being very different from the initial outward appearance, along with the idea of (eschatological) reversal, are also present in Paul's words from 2 Corinthians 5. "We walk by faith, not by sight." "...so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart." "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view." "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" SRPW

Pastoral Reflections

The theme of all three lessons for this day is the form of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is like seeds and how they grow, says Jesus in the Markan text. The spread of the kingdom of God and the direction and final form of its growth are beyond our control.

But the kingdom does not grow haphazardly. God develops it so that the creatures of the earth, human and animal, can benefit from it if we pay attention to the kairotic moment. One summer our family grew tomatoes in cages made from farm fence wire mesh. These cages were over five feet tall, and we fertilized the ground well. Tomato "trees" resulted. In fact, one day a small bird built a nest right on top of three growing and ripening tomatoes. The kairotic moment had come. Sooner, and the tomato sprig would not have been strong enough to support the nest. Later, and the supporting tomatoes would have rotted, dropping the helpless babies to the ground. Thus, says Jesus, is the kingdom of God. Be alert, all creation, to see the coming of the kingdom, and stand with sickle in hand, ready to benefit from its coming *for us*!

Not only is the kingdom a process, but it also can be a disruption of the ordinary scheme of things. Ezekiel reminds us that the Lord can work by what appears to be destruction, snapping off the top of a tree.

So is it in the griefs, the losses of our lives. In the larger scheme of the kingdom of God, the snapping off of growth in one direction can result in a fresh creation, only possible by the hand of God and not by our own. The loss of what we expected is replaced by the gain of a whole new creation.

Faith does not deny the snapping of the trunk of our lives. But it looks constantly for the kairotic possibilities as the kingdom of God is made manifest through the suddenness of destruction we never expected. God gives hope through the tragedies we experience. We do not seek them out, heaven forbid! But we continue in life knowing that the kingdom of God becomes manifest through the incomprehensible, the sudden, through what seems terribly unfair, as well as the normal, the slow, and what we expect.

Paul uses the death and resurrection of Christ as the ultimate "parable" of the coming of the kingdom of God. What can be more foolish and destructive than the mowing down of the best person who ever lived in order to bring about our salvation? All our losses, all our expectations, all our griefs are brought to the foot of the cross where we can stand during our walk by faith and keep alert for the kairos of the coming of the kingdom of God in our lives for the entire world. Thanks be to God. NC

Probing the Texts

"...even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way... if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation... (2 Cor 5:16b-17a). Do we still regard Christ from a human point of view? What would it mean to worship and contemplate him with a new mind and a sanctified imagination? LK

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 22, 1997

Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32
Job 38:1-11
2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Mark 4:35-41

First Reading

It is tempting to focus exclusively on God's answer to Job, particularly because the miracle of the calming of the seas is so well known. However, even though this incident in Jesus' life is recorded in all three synoptic accounts, only Mark's account is included within the lectionary cycle. For this reason alone, the story needs to be given fair consideration.

This is a nature miracle that fits nicely into the overall structure of the first half of Mark's Gospel: miracles followed by disputes with authorities. Lack of recognition by those who would be expected to recognize Jesus is coupled with recognition by those who it would seem should not (i.e., demons). Here, in this singular event, even the seas respond to Christ's authority and power as Jesus speaks to them very much as though to a demon.

This is significant because of a widespread myth of antiquity, shared by Israel, which maintained that creation was the result of a contest between God and the forces of chaos and evil, which were often identified with the waters of the sea. Accordingly, storms are frequently used as a metaphor for trouble in the world and the ability to subdue storms is regarded as a sign of divine power. Jesus' ability to sleep through storms is indicative of his complete trust in God, and the disciples' fear during the storm reveals their lack of faith.

Jesus' authority over the waves of the sea, brought to a dead calm by his word, couples nicely with the portion of God's first response to Job. The litany of God's power in it concludes with God's governance of the seas and its waves. The entire answer that God gives to Job is really the announcement of God's unique power and authority–as the ultimate answer over any of the questions that Job (or we) can have.

The disciples ask, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" That echoes what Job has been asking throughout the whole of his book: "God, do you not care that I suffer?"

This is the question we humans raise when we are confronted with situations in life which we cannot control, which we do not understand, and which we fear. These cries are answered when Jesus asks in return, "Why are you afraid?" "Have you still no faith?" And then he calms the waves. MSJ

Pastoral Reflections

"Do you not care that we are perishing?" seems like a reasonable question to ask of your sleeping leader, when you are in a boat that is about to sink. Jesus' response, "Have you still no faith?" sounds rather harsh considering the circumstances! (After all, wasn't it God who created in us an instinct for survival?) What would have happened had the disciples *not* awakened Jesus? Was not their very act of rousing him from sleep an act of faith?

The whole scene raises the question: did Jesus mean, "Don't you believe that I have authority over nature and can calm the storm?" or did he mean, "Don't you believe that you are always in God's care, regardless of what happens?" Sometimes in our lives these two meanings seem to eclipse—but sometimes they don't.

In 1912 the Titanic put out to sea with everyone believing it to be unsinkable. When it hit an iceberg and began to take on water,

so the story goes, the ship's orchestra (knowing that the lifeboats would not carry everyone aboard) stayed behind and played "Nearer My God to Thee" as the ship sank. It seems a gripping testimony of faith in the midst of panic and pandemonium. But despite their apparent faith, no miracle mended the hole in the side of the ship; no miracle warmed the deadly cold waters.

We, too, are not unsinkable; nor is our faith. Growth in faith is not the equivalent of putting money in a bank account or a stock investment, where we can watch the principal grow and know that whenever we need it, we can simply withdraw some. Faith does not guarantee us smooth sailing or favorable weather or a safe outcome. It can only be lived, day by day, moment by moment, by the grace of God. Being a person of faith, as Joseph Sittler has said, is like sailing on perilous seas; and each new test of faith—each instance of senseless suffering or unexplainable hardship—can threaten to sink us.

"Have you still no faith?" The answer is always "No." Perhaps this was Jesus' point: our faith does not *belong* to us, it is not our possession. It is ours only as we place ourselves fully in the care of—under the authority of—the one who has authority and care over all that frightens and pains and confuses us. CD

Probing the Texts

"The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a warrior; I will question you, and you shall declare to me'" (Job 38:1-3). Do we proclaim "words without knowledge"? If so, how shall we survive God's questioning, a contest between unequal warriors? LK

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
June 29, 1997

Psalm 30
Lamentations 3:22-33
2 Corinthians 8:7-15
Mark 5:21-43

First Reading

The account of Jairus and the woman with the hemorrhage belong together. In v. 42, Mark puts in a parenthetical phrase which lets the reader know that the little girl is twelve years old. It is as if Mark is saying, "If you were wondering whether these stories really are connected, the answer is yes. Twelve years old, twelve years of flow and uncleanness. Please read them together and hear them that way."

The contrasts here are great: the leader of the synagogue and an unclean woman; a man, a woman; he is of the ruling class, she is lower class. What they have in common is faith in Jesus' ability to help them.

The unclean woman, having heard of Jesus, believes he can heal her where doctors have only made her worse. As Jesus dismisses the woman, he reminds her and those around him that she is not only now at peace, but she is whole, healed and healthy (v. 34).

The book of Lamentations, once attributed to Jeremiah, is a long dirge lamenting the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Our pericope is the one bright spot in the midst of darkness in the book. Surrounding it are the laments of one who knows that the consequences of sin and the righteous wrath of God are the sources of the present affliction. Yet in the midst of the storm of grief, faith raises its tremulous voice to remind the crushed mourner that God's wrath is finite, and joy will come to those who abide in God's law and wait for

the morning.

Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians starts out addressing a falling out between himself and the church, then moves to chapters 8-9 regarding the collection for the church at Jerusalem. It is in the midst of this section that our pericope lies. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to give to the effort, as is appropriate in light of their many other gifts (v. 7). He goes so far as to compare their giving with the giving of Jesus Christ. The word "charis" is used to refer both to the gracious act of Christ in giving up his "riches" for our sake and for the "gift" collected on behalf of the Jerusalem church. It appears to be very clear to Paul that whatever the Corinthians have to give—just like the good news of the gospel—comes as gift from God. And that gift is for the building up of the whole body, to the glory of God. Paul reinforces this idea by the quote from Exodus regarding the even distribution of manna. God gave enough for all, so that no one lacked, and no one had excess. The Corinthians should then need no further motivation for giving. LPB

Pastoral Reflections

It was one of those days when I had ten million things to do and no time to spare. I stopped off at the bank to make a simple transaction, but so did everyone else in town. I ended up standing in line, waiting for what seemed like an eternity while the person in front of me took forever to take care of his transactions! As the minutes swept by I began to get fidgety, then I got anxious that my schedule was being thrown off, and finally I became downright perturbed!

Can you imagine the anxiety of Jairus? His daughter is "at the point of death," so he comes to Jesus and pleads with him to heal her. Jesus agrees and goes with him. Jairus' little girl is terminally ill and he is rushing the healer home to cure her. But along the way Jesus stops. He stops to deal with some woman, who is also ill. She has lived with an ailment for twelve years. What anxiety she must have carried with her, hoping beyond all hope that the Lord of Life would be able to restore her to health—no one else could. But what of Jairus? He watches as Jesus wastes precious time dealing with this woman. Every moment counts! His daughter could die at any moment, did he not care? Can you see him as he waits while Jesus encounters this woman while his daughter lies suffering?

We have those moments in our lives when we are anxiously waiting for healing, for God to break in and make things whole—be it illness, or accident, or dysfunction, or a broken relationship, or death itself. It is in these times that we may feel cut off and rejected by God. It is as if we sit bleary-eyed through the night, waiting for the dawn to finally creep up through the darkness. The author of Lamentations had those moments too. He watched as his beloved city Jerusalem was destroyed, as his family and friends were carted off to exile in Babylon, as his whole world was shattered. In verses 18-20 he laments, "Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the LORD. The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me." The author is beside himself with grief.

In these times of anxious waiting, we need the reminder of God's graciousness: "For the Lord will not reject forever." It seemed like an eternity for Jairus, but after healing the woman with the hemorrhage, Jesus continues on and not only healed Jairus' daughter but resuscitated her from death!

It is this power that will break into our lives. It is this power that will have the last word in our lives—and in our deaths. The psalmist says, "Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning." "You have turned my mourning into danc-

ing" (30:5b, 11a). Jesus is the Lord of the dance, and his dance does go on. DDG

Probing the Texts

[Jairus said:] "'My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.' So Jesus went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years.... She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak.... Immediately her hemorrhage stopped..." (Mark 5:23-25, 27, 29a). Do we have it all mapped out and under control? Isn't ministry carried out *on the way to* the ministry we had intended? LK

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 6, 1997

Psalm 123
Ezekiel 2:1-5
2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Mark 6:1-13

First Reading

In the story Mark tells, Jesus has just encountered the incredible faith of the woman of last week's lesson and of Jairus. He has cured the twelve year ailment of the woman and has raised the dead. The people had been "astonished" (Mk 5:42). Now he turns to the people with whom he grew up. Initially, his hometown is also "astonished" (the emotion is the same though the Greek word varies). They too see wisdom and power that amazes them. But their wonder is quickly overcome by "unbelief." They can not accept Jesus in faith even after clearly seeing his giftedness. They present their case to each other, making clear why their eyes and ears must be deceiving them.

The evidence against Jesus seems to be his vocation, his rumored illegitimacy, and his membership in their own community. He is a carpenter, not a prophet. He is referred to as the son of Mary, notably not Joseph. And they know him and his whole family. He is one of them, so apparently this also deprives him of the possibility of truly speaking with wisdom and acting with power. They appear to accept the prejudice voiced by Nathaniel in John's Gospel, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" "God certainly would not choose one of us to be the prophet, and if God did, better selections could be made even among us." The people are looking "up" for God's chosen, and thus they miss God's choice in that down home boy. Their past history with the man blinded them to his present mission. Apparently we are not the only ones who have needed to "meet Jesus again for the first time!"

In the face of their offense, Jesus takes his turn at being astonished (v. 6). And in the presence of their unbelief, he is rendered powerless to do his normal "deeds of power." So Jesus and his followers move on. The kingdom will come with or without the Nazarenes, but Jesus had prayed that it might also come among his people.

With the bitter taste of rejection still in his mouth, Jesus sends out the Twelve, ordering them to pack light and depend on the hospitality of strangers. They will at times meet with their own "Nazarean welcomes." They are to shake off the dust and move on. Those followers are sent out in pairs, with no fancy packaging–neither money nor new garments–to commend them. They preach, cast out demons, and heal the sick. Those who receive their message and ministry also receive the responsibility to care for them. God is already about the work of creating small communities of mutual caring. PR-J

Pastoral Reflections

Have you ever encountered a stubborn person? Have you ever had to ask a child the same question six, seven, eight times? Have you experienced a congregation that was so obstinate, so resistant to change, that they brought you to your wits' end? Have you found that stubborn quality closer to home, in your husband or wife, in yourself, perhaps?

Jesus encountered stubborn folks in his hometown. At first the community was astonished, amazed by his teaching and miracles. But then that stubborn streak shone through and their astonishment at Jesus' wisdom and power turned to offense. They were too close to see the new thing that was right in front of them.

In their thinking, a person is defined by his family and community. And the people concluded, "He is one of us. He cannot be a prophet." Someone of unspectacular origin, who played in the same streets they did, could not possibly be responsible for the spectacular events that Jesus had done. A carpenter does not become a prophet. So they could not believe.

But the lesson does not end with unbelieving, stubborn folk. The mission must go on. Jesus calls the Twelve together and sends them out to preach, exorcize and heal. He sends them out with this advice: "Travel light. Don't take unnecessary baggage with you. Rely on God and you will be sheltered and fed. And if the people don't receive you, shake the dust off your feet and leave that town." Their help will come from God. That is the only resource they need. The Twelve are obedient and they are able to fulfill their mission.

But what of the stubborn lives that we encounter from day to day? What of our own obstinance that refuses to be obedient to God? Our familiarity with Jesus, too—or, more correctly perhaps, our familiarity with the church—can bring out a stubborn refusal to see new life blooming around us. We find it difficult to see the extraordinary events of God in the ordinary lives of people with whom we live.

The advice to travel light is offered to us as well. We Christians are called to simplify our lives and trust God completely. Not because we are fearful of the shrinking world resources but rather because we trust in and are obedient to Jesus. There is an invitation here to rely on the authority that Christ gives. We are challenged to strip ourselves of the extra baggage in our lives that gets in the way of God's mission.

Yet our stubbornness does not leave God impotent. We may disobey and be inadequate messengers of God's good news, but God promises to operate through weak, human vessels. The Twelve, flawed as they were, had positive results because the power of God was with them. In the midst of our ordinary lives, God's purposes are accomplished. Paul spoke of this to the Corinthians: the power of God shines through our weaknesses. Our strength is in Christ (2 Cor 12:9-10). Despite our weaknesses, God dares to send us and we dare to follow. The authority of Christ will shine through us, too. JAK

Probing the Texts

"A voice said to me: O mortal, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you" (Ezek 2:1). Is our faith posture one that expresses awe and respect before a God who promises to speak? When and where do we stand or kneel in readiness to hear and obey? LK

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
July 13, 1997

Psalm 85:8-13
Amos 7:7-15
Ephesians 1:3-14
Mark 6:14-29

First Reading

Amaziah the priest told Amos to take his negativity and leave Israel. The prophet's words were causing great discomfort. Let Amos go to Judah and earn his bread there (in Judah)! In his initial vision, which inspires his word of judgment in this text, Amos uses the image of God as a builder. The plumb line appears four times in only a few sentences. What is the purpose of a plumb line in construction? It is simply a string with a weight on the end of it, used to measure or check a wall for being vertical or true. A crooked or leaning wall is likely to topple. God's plumb line is measuring Israel to see whether the relationship between God and God's people is true. Or are the people veering off course, leaning, eventually to topple over?

John the baptizer, like Amos, stands outside of any professional class of prophets or priests. From other pericopes, we know John to be outside the norm with his dress and eating habits. His speech is razor edged and evokes the prophets of old who stand as outsiders speaking to those on the inside who cannot see.

Mark's text tells of the events surrounding John's death under Herod when Herod heard about Jesus. For a time Herod kept John alive but captive in a dungeon. He used to take pleasure in listening to John's thundering. What is Herod up to with John? We wonder if he is deriving some kind of perverse pleasure from having the powerful John chained up in his prison, on a leash so to speak. It is hard to understand how John's words of judgment, his cries of "Repent," his razor edged tongue, could bring Herod much honest pleasure. Perhaps Herod's pleasure comes from being able look at this mighty prophet under glass—"He's mine," thought Herod.

In the end Herod ends up killing his prize prophet because he himself is domesticated by his political loyalties and oaths to his guests, his wife, and a daughter.

John's word could not be killed, ultimately, because Jesus picked up where John left off and proclaimed the immediacy of the kingdom of God. Ultimately, though some will try, neither can Jesus be silenced as he is raised from the dead. N&CF-B

Pastoral Reflections

It could be useful to think of ways that we seek to control God's Word for our own purposes, or keep God on a leash to make the message more palatable for us. Kings Jeroboam and Herod want a domesticated Word from God rather than an untamed Word like John, or an un-bought Word as from Amos. In proclamation, it is too often our tendency to equate proclamation with answers from God about the troubling questions of our times. If our proclamation raised tough questions and let them hang unanswered in the sermon, it might be quite discomforting, but it might also be honest. Why does a loving God allow bad things happen to good people? Why do people who love each other hurt each other so badly? Why doesn't God answer our prayers? Why doesn't God just stop the evil in the world—or is God weak? If we try to answer these questions, our answers sound flat. Perhaps daring to ask such questions would remind us that God is not on our leash and that God will be God.

Ephesians 1:13 speaks of those who, having "heard the word of truth, the gospel

of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit." The Greek for "promised" suggests the Holy Spirit promised "by the prophets." The same Holy Spirit who called the prophets of old still calls believers today to new life in Christ. As he lives, so Christ's Word lives for us, in us, through us and despite us. When we dare to acknowledge that the Word cannot be leashed by us, cannot be kept safely under glass, and can come even to and through ordinary people, then we acknowledge the freedom of God and the possibility that there is no telling what we yet shall be. N&CF-B

Probing the Texts

"And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom" (Amos 7:12-13). Where is our speaking unwelcome? Do our words ever have a prophetic edge, prompting hearers to wish we would go away? LK

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 20, 1997

Psalm 23
Jeremiah 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:1-11
Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

First Reading

A recurring movement flows through these texts: outward to inward, the scattered are gathered. Jesus is the magnetic center toward whom all movement tends; and ultimately the one who redirects and sends us out again.

The Markan text reveals the disciples, just returned from their mission to teach, preach, and heal, now gathering around Jesus, ready for rest and privacy in order to receive encouragement and strength from him. Instantly, however, their rest is interrupted by the scattered multitudes clamoring for Jesus' touch. In spite of the Markan Jesus' tendency toward secrecy, the "people at once recognized him." Does he send them away? No, "he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." The image recalls Jeremiah's potent picture of Judah as a ravaged and scattered flock. The parallel runs deeper, in fact, for Jeremiah identifies the careless shepherds who have caused this chaos as the kings of Judah; their greed and self-interest have led to the dissolution of the kingdom. Similarly, in last week's passage, Mark describes the self-centered willfulness of King Herod operative in the events surrounding the death of John the Baptist. Like his pre-exilic predecessors, Herod has used his position of power to benefit himself, thereby helping fragment and weaken the community under his care.

Viewed against this backdrop of corrupt leadership and shattered society, Jesus

emerges with startling clarity: in him, both far and near are brought together in a new and holy community. In him, "the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21).

The preacher's dilemma is that, unlike the people who first heard and read these texts, we have little experience of kings and shepherds outside the Bible. Indeed, our understanding has been shaped by texts like Psalm 23 (appointed for today) and Isaiah 40: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." Relying on these images to bear the freight of the gospel to today's hearers, who may not be steeped in biblical imagery, is a risky business.

Common to our current experience, however, are fragmentation, anomie, and the breakdown of community. Images of the lost and scattered have been branded on our eyes in recent years: boat people, refugees, victims of war. We have felt our own lives slip out of control: families disperse in all directions, sin distorts our capacity to love and be loved. Collectively and individually, we seek wholeness and peace, and rest from this endless scattering. The answer has not changed: it still lies "in him." In Christ, we are joined together. More than that, we are energized to go out again, not as lost and helpless, but full of power in the knowledge that, gathered or dispersed, we are still "in him," members of the body of Christ.
K&JWH

Pastoral Reflections

At first glance, the text appears to present a difficult choice: To whom should Jesus minister? the already proven disciples, or the lost and scattered multitude? Within the congregation assembled for worship, there are those who are scattered, lost, and helpless; and there are those who are gathered, strengthened, empowered for service. Speaking to both groups in one sermon might seem a difficult task. How is one to exhort and challenge the strong to go out, while offering solace to the brokenhearted, and still feed those at some intermediate "stage" of faith? Megachurches geared toward "seekers" offer separate worship experiences to address these separate needs.

However, it is not within the power of the preacher to determine where any individual may be along the continuum of near and far. Even the "near," the lifelong disciple, may undergo periods of shattering depression, financial instability, family crisis, or other desperate need. Even the most effective leader may sometimes crave only a safe haven in Christ, freed from the necessity of active service. Conversely, those who appear "far," who are biblically illiterate, awkward about liturgy, and more familiar, perhaps, with the Business Page than the Beatitudes, may be drawn to worship because they see the church as a community of organized service. Those who have been touched by divine love outside the confines of the institution may come to it to express their gratitude, and newborn Christians may inspire those grown weary with working and waiting for the kingdom. In Mark, after all, those who are nearest to Jesus are portrayed at times to be as far away from him as anyone else.

Grace lives in the intersection of these two complementary needs: the need for nurture, forgiveness, and healing, and the need to express our gratitude and strength in nurture of others, speaking to them the words of forgiveness and healing. There is no optimal position in this cycle of giving and receiving, no place where we are more acceptable to God. Our first need, like the people in the stories, is to "recognize" Jesus, and to find ourselves "in him."

The story is told of three desert fathers. One was ill and could not work. One devoted himself to constant prayer. The third cared

for the physical needs of the other two. Which of them, it was asked, was doing God's will? The answer: Each one, equally.

Precisely because we cannot anticipate where or how connection will not occur, precisely because the Holy Spirit carries the Word beyond our vision or imagination, we who proclaim may do so in the assurance that "in Christ" all will be drawn together. The invitation is not an either/or: either an invitation to come in and rest, or an invitation to go out and work. Jesus Christ's welcome is to each, equally. Abiding in Christ, we are assured that both will happen in due season. K&JWH

Probing the Texts

"The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while..." (Mark 6:30-31a). When did we, who are busy with "holy things," stop to tell Jesus all that we have been doing and teaching? When the apostles did so, they found a deeply attentive Jesus, who responded not with applause and a charge to go and do more, but with an invitation to solitude and rest. The invitation still stands. LK

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