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One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church

Some Lutheran
and Ecumenical Perspectives



The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches



One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church

Some Lutheran and Ecumenical
Perspectives

LWF Studies, 2009
May 2009

edited by
Hans-Peter Grosshans
on behalf of
The Lutheran World Federation

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Hans-Peter Grosshans, editor

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

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Introduction

Hans-Peter Grosshans

This publication documents the beginning of a study on ecclesiology carried out by the Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), with papers presented at a conference held in June 2008 at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, near Geneva, Switzerland.¹ It is our hope that this book stimulates theological discussion on the understanding of the church within the Lutheran community.

Background to the study

Developments affecting the ecclesiological self-understanding of Lutheran churches worldwide vary according to context. It is therefore necessary within the global Lutheran communion to reflect on the respective understandings of the church, and thus to arrive at a deeper mutual understanding and a common ecclesiology. A number of these developments were touched upon in former DTS study programs related to ecclesiology. Two publications in particular need to be mentioned here, namely, *The Church as Communion*² and *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*.³ The former documents the ecclesiological discussion in the early 1990s, which enhanced the then new understanding of the LWF as a communion of churches and, in ecclesiological terms, constituted a major step forward. The latter discusses how Lutheran churches in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin and North America understand themselves in their respective social contexts and live out what it means to be church. One of the main questions examined was how the church as a communion understands itself in today's society.

On the basis of these former study programs, the new study process intends further to develop Lutheran theological reflection on the understanding of the church. Taking into account the actual contexts, the

¹ The conference at Bossey was organized in cooperation with Hans-Christoph Askani, professor for systematic theology, University of Geneva. A second conference is planned for spring 2010.

² Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion*, LWF Documentation 42/1997 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1997, 1998).

³ Wolfgang Greive (ed.), *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*, LWF Documentation 47/2001 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2001).

program seeks to sharpen theological reflection on and the spiritual understanding of the church by taking up more doctrinal considerations. On the one hand, there is the simple question if and what Lutheran churches can learn from the ecumenical ecclesiological expression: "We believe ... in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church," which has been part of the truly ecumenical Creed of Nicaea that Lutheran churches share as their doctrinal and confessional basis since 381 AD. On the other, how do churches, past and present, realize in their life and theology their belief in the church as one holy, catholic and apostolic?

The study process inevitably included voices from other denominations and took into account how they understand the church as being one holy, catholic and apostolic. Today, Lutheran churches profile their ecclesiology not in contrast to other denominational understandings of the church, but in constructive discussion with other ecclesiologies. While Lutheran churches can learn from Reformed, Baptist, Orthodox or Catholic ecclesiology (as well as others), other churches can also learn from Lutheran ecclesiology. In a certain sense, the ecclesiological mission of Lutheran theology continues to aim at reforming the church worldwide.

It is vital that the global communion of Lutheran churches pursue a common theological discussion on the understanding and realization of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. Various challenges affect how churches conceive of themselves as being church, and a number of Lutheran churches find themselves in historical processes of transition.

If we look at the well-established Lutheran churches across Europe, we can observe that some have recently severed their close links to the state, or are in the process of doing so. These churches will have to develop an understanding of themselves as historical realities on their own, and no longer as being a part of the state. Without this specific identity in their relations to a particular nation (partly also due to immigrant Christians from other countries), these churches will have to relate more intentionally to the one holy, catholic and apostolic church as a spiritual and historical reality. In order for these churches to relate more closely to the universal ecclesial movement and all churches, it becomes necessary to consider carefully the meaning of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Lutheran churches in North and South America have faced similar challenges as they have tried to loosen their ties to certain ethnicities. In times of global migration, the close and exclusive relationship of Lutheran churches to certain ethnicities is being questioned.

In Europe as well as in North and South America, Lutheran churches are struggling with the consequences of secularization. How can churches relate to societies that more often than not are suspicious of the church? How does this question traditional ecclesiological concepts and how do churches adapt to secularized societies in order still to be heard?

In the global South, Lutheran churches, products of the missionary churches' and mission organizations' activities, are today in a process of transition into more autonomous organizations that are part of their respective societies. Increasingly, these churches try to define themselves as churches in their own right and not according to their origins in a European or North American church or mission society. In this respect, ecclesiological considerations are necessary, at least as part of a post-colonial theology that has developed its own theology in light of its cultural, political, economic and religious contexts. It is in this respect that the study project can be seen as a continuation of the previous DTS study project, "Communion, Community, Society."

Through ecumenical discussions, the LWF is in an ongoing process of defining its ecclesiological status and role in relationship to its member churches on the one hand, and to other churches and denominations on the other. However, these ecumenical discussion usually involve only a small, select group of theologians. The intent of this current study is to broaden the audience and to integrate wider parts of the Lutheran communion into this discussion.

In 1999, the LWF and the Roman Catholic Church signed the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* at Augsburg, emphasizing that the "consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification," which was formulated in this declaration, "must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches." However, in this respect there are still questions "which need further clarification,"⁴ one of which concerns the doctrine of the church.⁵ This study process seeks to clarify the relevance of the Lutheran doctrine of the church for today and, with other churches, to arrive at a deeper understanding of the church.

One might ask why such theological discussion and clarification are not from the outset carried out in an ecumenical process, together with

⁴ *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, at www.lutheranworld.org/Special_Events/EN/jd97e.pdf, para. 43.

⁵ These questions include "the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, ecclesial authority, church unity, ministry, the sacraments and the relation between justification and social ethics," *ibid*.

representatives of other churches and, in light of the consensus reached on the Doctrine of Justification, especially in dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. Does it still make sense for the LWF to have its own study process on ecclesiology?

The answer to this question is affirmative. With around 140 member churches worldwide, the LWF has no central teaching magisterium on doctrinal matters. Over the past decades, a considerable number of theological positions affirmed by the LWF have been developed through ecumenical dialogues and not through study processes involving the whole Lutheran community. Consequently, the results of these dialogues have rarely been received in the member churches and Lutheran theology. This study, therefore, is important for enhancing the self-understanding of the LWF and its member churches.

On the basis of their competence and interest in interdenominational theological work, Lutheran theologians, together with a few theologians from other denominations, were invited to participate in this 2008 consultation. In this publication, a Baptist, an Orthodox, a Reformed and a Roman Catholic theologian have contributed aspects of the ecclesiology of their traditions. It is noteworthy that the profile of Lutheran ecclesiology becomes much sharper in the constructive discussion with other ecclesiologies, rather than in confrontation with them.

Toward a Lutheran ecclesiology

In the present ecumenical climate, Lutheran (and other Protestant) churches are time and again told by other churches that they do not fully realize what it means to be church. In this regard, Lutheran churches can contribute at least two things to the ecumenical discussion: first, they could offer a Lutheran interpretation of the four marks of the church (Nicene Creed) and thus to present an ecclesiological alternative to Orthodox and Catholic ecclesiology; second, they could clearly demonstrate what other confessional churches can learn from Lutheran churches, especially from those that have existed in a minority situation and which through their way of living out the Christian faith have always enriched the majority churches. The Lutheran churches in South and North, East and West have to make clear in their ecclesial and spiritual life why they are churches even if they do not fulfill the ecclesiological criteria of the Catholic or Orthodox Church. Here they should refer back to the ecumenical formulation in the Creed of

Nicaea: “We believe ... (in) one holy, catholic and apostolic church.” The Lutheran churches are challenged to put forward a modern interpretation of the four marks of the church against the horizon of Reformation theology.

In accordance with the spirit of the Reformation, the church is the earthly realization of salvation by Jesus Christ. What then does it mean for the Lutheran churches to be the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, including the meaning of singularity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity in the various Lutheran churches worldwide? Traditional Lutheran ecclesiology and the current understanding of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church in the various Lutheran churches and Lutheran theology globally need to be brought into discussion with each other. The communion of Lutheran churches can be strengthened by deepening their common understanding of church, as well as the Lutheran profile in questions of ecclesiology. Furthermore, the ecumenical discourse between the different confessions and communities of churches can be strengthened by providing a clear and accessible account of Lutheran ecclesiology.

Many Lutheran churches in the global South and North have developed an instrumental interpretation and use of the church: the church is not seen as an end in itself but rather as an instrument and a means to reach something, be it personal salvation, the emancipation of a social group, or material and intellectual improvement. In absolute terms, the church is not an end in itself: the end is God and God’s kingdom. But, relative to the conditions of life on earth, the church is not only an instrument but also an end in itself. In its earthly existence it is an end in itself, because it is a universal, historic movement, in which Jesus Christ’s earthly work is realized (not fully, but preliminary and fragmentarily): the reconciliation of God and human beings and of human beings with one another. In order to reclaim the soteriological meaning of the church, the Lutheran churches will once again have to consider the church’s spiritual role as an end in itself. What this could mean in terms of the life of the churches in different contexts remains to be discussed.

For Lutheran theology, the church is a spiritual reality, visibly manifest in the world, as well as a worldly institution. As an institution, the church’s structures are similar to those of other organizations. This is how *inter alia* the church manifests itself in the world, as a part of the world. As a spiritual reality, manifest in the world, the church is called to transform the world, which has lost sight of God, toward living in the presence of the incarnate God. As such, it does not set Christians apart from the life of the world, but implicates them deeply in the life of the world, just as

Jesus Christ was intensively involved in the life of the world. The church does not create holy spaces separated from an unholy world, but within the unholy world, realizes a life in the presence of the Triune God. In realizing its spiritual character, the church intensifies its involvement and participation in the life of the world, and thus realizes its specific relation to Jesus Christ. The church's strict orientation toward Jesus Christ leads to a deepening of its involvement with the world.⁶

The discussions about the church could lead us to consider it as an essentially worldly institution and organization. Questions regarding the church or ecclesiology are thought to pertain to its constitutional order, its law, its offices, its public representation, its services to the believers and to the world in general (worship, religious education, pastoral care, rites of passage, diakonia, mission), its relationship to everything in the world that is not "church" such as societies, cultures, politics, the sciences, other religions, etc. If we look at the church's organization, actions and relationships we might get the impression that ecclesiology does not address questions of faith. However, ecclesiology seems to address the hard realities of Christian faith. This impression is supported by the undisputed fact that the church is not only a spiritual reality, but also an historical one. In contrast to most other doctrinal elements of the Christian faith, the church is an historical reality in a very direct way: it is part of human history on earth. Looking at the church as a part of human history gives us a very ambivalent impression of the church.

In spite of this ambivalence due to the church's historical and institutional realities, the church is also a spiritual reality. This is best expressed in the fact, that the church is part of the fundamental common creeds of the Christian faith. According to Western tradition, Christians confess with the Apostles' Creed: "I believe ... the holy Christian church." The Nicene Creed is more widespread than the Apostles' Creed because it is not only shared by the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church, but also by the Orthodox churches. With this truly ecumenical Creed, Christians in almost all churches confess: "We believe ... in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church".

In uttering this Creed, Christians express that the church is a matter of faith and therefore a spiritual reality—just like the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection from the dead, eternal life, the reign of the risen,

⁶ Cf. Hans-Peter Grosshans, *Die Kirche-irdischer Raum der Wahrheit des Evangeliums* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), p. 225: "Die strenge Christusbezogenheit der Kirche bedeutet gerade keine Weltflucht, sondern eine Vertiefung des Weltbezugs der Kirche."

crucified Jesus Christ at God's right hand, God the creator of heaven and earth, etc. If we compare the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed in terms of what they state about the church, it is interesting to note that in the Greek original the Nicene Creed strengthens the understanding of the church as a spiritual reality: "We believe ... in ... the church." First, the subject of confessing is the "we" of the congregation, and not the individual "I" of the confessing person as in the Apostles' Creed (originally used for confessing in baptism). Second, with the Nicene Creed we confess, that we believe "in" the church and not only that we believe the church, as in the Apostles' Creed. In the Apostles' Creed, the formulation "to believe in" is used only in relation to God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. When Christians confess with the Nicene Creed that they "believe in" the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, then they express their trust in the church. It is not the same trust that Christians have in the Triune God and in all of God's activities. It is trust in the church like people trust in their home where they are familiar with everything, the people around them and their natural surroundings.

We find this understanding expressed in Martin Luther's formulation, whereby the church is "the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God."⁷ Martin Luther's formulation in his *Large Catechism* employs a widespread phrase that originated in first-century theology. In his commentary on Paul's letter to the Galatians, Martin Luther used this phrase in his interpretation of Galatians 4:26 ("But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother"). It is worth reading Luther's ecclesiological reflections on this sentence of the Apostle Paul.

Therefore Sarah, or Jerusalem, our free mother, is the church, the bride of Christ who gives birth to all. She goes on giving birth to children without interruption until the end of the world, as long as she exercises the ministry of the Word, that is, as long as she preaches and propagates the Gospel; for this is what it means for her to give birth. Now she teaches the Gospel in such a way that we are set free from the curse of the Law, from sin, death, and other evils, not through the Law and works but through Christ. Therefore the Jerusalem that is above, that is, the church, is not subject to the Law and works; but she is free and is a mother without Law, sin, or

⁷ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism: The Apostles' Creed*, see: www.bookofconcord.org/lc-4-creed.php.

death. And as the mother is, so are the children to whom she gives birth. Therefore this allegory teaches in a beautiful way that the church should not do anything but preach the Gospel correctly and purely and thus give birth to children. In this way we are all fathers and children to one another, for we are born of one another. I was born of others through the Gospel, and now I am a father to still others, who will be fathers to still others; and so this giving birth will endure until the end of the world. ...

Therefore just as Isaac has the inheritance from his father solely on the basis of the promise and of his birth, without the Law or works, so we are born as heirs by Sarah, the free woman, that is, by the church. She teaches, cherishes, and carries us in her womb, her bosom, and her arms; she shapes and perfects us to the form of Christ, until we grow into perfect manhood (Eph 4:13). Thus everything happens through the ministry of the Word. It is the duty of the free woman to go on giving birth to children endlessly, that is, to sons who know that they are justified by faith, not by the Law.⁸

Martin Luther calls the church “our free mother,” not only because the church gives birth to us as Christians by preaching the gospel, but because this mother is a place of freedom within the world. In being with this mother, people are liberated from abuse which they experience too often within the world. In their mother’s place, people are free to listen to and speak the truth, which is only possible there where people trust one another. If we understand the church, this communion of the faithful, as the “motherly” space within our world, in which we live trusting God and one another, then the church becomes trustworthy and we can confess that we believe “in” the church. Therefore, Martin Luther insists that the church gives birth to sons and daughters, who believe and know that they are accepted at their mother’s place, not because they live according to certain rules (laws), but because the church is their mother.

According to Lutheran understanding, the church is more than a mere instrument to mediate salvation or to foster liberation. During the Reformation, Martin Luther opposed the understanding of the church as a mediator of salvation. Just as our mothers are not merely the mediators of life for us but represent the place within the world where we are at home and can be free and live in truth, the church is more than a mediator of our salvation. It provides a space of truth and freedom within

⁸ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians (1535),” in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 441f.

our world, where we can be safe and reconciled with God and with one another. The church is the social space in which faith and salvation on earth are enacted and lived out. The church is there where Christian faith is lived out and enacted. The church is the earthly enactment, the earthly abode of faith. The church is the frame around which faith grows, the channel through which it moves; it is the Christian form of life.

Many say that Christian faith relates chiefly to individuals: to their justification and sanctification, to their attaining selfhood and becoming whole, to their being healed and blessed—in other words, to individual salvation. However, this is at best a half-truth and does not do justice to a large part of the truth of the gospel. We can be sure that the gospel's life-renewing agency not only means that individuals become whole and sanctified (which is to say "healed"), but also that those who live in God's presence are made one with and taken up into the church. The church is one of God's creative, reconciling and redeeming acts of salvation, an act that includes individual persons being reconciled with one another. The church is there where the salvation wrought by God is enacted on earth. It is the earthly space opened up by the truth of the gospel, the place where the faithful live reconciled with God and one another. And this earthly space of reconciled life is intended to encompass all of humankind.

This is brought out with impeccable clarity in the writings of Paul. For instance, Paul's letter to the congregations in Galatia takes as its theme the justification of the godless and sinful by God solely on grounds of their faith. In this doctrine of justification, Paul lays out a whole ecclesiology in just a few sentences.

for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26–28).

Galatians 3:28 does not deal in abstractions, but envisages a specific and concrete experience. It does not outline a utopia, an ideal state of affairs, or how things should be. Rather, we are told of what was actually taking place and being experienced in the Pauline congregations. As New Testament scholar, Jürgen Roloff, puts it,

Here, *in statu nascendi*, a new way of relating to others is being brought forth, one that no longer, as in the usual forms of social life, stems from

the demarcations and distinctions by which people have so far determined their identity. Social inferiors must no longer defer to their betters; the rich no longer laud it over the poor, the powerful over the weak. What counts now, and henceforth, is that one partakes in Christ.⁹

The following three pairs of opposites denote changes in the church's social structure brought about by rebirth through faith and baptism. This concerns the domain of religion (Jew and Greek), society (slave and free) and family (man and woman). In Galatians 3:28, a new state of affairs is described in which human justification takes concrete form. This occurs in lived and experienced communion with God and with those so reconciled with each other. The church is there where a revolutionary change in life circumstances takes place.

But what was revolutionized? Were the Pauline congregations egalitarian societies in miniature? If this was what they set out to be, did they get to this reality they were proclaiming? Nor do we today fare particularly well on that score. I think the point being made in this passage is rather different.

The Pauline congregations did not set out to eliminate all religious, social, familial and personal differences. But while these social differences in the Christian community continued to exist, they were no longer criteria for worthiness and reputation. The point of the reconciled community of believers is that while the Jew as Jew and the Greek as Greek are part of the community their differences, which continue to persist, retreat behind their oneness in Christ. The Jew as Jew and the Greek as Greek are reconciled in the communion of the church, as one to another, as is also the case with the slave as slave and the free as free, the man as man and the woman as woman. Unique to the community of the faithful brought forth by justification is the fact that in it reconciliation can truly be lived out. This means, in effect, that the distinguished and differentiated are not pressed into a Procrustean bed of sameness. Christian faith is not the great leveler. Rather, it preserves the differences in everyday life. What matters in Christian faith is the reconciling of these differences, not pretending they do not exist.

According to Paul, the experience of a reconciled society, meaning the faith-based experience of partaking "in Christ," mainly takes place in the fellowship of sharing a communal meal in the Christian congregation.

⁹ Cf. Jürgen Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), p. 94 (author's own translation).

Originally, the Christian congregation's fellowship of the table had almost no cultic significance. The first Christians would gather in their homes and eat together to commemorate the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ. Concrete reconciliation was shared by persons who in society differed in social, economic, cultural and religious terms. The more Jesus Christ's presence was perceived at the communal table, the more the fellowship in which all partook was vested with cultic significance. Christian fellowship of the table is lived-out reconciliation. Its importance lies in those present being joined in a community of obligation primarily and chiefly with Christ¹⁰ and with one another.¹¹ In the community of the church, the reconciliation of human beings with God is made real as is the reconciling of those who in our pluralistic, postmodern societies are painstakingly set apart from one another.

The concept of the church as the place where reconciliation is concretely enacted is explored at greater depth in the Epistle to the Ephesians, according to which it is integral to the process of reconciliation that the existence of those who believe is renewed. This renewed existence finds its expression in the church as the community of the faithful. The church is the *locus* and space in the world in which God's universal agency of salvation, valid for all humankind, is fittingly lived out. It culminates in Jews and heathens [Gentiles] being one in Christ. In Ephesians 2:13–22, this experienced reconciliation in the church is clearly formulated. Here it becomes perfectly clear that the church is the place on earth where reconciliation is lived out, realized and incarnated. The church is the earthly social space in which life can be lived in order to conform to God's reconciling agency, which is valid for all. Even though the faithful tread different pathways, they come together as church for the communion of those who believe that God's reconciling agency is valid for each and every one of them. The Epistle to the Ephesians gives concrete shape to the belief in reconciliation—made real in Jesus Christ and valid now—of all human beings with God and with one another.

It is the hope of the Epistle to the Ephesians that salvation in Jesus Christ will prevail in the world and carve out a space for itself in the guise of a human community living reconciled with God and therefore reconciled with one another. Are we then to abandon this hope? Shall we not strive, as best we can, to ensure that the reconciliation of human beings with God and with one another is made manifest in our world?

¹⁰ Cf. the rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?"

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:17, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

If this is to happen, the church, as the communal vessel of Christian faith, must be seen not only as an instrument for and means of individual salvation, but also as the place where salvation is enacted. Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, spoke of the church as the “great idea in God’s mind.”¹² There is some truth to this formulation. It really is a great idea of God’s to deem possible the reconciliation of such a diverse humanity, highly differentiated in terms of any number of social parameters. But, if this great idea in God’s mind is to be realized, it will require more than representative acts, gestures and ceremonies. It demands that we shoulder the work of reconciliation.

The articles in this book

The contributions in this book reflect the spiritual and theological character of the church. Eberhard Jüngel, a retired professor for systematic theology, originally from the former Eastern Germany, taught theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. He interprets the formulation “we believe ... in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church” in the Nicene Creed against the horizon of contemporary Lutheran ecclesiology. He insists on a spiritual and theological understanding of the church and clearly shows the relevance of the church for our realizing the God given salvation within the limits of our life on earth.

Eve-Marie Becker, who teaches New Testament at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, demonstrates how we can observe in the New Testament that the Christian faith wants to express itself in creedal formulations which summarize faith and get to its essence. Furthermore, she shows the soteriological relevance of the church in the New Testament. Jüngel and Becker prepare the field for the following essays which reflect the rich tradition of ecclesiology in Christian theology and churches. Lutheran theology has always claimed the whole of Christian theology as being its own tradition, not only the theology of Lutheranism.

In her essay, Minna Hietamäki, from Helsinki, Finland, who specializes in ecumenical theology, surveys the relevance and the interpretation of the four marks of the church in select ecumenical dialogues. Michel Grandjean, who teaches church history at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, outlines

¹² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “Die grosse Gottesidee ‘Kirche’ ist keine Schwärmerei,” in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 298 (22.12.2000), p. 46 (author’s own translation).

how John Calvin understood the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, which has strongly influenced the Reformed understanding of the church. Dimitrios Moschos, a lecturer in church history, University of Athens, Greece, gives an overview of Orthodox ecclesiology. Johanna Rahner, a Catholic theologian, teaching dogmatics at the university of Bamberg, Germany, discusses the development of Catholic ecclesiology in the Second Vatican Council, contrasting it with former Roman Catholic ecclesiology.

The Baptist theologian, Samuel Ngun Ling, teaching systematic theology at the Myanmar Institute of Theology in Yangon and director of the Judson Research Center, examines Baptist ecclesiology in general and describes the cultural, political and religious challenges churches are facing in Myanmar. He then develops an understanding of the four marks of the church against the background of these challenges. He shows the vitality of the Baptist ecclesiological model in the minority situation of the churches in a country in which fundamental human rights are not respected. Philipp Stoellger, a Lutheran theologian teaching systematic theology at the University of Rostock, Germany, presents some fundamental concepts in Martin Luther's understanding of the church, especially the distinction between the universal, the particular and the spiritual church.

These essays, which outline certain denominational perspectives on the church in light of their respective denominational traditions, give a good picture of the various ways in which the church is lived out and realized in our world. They attest to the ongoing discussions and efforts in the various denominational traditions to realize what it means for the church to be one holy, catholic and apostolic.

The last contributions included in this book widen the horizon. Case studies of four Lutheran churches analyze and explain the churches' situations and how they seek to be one holy, catholic and apostolic.

Yonas Yigezu Dibisa, director of the Department for Mission and Theology in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, describes attempts in the Lutheran church in Ethiopia to live out the belief in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, and outlines the challenges the Mekane Yesus church is facing in doing so. Song-Mee Chung, teaching church history at the Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, suggests that while the belief in the oneness of the church has little relevance for the many small churches in an overwhelmingly Muslim country, the holiness of the church is very important for these churches in order to set themselves apart from other groups in society.

The Brazilian Lutheran, Nelson Kilpp, teaches Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology (EST) in São Leopoldo, Brazil. He describes the development of the ecclesiological discussion in the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil, relating it to the four marks of the church, and critically analyses questions and problems this church will be facing in its further development.

Cheryl Peterson, teaching systematic theology at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, USA, details the role and understanding of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church in the context of the North American churches. She emphasizes the mission of the church as the main expression of its apostolicity. The church is apostolic because it is sent into the world and realizes its apostolicity in transgressing itself.

The articles in this book are rather like a multicolored bouquet of flowers, bringing together a multitude of theological styles and traditions. In their variety, they are like the multicolored reality of the churches. This variety is pleasing and not to be lamented; it is part of God's history with humankind. The essays collected here give us a glimpse of the creative ways in which God relates to people and makes God's presence on earth real.

It is our intention with this collection of essays to stimulate the discussion on the church's theological and spiritual character and to bring the goal the church is heading for closer. Our attitude toward the church can be illustrated by the following parable:

On a building site, three laborers were breaking rocks. A stranger came up to the first laborer and asked him what he was doing. The laborer answered, "As you can see, I'm breaking rocks." "And what are you doing?" the stranger asked the second laborer, who answered, "I've got to earn money to feed my family." Then the stranger asked the third laborer, "What are you doing there?" The laborer looked up to the sky and said with quiet pride, "I'm building a cathedral."

A task of such magnitude as working together on God's great work of earthly reconciliation that is the church is frequently forgotten as we go about our daily duties. But theological work wants to keep present this wider perspective of the church and everything that is going on in the church. Building on this first consultation, a subsequent consultation in this study process is expected to deepen and develop more fully Lutheran understandings of the church.

I. An Overall Interpretation

Belief in the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church

Eberhard Jüngel

What is the *una sancta catholica et apostolica ecclesia*? What is the relationship of faith to this one holy, catholic and apostolic church? Let me offer a few remarks from a Protestant perspective.

In order to understand the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, we have to draw a basic distinction that does not aim at separation but rather at establishing its identity as one and the same: this is the distinction between the visible and invisible or, better perhaps, hidden church. This basic distinction is necessary because the church cannot constitute itself, it cannot bring itself to being any more than it can rule and sustain itself. It cannot do so because the church is God's unique work. It is very special among God's works, in that it is the work of the Holy Spirit and of the gospel establishing itself in the power of the Spirit, through which Jesus Christ gathers people around himself in our world. The church cannot create and sustain itself because it is the creature of God's Word, through which God makes community with Godself and with one another possible for sinful human beings: *ecclesia enim creatura est Evangelii* [the church is a creature of the gospel].¹

As the creature of the gospel, however, the church can only be recognized by faith. It is the object of faith in the same sense as is the belief in God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed therefore speaks successively of belief in the one God, the Father Almighty and Creator, belief in the one Lord Jesus Christ, belief in the Holy Spirit and also now, belief in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church: Πιστεύομεν ... εἰς μίαν ἁγίαν καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν [we believe in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church].

¹ "Resolutiones Lutherianae super propositionibus suis Lipsiae disputatis" (1519), WA 2, 430, 6f. Luther continues (l. 7-9): "*incomparabiliter minor ipso, sicut ait Iacobus: voluntarie genuit nos verbo veritatis suae, et Paulus: per Euangelium ego vos genui. Unde idem verbum vocatur uterus et vulva dei, Isa. xlv.*"

The Latin version of the text, which is contained in the *Missale Romanum* and has also found its way into the *Lutheran Book of Concord*,² deviates from the Greek original in several respects, including the replacing of the plural πιστεύομεν with the singular *credo* and omitting the εἰς [in] before the statement about the church, so that it now reads: “*Credo... unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam*.”³ From quite early on—usually by reference to the Apostles’ Creed—this led to the erroneous assertion, which persists even in our own times, that in contrast to the belief in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed deliberately chose not to speak of believing in the church (*credere in ecclesiam*) but only of *credere ecclesiam*, that is, believing the church. This was accompanied by speculation about different ways of understanding the faith.⁴ Old Protestant theology then associated the three essential marks of faith, *notitia*, *assensus* and *fiducia* (content, acceptance and trust) with a threefold distinction in the act of faith, i.e., a *credere Deum* (I believe that God is), a *credere Deo* (I believe God’s authority and accept it) and a *credere in Deum* (I trust in God) and *credendo in eum ire* (to go to God by believing). Hollatz states:

It is one thing to believe that God is, another to believe God, and another to believe in God. We believe that God is by knowledge of him, we believe God by acceptance of him and we believe in God by trust⁵

It has even been said, often without taking account of the original Greek text, that the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed itself deliberately taught only the *credere ecclesiam* and not the *credere in ecclesiam*. This is

² Cf. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 22f.

³ A whole series of eastern creeds speak of belief in the church. Cf. Hans Lietzmann, “Symbolstudien III,” in Hans Lietzmann, *Kleine Schriften III. Studien zur Liturgie- und Symbolgeschichte, zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962), pp. 208ff.

⁴ On the problem of distinguishing between *credo in ecclesiam* and *credo ecclesiam*, cf. for example, John Calvin, *Institutio christianae religionis*. 1559, IV, 1,2, in Petrus Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (eds), *Opera Selecta*, vol. V (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1962), pp. 2f.

⁵ *Aliud enim est credere DEUM, aliud credere DEO, aliud credere in DEUM. Credimus esse DEUM per notitiam, credimus DEO per assensum, credimus in DEUM per fiduciam*. David Hollatz, *Examen theologicum acroamaticum*, vol. II (Stargard: Johann Nikolaus Ernst, 1707, reprinted in Darmstadt, 1971), para III, sect. II, ch. VII, q. 3, p. 282.

nonsense and is not made any better by the fact that it is defended by a whole cloud of (false) witnesses.⁶

Luther, by contrast, expressly emphasized that belief concerning the church “was just as much an article of faith as the others, wherefore it (the one holy, catholic and apostolic church) could never be recognized by reason, even wearing all its spectacles.”⁷ The church “does not want to be seen but to be believed, but faith relates to that which we do not see, Hebrews xi.”⁸

The *Catechismus Romanus*, ordered by the Council of Trent, declared for its part that the article on the church cannot be recognized by human reason (*non humana ratione*), and that only an “intuition with the eyes of faith” (*fidei oculis intueri*) can apply here. With regard to the church’s office of the keys, its power to forgive sins and excommunicate and to consecrate the true body of Christ, it is again specifically stated that this power granted to the church “as a divine office” (*divino munere*) can only be recognized in faith (*fide solum*).⁹ Indeed, according to the *Catechismus Romanus*, it is necessary to believe that the church is one holy and catholic.¹⁰ Following tradition, however, the *Catechismus Romanus* likewise prefers only to confess

⁶ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* II-II, q. 1, a. 9 ad 5; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV/1 (London/New York: T&T Clark Int., 2004), p. 686; Werner Elert, *Der christliche Glaube* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1956³), p. 404; Hans Küng, *Die Kirche* (Munich: Piper, 1985³), pp. 44-49; Gerhard Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, Bd. III (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993³), pp. 3f; Bernd Jochen Hilberath, “Zum Verhältnis von Ortskirchen und Weltkirche nach dem II. Vatikanum,” in Albert Franz (ed.), *Was ist heute noch katholisch? Zum Streit um die innere Einheit und Vielfalt der Kirche* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2001), pp. 36-49, 36. It says much for the careful approach of my teacher Heinrich Vogel, *Das Nicaenische Glaubensbekenntnis. Eine Doxologie* (Berlin: Lettner, 1963), pp. 166ff., that he explicitly takes account of the original Greek text, before himself going on to contest a *credere in ecclesiam*—on account of the church’s createdness; because, in his view, this was the only way that the identification of God with the church could be defended.

⁷ Martin Luther, “Vorrede auf die Offenbarung S. Johannis,” *WA.DB* 7, 418, 36-38.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 421; 3f.

⁹ “*Catechismus Romanus seu Catechismus ex decreto Concilii Tridentini ad Parochos Pii Quinti Pont. Max. iussu editus*” (1566), in Pedro Rodriguez, *Editio critica* (Vatican: Libreria Ed. Vaticana, 1989), p. I, c. 10, 20-21, pp. 117f: “*Cum igitur hic articulus ... intelligentiae nostrae facultatem et vires superet, iure optimo confitemur nos Ecclesiae ortum, munera et dignitatem non humana ratione cognoscere, sed fidei oculis intueri. ... nec potestas quam accepit humana est, sed divino munere tributa. Quare ... ita etiam fide solum intelligimus in Ecclesia claves regni caelorum esse, eique potestatem peccata remittendi, excommunicandi, verumque Christi corpus consecrandi traditam.*”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. I, c. 10, 21, p. 118: “*Unam igitur Ecclesiam sanctam et catholicam esse necessario credendum est.*”

the *credere ecclesiam* and not the *credere in ecclesiam*. The intention of this differentiation is to distinguish God the Creator from all created things and to trace the glorious benefits bestowed as gifts on the church back to divine goodness.¹¹

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1993, which replaced the old *Catechismus Romanus*, states:

To believe that the Church is “holy” and “catholic,” and that she is “one” and “apostolic” ... is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet even this new catechism also points out—referring to the Apostles’ Creed—that we do not say that “we believe in the Church.”¹²

Nevertheless, it is made unequivocally clear that the church is an object of faith and can only be recognized in faith. The “short” text states briefly that, “The church is both visible and spiritual, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ. She is one, yet formed of two components, human and divine. That is her mystery, which only faith can accept.”¹³ Thus, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, too, it is the one holy, catholic and apostolic church (*una sancta catholica et apostolica ecclesia*), present in hidden mode in the visible church, that is believed, and which has therefore also been incorporated into the confession of faith.

The Protestant understanding here is based on the definition of the church as a community of believers constituted by Word and sacrament, participating as the body of Christ in the life of the Triune God, and representing and presenting that life in the power of God’s Spirit in an earthly and historical form. It presents and represents the Trinitarian life of God in earthly and historical form in two ways: in service of God (in worship) on the one hand, and in service to the world on the other (through “holy and acceptable” service of God in day-to-day life in the world, in accordance with Romans 12:1). Understood in this way as worship of God and service to the world, the church is believed as the one holy, catholic and

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. I, c. 10, 22, p. 118: “*Tres enim Trinitatis personas, Patrem, et Filium, et Spiritum Sanctum ita credimus, ut in eas fidem nostram colloceamus. Nunc autem, mutata dicendi forma, sanctam, et non in sanctam, Ecclesiam credere profiteamur, ut, hac etiam diversa loquendi ratione, Deus omnium effector a creatis rebus distinguatur, praeclaraque illa omnia quae in Ecclesiam collata sunt beneficia, divinae bonitati accepta referamus.*”

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1993, 226 (no. 750), at www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/pls2c3a9.htm.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 234 (no. 779), at www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/pl123a9p1.htm.

apostolic church and, although as such it remains hidden as an object of faith, in its hiddenness it nonetheless calls for visible expression in the form of service of God in worship and service in the world.

The distinction between visible and invisible church should therefore not be misunderstood to mean that the visible church is simply a deficient form of church. With regard to what is believed, invisible does not mean purely and simply hidden. In the same way as God the Father is present in a specific hidden way in God's creation, and God the Son is present in the man Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit is present in believers, so the church too is hidden in a specific way. It is invisible in an identifiable way, so that we may say: here and now the hidden church (*ecclesia abscondita*) is present.

To advocate a kind of ecclesiological docetism, either declaring the "earthly and historical form" of the church to be indifferent or denying it with hostility or simply treating it as a necessary evil, preferring instead "an invisible fellowship of the Spirit and of spirits," would be totally to misunderstand the distinction between the visible and the invisible church. An ecclesiological docetism of this kind is in danger of "secretly pandering to a christological docetism as well." Belief in the church is "faith in the invisible aspect which is the secret of the visible. Believing in the *ecclesia invisibilis* we will enter the sphere of labor and conflict of the *ecclesia visibilis*."¹⁴

So much, briefly, for the definition of the nature of the church on which the more specific description of the church as one holy, catholic and apostolic has to be based if it is to mean anything. Let us now look at what are known as the four marks of the church.

First, I shall comment on the fact that the visible church has felt the need to attribute to the invisible church these qualities of being the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. These distinguishing marks shine with the splendor of the heavens. But what about here on earth? In view of the empirically perceptible church, the church as we know and experience it, on hearing that this is the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, one is tempted to whisper to oneself, "oh, wouldn't that be wonderful!"

Indeed, these glorious qualities attributed to the church by faith are in marked contrast to the state of the visible church which prescribed these marks of the invisible church. "The real intention" of attaching these beautiful qualities to the invisible church was to help an insecure and uncertain visible church, "struggling in the darkness of beleaguered

¹⁴ Barth, *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 653f.

Christian existence,”¹⁵ to reconcile the obvious contradiction between the church in real life and its true nature. It was precisely because

the unity of the church had been so radically called in question that it had to be affirmed so emphatically... Likewise, its apostolicity had to be emphasized because it was all too obvious that the church was drifting away from its apostolic origins... The church’s holiness had become so important because the signs of its unholiness were so strikingly obvious. ... [Universality or catholicity] became such a focal point for the church because its own tendency to particularism was giving it so much trouble. These statements of perfection were actually prompted by the experience of the church’s many imperfections. They are cries of protest against appearances being taken for the truth and judgments on what is ultimately true being made on the basis of what can be seen.¹⁶

So, it was not the excess of a triumphant church (*ecclesia triumphans*) but the conscious recollection of its true vocation by a church under attack that led the church to confess its unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

But what more precisely is meant by the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church?

We shall first take a brief look at the meaning of apostolicity before going on, likewise briefly—and reversing the order of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed—to ask about the catholicity and holiness of the church. We shall then look in greater detail at the meaning of unity as an attribute of the church, which is no doubt of special significance for an ecumenical understanding.

- ***Credo in...apostolicam ecclesiam*** (I believe in ... the **apostolic** church): The apostolicity of the church can be taken to mean its faithfulness to its mission and the task to proclaim the gospel in thought, word and deed, as originally expressed in the early Christian apostolate. Since the successor of the apostle is the canon of the New Testament (and not the bishop), the church can be said to exist in apostolic succession only to the extent that it thinks, speaks and acts in accordance with Holy Scripture, and only then.

¹⁵ Ebeling, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 369.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 369f.

- The church existing in apostolic succession is the church that lives in the power of the Holy Spirit and is therefore guided into all truth. It is preserved from bringing about its own ruin, not by any decisions of its own, but by the truth of the gospel that surmounts its errors. This claim to infallibility established with the apostolicity of the church lies in the promise given to the church that God will keep it in the truth of the gospel. But, God keeps the church in the truth by keeping the truth of the gospel alive within it, thereby affirming and sustaining the church itself as the earthly domain of that truth. Everything the visible church existing in the world says and does therefore always has to be measured against the truth of the gospel. Self-critical reflection of this kind on the part of the church takes place not least through theological work. In this sense, apostolic succession is always also taking place in the form of theological responsibility. Part of this theological responsibility is not only to interpret apostolicity retrospectively, but to show it as the forward-looking power of the gospel seeking to serve the future unity of all believers.
- ***Credo in...catholicam...ecclesiam*** (I believe in... the **catholic** ... church): The catholicity of the church is the universal extent of its unity, thanks to which the one and only church exists throughout the world and so, as the true *oikumene*, bears witness to the gracious lordship of Jesus Christ throughout the whole world (cf. Mt 28:20; Acts 1:8). In its catholicity, the church is everywhere and always the same, that is to say, it is the sacramental sign of Jesus Christ's hidden presence. The oldest reference that speaks of the church as catholic—in the letter of Ignatius to the people of Smyrna—puts it succinctly: where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.¹⁷
- However, the church is also catholic in the fact that, imbued with its ministry of service to the whole world, it exists as the spiritual image of the coming kingdom of God, and to that extent also has indirect political significance. For, as the spiritual image of the coming kingdom of God, the church in its catholicity represents

¹⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, 8,2: ὁπου ἂν Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς, ἐκεῖ ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία. Cf. Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Katholizität evangelischer Theologie," in Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen (ed.), *Wissenschaften 2001. Diagnosen und Prognosen* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), pp. 27-47.

the gospel's challenge to the state, through its legislation, to be a secular image of the coming kingdom of God. As the spiritual image of the coming kingdom of God the church, in its catholicity, also represents the gospel's challenge to the political world to be a world for all in common, and to give its unity a form that expresses its universal scope.

- ***Credo in ...sanctam...ecclesiam*** (I believe in ... the **holy** ... church): The church's holiness is what distinguishes it as different from an as yet unconverted world, which it is nevertheless called to serve prophetically through spiritual, charitable and political diakonia, in order to reflect the holiness of the Lamb of God, who bears the sins of the world. For the Lamb of God is holy because God bears the sins of the world and, in so doing, offers the world the best service of all.
- However, the church is holy in that its own sins are forgiven; it is therefore holy "not on the basis of [its] own holiness but on the basis of a holiness not [its] own, not by an active holiness, but by a passive holiness [*non sua sed aliena, non activa sed passiva sanctitate*]." ¹⁸ Part of its holiness is the knowledge of its own sinfulness and the longing to be free of its sinful past. Unholy human beings know nothing of their sin, or wish to know nothing. But the church believes in the forgiveness of sins and prays: forgive us our sins. Anyone who asks for the forgiveness of sins is truly holy. In this sense, Christians and the Christian church are righteous sinners. ¹⁹
- On this basis, the church's holiness compels it to fulfill a threefold diaconal ministry, reflecting as it were, its alien holiness (*sanctitas aliena*). The church is holy (1) in that, in response to the holiness of Christ, it measures the weight of sin and names its own guilt and that of human individuals and of humanity as a whole by name: this is the ecclesiological diaconate of truth. The church

¹⁸ Martin Luther, "Lectures on Galatians 1535," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luthers Works*, vol. 26 (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), p. 25.

¹⁹ Cf. Martin Luther, "Predigt vom 9. April 1531," WA 34/I, 276, 8-12: "*Quomodo haec est Sancta et peccatrix? Credit remissionem peccatorum et dicit: 'debita dimitte'. Hoc nemo dicit, nisi qui sit sanctus ... Ideo Christianus et Christiana ecclesia sind die rechten sunder, quia vere agnoscunt peccata.*"

is holy (2) in that, in response to the holiness of Jesus Christ, it resists injustice in all its forms and, through acts of love, tries to prevent it from recurring: this is the ecclesiological diaconate of love. The church is holy (3) in that, in response to the holiness of Jesus Christ, it testifies to the power of God's grace over sin and so encourages believers to work for the coming kingdom of God: this is the ecclesiological diaconate of hope.

- ***Credo in unam...ecclesiam*** (I believe in the **one** ... church): Unity is the fundamental attribute among the marks of the church; the other three attributes—holiness, catholicity and apostolicity—can only define it more precisely, as they need to do. What does it mean when Christians confess that they believe in the one church?
- The unity of the church is first of all the oneness of the communion of saints that corresponds to the oneness of the Trinitarian community and mutual otherness of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Triune God exists once and once only. God is the one and only God. That is why the Christian church likewise exists once and once only. It is the one and only church. The unity of the church in the sense of its oneness does not exclude difference any more than the unique oneness of the Triune God excludes the difference of Father, Son and Spirit. Rather, the church's oneness is its continuing identity in the midst of difference: difference (1) among the many members of the one body of Christ; (2) between the visible and the invisible church; (3) the communion of the living and the dead, or the struggling church (*ecclesia militans*) and the triumphant church (*ecclesia triumphans*); (4) locally divided churches; and, last but not least, (5) heathen Christians and Jewish Christians. Yet, for all these differences, the church is the one and only church. How the identity of the church relates to the identity of the synagogue, how Judaism and Christianity differ from each other and yet relate to each other, is one of the most difficult theological problems that will have to be dealt with in eschatology, but which will not be solved simply by putting at disposal the apostolate to the Jews, which is testified in Galatians 2:7f.

With all its differences, however, the church is not only one but also united in and with itself. Far from focusing on realities that have to be kept separate, the aforementioned differences emphasize the exciting

richness of the one church. Like the Triune God, whose life it represents and presents, the church is a community of mutual otherness.

In this connection, the problem is the question of how far the visible church can and should represent the oneness attributed to the invisible church. This question dominates ecumenical dialogue.²⁰ The answer to

²⁰ It may be helpful here to look back, particularly with regard to the current ecumenical communication. Looking at older Catholic dogmatics, published before Vatican II, such as that by Michael Schmaus, the astonishing self-confidence with which the premise of the oneness, uniqueness and unity of the church is interpreted as applying exclusively to the Roman Catholic Church is striking. Cf. Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik*, vol. III/1 (Munich: Hueber, 1958⁵). Schmaus criticizes the view of the 1927 World Conference on Faith and Order in Lausanne, according to which "all Christian communities that have a minimum of church order and doctrinal tradition are in some degree, albeit imperfectly, the Church of Christ. Christ is the hidden foundation of unity, bringing them all together in invisible unity. Full unity will only be realized in future" (*ibid.*, pp. 544f.). The "christological aspect of unity" was, he said, "fundamental"; but it should not be "separated from the hierarchical aspect because this goes back to Christ himself. Those who omit this, fail to appreciate the whole fullness of the christological aspect" (*ibid.*, p. 545). According to Schmaus, the view that is expressed in the eschatological view of unity is also partial and incomplete. If unity is defined *only* eschatologically, what emerges is the one-sidedness which is the mark of heresy. To be sure, the church will only achieve its "perfect unity" with the coming again of Christ. But, he says, the "foreshadowing" of that perfect unity is already present in history... It is realized in the Roman Catholic Church... so that unity within history can only be realized in harmony with the Roman Catholic Church (cf. *ibid.*). The fact is that Christ built the whole of salvation into the church which he has founded. A second church would therefore be pointless (cf. *ibid.*, p. 547). To be precise, "... there is only one Church that is legitimately descended from Christ, and that is identical with the Roman Catholic Church" (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 548f.).

Schmaus goes on to show why this is so in a series of argumentations, each of which mention criteria which only the Roman Catholic Church fulfills: (1) According to Paul, the unity of the church is on three levels which belong closely together: One is a unity in the Spirit, rooted in Christ; it is represented in worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist; it has its visible guarantee in apostolic authority. It is therefore a christological-pneumatological, liturgical-sacramental and authoritarian-hierarchical unity (cf. *ibid.*, p. 562). This unity is not only a gift, it is a command (cf. *ibid.*, p. 563). According to the Fathers, it was preserved through "faithfulness to the rule of faith," celebration of the Eucharist and, above all, the apostolic succession (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 564f.). (2) Schmaus distinguishes between two sets of unifying factors, namely, the pneumatic-personal factors and the hierarchical-official factors. The former include a) "the God who plans and creates the Church," whose unifying action is most effective because Christ is the head, and the Holy Spirit the heart of the church (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 569f.); b) the common faith and the common hope and love of the members of the church (cf. *ibid.*, p. 571); the common faith here does not mean only every believer's subjective devotion to Christ, but also the formal principle held in common by all believers, by which they fulfill their faith, namely, "the proclamation of the revelation by the church, more precisely, the church's teaching office" (cf. *ibid.*, p. 572); love is expressed in worship and sacrament in the Eucharist, in which the church "celebrates Christ's sacrifice as its own" (cf. *ibid.*, p. 577). The official hierarchical factors include (a) the papacy, (b) the bishops (just as the Pope is the foundation, guardian and guarantor of unity in the whole church, so the bishop is in the smaller community of the diocese [cf. *ibid.*, p. 579]) and, lastly, (c) the parish priest (in whom the unity of the faithful gathered in one parish is guaranteed and made visible [cf. *ibid.*, p. 582]). The sets of factors of unity are inseparable: on the one hand, "pneumatic unity needs to be secured in hierarchical unity." On the other hand, "hierarchical unity acquires meaning in caring for pneumatic unity" (cf. *ibid.*, p. 583). (3) All in all, church unity presents itself in many different forms: in the common life of faith, expressed in the confession of faith and in a life shaped by love (cf. *ibid.*, p. 590), as a fellowship of prayer and sacrifice (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 590f.), as a community of suffering and obedience, founded in the

this question will require particular theological prudence, for expecting or demanding too much in this respect will achieve little, whereas wanting too little might suggest that the confession of the church's unity is not being taken seriously.

Prudence is certainly appropriate. For the church has never existed in

uncontested, untroubled unity... . The entire history of the church, from its earliest beginnings, is the history of a church that confesses its unity, yet has time and again been divided over this confession and the understanding of church unity. But we have to distinguish between the multiplicity of representations of the one *ekklesia* and the dividedness that can result from the attempt to find unity in the sense of uniformity. There is a legitimate diversity which does not contradict unity but which, on the contrary, is a necessary part of it. But there is also a form of opposition of an exclusive kind which makes unity impossible and which should not be downplayed for the love of unity; rather, for the sake of true unity, what is needed is an admission of the lack of unity.²¹

When it comes to Christian worship, the visible church can surely be said to represent the unity of the church, for the church comes into being first and foremost in the form of worship. Here the Triune God, as God revealed Godself in the history of Jesus Christ, finds God's earthly representation. Where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, Christ is there among them and unites them as his body. This invisible one body of Christ has its visible counterpart or representation in worship, and as the body of Christ is represented, so also is its unity. This happens whenever the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments are celebrated according to the gospel. This unity leads to *communio* among the believers, which is expressed in the sharing of the different gifts, as well as in the sharing of burdens and suffering.

Of considerable importance in this connection is the question of what is or is not necessary for the unity of the church. Is the episcopal office an integral part of unity? Or, can the consensus about the gospel

"acceptance of the hierarchical authorities established by Christ" (cf. *ibid.*, p. 595). It would be worthwhile examining to what extent Vatican II and the ensuing ecumenical agreements call for some corrections to Schmaus's arguments, and it would be helpful if some doctrinal clarification were to come from the Roman Catholic side as to whether these statements need to be contradicted, and if so, to what extent.

²¹ Ebeling *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 371f.

be adequately expressed in its verbal and sacramental form, without the episcopal office? Can church unity be laid down dogmatically, so that “the ideal would be progressively to determine the theological definitions as closely as possible”?—an approach that Gerhard Ebeling strenuously warned against.²² Lastly, what is preventing the separated churches, all of which claim themselves to represent the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, from establishing *communio* among themselves? Is the recognition of a *communio* of churches a prior requirement for the common celebration of the Lord’s Supper, or is such a celebration itself a decisive step on the way to the visible unity of the church?

Since a broad consensus exists between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches with regard to the teaching on the Eucharist, the real point of divergence between them seems to lie in the question of ministry. The Reformation churches are said by the Vatican not to have “preserved ... the true episcopate,” so that their ordination is deemed defective. Clarification of the problems relating to ministry therefore seems absolutely essential as the way forward for the separated churches.²³

In the meantime, as far as Rome is concerned, it should be noted that there too is a remarkable polyphony of voices. The current president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Walter Kasper, in his address on the occasion of his nomination as honorary professor in Tübingen, suggested that—deviating from the official language usage of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—in future we should speak of different types of churches, so that the demeaning talk of “ecclesial communities” could be abandoned.²⁴ This kind of language would allow for ecumenical work and open the way for new steps forward.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 373.

²³ Cf. the series of theses published in the Festschrift for Theodor Schneider. Bernd Jochen Hilberath/Otfried Hofius/Eberhard Jüngel/Michael Theobald, “Tübinger Thesen zum Amt in der Kirche,” in Konrad Raiser and Dorothea Sattler (eds), *Ökumene vor neuen Zeiten. FS Theodor Schneider* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2000), pp. 261–291, here pp. 267–274 [= Eberhard Jüngel, *Indikative der Gnade - Imperative der Freiheit. Theologische Erörterungen IV*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), pp. 373–380]. On the understanding of ministry of the Reformation churches, cf. also Werner Führer, *Das Amt der Kirche. Das reformatorische Verständnis des geistlichen Amtes im ökumenischen Kontext* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund-Verlag, 2001).

²⁴ Walter Kasper, “Situation und Zukunft der Ökumene,” in *ThQ* 181 (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 2001), pp. 175–190, here pp. 184f.: “In the course of the Reformation and the formation of confessions that followed ... a new type of church in fact developed... Churches ..., that deliberately understood themselves as different from the Catholic church, in short, and more correctly: churches of a different type.”

II. The Soteriological Relevance of the Church: The New Testament Witness

The Correlation between Ecclesiology and Soteriology in the New Testament

Eve-Marie Becker

Syntheses of ecclesiology and soteriology in creedal texts

In principal, ecclesiology and soteriology are different theological topics. In the New Testament writings both topics are not correlated systematically either. A synthesis of ecclesiological and soteriological aspects, however, can be observed within confessional acts.

Already in earliest Christianity, creedal formulae and texts or confessional formulae¹ reveal certain aspects of a close correlation between ecclesiology and soteriology. According to David E. Aune, such creedal formulae in the New Testament as “Jesus is the Messiah” (Jn 20:31), or “Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3), “refer to declarative statements of varying length that are typically recited by groups in the setting of worship as a way of expressing common beliefs and values.”² According to Aune, articulating the belief in worship is a constitutive factor in the formulation of creedal formulae. Thus, creeds contain soteriological aspects of belief that constitutes and characterizes early Christian assemblies. This is how the basic correlation between soteriology and ecclesiology works *in praxi*.

Beside these short creedal formulae, we also find longer texts, such as acclamations, consisting of two (= binitarian: 1 Cor 8:6) or three (= trinitarian: 2 Cor 13:13) creedal elements, hymns (e.g., Phil 2:6-11), or liturgical songs (e.g., Rev 5:9-10; 15:3-4).³ These also have a creedal func-

¹ Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament. An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2006), pp. 34ff.

² David E. Aune, “Art, Creeds, Creedal Formulas,” in David E. Aune, *Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), p. 120.

³ Here we find ὁ δὲ ω as an introduction to the liturgical form.

tion in Christian worship, or confessions of Jesus as the Χριστός, as we find them in the gospel narratives (e.g., Mk 8:29ff.; Jn 6:68). Besides, texts such as Matthew 28:19 became important for the development of Christian creedal formulae without themselves being in a creedal form.

The meaning of creedal formulae and statements is based on the fact that, as John Kelly puts it, the early church was “from its beginnings a believing, confessing and proclaiming church.”⁴ If we look at Irenaeus or Tertullian, we can observe the further development of creedal formulae in the sense of an establishment of a rule of faith (*regula fidei*; κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας): both in binitarian⁵ concepts, which for instance refer to 1 Corinthians 8:6,⁶ or in trinitarian⁷ concepts.⁸

In *Adversus haereses* 1.10.1, Irenaeus defines preaching (κήρυγμα) or teaching (παράδοσις) (1.10.2), a characteristic and unifying factor of the church in its mission (“in one God ..., in one Christ Jesus..., in holy Spirit:” εἰς ἓνα θεόν..., εἰς ἓνα Χριστόν Ἰησοῦν..., εἰς πνεῦμα ἅγιον). Nonetheless, neither in Irenaeus nor in Tertullian can we observe that the church itself is a substantial part of the creed, i.e., object of belief. Rather, the church is considered to be the result of the binitarian or trinitarian creeds.⁹ According to Kelly, it could be the *Dêr-Balyzeh-Euchologion* (around mid-fourth century) which, in the context of eschatology, makes the church such an explicit part of the creedal formula for the first time (“in the resurrection of the flesh, in the holy catholic church:” εἰς σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν, ἐν τῇ ἁγίᾳ καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ).¹⁰ Only the Old Roman Creed, which we know primarily through Rufinus (*Commentarius in symbolum apostolorum*, approx. 404),¹¹ might precede this.

⁴ John N. D. Kelly, *Altchristliche Glaubensbekenntnisse. Geschichte und Theologie*, UTB 1746, 2nd edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), p. 15; Cf. also Dunn, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 34.

⁵ E.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* book III, ch. 1.2; Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 1.4.

⁶ Irenaeus, *ibid.*, 3.16.6; cf. Kelly, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 84.

⁷ E.g., Irenaeus, *op. cit.* (note 5), 1.10.1; Tertullian, *De praescriptione* 17. Cf. Kelly, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 88f.

⁸ According to Kelly, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 86-92, we find the *regula fidei* four times in Tertullian's writings: *De praescriptione haereticorum* 13; 36; *De virginibus velandis* 1; *Adversus Praxeam* 2. Cf. also Peter Bruns, “Symbol/Symbolerklärung,” in Sigmar Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings (eds), *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, 3rd edition (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), pp. 660-662.

⁹ Cf. e.g., Tertullian, *De baptismo* 6; Irenaeus, *op. cit.* (note 5), 1.10.1.

¹⁰ Kelly, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 92. Cf. also Hans-Jürgen Feulner, “Euchologion,” in Döpp and Geerlings, *op. cit.* (note 8), pp. 235-236.

¹¹ Kelly, *ibid.*, pp. 104f. Cf. also Matthias Skeb, “Rufin von Aquileia/Concordia,” in Döpp and

In the New Testament texts, we find *ὁμολογεῖν* (“to confess,” e.g., Jn 1:20; 9:22; Rom 10:9; 1 Jn 2:23; 4:2f.; Rev 3:5) and *ὁμολογία* (“confession,” 2 Cor 9:13; 1 Tim 6.12f.; Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23) and, in semantic opposition to this, *ἀρνέομαι* (“to deny,” Jn 1:20; Mt 10:32f.; Lk 12:8f.; 1 Jn 2:23; Tit 1:16), as Greek terms relevant with regard to the formulation of the creeds. Generally speaking, creedal language and formulae as well as the preaching of the gospel (*εὐαγγέλιον*) are based on the belief in Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:13f.; cf. Ps 116:10 LXX): Preaching and the creeds are closely related to believing (*πιστεύειν*). In this respect, a text such as Romans 10:8b-10 is of particular interest:

that is, the word of faith that we proclaim; because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.

These verses not only indicate the essence of Christian belief (verse 9a: Jesus is Lord; verse 9b: God raised him from the dead), but also the correlation between certain terms and *topoi*, namely: belief (*πίστις*), preaching (*κηρύσσομεν*), creed (*ὁμολογεῖν*), believing (*πιστεύειν*) and salvation (*σωτηρία*). As Robert Jewett stated recently, “The close association between confession and salvation derives from early Christian missionizing, in which the preached word evokes oral responses from converts.”¹² With regard to Romans 10, Rudolf Bultmann describes the Pauline structure of faith (*πίστις*), namely: obedience (*ὑπακοή*), confession (*ὁμολογία*), hope (*ἐλπίς*), fear (*φόβος*) and trust.¹³

Nonetheless, even if we recognize such a natural interconnection between faith and confession (*πίστις* and *ὁμολογία*), we will need to distinguish between confessing (*ὁμολογεῖν*) and believing (*πιστεύειν*): confessing is done orally and loudly (“with your lips”) and includes the creedal statement: Jesus is Lord. It is a formal proclamation¹⁴ or

Geerlings, *op. cit.* (note 8), pp. 612-614.

¹² Robert Jewett, *Romans. A Commentary. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), p. 630.

¹³ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. I, transl. K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 314ff.

¹⁴ Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer*, HNT 8a, 4th edition (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), p. 281. Käsemann, however, does not distinguish between *πιστεύειν* and *ὁμολογεῖν*: “Both verbs refer to the content of the faith, which is fixed in the creed, and can therefore not be separated.”

acclamation, and we can therefore assume that Romans 10:9-11 refers to baptism.¹⁵ Believing is an inner conviction (“in your heart”).¹⁶ This proclamation includes the statement, “God raised him from the dead.”

Both acts—believing and confessing—are related to each other as follows: *credo ut confiteor*.¹⁷ While according to verse 9 confessing and believing are conditions for being saved, verse 10 relates the inner attitude of believing to justification (δικαιοσύνη) and confessing to salvation (σωτηρία). Thus, in Romans 10, Paul finally focuses on oral expression, i.e., the formal proclamation (ὁμολογεῖν) of the Christian belief.

The formulation of creedal formulae in early Christian times is a consequence of faith/believing (πίστις/πιστεύειν) and, within the different types of worship, is situated in a creedal act (ὁμολογία) and identifies Christians as belonging to the church of God (ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ). A Pauline text such as Romans 10:9 shows that the constitutive sequence of faith (πίστις) and the content (“Lord Jesus”) of the creed (ὁμολογία) are complemented by salvation (σωτηρία). Thus, faith (πίστις) and creed (ὁμολογία) have a soteriological relevance, which is bound to worship and the community of Christian believers (ἐκκλησία). Here we can observe the interrelatedness of salvation (σωτηρία) and the church (ἐκκλησία) that is mediated by the apostolic mission and preaching.

The interrelatedness of ecclesiology and soteriology in New Testament theology

In New Testament exegesis, references to the correlation between ecclesiology and soteriology only occur implicitly, because traditional concepts of New Testament theology prefer to look at the various dogmatic *loci* separately. In the German context, most recent examples for such an approach are Ferdinand Hahn¹⁸ and Udo Schnelle.¹⁹ Let us

¹⁵ Cf. Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, vol. 2, Romans 6-11 (EKK VI/2), 3rd edition (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner), p. 227.

¹⁶ Concerning the relation of Romans 10:9 to Deuteronomy 30:14, cf. Käsemann, *op. cit* (note 14), p. 280; Wilckens, *ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁷ Cf. John Reumann, “Bekenntnis,” in II.2 *RGG*, vol. 1, 4th edition (1998), pp. 1248-1249, here p. 1248.

¹⁸ Cf. Ferdinand Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Band II: Die Einheit des neuen Testaments (Thematische Darstellung)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 310ff. and pp. 442ff. Soteriology and ecclesiology are dealt with separately.

¹⁹ Cf. Udo Schnelle, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, UTB 2917 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck &

examine two concepts that appear promisingly to present the correlation between ecclesiology and soteriology. First, in his *Theology of the New Testament*, Rudolf Bultmann contributes to this topic by specifically conceptualizing Pauline theology.²⁰ Second, in his 1993 monograph Jürgen Roloff developed a New Testament ecclesiology that discussed the correlation between ecclesiology and soteriology.²¹

Rudolf Bultmann's Theology of the New Testament

Bultmann places Pauline theology within the framework of faith and distinguishes between two periods, namely: “man [sic] prior to the revelation of faith” and “man [sic] under faith.”²² Thus, according to Bultmann’s interpretation of Pauline theology, faith functions as a keyword. The second period, “man [sic] under faith,” has four aspects defined by Pauline terminology: (1) God’s righteousness (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ); (2) grace (χάρις); (3) faith (πίστις); and (4) freedom (ἐλευθερία). Under grace (χάρις), a soteriological term, an explicit connection to ecclesiology is established in paragraph 34: “The Word, the Church, the Sacraments.”²³

Bultmann’s starting point is eschatology: because salvation has to be considered an eschatological event, the apostle as a mediator of the Word is part of this eschatological scenario.²⁴ The preaching of the Word calls and brings together ἐκκλησία and vice versa: “As it [the church] was called into existence by the proclaimed Word, its existence in turn is the foundation of the preaching.”²⁵ At the same time, the church (ἐκκλησία) remains an ambiguous phenomenon: it is visible as a part of the contemporary world and invisible, i.e., just visible for believers, as an element of the world to come.²⁶

Ruprecht, 2007) suggests a disposition of theological themes and topics in the scheme: “Theologie, Christologie, Pneumatologie, Soteriologie, Anthropologie, Ethik, Ekklesiologie, Eschatologie.” Cf. “Concerning Ephesians,” pp. 521ff.

²⁰ Cf. Bultmann, *op. cit.* (note 13).

²¹ Cf. Jürgen Roloff, *Die Kirche im Neuen Testament. Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament*. 10 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

²² Cf. Bultmann, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp. 190ff. and pp. 270ff.

²³ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 306–314.

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 307f.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

How does soteriology interfere with Bultmann's eschatological characterization of the church? He formulates two ideas: First, "Paul may designate the eschatological character of the Church ... in terms of the ... history of salvation. He does so when he connects it with the 'new covenant'" ²⁷ Thus, Paul uses soteriological terminology for defining the church and separating it from its inner-worldly context. Second, the cultic meeting of community has to be considered as the centre of life in community. ²⁸ In this respect, the two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, are important: while baptism includes the individual in the *σῶμα Χριστοῦ* ²⁹ for Paul the ceremony of the Lord's Supper has a magical as well as a kerygmatic function. "Obviously ... the efficacy of the sacrament—in spite of the influence of mystery ideas—does not really rest upon the elements, the bread and wine partaken, but rests upon the doing of this act as an act of 'proclamation'." ³⁰ I understand Bultmann's definition of the sacrament primarily as an interpretive theological approach to Paul. On the basis of recent studies in ancient mystery cults further distinction would be required. ³¹

Jürgen Roloff's The Church in the New Testament

In his monograph on New Testament ecclesiology, Roloff makes three explicit references to soteriology. ³² These are connected to the *corpus Paulinum* only and indicate a certain development of ecclesiology from Paul himself via a Deutero-Pauline letter such as Ephesians to the Pastoral Epistles.

(1) Concerning the ecclesiology of the authentic Pauline letters, Roloff sees a certain incompleteness: "Unlike the key Pauline doctrines—Christol-

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 309: "The eschatological holiness which takes form in the cultic gathering determines the structure of the Congregation and its life in general."

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 311f.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 313.

³¹ Cf. for example Hans Dieter Betz, "Mysterienreligion II. Christlicher Kult und Mysterien," in *RGK*, vol. 5, 4th edition (2002) 1640-1642, 1641: "Das NT zeigt, daß die Urkirche ihre Rituale nicht durch Kultübertragung aus den Mysterien entwickelt hat; sie stammen aus dem Judentum und sind nicht esoterisch, sondern öff(en)tl(ich). Einwirkung der Mysterien geschieht auf der Ebene der mysterientheol(ogischen) Interpretation." [The New Testament shows that the early church did not develop its rituals on the basis of mysteries. Rather, they originated in Judaism and are not esoteric but public. Their influence takes place at the level of the mystery theological interpretation.]

³² Cf. Roloff, *op. cit.* (note 21), with reference to pp. 88, 237, 252.

ogy, soteriology, justification and eschatology—where certain theoretical basic concepts are fixed, things in ecclesiology are more floating. Thus it would seem that ecclesiology is still in the process of being developed.”³³ Roloff refers to two metaphors Paul uses for defining the church, namely: the body of Christ (σῶμα Χριστοῦ, e.g., 1 Cor 12) and the people of God (λαὸς θεοῦ, especially Rom 9-11). The metaphor of the body of Christ bases ecclesiology on Christology, so that soteriology is implicated as a “message of the justification of the sinner,”³⁴ while the people of God metaphor refers to the dimension of salvation history: “It is about the continuity of God’s acting with his people Israel in history.”³⁵

(2) The letter to the Ephesians represents a shift in Pauline ecclesiology (Eph 5:22-33). Now the church mediates between Christ and the believer: “Ecclesiology has become a condition for soteriology.”³⁶ How has ecclesiology developed from Paul to Ephesians? The metaphor of the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12 indicates that ecclesiology is based on Christology, in the sense that soteriology is a precondition for participation in the church. In Ephesians 5, this order is reversed: Christ—as the head of the community—has saved the church—as his body—so that believers can partake in salvation only by taking part in the church.

(3) In the Pastoral Epistles, we find a different correlation between ecclesiology and soteriology. According to 1 Timothy 3:15f., for example, the church is classified as the house of God (οἶκος θεοῦ), which functions as a “support of the truth” (ἐδραίωμα τῆς ἀληθείας).³⁷ So the church acts as a sign of the presence of salvation, which is articulated by the epiphany of Christ, who has brought to light life and immortality through the gospel (cf. 2 Tim 1:10).³⁸

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 88: “Während im Bereich der großen paulinischen Lehrthemen—der Christologie, Soteriologie, Rechtfertigungslehre und Eschatologie—bestimmte gedankliche *Grundkonstanten* festliegen..., sind in der Ekklesiologie die Dinge noch stärker im Fluß. Es hat fast den Anschein, als sei sie erst in einem Entstehungsprozeß begriffen.” Here and in the following, author’s own translation.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁷ Concerning the singularity of this formulation, cf. the standard Greek dictionary, Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 478.

³⁸ Cf. Roloff, *op. cit.* (note 21), p. 253.

From the perspective of the history of religions: sacraments as ritual

The above mentioned concepts regarding the correlation between ecclesiology and soteriology are to be understood as contributions to New Testament theology. Besides, New Testament exegesis works historically and phenomenologically with regard to the reconstruction of early Christian history, literature and religion. Therefore, I shall refer to at least one concept in the field of history of religion, which shows how the interrelatedness of ecclesiology and soteriology can be described on the basis of religious studies.

In his monograph on the religion of the first Christians, Gerd Theissen characterizes the origin of Christian sacraments as a transformation of symbolic rites and actions.³⁹ In the process of transforming “prophetic symbolic actions into primitive Christian sacraments,”⁴⁰ baptism and the Lord’s Supper have been related to Jesus’ death. We can therefore conclude that in early Christianity, rites which—together with ethos and mythos—are generally characteristic signs of the foundation of religious communities, have assumed an interpretative function in respect to Jesus’ death. At the same time, we can observe that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are also related to the interpretation of Jesus’ death differently. While the relation of the Lord’s Supper to Jesus’ suffering and death can be traced back to the historical Jesus, it seems quite clear to Theissen that baptism has only secondarily been connected to Jesus’ death “... baptism was associated with the promise of the forgiveness of sins, and an early consensus in primitive Christianity was that forgiveness of sins was brought about by the expiatory death of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5).”⁴¹ Theissen’s concept of early Christian religious history is based on semiotics.⁴² Not only the religious need for rites as community markers is specific for the development of Christian sacraments. There exists, moreover, an interpretative aim of understanding sacraments as religious signs, i.e., as soteriological references to and representations of Jesus’ death.

³⁹ Cf. Gerd Theissen, *The Religion of The Earliest Churches. Creating a Symbolic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), pp. 119ff.

⁴⁰ Theissen, *op. cit.* (note 39), p. 128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 2ff.

Thus, from a religious-historical perspective, ecclesiology and soteriology interact as follows: the community's (ἐκκλησία) need for religious rites has set free a soteriological interpretation of the sacraments. Soteriology is, so to speak, an interpretative consequence of the celebration of religious rites within the early Christian communities.

Some overall observations

We have seen that most ways of correlating ecclesiology and soteriology are formulated in the *corpus Paulinum*, setting different emphases depending on the authorship (authentic; pseudepigraphical) and date (mid or late first century) of the letters. The question that arises is, Why are ideas for relating ecclesiology to soteriology best found within the Pauline and Deutero- or Trito-Pauline Epistles?

In the case of the Pauline Epistles, we are dealing with argumentative texts that address the issue of defining the church or the meaning and function of Christ's salvation. In contrast to other argumentative texts such as the New Testament letters, which are not part of the *corpus Paulinum* (Jn 1-3; Heb; Jas; Pet 1-2; Judas), the Pauline and Deutero- or Trito-Pauline Epistles are community letters or at least letters giving instructions for community leadership (Pastoral Epistles: Tim 1-2; Titus). Thus, Pauline theology can be described as a "community theology"⁴³ and we can therefore expect the Pauline Epistles to discuss diverse aspects of ecclesiology that include questions of soteriology.

The second question relates to what the substantial outcome of our investigation of the interrelationship between ecclesiological and soteriological ideas might be.

(1) The correlation between ecclesiological and soteriological concepts is expressed through diverse theological concepts which are based on the formulation of specific terminology: faith, grace, church—some of the most important Pauline concepts. These concepts stand for the argumentative rationalization of diverse aspects of Christian belief. By defining grace, Paul formulates central soteriological ideas; by finding synonyms for the church (ἐκκλησία, κλητοί, ἄγιοι), Paul defines the nature of Christian community. And, finally, by relating grace and the church

⁴³ Cf. Oda Wischmeyer, "Themen paulinischer Theologie," in Oda Wischmeyer (ed.), *Paulus. Leben—Umwelt—Werk—Briefe*, UTB 2767 (Tübingen/Basel: Francke, 2006), pp. 275-304, here p. 283.

or the group of recipients (e.g., 1 Cor 1:1-3; Rom 6.14), Paul expresses ideas for interrelating ecclesiology and soteriology.

Theological concepts are also based on metaphorical language. Expressions such as the “body of Christ” or the “people of God”, do not simply function as the ecclesiological classification of a group of believers, but manifest the christological and soteriological backgrounds upon which Paul’s creation of ecclesiological terms and metaphors is based.

(2) The interrelationship of ecclesiological and soteriological concepts becomes evident in the creedal statements. A text such as Romans 10:9-11 shows that the homologetic act, required by the individual believer as well as the entire community, includes eminent soteriological statements.

(3) Beside the articulation of the creeds, as occurs in worship and especially in baptism, the development of Christian sacraments out of religious rites indicates a close relationship between early Christian rituals and the soteriological content of Christian belief.

Exegetical observations: 2 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 3

Finally, taking the Pauline Epistles as a starting point, I shall formulate some exegetical observations that might indicate how the search for a correlation between ecclesiological and soteriological ideas in the Pauline Epistles can be continued.⁴⁴

In her article, “Topics of Pauline theology,” Oda Wischmeyer presents a structure of central themes and topics of Pauline theology according to dogmatic *loci* (theology, Christology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, ethics, eschatology).⁴⁵ It is interesting to observe in what detail Wischmeyer describes soteriology and ecclesiology in respect to their diverse theological aspects, for instance to show how Paul develops a theological topic such as ecclesiology. I shall here refer to Wischmeyer’s description of ecclesiology.⁴⁶

Ecclesiology refers to: apostleship (e.g., Gal 1-2); the preaching of the gospel (e.g., 1 Cor 15:1-11); sacraments (baptism/Lord’s Supper; e.g., Rom 6:1-11); worship (1 Cor 12-14); Old Testament/Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor 10:1-13).

⁴⁴ For an overview of exegetical-theological approaches to Pauline theology, cf. Ferdinand Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Band I. Die Vielfalt des Neuen Testaments. Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 181ff.

⁴⁵ Cf. Wischmeyer, *op. cit.* (note 43), pp. 276-278.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

This systematization not only constitutes a multiple view regarding the diverse thematic aspects such as ecclesiology, but also indicates a link between the different theological topics: For example, apostleship as a theological topic is relevant for both topics, soteriology and ethics. Therefore, the different theological topics or *loci* can be distinguished and systematized because there is a general permeability, which becomes evident in the rationale of the concrete Pauline texts. For that purpose, I shall look at two Pauline texts, which develop the correlation between ecclesiological and soteriological concepts in very different ways.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19-20, Paul further elaborates on the statement of the “new creation” (καινὴ κτίσις, verse 17). Verse 18 explains the conditions of such a new creation in that everything new comes from God, “who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (διακονία τῆς καταλλαγῆς). Verse 19 further states that, “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself ... entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (λόγος τῆς καταλλαγῆς). So the apostle acts as a messenger for Christ and invites the community to be reconciled to God (verse 20).

In these verses, Paul transforms apostleship into a ministry of reconciliation for the communities in Corinth and Achaia. In other words, as a soteriological event, reconciliation is mediated by the apostolic mission within and to the community.

In Galatians 3:26-28, Paul formulates a different kind of interrelationship between ecclesiology and soteriology. In verse 26, Paul summarizes the consequences of faith: “in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” In verse 27, Paul correlates being baptized and being related to Christ: “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Thus, baptism acts as a kind of clothing that expresses the community’s close relationship to Christ. Being dressed with Christ happens through baptism, it leads to the unity of the community (verse 28b: “for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”) and, according to verse 28a, that can be described in even more detail: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female.” Hence, we can conclude that ecclesiological life, based on the soteriological act of baptism as a clothing with Christ, neglects discrepancies among the group of believers, caused by race or origin, social status and gender.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Verse 29 points to another aspect of the consequences of soteriology that is relevant for the community, namely the integration of believers in the salvation history of Israel (Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα ἐστέ).

Galatians 3:26-28 finally points at the ethical perspectives that follow the believers' soteriological *status quo*, i.e., being clothed in a "christological uniform," the consequences of which are the objection to any kind of generic, cultural, social or sexual differences in community life.

If we compare the correlation between the ecclesiological and soteriological aspects in 2 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 3 we can conclude the following: In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul develops the relevance of soteriology for the Corinthian community from the perspective of the apostolic ministry. The soteriological relevance of reconciliation is revealed through apostolic mission within the community. In Galatians 3, Paul seeks to clarify the believers' *status quo* after baptism: by wearing such a "christological uniform" and neglecting any kind of social hierarchy, the ecclesiological and ethical relevance of salvation become evident. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul develops the interrelation of ecclesiology and soteriology on the basis of apostleship, i.e., the act of kerygmatic pronouncement. In Galatians 3, however, Paul points to the ethical consequences of salvation in the community, i.e., the visibility of soteriology.

III. Learning from Different Christian Traditions and Ecumenical Dialogues

The Ecumenical Relevance of the Marks of the Church

Minna Hietamäki

Introduction

In bilateral ecumenism, ecclesiological questions have most often been approached indirectly. The first ones are often the “classically controversial” questions or areas where commonalities are most tangible. It is an ecclesiological paradox that to start an ecumenical dialogue, that is, to strive towards the unity of the church by seeking unity with a particular dialogue partner, is implicitly a positive assessment of the dialogue partner’s ecclesial character. If ecumenical dialogue is to be a true dialogue rather than a monologue, then this implies a certain recognition of the ecclesial character of the dialogue partner and a willingness to being exposed to it. An important aspect of ecumenical dialogue is the willingness to discern one’s own ecclesial character. There are two distinctly different perceptions of the purpose of dialogue. While monologue assumes that a clear enough exposition of the truth as understood and conceptualized by a church will result in others recognizing the truth and returning to it, dialogue is founded on a relational or dialogical anthropology in which the individual “I” is formed or, at least in a certain sense, affected through the encounter with the “other.” In dialogue, we not only question the character of the other but also that of our own community.¹ Geoffrey Wainwright describes the dialogical attitude as “a readiness for self-criticism and willingness to look at others sympathetically.”²

A dialogue document describes that which is peculiar to the relationship between the two dialoguing churches. It resonates, of course, with what the churches hold to be universally true. The specific emphases pertain to the unique encounter between two dialogue partners, which is obviously challenging with regard to the compatibility of different dialogue documents.

¹ Johannes Brosseder, “Dialogfähige Theologie,” in Johannes Brosseder (ed.), *Dialogfähige Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1998), pp. 9–32, here, pp. 18–19.

² Geoffrey Wainwright, “Church,” in Nicholas Lossky *et al.* (eds), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd edition (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003), p. 179.

In the following, I shall discuss the understanding and relevance of the four classical marks of the church in the ecumenical context. My examples will be drawn primarily from dialogues between Anglicans, Lutherans and Roman Catholics. I will begin by reflecting on the concept of the marks of the church and examine their relevance for the ecumenical quest for unity. It is obvious that the ecumenical question is not primarily about the marks as such, but their theological significance. I will conclude with some thoughts on the compatibility of the different approaches.

Marks or attributes of the church?

According to *Merriam-Webster's*, the word “mark” has a number of different meanings. Two of these meanings have rather different ecumenical implications. A mark as a “distinguishing trait or quality: characteristic the *marks* of an educated person”³ has the connotation of “signifying.” In the theological and ecumenical sense, the four marks of the church are not universally understood in such a way. This connotation nevertheless exists, both as a threat and a hope. Another meaning of mark is “goal or object.”⁴ This meaning of the word mark resonates with Geoffrey Wainwright’s observation in the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* regarding the basic tension between the actual and the ideal, or “the already” and “the not yet,” which underlies all ecumenical encounters. Wainwright writes,

The four “notes” of the church—its unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity—all labour under that tension: there is need for reconciliation and a manifest unity; there is an imperative to the conquest of sin and a growth in holiness; there is room for many forms of the true faith in a harmonious catholicity: there is a test of apostolicity to applied to all intended embodiments of the gospel message.⁵

In ecumenical terms, the question regarding the marks of the church can be divided into four sub-questions: (1) Are there recognizable marks that signify that the true church is present or should the classical marks be

³ At www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mark .

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Wainwright, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 176-186.

considered a goal toward which the churches should strive? (2) If marks are understood as signs, what are the signifying marks? (3) If marks are not understood as signs, what then is the function of the four classical marks of the church—oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity—, taking into consideration that as a part of the Nicene Creed they are part of the commonly shared tradition of the church? (4) What ecumenical implications are there if marks are understood as a goal?

In the ecumenical context, the “signifying” understanding of the classical marks of oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity have not been primarily understood as such. None of the four marks is tangible enough to serve as the constitutive mark of true ecclesial character. The same goes for other biblical and traditional images such as “the body of Christ,” “the temple of the Spirit” and “the people of God.” Churches perceive these classical images, descriptions and definitions from various positions. Consequently, the descriptions and definitions differ from one church to another to the extent that merely repeating them seems to contribute very little to the actual problem of a divided Christianity. In principle, it is not difficult for the churches to agree on oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity as being essential features of the church. Problems arise when describing their concrete manifestations. This is maybe the reason why the bilateral ecumenical documents appear to distinguish between the four classical marks as essential attributes of the church, and the visible signs that signify the presence of these attributes. The distinction is not clear and most likely not understood in the same way in different ecclesial contexts.

Since the 1980s, the Lutheran Roman Catholic dialogue has produced several ecclesiological documents. At the international level, they include: *Ways to Community* (1980),⁶ *Facing Unity* (1984),⁷ *Church and Justification* (1993)⁸ and *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2007).⁹ Significant ecclesiological studies have also been published in Germany, (*Communio Sanctorum. The*

⁶ “Ways to Community,” in Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (eds), *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (Ramsey, NJ, Geneva: Paulist Press, World Council of Churches Publications, 1984), pp. 215-240.

⁷ “Facing Unity—Models, Forms, and Phases of Catholic—Lutheran Fellowship,” in Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch (eds), *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998* (Geneva, Grand Rapids, Mich.: World Council of Churches Publications, Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 443-484.

⁸ “Church and Justification,” in *ibid.*, pp. 485-565.

⁹ The Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (eds), *The Apostolicity of the Church. Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commissions on Unity* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006).

Church as the Communion of Saints [2000]),¹⁰ and in North America, (*The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries* [2004]).¹¹

The international dialogue texts emphasize the placing and givenness of the goal of unity. Unity cannot be constructed through our own efforts, but is received as a gift. *Ways to Community* identifies receiving life and unity in Christ with the working of the Holy Spirit through God's Word, the sacraments and the diverse ministries of the whole people of God.¹² Within these three, the emphasis is on the Word and sacraments. God's Word, fundamental to the church and baptism, is mentioned for its "basic importance for both salvation and fellowship."¹³ Proclamation, sacraments and ministry are cited as realizing the unity that is given in Christ and rooted in the Triune God.¹⁴ The text is an example of the tension between the factual versus the ideal. This can, for instance, be observed in the document's description of the sacraments as the means and the realization of unity as "already given."

The international Lutheran Roman Catholic dialogue uses the notion of catholicity as a way of explaining the variety within the church, rather than as a way of discerning the truthful nature of the church. For example, *Facing Unity* quotes Cardinal Willebrands according to whom "the life of the Church needs a variety of *typoi* which would manifest the full catholic and apostolic character of the one and holy Church."¹⁵ *Church and Justification* reaffirms this by pointing to the positive effect the church's diversity has on fulfilling its mission.¹⁶ The fullness implied by catholicity contributes to the church's apostolicity by preserving the church's authenticity. *Facing Unity* also describes "catholicity" in words that according to our current standpoint appear to point to a unity that embraces differences as first presented in *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999). The full catholicity of the faith can be mutually comprehended from the perspective of the Christological and

¹⁰ *Communio Sanctorum. The Church as the Communion of Saints*, Official German Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005). The document was originally published in 2000 in German.

¹¹ Lee Randall and Jeffrey Gross (eds), *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation. Its Structures and Ministries* (Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

¹² "Ways to Community," *op. cit.* (note 6), para. 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, paras 66-67.

¹⁴ "Facing Unity," *op. cit.* (note 7), para. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* para. 43. Cardinal Johannes Willebrands' address has been published in *Documents on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations* (Washington DC, 1972), pp. 39ff.

¹⁶ "Church and Justification," in *op. cit.* (note 7), para. 56.

Trinitarian centre of faith. Observing faith from this position will “bring about shifts of emphasis and changes in the self-understanding of our churches: overcoming of one-sidedness, loosening of constraints, correction of certain exaggerations.”¹⁷ Apostolicity, as something indicating the trueness or authenticity of a church’s character, is mentioned more frequently than the other three marks. *Facing Unity* notes that apostolic faith is of fundamental importance for the unity of the church, especially for the churches to fulfill their task of preaching.¹⁸ The latest extensive study on *The Apostolicity of the Church* considers apostolicity in a similar way. While it is thought necessary to recognize the apostolicity of a church in order to recognize the community of a church, the recognition itself takes place in observing the presence and configuration or use of certain “elements of sanctification and truth” (concept borrowed from *Lumen Gentium* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*). The document states,

on the apostolic tradition, both as comprising a manifold legacy of fundamental means of sanctification and as directed to shape community life by the gospel of our salvation in Christ, Lutheran and Catholic teaching and church life manifest a wide-ranging agreement. Today we therefore mutually recognize, at a fundamental level, the presence of apostolicity in our traditions. This recognition is not negated by the important differences still to be investigated.¹⁹

The most recent document continues along the lines of *Facing Unity*, which speaks of the importance of the apostolic faith and elaborates further on the concrete meaning of this requirement. The text speaks of apostolicity as “a mark and attribute of the church.” The goal of the dialogue is the mutual recognition of the apostolicity of the other. This is still hindered by the churches’ different understandings of ordination, the ministry in apostolic succession and the episcopate. Lutherans and Catholics still differ on the means by which the church interprets Scriptures authentically, and especially on the role of “the teaching office” in the interpretation of Scripture.²⁰

The North-American document, *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries*, is an interesting attempt to describe the

¹⁷ “Facing Unity,” *op. cit.* (note 7), para. 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 56.

¹⁹ *The Apostolicity of the Church*, *op. cit.* (note 9), para. 160.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 162.

concrete implications of the principle conviction that both Lutherans and Catholics partake in the *koinonia* of the church. The document understands the church's catholicity to include an essential element of diversity. In the text, the notion of a "normative complementarity" is used to describe a plurality in which the differing aspects complement each other in a way that is normative for the description truly to reflect the church's "catholicity and diversity."²¹ The document's discussion on the understanding of "local church" is a good example of "normative complementarity." Despite differences in theological evaluation, Lutherans and Catholics agree that the various structural levels exist in an interdependent relationship. Neither the immediate face-to-face community (the Lutheran emphasis), nor the regional communities (the Catholic emphasis) can exist without the other. It is true to say that the basic unit of the church, i.e., the place where the church is "essentially realized," is the face-to-face community where the gospel is proclaimed in Word and sacrament. At the same time, it is true to say that catholicity, which is essential to the ecclesial nature of the church, is realized only in *koinonia* with other communities. *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation* concludes that "the complementarity of face-to-face eucharistic assembly and primary regional community is [thus] theologically normative."²²

In *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation*, catholicity means the church's continuity across space in the variety of local churches in communion with each other, while apostolicity refers to continuity in time with the teaching of the apostles.²³ The text describes the means by which the church strives to preserve continuity rather than the manifestations of apostolicity. When reading the text, one has to appreciate the dialogue commission's courageous observation that the question of apostolicity has been discussed in "a canonical and mechanistic manner." The document endeavors to speak of a dynamic "bond of *koinonia*" within the church, which includes a variety of "bonds of church to the apostles' mission, ministry, and message across space and time."²⁴ It enumerates means by which the church, as a gift of the Spirit and through God's faithfulness to God's promise, strives to remain apostolic. These include the apostolic Scriptures, faithful teachers, the creeds and the continuity of ordained ministry.²⁵ The intention to avoid a mechanistic

²¹ Randall and Gross, *op. cit.* (note 11), para. 28.

²² *Ibid.*, para. 91.

²³ *Ibid.*, para. 31.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 77.

understanding of apostolicity is obvious in the implication that the mere existence of the means does not suffice; they also have to be used in the correct way, that is, in faithfulness to the gospel.²⁶ The document's emphasis on the interconnectedness between catholicity (continuity across space) and apostolicity (as continuity across time) is repeated in *The Apostolicity of the Church*. The more recent document discusses the question of apostolic succession with the help of this interconnectedness. Crucial to the apostolicity of the ministry is not primarily its connectedness to an uninterrupted chain of episcopal ordinations, but the consensus and communion among the bishops, that is, the catholicity of the ministry: "The consensus among the bishops is the decisive sign of the apostolicity of their teaching. Catholicity is the means and expression of apostolicity."²⁷ Interestingly, the mark of catholicity has now become a sign that signifies apostolicity.

From the very beginning, the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue has considered ecclesiological questions, as well as the dynamics of factual versus ideal. While the church is affected by sin and therefore in constant need of repentance and renewal in order to be seen as "the one holy, catholic and apostolic church," it also embodies God's will. The gospel contains God's promise and despite its failures, God uses the church as an instrument of God's purpose.²⁸ Since the intention of the early documents was to avoid traditional linguistic expressions, one rarely finds discussion of the oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church.

It is interesting to note that *The Church as Communion* (1990)²⁹ is in fact the first Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission's (ARCIC) document that discussed the idea of apostolicity. Here the church's characteristics are essentially interconnected.³⁰ Apostolicity is conceptualized in terms of faithfulness; if the church is to remain apostolic, it must "remain faithful to the tradition received from the apostles."³¹ Discontinuity with the Tradition (with a capital "T") leads to "disruption within the community, [and] estrangement from other parts of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 76.

²⁷ *The Apostolicity of the Church*, *op. cit.* (note 9), para. 291.

²⁸ Wainwright, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 181.

²⁹ *Church as Communion. An Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II)* (London: Church House Publ., 1991).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 41.

³¹ *Ibid.*, para. 29.

the Church,”³² that is, the loss of unity/oneness and catholicity. As in the Lutheran Roman Catholic documents discussed earlier, the ARCIC also documents that the marks of the church are connected. The catholicity of the church depends on the apostolicity of the faith and the holiness of the church’s life.³³ Unlike in *The Apostolicity of the Church*, in *The Church as Communion*, “apostolicity” as faithfulness across time has priority over relations across space (catholicity). The succession in episcopal ministry is to assure the community that their faith is indeed the apostolic faith. Communion among bishops functions as a means for sharing information between the local churches and for the local churches to “maintain their place and particular character within the communion of all the churches.”³⁴ Consequently, catholicity refers to the church’s mission to teach the entirety of the apostolic faith to all peoples and all nations. Catholicity is also understood as the presence of the diversity, which is a result of communion with God in Christ.³⁵ The aspect of diversity and the interconnectedness of the diachronic and synchronic elements of catholicity are emphasized in the later *The Gift of Authority* (1997).³⁶

The ARCIC’s understanding of unity emphasizes the visible aspect of the church’s communion. Participation in the Trinitarian life and, through this participation in the life of other Christians, is not merely a spiritual reality. According to *The Church as Community*, speaking of a spiritual unity is an inadequate way of speaking about the fulfillment of Christ’s will on earth. The invisible spiritual communion “requires visible expression.” The church’s unity, a “communion of local churches,” is real when all “the essential constitutive elements of ecclesial communion are present and mutually recognized in each of them.”³⁷ What are these elements and how do they relate to the visibility of the church’s unity? The list of essential constitutive elements is long. It includes the confession of the one apostolic faith, the church’s nature as being founded on baptism and preeminently expressed in and focused on the Eucharist. Ecclesial com-

³² *Ibid.*, para. 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, para. 40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, paras 33-34.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 39.

³⁶ *The Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III. An Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)* (London, Toronto, New York: Catholic Truth Society, Anglican Book Centre, Church Publishing, 1999), paras 26-27.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 43.

munion is expressed in the shared commitment to the church's mission; this includes the shared concern for one another in various forms. Accepting shared basic moral values is also constitutive of life in communion. The church has been provided with a ministry of oversight in order to nurture unity. According to the document, the fullness of this ministry is entrusted to the episcopate, which, in turn, finds its visible focus at the universal level in the episcopal ministry of a universal primate. The expressions and ways to preserve and foster communion between bishops includes various forms of cooperation, such as participation in episcopal ordinations, prayer for other bishops, exchange of episcopal letters and local churches maintaining the necessary communion with principal sees, particularly the See of Rome. Also, the practice of holding synods belongs to the means of maintaining unity in the one apostolic faith.³⁸

The concept of "essential constitutive elements" reappears in *The Gift of Authority* (1997). Rephrasing the list of constitutive elements, *The Gift of Authority* puts less emphasis on the episcopal ministry and speaks instead of "the apostolic ministry."³⁹ "Apostolic tradition," in a more holistic sense, is used as the context to discuss the constitutive elements of the church. In contrast to reducing "tradition" to a depository of propositions about faith, it is to be understood as the handing on of "the revealed Word," "The Gospel of Christ crucified and risen." Tradition as receiving and handing on the original witness of the apostolic community is identified with receiving and handing on of the essential constitutive elements of the ecclesial communion.⁴⁰ The basic dynamics of factual and ideal are again explicitly present. The discussion on catholicity ends with the note that although Anglicans and Catholics agree in principle with what has been said, they still need to find concrete ways of "retrieving" the shared understanding. By "retrieving" *The Gift of Authority* means the recognition of the elements of apostolic tradition present in the other church and in this way moving toward the ecumenical goal.⁴¹

The above examples show that in ecumenical documents the four classical marks of the church have essentially not been identified as being indicative of the presence of the true church. Nonetheless, it appears

³⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 45.

³⁹ The rephrased list includes baptism, confession of the apostolic faith, celebration of the Eucharist and leadership by an apostolic ministry. *Ibid.*, para. 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, para. 31.

that various other “elements” or “features” are treated as indicative marks. What is the significance of these other elements, especially in light of the classical mark of unity? In the documents cited above, the understanding of apostolicity and catholicity, not to mention the work of the Spirit, essentially include an element of possible, even necessary, diversity. This implies that the vision of the church’s unity (or oneness) also includes diversity. How does church unity relate to diversity, especially in light of the growing acceptance that the unity of the church is a “visible unity”? What is the role of the above mentioned “elements,” which at the time were understood to indicate the presence of “the true church”?

Unity, visibility and the marks of the church

The rhetoric of “full, visible unity” is best known from the bilateral documents of the Anglican Communion.⁴² I will shortly discuss two examples from the Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, the North American document *Called to Common Mission* (1999)⁴³ and the *Porvoo Common Statement* (1992).⁴⁴

The immediate context of *Called to Common Mission* was the defeated document *Toward Full Communion* (1991),⁴⁵ which conceptual-

⁴² The “visibility” of unity was also emphasized in the work of the Faith and Order movement (beginning with the 1927 meeting in Lausanne) and became attached to the WCC’s perception of the goal of the ecumenical movement at the WCC Assemblies in New Delhi (1961) and Nairobi (1975). See the Third Assembly of the WCC, New Delhi, “Report on the Section on Unity, I 2,” in *The New Delhi Report, The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1961* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1962) and the Fifth Assembly of the WCC, Nairobi, “Report of Section II: What Unity Requires, II, 2,” in David M. Paton (ed.), *Breaking Barriers*, Nairobi 1975 (Geneva: Word Council of Churches, 1976). The occurrences are by no means independent as can be seen, for example, in Mary Tanner’s presentation on Anglicanism and the ecumenical movement. Mary Tanner, “The Ecumenical Future,” in Stephen Sykes and J. Booty (eds), *The Study of Anglicanism* (London, New York: SPCK, Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 379–393, here p. 380.

⁴³ “Called to Common Mission: A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement as Adopted by the 1999 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the 2000 General Convention of the Episcopal Church,” in *Anglican-Lutheran Agreements: Regional and International Agreements, 1972–2002*, edited by Sven Oppegaard, Gregory Cameron on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, the Anglican Consultative Council (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2004).

⁴⁴ *Together in Mission and Ministry. The Porvoo Common Statement with Essays in Church and Ministry in Northern Europe* (London: Church House Publishing, 1993).

⁴⁵ William A. Norgren and William G. Rusch (eds), “*Toward Full Communion*” and “*Concordat of Agreement*.” *Lutheran—Episcopal Dialogue*, Series III (Minneapolis, Cincinnati: Augsburg Fortress, Forward Movement Publications, 1991). Reprinted in *Growing Consensus. Church Dialogues in the US. Ecumenical Documents V* (New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995), pp.

ized Lutheran and Episcopalian views of episcopal succession through the relationship between the substance (*res*) of apostolicity and the sign (*signum*) of succession. Lutheran and Episcopalian views differ on whether or not the sign can exist without the substance. The document offers a reworked understanding of the “sign” and a proposal for undoing the dichotomy of an ontological versus a functional understanding of the ministry. Consequently, the document treats episcopacy as a “practical necessity.”⁴⁶ The following statements form the core of the argument:

The church as witness to the reign of God in its worship, doctrine and polity is the primary implication of the Gospel. Therefore, ecclesial order is an implication of the Gospel and is of significance.⁴⁷

No single institution is of the *esse* of the church; only the gospel is that.⁴⁸

Apostolic succession is distinct from the institution of historic episcopate.⁴⁹

Ministerial institutions have a symbolic function. “Symbolic” here means that the ministerial institutions are ways to communicate the community’s identity both to the community itself and to other communities. Ordination is “gestural language,” which is used to communicate the self-understanding of a community.⁵⁰

Presbyteral and episcopal successions do not have identical symbolic functions. Their symbolic functions are nevertheless not antithetical. “Since we believe that the Spirit has given utterance to both, the challenge is ‘to find ways of sharing and preserving both messages.’”⁵¹

The Concordat intends to cultivate common forms that will facilitate the maximum reciprocity and interchangeability of the ordained ministry.⁵²

I would like to emphasize the asymmetrical relation between presbyteral and episcopal successions. *Toward Full Communion* does not condemn

253-338.

⁴⁶ *Toward Full Communion*, *ibid.*, paras 10, 13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, para. 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*, para. 75.

either form of ordination. In principle, both presbyteral and episcopal ordinations can contribute to the apostolicity of a church. Both forms of ordination are implied by the different emphases within the Lutheran and Anglican communions.⁵³ As signs, the forms of ordination are not interchangeable. Therefore, in a community that uses signs to communicate its identity, one cannot be substituted for the other. A life in communion requires coherent communication and the common use of communicative signs. Although, in principle, both forms of ordination are valid, they cannot exist at the same time in one communion.⁵⁴

Called to Common Mission describes episcopacy as a “sign, but not a guarantee” of apostolicity.⁵⁵ The concept of “sign” appears in three contexts: the church is described as “a sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom of God,” episcopal ordination is “a sign, though not guarantee of the unity and apostolic continuity of the whole church” and “episcopal succession as a sign shared by bishops.”⁵⁶ The document’s “theology of the sign” is characterized by two attributes of apostolicity: the “evangelical” and the “historic.” The historic episcopate, understood as a sign, is an image pointing to a reality beyond itself. The sign is not self-sufficient but continuously reconstructed by reference to the gospel. This is the “evangelical” side of episcopacy as a sign. The bishop’s role as a visible expression and symbolic presence of episcopate relates to this evangelical side of the sign. Bishops fulfill their figurative role in their authentic action, in teaching, preaching and celebrating the sacraments. The sign is “historic” when it is continuously present in the church. Neither the evangelical nor the historic aspect of episcopacy should be overemphasized. Focusing solely on the historic and symbolic sign overemphasizes the formal presence of the symbol. Concentrating only on the exercise of the ministry produces an evangelical overemphasis that makes the sign dependent on the bishop’s ability to fulfill the episcopal functions. The “historic” (figurative) and the “evangelical” (functional) are necessary correctives to one-sided interpretations.⁵⁷ *Called to Common Mission*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, para. 70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 78.

⁵⁵ This description originates with BEM and is used even more extensively in other Anglican-Lutheran documents, such as the Porvoo Common Statement. See *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 38 and para. 51 of *The Porvoo Common Statement*, at www.porvoochurches.org/statements/en/4.htm#51.

⁵⁶ *Called to Common Witness*, *op. cit.* (note 43), paras 5, 12, 19.

⁵⁷ Joseph Britton, “The Evangelicity of the Episcopate,” in *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no.

appears to support the diversity of episcopal ministries. The document nevertheless shares *Toward Full Communion's* view that although diverse forms of the ordained ministry can fulfill the criterion of being "apostolic," for the sake of witness to the faith, the churches are called to share "one ordained ministry."

In describing the new communion between Lutherans and Episcopalians, *Called to Common Mission* makes a methodological distinction between the beginning of a relationship of full communion and realizing it. Full communion will remain partially unrealized until "both churches determine that in the context of a common life and mission there is a shared ministry of bishops in the historic episcopate." It was believed that the proposed practical changes would facilitate the realization of full communion.⁵⁸ These changes reduce diversity since, for instance, they require certain uniformity in how ordination is practiced. Although this call for similarity does not fit with the goal of "reconciled diversity," the existence of differences should not be idealized.

The vision of the church in the *Porvoo Common Statement* is characterized by instrumentality and a strong missiological vision. The church is the instrument through which God realizes God's ultimate purpose.⁵⁹ Thus the church is constituted by the Word and the sacraments.⁶⁰ The proclaimed gospel summons the church as *koinonia*, baptism unites members with Christ and the Eucharist sustains the *koinonia* as the body of Christ. The ministry exists to serve this community, which is constituted by the Word and the sacraments. In the *Porvoo Common Statement*, the visible and the audible word and the ministry are necessary but their relation to the community is different. The "Word constitutes and ministry serves."⁶¹

4 (2003), pp. 614-618.

⁵⁸ "Called to Common Mission," *op. cit.* (note 43), paras 14, 16. See also Paul Avis, "The Significance of Regional Agreements for International Dialogues: An Anglican Perspective," in Alan D. Flaconer (ed.), *Eighth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues, The Implications of Regional Bilateral Agreements for the International Dialogues of Christian World Communions* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2002), p. 26.

⁵⁹ *Porvoo Common Statement, op. cit.* (note 55), paras 15, 18. Also, see Ola Tjørhom, "The Porvoo Statement. A Possible Ecumenical Breakthrough?," in *Ecumenical Review* 46, no. 1 (1994), p. 99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

⁶¹ Here Porvoo's ecclesiology seems more coherent than Meissen's, though they are comprised of very similar elements. Emphasizing the constitutive character of the Word and the sacraments clarifies the relationship between the different marks of the church. *On the Way to Visible Unity*.

In the *Porvoo Common Statement*, the connections between witness, service and apostolicity on the one hand, and witness, service and succession on the other are especially important. These connections can be placed in two categories according to the kind of questions they answer, that is the “whys” and the “hows” regarding the church’s witness. The “whys” address the constitutive elements of the church’s being, while the “hows” refer to the ways in which the church carries out its mission. The proclamation of the gospel constitutes the church. It is the fellowship of those brought together by God through the proclamation of the gospel.⁶² This is the source of ecclesial *koinonia*. Without it, the church does not exist. “The church and the Gospel are thus necessarily related to each other.”⁶³ The “why” of apostolicity is found in living “in continuity with the apostles and their proclamation.”⁶⁴ Apostolicity is a predicate of the whole church and realized through various means. Apostolicity is first the continuity in the proclaimed message and in the proclamation of the gospel. Since proclaiming the gospel and administering the sacraments require a ministry, this means continuity in ministry. The ordained ministry is nevertheless relative to the Word and the sacraments and to the mission of the whole church.⁶⁵ Ministry does not constitute the church. Its existence is necessary for the constitutive elements, the Word and the sacraments to be present and therefore also for the church to be apostolic.

The question of apostolicity in *Porvoo* is more difficult than distinguishing between the *res* of succession in apostolic witness and service from the *signum* of succession in ministry or episcopacy. Apostolicity is signified by a multitude of *signa*, none of which individually constitutes apostolicity. Within this multitude of *signa*, succession in the ministry has specific relevance because it is the specific responsibility of the ordained ministry to safeguard and express the church’s apostolicity. This

Relations between the Church of England, the Federation of the Churches in the German Democratic Republic, and the Evangelical Church in Germany in the Federal Republic of Germany (London: Church House Publishing, 1988); see Ingolf Dalferth’s criticism in “Ministry and the Office of Bishop according to Meissen and Porvoo: Protestant Remarks about Several Unclarified Questions,” in Rupert Hoare and Ingolf U. Dalferth (eds), *Visible Unity and the Ministry of Oversight, The Second Theological Conference Held under the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany* (London: Church House Publishing, 1997), pp. 9-48, here p. 15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, para. 15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 36.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 32.

raises such questions as, What is the necessity of particular individual signs? Can individual signs be seen as necessary requirements of being truly apostolic? Should the churches be open to as many “appropriate apostolic signs” as possible in order to emphasize the importance of giving visible signals of the church’s intention to remain apostolic?⁶⁶ How do we make the transition from “signs of apostolicity” (in the plural) to episcopacy as a privileged sign (singular) of apostolicity. Mary Tanner described apostolicity as “a rope of several strands of continuity.” In Tanner’s “rope,” the succession of bishops and the ordered succession in the historic episcopal sees are equally capable of maintaining the apostolic succession.⁶⁷ Tanner’s interpretation connects episcopacy and episcopal succession to the community, which the episcopal ministry serves through the historical sees of the church catholic. She does not, however, address any of the other signs of apostolicity. The intention here is for the connection between the episcopacy/episcopal succession and the community to introduce the idea of the “historicity” of succession without losing the context of the church’s *koinonia*, which is an essential element of the argument in *Porvoo*.

Conclusion

What then do we make of the marks of the church in an ecumenical context? Unity, holiness, apostolicity and catholicity appear to be ecumenically indispensable as well as intangible to the degree of being redundant. They are indispensable not only as part of the common confession of faith but also as an ecumenical imperative. The paradox of “already” and “not yet,” the “fully given” and “only partially realized,” is most painfully and most seriously observed in respect to these attributes of the church. As four words, unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are simple enough to draw us back from the sometime overly elaborate theological constructions of ecumenical documents.

⁶⁶ Ola Tjørhom, “Apostolic Continuity and Apostolic Succession in the Porvoo Common Statement: A Challenge to the Nordic Lutheran Churches,” in *Louvain Studies* 21 (1996), p. 128, and Ola Tjørhom, “Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession in the Porvoo Common Statement—Necessary or a Mere ‘Optional Extra’ in Church’s Life?,” in Ola Tjørhom (ed.), *Apostolicity and Unity. Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, World Council of Churches, 2002), pp. 162–181.

⁶⁷ Mary Tanner, “The Anglican Position on Apostolic Continuity and Apostolic Succession in the Porvoo Common Statement,” in *Louvain Studies* 21 (1996), pp. 113–125, here p. 123.

At the same time, they are challenging enough for the church's struggle fully to realize its already given characteristics. My final thoughts are on the compatibility of the various approaches with the church's unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. I would like to emphasize the positive elements of the challenge of variety. It is enlightening to see that emphases in ecumenical documents not only differ between different confessional pairs. In addition, regional documents between the same two confessions can vary in their emphases. Certainly, there is a point beyond which one can question whether the proposals made in different documents can exist at the same time. The documents are attempts to appease concerns that arise not only from the clash of universal beliefs, but also from the encounter of two traditions living in a certain age and place. This suggests that the "certain age and place" play an essential role in how the arguments are constructed and, in a sense, cannot be separated from it. Perhaps the diversity of "ecumenical solutions" could also be a process of mutual learning in the common struggle to realize more fully what has been already given, the church's oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity in tangible albeit diverse forms.

The One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church According to John Calvin

Michel Grandjean

In memory of Lukas Vischer (1926–2008)

The organizers of the study program and conference on the understanding and relevance of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church quite rightly wished the Reformed tradition to be represented. One reason might very well have been that the place where the conference took place embraced the Reformation in 1536, the year of the Bernese conquest of Vaud, but it was a reformation that owes more to Zwingli than to Luther. A few years earlier, at the fateful Marburg confrontation (1529), Luther and Zwingli parted company due to a resounding failure to agree on the understanding of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Luther allegedly refused to shake hands with Zwingli, peremptorily declaring, “Your spirit and our spirit cannot go together. Indeed, it is quite obvious that we do not have the same spirit.” Despite the common attachment to the Scriptures, the newly born Reformation was split asunder, followed by heated disputes between John Calvin and Joachim Wesphal and between Heinrich Bullinger and Johannes Brenz. At the end of the sixteenth century, some Lutherans even asserted that it was better to be a papist than a Calvinist: *lieber päpstlich als calvinistisch*.

Fortunately, times have changed. Since the 1973 Leuenberg Concordat, Lutherans and Reformed Christians of Europe form a fellowship of altar and pulpit, which urgently needs not only to be extended to all our churches, but also to be deepened—even if the intra-Protestant dialogue progresses with a cautiousness that could rightly be considered excessive.¹

¹ Since the Leuenberg Concordat, a number of efforts have been made which are documented in various reports (cf. *Toward Church Fellowship. Report of the Joint Commission of the LWF and WARC* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1989); *Called to Communion and Common Witness. Report of the Joint Working Group between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1999–2001* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2002). The culmination of these efforts was the creation of a Lutheran-Reformed Joint Commission in 2006 by the LWF

The inclusion of a contribution on Calvin's ecclesiology is all the more legitimate in this context since, despite all the differences between Luther and Calvin, failing to evoke the deep Lutheran roots of Calvin's theology would be to risk misrepresenting his thinking. No matter how divergent the emphasis placed in Wittenberg and in Geneva on the role and uses of the law, whatever the differences between their conceptions of the relationship between church and state, Calvin agrees with Luther on the one truly fundamental point of all Reformation theology, namely, justification by faith. To use Alexandre Ganoczy's words, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, at least in the first version of 1536, is "basically a Lutheran work" insofar as its content generally agrees with Luther's catechisms.² Calvin later nuanced his theology, developing his own ecclesiology, while keeping the same title for his book in order to show that, in his view, there was more continuity than change.

At the time of the Bernese conquest of Vaud in 1536, Calvin was the young author of a text published in Basel, the *Institutio religionis christianae*, which was an introductory textbook on the Protestant faith intended especially to enlighten King Francis I of France on true Christian piety. This was before Calvin's arrival in Geneva, where he would take up residence a few months later, linking his name to that of this town of scarcely more than 10,000 inhabitants where he would tackle the task of organizing the church. Two years later, he was expelled from the city following a dispute with the authorities and took refuge in Strasbourg. Acceding to pleas from the inhabitants of Geneva to return, he journeyed back to the city and remained there until his death in 1564. Calvin would henceforth be a man of the church in the most accomplished sense of the term. As pastor, he preached regularly (he is credited with several thousand sermons) and administered the sacraments. As a theologian, he was a tireless polemic and apologetic writer, and constantly reworked his *Institutes* until the last edition of 1559, which would be roughly five times the size of the first edition. Originally trained as a lawyer, he drafted the Ecclesiastical Ordinances and frequently intervened in city matters. As an educator, he

and WARC to concretize at church level earlier proposals to strengthen the communion between Lutherans and Reformed Christians.

² Alexandre Ganoczy, *Calvin, théologien de l'Eglise et du ministère* (Paris: Cerf, 1964), p. 45. Concerning Calvin's theology, among the many studies published or planned on the occasion of the 2009 jubilee, see Marc Vial, *John Calvin. An Introduction to his Theological Thought* (Geneva: International Museum of the Reformation and Labor et Fides, 2009).

introduced public education: the “collège,” an institute for the education of children, and an advanced school called the “académie.”

It is not possible in a few pages to retrace the Geneva reformer’s entire ecclesiology, because it was a subject Calvin constantly developed and expanded upon and because, as Benjamin C. Milner has pointed out, Calvin’s ecclesiology cannot be separated from his theology as a whole, especially his Christology.³ Several key texts shed further light on this.

One of the first texts in which Calvin expressed himself concerning the church was his letter to King Francis I of France, which prefaces the 1536 *Institutes*, but which had been written a year earlier. We find ourselves immediately confronted with the subject with which we are concerned here:

The Church of Christ has lived, and will continue to live, as long as Christ shall reign at the right hand of the Father, by whose hand she is sustained, by whose protection she is defended, by whose power she is preserved in safety. For he will undoubtedly perform what he once promised, to be with his people “even to the end of the world.” We have no quarrel against the Church, for with one consent we unite with all the company of the faithful in worshipping and adoring the one God and Christ the Lord, as he has been adored by all the pious in all ages. But our opponents deviate widely from the truth when they acknowledge no Church but what is visible to the corporeal eye, and endeavor to circumscribe it by those limits within which it is far from being included.⁴

The church about which Calvin is speaking draws its substance not from the contingency of epochs but, rather, derives its existence from Christ himself. The reformer would of course never envisage taking arms against this church; hence he is not a schismatic. He invokes the consent of the faithful, using a phrase reminiscent of the Comminatory of Vincent of Lérins (434 AD): *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* (what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all). His purpose is to impress upon Francis I that there is continuity of nature between the church of Christ and the evangelical (or Lutheran) party, which was

³ Benjamin Charles Milner, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). Most recently, see Eva-Maria Faber, “Une interdépendance comme don et comme mission. A propos de la conception calvinienne de l’Eglise,” in Martin Ernst Hirzel & Martin Sallmann, *Calvin et le calvinisme. Cinq siècles d’influences sur l’Eglise et la Société* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2008), pp. 191-221.

⁴ John Calvin, *Dedication of the Institutes of the Christian Religion to His Most Christian Majesty, Francis, King of the French*, at www.bartleby.com/39/10.html.

beginning to be persecuted in France, and that to attack the evangelicals was to attack the Catholic church itself. Meanwhile, the papists and Sorbonne theologians, erred in thinking that they may define the church in a purely institutional fashion, limiting it to what they “see with their very eyes” and, in that way, setting the boundaries of the church.

In short, Calvin, faithful to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, cannot but also want the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, even if he may now and again place the emphasis elsewhere. Let us focus now on the unity of the catholic church before briefly considering its holiness and apostolicity.

The unity of the catholic church

In the first, Latin, version of his *Institutes*, we see Calvin defending the unity of the church with a conviction he will never renounce:

First, we believe the holy catholic Church, that is the entire body of the elect, whether they be angels or humans; among humans, whether they be living or deceased; among the living, wherever they dwell upon the earth and wherever they are dispersed among peoples. [We believe] that there is one church and one fellowship and one people of God, of which Christ, our Lord, is the master and the prince, of which he is the head, as of one body. [We believe] that in him and by the goodness of God, they had been elected before the creation of the world in order that they might be all united in the kingdom of God. This fellowship is catholic, that is, universal, for one cannot find two or three of them; rather, God’s elect are so joined together in Christ that as they depend on one head, so they are as it were compacted into one body, being knit together like its different members.⁵

As in his letter to the King of France, Calvin tries to show that the evangelicals are not the revolutionaries, schismatics or iconoclasts their adversaries depict. In doing this, he proceeds by a process of decentering: the church is not only that of a place (i.e., Rome), it is not only of the living, nor even of humans alone, for the angels are also part of it. There can hardly be a more categorical assertion of the catholicity, that is, the

⁵ *CO (Calvini Opera)* 1, col. 72 (cf. Ganoczy, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 185f., which indicates that the Apostles’ Creed commented here does not contain the adjective *unam*, making Calvin’s insistence even more forceful).

universality of the church. These lines betray a thinly disguised criticism of any attempt to define the church as an hierarchical institution; ecclesiastical authorities do not make the church. Rather, the church consists of a head, which is Christ, and a body, which is the people or company of the elect. The unity of the church is not based on some legal principle, but on a primarily theological conviction—its members live in harmony with one another as a fellowship of the elect. Hence, the “notes” (marks) of the true church—holy, catholic, apostolic—are legitimately objects of faith: *credo ecclesiam*. In 1539, Calvin will distinguish explicitly between the subject—or foundation—of faith (God, Christ and the Holy Spirit): *credo in Deum patrem omnipotentem, in Jesum Christum, in Spiritum sanctum*; and the object of faith: *credo ecclesiam*. Accordingly, faith rests in God, the sole cause of our salvation, and not in the church, which is only our means to salvation.⁶

In 1539, this will not prevent Calvin, no doubt influenced in Strasbourg by his friend Martin Bucer, from adding to his treatise on the church the notion of the church as the mother of all believers: “She is the mother of us all, upon whom the Lord has bestowed all the treasures of his grace.”⁷ Even if the church is visible, inscribed in a particular historical context and prone to shortcomings, the reality of the church is still not purely human or institutional. In the French version of 1541, Calvin writes:

But as our present design is to treat of the visible Church, we may learn even from the title of mother, how useful and even necessary it is for us to know her; since there is no other way of entrance into life, unless we are conceived by her, born of her, nourished at her breasts, and continually preserved under her care and government till we are divested of this mortal flesh and become like the angels.⁸

These lines are crucial. While it is true that Calvin was opposed to Rome (and fiercely so, because according to his view the papists had usurped the true church), with equal conviction he opposed the spiritualists, who considered the believer’s personal relation with God to be sufficient, making the church as a reality superfluous. His ecclesiological battle therefore was always waged on two fronts: against papism and its claim to be above

⁶ Cf. Ganoczy, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 192f.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 193.

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, I, 4, vol. 2, trans. John Allen (London, 1838), p. 196.

the Scriptures on one hand and, on the other, against those he referred to as spirituals or visionaries who postulated the immediacy of their relationship with God. In this way, because of the value he ascribed to the church, Calvin quite naturally embraced the Cyprianic maxim, popularized by Augustine, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. This does not only mean that outside of the invisible church no one will be saved, but rather that no one, at least no human being here and now, can hope for salvation if they have not already been conceived in the womb of our mother, the church, and nourished at her breast. No one can hope for forgiveness of sin or salvation outside of the bosom of the visible church.

As we have already seen, Calvin's church includes even the angels. Within humanity, it is not limited to the elect subsequent to the proclamation of the gospel, for the prophets and the patriarchs who came before them are fully part of it. In fact, the church existed from the very moment our first parents were created:

Adam and Eve, with a few other of their children, were themselves true worshippers of God (...). We may rightly conclude that Seth was an upright and faithful servant of God. And after he begat a son, like himself, and had a rightly constituted family, the face of the church began distinctly to appear.⁹

This vision of the church is consistent with the decentering approach we mentioned above. The church is catholic, not, to be sure, because it is Roman, but because, seen globally, it is Adamic. Analogously, Calvin insists more strongly on the similarity between the Old and the New Testaments than on the difference between them,¹⁰ if only because it is the same Christ who seals the promise of the Old and the New Testament. Since there is no new covenant *per se* but, instead, a renewal of the one covenant between God and God's people, the church, the new Israel, is not another Israel juxtaposed to the chosen people of the old covenant.

While the true church exists, there are also one or several false churches. Calvin devoted much effort to seeking out the criteria making it possible to distinguish the true church from the others. Chapter IV of the last edition of his *Institutes* is entitled "Of the true Church. Duty of

⁹ *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, ad 4, 26. Quoted in Milner, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 8.

¹⁰ Respectively Calvin, *op. cit.* (note 8), II, x and II, xi.

cultivating unity with her.” This church—the mother of all the godly—is founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ. We know that Calvin most often defined the genuine, visible church by two marks: the church is wherever the Word of God is “sincerely preached” and wherever the sacraments are “administered according to the institution of Christ.”¹¹ It would be on the basis of this definition that the polemic against human institutions that undermine the true church would rage. As Calvin wrote in 1539 in his “Reply to Sadoletto,” who had tried to persuade the citizens of Geneva to return to the fold of Rome, “the truth of Prophetical and Evangelical doctrine, on which the church ought to be founded,” had not only perished in the Roman church, but had been “violently driven away by fire and sword.”¹² From this point of view, rejecting the church of Rome was in no way an act against the unity of the church, that is, to put it more clearly, the Reformation was not a schism, but on the contrary, it was the reestablishment of the true church.¹³

The call to unity is often echoed in Calvin’s commentaries and sermons. In homage to a great ecumenist of the last century, the late Lukas Vischer, I should like to quote two texts from his booklet *Pia conspiratio*, which contains a beautiful anthology of Calvin texts on unity.¹⁴

The first text is taken from the commentary on Ephesians 4:4 (“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.”) Calvin writes:

There is one body. He proceeds to shew more fully in how complete a manner Christians ought to be united. The union ought to be such that we shall form one body and one soul. These words denote the whole man. We ought to be united, not in part only, but in body and soul. He supports this by a powerful argument, as ye have been called in one hope of your calling. We are called to one inheritance and one life; and hence it follows, that we cannot obtain eternal life without living in mutual harmony in this world. One Divine invitation being addressed to all, they ought to be united in the same profession of faith, and to render every kind of assistance to each

¹¹ Cf. *Institutes*. IV, 1, 9 (1559), transl. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845).

¹² “John Calvin: Reply to Sadoletto,” in *John Calvin, Tracts Relating to the Reformation*, vol. 1, transl. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), pp. 25–68, here p. 38.

¹³ Cf. the dissertation of Gyeong Su Park, *John Calvin as an Advocate of Church Unity: A New Portrait of John Calvin* (Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2004).

¹⁴ Lukas Vischer, *Pia conspiratio. Calvin’s Commitment to the Unity of Christ’s Church*, at <http://warc.ch/dt/erl3/12.html>.

other. Oh, were this thought deeply impressed upon our minds, that we are subject to a law which no more permits the children of God to differ among themselves than the kingdom of heaven to be divided, how earnestly should we cultivate brotherly kindness! How should we dread every kind of animosity, if we duly reflected that all who separate us from brethren, estrange us from the kingdom of God! And yet, strangely enough, while we forget the duties which brethren owe to each other, we go on boasting that we are the sons of God. Let us learn from Paul, that none are at all fit for that inheritance who are not one body and one spirit.¹⁵

Of course, church unity is doctrinal unity, for the teaching is drawn from the same gospel, but it also consists of unity of heart and behavior given, as Calvin reminds us in his sermons, that we have not been created for ourselves, but for others.¹⁶

In the case of Calvin, the call to unity never signifies tolerating everything in the name of apparent harmony. He took part in ecumenical conferences, such the Conference of Ratisbon in 1541, but he never compromised on what he held to be the evangelical truth. Hence, he abhorred the so-called *moyenneurs* (middle parties), who attempted to find ways of conciliation between Rome and the Reformation.¹⁷ Like the majority of his contemporaries, Calvin categorically refused to mingle truth with error. He subscribed to the principle that the truth is one and undivided and hence never subject to the point of view of the knowing subject. At the same time, he was far from being entirely opposed to church diversity. He held that there were *adiaphora*, things that were not totally insignificant, but nonetheless of such little importance that they should not divide churches. For example, he exhorted the English refugee congregation in Frankfurt to be open-minded. In a letter dated 18 January 1555, he wrote:

... that some of you should be stirring up contentions about forms of prayer and ceremonies, as if you were at ease and in a season of tranquility, and thus throwing an obstacle in the way of your coalescing in one body of

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Pia conspiratio*, at http://files.libertyfund.org/files/1793/Calvin_0036_EBk_v4.pdf.

¹⁶ Cf. Sermon 20 on Ephesians (CO 51, 494): "Do we have faith? Charity must be conjoined and we must dwell with one another in equity and righteousness and let everyone acknowledge, 'I have not been created for myself, neither for my own good nor for my private use, but for my fellows'."

¹⁷ Cf. Mario Turchetti, *Concordia o Tolleranza? François Bauduin (1520-1573) e i "Moyenneurs"* (Geneva: Droz, 1984).

worshippers, this is really unreasonable. Nor do I blame the firmness of those who, even to fight in a just cause, are unwillingly dragged into the contest, but I condemn, and with justice, that stubbornness which clogs and retards holy efforts to form a church. Though in indifferent matters, such as external rites, I shew myself indulgent and pliable, at the same time, I do not deem it expedient always to comply with the foolish captiousness of those who will not give up a single point of their usual routine. In the Anglican liturgy, such as you describe it to me, I see that there were many silly things that might be tolerated.¹⁸

Of course, these lines alone would not suffice to make Calvin an advocate of church diversity. After all, the issues at hand are not of critical importance, since they concern what form the eucharistic bread should have or whether the liturgical use of candles should be allowed. Yet, even if only to a limited degree, Calvin was aware of cultural diversity and the diversity of worship as is shown by the fact that, in order to preserve church unity, he accepted a relative degree of diversity.

The holiness of the church

Ecclesia sancta: For Calvin, the church is holy. But Calvin, like other reformers, had no illusions concerning human frailty and the imperfections of the faithful: “We see that God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the Church.”¹⁹ To counter the Cathari, Donatists and Anabaptists, Calvin (based, of course, on the image he has of them respectively) denounced the temptation to idealize the church. Christ gave himself for the church so that “he might sanctify and cleanse it,” but nevertheless, “the Lord is daily smoothing its wrinkles, and wiping away its spots.” The holiness of the church is a work in progress, the church advances daily on the way to the holiness that God has already attributed to it.²⁰

One of the nuances that separates Calvin from Luther is one that precisely concerns the concept of holiness. For both Calvin and Luther, the law functions as a mirror, reflecting back to human beings their

¹⁸ Quote taken from *Pia conspiratio*, *op. cit.* (note 14), p. 26.

¹⁹ *Institutes* IV, I, 5.

²⁰ *Institutes* IV, I, 17 (cf. also IV, I, 13).

weaknesses—by opening their ears to the law, they become aware of their need for God’s mercy. For both Calvin and Luther, the law also has a political function, for experience shows that some people only concern themselves with what is good if they are forced to do so. However, Calvin, unlike Luther, sees a third function (or use) of the law, the most important one, by virtue of which it must guide the faithful on their way to holiness:

For no man has already acquired so much wisdom, that he could not by the daily instruction of the law make new advances into a purer knowledge of the Divine will [...]. For in this manner should the saints stimulate themselves, because, with whatever alacrity they labour for the righteousness of God according to the Spirit, yet they are always burdened with the indolence of the flesh, which prevents their proceeding with due promptitude.²¹

Consequently, the church which we mentioned above as an instrument of salvation, also has a didactic role, for it must keep watch over the faithful, not least because the church’s quest for holiness demands daily effort. Moreover, since the faithful require “constant prodding,” they need ecclesiastical discipline. For Calvin, discipline is to be exercised with mildness and charity, more as a kind of fatherly rod than as a master would treat a servant.²² Through it, the church toils day after day toward the holiness to which it is destined.

The apostolicity of the church

Calvin’s definition of the true visible church has already been mentioned: the symbols by which the church is discerned are the sincere preaching

²¹ *Institutes* II, vii, 12. Cf. Eric Fuchs, *La morale selon Calvin* (Paris: Cerf, 1986), pp. 49-56; Guenther H. Haas, “Calvin’s Ethics,” in Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 93-105.

²² This ecclesiological principle saw its historical realization in Geneva with the institution of the Consistory. As an educative rather than repressive instrument whose role it was to admonish rather than to punish, the Consistory strove to eradicate religious superstitions (papism) and intervened to protect the weak against the strong (cf. Michel Grandjean, “Du catéchisme à la discipline. L’Eglise de Calvin entre profession de foi et exigence éthique,” in *Equinoxe* No. 11, pp. 37-50; more generally, see the seminal work by William E. Monter, *Calvin’s Geneva* (Huntington, New York: Krieger, 1975). The registers of the Consistory, a gold mine of religious and social history, were published in Geneva by Droz (4 vols published in 1996-2007).

of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to the institution of Christ. Both marks are necessary. By explicitly invoking Ephesians 2:19-20 ("You are members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone"), Calvin affirms that the apostolicity of the church is not to be sought anywhere else than in sincere preaching and the administration of the sacraments. In other words, the true apostolic succession is not that of persons (no more than Roman emperors such as Nero and Caligula who became tyrants are the legitimate successors of the government of the Republic), but of doctrinal faithfulness. The true church is not *ipso facto* the church of the popes in Rome, rather, it is that in which the Word of God resounds.²³

That having been said, while the apostolic church is the church which descends from the apostles, it is also in the strictest sense the church that exercises the apostolate. The apostolic church is a missionary church. This reveals what appears to be an oversight of Calvin's ecclesiology, indeed, of all Protestant ecclesiology in the sixteenth century: Calvin's church is scarcely a missionary church. No doubt the reformer was sufficiently occupied establishing the Geneva church and sustaining the churches in France. Indeed, it would not be until the nineteenth century that a genuine missionary awareness would develop within Reformed churches, not without some ambiguity.²⁴

Contemporary theological reflection therefore incorporates a missiological dimension that is missing with Calvin. The theologians Gérard Delteil and Paul Keller went so far as to say that "mission has two enemies: abdication, which is its opposite, and proselytization, which is a perversion of it."²⁵ Extrapolating on Calvin's ecclesiology, Reformed theologians attempt to give the church's apostolic dimension new vitality. Mission precedes the church, for the faithful are the witnesses of a God incarnated in history. At the same time, mission carries the churches forward, decenters them from themselves by constantly reminding them that God's realm of action is not the church, but the world. In other words, a Reformed church today which calls itself apostolic must not only reaf-

²³ Cf. *Institutes* IV, I, 2-3.

²⁴ Cf. for example Jean-François Zorn, *Le grand siècle d'une mission protestante. La Mission de Paris de 1822 à 1914* (Paris: Karthala et Les Bergers et les Mages, 1993).

²⁵ Gérard Delteil and Paul Keller, *L'Eglise disséminée. Itinérance et enracinement* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), p. 291.

firm, with Calvin, preaching and the sacraments, but also acknowledge that its end is not in itself, but in God. After all, to echo Luther once again, particularly as expressed in the treatise *On the Freedom of a Christian*, Calvin invites each person to look not to themselves, but to God and to their neighbor. The apostolic church has not to look to itself, but to God and the world.

A Harbor for the World in Stormy Times: Ecclesiological Reflections in the Orthodox Church and Theology

Dimitrios Moschos

It would be rather unproductive if we were to summarize the doctrine of the church in the same scholastic manner as tomes on dogmatics have done in the case of ecclesiology. This approach is used in Greek Orthodox theology such as, for example, in J. Karmiris's 800-page book, *Orthodox Ecclesiology*.¹ I regard such an approach as counterproductive, because the church never formulated an official doctrine of the church in the form of solemn synodal texts, discussing the church's belief in the Trinity or the two natures of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the Nicene Creed shapes how the church understands itself. It is this reality, reflected in historical challenges, that allows us to discern how the belief in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church is to be understood. Therefore, my approach will be an historical one.

Some ideas regarding the attributes of the church in the Nicene Creed

Oneness and holiness

Various misunderstandings regarding the church's attributes have been cleared up, and the attributes have been reinterpreted in the light of the Nicene Creed's historical context. One and holy, for example, are no longer understood statically and authoritatively as a supreme institutionalized power to which the faithful must subjugate themselves in order to obtain

¹ Ioannis Karmiris, *Orthodox Ecclesiology* [in Greek: *Orthodoxos ekklesiologia*] (Athens, 1973).

salvation. In the early church, oneness and holiness were connected to the election made by God, *ekklesia tou Theou* (the church of God). God calls God's new people from all peoples on earth in a new covenant, based on the witness of God's resurrection and mediated by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. The new era is inaugurated through the "outpouring" of the Spirit in the Pentecostal event, when every nation is called and enlisted in the new people of God—the opposite of Babel.² The church's oneness and holiness derive from this call because the one God calls God's people to become united with God. As Paul puts it, "[a]nd he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22-23).

This leads us one step further, namely to oneness as participation in the , a notion that Paul vividly expands upon in 1 Corinthians and Romans. The incorporation into the one body (Rom 12:4-8) started with the witness of the crucified and resurrected Jesus and goes on to the experience of salvation through God's blood that brings reconciliation with God (Rom 5:8-11). Reconciliation means being one and leads to sanctification, the transformation of the world to holiness, which is then manifested in the local gathering for the Lord's Supper, the divine Eucharist. From this derives the forgiveness of sins or the exclusion from this gathering, the exposure to Satan's dominion (1 Cor 5:4-5). The experience of holiness and unity as precipitating the *eschaton* in the Eucharist is best attested to the eucharistic prayer of Didache (late first century AD), which is found in many eucharistic prayers mainly in Egypt: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the hills, and was gathered together and made one, so let thy Church be gathered into thy kingdom from the ends of the earth."³

Catholicity

If we stay with the theme of the Eucharist as we examine the attribute catholic (which is not mentioned in the New Testament), we find a close

² See Jean M. R. Tillard, "L' Église de Dieu dans le dessein de Dieu," in *Irénikon* 58 (1985), pp. 21-60. The main hymn (the so-called *kontakion*) for the feast of Pentecost in the Orthodox calendar justly stresses this antithetical scheme: "When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations; but when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to unity. Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the all-holy-Spirit."

³ "Didache 9, 3," in Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), pp. 261, 263. See also Archbishop Pierre (L' Huiller), "Believing in One Church: An Insight into Patristic Tradition," in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48, 1 (2004), pp. 21-47.

connection between the eucharistic gathering around the bishop, and the unity between Christ and the catholic church in Ignatius's Epistles (Smyrn 8). It has been pointed out that the real meaning of the Word in this context is not "universal" or "invisible," but the "whole, true essence" of the church,⁴ which is experienced and manifested in the community.⁵ In the mid-fourth century, an excellent interpreter of the Jerusalem Creed (the ancestor of the Nicene Creed), Cyril of Jerusalem, engaged with all aspects of the term, stressing the dynamic process of catholicity:

She is called catholic because she extends throughout the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because she teaches universally and completely all the doctrines that should come to men's knowledge... and because she brings into subjection to godliness (εὐσέβειαν) the whole race of mankind, rulers and ruled, intellectuals and simple men and because she universally treats and heals the whole species of sins... and possesses in herself every form of virtue which is named ...⁶

In the eight century, John of Damascus once again explains catholicity as a dynamic, unifying, peacemaking and redeeming force:

The Church is called catholic, because her omnipotent head, that is Christ, managed to save, through the apostles, the entire world; the Church is catholic, because by the power of Spirit, she unites various, strange and multilingual nations from all over the earth, into one peaceful and redeeming faith and relation with God.⁷

Redemption, healing, enlightenment and peace are the connotations of catholicity for most Church Fathers of the classical era.

⁴ John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, transl. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline Ma.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), pp. 107-128.

⁵ See also John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (Crestwood New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1983), p. 7, and John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1985), pp. 143-144.

⁶ Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catecheses ad illuminandos" (Catechetical Lectures) 18, 23, J. P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca* (Paris 1857-1866), hereafter PG, 33, c. 1044.

⁷ John of Damascus, *Adv. Iconoclastas* 11: PG 96, c. 1357 B-C.

Apostolicity

With regard to apostolicity, we can confine ourselves to the sound remarks by Reinhart Staats who showed that, at the time, apostolic not only meant a typical connection to the institutionalized bishopric (historic episcopate), which descends from the apostles, but also the imitation of the manners of the apostles, that is the ascetic renunciation of the world and the established social setting.⁸ This is related to the original apostolic community in Jerusalem and the wandering prophets and ascetics of the second century in Syria and other places.⁹ It is used as a technical term for both ascetic life and the standard for apostolic living (i.e., in Gregory of Nyssa's Epistle 17:11-12, where he expands on the qualifications of a candidate for the bishopric) in monastic literature as well as by the famous Church Fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianz (fourth century).¹⁰ We can add some of St John Chrysostom's characteristic apostrophes about the qualifications for being apostolic:

This is the model of the Master's disciples, the example of the servants of God, that characterizes the Apostles: "by that everyone knows that you are my disciples." By what, I ask you, does he mean rising from the dead or healing lepers or driving away demons? No, he doesn't! He leaves aside all these and says "by that everyone knows that you are my disciples, if you love each other."¹¹

This shows clearly that, until the fifth century, being apostolic was, for important church persons, not only a matter of institution but one of living in renunciation and neighborly love. We can therefore paraphrase the words "one holy, catholic and apostolic church" as follows: A church that

⁸ Reinhart Staats, *Das Glaubensbekenntnis von Nizäa-Konstantinopel. Historische und theologische Grundlagen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), pp. 268-269.

⁹ Cf. Karl Suso Frank, "Vita apostolica und dominus apostolicus," in Georg Schwaiger (ed.), *Konzil und Papst: historische Beiträge zur Frage der höchsten Gewalt in der Kirche; Festgabe für Hermann Tüchle* (Munich: Schöningh, 1975), pp. 19-41.

¹⁰ "In Rome the fisherman Peter was preferable, because although alien and homeless he was richer than everyone, since having nothing he acquired God in all His fullness. The same happened with Mesopotamians who had their wealthy lords but they preferred Thomas to govern them. The same with Cretans and Titus and so on." Gregory of Nyssa, "Epistulae 17, 14-15," in Pierre Maraval (ed.), *Sources Chrétiennes* 363 (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1990), p. 224.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, *De incomprehensibili dei natura*, 1: PG 48, c. 702A.

- Guarantees the experience of living in the dawn of the new world of *eschaton* as part of Jesus by the power of Spirit. This new world is characterized by the unity in diversity in the one .
- Reveals the wholeness of this experience (catholicity) in the properly organized eucharistic gathering from which derive redemption, knowledge of divine things and peace for the whole world.
- Transforms this experience of eschatological life into a social act connected with apostolic authority, that is mission by ascetic renouncement and the exercise of neighborly love (apostolic).

This raises the question of how, historically, this interpretation was elaborated and reflected (or how did it fail to be reflected) in the Orthodox Church? Furthermore, we will have to consider how ecumenical understanding can be facilitated and the challenges of the modern or postmodern world can be met by the answer to this question.

The oneness and catholicity of the church in the Orthodox tradition: a dynamic evolution

The notion of the one catholic church was developed after the second century, thus acquiring the additional meaning of a universal church manifested in conformity regarding doctrine. This was Cyprian's idea of catholicity as he confronted Donatism, while related ideas and terms such as *consensus patrum*, *regula veritatis* and holy tradition stressed the importance of unanimity regarding the content of faith as experienced within the one and catholic church. Yet, it has been pointed out that these terms are not identical with a factual universal consensus at every given moment (the canon of Vincent of Lérins), since in numerous cases it was accepted that the wholeness of truth was on the side of a small, at a certain time even condemned, minority who were later declared Church Fathers. As the famous Orthodox theologian, Georges Florovsky, puts it, "Decisive values reside in inner catholicity, not in empirical universality. The opinions of the Fathers are accepted, not as a formal subjection to outward authority, but because of the inner evidence of their catholic truth."¹² We must add here

¹² Georges Florovsky, "The Catholicity of the Church," in Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works*,

that the argument for a general consensus as a criterion of truth is actually of stoic origin.¹³ Florovsky's remark explains why certain external criteria for catholicity such as geographical expansion, majority vote, enactment of institutions such as metropolitan synods, patriarchs, papal primacy and imperial convocations, which were at times invoked, did not solve the problem of how to prove the authority of the church as being self evident through its oneness and catholicity. According to Florovsky,

The Church knows that it is a unity of all times, and as such it builds up its life. Therefore the Church thinks of the past not as of something that is no more, but as of something that has been accomplished, as something existing in the catholic fullness of the one Body of Christ. Tradition reflects this victory over time. To learn from tradition, or, still better, in tradition, is to learn from the fullness of this time-conquering experience of the Church, an experience which every member of the Church may learn to know and possess according to the measure of his spiritual manhood; according to the measure of his catholic development.¹⁴

Yet, we are confronted with the question of how this timeless unity came to be shaped in concrete historical challenges, especially in cases of conflict. The quest to render the belief in the one catholic church an historical reality was never abandoned. The so-called "summaries" in the Acts and the decisions of the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem of 48 AD, demonstrate the effort to express the catholic fullness in the course of human history. Later, the crystallization of the authority of the bishopric and the intense communication between bishops in case of dispute (for instance the second-century Passover dispute) or the need for ordaining a new bishop to a vacant see in the local region brought about an institutional mechanism for manifesting the one church, the raw material for which were stoic philosophy, classical democracy and the Roman legal system and administration. The "product" distributed by this mechanism was the experience of salvation through the Holy Spirit that fueled this mechanism. According to reputable texts, such as the

vol. 1 (Belmont Ma.: Nordland Publ. Co. 1987, first published 1934), p. 53.

¹³ See Klaus Oehler, "Der Consensus omnium als Kriterium der Wahrheit in der antiken Philosophie und der Patristik. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Begriffs, der Allgemeinen Meinung," in Klaus Oehler, *Antike Philosophie und Byzantinisches Mittelalter* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1969), pp. 234-271 (originally published in *Antike und Abendland* 10, 1961, pp. 103-129).

¹⁴ Florovsky, *op. cit.* (note 12), p. 46.

Shepherd of Hermas and the Apostolic Constitutions (Book VIII), gifts of prophecy and the priesthood of all Christians are important components of ecclesiastical reality. The mechanism was of course improved and further elaborated. The ordination of the bishop and the theological discussion which took place in an extended eucharistic gathering (namely councils)¹⁵ were extended to a complex form of metropolitan and patriarchal synods, through an hierarchical list of prime patriarchal thrones shaped between 381 and 451 AD. The basic idea is the same: via human legal institutions and procedures the manifested catholicity in one eucharistic gathering would guarantee the same results in every eucharistic gathering in the world.

Theoretically, this very high standard always has to be verified in practice. For the Orthodox Church (which manifests catholicity in the system of local Orthodox churches, and so the singular equals the plural) no agreed text (i.e., Confession) and no primate can better guarantee this catholicity than the constant communication between churches through the enthronization letters, mutual commemoration of the head of every other local church during the liturgy (*mnemosynon*) and conciliar structures. Although fundamental texts (the so-called *horoi*), were produced within the conciliar frameworks (the Nicene Creed being the most important of them), we note that no text (especially the Nicene Creed) could rule out the possibility of a later dispute about an unresolved issue. Doctrinal texts such as the Nicene Creed and the various *horoi* of the Third (431 AD), Fourth (451 AD), Sixth (680 AD) and Seventh (787 AD) Ecumenical Council, which dealt with questions of Christology and the veneration of icons, were not exclusive of the whole of the church's teaching and consequently of its oneness and catholicity in the future.

What can we learn from this? As we can see from the example of dogmatic expression, the one catholic church is obviously not a static entity. Although the experience of the living tradition, that is the experience of the Holy Spirit "... will guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13) is definitely within the church and is granted by its head, Jesus Christ, the way in which we experience this and present it to the world at large (mission) is certainly a dynamic process. As the Apostle Paul stressed, the body of Christ is growing. Another aspect

¹⁵ The evolution of primitive conciliar structures from a kind of a bishop's council such as described in Syriac Didascalia was analyzed by John D. Zizioulas, "The Development of Conciliar Structures to the Time of the First Ecumenical Council," in John Anastasiou *et al.* (eds), *Report of a Study Group and Contributions. Councils and the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), pp. 34- 51.

of this is the seventh-century monk, Maximus the Confessor, according to whom the church is being accomplished in the life of the Trinity (this is of course to counter the Neoplatonic captivity of the mind).

In this process, new members are constantly invited. It seems logical to expect this growth also to be manifested in history, as was the case with the church's teaching. Every doctrinal dispute, such as the past christological or Trinitarian controversies, not only involved a quest for the truth but also a quest for procedure, in other words, for how to sit down and discuss the truth. Old baptismal symbols, prayers and liturgical texts along with the Scriptures were studied, negotiations between say Athanasius and Basil the Great and the Homoiousianists in the fourth century, or between Cyril of Alexandria and the bishops of Antioch in the fifth century took place, while some councils were recognized as ecumenical and others were condemned—in both cases only afterwards. In other cases, isolated faithful (such as the monk Maximus the Confessor) were acknowledged as expressing the catholicity of the church against the alleged unanimity of the patriarchs, who at that time had accepted monotheletism. During that period, the manifestation of the one catholic church was in the making. The concept of a single catholic church existed of course, but was still in a dynamic process to manifest itself. In the reception of this process by the whole people of God this idea is worked out more clearly and historical contingencies are eliminated. In this process, the basic steps of the universal church's teaching on ecclesiology became clear and are extended to the end of times. This is why the ecumenicity of a council was only declared by the next one. Those who participated in this process were regarded as partakers in the holiness, which is why the participants in the ecumenical councils were venerated as saints, even if some of them had been inconsistent in their theological opinions on several previous occasions. It is the process that sanctifies the individual, because the Holy Spirit acts on the gathered church as a whole as on the Jerusalem community. Holiness is ascribed to a certain historical procedure.

This also affects the boundaries of the church. Even in the Orthodox Church, where there is very clear indication as to who belongs to it, there is nonetheless a certain differentiation in the way other Christians are accepted into the community of Orthodox churches. Some are rebaptized, others only take the chrism and then there are those who only need to condemn their former commitment.¹⁶ This must not be understood in the static sense of

¹⁶ Huiller, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 40.

concentric circles, according to which some denominations are closer to the Orthodox Church than others, or in the context of the long discussion about whether there is a mother church or simply sister churches etc., but as a dynamic event. In view of the peregrinations of the church, in order for all to “be gathered into thy kingdom” for which the Christians of the early church prayed (cf. the *Didache*), some are on this way together, while for others there is a time lag. Those walking out-of-step or staying outside the church will be judged by Jesus Christ at the time of his arrival and not by us.¹⁷ If the Orthodox Church understands itself as in *statu viae*, it does not have to regard others, who confess Jesus Christ, as members of the same church nor as alienated from the church, but rather as a potential church, a would-be part of the one church, which is constantly invited to complete itself. This potential explains the Orthodox Church’s existing practice not to duplicate its hierarchical structures in the traditional vicinity of non-Orthodox churches mainly in the Western sees. There is therefore no “Orthodox” bishop of Rome next to the legitimate bishop of Rome.¹⁸ This implies the temporality of the present schism, which is expected to be healed some day.

In the process of attempting to render a visible unity to the one church, it is unproductive constantly to ask which is the “mother” or “daughter” church. It would be wiser to aim at spiritual maturity. We have to look at each other in order to experience together the dawning of the kingdom of God, anticipated in the early church, and to bring humankind to its completion, which for Christians is the endless indulgence in the life of the Holy Trinity. These soteriological and eschatological dimensions of experiencing and manifesting the one catholic church, which were pursued through the evolving institutions and procedures in the Orthodox Church, lead us to another important issue.

The ecclesiological roles of charismaticism and asceticism

As we stressed above, the church’s holiness and apostolicity are closely connected to the experience of the Spirit in the eucharistic gathering, accession to which is granted by baptism and in the missionary call of

¹⁷ At least that was the spirit in the early church when one decodes the issue of the quarrel about penitence in the third and fourth centuries.

¹⁸ Greek Orthodox living in Italy are under the jurisdiction of a Metropolitan of Italy. Similarly, those living in Germany come under a Metropolitan of Germany, not a Bishop of Cologne or Freising, which would clash with the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

all people through prophetic signs and miraculous changes in human relations in exercising neighborly love.

How is this experienced in the Orthodox Church? In the Eastern churches, the feast days of saints are the actual center of everyday piety. Most saints were martyrs who died in order to bear witness to the name of Jesus Christ. Others were ascetics who lived in chastity and poverty or bishops who witnessed to the truth through their theology and pastoral and social care. Some even were emperors. It is noteworthy that in Greek the same term is used in the liturgy for the commemoration of the bishops as for the prayer for the dead (*mnemosynon*). Until the mid-Byzantine era (seventh to eighth century) there was no official act of canonization. All Christians who had passed away were considered saints as were those living (hence the *communio sanctorum* or the announcement “the sacred to the saints” before the distribution of Holy Communion in the liturgy and so on). Therefore, by praying for and with the saints in the liturgy, the church’s oneness and catholicity are proclaimed as identical to holiness (sanctification). The eucharistic gathering is once again the primary manifestation of the church.

Around this event and in the “net” of prayers in all eucharistic gatherings, we experience the real fruits of the Spirit which attest to the eschatological dimension of life in the church. The martyrs in the past and the ascetics after them were the output, the real “product” of the distribution of the Spirit. We should always remember that martyrdom is not only an act of religious fervor, but a gift from the Spirit, which happens also in a variety of paschal and eucharistic connections. According to the apocryphal Acts or related texts, many first- and second-century apostles or apostolic fathers were arrested and put to death during the Easter liturgy and their blood was poured onto the streets. Such was the case of Mark in Alexandria, James in Jerusalem and Polycarp in Smyrna. Obviously, this is interpreted as a factual repetition of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice in the eucharistic context. Visions of martyrs such as in the Acts of Perpetua represent a celebration of the heavenly Eucharist. The martyrs were therefore the primary bond that united Christians at the one eucharistic table and manifested the holiness of the church. This explains the veneration of their relics under the altar and the *martyriai* which are archeologically corroborated. In the Alexandrian school, the concept of martyr is broadened and an ethical dimension is added. For example, Clemens of Alexandria presented martyrdom not as the mere end of one’s life but as the accomplishment of love.¹⁹

¹⁹ “We call martyrdom a completion, not because a man completes his life like others, but be-

In the fourth century, the monasticism that emerged in the Orthodox Church in Egypt and the Ancient Near East did not primarily serve as a resource for the clergy or a moral example of Christian social ethics as was more or less the case in the West. Rather, monastic life was understood as the inauguration of the kingdom of God, as a revival of the Old Testament prophets and of the apostles of the early church,²⁰ as well as of the martyrs.²¹ It was also to give practical content to the baptismal vows, especially the renunciation of the world. Monks could heal the sick and see into the hearts of their visitors, they could discern spirits, give spiritual guidance and hear confession. It is interesting that the terms and images, which were applied to the whole Christian church in the second and third centuries, are now applied to the monks.²² In this respect, the monks as well as society considered ascetic life as a reassertion of the gifts of the Spirit (*charisma*) and a model of ecclesiology. St Basil the Great had organized his monastic communities in Asia Minor as an outpost: the monks as the avant-garde of Christianity and the communities of monks as the paradigm of church life.²³ The same has been shown for Pachomius the Great, who regarded his coenobitic society *Koinonia* as a church.²⁴ The growth of the monastic movement in its various forms had ecclesiological implications i.e., as a manifestation of the church's holiness and apostolicity. This should not be interpreted as an attack on the ecclesiastical institutions that questioned the sanctifying power of the ministry. There is no evidence from any source that openly supports such a claim. In the anchorite communities of Scete and Nitria in Egypt and in the lavras of the Judean, desert monks enriched and

cause he showed an accomplished work of love (τέλειον ἔργον ἀγάπης),” Clemens of Alexandria, “Stromata 4, 4, 14, 3,” in Annewies van den Hoek (ed.), *Sources Chrétiennes* 463 (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2001), pp. 78, 15-17.

²⁰ See Karl Suso Frank, “Imitatio Apostolorum im frühen Ägyptischen Mönchtum,” in Isaac Vázquez (ed.), *Studia historico-ecclesiastica, Festgabe für Prof. Luchesius G. Spätling OFM* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 1977), pp. 123-145.

²¹ See the old but useful work by Edward. E. Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr. The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950).

²² Images such as “soul of the world,” “closed garden,” “people of God,” or “sons of Israel,” which characterized Christians in texts of the second and third centuries, are used to describe monks in texts of the fourth and fifth centuries.

²³ See the interesting remarks by Klaus Koschorke, *Spuren der alten Liebe. Studien zum Kirchenbegriff des Basilios von Caesarea* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1991), pp. 50-60.

²⁴ Pius Tamburrino, “Koinonia. Die Beziehung Monasterium—Kirche im frühen pachomianischen Mönchtum,” in *Erbe und Auftrag* 43 (1967), pp. 5-21.

renewed the eucharistic gathering (accompanied by common meals) and reasserted the aims of any Christian, which is to live in anticipation of the kingdom of heaven on earth. This enabled monks to participate in conciliar gatherings or in preaching and teaching.

Although sometimes noisy and unproductive (especially in the fifth and sixth centuries), the involvement of monks in the doctrinal controversies was historical proof that the ascetic life was an important ecclesiological factor. Peter Brown has shown that the insistence on the “holy men” instead of “holy places” in the East shook the power of church institutions, and when Westerners visited Byzantium many could not differentiate between an ordained priest and a simple monk.²⁵ The tenth-century dispute²⁶ over the monks’ canonical authority to hear confessions is well known. A last example deserves to be mentioned, namely the case of the Hesychast theology of the fourteenth century in Byzantium.²⁷ The Hesychasts, most of whom were monks, were defended by a simple monk, Gregory Palamas, who was imprisoned from 1344 to 1347 for trying to teach theology without episcopal authority. The Hesychast councils of Constantinople in 1341, 1347, 1351 and 1368 were technically broader Constantinopolitan synods, which nevertheless were tacitly ascribed the importance of an ecumenical council. In support of Palamas, a group of important monks in Athos signed the *Hagioritikos Tomos*, a sort of manifesto about the doctrinal aspect of experiencing God in asceticism.

Considering the fruits of the Spirit, we can observe that in these times the charismatic character of the one catholic church, which is in a dynamic process of developing, leads to a paradox. The evolution of a proper institutional mechanism and an elaborate theology is and should be a constant aim of all the responsible functionaries of the church in order to preserve its unity and catholicity. On the other hand, charismatic persons manifest the catholicity, holiness and apostolicity of the church precisely by breaking and by setting off these procedures, because without the gifts of Spirit every institution works in vain. All in all, the Orthodox Church maintained a balance between institution

²⁵ Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” in Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press Ltd., 1985), pp. 139-142 (originally published in 1971).

²⁶ Karl Holl, *Enthusiasmus und Bußgewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum* (Leipzig, 1898).

²⁷ See the concise work of John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas* (London: Faith Press, 1964).

and charisma in its notions of the oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church.

The devil's traps in the history of the church

It cannot be denied that this fragile balance between dynamically evolving institutions and processes on the one hand, and charismatic manifestations of the church on the other, could not have endured had there not been a constant, supporting legal and cultural framework. The concept of one Christian empire and the massive technical and financial support available helped the church render the formula of the Nicene Creed an historical reality. However, already in the eleventh century, there was a counterattack. Repeated waves of secular ideas were followed by various shocks in the East and West that brought about a general dysfunction. In Rome, the gradual, autonomous elaboration of a certain version of the primacy of Peter's throne, which was developed to ensure the independence of the Roman See in the West against challenges of rival ecclesiastical and secular forces, ended up in a conflict with the Eastern church. On the other hand, the greater and deliberate reliance of the Constantinopolitan church on the state from the tenth until the fourteenth century, subjugated the oneness and catholicity to the priorities of the Eastern empire (especially under the Comnenian dynasty 1081-1185), which frequently used the prospect of church union as an instrument for political bargaining. The institutional and legal versions of oneness and catholicity in Rome could not stop the aggressive, economic and military expansion of European social groups and forces in the East (the Crusades), which ultimately had disastrous consequences for relations between the Eastern and Western churches. With regard to the Eastern church, the dependence of oneness and catholicity on the political center meant that it did not manage to reassert the elaborate administrative and conciliar mechanisms and restore the visual manifestation of the one church once that political center began to disintegrate.

After the end of the Eastern Christian Empire in 1453, the Orthodox Church, around the Patriarchate of Constantinople, managed to survive Islamic rule²⁸ but was strongly challenged by the emergence of modern-

²⁸ See the fundamental work of Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity. A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

ism in the eighteenth century and nationalism in the nineteenth century. Without an imperial umbrella—a Greek emperor or a Russian czar—the Orthodox Church was called on to develop a suitable framework which would demonstrate that the belief in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church was not devoid of historical relevance. The different forms of nationalism have proven considerable, but not insurmountable, obstacles to this. The fact that important new influences, such as that of German Idealism on Russia in the nineteenth century, were used as new raw materials for this remodelling, was a hopeful development. The development of the notion of *sobornost* in today's ecclesiological discussion, in a way that faintly reminds us of its use by Russian theologians at the end of the nineteenth century, constitutes positive progress.²⁹ The same applies to the influence of twentieth-century existentialism on Orthodox theologians in Greece³⁰ and elsewhere. These influences brought about a notable change from the old static paradigm of Orthodox ecclesiology of the scholastic handbooks of dogmatics in the first half of the twentieth century, to a new dynamic one, integrating the progress made in the theological understanding of the Trinity in the course of the twentieth century. This teaching on the Trinity served as an ecclesiological model. Further, apophatic and eucharistic theology as well as the so-called neopatristic synthesis contributed to a dynamic interpretation of the church's oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

The importance of believing in the church in the modern and postmodern world.

It is time to ask how this version of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church thus reflected in the Orthodox Church has anything to do with today's world. The Christian heritage is one cultural component of the modern world. Yet, Christianity is more or less a system of symbols, which are disconnected from their semantic origins and toward which modern society is explicitly hostile (e.g., notions of sin and forgiveness etc.). What counts today is a rearrangement of collective structures of symbols: for many Westerners, the anxiety caused by the constant pur-

²⁹ See Todor Sabev, "The Nature and Mission of Councils in the Light of the Theology of Sobornost," in *The Ecumenical Review* 45/3 (1993), pp. 261-270.

³⁰ See for example Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite* (London: T & T Clark International, 2005).

suit of prosperity, economic growth, social stability and other classical modern values leads to individual escapism. This has brought about a flourishing of a mysticism hostile to history and social involvement. The notions of salvation, union with God, personal completion, etc. have become detached from their original religious background and have become part of a syncretistic puzzle, which has built a private religion. In this process, important aspects of the Christian message are also isolated in order to be incorporated into this new religious movement.

For others, important elements of biblical concepts such as neighborly love and social justice, which are essential aspects of salvation and the anticipated kingdom of God, were interpreted in the light of an enthusiastic collectivism, which wants to reform society even by use of force. The various fundamentalisms constitute the counterpart to the private mystic religions. At both ends of the spectrum there is abhorrence toward history. Mysticism seeks an escape from history; fundamentalism, despite its extremely political agenda, subjugates history to perfectionist visions and suppresses alternative ideas and often different kinds of people.

Christians are urgently called to unite to bear witness to the way in which salvation, the fulfillment of humanity, living in the divine light together with justice, human progress, etc., are clearly connected to working in and through human contingencies. This implies that Christianity can and should play a major role in taking conflicts seriously, considering political necessities and being involved in changing institutions and settings in order to bear this witness. The Orthodox Church can facilitate this task. According to our definition, the one holy, catholic and apostolic church is the body of Jesus Christ, a community that works on itself to elaborate a common understanding in order to bear the fruits of the Spirit and experience the holiness of the inauguration of the new era in Christ.

A second important issue is the rediscovery of the charismatic and spiritual character of the church. In the greatest Christian traditions, oneness, apostolicity and catholicity depended either on an elaborate administrative system or deep theological scholarship. Facing the rearrangement of the boundaries between the visible and the invisible as we have described above, it is very probable that many people cannot discern in the established Christian traditions the veins of spirituality and charisma. Hence, the reaction in the form of emerging charismatic movements in regions outside Europe, which obviously reflects the

growing need for a spiritual and prophetic guidance that is apparently lacking elsewhere.

Today's world is not so different from the world of the Late Antiquity into which Christianity was born. The church expressed its identity in the Nicene Creed (in the way we have analyzed it) as an experience of the new world, by the power of Spirit, manifested in the eucharistic gathering, in the missionary call through prophetic signs and in the exercise of neighborly love. Theophilus explained this type of paradoxical message (scandal and foolishness according to St Paul) vividly to Autolycus:

The world, if it had not had the law of God and the prophets flowing and welling up sweetness, and compassion, and righteousness, and the doctrine of the holy commandments of God, would long ere now have come to ruin, by reason of the wickedness and sin which abound in it. And as in the sea there are islands, some of them habitable, and well-watered, and fruitful, with havens and harbours in which the storm-tossed may find refuge,—so God has given to the world which is driven and tempest-tossed by sins, assemblies—we mean holy churches—in which survive the doctrines of the truth, as in the island-harbours of good anchorage; and into these run those who desire to be saved, being lovers of the truth, and wishing to escape the wrath and judgment of God.³¹

The world embraced that church seeking the harbor. The same happened two centuries later with the emergence of the monastic movement.

The fact that this message of a church harbor was embraced by society at the time implies a considerable responsibility for all Christian traditions today to minister to the world, which looks forward to the good news of its salvation.

³¹ Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 2, 14: PG 6, c. 1076, transl. Rev. Marcus Dods.

Reconsidering Roman Catholic Ecclesiology

Johanna Rahner

The essential features of the church as elements of an ecclesiology “against all odds”

Despite its spiritual character, the church is always too much a worldly creature of whoever wants to make use of it. The visible side of the church is, by and large, neither absolute transparency nor total obscurity. Faith clings to the firm conviction that what is visible of the church also reveals its connection with the Holy Spirit—even if this Spirit can only express itself in protest against the lack of spirit in the church as it is actually experienced. Promises of fullness next to brokenness—that is the true scandal that is the church. Hence, ecclesiology is always also the steadfast adherence to what can be said about the church fundamentally, no matter how much it is called into question externally. An appropriate ecclesiology is always an ecclesiology “against all odds”—a “doctrine of the church” in contradiction—or rather in contrast to what it is and what it should be.

Because of this incongruity, the church needs images to give appropriate expression to this contrast between what is and what should be. In addition, ecclesiology always tends toward criteriological generalization. This involves citing grand metaphors or distinctive marks. Yet, in the end, consciously or unconsciously, the church is never brought into a definite focus. What role do these marks play? They certainly say something about church as an ideal, making clear what—in its present reality—is genuinely missing and what is done without. However, they also shed light on how the church can be understood, how it can be represented in order to use it for direction, to find oneself within it, indeed, to rediscover the true reality of the church. Essentially, such basic definitions are generally less productive if they merely serve to identify distinctive marks—in quite an ancillary fashion—which comment the current situation, than if they are used as catalysts to elicit discordant, aporetic and provocative statements about a genuine reality. Such definitions have both an heuristic and hermeneutical function.

In putting things this way, I am aware that Catholic theology has sometimes either neglected the role of a more functional understanding of these marks, or has ceased to consider them at all. For far too long, it wanted to take certain concepts as plain statements about the reality of the present church and instrumentalized them for that purpose. So, in order to discuss the essential marks of church in Catholic theology and in the Roman Catholic Church today, it will be necessary to take an honest look at its own theological history.

The marks of the church as instruments in theological apologetics and debate

Specifically in reaction to the Reformation, a “propensity” to instrumentalize the marks was naturally found in the context of the question, Who is the true church? To take an example: In explaining article 9 of the Creed, the *Roman Catechism* [Catechism of the Council of Trent] (*CR*) draws on Augustine’s open concept of the church (“The church, says St Augustine, consists of the faithful dispersed throughout the world”),¹ and yet it did not address the question of who is the “true church.” Instead, this remark ultimately served to highlight the necessary visibility of the church.² It was defended as a reality of faith although the *CR* also refers to the church as a *corpus mixtum* (a mixed body).³

Membership in the church was to be recognized by three outward conditions—baptism, a common faith, hierarchy—conditions which the latter alone determine and define. The effective objective was an hierarchical structure based on absolute authority and obedience that made internal cohesion visible and secure. The impetus created by the spiritual upsurge, which led the Reformers to follow Augustine in their twofold concept of church, was thus eliminated by the *CR* in favor of a legalistic and authoritarian structure and an emphasis on external criteria. This tendency was further reinforced in the more detailed description of the distinctive marks of the true church. According to the *CR*, it is not just “marks” (*notae*), but “qualities” (*proprietaes*) that “are also to be

¹ *The Catechism of the Council of Trent (CR)*, I, article 9, at www.catholicapologetics.info/thechurch/catechism/trentc.htm. In printed editions, this is I, chapter 10.

² Cf. *Ibid.*

³ Cf. *Ibid.*

made known to the faithful, that thus they may be enabled to estimate the extent of the blessing conferred by God on those who have had the happiness to be born and educated within her pale.”⁴

The first of these marks is unity:

One Lord, one faith, one baptism. . . The Church has but one ruler and one governor, the invisible one, Christ, whom the eternal Father hath made head over all the Church, which is his body; the visible one, the Pope, who, as legitimate successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, fills the Apostolic chair.⁵

Although Christ himself is and remains the internal, invisible principle of the unity of the church, in the papacy there is the visible principle of unity, and this is particularly characterized by its comprehensive leadership and governing authority. The idea of unity is directly and almost necessarily connected with the idea of primacy. The essence of unity consists in the jurisdictional power of the Bishop of Rome (here the *CR* goes far beyond what would have been imaginable at the Council of Trent). “Church unity” in the spirit of the *CR* makes internal unity visible in, and through, the external, hierarchically structured church.

The other marks of the church contained in the Apostles’ Creed have an equally apologetic character in the *CR*. Here catholicity is not just a quality but also a mark, as it becomes a “most reliable criterion, by which to distinguish the true from a false Church.”⁶ And thus the adjective “catholic” is often opposed to the concept of “heretical” in the *CR* and is thereby no more understood as a universal attribute of the one church of Jesus Christ, but as a confessionally distinctive and thus apologetic mark (which ultimately remained so up to Pius XI, Encyclical *Mortalium animos*, 1928). Likewise, because it entails the true doctrine, the apostolicity of the church becomes a polemical concept, also serving to distinguish and exclude.⁷

Unlike its statements on catholicity and apostolicity, what the *CR* says about the holiness of the church cannot be interpreted merely apologetically: “The Church is called holy because she is consecrated

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*

and dedicated to God” and “because she is united to her holy Head, as His body; that is, to Christ the Lord, the fountain of all holiness, from whom flow the graces of the Holy Spirit and the riches of the divine bounty.”⁸ Nevertheless, this holiness of the true church remains its lasting “quality,” “although numbering among her children many sinners.”⁹ After all, “the faithful, although offending in many things and violating the engagements to which they had pledged themselves, are still called holy, because they have been made the people of God and have consecrated themselves to Christ by faith and Baptism.”¹⁰ The stamp of holiness subsists, even if a person’s deeds do not match their existence. Church is the communion of saints (*communio sanctorum*)—also and precisely as communion through the common participation in holiness of which the sacraments are the outward expression.¹¹ The sacraments are the basis of communion and at the same time a source of grace to the communion. In the *CR*, the church as *communio sanctorum* is identical with the church as a sacramental communion (*communio sacramentorum*).¹²

In connection with the development of the Catholic theological debate, one name certainly needs to be mentioned: Robert Bellarmine. Although the influence of a significant part of Bellarmine’s ecclesiology on Catholic theology today is mainly subliminal, one aspect clearly stands out: his remarks on the concept of church and—more importantly—membership of the church. Bellarmine developed the model of stages of church membership from the criteriology of the three vincula. External, visible factors determine membership in the church at least in a “minimal” sense. What makes the church the church and makes its members identifiable cannot be some kind of “inner faith,” inner virtue; it can and must be empirically recognizable. Here Bellarmine developed a superficial, purely external set of criteria. It quite clearly involved a confrontation with Reformation theology:

Now there is this difference between our teaching on this point and all the others. All the others hold that internal virtues are requisite in

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹² Cf. *Ibid.*

order that a person may be constituted in the Church, and therefore they consider the true Church as visible. On the other hand, although we believe that all the virtues, faith, hope, charity, and the rest, are to be found in the Church, we do not think that any internal virtue at all, but only the outward profession of faith and the sensibly manifest communion of the sacraments are required in order that a person may be judged absolutely to be part of the true Church of which the Scriptures speak. For the Church is as visible and palpable an assembly of men as the assembly of the Roman people or the kingdom of France, or the republic of Venice.¹³

Apart from his definition of membership, this proposition of Bellarmine's—the real church is as visible as the Republic of Venice—is probably his best known, and its impact on subsequent theological history cannot be overestimated. Do we do justice to Bellarmine's ecclesiology nowadays if we understand him as the “initiator and chief witness of an externalized and legalistic concept of church”?¹⁴

Bellarmino was concerned with discovering the truth and, within his theological system, this required knowing how and where the true church was to be found. It had to be possible to recognize the true church as such and, since only one person could guarantee this “recognizability,” the entire question of certainty and truth gravitated around one pole, the authority of the Pope. In this way, Bellarmine made the “papal” structure of the church into its unrelinquishable criterion: it had not only to be visible and one, but also Roman (*romanitas*). Moreover, within such a conception, the relationship between episcopacy and primacy that had been left undecided at Trent is finally determined. Since the apostolic succession (*successio apostolorum*) and ordination constituted true

¹³ *Atque hoc interest inter sententiam nostram et alias omnes, quod omnes aliae requirunt internas virtutes ad constituendum aliquem in Ecclesia, et propterea Ecclesiam veram invisibilem faciunt; nos autem, et credimus in Ecclesia inveniri omnes virtutes, fidem, spem, caritatem, et caeteras; tamen ut aliquis aliquo modo dici possit pars verae Ecclesiae, de qua Scripturae loquuntur, non putamus requiri ullam internam virtutem, sed tantum externam professionem fidei, et sacramentorum communionem, quae sensu ipso percipitur. Ecclesia enim est coetus hominum ita visibilis et palpabilis, ut est coetus populi romani vel regnum Galliae aut respublica Venetorum.* Robert Bellarmine, *De Controversiis christianae fidei adversus huius temporis haereticos* IV. *Contraoersia De Ecclesia, Lib. III Ecclesia militante, Cap. II De definitione Ecclesiae* (ed. Neapel 1837, vol. II, p. 75 Sp. a/b) (Contr. IV.3.2-2.75ab).

¹⁴ Cf. Medard Kehl, “Kirche als Institution,” in Walter Kern, Herrmann Josef Pottmeyer and Max Seckler (eds), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, vol. III (Stuttgart: UTB, 2000), pp. 176-197, here p. 176. Here and in the following, author's own translation.

episcopacy—Bellarmine was probably thinking of a kind of “chain of succession” rather than of a substantive, doctrinal understanding of the concept while at the same time rejecting the idea of an apostolic college—and this proof could hardly be produced for an individual episcopal see, Bellarmine turned to the papacy and its provable succession (*via primatus*) as the decisive factor.

Bellarmino's approach prefigures the latent ecclesiological positivism that subsequently seemed to become the characteristic principle underlying all Catholic ecclesiology. Visibility, delimitation, distinction and a growing hierarchy would henceforth be the themes shaping commentary on ecclesiology, precisely with reference to Bellarmine. The “theology of the church” deteriorated into the “apologetic of the church,”¹⁵ and Bellarmine's work became “an arsenal, into which everyone dipped. Consequently, what was only a polemical chapter on controversial issues was taken for an entire theology *de ecclesia*. The theology *de ecclesia* became impoverished.”¹⁶ Thus the perception of the theological marks of the church was reduced to an apologetics of proof.

Such an apologetic ecclesiology of the Counter-Reformation thus became an “exclusively catholic” ecclesiology in the actual sense. Because it could only make delimiting statements, it constituted an ecclesiology that excluded all else, and then developed this idea of church into an hermetically closed, narrowly confessional concept. The fullness of what is possible in Catholic theological discussion was thereby restricted to the one school of thought that was best able to impose itself. Thus the apologetic of the Counter-Reformation ushered in the “era of legalism”¹⁷ in Catholic theology, which was to have a great influence on theology for the following centuries. It emphasized the external form of the church and its legalistic structure, and used a conceptual system inherited from scholastic theology. This kind of theology corresponded to a type of dominant Catholicism defined as follows: “one Catholic and Roman system, dynamic and triumphalist to the outside world, yet closed in

¹⁵ Cf. Heinrich Fries, “Wandel des Kirchenbildes und dogmengeschichtliche Entfaltung,” in Johannes Feiner *et al.* (eds), *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. VI/I (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1972), pp. 223-285.

¹⁶ Cf. Yves Congar, “Kirche, dogmengeschichtlich,” in Heinrich Fries (ed.), *Handbuch Theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. I (Munich: Kösel, 1962), pp. 801-812, here p. 808.

¹⁷ Cf. Yves Congar, “Die Lehre von der Kirche - Vom abendländischen Schisma bis zur Gegenwart,” in Michael Schmaus *et al.* (eds), *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, vol. III/3d (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), pp. 1-127, here p. 51.

upon itself in the constitution of a state of siege.”¹⁸ Here the idea of church drew its existence from an idea of unity, based on an idea of uniformity. The standard was pontifical Rome itself immediately after the Council of Trent, be it in the liturgy (see the missal of Pius V), in canon law (see the Roman version/*Correctores* of the *Decretum Gratiani*), or in theology itself, whose criterion of truth from now on became “certainty,” a certainty which arose from “being in conformity with what is taught in the Roman theological school under the supervision of the Curia.”¹⁹ It was not just that the Catholic Church was now exclusively identified with the church of Jesus Christ—of which the understanding of “catholicity” as a confessional trait as mentioned in the *CR* was already an indication—but that it defined itself just as exclusively through the principle of *romanitas* (Romanness) and in the strict sense as the “church of the Pope”: *Romanitas* became “the all-embracing mark” of the church.²⁰

The marks of the church in contemporary Catholic theology in respect to the Second Vatican Council

Unity and catholicity

Tackling the topic of “church” in a new, changed way, was probably one of the decisive insights of the Second Vatican Council. It was not a matter of self-reassurance through setting itself apart from the others, but of finding itself through opening up to the others—that is how one could describe the way the Council set the direction for the quest for identity as the “church in the modern world.” Vatican II’s basic perspective on the church turned from being inward-looking to being outward-looking. From then on, church was to be viewed from a dual perspective—*ad intra* (within) and *ad extra* (without)—and thereby described in a “plural grammar,” from inside and from outside. However, two things needed to come together here: an appreciative perception and recognition of others and a new awareness, on the part of the church, of its own identity. Hence, the definition of one’s position with regard to the other gave rise

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁰ Fries, *op. cit.* (note 15), p. 260.

both to changed criteria for one's own characteristics²¹ and to specific directions for how to get on with the other.²² The church discovered that the world "out there" was not just a target for its mission, but that the church itself was at the service of that world.²³ The world thus became a relevant theological locus (*locus theologicus*) for the church's own life. The church's marks were determined from the perspective of mission. This change of perspective on the part of the Council did not just mean that the Catholic Church lost its "enemies"; it also meant that the relationship to others was placed on a new footing. "The others, as actors, were given the right to object: they were allowed to decide how we speak about them [...]. We can no longer talk about others without having listened to them first."²⁴

Hence, after Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church did not attempt to seek unity and to consummate Catholicism by pursuing an ecumenical policy of "the return to the fold." The only concern was to bring out the most profound essence of the church and its unity in dialogue with the other churches. To understand one's own "ecclesial identity" and the meaning of church unity, looking at other churches and ecclesial communities is constitutively significant and indispensable.

The related distancing of the Roman Catholic Church from itself was clearly demonstrated by its attempt to qualify itself and others by a standard outside itself. The way of the church was the way of "conversion by returning to a deeper discipleship of Christ."²⁵ Hence, the "actual reform of the church [was based] on a change of mind and heart towards Christ."²⁶ With Edmund Schlink, we can understand this as the decisive "Copernican revolution" of the Council. The heuristic relevance of this

²¹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 8, 2; 13-16, at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

²² Cf. particularly *Nostra Aetate* 2 at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, and also *Unitatis Redintegratio* 1-4, at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

²³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, *op. cit.* (note 21), p. 1.

²⁴ Roman Siebenrock, "'Das Schifflein Petri auf offener See...'. Besinnung auf das Gewicht des Konzils," in Hans-Herman Henrix (ed.), *Nostra Aetate—ein zukunftsweisender Konzilstext. Die Haltung der Kirche zum Judentum 40 Jahre danach* (Aachen: Einhard, 2006), pp. 11-31, here p. 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

fundamental change of perspective became particularly clear in the question of understanding the church's unity and catholicity.

From this perspective it becomes clear that even though the "unity subsisting [in the Roman Catholic Church] was not yet perfect unity," it too "aspires to its own completion."²⁷ For, to begin with, the church is bestowed with the fullness of gifts.²⁸ The very fact that all gifts are "bestowed" is meaningful. First, the gift of unity is not an end in itself but Christ's gift to his church so that its witness can become more credible to the world.²⁹ Second, the Roman Catholic Church does not simply "possess" this fullness of gifts proper to Christ's church—this fullness has to be given them ever anew. The church therefore perpetually strives for the fullness of Christ, from which alone it can achieve its own fullness.³⁰

However, that does not mean that this "fullness" of Christ is already fully realized in the Roman Catholic Church, since—*Unitatis Redintegratio* 4, 6 continues—the divisions in the one church of Jesus Christ also adversely affect the Roman Catholic Church (i.e., as the realization of the one church of Christ) to such an extent that it is not able more effectively to realize the gift of Catholic fullness which has been bestowed upon it. For want of the others, it foregoes the fullness of its own catholicity. The true unity of the church of Christ is given to it and as such it cannot be lost, but it is also can no longer be fully realized in the Roman Catholic Church because of the absence of the others. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church suffers from a lack of unity and catholicity (*defectus unitatis et catholicitatis*) that cannot be compensated for even by the existing, effective fullness of the ecclesial elements given and of its realization of the one church of Christ in an "historically limited form."³¹ However, that means that the Roman Catholic

²⁷ Heinrich Fries, "Die ökumenische Bedeutung des II. Vatikanums," in Elmar Klinger and Klaus Wittstadt (eds), *Glaube im Prozess-Christsein nach dem II. Vatikanum* (Freiburg: Herder, 1984), pp. 326-355, here p. 336.

²⁸ Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *op. cit.* (note 22), 4, 6.

²⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4; *Lumen Gentium*, *op. cit.* (note 21), 1, 5.

³⁰ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, *op. cit.* (note 21), 7, 7.

³¹ Cf. Walter Kasper, "Kircheneinheit und Kirchengemeinschaft in katholischer Perspektive," in Karl Hillenbrand and Heribert Niederschlag (eds), *Glaube und Gemeinschaft* (Würzburg: Echter, 2000), pp. 100-117, here p. 104.

Church has a deficiency with respect to this unity. Its “being church” is not perfect and its unity is not complete without the others.³²

Precisely on the question of church unity, there was constant tension between two, coexisting, basic options for the Council, which as such had to remain unresolved; indeed, one may well ask whether a resolution is ever to be achieved. The Council Fathers, on the one hand, assumed that the church of Christ had actually found, and finds, its one historical form in the Roman Catholic Church. On the other, they did not want to depart from the position that the separated churches are, fundamentally and in the truest sense, *media salutis* (the means of salvation), and as such comprise the full form of the church as “sacrament.” Moreover, when Walter Kasper defines the status of non-Catholic churches as a situation of historical emergency because “with historical consistency [...] the plural ‘churches,’ which *de iure* should exist as the singular ‘church,’ has *de facto* emerged outside the church in the form of denominations,” he is also saying that “church unity in the Catholic Church only exists in historical deficiency, because in its present form, it does not allow sufficient room for the necessary and intended diversity [...]”.³³

So, admittedly, the Roman Catholic Church is in an analogous situation of need. It cannot realize its gift of catholicity and unity without the others. This circumstance necessarily has as its consequence a changed understanding of unity: no longer uniformity, but “unity in diversity.” Although this concept is not to be repeated to the point of becoming an empty formula, as a decision of the Council it needs to be taken seriously.³⁴ In its own ecclesial reality, the Roman Catholic Church also has to let itself be fundamentally co-determined by the other churches and by the center common to all, namely Christ himself. The Catholic church must first rediscover its catholicity, “which would be incomplete if the other churches were disregarded or only played a role for the purpose of delimitation. ... [This catholicity] is shown in the universal, time-spanning unity in diversity that is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit.”³⁵

³² Cf. Walter Kasper, “Der ekklesiologische Charakter der nichtkatholischen Kirchen,” in *Theologische Quartalschrift* 145 (1965), pp. 42-62, here p. 45.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 61; cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes - Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1969), pp. 228f.

³⁴ Cf. Otto-Hermann Pesch, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil, Vorgeschichte-Verlauf-Ergebnisse-Nachgeschichte* (Würzburg: Topos Plus, 2001), p. 224.

³⁵ Volker Sühs, “Die Herausforderung durch die ökumenischen Beobachter,” in *Herders Theolo-*

Rather, the Council's Christocentric ecclesiology centered around the Eucharist makes this new qualitative understanding of catholicity quite clear. Thus, in article 26 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Council does not just give more importance to the local church under its bishop, but also defines more precisely the ecclesiological dignity of the local congregation, the altar fellowship, referring back to a Eucharist centered ecclesiology: the church of Christ is present in the altar fellowship, not just as "part" of this church but as an embodiment of the whole, as its "highest consummation."³⁶ Such greater theological and ecclesiological importance for the local community reinstates something that was long neglected in Roman Catholic ecclesiology.³⁷ "The church must be present in the congregation and the congregation must have rights in the church."³⁸ This change of perspective changes the center of gravity of every definition of being church. Such new emphasis highlights the necessary inner pluriformity of catholicity. A church centered around the Eucharist is catholic only in the diversity of God's gifts received through the Holy Spirit.

Holiness

The New Testament already refers to the inseparable connection of holiness and sin in the church, and hence one of the images of the church used by the Church Fathers was *casta meretrix* (chaste whore), which coexisted with the idea of bridal immaculacy. In later theology, the "church of sinners" was a constant, albeit unpopular, subject of Roman Catholic dogmatics. Of course, this was subject to specific assumptions: "It was known and it was stated that many members of the Church were sinners and yet were still members. But this fact, which was admitted almost as a matter of course, was not perceived as an existential problem of the

gischer Kommentar zum zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil, vol. V, "Theologische Zusammenschau und Perspektiven" (Freiburg: Herder, 2006), pp. 201-209, here pp. 208f.

³⁶ Cf. Karl Rahner, "On the Presence of Christ in the Diaspora Community According to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council," in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations X* (New York: Crossroad, 1977), pp. 84-102, here pp. 89f.

³⁷ Cf. Karl Lehmann, "Was ist eine christliche Gemeinde?," in *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift Communio* 1 (1972), pp. 481-497.

³⁸ Walter Kasper, "Kirche und Gemeinde," in Walter Kasper (ed.), *Glaube und Geschichte* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1970), pp. 279-294, here p. 283.

church itself.”³⁹ Instead, it brought to light the “objective holiness” of the church in its institutions, sacraments and teaching. The consequence is an unconscious “hypostatization” of the church’s essence,⁴⁰ since an ecclesiology admitting that there are sinners in the church but making an exception for the “real” church presupposes “an idealistic concept of the church.”⁴¹ This approach is theologically questionable. Church is here only “an idea, an ought-to-be, something to which appeal can be made from concrete reality, something which is meant to be reached only asymptotically, as it were, by slow approximation.”⁴² By contrast, Roman Catholic ecclesiology has always held on to a concept of church as a visible and institutionally and legally organized reality, so that it cannot be said of this church that “it has nothing to do with the sins of its members [...]. If it is something real, and if its members are sinners and as sinners remain members, then it is itself sinful [...]. The Church is a sinful church: this is a truth of faith, not an elementary question of perception.”⁴³

At the same time, the Roman Catholic concept of church also holds that the church’s holiness is a truth of faith.⁴⁴ It is a sinful church and yet remains “the bride of Christ and the vessel of the Holy Spirit, the only fountain of blessedness.”⁴⁵ One could say that precisely in its sinfulness the church is and remains the mystery/sacrament of God’s universal will for salvation. That is not a paradoxical “unity of visible sin and invisible grace”; rather, the church is a “holy” and thus efficacious mystery/sacrament from God’s holiness alone.⁴⁶ Ultimately, holiness and sinfulness are never a “truth of faith” or a “mark” of the church in equal proportions, as sin is never the “visible expression of what the Church is in its own, characteristic, living roots, but on the contrary, a contradiction veiling it from view [...]. Sin remains in it a reality which

³⁹ Karl Rahner, “The sinful Church in the decrees of Vatican II,” in Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations VI* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 270-292, here p. 276.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁴¹ Karl Rahner, “Church of Sinners,” in *op. cit.* (note 39), pp. 253-269, here p. 260.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Cf. Yves Congar, “Die Wesenseigenschaften der Kirche,” in Feiner *et al.*, *op. cit.* (note 15), pp. 357ff., here p. 425.

⁴⁵ Rahner, *op. cit.* (note 41), p. 261.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

contradicts its nature; but its holiness is the manifestation of its most profound essence.”⁴⁷

In view of the long apologetic phase during the Counter-Reformation, during which Roman Catholic ecclesiology tried to immunize itself against the self-critical concept of a “sinful” church, *Lumen Gentium* offered practical approaches for a “theology of sin in the church” although the terms “sinful church” or “church as sinner” are not mentioned. Article 8.3 forms the central starting point for the Council’s new approach:

While Christ, holy, innocent and undefiled [Heb 7:26] knew nothing of sin, [2 Cor 5:21] but came to expiate only the sins of the people, [Cf. Heb 2:17] the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal.⁴⁸

In order to qualify these statements properly we first need to determine their context. Against the backdrop of the church as a universal sacrament of salvation and sacrament of Christ, which includes the question of the actual relationship between the Christ event and the church, article 8 of *Lumen Gentium* also takes up the issue of the realization and real life of the church. Apart from the statements about the church of Jesus Christ being made visible in the Roman Catholic Church, and an initial definition of the relationship to other churches and ecclesial communities, which are explained in greater detail in the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), article 8.3 of *Lumen Gentium* describes the realization of church in the world on a Christological basis. There are three key ideas: suffering discipleship, sinfulness/repentance and eschatological consummation. All three may be understood as deliberate, regulatory concepts for the statements preceding them. They determine the potential and the limits of the “analogy” described in section 1 of article 8, and they are conditions for the concrete realization of the church of Jesus Christ in the Roman Catholic Church, set out in section 2 of the same article. Article 8, section 3, thus expands on the criteria for this realization. The analogy emphasized in section 1 is explicitly turned into an antithesis: the sinlessness of Christ is contrasted with the idea of the church as sinner. Any realization of church—already placed under

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263f.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, *op. cit.* (note 21), 8, 3.

the judgment of God—is measured against internal criteria of suffering discipleship and poverty as the signs of the “true church,” which finally strips all ecclesiastical triumphalism of its legitimacy and places every realization permanently under an eschatological reservation.

The church can only be the “subject” of renewal and purification if it has previously been the “subject” of guilt and sin.⁴⁹ That is, the actual church itself dims the illuminating power of this symbol, although the church’s preservation has been promised and assured by Christ himself. The “subject,” both holy and sinful, is thus a complex reality (*realitas complexa*) deriving from Christ’s Spirit and the social fabric of the church. This is the only passage in the whole of *Lumen Gentium* that specifically speaks of the sin, repentance and renewal of the church itself. Yet, the Council went far beyond the context of previous doctrinal statements in stressing the immediate effect of the sins of its members on the church, and from there developed the idea of repentance and of the need for the renewal and purification of the entire church. For “the church as a symbol of salvation suffers all the more when sin leads to a lessening of its symbolic power. [...] Hence the church—and not just the individual believer—must ‘always follow the path of penance and renewal’ [...]. *Ecclesia semper reformanda!*”⁵⁰

In this respect, the overall landscape set by *Lumen Gentium* is of particular importance: it portrays a pilgrim church that suffers poverty, humility and trials as it follows Christ and moves towards its fulfillment, while having the “appearance of this world which is passing.”⁵¹ Vatican II’s basically formative concept does far more to foster reflection about the church’s own temporality, sinfulness and need for repentance than an ecclesiology which regarded the church merely as an institution of salvation rather than as a fruit of salvation dependent on God’s grace alone would have.⁵² Precisely the understanding of the church as being on a pilgrimage in the world constituted a kind of “climax” for the “lowliness” of the church. (Along with the whole of chapter VII, article 48 emphasizes not only the eschatological character of the church’s

⁴⁹ Cf. Rahner, “The sinful Church,” *op. cit.* (note 39), p. 285.

⁵⁰ Alois Grillmeier, “Kommentar zu Kapitel 1 und 2 der dogmatischen Konstitution über die Kirche—*Lumen Gentium*,” in Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner (eds), *LThK Ergänzungsband 1* (Freiburg: Herder, 1966), pp. 156-207, here p. 176.

⁵¹ *Lumen Gentium*, *op. cit.* (note 21), 48, 3.

⁵² Cf. Rahner, “The sinful Church,” *op. cit.* (note 39), pp. 281f.

holiness but also the aspect of being judged for the church, admittedly only for each individual member of the church.)⁵³

This fundamental change of orientation in the church's self-understanding and the resulting consequences are particularly visible in the changed relationship between the church and the world, as explained in the Pastoral Constitution on "The Church in the Modern World," *Gaudium et Spes*. The option explicitly enunciated by the Council here belies first a "dualistic" relationship between church and world that sees salvation as being solely in the church and regards the world as a "sinful remnant" which is eternally lost. Sin and the awareness of sin are no longer simply negative marks of the world but necessary components of the church's self-understanding. However, the Council's basic conviction also contrasts secondly with a fundamentalist relationship with the world that would turn the church's mission into "spiritual imperialism."⁵⁴

By contrast, the profession of faith in holiness as the true mark of church is still to be retained, and a false "hypostatization" of the church can only be avoided by firmly rooting this profession in the Christ event itself. The church is

as a whole, from the human point of view, one who is utterly incapable by her own power of performing any saving act or of reaching a state of justice [...], who is therefore in this sense also sinful; and she is by God's prevenient, efficacious grace to which she has been absolutely predestined one who has been raised to true holiness, even though on earth this divinely bestowed holiness still has to grow.⁵⁵

Only if church always understands itself as sinful here and thus in perpetual need of conversion and purification, will it understand this call as a call reaching into its innermost being and that it is always in need of God's grace and precisely for that reason is also "holy."⁵⁶ However,

that "actualistic" moment in the being and action of the Church which Protestant theology quite erroneously finds wanting in Catholic ecclesi-

⁵³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, *op. cit.* (note 21), 48, 4.

⁵⁴ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes—Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos 1969), here cf. p. 111.

⁵⁵ Rahner, "The sinful Church," *op. cit.* (note 39), p. 291.

⁵⁶ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1979), pp. 265f.

ology is in fact present in a Catholic understanding of the Church. Even the most “objective” and most “institutional” element in the Church is only accomplished, and rightly accomplished from every point of view, under the grace of God.⁵⁷

Apostolicity

For the Council, the concept of common mission and thereby the fundamental apostolicity of the whole church⁵⁸ was a fundamental theological tenet. It was also linked to the dimension of the church as mystery/sacrament that places the church in the role of a sign (*signum*) and instrument (*instrumentum*) of humanity’s union with God and of the unity of people among themselves. However, this ultimately implies that in the service of this church there is only one mission common to all and, consequently, only one apostolate common to all. The vocation and mission of all is especially significant for that which is emblematically called “apostolic succession” to express faithfulness to the truth. Therefore,

the apostolic succession of the office-bearers takes place within the apostolic succession of the whole community of the faithful of the church. In their witness, that has no other foundation than the witness of Christ and of the apostles, the office-bearers are surrounded by the witness of all who received the spirit.⁵⁹

For the Council the “succession structure [...] was the expression of the bond and idea of tradition in the Catholic Church.”⁶⁰ The Council’s explicit emphasis on the dimension of tradition as an event involving the whole church, of the common priesthood of all and the participation in the prophetic ministry of Christ, ultimately had inevitable implications for the basic structure and the basic understanding of apostolic succe-

⁵⁷ Rahner, “The sinful Church,” *op. cit.* (note 39), p. 292.

⁵⁸ Cf. Wolfgang Beinert, “Ökumenische Leitbilder und Alternativen,” in Hans-Jörg Urban and Harald Wagner (eds), *Handbuch der Ökumenik*, vol. III/1 (Paderborn: Bonifatius GmbH, 1987), pp. 126-178, here cf. p. 149.

⁵⁹ Jürgen Remmers, “Apostolische Sukzession der ganzen Kirche,” in *Concilium* 4 (1968), pp. 251-258, here p. 257.

⁶⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre—Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie* (Munich: Erichewel, 1982), p. 257.

sion.⁶¹ So, the Council situates the idea of apostolic succession—precisely of the episcopal ministry—as a symbol/expression, but not as the only essential component, of the apostolic tradition of the entire church to the broader context of the apostolic succession of the church as a whole; but the Council did not give any specific indications of how this classification was to work in practice.⁶²

The traditional line of argument of Catholic apologetics drew unilaterally on biblical witness as the tradition of the early church and centered apostolic succession around the bishop's office or, even more markedly, on the papacy. However, this was insufficient, especially with regard to a pneumatologically based communion structure, which focuses on the community as a whole as the bearer of the apostolic tradition (*traditio apostolica*) and which Vatican II expressly included in its basic thinking about the church as the "people of God." Orthodox theology, in particular, has always laid particular importance on this dimension of apostolic tradition and its fundamentally pneumatological dimension.⁶³ With such a broad horizon, the formal identification of apostolic tradition and apostolic succession (*traditio* and *successio apostolica*) with succession in office would constitute a theological reduction. However, where this reduction is not applied, an overture toward an understanding apostolic succession in terms of communion becomes possible. It is the communion that becomes visible during the celebration of the Eucharist that is the subject of the succession, the external sign of which is the office-bearer/bishop.⁶⁴

Thus, regarding this concept of apostolic succession, Council and post-Council Catholic theology has been less concerned about the issue of formal, historical succession than about a more precise substantive definition. There is an ongoing confrontation of the church with its origin, in particular with the original, fundamental witness of the Holy Scripture through which tangible history became the criterion of the beginning. The ecclesiastical ministry is the symbolic expression of the church as a whole within the *traditio apostolica*. This symbolic function is necessary and essential to the church, and yet *Lumen Gentium*

⁶¹ Cf. Congar, *op. cit.* (note 44), pp. 560f.

⁶² Cf. Walter Kasper, "Die apostolische Sukzession als ökumenisches Problem," in Walter Kasper (ed.) *Theologie und Kirche*, vol. II (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald 1999), pp. 163-182, here p. 171.

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

itself makes it clear that there can also be true tradition without explicit succession of office.⁶⁵ For it is the Spirit who creates communion and forms church, and because of whom the whole community bears fruit, no matter how much the Spirit works through the office for the edification of the community in a unity of diversity.⁶⁶ Episcopal succession is thus a necessary, visible element, but it does not guarantee remaining in the succession of the apostles.⁶⁷ Giving actual form to the essential symbol of this succession was, according to Vatican II, a task that still remained to be carried out on the basis of the communion ecclesiology developed in the Council.⁶⁸ The question of the extent to which the communion of the local church—not just its (episcopal) office—represents the whole church, and how such an office could be integrated into the communion, was barely touched upon in the Council and has not been fully explored since.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, *op. cit.* (note 21), 8; 15; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *op. cit.* (note 22), 2f.

⁶⁶ Cf. Kasper, *op. cit.* (note 32), p. 181.

⁶⁷ Cf. Otto Hermann Pesch, "Hermeneutik des Ämterwandels? Kleine Ausarbeitung einer Frage," in Peter Walter, Klaus Krämer and George Augustin (eds), *Kirche in ökumenischer Perspektive* (Freiburg: Herder 2003), pp. 417–438, here cf. p. 425.

⁶⁸ On the ecumenical relevance, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Thesen zur Theologie der Kirche* (Munich: Claudius, 1970), p. 43.

Revisiting Baptist Ecclesiology in the Context of Myanmar

Samuel Ngun Ling

Prologue

We live in a pluralistic world, one in which the diversity and differences in faith traditions have become increasingly important and challenging, and secular faiths have developed moral visions that are profoundly influencing individuals, civilization, education and community. In this context, how can Christians claim that the church is one holy, catholic and apostolic? What is its contribution and that of ecclesiology to the world today? What does it mean to be a worshipping and believing community in this rapidly changing world? Does the church make sense to humanity as a whole and can it persuade people to follow Christ's way? What is the purpose of being a church and being a Christian, especially in religiously plural and globally changing contexts?

Adherents to a faith are often persons of profound insight, intellect and deep piety. Protestants affirm that the church is one (*una*) in an internal unity of faith; is holy (*sancta*) in the person of its head, Christ, and in its doctrine, laws and sacraments; is catholic (*catholica*) or universal in place or scope, at all times and in all the faithful everywhere, as opposed to a spatially and temporally limited heterodoxy; and is apostolic (*apostolica*) in its foundation and doctrines. How should Christians speak to and act toward their neighbors with an integrity that combines confidence and hope with humility and deep faith in the ultimate significance of Jesus Christ and Christ's one catholic, apostolic and holy church? What is the significance of traditional ecclesiology and soteriology today? Does it make a difference to human history, as well as to our own lives, that we are faithful? Does it make sense to follow Jesus, to try to discern and to embody him, even in a broken and fragmentary way?

The Church is one because God is the one creator and redeemer . . . , who binds the Church to himself by Word and Spirit and makes it a foretaste and instru-

ment for the redemption of all created reality. The Church is holy because God is the holy one ... who sent his Son Jesus Christ to overcome all unholiness and to call human beings to become merciful like his Father ..., sanctifying the Church by his word of forgiveness in the Holy Spirit and making it his own, the body of Christ ... The Church is catholic because God is the fullness of life ... and who, through Word and Spirit, makes his people the place and instrument of his saving and life-giving presence, the community 'in which, in all ages, the Holy Spirit makes the believers participants in Christ's life and salvation, regardless of their sex, race or social position'. It is apostolic because the Word of God, sent by the Father, creates and sustains the Church. This word of God is made known to us through the Gospel primarily and normatively borne witness to by the apostles ..., making the communion of the faithful a community that lives in, and is responsible for, the succession of the apostolic truth expressed in faith and life throughout the ages.¹

The Baptist doctrine of the church

According to Baptist doctrine, the church's catholicity and its locality are of equal importance. Local churches are believed to embody the invisible, universal church of Christ. Baptists affirm the autonomy of the local churches not in the sense of a separation from other churches and denominations, but in their responsibility to Christ in the inclusiveness of the church and in the oneness or interrelatedness of the congregations. Local churches are regarded as a part of the universal church. Baptist ecclesiology supports the autonomy of the local churches combined with the associational principle, believers' baptism by immersion combined with regenerate church membership and an holistic vision of Christian mission and evangelism combined with spiritual renewal and service.² Baptists believe in the separation of church and state so that the church can enjoy full freedom in carrying out God's service to the world and to safeguard its sovereignty against the dominance of geopolitical interests.

Paul's teaching on the Eucharist, which he understood as a memorial meal, inspires and reminds its celebrants of the incarnation, suffering,

¹ World Council of Churches, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (December 2005), ch. 12, at www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/FO2005_198_en.pdf, accessed 15 January 2009.

² Cf. Norman H. Maring & Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*, revised edition (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1991), pp. 44-47.

death, burial, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. The elements of bread and wine point to the body and blood of Christ. Central to the meaning of this memorial rite are covenant, church, Christ and communion: the blood as the new covenant (1 Cor 11:25); the church as covenant people of God; Christ as the head of the church; and communion as communion with Christ and with one another. Partaking of the meal implies participation in the new life in Christ and in the fellowship of believers who represent the church of Jesus Christ.³ Baptists believe in holistic salvation; the practicing of Christ's servanthood (*kenosis*); enhancing community building (*koinonia*); advocating the unity of the churches (*oikoumene*); and promoting evangelization (*missio dei*).

In 1926, a concise and modern definition of the church was formulated by British Baptists:

We believe in the Catholic Church as the holy society of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, which He founded, of which He is the only Head, and in which He dwells by His Spirit, so that though made up of many communications, organized in various modes, and scattered throughout the world, it is yet one in Him.

We believe that this holy society is truly to be found wherever companies of believers unite as churches on the ground of a confession of personal faith. Every local community thus constituted is regarded by us as both enabled and responsible for self-government through His indwelling Spirit who supplies wisdom, love, and power and who as we believe, leads these communities to associate freely in wider organizations for fellowship and the propagation of the Gospel.⁴

The above statement summarizes the historical Baptist doctrine of the church that takes into account the catholic (universal) church as well as the local churches where the catholic (invisible) church is embodied. The American Baptist churches, to which the Baptist churches in Myanmar belong, stress a more biblical concept of the church as the basis for developing a broader concept of the church from local to global, with the formation of the larger community fellowships such as associations, conventions, federations and alliances.

At this point, we must be careful not to misinterpret Baptist doctrines or principles.⁵ While Baptists believe in the autonomy or self-government of

³ *Ibid*, pp. 162-164.

⁴ Ernest A. Payne, *The Fellowship of Believers* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1952), p. 143.

⁵ There are six Baptist principles: authority of the Scriptures; priesthood of all believers; liberty of the

the local churches, the associational principle, that is the interdependence or fellowship of the local churches with other churches (ecumenism), is also stressed, so that isolated self-sufficiency is avoided. The other point at which Baptists differ from Congregationalists is in their insistence on the complete separation between church and state. Characteristic of Baptist thought, this principle arose from the concern that the church needs to be free to obey God, and the insistence that the state or civil government does not interfere by prescribing a certain religious belief or practice.

The practice of baptism by immersion is widely believed to be the other important distinction between Baptists and other Protestants. However, this principle is not to be taken as the primary mark of differentiation, as early Baptists seem to have baptized by pouring water on the head rather than by immersion. More important than the practice of baptism by immersion is the practice of believers' baptism, that is the restriction of baptism to persons who make a personal profession of faith. Baptists believe that the practice of baptism in the New Testament signifies faith, confession and repentance, and therefore it is to be administered only to those who are old enough (adult) to make responsible decisions. At the same time, by confining baptism to persons who have made personal professions of faith, the churches guard the entrance to membership and try to maintain regenerate churches and church members. In summary, historically the distinguishing marks of the Baptists have been the following: a regenerate church membership safeguarded by believers' baptism; congregational polity, coupled with an associational principle; and the necessity of freeing the local church from interference by the civil government or ecclesiastical officials.⁶ With regard to the practice of the Eucharist, Baptists have usually stressed the fact that the Lord's Supper is a memorial meal, relying on Paul's account according to which Jesus said before the bread and the cup, "Do this in remembrance (*anamnesis*) of me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). The memorial is not just a sign pointing to an historical event, but an occasion to inspire and remind its celebrants of the incarnation, suffering, death, burial, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ as the elements of bread and wine point to the body and blood of Christ.

Finally, these events signify God's deliverance of humanity from bondage to sin and remind the church that Christ is the reason for its existence. Christians speak of the new covenant sealed with his blood,

soul or freedom of conscience; autonomy of the local church; separation of church and state or religious liberty; and believers' or adult baptism by immersion and regenerate church membership.

⁶ Maring & Hudson, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 17.

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25), representing an offer of pardon and power which could be freely received by those willing to accept it with faith. The church represents the covenant people of God, who gather around the Lord’s Table, where they are reminded of their identity as a people God has called or purchased for God’s purpose. At the head of the church or covenant people is Jesus Christ the Lord, whose real presence can be recognized in their midst. Lastly, communion represents communion with Christ and with one another.

What then is the Baptist understanding of mission? Rooted in the Puritan and Anabaptist traditions, Baptists are conservative evangelicals whose strong missionary zeal and moral emphasis on purity of life have produced a faithful commitment to Jesus’ Great Commission to make all nations his disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:18-19). Baptists, particularly American Baptists, not only focus on spiritual concerns but also on the sociopolitical interpretation of the gospel (social gospel); the holistic aspect of salvation; *kenosis*; *koinonia*; *oikomenē*; *missio Dei*. For Baptists, the evangelistic witness is integral to the life of the Baptist church. Evangelism and mission essentially refer to the church’s outreach to persuade all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and to obey him as their Lord. In addition, Baptists believe that the church must teach its members and is obliged to prepare its members to become articulate Christian witnesses in their roles as citizens, workers and members of families. Finally, Baptists generally consider themselves in accord with the New Testament understanding of the church.

Contextual Challenges⁷

Political challenges

The Protestant churches in Myanmar, particularly the Baptist church, have had to face major political challenges: colonial rule, military socialism and the relationship between church and state.

⁷ See Samuel Ngun Ling, *Communicating Christ in Myanmar: Issues, Interactions, and Perspectives* (Yangon, Myanmar: Association for Theological Education in Myanmar, 2005) and Samuel Ngun Ling, “A Dialogical Approach to Communicating the Christian Faith in Myanmar Today,” in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Identity, Survival, Witness. Reconfiguring Theological Agendas*, *Theology in the Life of the Church*, vol. 3 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2008), pp. 87-102.

The Baptist doctrine of separation between church and state was challenged when Burma's first prime minister, U Nu (1948-1962), tried to declare Buddhism the state religion. Muslim and Protestant leaders strongly opposed this proposal claiming that it would create two classes of citizens: first-class Buddhist citizens and second-class non-Buddhist citizens.⁸ Buddhists, Hindus and the Roman Catholic Church did not oppose his proposal and therefore U Nu often referred to the Roman Catholic Church as a "model church" in Myanmar. The Protestant churches generally, but primarily the Baptists, strongly opposed him, fearing that Burmanization (Buddhist nationalism) might be imposed on the minority ethnic Christians. Insurgent ethnic Christian groups, such as Karen and Kachin groups, fought against the central government for their religious and cultural identities and the proposal was never implemented.

General Ne Win's socialist government forcefully nationalized the church and, as a result, the church suffered from severe shortages of material and human resources until the military regime came to power in 1988. The prolonged period of social and economic hardship, physical suffering, malnutrition, poor education and isolation from the international community have negatively affected the church in Myanmar. The protests in September 2007 and crackdowns on democratic activists in Myanmar received international attention. Initially led by widely respected Buddhist monks, these protests were sparked off by public unhappiness with a sudden rise in government controlled fuel prices. People simply could no longer put up with the situation. Monks and students protested peacefully in the streets, reciting prayers. Many were arrested, imprisoned, and others went into hiding, crossing borders in order to seek political asylum in other countries. In this challenging situation, the Myanmar Council of Churches advocated for a peaceful resolution.

Cultural challenges: Buddhistization or Burmanization⁹

Myanmar comprises 135 dialect groups with eight major ethnic groups: Kachin, Kayin, Kayah, Chin, Mon, Burman, Rakhine and Shan. Instead of

⁸ Kanbawza Win, "Colonialism, Nationalism and Christianity in Burma: A Burmese Perspective," in *Asia Journal of Theology* (October 1988), p. 248.

⁹ This whole section is taken from my original article entitled, "Voices of Minority Ethnic Christians in Myanmar," in Hope S. Antone (ed.), *CTC Bulletin, Bulletin of the Program Area on Faith, Mission and Unity (Theological Concerns)*, *Christian Conference of Asia*, vol. XVIII, no. 2—vol. XIX, no. 2 (Hong Kong: CCA, 2003), pp. 16-17.

respecting the plurality of 135 national ethnic groups with their distinctive languages, cultures and historical backgrounds, there has been an attempt to assimilate the different ethnicities—including the minority ethnic Christians—into the religion, culture and ways of life of the majority. Some Christians have described this policy of assimilation combined with Buddhist nationalist movements as Buddhistization or Burmanization (to make all ethnic people Burmans and Buddhists). In the 1930s, the nationalist motto was *amyo, bathar, thatana*, which means “Burmese race, Burmese language and Burmese religion (Buddhism).” This Burmese nationalist ideology has continued to dominate the country’s post-independence political leaders. The process of cultural assimilation became a predominantly social and political threat to the existence and growth of the minority Christian churches. A crucial problem for the minority ethnic Christians is not the use of Burmese as the common language, but the government’s attempt to eliminate the languages of minority ethnic groups. In response to this challenge, minority Christian churches are determined to focus on community building in order to preserve their ethnic selfhood and cultural identity.

Religious challenges

In 1966, when all foreign Christian missionaries had left the country, the Christian population was estimated at only three percent. The socialist government assumed that the Christian churches and their mission would gradually die out without the physical presence of their missionaries but, on the contrary, the Christian witness flourished amidst these challenges and twenty-five years later, in 1991, Christians accounted for five percent of the population, and in 2007, six percent. Various restrictions were imposed on the churches’ activities, including limiting freedom of speech, movement and publication,¹⁰ despite the government’s official claim that everyone has the right to profess and practice their own religion.

Although lip service is paid to religious freedom, in practice, strict rules are applied and permissions are often required to hold Christian meetings, conferences, evangelistic campaigns and for mission fields, church building and Christian publications. Restrictions that hinder Christians and other non-Buddhist minorities from fully enjoying their rights and freedom of faith include: refusing permission to construct churches or Christian institutions;

¹⁰ In Myanmar, the printing of the Bible in tribal language is officially prohibited. It has to be printed in India or any other country in Asia.

controlling censorship of Christian literary works, and limiting freedom of propagation of the Christian gospel among Buddhists.

A very challenging issue is a different form of religious discrimination along ethnic lines. In the context of Myanmar, religious discrimination has much to do with religious favoritism, that is, whether one belongs to majority's religion, Buddhism. Buddhism continues to enjoy a special status and privileges¹¹ and has the state's backing in all its activities. As a consequence, it continues to be a sociopolitical force whose activities impinge on the freedom and activities of other religions. The ideology of favored religion minimizes the freedom of other un-favored religions while claiming to embrace all religions to flourish together peacefully and harmoniously. Religious favoritism has led to misunderstandings between minority non-Buddhists and majority Buddhists and to a breakdown in communication between them. This has often resulted in a conflict that is related to a religion-based ethnic identity crisis. When the first Burman Buddhist by the name of Maung Nau was converted to Christianity, many Burman Buddhist nationalists assumed that he constituted an act of disloyalty to Buddhist society and the nation.

In the same spirit, most Buddhists continued to look at Christianity in Myanmar with nationalist eyes, regarding Christians as an alien element connected to Western cultural imperialism and associated with colonialism from which it took the whole nation more or less a century to gain full independence. In this context, it was British colonization rather than the Christian mission, which made Christianity culturally alien and socio-politically undesirable for the typical Burmese Buddhist who considers Buddhism to be the very *raison d'être* of their state.¹² The church and its activities remain alien and undesirable elements in the eyes of Buddhist nationalists. The church's growth is viewed with envy and suspicion as being part of Western political dominance and cultural exploitation.

Reevaluating the church's role in the context of multiple challenges

Primarily, the church is the worshipping assembly called forth by God. The church of the New Testament, though richly diverse, claimed: (1) faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord; (2) practiced baptism and Eucharist;

¹¹ *Kye-mun (Mirror)* (20, 21, 22 August 2002).

¹² G. E. Harvey, *British Rule in Burma, 1824-1942* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), pp. 25-26.

and (3) performed apostolic preaching and instruction centered on God's kingdom. The church serves as both sign and instrument of God's kingdom and the means by which the gospel is proclaimed, disciples are drawn together, sins are forgiven and the power of Satan is broken.

Ecclesiology deals with questions pertaining to the meaning of the sacraments, baptism, Eucharist, ministry and the nature of the oneness of the church. Traditionally, ecclesiology is developed based on biblical foundations, the teaching of the Church Fathers and church traditions. This is the deductive approach of an ecclesiology handed down from the past. It should be noted that there is neither a universally accepted ecclesiology nor doctrine of the church. The context has to be taken seriously and we need to develop an ecclesiology relevant and meaningful for our different contexts. The biblical foundations cannot be absolutized for all, at all times, everywhere. They need to be understood in terms of the context in which the different affirmations were made. Plurality of churches, cultures and faiths are important factors in this regard.

What then is the role of Christians? All forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination at the individual as well as the structural level must be rejected. The church should make every effort to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to live a fuller life, not simply to enjoy basic human rights but to be able to express themselves through work, thoughts and words in order to be able to contribute to the common good. While for the churches prayers are very important, these must be followed by actions. The church needs to be prophetic enough to speak up against the state's fallacies and wrong decisions which affect people's livelihood. The church's understanding of peace must be reconsidered in the relationship between church and state (Rom 13:1ff). Peace means more than reaching a certain level of compromise so that conflicts can be resolved or avoided. Genuine peace is not simply the absence of conflict or war, but an active presence of justice. In not standing alongside the poor, the powerless and the oppressed, Christians are denying them the opportunity to live a dignified life. Christians are called to be peacemakers not simply "peacetalkers." We must have the courage actively to seek peace and justice. The most effective way is to speak out against all forms of injustice, exploitation and oppression.

Article XIII of the New Hampshire Baptist Confession, defines the church as follows:

We believe that a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel;

observing the ordinances of Christ; governed by his laws, and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by his Word.¹³

In line with the above confession, the Baptist understanding of the church is understood as a company of regenerate persons, baptized on a profession of faith in Christ; united in covenant for worship, instruction, the observance of Christian ordinances and for such service as the gospel requires; recognizing and accepting Christ as their supreme Lord and lawgiver; and taking God's Word as their only and sufficient rule of faith and practice in all matters of conscience and religion.¹⁴ The four marks of the church: unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are accepted as signs in relation to the invisible, universal church.

Redefining the unity of the church in the context of religious pluralism

The church is the body of Christ. The head of the body is Christ and therefore Christ is the center of the unity of the church. Baptists accept unity as taught by the New Testament: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6). But what is the purpose of this unity in the context of religious pluralism?

Baptists strongly support unity in diversity and practice democratic principles of the church without minimizing fellowship and cooperation with other churches. The Baptist church believes the autonomy of the local churches to be an ecumenical basis for the unity of diverse churches and denominations. Because of their belief in the autonomy of local congregations, Baptists reject the Roman Catholic doctrine that the combination of many separate congregations of Christians into a single catholic church constitutes church unity. Baptists deny unity in the sense of the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Unity is understood not only as the unity of the Christian church, but also as the unity of humanity and creation. Baptists in Myanmar believe in a wider ecumenism, meaning the unity of churches

¹³ The New Hampshire Baptist Confession, at www.reformedreader.org/ccf/1833newh.htm, accessed 21 February 2009.

¹⁴ Cf. Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1980), p. 20.

(living in harmony of life); the unity of faith traditions (interfaith relations); the unity and renewal of humankind (holistic development); and the integrity of the whole creation (ecological salvation).

In his book, *The Church after the Council*, Karl Rahner points out that Vatican II implies ecclesiological reflection. He draws our attention to three important areas: the relationship to other churches, to non-Christian religions and to the world.¹⁵ I refer to this mainly because of the recognition that our relationship to people of other faiths is also of ecclesiological significance. Traditionally, people of other faiths are of concern to the church only in terms of mission. Such an understanding of Christian mission must be critically reviewed. Images of the church such as the people of God, the body of Christ and the bride of Christ need to be critically reviewed in the light of today's context. The Cyprian dictum, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church there is no salvation), has had a tremendous influence on the churches' attitudes throughout the centuries and has raised questions about the meanings of both the *ecclesia* and salvation. Both have been misunderstood and misinterpreted.

The Baptist church in Myanmar has taken a leading role in the formation and development of the ecumenical movement. Major initiatives by the Myanmar Council of Churches, such as bringing together Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and mainline Protestant and evangelical Pentecostal churches, have been carried out under the skillful direction and leadership of the Myanmar Baptist Convention. Efforts are being made to heal divisions, tensions, conflicts and broken relationships between the churches in Myanmar. In the area of theological education, the Myanmar Institute of Theology, the oldest and largest Baptist theological institute in Myanmar, contributes significantly to post-graduate theological training with a special focus on ecumenical theology, interdenominational studies, church and society, interfaith dialogue, world religions and contextual theologies. With interdenominational (Baptist, Anglican and Methodist) faculties and students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, the institute prides itself as a model for ecumenical praxis and community building in Myanmar.

It should be mentioned that Baptists in Myanmar have been taking leading roles in promoting the unity of faith traditions by initiating interfaith dialogue as well as interfaith cooperation between religions especially between Christians and Buddhists.

¹⁵ Karl Rahner, *The Church after the Council* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), pp. 37ff.

Recapturing the church's holiness in the context of globalization

Holiness should not imply an exclusive spiritual holiness, setting the church and its believers apart from worldly things. Holiness is not an escape from the world, but a penetration into the world as the Word becomes flesh (Jn 1:14). We are in the world but not of the world (Jn 15:19). We are sent into the world, not into the church (Jn 20:21). Holiness must be a ray of light that enlightens darkness. Holiness is the power of justice that can break the evil power of the world. That transforming power of holiness, as embodied in the church's sacramental life, impacts the world with the presence of Christ. "We are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 5:20), representing Christ in the sense of making Christ present in the world. When the world experiences the presence of Christ, it experiences God's holiness through the church.

Finding a way to reclaim the holiness of the church in the context of globalization has become a great challenge to the Baptist community in postcolonial Myanmar. Many Christian leaders in Asia believe that despite considerable benefits, such as technological advancement, globalization has created social disintegration, inequality and poverty and is endangering the environment. Furthermore, it has led to a growing divide between rich and poor, both nationally and internationally. Myanmar is ranked as one of the ten poorest countries in the world. Because of its long-standing exclusion from the international community and global market, Myanmar's economy is on the verge of collapse.

The question that needs to be raised is whether Buddhism or Christianity is strong enough to resist the forces of globalization.¹⁶ Will Buddhist or Christian theologians in Myanmar be able to confront or meaningfully to redirect the homogenized streams of globalization, which have directly benefited an elite, the ruling class or power brokers, while leaving the majority, the poor and hopeless, in their abject condition? It has brought about moral corruption, the disintegration of the sociocultural fabric, the collapse of education and political instability.

What could be the role of church? Does the Baptist church have any say in this dilemma? What does the church mean by preaching justice, peace, human rights, dignity and equality to the oppressed and margin-

¹⁶ Vinay Samuel, "Keynote Address: Evangelical Response to Globalization: An Asian Perspective," in *Transformation* (January 1999), p. 4.

alized community? Baptists practice three principles of self-reliance: self-support, self-propagation and self-governance.¹⁷ These principles not only play a significant role in maintaining the church's identity and selfhood, but also in promoting human dignity and moral values against the dominant global economic forces. Based on the principle of self-reliance, the Baptist churches in Myanmar have struggled to free themselves from the bondage of the dominant streams and oppressive structures of economic globalization, and to take root in their indigenous identity and local social and cultural values. It is therefore important for the churches in Myanmar to stand firmly in faith and to reclaim Christian moral values such as justice, holiness, equality and peace against all oppressive and evil social, political and economic systems, and to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13-14).

Reshaping the catholicity of the church

The church is universal in terms of its proclamation of God's universal salvation. Catholicity means universality in which the diverse demarcations that set one segment of religious society against the other are abolished, and which enriches the unity of the whole by giving scope to different gifts and vocations. Paul affirms that "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) and that there are varieties of spiritual gifts and vocations (1 Cor 12:4-6). Hence, catholicity is the inclusive unity with diversity that constitutes the whole of the church. Catholicity safeguards the authenticity of the church's belief and practice. Without authenticity there is no catholicity. The structures embodying the church's catholicity are primarily the creeds (Apostles' and Nicene Creeds) as well as the pronouncements of the Councils such as those of Nicaea and Chalcedon. These creeds are catholic in the sense that they set forth the authentic faith. The creeds express the authenticity and identity of the community and aim at excluding errors. When we speak of the church as a sacrament of unity, we need to reaffirm our vision of gathering "up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). Thus we move beyond the vision of a single new humanity:

¹⁷ Samuel Ngun Ling, "The Encounter of Missionary Christianity with Resurgent Buddhism in Post-Colonial Myanmar," in *Quest, an Interdisciplinary Journal for Asian Christian Scholars: Religion and Globalization*, vol. 2, no. 2 (November 2003), p. 66.

not just a renewed humanity but a renewed cosmos. In Romans 8:19-25, Paul speaks of the hope for the whole creation. In sharing such a vision we are challenged to reformulate and revise our traditional ecclesiology. The diversity, enriching the oneness of the church, should include different religious faiths and practices, symbols, rituals and celebrations of festivals. The wider ecumenical fellowship, the fuller *koinonia*, includes all religious faiths liberated from everything that is unclean or evil.

The Baptist understanding of catholicity recognizes the essential spiritual unity of the churches of all redeemed peoples. "The same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him" (Rom 10:12; cf. Acts 10:34-35). Baptists regard the nature of the church as catholic because God is the fullness of life who through Word and Spirit makes the church the place and instrument of God's saving, life-giving and fulfilling presence, thereby offering the fullness of the revealed Word the means of salvation to people of every nation, race, class, gender and culture. The catholicity of the church is the fellowship (*koinonia*) of all those for whom Jesus Christ is Lord. The church is the living congregation of the living Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom the reality of the worldwide community of faith has come to be constituted. Based on this idea of the church's catholicity, Baptist theologians in Myanmar have focused very much on God's universal presence (catholicity of God's presence) outside the church in the community and also the fullness of life among the oppressed and marginalized. Baptists believe that the kingdom of God is within and among all people, regardless of their religion, race, or gender.

Reaffirming the church's apostolicity amidst the challenges of religious pluralism

Apostolicity is the continuity of the apostles' teaching and practice. Being faithful to apostolic teaching in order to distinguish the church from heretical teachings was a mark of the New Testament church. Apostolicity endows the church with authenticity and serves as a foundation for the church's authenticity and authority. When the biblical canon was formed, for instance, books claiming to be written by the apostles were regarded as authoritative. In addition, controversies within the early church were usually settled by its living continuity with the apostolic tradition.

According to the Baptist understanding, apostolicity is not the unbroken succession of ministerial gifts and ordinations direct from the apostles,

sometimes called the “historical episcopate.”¹⁸ True apostolicity does not consist of succession, but possession—only those who possess the doctrines, the spirit and the life of the apostles have the right to claim this mark of a true gospel church. “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (Eph 2:19-20). Apostolicity is one of the four marks of the church. It rests upon the apostles’ message, the message of Jesus the Son of God, crucified and risen, and the message of the kingdom and reign of God. One belongs to the church when one is motivated by this message. A church ceases to be church when it loses its apostolic as well as its doctrinal foundations. It is therefore very important for every church to maintain its own identity or distinctiveness, even if such identity or distinctiveness is not an end in itself confining the church to the domain of a particular denomination or church.

Christianity is deeply rooted in proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior, who rose from the dead. However, the context in which the Lord is proclaimed challenges Christ’s apostolic message anew. While the apostolic message of the Christ has been developed in certain dogmatic and traditional forms, our new context demands changes in forms and methods of witness. In Myanmar, Baptists concentrate on dialogue rather than proselytizing without minimizing the apostolic foundation of the message. They teach more about an incarnated type of the Christian witness, an emphatically *kenotic* model of Christian servanthood, than the “proselytizing model” of Christian mission. The latter is concerned with spiritual conversion and its aim is not servanthood but conquest, while the former is concerned with social transformation. Baptists affirm that the body of Christ, the church, continues that courageous incarnation in our daily lives. Thus, connecting one local church with another, across divides of culture, race, ethnicity and geography, is a radical participation in God’s ongoing incarnation. Thus, the local church’s direct participation in various ministries and mission projects throughout the global church allows for a new level of incarnated living.¹⁹

¹⁸ Edward T. Hiscox, *Principles and Practices for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), p. 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The *kenotic* type of Christian witness is concerned with the person, not statistics of religious conversion, and is ecumenical in spirit. It does not insult or look down on those who adhere to other faiths by making mere dogmatic claims about Christ's apostolic message, nor does it treat them as heathens, peoples of darkness, an un-Christian attitude that has characterized much of Western missionary activity over many centuries. Such an apostolic message has already caused sufficient annoyance, particularly among Buddhists in Southeast Asia. The plural Asian context calls for Christ's humble and holy apostolic message, which does not look down on people of other faiths. By demeaning other faiths and traditions, Baptists in Myanmar believe that Christian witness would create tensions and conflicts in church and society rather than bringing about peace and harmony. The real purpose of Christian witness or mission is not conversion, but to serve the world and to treat fellow human beings as we treat ourselves. This is the Baptist understanding of apostolic servanthood (*kenosis model*). "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

In light of the suffering and poverty in Asia today, what then is the purpose of ecclesiology? According to a statement by the World Council of Churches,

40. The Church is called and empowered to share the suffering of all by advocacy and care for the poor, the needy and the marginalised. This entails critically analysing and exposing unjust structures, and working for their transformation. The Church is called to proclaim the words of hope and comfort of the Gospel, by its works of compassion and mercy (cf. Lk.4:18-19). This faithful witness may involve Christians themselves in suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The Church is called to heal and reconcile broken human relationships and to be God's instrument in the reconciliation of human division and hatred (cf. 2Cor. 5:18-21). It is also called, together with all people of goodwill, to care for the integrity of creation in addressing the abuse and destruction of God's creation, and to participate in God's healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity.

41. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to proclaim faithfully the whole teaching of Christ and to share the Good News of the Kingdom - that is, the totality of apostolic faith, life and witness - with everyone throughout the entire world. Thus the Church seeks faithfully

to proclaim and live the love of God for all, and to fulfill Christ's mission for the salvation and transformation of the world, to the glory of God.²⁰

In light of the above statement, it is important for us to revisit and to redefine our traditional understanding of ecclesiology so as to make it more critical and relevant. The ecclesiology we confess and practice today needs to be a redeeming, healing and reconciling ecclesiology, providing an antidote to the effects of various systemic diseases. As the light of the world and salt of the earth (Mt 5:13-14), the church is called to manifest God's fullness of life. From its beginning, the apostolic church has combined preaching of the Word, the call to baptism and service to the community. The fullness of life that the church proclaims means life in liberty, with dignity, justice and freedom. Enabling the poor, the oppressed and marginalized to enjoy the fullness of life (Jn 10:10) is the important task and mission of the church. The church in Asia and Myanmar should no longer be only a stagnant community gathered in worship, but rather a dynamic social movement helping those in need. The church should be an agent of sociopolitical change as was the New Testament apostolic church. In this way, the church has to undergo a paradigm shift in order to confront the new challenges.

The church's mission should have community oriented, universal, reconcilable, dynamic, liberative and prophetic dimensions. Therefore, in the context of Myanmar, the church's mission should reach the oppressed and marginalized, challenge the rich and those who exploit or oppress, and free people from their bondage into a new life in Christ. The church's social action should not be a means of mission and evangelism but a manifestation of mission. Hence, social action and mission must go hand in hand.

As we live in a pluralistic society, interreligious dialogue and cooperation are an important part of Christian witness to help foster peace, justice and harmony in society, and to unite different religious communities and societies in a collective force to fight together against the social and political evils of our age.

²⁰ *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, op. cit. (note 1), pp. 10-11.

Particular, Universal, Spiritual: Understanding the Church by Drawing on Martin Luther

Philipp Stoellger

The Neoplatonic burden

Traditionally, Lutheran theology has distinguished between the visible and invisible church. This distinction belongs to the tradition and not to the Holy Scripture and is therefore not strictly necessary. While we could do without, it is of course not merely random and may be helpful, but also misleading. It depends on what use we make of this difference.

The problem with distinguishing between the visible and invisible church is its inherited Neoplatonic burden: if it is understood as a separation of two “worlds,” if the visible and the invisible are compared with one another (in the sense that the “really” real is invisible, like the highest idea) and if one asks how the visible is in the invisible. If the really real is invisible, then what is visible is a mere derivation or at best acceptable as a mirror image, and to be regarded as being ontologically inferior. For our understanding of the church, the Neoplatonic model poses a problem rather than providing a solution. It operates with a “world behind our world”—a model that can easily be criticized—and it provokes the unrealizable desire for a church behind the actual churches.

The Neoplatonic paradigm bewitches theological understanding in that it focuses on the question of how the invisible can be behind the visible, and how the eternal can be within time. The phenomena of churches—the actual churches we experience and live in—are then not relevant in their own right. They are perceived only as manifestations of a secret reality of the church which lies behind them.

For a clear understanding of the church we therefore need an hermeneutical shift in Protestant ecclesiology: We have to orient our understanding toward the phenomena, not a metaphysical and dual-

istic ontology of “the one church behind the many churches.” Church is “phenomenal” and shows itself. It is with this insight that we must begin in ecclesiology. Assuming the invisible church to lie behind the phenomena would be to betray the churches, which are manifest. Even the invisible church “must appear,” in whatever manner.

With reference to Luther’s ecclesiology, this poses the question of how to relate the *ecclesia spiritualis*, *universalis*, and *particularis* (the spiritual, universal and particular church) to one another. The answer to this question reveals the soteriological and eschatological redefinition of the church in Protestant theology in contrast to the Roman tradition, and may offer new perspectives for the understanding of a “universal” ecumenism in a relationship to the *ecclesia spiritualis* and *ecclesiae particulares*.

A critique of identity

In the face of claims to the contrary by the Bishop of Rome, who tended toward ecclesiological fantasies of omnipotence, for Luther it was fundamental to disempower the soteriological relevance of the church of his time. In itself, a church is impotent in respect of salvation so that no bishop (or any other office) can claim to represent the soteriological power of the church. Such a disempowerment of the church is theologically justified, because the church is not identical with Christ, nor with the Holy Spirit, or the kingdom of God, since human work cannot be identical with God’s work. Christ and his salvific work are external to the church and the church is passive in respect to Christ’s exclusive soteriological work. In traditional terms, we could formulate this as follows: the church is purely passive in respect to God (*mere passive coram Deo*) and what God is doing.

The church is neither analogous with Christ, nor Christ’s representative and it does not bring forth salvation. In Reformation terms, the church is chiefly part of the world, a worldly institution. Moreover, as a body of believers, it is theologically qualified as a sinner.¹

We would produce a theological monstrosity or run into ecclesiological absolutism if we were to understand the so-called visible church

¹ “Non est tam magna peccatrix ut Christiana ecclesia. Quomodo haec est Sancta et peccatrix? Credit remissionem peccatorum et dicit: ‘debita dimitte.’ Hoc nemo dicit, nisi qui sit sanctus” (Martin Luther, “Sermon of 9 April 1531,” WA 34/1, 276, 7–9).

as being identical with the invisible church—the visible representing the invisible. This would exaggerate the importance of the church as a necessary and indeed sufficient means of salvation, if not salvation itself. The church is neither the kingdom of God nor identical with God's presence on earth. This would not only constitute a Babylonian captivity of God, but also presuppose a representational theory of the church:² the church representing God and God's kingdom on earth. This would conform to a certain model of political theology, a model that sees the ruler and the nation state as God's representative. The representational model is strengthened by making use of the ecclesiological metaphor of the church as the "body of Christ" in the sense of claiming Christ and the church as being identical.³

To guard against these tendencies, Luther (and Lutheran tradition) use very different distinctions: the true and false church; the church and Christendom; the spiritual and physical church and the invisible and visible church; the hidden and manifest as well as the spiritual, universal and particular church.⁴ In order to avoid dwelling solely on attempts to explain these distinctions, we will reduce the level of complexity:

- The church is to be conceived of in a differentiated way along polemic, profane and pneumatological lines
- In my view, the distinction most relevant to ecumenism is that of the *ecclesia spiritualis, universalis* and *particularis*
- Finally, an eschatological distinction is necessary to justify the distinction between a spiritual, a universal and a particular church systematically.

² Cf. Stephan Schaede, *Stellvertretung: Begriffsgeschichtliche Studien zur Soteriologie* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2004).

³ At best, this leads to an ecclesiological version of anhypostasia and enhypostasia: the church is anhypostatic with regard to the external provider of its identity. But does the church enhypostatize in the identity of Christ? Is it in Christ as we are in it? Indeed not, otherwise the relationship between the church and Christ would be understood as a *unio hypostatica*—thus insinuating the incarnation of Christ in the church—as if Christ and the church were one ("supernatural") person. This identification of the church with Christ would be a theological monstrosity. Cf. a much more differentiated view, Hans-Peter Grosshans, *Die Kirche—Irdischer Raum der Wahrheit des Evangeliums* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), pp. 70–84.

⁴ Cf. Gudrun Neebe, *Apostolische Kirche: Grundunterscheidungen an Luthers Kirchenbegriff unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Lehre von den *notae ecclesiae** (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1997).

According to Luther, what is the church and how does it show itself?

Polemics: Antichrist and beast

"The church is a Babylonian beast," remarked Martin Luther with regard to the pre-Reformation Western church; this phrase applies to any church understanding itself in this manner. The beast is "Babylonian" in that the sinner is touted as a savior, the fallible church is touted as a necessary (or even sufficient) mode of salvation. The result would not be a legitimate analogy of the church as Jesus Christ, but rather an "anti-Christian," illegitimate analogy in which the church—if not substituted for Christ—competes with him, as if the church were salvific and without sin—and not Christ alone.

A church that claims for its own the "visible unity" of the "invisible and visible" church is stricken with hamartiological blindness and represents a glorious ecclesiology, not recognizing that, as human work, the church is at best *simul iustus et peccator*, i.e., at the same time righteous and a sinner.

Whether human work (or institutions) can be justified is questionable. Can means (to an end) be justified in this soteriological sense? In other words, can institutions such as churches, banks, states, etc. be justified? Since they are certainly able to sin, they are surely in need of justification. But, if one transposes the joyful exchange (*admirabile commercium*) onto the relationship between Christ and the church, things begin to be problematic. The church, as a collective, could then become an intermediary agency of salvation between Christ and Christians. The joyous exchange could then turn into an unholy alliance.

It follows from the difference between Christ and church and between salvation and church that the celebration of mass cannot be a "redemptive or salvific work."⁵ Thus the celebration of mass does not bring about salvation by itself. In accordance with the critique of a soteriological over-interpretation of the church's actions, this difference between Christ and church means that worship cannot be sacrificial, and that the Lord's Supper can therefore not be a eucharistic sacrifice.

⁵ In contrast to the view of mass as a good work, with which one understands oneself as providing a great service to the almighty God while in reality, we give Christ nothing in mass so that nobody gives God anything or does God any good, but instead takes and profits from the sermon and sacraments. Cf. Martin Luther, "Eyn sermon von dem neuen Testament, das ist von der heyligen Messe (1520)," WA 6, 364, 14–27. Cf. Martin Luther, "Das Magnificat verdeutschet und ausgelegt (1521)," WA 7, 595, 34–35: For "no one yet serves God, but he lets him be his God who performs his work in him" (*niemand dienet aber got, denn wer yhn lessit sein got sein und seine werck in yhm wircken*).

In correlation to this, the activity of the church is not a prolonged incarnation, just as its passivity is not a prolonged passion. Both of these interpretations would skew the difference between Christ and church. Eberhard Jüngel states that “the Christian worship lives from the death of Jesus Christ.”⁶ In other words, it cannot itself repeatedly execute Christ’s death as a sacrifice without dispersing its own basis of life. If one follows the metaphor of sacrifice in interpreting Jesus’ death, this sacrifice is the end of all sacrifice “once and for all.” That there are no further sacrifices to be made remains the Christological objection to any repetition or reenactment of the sacrifice, whether through martyrdom, the suffering of mystical life, or the life of the church.

Once the misunderstandings of theological absolutism and a glorious ecclesiology are excluded, the next step in the tradition of Luther’s *theologia crucis* is to understand the church with reference to the theology of the cross—as a sort of *ecclesiologia crucis*. How can this be possible without implying a new problematical identification, in this case that of the crucified Christ with the similarly “suffering” church. The *ecce homo* would turn into an *ecce ecclesia*, as if the church as a body of martyred bodies were the prolongation of the passion of the crucified. The church’s suffering is, however, not Christ’s suffering.

The church does not carry out works of salvation. This phrase could be contradictory since the church does administer the sacraments. It is thus to be expected that the church is misunderstood as being sacramental: if the sacraments bring about salvation and the church administers the sacraments, is the church not (or even the church “administration”) also contributing to salvation by its very nature?

Yet these works of the church are not its own works. The church is only an indispensable condition for God’s presence in these works.⁷ Or, phrased differently, the church provides the elements that only become sacramental through God’s Word, and not through the church’s own word and administration.

The church’s activity and passivity are thus double coded: as the work and suffering of the church, it is human work with all its weaknesses and suffering, but both are places for God’s presence and work. The

⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, “Der evangelisch verstandene Gottesdienst,” in Eberhard Jüngel, *Wertlose Wahrheit. Zur Identität und Relevanz des christlichen Glaubens. Theologische Erörterungen III* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003), pp. 283–310, here p. 306.

⁷ This necessity is questionable. Is God’s work dependent on a necessary condition, and could it be the church’s agency?

church's activities and the passions lead to salvation only inasmuch as God is active in them. These church's works and sufferings are thus not "actions," but events that go beyond the logic of action; no one involved is an "autonomous subject" of an action, but is a participating, responding individual within the framework of an event.

Profane: Church as means to an end

The church is merely a responsible means to an end, a means to the administration of Word and sacrament. It is thus not a means unto itself, but the end is *extra ecclesiam*, beyond the church. It is and always has been a fallible human creation. Its activity was thus functionally reduced in the Reformation—without the end sanctifying the means and without the end declaring all means to be "unholy" and thus doing without all means or declaring it to be a false form of institutionalization. In contrast to the Roman interpretation of the church, the end does not sanctify the means and in contrast to a spiritualistic interpretation of the church, the end does not render the means "unholy."

The church is thus to be critiqued from a theological point of view with regard to its aim and end, and from a profane point of view with regard to its humanity, service to life and the "professionalism" of its means and forms. This seemingly marginal and "external" dimension is its "core function." The church must ensure the best order possible for the extraordinary in the world, the administration of Word and sacrament.

This is the true place of the church's own activity, a place whose profane nature and professionalism are defined from the perspective of theology: to be as worldly, efficient and supportive of life as possible "for the sake of God." The entire institutional spectrum, from ecclesial architecture to ecclesial politics, is to be assessed from a profane perspective (in which profane organizational development is appropriate, but not a neoliberal market model). This aspect of the church is indeed human in origin and must therefore not be given a "higher" meaning. At best, this can serve as an example for other institutions inasmuch as the life of a community can be formed as efficiently and humanely as possible on the basis of faith. In this sense, the church can be thought of as the "light of this world."

The question that must be addressed is to what extent spiritual criteria apply here. Or, to paraphrase the words of the Austrian poet Karl Kraus, it certainly is not alone a question of the outer appearance of the

church. The lingerie also is important.⁸ Is the institutional order to be conceived of as an equivalent or as an analogy to faith? Should worldly appearance be the equivalent of the eschatological end and hope?

If one were to claim this, this analogy could have serious consequences. In political as well as theological terms one could then support a monarchical church order in the name of the kingdom of God, and vice-versa. The worldly can then be overestimated and exaggerated in theological terms. This could even lead to a state of *morbis oecumenicus* (ecumenical sickness) when, in spiritual terms, one attributes too much relevance to the office of bishop and misunderstands it with regard to historical succession. In the end, one could erroneously conclude that the invisible church has to be represented in visible unity through an *episcopus maximus*.

Nonetheless, the phenomenal appearance cannot completely depart from the “content,” the aim of the means. Although the kingdom of God does not come to the world as the church institution, the profane means cannot be indifferent to or contradict their end. The end does not sanctify the means; but not all means are appropriate to the end.

The kingdom of God will surely not come about through force (although not without power); and surely not through injustice; and surely not “as a market in a market”; etc. Certain commonalities of the profane order are inappropriate for the institutional manifestations of faith. A life of faith is thus work within the forms of life of this world and work on these forms of life. Naively adopting the market model within the church (and the desire for spiritual success) can and should thus be open to profane and theological critique.

All of these indispensable yet ambivalent externalities are open to criticism, not in the name of a purely internal world but in that of another external one, the whence and whither of the church: from Christ to the fulfillment of the world in the kingdom of God. Christ and the fulfillment of the world in the kingdom of God are the eschatologically defined points where the church comes from and where it goes; they are the basis and the final limitation of the church.

The critique against giving too much soteriological relevance to the church as a supposed medium of salvation (*sacramentum*, as if it were

⁸ Cf. Karl Kraus, “Aphorismen. Sprüche und Widersprüche: Pro domo et mundo, Nachts,” in Christian Wagenknecht, *Schriften*, vol. 8 (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 24: “Es kommt gewiß nicht bloß auf das Äußere einer Frau an. Auch die Dessous sind wichtig.” [It certainly is not alone a question of the outer appearance of a woman. The lingerie also is important]. Cf. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Paris: Carrington, 1908), pp. 34–35: “It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.”

or represented Christ) as well the diminishing of the sinful dimension of the church in claiming its being immaculate and sinless is rooted in this functional, non-sacramental definition of the church.

The church is not identical with that for which it is the means. The church is not the end. If, nevertheless, it (mis)understands itself as being identical with the end, if it claims to be that for which it is only a means to an end, then it becomes a pseudo-church—a poor illusion with a mere claim to true being.⁹ This exaggerates the importance of the church and plays down the importance of Christ, if it does not in fact compete with him.

The particular church (ecclesia particularis)

Even before the Reformation, the church existed as particular churches, in other words, the particular churches were not identical with the universal church. This non-identity of particular churches and the universal church is fundamental and irreducible. An identity (of the particular with the universal) would neither be possible nor desirable.

In Western Europe, twelfth- and thirteenth-century interpreters of Gratian, the fourth-century founder of Roman Catholic church law, saw the Roman church only as a particular church; only the universal church was infallible.¹⁰ The law of love (*lex caritatis*) was valid only for the universal church (*Res publica ...ecclesiastica una lege caritatis instituta*).¹¹ Claiming this universal Christian law for one's own legislation meant promoting oneself to be the director of and judge over all church bodies (*rector et iudex omnium ecclesiarum*), something that nobody—not even the highest bishop (*episcopus maximus*)—should or may do.¹²

How does one assess particularity from a theological perspective? Is it a sign of deficiency, or a mere lack of universality? A lack of spirit in contradiction to the unity of the Easter creed and Pentecost? The

⁹ Cf. Grosshans, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 194. Grosshans refers to Karl Barth in another sense than expressed here.

¹⁰ Cf. Wilhelm Maurer, "Der ekklesiologische Ansatz der abendländischen Kirchenspaltung nach dem Verständnis Luthers," in *Fuldaer Hefte* 18 (Berlin/Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1968), pp. 30-59, here p. 36.

¹¹ Cf. Johannes Heckel, *Lex charitatis, Eine juristische Untersuchung über das Recht in der Theologie Martin Luthers*, Heft 36 (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1953), p. 139; referring to WA 2, 617, lff.

¹² From comparative linguistics we can learn, that a universal language is neither possible nor desirable. In a similar way, it is impossible and undesirable to give up particular churches in favor of a universal church.

sickness of the church (*morbus ecclesiasticus*)? When a Protestant bishop declares that the division of the church is theologically not a point of pride and that it must be remedied, then this indicates a tendency toward institutional unity and visible identity. Does this indicate a “Vaticanization” of Protestantism?

The position referred to implies that the church’s actual phenomenality in its plurality is perceived as an evil; phenomenality would then be held in low esteem in the name of higher unity. This seems to be a consequence of the Platonic paradigm, from unity through the ontologically inferior plurality back to the final unity. This judgment would be more of a theological Platonic sickness (*morbus platonius*) than its Protestant upshot. Why and to which end should one bring together the particular churches into one universal church? In order to turn the universal church into the kingdom of God? Or because globalization is now fashionable also in ecclesiological terms? This would indicate a shift towards church fusion as was the economic ideal during the 1990s.

If one believes that the unity of the so-called invisible church must become visible in oneness, the danger is that one renders the invisible visible. Should this only apply to Christianity or does it extend to a unity with Judaism, or with all monotheistic religions or, in the end, with all religions? This would end in a religious Esperanto.

The universality of the ecclesia universalis in contrast to the ecclesia spiritualis

In contrast to the legally organized community (as a community of love)¹³ of the *ecclesia universalis*, the *ecclesia spiritualis* is the community of the faithful (*communio fidelium*). All those who are baptized are members of the legal community of the *ecclesia universalis*, while the *ecclesia spiritualis* “only” includes those who have baptismal grace “received in faith.”¹⁴ This spiritual body¹⁵ appears in the order of worship as it otherwise would be a defunct particular church.

¹³ Cf. Maurer, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cf. Martin Luther, “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate (1520),” in Helmut T. Lehmann, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 44 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1966), pp. 115ff., according to Maurer, *ibid.*, pp. 37f.

In contrast to (the former) Roman ecclesiology, in Protestant ecclesiology the legal order of the *ecclesia universalis* does not rule but serves the *ecclesia spiritualis*. The bishop of Rome, or any other office, therefore has no jurisdiction over Christendom; he does not rule, and would only turn himself into a *monstrum* should he wish to be *pontifex* and *imperator*.¹⁶ As the Roman bishop does not rule, the administrators of Word and sacrament are servants of the Word (*ministerium verbi*) and not “priests who are servants of sacrifice.”¹⁷ The universal church has no earthly head, but its head is Christ alone.¹⁸ One consequence of this metaphor becomes clear in that all Christians are servants to an equal degree (in the sacrifice of prayer and in their work), and thus in a priesthood of all.¹⁹

No individual therefore has control over “central power” but the *ecclesia universalis* alone.²⁰ The church as a legal community is an historical figure, which includes (for example) the Greek, Russian, Indian and Hussite churches (as Luther used to say).²¹ This reveals a differentiated structure of the legal community, which can be divided into segments according to territory and class—during the Reformation through the *landesherrliche Kirchenregiment*, the state leadership of the church—but which derives its orientation, foundation and teleological structure from service to the Word and the community of love. Its unity is anchored in the unity of the true creed and its vitality in its service and its character as a community of love.

The church is thus differentiated as *ecclesia universalis* and *spiritualis* but is not “spiritualized” since the spiritual church must appear within the particular churches and show them to be part of the

¹⁶ Cf. Martin Luther, “Ad dialogum Silvestri Prieratis de potestate papae responsio (1518),” WA 1, 677, 29ff. and 678, 1ff.

¹⁷ “Concilium Tridentinum, Sess. XXII, Doctrina de ss. Missae sacrificio, 1562, Caput 2,” in Heinrich Denzinger/Peter Hünermann, *Enchiridio symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum: Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, Lateinisch-Deutsch (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 1991), no. 1743: “*Una enim eademque est hostia, idem nunc offerens sacerdotum ministerio, qui se ipsum tunc in cruce obtulit, sola offerendi ratione diversa*” [For the victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests, who then offered Himself on the cross, the manner alone of offering being different]. For an English translation of the “Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass of the Council of Trent (1562),” see <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct22.html>.

¹⁸ This head/body metaphor remains problematic.

¹⁹ Cf. Martin Luther, “Resolutio Lutheriana super propositione XIII. de potestate papae (1519),” WA 2, p. 223, 34ff. Cf. Jüngel, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 43.

²⁰ Cf. Maurer, *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 40–41.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 42.

universal church—otherwise these segments would be dead (in opposition to spiritualists). On the other hand, the *ecclesia universalis* is never identical with an *ecclesia particularis*—there appears a clear non-identity. During the Reformation this also stood in opposition to the so-called spiritualists who identified the *ecclesia spiritualis* with one *ecclesia particularis*.

The real presence of the *ecclesia spiritualis* in the proclaimed Word and the sacraments in the particular churches may possibly be defined similar to Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper: *non extra usum*. This means that only in the use of the Word (*usus verbi*) and the sacraments the particular church can hope, with certainty, to be filled with the real presence of the Spirit. This has the critical flip side that churches that do not make use of the Word wilt away and can only expect a real absence of the Spirit. When, for example, a church applies its means chiefly to preserve itself and therefore eliminates pastoral positions until as few as feasibly possible remain, the church then faces the threat of breaking apart.²²

The ecclesia spiritualis in contrast to the ecclesia universalis

Is the spiritually existing church (*ecclesia spiritualis*)²³ the essence of the universal church (*ecclesia universalis*) as articulated in article III of the Apostles' Creed that defines the church as the "communion of saints"?²⁴

"This communion and congregation includes all those who live in true faith, hope and love, so that the essence, life and nature of Christianity are not a physical congregation, but a congregation of the hearts in one faith."²⁵ It is clear

²² Furthermore, if a church believes that it can deem the *usus verbi* as useless or even dispensable (and maintains a strict doctrine or reduces it to a Bible school), this will also result in the dissolution of the particular church.

²³ Cf. Martin Luther, "Sermo de virtute excommunicationis," WA 1, 639, 2–6: "*Est autem fidelium communio duplex: una interna et spiritualis, aliena externa et corporalis. Spiritualis est una fides, spes, charitas in deum. Corporalis est participatio earundem sacramentorum, id est signorum fidei, spei charitatis, quae tamen ulterius extenditur usque ad communionem rerum, usus, colloquii, habitationis aliarumque corporalium conversationum.*" Cf. Neebe, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 34ff. Cf. Martin Luther, "Von dem Papstthum zu Rom wider den hochberühmten Romanisten zu Leipzig (1520)," WA 6, 296, 7–11: "*die natürlich, eygentlich, rechte, wesentliche Christenheit stehe ym geiste, unnd in keinem eusserlichenn ding, wie das mag genennet werdenn. Dan alle ander ding mag haben ein unchristen, die yhn auch nymmer mehr einen Christenn machen, ausgenommen den rechten glaubenn, der allein Christenn macht.*" Cf. Neebe, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 44.

²⁴ Cf. Maurer, *op. cit.* (note 10), p. 37.

²⁵ Martin Luther, "Von dem Pappstthum," WA 6, 292, 37ff. (ad Eph 4:5): "*Dies Gemeinde oder Sammlung heißet aller der, die im rechten Glauben, Hoffnung und Liebe leben, also daß der*

that the territorially, nationally and linguistically diverse particular churches are united in the Spirit and, as a result, in faith. “The *ecclesia universalis*’ spiritual life is in the *ecclesia spiritualis*,” as Maurer phrased it.²⁶

The universal church consists of an invariably plural legal and creedal community of all particular churches. This could be an ecumenical council of churches while at the same time being a critical regulator with which the World Council of Churches (WCC) can never be identical. The spiritual church is the community of faith which is to be distinguished from any given institution. The spiritual church is not “anti-institutional” but has its own particular appearance in the world: it appears in the fulfillment of Word and sacrament.

The life of the universal church is the community of love, which is formed through the spirit of the community of faith (*ecclesia spiritualis*). This could be a useful model. Is the plurality of particular churches identical with the universal church and the WCC thus an excellent candidate to administer the universal church, or does the WCC even represent the universal church? Would this imply identifying the spiritual church with a worldly institution? One can avoid such identification if one understands the particular churches and the universal church as thresholds within the possibilities for being church on earth, which together contrast with the spiritual church as a pneumatological reality, just as God’s work contrasts with human achievement.

This explanation is, however, debatable. Luther himself states that “Where faith is, there is the church; where the church is, there is the bride of Christ; where the bride of Christ is, there is everything, which belongs to him. This faith has everything that follows out of faith: the office of keys, the sacraments, the power and everything else.”²⁷ Would this not transfer the *communio* of the “joyful exchange” between Christ and the faithful Christian to the church, and the church to the mystical bride of Christ?

An explanation is thus needed for how to maintain the Christological and pneumatological difference between the *ecclesia universalis* and *ecclesia spiritualis*. If the church is misunderstood as today’s figure of the crucified and risen Christ and, if at the same time, it is misunderstood

Christenheit Wesen, Leben und Natur sei nit leiblich Versammlung, sondern ein Versammlung der Herzen in einem Glauben.” Cf. *ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁶ Maurer, *op. cit.* (note 10), pp. 45f.

²⁷ Martin Luther, “Resolutio Lutheriana,” WA 1, 208, 26ff.: “*Ubi autem fides, ibi ecclesia; ubi ecclesia, ibi sponsa Christi; ubi sponsa Christi, ibi omnia, quae sunt sponsi. Haec fides omnia secum habet, quae ad fidem sequuntur, claves, sacramenta, potestatem et omnia alia.*”

as a means of salvation, as if the church were the eucharistic bread, it would seem that we confuse it with the Holy Spirit.

In this regard, we must recall that the church (as *ecclesia spiritualis*) is also a creature of the Word (*creatura verbi*), and is not itself the Word (let alone the first Word), nor is the Word “internal” to the church. The Word (as Spirit) in the church comes from outside us (*extra nos*) and we are totally passive to it (*mere passive*).²⁸

An eschatological difference

The tendency towards indifference (and false identity) between the church as a spiritual body on the one hand, and the particular churches and the universal church on the other, can be countered with an eschatological distinction anchored in the *ecclesia spiritualis*.

The critique of the Roman Catholic Church from the perspective of positivity brought a dynamic into Luther’s ecclesiology that was not only later retracted but also duly criticized in Lutheranism. Werner Elert explained that Luther “spiritualized” the definition of the church as *ecclesia spiritualis* to such an extent that, in the end, it was no longer effective as a formative “energy of history.”²⁹

Just as no particular church is identical with the universal church (not even as a generalization) the spiritual reality of the church remains external to the universal church. In its temporal relation to the universal church and the particular churches the spiritual reality of the church withdraws from identification while approaching them to realize itself in them.³⁰

The spiritually existing church is the church from an eschatological perspective and therefore promise and hope for the communion of saints or a “matter of faith” in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. As a pneumatologically defined concept of church it is neither institutional nor anti-institutional, but the dynamics and the critical criterion for all ecclesial institutions. One can refer to the stabilization of the universal

²⁸ This confusion is not surprising when the church “administers” Word and sacrament, thus representing the order and fulfillment of Word and sacrament.

²⁹ Cf. Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, vol. 1 (Munich: Beck, 1965), pp. 226-227; cf. Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1980), p. 254. Cf. for the entire discussion, Konrad Hammann, *Ecclesia spiritualis. Luthers Kirchenverständnis in den Kontroversen mit Augustin von Alvelde und Ambrosius Catharinus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).

³⁰ Cf. Grosshans, *op. cit.* (note 3), p. 80: “Das Sein der Kirche ist ein ihr selbst entzogenes Geschehen, das an ihr geschieht und für das sie sich immer offen halten muß, wenn sie Kirche sein will.”

church through the legal community as a counterpart to the labilization through the faith community of the spiritually existing church.

To what extent does the *ecclesia spiritualis* exist as a (visible) phenomenon? How does it appear and depict itself in the world? Does the community of the faithful actually appear at all as a form within the world? If it does, it appears in, with and under the auspices of the church in the simple sense of a “means to an end.” The particular churches are thus the earthly form in which the church as a spiritual reality appears and becomes earthly real *sub contrario*. This happens precisely at the moment they achieve their end in proclaiming the Word and administering the sacraments. The church appears and becomes an earthly phenomenon and reality in people listening to the gospel, receiving the sacraments and in answering to this in creeds, songs, prayers, diakonia, etc.

In Word and sacrament the invisible becomes visible. The visible and audible is God’s presence in Word and sacraments: “to hear and treat of God’s Word, and then to praise God, to sing and pray.”³¹ It is worth noting that the proclamation of the gospel or the songs of the Christian community do not obviously make the spiritual church evident. Yet this does not mean that the *ecclesia spiritualis* is invisible, but that it is hidden: God is present in God *sub contrario*, in other words, God is present in worldly elements and forms. The visible phenomena are signs of the invisible, or more precisely: without being identical they are media of the present Divine.

Word and sacraments are not the only phenomena of the church. Visual media such as images are viewed more critically. Are images (of God, Christ, Mary, the saints) possible forms of the spiritual reality of the church corresponding to creeds or songs? Or, is the visibility of the altar bread the cardinal medium?

The life of the justified sinner is evident in the community. In contrast, however, with this (hopefully) exemplary phenomenon (of daily worship), Word and sacrament are constitutive aspects (of liturgical worship), and thus sacramental and not only exemplary of how the life of a Christian should be.

³¹ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* (Third Commandment), see <http://bookofconcord.org/lc-3-tencommandments.php>. So that in the church which takes place in worship “nothing else ... happens but our beloved Lord himself is speaking to us by means of his holy Word, and we are in turn speaking to him by means of prayer and doxology.” (Martin Luther, “Predigt am 17. Sonntag nach Trinitatis, bei der Einweihung der Schloßkirche zur Torgau gehalten (1544),” WA 49, 588, 16-18: *nichts anders ... geschehe, denn das unser lieber Herr selbs mit uns rede durch sein heiliges Wort, und wir widerumb mit jm reden durch Gebet und Lobgesang*).

This excludes the possibility of the liturgical worship being the means to an end in daily life. This would be a reduction of the actual end (that of the kingdom of God or the community of God) to a derivative medium: everyday life.

Therefore, the church as a spiritual body (*ecclesia spiritualis*) appears in the world in terms of a true worship. This is expressed in the Apology of the Confessio Augustana: “*praecipuus cultus Dei est docere evangelium*: the chief worship of God is to teach the Gospel,”³² just as Luther said, “from the highest worship, whose name is faith.”³³

This is shown symbolically in word and image, just as in the creed of faith or in the iconic communion of saints, and shown indirectly in the constructive criticism of the ecclesial institutions, the forms and figures. It would, however, also invite misunderstanding if we were to confuse such constructive criticism with a permanent critique in form of anti-institutionalism and a phobia against all ecclesial forms. This holds true with regard to both institutional and anti-institutional identification. The motto, no salvation outside the church (*extra ecclesiam nullus salus*), thus fits with the equally false spiritualistic antithesis of salvation only without the church (e.g., Joachim de Fiore). Both identify the Spirit either with a certain form or with formlessness and therefore mistakenly conceive of the church and the Spirit as being in a distinctive relation to each other, which is characterized by the Spirit being external to the church and the church being passive with regard to the Spirit. Consequently, the communal spirit (*Gemeingeist*) of the church cannot be identical with the Holy Spirit.³⁴

³² “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 107ff., here p. 229.

³³ “Apologie der Confession,” in *Bekennnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), p. 300, here pp. 8f.: “*vom höchsten Gottesdienste, der da heißt Glaube*.” Cf. Martin Luther, “Von der Beicht, ob die der Bapst macht habe zu gepieten. Der Hundertt und achtzehend Psalm (1521),” WA 8, 172, 3: “*Der glawb ist der recht gottis dienst*” (Faith is true worship).

³⁴ I state this in opposition to Schleiermacher and probably in opposition to Johannes Fischer as well. On Schleiermacher cf. Grosshans, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 95ff., here p. 100: “Obwohl der Heilige Geist in der irdischen Form des Gemeingeistes sich mitteilt und wirkt, ist er doch nicht mit ihm identisch. Vielmehr bleibt er das bestimmende und kritische Moment des Gemeingeistes der Kirche.”

The passivity of the church

The church's passivities are signs of its non-identity. Christ and the kingdom of God in the fulfillment of the world are external to the church and given by God alone. Therefore the church is passive in respect to them. The church can be referred to as holy only inasmuch as it serves as a means to this end of the kingdom of God.³⁵ In an indirect sense, however, it is sanctified by the one who alone is to be called holy; and the church is only holy inasmuch as this characteristic is communicative: it sanctifies to the extent that it forms the living space for this "sanctification," i.e., of the life of the justified sinner.

This passivity is the reason for the Reformation's critique of all inappropriate claims of particular churches to be identical with the universal or even the spiritual church and therefore to be of immense soteriological relevance. It is the reason for its profanity as a means to the kingdom of God and the reason for preserving the eschatological distinction between the church and its purpose: the realization of the eschaton.

In accordance with the passivity of the sinner in the process of justification, the church's passivities can be divided into the creation theological, hamartiological, soteriological and eschatological passivities of the church: the church is a creature just like all human works. It is and has always been a fallible creature, and thus a sinner. It is not forever left to its Babylonian confusion but is sanctified if used correctly as a creature of the Word (*creatura verbi*).³⁶ And it is oriented *ad extra* toward its purpose (the kingdom of God), with which it is never identical.

For this reason, we have looked at the church especially in respect to its non-identity. We have dispensed with all theories of mediation and have resisted the temptation to exaggerate the role of the church as a mediator, sacraments as means of mediation, and the order of the church as the integration of the extraordinary. Whether this is to be criticized as "ecclesioclasm" or is an appropriate Protestant ecclesiological exercise in disillusionment remains a matter for further discussion.

³⁵ Cf. Martin Luther, "Großer Galaterkommentar[1531] (1535)," WA 40/1, 70,20: "*non sua sed aliena, non activa sed passiva sanctitate.*"

³⁶ *Tanquam creatura verbi*. Cf. Martin Luther, "De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium (1520)," WA 6, 560, 36-561, 1.

IV. Analyzing Ecclesial Realities in Select Lutheran Churches

Focusing on the Mission of the Church: Lutheran Ecclesiology in Ethiopia

Yonas Yigezu

Why do people describe the church in different ways? How genuine is our commitment to the unity of the church? What does the church expect of itself in terms of what it seeks to be and desires to do? How might the Lutheran communion meaningfully and effectively contribute to the vision of greater unity in a way that would transcend ecumenism?

According to a saying in my culture “it is not what you say that counts but what you do.” Contextually, this means it is not what we confess that counts but whether our actions are consistent with that which we confess. The question is therefore, How might we be able to live out our belief in the one holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Against this background, I would like briefly to reflect on the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus’ (EECMY) self-understanding from the perspective of the church’s mission.

At a recent ecumenical conference in Addis Ababa, I heard very different descriptions of the church.¹ While some participants attempted to avoid the concept of diversity and to promote exclusivity, others strongly emphasized the church’s local importance and we repeatedly heard that the Ethiopian church is not many but one. There were a number of theologians attending the conference, but none of them dared to refer to the creedal marks of the church—one holy, catholic and apostolic.

In recent years, EECMY has been seeking practically to witness to what it confesses about the church. It wants Lutheran ecclesiology to be vibrantly lived out in the life and mission of the church.

¹ This was the twenty-third general assembly of the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia.

Mission at the center

In January 2008, the EECMY reaffirmed its commitment to being more intentional in its ecumenical engagement. This reaffirmation resulted from an effort theologically to define what it means to be in partnership with other denominations and mission agencies around the world. The church has therefore openly declared that it understands its own mission as one that belongs to the church universal, and not a mission that is owned exclusively. Accordingly, the EECMY has also challenged its partners to enter a new dimension of mission and suggested that they free themselves from the concept of North/South mission, since the one holy, catholic and apostolic church knows no boundaries. Thus, the church's mission is one irrespective of diversity. EECMY therefore understands that the concept, together in God's mission, must be at the very heart of all church partnerships.

EECMY's turning toward ecumenism can be seen as a retrieval of its own heritage. The church originated in diversity, although not strictly speaking of a theological or doctrinal kind. It reflects the joint national and international Lutheran missionary movement that initiated the evangelical preaching of the gospel at a time when the very presence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church could have made that impossible.

EECMY's first evangelical fathers did not intend to form a separate national church, but sought to minister within Ethiopian Orthodox congregations and thus to bring about an evangelical revival within the Orthodox Church. They were too optimistic as they passionately worked toward increasing the presence of evangelical Christians in the communities, thereby bringing about national reform rather than creating an institutionally structured national church. Unfortunately, certain national realities prevented their efforts from bearing fruit.²

By the mid-1940s, several evangelical missionary groups and congregations had been established, mostly in the western and southern parts of the country. The time was ripe to form a National Evangelical Church in Ethiopia as a counterpart to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.³ At a first

² This can be explained with the story of Onesimos Nesib and his friends Gebre Estatiwos and Gabresilase, who first joined Kidane Miret Orthodox Church at Boji Bila. But their expulsion by the Orthodox priests led to their forming the first evangelical congregation at Boji, which later formed a strong link with mission agencies abroad, leading to the formation of administrative structures.

³ Cf. Fikadu Gurmessa (ed.), *The first Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia* [in Amharic], 2001.

meeting in 1945, the leaders of all evangelical entities enthusiastically agreed to the idea of merging and forming a United National Evangelical Church. At this point, their priority was the proclamation of the gospel and the transformation of the nation through evangelical ministries, and there was only little interest in the institutional expression of this newly formed church.

Owing to the failure to overcome differences on some practical issues related to liturgy, leadership, theology and the administration of the sacraments, their efforts did not achieve the desired results. Disagreement resulted in the emergence of several evangelical denominations as opposed to a unified national one.

The evangelical Lutheran congregations united under one institutional and leadership structure and this resulted in the birth of EECMY in 1959. While in institutional terms EECMY is still young, its mission dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. We can therefore conclude that ecumenical commitment is natural to EECMY, which from the beginning has sought strong and effective ecumenical ties with all like-minded churches and mission agencies.

The apostolicity and holiness of the church

Undoubtedly, Luther's ecclesiology influences EECMY's understanding of the church. One might say that Luther's vision of the church goes beyond what the confession says. According to *Confessio Augustana VII*, Lutherans confess that the church is "the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel."⁴ Thus, for Luther and the other Reformation theologians, the church is more than an institution in the world in time and space. This necessitates the visible expression of the church through the community (congregation) both for confession and the practice of faith (mission).

The essence of gathering around the Word and sacraments goes beyond what is performed in the sanctuary. These two essential ministries of the church are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end which is God's mission. Gathering and dispersion (dismissal) belong

⁴ "The Augsburg Confession," in Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 42.

together as far as mission is concerned. What the congregation does when it gathers in the sanctuary is a means toward what it does in the world when it is outside the sanctuary.

Arguably, Luther did not often refer explicitly to mission. Nevertheless, his theology of love compellingly explicates the indispensability of Christian mission that seems to have radically shaped his view of the church. The church becomes a place where Christians are given a chance to exercise God-like love—the love of the cross—which turns in the direction where it does not find good which it may enjoy, but where it can confer good upon those in need.⁵

The headship of Jesus Christ makes the church church, by which merit it becomes the agent of Christ—commissioned to do the work that Christ did.

Jesus' headship is the basis of the church's apostolicity. Apostolicity moves the church beyond the true preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments to a mission that impacts and transforms the world. The apostolicity of the church has to do with calling, commissioning and sending—with a goal to impact the world so it can be transformed to God's kingdom where peace, justice, love and reconciliation prevail.

The church's holiness and apostolicity are inseparably linked. The church's holiness should be understood in what it does in the world. This view draws upon the apostolic model of the early church insofar as the apostolic church did not allow itself to be tainted by the evil of the world, but radically rejected it. The church's holiness is therefore not its own internal and human perfection. As we read in the *Augsburg Confession*, "in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even public sinners remain among the righteous,"⁶ but its distinctiveness from the world and function within the world complete the holiness of the church.

The apostolic church's mission is also holistic in that diakonia and the proclamation of the gospel constitute its ministry. The apostolic church can therefore be understood as the agent of "good." God's goodness is conferred unto unfortunate situations in the world through Christian mission. The church's apostolicity in the current context has therefore to do with its prophetic role in the world. This is to say that the church

⁵ Cf. Martin Luther, "Heidelberg Disputation (1518)," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 57.

⁶ *The Augsburg Confession*, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 42.

is understood better when it is seen to be actively engaged in the formation and transformation of the world.

The unity of the church is given in the gospel event itself rather than in ecclesiastical uniformity. Its unity is evident only when its unified and impact making mission and prophetic voice in the world are compellingly heard and responded to. In this respect, its oneness needs to be expressed in the unity of realizing God's kingdom in the world. But, is unity in diversity possible? Is it possible to see the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church in reality?

Let me draw the following analogy. Imagine an orange. An orange has different segments, each of which has its own place within one whole. Some are bigger than others, but all taste the same. The amount of juice the segments contain varies, but when the whole orange is manipulated and squeezed, each segment will allow its juice to be poured into a vessel so that those who drink from it shall be empowered and transformed.

Likewise, the "one church," revealed through active communities that are nurtured and sustained by feeding on the Word and sacraments, works together despite diversity so that it can offer a life-giving flavor to the world. In this respect, the church's oneness is not only limited to the believers' confessional affirmation, but also to the oneness of its mission, irrespective of its location, its particular administrative setup, liturgical tradition and related practices.

The church does not exist if its impact is not felt in significant ways. The ecclesiological assertion of the *Augsburg Confession* is that "at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church,"⁷ is to be understood within its active presence. The church is known to itself by its confession but known to the world by what it does to the world or in the world.

This conviction has recently led EECMY to work toward a fresh self-understanding and ecumenical sensitivity. This self-understanding is rooted in its confession about the church, and the subsequent determination to transform that confession into practical witness, which is to be realized through its holistic mission—it does so as a visible community of the one church of Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, EECMY tries to understand itself and its existence in the world not as branch of the one church, but as a revelation of the one church that is visible through its assembly (congregation) and nurtured,

⁷ *Ibid.*

empowered and engaged in God's one mission to which the one holy, catholic and apostolic church is commissioned. The awareness of the one universal church is supported by the fact that the center of Christianity is no longer in the North but shifting to other parts of the world.

According to EECMY's understanding, the church is universal. It is catholic and should not be evaluated in geographical terms, but in terms of its unity in Christ and its existence in the world for one mission. In 2007, EECMY gained nearly 300,000 new members. EECMY understands that these new believers belong to the church universal and not to itself. Thus, in reality, the church is growing in its universality faster than it ever did before.

Conclusion

We, as the church, are a part of changing local and global realities. The question is whether or not we have to change. While change is inevitable and necessary how, what and when to change requires thoughtful discernment. May we all be one.

The Common Identity of the Churches in Malaysia and Southeast Asia

Song-Mee Chung

Introduction

In Malaysia, only the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist churches occasionally use the Nicene Creed in their worship services.¹ The Apostles' Creed, which catechumens have to learn by heart and confess prior to baptism, is used more frequently. Therefore, many Christians know the formulation "the holy Christian church" in the Apostles' Creed. However, with the rise of Pentecostalism and numerous charismatic movements, an increasing number of independent splinter churches do not use traditional liturgical worship. As a result, there are many Christians who have never heard of either the Nicene or the Apostles' Creed. In the following, I shall examine what the "one holy, catholic and apostolic church" of the Nicene Creed means to Christians mainly in Southeast Asia with some references to the wider context of Asia, and explore its significance in the lives of Christians and the ministry of the church in the past and present.

Denominationalism and oneness: a brief historical overview

Historically, as Christianity spread throughout Asia, denominational boundaries were obvious. Mission fields became religious battlegrounds. For example, in the former Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Malaysia, Roman Catholics were prevented from carrying out their activities and priests were expelled. Or, in North Borneo, Methodist missionaries withdrew students from Roman Catholic schools once they had their own schools.²

¹ I suspect that this is the case for most countries in Asia and Southeast Asia.

² This happened in Sarawak when James Matthew Hoover established the first Methodist boarding school in 1903.

Missionaries from different Protestant churches transplanted Western theological and ecclesiological differences to the mission fields. Yet, in some cases, missionaries from different societies cooperated closely.³ In Malaysia, for instance, through the London Missionary Society (1815 in Penang), different denominations shared certain facilities and Anglicans and Presbyterians jointly financed mission work (1880 in Penang).⁴ However, a strong sense of denominationalism prevailed among converts such as the Hakka. They had been evangelized by the Basel Missionary Society in China and only joined the Anglican Church when they migrated to Malaysia. As soon as they were more numerous and had their own pastor, they left the Anglican Church and established their own church in the Reformed tradition.⁵

However, as Christianity expanded, churches became aware of the weakness of disunity and saw the necessity to be one. Various attempts have been made to cross denominational boundaries and to be united as one.

Reacting against Western denominationalism, the Indian Christian, Kali Banerjee, stated as early as 1887 that the Indian church should be one, not divided. Under his leadership, a group of Christians left their churches and formed the Calcutta Christo Semajin, whose stated purpose was to promote Christian unity and to eliminate Western denominationalism. They used the Apostles' Creed as their basic creed. Other such movements in Bombay and Madras were not as successful, mainly due to opposition from the missionaries.⁶ However, in the twentieth century these efforts bore fruit, the most notable being the union established across denominations in 1947 to form the Church of South India, not only an administrative merger, but also one in terms of worship and liturgy.⁷

³ After 1860, many mission societies sent missionaries to China. These included the London Missionary Society, Church Missionary Society, Methodists, Presbyterians, American Board of Commissioners. It was said that Protestant missionaries from revival movements worked well together, especially with regard to translating the Bible, even though they were from different churches or denominations. See Anne Ruck, *Sejarah Gereja Asia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1997), p. 141.

⁴ John Roxborough, "The Story of Ecumenism," in Robert Hunt *et al.* (eds), *Christianity in Malaysia: A Denominational History* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1992), p. 280.

⁵ As a result, the Basel Christian Church of Sandakan was established in 1907.

⁶ T. V. Philip, "Protestant Christianity in India since 1858," unpublished article, p. 27. These attempts took place long before the formation of the World Council of Churches or even the Edinburgh Mission Conference in 1910.

⁷ "The Church of South India is the result of the union of churches of varying traditions: Anglican, Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Reformed in that area. It was inaugurated in September 1947, after protracted negotiations among the churches concerned. Organized into sixteen dioceses, each under the spiritual supervision of a bishop, the church as a whole is

In Malaysia, first discussions on transcending denominational boundaries took place in 1926, following a visit by John Mott. The aim was to establish the National Council of Churches. These discussions did not result in much, mainly because they had been initiated by a few expatriate leaders. Under pressure from the Japanese government, a Federation of Christian Churches—excluding the Roman Catholic Church—under one bishop was formed on paper. It was explicitly stated that the universal church in Malaya did not mean uniformity of worship but a united faith. In 1943, the Japanese closed the Federation and its leaders were imprisoned. The union had been mainly appreciated by its leaders rather than the church members. After the war and until 1948 the Federation was all but forgotten. Following the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the idea of ecumenism was revived with the inauguration of the Malayan Christian Council in 1948. In 1967, the Malayan Christian Council was renamed the Council of Churches of Malaysia and Singapore. In view of Malaysia and Singapore having separated and become independent sovereign nations it was considered desirable to have separate Councils of Churches for each nation. Therefore, the Council was divided into two national organizations in 1975; the current Council of Churches of Malaysia (CCM) and the National Council of Churches of Singapore. Its founding members included the Methodist, Anglican and Presbyterian churches, the National Council of YMCAs, the Bible Society of Malaysia and was later joined by the Orthodox Syrian Church in Malaysia, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church in Malaysia, the Lutheran Church in Malaysia and Singapore and the Salvation Army in Malaysia.

governed by a synod, which elects a moderator (presiding bishop) every two 2 years. The church explicitly recognizes that Episcopal, Presbyterian and congregational elements are all necessary for the church's life. The Scriptures are the ultimate standard of faith and practice. The historic creeds are accepted as interpreting the biblical faith, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are recognized as of binding obligation," at www.csichurch.com, accessed 26 May 2008. The church uses John 17:21, "That they may all be one" as its logo.

The Protestant churches in China were forced to unite under the Communist regime into the Three-self Patriotic Church in 1951. Christians who objected to this union became members of the House Churches outside this union, from which Catholics were excluded.

"In 1934, in Thailand, the small minority Christian population founded the Church in Siam with the intent of forming a single ecumenical denomination to include all Protestant churches in Thailand. Other than a small number of American Baptist and British Churches of Christ congregations, all of the original member churches were originally Presbyterian congregations. The merger also included Lutherans from the German Marburger Mission. The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT) originally had seven districts, six geographical and one ethnic Chinese. Except for a brief period during World War II, Presbyterian missionary influence remained predominant in the CCT until the late 1970s," at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_Christ_in_Thailand, accessed 16 September 2008.

While the Anglican Church continued to form bilateral relations with denominations such as the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and to promote the idea of church union during the 1950s to the 1970s, other denominations (both leaders and church members) were not so keen on a union. In 1972, talks of a union between members of the Christian Council of Churches (Methodists, Lutherans and Mar Thoma Syrian Church) seemed to come to fruition. The draft constitution was a replica of that of the Church of South India, and the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds were considered sufficient basis for a doctrinal agreement of a spiritual as well as an organic union. This plan died with the demise of the Anglican bishop, Roland Koh, in the same year. Since then, churches have cooperated in setting up ecumenical seminaries, evangelism, training conferences and seminars, the production of printed resources, social services and joint activities such as the Women's World Day of Prayer.⁸

In 1983, when churches began to face restrictions such as limited access to worship sites, denial of work permits to missionaries and threats of Islamic resurgence and Islamization, the Pentecostals and charismatic wings of the churches formed the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF), due to ecclesiological and theological differences with the other CMM member churches.⁹ Following that, it was deemed necessary to establish an umbrella body that would include all churches. Thus, in 1986, the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) was formed, which included the Roman Catholic Church, CCM and NECF. The criterion for membership in this loose federation of churches was the acceptance of the authority of the Bible and the Apostles' Creed. There was no expectation of conformity or uniformity among its members and the Roman Catholic Church still does not practice eucharistic hospitality. In fact, many Protestants, especially Chinese Protestants, did not even think of Roman Catholics as being "Christians."¹⁰ The CFM

⁸ Kalaimuthu, "The Church Union Enterprise in West Malaysia-An Anglican Perspective," in *Asia Journal of Theology*, vol. 20, no. 2 (October 2006), pp. 256-263. Roxborough, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 278-314.

⁹ "Although the divisions, dissipation of meager resources and the lack of a credible, united evangelical voice were matters of concern to some Christian leaders, it was not until certain constraints arose that the NECF was precipitated into being. These constraints were the partial banning of the Malay Language Bible (since 1981 only Christians are allowed to purchase and own one), the limiting of the number of sites for worship, which affected the status of independent churches, and the outlawing of public gatherings of five or more people." In "About NECF, a Brief History," at www.necf.org.my/index.cfm?&menuid=3.

¹⁰ In Chinese, Christianity is *ji du jiao*. Many Chinese uses this term without including the Roman Catholic Church.

has functioned mainly as the Malaysian Christian community's voice, especially in relating to the government and in speaking out against religious controls and the erosion of religious freedom.

The fact that there are three ecumenical bodies representing the two million Christians (approximately nine percent of the population) reflects the disunity of the church in the eyes of the non-Christian population and demonstrates the difficulty of achieving visible unity.

Despite attempts to express unity at the national level, further fragmentation occurred, even within denominations (except for Roman Catholics and Anglicans), due to differences in theology, practices, ethnicity and language.

Lutherans separated along ethnic lines. After 1968, Methodists were organized according to languages and, in 2003, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia was restructured into Chinese, Malay and English sections.

In May 2003, the Anglican Church of South East Asia cut relations with the Anglican Church of Canada because of the blessing of same-sex unions and, in November of the same year, with the Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA), when a practicing homosexual was consecrated bishop in New Hampshire.

The Synod of the Province of the Anglican Church of South East Asia ("the Province²) unanimously reject the purported consecration of Dr Gene J Robinson ... on 2 November 2003 by the Episcopal Church in the United States of America ('ECUSA') in New Hampshire, as a bishop in the Anglican Church. This means that the Province no longer treats those in ECUSA who carried out and supported the act of consecration as brothers and sisters in Christ until and unless they repent of their action and return to embrace Biblical truths. At the same time, the Province remains in fellowship with the faithful believers within ECUSA who rightly oppose and reject the erroneous actions of their house.¹¹

Since 1970, due to the impact of the charismatic movements, the fragmentation of the churches has increased. There are increasing numbers of independent free churches whose pastors and leaders break away from the parent churches due to conflicting theological understandings and practices. The emergence of the charismatic movement has created a

¹¹ *Diocesan News Archive*, at www.anglican.org.sg/break_communion_24nov2003.html, accessed 16 September 2008. The Primate of the Province was the Archbishop, the Most Rev Datuk Yong Ping Chung.

paradox of commonality amidst division. Charismatic influences have infiltrated every denomination and create a common liturgical expression across denominations.

Do Malaysian Christians believe in the oneness of the church in spite of dissension and fragmentation? I would say, yes, in the sense that they all worship the one Triune God. In times of disaster, such as the tsunami, the cyclone and the Szechuan earthquakes, the one church is visible in action. The oneness of the church is experienced in terms of life and work.

In practice, for the average church member the one church is no more than an ideal or illusion. Even though the Nicene Creed has been referred to as one of the criteria for church union, the “one holy, catholic and apostolic church” can only mean unity in diversity.

Living as a minority in a predominantly Muslim country might have encouraged the churches to be more visibly united in order to survive. However, for the average Christian, visible unity is not a topic that needs to be discussed. Malaysians are not bothered by diversity. In order to survive in a multiracial, multilingual and multireligious context, people have to accept plurality. Chinese¹² and indigenous cultures are inherently pluralistic. Since the 1990s, despite Islamization remaining on the government’s agenda, Christianity is thriving and there is freedom of worship. Consequently, there is no felt need for visible unity.¹³

The church as holy

It is not difficult for Christians in Southeast Asia to relate to the holiness of the church, even though what this means or how this is understood may vary from one denomination to another, or be of concern only to theologians. But, holiness as being “set apart” or different from others is quite real for ordinary Christians.

The experience goes back to the missionary era when converts distinguished themselves in terms of cultural practices. For example, in India, Christians no longer practiced the traditional cultural practice of widow burning. In Borneo, indigenous tribal Christians stopped head

¹² For instance, the Chinese concept of yin and yang describing two opposing and, at the same time, complementary (completing) aspects of any one phenomenon (object or process) or comparison of any two phenomena.

¹³ Politics seem to reinforce the fragmentation of churches in east Malaysia as grants from the government to churches are given according to the size of the denomination. There is no incentive for union since it would mean being deprived of grants.

hunting and drinking rice wine. Chinese Christians abstained from rituals such as honoring ancestors, arranging marriages, or polygamy. Many new Christians were ostracized by their immediate family and clan because they were different. As a Chinese saying puts it, “Plus one Christian, minus one Chinese.”

Today, pietists are once again claiming that holiness implies giving up certain cultural practices; this means renouncing worldly entertainments, such as popular music, cinema, TV and literature. Similarly, evangelicals and charismatics emphasize the ethical and moral aspects of Christian faith in order to distinguish themselves from a society where morals are disintegrating, crime is increasing and there is no social justice. Liberation theologies that speak out against social injustices are also strengthening the concept of holiness as being different from the rest of society by advocating that the Christian community distinguish itself from societal and worldly trends.

Despite these emphases on holiness by some Christian groups, most Christians are aware that neither the individual nor the church are perfect, but that power struggles and sexual scandals and the like are plaguing both individuals and the churches.

The church as catholic

Except for the Roman Catholic Church, churches in Malaysia have replaced the word “catholic” with “universal” when translating the Apostles’ Creed into Malay, Chinese or other languages. The term “catholic” does not even exist in these languages. For some Protestant Christians, this universal church excludes the Roman Catholic Church. Some Chinese students studying at the seminary in Malaysia assume that Christianity is synonymous with the Protestant churches and consider the Roman Catholic Church to be heretical.

While mainline Protestant churches generally do not question each other’s orthodoxy, some churches are almost competing with each other on the question of who has the most Christian truth. One of these churches, “The True Jesus,”¹⁴ envisaged bringing back the true church and to correct those who are wrong. Charismatic groups also claim

¹⁴ This church was established in 1917 in Beijing. It was founded by a Presbyterian who believed that the church was unscriptural and felt called to bring back the true church as in the age of the apostles. He started preaching using the name “True Jesus.” This church, with 2.5 million members worldwide, practices feet washing, speaking in tongues and worship on the Sabbath.

that traditional churches are lacking the Holy Spirit and are therefore less authentic.

In recent years, the assumption that the universality of the church implies a universal uniform Christian doctrine and church practice was questioned. The relevance of Western theology has been challenged by some Asian theologians who are dissatisfied with Western theologies and seeking a theology that speaks to the Asian people, their histories, other faiths and philosophies. One is C. S. Song who maintains that God's truth is not limited to a universal theological formula that reflects only a limited Christian perspective, namely the Western cultural perspective. Doctrines of traditional Western theology, such as salvation by Christ alone, should not be normative for all.¹⁵ Another theologian, Stanley S. Samartha, believes that an apprehension of the truth can be valid at a certain point of human history, but that it is not exclusive. "No particular response to or formulation of truth can claim to be unique, final or absolute."¹⁶ In speaking of salvation, Samartha said that "to claim that the Jewish-Christian-Western tradition has the only answer to all problems in all places for all persons in the world is presumptuous."¹⁷ Perspectives that limit theological doctrines to a certain regional and historical context call into question the theological catholicity of the universal church.

At the same time, for ordinary Christians in Malaysia¹⁸ and elsewhere in Asia, there are some elements of Christian faith which testify to the universal validity and relevance of the gospel and the Christian message. One sign for the universality of the Christian church is the translation of the Bible into many languages. Furthermore, the gospel is preached in many languages to many different ethnic groups, who receive the message of the gospel in which Jesus Christ is confessed as Lord and Savior. In this respect, we can agree with St Vincent of Lérins (Vincentius) that the message of the gospel is *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*, (what has been believed everywhere, always and by all)—and therefore universally true.

¹⁵ C. S. Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 54.

¹⁶ Stanley S. Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 104.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁸ In Malaysia alone, there are more than fifty ethnic groups.

The church as apostolic

Although not all churches agree with the theory of apostolic succession in the classical sense, most Christians will agree with Hans Küng's definition that to be apostolic is to follow the faith and witness of the apostles as handed down to us in the writings of the New Testament.¹⁹ However, even the written Scriptures and their interpretations do not unanimously hold the same beliefs. What is apostolic to some is not so to others. Even the apostles had fierce differences on the question what the gospel really is, as the controversy between Paul and Peter (see Paul's Letter to the Galatians) on the relevance of circumcision shows. Nowadays, there are other controversies that testify to the ongoing discussion about the true apostolic faith and its true interpretation. The present controversy regarding same-sex unions demonstrates this well. The Anglican Church of South East Asia insisted that the blessing of a same-sex union and the consecration of a practicing homosexual were against the apostolic faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ, whereas other Anglican dioceses obviously did not think so.

Most ordinary Christians regard the Bible as being the infallible Word of God, authoritative for belief and practice, and take the words of the New Testament literally (or what they conceive to be literally). Academic contextual theologians take a different stand and in their interpretation of biblical texts are quite often far away from ordinary Christians. In order to make the Christian message more relevant to the Asian multireligious context, these theologians do not consider the Bible to be the only source and norm for Christian theology, but also draw on Asian literary and non-literary sources for theological reflection.²⁰ This implies that the scope of the Christian confession can go beyond the beliefs handed down by the apostles.

From a sociological perspective the charismatic renewal in the various churches of Malaysia has a far greater influence than these contextual theologians. The charismatic renewal not only treats the New Testament as the infallible Word of God but aspires to organize Christians according to the early church. Their emphasis on speaking in tongues, miraculous healing, cell ministry and prophecy are attempts to return

¹⁹ Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Image Book, 1967), pp. 458-459.

²⁰ Abraham K.C. (ed.), *Third World Theologies—Commonalities and Divergences* (Papers from EATWOT, 1986), pp. 26-27; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Frontiers in Asian Theologies: Emerging Trends* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 6-7.

to first-century Christianity. A recent movement in Malaysia is the New Apostolic Reformation, which wants to revive the office and function of the apostle in contemporary Christianity. Peter Wagner, the initiator of this movement, defines “the gift of apostle is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to assume and exercise general leadership over a number of churches with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters that is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches.”²¹

Concluding remark

The Nicene Creed is not commonly used by churches in Malaysia and South-east Asia. Nevertheless there are some churches, such as the Basel Lutheran Church, that try to live out that they are realizing the one holy, catholic and apostolic church only in cooperating with other churches locally and globally. For example, the Sabah Theological Seminary in Malaysia, which was founded by the Basel Lutheran Church, has established at least thirteen partnerships and accepts students from all denominations, including Roman Catholics. Or, although officially the Basel Lutheran Church is not in favor of healing services or speaking in tongues, it is willing to use educational and training material from charismatic sources. Another example is that this church is increasingly aware of its social responsibility, by establishing and participating in diaconal services such as nursing homes for the elderly, schools for immigrant children and is actively engaged in planting churches as part of God’s mission in the world.

If we look at such activities as a way for churches together to realize the one church of Jesus Christ on earth, then it might be more helpful for the common discourse on ecclesiology to use biblical images of the church, such as the body of Christ, the people of God, or the family of God than to define the church as “one holy, catholic and apostolic” because these metaphors allow more room for diversity and inclusiveness.

²¹ www.globalharvest.org/index.asp?action=churchquake#question1. For a detailed explanation of what the function and office of the apostle means in this movement, see www.globalharvest.org/index.asp?action=churchquake#question2, accessed 16 September 2008.

Being a Lutheran Church in Brazil

Nelson Kilpp

In the following, I shall describe how one particular Lutheran church, the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil (IECLB), tries to be a local manifestation of the “one holy, catholic and apostolic church.”

The IECLB is a small church with approximately 720,000 members in a country with a population of 180 million people (less than 0.5 percent). This diaspora situation is even more evident if we consider that the church is concentrated in only a few regions of this huge country. In its new constitution (1997), the IECLB confesses that it is founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ as witnessed in the Holy Scriptures and reaffirms the faith in the Lord of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church (art. 5).¹ I shall try to point to some of the features I consider important, and describe the issues and tensions arising over the last decades with regard to the one holy, catholic and apostolic church. While these ecclesiological marks have not always been explicitly mentioned, they have been more or less implicit in the discussions and reflections over the last decades, since the main focus has always been what kind of church the IECLB actually is or wants to be.²

The IECLB originated in Brazil in the nineteenth century, with German and Swiss immigrants settling in the southern and central parts of the country. For practical, ethnic and cultural reasons, the new non-Catholic congregations gathered Lutherans, Reformed, United and Mennonite groups. This pluralistic tendency, in terms of confession, persisted when in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries these evangelical (evangelische) congregations formed synods and, when in 1949, the existing four synods united to form one national church in Brazil. This was possible because there was a degree of awareness that all these non-

¹ *Constitution of the Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil* (Blumenau: Centro de Literatura da IECLB, 2002), p. 1.

² Cf. Presidência da IECLB, *IECLB às portas do novo milênio* (1999), at www.ieclb.org.br/downloads/posicionamentos/portas%20novo%20milenio.doc, accessed 15 January 2009. Johannes Friedrich Hasenack and Carlos Gilberto Bock (eds), *Unidade: Contexto e Identidade da IECLB* (Blumenau: Otto Kuhr, 2006). IECLB, *Missão de Deus, nossa paixão* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 2008).

Catholic congregations had something in common and felt themselves as belonging to one church, which in 1968 became the IECLB.

Not all evangelical congregations wanted to give up their independence and, until today, there are several congregations which never joined any church ("free communities"). There was also a group of congregations, served by pastors of the Missouri Synod, which had a different history and decided to form another church.

To believe in one church means to accept that one's tradition is not the only one, that other Christian traditions are also "right" and that while we may remain different we belong to the same church. This implies that diversity is possible, even probable or necessary within the one church and should be respected. In my opinion this was initially a major characteristic of this new church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil and remains so until now.

Over the last four decades, one of the most important challenges faced by the Lutheran church in Brazil was to ascertain to what extent it was possible to incorporate different movements without losing their identity and unity. During the 1970s and 1980s, the major theological trends in the church were sometimes in open conflict: the sociopolitical tendency along with liberation theology; the traditional tendency, influenced mainly by German liberalism; and the evangelical tendency (*encontrão*), influenced by the US revivalist movement as well as the pietistic German Gnadauer Mission (MEUC). The tensions in the church were manifold and discussions and reflections took place at several levels. Since the church had only one theological school for ministerial formation, the differences could be dealt with at an academic level. This was not enough and other measures were needed to promote the unity of the church. The most important of these was a series of general meetings and seminars on Lutheran identity and the church and its mission as a Lutheran church in the Brazilian context. These continue today. These efforts are a clear sign that the IECLB decided to stay in continuity with the Lutheran tradition and thus in continuity with the apostolic tradition. The 1997 constitution reaffirms that the IECLB is founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ as witnessed in the Scriptures and accepts the universal creeds of the ancient church, *Luther's Small Catechism* and the *Augsburg Confession invariata*. The continuity with the apostles' community expresses itself in terms of the Lutheran tradition: the pure preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments according to the gospel.

During the 1990s, discussions regarding the extent to which diversity in the church is possible led to the following developments. First, upon the request of the evangelical groups, who were dissatisfied with the traditional and liberal education and wanted a more missionary theological education for future ministers, the church allowed the creation of a second theological school. In addition, the church recognized the existing theological missionary center of the pietistic Gnadauer Mission. With three theological schools, the unity of the church was in danger and the church had to state clearly what it expected of its future ministers. An examination, obligatory for all those who wanted to be accepted as ordained ministers in the church, was introduced, which was to guarantee that the legitimate diversity would not destroy the unity nor go against the identity of the whole church. Theoretically, this system also permits the examination of candidates from non-Lutheran traditions.

Another development had to do with the charismatic movement within the church. The rise of Pentecostalism has strongly influenced the mainline Protestant churches in Brazil. Within the Lutheran church, the charismatic movement grew out of an evangelical group from which it separated following internal conflicts. The practice of rebaptism, which can partially be explained by the strong influence of Pentecostal and Baptist traditions and the country's syncretistic context, was the cause of the most serious tension between the national church and the charismatic movement within it. Many of those who had been baptized in this overall national syncretistic context were no longer sure whether they had been "rightly" baptized in the Triune God, while others did not remember whether or not they had been baptized. The practice of rebaptism by a few ministers of the IECLB was considered not to be in conformity with Lutheran doctrine. As part of one and the same church, the IECLB recognizes all baptisms realized with water in the name of the Triune God. Rebaptism is considered an offense to God, since it would deny that God acts graciously, independently of the (right) faith of the baptized child. Following extensive dialogues with the charismatic movement within the church and several pastoral letters to the congregations, rebaptism did continue in some congregations. As a result, fifteen pastors left the church together with some 2350 members.³

³ XXIV Concílio da Igreja, "Unidade: contexto e identidade da IECLB," in Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil, *Boletim Informativo* 185, Porto Alegre (6 December 2004); Walter Altmann, *O Movimento de Renovação Espiritual na IECLB ("Movimento Carismático")*. Message of the Church President, Porto Alegre (27 November 2004); Walter Altmann, *Carta ao*

Over the last decades, the centrifugal forces within the church have shown that more uniting measures were necessary. These were gradually implemented and include: a common annual plan for offerings; common topics for intercession suggested by the church's presidency; yearly seminars or forums on major issues concerning the whole church (especially its identity regarding mission, unity or baptism); a common annual theme and motto for discussion at all church levels, with adequate material to offer a specific focus for the whole church; liturgical renewal with the adoption of a common liturgical book and the triennial lectionary. This new lectionary gives more ecumenical visibility to the IELCB, and the liturgical renewal aims at an increased participation of church members.

Being part of the one universal church implies ecumenical commitment. In its 1997 constitution, the church expresses its ecumenical nature with other Christian churches immediately after mentioning, in the same article, its confessional identity so that ecumenicity is considered part of its identity (art. 5). The same happens in the internal regulations (art. 2).⁴ This church's ecumenical nature expresses itself in the active participation in the national and regional church councils (CONIC and CLAI), in bilateral dialogues (with the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and the other Lutheran church—former Missouri Synod—in Brazil) and in partnerships with several churches throughout the world.

From the beginning, the IELCB did not pursue an aggressive mission—which originally meant anti-Catholic—as was common in the Protestant mission churches that could only grow through proselytization. The absence of proselytizing activities in the Lutheran congregations was not always an expression of a conscious ecumenical position, but helped to build bridges to other denominations, since they did not need to be afraid of competition over “souls.” Today, the IELCB is represented at every major ecumenical event and organization in the country, and the church is respected for its serious ecumenical commitment. Nevertheless, it is probably true that the many internal issues which have had to be dealt with over the last years, the decrease of church income

Movimento Carismático [Open Letter to the Charismatic Movement], Porto Alegre (13 December 2004). The figures are taken from Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil, *Relatório 2004-2006 ao XXV Concílio da Igreja* Porto Alegre (2006), p. 60.

⁴ Constitution, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 1; Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil, *Regimento Interno* (Blumenau: Centro de Literatura da IECLB, 2002), p. 1.

and the overall stagnation of the ecumenical movement have also led to a decrease in the involvement in ecumenical activities, especially by the lay leadership. Moreover, the rapidly growing Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal churches have influenced some congregations in the sense that they believe that numerical growth can only be achieved with aggressive, proselytizing (and thus non-ecumenical) evangelization. Relations between the church's mission and its ecumenical commitment have been under discussion for several years.

Catholicity can be understood in the sense that each church, as the local representation of the one and universal church, has a specific task in a particular geographic, sociopolitical and cultural area. The local church would then represent the universal church in one place, and its mission would be to translate the gospel of Christ to that particular environment. The Lutheran congregations in Brazil have lived in an ethnic and cultural ghetto for decades. Although the reason for the efforts to unite the evangelical congregations and synods in a national church after World War II was consciously to be a church in Brazil, the national church's first public pronouncements on social and political issues were only made in 1970. The first of these, the Curitiba Manifesto,⁵ deplored the military regime's disrespect for civil rights. Thereafter, these public manifestations became more frequent, especially due to the influence of liberation theology and the political opening up of the country.

Although, since the early 1990s, the church has reached out to the indigenous population of Brazil, there is no consensus in the congregations about the necessity of this mission. The majority of its members are of German descent, although German is only rarely used and will probably disappear during this generation. There are only very few Black members, and the issue of race is only being discussed by a few groups. Nonetheless, many congregations are becoming increasingly aware that in the past they have been too closed to other cultures and were thus not attractive to people of other cultures. Recently, the church took some important decisions regarding accessibility for persons with disabilities, and a special department is mandated to raise awareness about disability in congregations and church-related institutions. In spite of all these and other initiatives, the church admits that this aspect of catholicity—to be an inclusive church—continues to be a big challenge.

⁵ At www.ieclb.org.br/downloads/posicionamentos/o%20manifesto%20de%20Curitiba.doc, accessed 19 August 2008.

The catholicity of a church does not only become evident when the gospel is offered to everyone, but also when a church remains faithful to the heritage and traditions of the universal church. This is what the IECLB has been trying to do.

Throughout church history, the ordained ministry has been considered a sign of the unity of church or a guarantee for its apostolicity. In the beginning, pastors were highly considered and respected in the Lutheran congregations in Brazil and had the important task of uniting the congregations. Yet, frequently the pastor's authority led to the centralization of several community services in the hands of the clergy, thus resulting in the concentration of power and only little participation by other members of the congregation. Out of this grew the idea of the shared ordained ministry.⁶ In accordance with the concept of the general priesthood of all believers, the church's one public ministry (CA XIV), usually restricted to the pastor, was to be realized by four specific and ordained ministries: the pastoral, catechetical, diaconal and missionary ministries, all of them subject to adequate theological formation. This fourfold ministry understands the preaching of the gospel in a broader sense—including, for instance, diaconal work—and expresses the ministry more clearly as service. While this diversity intends to cope effectively with the multiple tasks within the congregations, it may be another centrifugal element within the church. So far we have not been able to evaluate this shared ministry, but congregations seem to be somewhat skeptical.

The IECLB has to perform its mission on a very competitive religious market.⁷ The missionary strategies of the Pentecostal and, more recently, Neo-Pentecostal (or Post-Pentecostal) churches are more efficient than those of the traditional Protestant churches. They seem to address people's immediate problems such as sickness, poverty, unemployment and destroyed families more directly, and promise immediate help and healing, economic success, prosperity and other blessings. The churches—sometimes one can speak of religious enterprises—attract many people to emotionally charged, quasi mystical sessions of healing and exorcism. Many Lutheran congregations see that these churches fill their sanctuaries while their own temples remain almost empty. As a

⁶ *Ministério Compartilhado*. The approved final form of the text is available at www.luteranos.com.br/categories/textos, accessed 14 August 2008.

⁷ Cf. Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil, *IECLB no pluralismo religioso* (Porto Alegre: IECLB, 2000).

result, they sometimes try to copy their methods, while other Lutheran congregations and ministers become frustrated. We must ask ourselves, How can the church compete without betraying the gospel? Are Protestant church models still adequate? What is the particular mission of the IECLB in this confusing religious market?

The IECLB's stagnation in terms of growth is largely due to internal problems and tensions. Exclusivist attitudes within the church frighten members because they do not know what is going on. Congregations have been torn apart by the charismatic movement. Traditionally, Lutheran congregations wanted to be assisted in their spiritual needs but did not have a missionary consciousness. For some people, the very concept of mission was a negative one, carrying the burden of colonialism and implying proselytism. Additionally, Lutheran congregations were not considered particularly attractive, because their services were seen as cold, centered on rational and dogmatic preaching, without emotion and lifeless and insensitive to non-German visitors or members. On the other hand, there is the example of an entire congregation joining the IECLB on the basis of its doctrinal information on its Web site.

To handle these and similar problems the church changed its structure so as to give due value to its base—the local congregations. A more decentralized structure (started in 1998) was to make mission in and by the community more efficient. Its motto was, “No congregation without mission, and no mission without congregation.” The intention was to form a mature community that is aware of its identity and its mission. The new church structure has not yet been fully implemented, and so far it is not known how it will make mission more effective.

With regard to the sanctity of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church, I suggest that maybe holiness is our major deficiency. I do not speak of moral holiness; Lutherans know that the church is the congregation of justified sinners, not of morally perfect people. We understand that the church is holy because it belongs to God. It is not our creation, but the *creatura verbi*. But, how does the community show that it is not a copy of this world, but a creation of the Holy Spirit? The New Testament speaks about the Holy Spirit's activities, two of which are of special importance: the gifts of the Spirit and the quality of the communion. Lutheran churches have inherited a skepticism regarding spiritual gifts, and a long history of pastoral authority has in some regions led to apathy, a lack of enthusiasm for the church and only minimal participation in the church's activities. For instance, only a few lay people are actively involved in the Lutheran

church services. A liturgical renewal is meant to change this. Lutheran members sometimes do not know how to react in face of “strange” spiritual phenomena within the church and do not understand the discussions about them. Furthermore, still today there are pastors and presbyters who think of the congregation as their own “private property” where they can introduce, abolish or change whatever they want, how they want it, without discussing it with the whole community.

The IECLB’s recent history has shown that the confession of the church’s oneness has always implied ecumenical openness and the admission of diversity within the local and national church. Nevertheless, because of the existing diversity, the main struggle has been to avoid the disintegration of the national church, whose unity could only be established due to the constant search for the church’s identity. This has led the church back to its origins. Thus, unity and apostolicity are at the very heart of ecclesiology. In recent decades, catholicity has always been at center of tense discussions. The IECLB did not give in to the temptation to simplify and reduce the message of the gospel for missionary reasons. It has tried to stay within the traditions of the whole church. For several decades, the IECLB has been trying hard to leave its ethnic ghetto existence and to become a truly Brazilian Protestant church. One of its major deficits has been its failure to make its sanctity—in the sense of a church that belongs to God—visible in its existence. Therefore, the last missionary action plan⁸ stresses the congregation as the place and the means of God’s mission in and for the world.

⁸ IECLB, *Missão de Deus, nossa paixão* (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 2008).

The One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church in the North American Context

Cheryl M. Peterson

The North American context

If one were to ask, What is the state of the church in North America? one would hear concern about declining worship attendance and participation in congregational life. It is an undeniable fact that since the 1960s the “mainline churches”¹ in the USA have been in continuous numerical decline. Since its foundation in 1988, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has declined in membership by 9.1 percent (from

¹ According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, Hartford Seminary), “the so-called mainline churches are the large and established denominations that constitute the majority of organized American Christianity. The term, while somewhat inexact, is used informally to refer to the major players in the American religious sector, implying a shared concern for ‘public ordering . . .’ Generally, mainline churches exhibit many or most of the following characteristics: They have their own (or predecessor) origins in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries; have a million or more members spread widely among the 50 states; are predominantly Caucasian (except for black Baptist or Methodist denominations) but include proportions of African Americans, Hispanics, Asiatics, Native Americans, and others; are governed by elected, parliamentary assemblies, with agency offices and staffs at a central location; sponsor colleges, seminaries/theological schools, and part-time local church schools (sometimes also elementary and high schools); staff their congregations with full-time, professional, seminary-educated, ordained clergy who now increasingly include women; run publishing houses and publish theological journals, denominational magazines, and newspapers; operate program units in domestic and global missions, social action and social welfare, evangelism, and Christian education; issue ‘social statements’ on political, economic, and social issues and sponsor representation (lobbying) to governmental agencies; contribute to and/or cooperate with councils of churches at local, state, national, and world levels.” See the web version of William H. Swatos, Jr, *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1998), at <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/Mainline.htm>, accessed 7 August 2008. Today the major mainline denominations include the American Baptist Convention, the Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. Historically, mainlines (collectively) have been the most prominent and powerful religious groups in the USA, although the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) in a 2000 study counts 26,344,933 members of mainline churches versus 39,930,869 members of evangelical Protestant churches. See ARDA, at www.thearda.com/, accessed 7 August 2008.

5.25 million members to 4.77 million in 2006).² Some have predicted that if current trends and demographics continue, the ELCA will “turn out the lights” in 2046.³

Whatever the cause (or causes),⁴ this decline is causing great anxiety in these churches—not only because they are growing smaller in numerical terms but because they have lost a certain cultural and social position within American society and are becoming “sideline” churches. This is part of a larger shift in American society that Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall describes as “dis-establishment” from a *de facto* form of Christendom operative in the USA since its founding. Although Christianity was never legally established by the government as the national religion, as in many European nations, it has become commonplace for contextual theologians to apply this term also to the USA and Canada. Hall argues that the constitutional separation of church and state has blinded us regarding the depth of influence culture has had on North American Christianity. While in modern-day Europe cultural Christianity is largely a matter of form, in the USA it is on the level of content.⁵ Hall explains that

[i]n North America, the establishment of Christianity consists of the identification of the Christian faith with the values, goals, and ways of the dominant culture [...]. It exists rather as a *de facto* cultural alliance. It functions at the level of what is meant by the term “way of life,” that is, ideologically.⁶

² These figures can be found on the Web site of the ELCA, at www.elca.org, accessed 7 August 2008.

³ Cited in Mark Hanson, “The Future of Lutheran Institutions,” address given in January 2005, at https://archive.elca.org/bishop/messages/m_ELCAInstitutionsJan2005.pdf, accessed 7 August 2008.

⁴ The cause for the decline is debated. Recently, a team of sociologists at the University of California, Berkeley have shown that the primary reason for this decline is not, as is sometimes argued, their liberal theology, but a matter of demographics, including lower fertility rates among their predominately white, native-born members (and unlike evangelicals, Mormons and Catholics, the low birth rate among mainliners has not been offset by streams of immigrants). See Mark I. Pinsky, “Lifeline for Mainliners,” in *USA Today Opinion Forum* (19 May 2008), at <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/05/lifeline-for-ma.html>, accessed 7 August 2008.

⁵ This was first noted by Alexis de Tocqueville. See the discussion in Jerald Brauer, *Images of Religion in America*, Facet Books, Historical Series, no. 8, edited by Richard C. Wolf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

⁶ Douglas John Hall, *The Reality of the Gospel and the Unreality of the Churches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 103-104. See also Douglas John Hall, *Confessing the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 228-256.

The identity and place of the mainline churches was guaranteed by the wider “Christian” society.

Accompanying this shift is the *de facto* operative ecclesiology for North American Protestants: the church as a voluntary association of self-selecting individuals who choose to belong to a church for reasons of their own.⁷ This “peculiar” North American concept of the church developed in the American colonies in an effort to legitimize the variety of Christian traditions immigrating into the same geographic area. Later, it was codified in the US constitution in the first amendment and became firmly established in the nineteenth century. While this concept has led to many arguably good developments, it gave shape to a particular way of thinking about the church and tended to “push tangible, practical considerations to the fore by placing primary emphasis on the free, uncoerced consent of the individual.”⁸ At the center of this concept is the individual who chooses to affiliate (or not) with a particular congregation, denomination, or even a “non-denominational” entity, rather than on the Triune God who calls, gathers, enlightens and sends. Clarence Goen charges that theological reflection on the doctrine of the church was lost in the process. He states,

Three centuries ago the question, “What is the church?” was of crucial, even revolutionary importance. Today it is diffidently asked, rarely answered, and indeed scarcely visible—having been displaced by more urgent questions about growth, efficiency, dollars.⁹

It should be pointed out that Lutherans were among those in the nineteenth century who rejected or severely criticized the voluntary principle as a basis for ecclesiological understanding. As a whole, Lutherans were also suspicious of revivalism, upon which many of the churches relied. However, E. Clifford Nelson points out that in the wake of the 1950s’ religious revival, all mainline churches became closely allied with “the American way of life.” Theologically, the Lutheran position

⁷ See James Luther Adams, “The Voluntary Principle in the Forming of American Religion,” in Elwyn A. Smith (ed.), *The Religion of the Republic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 217–246. For the development and critique of this peculiarly “American ecclesiology,” see Clarence C. Goen, “Ecclesiocracy without Ecclesiology,” in *Religion in Life* (1979), pp. 17–31.

⁸ Sidney Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963, 1975), p. 113.

⁹ Goen, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 29.

was to stand against all forms of culture-religion, by emphasizing the transcendent, eschatological nature of the kingdom of God. However, as Nelson notes,

[i]n doing so [Lutherans] mis-interpreted, or at least gave one-sided emphasis to, a facet of Lutheran theology, and they did not escape captivity to culture-religion by minimizing the public and prophetic role of the church. As a matter of fact, Lutheran congregations across the land in the prosperous fifties gave evidence that they were enamored of the desire for popular approval and success. Accepting uncritically the approbation of middle-class America, Lutheranism was in danger of becoming what its theology did not allow, a culture-religion.¹⁰

Since the 1960s, American culture religion began to be disestablished and the mainline Protestant churches found themselves being dislodged from their particular role as a chaplain to the culture, and the privilege, influence and public voice that went along with that position.¹¹ Not only has the church lost its public voice, it no longer has any hegemony with regard to the “private” side of religion. The USA and Canada are becoming more and more religiously pluralistic,¹² with an increasing number of non- and pre-Christian options available to the religious seeker. Interest in spirituality is on the rise (you can visit any major bookstore chain the USA for evidence of this). However, many of these spiritual seekers are looking elsewhere because, as Baptist church consultant Reggie McNeal charges, most mainline churches are now more secular than the surrounding culture. He writes, “The problem is that when people come to church, expecting to find God, they often encounter a religious club holding a meeting where God is conspicuously absent.”¹³

¹⁰ E. E. Clifford Nelson, “The New Shape of Lutheranism,” in E. Clifford Nelson (ed.), *Lutherans in North America*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 525-526.

¹¹ According to Wade Clark Roof, this is the fruit of the voluntary principle. See Wade Clark Roof, “America’s Voluntary Establishment: Mainline Religion in Transition,” in Mary Douglas and Steven Tipton (eds), *Religion and America: Spiritual Life in a Secular Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982, 1983), pp. 130-149.

¹² The proportion of the [American] population that can be classified as Christian has declined from 86 percent in 1990 to 77 percent in 2001. If this trend continues, then by about the year 2042, non-Christians will outnumber the Christians in the USA. See *The American Religious Identification Survey*, Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001, p. 10, at www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris.pdf, accessed 7 August 2008.

¹³ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco:

The voluntary association model worked in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Americans were interested in joining organizations and societies. More and more, Americans are not looking to “become members” of institutional organizations and societies so they can go to meetings; they are looking for authentic community and deep spiritual experiences.¹⁴

The most common response to the disestablishment of the churches is the attempt to recapture their former position and role in society, either by adapting the voluntary principle to entrepreneurial ends (e.g., some church growth movements that market congregations as vendors of religious goods and services, or that market set principles and programs that congregations can purchase and use in order to grow and flourish, such as Natural Church Development),¹⁵ or through forming new cultural alliances (e.g., the “Religious Right”). The solutions assume a voluntary concept of the church and are pragmatic, focusing on strategy to reverse the decline in membership and return to the “golden days” of church activity and/or a “Christian America.”¹⁶

Another—and I would suggest more faithful—response is to see the process of disestablishment as an opportunity for the American churches to rediscover their biblical identity and purpose in this changed context (which has become a new “mission field” for the gospel) in the USA and Canada.

The marks of the church in the Lutheran tradition

What purpose do the “marks of the church” have in the changing context of North America—a context of “post-Christendom”—in which the church is wrestling with questions of identity and mission? The four

Jossey-Bass, 2003), p. 59.

¹⁴ This is one reason why the “Emerging Church” movement is gaining ground in the US A and UK: because it proposes a model of church that is relational, rather than institutional.

¹⁵ Michael Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Post-Modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999), p. 13; Darrell L. Guder (ed.), *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 83-85.

¹⁶ For mainline Protestants, this is the post-World War II era, when the sanctuaries and Sunday school classrooms were filled every week and when the church played the role of “chaplain” to the nation, blessing America and its values of freedom, democracy and progress—all while ignoring racist Jim Crow laws and other human rights violations, such as the internment of Japanese Americans during the War.

attributes of the church (one holy, catholic and apostolic) appeared in the Creed of Constantinople in 381 AD,¹⁷ although it was not until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the notes themselves were debated when the unity of church and empire were once again at stake. Until this point, the marks of the church were explained as attributes or characteristics of the true church, but as Hans Küng points out, the new ecclesiological concepts, introduced by John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, raised the question of the truth of a church independent of the Holy See. Catholic apologists no longer argued that these marks were merely characteristics; now they were treated as distinguishing characteristics, recognizable marks, by which the true church can be perceived.¹⁸ Of course, the apologists understood these marks to be firmly and visibly rooted and guaranteed by the church's ecclesial structures, the office of bishop, the papacy, canon law, etc. The Reformers had no objection to the classic attributes of the church, but rejected the idea that they could be empirically identified by these ecclesial structures. The only outward signs by which they claimed one can discern the true church were the pure proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments in accordance with the institution of Christ.

As American Lutheran Timothy Wengert points out, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed actually seems to argue against the *notae* serving as visible marks.

The phrase, "We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church," far from defining the church's visible marks, calls for faith (we believe!), not sight. However, the next phrase "we acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins" points instead to something physical and

¹⁷ While the origin of the creedal affirmation that the church is "one holy, catholic and apostolic" may be obscure, it seems right that these "notes" would be affirmed during the formation of the church's orthodox teaching, designating not only the correct doctrine of Christ and the Trinity but also affirming the qualities of the church that held to these teachings. The third article of the Creed established at Nicaea (325) consisted of a simple phrase: "And in the Holy Spirit." It was "in fact supplemented and for practical purposes replaced by the so-called Creed of Constantinople, which is what we know as the 'Nicene Creed.' The origins of this formula and its connection with the Council of Constantinople in 381 are obscure. But it was accepted by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 as a fuller statement of the 'faith of Nicaea'—which it does in effect maintain, while at the same time expanding the third article with the double purpose of safe-guarding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and of assimilating the older statement to the typical baptismal creed." John Burnaby, *The Belief of Christendom: A Commentary on the Nicene Creed* (London: SPCK, 1959), p. 6.

¹⁸ Hans Küng, *The Church*, transl. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), p. 266.

tangible: water and the Word. In fact, the verbs in the creed demarcate an important shift (from believing to acknowledging) precisely at the point where the church's true *notae* first appear in the creed. One holy, catholic and apostolic are not the church's visible marks: baptism for the forgiveness of sins is!¹⁹

The guarantor is not the right structure or office but the right proclamation of the Word and right administration of the sacraments.

In the late medieval and Reformation contexts, in which the church played a central role in the spiritual lives of all citizens and where the unity of the church was assumed, the question, How does one identify the true church? became central once the identification of the "true church" with the Roman Catholic Church was challenged.²⁰ In any event, the debate in the Reformation period over the marks of the church centered on contrasting claims about how to identify the "true" church from any false church. In a post-Christendom context, where there is no established church (legally or culturally) and where Christianity is losing its cultural dominance and influence, this is no longer the central question being asked by those in the church. The question for the North American context is a more basic one, What good is the church? What is the church good for?

In light of this question, do the traditional Nicene-Constantinopolitan "marks" of the church have any relevance for the churches in North America, in particular with regard to how the churches might rediscover their identity and purpose in a post-Christendom context? I will argue that if we understand the Nicene-Constantinopolitan marks as the Reformers did—as attributes (or as Küng proposes, "dimensions") of the church, these marks can assist the American churches in rediscovering their biblical identity and mission.²¹

¹⁹ Timothy J. Wengert and Gordon W. Lathrop, *Christian Assembly: The Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 34.

²⁰ The English translation of the *Catholic Catechism* (part one, section two, chapter three, article 9, paragraph 3.812, reads: "Only faith can recognize that the Church possesses these properties from her divine source. But their historical manifestations are signs that also speak clearly to human reason." At www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p123a9p3.htm, accessed 7 August 2008.

²¹ Even if they cannot be objectively verifiable tests of a church's authenticity, they should nevertheless be considered "serious points of corporate reflection, part of that process of critical self-examination that belongs to the household of faith." Hall, *Confessing...*, *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 72.

For Lutherans, the four adjectives in the creed cannot serve as marks in the determinative sense. For Lutherans, the church's being or identity is marked and constituted by the event of the Word being proclaimed and the sacraments being administered. We cannot point to anything except these means of grace to know "where" the church is. The church is created by the Word and sacrament but it is the Spirit who works through these means to shape a people for ministry and mission. However, Lutherans can affirm the Nicene-Constantinopolitan "notes" as attributes that result from the Holy Spirit's activity working through these means to create the church in a dynamic way or, in Lutheran terms, to "gather and sanctify" the church to be God's people on earth and to do God's will. If we view these notes of the church as dimensions of the Spirit's activity in and amidst this "spiritual community," then these marks become very relevant indeed for ecclesiological reflection in the North American context. At the same time, it should be stressed that as dimensions of the Spirit's activity, these "notes" are reflective of the God who calls the church into being:

- One: "The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (Jn 17:22-23)
- Holy: "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 16)
- Catholic: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority" (Col 2:9-10)²²
- Apostolic: "As the Father has sent me, so I sent you. . . Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:21-22).

These attributes belong to the church only pneumatologically and eschatologically, that is, as dimensions of God's "preferred and promised

²² Avery Dulles suggests that the term *pleroma* (fullness) is perhaps the nearest biblical equivalent for what we call catholicity. Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p. 31.

future”²³ that manifest themselves in the present-day church through the Spirit’s activity but that will not be fully realized until the eschaton. If we start with the eschatological Spirit of God, what can we learn from the *notae ecclesiae* about what it means to be the church in the North American context today?

The marks of the church for a North American context

Wolfhart Pannenberg states that although these four attributes of the church mutually imply one another, “it is no accident that unity comes first, for it is directly given with the being of the church as the fellowship that is grounded in the participation of believers in the one Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁴ Even though unity may seem to have a logical priority as Pannenberg states and may seem to be the most logical starting point for an American ecclesiology considering the sheer number of denominations in the USA, I am going to suggest that we begin in reverse order for three reasons, two theological and one contextual.

If we begin our consideration of the marks of the church with the attribute of unity as a reflection of the perichoretic unity of the Trinity, we risk an idealized concept of the church which “can and has led the church to focus on its internal life and develop hierarchical structures to ensure unity, indeed, using an appeal to unity as an ideological weapon to suppress disagreements and movements calling for change.”²⁵ Neil Ormerod points out that while the attempt to link ecclesiology to the Trinity by means of *communio* and *perichoresis* is admirable, it is problematic because

the divine unity is where God is most different from God’s creatures, even the creation that we call church. What is first in our knowledge of the

²³ This phrase is Patrick Keifert’s. See Patrick Keifert, *We are Here Now: A New Missional Era, A New Missional Journey* (Eagle, ID: Allelon Publishing, 2006).

²⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III, transl. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 405-406. Historically, the mark of unity likely appeared first in the creedal formulation because it was in the Emperor’s political interest to restore the organizational unity of the church.

²⁵ Cheryl M. Peterson, “The Church as a Confessing *Koinonia* of the Spirit,” in Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire*, *Theology in the Life of the Church*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), p. 81.

triune nature are the divine missions of Word and Spirit, which in turn ground our knowledge of the processions and persons of the Trinity.²⁶

To begin with, the divine missions of Word and Spirit suggest beginning with the mark of apostolicity, with the “sent-ness” of God’s own self in the incarnation and Pentecost, and God’s sending of the church into the world as God’s own ambassadors.

Moreover, from a specifically Lutheran perspective, it makes sense to begin with apostolicity, since it is the mark that refers to the teaching of the apostles, the message of the gospel, the *kerygma*. According to Luther, it is the dynamic event of the proclamation of this gospel message that creates the church.²⁷ Hans Küng concurs that

[t]he church can only be truly one, holy, and catholic if it is in all things an apostolic church. What is in question is not any kind of unity, holiness, or catholicity, but that which is founded on the apostles and in that sense is apostolic.²⁸

A final reason for starting with apostolicity is contextual. If we understand that the American churches are in need of a “missional ecclesiology”—a church that is not only gathering to “bless” the culture and serve as a social club for its members, but that is being sent out into neighborhoods and communities to witness to the in-breaking reign of God—then we must begin with apostolic. Here I am following Darrell Guder and the Gospel and Our Culture Network who propose that we read and understand the Nicene marks in reverse order

in order to restore missional purpose to our theology of the church. ... It is a simple and yet revolutionary proposal: What if we were to say

²⁶ Neil Ormerod, “The Structure of a Systematic Ecclesiology,” in *Theological Studies* 63 (2002), p. 29. See also Stephen Bevans, “God Inside Out: Notes toward a Missionary Theology of the Spirit,” at www.sedos.org/english/Bevans.html, accessed 7 August 2008.

²⁷ According to Edmund P. Clowney, “The marks of the church, as developed during the Protestant Reformation, centered on the church as apostolic. The sure sign of Christ’s true church is the preaching of the apostolic gospel.” Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995), p. 73. And as Robert J. Scudieri also points out, “The Word of God is Luther’s expression for the apostolic quality of the church.” Robert J. Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Missionary*, Lutheran Society for Missiology Book Series (Fullerton, CA: Lutheran Society for Missiology, 1995), p. 10.

²⁸ Küng, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 344.

that the church we confess is apostolic, catholic, holy, and therefore one? . . . If we start our Nicene ecclesiology with apostolicity, then we end up defining catholicity and holiness and oneness in rather different ways—in ways closer to the sequence of formation that we find in the Biblical documents.²⁹

Apostolic

It is customary to define apostolicity as continuity with and faithfulness to the apostolic tradition. According to the recent international Lutheran-Catholic study document, *The Apostolicity of the Church*, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed confesses the church to be apostolic, “which is an attribute effected by the Holy Spirit who unites, sanctifies, and maintains believers over time in continuity with the apostles’ faith, teaching, and institutional order.”³⁰ As essential as it is to stress the apostolic origins of the content of the gospel message, Carl Braaten argues that

continuity with the apostles does not mean constructing an irreducible minimum of apostolic doctrines, nor does it mean linking into an unbroken chain of apostolic offices of leadership; it does mean laying hold of the original eschatological drive of the early Christian apostolate and tracing its trajectory through the discontinuities of time and history.³¹

As a pneumatological dimension of the church, apostolicity must be understood in the original New Testament sense of being sent out to bear witness to the eschatological future that breaks forth in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To be an apostolic church means to be a church that continues to be sent into the world to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.³² Robert J. Scudieri has suggested that when

²⁹ Darrell L. Guder, “The Nicene Marks in a Post-Christendom Church,” unpublished paper, 27 December 2005, pp. 9-10, at www.pcusa.org/oga/perspectives/oct06/nicene-marks.pdf, accessed 7 August 2008.

³⁰ The Lutheran World Federation and Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006), p. 47.

³¹ Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2007), p. 62.

³² “What is originally apostolic is sending to bear witness to the universal and definitive truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ. Primarily, then, the church’s apostolicity means the sending

we hear “apostolic,” we should first think “missionary.” According to Braaten, if the apostolic mission aims at the renewal of all humanity in the kingdom of God, then the criterion of what is apostolic in the church’s life (doctrine, worship, structure, etc) is that which points to and motivates the “comprehensive and liberating truth of the kingdom of God in Jesus and his resurrection from the dead.”³³

The North American churches need to reclaim this dimension of their ecclesial identity. Because of the legacy of *de facto* Christendom, most congregations do not see themselves first and foremost as communities commissioned and authorized sent out with a purpose—to speak the liberating gospel to their neighbors.³⁴ If they do have a vision for outreach, the stated goal is more often than not the attainment of new members (since the old Lutheran methods—immigration and procreation—are no longer working), and not witnessing to the in-breaking kingdom of God.

Catholic

Moving on to the second Nicene mark, a church can only be apostolic if it is also catholic, as Braaten points out, because the scope of the apostolic mission is total and universal. Lutherans have not always been comfortable with this term because of its association with obedience to Rome. Following Augustine, the “catholic church” was defined as the universal church spread throughout the world whose unity is manifested under the authority of Rome. This led some to substitute the word “Christian”

out of the apostles to all humanity is continued by the church.” Pannenberg, *op. cit.* (note 24), p. 406.

³³ Braaten, *op. cit.* (note 31), p. 63.

³⁴ Following Gustav Warneck, it has become fashionable to say that Luther did not stress this meaning of apostolic. I agree with James A. Scherer who argues that Luther was mission-minded; it was just that his “field” for missionary work was limited to Christendom. As Scherer says, “Since the Gospel had fallen into oblivion in Christendom—Luther’s Gentiles being those who had never heard the pure Word of God preached in Germany—missionary obedience could only mean preaching the gospel anew. And since the distortion of the Gospel message had led to the degeneration of mission into ecclesiastical propaganda, forced conversions, crusades, and non-evangelical methods, Luther’s obedience to the mission command meant re-establishing the church on its one true foundation of Jesus Christ and the Gospel.” James A. Scherer, “Luther and Mission: A Rich but Untested Potential,” in Alan D. Scott (ed.), *The Lutherans in Mission: Essays in Honor of Won Yong Ji*, Lutheran Society for Missiology Book Series, series edited by Eugene W. Bunkowske (Fort Wayne: Lutheran Society for Missiology, 2000), pp. 1-8. See also in the same volume, Eugene W. Bunkowske, “Was Luther a Missionary,” pp. 9-24 and Werner Elert, “Luther and ‘Mission,’” pp. 25-42.

for catholic in the creed.³⁵ This makes no sense, as Conrad Bergendoff points out, because “there can be no question of any other church in the Third Article of the Creed than the Christian church.”³⁶ More common today is the substitution of the word “universal,” which is closer but still does not capture the full meaning of the term catholic.

The word in the original Greek is *kata holon*, according to or appropriate to the whole. The Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala (1968) defined catholicity as “the quality by which the church expresses the fullness, the integrity, and the totality of life in Christ.”³⁷ Thus, rather than simply identifying catholicity with the universal scope of the apostolic mission (although it includes that), we might agree with Darrell Guder that “the catholicity of the church is demonstrated in all the ways that the church at every level witnesses to the one gospel that draws all people to Christ.”³⁸ In other words, this dimension of ecclesial identity is qualitative as well as quantitative.

To be a “catholic” church means to go beyond the limits of particularity, both in terms of its openness to God’s eschatological future and to the whole world in its diversity.³⁹ The implied universality of the church’s mission is constitutive for its catholicity; the fullness of the church’s eschatological consummation (Eph 1:23), as Pannenberg states, “finds manifestation at any given historical moment in the openness of the church’s actual fellowship, of transcending any and all particularity, to the fullness of Christ that will fully come only in the eschaton.”⁴⁰

Each Christian congregation is at the same time “fully” the church (per *CA VII*) but not by itself the “whole” church. To be catholic means consciously to point beyond one’s own particular community to the global church as a fuller expression of the Spirit’s work in creating and

³⁵ This line of thinking follows Augustine in his debate with the Donatists. Lutherans would affirm the catholicity of the church apart from Roman obedience, arguing that there could only be one universal church spreading throughout the world because there could be only one true faith and therefore only one church in which that faith was confessed and believed. The church was catholic insofar as it was faithful to this one gospel attested by Scripture and early Christian fathers. See Dulles, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 148.

³⁶ Conrad Bergendoff, *The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, The Hoover Lectures 1953 (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1954), p. 51.

³⁷ Norman Goodall (ed.), *The Uppsala Report* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968), p. 13.

³⁸ Guder, *op. cit.* (note 15), p. 257.

³⁹ Braaten, *op. cit.* (note 31), p. 65.

⁴⁰ Pannenberg, *op. cit.* (note 24), p. 407.

shaping a people.⁴¹ This is more than recognizing that each local congregation is a part of a larger ecclesial whole. To say that the church is catholic is not just to say that it is in *koinonia* or communion with other congregations throughout the world, but that this communion extends to all classes and kinds of people. As a catholic community, the church is called to be all-embracing in its mission and ministry, reflecting the fullness of Christ and the universal redemption available through his life, death and resurrection.

Such a catholic identity suggests the need to call into question the self-interests of groups and members within the church.⁴² The dis-establishment of mainline Protestant churches in the USA from positions of influence and hegemony offers a real opportunity to reclaim true catholicity as a dimension of ecclesial identity. For the churches in North America, this includes rejecting all attempts to define their own cultural tradition or theology as normative for the global church.⁴³ For Lutheran congregations in North America, this means to break out of our historical ethnic enclaves and tendency toward social and classist parochialism. The ELCA remains a largely white (98 percent) and middle-class church. In order to claim the ecclesial dimension of catholicity, white North American Lutherans and other Christians need to recognize their parochialism and privilege and be willing honestly to acknowledge the racist heritage of their country and the continuing impact that the history of slavery and racist Jim Crow laws have socially, culturally and economically (if not legally). In spite of gains made by many African Americans, the fact that North Americans have not come to terms with this history should be clear from recent press coverage of the presidential primaries this spring.⁴⁴

Holy

The apostolic mission is the announcement of the kingdom of God, an eschatological future in which all belong to the “whole” in the fullness

⁴¹ Guder, *op. cit.* (note 15), p. 257.

⁴² Dulles, *op. cit.* (note 22), p. 180.

⁴³ Guder, *op. cit.* (note 15), p. 257.

⁴⁴ I am referring to the controversy regarding Senator Barack Obama's (D-Illinois) relationship with his former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright and the historic speech he gave on race in response. For several stories related to these events, see www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88552293, accessed 7 August 2008.

of life given through Jesus Christ. In order to witness to this kingdom, the church is called to be “holy.” This may be the most misunderstood of the notes or dimensions of the church’s identity. In the first place, holiness must be understood as being “set apart” for this mission in order to engage the world, not to withdraw from it. Like the other marks, this is not an empirical designation that can be observed by, in this case, looking at the piety of its members; it is the result of the Holy Spirit working in and through the church to reconcile and heal with the forgiveness of sins given through Jesus Christ. The churches in North America need to reclaim this dimension of ecclesial identity as a mark of the whole church and not just of individual members. In the North American experience, holiness, from the two Great Awakenings to more recent revival movements, has too often been defined in individualistic (focusing on personal salvation and sanctification) and moralistic (with a particular concern for sexual purity) terms.

In his explanation of the third article of the Apostles’ Creed in the *Large Catechism*, Martin Luther speaks of the Spirit’s work of “making holy” in terms of the forgiveness of sins. The Christian experiences new life as “full forgiveness of sins, both in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.”⁴⁵ Luther speaks of the growth of the holy community in eschatological and missional terms. Holiness has begun and is growing daily, but “now we remain only halfway pure and holy.”⁴⁶ The Holy Spirit will continue to work in us, increasing holiness on earth through the church and forgiveness, until the last day, when there are only perfectly pure and holy people. In its earthly pilgrimage as God’s “holy flock,” the Christian community is to bear the blessings it has received, for the sake of the world. As Luther states,

The Holy Spirit continues his work without ceasing until the last day, and for this purpose he has appointed a community on earth, through which he speaks and does all of his work. For he has not yet gathered together all of this Christian community, nor has he completed the granting of forgiveness.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Martin Luther, “Large Catechism,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 438.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

The church's apostolic mission is not only to proclaim the forgiveness and reconciliation given in Jesus Christ as a witness to the in-breaking kingdom of God, but to embody it in its own life, even if imperfectly. Lutheran theologian, Christof Gestrich, suggests that it is only when the forgiveness of sins becomes a communal reality that the church truly can bear the gospel to the world. The proclamation of a promise is not enough, he argues, because the church's "promises are no longer enticing for many people, at least in the form which they are usually 'proclaimed.'"⁴⁸

As I pointed out earlier, North Americans outside the church are seeking what the church purports to have: authentic relationships, healing and reconciliation. However, when they walk into the typical mainline congregation, too often they find instead a social club where members are bickering about unimportant things, people who not only refuse to live by forgiveness, but who instead hold grudges and judge others. Christian witness begins with how we treat one another within the church, but the Spirit's work of reconciliation and healing is also carried into our communities and neighborhoods and shared directly with our neighbors, especially those who suffer injustice and discrimination. It is true that the church is simultaneously a fellowship of sinners and a fellowship of saints (declared righteous in spite of our sin); yet, it is through the Spirit's work to heal and forgive that the church itself is being made "holy" so that it can demonstrate the in-breaking and gracious rule of God and be an instrument of God's sanctifying and gracious rule for others.⁴⁹

Unity

Finally, we come to the unity of the church. As stated in Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, unity ought to serve the mission (apostolicity) of the church ("so that the world may believe").⁵⁰ The lack of visible unity among the churches is an obstacle to the church's apostolic mission to witness to the kingdom of God. While Christians already share a spiritual unity through their baptism into Christ and faith, the healing of historic

⁴⁸ Christof Gestrich, *The Return of Splendor in the World: The Christian Doctrine of Sin and Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 278.

⁴⁹ Braaten, *op. cit.* (note 31), p. 68.

⁵⁰ Bergendoff, *op. cit.* (note 36), p. 89.

divisions in the church helps to enable the church's apostolic witness to the world. As Conrad Bergendoff states, wherever baptism incorporates people into the fellowship of faith, which is the body of Christ,

there has existed a unity whether recognized or not . . . the achievement of the ecumenical endeavor is not in the creation of this underlying, unbroken, eschatological unity, but in its insistence that this unity requires expression in the churches who confess it.⁵¹

In the American context, the unity of the churches is not and has never been a political affair because the first amendment forbids the establishment of a national church. More importantly, it has never been sought. Unity therefore must be addressed by Christians themselves. The history of Protestant Christianity in the USA has been one of division and merger. In addition to the divisions that immigrant Christians brought with them when they came to America, Christians in the USA have split over various doctrinal and ethical issues, including slavery. According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, there are 635 denominations in the USA alone and an increasing number of congregations are started without any denominational affiliation.⁵²

The ELCA is one example of a denominational merger in the USA. As stated in its constitution, the ELCA seeks in its faith and life “to manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.”⁵³ The ELCA participates at various stages of ecumenical relations with other church bodies that confess the Triune God and Jesus as Lord and Savior. The desired goal is

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 93. “Whether we acknowledge it or not, incorporation into His body places us in relationship to all others in the body, and no denial of fellowship on our part can rend the unity of the body—it can only separate us from the fullness of grace dwelling in the integration of the members in unity. If we are planted in the vine, the branches are not detached from other branches except those that bear no fruit—and each leaf and twig and limb derives strength through each other from the vine itself” (*ibid.*, p. 91).

⁵² This figure is from the World Christian Database of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2004, at <http://worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/about/denominationlist.asp>, accessed 7 August 2008.

⁵³ Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 4.02.f., at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/ELCA-Governance/~media/Files/Who%20We%20Are/Office%20of%20the%20Secretary/Constitutions/PDF/ConstitutionsBylawsandContinuingResolutionsApril2008.ashx, accessed 18 August 2008.

“full communion,” a relationship that is rooted in agreement on essentials and allows diversity in nonessentials. The ELCA Vision for Ecumenism states that full communion includes all that Lutherans have meant by “pulpit and altar fellowship” but goes beyond that historical formulation “because of the obligatory mission given by the Gospel.”⁵⁴ It is a goal that needs continually to be defined; it does not demand organic union but neither does it rule that out. It allows for situation oriented decisions about order and decision-making structures; this flexibility has enabled the ELCA to be in full communion with church bodies that could not (at this point) be in full communion with one another. Since its formation, the ELCA has adopted full communion agreements with five mainline Protestant denominations and will vote on a full communion agreement with a sixth (the United Methodist Church) when it meets in assembly in summer 2009. Even with these agreements, much work remains to be done at the level of local reception: what difference do these agreements make in the day-to-day life of congregations and denominations, especially with regard to the apostolic mission?

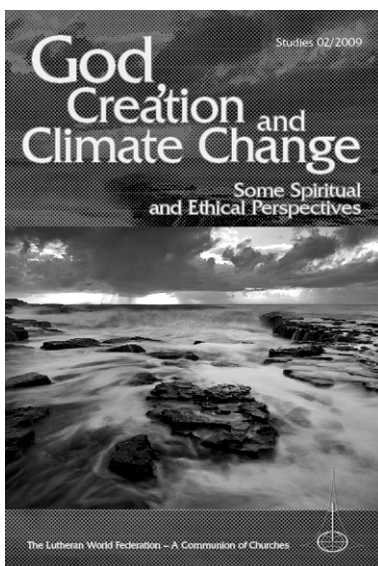
Finally, I would argue that in order to express more visibly the given unity we have as members of Christ’s body, the ELCA and other mainline churches in North America need to address not only the theological differences that have historically divided our denominations, but also the issues that threaten further to divide Christianity today (e.g., sexuality, biblical interpretation), as well as the fact that American Christians continue to segregate themselves by race. The adage that “Sunday morning at 11:00 a.m. is the most segregated hour during the week” remains as true in the USA today as ever.

⁵⁴ *The Vision of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, at <http://archive.elca.org/ecumenical/vision.html>, accessed 15 September 2008.

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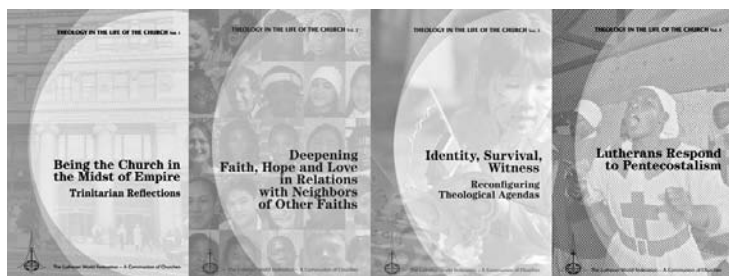
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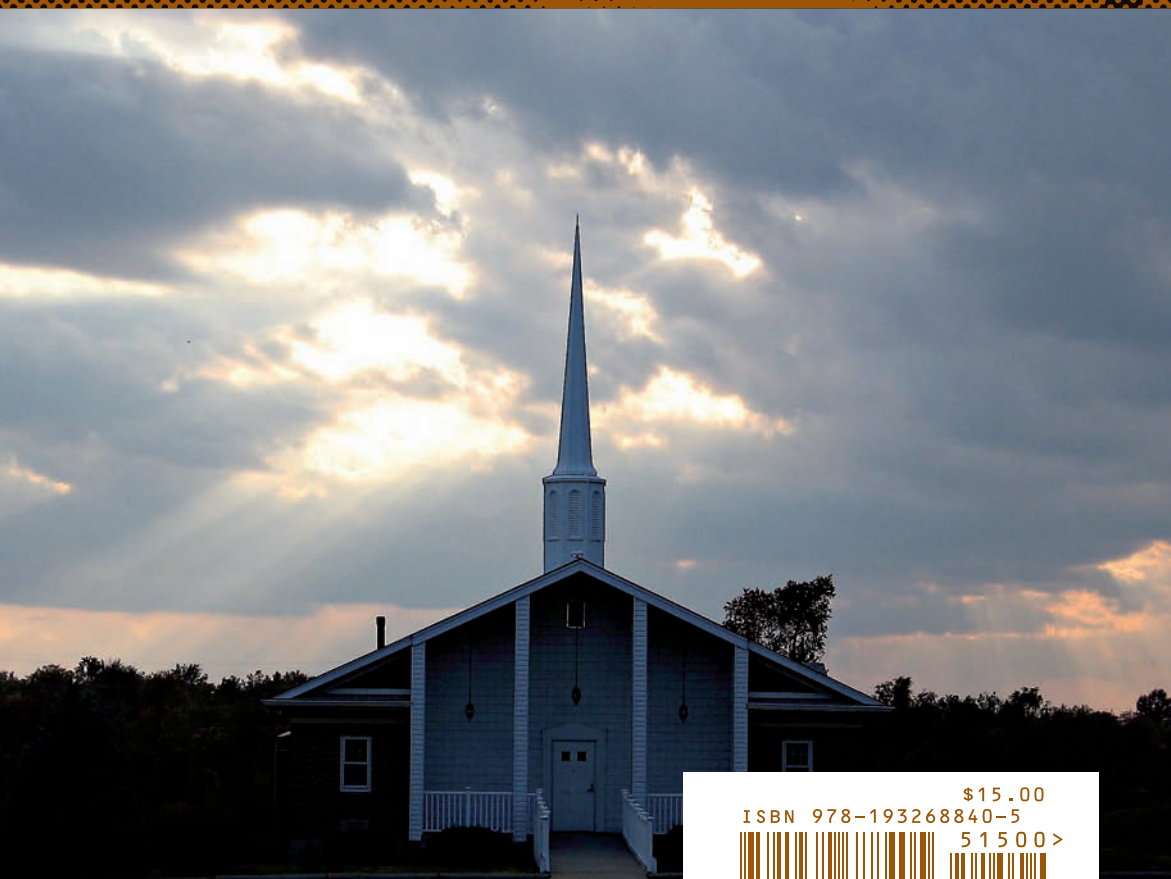
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