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# SEMINARY RIDGE REVIEW

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# CONTENTS

- 1 The Ecumenical Mother Mary and Her Significance for  
Lutheran Tradition  
*Elina Vuola*
- 22 Martin Luther: A Common Teacher, *Doctor Communis*?  
The Ecumenical Significance of Martin Luther  
*Eero Huovinen*
- 35 Is Baptism Complete or Part of a Larger Christian Initiation?  
A Dialogue with Lutheran Sacramental Theology  
*Susan K. Wood*
- 49 Lutherans, Ecumenical Reflections, and Doctrine  
*Christine Helmer*
- 63 Unity is in the Hands of God  
Luther Colloquy Sermon, October 29, 2014  
*Eero Huovinen*
- 66 Book Review on  
*Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War* by Michael C. C. Adams
- 70 Poetry + Theology
- 96 Gettysburg Seminary Fine Arts

# The Ecumenical Mother Mary and Her Significance for Lutheran Tradition

*Elina Vuola*

There has been a growing interest in the Virgin Mary in recent years. Pope John Paul II was a Marian pope, who increased Marian devotion in the Catholic Church. There is more interest in Mary among theologians from different denominational backgrounds, women and men, feminist and others. Protestants seem to be more favorably disposed towards Mary than ever before.<sup>1</sup> Pilgrimages to well-known Marian pilgrimage sites have increased since the 1960s, and it is not just Catholics or even people of faith who participate in them.<sup>2</sup>

One of my scholarly interests has been in the Mother of God, forms of devotion toward her, and the ways in which she is understood and interpreted by “ordinary” believers. I start from the argument – presented by scholars from the fields of theology, history and cultural studies – that over the centuries, and still today, women tend to have a special relationship to Mary. Part of my research over the past years has focused on women’s thoughts, interpretations, their ways of thinking theologically, and their identities as Christian women in different cultural contexts – for example, Central America and Finland. Liberation theology, broadly understood, has also been a context and object of my theological research. In both, one of my interests has been the Virgin Mary.

Focusing on women, I want to understand but also give a legitimate space for their ways of thinking about their religious traditions. This is all the more important in such religious communities as the Catholic and Orthodox churches, in which women are de facto excluded from positions of authority, including the right to interpret theological dogmas and Scripture. Even when they are granted the possibility of pursuing theological studies – a quite

recent phenomenon – they are considered lay people. Thus, the question about representation is crucial, inclusive of ecumenical and interreligious dialogues. By paying attention to women and gender, I consider women – theologians and so-called ordinary women – as carriers, critics, and legitimate interpreters of their faith and religious tradition. In the case of the Virgin Mary, rethinking is necessary in both dogma and devotion.<sup>3</sup>

My interest in ordinary people's religious identities stems from the conviction that their voices and ways of thinking are not only invisible, but that they are important, when we as academic theologians are making truth claims about religion. Theoretically, this has to do with methodological choices. It is mainly by ethnographic methods that aspects of lived religion can be brought into dialogue with texts, including biblical texts.

Mary is the single most important female person in Christian theology, liturgy, and spirituality, with well-known differences between the churches. She is important not only within the religious sphere: historians and scholars from cultural studies argue that she is the most important female figure also in “Western” culture in general. For example, according to the British cultural historian Miri Rubin:

For a historian of Europe Mary is a constant present. Women and men are named after her; so are places, towns, villages and churches. The figure of Mary is imprinted on the medieval fabric of modern Europe: in the images built into houses and walls of Italian towns, on cathedral facades in northern France, on roadside crosses in Austria and Bavaria, or in the icons of Greek churches. Mary is ubiquitous in much of the music of the classical tradition and is frequently portrayed in works of art that form part of the modern grand tour, from the National galleries of London and Washington to the Uffizi of Florence, the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, or the Louvre in Paris. Mary is central to western canons of beauty and pleasure in all the historical art forms and in many new ones: painting, sculpture and music, but also conceptual art and advertising.<sup>4</sup>

I begin by looking at the place and role of Mary in three religious contexts in which her significance is contested but often also misunderstood. These three contexts are Judaism, Islam and the Lutheran tradition. I will not present an overview of how Mary is portrayed in them but rather pay specific attention to the gendered construction of Mary's place and meaning in these three contexts and, to some extent, between them. In all, Mary is both present and absent, obviously for quite different reasons. My focus is on issues that I consider crucial in interfaith and ecumenical dialogues on Mary. A

deconstruction and critique of the use of the figure of Mary and Mariology as primarily something against – *anti* – the other, especially Jews and women, is a necessary step in order for these dialogues to take place.

In the case of the Lutheran tradition, I point out some similarities between Luther's Mariological thoughts and liberation theological interpretations of Mary, especially in the context of the *Magnificat*. The perspective of Mary's ordinariness and humbleness together with her announcement of the Kingdom of God is what brings Luther and Catholic liberation theology close to each other.

After that, I will take examples from my own ethnographic research: Catholic Costa Rica and Eastern Orthodox Finland. In both contexts, I have been interviewing women on their relationship with the Mother of God. This ethnographic work further accentuates the necessity of interpreting Mary also from ordinary believers', particularly women's, perspectives.

In all these cases, I aim at looking at some difficult and contested spaces between different traditions, and hopefully, offer some new insights and signposts for a road that could take us onto a bridge, however narrow and shaky, between the three Abrahamic religions and different Christian churches. Possibly more than anything else, it is Mary and her body which form an intersection between them.

### *Miriam and Judaism*

Miriam of Nazareth was a Jewish woman. She was born as a Jewish woman, she lived and died as a Jewish woman. She was most probably familiar with key Jewish religious teachings and practices even if she was illiterate. Her Jewish son was killed as “the king of the Jews” in the hands of Roman soldiers (crucifixion was a Roman practice). This is what Christian and Jews can agree upon concerning Mary.

In Christian theology, the obvious but often downplayed fact that Mary was a Jewish woman of her time has only recently been taken more seriously. According to Mary Christine Athans, an awakening to the Jewishness of Mary in recent years is related to two factors: Jewish-Catholic dialogue after Vatican II and feminist scholarship on Mary.<sup>5</sup> Prominent feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Elisabeth Johnson have been among the first to pay attention to the ways Christian Mariology has historically functioned as a vehicle of both sexism and anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup>

In the course of history, Mary has been used as a sign of Christian triumphalism over Judaism. This is especially clear in the so-called Ecclesia-Synagoga symbolism, elaborated both in theological writings and in visual

art. Even when the symbolism is not directly and explicitly about Mary, it is linked to the idea of Mary as *Persona Ecclesiae*, the personification of the Church, on the one hand, and to Mary as the crystallization of everything feminine in Christianity, on the other. Gendered symbolism is frequently used to express symbolically or metaphorically theological truths and dogma, often but not always in reference to real women and men and their roles. The symbolism is often construed in terms of simultaneous binarism (oppositions) and hierarchy (of value). Especially in Western Christianity, Mary has become the primary reservoir of this gendered symbolism in both theology and art.

Church and Synagogue as a visual theme depicts a pair of figures personifying the Church and the Jewish synagogue – that is, the Jewish religion – found in medieval Christian art. The figures often appear sculpted as large figures on either side of a church portal, as in the most famous examples, those at the Strasbourg Cathedral. They may also be found standing on either side of the cross in scenes of the Crucifixion. The two figures are shown as women. Ecclesia is generally adorned with a crown, chalice, and cross-topped staff, looking confidently forward, representing the victorious, triumphant Church. In contrast, Synagoga is blindfolded and drooping, carrying a broken lance (possibly an allusion to the Holy Lance that stabbed Christ) and broken Tablets of the Law or Torah scrolls that may even be slipping from her hand. If not blindfolded, Synagoga usually looks down, defeated. Theologically, this symbolism refers to the Christian understanding of the Jews as blind and Judaism as a dead religion.<sup>7</sup>

The sculpted portal figures are generally found on the cathedrals of larger cities in northern Europe that had significant Jewish communities, like in Germany, and apart from their theological significance, were certainly also intended to remind Jews of their place in a Christian society, by projecting an ideal of Jewish submission within an ideally ordered Christian realm.

The Ecclesia-Synagoga parallel is visualized in the form of two women in opposition to each other: good (woman) vs. evil (woman); beautiful vs. ugly; young (virgin)/new (*novus*, also referring to the New Testament) vs. old (hag) (*vetus*, referring to the Old Testament); obedient vs. rebellious or reluctant (to convert); clear-sighted vs. blind, erect vs. drooped; church vs. demon; triumphant – defeated; life (church) – death (demon). Two opposed femininities are used to illustrate theological truths.

Mary as the deposit of all things considered feminine in Christianity – and conversely, everything feminine condensed in Mary – is also depicted in terms of opposition, and thus becomes “Our Lady of the Binaries.” The Ecclesia-Synagoga parallel is a continuation and a version of a much older parallel between Eve and Mary. Paralleling and opposing of Eve and Mary

was the earliest Christian teaching concerning Mary in the early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and especially Irenaeus. Eve-Mary parallel and opposition is still today a core Mariological teaching of the Catholic Church.

In the opposition of Eve and Mary, Eve represents (as in the Ecclesia-Synagoga parallel) the fallen Israel and old humanity. She is the mother of fallen humanity who brought sin to the world (*porta diaboli*, the devil’s gateway, in the words of Tertullian) just as the Synagoga in the Ecclesia-Synagoga parallel. Eve represents sin, and it is especially through her femininity, that she represents disobedience. In art, her nudity accentuates her sexuality, which is conceptually and visually linked to sin and death.

Mary as Eve’s counterpart is the mother of redemption, the personification of the church (gate to heaven), in art sometimes acting in the role of the priest: feeding her children, the Church, in an act of Eucharist. Like Ecclesia in the Ecclesia-Synagoga pair, Mary represents the New Israel, new redeemed humanity, and grace. Her (gendered) chastity underlines her obedience and goodness.

The representation of Eve/Israel as the disobedient and unfaithful wife, a whore, is present already in the Old Testament. The marriage metaphor and its gendered imagery of the good vs. evil woman are shared by Christianity and Judaism: humanity’s relationship to God is expressed in terms of a woman’s rightful relation to her husband, or men in general.

The Eve/Mary parallel is central in classical Mariology, still today, as well as in its feminist critique and reconstruction. Feminist theologians have been particularly critical of the dualistic way of the portrayal of women at the core of Christian self-understanding, especially in its relation to Judaism.

The Eve/Mary parallel is not only a binary view of women. The overlapping of it with the Ecclesia-Synagoga symbolism is evident even when the Church is not explicitly depicted as Mary. Mary *contra* the Jews is an explicit theme in much of Christian theology from the same era as the visual depiction. Jewish opposition to Christianity and their unwillingness to convert are regularly interpreted as an insult to the Christian Mother Mary, as the mother of Christ but also as the primary symbol of the church.

According to Rubin, the blend of biblical commentary, monastic liturgy, and Marian devotion was suffused with anti-Jewish themes. In the Middle Ages, a powerful new link emerged between the Jews’ perceived malevolence towards Christ – Jews as killers of Christ – and Mary’s motherly sorrow.<sup>8</sup>

It is worth of remembering, though, that both Eve and Mary have a quite different meaning as women in Judaism. Especially Eve’s positive meaning in Judaism as the mother of all living becomes grossly distorted in her negative juxtaposition with Mary in Christian theology. The hierarchy

and binarism are constructed in terms of two opposite femininities robbed of their meaning in the Jewish context: Eve as the mother of all living and Mary as the ordinary Jewish woman, who suffered the death of her son.

Theologically, incarnation is an impossible idea in Judaism. Jews reject above all the incongruities of a God taking flesh, a God who experienced gestation, birth and childhood.<sup>9</sup> The ideal of virginity and the possibility of a virgin birth are unthinkable in Judaism as well. However, the idea of the need of purification from the natural functions of the female body – such as menstruation and childbirth – have by and large been shared by Judaism and Christianity. Thus, even when there has always been a more positive view of human sexuality in Judaism, one of the arguments for the necessity of the virgin birth in Christianity derives from this commonly shared view of the polluted female body and its functions.

In the imagery of Ecclesia and Synagoga, women and Jews, who shared similar symbolic association with the inferior flesh, were situated as adversaries in a rhetorical bond that served to denigrate and circumscribe the status of both parties. Hence, the two parties set to contend against each other were those established as inferior by the very same discursive processes.<sup>10</sup>

Mary has occupied a central place not only in Christian anti-Semitism but also in Jewish anti-Christian polemics: over the centuries, she has been depicted as the adulteress and betrayer of her people. Here, too, it is the female body and femininity as a theological category that occupies a central place in the construction and defense of one's religion in opposition to the other. Mary is presented as the proof of the truthfulness and superiority of one's religion in both Christianity and Judaism.

Christian theological anti-Semitism needs to be deconstructed simultaneously with Christian theological sexism. Mary plays an important, even central, role in both. At the same time, critical and careful analysis of the role of gender opens up space for a critical rereading of sexism in both Christianity and Judaism.

### *Maryam and Islam*

Perhaps surprisingly, Islam presents a less conflictive possibility of thinking about Mary in an interreligious context than does Judaism. She is honored in Islam and in the Qur'an, which contains an entire surah (19) dedicated to her. She is, in fact, mentioned by name more often in the Qur'an than in the New Testament.

Although Mary has no salvific powers in Islam, she is one of the most revered women in the Islamic faith. In various *hadiths*, Mary is discussed as being one of the four perfect women in history. Mary belongs in an exclusive

group of women who are considered perfect because of their strength of faith and submission to God. Unlike in the traditional Christian understanding of Mary, the Mary of Islam is an important figure in her own right.<sup>11</sup>

Muslims venerate Jesus as a divinely inspired human and as a prophet but never as the son of God. Consequently, the earliest ecumenical dogma on Mary, calling her Mother of God, *Theotokos*, is not shared by Muslims. If Jesus is not the Son of God, then his mother cannot be the Mother of God. The virgin birth and the consideration of Mary as an exemplary woman and human being are shared by Christians and Muslims, but not Jews. The Qur'an states clearly that Jesus was the result of a virgin birth, but that neither Mary nor her son are divine. In the Qur'an, no other woman is given more attention than Mary. The virgin birth of Jesus is supremely important in Islam, as one of the most important miracles of God. The Qur'an's narrative of the virgin birth is both similar and somewhat different from that of the New Testament.

There are several joint sites of Marian devotion and pilgrimage in the Middle East where Muslims and Christians, especially women, pray together. The most well-known of these sites is the House of Mary, in the vicinity of Ephesus, Turkey, where according to the legend, Mary lived after her son's death. A water fountain and a "wishing wall" are located nearby, as the site is believed by some pilgrims to have miraculous powers of healing and fertility.

Thus, there is more common ground for Mariological interpretations between Islam and Christianity than with Judaism – in spite of the historical Mary, Miriam of Nazareth, having been a Jewish woman.

### *The Lutheran Tradition*

In spite of her own evangelical claim that "all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48), the Blessed Virgin Mary has not held a particularly prominent place in the devotional life or theological imagination of Protestant Christians. This observation of Cody C. Unterseher<sup>12</sup> is shared by many Protestant writers who point out the silence or avoidance of Mariology and Marian devotion in the Protestant tradition, both academically and in the churches. In addition, Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors of *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (2002), while commenting on the title of their book, state: "Although we Protestants identify Scripture as authoritative, the Lukan blessing of Mary has rarely inspired Protestants to act accordingly."<sup>13</sup> According to Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "this uncertainty about Mary [in Protestantism] is not unrelated to ambivalence about women and motherhood."<sup>14</sup> Further, "while the exaltation of the virgin ideal had its problems, so did the glorification of marriage and

motherhood as the only legitimate calling for women after the Reformation. Protestants no longer exalted Mary. They elevated instead the virtuosity of submissive wives and selflessly loving mothers.”<sup>15</sup>

The nearly complete silence on Mary in Lutheran theology as well as the avoidance, if not fear, of mentioning her in Lutheran liturgy and spirituality, have shown signs of change recently. Some kind of apparition of Mary has happened in Protestant churches recently, even if modestly. This is probably due to many factors. Ecumenical feminist theology is certainly one reason, with interest in Mary being shared by women scholars from different denominations and backgrounds. Ecumenical dialogue – and within it, greater interest in and emphasis on gender issues – is another reason.

In more practical terms, at least in my home country of Finland – one of the most Lutheran countries, if not the most Lutheran country in the world – new forms of liturgy, prayer and spirituality, such as the Taizé and retreat movements and a growing interest in pilgrimage, testify to a renewal of Christian practices of the undivided church also in Lutheran churches. The Virgin Mary has made her way, especially in liturgy and in the forms of icons, into these kinds of spaces in the Finnish Lutheran church.

There seems to be a growing interest as well among more “conservative” sectors of the Lutheran and other Protestant churches towards Mary. Thus, the renewed attention to the Mother of God is shared by otherwise unlikely allies such as feminists, ecumenically oriented theologians, ordinary churchgoers, and those who focus on Mary and especially her virginity as some kind of litmus test of the church’s faithfulness to biblical texts.

Let me take an example of this from my own country, Finland. In 2011, during the upcoming bishop elections in one of the dioceses of the Lutheran church, one of the candidates, Sakari Häkkinen – a biblical scholar by training – stated in an interview that he does not believe in the virginity of Mary in the literal physiological sense. He was criticized from the more conservative sectors of the church as being non-biblical and, thus, unfit for becoming a bishop or even for being a priest. Less noted in the debate was a comment by Father Serafim, an Eastern Orthodox monk and theologian, who pointed out that for the Orthodox, the Mother of God is an essential part of liturgy and teaching about the church, and the approach towards her is of the heart rather than of the brain.

What Father Serafim calls to our attention is that the obsession of literally-minded Lutherans with physiology misses the point and feels rather foreign to an Orthodox Christian whose approach to the Mother of God is primarily spiritual. It is also an example of how the greatest difference between Lutherans and Orthodox concerning Mary is not so much dogmatic but rather spiritual and liturgical.

The “gynecological” or biological approach to Mary has been pointed out also by Protestant theologians. For example, according to Nancy J. Duff: “the Church has ... often encountered resistance to the claim that God ... was incarnate, embodied, and fully present in this world. This resistance (which has been dubbed “docetism”) has had disastrous consequences not only for Christology (God’s incarnational presence in this world is illusory if Christ is human in appearance only) but also for its implied devaluation of the physical, bodily nature of human life.”<sup>16</sup> According to Duff, the creedal statement “was born of the Virgin Mary” and its anti-docetic function is lost when undue attention is given to the *biology* of the Virgin birth. Duff continues: “Fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals divert attention away from the Christological function of statements regarding Mary – literal interpretation becomes more important than an integrated understanding of incarnation.” The word “born” rather than the word “virgin” is the initial emphasis in the confession of faith.<sup>17</sup> It points to incarnation, emphasizing the original Christological meaning of the creedal statement of Jesus having been born of the Virgin Mary.

Thus, somewhat oddly, those who are most concerned about Lutheran or Protestant orthodoxy, who are eager to blame the Lutheran church and their fellow Lutherans as not being Christian or Lutheran enough and as unfaithful to the Bible, tend to emphasize aspects – in the context of Mary and the Virgin birth – that turn the focus away from the ecumenically shared understanding of Mary and her role in the incarnation. This is in fact what I think Father Serafim meant as well from an Orthodox perspective and expressed in different words: Mary – and even less so her virginity – cannot be separated from her larger meaning as the symbol of faith and the church and the incarnation.

### *Luther and the Magnificat*<sup>18</sup>

Luther’s Mariology is summarized in the words of Eric Gritsch: “Mary is the prototype of how God is to be “magnified” ... for his unconditional, graceful and ever-present pursuit of his creatures.... ‘Being regarded by God’ is the truly blessed state of Mary. *She is the embodiment of God’s grace.*”<sup>19</sup>

The commentary on the *Magnificat* is the only systematic and extensive Mariological text by Luther. Apart from this commentary, he deals with Mariological themes in his sermons and elsewhere, but not as systematically as in his over 60 pages-long commentary, which is why it occupies a central place in the scholarly analysis of Luther’s Mariology.<sup>20</sup>

According to the Finnish Luther scholar, Anja Ghiselli, Luther’s overall Mariology can best be understood in the context of Christology, especially

the theology of the cross.<sup>21</sup> Ghiselli reminds of Luther's agreement with the two Marian dogmas of the early church, as do Lutheran churches still today, namely, calling Mary Mother of God, *Theotokos* (Ephesus, 431) and Mary's perpetual virginity (Constantinople, 681). Consistent with his overall theology, Luther emphasizes Mary's exemplary faith in God: the entire *Magnificat* is about praising God's glory and goodness. It is God-centered. Mary's humility – that Luther so much underlines – is not so much about Mary herself as it is about the critique of power and self-centeredness. God chose her who had no power in human terms. Mary's humanity, even when praised as exemplary, does not make her divine. There is the place for Marian spirituality and devotion in Luther, but not for her divinization.<sup>22</sup>

By and large, it can be said that Luther's relationship to the Virgin Mary is positive, even warm and affectionate. There is a Marian spirituality and importance given to Mary in Luther's thinking, which later essentially disappeared from the Lutheran tradition, both theologically and practically. It is probably Marian spirituality that is so poorly understood in the Lutheran churches, often even seen as something heretical. This is also the primary difference between the Lutheran and Orthodox churches concerning Mary. The differences are not so much dogmatic, since like the Protestant churches the Orthodox churches have not approved the two later Marian dogmas of the Catholic Church (*Immaculata Conceptio*, 1854 and *Assumptio*, 1950). The differences are related rather to ecclesiology, liturgy, and spirituality: the central place of the Mother of God in Orthodox understanding of the Church, its liturgy and its spirituality, has no equivalent in the Lutheran churches.

Theology of the cross is also the context of liberation theological Mariology. Besides obvious differences, there are remarkable similarities between primarily Catholic contemporary liberation theology and Luther's interpretation of the *Magnificat*.<sup>23</sup> The comparison between the two serves the objective of understanding Mary in an ecumenical and cross-cultural context. Luther is consistent in seeing Mary as a human being, even if an exemplary one. Mary's humanity is also about her being ordinary and poor. Nevertheless, Mary is worthy of praise and devotion. As Kirsi Stjerna has proposed, Luther's spirituality and theology of the cross are also a basis for his social critique.<sup>24</sup> Since these elements are so tied together in his commentary on the *Magnificat*, it is worth asking if Luther's Mariology is in fact representative of how spirituality, theology of the cross, and social critique are interrelated in his thought. The combination of spirituality, social critique, and theology is also at the core of liberation theology, often misunderstood as lacking spirituality in favor of mere social critique. There is a clear and noteworthy critique of wealth and abuse of power in Luther's

commentary. The socio-political aspect of the *Magnificat* is shared by Luther and liberation theologians.

Both Luther and liberation theologians see Mary primarily as an ordinary human being, chosen by God. Any Marian devotion is based on her closeness to God, as *Theotokos* and exemplary human being. Marian spirituality is not about making her a goddess. Luther stresses how Mary came from poor, despised, and lowly parents. Her humility and poverty are real, "disregarded, despised and lowly estate" meaning poverty, sickness, hunger, being imprisoned, suffering, and death.<sup>25</sup> One central, perhaps the most important, tenet in liberation theology's Mariology is to consider her as "one of us", a *campesina*, an ordinary, poor woman, which is why she can be so easily identified with by the poor and marginalized of today.

Taken together, the feminist and liberation theological – and, I believe, basically Lutheran – approach to Mary is to see her as an ordinary woman, which includes her body, her maternity, and the social context in which she lived (including her Jewishness), and at the same time, to recognize Mary as a paragon and exemplar of faith and her prophetic critique (call for the reversal of power), which is why she can be a symbol of the church.

Her being an ideal is, however, an especially tricky issue for women. Non-sexist uses and interpretations of Mary must be based on an understanding of ordinary Christian women's closeness with her (in which virginity usually plays no role – even Catholic women I have interviewed mostly just ignored the whole issue of virginity) and on the feminist critique of much of traditional Mariology.

According to the Danish Luther scholar Else Marie Pedersen, "there is no doubt that Luther, like the whole tradition before and after him, was ambivalent towards women, and that he can sound equally misogynistic as absolutely venerating."<sup>26</sup> Luther's approach to women – his "bad anthropology" – is in tension with his "good theology", which comes to the fore in his Mariology, in which Mary is not just a "woman" but the human being *par excellence* in her truly faithful relation to God.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, Lois Malcolm has pointed out that the 'now' // 'not yet' aspect of the announcement of God's kingdom in the *Magnificat* should open up a space for the equality of men and women, not allowed by traditional Mariologies that link Mary's motherhood and gender to a more subordinate and receptive role for women in church and society.<sup>28</sup> This radical call for equality and reversal of power is, obviously and understandably, important for the poor and the oppressed, as expressed by liberation theology, but as feminist theologians – Catholic and Protestant – point out, it is especially crucial for women. There is no reason (quite the contrary) why



Mary's prophetic message in the *Magnificat* should not be taken as calling into question women's subordination, theologically legitimized for centuries.

There are resources in the Protestant tradition for rethinking Mary which are not often taken into account in expressly theological work. There is a long tradition of Marian piety in Protestant churches that we may not sufficiently pay attention to, which could be called "auditive piety." The greater emphasis on what some scholars such as David Morgan<sup>29</sup> call "visual piety" in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions – sometimes considered heretical devotion to images in Protestantism – is certainly true. However, the Protestant hesitation towards the visual is balanced by music, not only hymns but also great musical works over the centuries by Protestant composers in which the Mother of God occupies a far more important role than in theology or liturgy. The *Magnificat* alone is a continuous source of inspiration for composers still today.

#### *Eastern Orthodox Tradition: Finnish Orthodox Women and Mary*

As important as the feminist critique of traditional Mariology is for a more sober view of both Mary and other women, it is important to note how ordinary women in different churches have in fact always maintained a view of Mary as someone both like them and more powerful than them. This both-and character of Mary is something that I have called a form of women's *imitatio Mariae* to sustain their identities as Christian women.<sup>30</sup> This imitation of Mary is primarily an ethical ideal, based on women's identification with her, not necessarily or primarily an ideal of femininity or motherhood.

Popular piety concerning Mary developed first in the East, often involving icons, as well as the liturgical context and Marian festivals.<sup>31</sup> Eastern Orthodox regard for Mary has continued throughout the centuries, but without the emphasis on dogmatic articulation found in Roman Catholicism.<sup>32</sup> The two Catholic dogmas of 1854 and 1950 are not accepted by Protestant or Orthodox churches. Thus, on a dogmatic level, there is an affinity between Orthodox and Protestants traditions. However, on a liturgical and spiritual level, the two older churches certainly share more with each other. As we have seen, the Mother of God is virtually absent from Protestant liturgy, spirituality, and theology.

I would even argue that the lived experience of Mary – or the lack of it – at the heart of liturgy, prayer, and spirituality, is in fact what most separates the Protestant churches from the Catholic and Orthodox churches concerning Mary. Dogmatic differences between Catholic and Orthodox Mariology churches have not erased her importance and central role in both. It is only in Protestant churches where the somewhat odd combina-

tion of dogmatic obsession, scriptural fundamentalism, and devotional coldness concerning Mary is to be observed.

In 2013-14, I interviewed 61 Orthodox women in different parts of Finland. 26 of them were born and raised Orthodox, 17 were converts (from the Lutheran church, mostly), and 18 Skolt Sami indigenous women in North-Eastern Lapland who are Orthodox by religion. I also received written narratives from 19 women, most of them converts, as responses to my call to either write about their relationship to the Mother of God or to be interviewed. My interviewees were *born between the years 1917 and 1986*.<sup>33</sup>

My principal question for them was, "What does the Mother of God mean to you?" In most of the interviews, the link between my informants' gender (all women), issues related to being a woman, and Mary, came up, without me always asking about it. Talking about Mary with women who belong to a tradition in which she is important, opens up the entire spectrum of women's lives, often in intimate ways. Icons are sometimes called windows to transcendence, but for women, talking about Mary is a window to both transcendence and immanence. Opening the "Mary-window" brings into sight all of the important issues in a woman's life. Here are three different examples, all from women who were born and raised Orthodox.<sup>34</sup>

*I have this thought, it is maybe awful to say it, but I am a single mother, I gave birth to my son alone, and somehow ... when Mary learned that she is pregnant, she too had to suffer the anguish of being a single mother, the shame and things like that... So it is also because of this experience that Mary is so human, so very close to me ... that I have experienced all these things in my own life... I prayed [Mary] for strength: 'you who have gone through the same.'* (Sarah, born 1949).

Sarah identifies strongly with Mary as a mother, especially as another single mother. It is most probable that she has not heard this kind of an interpretation in the Church, but it is rather an outcome of her own reflection of her difficult life situation. Mary's role as someone who prays for humans before God is accentuated, but the strong identification of Sarah with Mary's earthly lot as a single mother, leads her to pray to the Mother of God herself as someone who has experienced the same. Mary's both/and role, both as a human woman and as someone more powerful and empowering than ordinary women, is present in Sarah's words, uttered with sobs and tears.

*When I went to ecumenical meetings, I did not understand what Protestant women were talking about when they said Mary is a model of submission.... It was an aha experience for me – that my image of her in*

*the Orthodox church as the God-bearer was something totally different... I was thinking about her images, the icons. I see a strong and independent woman, not a mellow young girl. I don't recognize the submissive image of Mary." (Lisa, born 1961).*

Lisa was active in the ecumenical youth movement during her student years. In this excerpt from her interview, it becomes clear how even the most traditional image of Mary in the Orthodox Church is different from not only the traditional Catholic Mary but also, and particularly, from the Protestant stereotype. Mary is not as narrowly gendered in the Orthodox Church as she is in the Catholic Church – as an ideal especially for women to follow – but her being a woman is not without relevance either. For Lisa and many other women I interviewed, Mary the woman is at the center of the church and liturgy and thus offers women self-esteem, a model and a mirror.

*Me and my husband wanted to have a child, but when nothing happened, we visited Valaam monastery and prayed in front of this icon [Mother of God of Valaam] ... [and] we experienced a kind of response to our prayers. We just recently visited Valaam with our family and we told our children about this. My brother-in-law brought this icon to the hospital when our daughter was born, and now it is on our bedroom wall." (Ann, born 1976).*

Ann brought the icon of the Mother of God of Valaam, believed to be miraculous, to the interview and placed it on the table between us. In her interview, the ambiguity of miracles in the Orthodox tradition came up. Everybody knows that certain icons are believed to have miraculous effects, but it is not easy to talk about it, probably because of fear of heresy and idolatry. All my interviewees, like Ann, who spoke of experiences of miracles, spoke of a concrete personal experience where prayer and openness to God were central elements – not the icon as such. In the case of the Mother of God, the miracles were without exception related to fertility, praying for a child.

The Virgin Mary is extremely important for Orthodox women. Most of them answered positively, when I asked if there are differences between men and women in their relation to her. The Mother of God, according to them, is especially important and close for women. Mary is easy (easier than God or Christ) to approach in issues such as maternity, family, sexuality, and everyday life, based on women's identification with her.<sup>35</sup> She understands women because she is a woman and mother herself – here, the element of Mary as divine feminine mirror is crucial.

Most of my interviewees agreed with the idea that Mary gives worth to women in the Orthodox Church in spite of exclusive male leadership and priesthood. Some were critical of patriarchal elements in their Church, including the refusal to ordain women, but this was not linked to Mary. Because of her and other female saints, the Orthodox Church was considered in fact more "feminine" than the Lutheran church. This was something I heard especially from several of my informants who were converts from the Lutheran church. A female presence at the heart of liturgy and spirituality was considered more important than women's access to ordination.

### *Catholic Tradition: Costa Rican Catholic Women and Mary*

My research among Finnish Orthodox women follows from my earlier work in Central America, where I interviewed Catholic women in 2006 and 2007. I conducted the interviews in Costa Rica with 21 Catholic women between ages 28 and 81. For these self-identified devotees of the Virgin Mary, she was experienced as deeply empowering, in ways which are often in tension with both the official teaching and the sort of feminist critique which sees religion and religious symbols and sentiments in homogenizing and negative terms. I wanted to pursue a critical analysis and interpretation of the dynamics at work in this "triangle of tension" among 1] the official, obviously patriarchal, Catholic view of Mary (especially as a model of maternal purity and submission for women to follow), 2] the feminist critique of her and its consequences (in the Latin American setting especially in the form of the concept *marianismo*), and 3] women's experience of her as life-sustaining, empowering and transformative.<sup>36</sup>

*...because she [the Virgin] has been a mother, knowing the worries of a mother (...) it is easier for someone who has lived through something to understand another person who is going through the same. The Virgin already lived through all these things and she can understand me better, understand what I am feeling." (Eugenia, 49 years).*

In their identification with Mary, Costa Rican women saw her both as themselves and as radically different from them. The Virgin Mary is understood in both human and divine terms. The line between the human and the divine is blurred. The women struggled with not presenting Mary as a divinity, knowing it is not the official Catholic view. Mary is first of all deeply human. Her humanity is female. But still she is not like any other human being, any other woman. She understands women because she is a woman herself, but she also can help them, sometimes through miracles,

because she is more than a human female, she is a transcendent, divine figure. She is both like her devotees (her immanence and humanity) and radically different (her transcendence and even her divinity). This is why she can be prayed to for help. She has the power to intervene. At the same time she understands the complexities of human life, especially those of women, better than God and Jesus, both understood in masculine terms.

*When I was seven months pregnant, my blood pressure went up. I was hospitalized several times. When the time to deliver came, the baby was born, but with a heart deficiency. The baby could not be operated and thus died. It was Saturday afternoon, my family came to visit me at the hospital. They did not mention the baby, even though they knew. I was not told. They saw I was exhausted. When I woke up and opened my eyes, I saw the Virgin by my side. She touched my hand. I turned and said: 'Oh Virgencita, I have to go through the same as you had to, because you are there with me.' She disappeared without responding. (Clarissa, 38 years).*

By and large, my results from the two different cultural contexts are surprisingly similar: Mary's womanhood is important. She understands women because she has gone through the same as most women. My informants both in Costa Rica and Finland talked about her in terms of protection, intimacy, and empowerment. In the Catholic context, however, her role as *Mediatrice*, intercessor between humanity and God, was more accentuated. Economic uncertainties and lack of social safety nets in poorer Costa Rica were reflected in how my informants experienced Mary as the ultimate source of help, including the possibility of miracles.

### *Conclusion: "Our Lady of Bridges"*

The figure of the Virgin Mary and much of Mariology have been used against different groups of people in a variety of ways: Christian anti-Judaism, Protestant anti-Catholicism and to a lesser degree, anti-Orthodox, and anti-women. In all of them, the imagery of femininity and motherhood are central, but not necessarily as stemming from real-life experiences of being women and mothers of real women, in different times and cultures. Also my interviewees' image of Mary is strongly gendered, but differently from much of the traditional Mariology: it is based on an experience of shared humanity and womanhood between Mary and her devotees.

The Swedish Lutheran theologian Cristina Grenholm calls for a simultaneous elaboration and critique of both dogma and gender stereotypes of

Mariology. There is no necessity to "save" Mary for any purposes, but there is need for critical evaluation of the historical, doctrinal, and social construction of the Christian image of Mary and Mariology in order to think of any possibility of her becoming a liberating or uniting symbol.<sup>37</sup> One place to start is with ordinary women's experiences of themselves as Christian (Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran) and as women, and listening to how their identities have been shaped by the image of Mary, both negatively and positively.

I think at least the following issues are necessary for the kind of Mariology that could be genuinely ecumenical – in other words, the possibility of Mary forming a bridge rather than being an obstacle.<sup>38</sup> First, Mary's exemplary humanity should be taken seriously. It is a central Marian theme in all Christian churches, including the Lutheran tradition. Second, it is important to pay attention to the fact that Mary seems to bear specific importance for women in all Christian churches. This does not mean the mostly Catholic emphasis on Mary as a specifically female ideal, impossible as such, as many feminist theologians remind. Rather, her exemplary humanity is female humanity, and thus bears connotations which may be gender-specific. I have called this female Marian piety and devotion *imitatio Mariae* – Mary as a divine mirror reflecting human womanhood and thus validating it.<sup>39</sup>

Third, especially in the context of the *Magnificat*, Mary's importance for the poor and marginalized is highlighted. There is a possibility of a Marian spirituality, related to the understanding of her as an exemplary human and paragon of faith, which points to social change and critique of structures of power. Here, too, it may be possible to talk about *imitatio Mariae*, not necessarily in a gender-specific form, but considering Mary as simultaneously a prophet and an ordinary, even poor and insignificant, person, chosen by God. Mary is both like her people (deeply human) and something more (a prophet and powerful actor).

This is related to the fourth point, Mary's role in lived religion and popular piety. It is exactly this double-role of hers which is so central for ordinary Christians, including its gender-specific forms. In Latin America, the cult of the Virgin Mary has had this role since the very beginning of the Conquest, with Mary forming the cultural bridge between the European and the American, between the white and the indigenous, resulting in a unique form of Marian piety even within the Catholic Church.

Fifth, a close reading of Luther, and especially his commentary on the *Magnificat*, points to a possibility of a Marian spirituality. Mary's importance in the Catholic and Orthodox churches is best understood from the perspective of spirituality. The Lutheran churches share the two ecumenical

dogmas with the other Christian churches, but instead of the deep Marian spirituality, liturgy, and devotion of the Catholic and Orthodox churches, there is an emptiness and a vacuum in the Lutheran tradition.

The idea of Mary as *Mediatrice*, mediator and intercessor, is central in Catholic Mariology and popular devotion. At the same time, it is exactly this role that raises suspicion in the Lutheran tradition. In his commentary on the *Magnificat*, Luther seems to be ambivalent about it. On the one hand, all of his theology revolves around the idea that there is no other mediator besides Christ. On the other hand, the last sentence of his commentary points to a more devotional understanding of Mary, which does not exclude the possibility of Mary having some kind of active role: "May Christ grant us this [a right understanding of the *Magnificat*] through the *intercession* and for the sake of His dear Mother Mary."<sup>40</sup> It is clear in the overall context of Luther's theology that this does not mean Mary acting as some kind of *co-redemptrix* beside her son or having some salvific power in herself. Understanding Mary's mediating and intercession rather as a bridge – to God and Christ, to fellow human beings, between women and men, between cultures – takes her role in the other Christian churches seriously and opens up space for an ecumenical, including Lutheran, Marian spirituality.

Finally, this role of hers as a bridge and example to follow (*imitatio*) can be relevant not only in ecumenical but also in interfaith contexts. Mary is important in Islam and the Qu'ran as we have seen. But whatever kinds of Marian theology and spirituality there are in Christian churches, it is important to remember that Miriam of Nazareth was a Jewish woman, also by religion. Mary's suffering is something that especially poor Catholic women identify with.

One scholar who has researched Mary from a Jewish perspective is David Flusser, an Austrian-Israeli professor emeritus at the Jerusalem's Hebrew University. He begins his work with the recognition of Mary as a Jewish woman. That Mary was a mother of Jesus makes her – with some tension – also part of the Jewish people. Flusser adopts western Christianity's term, *Maria Dolorosa*, tying Mary's suffering with actual, concrete suffering: both Mary and her son Jesus need to be interpreted in the context of the suffering of the Jewish people. Crucifixion was a Roman death penalty, and Jesus was not the only Jewish man who was executed. Mary lived her life as any eastern woman. Her son was one of the many Jewish men who died the death of a martyr, and Mary was one of the many Jewish mothers who cried over the violently murdered Jewish children. Mary's tragedy is part of her people's suffering.<sup>41</sup>

Flusser wants to demolish the foundation for Christian anti-Semitism that blames Jews for the death of Jesus. He underscores that the execution of the Messiah was an expression of the Romans' anti-Semitism. This kind of interpretation may have a healing effect on the wounds between Jews and Christians. Even when Mary has been used as a weapon both in Christian anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-Christian polemics, it is Mary and her body which form the bridge at the crossroads of the three Abrahamic religions.

## Notes

- 1 George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996).
- 2 On the variety of contemporary Marian pilgrimage sites and practices see Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, eds., *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009).
- 3 See Cristina Grenholm, "Mother Mary Comes to Me': An Essay in Constructive Feminist Theology," in *Perspectives on Women's Everyday Religion* (ed. Marja-Liisa Keinänen; Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2010) 95-115; Maaike de Haardt, "The Marian Paradox: Marian Practices as a Road to a New Mariology?," *Feminist Theology* 19/2 (2011) 168-181.
- 4 Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Penguin, 2010) xxi.
- 5 Mary Christine Athans, *In Quest of the Jewish Mary: The Mother of Jesus in History, Theology, and Spirituality* (New York, NY: Orbis, 2013) 10-11.
- 6 See for example Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church* (London: SCM, 1979); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus, Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1994); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2005).
- 7 In his public lecture yesterday afternoon, Brooks Schramm explicated how these very conceptions are fundamental in Luther's thinking about the Jews and Judaism.
- 8 Rubin, *Mother of God*, 161-168, 252, 301-2. The fact that Mary herself was a Jewish woman is obviously totally overlooked in this kind of theology.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 167.
- 10 See Christina V. Cedillo, "Monstrosity and Faith, Gender and Reason: Ecclesia and Synagogue in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*." [https://www.academia.edu/2903017/Monstrosity\\_and\\_Faith\\_Gender\\_and\\_Reason\\_Ecclesia\\_and\\_Synagogue\\_in\\_Hildegard\\_of\\_Bingens\\_Scivias](https://www.academia.edu/2903017/Monstrosity_and_Faith_Gender_and_Reason_Ecclesia_and_Synagogue_in_Hildegard_of_Bingens_Scivias) (accessed October 13, 2014).
- 11 Aliah Schleifer, *Mary, the Blessed Virgin of Islam* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1997).
- 12 Cody C. Unterseher, "Mary in Contemporary Protestant Theological Discourse," in *American Magnificat: Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe* (ed. Maxwell E. Johnson; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) 29.
- 13 Beverly R. Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby, "Introduction," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2002) 1.

- 14 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Pondering All Those Things': Mary and Motherhood," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2002) 97.
- 15 Ibid., 101.
- 16 Nancy J. Duff, "Mary, the Servant of the Lord: Christian Vocation at the Manger and the Cross," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2002) 61.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 This part of my paper is largely from my article, Elina Vuola, "Luther's Interpretation of the Magnificat and Latin American Liberation Theology," in *Justification in a Post-Christian Society* (Church of Sweden Research Series 8; ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014) 222-240.
- 19 Quoted in Maxwell E. Johnson, "Introduction: Can Protestants Celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe?," in *American Magnificat: Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe* (ed. Maxwell E. Johnson; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) 6 [emphasis original].
- 20 See Luther's treatise on *The Magnificat* (1521), LW 21:295-358.
- 21 Anja Ghiselli, *Sanan kantaja. Martti Lutherin käsitys Neitsyt Mariasta* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Teologinen Kirjallisuusseura, 2005).
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 For a detailed analysis, see Vuola, "Luther's Interpretation of the Magnificat and Latin American Liberation Theology."
- 24 Kirsi Stjerna, "For the Sake of the Future: Rekindling Lutheran Theology on Spirituality, Equality, and Inclusivity," in *Lutheran Identity and Political Theology* (Church of Sweden Research Series 9; ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014) 83-100.
- 25 LW 21: 301, 313, 317.
- 26 Else Marie W. Pedersen, "A Man Caught between Bad Anthropology and Good Theology? Martin Luther's View of Women Generally and of Mary Specifically," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 49/3 (2010) 198.
- 27 Ibid., 190.
- 28 Lois Malcolm, "What Mary has to say about God's Bare Goodness," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby; Louisville, KY: WJK, 2002) 141.
- 29 David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).
- 30 Elina Vuola, "Patriarchal Ecumenism, Feminism and Women's Religious Experiences in Latin America," in *Gendering Religion and Politics: Untangling Modernities* (ed. Hanna Herzog and Ann Braude; New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 217-238; idem, "Seriously Harmful for Your Health? Religion, Feminism and Sexuality in Latin America," in *Liberation Theology and Sexuality* (ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid; London: Ashgate, 2013) 137-162.
- 31 John Reumann, "Mary: An Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Lindsay Jones; 2nd ed.; Detroit, MI: Thomson Gale, 2005) 9:5753.
- 32 Ibid., 9:5754.
- 33 *I am only beginning the process of analysis of the interviews. What I present here are tentative, general results.*
- 34 The names are pseudonyms.
- 35 Of course, this does not mean that she is not important to men. There are certainly gendered elements in men's devotion, too. However, I interviewed only women, and it would make another research project to interview men. In fact, I had two men approaching me wanting to be interviewed even when they were aware that I was looking for only female informants.
- 36 For more information, see Vuola, "Patriarchal Ecumenism, Feminism and Women's Religious Experiences in Latin America."
- 37 Grenholm, "'Mother Mary Comes to Me': An Essay in Constructive Feminist Theology," 99, 107.
- 38 This section is partly from Vuola, "Luther's Interpretation of the Magnificat and Latin American Liberation Theology."
- 39 Vuola, "Patriarchal Ecumenism, Feminism and Women's Religious Experiences in Latin America," 229; idem, "*La Morenita* on Skis: Women's Popular Marian Piety and Feminist Research of Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (ed. Sheila Briggs and Mary McClintock Fulkerson; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011) 516-18.
- 40 LW 21:355 [emphasis added].
- 41 David Flusser, "Mary and Israel," in *Mary: Images of the Mother of Jesus in Jewish and Christian Perspective* (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, David Flusser and Justin Lang; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005) 1-12.

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## Martin Luther: A Common Teacher, *Doctor Communis*? The Ecumenical Significance of Martin Luther The George and Janet Harkins Lecture, Luther Colloquy, 2014

*Eero Huovinen*

Distinguished participants of the Academy, dear sisters and brothers in Christ.

It is a great joy and honor to visit the famous Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg and especially to be invited by Professor Kirsi Stjerna, with whom I have been able to study theology both in Helsinki and in Rome.

Especially I appreciate the honor of offering the George and Janet Harkins lecture. George Harkins graduated from Gettysburg Seminary and was the secretary to Franklin Clark Fry, who was elected in Helsinki in 1963 to be the President of the Lutheran World Federation. His wife Janet had a lifelong devotion to the church in a remarkable way, teaching church school for 77 years. Through to their will, much has been donated to Gettysburg Seminary.

### *Luther's Relation to the Earlier Tradition?*

Speaking during this Reformation week, I would like to start by asking together with you, how Martin Luther stands out from his own environment and background, from his contemporaries. What is Luther *specificus*? What relation does he have to the Medieval Roman Catholic Church and its theology? This issue can be approached from different angles. For a good while, we looked for the “real” Luther by emphasising the differences

and disputes that he had in regard to the mainstream of his time. Many researchers maintained that it was either Luther's fault or to his credit that the western part of Christendom was divided in the sixteenth century.

The viewpoint of this research shifted as late as the middle of last century. While nonetheless admitting the differences, both Catholic and Lutheran scholars now aim to assess how Luther connects with the preceding age and with the classic interpretation of Christianity. This has no doubt happened because of the rise of the Ecumenical Movement since World War II. As the year 2017 draws nearer, we find it appropriate to ask what the ecumenical significance of Martin Luther and his theology is, what they mean a half a millennium after the Reformation.

It was a new spirit of ecumenism when Cardinal Jan Willebrands in 1970 at the Fifth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation applied the classic Roman Catholic title of *doctor communis* to Martin Luther. Cardinal Willebrands referred to the well-known thought of Luther that justification is the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. In speaking of this matter, Luther can also be a “common teacher” for the Roman Catholic Church, because Luther desires that “God will remain our Lord and that our most important human response is unconditional trust and respect for God.”<sup>1</sup>

This title that the Cardinal used for Luther, *doctor communis*, is one of the honorifics of St. Thomas Aquinas. According to Willebrands, St. Thomas and Luther, the Middle Ages and the Reformation, belong together. Luther represents and continues a common tradition. Nevertheless, *doctor communis* is not simply a historical title, pointing to the past. With this title, the Cardinal wishes to show us that Luther has something to say jointly to the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches today.

Cardinal Willebrands' thoughts were continued by Karl Lehmann, then Roman Catholic Bishop of Mainz. Cardinal Lehmann writes of the ecumenical significance of Luther's Small *Catechism*. Lehmann states that the *Small and Large Catechisms* – in contrast to certain other writings of Luther – are an excellent example of the linkage of the Reformer with earlier tradition. Within the history of the church, Luther's *Catechisms* are neither new nor the random contrivance of a single theologian. Rather, they are closely related, both in their structure and their content, to the classical theology of the early church and the medieval church. According to Lehmann, Luther is a “Teacher of the Faith” (*Lehrer des Glaubens*).<sup>2</sup>

Although the churches' evaluations of Luther have differed greatly throughout history in regard to content and estimation, both sides have long held certain features in common. Just as Luther's valuation as *doctor communis* has not been self-apparent to Roman Catholics, it has not been all that clear to Protestants either. Luther has been interpreted as an indi-

vidual, a person who started something new – whether that was negative or positive. Luther created a new “protestant” Christian belief – or at least he presented an interpretation of the original belief which differed radically from the faith of earlier centuries.

### *Roman Catholic Interpretation of Luther: Arch-heretic or Father in Faith?*

According to Roman Catholics, Luther departed from the one, catholic tradition – which was his downfall. In the assessment of Protestants, Luther departed from tradition, and that was his accomplishment. Overstating the case only slightly, we can say that Luther was not *doctor communis* for either side.

For Roman Catholics Luther has been one of those deviating from the main tide, in other words, a heretic, while for the Protestants he has been a guiding light whose significance is emphasized against an otherwise dark firmament overshadowing the church. And even when Luther has been studied in relation to his background of ecclesiastical and general history, his qualities, uniqueness, and digression from the norm, that is to say, his significance as an individual, has come to the fore. So it is rather understandable that there has not been enough motivation for scrutinizing Luther as *doctor communis*, as a representative of the one, classical Christendom.<sup>3</sup>

During the Reformation, Roman Catholics depicted Luther as an arch-heretic and as a destroyer of the unity of the church. Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, Luther was seen in dark colors, not only to be avoided in doctrine but also to be studied under the typology of a personal pathology. For example, Heinrich Denifle claimed that Luther had created his doctrine of justification simply in order to be able to live a carefree, libertarian life for himself. From these viewpoints, we could say that both Luther the person and Luther the theologian were viewed as the sum of individual flaws and biases.

On the eve of the Second World War, there was a new breakthrough both academically and ecumenically in the publication of Joseph Lortz's book: *Die Reformation in Deutschland*. Lortz critiqued the errors of the medieval church. He strove to understand Luther's own spiritual intentions. He appreciated Luther as a “religious personality.” Nonetheless, he concluded that as a theologian Luther was a “subjectivist.” In Lortz's view Luther represents a catholicity without being catholic in an authentic sense. In a unique way Luther had stressed the significance of the Apostle Paul. Yet, Luther did not attend fully (*Vollhörer*) to the Holy Bible. The revolutionary Luther was entirely a prisoner of his own deliberations.<sup>4</sup>

The theory of Luther's subjectivism was soon re-evaluated by Roman Catholic scholars. Lortz's own students, in particular Erwin Iserloh and Peter Manns, held that the thesis of subjectivism was overly superficial and denigrating. Manns used the name “Father in Faith” (*Vater im Glauben*) for Luther. Manns examined Luther with special reference to the devotional life of the medieval and early churches. The title “Father in Faith” arises from that spiritual tradition.

In his broad-ranging study of St. Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, Otto Hermann Pesch asserted that their understandings of the doctrine of justification were not mutually exclusive. Thus Luther's theology is properly to be situated among the common traditions of Christendom, regardless of the denomination of the person doing the evaluation.<sup>5</sup>

In official Roman Catholic evaluations after Vatican II, the position afforded to Luther is substantially different from those given at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition to Cardinal Willebrands and other ecumenically minded thinkers, Pope John Paul II on several instances quoted Luther's spiritual texts, e.g., the *Commentary on Romans*. Furthermore, he spoke positively of Luther's significance for all of Christendom.

### *Protestant Interpretation of Luther*

*Mutatis mutandum*, Protestant Luther research has followed the same channels as Roman Catholic scholarship. Protestant studies either historically or systematically tended to support a view of Luther as “the Reformer.” Indirectly, this research-setting quite possibly led to an emphasis on Luther's distinctiveness and exceptionality.

In examining the history of Protestant Luther studies,<sup>6</sup> it is rather amazing how radically Luther is emphatically viewed as extraordinary and original. During the period of Lutheran Orthodoxy, Luther was held by many to be unique, even infallible, as a teacher of correct doctrine. Luther was considered to correspond to the angel in Revelation: “having an eternal gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6). Pietism regarded Luther's theology as an expression of individual piety, i.e., from the point of view of regenerated, living faith and sanctification. In such a view, the significance of the Christian faith lies in the internal and personal experience of belief.

During the Enlightenment, Luther was construed as the precursor of the freedom of reason and the conscience, the one who freed the Christian faith from the dark disbelief of the Middle Ages. The general anthropological mode of thought, characteristic of the era, led to a delineation of Luther as a situation-bound thinker whose thoughts could not claim normativeness. Luther

was esteemed as a great person and as a fighter, but he too was to be evaluated critically on the basis of reason and the ethical demands of the conscience.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing boasted of Luther that he had set people free from the bondage of tradition. The task of the Enlightenment was only to carry this liberation to its fruition. Frederick the Great was not satisfied even with this, but rejoiced that Luther, the “poor, damn devil,” freed the people from the yoke of the priests and thus increased the income of the state. Lutheranism began to change into Protestantism, which then developed into enlightened subjectivism.

Albert Ritschl strove to place Luther into his own historical framework. Nevertheless, Ritschl was of the opinion that Luther’s value was primarily in the overturning of old speculative metaphysics and mysticism. Ultimately, Luther proclaimed freedom and independence of the soul.

More recent Luther research has been deeply influenced by the same Protestant theological models. In popular church discussions Luther is often held to be a situation-bound dilettante, or an otherwise unrestrained exception in the history of theology, one to whom Christians following current trends should not be too committed. Such comments often reflect, in their background, the same setting of the question: Was Luther a private sage or *doctor communis*?

Contrary to the previously used paradigm emphasizing the differences between the Catholic Middle Ages and Luther, we find that, for example, in the United States, Robert Jenson and Carl Braaten’s theological interpretation of the “Catholicity of the Reformation” has brought up new points of view.<sup>7</sup> In Finland, similar new thoughts were also introduced by Tuomo Mannermaa and his students.<sup>8</sup> Both of these parties delineated the philosophical, theological, and spiritual nature of the Middle Ages, thus attempting to understand the era preceding Luther. Furthermore, they focused their attention on how the modern image of Luther has been influenced by various philosophical preconceptions and trends.

So, back to our fundamental question: Was Luther exceptional, unique, i.e., in some manner a *novum*, or was he rather one link, one witness in the chain of the shared classic Christian faith? Without a doubt, this question is, to the observant academic researcher, quite a generalized one. Nonetheless, answering it may be a justifiable attempt to understand heuristically what is at stake in Luther’s theology and, shall we dare to say, the whole of Christian belief. Was Luther simply the father of Lutheranism or was he also, for all of Christendom, “*Vater im Glauben*”? *Doctor privatus* or *doctor communis*?

### *The Ecumenical Significance of Luther’s Catechisms*

In attempting an incipient answer to the question above, I want to adapt the interpretation of Karl Lehmann. According to Lehmann’s view, it is particularly the *Catechisms* of Luther that can, for their part, shed light on both Luther’s relationship to the tradition preceding him and on his significance for the church today. Lehmann says that he is astonished how little Luther’s *Catechisms* have undergone ecumenical evaluation.<sup>9</sup> There appear to be at least six well-founded reasons for giving the *Catechisms* an ecumenical reading.

(1) First, the *Small and Large Catechisms* are examples of Luther’s deepest desire to be *doctor communis*. In the *Catechisms*, if anywhere, Luther was *doctor*, a teacher of the ordinary people and a guide of pastors in need of theological knowledge and training. Among Luther’s writings, the *Catechisms* emphasize most visibly what is common to the classic Christian faith.

In accord with the basic idea of a catechism, Luther wanted to teach what is necessary in being and living as a Christian. As *doctor*, Luther the catechist was primarily a spiritual teacher. His goals of teaching and learning were not just to increase knowledge for its own sake but to foster faith in God and to strengthen love for one’s fellow human being.

(2) Secondly, in his *Catechisms* Luther was *doctor communis* in the sense that he structured his catechetical teaching on the foundation of a long tradition. That is to say, Luther’s *Small and Large Catechisms* were firmly and knowingly built on the framework of the tradition of the Jews and of the early church (the Decalogue, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Sacraments). Even in its own time Luther’s catechetical ideas were neither original nor a new plan. The Commandments, Creed, and Lord’s Prayer were the didactic heritage of the Middle Ages.

Although catechetical-type books of this form had not been written down, the three primary points mentioned above were the main body of Christian upbringing. Peter Abelard prepared his famous *Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer*, which all Christians were to study together and learn by heart. Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote a catechism soon after 1510. This is the same structure Luther that developed and deepened.

The very framework of the *Catechism* emphasizes continuity with the tradition of the faith. The Ten Commandments are the foundation of the Judeo-Christian way of life. The Apostles’ Creed has its roots in the first Christian century. The Lord’s Prayer is the model prayer taught by Jesus. The components of Luther’s *Catechism* are more those coming from the Jews, the New Testament, and Early Christianity than they are innovations of the Reformation.

(3) Thirdly, Luther’s *Catechisms*, especially the explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, are constructed on two classic dogmas of Christian-



ity, i.e., the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. Although justification is not mentioned as a term in the *Catechisms*, it is implicitly a central theme and is firmly based on trinitarian doctrine and christology: Salvation is the work of the triune God, which is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Currently, the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, as well as the constitutions of many other ecumenical organizations are built upon these *dogmata*.

(4) Fourthly, Luther's *Catechisms* are also witness to the common faith in the sense that, in them, controversial theology aimed at either Rome or the radical Reformation remains only in a subordinate role. The *Small Catechism* does not include any direct polemic. The *Large Catechism*, intended for pastors, has some critical comments on the "church of the Pope" and on spiritualistic baptismal concepts, but in comparison to Luther's other writings, it does not have anti-ecumenical, controversialist traits.

(5) Fifthly, in line with Karl Lehmann's thoughts, in Luther's *Large Catechism* one can discern a spiritual self-critical ethos, which may also have ecumenical significance. The *Large Catechism* is a good example of what an honest and open-minded analysis of the church and Christendom could be. At the same time the *Catechism* boasts of the breakthrough of the gospel, it appraises not only the problems of its theological opponents but also, in the same measure, the pitiful mediocrity of the Christian life of its own camp.

In the Preface, for example, we read that it is expressly its own "shepherds", that is, the priests who had migrated to the Reformation camp, who were afforded an earful as "lazy bellies" (*faule Wänste, ignavos vetres*) and "presumptuous saints" (*vermessene Heiligen, praesumptuosos sanctos*). They are depicted as being more interested in the perquisites of their office than in the duties of the office, or in such matters as prayer, study, and serving the parishioners: "These shameful gluttons and servants of their bellies are better suited to be swineherds or keepers of dogs than guardians of souls and pastors." Self-criticism in regard to one's own Church and one's own state of Christianity is a precondition for genuine ecumenical relations.

(6) Sixthly, in the explanations of the Sacraments at the end of the *Large Catechism*, Luther attempts to link up with the teaching of his predecessors. This too has positive ecumenical significance. The sacramental teaching of Martin Luther is characterized by a strong theological realism and an understanding of the effectiveness of the Word of God. Baptism, confession, and Holy Communion do not simply refer to things external to themselves, but they include and give Christ and all his works. They are the efficacious signs (*signa efficacia*) of Christ's presence, God's grace, and the communion of Christians.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Central Place of the Sacraments*

The Holy Sacraments have central standing in the *Catechisms* of Luther as well as in his other texts. Baptism joins one both to Christ and to his church. In accord with the strong words of the *Catechism*, in baptism God donates to the believer "victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ and all his Works, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts."<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, it is made clear that the one who is baptized every single day needs teaching, prayer, exhortation, and the support of other Christians in order to prevail over troubles, to persevere in faith, and to be strengthened in love.

In addition to Baptism, there is a link established to theological realism in the explanation of Holy Communion in the *Catechism*. The Eucharist is the meal of Christ's presence, which joins to other Christians and donates "the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life."

Currently, the doctrine and praxis of Holy Communion remain a central ecumenical issue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics as well as other churches. Holy Communion includes nearly all theological *loci* from creation to redemption and eschatology. The bottleneck that is choking off the visible unity of the Churches is the theology of the ministry, which reaches its culmination in Holy Communion. Thus it is interesting to ask what Martin Luther's concept of Holy Communion could bring to the rapprochement between the churches in our day. Could he also be *doctor communis* for the theology of the Eucharist?<sup>12</sup>

### *The Sacrament of Christ's Presence*

To Martin Luther, the Eucharist was the sacrament of Christ's real presence. Thus it is not only a feast of remembrance where we recall Jesus' teachings and deeds. Neither is it a mere symbolic feast where the bread and the wine might remind us of Christ's body, absent and distant in heaven. Luther frequently repeated the words of institution, that is, "this is my body," *hoc est corpus meum*. These words are to be interpreted simply and realistically. The host does not merely signify the body of the Lord, referring only to a Christ dwelling elsewhere. The words of institution include and effect what they promise.

The concept of the real presence, naturally enough, is not the sole content of Holy Communion in the Bible and tradition. Luther, too, links other motifs to Communion: grace and the forgiveness of sins, the communion of Christians, the remembrance of Christ, the meal of gratitude to and confession of faith in God. It is at one and the same time the represen-

tation of the sacrifice given by Christ on Golgatha and the foretaste of the heavenly feast. According to Luther the essence of the Eucharist is, however, the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and the wine. To Luther this faith was no abstract theological theory or philosophical idea. He wanted to rely on the simple Word of God, on the New Testament instituted by Christ himself. Christ gave his own body "for us for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28).

Faith in the real presence of Christ at the Eucharist has always united Lutherans and Catholics. We have always wanted to have confidence that Christ himself is present at the Holy Eucharist in the bread and the wine "truly and in substance," *vere et substantialiter*, giving the baptized believer the reality of all of salvation. As a community the church lives in the true meaning of the words *de eucharistia*, out of the mystery and gift of the Eucharist. In accordance with the Lutheran theology of the Eucharist, Christ's real presence is based on the doctrine of God, on Christology, and on the doctrine of justification. To Luther God is in his essence the Giver and the Donor.

According to the Creed, the Triune God is not a jealous judge or a merchant demanding compensation, but rather self-sacrificing Love, who loves us and wants good things for us. Luther summed up the message of the Creed by using the metaphor of giving gifts: "We see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and power ... the Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works and the Holy Spirit all his gifts."<sup>13</sup>

God's love is the reason for Christ's incarnation and the basis for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Out of love for us God became man in Christ, making peace with us. Out of love for us Christ instituted the Eucharist so that he might continue to be present among us and bring the gifts of reconciliation to our lives.

Christ's real presence at the Eucharist is thus in inseparable union with the gift of the Sacrament, its efficacy. The Eucharist is the feast of Christ's death and resurrection, where we partake of the reconciliation on the cross, the forgiveness of sins, life eternal – all in all, we partake of Christ himself. Trust in Christ's real presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist is such a treasure of faith which could bring Lutherans ever closer to Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, and to other Christians who confess this faith in doctrine and practice.

It is this mystery of faith that Pope John Paul II wrote about in his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. Christ, the true man and the true God is present in the bread and the wine of the Eucharist, really, wholly, and entirely.<sup>14</sup> We Lutherans can also wholeheartedly join in the words of the encyclical concerning Christ's presence and the gift of the Eucharist. Christ's

presence is true "in objective reality", *in ipsa rerum natura*, and "independently of our minds", *a nostro scilicet spiritu disiuncta*. The Sacrament of the Eucharist, apart from bringing Christ's person and work into the present, also donates them to us personally. "The Eucharist thus applies (*applicat*) to men and women today the reconciliation won once for all by Christ for mankind in every age."<sup>15</sup>

### *The Holy Eucharist as a Communal Feast*

On the basis of its name (*synaxis, communio*) the Holy Eucharist is a communal feast. St. Paul writes: "Is not the bread which we break a sharing [*koinonia*] in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16-17). The Holy Eucharist connects Christ and sinner, and a Christian to other Christians. Communion is not only a matter between God and the individual but a communal event with an ecclesiological and ethical dimension. Those who share the consecrated bread and wine also share all joy and sorrow, victory and suffering, concern and comfort. Those who are joined to Christ in the consecrated bread and wine are also joined to one another in faith and love.

The communal nature of this Holy Supper is brought out forcefully in the theology of the Holy Communion of Martin Luther:

Besides all this, Christ did not institute these two forms solitary and alone, but he gave his true natural flesh in the bread, and his natural true blood in the wine, that he might give a really perfect sacrament or sign. For just as the bread is changed (*vorwandelt*) into his true natural body and the wine into his natural true blood, so truly are we also drawn and changed (*als so wahrhaftig werden wir vorwandelt*) into the spiritual body, that is, into the fellowship of Christ and all saints and by this sacrament put into possession of all the virtues and mercies of Christ and his saints...<sup>16</sup>

As the Eucharist is a *communio* in Christ, so also the sacrament unites us with other Christians and the whole "*Gemeinschaft*" of the *communio sanctorum*. Participation in Christ through word and sacrament is, in fact, sharing in the body of Christ, in the community of all saints. The interchange of the love of Christ takes place between all the members of this community.

The manner in which Martin Luther here speaks about the communal nature of the Eucharist and faith can open possibilities for new ecumenical convergence in the field of ecclesiology.<sup>17</sup> In the *Large Catechism*, Luther strongly emphasises the role of the Christian church. In creating new spiritual life, the Holy Spirit accomplishes this "through the Christian church."

Luther states that: “In the first place he [the Holy Spirit] has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God.” When the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, “he first leads us into his holy community, placing us upon the bosom of the church, where he preaches to us and brings us to Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

On the above bases where Luther speaks of the presence of Christ, the communal nature of the Holy Eucharist and the role of the church, we Lutherans may join in with the words of Pope John Paul II that the Holy Eucharist has a “unifying power.”<sup>19</sup> “Our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church.” Communion not only joins Christ and sinner, it also joins together Christians within the same church, young and old, women and men, priests and parishioners. It joins together dioceses and finally also local churches ministering to various parts of the world, churches confessing the same faith.

It is my fervent wish that we Lutherans could come together with our Roman Catholic and other Christian sisters and brothers at the common Communion table. We yearn for a common table because the Holy Eucharist is the feast of Christ’s presence and *communio sanctorum*. On the basis of Luther’s theology we have no difficulty in joining with those words which Benedict XVI, Bishop of Rome, stated in his inaugural homily: “All of us belong to the communion of Saints, we who have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we who draw life from the gift of Christ’s Body and Blood, through which he transforms us and makes us like himself.”<sup>20</sup>

There is, however, no shortcut to a joint Holy Eucharist. Unity does not endure without truth; we require “the truth in love,” *veritas in caritate*. The goal of visible unity and of a common Communion demand that we dig deeper into the foundation of our common Christian faith. We need patience to delve into revealed truth and we need the courage then to take decisive steps when adequate consensus is achieved.

### Conclusion

In summary, may I dare to contend that Martin Luther, in his *Catechisms* and his writings on Holy Communion, speaks as *doctor communis*, not attempting to develop new doctrine but rather striving to express and interpret the common faith of the undivided Christendom. Thus his writings still bear ecumenical fruit.

### Notes

- 1 J. Cardinal Willebrands, *Mandatum unitatis: Beiträge zur Ökumene* (Paderborn, 1989) 124.
- 2 Karl Lehmann, “Luther als Lehrer des Glaubens? Die ökumenische Bedeutung seiner Katechismen: Lutherische Kirche in der Welt,” *Jahrbuch des Martin-Luther-Bundes* 45 (1998) 131–146.
- 3 “Die Bedeutung des überkommenen Dogmas für Luther kann schwerlich überschätzt werden; sie ist in der Forschung weithin zu gering veranschlagt worden.” Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: eine Einführung in sein Leben und sein Werk* (Munich, 1981) 171. On the history of Luther research, see 207–246.
- 4 Joseph Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (2 vols; Freiburg, 1941). See also Eero Huovinen, “Die ökumenische Bedeutung des Luther-Verständnisses von Joseph Lortz für die Lutherforschung in Finnland,” in *Zum Gedenken an Joseph Lortz: Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte und Ökumene* (ed. Rolf Decot and Rainer Vinke; Wiesbaden and Stuttgart, 1989) 262–292.
- 5 Otto Hermann Pesch, “Martin Luther: Reformator und Vater im Glauben,” *Referate aus der Vortragsreihe des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz* (ed. Peter Manns; Stuttgart, 1985); idem, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin* (Mainz, 1967); idem, *Martin Luther, Thomas von Aquin und die reformatorische Kritik an der Scholastik: zur Geschichte und Wirkungsgeschichte eines Missverständnisses mit weltgeschichtlichen Folgen* (Göttingen, 1994); Peter Manns, *Vater im Glauben: Studien zur Theologie Martin Luthers* (Festgabe zum 65. Geburtstag am 10. März 1988; ed. Rolf Decot; Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 131; Stuttgart, 1988).
- 6 See Lohse, *Martin Luther*, 213–240.
- 7 See Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Catholicity of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996).
- 8 On Finnish Luther research, see Juhani Forsberg, “Die finnische Lutherforschung seit 1979,” *Lutherjahrbuch* 72 (2005) 147–182.
- 9 Lehmann, “Luther als Lehrer des Glaubens?,” 142. In 1999 the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church approved a new official *Catechism*. Its base text was written by Eero Huovinen. Due to its historical and ecumenical significance, the *Catechism* included the entire text of Luther’s *Small Catechism*. This new *Catechism* has been translated, e.g., into English, Swedish, Latin, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Hungarian, German, Spanish, Croatian, and French.
- 10 On the effective character of the sacraments in the theology of Luther, see Eero Huovinen, *Fides infantium: Martin Luthers Lehre vom Kinderglauben* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 159; Mainz, 1997) 45–74.
- 11 *Large Catechism*, “Baptism,” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert; trans. Charles Arand et al; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 41–42.
- 12 See e.g., *Justification in the Life of the Church: A Report from the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue Group for Sweden and Finland* (Uppsala, Stockholm and Helsinki, 2010).
- 13 *Large Catechism* in Kolb-Wengert, 440. “Here in the Creed you have the entire essence, will, and work of God exquisitely depicted in very brief but rich words.... For

in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love.... We see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: the Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works and the Holy Spirit all his gifts." (Ibid., 63-69). On the theology of the Eucharist in Luther, see e.g., Jari Jolkkonen, "Eucharist," in *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment* (ed. Olli-Pekka Vainio; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010) 108-137.

- 14 *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, §15.
- 15 Ibid., §12.
- 16 "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ and the Brotherhoods," LW 35:59.
- 17 Simo Peura, "The Church as a Spiritual Communion in Luther," in *The Church as Communion: Lutheran Contributions to Ecclesiology* (ed. Heinrich Holze; LWF Documentation No 42; Geneva, 1997) 93-131.
- 18 *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ed. Theodore G. Tappert; Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959) 415-416.
- 19 "Eucharistic communion also confirms the Church in her unity as the body of Christ. Saint Paul refers to this *unifying power* of participation in the banquet of the Eucharist.... The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism though the gift of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:13, 27).... The seeds of disunity, which daily experience shows to be so deeply rooted in humanity as a result of sin, are countered by the *unifying power* of the body of Christ. The Eucharist, precisely by building up the Church, creates human community." *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, § 23-24.
- 20 *Omelia del Santo Padre per il solenne inizio del Ministero Petriano*, Domenica, 24 April 2005.

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## Is Baptism Complete or Part of a Larger Christian Initiation? A Dialogue with Lutheran Sacramental Theology

*Susan K. Wood*

Is baptism complete in itself? If not, what is missing or unfulfilled? If it is the beginning of an initiation, what are the other components of initiation and into what is the new Christian initiated?

The question whether baptism is complete initiation is ultimately paradoxical. On the one hand, we really and truly participate in Christ's death and resurrection in baptism and are incorporated into his mystical body, the Church. On the other hand, that which is contained in baptism is also received over time and in different modalities. Although baptism does indeed induct us into the life of grace and into the church, it does not stand alone. Catholics believe that baptism, confirmation, and eucharist comprise three sacraments within this process of initiation. Lutherans have traditionally held baptism to be complete in itself, even though in the revisions of their liturgical rites they incorporate elements of the ancient catechumenal process. For Lutherans, confirmation is not a sacrament, although for them, too, it is a ritual that bestows the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Eucharist is a sacrament, but the question then becomes whether it should be considered an aspect of initiation.

To understand the origin of possible differences between Lutherans and Catholics on this matter, it is helpful to understand Protestant rites of initiation against the rites of the medieval West.<sup>1</sup> At that time, infant initiation had become reduced to infant baptism, and infants were baptized as soon as possible in a privatized rite rather than in the context of the public prayer of the church. The patristic practice of a unified rite of initiation incorporating baptism, post-baptismal chrismation, and eucharist had evolved into a

sequence of four sacraments celebrated over a number of years: baptism in infancy with post-baptismal anointing with chrism given by a presbyter, first confession in preparation for first communion, first communion, and confirmation by a bishop at age seven or later.<sup>2</sup> Maxwell Johnson, a Lutheran liturgist, summarizes the situation thus:

On the Eve of the Reformation, then, baptism itself had become a rite administered almost exclusively to infants as a precautionary step, i.e., a rite for the dying, designed to rescue the candidate from the power of original sin and death; a rite filled with exorcisms designed to snatch the infant away from the grasp of Satan; a self-contained rite with no necessary relationship to the public liturgical life of the Church; a rite in which catechesis proper had been replaced by the exorcisms themselves; a rite leading to a process of catechetical formation which was limited to the memorization of a few texts; and a rite increasingly narrowed by scholastic theology to the categories of matter, form, intention, and dominical institution. Such is the rite and its interpretation inherited by both Protestants and Roman Catholics in the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

These rites and interpretations of baptism remained rather constant in the Roman Catholic Church up into the twentieth century.

### *Luther and Baptism*

The theology and rituals of Lutheran initiation lie between Catholic and Orthodox initiation on the one hand, and strictly Reformed patterns and theology, on the other, and so share some of the characteristics of both groups. Maxwell Johnson points out that the Lutheran Reformation was “a ‘conservative’ movement, both theologically and liturgically, valuing highly and retaining much of the Western Latin liturgical tradition in its own reforms of the sacramental rites of the Church.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, a significant difference is that Lutheran theology, in company with other Protestant traditions, has always insisted that baptism constituted full initiation.<sup>5</sup> Lutherans do not consider post-baptismal chrismation, which became known as confirmation, to be a sacrament because there is no dominical command for it, and do not identify the eucharist as a sacrament of *initiation*. Nevertheless, Luther had little quarrel with baptism as practiced in the Roman Catholic Church, as evident in his comments in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*:

Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to the riches of his mercy [Eph 1:3, 7] has preserved in his church this sacrament at least, untouched and untainted by the ordinances of men, and has made it free to all nations and classes of mankind, and has not permitted it to be oppressed by the filthy and godless monsters of greed and superstition.<sup>6</sup>

*His Little Book of Baptism (Taufbüchlein)* (1523), written in German, was a minor simplification of the *Latin Magdeburg Rite* of 1497, which retained the pre-baptismal ceremonies of exsufflation, the giving of salt, exorcisms with signings of the cross, the *effete* with the use of spittle, the three-fold renunciation of Satan profession of faith, and anointing. New elements added to the Latin rite include a prayer of Luther’s own composition, the *Sindflutgebet* or Flood Prayer, and the directions to dip the child in the font.

Luther produced a second *Little Book of Baptism* in 1526 which omitted what some considered to be “human ceremonies” such as the exsufflation, the giving of salt, the *effete*, the pre- and postbaptismal anointings, and the presentation of the lighted baptismal candle. He further reduced the number of exorcisms. Thus a comparison of Martin Luther’s two baptismal rites, those of 1523 and 1526, shows a progressive simplification and elimination of elements from the medieval rite in use during his time. This also represents a growing departure from the rituals accompanying a more extended rite of initiation.

### *Contemporary Retrieval of a Common Catechumenal Heritage*

In contemporary times, within the broader ecumenical movement when the search for a common doctrine of baptism reached a certain impasse, the ecumenical movement sought a wider context of commonality, appealing not to a common event or theology of baptism, but rather to a common process or pattern of initiation in which baptism is one moment.<sup>7</sup> This wider context has been ecumenically and theologically fruitful, demonstrating that baptism incorporates rites and patterns of life as well as doctrine. For example, the consultation on the role of worship in the search for Christian unity held in Ditchingham, England, in 1994 emphasized the ecumenical significance of the pattern of eucharistic celebration and also suggested that baptism has an order and pattern that is meaningful, ancient, and increasingly recognized in the churches.<sup>8</sup>

The subsequent consultation on baptism in Fauverges, France, in 1997 took up the Ditchingham emphasis on order and pattern, develop-

ing its application to baptism.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on *ordo* is not a comparison of liturgical rites, although it certainly takes account of them, but rather a comparison of deeper structures of initiation including such elements as proclamation/evangelization, conversion, profession of faith, water bath, meal and Christian formation/life in community.<sup>10</sup> In this *ordo* word leads to sacrament, and sacrament leads to Christian living. In short, it is the process of making Christians and the path of discipleship.

The Fauverges consultation points out that the *ordo* of baptism is discernable in Acts 2 where baptisms follow Peter's preaching and lead those who are baptized to life in community where "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42) as well as to the distribution of goods to those in need (2:45).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in 1 Peter, which may well represent a baptismal pattern, the proclamation of the resurrection and teaching about new life lead to purification and new birth, eating and drinking God's food (1 Pet 2:2-3), and participation in community as the royal priesthood, the new temple and the people of God (1 Pet 2:4-10).<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, baptism, a broader process of initiation, and baptismal life are related to each other as a threefold series of recapitulations involving the more restricted baptismal rite, the larger *ordo* of Christian initiation, and the general pattern of Christian living. The briefer form becomes a shorthand for the next expanded form, the sacramental rite indicating symbolically what is lived in day-to-day Christian living.

The baptismal rite itself recapitulates the larger pattern of initiation, which in turn recapitulates a larger pattern of Christian living. Thus the renunciations of evil and the recitation of the creed in the baptismal rite summarize the work of conversion in the catechumenate within an expanded rite of initiation, and the ongoing penitential life of Christian discipleship. Likewise, the first eucharist of the expanded rite of initiation anticipates the whole of the Christian life.<sup>13</sup> Participation in the eucharist involves not only full participation in the liturgical assembly, it also signifies participation in the life of the community through suffering witness in the world in the pattern of Christ's suffering on behalf of many.<sup>14</sup> The larger pattern of Christian initiation recapitulates the pattern of Christian living with its immersion in the word of God, its repeated reconciliations and the life-long process of growth in into life in Christ. The consultation summarizes this pattern thus: "By means of God's continuing grace and presence baptism is *process* and once-for-all eschatological event and *pattern* for all of life."<sup>15</sup>

This report notes, however, that the various elements of catechesis, water bath, admission to the eucharist, and community life have been separated one from the other. Baptism has been separated from the gift

of the Spirit, from the eucharist, and from perceived responsibility for an ethical life. Different traditions emphasize different aspects of this *ordo* to varying degrees, some emphasizing teaching and the making of disciples, others embodying a rich tradition of liturgical symbolism, and still others nurturing post-baptismal life in very intentional ways. The report of the consultation suggests to the churches that a renewed appreciation of this *ordo* of Christian initiation is a source for interpreting and renewing their own practices and for aiding in the recognition of the baptismal practices of other churches.

### *Retrieval of Catechumenal Elements of Initiation by Lutherans*

In addition to the restoration of the catechumenate model in Roman Catholicism in the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* adopted in response to Vatican II's mandate to reform the rites, many Lutheran churches have recently retrieved elements of the ancient catechumenal process. In 1982 the basic structure of Christian initiation was delineated in the Notes on the first order in *Occasional Services: A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship, "Enrollment of Candidates for Baptism."*<sup>16</sup> The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada developed an adult catechumenate process in its *Living Witnesses* series in 1992, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America also did so with its *Welcome to Christ* resources in 1997.<sup>17</sup>

As society becomes less Christian, churches are finding that more adults are seeking Christian initiation. This creates a need for churches to develop catechumenal processes for adults. As patterns of the catechumenate become more common among Christian churches, the theologies of baptism may converge more closely as doctrine develops to reflect baptismal practice.

### *Baptism and Post-baptismal Anointing*<sup>18</sup>

A thorny problem that cannot be addressed in detail in the present study is the relationship between baptism and the post-baptismal anointing that came to be known as confirmation. When a catechumenate which culminated in the reception of all three sacraments of initiation fell out of use due to the baptism of infants becoming the dominant practice, it eventually followed that the order of baptism followed first by confirmation and then by first reception of the eucharist no longer represented pastoral practice. The sacraments of initiation were first received over a period of time separated by years and then received in an entirely different sequence.<sup>19</sup> In the United States within Roman Catholicism, the order in which a child receives the sacraments is presently most often: baptism shortly after birth, followed by

first penance before first eucharist at about age seven. Confirmation occurs sometime during adolescence when the bishop visits the local parish. As Aidan Kavanagh has observed:

Confirmation in adolescence or early adulthood as the sacrament peculiar to one's mature assumption of public responsibilities in Church and society had the effect of reinforcing the presumption that baptism was the sacrament peculiar to birth and infancy. In that position, baptism was the wholly necessary exorcism of original sin and the occasion of the infants being lent sufficient faith by the Church, through the good office of godparents and parents, to see it through to the critical stage when, as an individual on the verge of 'maturity,' that faith could be appropriated by the former infant in his or her own right – namely in confirmation.<sup>20</sup>

The separation of confirmation from baptism reinforced the idea that the baptism of infants was primarily for the removal of original sin rather than a participation in the paschal mystery of Christ according to the theology of Romans 6 or preparation for ministry and Christian life according to the theology of Christ's baptism and anointing by the Spirit in the Jordan. It also had the unfortunate effect of shifting the emphasis in confirmation to a human act, namely a personal affirmation of baptism, rather than keeping the emphasis on God's activity on our behalf in the sacraments.<sup>21</sup>

In this light, then, the imposition of hands and the prayer accompanying the post-baptismal anointing in the ELCA's rites, both in the 1979 *Lutheran Book of Worship* and the 2006 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* are significant. The rites incorporate a prayer for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit, a laying on of hands, and an anointing with oil with a prayer for the seal of the Holy Spirit. The minister, laying both hands on the head of each of the newly baptized, prays: "Sustain (name) with the gift of your Holy spirit; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever." The presiding minister then marks the sign of the cross on the forehead of each of the baptized with oil saying, "(Name), child of God, you have been sealed by the holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever." The prayer for the Spirit is based on the sixth-century Gelasian sacramentary, itself derived from the early third-century *Apostolic Tradition*, traditionally attributed to Hippolytus. Maxwell Johnson comments that the prayer for the gifts of the Spirit can be interpreted as an explicit conferral of the Holy Spirit although it is not absolutely clear whether baptism or the hand-laying prayer constitutes the "seal" of the Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

This anointing, the imposition of hands, the announcement of the seal of the Spirit, and the prayer for the gifts of the Spirit represent what Roman Catholics understand to be a confirmation rite in everything but name. It does not carry the same meaning as the post-baptismal anointing in Catholicism, which is Christological in meaning rather than pneumatological: "He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King."

In 1971 Paul VI decreed in his Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation: "The Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of the hand, and through the words: 'Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>23</sup> Immediately before this, however, the bishop and priests who administer the sacrament with him lay hands upon all the candidates (by extending their hands over them) and say a prayer which closely corresponds with the hand-laying and prayer in the ELCA rite:

All-powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
by water and the Holy Spirit  
you freed your sons and daughters from sin  
and gave them new life.  
Send your Holy Spirit upon them  
to be their helper and Guide.  
Give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the spirit of right judgment and courage,  
the spirit of knowledge and reverence.  
Fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Paul VI's comments that "the laying of hands on the elect, carried out with the prescribed prayer before the anointing, is still to be regarded as very important, even if it is not of the essence of the sacramental rite: it contributes to the complete perfection of the rite and to a more thorough understanding of the sacrament."

The resemblance between the current Lutheran rite and the Roman Catholic rite of confirmation is even more remarkable when this prayer for the gifts of the Spirit is compared with Luther's rite of 1523 where we see a significant difference: "The almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath regenerated thee through water and the Holy Ghost and bath, forgiven thee all thy sin, anoint thee with the salutary oil to eternal life." This prayer makes no mention of the Holy Spirit, and the anointing with oil was omitted in the 1526 rite.

Thus the ELCA action and prayer represent what Catholics understand as confirmation, although this was not the intention of the LBW drafters.<sup>24</sup> They wanted to provide a fuller ritualization of the gift of the Spirit in order to affirm that baptism is the fullness of initiation<sup>25</sup> and that the Holy Spirit is the gift of baptism rather than the effect of some subsequent event.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, whatever the intention, this rite restores the proper order of the post-baptismal anointing associated with the gift of the Spirit by placing it right after baptism and before the reception of the eucharist whenever that occurs.

In ritualizing the gift of the Spirit with specifically pneumatological allusions, in having the post-baptismal anointing occur immediately after baptism, and in returning to a sacramental practice faithful to a period of the tradition prior to the disintegration of the rites of initiation, rites such as the current Lutheran rite are compatible with Roman Catholic theology even though Lutherans do not consider this post-baptismal anointing to be confirmation. Here, though, it must be noted that what constitutes “confirmation” is very ambiguous when one is comparing different traditions. Confirmation involves hand-laying, anointing, and prayer for the Spirit, although it has carried multiple meanings across various traditions and even within one tradition. The Lutheran practice is much closer to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, since in the RCIA the anointing after baptism is omitted and the rite proceeds immediately to the celebration of confirmation after the explanatory rites of baptism, the clothing with a baptismal garment, and the presentation of a lighted candle. The RCIA in effect identifies Roman Catholic confirmation with post-baptismal chrismation.<sup>27</sup> If one considers the law of praying as indicative of the law of believing (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), one can affirm a strong convergence between the Lutheran and Catholic traditions in these present rites. Nevertheless, obstacles preventing the full effect of this convergence include the Lutheran conviction that baptism in the Trinitarian name constitutes full initiation in water and the Holy Spirit regardless of any additional rites and gestures and the Roman Catholic practice of separating confirmation from baptism.

Confusion generally reigns in the relation between baptism and initiation more broadly considered, including, therefore, confirmation, a confusion traceable to the disintegration of the ancient unified rite of initiation inclusive of baptism, post-baptismal chrismation, and eucharist. In the ancient church one would not have argued that this unified rite did not constitute full initiation and it would not have made sense to attempt to ask the question of the individual parts. Catholics certainly agree with Lutherans that baptism in the Trinitarian name confers the Spirit, and Lutherans, without rendering prayer inefficacious, must affirm that the Spirit is given when invoked in the act of chrismation. Arguably there is a need for a rite

that explicitly identifies this gift of the Spirit, whether that be some version of Luther’s post-baptismal prayer of his 1526 service or the current prayer asking for the sevenfold gift of the Spirit. The issue is not whether the Spirit is given in baptism or whether a person is fully a Christian in baptism but whether the sacramental ritualization of initiation must necessarily be both Christological and pneumatological and culminate in the communal breaking of bread that identifies the Christian baptismal life. Ritual minimalism would argue to the sufficiency of water baptism in the Trinitarian name. Nevertheless a broader pattern is evident in the experience of Pentecost, which includes baptism, reception of the gift of the Spirit, attention to apostolic teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:38-42). The issue is not that a minimal ritual is inefficacious or deprives the baptized of the Spirit or membership in the church but that a more expansive ritual is more revelatory of the richness and complexity of what is accomplished in Christian initiation. This more expansive ritual has biblical warrant beyond the bare bones of the dominical command of Matt 28:19. This more expansive ritual is not empty ritualism but is truly efficacious – and therefore sacramental in the Roman Catholic understanding of sacrament – because we do not lay hands and pray for the Spirit without the Spirit being present, or break bread in obedience to Jesus’ request to do so without the risen Christ being present.

### *Baptism and Initiation*

If the patristic catechumenal heritage and its contemporary retrieval witness to the fact that Christian initiation is a process or journey extended over time, that process can comprise several rites or sacraments. That does not detract from the fundamental, foundational, and essential necessity of baptism. Baptism unites us through the Holy Spirit to Christ. In baptism the sacramental sign is immersion into the death and resurrection of Christ in the waters of baptism. In the Eucharist the sign is the body and blood of Christ crucified and risen. Baptism is the once-for-all, never repeatable sacrament of the immersion of Christians into the paschal event. The eucharist is the repeatable sacrament by which we are associated with the paschal mystery. Both sacraments incorporate Christians into the body of Christ, for in baptism we become members of the church, and the eucharist builds up the church as one body by virtue of our communing in the one bread of Christ (1 Cor 10:16-17). Jean Daniélou said that there is only one mystery, and that is Jesus Christ, dead and risen.<sup>28</sup> But there are different modalities of incorporation into that one mystery, namely baptism and eucharist.



Baptism makes Christians into a priestly community deputed for the worship of the Church in the Eucharist. As early as the *Didache* (ca. 160), baptism was a prerequisite for reception of the eucharist: “But let no one eat or drink of your eucharist but such as have been baptized in the name of the Lord.”<sup>29</sup> The baptized have the right and the responsibility of participating in the eucharistic liturgy. This is why catechumens participating in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults are dismissed after the Liturgy of the Word in Catholic churches. They have not yet received this deputation. In this sense we are baptized into the eucharist. This relationship is most evident in a unified rite of initiation as practiced in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and by the Orthodox.

Just as the Rite of Christian Initiation makes adult baptism at the Easter Vigil the norm for understanding baptism, the Eucharist at the Easter Vigil is where the Eucharist is most itself in public and the “standard that defines the meaning of everything else – cross and sacrifice, memorial and presence, ministry and priesthood, intercession and prayer, participation and communion.”<sup>30</sup> The Eucharist is the culmination of initiation because it is there that the communion of believers with one another and with Christ is sacramentally visible in the sacrament of God’s presence with us. Aidan Kavanagh eloquently describes the relationship between baptism and the Eucharist when he articulates the principle on which the Rite’s norm of baptism rests:

That baptism is inadequately perceptible apart from the eucharist; that the eucharist is not wholly knowable without reference to conversion in faith; that conversion is abortive if it does not issue in sacramental illumination by incorporation into the Church; that the Church is only an inept corporation without steady access to Sunday, Lent, and the Easter Vigil; that evangelization is mere noise and catechesis only a syllabus apart from conversion and initiation into a robust ecclesial environment of faith shared. In baptism the eucharist begins, and in the eucharist baptism is sustained. From this premier sacramental union flows all the Church’s life.<sup>31</sup>

Thus even though baptism is at the heart of Christian initiation and is complete in the sense that it conveys Christ and all that he is to the baptized, it does not stand alone but is intrinsically oriented to the eucharist. It would be strange, indeed, for someone to say that he or she has no need of the eucharist because he or she has received everything needed for salvation in baptism or to say that there is no need for a ritual conveying the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is already imparted in baptism.

Martin Luther preached that one should return to one’s baptism daily. In a light vein, the liturgist Kathleen Hughes has referred to the eucharist as “our daily dip in the font.” This lighthearted image represents the recognition that both sacraments make present the mystery of Christ’s dying and rising. The point is that we do not receive baptism once and then go on with our lives. That which is experienced and received sacramentally, under the modality of sacramental sign, must be enfolded in Christian living, in our own dying and rising. Initiation is not complete until sacramental ritual is embodied in our existential living. Otherwise, sacraments become magic. Tertullian said that Christians are made, not born.<sup>32</sup> The making does not occur simply in a sacramental instant, but in the duration required for growth and development. The author of the Epistle to the Ephesians spoke of the gifts of ministry as building up the body of Christ “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13). He spoke of “growing up into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph 4:15). If initiation is indeed this process of growth, then it is lifelong and does not end either with baptism or eucharist insofar as participation in the eucharist and the other aids to Christian living is lifelong.

Here the image of communion rather than church membership is helpful. Church membership is static and occurs in a moment. One can say that one’s membership in the church is complete with baptism. Catholics would say that a catechumen is a member of the church and thus deserving of a Christian funeral (LG 14). Communion, however, allows for an ever-deeper assimilation into the mystery of Christ and the church. Initiation in this context is not exclusively related to church membership, but induction into communion that allows for further growth and development.

In the light of the present project of examining the relationship between baptism and growth in ecclesial communion, obviously baptism establishes a real communion among all Christians who mutually recognize one another’s baptism. However, just as from the Catholic point of view initiation is not complete with baptism because the ritual does not incorporate the rich pneumatological theology of confirmation or the modality of incorporation into the body of Christ effected by the eucharist (1 Cor 10:16-17), that which is truly contained within the theology of baptism is not brought to full visibility. Can we say that the reality is there, but that the sign is lacking in the sense that aspects of what baptism effects can be brought to greater visibility and that even the reality is subject to growth, not least through regular participation in the eucharist? If Lutherans and Catholics are to grow together in ecclesial communion, perhaps we also need to acknowledge and share a larger process of initiation into that communion. The question

before us, not answered in this paper, is how much communion is necessary before we can share in the eucharist, which deepens that communion. If the eucharist is indeed a sacrament of initiation, it itself is not the final point at the end of a journey for those Christians who have already been initiated and completed their novitiate, so to speak, but an element of initiation and an essential aspect of participating in that journey to full communion. The ongoing nature of initiation mirrors the repeatable character of the eucharist. Perhaps such a view will enable both Lutherans and Catholics to situate both baptism and eucharist within the larger category of initiation in its efforts to relate baptism to growth in ecclesial communion.

### Notes

- 1 See Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2007), chapter 6.
- 2 See J.D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (London: SPCK, 1965) for an account of the disintegration of the primitive rite of initiation.
- 3 Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation*, 233. This summary does not occur in the 2007 revised and expanded edition.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 236.
- 5 The document, “Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion: The Toronto Statement ‘Walk in Newness of Life,’” makes the unequivocal claim that “baptism is complete sacramental initiation and leads to participation in the eucharist.” It affirms the rite of confirmation as having a continuing pastoral role as means of “renewal of faith” among the baptized, or a reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant (cf. 3.19-20), but it is not to be seen in any way as a “completion of baptism.” David R. Holeton, ed., *Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion. The Toronto Statement ‘Walk in Newness of Life.’ The Findings of the Fourth International Anglican Consultation, Toronto 1991* (Grove Worship Series 118; Bramcote, UK: Grove Books, 1991).
- 6 LW 26:37.
- 7 Paul Fiddes makes the helpful point that we are looking for a process of initiation, of which baptism is one moment, rather than a process of baptism. Then confirmation and eucharist are not seen as completions of baptism as if baptism were incomplete in itself, but as completions of initiation. “Baptism and the Process of Initiation,” *The Ecumenical Review* 54 (2002) 60.
- 8 The report is in Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller, eds., *So We Believe, So We Pray: Towards Koinonia in Worship* (Faith and Order Paper 171; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1995) 4-26.
- 9 “Report of the Consultation,” in *Becoming Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism* (Faith and Order Paper No. 184; ed. Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1999) §10.
- 10 *Ibid.*, §4, §19-20.
- 11 *Ibid.*, §20.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, §22.
- 14 See Gordon Lathrop, “Water that Speaks: The *Ordo* of Baptism and its Ecumenical Implications,” in *Becoming Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, 17.
- 15 Report of the Consultation,” §22.
- 16 *Occasional Services: A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg; Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1982), cited in Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 663.
- 17 The bibliographical information for these resources is given in Senn, 663, note 86.
- 18 Much of this section is taken from Susan K. Wood, *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009) 134-139.
- 19 See Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 381-391, for the history of this shift. He cites numerous ecclesiastical documents that legislated the proper order of the sacraments despite continuing pastoral practice to the contrary: the preparatory document for the first Vatican council (1870), *De Administratione sacramentorum*; the 1917 Code of Canon Law; and a 1932 statement of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments.
- 20 Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo, 1978) 86.
- 21 This essay does not explore the meaning of the rite of affirmation of baptism, adopted in the most recent ELCA liturgical book, and its relationship to confirmation. Since Lutherans do not consider confirmation to be a sacrament, at one level this ritual does not raise the issue of whether it is God’s act or a human act, but since the prayer (for the gifts of the Spirit) and the ritual action (laying on of hands) are what constitutes the Roman Catholic sacrament of confirmation, the ritual of affirmation of baptism raises ecumenical questions about the relationship of the two and the theological meaning of each. The theology of confirmation is vexed and often misunderstood. For the purposes here, the greatest point of agreement needed is the recognition that it constitutes an important step in the process of initiation.
- 22 Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 427.
- 23 Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Divinae consortium naturae* (15 August 1971).
- 24 Jeffrey A. Truscott, in *The Reform of Baptism and Confirmation in American Lutheranism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2003) 68-69, believes that the Roman Catholic confirmation formula of 1971/1973 was not the textual source for the LBW baptismal rite. He argues for the influence of the rite of the Consultation on Church Union, *An Order for the Celebration of Holy Baptism with Commentary*. My argument is not about the source of the liturgical texts but about their similarity and the consequences for a convergence of sacramental belief that result from praying such similar texts.
- 25 This is also the position of Anglicans: Holeton, ed., “Walk in Newness of Life,” *Christian Initiation in the Anglican Communion*; and idem, *Growing in Newness of Life: Christian Initiation in Anglicanism Today: Papers from the Fourth International Anglican Liturgical Consultation, Toronto 1991* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1993) 227-56.
- 26 Truscott, *The Reform of Baptism and Confirmation in American Lutheranism*, 109. Earlier Truscott cites Boehringer, the drafter: “We had ‘confirmation’ immediately after the baptism because we wanted to show that baptism and confirmation were the same thing, or that confirmation is merely a continuation of baptism. The problem is that you could say that, but no one in the Lutheran tradition knew that.... The purpose of this formula, ‘You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit,’ etc., was to combine anointing

and sealing with the marking of the cross.” In other words, the intent was to provide a fuller baptismal rite that could be acceptable to Lutherans and yet ritualize more fully the gift of the Holy Spirit, much in the manner of Roman Catholic confirmation (70).

- 27 See Maxwell E. Johnson’s critique of this in *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 444ff.  
 28 Jean Daniélou, “Le symbolisme des rites baptismaux,” *Dieu Vivant* 1 (1945) 17.  
 29 *Didache* 7,1-3; 9,5.  
 30 Nathan D. Mitchell, *Forum Essays: Eucharist as Sacrament of Initiation* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994) 109-110.  
 31 Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism*, 122.  
 32 Tertullian, *Apology*, 18,4.

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## Lutherans, Ecumenical Reflections, and Doctrine

*Christine Helmer*

When the word doctrine is uttered in trans-confessional conversation, it usually means difference.<sup>1</sup> Doctrines spell out assertions of belief, and in affirming one articulation, they deny and exclude other options. It was the impasse that doctrine presented to the ecumenical discussions after Vatican II that inspired Lutheran theologian George A. Lindbeck to reimagine the meaning and function of doctrine. Lindbeck diagnosed the situation in his book, *The Nature of Doctrine*.<sup>2</sup> Doctrinal articulation meant exposing a foundational difference (*Grunddifferenz*) that separated Lutherans from Roman Catholics. While one confession affirmed the doctrine of justification by which the church stands or falls, the other confession required a doctrine of the church as sacred mediator of justification. The impasse was, as Schleiermacher claimed two centuries earlier, the basic and non-negotiable difference between Protestants and Catholics on the self, Christ, church relation. Protestants see the relationship between self and Christ as primary, while Catholics have it the other way around; the church mediates Christ to the believer.<sup>3</sup>

With a new proposal for doctrine as a set of rules deployed by competent speakers of a distinctive language, Lindbeck invigorated the ecumenical conversation between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Doctrine was no longer understood in terms of a binary exclusion between a true and a false proposition referring to reality. Lindbeck, rather, opened the way for contextualizing doctrines in relation to their regulative function for specific deployments of Christian discourse. The notion that religion was like a language was an insight Lindbeck appropriated from the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz.<sup>4</sup> With this concept of religion in place, Lindbeck identified doctrine as the distinctive grammar for a “language game.” While

grammatical elements remain the same across the diversity of Christian confessions, confessional distinctiveness can be attributed to different configurations of “grammar”. The doctrine of justification, for example, while characteristic of Christianity as such, is deployed in a Lutheran context with an all-important emphasis, while in a Catholic context, justification is one doctrine in a hierarchy of doctrines.

Lindbeck’s proposal paved the way for the signing of the *Joint Declaration between Lutherans and Roman Catholics* on Oct. 31, 1999.<sup>5</sup> Yet it became more than just an ecumenical device. Lindbeck’s new understanding of doctrine provided a conceptually powerful resource for doing theology in contemporary North America. His vision recovered a sense of theology’s primary commitment to the church. Theology’s distinctive function as an academic discipline was to help the church better articulate its mission in the world. Furthermore, Lindbeck insisted on theology’s recovery of the biblical canon, and its normative reading through the lens of the church’s rule of faith (*regula fidei*), as distinctive source. The Bible, when read as a whole, is related to Christian doctrine. As such, it informs the constitutive doctrinal grammar of the church.

Lindbeck’s model has brought theology, particularly ecumenical theology, very far. Yet at this point in the reception of his book, the term “doctrine” is being co-opted in ways that might differ significantly from Lindbeck’s original intention. Doctrine, as I diagnose the situation in my recent book *Theology and the End of Doctrine*, has become a term restricted to rules that underline a restricted normative view.<sup>6</sup> The ancient *regula fidei* is invoked to enforce the triune confessions that were, and should remain, the one hermeneutic for the church’s biblical reading. Trinitarian truth informs the Christian worldview that is set in opposition to secular culture. Conversion is required in order to leave falsity behind and become a “new creature” (cf 2 Cor 5:17) founded on doctrine’s truth.

When looking at the ELCA website, it seems that the ELCA has allowed Lindbeck’s proponents to appropriate the restrictive normative notion of doctrine. Where does the ELCA define and account for its doctrines? On the site, there are some comments on “ELCA Teaching” that pertain to a confession of faith in the triune God and the significance of fundamental texts, such as Bible and creeds, for faith.<sup>7</sup> Theology is identified as a “conversation,” and another page contains the “social statements,” or positions for policy on a variety of issues, including sexuality and education.<sup>8</sup> At no place does the word doctrine appear. Other Lutheran groups, however, relish the term. The Missouri Synod webpages, for example, identify doctrinal positions with theological precision on many topics from Scripture to justification.<sup>9</sup> The website for the Society of the Holy Trinity,

a group of rostered Lutheran clergy that has as its goal a deepening in the spiritual and intellectual formation of the Lutheran “ministerium,” exhibits a rule for the society and a founding statement that details what is meant by Trinitarian faith, the sources of faith in confessions and creeds, and the church’s ministry.<sup>10</sup> These Lutherans are not shy to highlight doctrine as the primary genre in articulating belief, its meaning, and rationale. Could it be that the term doctrine is only a worthwhile endeavor for promoting a distinct sort of Lutheranism?

In this paper I intend to convince readers that doctrine is an important endeavor for theologians to pursue. I argue that the meaning that has accrued to the term over the past several decades represents only one (restrictive) aspect of doctrine. If we can think about doctrine in other ways, then we can better appreciate the task of producing doctrine as significant for articulating claims about self, God, and world that convey meaning and truth in the church today. When doctrine is understood to relate to both experience and its divine referent, then its production can reflect a living Christianity. I make my case by the following two steps. 1] I take the early nineteenth-century German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) as my historical point of departure. I consider Schleiermacher’s intriguing ecumenical notion of doctrine that he deploys in his theological work, *The Christian Faith*, in order to show that he conceived doctrinal production from the start with an ecumenical focus. Schleiermacher is to be considered in the spirit of his ecumenical dogmatics, representative of Lutheran as well as Reformed theology. 2] At the end of this paper I propose a way for Lutherans to “construct doctrine boldly” by contemplating doctrine’s referent, how historical work is part of doctrinal production for the present-day church, and how experience plays a role. If doctrinal production is the measurement of vital signs for a living Christianity, then Lutherans should take on the challenge.

### *Lutherans and Schleiermacher*

Friedrich Schleiermacher, known as the parent of modern theology, is also generally identified as a Reformed pastor and theologian. He began his career as a pastor in 1794 in Landsberg, moved to Berlin in 1796 and was hospital chaplain at the Charité hospital until 1802. Significant for his promotions after this point was a two-hundred page text he wrote in 1804 that would catch the king’s attention: *Two Provisional Reports Concerning the Condition of the Protestant Church in Relation to the Protestant State*.<sup>11</sup> In this work, Schleiermacher addressed the confessional divide between Lutherans and Reformed, and proposed to heal the rift with a common liturgy. His arguments caught

King Friedrich Wilhelm III's eye. The king, from the Reformed branch of the Hohenzollern dynasty, longed to take communion with his Lutheran wife, Queen Louise. Thus he intervened in Schleiermacher's career, first to appoint him in 1804 to a pastoral and teaching post in the Lutheran University of Halle, and then after the dissolution of the university because of Napoleon's victory over Prussia in 1806, appointed Schleiermacher as court preacher in Berlin, a territory that was predominantly Lutheran. In Berlin, Schleiermacher also occupied a Reformed clergy post alongside a Lutheran minister at the 12,000-member Trinity Church, founded as both Lutheran and Reformed by Friedrich Wilhelm III's grandfather, and was professor of theology in the university he helped to found, the University of Berlin.

Schleiermacher did, however, clash with the king on ecumenical issues.<sup>12</sup> In 1814, Schleiermacher criticized the monarch for encroaching on ecclesiastical affairs. Friedrich Wilhelm had appointed a commission to oversee the unification of the Protestant confessions in Prussia, a goal that he mandated in October 1817. On October 31, Schleiermacher together with his Lutheran co-pastor of Trinity Church and Berlin colleague in systematic and practical theology, Philipp Marheineke (1780-1846), celebrated the three-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation in the Nicolai Church in Berlin with a joint communion.<sup>13</sup> Schleiermacher subsequently edited the hymnal for the unified church (*Unierte Kirche*), eventually clashing again with the king in 1821 when Friedrich Wilhelm wrote his own unified liturgy modeled on Luther's to impose on the Prussian churches.

The point I want to emphasize here is that although it is commonly assumed that Schleiermacher represented a Reformed commitment, the case in his own self-understanding was quite different. His controversies with the king had to do with Schleiermacher's conviction that the state should not intrude in church matters. It was up to church leaders, not the king, who should create a liturgy uniting both Lutheran and Reformed confessions. In another controversy, this time with the Lutheran confessionalist Claus Harms (1778-1855) who protested the union by re-issuing Luther's *Ninety-five Theses* and adding ninety-five of his own, Schleiermacher insisted that:

the work of the Reformation was not ... to found a Lutheran Church – against which, indeed, no one protested more warmly than Luther himself – nor was it to found a Reformed Church, but to bring forth in renewed glory the Evangelical Church, which is guided and governed by its founder, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. He is the quickening centre of the Church; from Him comes all, to Him all returns: He is Beginning and End; in Him we believe, and through Him alone we are blessed.... We ought not, therefore, to call ourselves

Lutherans nor Reformed, but we ought to call ourselves Evangelical Christians, after His name and His holy evangel.<sup>14</sup>

But Schleiermacher's commitment to a common Protestant church is most forcefully and clearly represented by his *Christian Faith*, one of the few complete books Schleiermacher published during his lifetime.<sup>15</sup> The English title, *Christian Faith*, takes us quite afar from Schleiermacher's vision. The German original is literally translated into English as "The Christian Faith According to the Principles of the Evangelical Church Presented in Their Connection."<sup>16</sup> The title understands "Evangelical" to mean Protestant, specifically Lutheran and Reformed taken together. By "evangelical" Schleiermacher did not intend a third denomination as an amalgamation of both Lutheran and Reformed. Rather, he takes them together and investigates what he calls the "principles ... in their connections among each other." Thus he intends to write a system of theology, guided by specific principles or doctrines that he selects and then relates to other doctrines.

Selection and integration does not take place by objectively analyzing propositions. Schleiermacher, rather, bases his theological system of doctrines on psychological states of Christian consciousness that have been advantageously affected by the one person that Christianity acknowledges as redeemer of the world, Jesus of Nazareth. These states of consciousness reach for external expression by virtue of the necessary relation between individuality and inter-subjectivity. Jesus has transformed human persons in memorably healing ways that believers run to "go tell it on the mountain." Doctrines represent articulations of Christian consciousness a few steps removed from original expressions because they make claims to knowledge. Doctrines account for the transformation of consciousness from sin to grace by crediting Christ with redemptive activity. They make explicit the experiential connections between self, Christ, and community as these explications are governed by conditions for knowledge. Schleiermacher's doctrinal system assumes that both Lutheran and Reformed consciousness is the same; principles derived from a common Protestant consciousness can be selected and integrated into a unified system of theology.

The resources Schleiermacher uses in his critical discussions of doctrines articulated in the past also provide evidence that he intends his theology to represent the "Evangelical" church of his day. Texts by Johannes Andreas Quenstedt and Johann Gerhard, two prominent Lutheran orthodox theologians, appear in conversation with Reformed texts and authors, for example, the Heidelberg Catechism and Theodore Beza.<sup>17</sup> Luther and Calvin, as well as sixteenth-century documents from both confessions – the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the Helvetic Confession (1536) – are mustered through

the historical-critical operations Schleiermacher performs on theological texts. Furthermore, doctrines that distinguished Lutherans from Reformed and that had caused division in the past are also taken, weighed, and critically reconstructed. The Lutheran doctrine of the communication of attributes, for example, fares rather badly in Schleiermacher's assessment of the hypostatic union (CF § 97, 5 [411-13]), while he distinguishes his view of the "strengthening of the spiritual life" (CF § 140, 1 [645]) in the Lord's Supper from "the over-intellectual bareness of the Zwinglian view and from the mysteriousness sensuousness of the Lutheran" (CF § 140, 4 [650]). Thus constructive work occurs by critical assessment and then appropriation for the most accurate representations of the doctrines held to be normative by Protestant Christianity of early nineteenth-century Prussia.

The intriguing contribution that Schleiermacher made to the history of theology is to articulate a doctrinal system on the basis of a common Protestant consciousness. He published the first edition of the *Christian Faith* in 1820 on the heels of the ecumenical rapprochements instituted by the king. Schleiermacher's approach to doctrine consisted in the critical task of weighing historical confessional documents in relation to their capacity to articulate doctrinal truths in his contemporary context. The doctrinal task was one of *production* in relation to past historical formulations; the testing of these formulations in order to determine which aspects had lost their meaning or presented contradictory claims; and then the integration of these historical articulations into new formulations that were themselves tested according to their capacity to communicate the essential core of Christianity in relation to the critical and constructive work applied by the contemporary theologian to the formulations. Belonging to a creedal and confessional community means precisely to participate in ongoing engagement with the past in order to more clearly articulate the central commitments of the present church. This is the message of Schleiermacher's theological hermeneutics. In the words of Brian Gerrish, "Doctrines then become something quite other than permanently fixed pronouncements, authorized by scriptural proofs and to be affirmed by the believing theologian, come what may."<sup>18</sup>

Doctrinal articulations change. They are not free from error, or contradictions, or problematic articulation, even from senility. Active Christian community participates in the ongoing examination and testing and articulation. Doctrine exists in a state of production.

### *Lutherans and Doctrine*

Can Lutherans begin to appreciate a new concept of doctrine? Lutheran legacy does not bode well for a new understanding. It is after all the six-

teenth-century Lutherans who qualified doctrine with adjectives such as "sacred" and "pure." In fact Luther's Reformation, as the Augsburg Confession stipulates, has to do with digging out the "pure doctrine" that had been overlaid by the sediments of Rome's human traditions.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Lindbeck's claim that doctrine is the "grammar of faith" is close to Luther's own formulation that the Holy Spirit teaches the new grammar of faith. Likewise Luther's discourse about the new language in Christ seems close to Bruce Marshall's assertion that Luther's idea of doctrine is the grammar of the new language of theology.<sup>20</sup> Thus the Lutheran tradition's common understanding of doctrine is informed both by the high standard of "purity" and claims regarding doctrinal grammar of the new language in Christ.

The issue centers on what is meant by the word "doctrine." The term has a history that conveys different meanings in distinct historical contexts. While a contemporary understanding might limit it to a regulative function, Luther in the sixteenth century saw doctrine as the teaching (*Lehre*) about the Christian God. Doctrine, according to Luther, can be articulated in various liturgical contexts, whether in the confession of faith, hymn singing in church, or religious education at home. When individuals and communities participate in evocations that relate doctrine to its referent, they articulate doctrine. The oblique formulation of confession of faith ("We believe in...") is uttered in community gathered in divine presence. Hymns are sung in praise of God, while religious education in the form of question and answer reflects on the meaning of God in human lives. Luther introduces his explanation to the first article of the Creed in the Large Catechism (1529) with questions about meaning.

So it now may be asked: "What kind of person is God? What does he do? How can we praise or portray or describe him in such a way so we may know him?"... If you were to ask a young child, "My dear, what kind of God do you have? What do you know about him?"<sup>21</sup>

Personal and communal reflection on meaning makes explicit the relationship with God that is doctrine's referent. Teaching is embodied and enacted in lives confessing and reflecting on experience of the living God. Doctrine is deployed in liturgical and pedagogical genres, generating meaning as individuals live out their faith in life and community.

Do meaning, history, and experience render doctrine impure? This question is significant in view of the common notion of doctrine as deposit unchanged through successive generations in the church. If doctrine is the "faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 1:3; NRSV), then where can it be found? The desire for doctrinal certainty leads to assump-

tions that there is such a literary deposit of pure doctrine. By this argument, the literary formulation for Irenaeus's rule of faith (*regula fidei*) is set down in the Apostles' Creed. Yet on closer examination, the Trinitarian term of consubstantiality between Son and Father is available only in the Nicene Creed, the *filioque* clause officially part of Western formulation by 1014; the ecumenical-liturgical language of "one in being" is – since Benedict XVI's changes to the English mass in 2011 – a reversion to the Latin translation of the Greek *homoousios*, or "consubstantial with the Father."<sup>22</sup>

If the Creed does not display a once for all literary formulation of pure doctrine, then does a specific conciliar document? Let us consider the minimal Trinitarian formula consistent across the middle ages: the Latin term, "tres res sunt una res," literally "three things are one thing." The place to look for conciliar decisions on normative formulations of (Catholic) doctrine is Heinrich Denzinger's compendium, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. Yet a cursory glance at the seven-hundred pages of the English translation of Denzinger exhibits an incredible variety of conciliar pronouncements contextualized in a variety of historical debates, meetings, and controversies. Even a series of propositions refuting the "Errors of Martin Luther" from Leo X's papal bull "Exsurge Domine" against Luther is documented!<sup>23</sup> When looking for the literal phrase "tres res sunt una res," no single recitation of this medieval Trinitarian formula can be found. The closest possibility is the condemnation of Joachim of Fiore issued at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 in which the Council affirms the position of Peter Lombard "that there exists a most excellent reality, incomprehensible indeed and ineffable, which truly is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, at the same time three Persons..."<sup>24</sup> A once for all doctrinal formulation for the Trinity does not exist. What one finds, rather, in the medieval period is an inspiring diversity of ways in which the bare bones formula is explained, described, articulated, and analyzed. This activity introduces new conceptual distinctions and novel terminology into the production history of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The question regarding which literary formula captures doctrine or where a once for all deposit can be found must be answered in the following way. Doctrine is only available in literary-linguistic deployments that have their own liturgical, pedagogical, or theological function. Doctrine is articulated in particular genres and uttered in context-specific situations. Invoking doctrine in the life of the church involves expression of commitment to the referent of doctrine, the triune God. When the confession of faith is recited, a hymn of praise is sung, the people are catechized, doctrine is available in the words that are recalled and uttered. Doctrine is a matter of living faith.

### *To Construct Doctrine Boldly!*

Where does the work of theology fit in to the church's expressions of doctrine? While theology can point out that doctrine cannot be exhausted by one formula, it is theology's distinct task to consider doctrine in a particular way. Like the task of other academic disciplines theology's task is to produce knowledge. Theology produces doctrine as knowledge claims about God in such a way as to be adequate to the ways in which God is invoked, experienced, and worshipped. This section's title tweaks Luther's imperative in the Galatians commentary: Construct doctrine boldly! How can Lutheran theologians participate in this task?

Theology's work is to articulate doctrine. Yet as I have underlined above, doctrine is not available in one proposition. Doctrine is alive in many formulations. Although foundational expressions of doctrine are historically available in creeds, confessions, and liturgies, doctrine is expressed in a variety of discourses and in different languages by particular historical communities of faith. Theology's task is to apply its best intellectual resources to diverse formulations in order to produce knowledge about its subject matter.

The unique subject matter of Christian doctrine is the triune God and God's way of being "with us." Take for example the heart of the Christian religion, the central mystery and paradox of the Word that "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14; NRSV). Christian theology has been occupied from its earliest days with negotiating this claim of God's historicity with the intellectual tools from Greek philosophy that stressed God's incapacity for change or suffering. Testing terms, such as *homoousios* and *homoiousios*, for their adequacy to represent the inner-Trinitarian relations, was an exercise that required negotiating between diverse formulations and figuring out the meanings of terms deployed to make claims about the subject matter. The central reality of Christianity, the person of Jesus Christ, has elicited many acclamations, stories, and claims about his identity and work. The theological task is to select from the diverse comments, and construct claims and their explanations that do justice to God's eternal being that, united with temporal human nature, "was crucified under Pontius Pilate." Time and death are brought together with divine nature in Christology.

While the referent stays the same, doctrinal claims are unstable as they produce and reproduce meaning. Words acquire different valences, equivocations arise, and debates take place over interpretative difficulties. Terms inevitably have different values in new semantic fields. Contradictions, logical difficulties, or mere lack of clarity present the theologian with the task of defining terms, determining meaning, and stabilizing referentiality. Theology is thus characterized by an ongoing critical assessment of inherited

terms and the testing of terminology and logical tools to represent doctrine. The aim is clear meaning and adequate referential capacity.

Doctrinal production is the theologian's ongoing task. Doctrine cannot just be the recitation of old formulas that are deployed without understanding. A church's vital sign consists in determining doctrine for its representation as both expression of and guidance for the worship of the living God in the present. Schleiermacher proposed this historical definition of "dogmatic theology" as the theological task in producing doctrines representative of the church of his day.<sup>25</sup> He introduces an entire section on dogmatic theology in his compendium of theology: "Here we have to do with dogmatic theology ... as the knowledge of doctrine that now has currency in the evangelical church."<sup>26</sup> Dogmatic theology comes at the end of the historical study of Christianity, beginning with the Bible and moving through church history. The study of the past helps situate knowledge of the present-day church; the present church is the culmination of the past, yet in a novel way. Doctrines represent a church's dominant ideas in a specific historical context. Schleiermacher sees doctrine as the task that has a critical component regarding the past and a constructive aspect regarding the evaluation of which ideas are valid in the present church. The theologian's task is to cull and discern from the past, to examine the past critically in view of the present in such a way as to produce dominant doctrines in their relations for formulations and explanations that have determinative function for the contemporary church. The ongoing interpretation of the history of doctrine is indispensable for the goal of proposing fitting doctrines characterizing and governing the life of the church. There is, of course, the danger that something is lost in translation. The historical-critical nature of the enterprise, as Schleiermacher's own example reveals, risks dropping key parts of Trinitarian doctrine and even the Old Testament from Christian canonical status. Yet the historical constructive task of producing doctrine is a necessary sign of ideas that are alive to the experience of the living God.

Luther valued subjective participation in the articulation of doctrine. "Only experience makes the theologian," he writes in his *Table Talk*.<sup>27</sup> Experience is the way that ideas become embodied in the reality of human existence. Theories make sense when they are experienced in empirical particularity. When Luther asks questions about God in his Large Catechism, he probes the person answering to add experiential meaning to the catechetical formulas. If God is "that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need," as Luther defines the term in his explication of the first commandment in the Large Catechism, God is experienced individually and communally in different ways.<sup>28</sup> The experience of God presupposes relationship. Doctrines acquire meanings as individuals

experience the ups and downs, the faithfulness and surprises of a relationship with God. Experiential and intellectual considerations mix when doctrine is seen as more than a linguistic circumscription of faith's object. Doctrines capture the peculiar way in which the language about the Christian God brings the reality of God into memorable presence. Doctrine is at once definition and reality, and in Luther's particular case, definition and reality in relationship "to me."

Subjective meaning-making in relationship and objective referent are the two aspects crucial for doctrinal production in a living community of faith. Doctrines are about something. They refer to something that transcends the linguistic formulation, that can be experienced and that enters into communal memory through accrual of meanings in history. Luther's breakthrough experience – whether real or part of the hagiography – is constitutive of Lutheran memory that adds meaning to the doctrine of justification. The experience of justification is one of the markers of Lutheran identity that orients doctrinal production in new ways.<sup>29</sup> Christology and sin, redemption and eschatology have as particular doctrines in Lutheran Christianity accrued the meaning of justification considered central by Luther and appropriated as central in the Lutheran tradition. The task is to reconnect doctrine to a semantics that opens it to new experience and thinking, honoring the Spirit who breathes life into individuals and the church, sometimes in quite unexpected ways.

### *Conclusion*

In order to appreciate the theological task of constructing doctrine, we need to admit that any linguistic proposition is radically informed by historical context and the particularity of language. Doctrine is not on the eternal side of the time/eternity divide. Rather, doctrine is the task of a theology that is inevitably rooted in history's contingencies. The question, thus, is not one of a doctrinal monopoly by theologians who claim trans-historical truth, but the one of who can adequately articulate a representative notion of the referent of doctrine in terms that convey meaning to the contemporary church.

While doctrine as grammar of faith has proved productive for past ecumenical discussion, I have argued that this model does not do justice to the historical nature of doctrine. Rather, I have described Schleiermacher's example as a theological system that represents doctrines of an ecumenically united early nineteenth-century Evangelical (Lutheran and Reformed) church. Schleiermacher should be considered a Lutheran theologian! While political interests in his day precipitated the ecumenical agenda, it was Schleiermacher's understanding of doctrine that achieved the theological



rapprochement. Schleiermacher models theology's task to articulate ideas (and their interconnections) that have "currency" in the present-day church. This constructive task presupposes historical-critical discerning of doctrinal formulations from the past. Terms are examined for their inconsistencies and obsolete polemics; terms are tested as to whether they have suppressed significant meanings and how new terms might better convey meaning about divine presence in life and worship. Theology's task is to discern the direction that God takes in historically situated Christian communities and to propose doctrines that adequately refer to the living God who is experienced in individual and communal ways. Doctrinal production is a vital sign of a Christian community.

### Notes

- 1 This publication was made possible through the support of a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation. I am also grateful to Saint Louis University that has also generously assisted this publication.
- 2 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1984) 16-17: "For a propositionalist, if a doctrine is at once true, it is always true, and if it is once false, it is always false.... Thus, on this view, doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation is impossible because there is no significant sense in which the meaning of a doctrine can change while remaining the same." (= *25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, foreword by Bruce D. Marshall and a new afterword by the author [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009]). Citations from *The Nature of Doctrine* are taken from the original 1984 edition.
- 3 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* [1830/31] (ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart; trans. D.M. Baillie et al; Edinburgh: Blackwell, 1999) § 24, proposition (p. 103): "In so far as the Reformation was not simply a purification and reaction from abuses which had crept in, but was the origination of a distinctive form of the Christian communion, the antithesis between Protestantism and Catholicism may provisionally be conceived thus: the former makes the individual's relation to the Church dependent on his relation to Christ, while the latter contrariwise makes the individual's relation to Christ dependent on his relation to the Church." For a critical reading of Schleiermacher's view of Catholicism, see Julia A. Lamm, "Schleiermacher on 'The Roman Church': Anti-Catholic Polemics, Ideology, and the Future of Historical-Empirical Dogmatics," in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue* (ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb; TBT 148; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010) 243-56.
- 4 For a detailed look at Lindbeck's appropriation of Geertz, see my "Luther, History, and the Concept of Religion," in *Lutherrenaissance: Past and Present* (ed. Christine Helmer and Bo Kristian Holm; FKDG 106; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2105) 174-89.
- 5 For the text, see *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, English-language edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).
- 6 Christine Helmer, *Theology and the End of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014).
- 7 Online at <http://www.elca.org/Faith/ELCA-Teaching> (accessed Nov. 3, 2014).
- 8 Online at <http://www.elca.org/Faith/ELCA-Teaching/Theological-Conversations> (accessed Nov. 3, 2014); online at <http://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Statements> (accessed Nov. 3, 2014).
- 9 Online at <http://www.lcms.org/doctrine/doctrinalposition> (accessed Nov. 3, 2014).
- 10 <http://www.societyholymtrinity.org/> (accessed Nov. 3, 2014).
- 11 I follow Brent Sockness's translation of the German title, "Zwei unvorgreifliche Gutachten in Sachen des protestantischen Kirchenwesens zunächst in Beziehung auf den Preußischen Staat," in *Schriften aus der Stolper Zeit [1802-1804]* (ed. Eilert Herms, Günter Meckenstock, and Michael Pietsch; *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* 1/4 [2002]); in Brent W. Sockness, "The Forgotten Moralists; Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Science of Spirit," *Harvard Theological Review* 96/3 (2003) 319.
- 12 On the historical aspects to Schleiermacher's ecumenical work, I follow Theodore Vial, *Schleiermacher: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London/New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013) 18-19, 22-23.
- 13 For a selection of Schleiermacher's texts, sermons, and letters pertaining to the church union, see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Friedrich Schleiermacher on Creeds, Confessions and Church Union: That They May Be One* (trans. Iain G. Nicol; Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 24; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 2004).
- 14 Cited in B.A. Gerrish, ch. 1, "Continuity and Change: Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Task of Theology," in *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) 13-48 [here 21 n. 18]. Gerrish is citing Schleiermacher's pamphlet to Ammon in *The Life of Schleiermacher, as Unfolded in his Autobiography and Letters* (trans. Frederica Rowan; 2 vols; London: Smith, Elder, 1860) 2:206-7.
- 15 See endnote 3.
- 16 *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*.
- 17 On Schleiermacher's historical method in dogmatic theology, see my "United and Divided: Luther and Calvin in Modern Protestant Theology," in *Calvin and Luther: The Continuing Relationship* (ed. R. Ward Holder; Refo500 Academic Series 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013) 202-218.
- 18 Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World*, 43.
- 19 Philip Melancthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," Art. VII, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert; trans. Charles Arand et al; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 177, 20.
- 20 On these remarks concerning the history of the term doctrine, specific adjectives attached to the term, and Lindbeck and Marshall's understanding of doctrine, see my *Theology and the End of Doctrine*.
- 21 *Book of Concord*, 432, 11.
- 22 See Brian MacMichael, "The New Translation of the Holy Mass," in *Today's Catholic News* (Jan. 19, 2011); online at [www.todayscatholicnews.org/2011/01/the-new-translation-of-the-holy-mass-8](http://www.todayscatholicnews.org/2011/01/the-new-translation-of-the-holy-mass-8) (accessed Nov. 23, 2014).
- 23 Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (30th ed, trans. Roy J. Deferrari; Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto) 240-43. The names of Popes Hadrian VI and Clement VII, not Leo X, are attached to this document.

- 24 Ibid., 171.
- 25 Schleiermacher rejects the term “systematic theology” in favor of “dogmatic theology” because he thinks that the latter term connotes the historicity of the subject matter. Theology is descriptive, even when it studies the doctrines that are valid in the present context of the church. It remains to be seen whether Schleiermacher’s terms of description preclude normativity, as is often the criticism.
- 26 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field Study [1811/1830]* (trans. Terrence N. Tice; Schleiermacher Studies and Translations 1; Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990) § 195, proposition (p. 97).
- 27 Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Tischreden* (6 vols, ed. K. Drescher et al; Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1912-1921) 1:16, 13.
- 28 *Book of Concord*, 386, 1.
- 29 See my recent article, “The Experience of Justification,” in *Justification in a Post-Christian Society* (ed. Carl-Henric Grenholm and Göran Gunner; Church of Sweden Research Series 8; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014) 36-56.

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## Unity is in the Hands of God (John 17:20-23) Luther Colloquy Sermon, October 29, 2014

*Eero Huovinen*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I greet you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And I also bring with me well wishes to you from Helsinki, where your professor and my dear friend Kirsi Stjerna studied in the 1980’s. We both are yet students of theology, which is an odd vocation.

We all know that the proper way is to preach on the Gospel text for a particular Sunday. Today, however, I took the freedom to choose another Bible passage for us. This week is the classical Reformation week. We Lutherans today are called to meditate on how we, from our side, could do our best for the unity of the church, which we lost 500 years ago. And so I have chosen the famous reading from the Gospel of John.

Jesus said: “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20-23).

In his prayer Jesus prays for the unity of his followers. I am sure that you have heard countless sermons on this prayer, and that you have also meditated about this prayer very often. Wherever we have an ecumenical gathering, these words are always in the center: “that they may be one.”

There are some prayers which are said, and should be said, again and again. Repetition is an essential part of praying. In literature, repetition may be a fault, but in the matters of faith and religion it is a merit. What is in our hearts, is also on our lips. What is important to us, we also often repeat.

So, it is not strange that we again and again repeat the prayer, “that we may be one.” Why is just this prayer so important for us? I have four points.

First, it is the prayer of our Lord and God. God’s Son is praying to God. The purpose of that kind of prayer must be something which is extraordinarily important. Usually praying is something we as human beings are called to do. We pray for others and for ourselves. The congregation prays, the priest prays, a mother prays. But here God himself is praying. Already the fact that the Son is praying to his Father shows that something very important is taking place.

Second, the fact that the Lord himself is praying, shows that unity itself is of primary importance to God. If the unity of Christians and the unity of the Christian Church depended only on our human hands, the future would be most unsure. If the unity of the Church depended only on our prayers, no matter how pious and wise we might be, it would lie on shoulders that are too weak.

When we carry out our responsibility for the future of unity, we have to remember that – ultimately – unity depends on how our Lord, his Father and the Holy Spirit will build the future. We have to do the best that we can, but we have to remember as well that God takes the responsibility of creating unity.

The unity of the Christian Church is not only a question of relationships between human beings or human organizations, not even between the most qualified theologians. On the one hand, we are not allowed to be lazy, and, on the other hand, we have to be aware that everything depends on God. The unity of Christians and the unity of the church is totally in the hands of God.

Jesus may have been aware that unity would not be an easy thing for his disciples. He had already learned how difficult it was for them not to compete or struggle with others. After the death of their Master, the future of his followers would not be unproblematic. That is why Jesus wanted to pray for their unity well in advance. That is why he wanted to commend unity into the hands of his Father.

Third, the prayer of Jesus shows that the unity of the Church belongs to the very core of the Christian faith. Jesus prays that his disciples may be one “as we are one, I in them and you in me.” Unity belongs to the center of our salvation. As Christ dwells in us through faith, and we are one with him, so we are also one with our sisters and brothers. Unity is also one part of the mystery of the unity of God. As the Father is in his Son, so are we in the Son and in the Father.

Unity is not an adiaphoron, upon which we can make a judgment according to our own will. We are not allowed to choose how important unity is, whether we can seek balance between our own profile and unity with others, between our personal opinions and the unity of the Church. It is not possible to believe in God and forget the unity. Unity is a necessity of the Christian faith.

Fourth, the prayer of Jesus is for us not only a challenge or an admonition, but lastly a consoling sign and an encouraging message. The words of Jesus are not only a command. Lastly and primarily they are words of a promise, words of a Gospel, which gives and donates the future.

We can all remember and put our trust in the fact that unity is in the hands of our Lord. Despite all of many our faults and mistakes, we do not have to be pessimistic. Jesus Christ does not only pray for unity, but he and his Father will also create and mold the unity. So, let’s be optimistic and put our faith in Christ. Amen.

*Eero Huovinen was Bishop of Helsinki, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) from 1991-2010. He holds a Master of Theology, Licentiate of Theology, and Doctor of Theology from the University of Helsinki. Prior to his election as bishop, he was Professor of Dogmatics and Dean of the Faculty at the University of Helsinki. Since 2008 he has served as co-chair of the international Lutheran - Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. Among his many other responsibilities, he has been Moderator of the Doctrinal Commission of the ELCF General Synod, a member of the ELCF Church Council for International Relations, a member of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation, and Vice-President of the Lutheran World Federation.*

## BOOK REVIEW

### Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War

*Michael C. C. Adams (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014)*

*Reviewed by Leonard Hummel*

Much recent scholarship about the American Civil War has highlighted the harsh or tragic features of that conflict and its aftermath. For example, throughout his work, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (New York, Viking Press, 2006) Harry S. Stout laments that the widespread endorsement by both Northern and Southern religious leaders for their sectional causes contributed to unjust warfare. Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), has detailed how the war's production of death overwhelmed the living in many ways. The works of a new crop of researchers has uncovered how the difficulties endured by Civil War veterans encompassed even more than their disabling war wounds and displacement (e.g. James Marten, *Sing Not War: The Lives of Union and Confederate Veterans in Gilded Age America*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: UNC Press, 2011). David Goldfield has argued that insult was added to these injuries by the war's failure to engender a new birth of freedom (*America Aflame: How the Civil War Created a Nation*. London, England, Bloomsbury Press., 2010) – while David Blight contends that reconciliation between North and South came at the costs of both forgetting the origin of this conflict in slavery and, consequently, denying civil rights to those set free from it (*Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

In his recent work, *Living Hell: The Dark Side of the Civil War*, Michael C. C. Adams, Regents Professor of History Emeritus, Northern Kentucky

University covers these topics and many others as his book

paints a graphic picture of the dark side of the Civil War, its pain, its heartbreak and tragedy. It describes the vicious nature of combat, the terrible infliction of physical and mental wounds, the misery of soldier living among corpses, filth and flies. It also concerns the many civilians who endured loss, deprivation, and violations. (1)

Portions of its text include accounts of close order combat whose presentation employs John Keegan's phenomenological method of describing warfare – and, in a manner that, in graphically portraying the horror that was the Civil War, calls to this reviewer's mind the writings of Ambrose Bierce.

Living Hell is a very lucid text by senior American Civil War historian who can look back on not only this war but also on its vast literature in order to highlight that which remains dark and disturbing. His work is a very readable reminder about the hardship and suffering involved in such conflict – and of the many kinds of costs borne both by those directly involved in that conflict and also by all.

*Leonard Hummel is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Care, and Director of Clinical Pastoral Education at Gettysburg Seminary. His book *Clothed in Nothingness: Consolation for Suffering* tells the story of seven individuals whose faith helped them in coping with suffering. His A.B. is from Haverford College, his M.Div. and S.T.M. are from Yale Divinity School, his Ph.D. is from Boston University. Along with Gerald Christianson and Barbara Franco, he is the editor of *Increased Devotion: The Quest for Religious Meanings of Gettysburg*, forthcoming from Seminary Ridge Press.*

## POETRY + THEOLOGY

## Poetry, Preaching and Pickleball

*Katy Giebenhain*

In the mid 1960's, on Bainbridge Island, Washington, a new racquet game was invented to be both "challenging and accessible." Born of a father's promise to his bored kids and a mother's rowing reference – the Pickle Boat<sup>1</sup> – pickleball is a kind of cousin to tennis. It's the fun, kind, not-snotty cousin. The one you love to visit. A smaller court, the use of paddles instead of rackets, the no-volley zone (slang: "the kitchen") and, above all, the underhand serve make it approachable. Pickleball rises to many skill levels, which makes it rather Shakespearean. The fact that it is easy to learn does not mean it is simply easy. You have doubts? Go up against someone who is serious and experienced and you will have your ass handed to you.

### *The Brilliance of the Underhand Serve*

Have you ever been in a worship service where the sermon opening felt like a tennis serve to annihilate everyone in the pews? The fastest recorded tennis serve was hit by Sam Groth at the 2012 Busan Open Challenger in South Korea, at 163.4 mph.<sup>2</sup> That kind of opening. Have you ever been to a poetry reading where the feature began the same way? As if the opening was intended to crush you and score rather than begin a game? How do we serve from the pulpit? From the lectern?

This isn't about delivery, it is about writing. Delivery can only put spin or speed on what is already there. What this choice of an underhand serve in pickleball shares with sermon-writing and poetry-writing is the acknowledgement of others. Someone is listening to you or playing with you. Someone receives what you serve. Let your ideas and comparisons come through in a wild, skillfully-satisfying volley. Start strong, but not with intent to destroy, or to show off. Accessibility is good if you want to be understood.

Pickleball is now played in all 50 states and it has hopped the oceans. There is, in fact, a World Pickleball Federation. From outdoor courts in Arizona retirement communities to school and Y gymnasiums and private backyards, pickleball is played from beginner- to tournament-levels. It does not look or sound impressive, this “folk” game, but the word “addictive” comes up frequently when pickleball players describe it.

Recently I was in a metal pole barn tucked into the filbert orchards and vineyards of northwest Oregon. I walked past parked tractors, a bulletin board displaying rules for the game, and an old refrigerator packed with cold drinks onto a court where pickleball has been played for thirty years. It is a congregation of sorts. Like First Friday readers gathering for their five minutes of open mic time in small-town coffee houses and in big-city basement bars, and the way people in churches and synagogues and other sacred spaces gather to deepen their knowledge, and to be refreshed and surprised by others’ perspectives, these players meet. We’d be wise not to underestimate this. The liturgy of the underhand serve is practiced in places where content matters, where something is worth saying. It is practiced where community matters. It is practiced where striving to be both challenging *and* accessible matters. That’s how we get hooked.

The work of the author of *Playing God: Poems about Medicine* has me hooked right now. Glenn Colquhoun is a great poet for seminarians. He’s a pickleball kind of poet because he’s extremely able, but he doesn’t kill us with 163.4 mph serves. And how lucky we are, because we get to read his funny, raw, fearlessly-curious and inventive poems. Whether the topic is race, or national identity or portraits of neighbors or the impossibly tricky rhythm of a doctor’s day there is a strong sense of him thinking of the listener, of the reader, and there is a sense that it matters to him. Colquhoun is a doctor and poet living in a small town in New Zealand. He studied medicine, creative writing and a couple of years of theology and lived for a year with a Maori community.

### The Heart Attack

The heart is not attacked  
by red Indians clinging underneath  
the bellies of their ponies.

The heart is not attacked by  
kamikaze flying their exploding planes  
onto its burning decks.

The heart is not infiltrated by secret agents  
crawling through their air conditioning  
into its secret chambers.

The heart is not broken  
by the slippery hands of love.

The heart is not squeezed like  
ripe lemons into a clean glass.

The heart is not beaten by  
the arrangements of its soft belly  
around a hard fist like a glove.

The heart is not stabbed by bayonets  
or chainsaws or carefully sharpened kitchen knives  
slipping their cold steel cleanly between its ribs.

The heart stops simply like a blocked toilet

While someone unsuspecting is opening the  
newspaper or reading poetry or staring quietly at  
the pictures in the calendar on the back of the door.

Sunday seems a good day for fishing.

A pair of trousers fall against the floor.<sup>3</sup>

Whether writing about his father’s slow deterioration from Parkinson’s Disease, or spells like “A Haka to be Used When Reversing the Effects of a General Anaesthetic” or the lives of aunties, or the taste of kumara, or words as tools (he has a series of fabulous construction metaphors), or overconfidence or doubt, or faith, Glenn Colquhoun calls things out – things we resist – but are then grateful to have named in interesting succinct ways (as the best sermons do). Keep him on your radar. Visit Hammersmith Press at [www.hammersmithpress.co.uk](http://www.hammersmithpress.co.uk) and Steele Roberts Ltd. at [www.SteeleRoberts.co.nz](http://www.SteeleRoberts.co.nz). Start with *Playing God: Poems about Medicine* and go from there to *The Art of Walking Upright* or *An Explanation of Poetry to my Father*, or one of his other books.

## Notes

- 1 Joan Pritchard, "Pickle Ball featured on Morning show," News and Sentinel, <http://www.newsandsentinel.com/page/content.detail/id/507610/Pickle-Ball-featured-on-Morning-show.html>. For more information about Pickleball, visit the USA Pickleball Association website: <http://www.usapa.org/what-is-pickleball>.
- 2 Katherine Harmon, "What's the World's Fastest Tennis Serve?" Live Science, January 28, 2013, <http://www.livescience.com/34401-worlds-fastest-tennis-serve.html>.
- 3 "The Heart Attack" is reprinted with the permission of Hamersmith Press, Ltd. from Glenn Colquhoun's *Playing God: Poems about Medicine* (London: Hamersmith Press, Ltd., 2007), 50.

## We Welcome our Poets

This issue includes poems by Robert Randolph (Pennsylvania), Aaron Smith (Massachusetts), Bonnie Naradzay (Maryland), Suzanne Cleary (New York), Yehoshua November (New Jersey), Jay Rogoff (New York), Will Lane (Pennsylvania), D.S. Martin (Canada) and Marjorie Maddox (Pennsylvania). Book recommendations are for *Psalms for Skeptics* by Kent Gramm, *Venera* by Jay Rogoff and *I Heard God Talking to Me* by Elizabeth Spires.

## Book Recommendations

### *Psalms for Skeptics*

In his new collection of sonnets responding to the psalms, Kent Gramm voices our own skepticism – often better than we can ourselves. *Psalms for Skeptics* could also be called *Psalms for Mortals*. The book is not one of shallow critique or drama. It is full of natural, grounded responses to familiar fragments from the psalms. Gramm is no Old Testament cheerleader. He is a healthily-skeptical responder and a nuanced questioner. His writing manages to be both sharp and restrained. No easy feat. And this book is a full meal: 167 pages of sonnets, and each of them expertly prepared.

This is the stuff of everyday, from the way "murmuring in tents" hasn't changed in thousands of years to desire, trust, doubt, waiting, heart attacks, handguns, cars "...then John's / God – Word made car, full of race and youth, big V-8" (36)

A rhythm, back-and-forth between the excerpted psalm texts and Gramm's poems keeps us from sticking in the present day. We keep going back to the psalms themselves. The sonnet form feels intuitively right for these mullings. Here's the opening of "Psalm 139"

*O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me*

A cat regards me as I write: all black,  
her eyes pale green as the eyes of a poet  
on another planet. She sits, stays back  
a careful ell; she is wild and homeless  
as the Son of Man. Her lids droop, dismissive,  
bored, but the body's gathered on a dime (124)

A writer, teacher and historian you may not know that Gramm also has an M.Div. It is evident here. When visiting the Gettysburg Battlefield tourists can hire a Licensed Guide for a car tour. He or she gets in your car and off you go for a personalized tour of part of the National Park. Reading *Psalms for Skeptics* is a bit like handing over the keys to Gramm and sitting back for an after-hours tour, the kind a licensed guide would give to a friend or colleague which veers off-script and into even more interesting bits, but where you know that he has the training and understanding to bring you back to the record at any time. This is a good one for any preacher's library. *Psalms for Skeptics* is published by Resource Publications, an imprint of Wipf & Stock. Visit [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com).



### *I Heard God Talking to Me*

The first black artist to have a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (in the fall of 1937) was the son of former slaves, working with chunks of limestone in his yard in Nashville, Tennessee. William Edmondson followed “the vocation of stone cutting.” He made tombstones, garden ornaments, figures and animals. *I Heard God Talking to Me* came out in 2009. Poet Elizabeth Spires wrote a series of poems in response to some of his work. The book includes photographs and a few found poems which Spires shaped from Edmondson’s own words. The figures speak, addressing the artist, their creator. The poems are not simply descriptions of the sculptures. This point of view can be helpful when looking at scripture and trying to come at something familiar in a different way. Read it when the sermon draft you’re working on sounds stale. Change the voice. Change the perspective. Spires’ poem “Eleanor Roosevelt” is a good example. The Roosevelts visited Nashville in 1934. There was a parade. The sculpture addresses the artist “Do you know what I remember best about that day? / The Jubilee Singers at Fisk, in black-and-white regalia, / singing ‘Hand Me Down My Silver Trumpet, Gabriel.” (19)

In “Adam and Eve,” Spires shares the scene of the artist’s yard and shed when they were still intact as an imperfect place of welcome with Will Edmondson surrounded by the sculptures. “There are different kinds of Eden.” (11) The character of the writing feels very in tune with the character of the stylized figures. The second stanza of “Angel with a Pocketbook” opens

As you can see, I’m not the airy, wings-aflutter sort.  
I’m a two-feet-on-the-ground, no-nonsense type  
who can’t carry a tune for trying, and heights,  
even a choir loft, make me dizzy. (41)

In “Wisdom” Edmondson’s words tell the whole story of gifts, his and ours: “It’s wonderful when God / gives you something. / You’ve got it for good, / and yet you ain’t got it. / You got to do it and work for it.” (47) Elizabeth Spires is Professor of English, Chair for Distinguished Achievement and Codirector of the Kratz Center for Creative Writing at Goucher College. Frances Foster Books is an imprint of Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Visit <http://us.macmillan.com/fsg>.

### *Venera*

Like the restoration that the 15<sup>th</sup> century Ghent Altarpiece “Adoration of the Mystic Lamb” is now undergoing (panel by panel with the rest remaining on view) Jay Rogoff’s latest collection is one of keen examination.

*Venera* includes what can be called 21<sup>st</sup>-century love poems. Their content is not all about the Ghent Altarpiece, but they function like its panels in the way that they are side-by-side yet focused individually on aspects of “The Reader,” “The Mother,” “The Whore,” “The Daughter,” “The Queen,” “The House,” “The Mirror,” etc. Each poem combines realism and imagination. The painting “The Reader” responds to the detail from “The Virgin Enthroned,” one of the central panels of Jan van Eyck’s Altarpiece, which is on the book’s cover.

She happens to turn, happens as she turns  
the page an old hand happens to have written,  
her index finger marking what must happen.  
Lips parted – changing or astonished – she  
happens to read the one book whose one story  
chances inevitably to be hers. (45)

*Venera* is full of voluptuous language and images. How do we see? What do we see? What do we wish we could see? To call attention to the saturated color and rendering of the Virgin Enthroned may sound distracting, but this cover image is connected to the poems inside. Restoring the Altarpiece panels includes, among other analysis, taking x-rays to reveal the developing composition under the surface of the paint. Rogoff’s poems are x-rays of sorts.

This is also a book which looks at relationships inside and outside of families as in “A Son for my Ex” or “Kindergarten Heart” or “Redemption Center.” In the sequence “Laughter,” there is a Giorio Visari epigraph describing a competition to find the best craftsmen in Italy. The subject chosen was Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac, as it was thought to “... test the competitors in all the problems of their craft...” (39) In these seven sonnets we are compelled to think of sacrifice and the physicality of bodies and decision-making and what this looks and feels like from the inside. We are reminded of any artist’s power to steer and revise and suggest. Rogoff also keeps us circling back, slyly, to the book and the girl and all that either of them might mean. Visit Louisiana State University Press at <http://lsupress.org/>.

## Glory

*Suzanne Cleary*

My husband and his first wife once sang Handel's *Messiah*  
at Carnegie Hall, with 800 others who also had read  
the ad for the sing-along, and this is why I know  
the word *glory* is not sung by the chorus,  
although that is what we hear.  
In fact, the choir sings *glaw-dee, glaw-dee*  
while it seems that glory unfurls there, like glory itself.  
My husband sings for me. My husband tells me they practiced  
for an hour, led by a short man with glasses,  
a man who made them sing *glory* twice, so they could hear it  
fold back upon itself, swallow itself  
in so many mouths, in the grand hall.  
Then he taught them *glaw-dee*, a distortion that creates the right  
effect, like Michelangelo distorting the arms of both God and Adam  
so their fingertips can touch.  
My husband and his first wife and 800 others performed  
at 5' o'clock, the Saturday before Christmas,  
for a small audience of their own heavy coats,  
for a few ushers arrived early, leaning on lobby doors.  
but mostly they sang for themselves,  
for it is a joy to feel song made of the body's hollows.  
I do not know if their marriage, this day, was still good  
or weather it seemed again good  
as they sang. I prefer to think of the choral conductor,  
who sang with them. He sang all the parts, for love  
not glory, or what seemed to be  
glory to those who wandered in  
and stood at the back of the hall, and listened.

*"Glory" is reprinted with permission of the author from Keeping Time (2002) Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press. Suzanne Cleary won the John Ciardi Prize for Poetry for her third book, Beauty Mark, published by BkMk Press in 2013. Her other prizes include a Pushcart Prize. She is Professor of English at the State University of New York at Rockland, and also teaches as core faculty in the low-residency M.F.A. in Creative Writing Program of Converse College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Visit [www.newletters.org/](http://www.newletters.org/).*

## My Lord, You

*Robert Randolph*

Fifty years ago the moon  
hung in its jar of light  
and I loved You.

I walked out in a field, leaving tracks in the snow,  
to be more in love.

I stopped and closed my eyes  
to hear the fragile wind.

I thought I stood on a huge glass window  
one inch above the snow.

\*

But today a dark, cold rain falls.

I walk along a canal  
trying to name everything, each cloud, the wind.  
I give up.

It starts snowing.  
I pray; it feels like my bones get pure  
and light.

There are stop lights as deep as the red sea.

I sit by a café window  
as if waiting for a messenger.

\*

I go into rooms, look out windows.  
I sit in my kitchen and listen to the radio.

Part of me feels swindled.

Part of me feels like an exhaust pipe wearing clothes.

Part of me wants to hear You say,  
 “I’ve been trying constantly, my beloved,  
 and just could not get through to you  
 all these years.”

\*

Even so, the bread is good.  
 I am ok, and even when the sky is gray  
 the trees push up and down,

and even if I thought You did speak,  
 it would probably be only the snow blanketing the city,  
 for reasons of its own.

\*

Sometimes I stand in my kitchen looking out,  
 up against the coastline of the moon,  
 like a river turning

like one swan  
 across open water: alone.

I sit on the balcony  
 on a wooden chair, watching tall buildings darken  
 after sunset.

\*

Driving through snow,  
 I find myself outside the window.  
 How would anyone find me, out there  
 so alone in the ordinary?

I am an echo  
 in the silence of the mirror.

My white hair is whiter than my father’s.

\*

And there are excellent mornings,  
 the first cup of coffee  
 the waiter brings,

the overheard café talk  
 between friends planning the day.

And some afternoons  
 the rain falls straight from heaven,  
 dimpling the park pond  
 with rings.

\*

Something like a river of moonlight  
 flows through me,  
 like an etude.

I hope if my heart were a boat,  
 it would be a gondola.

That is my one hope, today.

\*

There was an old wood desk in my parents’ house.  
 I remember the single drawer,  
 opening it to find stationery and pens,  
 and trying to write a poem  
 in the lamp light.

I looked outside.  
 It had stopped snowing  
 and the moon shone through;

I believed that was You,  
 calling.

*Robert Randolph is pastor of a small Presbyterian church on the banks of the Monongahela River in Southwest Pennsylvania. He is a professor in the English and Foreign Languages Department at Waynesburg University. Randolph taught as a Fulbright Scholar in Finland and Greece. He holds a B.A. from Wilmington College, an M.A. from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Southern Illinois University. He is the author of two books of poetry, R. Cory in Winter and Floating Girl (Angel of War). His writing has appeared in many journals including Poetry, The Georgia Review, Mid-American Review, The Midwest Quarterly, The Journal of Process Studies, and Modern Fiction Studies. Visit <http://elixirpress.com/floating-girl-angel-of-war/>.*

## Confession

*Marjorie Maddox*

	Same lazy list of nothing
bold.	No sins
killed:	impatience,
lies, anger	still
kicking, still	karate-
chopping	seconds,
milliseconds	even;
unflashy, bland sins	defiant, standing
up to leave	but never leaving
entirely,	stomach-punched
by the priest,	then blood-flushed
from God's	eye but still
in mine,	those splintered
irritants,	such strong
tiny	crosses
	right in the retina.

*Marjorie Maddox is Director of Creative Writing and Professor of English at Lock Haven University where she was 2012 Honors Professor of the Year. She has published nine collections of poetry, including Local News from Someplace Else and Weeknights at the Cathedral and over 450 poems, stories, and essays in journals and anthologies. Co-editor of Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania, Maddox has two children's books published from Boyds Mills Press and eight forthcoming from Schoolwide, Inc. Her M.F.A. in poetry is from Cornell University. Her honors include Cornell University's Chasen Award, an Academy of American Poets Prize and a Bread Loaf Scholarship. Visit [www.marjoriemaddox.com](http://www.marjoriemaddox.com).*

## Teacher

*Yehoshua November*

In Kindergarten, I drew a picture of a king  
on the chalkboard.  
“Who’s that?” my teacher asked.  
When I told the large woman it was God,  
she scolded me.  
And her robust arm stretched out  
to erase the forbidden image with deliberate strokes:  
The crown...The crooked smile...The shirt’s circle buttons.  
And since then God has been an abstraction.  
And many more teachers have followed to make Judaism  
less and less real from me  
except one.

## Late Summer Afternoon in the Student Union

*He renews, in His goodness, each day, always, the work of creation.*  
—from Morning Prayers

The moment’s physicality.  
The cinderblock walls and wooden tables,  
the humming soda machine,  
the steel newspaper dispenser, the mailman  
dozing on a cushioned chair. I don’t long  
for spiritual revelation – the great light  
that rinses these away, that reinforces the weightless truth  
the universe does not exist. But who says  
the world’s supposed to be here – the cinderblocks  
and the sunlight, the flowing fountain  
where summer students have congregated  
in white clothing? Every second,  
the mystics claim, the world is recreated.  
And because its materials have materialized  
out of thin air  
and its true state, therefore, is nonexistence,  
the soda machine – like all things in creation –  
must become itself again  
at each instance.  
Over and over again,  
the One with no shape and no form thrusts  
the machine’s heavy body  
out of the void. Like a mover  
who keeps returning to lift the same box  
he has already loaded.

## A Psalm from the Night College

A Psalm. For the Choirmaster.  
 From a basement library in Brooklyn,  
 an hour's snowy drive from home.  
 There is no silent place when you are poor. No  
 sleep when you have children.  
 No time for poetry for a Chassidic man.  
 And sometimes twenty-five faces look up at you in a classroom,  
 and you have nothing to say.  
 And isn't life one long day  
 you were never prepared for?

*Yehoshua November is the author of God's Optimism, which won the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award and was named a finalist for the 2010 L.A. Times Book Prize in Poetry, Autumn House Poetry Prize, and Tampa Review Prize for Poetry. His work has appeared in The Sun Magazine, Virginia Quarterly Review, Prairie Schooner and other journals and on NPR's The Writer's Almanac. The winner of the Bernice Slose Award and the London School of Jewish Studies Poetry Contest, November teaches writing at Rutgers University and Touro College. He lives in New Jersey.*

## Still

*Will Lane*

Drinking bourbon,  
 talking Buddha,  
 creates two minds,  
 two crows on a winter wire,  
 complaining.

To be the mad monk  
 of your own busted woods,  
 you must listen  
 differently  
 as wind rises in the cedars.

Let your idea of God  
 grind and whine  
 like the highway  
 behind the hill.

Like a boulder  
 dropped long ago  
 in a meadow  
 by receding ice,

be still.

*Will Lane teaches in the English Department at Gettysburg College. His B.A. is from Gettysburg College in classical Greek, his M.A. is from the Graduate Institute at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland. His poetry books include In the Barn of the God and Elegy for Virginia Redding from Mad River Press. Moonlight Standing in for Cordelia was publishing by Hanging Loose Press. A fourth book, Trust Rust, is forthcoming this spring. His poem "In the Barn of the God," part of a series of poems retelling the myth of Eros and Psyche, received the Hart Crane Poetry Award in 1998. He is also a community activist and a carpenter.*

## Homosexuality

*Aaron Smith*

In front of the congregation  
 the preacher asked *do you believe in your heart*,  
 and I did, but I didn't  
 understand why Christ had to die  
 though they'd explained it to me so many times  
 they were angry. *We are born in sin...*  
 After church I climbed the hickory tree  
 and held my breath as the yellow plane  
 flew, surprisingly close,  
 over. That summer the hillside

smelled of smoke, and I sat by the above-ground pool  
 and cried. The sky was the only grace I could see: blue  
 and permanently changing.

## Evangelical

*We should invite him to swim*, mom says,  
*but stay outside, so I won't have to feed him.*

Tony keeps his glasses on even in the pool  
 and his swim trunks are the shorts  
 he wears to school.

*His father went to hell,*  
*be nice to him, talk to him*  
*about the Lord.*

His goofy laugh embarrasses me,  
 the way he lets everyone see him happy.  
 He doesn't have a towel  
 and hogs the inner tube.

I hate the hair under his arms.  
 I hate when he splashes me in the face.

*Aaron Smith is the author of two collections of poetry, both published by the Pitt Poetry Series: Appetite, finalist for the Paterson Poetry Prize, the Lambda Literary Award, and the Thom Gunn Award, and Blue on Blue Ground, winner of the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize. His work has appeared in numerous publications including Ploughshares and The Best American Poetry 2013. He is assistant professor in creative writing at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Visit the University of Pittsburgh Press at [www.upress.pitt.edu/](http://www.upress.pitt.edu/).*

## Panis Angelicus

*Bonnie Naradzay*

I saw the finger dripping soot, and felt  
the touch, but could not see what others saw  
in me. Behind the altar at Holy Rosary,  
pastel angels, glowing in halations,  
looked at me: a sinner kneeling in their pews.  
It's Lent, the place where we left off. Stations  
of the Cross, and grief for what's been lost

and so I pondered what to do to make it  
meaningful. Perhaps re-join a choir. Or  
seek to make amends to you, my son.  
At Madonna House on Capitol Hill,  
I learned to decorate pysanky eggs  
(just empty shells, already hollowed out)  
then prayed incessantly that I might hear

from you. Melted beeswax over flames.  
Confession? Where to start? I meant to go.  
Bewildered by the unfamiliar liturgy  
I sang the mass parts in our choir loft.  
Hearing about the Prodigal Son, I thought  
of Rembrandt's work, the feast inside the door.  
Lent could be perpetual for me,

a chronic state, like being underwater,  
suspended, trying not to breathe until  
feeling buoyed up when Triduum  
arrives, and when I hear from you.  
Once more I trudge (no, run – it's late) uphill  
to the lay apostolate, passing sentries  
on the way, desperate to taste a crumb

of symbolism (hot cross buns) after  
chanting psalms in halting antiphons.  
At last the dreadful re-enactment came,  
rehearsed with incense, accusations:  
it descended during fierce winds and snow.  
A woman I know says she *has* a son  
even though he fell to his death (with a branch

in his hand) years ago in Rome. About you,  
I lie, say "Portland" when friends ask where  
you are, and, "He's doing well." Oh, I wasted  
Lent, the whole time, spent it like a prodigal,  
my loss too great to be absorbed, distracted by  
the off-key choir's strangely jarring tunes,  
translations that confused me. The empty tomb.



## Sea Glass

Think of blue green algae in the leaf-dark pool,  
or milk-white pebbles gathered by a thirsty crow.  
Green like muscat grapes – or eucalyptus trees.  
Sulphurous skies. Last night's chives. A plume  
of phosphorus, and molten threads of a filtered  
golden afternoon. Baltic amber washed ashore.

Think of yellowed insects trapped in pinesap,  
rosin for the bow, and sundials of bronze. Blue  
curve of Murano quartz. Pearls, eyes: cracked,  
scattered, cauterized – or Cape May diamonds  
from sunset tides. Honeyed throat drops, or souls  
freed of earthly bodies, waiting in a field of stars.

*Bonnie Naradzay holds an M.A. in English from Harvard University and an M.F.A. in poetry from the Stonecoast program at University of Southern Maine. Her poems have appeared in JAMA, Atlanta Review, SLAB, Heartland Review, Delmarva Review, Pinch, Two Review, Innisfree, Convergence, Salt River Review, The Guardian, Anderbo.com, Beltway Quarterly, and New Verse News. Naradzay was awarded a scholarship to attend Squaw Valley Community of Writers in 2011 and she was the winner of the 2010 Poetry Prize, New Orleans M.F.A. Program.*

## Glosselle: William Blake

*(“Auguries of Innocence”)*

*D.S. Martin*

*To see a world in a grain of sand  
though galaxies fall through our fingers  
to find in a name a strong tower  
& a heaven in a wild flower*

*Though galaxies fall through our fingers  
secure in the hands of God  
though you lose grip on all you've planned  
hold infinity in the palm of your hand*

*Secure in the hands of God  
a home where my heart lingers  
to find in a name a strong tower  
& eternity in an hour*

*D.S. Martin's poetry has appeared in Canadian Literature, Christianity & Literature, The Cresset, Dalhousie Review, Sojourners and elsewhere. His books include a chapbook, So The Moon Would Not Be Swallowed and the full-length collections Poiema, and Conspiracy of Light: Poems Inspired by the Legacy of C.S. Lewis. Martin lives in Ontario, Canada and blogs at: [www.dsmartin.ca](http://www.dsmartin.ca). He is the Series Editor for the Poiema Poetry Series from Cascade Books. Visit <http://wipfandstock.com/imprint/cascade-3>.*

# Tempera

*Jay Rogoff*

Explosions bloomed everywhere after  
the autumn fireball, the skyscraper  
unzipping. Forsythia flamed  
through the neighbors' fence and consumed  
the pickets. This morning, the egg  
I dropped stared sullenly back,  
its primordial tempera  
smashed to raw glue on the ground,  
the yolk that could feed and fix the world,  
that medium for Gentile's  
and Simone's miracles,  
the Magi with their camels, Mary  
who with just an egg made history.

*Jay Rogoff has published five books of poems, most recently Venera. "Tempera" is reprinted with permission of Louisiana State University Press from The Long Fault (2008). A pushcart prize-winner, his poems and critical prose appear in journals such as Southern Review, Poetry London, Chelsea, Western Humanities Review, Hotel Amerika, Agni and Manōa. He is the dance critic for The Hopkins Review. Rogoff teaches at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Visit [www.lsupress.org](http://www.lsupress.org).*

## GETTYSBURG SEMINARY FINE ARTS

### Ex Cathedra: Taking a Seat

*John Spangler*

The recent cleaning and protective treatment of the Hans Schuler sculpture<sup>1</sup> of the sitting Martin Luther on the Gettysburg Seminary campus brings to mind the role of public art. Specifically, we look at two chair sculptures, one in Washington, D.C. and the other in Geneva, Switzerland.

The American chair, for a time the largest in the world, was originally constructed in 1959, placed at what is now Martin Luther King Ave and V Street, S.E. in Anacostia. It was created to draw attention to the manufacture of chairs on the location, as an advertisement, by the Bassett Furniture Company. The original was made of Honduran Mahogany as a 20 foot detailed replica of a Duncan Phyfe style chair. The wood failed and was replaced by an aluminum version in 2006, drawing public attention to it once again. According to D.C. residents, it has made a name for itself as a landmark, a directional aid, and survived the Washington 1968 riots unscathed, demonstrating its cherished value by a wide swath of the public.

Eclipsing the Anacostia chair is the installation of Handicap International Suisse's "Broken Chair" by Swiss artist Daniel Berset in Palais de Nations (Palace of the Nations), at the Geneva based United Nations European headquarters. Consisting of several tons of wood, the Broken Chair was installed in August of 1997 to spotlight the need for the signing of a treaty (Ottawa Treaty in October of 1997) banning the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel land mines. A disappointing 40 nations signed on at the time, and so the chair remained. State representatives had to walk past this 39 foot high representation of the indiscriminate destructive power of landmines. Today 162 parties are signatories to the treaty, and the United States, Russia, and China are not among them.<sup>2</sup>

It was the failure of high profile nations to sign the treaty that kept the chair in place initially, serving as a "great reminder" of the dangerous



The Martin Luther statue by Hans Schuler on the Gettysburg Seminary campus next to the Church of the Abiding Presence.

consequences of using landmines, long after the field of battle has been abandoned. In the early years of the new century, the Geneva public debated whether the “Broken Chair” had run its course as plans geared up to renovate Palais de Nations. Now belonging to Handicap International, the 5.5 ton chair was removed in 2006 for the refurbishing work, and reinstalled in 2007, re-dedicated to Norway’s initiative to ban the use of another form of violent weapon (cluster bombs) emerging in Africa and the Middle East.



“The American Chair” in Washington, D.C.’s Anacostia neighborhood.

This Broken Chair project was the brain child of Paul Vermeulen who after working with doctors without borders, co-founded Handicap International. He is a believer in the chair’s role as a great reminder to nearly everyone who enters the UN facility. Blogger D-L Nelson described his vision poignantly, “Vermeulen did not want a stone statue because human



“Broken Chair” by Daniel Berset, Palais de Nations, Geneva, Switzerland. Photo: Marta Erling Spangler.



Detail of “Broken Chair.” Photo: Marta Erling Spangler.

bodies are not hard or eternal like stone. He felt that wood was organic as is human flesh and bone, and thus vulnerable. Yet the chair, like so many land mine victims, stands firmly, almost defiantly against its handicap.” In her blog entry, Nelson quotes Vermeulen about the importance in having the “support of civil societies because governments alone won’t do it,” and offers up her own thought that it would be a cause to celebrate the chair’s removal should its cause become obsolete.

The “Broken Chair” is still at it. According to an essay by D-L Nelson, 85% of the world’s land mine casualties come from three nations: Afghanistan, Angola and Cambodia. The author also shared additional UN estimates from *Landmine Monitor of what remains hidden*: “some 37 million mines hidden in 19 African countries just waiting for someone to step on them or unearth them with a plough. In Angola alone, there are 70,000 victims. Eight thousand are children. Each year between 15,000 and 20,000 new land mine casualties occur.”<sup>3</sup> And so the work of the chair continues.

Literary critic Stanley Fish once argued creatively that a poem, or a text “is what it does.”<sup>4</sup> And this critical observation can be extended to the broken chair and other public works of art. What it means depends quite a lot upon what it does. One chair is famous for its size and exact ability to replicate faithfully if not exactly, an early American/European style of a dining room table chair. The other is known, not for its style, but for what is missing. The broken chair’s fragmented appearance, combined with its aggressive size, pushes its way into the consciousness of every person who makes their way past it. Playing “great reminder” is not always viewed as a positive, pleasant role. Great reminders can recall duty, the need for sacrifice, or the burden of doing the right things. But this chair is a truth teller, making visible for a diplomatic class, the global travelers, those bearing testimony to the world to the consequences of landmines and cluster bombs long after the cameras and satellite phones have left the arena. The Broken Chair is a teller of truths otherwise left hidden.

Two outsized objects, one aimed at drawing attention to the manufacturing of an American chair, an investment in the community, carrying the affection and protection from harm even in times of violent and indiscriminant protest. It possesses the creativity of clever advertising, creating a metaphor as it gives us a new way to look at an object we use (and probably take for granted) every day.

And the other, depicting a terrible brokenness, a wound in wood, a visual testament to the result of landmines and bombs that kill and maim long after the conflict is over. It is what it does: reminds, brings discomfort, calls to enlist in the war against war, and dominates its landscape, pushing its way into our consciousness.

Some Genevans complained about the chair and critics proclaimed that its work was finished, when the Ottawa Treaty was signed, and then again when the Handicap International group shared in the Nobel Peace Prize, and then again after the Conference on Cluster Munitions resulted in a signing event in Oslo in 2008. And so the chair, now owned by Handicap International, still stands.

Back to our sitting Reformer, I think again about the fact that he sits on Seminary Ridge after having made a name for himself by ‘taking a stand.’ Now that we are working to preserve this substantial work of art on the seminary campus, 68 years after he first took his seat next to the chapel, I wonder what it is that people will see in him? What is he expecting of us, nearly half a millennium after the actions he took causing the historical and religious storm of the 16<sup>th</sup> century? If his raised finger is to query us, what is he asking us, as we walk or drive or bicycle before him? Will we get the point he is making, finger directed half to heaven, half to listening

students? What will generations of students and alumni/ae and thousands of visitors to the Ridge see in him? Will they notice the indulgence jammed under Martin’s right foot? Will they see him at all? And which scripture is he pointing to on his bible? I still imagine that it is the Roman’s passage, in which the truth is the thing that sets us free. And our great reminder, brother Martin, tells me that the gospel is still about freedom from the ever renewing ways that we experience bondage to sin and death.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For more information about the Luther statue on the Gettysburg Seminary campus, see [www.ltsg.edu/about-us/information-history/architecture/luther-statue](http://www.ltsg.edu/about-us/information-history/architecture/luther-statue).
- <sup>2</sup> Treaty status, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines: [www.icbl.org/en-gb/the-treaty/treaty-status.aspx](http://www.icbl.org/en-gb/the-treaty/treaty-status.aspx), accessed March 2015.
- <sup>3</sup> D-L Nelson, “A Chair Can Be A Powerful Symbol,” The WIP Internet News Service, May 16, 2007, <http://thewip.net/2007/05/16/a-chair-can-be-a-powerful-symbol/>.
- <sup>4</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). See also Fish’s *Self Consuming Artifacts*, University of California Press, 1972.



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