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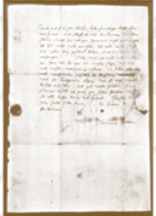

Lutheran Ethics at the Intersections of God's One World

The Lutheran World Federation
A Communion of Churches

Lutheran Ethics at the Intersections of God's One World

LWF Studies, 2005

December 2005

edited by
Karen L. Bloomquist

on behalf of

The Lutheran World Federation
Department for Theology and Studies

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“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Romans 12:1-5).

Members of the LWF study team writing "Ethics at the Intersections of God's One World," during their final meeting in Cape Town, South Africa. © LWF

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Introduction

Karen L. Bloomquist

- A Nordic woman is shocked that African church leaders are not speaking out more strongly against violence perpetrated against girls and women in the name of "culture."

- An indigenous farmer is stunned that Christians in another part of the world are not as strongly opposed to genetically modified seeds as he and his community are.

- An American man is surprised to realize that the democratic decision making he takes for granted is absent in many other countries.

- An Eastern European resents the Western cultural influences overtaking her society.

- An African woman is amazed at the free and universal access to education that females have in other parts of the world, and at the financial support to which widows are entitled.

- A German businessman finds commonly-accepted practices of US-based companies to be unethical.

- Many Lutherans at the LWF Assembly in Hong Kong (1997) were frustrated that they could not critique human rights abuses in China.

- Some participants at the LWF Assembly in Winnipeg (2003) were frustrated that there was no clear consensus as to what constitutes a family.

These are just a few areas of ethics where there are significant differences in the world today, depending on the cultural context and related history, politics and worldviews. More often than not, there is little actual engagement across these chasms or discussion of these differences that separate us. Instead, those on one side deplore among themselves the position of the other, sometimes with uncharitable characterizations. This can result in standoffs in which "our" position is deemed to be self-evidently moral or ethical, and "their" position self-evidently immoral or unethical. Ethical deliberation, if it occurs at all, tends to be restricted to those who share our assumptions or worldviews, which thereby are reinforced rather than probed as to whether they really are universally shared. "Global interdependence has practically transformed all cross-cultural communication and exchange into a real confrontation."[1]

Much has been written about the incommensurable ethical perspectives prevailing in our world today, and the postmodern reality this reflects. This book refers to these theoretical discussions, while seeking to move beyond them. By taking up particular topics of concern, the intent here is to shed light on how different cultural perspectives affect how an area of ethical concern is viewed and evaluated. How do these perspectives intersect and how might they be in conversation for the sake of greater mutual self-understanding? The lack of communication among these differences at the intersections of God's good creation is itself a serious ethical matter. "Understanding the other is a moral and political deed."[2] Ethics, approached through Christian assumptions, are not primarily a means through which separate cultural identities are reinforced or reified, but a means through which these are transformed in light of the gospel.

Theologically, this is grounded in basic Trinitarian affirmations.

- The world God has created, in all its diversity, is good. God creates human beings in relation with others, including with the rest of creation, rather than to remain as separate groups or cultures unable to communicate with each other.

- God became incarnate in Jesus Christ. This was God's radical act of contextualization—entering into the particularities of time, place and cultural identity. But such particularities are not the end of God's redemptive story.

- The church of Christ brings together those of many cultures, languages, ethnic and other identities. Through the power of the Spirit, the church becomes a community that communicates across and transcends the differences of culture in light of God's eschatological promises, and thus bears witness to the wider world.

Admittedly, many churches are composed of or closely related to those of one cultural identity. Yet, the church's confession of faith in Jesus Christ—who was continually crossing human boundaries of ethnicity, gender and nationality—is compromised if the church falls into the trap of essentializing differences based on such factors. It falls far short of its calling when it becomes an instrument primarily for preserving ethnic or national identities, especially when this leads to suspicion of "outsiders," immigrants and those with different cultural worldviews.

This book is far more than an academic exercise. It is an attempt to discern how such discussions might take place in a global communion of churches, which claims to share some basic faith convictions as well as a sense of relatedness to one another. "The communion we share with one another must become incarnate in very human, face-to-face kinds of communication and interaction that enrich, test and deepen what it truly means to be a communion."[3] Today, the tensions and differences are increasingly not over the faith convictions *per se*, but over how these are understood or interpreted, and even more so, over what this implies for ethical matters or how this faith is lived out in the world. Ethical questions are increasingly feared to be potentially church dividing, for instance, in relation to matters of sexuality and gender.

In an earlier era, it might have been easier to point, for example, to what Lutherans believe, which then implied a basic Lutheran position on a given ethical question. Not only were presumptions made about how Lutherans—wherever they were in the world—understood their faith, but also about how certain answers could be applied universally to ethical questions they faced. This was done without much reflection on the (usually Western) cultural assumptions, power and other interests embedded in what was being prescribed, nor in whether these understandings and perspectives were actually taking root in the people. The much needed and extensive movement to contextualize theology and ethics—taking more seriously particularities such as culture, history and gender—has certainly called into question these previous universalizing, one-size-fits-all approaches to ethical questions. Neighbor-love continues to be a key benchmark for Lutheran ethics, but discerning what actually will benefit rather than harm neighbors in contexts much different from our own is a formidable challenge.

Are context and cultural particularity then the end of the conversation? Are we left in a sea of moral relativism, with "fortressed islands" of moral presumptions? The book's premise is that this cannot be the conclusion. Yes, cultural particularities, with all the related historical and current power dynamics, need to be understood and taken seriously. But culture today is far more mixed, hybrid and affected by other influences than is often assumed. Cultural influences are inevitably and increasingly interacting, encountering ethical differences if not clashes, especially under forces of globalization. As the title of this book indicates, what happens at these intersections is the focus of attention here.

As the study team deliberated together and developed the articles in this book, we realized that the cultural differences and presuppositions among us are considerable, even though all of us have been trained to some degree in academic traditions of the West. But more significantly for our purposes here, we have been formed by the Christian tradition, which has developed through dynamics of crossing, blending and transforming cultures throughout its history. The faith conviction that the world with all its diversity is ***God's*** is what shifted the group's focus from the "many worlds" of postmodernity to insisting, nevertheless, that it is God's ***one*** world. What holds us together despite our differences, and empowers us to deliberate together in the midst of them, is a resilient conviction of faith in a God who creates, redeems and promises to transform us and our world. Moral imagination drives the moral subject out of his/her own world into that of others, and of God.[4]

This is the basis for Christian ethics as a way of life, not with enforceable "traffic rules"—which some simplistically equate with "ethics"—but living according to a kind of "grammar." In this case, a Lutheran grammar that makes sense of how God is acting and calling us to act in the midst of the intersections in our world today. What is distinctive about the interactions in this book is a theological-ethical lens or grammar that reflects a Lutheran interpretation of the wider Christian theological-ethical tradition. It is a grammar that in varying degrees has formed most of us in this study group and how we look at ethical challenges, but it plays out differently, given our cultural locations and ethical foci. It informs how we negotiate with one another at the intersections, and provides a form and direction for the content or substance that emerges in these interactions.

Early on in our work together, a Lutheran grammar, as outlined in Hans Ulrich's opening article, became a bridge through which we were able to communicate across our differences. As we further developed our articles, this became even more key than had originally been envisioned. It reflects the realization that "theological ethics is the grammar of Christian discourse."[5]

Culture

The anthropological notion of "culture" is a rather recent, modern construct to explain why people differ in their ways of life. The purpose was to move beyond the evaluative ways in which some cultures (e.g., European-based) were viewed as better than others, or to get beyond associating "culture" with a higher level of civilization. With the rise of anthropology as a discipline, cultures began to be studied in their own historical contexts, as bonded cultural wholes. Cultures were viewed as group-differentiated, holistic, non-evaluative and context-relative.[6]

Thus, modern anthropology has viewed culture as something that all human beings have, that is diverse, and that varies with a social group and its consensual ways of life. Culture is what makes life human; human beings are formed by it, but they also form it. It points to a characteristic set of norms, values, beliefs, conceptions, dispositions and preoccupation that together constitute a distinct way of life. Culture is the ordering basis for social behavior; social order is often thought to require what culture represents.[7] A culture reveals what people value, and therefore is intrinsic in the moral life.

Ancient cosmologies—which continue to operate in the contexts out of which some of these article have been written—presume a seamless connection between the cosmos and society. Cosmic order is reflected in the harmony of the individual and a harmony between the cosmic order and human affairs.[8] Here this is reflected particularly in the articles by Wai Man Yuen (in her discussion of Confucianism) and by Phillip Moeahabo Moila (in his discussion of traditional African principles). At the same time, understood biblically, creation is not static, but about "transformation and preservation, stability and fluidity, pathos and promise, connections and differences, the universal and the particular, all in a dynamic coherence."[9]

Culture can be viewed as a particular expression of the biblical concept of *kosmos*,[10] which is good but also fallen. Romantic notions of the harmony assumed to prevail in some cultures need to be viewed with skepticism, especially in light of the injustice they may perpetuate. Innovations must be integrated into cultural narratives if they are to be sustained. Furthermore, cultural traditions perpetuate many obsolete customs. Traditional cultures are not immune to corruption; in fact, they often become a cover for such practices. People in every culture are suffering and dying from cultural practices which have lost their rationale; they have become reified so that people forget they have the power to change traditions.[11]

The modern tendency to tolerate all cultural practices, regardless of how they may harm some people, is from a Christian ethical perspective increasingly intolerable. What comes to mind here, for example, are harmful practices inflicted on girls and women in many cultures. Yet, opposing such practices on Christian or on human rights grounds is often complicated by the ways in which those very grounds are considered to be power discourses, insensitive to the whole cultural cosmos of which these practices are a part. The thought of deviating from these can evoke immobilizing fear of breaking old taboos, unless the alternative of more liberating and life-giving practices can be developed and convincingly incorporated into a culture.

From a late- or postmodern perspective, it is less plausible today to view cultures as self-contained, clearly demarcated units that are internally consistent and consensual unified wholes. A culture is not an internally consistent whole that can be easily managed or controlled, as has often been attempted. Such forms have largely lost their correspondence with certain groups of people. Instead, they are permeated with interactive processes and negotiations, and various power dynamics that cut across boundaries assumed in the past. A culture is not an a-historical given, but is continually undergoing changes due to external influences, migration and internal tensions.

> Cultures are complex and internally riven with conflicting narratives […] formed through complex dialogues with other cultures[…]. Boundaries of cultures are fluid, porous and contested.[12]

Whereas previously it was possible to think of different cultures as if they were different worlds, today diverse "worlds" tend to merge into an interdependent global reality.[13] Globalization seems to be a wholesale demythologizing, a relentless cleansing of cultures of all inherited beliefs and sacred stories. This accounts for some of the protests today in which religious, ethnic and other cultural identities are being accentuated. Culture tends to become a synonym for identity. Under globalization there seems to be an obsession with identities. Thus, "culture" is used polemically or heuristically to resist the universalizing tendencies that ignore or overpower particularities or differences. In that sense, it becomes an empowering basis for protest.

Cultural differences can also be used defensively to deflect legitimate ethical critique or to resist forming common ground with others. Some conservatives argue that cultures should be preserved in order to keep groups separate, whereas some progressives claim this should be done in order to resist domination. But both can fall into the trap of essentializing culture, viewing cultures as clearly delineated wholes that generate coherence for the purposes of understanding and control.

The prevailing norms within a culture are not necessarily the constitutive principles for action. The social context and historical processes as well as the cultural forms, determine how culture influences or directs action. The influences are based on past historical developments (such as painful legacies of colonialism, conquest or repressive rule), the predominant religions (often not Christian) that have shaped values and priorities in that culture, social hierarchies within a society, shifting economic realities, political ideologies, changing gender roles and a variety of other factors. All of these continually need to be negotiated. Cultures provide motivations for actions in complex ways. People actively struggle over the meaning and importance of cultural influences, rather than only being passive recipients of such. Culture is recreated through these interactions in which such processes as appropriation, resistance, subversion and compromise are at work. Cultures act upon themselves with respect to information coming from other cultures (i.e., their reflexivity), making adjustments and learning through that process.[14]

Therefore, cultural identity has become a hybrid, relational matter that lives as much between as within cultures.[15] Few cultures today are bounded and self-contained; in multiple ways they are continually crossing over, infiltrating each other, blending, borrowing, resulting in intriguing and, at times, disturbing new hybrids. In light of this, this study program's original focus on "intercultural" (implying boundaries between discrete cultures) has shifted to a focus on the "intersections" where various cultural influences interact in a host of different ways.

Morality, ethics and the postmodern turn

Although morality and ethics are often used interchangeably, a general distinction can be made between morality as the commonly accepted set of expectations as to how people will act, and ethics as a more intentional reflecting on the "why" and "what" of moral life. Put in this way, it is obvious that morality and culture are closely intertwined; to a large extent, culture forms a sense of what is considered moral, right, or good.

Throughout human history, moral action has been socially embedded in webs of relationships. This is readily apparent in familial and communal settings where the morality of actions is determined by whether they uphold and further the social relationships considered basic for human survival and flourishing. To be a part of a family is to abide by its rules; to be a part of a people is to participate in certain practices, customs and traditions. Belonging and living in certain ways are inextricably connected. Although this does not exclude the possibility of personal choice, or critiquing and departing from community norms, it tends to imply that morality is largely given and nonnegotiable. Wider forces are viewed as controlled by fate or the gods, perhaps to be appeased, but over which human agency and institutions have little control.

In contrast, the discipline of ethics has used categories that transcend a given culture or morality in order to assess, evaluate and critique moral practices that tend to be taken for granted. Although traditions of ethics go far back in history, it is especially Enlightenment-inspired appeals to reason, universal norms and a focus on the individual which, until recently, have largely shaped the modern disciplines of philosophical and religious ethics. While this has furthered the prospect of global norms and standards (e.g., see Elisabeth Gerle's article on human rights), it has also been seen by some as "a kind of Western liberal conquest of the world, by telling of a grand narrative, into which the lives and actions of all humanity can be woven."[16] These accounts of reality carry an authority which can silence, ignore and marginalize those whose experience, assumptions and moral priorities do not fit into this universal discourse. "Universal thinking in ethics eliminates differences through thought."[17]

In recent decades, such strong allegations have evoked an upsurge of approaches that focus cultural and other differences as the point of departure for theological and ethical inquiry—various contextual, liberation, postcolonial, and feminist approaches. These have been crucial developments that expose power realities and attend to particularities and differences. Although these approaches strongly critique, they also presume much that is associated with the legacy of modernity (and thus, could be referred to as "late-modern"). Generally, this is referred to as an aspect of the "postmodern" landscape today which, in the extreme, means different moral frameworks "which cannot engage with each other because their basic moral reference points may not be compatible, and their definitions are so different as to prevent even basic understanding of what another is saying."[18]

Because of the “premodern,” “modern” and “postmodern” labels typically used to describe these developments, it is tempting, but misleading, to think of these as succeeding one another in a kind of linear progression. For example, what is premodern is either romanticized or viewed as unenlightened. When treated in this way, these cultural impulses can readily become susceptible to fundamentalist or xenophobic appeals, as reactions against the modern influences that have swept over these cultures.

The reality is that premodern impulses are often still present in what seem to be thoroughly modern or postmodern societies. As Wanda Deifelt reminded our study team, “each of us in a synthesis.” An example of this may be the upsurge of popular interest in cosmic forces, angels, spirits and demons in many Western societies,[19] and the way in which some moral questions evoke old taboos and dualistic ways of separating what is good from what is evil.

Although modernity has been shaped by Enlightenment influences with their focus on the individual, a focus on individual persons apart from the rest of society and creation is today increasingly seen as being ethically inadequate. Instead, more intrinsically relational approaches are needed, not only within a given society, but within the global community.

What to anticipate in this book

- **Lutheran ethics:** The first part of the book sets the stage for the articles that follow with two overall interpretations of Lutheran ethics, one using the framework of a “grammar” (Hans Ulrich) and the other the criterion of “embodied care”(Wanda Diefelt). Although these are different types of approach, both are permeated by recognizable Lutheran emphases and nuances to which they bring new language, perspectives and implications. Not surprisingly, the doctrine of justification grounds and permeates each approach, as well as the centrality of neighbor-love. Ulrich attends to the importance of a structured way of living in light of God’s promises, especially in relation to political and economic spheres, and thus makes a strong case for the public nature of Lutheran ethics. Deifelt addresses the good work of caring for bodies as key to an ethic that seeks the well-being of the neighbor. Both are emphatic, as are the other authors in this book, that ethics is not about imposing “timeless” rules on others, but about taking seriously the living contexts, cultures and challenges within which the Christian faith is lived out.

- **At intersections of sexuality:** This is where some of the most contentious ethical debates are occurring within churches and globally, with the first challenge being that of how to talk with one another amid our differences.[20] Some of the study team's conversation about this can be glimpsed at the end of this section. The articles here seek to contribute to the wider discussion in two ways. Phillip Moeahabo Moila brings traditional African principles of holism, vitalism and communalism, as they relate to heterosexual marriage and sexuality, into dialogue with a Lutheran grammar and finds many similarities. Although he considers these principles still to be essential in addressing current challenges in and beyond Africa, what must be challenged is how they have been used in ways that perpetuate injustice, especially patriarchal control over women. Building on the contextual implications of embodiment, Karen L. Bloomquist cautions against some of the ways certain categories (e.g., what is "the biblical view" or "of nature") are used in ways that cut off ethical deliberation over our differences, and calls for contextual approaches that are consistent with a Lutheran grammar.

- **At intersections of human rights**: The next two articles, by Elisabeth Gerle and Wai Man Yuen, engage the contemporary human rights discussion, but from two rather different vantage points. These reflect the much different Swedish-Lutheran and Chinese-Confucian contexts of the authors; the topic is engaged through their deeply rooted, contrasting cultural formations and experiences. Gerle takes us through the overall treacherous terrain of human rights discourses and critiques today, especially at interfaith and gender intersections. Bringing to light the politics of semantics is crucial, as well as seeking convergences in the midst of this late-modern landscape. Yuen focuses on the challenging Chinese intersection of being both Confucian and Christian. She articulates how the Confucian understanding and ritualization of *li* influences what it means to be human in terms of self-transformation and the regulation of familial and political affairs. Rights are assumed but rites are required. She then turns to Luther's theology, in search of points of convergence in what initially may appear to be quite divergent approaches to human rights.

- **At intersections of citizenship**: The articles by András Csepregi and Wanda Deifelt focus implicitly on the important Lutheran *locus* of citizenship, but through the two lenses of democratization and education that are key for furthering the exercise of citizenship. In contrast to their Hungarian and Brazilian perspectives, Elisabeth Gerle briefly highlights Swedish Lutheran influences on democracy and education.

After a brief survey of twentieth-century Hungarian history, and the churches' role in such, Csepregi is skeptical as to whether there actually has been a successful transition to democracy in his country. He exposes some of the more disturbing aspects of this through the diagnosis of political hysteria. After critiquing how some (distorted) Lutheran theological understandings have contributed to the problem, he proposes on Lutheran grounds the possibilities for a healthier political ethic. Deifelt highlights the importance of education and vocation from a Lutheran perspective, which is consistent with UNESCO emphases today. In this light, she examines key historical and current realities of education in Brazil, especially as they relate to women, and the contributions Lutherans have made. Education is key in empowering citizens to transform their social and political realities. Public authorities should be held responsible for assuring this for all.

- **At intersections of technology and property** : Human power, manipulation and control over nature, especially through science and technology, is not a new issue, but its implications and ethical urgency have escalated in our day. In part, this is due to dynamics of economic globalization.[21] Per Anderson takes up the multifaceted ethical challenges posed by genetically modified crops and foods, and how this changes the meaning and practice of agriculture. In carefully evaluating these developments according to the norms of precaution, participation, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability, he finds that, without significant changes in current practice, transgenic agriculture is morally deficient.

Puleng Lenka Bula raises serious ethical objections to the way in which land and biological resources that indigenous Africans have cultivated for centuries are essentially being stolen from the people through bioprospecting or piracy by large corporations. Such privatizing trends are undergirded by the regime of intellectual property rights or patents. She contrasts this with biblical and Lutheran perspectives on property, and calls for alternatives that are life sustaining for all who depend on what long has been held in common. The urgency of what she is here addressing is also recognized by others:

> In the information economy of the twenty-first century, the most priceless resource is often an idea, along with the right to profit from it […]. Some companies […] can make more money selling access to their ideas than from building anything themselves […]. Patents are becoming the highest-value assets in any economy.[22]

- **Ethical deliberation at the intersections**: Finally, in one of the two concluding articles, Anderson sets forth and explores the possibilities for viewing the church as a community of moral deliberation, drawing upon Pauline perspectives and one church's experiences, for the sake of pursuing Christian ethics inspired by Paul's passage that has undergirded much of the work of the study team:

> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom 12:2).

The concluding article reflects on what has been done through this study process and the continuing questions and challenges that remain.

Members of the study team met three times between 2003 and 2005 (in Chicago, Nürnberg/Neuendettelsau and Cape Town). We are grateful to those who hosted and met with us at these sites. Study team members have chosen to write on topics they consider to be important in their contexts. The aim has been neither to develop a thorough ethical discussion of a particular topic, nor necessarily to come up with a definitive answer. Instead, what is offered here are examples of how a given topic might be approached from the perspective of one person with their own particular cultural perspective and background, and in dialogue with the cultural perspectives or worldviews of others.

Most of the articles here have undergone considerable changes as the authors have interacted with one another, questioning, critiquing and prodding each other. Part of the spirit of those interchanges can still be seen in the occasional boxes and footnotes that bring in perspectives from other members of the team (identified through their initials), as well as from other LWF-related sources that contrast with or add to what is being said in the article. These should be considered windows or invitations for readers to bring their own cultural realities into the conversation, as are the questions at the end of most of the articles. These also signal that no one cultural perspective has the definitive or last word.

It is hoped that as you read these articles, you will at times argue with them and discern how what is addressed here might be further developed in different ways in relation to similar ethical challenges you face in your context. You are encouraged to share your comments and the feedback from your discussions with the editor, **kbl@lutheranworld.org**.

Notes

[1] Seyla Benhabib, *Claims of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 1.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[3] *Study Book. "For the Healing of the World,"* LWF Tenth Assembly (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2002), p. 7.

[4] William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1999), pp. 20-21.

[5] Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame, 2001), p. 230.

[6] Much of the discussion in this section draws on, Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 24.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 25-32.

[8] Brown, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 13.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 409.

[10] Bruce Bradshaw, *Change Across Culture: A Narrative Approach to Social Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), p. 70.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[12] Benhabib, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 185.

[13] William Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. xi.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[15] Tanner, *op. cit* (note 6), pp. 51-57.

[16] Susan Frank Parsons, *Feminism and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 190.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[19] See, e.g., Ingo Wulfhorst (ed.), *Spiritualism: A Challenge to the Churches in Europe.* LWF Studies 2/2004 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

[20] Currently a task force on family, marriage and sexuality, appointed by the LWF Council, is considering how best to do this.

[21] See, e.g., Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Communion, Responsibility, Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization.* LWF Documentation 02/2004 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

[22] Jerry Sheehan, " A new battlefield: ownership of ideas," *International Herald Tribune*, 3 October, 2005, p. 1.

Lutheran Ethics

On the Grammar of Lutheran Ethics

Hans G. Ulrich

The following considerations deal with Christian life and its shape at the various intersections of human life. These intersections are within a world where people of various traditions, cultures and life conditions are living in ever-closer proximity. It is a world that Christians profess to be God's one world. Lutheran churches, like others, are challenged and confronted with the intersections of human life in very different, incompatible contexts, different stories and cultural settings. These include problems of justice and what constitutes a "good" human life according to God's promises in relation to human labor, property, food, social and political identity, health, education, political participation, economic welfare, family—everything belonging to our human life.[1] Any Christian ethics has to think about these differences because they reflect human life in diverse contexts with their various local stories.

Looking through the lens of an ethical tradition

The Lutheran tradition has developed a specific sense for an ethic of everyday life[2] and of getting involved in our neighbor's needs and stories. To be deeply interwoven with different cultural settings and stories is the very characteristic of Lutheran ethics. Lutheran Christians are committed to the common ground of Christianity: to the Word of God as it is preached and communicated within the church. Thus, ethical reflection cannot be reduced to morally legitimating human actions with universal rules of conduct. The medium of ethical reflection and deliberation is not a transcultural or a-historical universal morality; rather it is the living ethos of Christians, with culturally and historically specific features. At the same time, this ethos is characterized by a distinctive grammar, shaping the identity of this ethos.

In a globalizing world, where various cultures and stories are interwoven and mixed together in any area of life, it is not enough to look for a universal morality. Universal regulations are needed, of course, in global economics or politics. But what is also needed is a particular ethos that communicates what is constitutive for human life. This does not relativize universal principles and rights, but interprets and transforms them.

Following in the steps of the biblical tradition, the Lutheran tradition can serve as a lens through which we can see the contours of human life in different cultural contexts and historical situations, such as the different postcolonial situations (e.g., in Hong Kong, South Africa or Brazil) or the post-communist situation (e.g., in Hungary). The grammar of Lutheran theology and ethics is not only western European, but bears the promise to be in accordance with God's unique and one Word. This Word is translated in many ways and contexts without losing its distinct theological grammar.

Interpreting the grammar of a tradition

In many ways, the Lutheran tradition has suffered from interpretations claiming to follow the grammar of Lutheran ethics, but which have actually obscured or deformed its theological meaning. For example, some interpretations of the "two kingdoms," the "inner man and outer man," or "orders" for human life have legitimized the "given natural" orders of human life (even when unjust). In this sense, the perspective of God's continuous creative and redeeming work is lost. Critique of some interpretations is not done on the basis of an authoritative understanding of Lutheran tradition, but out of the need for congruence with the theological grammar of God's work. The gospel of God's creative work may contradict many interpretations and lead to a new awareness of the Christian ethos.

Lutheran ethics must not be captive to problematic interpretations and their impact on Lutheranism. There will be significant tensions between the grammar of Lutheran ethics (e.g., the grammar of its political ethics) and actual convictions and habits. Lutheran Christians have many good reasons continually to rediscover the "promise" in their theological tradition and to communicate this tradition.[3] "Tradition" refers here to the substance of the common rules of living actually practiced within Lutheran congregations. According to Lutheran understanding, tradition consists of the continuous renewing of minds by listening to the Word of God and the continuing practices that characterize Christians.

Some features of this grammar

Justification and ethics

In his "Disputation Concerning Man" (1536), Luther wrote, "'We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works,' briefly sums up the definition of man, saying, 'Man is justified by faith'."[4] This simply means that human existence is rooted in God's justice. We are not delivered to any living conditions we have produced, but invited to live together with God in those times and places God has prepared for us. Here we experience God's care and justice in places of a sufficiently "good" human life.

To look for such living contexts is the task of ethics. It focuses on the question of how we can remain God's beloved creatures, or rediscover that privileged status, instead of being the objects and victims of human work. To miss this context, to miss or to ignore God's care and justice means, in the biblical sense, to be a sinner. It means to lose the roots and the soil of human life, so that we can no longer pray with Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." A global ethic pursues the possibility that everybody will have the opportunity to join this prayer. What will make this possible?

This is the ethical dimension of the doctrine of justification. The logic of justification is the central rule in the grammar of Lutheran ethics. It asks if we have lost the context of living with God, attending to God's help and consolation. Ethical reflection reminds us of this context of living. It is not a universal morality we have to communicate, but this reality which is the common focus for social and political coexistence. It is reflected in the spheres of human living which bear God's promises: to govern with justice for the political sphere, *politia*, to care about the needs of God's creatures for the sphere of economics, *oeconomia*, and to communicate God's Word to our hearts and minds in the sphere of communal life, *ecclesia*. It is essential in those spheres to live together with God and to respond to God's promises and acting, to God's creative Word and work.

Human beings living from God's promise

"[W]hat are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Ps 8:4). This points to the insight that we are defined by the belief that we belong to the story God shares with us. This is the content of Christian witness to a world dominated by all kinds of discourses on the human condition. Discourses on human labor, health, political structures and cultural identity are the bases for governing human affairs. From a Lutheran perspective, Christians are asked to witness to an ethos that is not simply adapted to the patterns of these discourses, but one that reflects God's care and loyalty. As God's beloved creatures and children, Christians are called to "… lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory" (1 Thess 2:12).

Here we find the roots of the Christian understanding of human beings as reflected particularly in the Lutheran tradition. At the core, human beings do not exist on their own, but because of God's unceasingly gracious work and justice, God's loyalty to God's creatures. This is the meaning of the justification of sinners, that God will take us as God's beloved creatures back into God's story and into the economy God wants to share with us. Nevertheless, we always tend to lose or forget this context, which in fact is our life context. *Simul iustus et peccator*; human beings are sustained by God's loyalty to them, but at the same time do not appreciate or even suppress this. To be a sinner means not to recognize or to value what God is doing for us. Rather than staying in God's story with us, we invent our own values and stick to our diverse histories. Christians have to explore practically what it means to live in God's story, consciously aware of God's wonderful gifts. We are in God's liberating story with us (*cf.* Gal 5:1), rather than subordinated to our own histories and laws, to our fears and pathologies.

This may sound strange because other modern or postmodern patterns of thinking predominate in our world. These have specific concepts of human autonomy and subjectivity and also processes that dissolve these concepts. What basic and promising ideas of human existence do Christians have to communicate in common with others? This cannot be narrowed down to concepts of humanity we construct or deconstruct, but is an agenda to which Christians must contribute. It is the agenda of what we human beings are allowed to be by God's promise and action.

As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds …" (Rom 12:2). Not to be conformed means, literally, do not follow the patterns of the present world. Furthermore, do not follow the patterns of a problematic Lutheran tradition. We continually need to renew our minds instead of fixing our own concepts. This is a fundamental insight of a Lutheran theology that continually stresses listening to God's Word and learning its grammar.

Cooperating with God in the spheres of daily life

A major emphasis in Luther's theology is that in loyalty to God's creatures, God cooperates with them in all spheres of human life. God's promise shapes the logic of Christian political, economic and communicative practices. The promise is that God will govern the world in opposition to presumptions of absolute human power, that God will care for human beings in opposition to poverty, and that God will be loyal to them in opposition to their resignation.[a] This provides an ethic for living with God's acting and gracious gifts amid the demands of daily life. We live based on God's calling, forgiveness, comfort and guidance. This provides an ethos in which human beings are aware of God's cooperation—that they are not alone in their struggles.

This is expressed in the biblical ethos from which Lutheran ethics have developed. It is, for instance, articulated in Psalm 127:1: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the guard keeps watch in vain."[5] Or, in Psalm 23:1-3: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake." Christians are to witness and communicate what this coexistence between God and humankind is about.

As we read in Luther's Small Catechism:

> I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth. What does this mean? Answer: I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that he has given me and still sustains my body and soul, all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with food and clothing, house and home, family and property; that he provides me daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life, protects me from all danger, and preserves me from all evil. All this he does out of his pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part. For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true.[6]

[a] KLB: In the most desperate, impoverished, life-threatening situations, how can this grammar become incarnate? It is important that this not lapse into a spiritualized promise apart from the painful realities in people's lives.

Civic justice

Within the framework of the concept of God's twofold regiment (not to be confounded with dualistic interpretations of a two realm theory) the Lutheran tradition has provided a prominent and particular view of practicing civic justice: *iustitia civilis*. This is based on God's justice that sets human beings free from egoistic self-interest and self-defense and therefore open to democratic structures.[7] To be a citizen is not a matter of conformity to a given political context, but belongs to the very character of doing justice toward one's neighbor. This is the meaning of the *politia Christi*, the vocation of Christians.[8] It requires a continuous renewing of minds and looking out for the needs of the other.[9][b] To be a citizen is to pursue neighbor-love shaped by justice. To be a citizen means to be ready to bear responsibility for our neighbor,[c] to take care especially of their rights, without looking for any kind of moral justification. The concept of a neighbor right, a civil right, which is the right of a citizen and the right to be a citizen, is tightly connected with the Lutheran tradition.[10] This character is embodied in certain practices like praying publicly to God for the world.

Attentive citizenship

A Lutheran grammar highlights the specific practices of Christian life: listening to the Word of God, learning and teaching the Word of God (catechetical practice), praying, caring for the neighbor, acting for social justice, fulfilling our specific citizenship, practicing mutual consolation and ethical deliberation. Where we find these practices, there is the church.[11] Through these prac-

[b] WMY: For Confucians, who is the neighbor is in terms of the five cardinal relations.

PA: To attend to what is going on and to think critically about the actual needs of the neighbor should be common practice among Lutheran Christians. But as a North American, I see little sensitivity to the particularities of love today, especially to the consequential, complex and rapid changes of global life today. The grammar of Lutheran ethics is properly dialogical—dialogue with the world and in service to the community of life

[c] PBL: People in our context feel alienated from citizenship. There also is increasing xenophobia toward Africans who come from outside South Africa. In my culture, the neighbors are also other creatures.

tices, Christians communicate justice, social and political responsiveness, solidarity, advocacy and support.

In such a grammar, any ethical question concerning justice or aspects of a good human life reflects a specific understanding of what we human beings are and what we are called to be as God creatively is acting upon us. We first have to know what belongs to us, not in terms of our individual preferences and values, but with respect to our vocation to live as God's creatures, remaining in God's story and with the promises God has made. This is reflected in common visible practices. These practices concern the needs of our neighbors within the sphere of politics, economics and education. This is the meaning of responsible and attentive citizenship: to respond to the civic vocation for the sake of my neighbor.

Global citizens rather than global players

This citizenship is cosmopolitan because the neighbor is everywhere. The public realm is not limited to private interests, although it may especially serve certain people's interests and needs. Cosmopolitan citizens are different from global players who follow their own universal codes according to their game.[12]

Ethics, in this context, have a political contour. This commitment is deeply rooted in the Lutheran tradition. The basic idea is that within the framework of God's two regiments, Christians are especially called to witness to this ethic. They are aware of their neighbors' needs and should not allow themselves to be subdued by any regiment promising to govern human beings without being itself responsible, in response to God's promises. This is the idea of public responsibility as opposed to hierarchical governance, including the hidden governance of economic laws. Christians are invited to participate in any public forum where ethical and moral issues are at stake, as did Martin Luther in his various statements on burning problems of his day.

As citizens, in this political sense, we are not fundamentally dependent on specific cultural or historical conditions, nor should we ignore them. Christians are citizens of the world, of God's one world. The global citizen is contrary to the global player who construes his or her own network instead of our common world. The global citizen is everywhere politically committed to the needs of the other. According to the grammar of Lutheran ethics, to be a global citizen means to follow that civic justice, the kind of loyalty that is rooted in God's loyalty to God's creatures.

Responsible to do good for others

Various movements for a new kind of citizenship are close to the Lutheran tradition of social ethics. They involve responsibility rather than a universal concept of justice and are rooted in reliable, institutional relations to others who are cooperatively connected as workers, trade partners, suppliers, etc. Responsibility means to be responsive to all within a certain context of cooperation and interaction, to share with others not only rights, but also corresponding duties. To be responsible means to be aware of others' needs, to take care of them, to benefit them. It is not simply reciprocal justice, but to do something supererogatory in favor of the other. On this grammar, Luther commented with regard to the Seventh Commandment:

> You must not steal. What does this mean? We must fear and love God, so that we will neither take our neighbor's money or property, nor acquire it by fraud or by selling him poorly made products, but will help him improve and protect his property and career.[13]

"… [To] help him improve and protect his property …" is significantly different from ethical theories based on reciprocities, formal concepts of justice or moral concepts of conduct.

The Christian vocation of bearing public witness

That which we share with others is not primarily a matter of how to communicate, but the ethos we have to communicate. From a Lutheran perspective, human beings are called to be and become within God's creative work and to testify to this as part of the public agenda. If politicians debate about social justice, health, education or labor, what can they really put on the agenda? As Jürgen Habermas recently asked, Is it possible, will it be accepted, to raise the question on the public agenda of human beings **failing**? Or is this only a hidden agenda with no real place for reflection and deliberation?

Can Christian congregations be places for an agenda like this? Christians have rich resources for articulating publicly what belongs to human beings who, as God's creatures with human dignity, live under God's governance.

Within the biblical/Christian tradition, "justice" is the practice of commitment to the community to which we belong. To do justice means to comply with the implications of that commitment, as God did. Christians respond to God's justice without adapting to a community's patterns of thinking or its history. Christians should be able to witness to their experience of God's justice, and not to follow selfish or self-centered interests, or look for any kind of moral justification. We are to live in justice with the community to which we belong: the congregation, the family, the global community of human beings. Within the biblical tradition, justice is understood as the commitment to the neighbor in his/her needs. In the Lutheran tradition, the commitment to the other is significant for Christians who are liberated from fundamental worries about their own existence. To communicate this freedom is their profession, with due regard for the weakness of others with whom we are connected (*cf.* 1 Cor 10).

A pastorally engaged ethics

Therefore, from a Lutheran perspective, ethics is not primarily about norms, guidelines, laws or limits; it is about a structured context of living. Here human beings are able to remain the creatures God has preserved and lives with. Lutherans have called such structures "orders of creation" (P. Althaus), "mandates" (D. Bonhoeffer), "places of responsibility" (R. Benne) or "occasions for good works" (E. Wolf). These "structures" have also been understood as places where we practically experience and explore God's promise, comfort and help. Lutherans have been inclined to stress the demanding character of this part of the ethical grammar. But these structures are an invitation to explore God's favor toward us: " … what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). Because of this invitation to explore God's will and to receive God's cooperation, these structures have been called "institutions," "foundations," or "endowments" (*Stiftungen*) for human life.

Following this grammar of God's promise, Christian ethics can deliberate what is good for human beings without defining norms of success or standards. These will vary and may lead to despair for those who cannot realize them.

At the same time, this grammar can help us to resist the patterns of a globalizing world. Globalization produces a uniform world despite its pluralisms. This uniformity is in contrast to the manifold and unique forms of Christian life within various cultures and histories. This diversity must remain in view, because it belongs to the grammar of Lutheran ethics that Christians are called to care about the particular needs of the neighbor.

Karen L. Bloomquist has remarked on the current situation of our ethical task:

> The particular cries, social forces, and relationships affecting human beings evoke the ethical questions that matter to people. This is where a pastorally engaged ethical method begins. The heart of what we as Christians profess is that God became incarnate not in an abstract sense but in the historical particularities of Jesus of Nazareth.[14]

Following the demands of a pastorally engaged ethical method, we have to find out how to articulate God's presence in our different contexts. This includes a critical task within mainstream discourses that have lost the grammar of hope, comfort and confidence in what is God's will and God's work for his creatures. For Christians this is the most challenging task: to bear witness to hope and comfort, which is based on God's promise for human beings, God's creatures. Christians have to witness to what could be meant by Jesus' reminder: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt 6:26). How can Christians bear witness to this to people who do not have enough to eat? What has to be done to provide living conditions so this will be possible?

Luther's theology was one of confidence in God's unbroken loyalty to God's beloved creatures. Therefore, human beings cannot live in deep existential worry about their lives and the conditions of life, political and social security, labor and property. It belongs to the grammar of these theological ethics that God's loyalty is manifest in God's promises to that threefold structure of human life in which human beings can explore their creaturely existence: *politia*, *oeconomia* and *ecclesia*. Rather than an ontological presupposition, this reflects the overwhelming richness of God's gifts.

The promise of good governance

In the sphere of politics, *politia*, Lutheran ethics follows the promise of God's governance through the human medium of rights and their protection. Any interpretation of the two realms that separates politics from living with God fundamentally contradicts this part of the grammar. The power that is entrusted to humans must be employed for other humans. This is the grammar of Christian political action. Political ethics are not confined to governmental (nation-state) politics, but are attentive to any form of political behavior.

Consequently, the central question is no longer, Who possesses power? but, What are we empowered to do? Whenever Luther appeals to a political authority it is always related to the duties and the tasks of political power. Particular political tasks of government (e.g., keeping the peace and securing justice) indicate what forms of power are necessary and can be used legitimately. In this way political tasks are given a specific content. Power is linked to these tasks. Luther had in view a *res publica* which is a remedy for the loss of politics. When Lutheranism had difficulties following a democratic form of politics, it was because of this kind of misunderstanding of the democratic grammar in politics. Christians are called to act for the other—this is the meaning of citizenship.[d]

For this *res publica* Luther's first priority was attending to peace, which entails freedom from every kind of violence. "Violence" is only thinkable there where justice has to be protected against violence or lawlessness. (From this vantage point, Luther also raised questions about the so-called just war theory.) The strict distinction between political power and violence subsists in the end for which human power is legitimated. Thus, a power vacuum can never be good, because every possible objective for political action is simultaneously open. This observation corresponds to the theological grammar of Luther's mature two kingdoms theory. The point is that human ruling finds its borders there where people's way of living is violated. There can be no human rule over their living with God. This limit on ruling is not simply reducible to religious freedom, which is important, but it sets limits to the concentration of political power over means of communal life and the corresponding justice necessary to sustain it.

[d] ACs: Luther doesn't acknowledge that his relative comfort was due to the favor of the princes, which in the twentieth century carried over into Bonhoeffer's "church for others." Bonhoeffer, like Luther, never reflected on the origin of the power he had. His family background for example made him very powerful in ways he didn't recognize. When others were imprisoned, his family was still untouched. He felt he was "for others" in ways that the church wasn't. In Hungary, Bonhoeffer's arguments were used in ways that weakened the church: if the church were to do things for itself it would be a mistake, because it must care solely for the other. But the church no longer knew who the other was, and took care of the communist leaders rather than of the voiceless in society. Hungarian churches are still told by the government what their purpose should be.

Dispensing justice, the exercise of *iustitia civilis*, corresponds to the fundamental idea that people are not left to the mercy, sympathy or pity of others, but able to rely on the rules, rights and institutions of common life. On this basis, Luther made a number of suggestions for regulation or legislation in different spheres, not least in the sphere of economics (where he critiqued the Fugger dynasty's banking practices). It is characteristic of Luther that he does not seek to designate rights that legitimate a procedural definition of justice, but insists that justice will be found by those who expect just social arrangements. This was also the point at which Luther employed natural right considerations in his search for that to which a universal reason conforms (i.e., the Golden Rule). Even in setting out such a rationality he is not implying that this could be ascertained by independent or rational means.

These contours make it possible for a political ethic to develop basic distinctions between legitimately conferred political power and power which has been seized, or between power which can be deployed for any purpose and power which is bound to certain tasks. Such distinctions will always provoke new questions about what the political task can be, causing us to reflect on the boundaries.

The fundamental limit of political power is in relation to political action that tries to do everything, using whatever force is necessary. This brings into view the positive exercise of a *iustitia civilis* in a political community's joint exercise of the practices of equity. It is important that, for the sake of justice, these practices always be explicitly on the agenda. Politics, understood in this way, have a content to which political or governmental power must be held accountable.

With this, we have established the essential distinctions for the discourse about power. Only a power engaged in a specific task can claim to be a "government" of human affairs. In a unique manner, Luther provoked vigilant ongoing questioning about what is good governance. It is decisive for these questions to be raised explicitly, thus calling every government to account for itself ever anew. This led Luther to speak out to the authorities and demand that they give a response. Such claims grow from a clear expectation of what must undeniably be the task of government.

The promise of cooperative economy

Luther also connected the grammar of ethics to the economic sphere. The point here is that human economic relationships are not special forms of social obligation, but something that people are already engaged in, with and for others. Here the ongoing practice of cooperation plays a special role. In this cooperative practice, humans exist; here they become aware that their economic relations are accompanied by God's leading and acting. Nothing that anyone produces originates entirely from human work, but human production is created out of the wealth that is given to all humanity.

These basic concepts provide Luther with a sharply critical insight into all economic arrangements that displace or corrode this grammar of cooperation. The paradigm of this is usury: the lender is enriched while the other is exploited. Luther not only has moral reservations about the risks to which the dependent submit, but is insistent about what cooperative economies should be. In such economies, every possibility should be provided for people to bear human misfortune, without forcing them to become totally dependent on others. The focus is not only on the distribution of resources or wealth, but on economic practices that indicate what the economy as a whole really means.

A sharp critique is also directed at avarice,[15] which frustrates economic relationships with and for others. Luther's discourse focuses on how economic practices should be watched carefully. Humans have a stake in these relations going well. Luther emphasizes that economic thinking should be shaped by the possibility of realizing God's promise of well-being for everyone. God cares for all our needs: "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt 6:26). Every human is bound to cooperative relations with all who participate in the gifts that God has given to all humanity.

An economy is protested as being corrupt insofar as it bars people from participating in it. The aim of this protest is critical engagement with the economy rather than primarily with matters of equitable compensation. On the basis of a grammar that contrasts with and questions the underlying economic theory, Luther's economic ethic thus can sustain resistance to economic concepts. It differentiates between concerns we must bear and those which can and should be met. The breadth of human problems is confronted with a grammar based on the promise, "worry not."

Luther discerned this theme in Psalm 127:

> So that trouble and grief do not overwhelm the outer man, the outer man must not be idle or lazy, but must through diligent work organize his work place, considerately, inventively, carefully, so that the hands work as well as

> any tool. But the heart must look away from work and to the Lord, and pray to Him for help so that while the outer man is occupied with work, the heart or the new man is occupied with care for the law, saying: Lord, I follow your call, and so I desire that everything I do, govern, etc., be in your name. The comfort this brings is so great that it cannot be put into words.[16]

It is essential that everyone discover something of this comfort, meaning that no one should have to worry about life's basic necessities. Wealth and goods are also understood from this perspective.[17]

Economic discourse rests on the desire that all people discover God's bounteousness. It is the grammar that keeps in view economics' essentially communal nature. This is not the grammar of the liberal model, based on the claim that the common good is the result of everyone caring for themselves. It contrasts with this liberal model by highlighting economics' communal, cooperative nature. In keeping with Luther's concern, this takes on institutional forms with specific rules for cooperative economies. A further challenge is to create institutional regulations in the global context. It is decisive that the economy, as a universal anonymous process, be distinguished from economy with specific institutional contours.

With regard to cooperation, Luther wrote the following:

> Thus although we are sure that God provides and cares for us, we should nevertheless know that we must use the things and means supplied by God, lest we tempt God. We should not rush in and say: "Ah, it must happen, for I have God's promise! Therefore I will hurl myself into the midst of lions and wolves, since God has promised that He wants to save me (*cf*. Ps. 91:13). I will not eat, for God will feed me!" God certainly wants us to use the supports established for the preservation and governing of this life; and even if we accomplish nothing with them, we should not despair but should rely firmly on the help of God […].
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> This is true in all other actions of our common life. I must not cut the tree down with my nose, but I must take an ax or a saw. The tree must not be cut down with a blade of straw, but with an ax. And this is why God has given man reason, perception, and strength. Use these as means and gifts of God.
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> This should always be repeated and discussed in the church of God, in order that we may steer a middle course and deviate neither to the right nor to the

> left. There should be no doubt about the promise; nor should God be tempted by neglecting and underestimating the means ordained by Him.[18]

The promise of life in community

The grammar of cooperation and living with God is to be found paradigmatically within the church, the Christian congregation and community. Here is the place where people learn to be aware of God's presence. Through the Word, God encounters human plans and actions and changes hearts and minds. A Lutheran grammar of Christian ethics implies this kind of renewal of hearts, minds and lives. It follows the grammar of Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect." The very place for this transformation is the congregation: the people who listen to the Word and let themselves be led by the spirit of God (*cf.* Gal 5).

This continual renewal of hearts and minds should enable the people of God to resist any kind of governance by anonymous law. The church is set free for the contradictory witness of God's governance and God's work. The congregation is the paradigmatic institution for this very political task. It is grounded in that basic education that occurs through God's work, rather than through human manipulation.

Close to this is the family, the place of learning by listening to each other and surrendering to the needs of the other. Here, basic formation for neighbor-love takes place. Within the Lutheran tradition, family is especially defined by that task, rather than by certain forms. Globally, this purpose of family is fundamentally important.

In relation to politics, *politia*, economy, *oeconomia*, and education and communication, *ecclesia*, Luther pointed to three ways the promise of God is discerned: (1) the promise of God's reign and governance in contrast to unlimited human power; (2) the promise of God's care in providing everything human beings need in contrast to avarice and despair; and (3) the promise of God's renewal of our minds and hearts in contrast to human self-centeredness. In these spheres the key question is, How can Christians maintain and witness that all human beings remain God's creatures, and not become objects for human manipulation? Within the grammar of Lutheran ethics, human beings are to surrender themselves to the needs of the other and thereby to practice justice.

The institutional responsibility of business

Companies present themselves as responsible institutional agents in a form of corporate citizenship. Corporate citizenship has become the model for the kind of business ethic that combines public responsibility with a commitment to being a good citizen.

Within a framework of institutional ethics and corporate responsibility, many companies have developed programs and guidelines for their business activities or have committed themselves to standardized codes or rules. These include defined codes concerning social and environmental needs and conditions. This commitment can be calculated in relation to market advantages because an ethical image will enhance their reputation. Companies discuss this quite openly; their ethical image is a part of their marketing strategy. But to maintain an ethical image is not enough. Any company can be externally evaluated through publicly established standards, acknowledged associations and memberships. More important is that companies really have advantages if they orient their interests toward partners, workers and suppliers with whom they want to cooperate and coexist.

It is not enough to have good economic reasons for an ethical profile; rather, a voluntary commitment is significant. This voluntary element is closely connected to the institutional form, which implies a direct commitment by all in that institution.

Whether or not ethical issues are part of a public agenda makes an important difference. If they are not part of the agenda they need specific means of legitimation. A public agenda constitutes a form of public responsibility. If companies have to discuss their strategies and programs, they can focus on and include the ethical matrix in their consideration.

The concept of institutionalized responsibility has become central within business ethics, especially corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate citizenship (CC). On the one hand, there are the anonymous conditions, constraints and anarchy of economic processes and, on the other, there are still individuals who try to act in responsible cooperation. The dilemma has been greatly intensified under globalization. Numerous movements, organizations and institutions are trying to implement new forms of business ethics, corporate and institutional responsibility and institutional commitments.

The African Institute for Corporate Citizenship defines corporate citizenship this way:

> Corporate citizenship relates to the interplay between the private sector and society not only in relation to the immediate internal stakeholders (employees) and key external stakeholders including shareholders, but also in terms of wider society stakeholders through products, supply chains, advertising, social and environmental impact, etc. It implies a two-way ongoing relationship between the private sector and society in which corporate needs will only be met in the long term through the ongoing development of communal society needs.
>
> The practices that advance good corporate citizenship are increasingly being recognized as stimulating general business excellence. Adopting good corporate citizenship practices can deliver a range of benefits that directly improve the financial bottom line while at the same time promoting societal value and sustainable development. Corporate citizenship involves a more holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development than has previously been the case […].
>
> Both internationally and in Southern Africa there is an increasing pressure for all companies and organizations (including government), to incorporate transparent accountability into their operating principles. This would involve coming up with management frameworks that not only take account of financial accountability but also social and environmental accountability, leading ultimately to full triple bottom line reporting.

A German example

In Germany, through the Institute for Business Ethics (*Persönlichkeit und Ethik*), related to the Lutheran church, I personally discuss with companies their ethical profile and social and political responsibility. An example of how the grammar of Lutheran ethics can be lived out is Faber-Castell, a company producing high-quality writing utensils globally. It reflects the Lutheran tradition of specific commitment to the neighbor. It was the first medium-sized company in Germany to face up to the social, economic and ecological challenges of globalization, in the form of a partnership between politics and the private sector. Throughout its 242-year history, it has always shown special commitment to its workers, to the local community and to the conservation of nature.

In 1984, the company started a unique timber project in southeast Brazil. The wood grown there is used to make eighty-five percent of the world's pencils. The project is exemplary in both economic and ecological terms. In 1992, the company introduced environment-friendly water-based paint, setting new world standards in the coating of pencils. Its internationally applicable "social charter" assures equal opportunities and the right to collective bargaining, minimum wage rates and agreed conditions of employment, a ban on child labor and forced labor, and no excessive working hours. The company is also working to extend its social charter to include its suppliers and trading partners.

A growing number of companies are committing themselves to new standards of ethical and moral competition on the global market and show a comparable ethical and moral design. A leading model relates business ethics to forms of institutionalized responsibility. New forms of institutional responsibility and ethics focus in particular on corporate citizenship. A Lutheran grammar can help sharpen the distinction between various types of corporate responsibility and specific commitment to political citizenship. Critical scrutiny is needed to discern whether this includes the wider public or only serves a company's own interests.

African examples

African examples also illustrate this Lutheran Christian perspective. In 2004, the second African Corporate Citizenship Convention highlighted the intention to ensure that economic development in Africa incorporates principles of responsibility and accountability, and to improve the economic competitiveness of companies, sectors and countries in line with a broader sustainability agenda.

The global agenda around corporate citizenship is moving at a rapid pace; it is crucial that it reflect African experiences and views. Within this context, the Convention constituted a valuable forum where the views and experiences from Africa could be shared in order to begin identifying the linkages between corporate responsibility in Africa and the international political agenda. But in many ways, the Convention personified some of the fundamental problems that corporate citizenship encounters in Africa. Corporate citizenship agendas devised in the North and exported to the African context do not necessarily reflect the realities, nor engage with the specific challenges that this continent faces. The realities of Africa, its place in the world, its diversity, its history and the unique aspirations of its communities necessitate a distinctly African version of the corporate citizenship agenda.

Questions such as the following need to be considered:

> What is the relationship between responsibility and competitiveness in Africa?
>
> How do these concepts relate to the fundamental problem of poverty that continues to plague Africa's growth and development?
>
> How can corporate responsibility not further the marginalization of African economies?
>
> What role should governments play?
>
> Are distinct models of corporate citizenship needed for companies with high social and environmental impacts, such as tobacco and mining, which are of such economic importance in much of Africa?
>
> How can corporate citizenship be defined and implemented in conditions of violent conflict or corrupt governance?

The building and strengthening of networks across Africa remains a crucial task in engaging with these fundamental questions. The Convention brought people together who are prepared to find African solutions to these challenges. Initiatives such as the Africa Corporate Sustainability Forum, which was launched during the Convention, will be a crucial step toward moving these discussions forward. Through a multi-stakeholder platform, the forum will provide an opportunity for business, government and broader civil society to discuss and act on corporate sustainability policy and practice in Africa.

Concepts of corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility are very close to Lutheran ethics. The Lutheran tradition is perhaps one of the very few traditions to include adequate ethical elements, because it connects personal commitment with an appreciation of the need for institutional structures. The basic idea of a vocation, as a specific kind of citizenship, has a significant place in Lutheran ethics. The church is the place to learn what it means to be a citizen;[19] its public teaching, *publice docere*, constitutes a public agenda. Justice is understood as a basic loyalty to the community in which we live. To be just means to judge with consideration the needs of the neighbor, being aware of differences and inequalities. It means pursuing social justice, even if this demands personal sacrifices. This kind of justice depends on personal engagement and not simply on rules or reciprocity.

A Lutheran contribution to an ethics for God's one world

The message of God's justification means liberation from any kind of self-defense, self-fragmentation or any postmodern streaming of the self, which turns people into objects to be governed. This was the basic logic of Luther's twofold view of God's governance. It critiques any human power that offers and rules by human promise instead of taking care of its citizens. The concept of God's twofold regiment aims to empower and encourage people to be citizens. This occurs through such practices as learning the Word of God, mutual consolation, deliberation and, in the political sphere, exercising responsibility and civic justice for all.

Enabling citizenship is important in any social ethic. What Lutheran ethics can contribute is the context of citizenship: human life structured in the spheres of politics, economics and communities. Within this perspective, the substantial content of this political ethics is living in response to God's gifts and actions and practicing civic justice in favor of the neighbor.

Attention is drawn not to an abstract moral obligation or universal responsibility, but to the actual persons who are called to attend to the needs and the affairs of the neighbor—to do justice, *iustitia civilis*, for those entrusted to their care. More than individual responsibility, these are institutional relations and commitments within the political, economic and communal spheres.

For reflection or discussion:

How does this presentation of a "grammar" of Lutheran ethics differ from what you have assumed ethics to be about? How does this support or challenge prevailing patterns and practices? What might this grammar imply for engaging the political and/or economic challenges in your context?

Notes

[1] See Timothy J. Wengert, *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church. Lutheran Quarterly Books* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

[2] See Charles Taylor, "The Interpretation of the Reformation," in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1992).

[3] See, for instance, Bernd Wannenwetsch, "Luther's Moral Theology," in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther. Cambridge Companions to Religion* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 120-135; Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme (eds), *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); Carter Lindberg, "Luther's Struggle with Social-ethical Issues," in McKim, *ibid.*, pp. 165-178.

[4] Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 34 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 139.

[5] From this Psalm Luther developed his concept of social ethics.

[6] "The Creed," in Theodore G. Tappert (ed. and transl.), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 2000, c1959), p. 344.

[7] See e.g., EKD, *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland: Evangelische Kirche und freiheitliche Demokratie. Der Staat des Grundgesetzes als Angebot und Aufgabe. Eine Denkschrift der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1985).

[8] Ernst Wolf, "Politia Christi. Das Problem der Sozialethik im Luthertum [1948/49]," in Hans G. Ulrich (ed.), *Freiheit im Leben mit Gott. Texte zur Tradition evangelischer Ethik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), pp. 95-102.

[9] See especially D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, edited by Ilse Tödt, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Erst Feil, Clifford Green, (=Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Werke*, edited by Eberhard Bethge, Ernst Feil, Christian Gremmels, Wolfgang Huber, Hans Pfeifer, Albrecht Schönherr, Heinz Eduard Tödt, vol. 6) (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1992).

[10] See Erik Wolf, *Recht des Nächsten: ein rechtstheologischer Entwurf. Philosophische Abhandlungen*, 15 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1966); Ernst Wolf, *Sozialethik. Theologische Grundfragen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975); Wolfgang Huber, *Gerechtigkeit und Recht. Grundlinien christlicher Rechtsethik* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1996).

[11] See Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[12] See Otfried Höffe, *Wirtschaftsbürger, Staatsbürger, Weltbürger: politische Ethik im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2004).

[13] "The Small Catechism," in *op. cit* (note 6), p. 343.

[14] Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme (eds), *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 6.

[15] Ricardo Rieth, *"Habsucht" bei Martin Luther: ökonomisches und theologisches Denken, Tradition und soziale Wirklichkeit im Zeitalter der Reformation. Arbeiten zur Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte*, 1 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1996).

[16] Martin Luther, *Der hundertsiebenundzwanzigste Psalm*, in Johann Georg Walch, *Sämmtliche Schriften*, vol. IV (Groß Oesingen: Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung, 1987), Sp. 1942.

[17] "Goods are not evil, but are a gift of God, like wisdom. God begrudges us nothing and agrees to our usage and possession of things. But the rich want to add to this: This should be mine which I have acquired through my diligence and my work. And the things in question are only needed until more are acquired. This is evil and is a demonic aspiration after the Godhead… God blesses those whose goods are being well allocated in saying: I have gold, I have silver, but it is not my work, oh Lord, but your gift, which you have given me through my work." *Ibid*, Sp. 1953.

[18] Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 8 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), p. 94.

[19] See Bernd Wannenwetsch, *Political Worship: Ethics for Christian Citizens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

A Lutheran Ethics of Embodied Care

Wanda Deifelt

The topic we were to address in class was Luther's understanding of vocation, *Beruf*. The young students tried to follow my reasoning, as I pointed out that Luther's sense of vocation encompasses all dimensions of one's life. At the liberal arts college where I teach, looking for Luther's theological contribution on any topic—ranging from education to politics—is quite standard. Students were not surprised that vocation is related to the totality of one's existence.

During the class, I was quite aware that I read Luther's writings from a Latin American perspective. Luther became meaningful in my Brazilian context through the lens of liberation theology.[1] Justification by faith should be translated in such a manner as to include social justice. My social, cultural and political context has been a hermeneutical key for me, allowing me to appropriate Luther's sixteenth-century writings from a twenty-first-century perspective. How could a similar reading be relevant to college students in the United States?

In a collective class exercise, students were asked which topics they would identify if they were to write their ninety-five theses. If the fear of an avenging God and anguish over one's salvation were central in Luther's writings, what would be the issues named by Christians in the twenty-first century? What ethical concerns would a theology of vocation lead us to address?

A central concern among the students was the contradiction between faith and action, that is, how people who claim to be Christians can be indifferent to other people's needs, how Christianity has became a private matter, and what little impact faith has on social transformation.

When asked what prevents life from flourishing today, one student replied that people are reduced to their possessions, that success, reputation and material goods dictate if one's existence is "justified" in this culture. Another pointed out that people are valued by the color of their skin, by their physical appearance, their gender or sexual identity. A third said that people are valued if they have family and friends. Divorce, homosexuality, or any other "abnormalities" can stigmatize. Still another summarized, "It is all about money."

If Christian vocation encompasses all aspects of our existence, why have we talked so little about these topics? If they are addressed, they refer to separate concerns of business ethics, sexual ethics, political ethics, etc. Would it not be more appropriate to ask about the role human bodies (in their multiple dimensions) play in ethical reflection, without compartmentalizing? Are human bodies not worthy of theological consideration? Can embodiment provide a framework for ethical deliberation and become a key to appropriate Luther's theology from a twenty-first-century perspective? This is what I will explore here.

Reclaiming embodiment in ethics

By overlooking life's concrete reality and the multiple layers of human existence, many Christians overrate the spiritual dimension and reduce Christianity to a set of individual moralistic values. In so doing, they deny the concern for the well-being of oneself, of others and of the whole creation (see Rom 8:22-23). Reducing Christianity to individual spiritual experience or exempting oneself from doing good works (out of fear that one might be justifying oneself) not only denies the doctrine of justification and its capacity to engender transformation. Relating Christianity exclusively to eschatological questions of personal salvation overlooks the importance of discipleship here and now. An embodied ethics can help us appreciate the Christian concern for the neighbor's well-being in a new way.

Embodied care offers a concrete expression of Christian love, and brings human bodies into theological reflection and ethical deliberation. Embodied care points to our humanity, vulnerability and interdependence as social beings. It is through our bodies that we communicate, interact and demonstrate our care for one another. Our bodies connect us with the world; as tangible parts of the web of life, they weave us into the whole of creation. "Our body is a sort of house, in which both the political and the domestic may be found."[2]

The human body is an intrinsic part of our faith. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, the human being is a body along with the soul or spirit. Created by God, the body is good. In the context of the Hebrew Scriptures, the body, *basar*, (also translated as flesh), is part of a unity: without the soul, *nefesh*, breath, or the spirit, *ruach*, (the divine spirit), the body does not survive. Without the body, however, there is no manifestation of life. Life is found in the breath, *nefesh*, and in the blood, *dam*. The importance of this unity of the human body is stated in the affirmation that humanity, *Adam*, is made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), as male and female.

The relevance of the body is also affirmed in Christianity, so much so that the divine becomes flesh. The prologue of the Gospel of John highlights the importance of the incarnation: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, […] full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). This affirmation is central to the Christian faith. In Jesus Christ, the divine is made human (flesh); God becomes embodied.[3] In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Luther reiterates the unity of body and soul in Jesus Christ, who was fully God and fully human: "For he is one person, by reason not only of the body but of both the body and the soul."[4]

In the Gospels, incarnation implies that the divine enters human reality and becomes fully embodied, totally human. Jesus brings physical and spiritual well-being through miracles, healing, feeding, preaching and reintegrating the outcast back into the community. In his own body, Jesus experienced physical pain, death and resurrection. Jesus Christ is both true God and true man, and all his words and works must be attributed to the whole person; the human and divine cannot be separated.

> Similarly, body and soul present two distinct entities in a natural and sound person; yet the two constitute but one person, and we ascribe the functions, activities, and offices of each to the whole person.[5]

A theology of incarnation does not allow us to spiritualize this message, but brings urgency to assuring the neighbor's well-being.

The spiritual or eschatological must not be overemphasized in ways that downplay embodiment, politics, economics, ecology and concrete efforts to assure the neighbor's well-being. To do so would echo the early Gnostics, whose negative view of the human body led them to dispute the incarnation. They argued that Jesus could never have been fully human, felt bodily desires or suffered. Similar views were shared by Docetists, who maintained that Christ merely appeared (pretended) to have a human body. Gnostic tendencies are still alive today when Christians disregard the body's well-being. Although Christians may agree, in principle, on the importance of the body's well-being, the need is often overlooked for systemic analysis of the economic, social, sexual, cultural, political, racial, geographical, or religious conditions that prevent or foster such well-being.

When addressing issues of embodiment, the debate frequently falls into moralistic antagonisms. Contemporary debates on sexuality are reduced to questions related to homosexuality, for example, instead of perceiving sexuality as a constitutive part of the embodiment of all persons. The body's well-being is reduced to one facet of human life, and this one aspect is disproportionately addressed though preestablished moralistic principles. The either-or juxtaposition of arguments does not address the complexity of human life nor the need for more careful reasoning in ethical reflection today.

Beyond dualisms

Valuing the body in the doctrine of incarnation and in Jesus' ministry contrasts with Greek dualism, where the human body (and material world) was considered inferior to the soul. In the Greco-Roman world this dualism led to two extremes: the body was either kept under control with spiritual contemplation and ascetic practices or was overly indulged through orgies and bacchanals.[6] In either case, the body's well-being was denied. There was no understanding that the body itself could be a sacred manifestation of divine creativity. The body was perceived as the prison of the soul; the soul sought to be freed from the carcass of the body. Death was welcomed because it allowed the immortal soul to be freed; the body could perish, but the soul would live.

In subtle ways, this dualism also influences how human bodies are perceived in societies today.[7] On the one hand, suffering, impoverishment, illness and violation of bodies are denied or overlooked. People become insensitive to others' pain because of how it is caricatured and made ephemeral or irrelevant. Daily violence (whether in the mass media or in personal encounters) sweeps away empathy and care. When embodiment is not honored, violence is tolerated, others' needs dismissed and social injustice accepted. Spiritual salvation becomes the primary focus of Christian teaching. What then is overshadowed is ethical concern for the neighbor's well-being—assuring that the bodily needs for food, drink, shelter, clothing and quality of life are available for all human beings.

On the other hand, there is an obsession with bodies. Objectifying bodies in the mass media, using bodies (especially women's) to advertise products, exploiting bodies through sex tourism, and being preoccupied with fitting human bodies into a preestablished or stereotypical mold are also symptoms of the denial of bodies. The body is punished in order to comply with the values a culture (or other interests) imposes. Overindulgence in bodily pleasures (e.g., overeating or overdrinking), for the sake of instant pleasure, is another offshoot of this.

To point to such contradictory views, which are so widespread in globalized and consumerist societies, is not to suggest a moralistic approach. We must not claim to stand on a higher moral ground and from there to judge a denial or obsession with bodies as deviant or "un-Christian." An emphasis on embodiment needs to reclaim the human body as sacred, a temple of the Holy Spirit. More importantly, ethical reflection that takes embodiment seriously needs to be concerned with caring for other people's bodies. Insisting on moral conformity, for example, on the basis of classist, sexist, racist, or heterosexual criteria is inadequate. An embodied ethics needs to reclaim the importance of all bodies and affirm care as the criterion for ethics.

Paul and human bodies

The apostle Paul combines a Hebrew approach that values the human body (Greek: *soma*) as a part of God's good creation ("the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," 1 Cor 6:19) with a dualistic approach where the flesh, *sarx*, is seen as the opposite of life in the Spirit (Rom 8:3ff: "the flesh is sinful and weak"). Paul presents a paradox between the body as good creation, thus requiring attention and care, and the carnal reality of sin experienced in the flesh. Since the body is so important, it deserves attention and special care. Thus, deeply influenced by his own cultural background, Paul offers guidelines for conduct ranging from sexual practices to how to receive the sacraments.

It is important that interpreters focus not exclusively on the content of such guidelines, but on the larger framework or principles from which they spring. The interpretive principle we propose here, based on Lutheran ethics, is the principle of care or neighbor-love. The hermeneutical distinction Luther spelled out implies the freedom to interpret in light of the liberating core of such guidelines—i.e., love of the neighbor. We can then ask whether the guidelines are still appropriate or if they need to be challenged—because of their effect on the neighbor, according to the criterion of embodied care.

Thus, if Paul repeated the so-called household codes (women, children and slaves being subservient to the head of the household), which reflected the standard culture of his time (upholding slavery and hierarchical systems), Christians do not have to go along with such codes simply because they are in the Bible. The guiding framework, when interpreting Scripture, is the gospel, the good news for people then and now.

One of the stumbling blocks is, of course, Paul's position on homosexuality. If taken literally (the letter of the text), homosexuality would be condemned. If read in light of the criterion of embodied care for all people, including those who today are understood to be homosexual in orientation, the implications of a text must be examined more carefully. Rather than a literalistic appropriation of certain texts (especially to judge others), the question for ethical deliberation and discernment becomes, How do we take good care of our bodies, as an aspect of an ethics of embodied care?

When addressing issues of human sexuality, therefore, an ethics of embodied care cannot merely repeat the guidelines on sexual conduct established by previous generations of believers (much less of the prevailing culture). To reclaim embodiment as an ethical and theological parameter and to commit ourselves to an ethics of care, requires that we deliberate on both heterosexual and homosexual relationships using the same principles: commitment, respect, integrity, accountability, faithfulness and care for one another. It is the issue of care (similar to Paul's concern for the body's well-being) that becomes the focal point. The concern of the community (the body of Christ) is for those who suffer because of discrimination and stigmatization.

Luther and the human body

Luther reflects his time and context when describing the human being in terms of spirit, soul and body. He perceived the spirit as the highest, deepest and noblest part of the human being, and the human body as its exterior manifestation. The soul gives life to the body and works through it. The body is not negative—although the flesh is sporadically referred to as a "rotten old bag," and with frequent admonishments to keep it under control.[8]

Similar to Paul, Luther implies that the body (God's creation) is intrinsically good but the flesh is corrupt and sinful. For instance, in commenting on Paul's letter to the Romans, Luther echoes such a dualistic approach. The nobility of the body involves chastity and continence, whereas dishonor and shame involve "intentional" pollution[9] or involuntary pollution (for instance, wet dreams). Luther's concern is with practices that defile not only one's own body but that of another. On this basis, he condemns adultery and prostitution.

On the surface, this might seem to imply that Christians should focus on spiritual rather than earthly, bodily matters. However, Luther's theology offers a more integrated and holistic approach by focusing on qualities rather than on "nature." The distinction is not between the body being bad and the spirit good. It is the use we make of these gifts that is at stake and defines them as good or evil.[10] Thus, sexuality is not bad but is part of God's good creation. Human sexuality is to be lived in ways that are healthy, respectful, mutually engaging and caring.

Even when Luther critiques bodily conduct, he insists that those who live chaste lives are no purer than others. "In this world we are bound by the needs of our bodily life, but we are not righteous because of them."[11] Luther's notion of Christians being saint and sinner, *simul iustus et peccator*, is relevant here: nobody is better or worse than anybody else. Luther critiques the ascetic, monastic ideal: "Is it not true that money, property, body, spouse, child, friends, and the like are good things created and given by God Himself?"[12] In the mundane, bodily realities of life, believers testify to their faith not by judging each other, but by caring for one another.[13]

The whole of creation provides opportunities for encountering God in gratitude. Material resources must

> be traced back to God, because they are gifts of God put into practice not only in the spirit but also outside and toward people; for God is also the God of bodies. Therefore he provides us with bodily gifts, and he wants us to enjoy these gifts with gladness.[14]

Yet, these are not entitlements to be taken for granted; God is not obligated to provide them for us—they are gifts. To squander, lose a sense of awe, commodify or objectify the material world is sinful. As Luther explains the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "give us today our daily bread," when material things become the center of our concerns, then mammon rules and not God.

God creates and sustains us. Life is a gift, as is the whole creation. Luther's theology allows us to see creation itself as a manifestation of divine grace, which we are invited to partake and share with one another. Our bodies and our sexuality are God's gifts to us, in which we are to take delight. For Luther, God's creation of the material world is to be enjoyed:

> These gifts seem secular and profane. A Stoic or a Pharisee would ask whether they are lawful. People of this kind are exceedingly disgusting. They allow the

> body no delight and joy at all. It is their religion which Paul describes in Col. 2:23, namely, not to spare the body but to torture and kill it until it is reduced to nothing. Thus it is said of Bernard that in order to overcome his lust he tormented his body to such an extent that eventually the brothers could not associate with him because of his stinking breath. God created body and soul, and He wants recreation allowed to both, but in a definite amount and manner.[15]

"The body is a beautiful and noble creation of God."[16] Therefore, it is also our responsibility to assure the well-being of other people's bodies. We cannot save their souls—salvation is God's prerogative alone. But we can—and must—work for the good of each other's bodies and all that this might entail. This is the whole realm of Christian action, doing good works for the sake of the good of others, not merely our own good.

The body of Christ

Paul uses the body as a metaphor to describe the church as the body of Christ. Thus, embodiment draws on the Hebrew understanding of the collective, communal body. The implications for ecclesiology are key: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor 12:26).[17] The church, as the body of Christ, is more than an assembly of bodies; it is Christ's real presence in each person, affirming each person's dignity and creative potential. This is also affirmed through baptism, whereby Christians become one in Christ (Gal 3:27-28). To become part of the body, through baptism, means that the body also respects the different talents given to each member by the Holy Spirit; recognizing diversity itself as a gift. To care for the members of the body is to give voice to the body's sufferings and pleasures.

This has consequences for how Christians as a social body perceive themselves and act in society. Christians are to be active citizens, taking responsibility and being accountable for the common good. Governments are to assure that the needs of all citizens are met. "The government has the charge not to permit the harsh oppression of the innocent."[18] Christians are called to make sure governments act justly. Even if the social order is given, Christians not only have the opportunity, but also the obligation, to make their voices heard, especially in advocating on behalf of others.

The sharing of the body of Christ as food in the sacrament of Holy Communion is a visible testimony of an embodied theology.[19] God reveals Godself in the body. The broken body is shared to fortify other bodies, and to announce the resurrection. In the communitarian sharing of the Last Supper, Christ himself is the one who gives of himself through the bread and the wine.[20] We share in the body of Christ with others, and as we do so, we experience a foretaste of God's reign. We experience God's passion for humanity in the incarnation and in the strength of the community that is united through this Meal. We proclaim that the body of Christ, the church, is a welcoming community open to all. The unity of the church is not given through its bishops or priests, but by Christ.[21]

To share the body and blood of Christ is, at the same time, to eat and to drink the forgiveness of sins, to be reconciled to God and each other and to be fortified to live out the love of God with our neighbors. We do so in anticipation of the fullness of life that God promises and gives. The broken body of Jesus becomes food for us; no other human sacrifices are necessary. In the Apostle's Creed, we confess our faith in the resurrection of the body; a resurrection that begins here and now.[22] The food we eat and the drink we take strengthen us to testify to the good news of forgiveness, reconciliation and God's loving presence in a suffering world.

An ethics of embodied care translates into genuine concern for the well-being of others. But hubris often leads us to be concerned with others for the sake of our well-being, not theirs. We judge some attitudes as unacceptable while condoning values or practices that are equally troublesome. In the body of Christ, mutual admonition and challenge are needed. However, matters of embodiment too easily are subjected to moralistic judgments. Adultery, fornication, improper sexual behavior, pornography and sexual violence are expressions of sin. But from an embodiment perspective, sin also includes the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the trafficking of women and children for sexual purposes, slave and child labor, world hunger, exploitative economic systems, domestic violence and the violence inflicted through conflicts and wars. A broad understanding of human embodiment is needed so as not to reduce it only to certain sexual practices.

An ethics of embodied care for bodies

The core of Christian ethics, therefore, is care for the well-being of others. That well-being includes assuring safety, nourishment and shelter. It also includes using our strength, our goods and our reputation to advocate on behalf of others. Such advocacy is an expression of service, *diaconia*. Our Christian calling is to be responsible for the well-being of others: "It is one's neighbor, not one's sanctification, which stands at the heart of the ethics of vocation."[23] To respond to the needs of others is more than helping in times of peril. It is to speak and advocate for the rights of others, to do good deeds as agents of social transformation, bearers of peace and proclaimers of justice.[a]

In carrying this out, we face many temptations. According to Luther, the first temptation is found in ourselves, when we become indifferent and inattentive to the Word of God.[24] When humans beings become either indifferent to the temporal reality or overwhelmed by anxiety or hopelessness, their awareness of being creatures dependent on God is lost. This awareness is sharpened through a spiritual life of prayer, reading the Word of God and living daily in God's grace. Otherwise we are tempted to fall into self-righteousness or self-sufficiency. Graceful and grateful living results from knowing we are utterly dependent on God's mercy and love. Accepted by God, we also accept each other.

The Christian life involves transformation and renewal–dying and rising daily through baptism. We are to care for one another in the same way Jesus did, in loving, accepting, challenging and practical ways. The human body is part of God's good creation and, as such, it is to be cared for, respected and honored. This is not a mystical body, but the very body we inhabit.[25] The body is a *locus* of God's revelation and a focus of our concern.

An ethics of embodied care is based on a theology of creation—the human body as part of God's good creation; on a theology of incarnation—God

[a] ACs: The Lutheran Church in Hungary was famous for its theology of diaconia during the 1970s and 1980s. This experiment reveals some of the dangers as well as the weaknesses of the ethical approach that puts a one-sided emphasis on the needs of the other, on the basis of either the New Testament or Luther. The need of the other, whether real or imagined, can grow into a tyrant that turns the Christian into a helpless slave. Historically, in Hungary, the "other" was represented by the atheist state to which the Christian was to give unquestioned loyalty, on the basis of the frequently cited Rom 13. This relationship with the "other" did not leave any room for criticism of the "other." Therefore, an East-German-type of "critical solidarity" could not be developed. Apart from this particular situation, I think, two questions remain. First, who is the "I", and how can the "I" preserve a critical distance form the "other" while serving the "other"? Second, who cares for the caretaker? I think the general answer that God cares, is not enough, if, on the other hand, we speak about a very concrete "embodied care."

became totally human in a human body; on an ecclesiology—the church a communal body; on a sacramental theology of baptism and the Eucharist and on the resurrection of the body.

For reflection or discussion:

What messages has your culture or family conveyed to you about your body? How is this different from or similar to what the church has conveyed? What specific kinds of care are important for you as an embodied being? In your society, what kinds of human bodies are devalued, treated as outcasts or polluted? How is this challenged or transformed through a gospel hermeneutic and an ethic of embodied care?

Notes

[1] Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) (copies are still available through the LWF Department for Theology and Studies).

[2] Martin Luther, "Notes on Ecclesiastes," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 15 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1972), p. 179. Here Luther reflects the social and cultural understanding of his time by adding to the sentence "[…] the king of the state is the head; its guards are the arms, etc."

[3] For a more comprehensive analysis of the theology of incarnation and the its Christological consequences, see Wanda Deifelt, "The Recovery of the Body: Jesus in a Feminist and Latin American perspective," in Sturla Staalsett, *Discovering Jesus in our Place* (New Dehli: ISPCK, 2003), pp. 24-44.

[4] Martin Luther, "Sermons on the Gospel of St John. Chapters 14-16," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 24 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 106.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christianity* (London: Lepus Books, 1979), pp. 3-15.

[7] Marga J. Stroeher, Wanda Deifelt, Andre S. Musskopf, *À flor da pele: ensaios sore gênero e corporeidade* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 2004).

[8] Quoting from Gregory in his homily on Ezekiel: "A living sacrifice is a body which is afflicted for the Lord, and it is called living sacrifice because it lives in virtues and is dead to vices; it is a sacrifice because it is already dead to this world and its depraved works; living because all the things it continues are good." Martin Luther, "Lectures on Romans. Glosses and Scholia," in Hilton C. Oswald (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 25 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), p. 436.

[9] "Excessive passion from shameful thoughts, through rubbing with hands, through fondling of another's body, especially a woman's, through indecent movements, etc." Luther, *ibid.*, p. 166.

[10] Luther goes on to explain each of these categories: "The first part, the spirit, is the highest, deepest, and noblest part…[by which we are enabled] to lay hold on things incomprehensible, invisible, and eternal. It is, in brief, the dwelling place of faith and the Word of God… The second part, the soul, is this same spirit, so far as its nature is concerned, but viewed as performing a different function, namely, giving life to the body and working through the body. In the Scriptures it is frequently put for the life; for the spirit may live without the body, but the body has no life apart from the spirit… The third part is the body with its members. Its works is only to carry out and apply that which the soul knows and the spirit believes." Martin Luther, "The Magnificat," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 21 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp. 303-304.

[11] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 81.

[12] Luther, *op. cit.*, (note 10), p. 334.

[13] "To be sure, He [Jesus] did depart from them [his disciples] physically, so He is no longer visible; but He left His peace behind to all Christendom. Where? Nowhere else than in His Baptism, in the Sacrament, and in the office of the ministry. I will say nothing of the other gifts and goods – also the physical ones – which He bestows on us, such as father and mother, government, order, temporal peace, and the like. How angry can God really be if He lets His sun rise for us every day, if He gives us good weather, if He lets all kinds of plants, fruits, and nourishment grow for us, if He favors us with healthy bodies and members? If we could look at these things properly, we would have to say: 'He surely has given us great treasures – above all, peace and joy toward Him and, in addition, all kinds of physical benefactions on earth, visible and palpable evidence of His mercy and His willingness to help us.' Therefore, we should learn not to be afraid or fainthearted before Him. He does not want to do us harm; otherwise He would not have given us His Word, Baptism, and the Sacrament." Luther, *op. cit.*, (note 4), p. 180.

[14] Martin Luther, Lectures on Genesis. Chapters 21-25, in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.). *Luther's Works*, vol. 4 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 273.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Luther, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 206.

[17] Luther affirms interdependence, recognizing that the community lives through its members and compensates for each other's flaws and shortcomings: "Again there are those who see that they are honorable and serve as a cover for others and as a result run away from the others to whom they have been given a cloak of respectability. These are the most foolish of all, because they think that they are this way of themselves, not realizing that they are what they are because of other people." Luther, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 510.

[18] Martin Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 21 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 25.

[19] "Thus Christ and the Christians become one loaf and one body, so that the Christian can bear good fruit – not Adam's or his own, but Christ's. For when a Christian baptizes, preaches, consoles, exhorts, works, and suffers, he does not do this as a man descended from Adam; it is Christ who does this in him. The lips and tongue with which he proclaims and confesses God's Word are not his; they are Christ's lips and tongue. The hands with which he toils and serves his neighbor are the hands and members of Christ, who, as He says here, is in him; and he is in Christ." Luther, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 226.

[20] Martin Luther, "The Pagan Servitude of the Church," in John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (New York: Anchor, 1962), pp. 256-291.

[21] "For as one body, the body is a unit, as is also the church, we are many members, yet the many members do not divide the unity, thus neither do the many believers divide the church, and all, that is, the individual, the members do not have the same function, the same duty, as in 1 Cor 12:4ff." Luther, *op. cit.* (note 8), pp. 105-106.

[22] Luther established a connection between the Holy Supper, redemption, and resurrection. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works. Luther the Expositor*, Companion Volume. Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 186: "Since the Lord's Supper thus granted a share in the total redemptive work of Christ crucified and risen, it was a means by which that total redemptive work of Christ was applied to the total life of man [sic]."

[23] Gustaf Wingreen, *Luther on Vocation* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), p. 182.

[24] "Once you have the Word of God right and have made a good start in both doctrine and life, then inevitably temptation and opposition arise, not one kind but thousands of kinds. In the first place, there is our own flesh, that rotten old bag. It quickly becomes bored, inattentive, and indifferent to the Word of God and the good life. Thus we always have less of wisdom and of the Word of God, of faith and love and patience, than we should. This is the first enemy hanging around our neck so heavily every day that he keeps dragging us that way. Next comes the second enemy, the world. It begrudges us the dear Word and faith and refuses to put up with anything in us, no matter how weak we may be. It goes ahead and condemns us, it tries to take away what we have, and gives us no peace… Now, the third enemy is the strongest of all, the devil himself. He has us at a great disadvantage for two reasons: by nature we are not good; and in addition we are weak in faith in spirit." Martin Luther, "The Sermon on the Mount," in Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, vol. 21 (Saint. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), pp. 230-231.

[s] Luther, *op. cit.* (note 8), p. 314.

At Intersections of Sexuality

An African Perspective on Marriage and Sexuality

Phillip Moeahabo Moila

Introduction

In different contexts, there are indications that "marriage and sexuality" and "Christian ethics" are in crisis. This article reflects on this problem from an African perspective, with traditional ethical principles that could be relevant in various contexts. The article is furthermore informed by how a Lutheran ethical grammar interfaces with these African principles.

In Africa, understandings and practices related to sex and marriage have undergone many changes and face significant challenges. The relationship between husband and wife is changing fundamentally and the modern small (nuclear) family is replacing the patriarchal large (extended) family. Sexual relations can no longer be controlled by social institutions; satisfying sexual desires or conceiving children often occurs outside the institution of marriage. The realm of sexuality is becoming less of a taboo subject; sexual attitudes have developed which are different from standards of traditional communities. Through various media, the impression has been created that individuals have a right to satisfy and fulfill their sexual desires.

HIV/AIDS continues to afflict African and other societies. Efforts to control this pandemic are bound to fail if the rapid upsurge of reckless and irresponsible human sexual behavior is condoned. I believe there to be a close relationship between globalization, moral decay and the high infection rate of HIV/AIDS. The millions of deaths from HIV/AIDS inflict extraordinary pain on communities, leave many orphaned and intensify poverty. African ethical principles are needed to aid the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Traditional African ethical principles

Three African ethical principles are important for understanding traditional African ethics of sex and marriage: holism, vitalism and communalism.[1]

"Holism" maintains that by virtue of being created and sustained by a Supreme Being, all belong together.[2] This belief is ritualized at various stages of sex and family life. Rituals integrate the religious and the secular and serve as a framework for guiding people toward a morally good sexual life.

This principle calls for the unity and cooperation of all who live on earth. In adherence to this principle, traditional Africans not only respect but, to a certain extent, also fear nature. Thus, they declare some natural phenomenon such as mountains, rivers, stones and animals to be "holy." This principle inspires people with a strong sense of belonging to one another in an undivided world of the Creator. It echoes the biblical view that all humans are coinhabitants of the earth, as part of the one *oikoumene*. It can serve as the basis for the development and shaping of world Christianity.[3]

The feeling of being part of the whole cosmos of ancestors, nature and God is essential, but such a sense of cosmic order must also be open to critique and opposed when it is used to justify or perpetuate injustices.[4] This would be a misuse of this principle. Its strength is that it challenges us to focus not only on other people's welfare, but also on the welfare of all creatures with their Creator.

"Vitalism" is the African belief that sex and marriage are vehicles for the perpetuation of life, understood especially in terms of procreation. Vitalism increases the parents' life force. On this basis, marriage has been obligatory for every adult, and its purpose has primarily been for procreation. In African societies, barrenness was seen as a curse, resulting in being humiliated by both men and women. A married woman who was barren was expected to have another woman bear children on her behalf. The latter was also humiliated because she served as a "garden" for bearing children, and was never regarded as a wife. This misuse of vitalism caused a lot of pain for barren women; they were made to serve the principle, or the culture, rather than being served by the culture.

According to Genesis 2:24, the union between man and woman is the basis for human sexual life and behavior. This is in harmony with the African principle of vitalism. In both cases, marriage is the foundation of reproduction and the growth of society.

"Communalism" is the traditional African belief in which the community is more important than any individual: individuals are who they are through others. As a result, in some traditional African societies the family arranged their sons' and daughters' marriages and the extended family regulated relationships between husband and wife. While this obviously deprives the individual of the right of choice, the principle helped individuals to develop a sense of belonging and being useful to a community. This principle can be used either to oppress or liberate persons. For instance, it can be used to empower individuals who cannot face life's challenges or oppressive social structures on their own. However, some persons, especially many women, experience it as oppressive.

Nevertheless, this principle, consistent with biblical understandings of unity and community, can serve as one of the interfaces between local and global ethics of sex and marriage. For instance, in Genesis 1:26 we read, "Let us make humankind in our image." The pronouns "us" and "our" reflect a conversation within the Godhead which indicates that from the very beginning God was in community and sought community with human beings. In the Old Testament, the analogy of Israel as the wife of Yahweh is frequently repeated to show that God seeks community with human beings. The Bible bears witness to the God who seeks community with people, which means that it is in our nature to seek community with others, including with God, for as long as we live. Therefore, we must affirm this principle of communalism in African (and other) societies. "Unity seeking is central to our being, a basic integral part of each of us, just as it is a basic integral part of God."[5]

We must not mistake communalism for fusion or uniformity. Individuals living in community remain separate persons, each one capable of independent existence and action. Their communal life is and should be an act of will—something they choose to do for each other. In marriage, communalism is expressed through the spouses' intimacy, procreation and parenting. Societies or marriages in which individuals are no longer capable of independent personal actions do not represent the ideal of communalism/unity. Instead, they lapse into "communism," which diminishes the person's growth and fulfillment.

Holism, vitalism and communalism articulate the traditional African belief in the wholeness of life, human power to create life and life in community. The African person's way of thinking, speaking and acting has been influenced by the belief that s/he is part of the order of creation, able to create life and to live in community with others. In traditional African societies, belief in the wholeness of life, creative activity and communal life has provided the framework for ethical action.[a]

African principles intersect with a Lutheran grammar of ethics

Wholeness of life

The traditional African belief that the cosmic order belongs to God and that God belongs to the cosmic order challenges any dualistic tendencies to separate the spiritual and political spheres of life. While Luther did not intend to promote dualism, after him the spiritual and political spheres became more separated in Western Christianity. Luther perceived the cosmic order in terms of family, state and church. As such he argued that, as a member of society, the human being is part of these created orders. Rather than analyzing these orders, for Africans, this is a matter of belief: through creation, humanity belongs to this cosmic order, as does God, and we belong to God. Because of this, the religious and secular cannot be separated.

The African principle of holism is essential for the transformation to life-affirming attitudes. The battle against the HIV/AIDS pandemic cannot be effectively won without this transformation. As Hans G. Ulrich has remarked, "All human beings are created in order to remain God's creatures—not the material for our own purpose of formation." Luther also believed that God revealed Godself to all humanity as Creator and Lord of nature as well as of history. Hence he argued that the revelation in Christ does not destroy this general revelation of God's preserving will as it is expressed in the natural orders.[6]

[a] ACs: In Hungary, prior to World War II, similar principles prevailed; traditional Hungarian society had much in common with traditional African society. Communism brought a strange change: although communist ideology attacked the traditional family as a relatively independent unit and tried to replace its cultural effect with a homogeneous and state-controlled atheist cultural orientation, relative poverty and isolation from the West resulted in the survival of traditional patterns. After communism, however, this tradition has been fading rapidly, as levels of individual, political and economic freedom have been rising. The immediate effect of this change is a birth rate so low that the number of Hungarians will probably decrease by twenty percent over the next fifty years. Some political forces advocate for a return to traditional values, but I think instead we need a new vision for marriage, based on equal sharing and much more flexible gender roles.

However, we need to guard against the rigid application of this principle, as if human beings needed only to assent to the order of God, without being free to decide or exercise responsibility, or even to reject God's creative will. In this sense, marriage would become an obligation imposed on every human being. This conservative, unhistorical view of holism has been prevalent in most traditional African societies, and as such, has contributed to a rigid ethics of sex and marriage. However, the primary purpose of this principle is not to prescribe ethical rules, but to make human beings aware that their thinking, speaking and actions are influenced and guided by a cosmic order.

It was the negative use of the principle of holism that turned traditional African culture into a burden, especially for women. It is not surprising then for Mercy Oduyoye to remark that, "the traditional ordering of society placed its own burdens on the African people."[7] Instead, African theology needs to liberate Africans from their cultural limitations and bondage. This is correct as long as it is an attack on the misuse of the principle; the principle itself is a reflection of the dynamic character of the culture.

Human creative activity

The principle of vitalism is inspired by an African perception of life. For Africans, life produces and maintains itself; life is dynamic. "The continuation of existence by means of children is life's answer to the law of death."[8] In line with this, the bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania recently declared that, "Marriage is the only institution which God ordained through His word to be the foundation of reproduction, growth and civilized society."[9] Both Bovet and the Tanzanian bishops articulate the fact that life is given through procreation. Similarly, for Luther the family is one of the created orders through which God is continuing to create life.

I will briefly analyze how this African concept of life is manifest in Zulu culture. For Zulus, life is given through procreation in order to perpetuate the existence of the clan. Life is defined as a long chain that starts with the first father of the clan and carries on through the children. Both males and females are carriers of life. Hence, for the Zulus marriage is for the purpose of furthering life. The child is regarded as a link in the chain of life carriers. Both clan and individual are very important—they cannot be separated. This is why the Zulus are so eager to have many children. For them, life flows in an endless chain from the father through all his children. It is expected that no family or clan be childless, or especially without sons. This belief has contributed to the emergence of polygamy in traditional African societies.

Life is collective and productive. "Life to the Zulu is both individualistic and corporate as well as inclusive in the tribe."[10] Life force, *amandla*, is another important concept used by the Zulus to indicate the importance of the continuity of the clan. Hence, life, *imphilo*, and *amandla* form the essence of a human being. "From God flows all power and He is the giver of life in creation and He is the one who causes the life force to flow from generation to generation and terminates life and life force."[11] The Zulus have believed in the high-god, whom they called *Umvelingganngi*, and from whom "flows power (*amandla*) which is both creative, positive and strengthening and on the other hand vile, evil and destructive."[12]

For the Zulus, immortality is not necessarily related to living ethically. One can live an extremely wicked life, yet face death hopefully because one has many children. The Zulu concern for a person's *imphilo* differs radically from the ancient Eastern teachings of immortality. The latter believed one's ethical life on earth to be fundamental for one's life beyond death. In Zulu culture the two have nothing to do with each other. For the Zulus, life flows from the father through all his children; the more children, the better. Thus, the Zulus cannot understand modern arguments for limiting the size of families. Furthermore, they do not believe ultimately they will be annihilated because having children is what strengthens and stabilizes life.

The Zulu perception of life has important implications for marriage and sexuality in all human contexts. Through marriage and sexuality humanity is brought into God's creative work. Humanity is offered an opportunity to employ its creative power, flowing from God who causes the life force to flow from generation to generation. God's leading and acting accompanies married couples of all human clans in their creative activity. Through marriage and sexuality God continues to create life.

Is the God the Zulus are talking about the same God who is revealed through Christ? Luther would have answered with a resounding yes. Luther believed that God is revealed to all humanity as Creator and Lord of nature and history. Revelation in Christ does not destroy this general revelation of God's preserving will as expressed in the natural orders. However, for him as for St Paul, this general revelation is not sufficient; it is not what saves humanity.[13]

In both the Old Testament (Gen 1 and 2) and New Testament (Mt 19 and 1 Cor 11), there is evidence for marriage having originated in God's creation, with God ordering the mutual relationship between man and woman. The Bible bears witness to God's creative activity in and for the historical forms of social life. From a Lutheran perspective, human beings are called to be and become within God's creative work. Like Lutheran ethics, the African principle of vitalism affirms and promotes the presence of God in human communities.

A second implication of this Zulu perception of life is the focus on human creative activity (i.e., procreation) benefiting the clan (or society) rather than individuals. Marriage and sexuality offer the couple the opportunity to contribute to the growth of the community by creating life. Thus, they are very eager to beget children. In this context, the principle of vitalism is a counterpoint to self-centeredness or selfishness. Nonetheless, it has caused significant pain and humiliation for those (especially women) who are not able to beget children and, on this basis, are considered inferior.

It is unfortunate that this has undermined the principle of vitalism. The real problem here is the application, not the essence of the principle which concurs with a Lutheran ethical grammar.[b] According to Luther, good works must benefit one's fellow human beings and society—otherwise they are worthless. In his view, good works are socially useful; they are works done within and for the community.[14] It is important to note that for Luther only faith could guarantee ethical action; he did not base his ethics on social or philosophical principles, but on the Word of God. His ethics start with revelation instead of human perceptions of life or reason; justification is the basis for all Christian ethics. Hence he argues that those who have faith will do good works. For Christians, therefore, adherence to the principle of vitalism is and should be the consequence of faith rather than a cultural requirement.[c]

[b] PA: But was Luther really a vitalist? Procreation, for Luther, involved far more than having children.

KLB: A Lutheran grammar has also led most Lutheran churches to affirm and encourage the use of birth control in order responsibly to limit the size of families, for the sake of the common good.

[c] As the LWF Action Plan, *Compassion, Conversion, Care: Responding as Churches to the HIV/AIDS Pandemic*, states: "God's grace frees people of faith to break out of accustomed boundaries and taboos, to challenge irresponsible sexual practices, and to move into new perceptions of themselves and of God's healing activity in the world. We are freed and empowered to: tell the truth to one another about what is happening in our lives and communities; speak together as adults, youth and children about sexuality and responsible sexual practices; teach new ways of relating to one another as women and men as equals, and especially new patterns of sexual responsibility by males; take initiatives to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS and save lives."

Life in community

The African principle of communalism emanates from the African kinship system, by which life is lived out and realized in community. Thus, marriage was perceived as a group affair. Marriage established a variety of links between married partners and their parents. The husband's and wife's parents and relatives became one big family, not only in words but also in deeds. Their oneness was manifest in an attitude of friendliness and helpfulness toward one another. Relatives were mutually hospitable, and assisted each other in times of crisis. "The ties of kinship as expressed in terms of mutual interdependence are effective mostly in close family circle and closer categories of relationships associated with the family."[15]

Relatives exchanged gifts and visited each other regularly. The core of this lifestyle, therefore, was communal. Thinking of others was the heart of the Pedi's communal life and the best evidence of growth. Relatives cooperated willingly and harmoniously. Respect for one another in everyday life was regarded as good manners. Even the chief was expected to be respectful in relationships with the most humble of his followers. In ordinary social relationships questions of status differences were disregarded. "It is only in situations of dispute or on religious or ceremonial occasions and in political or jural activities that differences in status become apparent."[17] For Africans, the principle of communalism is of fundamental importance in social ethics.

The principle of communalism is also evident in Luther's ethics. A life of faith expresses itself in love toward others. It is in the community that God wants to be served. To love means to love the neighbor. Luther's ethics received its basis not from kinship but from the Word of God. His ethics starts with revelation instead of social life. The basic motive for Christian action arises from justification, which enables us able to love and care for our neighbors. For this reason, Luther argues that those who ignore their neighbor ignore God.[18] All service of God carried out in this world is service of neighbor. It is in the living community that God wants to be served. In the African community, to be responsible means to be aware of the needs of the other, to take care of them and to benefit them. Justice should be understood as the commitment to the neighbor in his/her needs. Ethics from a Lutheran perspective is not primarily about norms, guidelines, laws or limits; it is about communal life or a structured context of living. Christians are called to care about the particular needs of their neighbors. The power entrusted to humans is employed for other humans.

The principle of communalism is of fundamental importance for an ethics of marriage and sexuality. In African tradition, the kinship system prescribed relations among the members of the family, whereas in Luther's ethics, love for the other determined relations among family members. Kinship and love for the neighbor do not contradict each other. Love is born and grows within a community of relatives. A person who is capable of loving his/her relatives is normally capable of loving other people, even strangers and enemies. But the presence of God is initially experienced in the family.

Luther emphasized that men and women are created by God, not only to be attracted to each other and to live together as a family, tribe and nation, but to love, respect and serve each other. A kinship system devoid of love and respect for the other is ungodly and dangerous. Marriage, in a Lutheran ethical grammar, is an opportunity to exercise love for others. Traditional African ethics and Lutheran ethics concur on this but differ when it comes to how this is lived out. In traditional African societies, men have been accorded enormous power to control women, whereas in Lutheran ethics today, men have no right to lord power over women. Men and women are equal and need to love and respect one another. Communal life at all levels should be motivated and characterized by love and respect for one another.

Facing challenges today

According to a Lutheran grammar, Christian action springs from faith in Christ and fellowship with Christ, as shaped and molded by the love that is referred to in the Bible as agape. Agape is capable of transforming all social institutions, including sexual behavior. It is agape, not culture or a couple's efforts, which holds a marriage together. In traditional African societies, the principle of communalism is what held marriage together and regulated sexual behavior. Communal values dictated what married persons were to do, including their sexual behavior. But because of sin, this principle benefited men more than women. In traditional African societies, women have been regarded as inferior to men.

It is therefore the task of Christian ethics to liberate the African principle of communalism from patriarchal tendencies or exploitations that undermine the equality between men and women. Liberated from such tendencies, the principle can be useful for keeping marriages together and regulating sexual behavior: whatever one does must benefit the other and the rest of society.

Throughout the world, the institution of marriage is threatened. This challenges Christians to bear witness that marriage holds God's promise for a rich and full life. This cannot be done by affirming traditional precepts and customs, but by taking seriously God's promises and pledges. God's love and forgiveness in everyday life are transformed into respect and trust, into personal values that benefit the partners in marriage. Institutional structures of marriage must be personalized and transformed into responsible partnerships. Husband and wife are challenged to live in mutual affection and joint responsibility.

Although various forms of marriage are found in the Bible, monogamy seems to be the most preferable and practical. It is a form of marriage that can bear Christian witness. A married person is a partner, a human being, a whole person. The principle of holism plays an important role in this regard. The wholeness of a person includes sex, eros and agape. In all contexts today, married partners expect from the other understanding and concern for their personal interests. In this sense, the principle of holism does not undermine the individual's needs and interests. The principle is meant to counter individualism rather than to disregard the individual's needs, interests and rights in- and outside of marriage. Marriage is an institution that lessens people's burdens without robbing them of their dignity and rights.

Narcissism is the tendency to be overly focused on oneself rather than on others and, as such, is contrary to Lutheran ethics. The narcissistic modern society regards ego-related happiness as the highest ideal of life, does away with taboos and removes barriers that may limit the freedom of individuals. Christian ethics is challenged to fight narcissism with a sanctified principle of holism. Holism needs to be sanctified by agape so that it cannot be misused to inflict pain, e.g., on women and children. Such tendencies as the arbitrary changing of partners and premarital intercourse for self-gratification are to be rejected. Practices focused on the self rather than on others are inconsistent with both communalism and holism. An extreme example of violating the principle of communalism is the use of violence against spouses or other family members, sometimes to the point of murder. Laws, morals and customs of human societies need to be replaced by the gospel, which works well through communalism.

Traditional Christian ethics of sex and marriage must be transformed. New principles, informed by both biblical teachings and today's human contexts, are needed if world Christianity is to deal with current problems of sex and marriage in various contexts. Unfortunately, all human societies have developed ethical norms and rules that have benefited only some sectors of those communities. This must be rectified. Here, we have brought the traditional African principles of holism, vitalism and communalism into dialogue with a Lutheran grammar of ethics, and have suggested their usefulness in African and other contexts when they are combined with agape.

For reflection or discussion:

In your context, what traditional understandings are helpful, and not helpful, for responding to current "marriage and sexuality" challenges? What needs to be critiqued and/or transformed?

Notes

[1] See Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa. The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Carlisle: Editions Cle and Regnum Africa, 2000), p. 21.

[2] Phillip Moeahabo Moila, *Challenging Issues in African Christianity* (Pretoria: CB Powell Bible Centre, UNISA, 2002).

[3] Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 23-24. "World Christianity is the movement of Christianity into societies previously not expressed through the cultures, customs and traditions of the people affected. World Christianity is […] a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European Enlightenment frame."

[4] This point was raised by Wanda Deifelt during one of the study team's discussions.

[5] P. Baumeister, "Analogy of Intimacy: Marriage for Christians," in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 10, No. 5 (1983), p. 283.

[6] George W. Forell, *Faith Active in Love* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1954), p. 114.

[7] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

[8] Theodor Bovet, *A Handbook of Marriage and Marriage Guidance* (London: Longmans, 1958), p. 72.

[9] The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Bukoba Statement: Globalization, Human Sexuality and AIDS at http://www.elct.org/news/2004.05.001.html#3.5 , para. 3.5.2.2. "Marriage is the only institution which God ordained through His Word to be the foundation of reproduction, growth and civilize society. We thus ask: is it not also a human rights issue that children be raised in community with father and mother?"

[10] A. I. Berglund, "African Concepts of Health, Sickness and Healing," in *Report of the Umpumulo Consultation on the Healing Ministry of the Church* (Mapumulo Natal: Lutheran Theological College, 1967), p. 40.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] See Forell, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 114.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[15] H. O. Mönnig, *The Pedi* (Pretoria: J. O. Van Schaik Ltd., 1976), pp. 236-237.

[16] In southern Africa, the heterogeneous Northern Sotho are often referred to as the Pedi (or BaPedi), because the Pedi make up the largest of their constituent groups. Their language is sePedi (also called seSotho sa Leboa or Northern Sotho).

[17] Mönnig, *op. cit.*, (note 15), p. 243.

[18] Forell, *op. cit.*, (note 6), p.110.

Embodiment Contextualizes Sexual Ethics

Karen L. Bloomquist

Building on what Wanda Deifelt has laid out, I propose that an embodiment approach is crucial for intercultural discussions related to sexuality because embodiment is necessarily contextual.

The Word became flesh ***in a particular time and place*** Similarly, each one of us is embodied in a particular time and place, with biographical, cultural, experiential and other particularities, including with regard to our sexuality. Our body is central to who we are—in how we are identified—including in that most foundational identity which for Christians is established through the waters of baptism and nurtured through the bread and wine, the body and blood of the Eucharist.

Bodies are fed, washed, anointed, touched, embraced, clothed, adorned, cared for—as well as neglected, abused, violated and destroyed. Our vulnerabilities, so basic to what it means to be truly human, are expressed through our bodies. We relate to one another in face-to-face, embodied ways that are more profound than what is possible through the virtual, disembodied realities of new communication technologies.[a] Through our bodies we experience the delight of grace as well as the burden of sin. Bodies are finite and messy, often broken and anxiety-provoking, but also profoundly pleasurable and fulfilling. As Eugene Rogers has aptly put it:

> God created human beings embodied not only for their peril but also for their salvation. […] the body is the locus whereby human beings are accessible and vulnerable to others as God has become accessible and vulnerable to them. Love of neighbor is embodied because the body locates the accessibility of the other.[1]

Our bodies bring us down to earth, ground us in concrete, fleshly realities rather than in universal abstractions or platitudes. That is why some of the most interesting and creative ecumenical encounters occur, not by beginning with abstract doctrinal

[a] HU: The human "body" is a social body, a medium of communication and therefore not an object of social, moral or other technologies and language strategies.

discussions, but with matters that relate especially to the body, and in ways that cut across denominational boundaries.[b] I have experienced this, for example, among Protestant and Roman Catholic feminist theologians in discussions related to sexuality, and among women in the global South who, in ecumenical and interfaith collaboration with one another, together address urgent embodied challenges of life and death, especially those related to poverty and HIV/AIDS.[2]

Talking about sexuality

Beginning with embodiment provides a different point of departure for talking about sexual ethics than do approaches that, from a disembodied stance, proceed to pronounce on what is right or wrong, moral or immoral. This only reinforces the popular view of the church as an enforcer of sexual rules from "above."

One of the reasons topics of sexuality may be experienced as potentially church-dividing is because many in the church, including its leaders, may be uncomfortable regarding their own bodies, much less talking about bodies, much less about sexuality. When this silence is broken, when the taboos of "we don't talk about that" are violated, many tend to panic.[c] They point to "others" whose sexual orientation or lifestyle is considered "immoral" rather than at what we share in common in and through our bodies and through our faith. As embodiment, with all it entails, becomes a more normal, ongoing aspect of how churches express and live out core convictions of their faith, the anxieties and polarizations may begin to lessen.[d]

[b] HU: The doctrinal matters are misunderstood if we do not see them as reflecting our human existence in its "somatic" condition. The doctrinal agenda needs to be changed, e.g., to see how salvation and healing are interwoven.

[c] HU: Any language about sexuality is connected with cultural control and power (Michel Foucault). If churches talk about sexuality they have to talk about embodied human life and move beyond these power discourses of sexuality.

[d] From a presentation by Paul Isaak of Namibia at an LWF North American consultation, March 2005:

> "African villages, prior to their Christianization or conquest under colonialism, were relatively open in their recognition and discussion of sexual matters. The power of adolescent sexuality

Sexuality has to do with far more than genital sexual activity; it is an aspect of the whole of who we are, as simultaneously embodied *and* spiritual beings. Rowan Williams (now the Archbishop of Canterbury) expresses this in a theologically provocative away, when he points to the sexual as

> how human beings experience the desiring perceptions of another in their bodies, and the desiring perceptions of another person are a reflex of the way in which human beings experience in their bodies that "God loves us as if we were God."[3]

Underlying this is an implicit understanding of the doctrine of justification.

> Grace, for the Christian believer, is a transformation that depends in large part on knowing yourself to be seen in a certain way: as significant, as wanted. The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, *as if we were God*, as if we were that unconditional response to God's giving that God's self makes in the life of the Trinity.[4] [e]

In contrast to how much of the Western Christian tradition has approached sexuality, as if it were the primary *locus* of sin, such a point of departure

was recognized and measures were taken to minimize its socially destructive dimensions. But from the eighteenth to the twentieth century these forms of sexual socialization crumbled under the combined onslaught of Christianity, conquest, migrant labor, urbanization, globalization, capitalism and Western education." (See Peter Delius and Clive Glaser, "Sexual Socialization in South Africa: A Historical Perspective," in *African Studies*, vol. 61, no. 1 [London: Carfax Publishing, July 2003], pp. 27-54.)

"In a traditional African setting you discuss anything you want. And you will get honest and knowledgeable answers. You can discuss sexuality with boys as a boy, with girls as a girl, with women as a woman, with men as a man. But when you get into a Christian, Westernized environment, things like that just don't work anymore. In other words, silence on sexual matters among Africans is not the product of African cultures."

[e] HU: God communicates with us, we receive God's bodily presence through the Lord's Supper, which is why Luther insisted on this as the "real" presence of Christ in the bread and wine.

has interesting possibilities for further exploration. Ethics emerging from grace and promise, rather than from law and judgment, seem more consistent with a Lutheran grammar for sexual ethics, and would certainly transform the terms of the often contentious debates. It might also help move beyond terrain that has been overly rationalistic or based too much of what is "of nature."

Beyond rationalistic or literalistic approaches

Issues of sexuality often challenge what have been overly rationalist assumptions and theological approaches of the established churches. Although such assumptions and approaches are European in origin, they have also spread to churches in other parts of the world. This is especially prominent today in fundamentalist attempts to explain all matters of Christian faith and life in rational terms and, on the other hand, in some academic arguments regarding same sex relationships. Yet, such approaches simply do not suffice in the face of realities that are other than rational (but do have their own "rationality").[5]

Reacting to finely tuned doctrinal or ethical discussions that depend on rational discourse, many are turning instead to forms and expressions of spirituality that go beyond rational explanations. The churches' hold on rationally established truths now feels less secure. Although the very stability and unity of a social-transcendent body—the church as the Body of Christ—may appear to some to be endangered by the ordinary human affairs of sexuality, what actually may be threatened is a certain idealism about belief based on rational formulas.

This is compounded when certain positions are defended as being "biblical," in contrast to others that are not. The difficulty here is that with such a wide variety of sexual practices found or implied in Scripture—some of which would be universally rejected today—it is difficult to point to ***the*** biblical view of sexuality. What often happens is that texts are taken out of their historical context and used selectively to support positions that have been arrived at on other grounds. Rather than a sexual ethics based on literalistic proof-texting, the challenge is to discern major theological-ethical emphases in Scripture that speak to the contextual dilemmas we face in the realm of sexuality today.

What is "of nature"?

Although embodiment is rightly associated with a theology of creation, care must be taken lest this be equated with what is "natural." This is the common response of many who oppose any kind of relationships (e.g., homosexual) on the grounds that they are "against nature." When pushed further, however, this often ends up meaning that which goes against the unquestioned practices and norms prevailing in a given culture, usually religiously reinforced or prohibited. What has been customary, over long periods of time, comes to be seen as "natural." Moral repugnance is associated with what seems "unnatural" in this sense.[f]

This overlooks that for Thomas Aquinas, and natural law proponents since him, what is natural cannot simply be equated with what is moral. Any natural law morality has to be historicized, rather than assuming this reveals direct codes willed by God.[6] The "facts of nature" represent creation as continually modified by human interactions. Ethics, as the living vocation of all human beings, involves discerning how to act within this reality in ways that foster the fullness of life for all.

There are undeniably certain physiological givens associated with what it means to be embodied as male or female. Yet these are also socially constructed. Only in recent centuries of Western history have these come to be associated with certain gender-related dichotomies of complementarity between males and females, in which sexual differences are considered to be essential or a-historical. Such tendencies have increasingly been called into question, including cross-culturally. Gender distinctions vary or are quite fluid in different cultures. This in itself makes it questionable to continue using such categories for arguing, for example, that same sex relationships are "against nature."

Instead, when we focus on embodiment, a much broader array of "givens" comes into view. This includes our physicality and all that is associated with it, including gender and sexual orientation. But embodiment also reflects many other cultural, historical, economic, familial and other forces (including peers and media) that have influenced and shaped who we are and how we express this. What is given to us has already been modified by continual human interactions, and is far more than "of nature." What is considered to be "God-given" or "of nature" is not pristine, but from the beginning of human history has continually been shaped according to the ethos and values of cultures. It is this wide array of what has been given to us that becomes the material with which we are called to work, shape and transform, as active, embodied participants in God's ongoing creation.

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[f] HU: After the Reformation, according to Foucault, society changed from being juridically controlled to being socially controlled according to norms and distinctions of what is "normal" and "abnormal."

> Creation is about transformation and preservation, stability and fluidity, pathos and promise, connections and differences, the universal and the particular [...] all in a dynamic coherence.[7]

A Lutheran position?

While in all societies the importance of marriage between a man and a woman must continue to be affirmed and supported—on the basis of Scripture, church tradition and cultural customs—to assume that there can be one global Lutheran ethical position on any variations from this pattern is to overlook the quite different contexts within which embodiment and sexuality are lived out.[g] "How the church chooses to be the body in, with and under the diversity of our bodies has far reaching consequences."[8]

[g] ACs: In Hungarian culture, Christians–Catholics and Protestants alike–usually understand sexual life only within marriage and consider premarital, extramarital or same sex relationships unbiblical as well as unnatural. There are several reasons for this. First, liberalism was considered the chief antagonist of Christianity during the twentieth century, and this conviction has hardly changed. Rather, as a counter effect of our new membership in the European Union, it has become even stronger within Christian circles. Sexuality outside traditional marriage is regarded as a consequence of liberalism. Second, since the birth rate is extremely low, any sexual relationship that is not for the purpose of procreation within a legal marriage is regarded as behavior that betrays the national interest. Third, the liberal minority usually react to this deep-rooted anti-liberalism in aggressive ways. That, in the eyes of Christians, justifies the insistence on traditional values. These pressing factors of the past and the present simply do not allow a public sphere within Christianity where non-traditional forms of sexuality could be considered and discussed. As a result, Christians who live either in same sex, premarital, or extramarital relationships have to hide this part of their identity from fellow Christians, that is, their Christian identity can only be partially revealed in their congregations.

Because of how contextually different the understandings and practices of sexuality are, assuming there should be uniform Lutheran ethical positions on all matters of sexual conduct is actually inconsistent with a Lutheran grammar.[9] This is also unrealistic, given the wide cultural differences among us. The realm of sexuality is socially constructed over time in ways that vary considerably across cultures. Certainly on some matters there is little disagreement over the immorality of certain practices—such as exploitative, manipulative, non-consensual sexual conduct, as well as attitudes and practices that compromise the dignity of all persons as created in the image of God. Such practices are morally objectionable, whether within or outside of marital relationships, because of how they violate the central norm of embodied care, not to mention basic respect for persons. However, a Lutheran grammar is not based on abstract moral obligations, but on the concrete responsibility toward the neighbor in a given context. How this will be enfleshed in the realm of sexuality is bound to vary—in response to the actual persons and their social situations.

For instance, although some Lutherans in Tanzania share missional roots and a long history of relationships with Lutherans in Sweden, their churches' positions, especially on homosexuality, are quite different. An ethics of embodied care does not presume that they will arrive at the same position because what such care entails is related to deeply embedded assumptions and cultural constructs within each of these societies. What is faithful to God's mission in one context, even within the same country, may not be in another context.[h] The big challenge, of course, is whether there can be sufficient mutual appreciation of these differences in order to communicate what is right, good or fitting in each of these contexts. It is ***not*** a matter of one position being im-

[h] EG: In the Swedish context, where the Evangelical Lutheran Church still provides for the established "rites of passage," ethical deliberation on same sex relationships is for many a test as to whether the church is willing to identify with Christ's radical love. For them, not to affirm same sex relationships with blessings and marriage ceremonies within the church is a negation of love and the Christian emphasis on equality. This debate has broad implications for Swedish people beyond those who are active in church. In addition to public legislation upholding such partnerships, there are expectations that the church should also affirm same sex marriage. A wedding in church is also a legal, performative act. As a way of avoiding conflict some are advocating that all weddings ought to be civil, followed by a service in church for those who so desire. Others see this as yet another step in the secularization of Swedish society.

posed on or winning over the other. Yet, admittedly, the fear in the global South of positions arrived at in the North being imposed on them is all too real, given what has been the pattern throughout painful histories of missionary conquest and imperialism, as well as the power differentials that still prevail.

Does this mean that those outside certain cultural constructs of sexuality are not to critique such? No, we need the perspectives of those from outside our own cultural reality to help us see what we cannot when blinded by our own biases. But here too neighbor-love is what is normative. Intercultural critique of sexual matters must be done in ways that are open to hearing and discerning how embodied care is being realized, or violated, through the practices of a given culture.[i] But a rush to judge certain practices or policies as being "repulsive," "unbiblical," or "immoral" cuts off any further conversation, and thus itself becomes a violation of neighbor-love toward those who hold an opposing position, and on this basis are cast into an "enemy" camp. This can also escalate into subtle or more open forms of "warfare." In contrast, "serious theology in the presence of sexuality prevents the church from being 'holier than thou,' and from becoming too fond of its own imagined purity."[10]

It is necessary to get beyond idealistic platitudes associated with certain cultural ideals of sexuality and to focus on the actual effects on persons and families. Through the lens of a theology of the cross, attention is drawn to those who are victimized, marginalized or rendered silent by certain church-sanctioned policies and practices. Their cries and laments must be taken seriously in any response that claims to be ethical. Attitudes and practices must be challenged when they harm or manipulate bodies for the sake of acceptance within a culture, or exclude some bodies from full participation in the church.

For reflection or discussion:

If the embodied care of a Lutheran ethic of neighbor-love is lived out contextually, how much agreement with regard to sexual ethics is necessary or possible? How do we deal with our differences in light of a Lutheran grammar?

[i] HU: This does not mean a liberal acceptance of any practices, but asking how to treat the body as "holy" because it is included in God's salvation, and is a means of communication with others.

Notes

[1] Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., *Sexuality and the Christian Body* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 227.

[2] See, for example, the various publications of the Concerned Circle of African Women Theologians, http://www.thecirclecawt.org/

[3] Rowan D. Williams, "The Body's Grace," in Charles Heflin (ed.), *Our Selves, Our Souls and Bodies* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1996), pp. 58-68.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] See, for example, Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), who proposes that evangelicals should welcome postmodernity's challenge to overall rational approaches to religion. He also sees the spirit of the Reformation (especially Luther) as consistent with postmodern critiques today.

[6] Christine Gudorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995), p. 72.

[7] William P. Brown, *Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1999), p. 409.

[8] Gwen B. Sayler, "The Body of Christ and the Issue of Required Celibacy," in Norma Cook Everist (ed.), *The Difficult but Indispensable Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 208.

[9] *Cf.* Hans G. Ulrich in this volume: "To be deeply interwoven with different cultural settings and stories is the very characteristic of Lutheran ethics."

[10] Martyn Percy, *Power and the Church: Ecclesiology in an Age of Transition* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 175.

A Conversation of the Study Group

PA: In all our contexts, questions of sexuality have been given extraordinary attention. Consensus about marriage and sexuality is under assault. What is going on?

HU: The realm of sexuality has become the paradigm for governance. Reproductive politics are connected with lots of other issues in Germany (e.g., immigration). Political and self-governance is at stake in sexuality. But what is the alternative? How do we talk about ourselves as creatures? Why is it not possible to articulate what is good about sexuality?

WD: There has been a long tradition of reducing all sexuality to sin, rather than embodiment as a gift, as a constitutive part of who we are created to be. Attention needs to be given to the effects of sexuality when it is "ill-governed." Sexuality has been used as a means to oppress, as the Concerned Circle of African Women Theologians have insisted, e.g., in their outcry about female genital mutilation. When you rely on destiny or fate or a cosmic order, there is no possibility for self-governance. The voids and silences still need to be addressed.

HU: But we need to avoid the trap of naming sexuality as the first step to governing it. Sexuality is a form of communication that cannot be pinned down with rules; it is lived.

EG: Sexuality is related to the whole of a Lutheran grammar. It is where we are most vulnerable. We bring our gifts of and needs for tenderness, closeness and passion. We may, but do not necessarily, also receive the grace of mutual tenderness and passionate love. Prostitution, trafficking and HIV/AIDS are also connected to sexuality. These are global phenomena that are bringing us together and forcing us to respond ethically to the vulnerabilities of life. We do not live in a perfect world.

HU: Sexuality is neither a question of morality nor one of politics.

WD: It is basic to who we are as human beings and cannot be reduced to one arena. It is related to vital energies that are central to who we are. Gift and promise are key.

EG: It is also related to such factors as poverty. A pragmatic Lutheran ethic is needed to defend human life.

ACs: Sexuality can be related to power in a positive sense; it cannot be turned into a function.

EG: We want community and freedom, and we cannot talk about community without talking about power [...]. The bigger responsibility lies with the more powerful [...] that's very Lutheran.

HU: There are bridges here to the African principles to where we belong, rather than the false alternative of individual or community.

PLB: The language of belonging [...].

PMM: [...] to the wholeness of life.

At Intersections of Human Rights

Conflicting Religious-Cultural Discourses of Human Rights in the World Today

Elisabeth Gerle

Influenced by its national traditions of solidarity and advocacy for others, Sweden decided to join the United Nations (UN) in 1946. The reasons for Sweden's decision were pragmatic, as well as idealistic. As a small country, it saw international law as an important protection against all forms of arrogant geopolitics and more powerful states. Having declared itself neutral, Sweden did not belong to military alliances such as NATO or the Warsaw Pact. A more universal approach to the world, based on humanistic values, where a sense of belonging to a shared global story could be played out, was more fitting. Sweden was one of many states committed to promoting peace, human rights and living as good neighbors.

Despite its lack of pluralism, the Swedish Lutheran tradition nurtured a sense of citizenship and obligation that later translated into a global arena, such as the UN. In a secularized context, the old Lutheran understanding of *iustitia civilis* gave a vocational commitment to the UN's work. In his commitment to the UN, Dag Hammarskjöld, the Swedish diplomat who served as UN Secretary General, was a source of inspiration for many Swedes. His personal notes, published after his death in the Congo in 1961, reveal a deeply religious basis for his personal engagement in the world.

Since the creation of the UN, Sweden has strongly advocated for human rights and justice in distant countries. It has supported the sovereignty of all states with the aim of guaranteeing security for all states, especially small ones. However, the UN can also seem Janus-faced in so far as it supports human rights and individual freedom while affirming and protecting the sovereignty of totalitarian states that violate human rights. While this may be the only way of sustaining a truly global community, this very pragmatic approach makes it difficult to remain committed to the preamble of the UN charter in which human rights and the dignity and value of the individual are affirmed.

The human rights discourse has created the language which is being used to spread global norms. This is especially visible in the UN's special sessions and conferences where people from all over the world meet and human rights are perceived both as a liberating and a power discourse. While strong states often use human rights to rationalize their own behavior as well as to critique that of others, human rights are also used by social movements and individuals all over the world to pursue human dignity and the liberation from oppressive customs. Western states use human rights as a universal language, sometimes to legitimize their own hegemony. Asian governments occasionally refer to Asian values and to particular traditions and cultural diversity in order to avoid the demands made by human rights groups in their own countries. Human rights may be legalistic, almost fundamentalist, but they are also aspirational and open-ended and serve as an ethical challenge to the world community. The language of human rights is one of the crucial frameworks for ethics in the world today.

My analysis here is based on my personal experiences in UN-related meetings where conflicting views on human rights have been expressed. How is the language of human rights being used in international, global settings? How do the different world religions approach human rights? What conflicts arise? Are they clashes between different traditions or conflicting aims within each tradition? As a Swedish Lutheran with a sense of vocation, not only for my own society, but also for a global society, these reflections are in themselves an example of a Swedish approach to the world.

A late modern approach is reflexive. Our own evangelical Lutheran history and tradition can be understood as being liberating as well as oppressive. Such features as the emphasis on education, shared decision making and the vocational commitment to live as a citizen in the world were resources for democracy in Sweden, and may today be resources for a global democracy and responsibility for the other. The language of human rights may be one tool to pursue God's promise of a good life for all. Since any language can be used to liberate as well as to oppress, the politics of semantics need to be analyzed in every new situation. As many religions and worldviews influence our lives, we need to be in constant dialogue, able to listen to others and to explain the way we see things. Cherished values constantly need to be renegotiated in communities, trusting the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Some of the clashes

We say that our world is becoming more and more global, yet what is described as global or globalized is not necessarily universal, i.e., globally shared.

Moreover, people belonging to the same faith community do not necessarily share the same outlook. Our "situatedness," i.e., the social, physical and environmental conditions, may differ depending on where in the world we live, our gender, race, ethnicity, etc. Different life worlds sometimes coexist in the same neighborhood. Yet, experiences of people living on the same block or in the same family may be quite different.

Sometimes reference is made to living in a "global village." For many of us, living in a village is desirable; we think, with some nostalgia, that in the traditional village there was harmony, love, a sense of community and understanding. However, those who actually live or have lived in a village know that it is bound by hierarchies and boundaries.

With today's emphasis on local stories, it is important to ask, Whose stories? Are such stories focused on protecting the community with its hierarchies, or on protecting the individual? Tensions may arise when individuals claim the right to challenge given positions or to transcend borders or practices that their community regards as natural, or as a part of a cosmic order.

While today values such as autonomy and mobility are cherished, most premodern societies value stability. The freedom to leave a community may be tantamount to treason. In most traditional societies, human rights are not intrinsic to the person *per se*, but related to position, determined by such factors as age, gender and social class. Although this may be the case in all societies, one important difference is whether or not this is being challenged based on normative visions of an egalitarian understanding of human rights.

One of the great tensions between premodern and modern thought is how to understand human rights. In premodernity, static social positions were often given divine legitimacy. Differences that lead to unequal access to entitlements were often referred to as being God's will, or the created order or natural law. Even great asymmetries in relation to such basic rights as access to food, water and education may be rationalized by a given position in a cosmic order.

Today tensions arise globally in relation to hierarchies related to such factors as age, class, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Mostly these tensions are inter- as well as intra-cultural. The fact that they are often rationalized on religious grounds makes them even more tenacious. In the context of the Lutheran communion they create tensions and conflicts within the same faith tradition. Different understandings of the relationship between the individual and the collective, between autonomy and theonomy, static social ordering and democratic ideas, and male-female hierarchies set churches, denominations and faith communities up against one another, as well as individuals and groups within the same tradition.

How then do we interpret human rights within various traditions? Many conflicting discourses create tensions and lead to clashes. Religious thought and practices that influence ways of life, and how to understand the human being, permeate culture.[1] Existence is interpreted according to various religious concepts of humanity, where the individual has a given place and position within a larger context. Depending on the religion, this can be the tribe, the Jewish people, the kingdom of God, the *umma*, *dharma*, *rita*, *karma* or the chain of causality. The understanding of the person is related to "a view of reality as it really is" including ontological and metaphysical statements as well as anthropology and instructions on how to live.[2]

Many aspects of the human rights discourse are a heritage from the Enlightenment and therefore part of the modern project, while all major world religions emerged in premodern times. Traditional religions have often been connected with agrarian epochs in which God's demands are understood in a vertical, authoritarian, exclusive, hierarchical system with religious leaders at the top, followed by political leaders, other men and finally women. Modernity brought a mechanical faith in reason and secularism, which was often just as absolute. Premodern, industrial and modern cosmologies have in common their conviction that there is only one truth. While the agrarian worldview was enchanted and spiritual, and life had a meaning in which everything had its proper place and purpose in a context given by God, modernity meant that the world was de-spiritualized as a part of secularization and faith in rationality.

Some Lutheran impulses

For Martin Luther, Adam was the first creature, yet even if seen as Adam's "helper," Eve is described as a person in her own right. The concept that, from the beginning, everybody was equal is also inspired by ancient natural law thinking that emerged in revolutionary forms in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas, in the eighteenth century, these ideas were used to challenge social hierarchies in a way that Martin Luther had not, his teachings on God's direct relationship with every human being had paved the way.

Luther's focus was on how to understand God's purpose for human beings. As a consequence, ecclesial and clerical hierarchies were challenged, but other traditional hierarchies in the household and state were not. Luther focused on the inner man [sic] and his (her) relationship to God. He also developed a teaching for households and society inspired by the submission directives in Titus 2:9, 1 Peter 5:5, Ephesians 5:21-24, Romans 13:4. These biblical texts mirrored the culture of the day, rather than new and revolutionary aspects of Jesus' teachings. As a result, the Lutheran tradition has tended to be less radical in its social critique than, for instance, the Reformed tradition.

Traditional Lutheranism held an almost feudal understanding of life. Every person was to fulfill the role that he or she was supposed to— in a static order— in the family as well as in society. Martin Luther's spiritual reformation had no immediate intention to reform social structures. Rather, he challenged us to turn our hearts away from ourselves and toward the other. It is our vocation to do God's work in the world in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Here we can discover and fulfill our calling, rather than seeking such in a monastery or religious order. Notions and interpretations of personal life, emphasizing position and mobility, developed later as a part of modern and late modern thought.

Yet, Luther's emphasis on personal interpretation and discernment of the Bible challenged the clerical authorities' traditional ways of interpreting the Bible and led to increased literacy among lay people in Northern Europe. This development involved the entire population of Scandinavia and influenced the emerging democratic movements, even if these movements were more directly inspired by Reformed spiritual aspirations. The fact that the Bible could be read in one's mother tongue and services were held and hymns sung in one's own language went together with increased literacy. This was a precondition for a growing middle class and the nurturing of mobility for ordinary people.

Among Lutherans today, intense conflicts may arise from clashes between traditional, ancient or feudal understandings of life and a more modern emphasis on the individual. In spiritual terms, Lutheranism clearly focuses on the person and his/her relationship to God. This does not, however, always correspond to the social teachings of the Lutheran tradition.

Autonomy–theonomy

Change, movement and transition are charged with positive value within modernity. According to this understanding, the individual has a right to choose whether or not to belong to a group, or even to dissent from religion.[3] In most premodern worldviews this is unheard of, not only in relation to the collective (family, tribe or nation), but also with regard to the divine cosmic order.

One crucial tension between the concept of human rights and many religious traditions arises from understanding the individual's position as given and static. The idea of autonomy can be at odds with the idea of theonomy, interpreted as total submission to God's will.[4] Faith that God knows what is best and that the person therefore is guided by divine law is, however, part of most religious worldviews, including among Lutherans.

For Hindu thought, and societies strongly influenced by this, everything is based on the cosmic order. Caste or lineage determines each person's place in the hierarchy.[5] In contrast, the Jewish and Christian traditions relate the individual's value to creation where every human being is created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Islam shares this understanding of the human being as created with duties and responsibilities, first and foremost in relation to God but also in relation to the community. The Qur'anic vision of human destiny is embodied in the classic proclamation, "Towards Allah is thy limit."[6] Many of the clashes between *sharia*, Muslim law, and human rights have to do with what is experienced or described as a tension between autonomy and theonomy.[7] Vroom claims:

> Thus, each religious tradition determines the values of the human person within the whole of a view of human beings and the world. It still makes a difference whether one holds that one lives only once, has a special place in the whole of creation and furthers the cause of righteousness in the world or whether one views humans from the perspective of their karmic connection to the cosmic order, or from a humanistic understanding of human beings. If the basic idea is that the task of the human is determined by the *rita*, than his own perspective and preference is secondary in comparison with the insight into *dharma* that is transmitted by the religious spokesman.[8]

It does make a difference whether the human being is understood as possibly being reincarnated as a plant, animal, human or divinity or as sharply distinct from other non-human beings. From such a perspective, the emphasis on the individual as a bearer of rights seems closer to Western cosmologies. Here as well, duties and obligations, rather than freedom and rights, have been the focus of religious authorities.

The Jewish scholar, David Novak, bases the idea of human rights on the relationship between the commandments, *misvot*, and the obligations, *hovat*, on the one hand, and on what is permitted, *reshut*, on the other. He claims that classic Hebrew actually lacks an equivalent to the notion of rights, although there is a word *zechut*, right, both in biblical and prayer Hebrew. The Hebrew focus, however, is on obligation. Closest to our term "right" is the term "permission." Thus, he holds that what is allowed in practice becomes everything that the law does not mention, leaving much open to individual choice. Yet, since a duty is something one owes somebody else, in practice, it becomes a right for the other. Duties imply rights. Novak points out that the whole Jewish system of duties is understood in the context of God's absolute right as the Creator. Thus, individual freedom has traditionally been understood within a framework of God as the absolute who sets the limits.[9]

One obvious clash between human rights and some components of religious and cultural tradition is the understanding that hierarchies are divine, given by nature or implicit in natural law. Natural law may be invoked to protect hierarchies as well as to challenge them in the name of an original equality. A late modern challenge may be to allow and appreciate diversities and individual choices.

Official Roman Catholic interpretations of natural law still hold on to various hierarchies as divine or natural, while hierarchies in the Lutheran tradition are seen as something pragmatic and practical rather than as essential, static or given.

In its early phase, the Confucian tradition emphasized the relations between father and son, minister and ruler. Later, the five relationships, *wu-lun*, between parent and child, husband and wife, elder and younger siblings, ruler and minister, friend and friend were developed.[10] Virtues in this tradition have to do with fulfilling one's social role, a precondition for good government. Harmony, balance and complementarity are important notions. Further, the Confucian appreciation of right relations has focused on various male relationships.[11]

In all these traditions, democratic ideas that emphasize personal autonomy and the pursuit of individual happiness have been met with suspicion. One of the most visible tensions in the contemporary international debate occurs in the area of family values. Claims for democratization, equality and mutuality within the family are often rejected by referring to nature, the cosmic order, biology or divine laws. From the other side, however, persons who are suffering from patriarchal, heterosexual value systems are invoking God's creation of diversity and equality as a means of liberation and freedom to choose one's own life. One challenge then is how to encourage diversity without reintroducing traditional, feudal inequalities.

Gender power relations

Globally, women object to the double standard of boys and men being given many more privileges than girls and women. At international conferences, they argue for equal access to education, inheritance and personal freedom. The counter argument, namely that women are to be caretakers of children and the elderly, often is supported with reference to nature, biology, natural law or the order of creation. The most visible alliances in international conferences have been forged between the Roman Catholic Church, conservative Muslim states and right-wing Christians. Conflicts regarding the role of women and family are not only interfaith or interdenominational conflicts,[12] but also intra-cultural and intra-religious tensions over what is the good life. The various positions can become polarized in any tradition.

While various power structures have been publicly challenged for a long time, especially in Europe and North America, there continues to be more complicity with such structures in private life. In other parts of the world, gender inequality is not widely challenged. This has also influenced the human rights debate. There is a tendency to describe issues such as justice, democracy and equality as belonging to the public sphere of justice while the private sphere has to do with diverse expressions of the good life. Most traditional political philosophers, therefore, have refrained from discussing such issues in relation to families and women.[13] Because of the private-public distinction, women who socially and historically have been associated with the private domain have been expected to accept gender hierarchies within the family. The ethical challenges to democracy and justice that are taken seriously in public affairs have, within the family, often been labeled as struggles for equality. This does not take into account that private relations also have to do with democracy and justice.

Further, family law has often become a symbol of the right to diversity in religious interpretations of the good life. Issues concerning the "good life" are not supposed to be discussed. They have also been situated outside of the domain of justice in most interfaith dialogues.

In a critical analysis of John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, Vrooms points out that the idea of human rights is accepted by the Roman Catholic

Church, but with qualifications. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church rejected freedom of conscience. In *Rerum Novarum* this was changed, and freedom of association as well as the right to a just wage were acknowledged. In the *Centesimus Annus* there is a "prioritizing and interpretation of human rights" that brings the understanding in line with the Catholic concept of humanity:

> Thus the emphasis is on the unborn, young children, and the family as an institution, over against both a view of the rights of women that implies that they can terminate their pregnancies and the freedom of married couples to end their marriage. (*Cf*. Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, 36). Another caveat is that the encyclical recognizes the responsibility of the state to guard the exercise of human rights in the economic sector but at the same time limits this role—in line with the principle of subsidiarity—through giving primary responsibility to individuals and different social groups rather than to the state.[14]

Vroom considers this to be an example of the Roman Catholic Church's ambivalent view on human rights when these are formulated by other institutions. The church claims to know the truth and out of this understanding it "constructs a hierarchy of human rights and a specific interpretation of them."[15] He points to the contraception debate as an example of the discrimination against women.

In my view this can be seen as a rejection of women as autonomous subjects and moral agents. Hence, this way of arguing runs much deeper. The procreation debate can be seen as a contemporary example of a discussion about whether women really are created in the image of God or as secondary in a created order in which, next to God, men hold the first position. This discussion has taken place within Christianity since the beginning. Some Church Fathers argued in favor of hierarchy and complementarity while others such as Augustine argued in favor of original equality based on the first chapter in the Bible.[16]

Clashes occur regularly between human rights for women, as formulated in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, 1979, and in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, UDHR, 1948, and traditional Muslim interpretations of the *sharia's* emphasis on women and men as complementary, rather than equal. The notion of equity instead of equality was pursued by many Muslim states at the UN Women Conference in Beijing, 1995. The alliance between the Vatican and conservative

Muslim states was also active there. Complementarity between women and men was interpreted within cosmologies that assume male superiority.

There are growing movements in Africa, Asia and Europe arguing that a notion such as complementarity is being used to disguise a gender hierarchy where men are able to choose and women are not. The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that in much of the world today women are less well nourished, less healthy and more vulnerable to physical violence and sexual abuse than men. She argues that international politics and economics must be sensitive to the fact that gender difference is a problem of justice. A capability approach shows that many more men than women in the world are able to choose their lives, within certain limits.[17]

Tensions and the politics of semantics

Whether European, Asian or African in origin, unequal relationships are implicitly in tension with ideals of participatory democracy and representative rights.[18] It is easy to find examples of accepted or prescribed hierarchies from premodern times within all religious traditions. Such asymmetries are often said to grow out of affirming differences. Yet, they often rationalize injustices and confinements that have nothing to do with valuing diversity. Many of these tensions are reappearing in new forms in late- or postmodernity. The individual's position understood as being determined by divine, cosmic laws could be invoked against democratic participation, not only in feudal times, but also in the present phase of globalization.

In many international settings, notions such as "cultural identity" and "diversity" are being used to defend ethnic, patriarchal and heterosexual hierarchies. An important matter to focus on in these very different contexts, therefore, is the question of power conceived as the relationship between individuals and between groups and regions of the world. Various cosmologies and philosophies are often used in such intricate power relationships. Beautiful values are often invoked to defend what may be indecent ideas.

Afro-American "womanist" ethicists have pointed out that the economic interests and power relations behind colonialism and slavery went hand in hand with ethical theories emphasizing care. Colonialism was interpreted as being in the interest of the colonized; it was the burden of the white man to care for the colonized. A paternalistic ethics of care, therefore, is met with great suspicion today. Hence, religious-cultural argumentation, as well as the language of human rights in the service of political interests, is being scrutinized in recent international debates.

The Malaysian human rights advocate, Chandra Muzaffar, holds that notions such as democracy and human rights may be used as "a mandate to intervene."[19] He argues that human rights are part of a power game where the United States and the West are talking of human rights as a way of maintaining their dominant power in Asia. Muzaffar, however, does not argue in favor of giving development precedence over democracy. He does not see Asian economic successes as an outcome of dictatorship and repression. Rather, he credits parliamentary democracy:

> It is this system of governance which legitimates both multi-party competition and political dissent that is partly responsible for social stability - which in turn has facilitated continuous economic growth and progress. The ability of the national leadership to balance the diverse, sometimes conflicting interests of the different communities [...] should also be given due weight.[20]

Interpreting tensions between Europe and Asia as a clash between human rights and authoritarianism is often misleading. Also, tensions between secular and more spiritual forms of life, between commitment to community versus individualist consumer greed and materialism, are not mainly tensions between Europe and Asia but internal struggles within most societies, regions and cultures. Rhetorically, this is set up such that communities are always described as more unselfish, overlooking that communities may also be greedy. Attempts to pursue more flexible and just gender relations are a worldwide challenge when many of the ideals of the traditional premodern family are no longer appropriate in modern society. The notions of Western democracy, as well as Asian authoritarianism, are rhetorical rather than analytical:

> The usual contrast between a so-called "West" and a so-called "East" such that the West allegedly privileges the individual over the group while the East privileges the group over the individual forgets that all nation-states put the national whole first.[21]

Friedman further argues that the standard Anglo-American description of democracy as built on individualism and clashing interests is as much a myth as are the rhetorical references to soft Asian authoritarianism. A closer look at one's own history might help reveal such myths. Non-conforming Protestants had to flee England in pursuit of religious freedom for their communities, and English Protestants oppressed the community of Irish Catholics. The conventional understanding that democracy emerged from a democratic culture of Protestant individualism is misleading and dangerous.

Leaders of Asian democracies do not consider Asian cultures as "singularly anti-democratic."[22] From Korea, one of the world's most Confucian societies, President Kim Dae Jung points to Asia's "rich heritage of democracy-oriented philosophies and traditions" that were developed long before Europe.[23] He refers to the democratic elements in Mencius' (371-289 BCE) political philosophy that argues that "the people are the most elevated." The people are followed by the state and then the sovereign. Chinese despots, therefore, saw Mencian philosophy as being too democratic by putting the people first and legitimizing the deposing of tyrannical rulers.[24]

Muzzaffar has not been criticizing human rights as such, but their selective use and the Euro-American bias to describe human rights exclusively as individual civil rights. The dominance of strong Western states within such international financial institutions as the IMF and the WTO, the UN Security Council and the global media is in itself undemocratic.

> This ability to force others to submit to their will is backed by the West's, particularly the United States', global military dominance. […] The dominant West also controls global news and information […] Likewise Western films, Western fashions, and Western foods are creating a global culture which is not only Western in character and content, but also incapable of accommodating non-Western cultures on a just and equitable basis. Underlying this […] is an array of ideas, values, and even worldviews pertaining to a position of the individual, inter-gender relations, inter-generational ties, the family, the community, the environment and the cosmos which have evolved from a particular tradition—namely the Western secular tradition.[25]

The above shows a way of arguing that combines a critique of American hegemony through the military, global media and international financial institutions, and a defense of traditional family structures. It also portrays Asian cultures as less secular and more concerned about societal ties. It is a good example of the politics of semantics. How things are described influences the perception of reality. While Muzzaffar's critique of military, economic and cultural hegemony is quite appropriate, his analysis completely excludes the intriguing relationship between modernization and changing social roles. The argument, therefore, becomes part of a "them versus us" discourse where precolonial times are described as the ideal and the former colonizers as the enemy. Muzzaffar comes close to what many postcolonial writers term nostalgic descriptions of the past. Such idealized memories of a golden past often function as an easy escape from life's many complexities.[26]

Activists in the Third World Network have argued that many human rights campaigns, for instance against child labor, seem to be launched when European markets and labor are threatened. Is this then a new form of colonialism disguised as a "paternalistic ethics of care"? The Network claims that these campaigns are not really interested in just relations or free trade that may threaten European or American markets. If some Asian and African governments are using "soft authoritarianism" and nostalgic descriptions of a homogenous, precolonial past as a shield against Western infiltration, Western liberal democracies and social movements are using human rights as a rhetorical discourse that may also have implicit political interests. It is much easier to expose deficiencies when they are far away and in another context.

For both sides, the challenge for the future is to take democracy and human rights seriously, within the family and the local community as well as in relation to international institutions, business and trade regulations. A private-public dichotomy may not be used to excuse the lack of democracy in one or the other. That which is considered private or public and understood culturally as being African, Asian, Latin American or European is constantly being renegotiated. Not only social power structures but also traditional hierarchies of values are in transition in all regions of the world. It is important to analyze language, and how relations are described. The politics of semantics create reality just as matters change.

Some convergences

Historically there are clashes between authoritarian interpretations of tradition and claims of human rights within all religious traditions. At the same time, convictions regarding human and communal dignity also come from religious traditions. Neither clashes nor convergences between traditions and human rights follow geographical or cultural lines. It is too simplistic to describe human rights as ethnocentric and connected to Europe or North America. Some ideas that used to be associated with Europe can also be found elsewhere, even if formulated differently. Mencius' philosophy, including the people's right to overthrow tyrannical governments, is one example. Even for values with a more specific origin, it is important not to conflate validity and genesis. If the value of individual freedom and autonomy has had a longer history in Europe and the USA that does not mean that it is not important and valid elsewhere. The insight that an individual is created and nurtured by his/her community is a value that needs to be emphasized in all societies threatened by atomistic individualism.

Furthermore, to ignore religious motivations for human rights widens the gulf between European and Asian theories of rights. Many traditions with origins in Asia, especially Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and a variety of traditional religions, cannot imagine or accept a system of rights that excludes religious dimensions because religion is part of the totality of life.[27] Religious worldviews frequently offer more profound language, based as they are on the transcendent.[28] Religious traditions not only offer resistance to greed, the religion of secular modernism, but also inspiration and communal responsibility. This inspiration is very important because implementation is crucial; fine words, statements, declarations and conventions do not suffice. Many human rights declarations carry ethical challenges and create visions of a good society that remain to be implemented.

Finally, most religions place emphasis on community, even if limited to their own ethnic or religious community. The human rights discourse, in this context, is able to facilitate cohabitation and collaboration between religions. We are far away from the hope of liberal theology that the world religions would become ever more similar. Dissimilarities in worldviews remain and global homogenization is not likely to lead to one great world religion. If anything, global consumerism may have become today's world religion. Here the language of human rights becomes an important challenge.

The opening words of the UN Charter, "to live together as good neighbors," is a challenge not only for states but also, and even more so, for civilizations, cultures and religions that coexist within the same nations, states and regions. Neighbors are not necessarily fond of each other, yet respecting each other's differences facilitates cohabitation. Such respect ought to be especially focused on the person. Cultures consist of human beings worthy of respect; in themselves, cultures are not entitled to respect. They consist of liberating as well as oppressive elements that in most cultures are being evaluated and renegotiated. Such evaluations are also undertaken interculturally. Global networks such as the Lutheran communion need to deliberate ethical principles and different priorities of values.

Within communicative ethics, as developed by Seyla Benhabib (in the tradition and spirit of Jürgen Habermas), there are two basic conditions to make communication meaningful. One is that we respect the right for each person to participate in moral discourse. The second is the right of each person to raise new issues and to discuss the preconditions of the discussion. Benhabib calls the first, the principle of universal moral respect, the second, the principle of egalitarian mutuality.[29] She claims that the modern project can only be reformed from within, through the intellectual, moral and political resources at our disposal, and by developing some crucial values globally:

> Among the legacies of modernity which today need reconstructing but not wholesale dismantling are moral and political universalism, committed to the now seemingly old-fashioned and suspect ideas of universal respect for each person in virtue of their humanity; the moral autonomy of the individual; economic and social justice and equality; democratic participation; the most extensive civil and political liberties compatible with principles of justice and the formation of solidaristic human associations.[30]

Toward the future

Various human rights conventions are seen as indivisible and interdependent today. Also, cultures, religions and regions are interdependent in new ways. People within cultures, religions and faith communities that are secure enough to respect others and engage in dialogues are able to argue for crucial values at the intersections of God's world. Continuing discussions within cultures and religions on how to understand and interpret values may then be combined with inter-religious explorations. In the future, tensions between authoritarian religion and human rights that existed in premodernity, and that within modernity developed into a kind of rivalry, may be replaced by a new creative relationship inspired by the openness of late- or postmodernity.

The view of human nature as being socially shaped and constructed may provide a path for Europe to transcend its previous overemphasis on the individual as an island constituted by independent reason. A growing European interpretation of the human being as shaped in relation to other human beings and other things in the world may be closer to Asian and African values, stressing harmony and interconnectedness.

It is therefore possible to relate positively to postmodern discourse in the context of human rights. The critique of the great narrative of Europe and America has helped dismantle monolithic solutions. The Euro-American hegemony of Enlightenment understandings imposed on others is being challenged. Further, when the great narrative of a victorious West is met with skepticism, the deep asymmetries between people, countries and regions become visible. Many of the disagreements about how to interpret human rights in various contexts have to do with asymmetries between cultures and religions. Many people in Africa, Asia and Latin America resist and challenge the Euro-American secularist hegemony that they experience as economic and cultural oppression. To criticize the other by describing their culture as alien is often used to escape inner tensions. Yet, no culture is monolithic. European or American ways of life or value systems are not radically different from those of other civilizations. It is important to recognize that most cultures are "polyvocal" and "multilayered" rather than holistic and monolithic.[31]

While most premodern societies consider human rights in relation to, and even as depending on, social position, age and gender, the modern era argued that human rights ought to be related to each human person, independent of "race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."[32] Here, equality is seen as an issue of justice and morality. When postmodernity emphasizes differences, it is also important not to undermine the pursuit of justice and the equal value of each person. The moral and political ambitions of universal equality and justice need to be pursued in all cultures. To accept an understanding of social position as something given and static is to allow the powerful to prescribe the value of other persons. Human rights need to be related to the person, not to social position, age, color or gender.

Although we continually need to pursue basic values such as respect for the individual person, we also need to critique the American hegemonic use of the human rights discourse to advance its own interests. We also need to deconstruct various rhetorical games that refer to asymmetry, diversity, African, Asian or European values as a disguise for other interests. Moreover, we also need to combine elements from premodern worldviews with the best of modernity. We need to nurture a sense for what is shared as well as to recognize our responsibilities to others, to nature and the generations to come.

Here, various religious and spiritual traditions may provide inspiration. Positive features of a premodern understanding of life need to be combined with a deeper respect for the individual, a heritage of modernity.

Finally, postmodern critique may help us develop a more dialogical and humble attitude in relation to other cultures and religions and to understand that the world is multidimensional. Thus, in the discussion of religious diversity and human rights, religious thought and practice, as well as the rights tradition, are important sources of inspiration for ethical deliberation in an intercultural world. Such a perspective may create a new openness for different languages, for religious contributions in terms of old and new symbols, spirituality, transcendence and mysticism. This may be able to unite human beings in a shared understanding that neither God, cosmos nor human beings may be fully portrayed by words. Could we possibly be mature enough for a new kind of spirituality built on mysticism, with greater humility in relation to God, the inner core? Interpretations would then be more open and democracy and human rights more central values.

For reflection or discussion:

What points of the author's analyses would you add to or take issue with? What are the important tensions or critiques that human rights language encounters in your setting? What interests or politics are at stake? How might the tensions or conflicts be addressed?

Notes

[1] I am not discussing here the intriguing, complex relationship between religion and culture.

[2] Hendrik M. Vroom, "Religious Ways of Life and Human Rights," in An-Nai'im, Gort, Jansen, Vroom (eds), *Human Rights and Religious Values* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 31.

[3] In the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) the right to "change" religion or belief was pointed out (Art. 18). This has never been repeated, neither in the Covenants of 1966 nor in the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief, UN Doc. (A/36/684,1981) because of resistance especially from Muslim countries.

[4] Vroom, *op. cit.* (note 2).

[5] Madeline Biardeau, *Hinduism. The Anthropology of a Civilization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 12.

[6] The Qur'an, Surah 53:AnNadjm:42, translated by Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1971), p. 57.

[7] For a discussion of three different Muslim hermeneutical positions in relation to the Qu'ran and *Sharia*, see Jonas Svensson, *Women's Human Rights and Islam*, *A Study of Three Attempts at Accommodation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2000).

[8] Vroom, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 33ff.

[9] David Novak, professor in modern Jewish studies at the University of Virginia (USA) mentions seven different relationships with obligations and implicit rights: (1) God to person; (2) persons to God; (3) God to community; (4) community to God; (5) persons to persons; (6) persons to community; (7) community to person. David Novak, "Religious Human Rights in the Judaic Tradition," in John Witte, Jr. and Johan D. van der Vyer (eds), *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives* (The Hague/Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1996).

[10] Irene Bloom, "Confucian Perspectives on Individual and Collectivity," in Irene Bloom, J. Paul Martin, and Wayne L. Proudfoot (eds), *Religious Diversity and Human Rights*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 117.

[11] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 19779.

[12] For a deeper analysis of the argumentation at UN conferences, see Elizabeth Gerle, " Participatory Democracy and Human Rights for Women in Globalization-Challenges at United Nations Conferences," in *Mänskliga rättigheter-från forskningens frontlinje* (Uppsala: Iustus, 2003), pp. 87-115.

[13] This is for instance pointed out by Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self, Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 109.

[14] Vroom, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 36.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] For an analysis on gender and exegesis in the Latin Fathers, see Kari Elisabeth Boerressen, *From Patristics to Matristics* (Rome: Herder, 2002). Also, *Augustinianum. Periodicum semestre Istituto Patristico Augustinianum*, 2000.

[17] Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, *The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). A gendered dichotomy and hierarchy is, however, not the only one at work. Other power structures created around class and ethnicity are relevant as well.

[18] For a deeper analysis of the concept of justice understood both as freedom of oppression and as a procedural concept that includes rights and possibilities of participating in political work and decision making, see Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 33ff.

[19] Chandra Muzaffar, "High Commissioner for Human Rights," in *Just Commentary*, no. 7 (January 3, 1994).

[20] Chandra Muzaffar, "From Human Rights to Human Dignity," address to the International Conference on Rethinking Human Rights, December 6-7, 1994, p. 3, unpublished paper. A somewhat revised version is published in Peter van Ness (ed.), *Debating Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[21] Edward Friedman, "Asia as a Fount of Universal Human Rights," in *ibid.*, p. 64.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

[23] Kim Dae Jung, "Is Culture Destiny? The Myth of Asia's Anti-Democratic Values: A Response to Lee Kuan Yew," in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov/Dec 1994), pp. 189-194.

[24] Friedman, *op. cit.* (note 21), p. 77.

[25] Muzaffar, *op. cit.* (note 20), pp. 26f.

[26] See e.g. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[27] Martin E. Marty, "Religious Dimension of Human Rights," in Witte *et al*, *op. cit.* (note 9).

[28] Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel (eds), *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1993).

[29] Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self, Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[31] Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture, Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 25.

[32] Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Article 2.

East meets West: Rites and Rights

Wai Man Yuen

Introduction

Since Hong Kong was returned to China on July 1, 1997, people in Hong Kong have been subject to even stronger pressures than before. These include political strife, debates on patriotism, the interpretation of the Basic Law,[1] prominent people being silenced, accusations of aspirations for Hong Kong's independence, suspected interference in legislative elections, etc. Because the government insisted on implementing Article 23 of the Basic Law, more than 500,000 people took to the streets on July 1, 2003 protesting against the government's violation of the freedom of the people of Hong Kong. The protests resulted in the withdrawal of legislation on Article 23. The people of Hong Kong courageously raised their heads and called out to Chinese people all over the world and to the international community that they were no longer indifferent and fearful of politics. They were not slaves living merely in service of the economy, but willing to stand up for democracy, freedom, human rights and the dignity of the individual. Therefore, July 1 has become an important date for pro-democracy protests.

This is a vivid example of how, because of globalization, Hong Kong's people have become more aware of democracy and thus committed to struggle for their rights. Under modernity, East Asians also call for freedom and human rights. While the idea of human rights seems to be universally recognized, we must ask if there is a distinctive East Asian understanding of human rights because of the cultural differences between East and West.[a] One might even argue that these two traditions have different ideological and political systems and that they surely have different interpretations of human freedom and human rights. The question is then to what extent cultural factors affect the understanding the notion of human rights.

[a] PLB: Is the critique that human rights are Western, or that they are associated with individuals rather than communities?

This essay attempts to build a common understanding of human rights between East and West. First, I shall examine the Confucian concept of *li* ritual practices as a basis for comparison with the Western concept of human rights. Among Western Christian traditions, I will focus on the Lutheran tradition. A Lutheran ethicist, Trutz Rendtorff, argues that the doctrine of justification applies not only to our faith *per se*, but also to liberty.[2] In other words, this doctrine bears on human commitment to democracy and human rights. The second part of this essay will analyze the implications of Luther's interpretation of the doctrine of justification for human rights. Finally, I will compare these two traditions so that insights from this comparison can suggest directions for Chinese Christians in their ongoing quest for democracy and human rights.[b]

The Confucian understanding of authority

Beyond its immense impact on Chinese civilization, Confucianism has also had a great influence on Korea and Japan. The beliefs and values of this ethical tradition form the common heritage of East Asian cultures with their deep sense of hierarchy, a total commitment to the family (on behalf of which the individual must work hard and save) and absolute loyalty to the hierarchical state. This deep sense of hierarchy brings with it a deep sense of authority.

Ideally Confucian authority is noncoercive.[3] This noncoercive ideal is based on the Confucian concept of humanity. To be human implies the realization of a person's true nature. In addition, for Confucians, self-cultivation and learning are an important part of being human. A person who can actualize her/his humanity is a sage, that is, a profound or holy person. A sage is a model of what a human being with authority should be. In other words, authority is not possessed or claimed, but shown in what it means to be human. In this respect, the model of authority is the model of self-actualization.

In the *Great Learning*, all human beings are called upon to regard self-cultivation as the root of life and the foundation of learning. "To follow human nature

[b] WMY: Once baptized you still bring your tradition and seek to live that out as yourself. I am only one person. I try to bring the differences together, yet they remain in tension. The human being who complies can feel very conflicted. Many Chinese women feel overburdened by being the caretakers of all and the silence and suffering they are expected to bear.

is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called education. […] Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world, and harmony its universal path."[4] By means of education, a Confucian person can be self-cultivated. A self-cultivated person is "a focus of a field of relations, personal cultivation means cultivating others, including cultivating their freedom."[5] In Confucianism, the self is the center of everything and once established, it can open up into different areas of life. In this way, self-understanding should be sought first, focusing on the inner experience of our nature. This self-seeking understanding begins with learning, through which the self can be further developed in the direction of sagehood. For Confucians, a sage is a person who commits him- or herself to "the moral responsibility of becoming a person of goodness, an individual who, in reverential attitude, experiences a fundamental unity between him- or herself and Heaven, earth, and the ten-thousand things."[6] In other words, education is the process of investigating things in order to rectify the mind; this is the moral development of a person.

Moreover, self-actualization leads a sage to an understanding that the self is no longer a private ego but a communal self or entity,[7] conscious of living in a network of relationships. This network of relationships is based on the natural order of things in human society: family, neighborhood, kinship, clan, state and world.[8] Once a person is self-actualized, s/he becomes a responsible person. That is to say, for Confucians social responsibility is the ethical consequence of self-actualization. Therefore "good administration is not as efficacious as good education in winning the people—the former gains the people's wealth, the latter gains the people's hearts-and-minds."[9]

For Confucians, good education is the ability to strengthen the mind and the spirit so that humans are sincerely related to one another. Thus, as Sor-Hoon Tan indicates,

> Authority both enables and constrains. […] This applies to both parties in an authority relation. It is not a relation in which one party imposes her will on the other; rather, the ideal authority relation requires participation of both in shaping the means and ends to be shared, resulting in personal cultivation for both parties and contributing to communal harmony. The authority may be measured in terms of how much the constraints constituted by the action of the one in authority enable the action of the one under authority.[10]

Hence, through personal cultivation, Confucian authority is legitimated, contributing to both personal and communal growth. Unlike in the West, Eastern Confucian societies see authority as a means of liberating one's true nature. Authority brings freedom to people in the sense that each person through self-cultivation can understand and conform to her/his proper role.[c]

Li as self-actualization

Although *jen*, human love, is the concept that weaves throughout all schools of Confucian thought, *li* mediates all the specific human relations. It is an important concept for understanding how Confucianism harmonizes liberty and authority. *Li* is the traditional social mechanism for constituting community and creating sociopolitical order. Without *li*, human roles cannot function properly. In a social system, *li* embraces all the statuses and roles of familial and political order as well as all the prescriptions of behavior embedded in these institutions.[11] Basically, *li* provides social distinctions or divisions in various kinds of human relationships, such as the Five Cardinal Relationships: love between father and son; duty between ruler and subject; distinction between husband and wife; precedence of the old over the young; and faith between friends. The Five Cardinal Relationships have formed the general pattern of Chinese society. Note that only one of them is biological, all are defined in moral terms, and all are reciprocal.

Furthermore, *li* has to be understood as a dynamic movement involving self-transformation within the context of the dichotomy between the individual self and the collective social circumstances. It is manifested concretely in the four developmental stages of human beings: cultivating personal life; regulating familial relations; ordering the affairs of the state; and bringing peace to the world. These four developmental stages are not merely understood in a linear progression, but in a continual process of gradual inclusion. In this process, the individual self is the starting point and the universe as a whole is the final stage. Ideally, the result of self-transformation is universal peace. But, concretely, self-transformation cannot bypass the regulation of familial relations nor the ordering of the affairs of the state. Therefore, the ceaseless effort of self-cultivation is an end in itself; its primary purpose is self-realization.[12] At every stage, there is a given structure, but also, at every stage, there is a going beyond any finite restrictions.

[c] EG: What if the relationships break down?

Li provides a variety of religious rituals for integrating personality, family, state and the world. One has to go through these rituals in order to become truly human.[13] As Confucius says, "to master oneself and return to *li* is humanity."[14] In this social definition of the person, rights and duties are inseparable.[15] Moreover, in order to become truly human, one does not look at what is contrary to *li*, nor listen to what is contrary to *li*, nor speak what is contrary to *li*.[16] In this sense, Confucius' instruction of *li* is not in terms of fixed rituals. Rather, *li* is a process of ritualization manifested in four developmental stages. As de Bary says, "Confucianism is the most distinctly humanistic of the world's major traditions."[17] What lies behind the concept of "human equality" or the "natural rights of man [sic]" is the concept of "humaneness" or "humanity." Thus, although Confucianism does not explicitly talk about human rights, its concept of humanity fully embraces the notion of human rights.[18]

When a person acts out *li*, s/he is self-actualized. Since *li* is to be involved in a set of defined roles and mutual obligations, *li* mediates all human relationships. However, *li* is not a rights-based morality, but a morality of what it means to be human or "to be." Since Confucianism assumes the essential equality of humans, *jen* is the essence of Confucian ethics. Through ritual practices, individuals cultivate themselves in order to be fully human. The practice of *li* furthers the harmony of a society. This harmony presumes honor, a moral nature and respect for others.[d]

Thus, rights are assumed but rites are required. As De Bary observes, rites "as formal definition and concrete embodiment, cover some of our rational, moral and legal conception of 'rights.'"[19] Starting from the individual and family, people acting rightly can reform and perfect society. Thus, Confucians emphasize individual spiritual liberation rather than establishing laws and institutions to protect people's rights.[20] For them "ritual should be the first resort and law the last."[21] Since according to Confucianism laws can promote litigation and undermine personal relations, the measure of a good government is how little it needs the law.[22]

These understandings of the Confucian concept of *li* are at odds with the present situation in most East Asian Confucian societies. However, the fault may

[d] PLB: As an African, there are aspects of my culture that can enrich my Christian understandings, but others are terrible; therefore, I must critique what is not life affirming. Doesn't Confucianism also need to be critiqued in terms of its effects on women?

not lie entirely with Confucian culture, but rather with the concept of authority. Confucianism values authority to the extent that it is an ideal, noncoercive authority. In this respect, authority does not mean that a person has power over others such that s/he can use force to demand their obedience. On the contrary, those with authority should responsibly maintain a balance between freedom and authority. The exercise of personal freedom should be directed toward bringing people to self-realization. In this respect, self-realization "is not a lonely quest for one's inner spirituality but a communicative act of empowering one to become a responsible householder, an effective community worker, a conscientious public servant."[23] Denying any difference between power and authority would transform the exercise of authority into authoritarianism.

Western concept of rights

As Elisabeth Gerle points out, since the Enlightenment and the autonomy and secularization flowing from it, democracy and human rights have increasingly become one of the most globalized discourses of our time. I shall explore the historical development of the modern notion of rights and how this is complementary to Christian (particularly Lutheran) beliefs.

Some Lutheran bases for the notion of "rights"

In the West, there is a tendency to view rights as being derived from the Christian tradition, more specifically, from the Christian concept of freedom. As an Augustinian theologian standing firmly in the Western Christian tradition, Martin Luther immersed himself in the theological meaning of freedom, saying, "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."[24] For Luther, a Christian as a justified sinner is freed from the curse of sin. The ethical implication of justification by faith is that a Christian is no longer obsessed with the self, but instead the self is turned toward others.

For Luther, freedom is founded on the doctrine of justification by faith, through which Christians are liberated from sin. On this basis, good works can be done.

> […] sins must be forgiven before good works can be done. For works do not drive out sin, but the driving out of sin leads to good works. For good works

> must be done with joyful heart and good conscience toward God, that is, out of the forgiveness of guilt.[25]

Due to this radical freedom of the self, moral and other social activities are not means to achieve freedom. The freedom of the self comes through faith. These activities are the ethical consequences of justification, and are to be guided by the worldly needs of the neighbor and the community.

Because of original sin, humans live under the curse of sin, which for Luther leaves human beings with no freedom. He writes: "Free choice without the grace of God is not free at all, but immutably the captive and slave of evil, since it cannot of itself turn to the good."[26] Again, the free will or free choice, "is plainly a divine term, and can be properly applied to none but the Divine Majesty alone; for he alone can do and does [...] whatever he pleases in heaven and on earth."[27]

Christian liberty thus is not freedom of choice or freedom of the will, but arises from what it means to be a justified sinner. It means to be freed from the curse of sin, liberated from being obsessed with the self. Instead, we are absolutely dependent on God. A Christian then is "a servant of Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:1). It is only on the basis of this relationship to Christ that a Christian can be a servant to her/his neighbors. Furthermore, only when a Christian seeks the interest of her/his neighbors, can s/he become what s/he is. Christian liberty is completely dependent on this relationship. As Luther says:

> Although I am an unworthy and condemned person, my God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation without any merit on my part, out of pure, free mercy, so that from now on I need nothing except faith which believes that this is true. Why should I not therefore freely, joyfully with all my heart, and with an eager will do all things which I know are pleasing and acceptable to such a Father who has overwhelmed me with his inestimable riches? I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ.[28]

Justification frees us from the concern for self-interest in order that we might act in the interest of the neighbor. Freedom in this sense is in terms of its relation to other human beings. Luther never sees the human being in isolation, without a relationship to others. Freedom does not imply that I do whatever I want. It is given by God and not inherited. Without this gift from God, humans know no freedom. Insofar as I act as a justified sinner, I am free to act without concern for my own self-interest. We have received freedom in order to serve those in need. A free person is a responsible person.

We are bound to our neighbors in the sense that we unreservedly commit ourselves to our neighbors. We seek our neighbor's interest and protect it with our whole strength. Christian ethics are only possible on the basis of this liberation. We are saved and thus we are free to act. Human freedom and human rights are given. "Rights" are not sought but given. For Luther, then, "rights" are for the purpose of serving the neighbor.

We do this through the various duties associated with our vocation. This implies a calling from God.[29] Every Christian has a station in life, *stand*, where s/he is called by God to serve.[e] Luther focused on three basic stations or "mandates:" the church; the family (including everything related to business and the economy); and secular authority.[30] "It is God's will that there are distinctions of ranks,"[31] and that "these make for right and righteousness and thus preserve the peace.[32] " That is to say, God has established these different kinds of "stations" in which Christians are called to "serve God and the world."[33] The different institutions of life, *politia*, are to maintain order, justice and peace in the world.[34] Christians should not only pray for these institutions, but also criticize the existing social order based on their conscience. However, we should bear in mind that for Luther, conscience is bound to the Word of God. In this sense, what enables a Christian to criticize *politia* is based on obedience to God's Word. Thus, our call should lead us to fulfill neighbor-love with free responsibility. In other words, Christians should act according to their status in society, and be responsible for furthering the common good.

Accordingly, for Luther, worldly vocation implies basic rights, which are social rights. The concept of basic rights implies that every person is called to social responsibility.[35]

> We ought not to run away from one another and each seek to live for himself; rather, we should stay with one another in all kinds of stations, just as God has joined us together, and each serve the other.[36]

[e] EG: Rather than viewing the given as static, there is an eschatological challenge to all orders in which we live.

Social obligation corresponds to the concept of civil duties. Thus, our right is to fulfill our duties in our vocation so that God and our neighbors can be served, thereby preserving order in the world.

Luther's notions were different from modern ideas of human rights. His concepts of freedom and servitude are paradoxically intertwined in his doctrine of justification. As justified sinners, Christians no longer follow their own interest, but seek the needs of others. Christians are called to different vocations but with one purpose, that is, wholeheartedly to serve the neighbor. Because of this loving serfdom, Luther opens new possibilities for a more humane society.

The modern concept of civil rights follows from this Christian concept of the freedom of the self. However, under modern Western secularization, freedom and responsibility are advocated in the non-theological language of "rights." "Rights" become means towards achieving political order. They are protected by law and developed into legal concepts. Laws are necessary for societies in order to protect people's rights. However, without moral or ethical meaning, rights turn out to be a functional means of self-preservation.

In the West, political order is closely associated with the rule of law. Since there is an inherent conflict between individual desires and society's demands, human freedom and authority always exist in tension. Thus, in Western tradition, laws provide social constraints. Laws can be viewed as the chief instrument of political authority. Power is legitimized through the establishment of laws. By protecting people's rights, laws can ensure a society's stability.

Rights have also become associated with the liberty to pursue pleasure. The liberal ideal advocates individualism. Consequently, society becomes the aggregate of individuals and social institutions exist to serve individuals. In his book, *The Good Society*, Robert N. Bellah points out that American institutions today are dominated by this tradition of individualism. Every individual is seen as pursuing her/his own self-preservation, rather than the preservation of communities or other individuals. This reductionist view of human motivation leads to an individualistic view of morality. Neglecting the importance of communal ties ultimately has led to a "diseased" society. Losing their social origin and intent, "rights" may not seem like "rights" at all.

East meets West over rights

Do human rights have a universal character? Or, is the notion of human rights a kind of Western cultural imperialism according to which a certain version of individual freedom, especially in civil and political life, is held up as the mandatory standard for all peoples and states, regardless of their cultural particularities or circumstances?[f] In order to answer these questions, I shall compare two traditions.

Confucianism and Lutheranism have a common understanding of human rights as social rights; a free person is a responsible bearer of rights. There is no individualistic freedom because every person is in relation to others. Our place in society is where we concretely exercise responsibility. A"right" thus implies responsibility.[g]

From Luther's perspective, every person is defined through situational relationships rather than through any intrinsic selfhood or autonomy. Further, institutions structure our responsibility for social obligation. The Confucian concept of *li* clearly indicates that we are inescapably social beings. Mutual respect and equal reciprocity are much more important than a social contract. Everyone participates in a process of ritualization in order to become truly human. We are wholly obligated to our society and judged in part by how well we fulfill those obligations. Thus, although these two traditions are associated with different ideological and political systems, they provide us with a similar idea of human rights. Human rights imply civil rights. They can be seen as a basis for determining the right conduct in relations between people, governments or other institutions.

Confucianism counts on the inherent moral goodness of human nature, and emphasizes ritual practices rather than law. Since rituals have the validity of law, humans can actualize their moral nature through the practice of self-cultivation. Through this, we will feel obliged to seek the common good rather than our own interests. We will respect and not offend others. We will protect the property of others. The human rites we practice are not legal rights but our very human nature, which is ordained by heaven.

In contrast, Christianity has emphasized human sinfulness. Even though, according to Luther, we are saved by God, we remain both saint and sinner.

[f] EG: Human rights discourse started not as ideals but because of the experience of oppression. Besides seeking harmony, you also need to look at the problems. Ethics starts with those who are victimized. How do you break out of relationships that are oppressive?

[g] ACs: There seem to be two different sets of rules: for Confucianism, freedom and obligation, for Christianity, freedom and responsibility. Traditional Hungarian peasant life is very similar to Chinese culture.

Christians realize that they can never self-actualize themselves. Laws are necessary to constrain sin. Human rights and democracy are necessary in the political arena. At the same time, although Luther advocated the spiritual freedom of a Christian, he did not challenge the *politia.* For him, different social orders were instituted by God but they should not interfere with the *ecclesia*, religious affairs. Thus religious freedom and political rights coexist in Lutheranism.

Conclusion

So, does the understanding of human rights from an East Asian perspective differ from that in the West? Although globalization makes us more sensitive to cultural differences, human rights are relevant in both East and West. Rights and freedoms are basic to a humane society. Yet, when we demand rights and freedoms, we should also be aware of our responsibilities. That is, in order to establish a humane society, we have to be responsible for those who are in need. They have a right to peace and happiness, as do we. Respect for human rights is so fundamentally important that there should be a global consensus regarding this.

Different cultures and religions have different ways of conceiving, understanding and interpreting human rights. As we have discussed, the Confucian concept of *li* provides a basis for asserting certain human rights. That is to say, human rights have always been a part of Confucian culture and are expressed and practiced through *li.* Cultural concepts and human rights need to be properly related and mutually developed. Cultural diversities do not challenge the universal validity of human rights, but enrich our understanding and practice of them.

In Hong Kong, we have inherited a rich Chinese tradition in which Confucianism plays a significant role. Instead of asking about the relevance of Confucianism in today's Chinese social and political life, we should focus on how to preserve *li* in modern Hong Kong society.[h] Since the concept of *li* provides a positive potential for promoting human rights, we should continue to draw upon it.

[h] PMM: In Africa, we have been communicating with God long before Christianity. Christ did not come to destroy but to fulfill culture, but with new ways of looking at some practices in our culture. Can the Bible be read in light of Confucianism?

In the twenty-first century, as the world is becoming one, we are being drawn together by the grave problems of overpopulation, dwindling natural resources and an environmental crisis that threatens the very foundation of our existence on this planet. Human rights, environmental protection and the challenge of pursuing social and economic justice are interrelated. To meet these and other challenges of our time, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Every individual must assume responsibility for helping others in our global family. Such universal responsibility is the best hope for a more humane society.

For reflection or discussion:

From a Western Christian perspective, what is your reaction to the Confucian perspective on human rights as presented here (or vice versa)? What are the main tensions between these two approaches? Can, or ought, they be brought together? Reflect on the challenges of living at the intersections between any two such powerful religious-cultural traditions.

Notes

[1] Article 23 in HK SAR's Basic Law reads "The HK SAR shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition or theft of state secrets." For details, see **http://shkca.berkeley.edu/petition/index.php3**

[2] Trutz Rendtorff, "Christian Concepts of the Responsible Self," in Leory S. Rouner (ed.), *Human Rights and the World's Religions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 33-45.

[3] Sor-Hoon Tan, *Confucian Democracy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 189.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 195.

[6] Rodney L. Taylor, *The Religious Dimensions of Confucianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 56.

[7] Tu Wei-ming, "Embodying the Universe: A Note on Confucian Self-Realization," in Roger T. Ames (ed.), *Self As Person In Asian Theory and Practice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 180.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 181.

[9] Mencius 13.14/68/23. See Sor-Hoon Tan, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 190.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp.190-191.

[11] Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 295.

[12] Tu Wei-ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), pp. 27-28.

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

[14] Wing-tsit Chan, tans. and comp., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 38.

[15] Roger T. Ames, "Rites as Rights: The Confucian Alternative" in Rouner, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 210-211.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] W. Theodore de Bary, "Neo-Confucianism and Human Rights," in Rouner, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 184.

[18] Refer to *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[19] W. Theodore de Bary, *The Trouble with Confucianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 67.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Tan, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 183.

[23] Tu, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 182.

[24] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian ," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 344.

[25] Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 10.

[26] Martin Luther, "The Bondage of the Will," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) p. 67.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Luther, *op. cit.* (note 24), pp. 333-377.

[29] There are two different meanings of the word "vocation." One means calling, the other, which is more broader usage, is *Stand*, *Amt* and *Befehl*.

[30] Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press) p. 364. See Gustav Wingren, *Luther on Vocations*, translated by Carl Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957).

[31] Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 7 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), p. 190.

[32] Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 13 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), p. 370.

[33] Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967) p. 252.

[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 246-248.

[35] Rouner, *op. cit.*, (note 2), p. 38.

[36] *WA* 21, p. 343.

At Intersections of Citizenship

Transition to Democracy in a Post-Communist Society: Can Fear Be Overcome?

András Csepregi

> God is love […] There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:16-8); [...] God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline (2 Tim 1-7).[1]

These biblical verses are the cornerstones undergirding the following discussion. They point to the consequences of Jesus' victorious fight against destructive evil in the gospels, and compel the reader to ask, Am I able to believe this? Do I fight Jesus' fight? Do I know something of his victory?

The theological basis for our considerations is the conviction that modern democracy is rooted in Christianity.[2] Democracy is sometimes called "the art of living together," which can also be formulated as "the art of loving the neighbor." Unfortunately, under modernity, this second great commandment has often been separated from the first (love God), sometimes even arguing that following the first is counterproductive with respect to the second. This, however, cannot conceal the intrinsic relationship between the vision of the kingdom of God shared with us by Jesus in the Gospels, and modern democratic efforts that pursue the fair distribution of power, information, resources and possibilities for living a meaningful life.

Loving the neighbor means being open toward her/him in the spirit of mutual sharing, just as Jesus has become transparent for us, helping us to recognize God's unlimited, unconditional love. Fear, in turn, shuts us off from the other, turning us into islands, living in mutual unconcern, self-defense, or worse, in mutual enmity. These are key biblical and theological insights that frame the following discussion.

A postcard from Hungary

In 2004, the Hungarian people celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the proclamation of the multiparty, democratic Republic of Hungary. On 1 May 2004, Hungary, along with nine other European states, joined the European Union. The new Hungarian democracy presents a picture of a rather balanced society; freely elected governments have been able to stay in office for their full, mandated term. After some years of insecurity, people are experiencing steady economic growth in the economy and, at least for some, an improved standard of living. Strikes and public expressions of dissatisfaction are relatively rare, and extremist political parties are unable to secure a seat in parliament. All this speaks of the apparently successful peaceful transition of a national community from an authoritarian to a democratic society.

A closer look, however, raises some important questions. Does the calm surface really indicate peace or, rather, resignation? Does the lack of strikes really indicate general satisfaction or, rather, a certain lack of initiative? A deeper knowledge of life in Hungary reveals why such questions are being asked. People in the same community who have witnessed the same historical process disagree sharply about the nature and content of the significant tensions beneath the apparently calm surface. A clear sign of the hidden tensions is that the struggle between the leading political parties is sharper than ever. The political struggles within a multiparty democratic society pose new questions for the churches that Hungarian Christians are not always ready or able to answer. The lack of answers, and the need for them, make the problem of the transition to democracy a theological problem. In particular, it poses a challenge to Lutheran theology.

En route to 2004

1989 has been called an *annus mirabilis* because of the Velvet Revolutions that took place in several Central European countries. Without using violent means, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary declared their independence from the Soviet Union, leaving behind them the oppressive presence of "Big Brother." The people of these countries tend to think that the Velvet Revolutions were successful because they resisted power, while outside observers tend to celebrate a new era of nonviolent resistance.[3] Both diagnoses are misleading.

As a matter of fact, people in these countries had not accepted Soviet-style communism without resistance. The uprisings of 1953 (East Berlin), 1956 (Hungary), 1968 (Czechoslovakia) and 1980 (Poland) witness to the fact that initiatives were taken and that people deeply desired freedom. However, unsupported by Western powers who acted according to the Cold War logic, these uprisings failed. Thwarted by the brutal repression of the Soviet Union and the national communist powers it backed, the failed revolutions gave place to resignation. Until the late 1980s, no national power was effective in countering this.

The oppressed populations of the Central European satellite states could not become actors and agents in the 1989 changes. Rather, these changes were the result of the United States' superiority in the arms race against the Soviet Union and, secondly, the unintended result of Gorbachev's reforms.[4] From Budapest to Berlin, hundreds of thousands of people gathered on the streets of the large cities during the exciting months of 1989. Although the rest of the world came to know them as the new Central European troops of freedom and democracy, these people probably knew better than any observer that their celebrated freedom was given to them as a present instead of something for which they had fought.[a]

In reality, the new democracies were not founded on the irresistible desire for a genuine democratic order on the part of the people as a whole, but on a wise consensus among some of the political élite. In Hungary, for example, long negotiations between the six most popular parties, among them the post-communist socialist party, created the basic rules for the new democracy and led to the first free elections in the spring of 1990. It was surely one of the smoothest and most peaceful transitions to a democratic order ever experienced. A people who historically had only a limited sense of the meaning of democracy undertook the historic adventure of becoming a democratic society.

The coalition of right-wing parties won a convincing majority in the first free elections in Hungary in 1990. Four years later, the left-wing parties, led by the former communists, gained a landslide victory. In 1998, the newly organized political right won again, and in 2002, the left returned by a narrow margin. In the course of this political struggle, the consensus that had characterized the relationship between the governing and opposition parties dur-

[a] PMM: There is a great difference between what has been given and democracy that has been fought for. In the South African homelands, there was a lot of fear and suspicion. We have fought for democracy, but now we have too much uncontrolled freedom and an increase in crime, so that the situation is more fearful than under apartheid. Also, there is a very high level of expectation of the government. Democracy is very difficult. We fought together and won; but now some ask, Why did you take us out of Egypt?

ing the first years gradually faded away, making way for a state of permanent political struggle. In this struggle, both parties used every available means to bring about short-term success and to gain support from all possible powers in society, thereby involving a growing number of people on both sides.

Permanent ideological war

Being a fledgling democracy, Hungarian society does not have a strong, self-sustaining economy, independent cultural centers or a well-developed civil society. The state is still the most significant player in the country's financial affairs. Because in practice the distribution of wealth is controlled by the political winners, power comes mostly from party politics. Since large parts of society are in need of party support, these can easily be recruited to garner votes.

Sadly, Christian churches are by and large also part of this "give and take." Churches run several ever-expanding social and educational institutions that depend on the state for financial support. Hoping for more substantial support, they are ready to instruct their members regarding the "right decision" to be taken in the voting booths. An ideological superstructure has been erected on the basis of this material interest. Some parties call themselves "Christian" parties, thus offering a helping hand to the churches—or more accurately, to the established or so-called historic churches[5]—in their supposed "holy crusade" against an "atheist and secularized world." As a counterpoint to this alliance, some newly founded charismatic churches, emerging partly in critique of the historic churches, seek and find similar support at the opposite end of the political spectrum.

In Central and Eastern Europe, old-fashioned ideological divisions, like "conservative" versus "liberal," "right" versus "left," "nationalist" versus "cosmopolitan," are still deeply engrained. They are often used to describe an antagonism between "good" and "evil," in the form of mutual accusations with no explanations needed. These ideological cards can easily be played out against each other. Political battles over material and practical issues can be fought at ideological levels, since there are more than enough people who can still be mobilized by the militant slogans of the past. The ideological war sometimes shows the symptoms of a "political hysteria" (a term which we will discuss later). This situation can be seen as a hindrance in the transition to democracy as well as a bad legacy from the non-democratic past.

Ideological opposition is a hindrance, because in the atmosphere of the heated, sometimes hysterical, ideological war it is simply impossible to discuss the diverse relationships between means and ends, concepts and political purposes. This shortcoming also applies to the churches. For example, in Hungary today, it would be impossible to ask a leading theologian whether a Christian could be member of either a conservative, a socialist or a liberal political party, and for him or her to give a relaxed "yes," as did the German Lutheran Helmut Thielicke in the late 1950s.[6] In a multiparty democracy this is assumed to be the case, provided a Christian can exercise his/her genuinely Christian critical solidarity with any political party. The lack of this possibility in Hungary reveals a critical deficit in democracy.

The ideological opposition is also a bad legacy of the undemocratic past. Central and Eastern European societies experienced successive political dictatorships that fought each other during the twentieth century. In Hungary, during World War I, so-called "national-liberal" governments, exercising an authoritarian type of leadership that tried to manage the social unrest of a rather imbalanced, semi-feudal society, led the country toward the losing side. In 1919, a short-lived communist experiment shocked the country, followed by the "white-terror" of extreme right and anti-Semitic forces. The chaos caused by the 1920 Treaty of Trianon was overcome by a rather heavy-handed rightist government. As the country became more balanced, the rigor of the so-called "Christian-nationalistic" government became increasingly tolerant. However, the desire for revenge against neighboring countries, as well as the programmatic reference to the "Bolshevik menace," remained the leading motifs of interwar politics.

During 1938 and 1939, Hitler helped the Hungarian regime regain some of the lost territories, giving the extreme-right, anti-Semitic and fascist elements of the Hungarian political élite more power. War years brought a gradual shift toward the militant right, resulting in the Hungarian holocaust and the formal coming to power of the Arrow Cross (Hungarian Nazi) Party. The first free elections in 1945 brought victory for the moderate parties. However, the Communist party, backed by the liberating as well as occupying Soviet Red Army, gradually took control and by 1948 turned the country into a full-blown communist dictatorship. The short relief of the 1956 revolution was followed by a bloody revenge and, although the "People's Republic" made several compromises during the 1970s and 1980s, it never gave up its claim that the only legitimate leading force of society is the sole political party, the Communist party.

These subsequent and antagonistic "hard" or "soft" dictatorships mutually blamed each other for the country's hardships, thus developing a sophisticated ideological "blame culture" that still flourishes. The existential source and power behind this blame culture is the fallible individual who collaborated either with the brown or the red dictatorship, or frequently with both of them. Ideological reflexes and existential interests created a tightly woven web that prevented most people from realizing that both dictatorships were wrong, and that crimes committed in the name of either the brown or the red dictatorship were equally bad. A new democratic experiment could have been built on these basic convictions—sincere confessions of individual and collective sins, forgiveness and invitations for everyone to begin a new life in society. Instead, we are witnessing an expansion of the old ideological war, in which warriors of antagonistic alliances keep trying to answer the infamous question, Who is better, Hitler or Stalin? Party politics has already fallen into this trap, since any general election victory depends on the capacity to mobilize these ideological sentiments. Christian churches, dependent on party politics, are also part of this sad picture. Churches are a mirror image of the unhealthy political life, instead of a model for the new community, in which traditional antagonisms are overcome.[b]

Let me approach this problem in another way. In the 1980s, a so-called "5 plus 1" political joke (5 years in prison for those who tell, 1 year for those who hear) referred back to the 1950s when such consequences did occur.

[b] WD: In "On Secular Authority" Luther says that you cannot judge others on matters of salvation, but as citizens, you need to hold them accountable. This could open dialogue: I am not judging you, but holding you accountable via the law.

PLB: In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission got at both the clinical and the political. Violations need to be named. Judging is different from blaming. These are problematic words in South Africa. The distinction between holding accountable and judging is important.

EG: Dealing with traumatized individuals and groups is a pervasive problem. Only quite recently in history has attention been given to the effects of crime on victims. How do we take seriously the damage of long-term victimization without encouraging a blaming culture? How can our societies resist the temptation to blame others in ways that undermine personal responsibility as citizens? How can our churches be healing communities that take seriously the wounds without projecting everything that is evil onto others?

"Question: What is worse than communism? Answer: What comes after it." Originally, this was thought an absurd joke, since no one believed that anything would come after communism. However, even this absurd possibility had a liberating effect. Today, this joke has proven to be revelatory. Communism, by and large, deprived people of the possibility of facing their lives and deeds prior to 1945. The one-sided and programmatic anti-fascist, anti-imperialistic and anti-clerical culture gave plenty of possibilities to those who wanted to express their loyalty toward the new power, or even to compensate for their opposing loyalties in the past, but denied the public space for an honest, nuanced personal self-examination. Unfair treatment of the middle class, or of the clergy in general, pushed people into a defensive posture, thus denying them the psychological space for self-examination. Even the traumas of the holocaust-survivors could not be treated under the umbrella of the harsh anti-fascist propaganda. All this work was left to post-communist times, compounded by all the traumas caused by communism. So, we have plenty of "skeletons marching out of our cupboards," and it is often difficult to decide what to deal with first. However, the doors of the cupboard are finally open.

Political hysterias and their therapy

Political hysteria was detected and described by the Hungarian political philosopher István Bibó.[7] The immediate background of this idea is Bibó's analysis of Central and Eastern European political culture, which was rooted in existential fear.[c]

Bibó developed his analysis of deformed Central and Eastern European political culture in the early 1940s. His immediate purpose was to understand and demonstrate to Western readers the inner characteristics of Nazi Ger-

[c] WD: In situations of fear, freedom is what you give up first. In Brazil, under the threat of communism, we gave up freedom in order to preserve our freedom. Now, under neoliberalism we give up other freedoms and become slaves to work and debt, yet claim to be free.

ACs: Yes, cultivating the neoliberal economic system has also been disastrous for us because we were not prepared for a free market; the lack of a social web has impoverished many. If freedom comes with poverty, what kind of freedom is it?

many. (By Central and Eastern Europe Bibó referred to the area extending from the river Rhine to Russia.) In a detailed historical analysis, he shows that while stable state organizations were built in Western and Northern Europe, these never materialized in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, after the French Revolution, when democratic mass emotions and principles reached these areas, the political élite were uncertain about the national and state framework needed in order to govern these emotions. It was not possible to create a stable national framework for the reception of these democratic ideals. This is the root of the deformation of political culture in these countries. The people, *peuple*, who represented the dynamics of social improvement in Western Europe became at the same time the decisive carriers of national traits, *volk*, in Central and Eastern Europe. It was against this background that linguistic nationalism, which provided the most important arguments in the territorial disputes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was born. Linguistic nationalism made the borders fluid and the framework of national life chronically insecure. These insecure frameworks could not endure the pressure of democratic ideals, nor stabilize the emotions from earlier clashes with great empires and the existential fear. To quote Bibó:

> The existential fear for the community was the decisive factor that made the situation of democracy and democratic development unstable in these countries. [...] To be a democrat means first of all not to be afraid: not to be afraid of those with different opinions, different languages, of a different race, of revolution, of conspiracies, the unknown, evil designs of the enemy, hostile propaganda, derogation, and altogether of all the imaginary dangers that become real dangers because of our fear of them. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe were afraid because they were not mature democracies, and since they were afraid, they were unable to become ones.[8]

The starting point of political hysteria in a community's life is a shocking historical experience that the community is unable to stomach. While a well-balanced community is able to face an historical shock and to mobilize its political and moral strength to cope with it, a community without the necessary inner balance evades the problem and resorts to political hysteria instead of a costly, long-term solution. Similarly to a mentally hysterical person, a hysterical community becomes fixated on a single historical experience. It gradually loses its ability to identify the real causes of events, losing sight of its surrounding reality, trying to create consistency out of inconsistency, thus building up a false and all-embracing system of reference. A worldview that is developed by a hysterical community offers clear answers to every possible question, namely what the members of the community want to hear. Because it lives in a false relationship with reality, sooner or later a hysterical community becomes bankrupt. After a catastrophe, comes either healing or more severe hysteria. [9] [d]

Bibó wrote these sentences explicitly about Nazi Germany. At the same time, he knew himself to be a member of another hysterical community, the Hungarian middle class of the interwar period. Soon thereafter, writing in 1945 about "The Crisis of Hungarian Democracy,"[10] he detected the same political hysteria among the ranks of Hungarian communists who, in accordance with Stalin's desire, were preparing to take over total control in Hungary. What Bibó described in his own time is still today a political reality in Hungarian internal politics: both the right and the left show symptoms of political hysteria.

"Building up a false and all-embracing system of reference" can also refer to the historic churches. According to the right, historic churches are eminently important parts of today's society; even during the communist era, they lived and acted as the last and only fortresses of resistance against the totalitarian regime. According to the left, historic churches have represented reactionary politics throughout the whole twentieth century and until now; far from being resistant to Nazism and communism, they have been parts and beneficiaries of these regimes. According to the right, the historic churches should be given more voice in the public realm. According to the left, the involvement of the historic churches in public politics is extraordinary already, so they should withdraw and concentrate on their spiritual, pastoral and theological work.

Decades ago, István Bibó suggested a therapy to cure deep-rooted political hysterias.[11] Refusing to treat this as a moral problem, he argued that "we

[d] KLB: This is disturbingly similar to what has been occurring in the USA since September 11, 2001, with so much being justified under the "war on terrorism" rationale.

WD: Under the language of "homeland security," why are so many American people so anxious to waive their rights?

WMY: As Chinese, we too fear saying anything that will get us into trouble; we have a similar kind of hysteria. How do we break through this kind of hysteria?

could not do worse to a hysterical state of mind than passing moral judgment on it." Doing so makes a hysterical community even more closed. Instead, it must be confronted with bare facts. These should not only be negative, but also with positive aspects strong enough to convince the hysterical community of the advantages of being healthy. The metaphor of sickness allows us to see a healthy core, even if tiny, which can be the starting point for the other's recovery. Secondly, this allows one to recognize a similar sickness in oneself and thus to share a common predicament and hope. Recognizing illness as a common predicament provides for a needed process of recontextualisation.[12] Placing oneself in the context of the other, one recognizes oneself in the apparently different and even disturbing characteristics of the other. This has two effects: a greater understanding of the other and liberation from misplaced roles (such as being a judge of the other). The significance of Jesus' application of the metaphor of sickness to sinners is relevant here, as well as his parable of the speck and the log in the eye.[13]

Against the background of this Hungarian political-philosophical argument, we can formulate some political-theological tasks for the historic churches in Hungary. First, the phenomenon of the twin hysteria of the antagonistic political right and left should be recognized. Second, to the extent that churches are involved in political party struggles, they should reflect on and acknowledge that they show the same hysterical symptoms. Third, churches need to ask whether some aspects of their theological heritage and practice have contributed to this hysteria.

After these diagnostic steps, therapy can be considered. First, churches should ask themselves if they are ready and able to take an active role in healing the political hysteria for which they are partly responsible, but whose causes and related political interests go far beyond the churches. Does the claim to be an "historic" church lead to a responsibility of this kind? Second, they should consider whether they are able to avoid a moralizing approach that simply divides society into "good and bad guys." This moralizing approach has a long history in Hungary, in the churches and political culture as a whole. Will churches be able to start an alternative discourse? Will churches be able to open up a new approach that is self-critical but not self-denying? Can it be concrete enough, without losing itself in the details of the past? Can it express the elements of truth without hurting the other, but encourage the other to concentrate on its own truth? Third, do churches have a vision of a healthy society that can be shared with broad circles of the national community, involving people of different beliefs and political orientations? Is the vision important enough so that churches are ready to give up some of their historical privileges in order convincingly to pursue this vision?[e]

Possible Lutheran perspectives

Lutheran theological perspectives on these questions regarding the diagnoses as well as the dilemmas of political hysteria may be a special contribution the small Lutheran Church in Hungary can make to the work of healing its own society.

Martin Luther was born in Central Europe and some of the characteristics of Lutheran theology reflect the marks of his birthplace. This is not of advantage for our present task, but rather a difficulty that needs to be carefully considered. The political sphere of Luther's Germany obviously cannot be understood from a contemporary perspective. However, with respect to the political developments as of the mid-sixteenth century, we can seek to apply Luther's ideas to later forms of political thought.

As far as the Christian roots of modern democracy are concerned, the first important impulses came neither from Lutheran nor Calvinist circles, but from the descendants of the Radical Reformers whom Luther called Enthusiasts. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, German Lutherans lived under the patriarchal authority of their princes. After the French Revolution, Germany developed and followed its own peculiar way of living together, the *sonderweg*, a unique complex of intellectually liberal and socially conservative thoughts, in whose development eminent Lutheran theologians also played a part. After World War I, the majority of Germans preferred personal rule, even if the person was Adolf Hitler. The support Lutheran theolo-

[e] ACs: Church leaders first ask forgiveness for all the ways in which people were victimized due to the church's complicity and then set up a group to investigate this. But the order is wrong: forgiveness for what is not yet known. Most still don't know how they were harmed. You cannot ask for mercy for what is not known. Forgiveness is up to the victims, not the church leadership. As a church, we are private as to what went on, but we are public regarding money and political life.

WMY: During the cultural revolution in China, we hid our feelings amid the struggle to survive, rather than reflect on the need for reconciliation.

gians gave to Hitler is well known. What is all the more telling is that also the heroes of resistance like Dietrich Bonhoeffer built up their costly opposition, not on the basis of democratic political ideals, but on authoritarian concepts.[14] Germany became a democratic country (in the Western sense of the word) only after World War II. Needless to say, east of Germany, Lutheran theology has played an even more authoritarian social role.

Since the democratic potential of Lutheran theology itself is ambiguous, readings of Luther may be very different, depending on the democratic realities of the reading community. Intercultural ethical deliberation is a task that *par excellence* presupposes democratic ways of thinking from the very outset, so this problem touches not only on one aspect of our work in this book, but its very heart. A democratic reading community will find those impulses in Luther's thought that may be inspiring for an ever-deepening common understanding, notwithstanding lasting differences between standpoints and opinions. A non-democratic reading community, however, will instinctively select those pieces that discourage or even object to the same possibility. This is a serious problem Lutheran theologians in Central and Eastern Europe face.

The first task is to identify the center of Luther's theology. I think that the doctrine of the justification of sinners before God provides the most promising perspective for democratic reflections. God's unlimited and unconditional love, so crucial in both the biblical and the theological context of the modern democratic vision, can be approached most directly through this lens of Lutheran theology.

Others, however, would choose different centers, the distinction between law and gospel or the theology of the cross being the most typical ones. We have to be aware that the choice of the center is decisive for the possible social consequences an interpreter will finally reach. The first choice can easily lead to a simple authoritarian position according to which all worldly affairs belong exclusively to the realm of law, while the second may end up in a Kierkegaardian, inward-looking existentialism that has no relevant message concerning social life. Choosing a center is followed by a directed and also selective reading of Luther. It is important that an interpreter discloses the rationale of his/her choice at the beginning. There is no reading of a *totus Lutherus* that pays equal attention to everything that Luther wrote and tries to please everyone.

Since I consider fear to be the most important root of deformed political culture and political hysteria in Central and Eastern Europe, I seek those elements in the Lutheran heritage that represent a solid basis for the struggle against fear, within myself, within ourselves as a Christian community, and within society at large. As far as the implications of Luther's biography are concerned, I prefer the young Luther to the later Luther. I find great encouragement in the life and words of the young teacher of the Scripture who discovered Romans 1:17 to be a hermeneutical key to the Bible as well as an answer to his existential crisis. The writer of "The 95 Theses" and "The Freedom of a Christian" should be most seriously studied for our purpose, just as much as the monk who was examined at Worms in 1521 and who preached the first week of Lent in 1522 in Wittenberg. However, I also find much of value in the later Luther: the meaning of the First Commandment and of baptism in "The Large Catechism," the description of true conversion and its implications in "The Smalcald Articles," and finally, the last words of the dying Reformer, "we are beggars, this is the truth." All these are of great importance in the struggle against fear.

But there also are elements of Luther's theology that I think may have menacing implications for the sensitive process of transition towards democracy in Central and Eastern European societies. First are those pieces that reflect a dualistic understanding of human beings (inner and outer person), of society (church and world) and of God (of the law and gospel). Attacking dualistic elements may seem too big a challenge, since Luther's language and theology are deeply infused by a dualistic approach.[f]

The special hardships facing Central and Eastern European Christians and churches makes it essential to counter such dualisms. Dualistic tendencies prepare the ground for continuing to play hide-and-seek instead of coming face-to-face with those personal, social, cultural and theological challenges whose honest confrontation could be a starting point for a recovery from their long-lasting hysterical state. As far as the details of Luther's theology are concerned, a literally-interpreted doctrine of the two kingdoms,[15] the meaning of the fourth commandment in the Large Catechism, as well as several of his attacks on the Pope,

[f] KLB: Or, is it paradoxical? Much has been written to counter this dualism, e.g., see Hans Ulrich's article in this volume.

PA: Those who survive have a sense of meaning, a certain power that no one can take from you, a "wellness" before God. Here, Luther's inner and outer is helpful. Can the freedom of the Christian be preserved apart from this inner/outer tension? It is positive that one can be free from outer forces; one can resist. Luther is arguing for an ethics of integrity as an antidote to this corrosive fear.

the Anabaptists and the Jews belong to this corpus that Central and Eastern European theologians should reread with careful reflection. We need to remain suspicious about aspects of Luther's theology that provide support for our own anti-democratic attitudes and ways of thinking which must be left behind.[g]

For reflection or discussion:

What are the challenges regarding democratization in your context? What historical factors have affected this? How is the church involved? What perspectives from Lutheran theology are a hindrance or a help?

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[g] WD: Democracy as an overall way of life is in a sad state almost everywhere. Democracy is a theologically important value, but not as a Christian-based principle. The more democratic you are, the more possibilities for Christianity to flourish; the monarchical image of God is anti-democratic.

HU: Regarding the church and politics, what should and should not come to the public agenda? What questions of the good life are appropriate? Concerning guilt, forgiveness? What is the public about? What is accountability and responsibility within the context of citizenship?

HU: Luther can be problematic in various contexts, including Germany. From a German perspective, it is not so much the direct impact of Luther's theology on the history of thought, but the way in which certain patterns are legitimized because of the authority and public importance of the Lutheran church. The origins of ideologies and undemocratic thinking still need to be reconstructed. ACs' article vividly demonstrates undemocratic patterns in Hungary. I do not think that a story of the Lutheran impact on this can be reconstructed. Yet, there are various attempts to reconstruct the problematic side of "Lutheran" political thinking, either from the side of "Kulture-Protestantismus" or from the side of Barthians. But this kind of historical legitimization does not get at the roots of the phenomenon, as ACs does here. The question is not about the problematic aspects in Luther's theology, which can be used for any kind of legitimization, but how to read Luther theologically with respect to political ethics. This still needs to be done in the German context. Important theological implications for the political sphere can be found in the Lutheran tradition. One of these is Luther's emphasis on the ongoing renewing of our minds by the Word of God, for the sake of a theologically-reflected ethics of political citizenship. This debate in the future will hopefully bring together Christians from Hungary, Germany and other countries for the sake of European democratic unity.

Notes

[1] NRSV. Consider also the translations given by NET: "God is Love […]. There is no fear where His love is; but His mature love throws out fear"; "God did not give us a cowardly spirit but a spirit of power and love and good judgement."

[2] An excellent treatment of this issue can be found, in John de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[3] *Cf.* Walter Wink, "Re-visioning History: Nonviolence Past, Present, Future," as chapter 13 of his, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 243-257.

[4] See a brilliant—as well as convincing—piece of "virtual history," Mark Almond, "1989 Without Gorbachev: What if Communism had not Collapsed?," in Niall Ferguson (ed.), *Virtual History* (London: Picador, 1997), pp. 392-415.

[5] Among the "historic churches" are numbered the Roman (and Greek) Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church and—on a legal basis—the Jewish Community. Thus they are distinguished from the various Orthodox churches (they are very small), the New-Protestant churches, which are called either small churches or free churches, and the newly founded Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

[6] Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, *Volume 2: Politics* (London: Adam&Charles Black, 1969), pp. 558ff.

[7] Bibó was born in 1911. Coming from a cultured middle-class background, he had intellectual achievements at a young age; years of study abroad; responsible position in the state administration; anti-Nazi activity, acted on behalf of the Jewish community in 1944; large-scale political journalism; silenced by the communists in 1949; was a member of the Imre Nagy government in 1956; arrested in 1957 and sentenced for life in 1958; released by amnesty in 1963; silenced until his death in 1979. His writings had an incomparable effect on Hungarian intellectual resistance after his death. In addition, he was a devoted Christian. For a short and excellent presentation of Bibó's political philosophy, see Robert Berki, "The Realism of Moralism: The Political Philosophy of István Bibó," in *History of Political Thought*, Vol. XIII. no. 3 (Autumn 1992), pp. 513-534.

[8] Bibó István, "Az európai egyensúlyról és békérõl," in Bibó István, *Válogatott tanulmányok* (Budapest: Magvetõ, 1986) pp. 334-335. Quoted in English, in András Csepregi, *Two Ways to Freedom: Chris-*

tianity and Democracy in the Thought of István Bibó and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Budapest: Acta Theologica Lutherana Budapestinensia, vol. 2., 2003) p. 111.

[9] See *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[10] See in Bibó István, *Democracy*, *Revolution*, *Self-determination*, *Selected Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991 [East European Monographs 317]).

[11] For the background of the coming argument, see Csepregi, *op. cit.* (note 8), pp. 113, 121.

[12] On the possibility of "recontextualising the moral agent," see Reinhard Hütter, "The Twofold Center of Lutheran Ethics: Christian Freedom and God's Commandments," in Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme (eds), *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1998), p. 39.

[13] This piece of thought has been beautifully developed into a theological argument by Walter Wink in his *Engaging the Powers* under the heading, "The Acid Test: Loving Enemies." See the subtitles: "God Is All Inclusive"; "Against Perfectionism"; "The Enemy's Gift"; "Love Transforms" (pp. 263ff). Bibó and Wink have the same image of Jesus whose victory over violence is the utmost source of contemporary attempts of active nonviolent resistance.

[14] See the main argument of my book, *op. cit.* (note 8).

[15] The LWF carried out research on the application of the "two kingdoms doctrine" during the 1970s. I have not come across a Hungarian reception of this research yet, and I think, time is ripe for us, Central and Eastern European Lutherans, to read it through against the background of our contemporary dilemmas. The summary of this research is given by Ulrich Duchrow, *Two Kingdoms—The Use and Misuse of a Lutheran Theological Concept* (Geneva: Lutheran Word Federation, 1977).

A Contrasting Swedish Perspective

Elisabeth Gerle

Since the Reformation, Sweden has been a Lutheran country. In 1526, the New Testament was published in Swedish and in 1527, the Swedish king Gustaf Wasa was declared head of the church. In 1593, Lutheranism became the official state religion and every Swedish citizen was supposed to be Lutheran. (Later a few exceptions were made for foreigners living and working in Sweden.) Those who were Reformed (mainly Dutch craftsmen) received limited religious freedom in 1741, followed by Roman Catholics in 1781 and Jews in 1782.

Like most other European countries at the time, Sweden was more or less a monolithic society. The parliament and king were the highest representatives of the church, making all the decisions. In 1555, at the Peace of Augsburg, the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose district it is, his religion it is) was confirmed. The Peace of Westphalia in 1658 ended thirty years of warfare in which religion had played a crucial role. Here it was decided that everybody was supposed to share the religion of the ruler. This was regarded as a way of preventing religious strife.

Inspired by pietism and later by Enlightenment philosophy, religious pluralism emerged only fairly late in Sweden. Before 1951, it was legally impossible to leave the Church of Sweden without joining another denomination.

For many decades now, critique of such a monolithic society has overshadowed the positive appreciation of Reformation and Lutheran society. In popular culture, Martin Luther has been connected with a lack of freedom, pluralism, and an ethic of duty and heavy responsibility. Coupled with Reformed Puritan ethics of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revivalist movements, Lutheranism was associated with a certain working ethos filled with guilt with which modern Swedes no longer wanted to be associated. Hence, it was rare that the positive sides of a Lutheran ethos were mentioned, either in the media or in academic literature. Yet, a Lutheran impact has been crucial for the modern, secular welfare state that emerged during the twentieth century.

Some of these features have been important for Sweden's self understanding. These include: (a) a strong sense of education as emancipation; (b) democracy as a process seeking consensus and cohesion; (c) a sense of responsibility and advocacy for others; and (d) a sense of living one's vocation as a citizen (*iustitia civilis*).

Well before the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the Reformation introduced mass education in Scandinavia. The aim was to teach everybody to read at least the Small Catechism and hopefully parts of the Bible and some sermons in order to enable members of congregations to discern whether their ministers were rightly teaching the gospel. Every human being was supposed to be able to discern right and wrong teaching by reading the Bible with Christ at the center. What is often overlooked is the Lutheran influence on how democracy emerged from mass literacy and the evangelical Lutheran trust in human discernment, despite human sinfulness—both of which are resources for later democratic developments. A Lutheran emphasis on education, shared decision making and a sense of vocation in the world, not outside the world, have been important resources for democracy in a monolithic Lutheran society such as Sweden.

Since the Reformation, Swedes have been literate. This was revolutionary at the time. In local parishes, people [men] came together to make decisions. Out of this negotiation process in such local bodies, grew local democratic practice. The same people were responsible for schools, the poor and the sick. Originally, basic instruction in reading was the household's responsibility. Everyone was supposed to be able to read the Bible, or at least the Small Catechism. Public education for everyone developed gradually. In 1842, parishes were obliged to start public schools that taught not only Christian education but also history, geography, geometry and some basic science that citizens needed. The Lutheran orthodoxy that had developed during the fifteenth century had little interest in democracy or independent thinking among lay people. Church and state had grown together to such an extent that they were difficult to distinguish. After 1842, the public schools were a first step toward more independent schools.

A shift toward pluralism emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Society took over responsibility for education, the poor and the sick; gradually a liberal welfare state was beginning to develop. While liberal and social democratic visions of a "people's home" began to replace the traditional Lutheran view, the Swedish *folkhem* also emphasized cohesion and consensus. Differences between people were supposed to be overcome and economic and educational inequalities minimized. After a long period under social democratic governments, competing ideologies were also met with suspicion.

In my view, the welfare state was the successor of the monolithic Lutheran society. It took over similar patterns of paternalism: the state knew what was best for its citizens. Inspired by a strong sense of responsibility for others, the Swedish authorities were not favorably inclined toward pluralism or self-initiative. Yet, charity and patriarchal, paternalistic responsibility for those in weaker positions developed into a sense of solidarity.[1] Basic to these welfare politics was the assumption that what happens to others today could happen to "me" tomorrow. In order to create cohesion in society, everybody was supposed to benefit from social welfare (i.e., health care, education, child support and support for the elderly), financed by tax revenues. But solidarity remained predominantly national in scope. While social movements and trade unions developed global networks, the political mainstream remained cautious.

Today, there is a heated debate regarding Swedish hypocrisy. Many have pointed out that Sweden has not always applied high ethical standards to its own behavior. For instance, it has been providing both Pakistan and India with weapons, despite their conflict. During World War II, the Swedish government made concessions to Nazi Germany, such as allowing the *Wehrmacht* to use the Swedish railways to transport soldiers. Yet, Sweden has often adopted a moralizing tone toward others. Trade unions are anxious that open borders and globalization may transfer jobs from Sweden to Latvia, Estonia, Poland or China. It is still an open question whether they will join forces with workers and organizations in other countries to request decent salaries and working conditions globally, not only in a their own national community. As the mainstream Swedish sense of solidarity (including in most of the trade unions) has stayed within the borders of Sweden, international challenges have mostly been dealt with through a lens of national interest.

The Swedish Lutheran church is one of the actors that has undertaken steps toward more international solidarity. Hence, together with other organizations, it has advocated for refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden as well as supported initiatives for debt cancellation for poor countries. In relation to economic globalization, the Swedish church has joined many others in their critique of the neoliberal paradigm.

In comparison with Hungary, Sweden has had a very peaceful and safe history during the last two centuries. Yet, also in Sweden there are patterns of fear regarding what is new and alien from what Swedes used to think of as their monolithic community. The Swedish Lutheran church has been one of the forces trying to counteract a too inward looking attitude, drawing on a

Lutheran sense of our being called to witness to the world as well as from a deeper sense of ecumenical belonging to the worldwide community of churches.

Notes

[1] Such developments were not always smooth but rather the outcome of intense ideological political battles between conservatives, liberals, social democrats and communists during the early twentieth century.

Education, Gender and Empowerment: A Brazilian Perspective

Wanda Deifelt

Historically, education has been a key element for social leverage. In more recent years, it has been identified as the main factor to indicate the level of a country's development. Access to education, along with other aspects such as income, distribution of wealth, access to housing, healthcare and longevity, indicate the discrepancies in any given society, mapping out the gap between rich and poor, the inequalities based on gender, cast and race/ethnicity. To deny people education is to block them from knowledge and the exercise of their citizenship. Knowledge is power. Education, as a means to access knowledge, is also an issue of power.

In a consumer society, education is often understood as a commodity that can be bought or sold, and a way of improving one's social condition, or gaining adequate preparation for the job market. However, this approach limits the scope of education, its role and its possibilities. Access to education has had an impact on issues of social mobility and has historically been linked to greater political participation. People with more years of schooling not only tend to be better paid for their work, but they are also more vocal in asserting their rights.[1] From an ethical perspective, education is deeply related to the notion of agency, empowerment and quality of life. Education is also the art of posing questions, of challenging oneself and others to grow, asking about the meaning of one's existence and the purpose of one's life.

Since it is associated with access to knowledge, education has consequences for how people perceive their reality, whether or not they have the means to transform it, or their place in the overall distribution of roles and tasks.[2] Education is more than literacy. It is also identified as a mental capacity to apprehend knowledge and, as such, an activity necessary for one's active participation in decision-making processes. Since education addresses issues of self-perception, social and historical location and participation in the transformation of one's environment, it is related to agency. Education is also connected to vocation as a call to citizenship. It becomes especially important for engaging in ethical deliberation.

A broad understanding of education

A recent report by UNESCO's International Commission on Education indicates a broad understanding of education. According to UNESCO, there are four cornerstones (or pillars) of education: learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together (with other people); and learning to be.[3] A traditional understanding of education usually identifies the learning experience with the first cornerstone: the school as a place where knowledge is disseminated. This comes from a classic Greek understanding whereby knowledge is equal to mental and spiritual development. Such knowledge is perceived as the supreme good. It idealizes the abstract, spiritual and intellectual world over against the material and bodily realm. Nature submits itself to the cosmos and its laws. These Platonic ideals are thus summarized:

> During this life, men [sic] ought to contemplate ideas, especially the most important idea, the idea of Good [...]. As an astronomer contemplates the stars, the philosopher, through the art of dialectics, contemplates the highest ideas, particularly the ideas of Being and Good. From this higher Good, man need to discover a scale of what is good that will help him reach the Absolute [...]. The ideal searched by the virtuous men is the imitation or assimilation of God: to adhere to the divine.[4]

This quotation demonstrates that there is a dichotomy between knowledge and everyday life, between intellectual development and matter, between the spiritual dimension and nature. There is a split between mind and body. Such a dichotomy reinforces the values that place rational, intellectual and spiritual discourses over and against the concreteness of human existence. Thus, there is a close connection between knowledge and hierarchical power structures. Since the purpose of knowledge was a virtuous life (not knowledge for its own sake), knowledge was understood (in Greek dualism) as the establishment of order, harmony and equilibrium instead of chaos. This implied, for philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Epicure, a denial of the human body and all its passions. Knowledge was built up by portraying and enforcing the dualism between mind and body, culture and nature, straight and curved, reason and intuition, public and private, humanity and animality, light and dark, production and reproduction, subject and object, self and other, civilized and primitive, white and black, master and slave, male and female. Such dualities always deem the first as superior to the second.[5]

The purpose in life, for any philosopher, was to achieve wisdom, and this could only be obtained by submitting to reason. The road to contemplate the world of ideas was dialectics, and virtue was how a philosopher engaged in such a path. Virtue was also a purification, through which men (philosophers were generally male) learned to let go of their bodies, of the material world, of the here and now, in order to contemplate the ideal, eternal and unchanging world. For Plato, this was the supreme Good. To practice virtue, *areté*, was precious; it was the measurement, *métron*, for the individual and social cosmic order. *Cosmos* meant order, in clear opposition to *chaos*.[6]

It is interesting to observe how in modernity, by implementing Cartesian principles (*cogito ergo sum*), the idealization of the spiritual world gave way to intellectual, rational and abstract thought, dissociated from chaotic subjective being. By establishing that the first pillar or cornerstone of education is “learning how to know,” UNESCO presents an important contribution to the overcoming of a dual understanding of knowledge. The epistemological foundation of knowledge is thus ascertained, forcing us to ask about the purpose of education itself, its basis and presuppositions and the values it upholds.

The second pillar proposed by UNESCO is “learning how to do.” This refers to preparation, to being equipped or undergoing a process with practical aspects—knowledge that can be applied. It has to do with training and skills. Still today, this level of education is perceived as inferior and less important than the previous, because it has to do with practical aspects. In other words, everything that is connected to the material world is less valued than the capacity to think in abstract ideas. This echoes the patriarchal social division in which the free man decides, the slave produces and the woman reproduces. In other words, learning related to practice, interweaving theory as it connects to everyday life, overcomes the dichotomy between theory and praxis. This modern concept brings back the question of the application of knowledge, the concrete use of what is learned in daily life.

Praxis is a key element in liberation theology precisely because it challenges the view that theory can be value free. That knowledge needs to be tested in practice is a basic presupposition of any field. What liberation theology introduces is a special place for praxis in theological reflection. The hermeneutical circle starts with praxis, it moves on to reflection on this reality in order to return, once again, to praxis. Conventionally these three stages have been named as seeing (the analytical stage), judging (the theological reflection) and acting (the involvement in transformation).[7] Whereas traditional approaches to theological reflection start with abstract concepts, liberation theology proposes to start reflection with the concrete experiences of everyday life. Instead of orthodoxy, it proposes orthopraxis.

The third and fourth pillars show concern for an education that enables people to be ethical agents. It reveals an holistic approach to education that encompasses the totality of human experiences and echoes Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's ideas of education. The third cornerstone shows the social and community-based dimension of education: we "learn how to live together" with other people and to address issues of difference. Social skills are not only learned in school, but a characteristic of every human being. As such, we are capable of absorbing and reproducing the values apprehended (in family, church, school, work, etc.) and also of questioning and changing this reality.

The communal role of education promotes egalitarian mutuality, as defended by popular educators, feminist and liberationist scholars and social activists alike. Unless a communal effort is undertaken, an individual's awareness of interdependence, the knowledge about the complexity of human existence, the human longing for happiness or the pursuit of the common good will not come to fruition. It remains dead knowledge. Education has a communal dimension because it takes a community, not only to share these insights with, but also to engage in dialogue and constructive efforts to implement such reality. Education reasserts the relationship between agency, power and struggle.[8] It is the road toward better understanding and cooperation among different communities, acknowledging that pluralism is not a hindrance but a blessing. It is also a way of providing people with tools for exercising a critical role in their own communities. Education, then, is a means for social and political change, fostering not only individual rights, but communal rights.

The fourth pillar, "learning to be," encompasses the previous ones and presents education as a complex, relational and living construction.[a] "Learning to be"

[a] WMY: "Learning to be" is similar to Confucian teaching. The purpose of education is to be enlightened, to be human. Thus, there is always an ethical dimension to education and a very high respect for teachers.

is the capacity of human beings to become subjects. It promotes transformation and citizenship. Conscious of rights and obligations, we become responsible for our existence as well as for the well-being of others. We learn to abide by values such as justice and freedom, equality and appreciation of differences. In this sense, education not only conveys information, but also assures active participation in the world. In other words, it is not only a matter of reading and writing, but also the capacity to read one's own reality and to rewrite and transform it (Freire).

"Learning to be" means that education needs to help individuals comprehend the reality of their existence and to name the contradictions and ambiguities in which they find themselves. It helps locate us in time and space, connecting us to one another, so that we can make sense of and find a purpose in life. Such a broad, all-encompassing notion of education could only be elaborated in our time because of the awareness of and importance we attach to human agency, deploring how it can lead to disruptive hierarchical power but celebrating its capacity for creative transformation. To empower each other for acts of genuine change—in ourselves, our community, in our nation or as global citizens—is a long-lasting learning experience.[9]

Martin Luther's contribution to a modern understanding of education

The importance of education in the Lutheran tradition is not surprising, given its roots in the university setting. Before being a reformer of the church, Luther was a reformer of the university; he insisted that reading, interpreting and understanding the Bible were vital for Christians.[10] Luther's emphasis on the role of education was first and foremost a sign of obedience to God, a testimony of human beings' willingness to serve God and understand God's Word better. If today education is a right, for Martin Luther it was an obligation. When children and youth were not in school, they were more easily tempted by the devil. Furthermore, Luther advised parents to send all children to school, not only those pursuing a religious vocation. It is important to remember that in the sixteenth centuryeducation was geared primarily to the cloister, and not to the secular realm. Following the understanding of *beruf*, vocation, Luther stressed that all human activities, even the most mundane, are ways of serving God.

In his treatise "To the councilmen of all cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian schools," Luther promoted literacy so that people could have access to the Bible.[11] According to Luther, the gospel comes through the medium of languages. Luther himself devoted a significant amount of time and energy to the translation of the Scriptures. Luther did not think that the reading of the Bible by itself would lead to a saving knowledge of God. After all, the Bible was not a book of doctrines or collection of laws imposing what one must believe in order to be saved. Rather, it proclaims the crucified Christ: "it is not yet knowledge of the gospel when you know the doctrines and commandments, but only when the voice comes to you that says, 'Christ is your own, with his life, teaching, works, death, resurrection, all that he is, has, does, and can do.'"[12]

In his writings, Luther insisted that it was better to spend money on education than on war. Education is a synonym for formation, the integral development of a human being that starts not in school, but in the family and community, and continues beyond the school years. Education is the formation of true Christians, followers of the gospel of justification by grace through faith. To educate properly is the responsibility of the parents in whose care God places children to be brought up as good Christians. Parents, therefore, need to be good Christians themselves, to serve as role models and mentors in the Christian faith.[13] They too need to be instructed about the Christian faith in order to explain it to the next generation. For this purpose, Luther wrote the catechism.

Although Luther ascribes an important role to parents in the process of education, nothing is better than school. Parents teach discipline and obedience, and much can be learned from their experience. However, this is a slow process, whereas, in school, the whole environment is conducive to learning. Luther develops some important pedagogical insights—he discourages the use of violence (he critiqued the common practice of spanking children) and proposes that the school be a happy and playful learning environment where children learn because of motivation, and not out of fear. The school has to have well-prepared teachers. According to Luther, school is the breeding ground for good ministers. All youth need to study, but not all need to become ministers.

Luther's distinction between the competencies of secular and religious authorities enables us to understand government as a part of God's creation, thus placing the government under God's judgment. Repeatedly Luther calls upon the princes of his time to be true to their God-given tasks. As leaders, it is their responsibility to assure that today's children will be tomorrow's citizens. Secular authorities need to be concerned with the preparation of children and youth. Furthermore, the well-being of the state is assured through proper education. Education serves the common good of church and society; it develops the gifts of the young for the good of the community.

> Now the welfare of a city does not solely consist in accumulating vast treasures, building mighty walls and magnificent buildings, and producing a goodly supply of guns and armor. Indeed, where such things are plentiful and reckless fools get control of them, it is so much the worse and the city suffers a great loss. A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens.[14]

Luther introduced a modern concept of education regarding the responsibility of public authorities for children's education. In several of his writings, Luther states that it is the authorities' obligation (including church leaders) to assure children's access to education, given the fact that many parents are neither prepared properly to educate their children nor capable of doing so. Education requires preparation, and not all parents are equipped to be good teachers. Many of them have not learned much, or are so consumed by the overall struggle for survival that they have no time to do so. Education should not be a privilege reserved for some, but an opportunity for all, regardless of their social condition. Education is the building block for everything else—family, community and country.

A particular case: women's access to education

A concrete example of how education can bring about social and political change is women's access to education. In 1792, in her book *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft pointed out that barring women from education prevented them from any form of political and social participation.[15] She critiqued the educational restrictions that kept women in a state of ignorance and slavish dependence reduced to ephemeral concerns for beauty to the exclusion of all else, particularly the development of their brains.

Influenced by Rousseau, and writing against him, Wollstonecraft questioned his biased view of women's role in society, whereby women were reduced to the domestic sphere, in charge of children and household duties. She was especially critical of a society that encouraged women to be docile and submissive, as if their place were dictated by nature and it were their duty to make themselves pleasing to men. She felt that this state of degradation was comparable to reducing women to slavery. Education and political participation were instrumental for changing this reality. She defended women's right to make decisions not only in the private but also in the public sphere. Wollstonecraft challenged the historical argument that women were by nature incapable of rational thinking or logic. By claming the right to education, the early feminists claimed women's active and engaged participation in the public sphere, the capacity for deliberation, the sense of agency that comes with being an active participant in the making of history.

In Brazil, one reader of Wollstonecraft who translated her book into Portuguese, was Nisia Floresta. She came from a wealthy family and, like many young women of well-to-do Brazilian families, she was educated according to the moral and cultural precepts of her time. In the nineteenth century, affluent young girls were taught how to read and write, to do simple mathematics, to play the piano and to speak French. Wealthy families hired private tutors, but many refused education to their daughters, afraid that this would compromise their moral behavior (for instance, that women would cheat on their husbands by writing letters to potential lovers). Nisia never agreed with the way education was handled in Brazil. Access to public school was denied not only to girls, but also to boys who were poor and the children of slaves.

Being a suffragette, Nisia Floresta wrote several books and articles on women's right to education, the right to vote and to own property. One of her best-known books is *Opúsculo Humanitário*, published in 1853.[16] Convinced of the need for education, she opened the first school for girls in Porto Alegre in 1874, where she herself was the headmistress teaching many subjects. Still, women's access to education was not guaranteed in spite of the endeavor of many historical figures such as Nisia Floresta. Until 1876, girls were forbidden to enter university and the first female university graduate, a medical doctor, was ridiculed by her colleagues for her ambition. After Brazil became a republic (1889), the ideals of free education for all were implemented. However, public education did not become a reality for the whole country until the 1960s.

The minimal importance given to education during the period of colonization has left deep scars in the history and formation of the country. By undermining the role of education and preventing the creation of a good system of public education, past political leaders set the social and economic pattern of underdevelopment and dependency. Educators have always been perceived as political agitators by the powerful oligarchies and, in the second half of the twentieth century, also by the military governments. Education is a powerful political tool because it can lead to conscientization, to asserting one's rights and those of the whole community.

Lutherans in Brazil and education

A Lutheran appreciation of the importance of education was brought to Brazil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Education was to be public and accessible to all, despite of poverty and other social constraints. The school was an intrinsic part of the social web. Among the first things immigrants did, after organizing their settlement, were to build a schoolhouse and to hire a teacher (usually one of the immigrants, a farmer with a little more education than the others). Protestant immigrants were not allowed to construct churches, since the official religion in Brazil was Roman Catholicism. This situation only changed when Brazil became a republic. But immigrants, arriving as early as 1824, were allowed to build schoolhouses. The school, the first building erected by the community, was also used as a place for worship.

The creation of schools among German immigrants is the second instance, after the suffrage movement, that affirmed the importance of the right to education for all people. This consciousness was not generally present among nineteenth-century Brazilians who understood education as a privilege for some and not a right for all. In spite of the harshness of living conditions, the importance of schools was never questioned. It was the link to a civilized world in the middle of the jungle, reminiscent of "culture" in contrast to the hardships of the Brazilian land. Promises made by the emperor—of land, seeds, tools, etc.—were never fulfilled. Accustomed to the misery of early nineteenth-century Europe, Brazil provided a new beginning, with land and food in abundance. Building and maintaining the school brought together people of different backgrounds and denominations (Protestants and Roman Catholics), who shared a common interest and expectation regarding education. Cemeteries, on the other hand, were still based on religious affiliation.

An innovation in the Brazilian contexts is that both boys and girls were sent to school for two to four years (depending on the availability of teachers). Among German immigrants, the ecumenical school associations assured that the schoolhouse and the teacher's salary were paid by the local community. The curriculum included German, mathematics and science, as well as music from the hymnals and readings from the Scriptures. Education was necessary so that the children would be able to read, write and do basic mathematics, but also because reading was required for the study of the Bible, the catechisms, prayer books and hymnals. It was necessary that children go to school in order to be educated in "a Christian manner."

Among Roman Catholics, the arrival of religious orders represented a renewal of education in the country. From the nineteenth century onwards, male and female members of religious orders were sent to Brazil to establish new schools and to use them as a means of renewing the presence of Roman Catholicism in the country.[17] Female religious orders were among the first to offer intermediate schooling for young women. Becoming a teacher was seen as an acceptable profession, since it allowed women to fulfill "their female nature" by taking care of others and extending their maternal attention to other children besides their own. Many female religious orders came to Brazil with a specific gift for educating small children and young women.

The fact that the Brazilian government did not provide public education to the population left a vacuum. Common people depended on charity or were left to their own devices. This applied also to other basic services (such as health). Since until the beginning of the twentieth century Roman Catholicism was the official religion, it had close ties with the local governments. The state systematically exempted itself from any social responsibility, thus feeding the notion that it was the church's responsibility to provide assistance and aid for the less privileged. The Roman Catholic Church stepped in when the government did not fulfill its public role. Protestants, on the other hand, came with a different understanding of the role of education and had different expectations of who should run it. However, with the government not committed to providing public services (including education), and the people not having the political clout to demand that from the government, they relied on their own networks to assure the continuity of their parochial schools.

The contemporary Brazilian picture: education and women's status

Given how late the education of women began in Brazil, it surprisingly has one of the highest rates of female literacy in the region today. Women have quickly taken advantage of education as a means of social improvement. As of 2003, there were 45,263 female and 51,247 male teachers with Master's degrees and 21,431 female and 34,807 male teachers with Doctoral degrees.[18] Although fewer women still have higher degrees, there is a significant increase in comparison to the previous decade.

Although, until the early twentieth century, teaching was a male occupation, it had become a predominantly female activity by the early twenty-first century. Still, according to the latest Brazilian census, 13.3 percent of the adult population (15 million people) remain illiterate.[19] Among children between the ages of seven and fourteen, ninety percent attend school. There still is a discrepancy regarding social class: among wealthy families, 98.9 percent of the children attend school, but this number drops to 92.5 percent among low-income families.[20] Raw numbers show that nowadays schooling is also more easily available to the poor, but low-income families send their children to public schools whereas wealthy families send them to private institutions (denominational or parochial schools, either Catholic or Protestant). There is a gap between these two. Public schools are ill maintained, with few resources, and teachers are generally overworked. These schools charge no tuition and are maintained by the state. Private schools hire the best professionals and offer them higher salaries, but they also charge tuition.[21]

Among the economically active population, women have spent an average of 6.8 years in school, whereas men spend only 5.9 years. Independent of geographic location or class, women spend almost one year longer in school. School is perceived as a safe environment—almost as an extension of the home—that protects female children from the dangers of the public world. Boys, on the other hand, are expected to be prepared for the workforce as soon as possible and tend to drop out earlier. The fact that women have more years of education does not automatically represent an increase in their salaries or better positions on the job market. According to the Instituto Econômico de Pesquisa Aplicada (IPEA), the income of women with a college degree is equal to that of men with a high school education.

Women with at least eleven years of schooling earn thirty percent less than men with the same level of education. Economists point out that women choose careers that pay less and are typically associated with female activities (social work, nursing, and teaching). Gender stereotypes strongly influence career decisions. Jobs associated with male activities, even if they do not require special training or education, are better remunerated. There is not equal pay for equal work, and women tend to earn much less than men: forty-nine percent of female workers receive only a minimum wage.[22]

The conditions for teaching and learning are far from ideal in Brazil. According to a UNESCO study, the 2.3 million elementary and high school teachers identified violence and the lack of security in schools as key issues needing to be addressed.[23] It is estimated that four percent of the students (200,000) come to school armed. Teachers in public schools are challenged by the precarious conditions of buildings and the scarcity of resources. They also report being threatened by their students if they demand attention, discipline and expect excellence from them. In private schools, including church-related schools, the situation is different, but teachers work overtime and often have more than one job. The overall scenario is grim, making the teaching profession in Brazil the fourth most stressful job in the country (after police officers, customer services and air traffic controllers).[24]

According to the World Bank, eighty-four percent of teachers are female.[25] Teachers at the elementary level tend to be mostly women, but this shifts in higher education. Male teachers are in the majority in graduate institutions where payment and working conditions are better. Gender constraints still lead women to take degrees in what are typically considered female activities: nursing, arts, theatre and dance, languages, psychology and education. That these are considered female professions makes them less attractive, less competitive and less important in comparison to science and technology.

Historically, women have become the majority of educators at preschool and elementary levels due to the maternal role associated with female teachers. The school is perceived as an extension of the child's home and female teachers are often called *Tia*, aunt, by the children. The extension of the maternal role, that is, teacher as caretaker, affectionate and calm, is mentioned by many young women about to become teachers as the reason for being interested in the profession.[26] Historically, badly paid teachers tended to be female because their activities were perceived as an additional income for households that depended primarily on men as providers. Because of gender discrimination, a woman's salary as a teacher was never sufficient to assure her financial independence. Her work is still perceived as a hobby, an extension of her maternal nature, and not as a real profession.

Along with cognitive development and the development of social skills, school is also supposed to be a place for affectivity.[27] Given the lack of specialized services, teachers help students deal with emotions, self-esteem, anxiety, fear and traumas. The role of the educator resembles that of a parent or an aunt who takes over the role of the mother in her absence. Educators are overworked and underpaid. It is virtually impossible to fulfill such high expectations. An educator needs to impart knowledge, aid students in developing their interpersonal relations and take an active role in the formation of their personality. All of these are to be done with very little infrastructure and support.

Many women invoke the notion of vocation to justify their willingness to work as teachers in spite of challenging conditions. Vocation is understood as an altruistic service given to society, in total abnegation and self-sacrifice, without expecting any reward.[28] By taking care of others, women are fulfilling a higher spiritual calling and complying with the social and cultural expectations. This poses questions regarding the understanding of vocation and the role of the educator. If a teacher perceives her task as self-sacrifice, what type of agency does she foster on her students? If self-abnegation and sacrifice are lived out by the teachers, what education are children receiving? If teachers work under strenuous conditions, what message do they send to students (and future workers) regarding their own rights?

Education, vocation, and empowerment

Luther's understanding of vocation can offer an alternative perspective on the dilemma of women's role in education. Being a female teacher draws on notions of self-sacrifice, abnegation and the endurance of work conditions that are far from ideal. The self-sacrificial theology promulgated in Latin America finds an unhealthy breading ground in women's lives. It idealizes a notion of vocation that does not empower women nor create a sense of agency for themselves or their students. It is an education that prepares for submission, not resistance. It leads to acquiescence, not a voice of one's own. It promotes further dependence, not a sense of worth in one's community and the capacity to draw on the resources available. It fosters resignation, not empowerment.

Comparing the situation of educators in Brazil with the four pillars of education mentioned earlier, it is clear that the educators themselves are in need of such a liberating education. To critique the oppressive educational system—particularly in the public setting—is a first step in dismantling the ideological use of education for conformity and compliance. It is fundamental to reassess the role of education, its importance not only in disseminating knowledge, but also in character formation, community building and overall awareness of one's being in the world. In that sense, educators are role models. Assessing their citizenship, learning how to read their reality and transforming it, is more than rhetoric; it is transformative praxis.

Luther's sense of vocation sharply contrasts with the sacrificial notion of vocation. Vocation is a calling that permeates every aspect of our existence. Through this calling we serve God's creative work, give witness to God's love and live according to Jesus' teaching. It leads to responsibility, accountability and promotes public responsibility. But it diverges from the medieval understanding, whereby vocation means compliance with the *status quo*. Acquiescence is critiqued when it does not promote the good news. Vocation is more than the service dedicated to one's profession or occupation. It refers to living according to the principles of faith in daily life, and sharing this conviction with others.

> […] the demands of daily life in vocation, the choice involved in life lived in the freedom of being called by Christ, and the way in which this view holds creation and redemption together if it is to make any sense at all–these themes give a most promising basis for understanding Luther's position.[29]

Since vocation belongs to our living between baptism and the final resurrection, it also acknowledges the human condition of simultaneity: we are at the same time sinners and saints. Therefore, vocation includes both the radical emphasis on the freedom we have through Christ and ongoing human sinfulness. By recognizing human sinfulness and the inability to overcome this situation without God's saving power, it is also possible to celebrate what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf. Justified by faith, we are free.

> From Christ the good things have flowed and are flowing into us […]. From us they flow on to those who have need of them so that I should lay before God my faith and my righteousness that they may cover and intercede for the sins of my neighbor which I take upon myself and serve in them as if they were my very own.[30]

Since faith is active through love, it is the task of a Christian to do the utmost for the welfare of others. Faith includes advocacy and justice:

> […] as Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:4, "'Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be rejected by the believing and those who know the truth." Among every

> creature of God you must reckon not simply food and drink, clothes and shoes, but also government, citizenship, protection and administration of justice.[31]

Thus Luther affirms that vocation permeates all aspects of human life and transforms the attitude toward and understanding of the situation in which we find ourselves. Luther's understanding of vocation is not restricted to occupation, but refers to "one's relationships, situations, contexts, and involvement (including, of course, one's occupation, if one is employed)."[32] Even the most mundane situations are places where Christians are to live out their faith.

In light of the situation of education in Brazil, Luther's understanding of vocation calls for a critical evaluation, not irresponsible conformity. Thus, Luther's sense of vocation empowers Christians to play a prophetic role, with a broader understanding of education: one that leads to transformation and fosters citizenship.

Creative ethical tensions

What are the ethical consequences of this overall scenario? First, Luther's perspectives on education and vocation are similar to a modern sense of agency.[33] Education is an ongoing process that does not end with schooling, but involves continuous growth and development. For Luther, there is a need to educate not only children, but also their parents (as he did through his catechisms). Similar to the notion of baptism, where human beings need to recognize the challenges posed by human finitude and the daily brokenness of human existence, education is a process that helps us bettern to understand our faith and purpose in the world.

Second, education has social dimensions, namely, helping people engage with and be accountable to others. It prepares citizens to become aware of their capacities and potentialities, conscious of their rights and obligations and responsible for themselves and others. According to Luther, institutions such as family or government are places to serve God diligently. He strongly emphasizes the communal aspect of education. School itself is perceived as a privileged place of formation for life. In the Brazilian context, this should translate into valuing education and all those involved in it. To understand education as doing God's good work brings a new dimension to an otherwise neglected facet of social life.

Third, Luther stresses the vocational dimension of work. This is not a vocation that leads to self-sacrifice and denial of one's identity or personality. Living one's life faithfully every day is to witness Jesus Christ in every aspect of one's existence. The dualistic approach to education seemed to give priority to intellectual work over labored activities, mind over the body. UNESCO proposes to overcome such an hierarchical dichotomy as Luther did in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the fact that education permeates every aspect of our existence leads to an active involvement in decision-making processes, public affairs and politics. Vocation is a call to a visible presence in all realms of life.

Fourth, education requires advocacy. In light of the situation of female teachers, described as being both oppressive and perpetuating a cycle of subjugation, the sense of vocation described by Luther empowers the community to advocate for change. It begins by acknowledging the importance of education and the fundamental role teachers play in that. Their service is a service to God. Vocation, however, is misused by authorities that exempt themselves from social responsibilities. The teachers' vocation needs to be met by the vocation of local communities—a vocation that is a call to citizenship. The active participation of citizens who seek the betterment of their environment will lead to change. Such advocacy translates into a proactive stance, i.e., pressuring secular authorities to take their public offices seriously. This includes Lutherans advocating for public schools that are accessible to all, although historically Lutherans have created many parochial schools.

Martin Luther contributed to a modern understanding of education—education as the formation of personality. While his understanding was deeply connected to a Christian way of life, nowadays this principle is encompassed by secular notions of democracy, political participation and social responsibility. A Lutheran approach needs to dialogue with and incorporate such notions into its theological and ethical reflections. Not everything Luther said or wrote can be taken literally, but there are some guiding principles regarding his notion of education, vocation and active social participation that ring true and can offer helpful insights to the contemporary ethical debate on education in Brazil.

This reality also challenges Lutheran theology to spell out more concretely the effects of a justified life, the freedom to disagree, the capacity to dissent and the prophetic role a Christian needs to play with regard to cultures and practices that do not allow human beings to flourish. Luther's theology did not include the notion of human rights so dear to civil society. For instance, his theology would not necessarily impel teachers to go on strike and demand better working conditions. However, his emphasis on civic responsibility, accountability and commitment toward the well-being of others offers a plausible framework for ethical debate. In that sense, it pressures the community to exert its power to guarantee that teachers and students alike have an environment conducive to learning. This is the broader notion of vocation as spelled out through education. Through education, not only the individual, but the whole community is empowered.

For reflection or discussion:

How are the education challenges in your setting similar to or different from those in Brazil? What influences, if any , have Lutherans had? What needs to change if education is to empower responsible citizenship?

Notes

[1] It is not surprising therefore that education is usually not a priority in countries with a history of colonialism. The lack of education feeds into a mentality of subservience and acquiescence, with very little room for social and political mobility. The connection between education and agency is one of the most powerful assertions in Paulo Freire's method of alphabetization, whereby adults learn not only to read and write but, most importantly, they learn how to read reality and rewrite it (transform it). See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1989).

[2] Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*: *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York/London: Routledge, 1994), p. 13: "To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of students."

[3] Jacques Delors *et al*, *Educação: um tesouro a descobrir; relatório para a UNESCO da Comissão Internacional sobre Educação para o Século XXI,* 2nd edition (São Paulo: Cortez; Brasília: MEC, 1999), pp. 89-102.

[4] Álvaro L. M. Valls, *O que é ética* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1986), pp. 25-26.

[5] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 28-29.

[6] Valls, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 26.

[7] Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987).

[8] Hooks, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 129.

[9] The term empowerment has been widely used, particularly in the context of the civil rights, feminist and womanist movements in the US. Recently, the term has been translated to other languages. It refers to a communal, non-hierarchical use of power, based on egalitarian relationships. It affirms the agency of social groups historically marginalized and asserts their rights to active social and political participation.

[10] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Our Calling in Education: A Lutheran Study* (Chicago: ELCA, 2004), p. 13.

[11] Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of all cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian schools," in Walter I. Brandt (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1967), pp. 339-378.

[12] James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and his Career* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 177.

[13] Martin Luther, "A sermon on keeping children in school," in Robert C. Schultz (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1967), pp. 207-258.

[14] Luther, *op. cit.* (note 11), pp. 355-356.

[15] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983).

[16] Nisia Floresta, *Opúsculo humanitário* (São Paulo: Cortez, 1989).

[17] Guacira Lopes Louro, "Produzindo sujeitos masculinos e cristãos," in Alfredo Veiga Neto (ed.), *Crítica pós-estruturalista e educação* (Porto Alegre: Sulina, 1995), p. 83.

[18] www.inep.gov.br/informativo/informativo78.htm accessed 6 March 2005.

[19] IBGE, *Síntese de Indicadores Sociais*, 2000, Rio de Janeiro, v. 5, pp. 79-114, 2001. Statistics on education in Brazil are taken from this census.

[20] Child labor is one of the main factors preventing school attendance. In order to keep children in school and away from work, the Brazilian government issues a special scholarship whereby low-income families get paid for sending their children to school.

[21] There are 1.9 million teachers in the public school system as opposed to 446,000 in the private system. According to the 2002 data, salaries range from R$ 171 to R$ 1,138 in the public school system (for teachers involved in elementary and high school education). In private schools, salaries range from R$ 248 to R$ 5,381 (for teachers involved in elementary and high school). Chico Silva *et al*, "Mestres sem carinho," in *Isto É*, vol. 1714, August 7, 2002.

[22] According to the official data of the Brazilian government, almost half of the women working outside the home receive up to R$ 260 per month (less than 100 US dollars). www.radiobras.gov.br/materia_i_2004.php?materia=216925&q=1&editoria= accessed March 4, 2005.

[23] The study interviewed 33,000 elementary and high school students, 3,000 teachers and 10,000 parents in 14 states. *Isto É*, vol 1714, 7 August 2002, p. 48-49.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

[25] http://www.worldbank.org/education/economicsed/tools/seminars/83199.ppt#276,2,Background accessed March 2, 2005.

[26] Elena Belotti, *Educar para a submissão* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1985), pp. 108-109.

[27] Rita Moraes, "A sala de aula é sagrada," in *Isto É*, vol. 1728, November 13, 2002. p. 9.

[28] Belotti, *op. cit.* (note 26), p. 109.

[29] Marc Kolden, "Luther on Vocation," www.elca.org/jle/articles/vocation/article.kolden_marc_print-friendly.html

[30] Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," in John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), pp. 79-80.

[31] Luther, "Secular Authority: to what Extent it should be Obeyed," in *ibid.*, p. 378.

[32] Kolden, *op. cit.* (note 29), p. 4.

[33] It would be naive to say that Luther shares a contemporary notion of agency since Luther does not partake in the modern idealization of the individual, nor the liberal notions of rights. Luther does, however, foster a sense of agency in terms of Christian responsibility. One relates to God through faith and to neighbors in love.

At Intersections of Technology and Property

Agriculture, Food and Responsible Biotechnology

Per Anderson

Introduction

In the fertile Red River Valley of North Dakota and Minnesota (USA) where I live, farmers are embracing high-technology practices to stem recent trends that have forced thousands of families to give up farming and that have hurt hundreds of farming communities. Global trade agreements, depressed markets, rising costs and changing weather patterns are requiring farmers to look for new ways to increase yields and to decrease production costs, simply to stay in business. Computerized tractors communicate with satellites to deliver exact amounts of fertilizer to different soils. They follow a precise course to avoid wasted fuel and chemical inputs. They plant genetically modified seeds designed to create more crop with less stress on the environment. In the last decade, American farmers have rapidly adopted transgenic soybeans, maize and cotton. In the Red River Valley, eighty percent of the soya crop is now transgenic. Wheat is also a major crop. But farmers here are divided over the recent decision by the Monsanto corporation to suspend development of genetically modified wheat for lack of consumer demand. Red River Valley wheat is an export crop prized around the world for bread and pasta. But most export consumers, especially in Europe and Asia, do not want transgenic wheat. Today, wheat plantings are down. There are better profits in transgenic soybeans and maize, which are mostly fed to animals, pressed into cooking oils or turned into ethanol to fuel automobiles. People of the Red River Valley, like other Americans, also consume these grains in processed foods every day. But few consumers know and few are seriously concerned when they know. The critical and normative questions are rarely recognized, let alone addressed in vibrant public discourse.

The creation, production and consumption of genetically modified crops and foods raise moral questions for all people today across every society and culture. Given the interactions of plants within nature and human interdependence with nature, transgenic agriculture raises questions of common human concern. It demands moral attention as a matter of responsibility for communities of life. Moral attention, in turn, requires senses of conscience and possibility. It requires also dialogical reflection and discourse with others. Such deliberation depends upon shared concepts and norms as a framework for discourse.

This articles seeks to provide a framework for deliberation and discernment about normative matters related to transgenic agriculture. Incorporating outlooks and sources from a North American context, we propose a framework that might be useable in other cultural contexts as well. We do not argue here for particular normative judgments about transgenic agriculture. This article seeks to serve moral deliberation across the various social contexts in which humans dwell today, including in an emerging global civil society.

On the threshold of transgenic agriculture

Since 1996, planetary life has entered the early stage of a new global agriculture through the mass production and consumption of genetically modified crops and foods. These crops and foods involve novel combinations of genetic material across species and kingdom boundaries through the manipulation of life at its most elemental level. Specific genes from one organism are being introduced into another to confer desired traits of various kinds. This recombinant DNA technology allows humans to produce new plant varieties more quickly than conventional breeding methods and to introduce traits that cannot be obtained through the intra-species hybridization that humans have practiced for ten thousand years. Although most transgenic crop production and food consumption to date have been limited to a handful of countries (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, South Africa, United States), at least seven million farmers are already planting genetically modified crops. While the landmasses under cultivation with genetically modified varieties today lie mostly in the global North (three-fourths in Canada and the United States), over eighty-five percent of the farmers currently using genetically modified varieties live in the global South. This is one indication of the global scope of transgenic agriculture today.

Another indication is the contested status of this new agriculture across dozens of societies. While genetically modified plants have enjoyed rapid diffusion into almost twenty countries, they have met resistance in some of these and rejection in many more, including whole continents (Europe). At a time when eight hundred million persons go hungry and when climate change may threaten the food supply of the future, proponents of transgenic agriculture see the promise of more abundant and nutritious food, economic growth for farmers, better yields for growing populations and relief for the biotic community through reduced chemical use. The imperative of transgenic agriculture could not be plainer. For opponents of this agriculture, the last decade has been one of mayhem—materially, socially and morally. There are better ways to address human need and biotic health. The objections of opponents take various forms and seek a variety of changes in current thought and practice. Because important matters are at stake in transgenic agriculture, senses of moral urgency exist on both sides of the debate.

This ethical intensity intersects with several domains of human interest and endeavor—scientific investigation, cultural identity, democratic governance, economic productivity, food security and sovereignty. These domains express and transmit important meanings and values. Transgenic agriculture is a modern Western technology, now being communicated, adopted and modified in non-Western contexts as well. While such technology can be seen as simply a value-neutral means for meeting a universal need for food and fiber, it arises from and exists within a larger worldview and way of life. The transgenic seed that goes into the soil participates in a cultural system. Genetic modification technology is the extension of the industrial agriculture that predominates in the global North, which is conditioned by a cultural, political and economic system with particular values and attitudes about creativity, nature and community. Consequently, as genetic modification technology moves around our world into new social contexts, it sometimes fits and furthers a given life world; in others, it threatens preexisting meanings and practices and stands to undermine cultural integrity.[a]

Transgenic agriculture, then, is a particular form of agriculture currently evolving and interacting with other forms. In human history, agriculture has taken different forms and continues to do so. In contrast to industrial agriculture, growing food can be a central activity of society in which all people play a part. People may participate every day or periodically in planting or harvesting. Through such participation, people do more than put food on the table. They create relationships to others and to the land. They transmit religion and the arts. In such contexts, agriculture tends to be integral to cultural life, not simply its material base.

[a] WD: Most of Brazil in the 1970s was rural rather than urban, but now that is reversed. Family based agriculture has eroded—also in the US—but at what social cost?

People gain identity, meaning and orientation through agricultural practice. In such contexts, social goods can be lost when the terms of agriculture change.[b]

Transgenic plant technology offers change in agricultural meaning and practice. Given the complex and powerful forces engendering and spreading this technology, these changes are rapidly becoming consequential. In less than a decade, millions of farmers worldwide have adopted this technology, and the human food supply and the biotic community have changed as a result. Are these changes beneficial or harmful? Is transgenic plant technology a proper use of human creativity? Are these new organisms being grown and consumed with appropriate sensitivity to affected life forms and with sufficient attention to the interests of the future? Should transgenic agriculture be continued, terminated, or reformed? Who should decide these matters? How should they be decided?

Human power and Christian responsibility

These questions are morally dense. They deal with unprecedented capabilities and actions in relation to complex and fragile processes of interdependent life. They involve a complex web of actors—farmers, consumers, research universities, public interest groups, multinational biotechnology corporations, international agencies and more. They situate moral discernment at the intersections of human and planetary well-being, as well as the present and the future. They require an expansive moral imagination and critical knowledge from the life sciences and social sciences. They call for the inclusion and integration of various needs, perspectives and interests, mindful of the persons and communities affected by these actions. In short, these questions demand a sense of morality that supports the shared destiny of planetary life today while honoring the dignity of difference within global community.

The moral density of transgenic agriculture today requires an ethics that construes certain considerations as highly relevant. For one, such an ethics must attend to the novel choices and challenges generated by new, immense human powers in the contemporary world. Transgenic agriculture attracts moral attention today because it embodies a double movement of human power. First, genetically modified organisms advance human power over nature significantly.

[b] ACs: Agriculture as a way of life—that is what is behind the fear.

If the aims of designers hold, engineered plants of the future will exhibit traits that dramatically extend human control over the natural world and without doing violence to it. Whether such aims will hold cannot be known now. However, with transgenic plants, humans do assume god-like powers over the evolutionary process. Are humans wise and conscientious enough to handle this power? Second, the aims of designers depend upon the continued expansion of the immense resources of the half dozen multinational corporations practicing biotechnology research and production (Monsanto, DuPont, Hoechst, Novartis, Rhône Poulenc, Zeneca). While public institutions in some countries undertake biotechnology development, this is usually done jointly with private sector corporations, where the vast proportion of research and development is being done and will be done for the foreseeable future. Thus, increasing human control over the natural world through biotechnology will also increase the owners' economic and social power of the means of production. Should the future of the human food supply and the health of the biota be yoked to the logic and dynamics of the market and profit?

Further, in addition to attending to power and its responsible use, an adequate ethics for transgenic agriculture should embody the creative tension within Christian ethics between living in conformity with and consent to the givenness of life (Gen 1-11) and living critically and creatively in anticipation of the transformative reign of God through unconditional service to the needy neighbor (Mt 5-7). In an age of ecological crisis rooted in a modern Western ethics of domination, people of goodwill strive to discern the human place in a larger natural whole and to limit their agency in ways that give space to life beyond them.[c] In an age of emancipation rooted in the dignity of all persons, people of goodwill strive to acknowledge and defer to the autonomy of others. In addition to an ethics of self-limitation and respect for the other, people of goodwill also strive to address needs that others cannot do for themselves. In an age of unjust distribution of material and social goods, people of goodwill see a world that can live better within the limits of time, contingency and finitude.

Finally, in addition to maintaining creative tension between acceptance and change, an adequate ethics for transgenic agriculture should seek to integrate the various goods that interact with the genetic modification of human crops and foods, and enable normative discernment where parts are rightly ordered to larger wholes. Because food is a basic human need, it enjoys a privileged status. Without nutritious food, a person cannot create music or cooperate with others. But persons do not live by food alone, and even food needs to be ordered and valued in light of other goods, human and non-human. For example, some analysts contend that future human food needs will not be met without transgenic agriculture. However, this agriculture will also involve the contamination of established landraces[1] by transgenes, such as genes for drought toleration or herbicide resistance. This would be the loss of a good (biodiversity) for the sake of another (food sufficiency). But is this course of action really necessary? An integrated ethics requires such questions.

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[c] HU: Romans 8 challenges the distinction we often make between us and nature in light of the eschatological hope for all of creation. Nature is not separate from us.

William Schweiker, a North American Christian moral theologian, proposes a responsibility ethics that addresses these considerations.[2] For Schweiker, a Christian should, in all actions and relations, seek to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God. This is the Christian imperative of responsibility today. Various interlocking goods—material, social and reflective—constitute life. While the goods of life are diverse, humans also seek unity and coherence in what they do. They want to be persons of integrity who are dedicated to respecting and enhancing life in its wholeness or integrity. For Schweiker, humans live first under an imperative to respect—to recognize and show regard for others and for the self. As life makes a claim upon the self, it also establishes constraints upon what can and should be done. Subjects of respect cannot be treated as means to other ends. Subjects of respect are members of the same moral community, and an important part of the moral life involves recognizing and showing regard for others. Respect constitutes a moral baseline for all actions and relations. But the imperative of responsibility in Christianity calls for humans to enhance the community of life as well. This means that humans should work for the well-being or the flourishing of life in all of its complexity, but not in ways that violate the demand of respect.

Schweiker's imperative of responsibility embraces the creative tension of Christian morality noted above. It calls upon Christians to respect and enhance multiple life goods with a view to the given integrity of God's world. Further, it aims to guide and govern the immense powers of modern technology. As a summary norm for the Christian moral life, this imperative provides a fitting guide for moral reflection about transgenic agriculture. However, the injunction to respect and enhance the integrity of life can be understood in terms more specific and more dedicated to the domain of human agriculture. Five principles seem relevant to this imperative: precaution, participation, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability.

Responsibility as precaution

Transgenic agriculture is a significant change in human practices with irreversible implications for life communities. While intended to be beneficial to all communities, this change will bring known and perhaps unknowable harm to planetary life. While risk is endemic to the human condition, it can and should be a matter of moral accountability and social control when possible and reasonable.[d] The will to reduce risk of harming to affected beings and communities is part of what it means to respect others and the integrity of life. Diligence in the assessment and reduction of risk is not easily determined or achieved. Concern about risk can be excessive and out of balance with other relevant moral norms. People can disagree about risk over matters of empirical belief as well as moral principle. Such conflicting judgments can also be subject to cultural conditioning and social location. Yet, no person flourishes while living at suspected or known risk of significant harm, especially unnecessary risk of harm. Putting others at such risk, knowingly or carelessly, is disrespectful.

If transgenic agriculture constitutes a change in human practices with risks of irreversible and significant harm, then questions of burden of accountability and standards of due diligence arise. These questions are at play today in debates over the "precautionary principle." As Robert Paarlberg argues, precaution constitutes a moral fault line in differing societal responses to transgenic agriculture.[3] For example, while North Americans have embraced transgenics, Europeans have rejected them to date, and these differing moral stances have decisively informed governmental regulatory environments in these societies. In the United States, regulatory policy has been "relatively permissive," while the European stance has been "precautionary." Further, Paarlberg argues, this hardened moral impasse in the global North has influenced thinking and decisions in the South. While some variation exists, societies of the South have generally followed a more precautionary path.

What is the precautionary principle and how does it address the moral questions of risk? The principle has been a concept in environmental thought for thirty years and gained recognition by its inclusion in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) and, more recently, the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (2000) and the Earth Charter (2000). Formulations of the principle vary. The 1998 "Wingspread Definition" offers a sound definition:

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[d] PLB: Democratic debates regarding risk are not open in many parts of the world.

> When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically. In this context the proponent of an activity, rather than the public, should bear the burden of proof.[4]

Given reason to believe that an activity may result in harm and scientific disagreement about actual harm, taking steps to prevent this possibility are obligatory. Further, the parties of change must justify change under such a circumstance.

The precautionary principle seeks to resolve a crucial question about how persons should respond to novelty and uncertainty. All ethics need a policy on uncertainty, and the precautionary principle adopts the critical standards of scientific knowing to justify a low-risk stance. However, this principle is not without critics. For example, critics of the European position wonder about a socioeconomic bias in this use of scientific skepticism. Does the fact that European societies are affluent and that food stocks are abundant there condition the question of tolerable risk? Two Danish advocates of human development take this view.[5] In support of their thesis, an international survey of attitudes towards genetically modified crops in thirty-four countries shows a strong correlation between income levels and attitudes (US and Canada excepted). Two-thirds of Europeans think that the benefits of genetically modified organisms are not worth the risk, while three-fifths of people in the Americas, Asia, and Oceania do. Africans are in the middle of these two groups. In general, people in poor countries view the benefits of transgenic agriculture to exceed the risks.[6]

These cultural differences in perception call for critical analysis and explanation. They illustrate some of the difficulty and complexity of risk analysis, especially when questions of risk are adjudicated through democratic processes. What should humans do to adjudicate such difference? "Science," says a recent report from the Food and Agriculture Organization,“ (FAO) cannot declare any technology completely risk free. Genetically engineered crops can reduce some environmental risks associated with conventional agriculture, but it will also introduce new challenges that must be addressed. Society will have to decide when and where genetic engineering is safe enough."[7]

Human societies both local and global will need to sort out standards of reasonable precaution. But this assumes that the imperative of precaution as such is widely embraced. In contexts such as the United States, a precautionary ethics does not enjoy strong support. It should for reasons of moral policy and for reasons of recent criticism from within the scientific community concerning the adequacy of safety standards and testing practices in the United States.[8] Despite industry's claims to the contrary, the actual number of independent, peer-reviewed studies remains surprisingly low. Given a precautionary norm, questions about food safety remain reasonable concerns.

Although the claim needs to be tested in actual moral discourse, the precautionary principle would seem to be an uncontroversial norm within the Christian community. As argued above, it can be grounded in an ethics of respect for the integrity of life. Grounding can be found in the stewardship of creation ethics, commonplace in Christian thought today.[9] Support for precaution can be found in Christian anthropology and social theory as well. For example, as argued in a policy statement from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, precaution can be grounded in the virtue of humility.[10] As argued in an ecumenical church statement from a farm state in the US, precaution can be grounded in the need for a "full examination" of the implications of transgenic agriculture in a cultural context where societal oversight has not kept pace with technological development and application. Given the novelty and complexity of the matters in question and human responsibility to consider these matters within the "full time span of creation," precaution can be grounded in the fact that humans have "only begun to understand what questions need to be raised."[11]

Because the precautionary principle is a new norm generated by modern forms of power and modern thought, it cannot be found in the classic sources and texts of Christian morality.[12] But it can be grounded in Christian neighbor-love and in recent Christian ecological ethics. As noted, it places the burden of justification upon the agents of change. Have the agents of transgenic agriculture assumed and satisfied this burden? This is the crucial question posed by this principle.

Responsibility as participation

The principle of participation is the second element of an ethics of respect for the integrity of life. Participation means that all living things exist within communal relations created by God and that the interests of the living should be heard and taken into consideration when decisions are made.[13] The voices of the living include the future as well as the diverse perspectives of the present. Participation means working to engender free and inclusive discourse as well as allowing it to occur. That is, "participation is concerned with empowerment and seeks to remove the obstacles to participating in decisions that affect lives."[14]

The principle of participation requires a democratic and inclusive process for decision making. Given the global scope of transgenic agriculture, the principle of participation entails discursive norms and institutions that are only beginning to evolve.[15] Global institutions for communication and decision making are not as developed today as are the intellectual and economic institutions engendering transgenic agriculture. As a result, there are many voices of discontent around the world saying that participation in transgenic agriculture has been and continues to be a serious problem globally. A Nigerian minister of agriculture, Hassan Adamu, gives voice to this:

> We do not want to be denied this technology [agricultural biotechnology] because of a misguided notion that we do not understand the dangers and future consequences. We understand […]. We will proceed carefully and thoughtfully, but we want to have the opportunity to save the lives of millions of people and change the course of history in many nations. That is our right, and we should not be denied by those with a mistaken idea that they know best how everyone should live or that they have the right to impose their values upon us. The harsh reality is that, without the help of agricultural biotechnology, many will not live.[16]

Adamu gives voice to a paternalism felt by many stakeholders—particularly in the South.[e] Given the character of developments to date, the existence and diffusion of genetically modified crops and foods should have produced a massive crisis of legitimacy, and part of the backlash against transgenics stems from public exclusion. Activists and intellectuals from the South, such as Vandana

[e] PLB: If communities are able to subsist and share, why would they want to embrace or accept these technologies? Subsistence farming may be able to sustain people more than through these technologies. When biotechnologies came to Lesotho in the 1990s, a whole tradition and ability of the people to sustain themselves was brought down. If a sense of contributing to a life for others is eroded, can efficiency be justified?

Shiva in India, have voiced discontent over the absence of participation.[17] Because transgenic crops are largely grown for commercial purposes, excluded consumers have been able to register their discontent in the market place—so far as they know. However, a responsibility ethics seeks greater participation.

The problem of participation to date has structural dimensions. Unlike the "Green Revolution" where new crop varieties were developed in the public sector and shared with private firms for local adaptation, the "Gene Revolution" has been, with the exception of China and India, a largely private sector affair. The proprietary nature of transgenic research due to new patent law has rendered the question of transgenics largely antithetical to public participation as an open deliberative process. In the United States, for example, the role of the public tends to be adversarial in the sense that input opportunity comes at the end of development when regulatory processes commence, and these cannot be completely transparent in order to protect trade secrets. In their recent study of US seed contamination, the Union of Concerned Scientists was unable to conduct a full investigation. In substantial portions of the public record of field-testing trials, the names of experimental transgenes have been withheld as confidential business information. These genes may or may not be present in the American food supply, but no one can test for them under existing policy.[18] Thus, even in a watchdog role, the American public cannot fully participate in the process of public biological change designed and introduced by private actors. In a moment of candor, the CEO of Monsanto, Hendrik Verfaillie observed:

> My company had focused so much attention on getting the technology right for our customer the grower that we didn't take into account the issues and concerns it raised for other people. We missed the fact that this technology raises major issues of ethics, of choice, of trust, even of democracy and globalization. We didn't understand that when it comes to serious pubic concern, the more you stand to make a profit in the marketplace, the less credibility you have in the marketplace of ideas. When we tried to explain the benefits, the science, and the safety, we did not understand that our tone, our very approach, was seen as arrogant. We were still in the "trust me" mode when the expectation was "show me." Instead of happily ever after, this new technology became the focal point of public conflict.[19]

According to a 2001 *New York Times* article, early in the development of genetically modified organisms in the late 1980s, Monsanto understood the social significance of this new technology and adopted an "outreach" strategy that would have included public groups and relevant experts to advise and respond. However, this participatory model was not enacted. In the early 1990s, new management at Monsanto, emboldened by compliant treatment from US regulatory agencies and growing confidence that science had shown transgenic foods to be safe,[f] decided to abandon a cautious and transparent strategy. This evoked the public dissent that emerged by the end of the decade.[20]

The advent of genetically modified crops and foods has not been participatory due in part to decisions made within the private sector. Yet, as the Monsanto case suggests, private research and development can be ordered to the norms of participation. The Monsanto case also illustrates the power of major biotechnology corporations to operate as they will. When these powers do not serve common goods, other powers need to participate. In a balanced account of the biotechnology debate, Mark Winston concludes with two recommendations, both relevant to envisioning more participation. First, more of the science that engendered transgenics needs to be deployed to research its risks. Winston, a scientist, claims that the absence of rigorous and comprehensive research has been "the single most important element" missing to date. Second, states in the global North have thus far been acquiescent toward corporate pressure and have not represented the diverse perspectives of their publics.[21] A stunning example was a proposal from a US regulatory body (USDA) to include genetically modified foods within new labeling standards for "organic" foods. The idea was withdrawn under protest from the public and organic farmers.[22] Similar patterns of corporate pressure and state cooperation can be found in the South. According to watchdog groups, the US and UN development institutions are actively pressuring countries of the South to adopt transgenic agriculture.[23]

Transnational corporations, the global scientific community and states are powerful participants who could make a difference in constructing participatory processes for public discourse. Institutions of civil society—like the churches and NGOs—also play parts in engendering participatory com-

[f] WD: People in the US are so trusting of government regulations; if they say it's safe, it's ok. Scientific means acceptable. In contrast, in Brazil, people always tend to be suspicious of what the government approves. Furthermore, in too many cases, states assure individual rights to succeed and the furthering of research, rather than communal well-being. Whose interests are really at stake?

munity. But these institutions cannot engender a participatory world without the cooperation and support of corporations, the sciences and states.[g] As an example of this potential, the recent FAO report raises up the possibility and imperative of "participatory agricultural research" which situates farmers, particularly poor farmers, in the beginning of design and discovery.[24] The principle of participation challenges people of good will to imagine, support and practice such relations, which have been markedly absent to date.

Responsibility as solidarity

What are the interests and needs of poor countries concerning transgenic agriculture? Solidarity requires special concern for and attention to all subjects of neglect, violence, exploitation and domination—human and "otherkind." If participation seeks communication with others as subjects of different perspective and wisdom, solidarity seeks community and mutuality based upon a sense of kinship. Put theologically, the community of life depends upon God and "stands together" as God's creation.[25] Funded and constrained by respect, solidarity involves enhancing life by attending to need and by working to create the needed goods of life.

Assuming that genetically modified crops and foods satisfy tests of sufficiency and sustainability, poor countries are currently being denied knowledge and materials that could increase human welfare. Transgenic crops and food are no panacea for the ills of the poor. But, if certain conditions can be

[g] KLB: In many parts of the world, alternatives are being effectively pursued by churches and other NGOs in opposition to what corporations and states are supporting, through movements such as the World Social Forum and the Life-Giving Agricultural Global Forum, which the LWF cosponsored. As the message from the latter states:

> "Today, agriculture is ironically the source of hunger, disease and environmental destruction in the world. Driven by the neoliberal development model, agriculture has become a massive economic activity, torturing nature to produce more and more for human greed. Export-oriented, capital-intensive and monocultured agriculture has compelled farmers to use life-killing practices, resulting in the degradation of land and water and other ecological problems. Unjust agricultural trade rules have led to the loss of livelihood for millions of people and worsening poverty."

met, this new agriculture can help because most of the world's poor are subsistence farmers and because evidence suggests that poor farmers can gain from growing genetically modified crops. Critics sometimes seek to blunt the imperative of transgenic technology transfer by noting that the world will be able to feed itself for fifteen to twenty-five years through existing agricultural technology and by arguing that the issue is poverty, not food.[26] However, while resources and distribution are a problem, poor countries have legitimate interests in domestic food security and food sovereignty and in supporting agrarian forms of life. There are good reasons why food should be grown in the place where it is eaten.[27] For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, seventy percent of the people are subsistence farmers. Populations are growing rapidly and increases in local food production will be required. At present, only 1.1 percent of the food supply comes from external donor sources, and these are not expected to increase along with population growth. In sum, the affluent today do not need genetically modified food, but arguably the poor do.

It is easier to claim that the poor may need transgenics than to envision how these countries might actually become self-sufficient or sovereign. States of the South will not become transgenic powers simply by being politically free to adopt them. These countries will also need economic aid through the public sector. At present, hundreds of millions of dollars are deployed by agencies like the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) to support indigenous research. This is just a fraction of what the private sector spends. For Paarlberg and the FAO, the public sector must do more.[28] There already exists what the analysts Calestous Juma and Karen Fang call the "genetic divide" that threatens to deny developing countries access to benefit.[29] If the North grows increasingly cool toward transgenic technology because of the absence of markets, the South is not likely to catch up.

Why is this? According to an FAO development scenario, public research and public-private joint ventures must bear the burden of development. Typically, countries of the South need improved agricultural ministries and agencies, new regulatory systems and public outreach programs, and new infrastructures and monies to carry out biotechnology transfer and development. These countries need to create more institutional structure to get biotechnology from the bench to the table. Further, they will need significant monetary resources to enter the world of patents and intellectual property rights upon which the transgenic revolution depends. Presumably, transnational companies will continue to develop new crop varieties with traits that poor countries can use through adaptation to local needs. The FAO does not expect these companies to donate much as humanitarian aid (as with Golden Rice and Golden Mustard Oil). More typically, the public sector in poor countries will need to purchase patent rights—ownership, licensing, joint public-private ventures—to do transgenic research and development.[30] These costs will be large. The FAO has ideas about what could be done. But they all involve more public monies.

Poor countries tend to prize transgenic agriculture because the technology is in the seed—the cheapest input of farming. But behind the seed there are huge costs, if the seeds are to be created and used in a responsible manner. States in the South could, perhaps, use these seeds, but they will depend upon the North to share resources to make cheap, effective, desirable and safe seeds available to poor farmers. The FAO report asks, "Who will develop biotechnology innovations for the majority of developing countries that are too small in terms of market potential to attract large private-sector investments and too weak in scientific capacity to develop their own innovations?"[31] This claim of the poor upon the affluent needs solidarity as a moral starting point.

Responsibility as sufficiency

Like solidarity, sufficiency seeks to enhance the integrity of life by supporting the needs of the community of life today. With respect to needs, members of this community are equals and should share as required. Discerning what humans need, as opposed to what they desire, can be difficult. In the case of genetically modified crops and foods, the body dictates such needs. Questions about whether genetically modified foods are needed and will be needed to feed humanity fall under sufficiency. In a world where over 800 million people lack a secure food supply, there are strong, but not necessarily overwhelming, reasons to pursue a technology that can support food sufficiency.

A crucial consideration is whether this new food is safe for human consumption. If genetically modified food causes illness or disease, it cannot serve sufficiency. Advocates of transgenic agriculture say that scientific studies and world health organizations concur that genetically modified foods consumed today are safe and nutritious. Critics say that the absence of known problems does not mean that they do not exist, for the science and the regulation may be flawed.

Food safety is a concern shared by all. In 2002, President Mwanawasa of Zambia, in the midst of famine, rejected a shipment of Bt maize donated by the

UN World Food Programme. His scientists saw a risk of toxicity, and the precautionary principle was invoked.[32] With the question of food safety and testing, a decisive conceptual issue presents itself, one needing further attention from the scientific community. Science-based food testing was an established government practice in the states where transgenics were first introduced. The practical question was whether transgenics should be treated as a new food additive or as yet another hybrid variety. If additive, they should be tested in novel ways. If hybrid, they should be tested just the same.

Underlying this decision is a conceptual judgment about differences between transgenics and conventional intra-species hybrids. When US and UN policymakers had to set policy, they turned to scientists to address the question of difference. The answer from several panels, beginning with the US National Academy of Sciences in 1987, has been that there is no scientific basis for a conceptual distinction between transgenics and conventional hybrids and that the risks of transgenic breeding are not significantly and inherently different from hybrids.[33] In 1989 and 2000, the National Academy restated this view and even suggested that the precision of transgenic processes offered a gain in the predictability of gene expression over conventional breeding methods.[34] This sort of science convinced policy makers that transgenics should be tested as hybrids. By 1993, the UN Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) borrowed an idea from medical device research and established the idea of "substantial equivalence" for testing transgenics.

This contested principle holds that transgenic origins are irrelevant. What matters is how the new product actually functions. If a HT (herbicide tolerant) soybean or a Bt (insect resistant) corn kernel digests—and looks, feels, tastes and smells—like a conventional hybrid, then it is basically the same. From the beginning, genetically modified crops were assumed to be functionally equivalent. In the US, producers of transgenics have had to provide evidence that the food itself (proteins, fats, etc.) does not differ structurally and functionally from non-genetically modified. If they are absent of any known problems, like allergens or toxicity, they are free for the market.[35] These procedures had a green-light effect on the diffusion of genetically modified crops and foods. Substantial equivalence has meant that governments, like that of the United States, do not test for new allergens unique to genetically modified foods and do not conduct long-term toxicity studies. In Europe, a precautionary ethos has led to tougher standards.

The debate over testing is technical and is an example of the specialized expertise that humans must possess in a technological age. Scientific opinion should be formative in the biosafety debate and responsive to critics who claim humans still do not know enough, despite technological capabilities to know.[36] In the absence of evidence that genetically modified foods are unsafe, it is hard to reject genetically modified crops and foods on precautionary grounds—given the need for better seeds for the poor. Yet, common safety standards remain to be adopted worldwide. Given the gains that genetically modified agriculture apparently offer to the poor, the world community needs some closure on the safety questions. Continued involvement by scientists in the development of international safety standards, such as those adopted by the FAO and World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2003, will be good for all.[37]

Responsibility as sustainability

In addition to considerations of social power and procedural justice, economic growth and livelihood, food sufficiency and safety, there are still wider and larger considerations of harm and consequence, not yet understood and easily known, that could diminish or negate the promised gains of genetically modified agriculture. What about the health and vitality of the biotic community when transgenic agriculture becomes the dominant form? Responsibility requires discernment and consideration of long-term, total consequences. Can humans know them well enough to make a responsible decision? Do humans really care about the long-term future of planetary life?

Sustainability seeks the flourishing of life and involves "providing an acceptable quality of life for present generations without compromising that of future generations."[38] Living beings and communities of the future make a moral claim upon us now. Humans do not owe the future something better than the present; they do owe future communities the conditions to meet their own needs. Sustainability is a moral concept still developing currency and force today. While the moral aims of sustainability are similar to earlier concepts of preservation, this imperative stems from the realities of human cultural evolution. Human powers and numbers have rendered local anthropocentric ethics of the present inadequate to the terms of life. Yet, just what it means to live together in and with the biotic community remain largely unanswered questions. Nevertheless, with the advent of transgenic agriculture, they must be answered now.

For responsibility ethics, questions of sustainability need to be pursued. At this time, the world community faces evidence that projected environmental risks and limitations of genetically modified technology are real. However, it has yet to pursue the sustainability question as seriously as the question of sufficiency. The question is exceedingly difficult. The issue is not only the natural properties of potentially hundreds of different species and varieties of transgenics plants and their ecosystemic interactions. It is also a matter of the quality and extent of human usage. While research into new genetically modified varieties has abounded, actual usage to date has been limited [mainly four crops (maize, soybeans, canola, cotton) modified for two traits (HT and Bt) used on less than twenty-five percent of the world's cultivated landmasses]. The question of a genetically modified future involves a much larger, more complex, global commitment to transgenics.

The expected and known environmental risks are several. First, because plants live in open environments, they can outcross, namely, reproduce with different plants through cross-pollination. Such gene flow has been seen with genetically modified crops, both between genetically modified and hybrid varieties and through hybridization with wild relatives. Does this matter? Non-genetically modified gene flow between established landraces and modern hybrids happens today. Genetically modified gene flow adds to an existing phenomenon. Again, does this matter? It matters if these modified crops become invasive species that disrupt and degrade the ecosystem, a problem known as "weediness." These plants might, for example, take on Bt or HT traits and become "superweeds" that are hard to control. Scientists are working on various strategies to minimize genetically modified gene flow. As with conventional pesticides, Bt varieties may take a toll on desirable non-target species like butterflies—but no major adverse effects of this kind have been documented yet. Genetically modified crops will change the way that land is cultivated. Proponents of Bt crops, for instance, point out that these varieties work well with reduced tillage designed to reduce soil erosion and to save water. How these changes will impact the environment is hard to predict.

The plants and insects that transgenic technology seeks to control are adaptive and inevitably develop resistance. Glyphosate and gluphosinate, the active agents used to control weeds in HT crop fields, have been used widely for decades, and 120 species of weeds have developed resistance to these chemicals.[39] A case in Canada shows that canola can within two years develop triple-resistance to the three top herbicides, a phenomenon known as "gene stacking."[40] Again, cropping methods are being developed to minimize these possibilities. In the US, farmers are required to plant twenty percent of their fields in non-Bt plant “refuges” so that some exposed insects will mate with non-exposed and reduce insect-resistance. Insect and weed resistance happen in conventional agriculture and is happening with genetically modified crops. Whether these trends are worrisome depends, in part, on human agency. Is it realistic to expect farmers to practice “resistance management” practices? Will the next generation of genetically modified varieties be less subject to resistance? Will monocropping continue in response to market pressures and government policies? Will genetically modified technology be used in support of biodiversity?

Through population migrations and the advent of agriculture ten thousand years ago, humans have engendered environmental changes. An American scientist has estimated that immigrants and traders have introduced fifty thousand non-native species into the United States, some beneficial and some detrimental, driving some four hundred resident species into or near extinction. Either way, this movement of genes has changed the aboriginal environment into a different biological world.[41] Similar movements of genes of similar magnitude have happened around the world. Genetic change happens continually through natural processes and human interactions. Some of this change degrades the biota. Some serves to sustain healthy communities. Some analysts do not think that the future of genetically modified agriculture will approximate the magnitude of change that pregenetically modified agriculture has already wrought. Genes have always been on the loose. Those let loose by genetically modified agriculture will not cause a crash.

Although change is a constant, responsibility requires consideration of the character and rate of human interactions with nature with a view to ecosystemic impacts. At some point, ecosystems do crash, and humans must avoid practices that compromise the biotic community. Clearly, there are great unknowns regarding the promises and perils of a global transgenic agriculture. Thousands of years of human modification of the environment may tell us something about the mass dispersal of genetically modified genes into the environment. But it may not tell us all we need to know. With respect to sufficiency, we have knowledge and arrangements that can render a clear judgment on the introduction of a genetically modified plant into the food supply. A plant that causes an allergy can be rejected by international agreement today as unsafe for human consumption. If the introduction of certain genetically modified plants into the biota undermines its health, responsibility calls for similar critical action.

At present, humans lack the knowledge and institutions needed to serve a sustainable future. The world community lacks shared norms for human actions. There are no international standards for evaluating the impact of transgenics upon the environment.[42] Environmental regulators disagree about what sorts of testing processes would allow humans to monitor the effects of transgenics upon the environment. In sum, developing international standards for sustainability will be hard work, conceptually and politically.

Conclusion

There is neither an orthodox nor an obvious Christian position on transgenic agriculture. There may, however, be a set of norms that capture relevant goods and that allow deliberation and decision making across human communities and societies. The analysis provided here suggests that such deliberation must occur because current global practices regarding genetically modified crops and foods are seriously morally deficient. Perhaps, approved genetically modified crop varieties are safe for human and animal consumption. Perhaps, the science of genetic recombination is well enough understood to create and produce the range of plant varieties and applications—the cornucopia—that scientists envision. Given the prospects for increasing and improving food supplies safely, the case for moving forward with genetically modified agriculture could be grounded in the principle of sufficiency.

However, on grounds of precaution, participation, solidarity and sustainability, humans cannot move forward without serious revision of current practices. Given current moral deficiencies, it is not clear that transgenic agriculture should be part of the human future. From the beginning, as genetically modified crops and foods have moved from the private commercial sector into the public and natural worlds, precautionary and participatory norms have been neglected or undervalued. Claims of moral illegitimacy and suspicion pervade public debates and seem to be justified. Regarding solidarity, while genetically modified crops and foods offer the prospect of lifting people from poverty and of keeping them on the land, the monetary resources and infrastructures that countries of the South will need to do genetically modified agriculture within the norms of food sovereignty are vast. To date, rich countries like the United States seem more interested in creating markets for their genetically modified commodities than in enabling the poor to grow their own. Consistent with the analysis of the FAO, private sector practices are neither sufficient nor committed to a genetically modified agriculture born of solidarity. Finally, the agents propelling genetically modified agriculture and the affected publics have exhibited different beliefs about and commitments to the question of sustainability. This norm challenges both human moral imagination and empathy. Modern industrial agriculture has an ambiguous record on sustainability. The global scientific community must take moral leadership on sustainability. Responsible societies must also look to farmers, the people of the land, to cultivate this norm in their local practices and in social consciousness.

To conclude that the advent of global transgenic agriculture to date has been morally deficient means that the agents of change have not satisfied the burden of justification for change. This use of the principle of precaution means that moral deliberation adequate to the terms of transgenic agriculture ought to precede any further advance of this new agriculture. The principles of participation, solidarity, sufficiency and sustainability require more attention than they have received thus far. The fact that transgenic agriculture is largely accepted in some contexts and is rapidly developing in others does not mean that it should continue. To the contrary, a global moratorium on further use might be most responsible at this time.

For reflection or discussion:

In your context, what are the reactions to genetically modified foods and crops and their actual or foreseen effects? Which of these ethical norms do you find most compelling? What would you add to this discussion?

Notes

[1] A crop cultivar (variety of a plant that has been created or selected intentionally and maintained through cultivation) that evolved with and has been genetically improved by traditional agriculturalists, but has not been influenced by modern breeding practices.

[2] William Schweiker, *Responsibility and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 117-134.

[3] Robert Paarlberg, *The Politics of Precaution: Genetically Modified Crops in Developing Countries* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 151-155.

[4] Quoted in "Genetically Modified Organisms in the Food Supply," a Social Policy Resolution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA], adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, November 2004, p. 10.

[5] Per Pinstrup-Anderson and Ebbe Schioler, *Seeds of Contention: World Hunger and the Global Controversy over GM Crops* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), pp. 1-6.

[6] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], *Agricultural Biotechnology: Meeting the Needs of the Poor? The State of Food and Agriculture 2003-04*, FAO Agriculture Series No. 35 (Rome, 2004), pp. 77, 84.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[8] National Academy of Sciences, *Safety of Genetically Engineered Foods: Approaches to Assessing Unintended Health Effects* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2004).

[9] William French, "Ecology," in William Schweiker (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 469-476.

[10] ELCA, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 5.

[11] Rural Life Committee, North Dakota Conference of Churches (USA), "A Response to Issues and Values Related to Genetically Modified Organisms," (unpublished paper), p. 1.

[12] Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[13] "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice," a Social Statement of the ELCA, adopted at the Churchwide Assembly, August 1993, p. 6.

[14] James Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers, *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 42.

[15] James Gustave Speth, *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 191-201.

[16] Pinstrup-Andersen and Schioler, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp. 107-108.

[17] Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1997); Vandana Shiva, "Globalization and the War Against Farmers and the Land," in Norman Wirza (ed.), *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land* (Washington, DC: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004), pp. 121-139.

[18] This study by the Union of Concerned Scientists reports that the certified seeds of traditional varieties of maize, soy and canola used by US farmers are now "pervasively contaminated" with low levels of DNA sequences originating in popular transgenic varieties of these crops. This study does not offer demonstrated estimates about overall contamination levels (.05 to 1 percent estimated) and does not document DNA contamination from other, less popular transgenic varieties tested or produced to date. The report does not establish whether this contamination is occurring because of gene flow in fields or because of commingling in production and transportation. Nonetheless, this verified contamination, inadvertent and yet not unexpected, gives credence to questions and concerns that have dogged transgenic varieties since the advent of commercial planting in 1996. See Margaret Mellon and Jane Rissler, *Gone to Seed: Transgenic Contaminants in the Traditional Seed Supply* (Cambridge, MA: Union of Concerned Scientists, 2004), www.ucsusa.org.

[19] Mark Winston, *Travels in the Genetically Modified Zone* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 128-129.

[20] Kurt Eichenwald *et al.*, "Biotechnology Food: From the Lab to the Debacle," in Michael Ruse and David Castle (eds), *Genetically Modified Foods: Debating Biotechnology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), pp. 31-40.

[21] Winston, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 254.

[22] Paarlberg, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 23; Sheldon Krimsky, "Ethical Issues Involving the Production, Planting, and Distribution of Genetically Modified Crops," in Britt Bailey and Marc Lappe (eds), *Engineering the Farm: Ethical and Societal Aspects of Agricultural Biotechnology* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002), p. 16.

[23] GRAIN, "USAID in Africa: 'For the American Corporations," in Seedling (April 2005), pp. 27-32. For a fuller analysis by the same authors, see "USAID: Making Countries Hungry for GM Crops," http://grain.org/go/usaid .

[24] FAO, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 91.

[25] ELCA, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 6-7.

[26] Peter Rosset, "Taking Seriously the Claim That Genetic Engineering Could End Hunger: A Critical Analysis," in Bailey and Lappe, *op. cit.* (note 22), pp. 81-93; Marc Lappe, "A Perspective on Anti-Biotechnology Convictions," in Bailey and Lappe, *op. cit.* (note 22), pp. 135-56.

[27] Pinstrup-Andersen and Schioler, *op. cit.* (note 5), pp. 5-6.

[28] Paarlberg, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 142; FAO, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 105.

[29] Calestous Juma and Karen Fang, "Bridging the Genetic Divide," in Ruse and Castle, *op. cit.* (note 20), pp. 309-321. See also Calestous Juma and Victor Konde, "Industrial Applications for Biotechnology: Opportunities for Developing Countries," in *Environment* 44 (July/August 2002), pp. 23-35.

[30] FAO, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 94, 105.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

[32] Martin-Schramm and Stivers, *op. cit.* (note 14), p. 301.

[33] Krimsky, *op. cit.* (note 22), pp. 13-4; Paarlberg, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 20.

[34] Henry Miller, "Substantial Equivalence: Its Uses and Abuses," in Ruse and Castle, *op. cit.* (note 20), p. 208.

[35] Winston, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 62.

[36] Lappe, *op. cit.* (note 22), pp. 137-145.

[37] FAO, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 61-66.

[38] ELCA, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 7-8.

[39] FAO, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 71-2.

[40] Winston, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 98.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[42] FAO, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 72.

Privatizing Property that Belongs to All

Puleng Lenka Bula

Introduction

This is a discussion of the ethical and theological implications of the privatization of property and biological resources that are in the public domain. African societies in the twenty-first century need to reflect on this issue because of the rampant expropriation and privatization of biological resources in the public domain. Given that privatization takes place in many different forms, my interest lies in the privatization of public commons and biological resources in terms of bio-prospecting, bio-piracy and intellectual property rights, particularly patents on life forms. I will present concrete examples of the ways in which African biological resources and commons have become the private property of individuals and multinational corporations. This privatization of property and biological commons is inextricably linked to economic globalization.

In order to conceive of alternatives to the widespread privatization of land and biological resources, I will also examine the Scriptures regarding how the themes of property and biological resources are dealt with there. Christian ethics ought to engage the Bible as one of its central sources without denying that some of its aspects are not life giving. Ethical discernment or reflection ought not to limit discernment only to the Bible, but ought also to engage reason, tradition, experience and culture. It is important to understand life and configure alternative values, attitudes, structures and institutions. I will use an interdisciplinary approach to deal with the topic.

Representations of property

Definitions of what constitutes property and approaches to the use of property vary from culture to culture.[a] They are also influenced by different historical eras. Property is commonly used to define not only rights that have fiscal content, but also rights that persons have with respect to possessions. Property involves far more than its economic value. People's rights and responsibilities are also an integral aspect of property.

The management of property consists of rules determining relations between people with respect to property. These aim to arrange socially the utilization of land and biological resources. Guiding rules or policies relating to property are not limited to the pecuniary aspects of property. There are a variety of ways in which property is delimited. These include state property, commons or common property, communal property and private property. State property commonly refers to land allocated to the state. It can be used by governments according to

[a] WMY: For me as a Chinese, property is important because it means my identity […] I can be identified by it. Property is what belongs to me, an expression of self. Confucian self-cultivation lies behind this. In China, people now have a small portion of land for them to take care of; you are somebody by having property.

WD: This Chinese perspective, however, sounds like you are what you own. As Christians, we own property but are not owned by it. Yet, because of the incarnation, we cannot deny that ours is a materialist religion. The material world is given to us, in contrast to Gnosticism and other spiritualizing tendencies.

EG: In Scandinavia, we had, but have lost the sense of land that cannot be sold. What happened in modernity, through buying and selling, is that space was opened up for those who did not inherit land. But the property rights domain has run aloof from this.

PLB: How can the misappropriation of the commons be contested with a written word in cultures that are oral? Contesting a patent requires written documentation. Owning land still is somewhat foreign to Africans. How land is allocated is not based on a written contract, but the communal memory, through consensus, contestation and argument by the community. The memory sits with the community. You may have a right to use it, but not in ways that contradict how the community feels it should be used. Your obligation is to participate in the creation of reserves in the case of drought, war, etc.

national laws and national needs. Common property generally refers to property or land allocated to members of society. "Commons" does not imply that land and biological resources could be used in anarchical ways, however people might choose. The treatment of the commons in the context of many African countries is subject to customary law and other rules accepted by society. Communal property refers to property or land used by an identifiable group of people. It is governed as a collective entity. Private property refers to individual ownership of land within socially and legally acceptable laws. Private property can be held, for example, by individuals, groups, institutions (e.g., the church) and commercial entities that are given such juridical status.

Property can be either tangible or intangible. Tangible property includes physical objects such as land. Intangible property includes concepts such as intellectual property rights, that is, patents, trademarks, geographical indications, trade secrets and copyrights. In many cases, the laws governing tangible property include rules regarding access to and use of the property. These laws differ from country to country. Intangible property in the form of intellectual property rights are different from physical property rights, although they sometimes share many of the characteristics associated with real and personal property. Intellectual property rights (hereafter IPR) are assets that can be bought, sold, licensed, exchanged and gratuitously given away like many other forms of property. A noticeable difference is that they are intangible.

Ownership of physical or biological resources is governed by property laws, while ownership of the genetic information contained in plant or biological resources is governed by intellectual property laws. When genetic information is patented, it changes the whole nature of this particular resource base—it is converted to an exclusive commodity. Ownership of intangible property is generally limited to a specific time frame (for instance, the WTO recommends twenty years for patent rights).

In Africa, property in the form of the land and biological resources has been held in common for a long time, although individuals, communities or institutions could be allowed trusteeship or ownership of land. Property generally is governed by customary and modern laws, e.g., Roman-Dutch law in South Africa and Lesotho. These laws coexist and normally are applied concurrently. They often state how, when and by whom the property or resources can be used. Historically, access to and use of biological diversity and resources have been conserved by means of "constructive utilization," such that no one in a society, now or in the future, is obstructed from benefiting from the land.

This practice, however, is beginning to be eroded. This is due to the privatization of property and biological resources encouraged by the logic and economic framework of hyper-capitalism, or neoliberal economic globalization sweeping across Africa. This is promoted by international financial and multilateral institutions as normative and conditional for receiving development support.

Property and bio-commons

In Africa, the land, biological resources and the long history of human use of plants for medicine, food, work, shelter, art and leisure form the basis of people's livelihood. Biodiversity is Africa's richest assets. Its vegetation is characterized by unsurpassed diversity: tropical forests in West Africa; vast endemic Savannah in central Africa; unique flora and fauna in South Africa; and varied desert vegetation in North Africa, Namibia and Botswana. Africa is "home to a quarter of the world's biodiversity, and many of its plant species occur nowhere else on earth."[1]

The African scientist Dr Maurice Iwu observes that due to the diversity of biological resources, Africa contributes immensely to the development of pharmaceuticals and medicines used worldwide. Many modern pharmaceuticals and everyday herbs owe their origin to Africa.[2] Examples of pharmaceuticals that are commonly used in many parts of the world include the anti-leukemia drug *Catharanthus roseus*, and *Rauwolfia vomitoria*, important for its antiarrhythmic and antipsychotic properties. Other biological resources from Africa, sold as phyto-medicines and nutra-ceuticals in many health and or herbal shops throughout the world, include *Agathosma betulina* (buchu oil), *Aloe ferox* (aloe bitters), *Aspalathus linearis* (rooibos tea) and *Cyclopia spp.* (honeybush tea).[3]

In many other parts of the world, indigenous knowledge associated with the conservation and preservation of life for human, animal, plant and other forms of life is found in geographically defined indigenous groups. In Africa, however, this knowledge is commonly found in many households and expressed through the diversity of cultures—cultures of the "more than 2,000 ethnic groups that inhabit the continent."[4] It also finds expression in the use of plants and animals in medicine and agriculture. To a large extent, Africans depend for their sustenance, security and shelter on free and open access to communal and open land and the rich diversity of biological resources.

Africa faces intense pressure to open up its natural resources and markets to transnational corporations and to conform to global trade rules, even while the basic needs of its populations go unmet. Africa has become susceptible to the exploitation, expropriation and hoarding of the biological commons and indigenous knowledge by multinational biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies and their international and local agents.

In order to find new leads and new biological resources, multinational pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, in collaboration with international and local scientists and/or commercial brokers, engage in bio-prospecting and sometimes bio-piracy of biological resources that are known and commonly used by Africans. In many instances, the biological resources and knowledge explored or prospected are not yet commonly known in mainstream Western pharmaceutical companies. After exploring their medicinal or biological usefulness, these companies employ intellectual property rights regimes, such as the agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (hereafter TRIPS), to claim these as private or intellectual property rights. As a result, these biological resources are often removed from use in the public realm. They are converted from being public property accessible to all to the status of private property under monopoly control of one owner or institution.

The problem is that many of the biological products patented by multinational companies from the North are often based on African knowledge and/or resources. In many instances, the companies or individuals who lay claim to their innovation have not even informed or asked for consent from the communities from which they have copied or learned how such plants and plant genetic resources can be used. The search for new products and knowledge sometimes takes place in very unethical ways. For instance, scientists from the North, sometimes in collaboration with local scientists, "hoping to find cures and billions of dollars, have gone to the extent of even taking samples of the blood, hair and saliva of indigenous peoples." African people's "knowledge, their resources and even their bodies are being pirated, yet they receive little or nothing in return."[5]

Privatization

Privatization enforces exclusive claims on public resources, independently of whether these are claims by individuals, groups, non-governmental organizations or corporations. The World Bank (WB) defines privatization as the "transfer of productive assets from the public sector (state) to the private sector under some type of equity sale or contracting out agreement."[6] This includes the sale of resources held in common or administered by states to private companies or individuals. Control and wealth move from the public domain to the private sector, thus expanding the market's scope and power.

In Africa, privatization is encouraged by international financial institutions, such as the WB, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to make economies more hyper-capitalist. Privatization is used as a "condition for the release of aid funds and has been tied to eligibility conditions for debt relief by the WB and the IMF."[7] It is a central component of donor-funded aid programs and features prominently as one of the conditions the WB, IMF and G8 establish as the basis for assisting Africa's development. The privatization of resources in the commons in Africa is not voluntary. It is implemented because of coercion by the rich countries and the international multilateral institutions governing trade, finance and international relations.

Numerous African scholars and institutions, e.g., Tewolde Egziabher (Ethiopia), Miriam Mayet (South Africa), Biowatch and the South African Council of Churches, have pointed out that the intellectual property regimes are being used by multinational companies and institutions or scientists from the North as conduits and instruments for privatizing the commons. A case in point is the establishment of TRIPS, as an internationally binding intellectual property rights regime, and the obligation placed on WTO members to provide patent rights and/or other forms of intellectual property protection on biological resources and life forms. In particular, TRIPS Article 27 compels WTO members to "grant patents on any inventions whether products or processes, in all fields of technology, provided they are new, involve an inventive step and are capable of industrial application."[8] In addition, TRIPS 27.3 (b) requires members to "provide for the protection of plant varieties either by patents, or by an effective *sui generis* system or by any system or by any combination thereof."[9]

The TRIPS agreement only recognizes knowledge that is associated with commerce and grants rights to those applying this knowledge. It undermines knowledge residing in communities, such as indigenous/traditional knowledge, which is generally used to nurture the earth, humanity and other creatures. Such knowledge cannot be subsumed into the market logic. TRIPS falls short of recognizing the importance of communally held resources or indigenous knowledge. Instead, it recognizes, protects and grants intellectual property rights to the creativity of Northern companies, but in many instances, this is based on indigenous knowledge that has been modified to fit Western epistemological ("scientific") paradigms. The TRIPS agreement clearly has a preferential bias toward knowledge that is individualistic and serves the interests of commerce.

Tewolde Egziabher points out that thousands of patents on African plants have been filed in various countries of the North (especially in the USA). Examples include brazzeine berries from Gabon, the Teff grain used in making Injera (bread in Ethiopia), the African soap berry, hoodia cactus from South Africa and many more.

Another controversial section of TRIPS allows the patenting of life forms. This is presented in a very ambiguous manner. Article 27 first states that plants, animals and essential biological processes will not be patented. However, it moves on to require member states to grant patents on microorganisms, nonbiological processes and microbiological process and their products, thus expanding the scope of patents to life forms and plant varieties. When one asks why there is such an artificial distinction between plants, animals and microorganisms, all of which constitute life-forms in TRIPS, one realizes that this is to protect biotechnology. Biotechnology involves isolating and modifying plants and animals. Furthermore, the market for goods and processes produced through biotechnology must be expanded.

Vandana Shiva, an Indian scientist, feminist and ecological justice activist, suggests that intellectual property rights have become the channel and instruments for pirating resources from the so-called Third World. This takes place at numerous levels. The first level is that of resource piracy in which

> biological and natural resources of communities and the country are freely taken, without recognition or permission, and are used to build up global economies.[10]

The second is intellectual and cultural piracy in which

> the cultural and intellectual heritage of communities and the country is freely taken without recognition or permission and is used for claiming IPRs, such as patents and trademarks, even though the primary innovation and creativity, has not taken place through corporate investment.[11]

The third is economic piracy in which

> the domestic and international markets are usurped through the use of trade names and IPRs, thereby destroying local economies and national economies where the original innovation took place and hence wiping out the livelihoods and economic survival of millions.[12]

Privatization also results from processes of bio-prospecting and bio-piracy. Bio-prospecting refers to the search for crude materials, such as plants and animals (including people), to be processed for commercial use. The primary objective is to find useful biological products for new commodities. What takes place in many countries in the South is bio-piracy under the guise of bio-prospecting. In bio-piracy,

> corporations use the folk wisdom of indigenous peoples to locate and understand the use of medicinal plants and then exploit them commercially without acknowledging or even sharing resources with communities or countries where these are taken from.[13]

The metaphor of bio-prospecting is borrowed from the prospecting for gold or oil by colonizing countries. According to Shiva, the word is deceptive because it operates under the pretext that the genetic or biological resources being prospected were "buried unknown, unused and without value" by communities in the South. This overlooks how such local communities have long valued and been using this knowledge. Bio-prospecting is promoted as a good model of relationship between corporations and indigenous communities. But it is actually a sophisticated form of bio-piracy—using intellectual property systems to legitimize the exclusive ownership and control over biological resources, products and processes that non-industrialized cultures have been using for centuries.[14] It is a theft of biological resources and knowledge associated with them under the guise of scientific research, commerce and intellectual property rights protection.

Examples of how Africa's biological resources are privatized

The Basarwa, commonly referred to as the San, are regarded as some of the oldest hunter-gatherer communities in Africa. They have lived in southern

Africa, in particular in the Kalahari desert, for many years. Their ways of life have generally remained unchanged. They have developed extensive knowledge of biological resources beneficial for food, shelter, medicine and other uses, and have traditionally eaten *Xhoba* (the hoodia cactus) to stave off hunger and thirst. After observing how the San communities use this cactus, a scientist from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in South Africa screened it to find what useful agents it contained. Finding an active agent that suppressed appetite, which he referred to as P57, he saw this as a potential cure for obesity.

In 1997, the CSIR licensed the rights to develop and market an anti-obesity drug to a British biotechnology company, which in turn licensed these rights to Pfizer, one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies. The knowledge and use of the hoodia cactus by the San was not acknowledged by the CSIR, nor by the two companies, until the San became aware of the patent and threatened to sue. The bio-prospecting/bio-piracy and thus patenting of the hoodia cactus had occurred without their prior knowledge and informed consent. Even more disconcerting, the CSIR and the two companies claimed that they did not request the consent of the San because they assumed they were extinct.

Another example is the piracy of brazzeine berries from Gabon. A scientist and his team from the University of Wisconsin (USA) claimed and were granted three US government patents on brazzeine berries and the knowledge associated with them.[15] This was based on isolating and genetically modifying the berry proteins. The patenting application and approval process did not reveal that this knowledge and resource were from the people of Gabon.

Rationales for privatizing property and biological resources

From the perspective of economic globalization and private property rights, it is generally thought that property and biological resources in the commons should be enclosed.

> Typically the position defending privatization has called for privatizing those resources which are under non-private control. [In addition] the image behind the privatizing model is that open accessibility of resources [and property] leads to depletive use, to the "tragedy of the commons."[16]

The contention is that if ownership of natural or biological resources is vested in individuals, and others are excluded from using them, they could be used and managed in an ecologically sound and sustainable manner. A similar logic is also used to enforce the privatization of life forms, forests, marines, genetic resources and other natural resources.

The capitalist motivation for privatizing property and, more recently, biological resources and life forms is strongly influenced by the philosopher John Locke. These views have subsequently been expounded upon and systematized by a vast array of liberal scholars and have been embraced in the ideology and policies of international financial institutions managing the global economy. Hans Kelson, Stefan Andreasson, Ulrich Duchrow, Franz J. Hinkelammert and others describe how Locke's theories have shaped and influenced global capitalist notions of property. Locke comprehensively and systematically developed a consistent liberal argument for "joining private property in an inseparable union with freedom."[17] He believed that when people join their labor to nature, this would consequently become their property, a right from which they cannot be alienated.

While liberal theorists from Locke to Friedrich Hayek and their contemporary supporters consider property rights to be an essential component of human freedom, "they fail to consider societal power asymmetries that impede the ability of property rights to protect the interests of the weak and marginalized."[18] This is

> problematic and ignores history […] . Absolute private property tends to concentrate […] it exceeds the consumption level of one who owns it, especially on a life-long basis […] excess tends to be invested in additional property that magnifies.[19]

The assumptions made by liberal economics and intellectual property regimes about the importance of privatizing property and resources must be challenged. Property ought not to be reduced to its commercial value only; it must also include the meaning and contributions that human beings and other creatures accord or receive from it. Market based views regarding property and individualism are antithetical to the worldviews, cultural understanding, ways of life and what is of value to people in the South. Behind the liberal understanding of property is an underlying assumption that property held in common implies that peoples of the South have no concept of human rights, autonomy or a credible understanding of the value of property and biological resources.

The failure of private property to promote the welfare of all is obvious. Excessive concentration of private property reinforces unequal relations between those who have it and those who do not. Privatization and commodification of the commons exacerbate contemporary problems of marginalization and dispossession.[20] Taking away communities' knowledge and resources by corporations that commercialize and transform these into proprietary knowledge and commercial products through the intellectual property rights regimes, has a number of consequences.

- Intellectual property systems and bio-prospecting are weighted against the poor in Africa and in the South in general. Securing a patent on a plant or gene can cost at least USD 1 million in countries of the North. This prevents poor communities from protecting their genetic resources through patents. Challenging patents on bio-prospected plants or knowledge is also costly and prohibits Third-World communities from challenging bio-prospected or bio-pirated knowledge.[21]

- Prohibiting free exchange between individuals and communities also alienates communities that have used bio-diversity for their sustenance. This results in the global monopoly of bio-diversity and its knowledge by commercial biotechnology companies.

- Biological resources are diverted from meeting local needs to feeding international profit and greed, leading to scarcity and price increases.

- The exploitation of indigenous knowledge and plant commons can lead to extinction and threatens to "extinguish farmer expertise in selecting seed and developing locally-adapted strains."[22] Since local farmers in the South often depend on saving seeds or exchanging seeds with neighboring farmers, patents limit their sharing and exchanging of knowledge and resources, thus rendering them dependent on commercial proprietors.[23]

- Emerging markets do not benefit from the resources of their biological commons and indigenous knowledge.

- A culture of dependency is created when communities, which had been sustaining themselves through indigenous knowledge and resources, have to rely instead on commercial interests and products.

- The increasing privatization of Africa's biodiversity threatens "the biological resource base, the livelihoods and rights of the local communities that depend upon it, and the knowledge and technologies they have developed for biodiversity conservation and use."[24]

- Granting intellectual property rights for bio-pirated products robs the cumulative, communal knowledge embedded in such, giving it instead to corporations and governments in the North.

- Bio-piracy occurs because of the inadequacy of Western patent systems and the inherent Western bias against other cultures and knowledge systems.

The implications outlined above highlight the intensity of the problem privatization generates for communities in Africa. They further marginalize communities from broader international relations and from fair and equitable access, use and distribution of resources to enhance humanity's and the earth's life. The poor are unable to compete in the manner that economic globalization requires. Garrick Small cites an analysis showing that every great civilization grew when property was used as a tool for willing solidarity and fell when property and the family decayed into radical individualism.[25]

Ethics ought to be central in how people decide, access, use and govern property. The institution of property is moral insofar as it requires people consciously to manage property in ways that avoid exploiting their neighbors. In contrast, hyper-capitalist globalization "in too many instances, creates, maintains and promotes inequalities between men and women, between poorer and affluent nations and between those who are affluent and those who live in poverty."[26] Economic globalization is based on the survival of the fittest. Its promotion of private property above all other systems of ownership results in the degradation of the lives of those who are poor. Therefore, the unequal distribution of the benefits deriving from property, whether in the form of land or biological resources, has to be transformed.

Biblical perspectives on the use of property

In seeking to bear witness to the message of justice and to transform the unjust distribution of the benefits of property and biological resources, it is imperative for Christian ethics to engage Scripture and other sources of faith. How Scripture relates to the economy and property is still relevant and valid today. Although it ought not to be used in a directly prescriptive manner, Scripture can be creatively engaged for insights on how to view and understand property in ways that promote the fullness of life for all (Jn 10:10). Numerous texts in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament address the themes of property ownership, possession and/or the responsibilities associated with them. Property is first mentioned in Genesis 1:26 where God creates humanity in God's likeness and makes them stewards of the resources of the earth.[27]

In setting rules for property, God's authority is linked to ownership of the property. For example, Leviticus 25:23 states that "[t]he land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants."[28] The idea that the land and its resources belong to God, a gift to people for their sustenance, is also reiterated in Psalm 24, which suggests that no individuals or groups of individuals ought to have absolute ownership of property. This is "because God is the absolute owner of all things and all human beings are responsible to him as stewards."[29] The laws regarding property are also enumerated in Leviticus 25:8-34, which reveals that the effect of the law was to give people the land "while maintaining the permanent common inheritance of the people of God […] [which] ensured long term independence."[30]

The prophets reaffirm a similar point. They protested against property systems that denied life. Duchrow and Hinkelammert point out that

> Amos and Hosea (still in the northern kingdom before its destruction in 722 BCE), Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Ezekiel called for law and justice […] knowing God was identical with creating justice for the poor (Jer 22:16).[31]

Furthermore, in the mid-eighth century in the northern kingdom, the prophet Amos addressed as one of his central themes the plight of farmers and their property.

> They were losing their possessions through seizures, being sold into slavery for excessive debts, the women abused as debt slaves (Amos 2:6-8), the smallholders deceived in credit deals (8:4-7) and made to pay levies and fines […] breaking the laws which were supposed to protect the poor.[32]

The prophets criticized those who amassed wealth at the expense of the poor. The overall message of the Hebrew Scriptures is that property is a gift from God so that all humanity might be nurtured and flourish. It should not be used to monopolize, control and alienate people.

The New Testament also addresses themes related to property and its ownership or use. The early Christians are described as freely choosing to apply their land wealth to the good of the community e.g., Acts 2:44-45. Although there is an affirmation that the land was shared and used for the well-being of all people, there is no "indication of the compulsion found in Leviticus."[33] Duchrow and Hinkelammert suggest that Jesus' views on property, and his option for the poor, are evident in the way he interacted or challenged dominant views on wealth. For example, Jesus asks with regard to the theft and hoarding of resources: "for what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?"(Mk 8:36). The Early Church followed Jesus in its understanding of property; for example, in Acts 4:32-35, members voluntarily share their property. The imperative is to share and use the resources of the earth without subjecting others to need or redundancy.

The New Testament clearly promotes the message that property must not be hoarded; it must be used and shared for the benefit of all. People are not only stewards of God's earth and resources, but also neighbors to each other. Stewardship in this sense implies not mastery over nature, economic forces and society, but solidarity with those who are marginalized from the fullness of life, including from the benefits of property and biological resources. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament and the history of the Early Church we find examples of sharing mutual aid and appealing for justice in the distribution of property and resources. Through its ministry the church has also traditionally shared the imperative for social justice, although at some points in history, it has not done this eloquently or prophetically.

Luther's teachings related to property

Luther did not believe that private property was immoral or wrong:[b] possessions are for sustaining self, family and contributing to people who are in need. Luther's view was that without personal possessions there could be no

[b] HU: "Property" is one of the "classic" institutions within the context of Lutheran social ethics. As an institution it is a medium of interaction and responsibility. The focus is on how to use property and the

stewardship because there would be nothing to give. The imperative for sharing necessitated having private property. “Failure to pass on one’s surplus goods to others renders them into ‘unrighteous mammon’.”[34]

> [B]ecause our possessions are only indirectly ours, we are not to grow attached to them. For when my neighbor is in need, then my property is—now even more so—no longer mine. It is to be set aside from my service to him or her.[35]

Sharing and allowing others to access one’s property should be understood in voluntary terms, rather than as a license for communism. Yet, failing to share in stewardship with others, according to Luther, means failing in the duties and responsibilities of kinship which represents “the greatest inhumanity.”[36] As human beings, we are to help to each other and to share with those who are in need.

In addition to discussions on possessions, Luther addressed the topic of profit and interests on loans; his views on profit were quite strict. Goods should not be sold for more than they were worth. He regarded this as “robbery and theft.”[37] He asserted that

> a trader was to seek only sufficient income to live on from his or her trade. The only amount of profit allowable was what was adequate to reimburse the trader

institutional characteristics of property in different cultures. The distinction between “private” and “public” belongs to the logic of individual rights and contradicts the institutional character of property. Yet, in various constitutions, there is often a mixture of institutional aspects and the logic of individual “private” rights. The task of public ethical discourse is to maintain the very different functions of property. From a Christian perspective, property is not seen as derived from one’s “own” work, but rather is based on cooperation between people and different resources. Property is part of a political citizenship.

Within the Lutheran tradition, “property” is entrusted to people to give them the means for living and supporting themselves and other people. In this sense, it is an institution in which people participate so as not to be dependent on others. Property is primarily something entrusted to human beings, as gifts and goods received from God. Within various constitutions, there are still characteristics stemming from this idea of property as an institution, for instance the rule of social obligation of property. More recently, freedom and property have been connected in a form of “substantial” freedom, as what enables persons to care for themselves and for others to have a chance to be responsible. Property is a medium of care and responsibility; it belongs to us because of its obligation.

> for the cost of his or her goods, and to compensate him or her for the trouble, labor, and risk taken in producing the goods.[38]

Pursuing alternatives

The supremacy today of the market and of individualistic views of private property ought not to overlook other ways of sharing, knowing and distributing property and the benefits associated with land and biological resources. Hypercapitalist ic views which exploit property and biological resources ought to be challenged and critiqued. Other views of property are relevant, credible and promote social and economic justice. Respecting the commons and communal ownership of land, as practiced in many parts of Africa, is also legitimate and facilitates good and sustainable livelihoods for the earth and humanity.

Contextual, black, feminist and postcolonial theologians/ethicists, such as Itumeleng Mosala, James Cone, Cornel West, Musa Dube and Takatso Mofokeng, have affirmed the need for Africans and other communities marginalized, dehumanized, exploited and/or rendered redundant by global capitalism, to resist and critique the supremacy of private property and the commodification of life. Subjugating all of life to the ideology of the market, to profit, to loans and to economies of death should be challenged because it undermines the inherent value of humanity and the earth. Proclaiming God's grace, justice and the imperative of equitable access to property and biological resources arises out of the liberating message of the gospel. On the grounds of justice, we must seek liberation from the exploitative expropriation of resources and the dehumanization and marginalization of people whose survival, substance and life depend on the commons.

It is our responsibility to promote a moral quality of life for all people, including in the socioeconomic and ecological spheres. Although critiquing the supremacy of market-based private property is viewed as peripheral to mainstream theories of how best to distribute resources, alternative perspectives ought to be articulated. If we keep quiet when the land and resources of the poor are taken away, and when such conduct is justified by economic "wisdom," the message of justice as articulated by Jesus and the prophets will be undermined.

Since the expropriation of the public commons and its conversion to private property impact negatively and deny the fullness of life, they should be critiqued and justice sought. The Christian ethic of love, stewardship and sharing affirmed in the Bible reflects "God's love and generosity and points away from the selfishness of greed toward the building of caring communities."[39] Caring and responsible communities thrive and flourish on justice and on sharing political, social, economic and ecological resources in ways that ensure that all human beings live their lives in full. Caring and responsible communities affirm in practice the goodness of God's earth, without seeing its resources as a means to profit maximization. We must affirm diverse approaches that do not inhibit life, but are life supporting for all communities and the earth.

Conclusion

Throughout history, Africans have allowed for the coexistence of multiple ways of using, sharing and caring for the earth, without necessarily promoting one form of use or access to the land as normative. For this reason, diverse means of ownership have continued to exist, and have promoted biological and cultural diversity. This has also enabled subsistence and commercial farming to coexist, without threatening people's lives. This coexistence of diverse views and uses of property is now being threatened by the intensification of economic globalization and its requirement that property that has been held in common be privatized.

A comprehensive analysis of the privatization of property and biological resources shows that it is detrimental to societies that value other forms of property ownership. These different perspectives are culturally, theologically and ethically conditioned. Privatization should not be pursued homogeneously, without due consideration to its impacts. It results in the dispossession and marginalization of Africans from the means of life and survival which have sustained them for generations. Private property is important in as far as it does not alienate, marginalize and obstruct life, but the excessive monopolization of property is unnecessary and ought to be guarded against. Other ways of property ownership, which guard against poverty, alienation and engender social and economic justice ought to be promoted. It is necessary to seek a balance between diverse views of property ownership and access to biological resources.

For reflection or discussion:

How is property understood and regulated in your culture and society? How does this article challenge your previous understandings? What kinds of commons are being privatized in your setting and what are its effects? How do biblical and theological perspectives speak to this?

Notes

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[2] Maurice M. Iwu, "Bioprospecting using African Genetic Resources," in K. E. Hoagland and A. Y. Rossman (eds), *Global Genetic Resources: Access, Ownership, and Intellectual Property Rights* (Washington D.C: Association of Systematic Collections, 1997), p. 181.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Wynberg, *op. cit.* (note 1).

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[6] Refer to www.absa.co.org, "Privatization in South Africa."

[7] Kate Bayliss, *The World Bank and Privatization: A Flawed d Development Tool* (London: Public Services International Research Unitiy, University of Greenwich: 2002), p. 3.

[8] Refer to the World Trade Organization's home page 'The Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights," http://www. WTO.org

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Vandana Shiva, *Protect or Plunder* (New York: ZED Books, 2001), p. 62.

[11] *Ibid*, p. 49.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Kimbrell, *op. cit.* (note 5).

[14] Shiva, *op. cit.* (note 10).

[15] Refer to Action Aid, http://www.actionaid.org.

[16] This is a term used in 1968 by Garrett Hardin to depict the model of over-exploitation.

[17] Kelson, quoted in Markku Oksanen, *Privatizing Genetic Resources: Biodiversity Preservation and Intellectual Property Rights* (Turku: University of Turku, 1998), p. 3.

[18] Stefan Andreasson, *Stand and Deliver: Private Property and the Politics of Global Dispossesion.* Prepared for the Political Studies Association Conference, Loncoln, England, April 2004. Can also be accessed at http://www.psa.ac.uk.

[19] Amarya K. Sen, *Poverty and Famines: Entitlements and Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), quoted in Garrick Small, *Contemporary Problems in Property in the Light of the Economic Thought of St Thomas Aquinas* (Sydney: Instituto Universitario Virtual Santo Tomas, 2003), p. 4. Can also be accessed at http://www.acquinas.net.pdf.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] The implications of privatization of commons are adapted from, LenkaBula, “Bioprospecting and intellectual property rights, the new form of colonization of Africa-an ethical study,” unpublished paper.

[22] Refer to http://www.sociallistfuture.org.uk.

[23] See Per Anderson, “Agriculture, Food, and Responsible Biotechnology,” in this publication.

[24] Wynberg, *op. cit.* (note 1).

[25] Small, *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 8.

[26] Puleng LenkaBula, "Jubilee at the Turn of the 21st Century and the African Woman," in John Mihvc (ed.), *Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative*, *Jubilee*, *Wealth and the Market* (Toronto: Canadian Ecumenical Initiative), p. 121.

[27] Garrick Small, "A Christian Understanding of Property: Spiritual Themes underlying Western Property," http:// www.business2.unisa.edu.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Bela Harmati, *Christian Ethics and the Question of Property. LWF Studies* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1982), p. 10.

[30] Small, *op. cit.* (note 27).

[31] Ulrich Duchrow and Franz J. Hinkelammert, *Property for People*, *not for Profit* (London: ZED Books, 2004), p. 15.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Small, *op. cit.* (note 27).

[34] M. B. G. Motlhabi, *Christian Social Ethics* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2003) p. 47.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Wolterstorff, in Motlhabi, *op. cit.* (note 34), p. 48.

[37] Theodore G. Tappert, *Selected Writings of Martin Luther 1523-1526* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), p. 88.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[39] James Childs quoted in Puleng LenkaBula, "Justice and Fullness of Life in the Context of Economic Globalization: An African Woman's Perspective," in *Reformed World*, *That They May Have Life in Fullness*, vol. 52, no. 4 (December 2002), p. 169.

Ethical Deliberation at the Intersections

"Renewing of Our Minds" through Moral Deliberation

Per Anderson

A new sense of church?

Throughout the world, the diverse situations, arrangements and aspirations of communities vary greatly. These particular conditions are integral and necessary dimensions of life in God's world. This life is marked by global integration and interdependence, daily cultural interaction and increasing novelty in the life and thought of almost all peoples.

What then does it mean to be the church? How shall we conceive of its participation in this world? One way of doing so is in terms of the church as a "community of moral deliberation."[1] This conception of the church can be grounded in important elements of biblical and Lutheran insights. It is consistent with the basic "grammar" of Lutheran Christian life, as highlighted in this book. Although this conception of the church does not find explicit expression in the Lutheran Confessions, community of moral deliberation as an element or mark of the church is indeed a Lutheran possibility.

For the sixteenth-century Reformers, God created the church for the Sabbath; Sabbath is for knowing and worshipping God through the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. While the Reformers recognized that the church is in some respects a worldly organization, it is "principally an association of faith and the Holy Spirit in the hearts of persons." The goods of the church serve the inner person and bring that person into the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which is "the righteousness of the heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit."[2] The Reformers did not talk about the church as an assembly of moral discernment[a] and responsible action. At the same time, moral insight and initiative are worldly goods which people of faith need if they are to serve the neighbor through their callings in the world.

[a] HU: The church's preaching and teaching should undergird this moral discernment.

The idea of the church as a community of moral deliberation goes beyond the classical Lutheran conceptions of church and world. It does not assume a condition of sixteenth-century German Christendom, where Christian ideas and values governed public life.[b] However, this new idea of church draws deeply on core principles of Lutheran and Pauline biblical thought, adapted to a multicultural global village.

Contemporary postmodern understandings of culture suggest that the church can be a place of intercultural deliberation about God's will for the world. Further, consistent with classical Lutheran ideas about vocation, moral deliberation provides a social practice (or a calling) that may be a faithful witness and response to the leading of God in the world that God graciously shares with humanity. In many contexts today, a community of moral deliberation may be a promising model for just, participatory and inclusive human community. It may be a new and needed practice for humans to cooperate with God's acting in our world. Such may be the gift of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of Christians today.

Deliberation as imperative and possibility

The world today needs dialogues of mutual understanding, creativity and insight. Life in an interactive and interdependent world needs less isolation, less competition and less hostility. It needs more commonality of conviction, more routine cooperation and more creative developments. It needs billions of people with attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills and behavior to talk together constructively. While these culturally constructed traits have always been needed, there seems to be more urgency today. The possibility of a sustainable human future may turn upon the mass cultivation of communicative practices like moral deliberation in community. More than ever perhaps, the world needs peoples of conviction and capacity to talk together constructively. Yet, for various reasons, the prospects in the world for such deliberative community seem doubtful, if not beyond human reach.

[b] HU: There has never been a "Christian" society in this sense. Luther wrote many of his texts because a Christian ethic was not being followed. Thus, his two-fold governance theory was developed because there was a need for good (not necessarily Christian) government.

Modern conceptions of "culture" have encouraged people to think that they share little, if anything, in common that might be the basis for open, mutually transformative engagement and discovery. In modern Western thought, human cultures have been conceived as "qualitatively distinct incommensurables."[3] The boundaries that differentiate cultures and social groups tend to be shared and sharp. Cultures and social groups are independent wholes that tend to determine their inhabitants' characters. When cultures are conceived as "self-contained and clearly bounded units, internally consistent and unified wholes of beliefs and values simply transmitted to every member of their respective groups as principles of social order," intercultural communication becomes an encounter with others and difference always surpasses identity.[4]

While this account of culture has some explanatory power, recent "postmodern" thinking about culture complicates modern conceptions, viewing them as not sufficiently attentive to the dynamic character of cultural systems. Cultures are always changing as each generation puts its marks on received meanings. Cultures are not the sharply bounded and consistent wholes that modern theory has postulated. Members of these social groups do not all believe the same things nor follow a common social order. This is so because cultures and social groups are not always contiguous. For example, people move into new social groups, bring their culture along and assimilate into a new one. Through electronic media, culture is communicated across social group boundaries. That is, social group boundaries are porous, and so are cultures. Cultures "are simply not distributed in space as the possessions of different social groups."[5] Rather, they are generated, shared and transformed by various processes of exchange and connection. Intercultural communication is not an anomaly in human affairs. It is commonplace and generative. If in modern thought humans are viewed as culturally determined, in postmodern thought humans are interculturally constituted.

Assuming that postmodern thinking about culture is more adequate today, three implications follow for moral deliberation. First, groups within or across cultures can engage in conversation without necessarily reaching agreement. Modern thinking about culture emphasizes the consensus-building function of culture and society; this is necessary in order to live together. From a postmodern perspective, societies do not require such agreement, but they do need to be in conversation about their identity, even if they cannot arrive at consensus. Culture operates by binding people together in ways that include significant differences in belief and practice.

Second, intercultural deliberation can be substantive and mutually transformative without loss of cultural distinctiveness. What moves from one culture to another is appropriated in new ways and thus transformed.

> What is important for cultural identity is the novel way cultural elements from elsewhere are now put to work, by means of such complex and ad hoc relational processes as resistance, appropriation, subversion, and compromise.[6]

Third, intercultural ethical deliberation appears to be an open possibility for Christians with one another and with non-Christians. Christian communities have their distinctive characteristics and sources of identity. But Christians always participate in larger cultural systems and bring such into their faith communities. They borrow from these systems and use them in new ways, as some of the articles in this volume have exemplified. Christian communities are hybrids, borrowing aspects from non-Christian cultures that are transformed in the process. Intercultural ethical deliberation is an open possibility when humans cross cultural boundaries and relate creatively and openly to others. Christians have done so since the time of the first believers.

Christian identity as conversation with God

If the above is the case, then in what sense do Christians share a common cultural identity? The question is important not only for the church catholic but also for specific denominations, especially when they struggle with differences over matters of faith and life. For example, in several church bodies in North America today, there are serious tensions over the morality of homosexuality and same-gender unions—with no consensus in sight after years of study and debate. Some wonder whether they can still claim to be "Christian" while being divided over these questions. What is the source of their communal identity if they can no longer agree on what has been a "core" moral teaching?[c]

While this important question cannot be fully addressed here, a proposal for Christian intercultural ethical deliberation needs to take a position be-

[c] HU: Why should there be core moral teachings? Christian identity is different from moral identity. We have to be critical of moralizing tendencies.

cause serious deliberation presupposes some sort of shared identity between the participants. If wider cultures and internal diversity are operative in Christian communities, what is their substantial identity? What, if anything, do they hold in common? If very little, can they deliberate across such differences?

As Hans Ulrich and other authors in this book propose, the Lutheran answer to this question should be theological. Christian faith is constituted by awareness of God's actions upon the world and of trust in God's promises. Christian life should be ordered to relate to the world as God relates to the world and all of creation. Moral deliberation, therefore, begins by asking what God is doing and seeks to formulate a fitting response. As the North American theologian H. Richard Niebuhr proposed, "God is acting in all actions upon you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to [God's] actions."[7] Such awareness and response to God is what Paul means in Romans 12:2 when he writes: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Understood theologically, moral deliberation becomes a theological conversation engendered by God, who shares the world with humanity and invites humanity to cooperate with God's creative action in the structures of life. Through the work of the Holy Spirit and the gift of faith, God gathers communities of those who seek to be transformed by God so that they may live together and cooperate with God in these diverse contexts where God is present and active. A Lutheran grammar of ethics calls upon Christians to appreciate their radical, continual dependence on God and the conditioned, contextual character of God's action.

Christians must, therefore, be ever attentive to the world and open to the "renewing" of their minds. Moral deliberation, as critical Christian discourse in the presence of God, may be one way in which the Holy Spirit renews the minds of the faithful. This understanding of God and of God's relation to the world suggests an answer to the above question of identity. Christian identity originates in God's gracious actions. Such capacity to discern and respond to God's actions in the world is assumed in what the Lutheran Reformers call the "mutual conversation and consolation of the brothers and sisters."[8] For the Reformers, Christian community is one means of God's grace—along with the gospel, baptism, the Lord's Supper and the power of the keys. Although the emphasis here is on the renewal that comes with the forgiveness of sins, the Reformers are clear that God is present in the critical communication and solidarity of the faithful, working through the Holy Spirit to engender "spiritual discernment."[9] For this Lutheran view, cultural plurality can be an asset for the renewing of community. It can challenge idolatry—being conformed to the present world—by disrupting the human tendency to be self-absorbed and unmindful of God. However, plurality becomes a problem when Christians cannot or will not be an open and free people of mutual conversation and consolation, of dialogue and solidarity, as they search together for what God wills.

Because of the creative role plurality can play in the permanent renewing of the Christian mind, Christian identity does not mean that Christians must share a set of common conceptions. While they do share distinctive authoritative texts (Scripture, creeds, confessions) and practices (sacraments, ministry), what these mean and how they are used vary beyond any meaningful claim to a shared culture or way of life. However, what distinguishes Christians from other communities is the way in which the received tradition takes central significance in the Christian community. This becomes the focus of ongoing interpretation and testing in dialogue with the lived experience of the faithful. Christian identity has more to do with "shared concerns"[d] than with "shared convictions." These concerns are expressed and cultivated when Christians communicate about the shape that life should take in cooperation with God.

Christian identity, then, is a matter of being open to being renewed. Christians share an identity when they share a commitment to do what is "good and acceptable and perfect." They claim this identity because they understand the futility of human efforts to grasp God's will, and yet they continue searching. Moral deliberation in our intercultural world constantly reminds us of the final inadequacy of what humans are able to discern. Communal conversation and critical testing are acts of faith in the free and living God. As Tanner observes:

> Christian identity in such a case does not revolve around commitment to particular conceptions but suggests allegiance to the object or subject matter of the claims or forms of action at issue. Making those claims or forms of action themselves the center of one's life apart from any particular specification of their meaning can be interpreted theologically as an effort, in short, to make God, rather than some human account of God, the center of one's

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[d] HU: As well as with common practices, like preaching the Word of God and listening to it.

> life. Doing otherwise, making Christian identity a matter of allegiance to certain meanings, threatens to put human ideas about God in the place that only God should fill in human life.[10]

North American interpretations of a Pauline community of moral deliberation

If moral deliberation is a central and essential Christian practice, like listening to the Word or praying, it should be interpreted and tested. It needs to be attuned to cultural particularity and the needs of communities. The process of creating culturally sensitive theories and strategies for communities of moral deliberation has begun in some Lutheran settings.[11] In North America, David Fredrickson and Martha Stortz have each recently offered proposals for deliberative practice based on Pauline thought and Lutheran sacramental thinking.[12] Both theologians seek to challenge churches to embrace moral deliberation as a counter-cultural practice, especially in North America today, where Christians tend to be averse to conflict and nonjudgmental to the point of repressive toleration.[13] As a result, Christians fail to face some of the most pressing moral questions in their context. In different ways, Fredrickson and Stortz seek to challenge North American Lutherans to act upon their claims about Word and sacrament.

In North America, where the church is a private voluntary association within civil society, the church as a community of moral deliberation tends to be conceived in congregational terms. Although North American denominations like the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) adopt corporate social policies and advocate corporately in the public arena, deliberation about these policies begins in congregations.[14] Existing methods and strategies for moral deliberation focus upon asset or capacity building within congregations. Further, public consciousness about religion in this society, with its strong strains of individualism and egalitarianism, tends to favor and privilege local assemblies of believers.

For Fredrickson, Paul's letters to the churches in Corinth, Philippi and Rome offer a model of moral deliberation that speaks powerfully to societies where democratic and voluntaristic social groups are increasingly challenged by internal and external diversity. In North America, people tend to seek communities of "like-minded" people and to advocate tolerating difference outside their preferred groups.[15] Consequently, significant diversity within "a church of choice" is deeply threatening to the congregation. For Fredrickson, the situations of Pauline churches bore important similarities to this kind of context. By all accounts, the Pauline churches were heterogeneous in several respects: they were independent, short on traditions and with disagreements about faith and life.

Paul's responses to these churches, according to Fredrickson, are an important model because Paul consistently avoids the temptation to control chaos by imposing his authority or a local hierarchy. Paul is a radical democrat who draws on Greco-Roman political thought to envision a participatory church charged to work out its own response to God as it tests received tradition, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.[e]

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul understands the local church to be like an assembly that governed the Greek city. A crucial feature is free speech that seeks consensus through persuasion among equals. When people speak freely, they speak the truth, as an act of integrity and respect for peers. Paul wants believers to speak freely among themselves, thus provoking the need to amend the Greek model: for Paul, those typically excluded from the Greek assembly—women, slaves, foreigners and children—are included in the church. The Spirit gives free speech to all of Christ's disciples. The church is a community of open discourse. The presence of the Spirit also frees this discursive community from the "letter" or written code. The letter "kills" the free speech of the community, while the Spirit gives "life" to community deliberation. Freedom from the rule of the letter follows from confidence that the Spirit transforms believers into the image of Christ. For Paul, through free, face-to-face encounter with other believers, Christians are transformed into the image of Christ. As the Lutheran Reformers said later, the freedom and free speech of the church as a diverse community is, for Paul, a means of grace.

In addressing the Philippian church (Phil 1:27-2:18), Paul continues to encourage inclusive deliberation and exhorts this church to engage in "testing the things that really matter." For Fredrickson, Paul upholds a contextual, communal view of moral insight. Received tradition and the community's opinions need to be examined, evaluated and revised as the entire community sees fit.

[e] PLB: Whose voice is given attention in this deliberation? In South Africa, there is the danger of deliberation being reduced to moralism, for example, telling women what they should or should not do. Some views need to be held accountable. For example, we cannot tolerate views that perpetuate violence. What inhibits the fullness of life for ourselves and our neighbors must be named.

Political and moral matters are for the entire church to determine. This activity requires love, knowledge and insight. Once again, Paul is confident in the power of Christ to engender this kind of community.

Freedom from the letter and the free speech that Paul commends to the Corinthians implies testing what does and does not matter in the conduct of the community. In the Christ hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians (Phil 2), the community is exhorted to take on the mind of Christ and engage one another in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Christ seeks to share his divine equality with humanity by taking on the form of a servant. Christ seeks to elevate humanity to equality with God and to model the extension of freedom and equality that Christians should show to one another. Here, as in the letters to the Corinthians, Paul emphasizes communal transformation into the mind of Christ as the key to right living before God—an ethic of character formation rather than a moral code ethic. God is at work in believers, engendering good character so that the community can work out what it discerns to be pleasing to God.

In Romans 12-15, Paul continues to emphasize and define Christ's common mind which the church must cultivate in order to engage and bear differences in the church. The call to be a community of response to God's action does not necessarily result in communal consensus. Some members of the community may not wish to test the ideas and values of the church or the wider world. Some are "weak" in faith, and others "strong." Mutual love is required in order to sustain conversation and to live with differences. Unity is possible while struggling over conflicting claims. For Paul, that unity resides in God's giving to the church the mind of Christ.

In Romans, Paul also takes up the question of the church's relationship to society. It is obvious that the church cannot speak to society with one voice. The freedom and free speech of the church will nourish and protect many voices—all equally legitimate in the church. But as a community of faithfulness and respect amid differences, the church can be a model for the wider world. It witnesses to real unity in Christ as it seeks consensus between multiple points of view. When members of the church are mutually dedicated to the freedom of others, strong bonds of social cooperation and solidarity can result.

On the basis of the above interpretation, Paul's theology and ethics of a community of moral deliberation are relevant today. Paul understands moral deliberation as a theological activity. Through the Holy Spirit, God is a part of the church's conversation as well as the subject of the conversation (Rom 12:2). Second, Paul assumes that Christians in communal assembly and deliberation are a transformed community. They have received the mind of Christ and no longer think and act as they did apart from Christ. Third, Paul advocates a contextual Christian ethic, which requires communal participation. Paul knows that believers can be deeply divided about God's will; he does not despair that some communal testing may not result in consensus. For Paul, unity in Christ is the unity that matters and that sustains the church. Moral consensus is secondary and derivative of unity in Christ and the freedom that Christ brings. Paul, it seems, would not share the anxiety and despair of many Christian churches today about moral unity. Rather, he would challenge these churches to cultivate community in diversity.

God's work makes all the difference between chaos and conversation. Diverse and disputing Christians enjoy a unity that comes from God. For Paul (and Luther as well), God's grace is needed and sufficient. But what is this unity in Christ really like? What might it mean for a community to share "the mind of Christ"? Clearly, questions such as these still need to be addressed by churches.

Martha Stortz sheds light on this by reflecting on the meaning of baptism, in dialogue with Paul. Her context is a North American church that for several years has been seeking to develop a shared teaching about homosexuality. In light of continuing strong differences, Stortz invokes Christians' "primary" identity, as received in baptism. To be sure, believers have identities—gender, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation—that inform their beliefs and values and that must be included in conversations around Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Yet, Stortz is convinced "that these conversations will be different if Christians begin with their primary identity."[16] Further, following the Pauline norm that Christian discourse should be conducted in a way that mirrors God's grace toward humanity, she contends that baptism implies a common response among Christians about whose they are. "Identity is a matter of belonging. Who they are depends upon whose they are."[17]

Through baptism, people belong to the body of Christ; this community ought to become the primary point of reference for all moral reflection. In other words, baptism involves death and rebirth—death to idolatries and rebirth to Christ-centered community. The principal moral question now becomes, What sort of behavior befits members of the body of Christ? The question here is communal and reflects mindfulness about Christ. The question guides every life situation. Accordingly, moral life essentially becomes public; sexual behavior cannot be privatized or withdrawn from communal accountability. As also noted by Fredrickson, moral life is situational.

Stortz also draws upon Paul: the identity and belonging of baptism provide a norm for living in cooperation with God. She makes a convincing case that a church that takes baptism seriously will have a distinctive and more faithful conversation about divisive and contested matters. It should not, in Paul's terms, be "conformed to this world." The invocation of baptism should help to create and sustain communities of moral deliberation.

This turning to baptism has a further implication: baptism situates moral life within the universal body of Christ. Stortz's idea of "primary identity" enlarges the Christian's moral world beyond the local congregation. While most congregational settings involve some intercultural dynamics, baptism into the universal body of Christ means that Christian moral deliberation is always global as well as local. Some moral questions are mainly local and without complex intercultural dimensions. Although Paul exhorts the churches he addresses to be mindful and supportive of other churches, Paul's ecclesial ethics are local. In our globalized era, conceptions of moral deliberation need to be global as well. If Christians took their baptisms as seriously as Stortz proposes, they would be led into deliberation with others in ways that, God willing, would be renewing.

Toward renewing our minds

We have claimed here that God is the ultimate source and subject of the community of moral deliberation. Christian deliberation is always already theological. Further, communal conversation and consolation around faith and life are the work of the Holy Spirit, creating and sustaining the church. The church is a spiritual assembly of Word and sacrament. It is also, as Paul believed, a political and moral assembly of critical consciousness and creative action. In many churches, adopting such a theological vision of the church as a community of moral deliberation is a necessary first step toward becoming one. Many will not join such community until they see and embrace this idea of church as God's will. Here we have offered an essentially Pauline account of its biblical and confessional authenticity.

Given that today almost all social decisions have an intercultural character, becoming communities of moral deliberation is an important matter for Christians and all people of good will. What is the nature and meaning of cultural plurality? Can persons who do not share common cultural identity understand one another? If so, can they form moral consensus? People today have diverse experiences around these questions. To varying degrees and in different ways, intercultural conversation is not new, but the challenges today are urgent and daunting. Such deliberation is occurring in civil society initiatives around the world today,[18] and Christian communities have good reason to welcome and join this global, intercultural discourse.

We have not addressed here the practical, "how to" questions of moral deliberation, which is related to "capacity building," "social capital" development, or "asset" development.[19] Authentic and productive moral deliberation depends on the formation of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills and behavior.[20] Most Christians need help in order to integrate communal deliberation into the routines of their lives so that it might become a daily ritual—like prayer or Bible reading. In some contexts today, people of faith do not need to be convinced that the church should be deliberative; they need and want the church to be a place of safety, civility and wisdom, where differences can be engaged. Different kinds of deliberation around the world have much to teach the church, and the church has much to learn from others in society.[f] Through such practices, may the Holy Spirit renew the mind of the church.

For reflection or discussion:

Do you find "the church as a community of moral deliberation" to be a helpful concept? What are its strengths and its drawbacks? What are some examples or models of how this is already occurring in your context? What is needed for this to become more regularly practiced in your setting?

[f] From a presentation by Paul Isaak of Namibia at the LWF North American consultation, March 2005.

> "Luther's Table Talks remind me of the African traditional communal problem solving, where communities come together in search for consensus on matters of collective interest such as human sexuality, marriage, circumcision, nomination of a chief, organization of ploughing, harvesting or hunting. Such gatherings are called by various names. African *padare* in its most popular form functions as a way of coming together around the fire to teach and search, within the community, for new human values that will promote love, justice and peace. It functions as a way of resolving social conflicts and tensions and, for that reason, embodies reconciliatory and healing powers."

HU: In the German context, it may be better to speak of "ethical deliberation," because what is "moral" (e.g., in a Kantian sense) is not a matter of deliberation but of rational insight. Per's paper reflects the US context in which the role of Lutheran churches has not been public in the same way as they have

Notes

[1] “Community of moral deliberation” is a social teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). See “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” a Social Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, adopted at the Churchwide Assembly, August 1991, pp. 5-6.

[2] Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Articles VII and VIII, Sections 5, 13 (1531), in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

[3] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), p. 30.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.

[7] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 126.

[8] Smalcald Articles, Article III/4 (1537), in Kolb and Wengert, *op. cit.* (note 2).

been and still are in Germany, where they are involved in public discussions, e.g., in connection with legislation on stem cell research. Also culturally different is the meaning and structure of the “public arena.” Reflections on the church and the public sphere have to be differentiated in relation to different contexts. In the German Lutheran tradition, “congregational” means public.

ACs: I think this concept of the church as “a community of moral deliberation” can be raised only in an open society like the United States. In more traditional societies, like ours in Central and Eastern Europe, it is very difficult to begin a public process of moral deliberation, even though we read the same Gospels. The reason for this is that for us to be Christian is never simply a biblical or confessional matter, but a set of related identities, social, national, political as well as cultural. These identities are taken for granted and may har dly be questioned or even reflected on in a process of communal search. Thus, our discussions are less open-ended deliberative efforts than they are certain rituals in which everyone affirms what s/he is expected to affirm; so that the whole community reaffirms its identity and celebrates its unique continuity.

[9] Karen L. Bloomquist and Ronald W. Duty, "Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues," a teaching resource of the Division for Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, August 1999, p. 4.

[10] Tanner, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 126.

[11] See, for example, Ronald W. Duty, "Talking Together as Christians Cross-culturally," a teaching resource of the Division for Church in Society, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, September 2004.

[12] David Fredrickson, "Pauline Ethics: Congregations as Communities of Moral Deliberation," in Karen L. Bloomquist and John R. Stumme (eds), *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), pp. 115-129; Martha Ellen Stortz, "Rethinking Christian Sexuality: Baptized in the Body of Christ," in James M. Childs Jr. (ed.), *Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pp. 59-79.

[13] Alan Wolfe, *One Nation, After All: What Middle-class Americans Really Think About God, Country, Family, Racism, Welfare, Immigration, Homosexuality, Work, The Right, The Left, and Each Other* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), pp. 275-286.

[14] See, for example, Bloomquist and Duty, *op. cit.* (note 9); Duty, *op. cit.* (note 11); Joseph Phelps, *More Light, Less Heat: How Dialogue Can Transform Christian Conflicts into Growth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

[15] Robert Bellah *et al*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 71-75.

[16] Stortz, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 59.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[18] See, for example, the Earth Charter movement, at: www.earthcharter.org .

[19] See, for example, Robert D. Putnam and Lewis M. Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

[20] Bloomquist and Duty, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp. 2-3.

Ethical Discernment in a Global Communion

Karen L. Bloomquist

We will not attempt to summarize or draw conclusions as to what should be the position, Lutheran or otherwise, on the various ethical topics discussed in this book. These topics were intended to exemplify some of the cultural, historical, religious, moral and other social factors that intersect in relation to a topic, rather than fully to develop ethical arguments, drawing upon the usual ethical sources and methodologies. Readers have been encouraged (e.g., with the questions after each article) to reflect on how they would continue these discussions within their own contexts.

At the intersections

The many intersections referred to in this book are occasions for further reflection where we need to stop and ask what is going on, and what formative values, worldviews, histories, religious sensitivities, social patterns and taboos are at stake. What happens when these encounter other cultural perspectives and influences? What power dynamics are at work, and how should they be dealt with? How do deeply rooted cultural sensitivities respond to what is experienced as an overpowering intrusion of external influences? Or, from another viewpoint, how can such influences challenge or transform what is harmful and destructive to life in these cultural realities?

In other words, we need to pause and appreciate the differences at stake, and not prematurely characterize or try to find a unifying common denominator. Furthermore, we need to recognize that at these intersections many different kinds of dynamics are interacting with one another, so that sometimes this feels like a situation of traffic congestion without a clear signal indicating how to move forward.

So where does this leave Christians who through the church are united in a common profession of faith which they seek to live out in the world? The catholicity of the church implies not only local particularities, but also what moves beyond or cuts across the particularities. We profess that God's Spirit is what holds us together as a communion of churches, rather than our agreement on ethical matters. But we sometimes doubt that this power is sufficient to hold us together in the midst of our real differences, based as they are on economics, geography, political ideologies, gender, age and various cultural factors. Conflict over ethical questions or, out of fear of such, avoiding such questions, has too often been the case. Not only is this so within our highly diverse global communion of churches, but also within individual churches.

As has been repeatedly emphasized here, a Lutheran approach to ethics–in common with many other religious traditions—asks what will help or harm the neighbor. But in our pluralistic world, the neighbor increasingly embodies significant cultural differences, making it difficult to generalize as to what is right, good or fitting. Questions immediately arise such as, Right according to whose criteria? Good for whom, in which culture? Many ethical positions, previously assumed to be universal, have increasingly been challenged, especially because of the cultural imperialism with which they are associated. In addition, in areas where Christianity is growing the fastest, including in many Lutheran churches, Enlightenment premises simply cannot be assumed. Instead, the ready compatibility between premodern biblical views and people's own views and practices today is assumed, so that the Bible becomes an unquestioned rule book for the moral life—no other discussion needed. Such tendencies have been called into question throughout this book.

The need for cultural sensitivity and tolerance has sometimes been emphasized so much that a kind of moral relativism may seem to be implied. Cultural differences can be accentuated to a degree that some wonder whether there is any longer a common tradition, Lutheran or otherwise, that is not primarily expressive of a certain culture (and resisted when it is imposed upon others). Abstract, presumably universal, perspectives are appropriately viewed with suspicion. The point is not to come up with the "universal" Lutheran answers to ethical dilemmas. Nor is it to leave matters in a postmodern sea of values freely chosen according to one's preference or situation. Both poles are inconsistent with a Lutheran grammar.

Thus it might be asked, Can there be global ethical positions, even within a confessional family, that take cultural differences seriously, but do not foreclose arriving at clear ethical judgments? The LWF, for example, has made numerous public statements on an array of political situations around the world in ways that cut across cultural contexts.[1] The abstract, universal language of human rights has often permeated these statements, even though this book has implicitly questioned some of the assumptions and the adequacy of such emphases. The LWF has generally not spoken out on ethical questions that are more deeply permeated with local cultural and political sensitivities. Instead, this is left to take place on more local levels. But is that sufficient within a communion of churches? Are we maturing to the stage when critical engagement across cultural terrains can be ventured, because of the theological grounds on which we stand as a communion?[2]

These grounds include a deep-rooted confidence in the God who promises, forgives and can be depended on, no matter how morally confused we might be. It is not our moral clarity that ultimately matters. Instead, we live by a grammar that is permeated with hope, comfort and confidence, based on who God is and what God promises. Thus we are empowered through God's Spirit to be the body of Christ in God's one world, seeking to discern what to do, and challenging others to do likewise.

Theological ethics involves reflective critique of much that is associated with culture, of the ethos or morality that is taken for granted. "Culture" cannot be the last word. Cultural assumptions and practices need to be critiqued when they go against basic theological convictions, such as when anyone's God-given dignity or equality is violated. But such ethical critique cannot assume to be neutral or without its own cultural (and philosophical) baggage. In this sense, it is crucial that ethics be done inter-culturally, preferably between more than two cultures.[3] Through our culture alone we may be unable to see, much less critique, what is unjust or otherwise inconsistent with basic theological/ethical convictions. Deliberation with those coming from different cultures enables us to identify and sift out important areas of overlapping consensus from factors that are more peripheral, no matter how important they may seem to be in a given society. It is through such deliberation that we (and at least some of our ethical sensitivities) can be transformed through the power of God's Spirit at work among us. This involves not only a "renewal of our minds," but of our perceptions, feelings, will and actions.

In other words, what happens at the intersections, and how we relate to one another there, is of theological as well as ethical importance. Content and process cannot be kept apart, but are deeply interwoven. Focusing only on procedural matters (e.g., how to go about ethical deliberation) apart from the content is inadequate for the church's ethical discernment.

In meeting with actual persons rather than generalized others, we encounter "all that belongs to them as embodied, affective, suffering creatures, their memory and history, their ties and relations to others."[4] Such encounters can provide the basis for ethical commitments and action, based on moral norms of equity and complementary reciprocity. Out of this may emerge something like an "interactive universalism"[5]—not moral guides imposed on others, but the emergence of norms for continuing relationships in ways that respect differences and lead us to join together with others to challenge unjust social practices and structures. In the process, cultures are likely to be transformed, in light of central faith convictions.

Some concluding observations from this study process

How then might we move from practices of moral deliberation that have been developing over some years in one member church (see the previous article) toward practices appropriate within a global communion of churches? How realistic is the Pauline ideal or the contemporary notion of the church as a "community of moral deliberation," not only within local congregations, but within a global communion of churches?

How to keep everyone in the conversation is an ongoing challenge, especially in settings where some of the participants predominantly come from highly verbal, analytical cultures and educational backgrounds. Western forms of discourse still tend to dominate in this book, as well as in the discussions that led up to it. Dominant, privileged discourses usually prevail over those of oppressed, submerged discourses, which have only begun to be heard or understood. For some, the personal and/or cultural tendency is to remain silent or to drop out of the process, especially when their perspectives or sensitivities are overlooked.

Bringing in our much different cultural viewpoints from the prevailing pattern tends to be done in polite ways. Without much further trust and relationship building, this is not likely to get at the heart of the matter, where sharp, difficult to communicate sensitivities still hold sway. These are very difficult to talk about. We have been formed morally in ways that are deeply embedded in us, in ways of which we may be unaware, yet that are reflected in how we react to and approach current ethical challenges.

It has been difficult to reflect explicitly on the many ways we have been formed by our cultures and experiences (although this often occured in informal conversations within the group). There is still much beneath the surface, glimpsed at points, but not fully comprehended. The real driving factors have largely still been left unspoken. To respond critically to what another is saying or expressing nonverbally can be risky and difficult. Also, how we engage our differences, or do not, reflects cultural (as well as individual personality) differences. Direct engagement, particularly when it involves critique, is not the preferred way in many cultures. But silence does not necessarily imply agreement.

Thus, the fallback is to lapse into abstractions that pass over the actual embedded realities. Perhaps, at times, the authors have leapt too quickly into engaging categories of a Lutheran grammar with their respective areas of ethical concern. Finding intersections with an authoritative tradition—although protesting any authoritarian misuse of such—may be an easier route than the more complicated exercise of delving more deeply into the intersections of cultural differences today.

The controlling discourse includes words and logic of a Lutheran grammar, which each of the writers have engaged to some extent in relation to their topic. Much could be said about how this grammar itself arose out of a certain (sixteenth-century German) context and has too often been imposed on other contexts. Some of that tendency may still be reflected in this book. But what is also conveyed is a sense of how the grammar opens up common touchstones for approaching ethics that are at the same time both contextual and that feel and are recognizably "Lutheran."

The grammar must be filled out, enfleshed and embodied in particular situations, but is not itself without substance or content. The grammar communicates a deep and living sense of God's active favor toward us—as promise, grace and living Word. This dynamic presence of God is what activates us to contextualize, and thus bear witness to the Triune God in the midst of the urgent ethical challenges we face. Preaching, worshipping and other practices of the church "form" us for this. Ethics is about how to live as God's creatures, rather than as objects of control by others, and thus to make the changes or create the conditions through which this can occur.

Neighbor-love[6] is a major thread woven through these articles. It is also what motivates us to give attention to the cultural and other intersections, as ethically necessary. A Christian ethic is incomplete if neighbor-love is not somehow central, because of how key this is biblically. Also, we need the perspectives of the neighbor because of the partiality of our own perspectives. Others are essential in enabling a way of moving beyond the cultural and related particularities of who we are. As an extension of neighbor-love, ethical discernment is inadequate unless it is continually reminded of what matters, and how matters look or feel from the viewpoint of those whose assumptions and life situations are most different from our own. Neighbor-love is not toleration, but at times, being confronted by those who challenge "my" (or my culture's) core moral values. This is a far cry from moral relativism. It is a spiritual process of being transformed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, as we engage with the neighbor.

Therefore, any process of ethical discernment necessarily requires humility and care, not only to avoid giving unnecessary offense, but because of ***how*** we interact with one another, especially across all the disparities dividing us. It is itself part of the witness of the interactive body of Christ in the world. There may be enormous power disparities, advantages and disadvantages among us, yet we deeply yearn to be connected, as parts of the one body of Christ. A communal, ecclesial, embodied ethic must pay attention to all its parts, their functions and their interrelationships within the whole body (*cf*. I Cor 12:14ff). Together the different parts are constitutive of the catholicity of the body. This is a down-to-earth "transcendence" that necessarily is embodied and "trans-cultural." It is also forthright in pointing out what does or does not serve neighbor-love or embodied care in a given context.

Thus, it is not a matter of some correcting others out of a sense of "one-upmanship" (gender connotation intended) or dominating power over others, as often occurs in competitive verbal debates that are preoccupied with who will "win." Instead, attention here is on what can be added or complemented from our respective perspectives. How contributions are offered can be as important as the content of what is said.

This also implies the need for those of us who have been trained primarily in Western thought to value more deeply and incorporate into our ethical discernment those aspects of the moral life that have often been overlooked, especially in the prevalent forms of ethical discourse in modernity. Conversely, how do those of us who have been conditioned with a deep sense of what is moral and immoral become more open to being critiqued?

In the communal ethical discernment suggested here, the wisdom of all is required, especially those who are not academically trained. After all, what the neighbor needs is *not* an academic matter. Experience is not peripheral but central. We are called to become involved in others' stories, with all the feelings and dynamics associated with such. Far more is at stake than a "renewing of "minds," understood in a narrow sense.

Seeing is central to discernment; how and what we see is central to the moral life. Discernment does not mean knowing for sure; that kind of confidence can lead to dangerous hubris. Active discernment occurs in community with others, which helps to keep us humble. It involves a living sense of those who are most different from us, who help to transform how we see, feel and evaluate matters of ethical urgency. This in turn can free up moral imagination.

Ethical discernment involves eyes, ears, mind, heart, bodies, experiences, feelings, stories, histories and more. We brush up against one another, interact and live together; we experience "diapraxis."[7] This is an aspect of what it means to be and to grow together as a communion. In a communion, the process of deliberation for the sake of discernment is more important that making statements—not speaking, but listening, being transformed by the other and living this out through our commitments and actions, enacting communion, not just talking about it.

For reflection or discussion:

How is this already occurring in your context? In relation to those in other contexts? How might it occur? What is needed for this to occur? What learnings would you pass on to others? What are your further questions? Let us hear from you!

Notes

[1] See the various statements and resolutions of the LWF General Secretary, the Council, the Assembly and the ongoing work of the Office for International Affairs and Human Rights.

[2] This is one of the challenges to be addressed in the "Church Unity Amid Moral Diversity" track of the LWF/DTS study program, "Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches." Contact kbl@lutheranworld.org to participate in this.

[3] In deliberations of the study team, just as there seemed to be some meeting of minds between two people, a third interjected a perspective that made any assumed consensus more complex.

[4] Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self. Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 161.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

[6] See also how the centrality of neighbor-love is developed in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Communion*, *Responsibility*, *Accountability: Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization*, LWF Documentation 50/2004, (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation), pp. 273-277.

[7] "Diapraxis" is used in LWF interfaith work to refer to a "dialogue of life," as those of different faiths work together to resolve conflicts and live together. See Sigvard von Sicard and Ingo Wulfhorst (eds) *Dialogue and Beyond: Christians and Muslims Together on the Way*, LWF Studies 01/2003 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2003), pp. 131ff.

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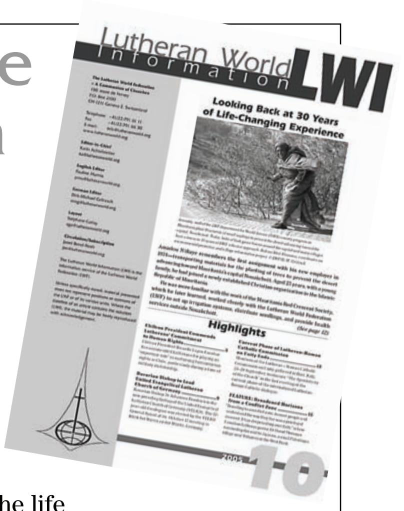

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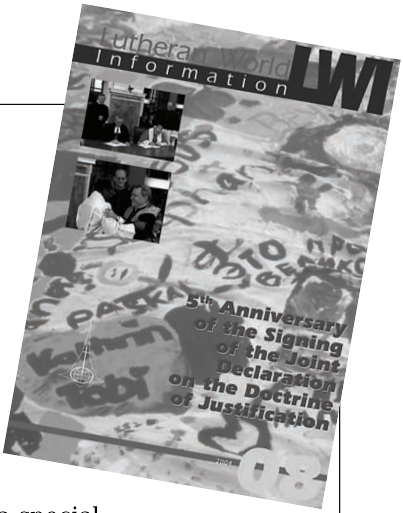
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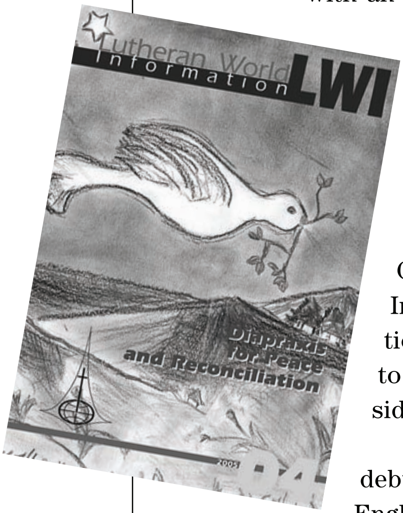
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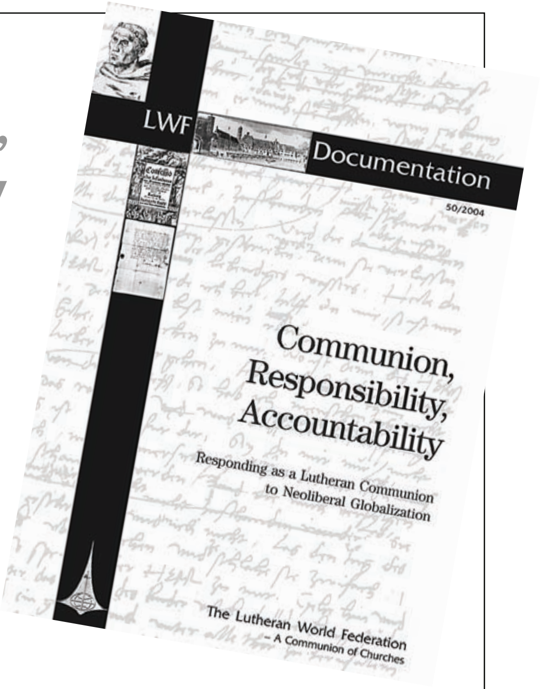
Communion, Responsibility, Accountability

Responding as a Lutheran Communion to Neoliberal Globalization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To encourage further responses to economic globalization, especially through the Lutheran communion, this book documents various processes and perspectives, and explores some strategic theological, ethical and practical implications of neoliberal globalization.

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For further information, please contact the Office for Communication Services, at: The Lutheran World Federation, 150 route de Ferney, P.O. Box 2100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland.

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In today's world, there are significantly different ethical perspectives even within one confessional tradition. These perspectives vary with cultural context, history, politics, gender, ethnic and interreligious dynamics. The book sheds light on how these different perspectives intersect and influence the ways ethical challenges are viewed and evaluated. Ethics is considered here as a way of living according to a "grammar" that reflects a Lutheran interpretation of wider Christian theological-ethical understandings.

Articles in this book are likely to challenge contextually-limited views on such topics as,

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- human rights
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- education
- genetically-modified crops and food
- privatization of property and biological commons

The book contributes to enriching ethical deliberation and discernment within a global communion of churches, as well as within civil society.

Authors include Per Anderson, Karen L. Bloomquist, András Csepregi, Wanda Deifelt, Elisabeth Gerle, Puleng Lenka Bula, Phillip Moeahabo Moila, Hans G. Ulrich and Wai Man Yuen.

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