

# INFORMATION SERVICE 2017

PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM AD CHRISTIANORUM UNITATEM FOVENDAM



# INFORMATION SERVICE

PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM AD CHRISTIANORUM  
UNITATEM FOVENDAM

2017

N.150



# CONTENTS

## POPE FRANCIS AND ECUMENISM

### AUDIENCES

Audience with an Ecumenical Delegation from Finland (19 January 2017).....	1
Audience with the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches (27 January 2017).....	3
Audience with an Ecumenical Delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (6 February 2017).....	4
Audience with Evangelical leaders gathered for the Pentecost vigil (3 June 2017).....	6
Visit to Rome of a Delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul (26–29 June 2017).....	7
Audience with the Delegation of the Church Relations Committee of the United Bible Societies (5 October 2017).....	11
Audience with a Delegation of the World Methodist Council on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the commencement of the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission (19 October 2017).....	12
Audience with His Beatitude Theophilus, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem (23 October 2017).....	14
Audience with the Moderator of the Church of Scotland (26 October 2017).....	16
Audience with the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East (24 November 2017).....	18
Audience with a Delegation of the Lutheran World Federation (7 December 2017).....	20
Audience with a Delegation of the Taiwan National Council of Churches (7 December 2017).....	22

### MESSAGES

Message of Pope Francis to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, on the occasion of its association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (5 July 2017).....	23
Message of Pope Francis for the opening of the 25 <sup>th</sup> International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality, Monastery of Bose, Italy (18 August 2017).....	25

Joint Message of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the World Day of Prayer for Creation (1 September 2017) .....	26
Message of Pope Francis on the occasion of the visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate by a Delegation of the Holy See for the Feast of Saint Andrew and Greeting of Patriarch Bartholomew (28 November–1 December 2017) .....	27

## HOMILIES

Vespers Concluding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls (25 January 2017) .....	31
Vigil on the eve of the Solemnity of Pentecost, Circus Maximus, Rome (3 June 2017) .....	33

## APOSTOLIC JOURNEYS

Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to Egypt (28-29 April 2017) .....	35
---	----

## VISITS

Visit to the Anglican Church of ‘All Saints’ in Rome (26 February 2017) .....	44
---	----

## ACTIVITIES OF THE DICASTERY

### CARDINAL PRESIDENT

#### PAPERS

Discours à l’occasion du premier anniversaire de la rencontre du Pape François et du Patriarche Kirill à La Havane, le 12 février 2016, Université de Fribourg, 12 février 2017 .....	49
Conferenza presso la Facoltà Valdese di Teologia, Roma, 13 febbraio 2017. <i>Il primato dell’accogliere rispetto al fare. Sull’attualità della dottrina cristiana della giustificazione</i> .....	58
Conferenza per il Dies Academicus dell’anno accademico 2016-2017, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma, 15 marzo 2017. <i>Cristiani uniti per un mondo in frantumi</i> .....	71
Conférence de carême en la Basilique de Fourvière, Lyon, 19 mars 2017. <i>L’unité de l’Église dans la profession de foi et dans le mouvement œcuménique. Perspective catholique</i> .....	81
Conferenza “Insieme nella testimonianza fino al martirio. Cattolici e Ortodossi e le sfide del XXI secolo”, Pontificia Accademia di Scienze Sociali, Casino Pio IV, Città del Vaticano, 24 maggio 2017. <i>L’ecumenismo dei martiri. Segno di speranza nell’unità del Corpo di Cristo</i> .....	95
Conference on the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther’s Posting of the Ninety-Five Theses, Catholic University of America, Washington, 30 May 2017. <i>Martin Luther’s Reformation and the Unity of the Church: A Catholic Perspective in Light of the Lutheran–Catholic Dialogue</i> .....	101
Symposium „Jesus der Christus im Glauben der einen Kirche. Christologie – Kirchen des Ostens – Ökumenische Dialoge“ an der Philosophisch–Theologischen	

Hochschule St. Georgen in Frankfurt am 21. September 2017. <i>Jesus der Christus: Grund der Einheit Oder Motiv der Trennung?</i> .....	118
Colloque international « En 500 après Martin Luther. Réception et conflits d'interprétation (1517-2017) », Institut Catholique de Toulouse, 19 octobre 2017. <i>Les implications personnelles des Papes Jean-Paul II et Benoît XVI dans le dialogue avec les luthériens</i> .....	134
Jubiläum 600 Jahre Papstwahl in Konstanz, Konzilsgebäude, Konstanz, 11. November 2017. <i>Die Papstwahl beim Konzil von Konstanz und ihre ekklesiologische und ökumenische Bedeutung</i> .....	150
Per il decimo anniversario dell'opera "Gesù di Nazaret" di Benedetto XVI, Auditorium Celestino V, Campobasso, 27 novembre 2017. <i>Sinfonia di amore e verità nella libertà. Joseph Ratzinger/ Benedetto XVI testimone grato della fede pasquale</i> .....	161
Conference organized by the Apostolic Vicariate of Istanbul on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the visit of Pope Paul VI to Istanbul, Istanbul, 28 November 2017. <i>The Ecumenical Path of the Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church</i> .....	172

## HOMILIES

In occasione dell'incontro del Consiglio di Gestione del Comitato Cattolico per la Collaborazione Culturale, nella Cappella della Domus Sanctae Marthae, Città del Vaticano, 4 gennaio 2017. <i>"Ecco l'agnello di Dio, ecco colui che toglie il peccato del mondo!" [Gv 1,29]</i> .....	179
Predigt in der Ökumenischen Vesper in der Basilika des Klosters Wiblingen, Ulm, am 2. April 2017. <i>Geistlicher Appell zur Einheit</i> .....	182
Predigt im Ökumenischen Festgottesdienst anlässlich der Ausstellungseröffnung „Dialog der Konfessionen. Bischof Julius Pflug und die Reformation“ im Dom St. Peter und Paul in Weitz am 4. Juni 2017. <i>Im Geist von Bischof Julius Pflug ökumenische Botschafter der Versöhnung Sein</i> .....	186
Omelia durante la celebrazione dei Vespri nella Basilica di San Nicola di Bari, 28 luglio 2017. <i>Ritrovare l'unità in Cristo con l'intercessione di San Nicola</i> .....	189
Homilie im Pontifikalamt anlässlich des Jubiläums 600 Jahre Papstwahl in Konstanz im Konstanzer Münster am 12. November 2017. <i>Primat des Christusbekenntnisses. Die schöne Sendung des Petrus und seines Nachfolgers</i> .....	191

## GREETINGS AND MESSAGES

Grusswort beim Gemeinsamen Buss- und Versöhnungsgottesdienst Hildesheim, 11. März 2017. <i>Erinnerung heilen – Jesus Christus bezeugen</i> .....	195
Messaggio per la "Settimana ecumenica", Castel Gandolfo, 9-13 maggio 2017 .....	196
Greetings at the 12th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Windhoek, Namibia, 12–17 May 2017 .....	197
Welcome message to Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi, new Director of the Anglican Centre. Caravita, Rome, 26 October 2017.....	198
Saluto al Convegno "Lutero, la Riforma, Sant'Agostino e l'Ordine Agostiniano", Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, Roma, 9 novembre 2017 .....	199
Gusswort beim Nationalen Festgottesdienst „500 Jahre Reformation“, Bern, 18. Juni, 2017.....	202

Address Upon the Conferral of the ‘Gold Medal’, Comenius University, Bratislava, 1 October 2017.....	203
Message to the Asian Consultation of the Bishops’ Commissions for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue (Bangkok, Thailand, 16-20 October 2017) .....	204

### **OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE DICASTERY**

Catholic, Lutheran, Mennonite, Trilateral Dialogue Commission on Baptism, Augsburg, Germany (9–14 February 2017) .....	206
Disciples of Christ – Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue, (Bayamón, Puerto Rico, 23-28 June 2017) .....	207
Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church (Lisbon, Portugal, 12-15 September 2017) .....	208
Lutheran, Mennonite, Catholic Trilateral Dialogue Commission on Baptism (Strasbourg, France, 15-19 September 2017) .....	209
Joint Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the Conclusion of the Year of the Common Commemoration of the Reformation (31 October 2017) .....	210

### **COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS**

Audience with a Delegation of the European Jewish Congress (27 January 2017) .....	212
Audience with a Delegation of the Anti-Defamation League (9 February 2017) .....	213
Audience with Rabbi Abraham Skorka and a Delegation of Jewish leaders for the presentation of a new edition of the Torah (23 February 2017) .....	214
Audience with a Delegation of Rabbis for the presentation of the statement ‘Between Jerusalem and Rome’ (31 August 2017) .....	215
Bilateral Commission Meeting of the Delegations of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews – Joint Reflections on the Declaration ‘Between Jerusalem and Rome’, Jerusalem, 12-14 November 2017 – 23-25 Mar Cheshvan 5778) .....	216

### **ACTITIVIES OF THE CARDINAL PRESIDENT**

Conferenza stampa nel Museo ebraico di Roma in occasione della mostra sulla Menorah, 20 febbraio 2017 .....	218
Ben Gurion University of the Negev – Beer-Sheva, 6 November 2017. Presentation of the Ladislaus Laszt Ecumenical and Social Concern Award .....	219
Ben Gurion University of the Negev – Beer-Sheva, 6 November 2017. <i>Panel Discussion: “The (Re)turn to God in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”</i> .....	224
Ben Gurion University of the Negev – Beer-Sheva, 7 November, 2017. <i>Christianity and the Other</i> .....	226
Remarks for Celebrating the First Day of Hanukkah on the occasion of the visit to the Vatican of a Delegation of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), 12 December 2017 .....	231

## DOCUMENTATION SUPPLEMENT

### DIALOGUE DOCUMENTS

<i>‘Scripture and Tradition’ and ‘the Church in Salvation’ – Catholics and Evangelicals Explore Challenges and Opportunities.</i> A Report of the International Consultation between the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance (2009-2016) .....	233
<i>The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory.</i> Report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church, 2016 (Tenth series) .....	268
Commentary on the Report by Monsignor John A. Radano .....	336
<i>Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice.</i> Report of the Fourth Phase of Catholic-Reformed International Dialogue..	349
Commentary on the Report by Robert F. Christian, OP .....	385
<i>Common Statement on ‘Sacramental Life’</i> – Joint Committee for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East .....	394

### WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018

Letter of the PCPCU’s Secretary .....	409
Resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018 .....	411

### MISC

<i>In Memoriam</i> Cardinal William H. Keeler (1931–2017) .....	442
<i>In Memoriam</i> Cardinal Cormac Murphy O’Connor (1932-2017) .....	442



# POPE FRANCIS AND ECUMENISM

## AUDIENCES

### **Audience with an Ecumenical Delegation from Finland (19 January 2017)**

*“We need the simplicity of children. They will teach us the way to Jesus Christ”. Pope Francis shared this observation in an address to the Ecumenical Delegation from Finland on Thursday morning, 19 January. The Holy Father received the Delegation on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Henrik, noting that the group had made this pilgrimage annually for over 30 years during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This year’s pilgrimage took an even greater significance as 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, as well as 50 years of official ecumenical dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics. The following is the English text of the Pontiff’s address, which he delivered in Italian, followed by the address of Bishop Kaarlo Kalliala.*

#### **Address of Pope Francis**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I joyfully welcome all of you, members of the Ecumenical Delegation, who have come as pilgrims from Finland to Rome on the occasion of the feast of Saint Henrik. I thank the Lutheran Bishop of Turku for his kind words... in Spanish! For more than thirty years, it has been a fine custom for your pilgrimage to take place during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which calls us to draw closer to one another anew through conversion. True ecumenism is based on a shared conversion to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Redeemer. If we draw close to him, we draw close also to one another. During these days let us pray more fervently to the Holy Spirit so that we may experience this conversion which makes reconciliation possible.

On this path, we Catholics and Lutherans, from several countries, together with various communities sharing our ecumenical journey, reached a significant step when, on 31 October last, we gathered together in Lund, Sweden, to commemorate through common prayer the beginning of the Reformation. This joint commemoration of the Reformation was important on both the human and theological-spiritual levels. After fifty years of official ecumenical dialogue between Catholics and Lutherans, we have succeeded in clearly articulating points of view which today we agree on. For this we are grateful. At the same time we keep alive in our hearts sincere contrition for our faults. In this spirit, we recalled in Lund that the intention of Martin Luther five hundred years ago was to renew the Church, not divide her. The gathering there gave us the courage and strength, in our Lord Jesus Christ, to look ahead to the ecumenical journey that we are called to walk together.

In preparing the common commemoration of the Reformation, Catholics and Lutherans noted with greater awareness that theological dialogue remains essential for reconciliation and that it is advanced through steadfast commitment. Thus, in that communion of harmony which permits the Holy Spirit to act, we will be able to find further convergence on points of doctrine and the moral teaching of the Church, and will be able to draw ever closer to full and visible unity. I pray to the Lord that he may bestow his blessing on the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission in Finland, which is working diligently towards a common sacramental understanding of the Church, the Eucharist and ecclesial ministry.

Therefore 2017, the commemorative year of the Reformation, represents for Catholics and Lutherans a privileged occasion to live the faith more authentically, in order to rediscover the Gospel together, and to seek and witness to Christ with renewed vigour. At the conclusion of the day of commemoration in Lund, and looking to the future, we drew inspiration from our common witness to faith before the world, when we committed ourselves to jointly assisting those who suffer, who are in need, and who face persecution and violence. In doing so, as Christians we are no longer divided, but rather united on the journey towards full communion.

I am pleased to recall also that this year the Christians of Finland celebrate the centenary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council, which is an important instrument in promoting communion of faith and life among you.

Finally, in 2017 your homeland, Finland, will celebrate one hundred years as an independent State. May this anniversary encourage all the Christians of your country to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – as did Saint Henrik so zealously – offering a witness of faith to the world today and putting that faith into practice through concrete acts of service, fraternity and sharing.

In the hope that your pilgrimage may contribute to further strengthening the good cooperation between Orthodox, Lutherans and Catholics in Finland and in the world, and that the common witness of faith, hope and love may bear abundant fruit through Saint Henrik's intercession, I willingly invoke God's grace and blessing upon you all. And, dear brother Bishop, I wish to thank you for the lovely idea of bringing your grandchildren with you: we need the simplicity of children. They will teach us the way to Jesus Christ. Thank you, thank you so much!

ORE, 20 January 2017



*Pope Francis meets ecumenical delegation from Finland, 19 January 2017*

© Vatican Media

**Audience with the International Joint Commission International Joint  
Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the  
Oriental Orthodox Churches  
(27 January 2017)**

*In regions bloodstained by violence and fundamentalism, the martyrs show us that ecumenism is the path to follow. Pope Francis emphasized this in his address to members of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, whom he received in audience Friday morning, 27 January, in the Clementine Hall. The following is the English text of the Pope's address.*

**Address of Pope Francis**

Dear Brothers in Christ,

In offering you a joyful welcome, I thank you for your presence and for the kind words that Metropolitan Bishoy addressed to me on your behalf. I also thank you for that beautiful and richly meaningful icon of the Blood of Christ, which shows redemption from the womb of the Mother of God. It is indeed lovely. Through you, I send cordial greetings to the Heads of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, my venerable brothers.

I am grateful for the work of your Commission, which began in 2003 and is now holding its fourteenth meeting. Last year you began an examination of the nature of the sacraments, especially baptism. It is precisely in baptism that we rediscovered the basis of communion between Christians. As Catholics and Oriental Orthodox, we can repeat the words of the Apostle Paul: “For in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). In the course of this week, you have further reflected on historical, theological and ecclesiological aspects of the Holy Eucharist, “the source and summit of the whole Christian life”, which admirably expresses and brings about the unity of God’s people (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). I encourage you to persevere in your efforts and I trust that your work may point out helpful ways to advance on our journey. It will thus facilitate the path towards that greatly desired day when we will have the grace of celebrating the Lord’s Sacrifice at the same altar, as a sign of fully restored ecclesial communion.

Many of you belong to Churches that witness daily the spread of violence and acts of brutality perpetrated by fundamentalist extremism. We are aware that situations of such tragic suffering more easily take root in the context of great poverty, injustice and social exclusion, due to instability created by partisan interests, often from elsewhere, and by earlier conflicts that have led to situations of dire need, cultural and spiritual deserts where it becomes easy to manipulate and incite people to hatred. Each day your Churches, in drawing near to those who suffer, are called to sow concord and to work patiently to restore hope by offering the consoling peace that comes from the Lord, a peace we are obliged *together* to bring to a world wounded and in pain.

Saint Paul also writes: “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor 12:26). Your sufferings are our sufferings. I join you in praying for an end to the conflict and for God’s closeness to those who have endured so much, especially children, the sick and the elderly. In a particular way, my heart goes out to the bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and the lay faithful who have been cruelly abducted, taken hostage or enslaved.

May the Christian communities be sustained by the intercession and example of *our* many martyrs and saints who bore courageous witness to Christ and have themselves

attained full unity. So what are we waiting for? The martyrs show us the heart of our faith, which does not consist in a generic message of peace and reconciliation but in Jesus himself, crucified and risen. He is our peace and our reconciliation (cf. *Eph* 2:14; *2 Cor* 5:18). As his disciples, we are called to testify everywhere, with Christian fortitude, to his humble love that reconciles men and women in every age. Wherever violence begets more violence and sows death, there our response must be the pure leaven of the Gospel, which, eschewing strategies of power, allows fruits of life to emerge from arid ground and hope to dawn after nights of terror.

The centre of the Christian life, the mystery of Jesus who died and rose out of love, is also the point of reference for our journey towards full unity. Once more the martyrs show us the way. How many times has the sacrifice of their lives led Christians, otherwise divided in so many things, to unity! The martyrs and saints of all ecclesial traditions are already one in Christ (cf. *Jn* 17:22); their names are written in the one common martyrology of God's Church. Having sacrificed themselves on earth out of love, they dwell in the one heavenly Jerusalem, gathered around the Lamb who was slain (*Rev* 7:13-17). Their lives, offered as a gift, call us to communion, to hasten along the path to full unity. Just as in the early Church the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians, so in our own day may the blood of so many martyrs be a seed of unity between believers, a sign and instrument of a future of communion and peace.

Dear brothers, I am grateful for the efforts you make towards attaining this goal. In thanking you for your visit, I invoke upon you and your ministry the blessing of the Lord and the loving protection of the Mother of God.

And now, if you so feel, we can pray together, each in his own language, the Our Father.

[Our Father]

ORE, 3 February 2017

---

### **Audience with an Ecumenical Delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany (6 February 2017)**

*On Monday 6 February, the Holy Father received in audience an ecumenical delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany. We publish here below the address of the Pope.*

#### **Address of Pope Francis**

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you and I greet you warmly. I thank the regional Bishop Bedford-Strohm for his kind words – ein Mann mit Feuer im Herzen – and I am happy for Cardinal Marx's presence: that the President of the German Episcopal Conference accompanies the delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany is fruit of a long-standing collaboration and an expression of a matured ecumenical relation over the years. I hope you will go ahead on this blessed path of fraternal communion, proceeding with courage and determination towards an ever fuller unity. We have the same Baptism: we must walk together, tirelessly!

It is significant that, on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, Evangelical and Catholic Christians take up the occasion, of the common commemoration of historical events of the past, to put Christ again at the center of their relations. In fact, “the question of God,” on “how there can be a merciful God” was the “profound passion, the mainspring of Luther’s life and his entire journey” (cf. Benedict XVI, Meeting with the Representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany, September 23, 2011). What animated and made the Reformers anxious was, at bottom, to point out the way to Christ. It is what must be at heart for us also today, after having undertaken again, thanks be to God, a common path. This year of commemoration offers us the opportunity to take a further step forward, looking at the past without rancor, but according to Christ and in communion with Him, to propose again to the men and women of our time the radical novelty of Jesus, God’s limitless mercy: precisely what the Reformers at their time wished to stimulate. The fact that their call to renewal sparked developments that led to divisions among Christians was certainly tragic. Believers no longer felt themselves brothers and sisters in the faith, but adversaries and competitors: for too long they have fueled hostility and were avid in fights, fomented by political and power interests, sometimes without having the least scruples in using violence against one another, brothers against brothers. Today, instead, we thank God because finally, “we have put down all that is a burden,” and “we run”, fraternally, “with perseverance on the course that is before us, keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

I am grateful to you because, with this gaze you have the intention of approaching together, with humility and frankness, a past that grieves us, and of sharing soon an important gesture of penance and reconciliation: an ecumenical function entitled “To Heal the Memory — To Witness Jesus Christ.” Catholics and Evangelicals in Germany can thus respond in prayer to the strong call that you perceive together in the country of origin of the Reformation: to purify the memory in God to be renewed interiorly and sent by the Spirit to take Jesus to the men of today. With this sign and with other ecumenical initiatives planned this year – such as the joint pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the joint Biblical congress to present together the new translations of the Bible and the Ecumenical Day dedicated to the social responsibility of Christians – you have in mind to give a concrete configuration to the “Feast of Christ” that, on the occasion of the commemoration of the Reformation, you intend to celebrate together.



*Pope Francis meets ecumenical delegation of the Evangelical Church in Germany, 6 February 2017*

© VM

May the rediscovery of the common source of faith, the healing of the memory in prayer and in charity, and concrete collaboration in spreading the Gospel and serving brothers be impulses to proceed still more speedily on the way.

It is the reality of the one Baptism that makes us brothers and sisters and in the common listening to the Spirit, we are able to appreciate, in a now reconciled diversity, the spiritual and theological gifts that we received from the Reformation. Last October 31 at Lund, I thanked the Lord for this and asked forgiveness for the past; for the future, I wish to confirm our call to witness the Gospel together and to continue on the path to full unity. Doing so together, the desire is also born to advance of new ways. Increasingly we learn to ask ourselves: can we share this initiative with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Can we undertake together another stretch of the way?

The differences in questions of faith and morality that still exist, remain challenges on the path towards visible unity, for which our faithful long. Spouses that belong to different confessions feel the pain especially. We must commit ourselves wisely, with insistent prayer and all our strength, to overcome the still existing obstacles, intensifying the theological dialogue and reinforcing collaboration between us, especially in the service of those that suffer greatly and in the protection of the threatened creation. Jesus' urgent call to unity (cf. John 17:21) comes to us, as well as the entire human family, in a period in which grave lacerations and new forms of exclusion and marginalization are being experienced. Because of this too, our responsibility is great. Great!

In the hope that this meeting will ultimately enhance communion between us, I ask the Holy Spirit, architect and renewer of unity, to fortify us on our common way with the consolation that comes from God (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:4) and to indicate to us His prophetic and audacious ways. I invoke from my heart upon all of you and your communities God's blessing and I ask you, please, to remember me in prayer. I thank you so much and would like to invite you now to pray the Our Father together.

<https://zenit.org/articles/popes-address-to-ecumenical-delegation-from-germany/>

—

### **Audience with Evangelical leaders gathered for the Pentecost vigil (3 June 2017)**

Some 100 Evangelical leaders met Pope Francis in the Vatican on Saturday morning, 3 June. They had gathered in Rome to participate in the Pentecost vigil that began Saturday afternoon at the ancient Roman arena, Circus Maximus. The celebrations also marked the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, one of the principal organizers of the event. Participants also attended the Mass celebrated by the Pontiff on the Solemnity of Pentecost, Sunday, 4 June, in Saint Peter's Square.

In his audience with Evangelical leaders, Francis thanked them for their ecumenical work in favour of Christian unity, their collaboration with other denominations in the field of education and in providing assistance to the poor. Reminding them to journey always on the path of fraternity, he invited them to conclude their celebrations as "brothers and sisters" by praying to the Lord "each in his or her language".

ORE, 9 June 2017

**Visit to Rome of a delegation from the Ecumenical Patriarchate for the  
Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul  
(26–29 June 2017)**

*For the occasion of the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Francis received in audience on Tuesday morning, 27 June, a Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I. The Delegation, traditionally sent to Rome by the Patriarch in celebration of the Solemnity, was led by Archbishop Job of Telmessos, Co-President of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, accompanied by the Very Reverend Ambrosios Chorozidis, Grand Synkellos of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Agathangelos Siskos, Librarian of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. They were joined by Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, with Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary, and Monsignor Andrea Palmieri, Undersecretary. The following is the English text of the Holy Father's address to the Delegation and the letter sent through the Delegation to the Pontiff by the Ecumenical Patriarch.*

**Address of Pope Francis**

Your Eminence,  
Dear Brothers in Christ,

I offer you a warm welcome and I thank you for being here for the celebration of Saints Peter and Paul, the principal patrons of this Church of Rome. I am most grateful to His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and to the Holy Synod for having sent you, dear brothers, as their representatives, to share with us the joy of this feast.

Peter and Paul, as disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ, served the Lord in very different ways. Yet in their diversity, both bore witness to the merciful love of God our Father, which each in his own fashion profoundly experienced, even to the sacrifice of his own life. For this reason, from very ancient times the Church in the East and in the West combined in one celebration the commemoration of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. It is right to celebrate together their self-sacrifice for love of the Lord, for it is at the same time a commemoration of unity and diversity. As you well know, the iconographical tradition represents the two apostles embracing one another, a prophetic sign of the one ecclesial communion in which legitimate differences ought to coexist.

The exchange of delegations between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople on their respective patronal feasts increases our desire for the full restoration of communion between Catholics and Orthodox, of which we already have a foretaste in fraternal encounter, shared prayer and common service to the Gospel. In the first millennium, Christians of East and West shared in the same Eucharistic table, preserving together the same truths of faith while cultivating a variety of theological, spiritual and canonical traditions compatible with the teaching of the apostles and the ecumenical councils. That experience is a necessary point of reference and a source of inspiration for our efforts to restore full communion in our own day, a communion that must not be a bland uniformity.

Your presence affords me the welcome opportunity to recall that this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the visit of Blessed Paul VI to the Phanar in July 1967, and of the visit of Patriarch Athenagoras, of venerable memory, to Rome in October of that same year. The example of these courageous and farsighted pastors, moved solely

by love for Christ and his Church, encourages us to press forward in our journey towards full unity. Fifty years ago, those two visits were events that gave rise to immense joy and enthusiasm among the faithful of the churches of Rome and of Constantinople, and led to the decision to send delegations for the respective patronal feasts, a practice that has continued to the present.

I am deeply grateful to the Lord for continuing to grant me occasions to meet my beloved brother Bartholomew. In particular, I recall with gratitude and thanksgiving our recent meeting in Cairo, where I saw once more the profound convergence in our approach to certain challenges affecting the life of the Church and the world in our time.



*Pope Francis meets delegation from Ecumenical Patriarchate, 27 June 2017*

Next September, in Leros, Greece, there will be a meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, co-chaired by Your Eminence and Cardinal Kurt Koch, at the gracious invitation of Metropolitan Paisios. It is my hope that the meeting will take place in a spiritual climate of attentiveness to the Lord's will and in a clear recognition of the journey already being made together by many Catholic and Orthodox faithful in various parts of the world, and that it will prove most fruitful for the future of ecumenical dialogue.

Your Eminence, dear brothers, the unity of all his disciples was the heartfelt prayer that Jesus Christ offered to the Father on the eve of his passion and death (cf. *Jn* 17:21). The fulfilment of this prayer is entrusted to God, but it also involves our docility and obedience to his will. With trust in the intercession of Saints Peter and Paul, and of Saint Andrew, let us pray for one another and ask the Lord to make us instruments of communion and peace. And I ask you, please, to continue to pray for me.

ORE, 7 July 2017

### **Letter of Patriarch Bartholomew I**

Your Holiness,

Today, we celebrate with you the honourable memory of the Holy, Glorious, and All-Praiseworthy Chiefs of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, who received their crown of martyrdom in the imperial city. We share in the joy of this feast by perpetuating the

blessed tradition of exchanging official visits through delegations on the occasion of our respective Thronal Feasts. Our fraternal congratulatory wishes on this feast are conveyed to Your Holiness and expressed in person by our Patriarchal Delegation led by His Excellency Archbishop Job of Telmessos, co-president of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between our two sister Churches, the Very Reverend Ambrosios Chorozidis, Grand Synkellus of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and the Very Reverend Archimandrite Agathangelos Siskos, Librarian of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and secretary of our venerable delegation to you this year.

The commemoration of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul reminds us of their common witness and ministry in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, which led them, ultimately, to their martyrdom. The Church was established on Christ, through the confession, witness and blood of the Holy Apostles, as our Lord foretold: *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). Hence, after Saint Peter confessed Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, our Lord said: *“you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it”* (Matt 16:18). For this same reason, Saint Paul spoke of his mission in these words: *“To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles”* (Acts 26:22-23).

Tertullian recognized the blood of the Apostles and later of the Christian Martyrs as a seed for the Church. Addressing those who persecuted Christians, he said: *“We spring up in greater numbers as often as we are mown down by you: the blood of the Christians is a source of new life”* (Apologeticus, 50). The death of the martyrs is a testimony of Christ’s death on the Cross and a witness to His third-day, glorious Resurrection from the Tomb, both of which lead us to everlasting life in His Kingdom. For this reason, we celebrate the feast of the holy martyrs brightly with the joy of the Resurrection and in the joyful anticipation of the glory of the Kingdom to come, as witnessed by the first martyr, Archdeacon Stephen, at the moment of his martyrdom: *“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God!”* (Acts 7:56).

The Church, throughout her history, during different epochs and times, has been persecuted; however, the blood of her martyrs was a source of strength in faith and a witness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As the Bride of Christ, the Church is still called to *martyria* today, as it faces new forms of persecution and oppression. Over the last few years, we have witnessed with great sorrow the attacks targeting Christians and their places of worship. Our sister Churches stand in solidarity with all persecuted and oppressed Christians of our times, and at this very moment, we call to remembrance *“those who are in mines, in exile, in harsh labour, and those in every kind of affliction, oppression, necessity, or distress”*.

Today, we call to mind the joy we experienced being with Your Holiness in Egypt two months ago, a land which is continuously watered by the blood of Christian martyrs. We prayed with you for the people of Egypt, for unity, peace and justice in the world, in the church of Saints Peter and Paul in Cairo near Saint Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, which became a few months ago a sacred *martyrion*.

This was a significant moment for us, and for the world. It was in Cairo that, together with Your Holiness, we addressed an International Conference on Peace,

sharing together the conviction that there cannot be any violence nor justification of terrorism in the name of religion. Together with you, we underlined that violence is the negation of fundamental religious beliefs and doctrine, that true faith does not release humans from being responsible for the world, and emphasized the importance of respecting human dignity and the need for supporting struggles aiming to attain justice and peace. We reminded our contemporary world that humanity demands from religion today honesty and openness to cultivate love, solidarity and compassion. This can be achieved also through interreligious dialogue which has the aim of overcoming religious fundamentalism and demonstrating that religions can and should serve as bridges between people, as instruments of peace and mutual understanding and respect between human beings. This interreligious dialogue is further strengthened through the deeper rapprochement of divided Christians.

Therefore, we are convinced that our common witness before the numerous challenges of our contemporary world constitutes a positive testimony for the Church of Christ and for bringing us closer to unity. This is indeed the commandment of our Lord and Saviour: *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (Jn 13:35). Over fifty years ago, our sister Churches have engaged into a dialogue of love that has led us into a dialogue of truth. With this in mind, we place great emphasis on the theological dialogue being conducted for nearly forty years between our sister Churches. We were particularly pleased to learn that the fourteenth meeting of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue, last September in Chieti, between our Churches was conducted in an atmosphere of fraternal collaboration and mutual theological exchange, successfully producing an important common document on primacy and synodality in the first millennium. Thus, this Commission has proposed new steps on our common path towards unity. Now, the Commission will be entering a new phase of the dialogue. It is our prayer that the Coordinating Committee scheduled for September on the island of Leros will be fruitful by producing a common theme and a methodology for the next stage of our discussions.

Your Holiness, dearest Brother Francis, as we celebrate today the Thronal Feast of the Church of Rome, we reiterate our deepest desire for our common advancement on the journey towards the unity. We pray that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may grant you health, strength and peace, so that you may continue your diakonia to the precious souls entrusted to your primatial care and wisdom.

Conveying to Your Holiness, the venerable Hierarchs and the Christ-loving faithful of your Church, our warmest greetings, we embrace you fraternally with a “holy kiss” and remain with much love and honour in Christ Jesus, the Lamb once slain who lives forever.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the twenty-ninth of June, 2017

Your Holiness’ beloved brother in Christ,

+ BARTHOLOMEW

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

<https://www.patriarchate.org/-/ecumenical-patriarch-bartholomew-s-letter-to-pope-francis-for-the-patronal-feast-of-the-church-of-rome>

**Audience with the Delegation of the Church Relations Committee of the  
United Bible Societies  
(5 October 2017)**

*“Let us walk together to spread the word. Let us pray together”, the Holy Father said in an address to the Delegation of the Church Relations Committee of the United Bible Societies, whom he received in audience on Thursday morning, 5 October. The following is the English text of the Pope’s address, which he delivered in Italian.*

Dear brothers and sisters,

“Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love undying” (*Eph* 6:24). With these words of Saint Paul I am happy to welcome the members of the Church Relations Committee of the United Bible Societies, and I thank Cardinal Onaiyekan for his presentation. It is my hope that the grace of the Holy Spirit will be with you, and with all who strive to make the Gospel known by making the Bible more easily accessible in diverse languages and today’s wide variety of communication media.

We are servants of the word of salvation, which never returns to the Lord empty. Allowing ourselves to be “wounded” by the word is indispensable for expressing verbally that which overflows from the heart. For the word of God “is piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (*Heb* 4:12).

We are servants of the word of eternal life, and we believe that man not only lives on bread, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. (cf. *Mt* 4:4). Aided by the Holy Spirit, we must nourish ourselves at the table of the word by reading, listening, studying and bearing witness with our lives. We devote time to those we love, and here we are dealing with the love of God who desires to talk to us and offer us words of life eternal.

We are servants of the word of reconciliation, also among Christians, and we wish with all our heart that “the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph” (*2 Thess* 3:1). It is right therefore to expect a new impetus to our spiritual life from a greater respect for God’s word.

We are servants of the word that “went out” from God and “was made flesh” (*Jn* 1:14). It is vital that the Church today go out to proclaim the Gospel to all, in all places, on all occasions, without delay, reluctance or fear (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 23). We do so in obedience to the Lord’s missionary mandate, certain of his presence among us until the end of the world (cf. *Mt* 28:20).

We are servants of the word of truth (cf. *Jn* 8:32). We are convinced that “the unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth. In the Body of Christ, ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (*Jn* 14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth?” (*Ut Unum Sint*, 18).

We are servants of the powerful word of God that enlightens, protects, defends, heals and frees. “The word of God is not fettered!” (*2 Tim* 2:9). Many of our brothers and sisters are in prison on account of the word, and many more have shed their blood as a testimony to their faith in Jesus Christ.

Let us walk together to spread the word (cf. *Acts* 6:7). Let us pray together, that “the Father’s will be done” (cf. *Mt* 6:10). Let us work together, that what the Lord has said may be accomplished in us (cf. *Lk* 1:38).

Thank you for your visit, dear brothers and sisters. Let us remain in fraternal communion and pray for each other. Thank you.



**Audience with a Delegation of the World Methodist Council on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the commencement of the Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission (MERCIC)  
(19 October 2017)**

*“We cannot speak of prayer and charity unless together we pray and work for reconciliation and full communion”. Pope Francis emphasized this in his address to a Delegation of the World Methodist Council, whom he received in audience in the Consistory Hall on Thursday morning, 19 October, marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the commencement of the Methodist-Catholic theological dialogue. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address, delivered after greetings from Bishop Ivan Abrahams, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I thank Bishop Abrahams for his kind words and I offer all of you a warm welcome on this fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the Methodist-Catholic theological dialogue.

In the Book of Leviticus, the Lord proclaims the fiftieth year as a special year that calls, among other things, for the setting free of slaves: “You shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (*Lev* 25:10). We are grateful to God because we can say that, in certain sense, we too have been freed from the slavery of estrangement and mutual suspicion. The Lord also told Moses that in the fiftieth year “everyone shall return to his property and... to his family” (*ibid.*). As a result of these fifty years of patient, fraternal dialogue, we can truly say to one another in the words of the Apostle Paul: “you are no longer strangers” (cf. *Eph* 2:19). Yes, we are no longer strangers, either in our hearts or in our belonging to the Lord, thanks to the one Baptism that has made us true brothers and sisters. We are, and we feel ourselves to be, “members of the household of God” (*ibid.*).

We have come to this realization as the result of dialogue. The Second Vatican Council continues to encourage the growth of knowledge and esteem between Christians of differing confessions by means of a dialogue carried out “with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 11). True dialogue gives us the courage to encounter one another in humility and sincerity, in an effort to learn from one another, and in a spirit of honesty and integrity. We are brothers and sisters who, following a long separation, are happy once more to see and learn about one another, and to move forward with open hearts. So let us advance together, knowing that our journey is blessed by the Lord. It began from him, and it leads to him.

“You shall hallow the fiftieth year”, God said to Moses. The latest document of the Commission spoke precisely about holiness. John Wesley sought to help his neighbours live a holy life. His example and his words encouraged many to devote themselves to reading the Bible and to prayer, and in this way to come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. When we see others living a holy life, when we recognize the working of the Holy Spirit

in other Christian confessions, we cannot fail to rejoice. It is impressive to see how widely the Lord sows his gifts; it is impressive to see brothers and sisters who embrace in Jesus our own way of life. But other “members of God’s household” can also help us grow closer to the Lord and spur us to bear more faithful witness to the Gospel. Let us thank the Father, then, for all that he granted us, even before the last fifty years, in bygone centuries and throughout the world, in our respective communities. Let us strengthen one another by our witness to the faith.

Faith becomes tangible above all when it takes concrete form in love, particularly in service to the poor and the marginalized. “You shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants”: after fifty years of our dialogue, this ancient summons of the word of God remains ever timely. As a call to life in communion with God, the call to holiness is necessarily a call to communion with others too. When, as Catholics and Methodists, we join in assisting and comforting the weak and the marginalized – those who in the midst of our societies feel distant, foreign and alienated – we are responding to the Lord’s summons.

As we look to the future, beyond the past fifty years, one thing is certain: we cannot grow in holiness without growing in communion. This is the journey that awaits us in the new phase of the dialogue, devoted to reconciliation. We cannot speak of prayer and charity unless together we pray and work for reconciliation and full communion. May your discussions about reconciliation be a gift, and not only for our communities but for the world. May they be an incentive to Christians everywhere to be ministers of reconciliation. The Spirit of God brings about the miracle of reconciled unity. He does so in his own way, even as he did at Pentecost, awakening a variety of charisms and ordering everything in a unity that is not uniformity but a communion. We need, then, to remain together, like the disciples awaiting the Spirit, and as brothers and sisters on a shared journey.

I thank you for your presence. I am grateful to the Dialogue Commission for its work, past and yet to come, and I thank the World Methodist Council for its ongoing support for the dialogue. The blessing of the past fifty years resides in the grace we have discovered in one another, which has enriched both our communities. But the task is not yet ended, and we are called to look ahead as we continue our journey. We have learned to see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ; now is the time to prepare ourselves, with humble hope and concrete efforts, for that full recognition that will come about, by God’s grace, when at last we will be able to join one another in the breaking of the bread. I would ask you to pray for this, as together we ask the Father for the daily bread that can sustain us along the way: Our Father...



*Pope Francis meets Bishop Ivan Abrahams, together with members of MERCIC, 19 October 2017*

© VM

**Audience with His Beatitude Theophilos III,  
Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem  
(23 October 2017)**

*On Monday morning, 23 October, in the private library of the Apostolic Palace, Pope Francis received in audience Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem. The Pope expressed his hope that “all those involved” might “intensify their efforts to achieve a stable peace based on justice and recognition of the rights of all”. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address.*

Your Beatitude,  
Dear Brothers,

With great joy I welcome all of you to Rome. I reciprocate with gratitude and fraternal affection the warm welcome Your Beatitude offered me during my visit to Jerusalem. Still fresh in my mind is the attentiveness with which you accompanied Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and myself in the Basilica that preserves the places of the Lord’s crucifixion, burial and Resurrection. I am still moved when I think of our moment of prayer in the aedicule of the empty Tomb, and I again express my pleasure at the restoration of that most holy place. It has not simply secured the integrity of a historical monument, but also enabled the empty tomb to continue to testify that: “He has risen, he is not here; see the place where they laid him” (Mk 16:6). I rejoice that the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land have worked together in such harmony on this project, as they also did for the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem. I thank Your Beatitude very much for your own efforts in this regard.

Our meeting allows me to renew my closeness to all those suffering from the conflicts that for decades have beset the Holy Land. The uncertainty of the situation and the lack of understanding between the parties continue to create insecurity, the restriction of fundamental rights, and the flight of many people from their land. I invoke God’s help in this, and I ask all those involved to intensify their efforts to achieve a stable peace based on justice and recognition of the rights of all. To this end, any kind of violence, discrimination or displays of intolerance against Jewish, Christian and Muslim worshippers, or places of worship, must be firmly rejected. The Holy City, whose Status Quo must be defended and preserved, ought to be a place where all can live together peaceably; otherwise, the endless spiral of suffering will continue for all.

I would offer a particular greeting to the members of the various Christian communities in the Holy Land. It is my hope that they will continue to be recognized as an integral part of society and that, as citizens and believers in their own right, they can continue tirelessly to contribute to the common good and the growth of peace, striving to further reconciliation and concord. This contribution will be the more effective to the extent that there is harmony between the region’s different Churches. Particularly important in this regard would be increased cooperation in supporting Christian families and young people, so that they will not be forced to leave their land. By working together in this delicate area, the faithful of different confessions will also be able to grow in mutual knowledge and fraternal relations.

Here I would reaffirm my heartfelt desire and commitment to progress on our way to full unity, in obedience to Jesus’ fervent prayer in the Cenacle “that they may all be one... so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). I know that past wounds continue to affect the memory of many people. It is not possible to change the past, but, without

forgetting grave failures of charity over the centuries, let us look to a future of full reconciliation and fraternal communion, and take up the work before us, as the Lord desires. Not to do so today would be an even graver fault; it would be to disregard both the urgent call of Christ and the signs of the times sown by the Spirit along the Church's path. Inspired by the same Spirit, may we not let the memory of times marked by lack of communication or mutual accusations, or present difficulties and uncertainty about the future, prevent us from walking together towards visible unity, nor hinder us from praying and working together to proclaim the Gospel and to serve those in need. In this regard, the ongoing theological dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, in which the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem participates actively and constructively, is a comforting sign of hope on our journey. How good it would be to say of Catholics and Orthodox living in Jerusalem what the Evangelist Luke said of the first Christian community: "All who believed were together... one heart and soul" (*Acts* 2:44; 4:32).

Your Beatitude, I thank you and the distinguished members of your entourage most cordially for your visit. I reaffirm my closeness to our Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, and my affection for our friends of the other great religions who live there. I hope and pray that the day of a stable and lasting peace for all will soon come. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you! [...] For my brethren and companions' sake I will say, 'peace be within you!'" (*Pf* 122: 6-8). [I would like us now to pray together for this, in the words of the "Our Father"]



*Pope Francis meets His Beatitude Theophilos III, 23 October 2017*

© Vatican Media

**Audience with the Moderator of the Church of Scotland  
(26 October 2017)**

*On 26 October 2017, the Holy Father Pope Francis received in audience an ecumenical delegation headed by the Right Reverend Dr Derek Browning, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. We publish here below their addresses.*

**Address of Pope Francis**

Dear Moderator, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I offer you a warm welcome and I thank the Moderator for his thoughtful remarks, and also for our meeting [private, which took place previously]. Your presence affords me the opportunity to offer a warm greeting to all the members of the Church of Scotland.

Our meeting takes place during the fifth centenary of the Reformation, which I joined in commemorating last year in Lund. Let us thank the Lord for the great gift of being able to live this year in true fraternity, no longer as adversaries, after long centuries of estrangement and conflict. This has been possible, with God's grace, by the ecumenical journey that has enabled us to grow in mutual understanding, trust and cooperation. The mutual purification of memory is one of the most significant fruits of this common journey. The past cannot be changed, yet today we at last see one another as God sees us. For we are first and foremost his children, reborn in Christ through the one Baptism, and therefore brothers and sisters. For so long we regarded one another from afar, all too humanly, harbouring suspicion, dwelling on differences and errors, and with hearts intent on recrimination for past wrongs.

In the spirit of the Gospel, we are now pursuing the path of humble charity that leads to overcoming division and healing wounds. We have begun a dialogue of communion, employing language befitting those who belong to God. Such language is essential to evangelization, for how can we proclaim the God of love if we do not love one another (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8)? It was in Scotland itself, in Edinburgh, more than a hundred years ago, Christian missionaries had the courage to set forth once again with renewed vigour the firm will of Jesus that we be one, "so that the world may believe" (*Jn* 17:21). They understood that proclamation and mission are not fully credible unless they are accompanied by unity. This remains as true now as it was then.

I have learned that the emblem of the Church of Scotland depicts the burning bush before which Moses encountered the living God. I am struck by the fact that in this great biblical text the Lord calls himself by a name that will echo down the centuries: "the God of your fathers" (*Ex* 3:15). In this way, he calls us too, as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, to enter into a history of prior relationships and to live the life of faith not as isolated individuals and in theory, but within a concrete community, a "we". For no one becomes a Christian by himself and no one can live as a Christian without others. We belong to the family of believers, of so many of our brothers and sisters who have begun to walk in newness of life through Baptism (cf. *Rm* 6: 4) and who accompany us along that same path.

My thoughts turn in a particular way to those Christians who in our day face grave trials and sufferings, enduring persecution for the name of Jesus. So many of them bear a heavy cross as they profess their faith, many to the point of martyrdom. Their witness impels us to persevere, with love and courage, to the end. Our dialogue directed to full unity, our witness and our shared service, our commitment to pray for

one another and to overcome the wounds of the past: these are also a response that is owed to them, within this great “we” of faith.

It is my prayerful hope that the journey to visible unity will continue daily and bear rich fruits for the future, as it has in the recent past. The Catholic Church, especially through the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, has engaged for decades in a fruitful cooperation with the Church of Scotland and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and desires to continue on this path. With gratitude for your presence here and on the ecumenical journey, I ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen our fellowship in Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. And to Him we turn together in prayer for each other: “Our Father...”

### **Address of Right Reverend Browning**

Your Holiness,

I greet you in the Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is also my privilege and delight as Moderator to bring you greetings in the name of the General Assembly from your sisters and brothers in the Church of Scotland.

Hospitality is the distinctive mark of the Christian Church. We are born out of hospitality and our faith spread because of hospitality. If we are in a position of privilege, it is better to build a longer table than a higher fence. In the Church of Scotland we ask of ourselves, and all our sisters and brothers, who is at our table? How do we share the message of forgiveness, mercy, hope and love with an increasingly secular world that no longer knows what we believe, or mistrusts us because of our past errors and narrowness?

My Church seeks to ensure that the ministry of our Church continues to reach out to every area of Scotland’s life, and to reaffirm that the strength of our Church, is to be found at the local, parish level. Prayers connect us to God and the faith we profess; practical compassion, motivated by an honest and robust engagement with civil and other authorities empowers us to speak out for the poor, refugees and migrants, for the marginalised in all our communities, and for the better stewarding of the creation that is entrusted to our care.

Next year the Church of Scotland celebrates fifty years of women ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament; two years ago we celebrated fifty years of women being ordained to the eldership; and women have been set apart as deacons for one hundred and twenty-nine years. The ministry of the diaconate in the Church of Scotland is a collaborative ministry, which seeks to build bridges between church and community. Our diaconate works not only in parishes but also in chaplaincies, counselling, with asylum seekers, and meeting spiritual needs. Now ordained since 2002, deacons, both women and men, play a welcome part in the courts of our Church sharing their experience and wisdom. Your Holiness, we note in your Church the commission you have encouraged to study the issue of women deacons and their ministry in the Early Church, and we look forward with interest to its conclusions.

The Church of Scotland will continue to advocate models of gender justice and crusade against violence and discrimination against women, and celebrate the contributions and place of women, alongside men, in our churches and communities.

The Church of Scotland maintains its active concern about issues relating to human trafficking and modern day slavery, and continues to express concern about the

fate of migrants and refugees, fleeing from their home countries, and finding a mixed welcome in countries where they seek new homes away from persecution, war and hunger.

In this year of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the German Reformation, the Church of Scotland recognises its roots in the many European Reformations. We acknowledge openly our doctrinal and governance differences, but gladly note the complementary dimensions of our shared faith within the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, especially in the documents *Together towards Life*, and *Evangelii Gaudium*, and the call to participate in the mission of God. We ask that where relations between our Churches have become less focussed at local and national levels, Your Holiness would join with me to call our Churches to work together for the common good, particularly in the face of national and international anxiety expressed in sectarianism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

A wise man recently told me: “When we speak, we must speak the truth. Then we must speak the truth in love. But first, we must speak.” Your Holiness, in our speech together, may truth and love shine out, not only in our words, but also in our actions. We would also be bold to ask that if it were possible you might make a visit to Scotland at some time, where you would be welcomed with open arms.

As you continue ministering in the name of Jesus Christ, we continue to pray that God will bless and use you generously. May God’s richest blessings be upon you, and the light of Christ illuminate your path, and the gentleness of the Holy Spirit encompass you day and night.

—

**Audience with the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the  
Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East  
(24 November 2017)**

*On Friday morning, 24 November, in an audience with members of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, Pope Francis called for solidarity for the population in Syria which “is afflicted by persecution, and is a witness of brutal acts of violence perpetrated in the name of fundamentalist extremism”. A Joint Declaration was signed by the Pontiff and Metropolitan Meelis Zaia. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address.*

**Address of Pope Francis**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I extend a warm welcome to all of you. I thank you for your visit and Metropolitan Meelis Zaia for his kind words on your behalf. Through you I convey my fraternal greeting in the Lord to His Holiness Mar Gewargis III, recalling with joy our cordial meeting a year ago, which marked a further step on our journey towards deeper growth in mutual solidarity and communion.

Our meeting today offers us the opportunity to look with gratitude upon the progress made by the Joint Commission, established following the historic signing of the Common Christological Declaration here in Rome in 1994. After professing the same faith in the mystery of the Incarnation, the Commission planned two phases of

dialogue: one on sacramental theology and one on the constitution of the Church. I join you in thanking the Lord for today's signing of the Joint Declaration which brings to a happy conclusion the phase regarding sacramental life. We can now look to the future with even greater confidence and I ask the Lord that your continuing work may help bring about that blessed and long-awaited day when we will have the joy of celebrating, at the same altar, our full communion in Christ's Church.

I would like to emphasize one aspect of the new Joint Declaration, where the sign of the cross is referred to as "an explicit symbol of unity among all sacramental celebrations". Some authors of the Assyrian Church of the East have included the sign



*Pope Francis meets with the members of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*

© Vatican Media

of the cross among the sacred mysteries, convinced that every sacramental celebration depends precisely on the Pasch of the Lord's death and resurrection. This is a beautiful insight, because the Crucified and Risen One is our salvation and our life. Hope and peace come from his glorious cross, and from the cross flows the unity of the sacred mysteries we celebrate, as well as our own unity, for we were baptized into the same death and resurrection of the Lord (cf. *Rom* 6:4).

When we look at the cross, or make the sign of the cross, we are also invited to remember sacrifices endured in union with Jesus and to remain close to those who today bear a heavy cross upon their shoulders. The Assyrian Church of the East, along with other Churches and many of our brothers and sisters in the region, is afflicted by persecution, and is a witness to brutal acts of violence perpetrated in the name of fundamentalist extremism. Situations of such tragic suffering take root more easily in contexts of great poverty, injustice and social exclusion, largely caused by instability, often fuelled by external interests, and by conflicts that have also led in recent times to situations of dire need, giving rise to real cultural and spiritual deserts, within which it becomes easy to manipulate people and incite them to hatred. Such suffering has recently been exacerbated by the tragedy of the violent earthquake on the border between Iraq, the homeland of your Church, and Iran, where your communities have also long been established, as well as in Syria, Lebanon and India.

As a result, particularly during periods of greater suffering and deprivation, large numbers of the faithful have had to leave their lands and emigrate to other countries, thus increasing the diaspora community, with the many trials it faces. Arriving in some societies, émigrés encounter challenges stemming from an often difficult integration, and a marked secularization, which can hinder their efforts to preserve the spiritual riches of their traditions, and even prevent their witness of faith.

In all of this, the constant repetition of the sign of the cross is a reminder that the Lord of mercy never abandons his brothers and sisters, but embraces their wounds within his own. By making the sign of the cross we recall Christ's wounds, which the Resurrection did not eliminate but rather filled with light. So too the wounds of Christians, including those still open, become radiant when they are filled with the living presence of Jesus and his love, and thus become signs of Easter light in a world enveloped by so much darkness.

With these sentiments, both heartfelt and hope-filled, I invite you to keep journeying, trusting in the help of many of our brothers and sisters who gave their lives in following the Crucified Christ. They, who are already fully united in heaven, are the heralds and patrons of our visible communion on earth. Through their intercession, I also pray to the Lord that the Christians of your lands may continue to labour in peace and in full respect for all, in the patient work of reconstruction after so much devastation.

In the Syriac tradition, Christ on the cross is represented as the Good Physician and Medicine of life. I pray that he will completely heal our wounds of the past as well as the many wounds that continue to be caused by the havoc of violence and war. Dear brothers and sisters, let us continue together on the pilgrimage of reconciliation and peace, on which the Lord himself has set us! With gratitude for your commitment, I invoke the Lord's blessing upon all of you, along with the loving protection of his Mother and ours. And I ask you, please, also to remember to pray for me.

—

**Audience with a Delegation of the Lutheran World Federation  
(7 December 2017)**

Dear Brother,  
Dear Archbishop Musa,

I extend a warm greeting to you, to Dr. Junge, the General Secretary, to the Vice Presidents and to the Delegates of the Lutheran World Federation. In expressing gratitude for your kind words, I offer my congratulations on your recent appointment as President.

Today we can join in commemorating, as Scripture teaches, all that the Lord has accomplished in our midst (cf. Ps 77:12-13). We think in particular of the ecumenically significant moments of the recently-concluded Year that marked the fifth centenary of the Reformation. I am especially happy to recall 31 October 2016, when we prayed at Lund, where the Lutheran World Federation was founded. It was important for us to meet first and foremost in prayer, for the gift of unity among believers takes root and blossoms not as a result of human projects but by the grace of God. Only by praying can we care for one another. Prayer purifies and strengthens us;

it illumines our path and enables us to move forward. Prayer is like the fuel of our journey towards full unity. Indeed, the love of the Lord, which we experience in prayer, sets in motion the charity that draws us closer; it is the source of our patient expectation, the motive of our efforts at reconciliation, and the power that enables us to go forward together. Prayer is in fact “the soul of ecumenical renewal and the yearning for unity”, the “basis and support” of all dialogue (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 28).

By praying, we can constantly see one another in the right perspective, that of God our Father, whose loving gaze rests on each of us, without preferences or distinctions. In the Spirit of Jesus, in whom we pray, we realize that we are brothers and sisters. This must be our continual starting point. From it, we can also look to the past and thank God that the painful divisions that kept us distant and in conflict for centuries, have brought us in recent decades to a journey of communion, the path of ecumenism awakened by the Holy Spirit. This has led us to abandon old biases like those having to do with Martin Luther and the state of the Catholic Church in that



*Pope Francis meets with LWF delegation, 7 December 2017*

© Vatican Media

period. A significant contribution has been made in this regard by the dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, initiated in 1967. Today, at a distance of fifty years, we can recall that dialogue with gratitude, and acknowledge certain particularly important texts, such as the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* and, most recently, *From Conflict to Communion*.

With a purified memory, we can now look with confidence to a future unburdened by past conflicts and preconceptions, a future whose only debt is that of mutual love (cf. Rom 13:8), a future which calls us to discern the gifts coming from the different confessional traditions and to receive them as a common patrimony. Prior to all disagreements, differences and past hurts, there is the present, foundational and permanent reality of our baptism, which has made us children of God and brothers and sisters of one another. Henceforth we will never again allow ourselves to be adversaries or rivals. Although the past cannot be changed, the future challenges us: we can no longer refuse to seek and foster greater communion in charity and faith.

We are also called to be on the watch against the temptation of halting along the way. In the spiritual life, as in ecclesial life, whenever we halt, we are always turning

back. To be self-content, to pause out of fear, indolence, weariness or convenience in the midst of our journey to the Lord in the company of our brothers and sisters, is to refuse his invitation. In order to advance together towards him, fine ideas are not enough; there is a need for concrete steps and outstretched hands. That means, above all, spending ourselves in charity, looking to the poor and the least of the Lord's brethren (cf. Mt 25:40): they represent precious signposts to us along our way. It will do us good to touch their wounds with the healing power of Jesus' presence and with the balm of our service.

By this simple, exemplary and radical way of acting, we are called, today in particular, to proclaim the Gospel, the priority of our Christian life in the world. Reconciled unity between Christians is an indispensable part of that proclamation: "How indeed can we proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation without at the same time being committed to working for reconciliation between Christians?" (Ut Unum Sint, 98). Along the way, we are spurred on by the example of all those who have suffered for the name of Jesus and are already fully reconciled in his Paschal victory. How many there are, even in our own day, who are suffering for their witness to Jesus! Their heroism, shown in meekness and peace, urgently summons us to an ever more authentic fraternity.

Dear Brother, I cordially invoke upon you every blessing of the Lord. I ask the Holy Spirit, who unites what is divided, to pour out upon us his gifts of wisdom, meekness and courage. And I ask each one of you here present, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

—

### **Audience with a Delegation of the Taiwan National Council of Churches (7 December 2017)**

*Pope Francis urged a Delegation of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan to train young people in the "art of dialogue" so that they "can become protagonists of a much-needed culture of harmony and reconciliation". The Pope received the group in audience in the Consistory Hall on Thursday morning, 7 December. The following is the English text of the Pope's address.*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a cordial greeting to you, the officers and members of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan, and I thank you for your kind words of greeting.

As you know, I have just returned from a visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh. There I was thus able to experience the vitality and the enterprise that mark the peoples of Asia, but also the suffering face of a humanity all too often deprived of material prosperity and social well-being. There are many areas in which we, as Christians, are called to work together to promote the dignity of each human being and to support those who are less fortunate than ourselves. I am encouraged by what you have told me: "Without love, peace is not truly peace; without love, the world descends into chaos". As Christians, we are bound above all to practise the Lord's command: "Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples" (Jn 13:34-35). The love of God, made incarnate in life, is thus our

royal road, and the basis of our common responsibility before the world to account for the hope that is in us (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15).

The Catholic Church, through the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference, has been committed, from the establishment of the National Council of Churches of Taiwan in 1991, to promoting greater unity between believers in the Lord. The strengthening of relations between the Christian confessions, and the shared proclamation of Jesus, also through works of charity and educational projects aimed at the young, will prove beneficial to society as a whole. Building a better future for all requires, in a particular way, educating the younger generations in the art of dialogue, so that they can become protagonists of a much-needed culture of harmony and reconciliation. This will encourage them to pursue, with God's help, the path that leads from conflict to communion, a path that has shown itself so fruitful in the ecumenical journey.

I thank each of you for your commitment to pursuing this path by strengthening fraternity and cooperation among your communities. Let us continue to journey together in the primacy of charity towards that day when Jesus' prayer will be realized: "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe" (*Jn* 17:21). I ask God to bless you, your dear ones and your communities, and I ask you to remember me in your own prayers, and I invite you to recite the Lord's Prayer together.

[Recital of the Lord's Prayer]

---

## MESSAGES

### **Message of Pope Francis to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, on the occasion of its association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (5 July 2017)**

*On 5 July 2017, within the framework of an ecumenical liturgy held in Wittenberg, Germany, representatives of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) signed a formal act of association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), in the presence of delegates from the Lutheran, Methodist and Catholic Churches. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity was represented by the Secretary, Bishop Brian Farrell, and Reverend Avelino Gonzalez, of the Western Section of the Dicastery.*

*Originally signed by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, the JDDJ describes an agreement on what was one of the more significant church dividing issues at the time of the Reformation – Justification, or how we are made righteous before God. In 2006, the World Methodist Council and its member churches signed a statement of association with the JDDJ. The Anglican Consultative Council in 2016 passed a resolution that welcomed and affirmed the substance of the JDDJ. This step was marked liturgically in Westminster Abbey on 31 October 2017 at the close of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation.*

*We publish below the 'Official Common Declaration', final section of the document 'Association of the World Communion of Reformed Churches with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' issued at the end of the gathering in Wittenberg, followed by a brief introductory greeting of Bishop Brian Farrell and by the Message of Pope Francis.*



*The World Communion of Reformed Churches formally associates itself with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, 5 July 2017*  
(Photo by kind permission of WCRC)

### **Official common affirmation**

In this Statement the World Communion of Reformed Churches affirms fundamental doctrinal agreement with the teaching expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed at Augsburg on 31 October 1999 on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. The World Methodist Council affirmed their fundamental doctrinal agreement on 23 July 2006.

The signing partners of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification join together in welcoming the above Statement of the World Communion of Reformed Churches which declares and demonstrates Reformed agreement with the consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification as expressed in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

Building on their shared affirmation of basic truths of the doctrine of justification, Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists and Reformed commit themselves to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification in theological study, teaching and preaching.

The present achievement and commitment are viewed by the four parties as part of their pursuit of the full communion and common witness to the world which is the will of Christ for all Christians.

### **Brief introductory greeting by Bishop Brian Farrell, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We are gathered here – together – in Wittenberg, conscious of what all that happened in this place signifies in the history of the Church and of the world in the last five hundred years. Being here helps us to realize again that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification opened the way towards a new era of dialogue, friendship and growing trust between the Churches.

We are now on the necessary and exciting path of healing and reconciliation, rediscovering how much in fact we share. Practically all the historical Churches are now in agreement on the Doctrine of Justification, a fundamental issue of the conflict at the time of Reformation. And agreement on Justification provides the basis for a more

profound common witness. The abiding Methodist concern with holiness of life and the Reformed emphasis on the pursuit of justice, with which Catholics and Lutherans fully concur, point to our shared calling to Christian discipleship. We now have a stronger reason for walking together and working together – and not in isolation – in addressing the critical social and ethical questions affecting our world.

Let us look forward to a more intensive witness to the hope that is in us through Christ Jesus (cf. *1 Pt* 3:15), in the Spirit who renews and transforms us.

In this hope and commitment I am very pleased to read the Message of Pope Francis to this gathering.

### **Message of Pope Francis**

As the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches assembles in Wittenberg, I send warm greetings and the assurance of my closeness in prayer to all present.

I am especially happy that, in this year commemorating the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, you have gathered to sign a formal act of association with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. This highly significant ecumenical event will take place in the presence of the original signatories – the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church – as well as representatives of the World Methodist Council, which has also associated itself with the Declaration.

The process of study and prayerful discernment that led to this step will now bear fruit in an eloquent sign of our commitment to walking together, as brothers and sisters in Christ, on a journey from conflict to communion, from division to reconciliation. It is likewise an invitation to continued trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, who guides the followers of Jesus towards a shared vision of righteousness, growth in holiness, and increased missionary zeal for the spread of the Gospel and the salvation of the world.

Together with great joy, today's formal act also brings new challenges and responsibilities in our pursuit of fidelity to the Gospel and unity in truth. May it mark a new stage of fellowship and cooperation in the service of justice and peace in our human family. Let us not be afraid to seek together creative ways of bearing witness to the saving power of the Cross, which is the source of our reconciliation and all our hope (cf. *Col* 1:21-23).

Dear brothers and sisters, I join you in thanking God for this day of grace. Upon all present, and all who have contributed to its celebration, I cordially invoke a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, joy and peace.

From the Vatican, 29 June 2017

—

### **Message of Pope Francis for the opening of the 25<sup>th</sup> International Ecumenical Conference on Orthodox Spirituality, Monastery of Bose, Italy (18 August 2017)**

On the occasion of the opening of the XXV International Ecumenical Congress on Orthodox spirituality, I wish to send to you, organizers and participants, my cordial greeting. In particular, I wish to convey a warm embrace of peace to His Holiness the

Ecumenical Patriarch, my dear brother Bartholomew, and to His Beatitude Theodore, Patriarch of Alexandria: your important presence honours the 25 years of the Congress, organized by the Monastery of Bose in collaboration with the Orthodox Churches, and confirms its contribution to the shared path to full unity. This year's theme "The Gift of Hospitality" is suggestive and current. It is true, hospitality is a gift, a gift above all that we have received: we are guests of a world created for us and which must be protected, but we are passengers here below, foreigners on earth, since we are invited guests, expected in heaven, where our citizenship is to be found (cf. *Ph* 3:20).

In the meantime, as pilgrim disciples, we are called to fix our gaze on that which does not disappear, on charity that will never end (cf. *1 Cor* 13:8), on welcoming each other as gifts of the Lord, on fostering mutual care and affection, on "having compassion, sharing in the pain of those who suffer, considering as evil the specific misfortunes of others" (N. Cabasilas, *La vita in Cristo*, VI, 8). I hope that this call can be revived through humble and sincere listening and through the reflections of these days, so that sentiments of fraternity may grow ever more and an authentic "hospitality of the heart" may mature, so that while we walk together towards the Kingdom, we will be encouraged to take more courageous and concrete steps to full unity.

With these sentiments, I invoke upon you and on the work of the Congress the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit, while I ask you to remember me in your prayers.

From the Vatican, 18 August 2017



**Joint Message of Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on the  
World Day of Prayer for Creation  
(1 September 2017)**

The story of creation presents us with a panoramic view of the world. Scripture reveals that, "in the beginning", God intended humanity to cooperate in the preservation and protection of the natural environment. At first, as we read in Genesis, "no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground" (2:5). The earth was entrusted to us as a sublime gift and legacy, for which all of us share responsibility until, "in the end", all things in heaven and on earth will be restored in Christ (cf. *Eph* 1:10). Our human dignity and welfare are deeply connected to our care for the whole of creation.

However, "in the meantime", the history of the world presents a very different context. It reveals a morally decaying scenario where our attitude and behaviour towards creation obscures our calling as God's co-operators. Our propensity to interrupt the world's delicate and balanced ecosystems, our insatiable desire to manipulate and control the planet's limited resources, and our greed for limitless profit in markets – all these have alienated us from the original purpose of creation. We no longer respect nature as a shared gift; instead, we regard it as a private possession. We no longer associate with nature in order to sustain it; instead, we lord over it to support our own constructs.

The consequences of this alternative worldview are tragic and lasting. The human environment and the natural environment are deteriorating together, and this

deterioration of the planet weighs upon the most vulnerable of its people. The impact of climate change affects, first and foremost, those who live in poverty in every corner of the globe. Our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly implies the recognition of and respect for all people and all living creatures. The urgent call and challenge to care for creation are an invitation for all of humanity to work towards sustainable and integral development.

Therefore, united by the same concern for God's creation and acknowledging the earth as a shared good, we fervently invite all people of goodwill to dedicate a time of prayer for the environment on 1 September. On this occasion, we wish to offer thanks to the loving Creator for the noble gift of creation and to pledge commitment to its care and preservation for the sake of future generations. After all, we know that we labour in vain if the Lord is not by our side (cf. *Ps* 126-127), if prayer is not at the centre of our reflection and celebration. Indeed, an objective of our prayer is to change the way we perceive the world in order to change the way we relate to the world. The goal of our promise is to be courageous in embracing greater simplicity and solidarity in our lives.

We urgently appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as political and cultural, responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to attend to the needs of the marginalized, but above all to respond to the plea of millions and support the consensus of the world for the healing of our wounded creation. We are convinced that there can be no sincere and enduring resolution to the challenge of the ecological crisis and climate change unless the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, unless we give priority to solidarity and service. From the Vatican and from the Phanar, 1 September 2017

*Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*

---

**Message of Pope Francis on the occasion of the Visit to the  
Ecumenical Patriarchate by a Delegation of the Holy See for the Feast of  
Saint Andrew and Greeting of Patriarch Bartholomew  
(28 November–1 December 2017)**

**Message of Pope Francis**

Though away from Rome on my Pastoral Visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh, I wish to extend my fraternal best wishes to Your Holiness and to the members of the Holy Synod, the clergy, the monks, and all the faithful gathered for the Divine Liturgy in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George for the liturgical commemoration of Saint Andrew the Apostle, brother of Simon Peter and first-called of the Apostles, the patron saint of the Church of Constantinople and of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. When the deacon invites those gathered during the Divine Liturgy to pray “for those who travel by land, sea, and air”, I ask you, please, to pray also for me.

The Delegation I have sent is a sign of my spiritual solidarity with your prayer of thanksgiving and praise for all that our Almighty and Merciful God has accomplished through the witness of the Apostle Andrew. In like manner, the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate welcomed in Rome last June demonstrated its spiritual closeness to us as we celebrated the wonderful deeds that God, the source

of all good, accomplished through the Apostles Peter and Paul, patron saints of the Church of Rome.

The Apostles proclaimed to the ends of the earth, through their words and the sacrifice of their lives, what they themselves had seen, heard and experienced - the Word of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose for our salvation. Making our own this proclamation enables us to enter into communion with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, which is the very foundation of the communion that already unites those baptized in the name of the Most Holy Trinity (cf. *1Jn* 1:1-3). Catholics and Orthodox, by professing together the dogmas of the first seven Ecumenical Councils, by believing in the efficacy of the Eucharist and the other sacraments, and by preserving the apostolic succession of the ministry of bishops, experience already a profound closeness with one another (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15). Today, in thanksgiving to the God of love, in obedience to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ and in fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles, we recognize how urgent it is to grow towards full and visible communion.

It is a source of joy to learn that on the eve of the feast of Saint Andrew, during a meeting attended by Your Holiness, the fiftieth anniversary of the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Phanar on 25 July 1967 was commemorated. That historic moment of communion between the Pastors of the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople brings to mind the words of Patriarch Athenagoras in welcoming Pope Paul VI to the Patriarchal Church of Saint George, where you are gathered today. I believe that these words can continue to inspire the dialogue between our Churches: "Let us join together what was divided, wherever this is possible, by deeds in which both Churches are involved, giving added strength to the matters of faith and canonical discipline which we have in common. Let us conduct the theological dialogue according to the principle [of] full community in the fundamentals of the faith, liberty both in theological thought, where this is pious and edifying and inspired by the main body of the Fathers, and in variety of local customs, as was favoured by the Church from the beginning" (*Tomos Agapis*, Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970), pp. 382-383).

I offer my heartfelt gratitude to Your Holiness for the generous and warm hospitality extended by the Metropolis of Leros of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, under the pastoral care of His Eminence Paisios, to the members of the Coordinating Committee of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. I wish to encourage anew this theological dialogue. The consensus reached by Catholics and Orthodox on certain fundamental theological principles regulating the relationship between primacy and synodality in the life of the Church in the first millennium can serve to evaluate, even critically, some theological categories and practices which evolved during the second millennium in conformity with those principles. Such consensus may enable us to envisage a common way of understanding the exercise of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, in the context of synodality and at the service of the communion of the Church in the present context. This sensitive task needs to be pursued in an atmosphere of mutual openness and, above all, in obedience to the demands that the Holy Spirit makes of the Church.

Your Holiness, beloved brother in Christ, in recent months I have followed with great interest your participation in significant international events held throughout the world regarding the care of creation, peaceful coexistence among peoples of

different cultures and religious traditions, and the presence of Christians in the Middle East. Your Holiness's commitment is a source of inspiration, support and encouragement for me personally for, as you well know, we share these same concerns. It is my fervent hope that Catholics and Orthodox may promote joint initiatives at the local level with regard to these issues, for there are many contexts in which Orthodox and Catholics can already work together without waiting for the day of full and visible communion.

With the assurance of my continued remembrance in prayer, it is with sentiments of warm affection that I exchange with Your Holiness a fraternal embrace of peace.

### **Greeting of Patriarch Bartholomew**

Your Eminence and beloved brother in Christ,

Kurt Cardinal Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity,  
Dear members of the Official Delegation of the sister Church of Elder Rome,

It is with fraternal love that we greet your presence here at the Phanar. These visits are not simply formalities, but rather opportunities to communicate face to face. Today, our meeting in and of itself constitutes a contribution to the dialogue of our Churches.

Some four decades have passed since the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue commenced its deliberations between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, and we rejoice in the dialogue's progress. Hitherto the dialogue has focused on what unites us. The Chieti statement clearly formulated what we confess with one mouth and one heart as a common legacy on essential matters, such as primacy and synodality, according to the first millennium of the Church's historical journey. "Throughout the first millennium, the Church in the East and the West was united in preserving the apostolic faith, maintaining the apostolic succession of bishops, developing structures of synodality inseparably linked with primacy, and in an understanding of authority as a service (*diakonia*) of love" (§20). This common inheritance constitutes a central point of reference and a source of inspiration for Orthodox and Roman Catholics on our journey towards unity that we so deeply desire today.

However, it appears that the time has come for us to be diligently concerned with the obstacles related to the restoration of full communion between our Churches, not in order to return to the futile conflicts of the past, but rather together to analyze these issues and be steered toward solutions acceptable to both sides. For this reason, we congratulate the Coordinating Committee of the Theological Dialogue, which convened and deliberated last September on the island of Leros, reaching a conclusion in formulating the central theme for the next phase of the dialogue, namely: "Toward Unity in Faith: Theological and Canonical Challenges", while proposing to draft a text entitled: "Primacy and Synodality in the Second Millennium and Today". We commend the efforts of the Co-Chairmen and members of the Joint International Committee for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church, and we express our appreciation to the participants for all that they have offered and continue to offer.

For an entire millennium, the Church was united in faith, in the Holy Chalice of the Eucharist, in piety, in holiness of life and in ministry. It is this unity that we strive to rediscover through the dialogue of truth in love, which began thanks to the blessed

initiative of our memorable Predecessors and has already borne fruit in a variety of ways, advancing in a spirit of mutual trust, without reductionist outbursts that do not serve the work of unity.

We express our joy and satisfaction for the fact that the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church that convened in Crete raised its “common awareness of the necessity for conducting inter-Christian theological dialogue” (*Relations of the Orthodox Church with the Rest of the Christian World*, §23), wherein “the common goal of all is the ultimate restoration of unity in true faith and love” (§12). “This dialogue should always be accompanied by witness to the world through acts expressing mutual understanding and love” as well as by the effort of “all Christians, inspired by common fundamental principles of the Gospel, to attempt to offer with eagerness and solidarity a response to the thorny problems of the contemporary world, based on the prototype of the new man in Christ” (§23). Common witness and common initiatives, in the face of the numerous challenges of our contemporary world, always aspire to the benefit of humankind and the peace of the world, while reinforcing our journey toward unity.

It is in this spirit that, last April in Cairo, we participated with His Holiness Pope Francis in the International Conference on Global Peace, organized by the Islamic Al-Azhar University and the Muslim Council of elders, where we stated the following: “We are convinced that the contribution of religions remains definitive in our common search for peace. After all, for religions, genuine peace in the world is not simply the absence of military conflict, but essentially the presence of freedom, justice and solidarity. Religions must guide people to the depth of this truth, to a change of mind and life, as well as to mutual understanding. This is indeed the core of our religious traditions. For this reason, humanity is entitled to expect from us more than we are presently giving. The greatest challenge for religions is to develop their potential for love, solidarity and compassion. That is what humanity expects from religion today.”

Our visit to Egypt and our prayer for peace, justice and reconciliation, demonstrated that violence constitutes a denial of the fundamental principles of religion, and that religious faith does not excuse humanity from its responsibility for a more compassionate world, for the protection of people’s dignity and of God-given freedom. More recently, on the occasion of the World Day of Prayer for Creation on September 1<sup>st</sup>, we issued a Joint Message with Pope Francis, where we highlighted our concern for the common household of humanity, as well as for the negative social consequences resulting from a degradation of the natural environment – for all people in general, but especially for the more vulnerable inhabitants of our planet. The Joint Message concludes as follows: “We urgently appeal to those in positions of social and economic, as well as political and cultural, responsibility to hear the cry of the earth and to attend to the needs of the marginalized, but above all to respond to the plea of millions and support the consensus of the world for the healing of our wounded creation. We are convinced that there can be no sincere and enduring resolution to the challenge of the ecological crisis and climate change unless the response is concerted and collective, unless the responsibility is shared and accountable, unless we give priority to solidarity and service.”

Our Churches are obligated to function as a positive challenge for the world, providing answers to existential questions and keeping the gates of heaven open. Modern man believes that it is possible to attribute his own desired meaning to life.

While we do not consider it appropriate for us to judge contemporary culture exclusively on the grounds of “sinful criteria”, as if ours is the supreme period of disdainful values, we wish to underline that the contemporary effort, especially in the secularized West, to alienate oneself from God – dismissing faith in God as lack of freedom and identifying rejection of faith or even God with supreme independence – constitutes a modern expression of the original sin, which was the attempt by Adam and Eve to discover freedom far from or without God. For us Christians, true freedom and blessedness are achieved through faith in God and the observance of His commandments. There is no true meaning outside of the liberating Truth. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (*Jn* 8:32). Christ is the Truth; and the life in Christ is “speaking the truth in love” (*Eph* 4:15).

With these thoughts and fraternal sentiments, we wholeheartedly welcome you to the feast of our Sacred Center of Orthodoxy. We express our sincere gratitude to His Holiness Pope Francis of Rome for sending his venerable Delegation to Phanar for our Thronal Feast. We entreat our Lord Jesus Christ, through the intercessions of the founders of our Churches and brother Apostles, Saints Andrew and Peter, the unwavering preachers of faith and imitators of His passion, to bless the Gold-pleasing ministry and work of the Churches of Elder and New Rome, for the glory of our benevolent God who is worshiped in Trinity.

—

## HOMILIES

### Vespers Concluding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2017 at Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls (25 January 2017)

*Every person is called “to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation in word and deed, to live and bear witness to a reconciled life”. Pope Francis offered this reflection in his Homily at the traditional Ecumenical celebration of Second Vespers on the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, concluding the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The celebration took place at the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls on Wednesday evening, 25 January 2017. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s homily, which he delivered in Italian.*

#### Homily of Pope Francis

Encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus radically transformed the life of Saint Paul. Henceforth, for him, the meaning of life would no longer consist in trusting in his own ability to observe the Law strictly, but rather in cleaving with his whole being to the gracious and unmerited love of God: to Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Paul experienced the inbreaking of a new life, life in the Spirit. By the power of the risen Lord, he came to know forgiveness, confidence and consolation. Nor could Paul keep this newness to himself. He was compelled by grace to proclaim the good news of the love and reconciliation that God offers fully in Christ to all humanity.

For the Apostle of the Gentiles, reconciliation with God, whose ambassador he became (cf. *2 Cor* 5:20), is a gift from Christ. This is evident in the text of the Second Letter to the Corinthians which inspired the theme of this year’s Week of

Prayer for Christian Unity: “*Reconciliation – The Love of Christ Compels Us*” (cf. *2 Cor* 5:14-20). “The love of Christ”: this is not our love *for* Christ, but rather Christ’s love *for us*. Nor is the reconciliation to which we are compelled simply our own initiative. Before all else it is *the reconciliation that God offers us in Christ*. Prior to any human effort on the part of believers who strive to overcome their divisions, it is God’s free gift. As a result of this gift, each person, forgiven and loved, is called in turn to proclaim *the Gospel of reconciliation* in word and deed, to live and bear witness to a reconciled life.



*Vespers concluding Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 25 January 2017*

© Vatican Media

Today, in the light of this, we can ask: How do we proclaim this Gospel of reconciliation after centuries of division? Paul himself helps us to find the way. He makes clear that reconciliation in Christ *requires sacrifice*. Jesus gave his life by dying for all. Similarly, ambassadors of reconciliation are called, in his name, to lay down their lives, to live no more for themselves but for Christ who died and was raised for them (cf. *2 Cor* 5:14-15). As Jesus teaches, it is only when we lose our lives for love of him that we truly save them (cf. *Lk* 9:24). This was the revolution experienced by Paul, but it is, and always has been, the Christian revolution. We live no longer for ourselves, for our own interests and “image”, but in the image of Christ, *for him and following him, with his love and in his love*.

For the Church, for every Christian confession, this is an invitation not to be caught up with programmes, plans and advantages, not to look to the prospects and fashions of the moment, but rather to find the way by constantly looking to the Lord’s cross. For there we discover our programme of life. It is an invitation to leave behind every form of isolation, to overcome all those temptations to self-absorption that prevent us from perceiving how the Holy Spirit is at work outside our familiar surroundings. Authentic reconciliation between Christians will only be achieved when we can acknowledge each other’s gifts and learn from one another, with humility and docility, without waiting for the others to learn first.

If we experience this dying to ourselves for Jesus’ sake, our old way of life will be a thing of the past and, like Saint Paul, we will pass over to a new form of life and fellowship. With Paul, we will be able to say: “the old has passed away” (*2 Cor* 5:17). To look back is helpful, and indeed necessary, to purify our memory, but to be fixated on the past, lingering over the memory of wrongs done and endured, and judging in

merely human terms, can paralyze us and prevent us from living in the present. The word of God encourages us to draw strength from memory and to recall the good things the Lord has given us. But it also asks us to leave the past behind in order to follow Jesus today and to live a new life in him. Let us allow him, who makes all things new (cf. *Rev* 21:5), to unveil before our eyes a new future, open to the hope that does not disappoint, a future in which divisions can be overcome and believers, renewed in love, will be fully and visibly one.

This year, in our journey on the road to unity, we recall in a special way the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation. The fact that Catholics and Lutherans can nowadays join in commemorating an event that divided Christians, and can do so with hope, placing the emphasis on Jesus and his work of atonement, is a remarkable achievement, thanks to God and prayer, and the result of fifty years of growing mutual knowledge and ecumenical dialogue.

As we implore from God the gift of reconciliation with him and with one another, I extend cordial and fraternal greetings to His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios, the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, to His Grace David Moxon, the personal representative in Rome of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and to all the representatives of the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities gathered here. I am especially pleased to greet the members of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and to offer my good wishes for the fruitfulness of the plenary session taking place in these days. I also greet the students of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey – how joyful they are! I met them this morning; they are visiting Rome to deepen their knowledge of the Catholic Church. Also, the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox young people studying in Rome thanks to the scholarships provided by the Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration with the Orthodox Churches, based in the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. To the superiors and staff of this Dicastery I express my esteem and gratitude.

Dear brothers and sisters, our prayer for Christian unity is a sharing in Jesus' own prayer to the Father, on the eve of his passion, "that they may all be one" (*Jn* 17:21). May we never tire of asking God for this gift. With patient and trusting hope that the Father will grant all Christians the gift of full visible communion, let us press forward in our journey of reconciliation and dialogue, encouraged by the heroic witness of our many brothers and sisters, past and present, who were one in suffering for the name of Jesus. May we take advantage of every occasion that Providence offers us to pray together, to proclaim together, and together to love and serve, especially those who are the most poor and neglected in our midst.

ORE, 27 January 2017

—

### **Vigil on the eve of the Solemnity of Pentecost, Circus Maximus, Rome (3 June 2017)**

*"Even while showing that we have differences ... we wish it to be a reconciled diversity". Pope Francis emphasized this hope as he presided on Saturday evening, 3 June, at the prayer vigil organized by International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services and the Catholic Fraternity, as part of the*

*celebrations for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. We publish below excerpts of the Holy Father's reflection originally delivered in Italian.*

### **Address of Pope Francis**

Brothers and Sisters,

[...] Today we are here in a kind of Upper Room beneath the open sky, unafraid, under the open sky and with our hearts open to the promise of the Father. “All of us who believe” have gathered here, all of us who confess that “Jesus is Lord”. Many have come from different parts of the world, and the Holy Spirit has brought us together to build bonds of fraternal friendship that encourage us on our journey towards unity, unity for mission. Not to stand still! But for mission, to proclaim that Jesus is Lord – *Jesús es el Señor*. To proclaim together the love of the Father for all his children. To proclaim the Good News to all peoples. To demonstrate that peace is possible. It is not so easy to show this world today that peace is possible, but in the name of Jesus we can show by our testimony that peace is possible! It is possible if we are at peace with one another. If we emphasize our differences, we are at war among ourselves and we cannot proclaim peace. Peace is possible, based on our confession that Jesus is Lord and on our evangelization along this path. It is possible. Even by showing that we have differences – this is obvious, we have differences – but that we desire to be a *reconciled diversity*. We should not forget that phrase, but say it to everyone: reconciled diversity. The phrase is not mine. It comes from a Lutheran brother. Reconciled diversity. [...]

We have assembled here from 120 countries throughout the world, to celebrate the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit in the Church that occurred fifty years ago and started... an institution? No. An organization? No. A flood of grace, the flood of grace of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. A work that was born... Catholic? No. It was born ecumenical! It was born ecumenical because it is the Holy Spirit who creates unity, and the same Spirit who granted the inspiration for this. It is important to read the works of Cardinal Suenens on this: it is very important! [...]

Today we have chosen to assemble here, in this place – as Pastor Traettino said – because here, during the persecutions, Christians were martyred for the entertainment of onlookers. Today there are more martyrs than then! Today there are more martyrs, Christians. Those who kill Christians do not ask them first: Are you Orthodox? Are you Catholic? Are you Evangelical? Are you Lutheran? Are you Calvinist? No. They ask if they are Christians, and when they say yes, they immediately slit their throats. Today there are more martyrs than in the early times. This is the ecumenism of blood. The witness of our martyrs today brings us together. In different parts of the world, Christian blood is being shed! Today Christian unity is more urgent than ever, Christians united by the power of the Holy Spirit, in prayer and in activity on behalf of the most vulnerable. To walk together, to work together, to love one another, and together to seek to explain our differences, to come to agreement, but as we keep walking! If we stop walking, we will never come to agreement. So it is, because the Spirit wants us to keep walking. [...]

The most precious gift that all of us have received is Baptism. And now the Spirit is leading us on this journey of conversion sweeping across the entire Christian world. It is one more reason why the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is a privileged place for pursuing the path to unity! [...]

To share baptism in the Holy Spirit with everyone in the Church, to praise the Lord unceasingly, to walk together with Christians of different Churches and Ecclesial Communities in prayer and activity on behalf of those in greatest need, to serve the poor and the sick. This is what the Church and the Pope expect from you, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, but also from everyone here: all of you who have become part of this flood of grace! Thank you!

ORE, 9 June 2017

---

## APOSTOLIC JOURNEYS

### Apostolic Journey of Pope Francis to Egypt (28-29 April 2017)

#### Speech of the Holy Father during the courtesy visit to His Holiness Pope Tawadros (28 April 2017)

The Lord is risen, he is truly risen!  
Al Massih kam, bilhakika kam!

Your Holiness, Dear Brother,

Only a short time has passed since the great Solemnity of Easter, the heart of the Christian life, which we were blessed this year to celebrate on the same day. We thus joined in proclaiming the Easter message and, in a sense, relived the experience of the first disciples who together “rejoiced when they saw the Lord” that day (*Jn* 20:20). This paschal joy is today made all the more precious by the gift of our joining to worship the Risen One in prayer and by our renewed exchange, in his name, of the holy kiss and embrace of peace. For this, I am deeply grateful: in coming here as a pilgrim, I was sure of receiving the blessing of a brother who awaited me. I have eagerly looked forward to this new meeting, for I vividly recall the visit Your Holiness made to Rome shortly after my election, on 10 May 2013. That date has happily become the occasion for celebrating an annual *Day of Friendship between Copts and Catholics*.

As we joyfully progress on our ecumenical journey, I wish particularly to recall that milestone in relations between the Sees of Peter and Mark which is the *Common Declaration* signed by our predecessors more than forty years ago, on 10 May 1973. After “centuries of difficult history” marked by increasing “theological differences, nourished and widened by non-theological factors”, and growing mistrust, we were able that day, with God’s help, to acknowledge together that Christ is “perfect God with respect to his divinity and perfect man with respect to his humanity” (*Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III*, 10 May 1973). Yet equally important and timely are the words that immediately precede this statement, in which we acknowledge Jesus Christ as “our Lord and God and Saviour and King”. With these words, the See of Mark and the See of Peter proclaimed the lordship of Jesus: together we confessed that we belong to Jesus and that he is *our all*.

What is more, we realized that, because we belong to him, we can no longer think that each can go his own way, for that would betray his will that his disciples “all be one... so that the world may believe” (*Jn* 17:21). In the sight of God, who wishes us to be “perfectly one” (v. 23), it is no longer possible to take refuge behind the pretext of differing interpretations, much less of those centuries of history and traditions that estranged us one from the other. In the words of His Holiness John Paul II, “there is no time to lose in this regard! Our communion in the one Lord Jesus Christ, in the one Holy Spirit and in one baptism already represents a deep and fundamental reality” (*Address at the Ecumenical Meeting*, 25 February 2000). Consequently, not only is there an ecumenism of gestures, words and commitment, but *an already effective communion* that grows daily in living relation with the Lord Jesus, is rooted in the faith we profess and is truly grounded on our baptism and our being made a “new creation” (cf. *2 Cor* 5:17) in him. In a word, there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (*Eph* 4:5). Hence, we constantly set out anew, in order to hasten that eagerly awaited day when we will be in full and visible communion around the altar of the Lord.

In this exciting journey, which – like life itself – is not always easy and straightforward, but on which the Lord exhorts us to persevere, we are not alone. We are accompanied by a great host of saints and martyrs who, already fully one, impel us here below to be a living image of the “Jerusalem above” (*Gal* 4:26). Among them, surely Peter and Mark in particular rejoice in our encounter today. Great is the bond uniting them. We need only think of the fact that Saint Mark put at the heart of his Gospel Peter’s profession of faith: “You are the Christ”. It was the answer to Jesus ever urgent question: “But who do you say that I am?” (*Mk* 8:29). Today too, many people cannot answer this question; there are even few people who can raise it, and above all few who can answer it with the joy of knowing Jesus, that same joy with which we have the grace of confessing him together.

Together, then, we are called to bear witness to him, to carry our faith to the world, especially in the way it is meant to be brought: by living it, so that Jesus’ presence can be communicated with life and speak the language of gratuitous and concrete love. As Coptic Orthodox and Catholics, we can always join in speaking this common language of charity: before undertaking a charitable work, we would do well to ask if we can do it together with our brothers and sisters who share our faith in Jesus. Thus, by building communion in the concreteness of a daily lived witness, the Spirit will surely open providential and unexpected paths to unity.

It is with this constructive apostolic spirit that Your Holiness continues to show a genuine and fraternal attention for the Coptic Catholic Church. I am most grateful for this closeness, which has found praiseworthy expression in the *National Council of Christian Churches*, which you have established so that believers in Jesus can work together more closely for the benefit of Egyptian society as a whole. I also greatly appreciated the generous hospitality offered to the thirteenth Meeting of the *International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches*, which took place here last year at your invitation. It is a promising sign that the following meeting took place this year in Rome, as if to bespeak a particular continuity between the Sees of Mark and Peter.

In the sacred Scriptures, Peter seems in some way to reciprocate the affection of Mark by calling him “my son” (*1 Pet* 5:13). But the Evangelist and his apostolic activity are also fraternally associated with Saint Paul, who, before dying a martyr in

Rome, mentions Mark's great usefulness in his ministry (cf. 2 *Tim* 4:11) and speaks of him frequently (cf. *Philem* 24; *Col* 4:10). *Fraternal charity* and *communion in mission*: these are the messages that the word of God and our own origins have bequeathed to us. They are the evangelical seeds that we rejoice to water together and, with God's help, to make grow (cf. 1 *Cor* 3:6-7).

The deepening progress of our ecumenical journey is also sustained, in a mysterious and quite relevant way, by a genuine *ecumenism of blood*. Saint John tells us that Jesus came "with water and blood" (1 *Jn* 5:6); whoever believes in him thus "overcomes the world" (1 *Jn* 5:5). With water and blood: by living a new life in our common baptism, a life of love always and for all, even at the cost of the sacrifice of one's life. How many martyrs in this land, from the first centuries of Christianity, have lived their faith heroically to the end, shedding their blood rather than denying the Lord and yielding to the enticements of evil, or merely to the temptation of repaying evil with evil! The venerable *Martyrology of the Coptic Church* bears eloquent witness to this. Even in recent days, tragically, the innocent blood of defenceless Christians was cruelly shed: their innocent blood unites us. Most dear brother, just as the heavenly Jerusalem is one, so too is our martyrology; your sufferings are also our sufferings. Strengthened by this witness, let us strive to oppose violence by preaching and sowing goodness, fostering concord and preserving unity, praying that all these sacrifices may open the way to a future of full communion between us and of peace for all.

The impressive history of holiness of this land is distinguished not only by the sacrifice of the martyrs. No sooner had the ancient persecutions ended, than a new and selfless form of life arose as a gift of the Lord: monasticism originated in the desert. Thus, the great signs that God had once worked in Egypt and at the Red Sea (cf. *Ps* 106:21-22) were followed by the miracle of a new life that made the desert blossom with sanctity. With veneration for this shared patrimony, I have come as a pilgrim to this land that the Lord himself loves to visit. For here, in his glory he came down upon Mount Sinai (cf. *Ex* 24:16), and here, in his humility, he found refuge as a child (cf. *Mt* 2:14).

Your Holiness, dearest brother, may the same Lord today grant us to set out together as pilgrims of communion and messengers of peace. On this journey, may the Virgin Mary take us by the hand, she who brought Jesus here, and whom the great Egyptian theological tradition has from of old acclaimed as *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. In this title, humanity and divinity are joined, for in his Mother, God became forever man. May the Blessed Virgin, who constantly leads us to Jesus, the perfect symphony of divine and human, bring yet once more a bit of heaven to our earth.

ORE, 5 May 2017

### **Common declaration of His Holiness Francis and His Holiness Tawadros II**

1. We, Francis, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, give thanks to God in the Holy Spirit for granting us the joyful opportunity to meet once more, to exchange a fraternal embrace and to join again in common prayer. We glorify the Almighty for the bonds of fraternity and friendship existing between the See of Saint Peter and the See of Saint Mark. The privilege of being together here in Egypt is a sign that the solidity of

our relationship is increasing year by year, and that we are growing in closeness, faith and love of Christ our Lord. We give thanks to God for this beloved Egypt, the “homeland that lives inside us,” as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III used to say, the “people blessed by God” (cf. *Is* 19:25) with its ancient Pharaonic civilization, the Greek and Roman heritage, the Coptic tradition and the Islamic presence. Egypt is the place where the Holy Family found refuge, a land of martyrs and saints.

2. Our deep bond of friendship and fraternity has its origin in the full communion that existed between our Churches in the first centuries and was expressed in many different ways through the early Ecumenical Councils, dating back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 and the contribution of the courageous Church Father Saint Athanasius, who earned the title “Protector of the Faith”. Our communion was expressed through prayer and similar liturgical practices, the veneration of the same martyrs and saints, and in the development and spread of monasticism, following the example of the great Saint Anthony, known as the Father of all monks. This common experience of communion before the time of separation has a special significance in our efforts to restore full communion today. Most of the relations which existed in the early centuries between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church have continued to the present day in spite of divisions, and have recently been revitalized. They challenge us to intensify our common efforts to persevere in the search for visible unity in diversity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3. We recall with gratitude the historic meeting forty-four years ago between our predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Pope Shenouda III, in an embrace of peace and fraternity, after many centuries when our mutual bonds of love were not able to find expression due to the distance that had arisen between us. The Common Declaration they signed on 10 May 1973 represented a milestone on the path of ecumenism, and served as a starting point for the Commission for Theological Dialogue between our two Churches, which has borne much fruit and opened the way to a broader dialogue between the Catholic Church and the whole family of Oriental Orthodox Churches. In that Declaration, our Churches acknowledged that, in line with the apostolic tradition, they profess “one faith in the One Triune God” and “the divinity of the Only-begotten Son of God ... perfect God with respect to his divinity, perfect man with respect to his humanity”. It was also acknowledged that “the divine life is given to us and is nourished in us through the seven sacraments” and that “we venerate the Virgin Mary, Mother of the True Light”, the “*Theotokos*”.

4. With deep gratitude we recall our own fraternal meeting in Rome on 10 May 2013, and the establishment of 10 May as the day when each year we deepen the friendship and brotherhood between our Churches. This renewed spirit of closeness has enabled us to discern once more that the bond uniting us was received from our one Lord on the day of our Baptism. For it is through Baptism that we become members of the one Body of Christ that is the Church (cf. *1 Cor* 12:13). This common heritage is the basis of our pilgrimage together towards full communion, as we grow in love and reconciliation.

5. We are aware that we still have far to go on this pilgrimage, yet we recall how much has already been accomplished. In particular, we call to mind the meeting between Pope Shenouda III and Saint John Paul II, who came as a pilgrim to Egypt during the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. We are determined to follow in their footsteps, moved by the love of Christ the good Shepherd, in the profound conviction that by walking together, we grow in unity. May we draw our strength from God, the perfect source of communion and love.

6. This love finds its deepest expression in common prayer. When Christians pray together, they come to realize that what unites them is much greater than what divides them. Our longing for unity receives its inspiration from the prayer of Christ “that all may be one” (*Jn 17:21*). Let us deepen our shared roots in the one apostolic faith by praying together and by seeking common translations of the Lord’s Prayer and a common date for the celebration of Easter.

7. As we journey towards the blessed day when we will at last gather at the same Eucharistic table, we can cooperate in many areas and demonstrate in a tangible way the great richness which already unites us. We can bear witness together to fundamental values such as the sanctity and dignity of human life, the sacredness of marriage and the family, and respect for all of creation, entrusted to us by God. In the face of many contemporary challenges such as secularization and the globalization of indifference, we are called to offer a shared response based on the values of the Gospel and the treasures of our respective traditions. In this regard, we are encouraged to engage in a deeper study of the Oriental and Latin Fathers, and to promote a fruitful exchange in pastoral life, especially in catechesis, and in mutual spiritual enrichment between monastic and religious communities.

8. Our shared Christian witness is a grace-filled sign of reconciliation and hope for Egyptian society and its institutions, a seed planted to bear fruit in justice and peace. Since we believe that all human beings are created in the image of God, we strive for serenity and concord through a peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims, thus bearing witness to God’s desire for the unity and harmony of the entire human family and the equal dignity of each human being. We share a concern for the welfare and the future of Egypt. All members of society have the right and duty to participate fully in the life of the nation, enjoying full and equal citizenship and collaborating to build up their country. Religious freedom, including freedom of conscience, rooted in the dignity of the person, is the cornerstone of all other freedoms. It is a sacred and inalienable right.

9. Let us intensify our unceasing prayer for all Christians in Egypt and throughout the whole world, and especially in the Middle East. The tragic experiences and the blood shed by our faithful who were persecuted and killed for the sole reason of being Christian, remind us all the more that the ecumenism of martyrdom unites us and encourages us along the way to peace and reconciliation. For, as Saint Paul writes: “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (*1 Cor 12:26*).

10. The mystery of Jesus who died and rose out of love lies at the heart of our journey towards full unity. Once again, the martyrs are our guides. In the early Church the blood of the martyrs was the seed of new Christians. So too in our own day, may the blood of so many martyrs be the seed of unity among all Christ's disciples, a sign and instrument of communion and peace for the world.

11. In obedience to the work of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies the Church, keeps her throughout the ages, and leads her to full unity – that unity for which Jesus Christ prayed:

Today we, Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II, in order to please the heart of the Lord Jesus, as well as that of our sons and daughters in the faith, mutually declare that we, with one mind and heart, will seek sincerely not to repeat the baptism that has been administered in either of our Churches for any person who wishes to join the other. This we confess in obedience to the Holy Scriptures and the faith of the three Ecumenical Councils assembled in Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus.

We ask God our Father to guide us, in the times and by the means that the Holy Spirit will choose, to full unity in the mystical Body of Christ.

12. Let us, then, be guided by the teachings and the example of the Apostle Paul, who writes: “[Make] every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you too were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (*Eph* 4:3-6).

Cairo, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017

ORE, 5 May 2017



*Pope Francis and Pope Tawadros II sign Common Declaration, 28 April 2017*

© Vatican Media

## Return Flight Press Conference from Egypt to Rome

29 April 2017

*During the return flight from Egypt to Rome on Saturday 29 April, Pope Francis participated in the customary on-board question-and-answer session with journalists. The session was led by Greg Burke, Director of the Holy See Press Office, who thanked the Pontiff and invited him to the microphone. Before taking questions, the Pope greeted and thanked the press corps. We publish here an extract of the press conference.*

[...] Vera Shcherbakova (Itar-Tass):

Holy Father, I thank you, first of all for your blessing: you blessed me, I had knelt down a few minutes ago, here in the front. I am Orthodox and I do not see any contradiction... I wanted to ask you: what are the prospects for relations with the Orthodox – obviously Russian, but also, yesterday, in the Common Declaration with the Orthodox Coptic Patriarch – there is the date of Easter in common, and it also speaks about the recognition of Baptism... At what point are we? And one more thing: how do you evaluate the relations between the Vatican and Russia, as a State, also in light of the defence of the values of Middle Eastern Christians, especially in Syria?

Pope Francis:

*Christòs anèsti!* [Christ is Risen] Since Buenos Aires, I have always had a great friendship with the Orthodox. For example, every 6 January I would go to Vespers, in your Cathedral, to Patriarch Plato – who now is in the area of Ukraine, he is the Archbishop – two hours and forty minutes in a language that I did not understand, but I was able to pray well! And then there was dinner with the community, three hundred people, a Christmas Eve dinner – not Christmas dinner but for the Vigil – they were still not able to eat dairy products or meat, but it was a wonderful meal... And then bingo and games... friendship. Also the other Orthodox. At times they needed legal assistance: they would come to the Catholic Chancery, because their community was small, and they came to see the lawyers... I always had a fraternal relationship: we are sister Churches. I have a special friendship with Patriarch Tawadros: for me he is a great man of God. Tawadros is a Patriarch, a Pope who will take the Church forward, the name of Jesus forward... He has great apostolic zeal. He is one of the most, allow me to use the word but in inverted commas, “fanatical” in finding a fixed date for Easter. Me too but... we’re trying to find a way. He says “we struggle on, we struggle on!” He is a man of God. He is a man who, as a bishop far away from Egypt, used to feed disabled persons; he is a man who was sent to a diocese with five churches and he left twenty-five, with I’m not sure with how many Christian families, and he did this with apostolic zeal. You know how their election works; they find three, they are chosen, and then their names are put into a bag, a child is called up with eyes bandaged and picks out a name... and there is the Lord! Clearly he is a great Patriarch. The unity of baptism moves forward. The blame, regarding baptism, has historical roots, because during the time of the first Councils it was shared. Afterwards, because the Coptic Christians baptized children in sanctuaries, when they wanted to get married and came to us to marry a Catholic, they were asked for proof which they didn’t have, and so they were baptized conditionally: it was us, therefore, who started this practice, not them. But now the door has been opened and we are on a right path to face this problem, to overcome it. In the Common declaration, the penultimate paragraph speaks about this.

The Russian Orthodox recognise our baptism and we recognise theirs. I was very friendly with the Bishop in Buenos Aires, with the Russians. Also with the Georgians, for example. The Patriarch of the Georgians is a man of God, Ilia II, a mystic! We Catholics must learn also from this tradition of mysticism in the Orthodox Churches. On this trip we had an ecumenical meeting: and Patriarch Bartholomew was also present, the Greek-Orthodox Patriarch was present, and there were other Christians: Anglicans, and the Secretary of the World Council of Churches in Geneva... Everything that contributes to ecumenism is in motion. Ecumenism is achieved by moving forward, with acts of charity, with the commitment to help, doing things together when things can be done together... There is no such thing as a static ecumenism. It is true that the theologians must study and agree amongst themselves, but this will never have a successful outcome unless we move forward. What can we do now? We must do what is possible: pray together, work together, exercise acts of charity together... But together! This is what it means to move forward. Relations with Patriarch Kirill are good, they are good. The Metropolitan Archbishop Hilarion has also come on several occasions to speak to me, and we have a good relationship. [...]

ORE, 5 May 2017

## **General Audience**

*3 May 2017*

*At the General Audience in Saint Peter's Square on Wednesday morning, 3 May, Pope Francis spoke of his recent visit to Egypt. Egypt is and has always been "a sign of hope, of refuge, of help", he said. The Holy Father gave thanks for his recent Apostolic journey to Egypt recalling the commitment to unity and spoke about the cultural and religious heritage that gives the nation a special role in the work of peacemaking. The following is an excerpt of the catechesis of the Holy Father which he originally delivered in Italian.*

[...] Christians in Egypt as in every nation on earth, are called to be the "leaven" of fraternity. This is possible if they live, within themselves, the Communion in Christ. Thank God, we were able to show a strong sign of communion with my dear Brother Pope Tawadros II, Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox. We renewed our commitment, also by signing a Common Declaration to journey together, and not to duplicate baptisms already received in the respective Churches. Together we prayed for the martyrs of the recent attacks that tragically struck that venerable Church; and their blood rendered fruitful that ecumenical encounter, in which Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the Ecumenical Patriarch, my dear Brother, also participated. [...]

ORE, 5 May 2017

## Letter of Pope Francis to Tawadros II

*On the day of friendship between the Coptic Orthodox and Catholic Churches, Francis sent a letter to Tawadros II, assuring his prayers for peace in Egypt and in the Middle East, and recalling his own recent visit to Cairo and His Holiness' visit to Rome on 10 May 2013. The following is the English text of the letter.*

To His Holiness  
Tawadros II  
Pope of Alexandria and  
Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark

Dear Brother,

After my visit to Egypt and the blessed encounter with Your Holiness in Cairo, and recalling the fourth anniversary of our fraternal meeting in Rome on 10 May 2013, I take this opportunity to offer my prayerful best wishes for your peace and health, as well as my joy and gratitude for the spiritual bonds uniting the See of Peter and the See of Mark.

I once more express my profound appreciation for your hospitality and for our moving meeting and common prayer as brothers in Christ. I am especially grateful that we have strengthened our baptismal unity in the body of Christ by declaring together “that we, with one mind and heart, will seek sincerely not to repeat the baptism that has been administered in either of our Churches for any person who wishes to join the other”. Our bonds of fraternity “challenge us to intensify our common efforts to persevere in the search for visible unity in diversity, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit”.

Along this path we are sustained by the powerful intercession and example of the martyrs. May we continue to advance together on our journey towards the same Eucharistic table, and grow in love and reconciliation.

I assure Your Holiness of my continued prayers for you, and for peace in Egypt and the Middle East. In this Easter season I pray that the Holy Spirit, the strength and tenderness of God, may fill our hearts with his grace and kindle in them the fire of his love. May the Spirit of peace bestow on us an increase of hope, friendship and harmony.

With these sentiments, on this special occasion which has rightly become known as the day of friendship between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, I exchange with Your Holiness a fraternal embrace of peace in Christ our Lord.

From the Vatican, 10 May 2017

Francis

ORE, 12 May 2017

## VISITS

### Visit to the Anglican Church of 'All Saints' in Rome (26 February 2017)

*Pope Francis made an historic visit to the Church of England chaplaincy of All Saints on Sunday, 26 February, as the first Pontiff to set foot inside an Anglican church in his own diocese as the Bishop of Rome. The event was part of All Saints' 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. During the afternoon encounter, the Pope joined the congregation for a short Choral Evensong service which included the blessing of a specially commissioned icon, and the twinning of the Anglican All Saints parish with the Ognissanti parish of Rome. The Holy Father delivered a homily during the liturgy, of which we publish the text here below.*

#### **Homily of Pope Francis**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I wish to thank you for your gracious invitation to celebrate this parish anniversary with you. More than two hundred years have passed since the first public Anglican liturgy was held in Rome for a group of English residents in this part of the city. A great deal has changed in Rome and in the world since then. In the course of these two centuries, much has also changed between Anglicans and Catholics, who in the past viewed each other with suspicion and hostility. Today, with gratitude to God, we recognize one another as we truly are: brothers and sisters in Christ, through our common baptism. As friends and pilgrims we wish to walk the path together, to follow our Lord Jesus Christ together.

You have invited me to bless the new icon of Christ the Saviour. Christ looks at us, and his gaze upon us is one of salvation, of love and compassion. It is the same merciful gaze which pierced the hearts of the Apostles, who left the past behind and



*Pope Francis visits All Saints Anglican Church in Rome, 26 February 2017*

© Vatican Media

began a journey of new life, in order to follow and proclaim the Lord. In this sacred image, as Jesus looks upon us, he seems also to call out to us, to make an appeal to us: “Are you ready to leave everything from your past for me? Do *you* want to make my love known, my mercy?” His gaze of divine mercy is the source of the whole Christian ministry. The Apostle Paul says this to us, through his words to the Corinthians which we have just heard. He writes: “Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart” (2 Cor 4:1). Our ministry flows forth from the mercy of God, which sustains our ministry and prevents it losing its vigour.

Saint Paul did not always have an easy relationship with the community at Corinth, as his letters show. There was also a painful visit to this community, with heated words exchanged in writing. But this passage shows Paul overcoming past differences. By living his ministry in the light of mercy received, he does not give up in the face of divisions, but devotes himself to reconciliation. When we, the community of baptized Christians, find ourselves confronted with disagreements and turn towards the merciful face of Christ to overcome it, it is reassuring to know that we are doing as Saint Paul did in one of the very first Christian communities.

How does Saint Paul grapple with this task, where does he begin? With humility, which is not only a beautiful virtue, but *a question of identity*. Paul sees himself as a servant, proclaiming not himself but Christ Jesus the Lord (2 Cor 4:5). And he carries out this service, this ministry according to the mercy shown him (2 Cor 4:1): not on the basis of his ability, nor by relying on his own strength, but by trusting that God is watching over him and sustaining his weakness with mercy. Becoming humble means drawing attention away from oneself, recognizing one’s dependence on God as a beggar of mercy: this is the starting point so that God may work in us. A past president of the World Council of Churches described Christian evangelization as “a beggar telling another beggar where he can find bread”. I believe Saint Paul would approve. He grasped the fact that he was “fed by mercy” and that his priority was to share his bread with others: the joy of being loved by the Lord, and of loving him.

This is our most precious good, our treasure, and it is in this context that Paul introduces one of his most famous images, one we can all apply to ourselves: “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (v. 7). We are but earthen vessels, yet we keep within us the greatest treasure in the world. The Corinthians knew well that it was foolish to preserve something precious in earthen vessels, which were inexpensive but cracked easily. Keeping something valuable in them meant running the risk of losing it. Paul, a graced sinner, humbly recognized that he was fragile, just like an earthen vessel. But he experienced and knew that it was precisely there that human misery opens itself to God’s merciful action; the Lord performs wonders. That is how the “extraordinary power” of God works (v. 7).

Trusting in this humble power, Paul serves the Gospel. Speaking of some of his adversaries in Corinth, he calls them “super apostles” (2 Cor 12:11), perhaps, and with a certain irony, because they had criticized him for his weaknesses even as they considered themselves observant, even perfect. Paul, on the other hand, teaches that only in realizing we are weak earthen vessels, sinners always in need of mercy, can the treasure of God be poured into us and through us upon others. Otherwise, we will merely be full of our treasures, which are corrupted and spoiled in seemingly beautiful vessels. If we recognize our weakness and ask for forgiveness, then the healing mercy

of God will shine in us and will be visible to those outside; others will notice in some way, through us, the gentle beauty of Christ's face.

At a certain point, perhaps in the most difficult moment with the community in Corinth, the Apostle Paul cancelled a visit he had planned to make there, also foregoing the offerings he would have received from them (*2 Cor* 1:15-24). Though tensions existed in their fellowship, these did not have the final word. The relationship was restored and Paul received the offering for the care of the Church in Jerusalem. The Christians in Corinth once again took up their work, together with the other communities which Paul visited, to sustain those in need. This is a powerful sign of renewed communion. The work that your community is carrying out together with other English-speaking communities here in Rome can be viewed in this light. True, solid communion grows and is built up when people work together for those in need. Through a united witness to charity, the merciful face of Jesus is made visible in our city.

As Catholics and Anglicans, we are humbly grateful that, after centuries of mutual mistrust, we are now able to recognize that the fruitful grace of Christ is at work also in others. We thank the Lord that among Christians the desire has grown for greater closeness, which is manifested in our praying together and in our common witness to the Gospel, above all in our various forms of service. At times, progress on our journey towards full communion may seem slow and uncertain, but today we can be encouraged by our gathering. For the first time, a Bishop of Rome is visiting your community. It is a grace and also a responsibility: the responsibility of strengthening our ties, to the praise of Christ, in service of the Gospel and of this city.

Let us encourage one another to become ever more faithful disciples of Jesus, always more liberated from our respective prejudices from the past and ever more desirous to pray for and with others. A good sign of this desire is the "twinning" taking place today between your parish of All Saints and the Ognissanti Catholic parish. May the saints of every Christian confession, fully united in the Jerusalem above, open for us here below the way to all the possible paths of a fraternal and shared Christian journey. Where we are united in the name of Jesus, he is there (cf. *Mt* 18:20), and turning his merciful gaze towards us, he calls us to devote ourselves fully in the cause of unity and love. May the face of God shine upon you, your families and this entire community!  
ORE, 3 March 2017

### **Exchange with Faithful of the Anglican Community present at the Celebration**

*Following the liturgy and prior to the exchange of gifts, the Pope answered the questions of three Anglican parishioners. The following is a translation of the exchange.*

Question:

Your Predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, warned against the risk, in ecumenical dialogue, of giving priority to cooperation in social initiatives rather than following the more demanding path of theological agreement. It appears that you prefer the contrary, that is, to "walk and work" together in order to reach the goal of Christian unity. Is this true?

Answer of Pope Francis:

I do not know the context in which Pope Benedict said this. I don't know, and so it is a little difficult for me. I cannot really answer this... Whether he meant to say this or not?... Perhaps it was during a conversation with theologians... But I am sure that both aspects are important. This is certain. Which of the two has priority?... And on the other hand, Patriarch Athenagoras' famous comment — which is true because I asked Patriarch Bartholomew and he said: "This is true" — when he said to Blessed Pope Paul VI: "Let us make unity together and leave the theologians on an island to think about it". It was a joke, but historically, it is accurate. I had doubts but Patriarch Bartholomew told me that it was true.

But what is the heart of the matter, because I believe that what Pope Benedict said is true: we must seek a theological dialogue in order to also seek the roots ... of the Sacraments ... of many issues on which we are still not in agreement. But this cannot be done in a laboratory: it must be done as we advance, along the way. We are on a journey, and as we journey, we also have these discussions. Theologians do this. But in the meantime, we help each other, we, one with the other, with our needs, in our lives; also spiritually we help each other. For example, in the 'twinning' [of the parishes] there was the fact of studying Scripture together, and we help each other in our charitable service, in service to the poor, in hospitals, in wars.... It is very important. This is very important. It is not possible to have ecumenical dialogue while standing still. No. Ecumenical dialogue is carried out as we walk, because ecumenical dialogue is a journey, and theological matters are discussed along the way. I believe this betrays neither the thought of Pope Benedict, nor the reality of ecumenical dialogue. This is my interpretation. If I knew the context in which that thought was expressed, I might say something different, but this is what comes to mind to say.

Question:

The Church of All Saints began with a group of British faithful, but is now an international congregation with people from various countries. In several regions of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, ecumenical relations between the Churches are better and more creative than here in Europe. What can we learn from the example of the Churches from the southern part of the world?

Answer of Pope Francis:

Thank you. It is true. The young Churches have a different vitality, because they are young. They are searching for a different means of expression. For example, a liturgy here in Rome, or consider London or Paris, is not the same as a liturgy in your country, where the liturgical ceremony, also Catholic, is expressed with joy, with dance and many diverse forms belonging to those young Churches. Young Churches have more creativity. And in the beginning it was the same here in Europe too: they were searching... When you read, for example in the *Didache*, how the Eucharist, the encounter among Christians, was celebrated, there was great creativity. Then as she grew, the Church became more consolidated, she matured into adulthood.

But young Churches have more vitality and they also have a need to cooperate, a considerable need. For example, I am studying, my collaborators are studying the possibility of a journey to South Sudan. Why? Because the Anglican, Presbyterian and Catholic Bishops, all three, came together to tell me: "Please, come to

South Sudan, just for one day, but do not come alone: come with Justin Welby, that is, with the Archbishop of Canterbury. This creativity came from them, the young Church. We are considering whether it can be done, whether the situation is too dangerous down there.... But we must do it because the three of them, together, want peace, and they are working together for peace....

There is a very interesting anecdote. When Blessed Paul VI beatified the Martyrs of Uganda — a young Church — among the martyrs, who were all young catechists, several were Catholic and others Anglican, and they were all martyred by the same king, in hatred of the faith, and because they did not want to follow the king's corrupt propositions. And Paul VI felt embarrassed, because he said: "I must beatify one and all; they are martyrs, one and all". But at that moment in the Catholic Church, it was not quite possible to do this. The Council had just taken place.... But today that young Church celebrates one and all together; Paul VI too, in the homily, in the discourse, in the beatification Mass, wanted to designate the Anglican martyrs of the faith at the same level as the Catholic catechists. This is what a young Church does. Young Churches have courage, because they are young. Like all young people, they have more courage than we, the not-so-young!

And then, my experience. I was a close friend of the Anglicans in Buenos Aires, because the back of the parish of Merced was adjacent to the Anglican cathedral. I was a close friend of Bishop Gregory Venables, a very good friend. But there is another experience: in northern Argentina there are Anglican missions with aborigines and Catholic missions with aborigines, and the Anglican Bishop and the Catholic Bishop work there together, and teach. When the people cannot go to the Catholic celebration on Sunday, they go to the Anglican celebration, and the Anglicans go to the Catholic one, because they do not want a Sunday to go by without a celebration. They work together. And here the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith knows this. And they do charity together. The two Bishops are friends and the two communities are friends.

I think this is a richness that our young Churches can bring to Europe and to the Churches that have a great tradition. They give us the soundness of a very well-developed and well-thought-out tradition. Ecumenism is easier, it is true, in the young Churches. It is true. But I think that — I'm going back to the second question — ecumenism in a more mature Church, more mature in research, is perhaps more sound in theological research, in the study of history, of theology, of the liturgy, as is the Church in Europe. And I think it would do us well, both Churches: to send some seminarians from here, from Europe, to gain pastoral experience in the young Churches; they learn a great deal. They come from the young Churches to study in Rome, at least the Catholics, we know that. But to send them to see, to learn from the young Churches would be a great richness in the sense that you have said. Ecumenism is easier there; it is easier, something which does not mean more superficial, no; it is not superficial. They do not negotiate the faith and identity. That aborigine tells you in northern Argentina: "I am Anglican". But [if] the bishop is not there, the parson is not there, the reverend is not there.... "I want to praise God on Sunday and I go to the Catholic cathedral", and vice versa. This is the richness of young Churches. I don't know, this is what comes to mind to say to you.

ORE, 3 March 2017

# ACTIVITIES OF THE DICASTERY

## CARDINAL PRESIDENT

### PAPERS

**Discours à l'occasion du premier anniversaire de la rencontre du Pape François  
et du Patriarche Kirill à La Havane, le 12 février 2016  
Université de Fribourg, 12 février 2017**

Éminence,  
Excellences,  
Mesdames et Messieurs les représentants des autorités civiles et académiques,  
Chers Pères, Frères et Sœurs,  
Chers amis,

Avant toute chose, je voudrais remercier de tout cœur la Conférence des évêques suisses, et en premier lieu son Président, S.E. Mgr Charles Morerod, Évêque de ce lieu, d'avoir bien voulu accueillir sous son égide ce premier anniversaire de la rencontre historique de Leurs Saintetés le Pape François et le Patriarche Kirill de Moscou et de toute la Russie. Ma gratitude va aussi à l'Institut d'Études Œcuménique de l'Université de Fribourg et tout spécialement à la Professeur Barbara Hallensleben pour avoir pris en charge l'organisation concrète, en des temps très brefs, de cet événement. Cette Université est d'ailleurs un point commun entre le Métropolitain Hilarion et moi-même, puisque j'ai brièvement enseigné ici et que le Métropolitain y est professeur titulaire. Il m'est donc particulièrement agréable de célébrer cet anniversaire en ce lieu – un lieu certes, moins exotique que Cuba, mais dont l'engagement œcuménique, aussi bien dans les relations académiques que dans les rapports d'amitié avec nos frères orthodoxes, est vraiment remarquable.

Les brèves remarques qui suivent porteront sur la rencontre de La Havane elle-même, puis sur la *Déclaration commune*, et enfin sur les perspectives ouvertes par cet événement historique dans les relations entre nos Églises.

#### **La rencontre elle-même**

Un des passages bibliques les plus fréquemment cités par le Pape François dans le domaine œcuménique est celui de Joseph et de ses frères. Envoyés par leur père en Égypte pour y acheter du grain, les fils de Jacob se mettent en chemin. Mais au lieu de trouver de la nourriture, ils y retrouvent Joseph, le frère qu'ils avaient perdu. Cette histoire est racontée par le Pape François comme un exemple du chemin qu'il est nécessaire de faire pour retrouver la fraternité, pour permettre la rencontre. Elle est

typique de la « culture de la rencontre » dont le Saint-Père se fait le promoteur dans tous les domaines, en particulier dans celui des relations entre chrétiens. Le chemin commencé nous conduit parfois à des rencontres imprévues, à des lieux inattendus.

Il y a un an précisément, le 12 février, pour la première fois dans l'histoire, un Pape et un Patriarche de Moscou se rencontraient. Il me plaît à penser que cette rencontre historique eut lieu à quelques jours de la fête orthodoxe de la Présentation, célébrée le 15 février selon le calendrier julien et appelée en Orient, précisément, « Fête de la Rencontre », parce qu'elle symbolise la rencontre de l'Ancienne et de la Nouvelle Alliance et surtout la rencontre de Dieu avec son Peuple. Au cœur de toute rencontre humaine authentique doit se trouver cette Rencontre fondamentale, source de toutes les autres, de Dieu avec nous.

De façon surprenante, cette rencontre des primats des deux plus nombreuses Eglises du continent européen n'eut pas lieu en Europe, mais à Cuba. Même si la providentielle coïncidence des voyages a joué son rôle, ce choix inattendu n'a pas été entièrement le fruit du hasard. Le Patriarche Kirill l'a justifié par le désir que la rencontre ait lieu loin d'un continent qui pourrait apparaître comme le symbole des polémiques et des divisions entre chrétiens – comme l'exprime d'ailleurs la *Déclaration commune* elle-même : « Loin des vieilles querelles de l'« Ancien Monde » » (§ 3).

Le choix de Cuba correspond bien aussi à l'attention portée par le Pape François aux périphéries et à son regard décentré sur l'Europe. Ce regard fut à juste titre appelé « regard de Magellan ». L'expression vient d'une interview dans laquelle le Saint-Père explique que, « lorsque Magellan arriva au bout du monde américain, il regarda l'Europe de ce point qu'il avait atteint et il comprit quelque chose d'autre ». Ce n'est pas un hasard si le Saint-Père a choisi les endroits les plus périphériques pour comprendre l'Europe : Lampedusa, Tirana, Sarajevo, Lesbos, Erevan, Tbilissi, Bakou et Lund. Il s'agit pour lui de décentrer le regard, comme il l'explique dans la même interview : « La réalité se voit mieux de la périphérie que du centre ». L'autoréférentialité est souvent citée par le Pape François comme une des causes profondes de la division des chrétiens. Renoncer à l'autoréférentialité, telle pourrait être une première leçon de la rencontre de La Havane.

Mais au-delà de sa position excentrée par rapport à l'Ancien Monde, Cuba, pour le Pape François, a aussi une signification particulière comme lieu par excellence de la rencontre. Lors de son premier voyage dans ce pays le 19 septembre 2015, le Saint-Père citait à cet égard le philosophe, poète et homme politique cubain José Martí, dont l'aéroport de La Havane porte d'ailleurs le nom : « Du point de vue géographique, déclara le Pape à son arrivée, Cuba est un archipel, d'une importance extraordinaire comme "clef" entre le Nord et le Sud, entre l'Est et l'Ouest, qui regarde vers tous les chemins. Sa vocation naturelle est d'être le point de rencontre pour que tous les peuples se réunissent dans l'amitié, comme l'a rêvé José Martí, "au-delà de la langue des isthmes et de la barrière des mers" ». Ces paroles du Saint-Père, prononcées à l'aéroport international José Martí, furent prophétiques.

Cinq mois plus tard, dans les salons de ce même aéroport, eut lieu la rencontre privée du Pape François et du Patriarche. Elle dura deux heures. Ce ne fut donc pas une rencontre furtive, entre deux avions, mais un dialogue approfondi, en présence seulement du Métropolitain Hilarion et de moi-même, et des deux interprètes. Je ne suis pas autorisé à divulguer le contenu de la conversation, mais je voudrais simplement reprendre les paroles du Saint-Père juste après la rencontre : « Nous nous sommes parlé

comme des frères, nous avons le même Baptême, nous sommes évêques. Nous avons parlé de nos Églises, et nous sommes tombés d'accord sur le fait que l'unité se fait en marchant. Nous avons parlé clairement, sans détours, et moi, je vous avoue que j'ai senti la consolation de l'Esprit dans ce dialogue.» Plus tard dans l'avion pour le Mexique, le Saint-Père exprimera sa joie : « Ce fut une conversation entre frères. Nous avons discuté de points clairs, qui nous préoccupent tous les deux. En toute franchise. Je me suis senti face à un frère, et lui aussi m'a dit la même chose... Je vous le dis, vraiment, je ressentais une joie intérieure qui était précisément celle du Seigneur. Il parlait librement et je parlais moi aussi librement. L'on ressentait de la joie. »

### **La Déclaration commune**

S'il ne m'est pas permis de parler de la rencontre privée, il nous est en revanche possible de commenter la *Déclaration commune* qui fut signée à son issue. Les précédentes tentatives d'organiser une telle rencontre avaient failli à cause aussi, notamment, de l'impossibilité de se mettre d'accord sur un texte commun. Un dialogue long et approfondi a permis cette fois de trouver des formulations acceptables pour les deux chefs d'Églises.

Je voudrais faire quatre observations qui me semblent nécessaires à la bonne compréhension de ce document. En premier lieu, il me paraît important de souligner qu'il s'agit d'un début et non d'une fin. La *Déclaration commune* est un document d'étape – d'une étape certes décisive – mais qui n'est que le témoignage d'un certain stade de notre chemin vers l'unité. Cette « unité se fait en chemin », comme l'a observé le Saint-Père aussitôt après la rencontre. Ce document témoigne du haut niveau de relations entre nos Églises, de l'aboutissement d'une phase particulièrement positive de nos relations, mais il ne prétend pas à la perfection : il n'a d'autre ambition que d'exprimer ce qui, dans un contexte et à un moment donnés, il est possible de dire ensemble. Il est à espérer, s'il plaît à Dieu, que d'autres rencontres et d'autres déclarations viendront approfondir et compléter ce qui a été dit.

En second lieu, il s'agit d'une déclaration commune, qui présente les avantages et les inconvénients de tout texte commun. Il est évident qu'ensemble on ne dit pas les mêmes choses, ni de la même manière, que dans des déclarations séparées exposant uniquement le point de vue de l'une ou l'autre partie. Un texte commun engendre inévitablement des insatisfactions de part et d'autre.

En troisième lieu, la *Déclaration* doit être lue comme un texte pastoral. Le Saint-Père l'a précisé lui-même : « Ce n'est pas une déclaration politique, ce n'est pas une déclaration sociologique, c'est une déclaration pastorale ». Le texte relève de ce que l'on peut appeler œcuménisme pastoral, ou pour reprendre les mots du Pape François, « de deux évêques qui se sont rencontrés avec une préoccupation pastorale ». L'introduction de la *Déclaration* se situe d'ailleurs d'emblée dans cette perspective : « Notre conscience chrétienne et notre responsabilité pastorale ne nous permettent pas de rester inactifs face aux défis exigeant une réponse commune » (§ 7). La dernière partie du document, qui porte sur la mission, met de nouveau l'accent sur cette collaboration pastorale : « Dans le monde contemporain, multiforme et en même temps uni par un même destin, catholiques et orthodoxes sont appelés à collaborer fraternellement en vue d'annoncer la Bonne Nouvelle du salut, à témoigner ensemble de la dignité morale et de la liberté authentique de la personne, "pour que le monde

croie" (Jn 17, 21) » (§ 28). La dimension pastorale est donc bien la clé d'interprétation de la *Déclaration commune*.

Par conséquent, même si la situation internationale a eu un certain poids dans la préparation du texte, il serait vain de lire ce document uniquement à la lumière de critères géopolitiques. Je peux témoigner que la rencontre – souhaitée depuis plus de vingt ans – et les premiers projets de documents furent préparés, il y a quelques années, dans un contexte international assez différent. Par ailleurs, il ne serait pas non plus exact d'accorder une excessive importance théologique aux paroles utilisées : la rencontre ne se situait pas dans le cadre du dialogue théologique, qui relève de la compétence de la Commission mixte internationale de dialogue théologique entre l'Église catholique et l'Église orthodoxe, mais dans le cadre de ce que l'on appelle le dialogue de la charité.

Ma quatrième remarque, pour interpréter correctement ce document, porte sur la nécessité d'en avoir une compréhension globale. Comme pour tout texte, il faut en saisir la structure d'ensemble afin de ne pas interpréter telle ou telle expression particulière hors de son contexte. La *Déclaration* commence par une introduction plus générale, plus théologique, composée de quatre paragraphes (§ 4-7) qui traitent du thème de l'unité. Dans le corps du document sont ensuite examinés successivement cinq thèmes de nature plus sociale : la persécution des chrétiens (§ 8-13), la liberté religieuse (§ 14-16), la solidarité avec les pauvres (§ 17-18), les jeunes (§ 22-23), et un sixième thème portant sur la mission (§ 24-29), car la mission commune des Églises comporte aussi la collaboration en faveur de la réconciliation et de la paix.

Sur le contenu même de la Déclaration, je voudrais souligner l'importance de ses paragraphes introductifs. En effet, pour la première fois, après des siècles de polémiques et de défiance, les primats de l'Église catholique et de l'Église orthodoxe russe rendent publiquement grâce à Dieu pour les dons qu'ils partagent : « la commune Tradition spirituelle du premier millénaire du christianisme », dont les témoins sont « la Très Sainte Mère de Dieu, la Vierge Marie, et les saints », parmi lesquels « se trouvent d'innombrables martyrs qui ont manifesté leur fidélité au Christ et sont devenus "semence de chrétiens" » (§ 4). Pour la première fois aussi, l'Évêque de Rome et le Patriarche de Moscou expriment leur espérance que leur « rencontre contribue au rétablissement de cette unité voulue par Dieu, pour laquelle le Christ a prié » (§ 6). Pour la première fois enfin, ils affirment leur volonté « d'unir [leurs] efforts pour témoigner de l'Évangile du Christ et du patrimoine commun de l'Église du premier millénaire, répondant ensemble aux défis du monde contemporain » et affirment que « orthodoxes et catholiques doivent apprendre à porter un témoignage unanime à la vérité dans les domaines où cela est possible et nécessaire » (§ 7). Ces paragraphes introductifs marquent incontestablement une étape historique des relations entre nos Églises.

En ce qui concerne les thèmes de nature plus sociale abordés dans le corps de la *Déclaration*, je ne puis ici les commenter de façon détaillée. Je voudrais simplement rappeler que ces questions se trouvent aux origines mêmes du Mouvement œcuménique contemporain. C'est lors de la Conférence mondiale de Stockholm en 1925, au lendemain de la Première guerre mondiale, que des Églises décidèrent d'unir leurs efforts dans le mouvement *Life and Work*, dit du *Christianisme pratique*, pour que les chrétiens apprennent à collaborer pour promouvoir ensemble la justice et la paix en dépassant leurs identités nationales. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que, face aux nouveaux

défis auxquels font face nos sociétés, nos Eglises sentent la nécessité d'unir leurs forces pour rendre compte au monde de l'espérance qui est en elles (cf. 1 P 3, 15).

Quant à la question de la mission, abordée dans la dernière partie du document, elle est la source même du Mouvement pour l'unité, comme en témoigne la Conférence d'Edimbourg de 1910, considérée comme fondatrice de l'œcuménisme moderne. Il est heureux que la *Déclaration* ait pu aborder ces thèmes qui furent longtemps des pommes de discorde entre nos Eglises, en particulier la question du prosélytisme ou celle de l'uniatisme. Comme l'affirme la *Déclaration* : « Orthodoxes et catholiques sont unis non seulement par la commune Tradition de l'Église du premier millénaire, mais aussi par la mission de prêcher l'Évangile du Christ dans le monde contemporain » (§ 24).

La *Déclaration commune* marque donc un pas historique dans les relations entre nos Eglises. Cependant, comme je le disais, elle ne prétend pas à la perfection. On a pu d'ailleurs entendre certaines critiques. Certains ont pu regretter, en ce qui concerne les éléments qui nous unissent, que le document ne fasse pas mention explicite des sacrements, en particulier du baptême, fondement des rapports entre chrétiens, ni de la succession apostolique et de l'Eucharistie. Cela aurait été d'autant plus facile que les positions respectives de nos Eglises sont très claires sur la reconnaissance mutuelle des sacrements. (Par exemple, le document du concile épiscopal de 2000 de l'Église orthodoxe russe sur les relations avec les non-orthodoxes reconnaît très explicitement que les relations avec l'Église catholique se fondent sur le fait que « celle-ci est une Église qui a conservé la succession apostolique des ordinations ».) Mais il est vrai que l'ambition de cette *Déclaration commune* n'était pas d'ordre théologique.

Une autre réserve exprimée par certains concerne une vision qu'ils considèrent comme trop « morale » de l'œcuménisme, qui pourrait donner l'impression de fonder le rapprochement catholique-orthodoxe uniquement sur des « valeurs » à défendre. Ils font valoir que ces valeurs en question ne sont pas forcément la caractéristique des chrétiens : d'autres religions ou philosophies les partagent. Surtout, ils soulignent que les chrétiens ne sont pas unis en premier par une morale, mais par une Personne, qui transcende toutes les valeurs, et dont l'action se perpétue dans l'Église qui est son Corps. Cette remarque me semble intéressante, et d'une façon générale il me semblerait préférable de parler de « principes » plutôt que de « valeurs », en ce sens que les principes expriment ce qui est « premier » dans nos vies, en l'occurrence les principes de l'Évangile, tandis que les valeurs en découlent.

Enfin, je ne peux ignorer un troisième type de critique, exprimée surtout par l'Église gréco-catholique ukrainienne, concernant les passages du document sur l'Ukraine. A vrai dire, seuls deux paragraphes, très brefs, parlent de l'Ukraine, les § 26 et 27, qui se trouvent dans la partie consacrée à la mission. Ces passages sont avant tout un appel à la paix et à la réconciliation, dont la promotion est la mission commune de nos Eglises. Ce n'était pas et ne pouvait pas être le propos d'une déclaration commune, qui plus est de nature pastorale, de s'exprimer sur les responsabilités éventuelles des uns ou des autres. Mais je reconnais que ces paragraphes sont très laconiques, et que ce laconisme n'a pas aidé à leur compréhension, surtout dans la situation si douloureuse que traversent et dont pâtissent en ce moment nos frères et sœurs ukrainiens. La lecture de ce document ne peut pas s'affranchir de ce que le Pape lui-même, à maintes reprises, a exprimé sur le drame vécu en ce moment par le peuple ukrainien.

En ce qui concerne la douloureuse situation en Ukraine, et notamment les relations entre l'Église orthodoxe russe et l'Église gréco-catholique ukrainienne, il me semble qu'un des fruits de la rencontre de La Havane pourrait et devrait être le rétablissement du dialogue, un dialogue à plusieurs niveaux. Au niveau historique me semble indispensable, dans le cadre d'une commission ad hoc, un travail conjoint, qui sera sans doute ardu et de longue haleine, sur les blessures subies dans le passé par les uns et par les autres, afin de permettre une « purification de la mémoire ». Sans guérison de la mémoire il est difficile d'imaginer un avenir commun.

En même temps, comme le disait récemment le Pape François : « Jeter un regard en arrière aide et est d'autant plus nécessaire pour purifier la mémoire, mais être rivié au passé, en s'attardant à rappeler les torts subis et faits et en jugeant avec des paramètres uniquement humains, peut paralyser et empêcher de vivre le présent » (Homélie du 25 janvier 2017). C'est pourquoi il faut aussi regarder l'avenir et instaurer un dialogue sur les difficultés actuelles, qui me semblent non pas de nature théologique, mais d'ordre national et politique, afin de « trouver des formes de coexistence mutuellement acceptables », comme cela est proposé par la Déclaration commune. J'espère de tout cœur que, dépassant les difficultés actuelles, l'établissement d'un tel dialogue sera possible.]

### Les perspectives

La rencontre de La Havane a été saluée dans le monde entier comme un signe d'espérance dans une actualité assombrie par de nombreux conflits. Certes, en Russie, le Patriarche fut critiqué dans certains milieux ecclésiaux pour ce pas fait en direction de l'Église catholique. Ces attaques ont permis de mieux comprendre, notamment en Occident, à quel point il s'agissait d'un geste courageux de la part du primat de l'Église russe.

À l'issue de la rencontre, le Saint-Père déclara : « Nous nous quittons avec une série d'initiatives dont je crois qu'elles sont viables et pourront être réalisées. ». Comme pour tous les événements historiques, il faudra sans doute du temps pour que la rencontre de La Havane et la *Déclaration commune* puissent donner tous leurs fruits. Je voudrais mentionner trois directions possibles qui, toutes, peuvent se rattacher à l'œcuménisme pastoral dont témoigne la *Déclaration commune* : l'œcuménisme des saints, l'œcuménisme culturel et l'œcuménisme de l'action commune.

Le premier domaine est d'ordre spirituel – fondement de tout œcuménisme. Un des fruits de la rencontre historique de La Havane a été une certaine intensification des relations fraternelles entre nos Églises. Dès le 13 février à La Havane, le lendemain de la rencontre historique, le Patriarche Kirill me recevait, puis de nouveau le 22 novembre dernier à Moscou à l'occasion de son jubilé, tandis que le Pape François reçut le Métropolitain Hilarion le 15 septembre puis de nouveau le 10 décembre à l'occasion de son 80<sup>e</sup> anniversaire. Or j'ai été frappé de constater que ces multiples rencontres furent l'occasion de pratiquer un œcuménisme des saints. À La Havane le Pape François offrit au Patriarche des reliques de Saint Cyrille, son patron céleste, tandis que le Patriarche lui offrait une icône de Notre-Dame de Kazan, qui rappelait celle offerte au Patriarche Alexis par le Pape saint Jean-Paul II en 2004, par l'intermédiaire de mon prédécesseur, le Cardinal Walter Kasper. Toujours dans cet « échange de dons », le Patriarche Kirill transmit au Saint Père le 15 septembre, par l'intermédiaire du Métropolitain Hilarion, des reliques de Saint Séraphim de Sarov, un des

saints russes les plus connus en Occident. À son tour, le Saint Père offrit au Patriarche le 22 novembre, par mon intermédiaire, des reliques de saint François, son saint patron, un des saints occidentaux les plus proches de Saint Séraphim par son expérience de la joie pascale et son aspiration à la paix de toute la Création. Le Pape François écrivait dans ses vœux au Patriarche : « Puissent ces deux extraordinaires témoins du Christ, déjà unis au ciel, intercéder pour nous, afin que nous puissions travailler ensemble de façon toujours plus étroite pour la paix et atteindre la pleine unité pour laquelle Jésus Christ a prié ».

La *Déclaration commune* souligne également cet œcuménisme des saints : « Nous partageons la commune Tradition spirituelle du premier millénaire du christianisme. Les témoins de cette Tradition sont la Très Sainte Mère de Dieu, la Vierge Marie, et les saints que nous vénérons. Parmi eux se trouvent d'innombrables martyrs qui ont manifesté leur fidélité au Christ et sont devenus "semence de chrétiens" » (§ 4). Une des perspectives importantes de la rencontre de La Havane pourrait donc être un approfondissement de cet œcuménisme des saints, notamment par l'échange des reliques ou d'icônes qui seraient proposés à la vénération des fidèles. Ce serait aussi une façon de donner au rapprochement de nos Églises une dimension plus populaire, que l'on peut à bon droit qualifier de « pastorale ». Plus audacieusement encore, ne pourrait-on pas faire des pas vers une reconnaissance mutuelle de certains saints ? Les saints de nos Églises, déjà unis au ciel, sont nos meilleurs guides et intercesseurs pour réaliser l'unité entre nous.

Un deuxième domaine, dans lequel la rencontre de La Havane a d'ailleurs déjà porté certains fruits, est ce que l'on peut appeler un œcuménisme culturel. Le champ culturel me paraît essentiel pour progresser sur le chemin de l'unité. Comme nous le savons, les facteurs culturels, à commencer par les différences linguistiques, ont joué un rôle déterminant dans les divisions entre chrétiens. Il est donc essentiel de connaître la culture des autres pour comprendre mieux la façon dont ils perçoivent l'Évangile. À plus forte raison lorsqu'il s'agit des catholiques et des orthodoxes, il me semble que cette connaissance réciproque nous permet de comprendre que, au-delà des légitimes différences culturelles, nous partageons la même foi exprimée diversement selon le génie spécifique de chaque peuple et de chaque tradition.

Quelques semaines à peine après la rencontre de La Havane, le 1<sup>er</sup> mars, se réunit au Conseil Pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens le Groupe mixte de travail pour la coordination des projets culturels entre le Saint-Siège et le Patriarcat de Moscou, qui regroupe des représentants de divers organes du Saint-Siège et de l'Église orthodoxe russe. Une des réalisations les plus immédiates fut l'organisation de « visites d'études » réciproques à Rome et à Moscou de jeunes prêtres orthodoxes et catholiques. C'est ainsi que du 14 au 21 mai 2016, sur invitation de notre Conseil Pontifical, une délégation de dix jeunes prêtres orthodoxes du Patriarcat de Moscou, enseignants dans divers établissements supérieurs de l'Église orthodoxe russe, se rendit à Rome pour mieux connaître la Curie romaine, les Universités, les Collèges pontificaux et les lieux saints de l'Urbe. De même, du 26 août au 4 septembre, pour la deuxième année consécutive, un groupe de dix jeunes prêtres catholiques, étudiants auprès de diverses Universités pontificales romaines, furent invités par le Département des relations ecclésiastiques extérieures du Patriarcat de Moscou et l'École des Hautes Études des Saints Cyrille et Méthode pour une visite d'étude à Moscou et à Saint-Pétersbourg, leur permettant de connaître les lieux saints de ces villes, de rencontrer des

représentants de l'Église orthodoxe, et aussi de s'initier à la langue russe. Ces visites d'études sont des occasions uniques pour les jeunes prêtres des deux Églises pour faire tomber des préjugés et échanger sur leurs préoccupations pastorales, suivant l'exemple de leurs primats à La Havane. Elles sont aussi des opportunités privilégiées de reconnaître les dons des autres, comme le soulignait récemment le Pape François dans son homélie pour la fête de la Conversion de Saint Paul : « Une réconciliation authentique parmi les chrétiens pourra se réaliser lorsque nous saurons reconnaître les dons les uns des autres et que nous serons capables, avec humilité et docilité, d'apprendre les uns des autres – apprendre les uns des autres –, sans attendre que ce soient les autres qui apprennent d'abord de nous ».

D'autres initiatives culturelles ont été organisées dans le cadre du Groupe mixte de coordination, dans le domaine de l'art sacré. Un concert conjoint de la Chapelle Musicale Pontificale « Sistina » et du Chœur synodal du Patriarcat de Moscou eut lieu le 11 décembre 2016 dans la Basilique romaine de Sainte Marie des Anges et des Martyrs sous le patronage de notre Conseil Pontifical et du Département des relations ecclésiastiques extérieures du Patriarcat de Moscou, en présence de leur présidents respectifs. Il ne s'agissait pas du premier concert de ce type, mais après la rencontre de Cuba il avait une harmonie toute particulière. Ecouter la musique sacrée de nos traditions respectives nous permet, me semble-t-il, de goûter déjà une certaine communion et accroît en nous le désir de l'unité.

Toujours dans le domaine culturel, je voudrais mentionner également d'autres initiatives qui ont impliqué le Saint-Siège. L'exposition « Roma Aeterna » organisée à la Galerie Tretyakov de Moscou de novembre 2016 à février 2017, propose pour la première fois à l'étranger 42 chefs d'œuvres de la pinacothèque des Musées du Vatican. Cette exposition exceptionnelle fut inaugurée le 25 novembre par le Cardinal Giuseppe Bertello, Président du Gouvernement de l'État de la Cité du Vatican, qui rencontra à cette occasion le Patriarche Kirill. L'exposition, présentée par le Directeur des Musées du Vatican comme un « acte de gratitude à l'égard de l'antique amour de la Russie pour la Rome éternelle », a rencontré en Russie un immense succès populaire, et devrait être suivie d'une exposition réciproque de chefs d'œuvres de l'art russe au Vatican. Il faut également évoquer la visite en Russie à la même époque de S.E. Mgr Jean-Louis Brugues, Bibliothécaire et Archiviste de la Sainte Église Romaine, qui y rencontra les directeurs des bibliothèques et des archives de l'État et de l'Église, en vue d'organiser des expositions de livres rares et de documents d'archives. Autant de projets qui, me semble-t-il, contribuent indiscutablement à la connaissance réciproque et à la création de rapports d'estime mutuelle, y compris dans le grand public.

Enfin, je voudrais évoquer les larges perspectives ouvertes par la *Déclaration commune* à un œcuménisme pratique entre l'Église catholique et l'Église orthodoxe russe. En ce qui concerne la question des chrétiens du Moyen Orient, dès les 6 et 7 avril 2016, une délégation mixte composée de représentants de l'Église catholique – dont S.E. Mgr Paolo Pezzi, Ordinaire de l'Archidiocèse de la Mère de Dieu à Moscou – et de l'Église orthodoxe russe, se rendit au Liban et en Syrie pour rencontrer et soutenir les populations locales affectées par la guerre et les déplacements. D'autres initiatives de ce genre pourraient voir le jour, ainsi que sur les autres thèmes de la *Déclaration*, à savoir la liberté religieuse, la solidarité avec les pauvres, la famille ou les jeunes. Sur ce dernier sujet, la tenue du prochain Synode des Évêques en octobre 2018 sur le thème « Les jeunes, la foi et le discernement vocationnel » devrait offrir des perspectives de

réflexion commune. Sur tout ces points il s'agit, comme le soulignait également le Pape François dans l'avion qui le conduisait au Mexique, d'une unité qui se réalise en marchant : « L'unité se fait en avançant : que le Seigneur nous trouve au moins en train de marcher, lorsqu'il viendra. »

Pour finir, il me semble que cet approfondissement des relations bilatérales entre l'Église catholique et l'Église orthodoxe russe ne pourra avoir que des conséquences positives sur les relations entre l'Église catholique et l'Église orthodoxe dans son ensemble, notamment dans le dialogue théologique international. J'en veux pour preuve l'adoption récente, avec la participation active de la délégation de l'Église orthodoxe russe, du sixième document de la Commission mixte internationale, intitulé « Synodalité et primauté au premier millénaire. Vers une compréhension commune au service de l'unité de l'Église », adopté à Chieti le 21 septembre 2016. Il s'agit du premier document de cette commission accepté par l'Église russe depuis celui de Balamand en 1993 – il me plaît à penser que le fait que cela ait été possible la même année que la rencontre de La Havane n'est sans doute pas le fruit du hasard.

Comme les questions théologiques dans les relations œcuméniques sont traitées au niveau non pas bilatéral avec des Églises autocéphales particulières, mais multilatéral avec l'Église orthodoxe dans son ensemble, dans le cadre de la Commission internationale déjà évoquée, il est évident que la *Déclaration commune* de La Havane traite de questions non pas en premier lieu théologiques, mais de collaborations pratiques et pastorales. Les deux niveaux doivent cependant se compléter et montrer que, « parmi les Églises et communautés chrétiennes, l'Orthodoxie est sans doute, théologiquement, la plus proche de nous ». Cette affirmation du Pape Benoît XVI nous oblige à trouver l'unité dans la foi et dans la vie. Alors notre témoignage sera encore plus crédible.

En guise de conclusion, je voudrais rendre grâce à Dieu pour cette rencontre providentielle, exprimer ma gratitude aux Primats de nos Églises pour le geste historique accompli, et remercier aussi le Métropolite Hilarion pour la part qu'il a prise à sa réalisation. Un cordial merci aussi à mon compétent collaborateur, le Père Hyacinthe Destivelle, chargé, au Conseil Pontifical, des relations œcuméniques avec les Églises orthodoxes de tradition slave. Dans cette action de grâce, je voudrais, en me tournant vers la Mère de Dieu, reprendre l'invocation finale de la *Déclaration commune* : « Puisse la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie, par son intercession, conforter la fraternité de ceux qui la vénèrent, afin qu'ils soient au temps fixé par Dieu rassemblés dans la paix et la concorde en un seul Peuple de Dieu, à la gloire de la Très Sainte et indivisible Trinité ! » (§ 30).

**Conferenza presso la Facoltà Valdese di Teologia  
Roma, 13 febbraio 2017**

*Il primato dell'accogliere rispetto al fare.  
Sull'attualità della dottrina cristiana della giustificazione<sup>1</sup>*

**1. Pietra miliare e sfida continua**

Nel 2017, il mondo cristiano commemora i cinquecento anni della Riforma. Trattandosi del primo centenario della Riforma in epoca ecumenica, a connotare la commemorazione non saranno più toni confessionalmente faziosi e polemici, ma uno spirito ecumenico. Queste circostanze favorevoli sono dovute in particolare al fatto che non ricorderemo soltanto i cinquecento anni della Riforma, ma anche cinquant'anni di intenso dialogo tra cattolici e protestanti, un lasso di tempo durante il quale abbiamo potuto scoprire quanto ci accomuna. Risultato positivo dei dialoghi ecumenici è stato quello di mostrare che, nelle verità fondamentali della fede cristiana, è stato possibile formulare un consenso ecumenico, evidenziando altresì che le differenze teologiche tuttora esistenti non mettono in discussione tale consenso e che, di conseguenza, le condanne dottrinali del XVI secolo, sia da parte cattolica che da parte protestante, non hanno oggi più valenza tra i partner ecumenici.<sup>2</sup>

Questo è vero soprattutto a proposito della “Dichiarazione congiunta sulla dottrina della giustificazione”<sup>3</sup> firmata il 31 ottobre 1999 ad Augsburg dalla Federazione Luterana Mondiale e dal Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione dell'unità dei cristiani. Il fatto che proprio sulla questione centrale che condusse, nel XVI secolo, alla Riforma ed in seguito alla divisione della Chiesa è stato possibile conseguire un ampio consenso può essere considerato come una vera e propria pietra miliare ecumenica. Le rispettive interpretazioni ed applicazioni del messaggio neotestamentario della giustificazione dell'uomo per grazia divina nella fede in Gesù Cristo hanno rappresentato infatti, nel XVI secolo, il fulcro delle dispute teologiche e sono diventate il motivo principale della divisione della Chiesa in occidente, come testimoniano sia gli scritti confessionali luterani sia le condanne dottrinali del Concilio di Trento, che hanno avuto sinora forza vincolante e dunque, come effetto, anche quello di mantenere divise le Chiese.

Precisamente alla luce della dottrina della giustificazione risulta evidente che la Riforma del XVI secolo nella Chiesa d'occidente e la successiva divisione della Chiesa erano legate a letture ed interpretazioni controverse del messaggio biblico; sotto questo aspetto, possiamo dire che la frattura si è spinta in un certo senso fin dentro alla Sacra Scrittura. Il dialogo ecumenico degli ultimi decenni ha mostrato<sup>4</sup> che anche il

---

1. Conferenza presso la Facoltà Valdese di Teologia a Roma, il 13 febbraio 2017.

2. Vgl. K. Lehmann und W. Pannenberg (Hrsg.), *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend? I Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt im Zeitalter der Reformation und heute* (Freiburg i. Br. – Göttingen 1986); W. Pannenberg und Th. Schneider (Hrsg.), *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend? IV Antworten auf kirchliche Stellungnahmen* (Göttingen – Freiburg i. Br. 1994).

3. Federazione Luterana Mondiale e Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione dell'unità dei cristiani, *Dichiarazione congiunta sulla dottrina della giustificazione*.

4. Vgl. H. Meyer und G. Gassmann (Hrsg.), *Rechtfertigung im ökumenischen Dialog. Dokumente und Einführung = Ökumenische Perspektiven* Nr. 12 (Frankfurt a. M. 1987); John A. Rodano, *Lutheran & Catholic Reconciliation on Justification. A Chronology of the Holy See's*

superamento di tale divisione ed il ripristino dell'unità della Chiesa potranno avvenire soltanto sul cammino di una lettura e di un'interpretazione comuni della Sacra Scrittura. Di fatti, l'ascolto comune della Parola di Dio testimoniata nella Sacra Scrittura ha condotto ad una fondamentale convergenza nella comprensione della dottrina della giustificazione<sup>5</sup>.

L'espressione "consenso su verità fondamentali della dottrina della giustificazione", utilizzata nella "Dichiarazione congiunta sulla dottrina della giustificazione", esprime il concetto che sviluppi differenti di singole affermazioni sono conciliabili con il "consenso differenziato" e che esistono questioni tuttora aperte che richiedono un ulteriore chiarimento<sup>6</sup>: "esse riguardano, tra l'altro, la relazione esistente tra Parola di Dio e insegnamento della Chiesa, l'ecclesiologia, l'autorità nella Chiesa e la sua unità, il ministero e i sacramenti, ed infine la relazione tra giustificazione e etica sociale."<sup>7</sup> Le riflessioni seguenti non vertono sulle tematiche ancora aperte, ma sulla questione - ben più fondamentale - di come il messaggio ecumenico comune della giustificazione possa essere trasmesso in maniera credibile nel mondo di oggi, un mondo al quale manca spesso la sensibilità per cogliere la reale importanza di questo messaggio.

## **2. Il testo tuttora valido della dottrina della giustificazione in un contesto mutato**

È eloquente il fatto che questa questione ermeneutica fondamentale venga posta sia da parte protestante che da parte cattolica. L'ecumenista protestante Wolhart Pannenberg ha osservato che, da un lato, Martin Lutero, con il suo concetto fondamentale di giustificazione dell'uomo per fede, si contrappone al sistema medievale della mediazione salvifica della Chiesa e della sua gerarchia, un sistema esemplificato soprattutto dal sacramento della penitenza, ma, dall'altro lato, lui stesso è profondamente radicato nella prassi e nella mentalità medievali. Più precisamente, Pannenberg vede le radici della dottrina della giustificazione di Lutero nel sacramento e nella teologia della penitenza della Chiesa medievale e si spinge sino ad affermare che, senza la pietà medievale della penitenza, sarebbe impossibile comprendere la dottrina della giustificazione di Lutero che, in questo punto, si differenzia persino da quella di Paolo. Secondo Pannenberg, ciò vale soprattutto per la dialettica - fondamentale per il pensiero di Lutero - tra legge e vangelo, nel senso che Lutero ha ampiamente sviluppato la sua dottrina della giustificazione basandosi sul concetto medievale del sacramento della penitenza, con la sua sequenza di legge divina che accusa e di assoluzione del peccatore pentito: "Come la coscienza del penitente si trova innanzitutto di fronte alla legge ed è spaventata da ciò che esigono i comandamenti divini prima di sperimentare il

---

Contributions, 1961-1999, to a New Relationship between Lutherans & Catholics and to Steps Leading to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (Cambridge 2009).

5. Cfr. The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification. An Ecumenical Follow-Up to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (New Jersey 2012).

6. Vgl. B. J. Hilberath / W. Pannenberg (Hrsg.), Zur Zukunft der Ökumene. Die „Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“ (Regensburg 1999); E. Pulsfort / R. Hanusch (Hrsg.), Von der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung“ zum „Gemeinsamen Herrenmahl“? Perspektiven der Ökumene im 21. Jahrhundert (Regensburg 2002).

7. Dichiarazione congiunta sulla giustificazione, n. 43.

conforto attraverso l'assoluzione del sacerdote, così, secondo Lutero, la parola del vangelo vuole risollevarlo il cuore che prima era afflitto davanti alla legge.”<sup>8</sup>

Partendo da questa visione critica del radicamento della dottrina della giustificazione di Lutero nella pietà medievale della penitenza, Pannenberg non giunge alla conclusione che oggi si debbano prendere le distanze dalla dottrina protestante della giustificazione per fede. Infatti, tale critica non tocca minimamente il concetto fondamentale alla base della dottrina della giustificazione di Lutero, secondo cui l'uomo può entrare in comunione con Dio soltanto attraverso la fede, soprattutto nel suo *extra nos*, concetto su cui s'impenna la libertà del cristiano. Poiché la dottrina della giustificazione per fede permette al singolo cristiano un accesso diretto a Dio, per Pannenberg l'idea della libertà cristiana è la conseguenza essenziale di tale dottrina e, dunque, “la più importante eredità della Riforma”<sup>9</sup>, rispetto alla quale il linguaggio adoperato da Lutero, influenzato dalla pietà medievale della penitenza, era “l'abito - condizionato dal tempo - di questo concetto di libertà cristiana”<sup>10</sup>. Pannenberg è dunque convinto che la teologia protestante sia chiamata oggi a sviluppare un'interpretazione della salvezza cristiana “che non si orienti più principalmente verso la questione della colpa, ma verso quella del senso, partendo dalla quale si potrà chiarire in modo nuovo anche il senso dell'esperienza della colpa”<sup>11</sup>.

In una direzione simile si muove anche l'approccio dell'allora Cardinale Joseph Ratzinger alla dottrina della giustificazione di Lutero, il cui elemento radicale è anche da lui ravvisato nel fatto che essa “riporta tutta l'antropologia e dunque anche tutte le altre tematiche dottrinali alla dialettica tra legge e vangelo”<sup>12</sup>. Dietro a questa dialettica, Ratzinger scorge l'esperienza di vita personale di Lutero, segnata da quel timore di Dio che permeò le fondamenta stesse della sua esistenza, nella tensione tra le aspettative di Dio e la sua consapevolezza dei propri peccati, fino a che Dio stesso non gli apparve anche “sub contrario”. Per liberarsi dal pesante fardello dell'esperienza del peccato, fu indispensabile per Lutero la certezza della salvezza, ovvero la convinzione che, nonostante tutto, sarebbe stato salvato ed accolto da Dio, e che questa accoglienza da parte di Dio è salda e inamovibile. All'esperienza opprimente del proprio Io, Lutero contrappose dunque il “sola fede” come contrappeso salvifico. Ma, secondo il Cardinale Joseph Ratzinger, l'esperienza del cristiano medio di oggi si allontana molto dall'esperienza esistenziale di Lutero e dall'impellente, conseguente ricerca di un Dio misericordioso. Il cristiano odierno, infatti, non sperimenta più nel modo in cui faceva Lutero la consapevolezza dei propri peccati, lo sconvolgimento della propria vita originato dalla maestà di Dio ed il grido esistenziale che invoca la grazia divina: “Il nostro problema non è più l'esperienza del fardello dei nostri peccati, ma l'assenza

---

8. W. Pannenberg, *Reformation zwischen gestern und morgen* (Gütersloh 1969) 10.

9. W. Pannenberg, *Reformation und Einheit der Kirche*, in: Ders., *Ethik und Ekklesiologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen 1977) 254-267, zit. 261.

10. W. Pannenberg, *Protestantische Bussfrömmigkeit*, in: Ders., *Christliche Spiritualität. Theologische Aspekte* (Göttingen 1986) 5-25, zit. 23.

11. W. Pannenberg, *Thesen zur Theologie der Kirche* (München 1970) 31.

12. J. Kardinal Ratzinger, *Luther und die Einheit der Kirchen*, in: Ders., *Kirche, Ökumene und Politik. Neue Versuche zur Ekklesiologie* (Einsiedeln 1987) 97-127, zit. 109.

dell'esperienza del peccato, che presuppone a sua volta l'assenza di Dio ed il suo disinteresse nei nostri confronti.”<sup>13</sup>

La stessa domanda che Joseph Ratzinger si era posto circa la dottrina della giustificazione di Lutero, egli l'ha ripetuta, come Papa Benedetto XVI, nel settembre 2011, in occasione del suo incontro con i rappresentanti del Consiglio della Chiesa evangelica di Germania, nell'ex convento degli agostiniani a Erfurt, quando, con parole di grande apprezzamento, ha riconosciuto nella vita e nell'opera di Martin Lutero la sua appassionata ricerca di Dio<sup>14</sup>: “Ciò che lo animava era la questione su Dio, che ha rappresentato la profonda passione e la forza trainante della sua vita e di tutta la sua opera. ‘Come faccio ad avere un Dio misericordioso?’ Questa domanda lo ha toccato nell'intimo; essa era dietro ogni sua ricerca e battaglia teologica.” Benedetto XVI ha inoltre osservato che Lutero non cercava un Dio qualsiasi, ma credeva in quel Dio che ci ha mostrato il suo volto tangibile nell'uomo Gesù di Nazaret; pertanto, Lutero ha concretizzato ed approfondito la sua appassionata ricerca di Dio nel cristocentrismo della sua spiritualità e della sua teologia. Tuttavia, mentre elogia, quali priorità cruciali di Lutero, la centralità della questione su Dio ed il cristocentrismo, Benedetto XVI si chiede, nel caso in cui la ricerca di un Dio misericordioso fosse ancora importante oggi, anche tra i cristiani: “Cosa significa nella nostra vita la questione su Dio? E nel nostro annuncio? La maggior parte delle persone, e tra queste anche molti cristiani, partono dal presupposto che Dio, in ultima analisi, non si interessi ai nostri peccati e alle nostre virtù. Egli saprebbe che, in fondo, noi tutti siamo fatti di carne. E, anche credendo in un aldilà ed in un giudizio divino, praticamente tutti siamo convinti che Dio dovrà essere misericordioso e che alla fine, con la sua misericordia, passerà oltre i nostri piccoli errori. La questione non ci preoccupa più.”

Le due posizioni teologiche menzionate brevemente dimostrano che oggi l'enfasi posta dalla dottrina della giustificazione di Lutero sull'esperienza dell'essere peccatori ed il messaggio del perdono dei peccati in ambito ecumenico devono essere sottoposti ad una questione critica, a causa soprattutto della constatazione che esiste una grande differenza tra l'esperienza di fede di Lutero e la situazione esistenziale dei cristiani di oggi. Tra questi due mondi, vi è la forte critica sviluppatasi in epoca moderna nei confronti della coscienza del peccato nella fede cristiana, critica che ha trovato un esponente difficilmente superabile in Friedrich Nietzsche, che ha stigmatizzato il concetto di peccato e di pentimento come aberrazione giudeo-cristiana: “Il peccato è un sentimento ebraico e un'invenzione ebraica, e se si considera questo sfondo... ci si rende conto che il cristianesimo di fatto ebbe di mira 'ebraizzazione' del mondo intero.”<sup>15</sup> Il prendere atto di questa critica sferzante non deve avere come conseguenza quella di estromettere dall'annuncio e dalla teologia cristiani il discorso sul peccato e sul perdono dei peccati. Una dottrina della giustificazione che non facesse menzione del peccato e del giudizio divino, né del giudizio divino e della grazia, non sarebbe più una dottrina della giustificazione cristiana.

---

13. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Wie weit trägt der Konsens über die Rechtfertigungslehre?* in: *IkaZ Communio* 29 (2000) 424-437, zit. 429.

14. Benedetto XVI, *Discorso durante l'incontro con i rappresentanti del Consiglio della Chiesa evangelica in Germania, nell'ex Convento degli Agostiniani di Erfurt, il 23 settembre 2011.*

15. F. Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* II, 125.

D'altro canto sarebbe bene, nell'odierna interpretazione della dottrina della giustificazione cristiana, partire dai suoi contenuti positivi di grazia e di misericordia e, da lì, tornare all'idea negativa dell'esperienza del peccato. In questo senso, non molto tempo fa, il Papa emerito Benedetto XVI ha osservato che, attraverso il tema della misericordia di Dio, può essere portato alla luce in modo nuovo il significato della giustificazione per fede: "A partire dalla misericordia di Dio, che tutti cercano, è possibile anche oggi interpretare daccapo il nucleo fondamentale della dottrina della giustificazione e farlo apparire ancora in tutta la sua rilevanza."<sup>16</sup> Muovendomi nella stessa direzione, tenterò qui di seguito di avanzare alcune riflessioni al riguardo, cominciando con la questione tradizionale del rapporto tra fede e opere nella vita di fede del cristiano. Da un lato, alla base di questa tematica vi è la dialettica tra legge e vangelo, di centrale importanza per la teologia protestante; dall'altro, essa è una questione tuttora aperta nel dialogo cattolico-protestante.

### 3. La giustificazione alla luce dell'amore e della misericordia di Dio

"La libertà cristiana o evangelica è una libertà della coscienza, attraverso la quale la coscienza è liberata dalle opere, non affinché esse non avvengano, ma affinché non si faccia affidamento su di esse."<sup>17</sup> Questa affermazione di Martin Lutero testimonia in maniera esemplare che egli non respingeva in alcun modo le opere del cristiano, ma si opponeva con enfasi teologica al fatto che il cristiano si affidi alle sue opere. Non si può e non si deve fare affidamento sulle proprie opere soprattutto per ciò che riguarda la propria salvezza. Infatti, là dove è in gioco l'aspetto centrale e autentico della vita cristiana, la felicità ed il successo dell'uomo, quello che conta non è il fare dell'uomo. La salvezza è concessa all'uomo non in base alle sue opere e neppure in base a forme esteriori di pietà quali le indulgenze; queste, agli occhi di Lutero, veicolano piuttosto un'ingannevole certezza di salvezza, dando l'impressione che si possa acquistare da Dio la propria salvezza e che ci si possa riscattare da soli del proprio peccato davanti a lui. Là dove è in gioco la salvezza dell'uomo, si dischiude piuttosto una passività dell'individuo che non può essere né taciuta né rimossa, ovvero l'apertura al dono non manipolabile di Dio nella sua grazia. Ecco il motivo più profondo per cui l'Apostolo Paolo, davanti all'uomo che vorrebbe vantarsi delle proprie prestazioni, insiste sul fatto che l'individuo deve considerare tutto ciò che è e tutto ciò che ha non come il risultato delle proprie azioni, ma soltanto come dono immeritato di Dio: "Che cosa mai possiedi che tu non abbia ricevuto? E se l'hai ricevuto, perché te ne vanti come non l'avessi ricevuto?" (1 Cor 4,7).

#### *a) Essere redenti significa essere amati*

Con queste parole, Paolo ha riassunto il contenuto ed il significato della fede biblica nella giustificazione. Ma le parole di Paolo lasciano anche trapelare il fatto che questa innegabile passività non si mostra per la prima volta nella redenzione, ma la si incontra

---

16. Intervista a S.S. il Papa emerito Benedetto XVI sulla questione della giustificazione per la fede, in: D. Libanori (ed.), *Per mezzo della fede. Dottrina della giustificazione ed esperienza di Dio nella predicazione della Chiesa e negli esercizi spirituali* (Cinisello Balsamo 2016) 125-137, cit. 129.

17. M. Luther, WA 7, 606.

già nella creazione. Nessuno può infatti darsi la vita da solo; l'unica cosa che ci si può dare da soli è la morte. Da soli non ci possiamo dare la vita; la vita la si può solo ricevere. L'uomo non è, primariamente, un essere che agisce; egli è piuttosto un vivente che, sin dall'origine, vive in una ricettività creaturale, come professa la fede cristiana: Dio ha creato l'uomo come una meraviglia, e proprio per questo, l'uomo può essere anche redento. Ecco il motivo per cui la fede cristiana è in grado di superare il concetto moderno che l'uomo ha dato di sé, espresso nella classica formula di Cartesio, "Cogito ergo sum", e di capovolgerlo completamente attraverso il messaggio liberatorio della fede: cogitor ergo sum, o, ancora meglio, amor ergo sum: sono amato, dunque sono.

In ciò risiede l'identità più profonda della fede cristiana. Il mistero cristiano centrale dell'amore di Dio per noi uomini è la corrente calda non solo della creazione, ma anche della redenzione. Come noi uomini non possiamo crearci da soli, così non possiamo neppure redimerci da soli, ma possiamo solo essere redenti. Già la stessa esperienza umana ci mostra che l'essere amati precede il saper amare. Proprio l'amore di Dio per noi uomini è il fondamento di una vita redenta e dunque capace di dare amore. Soltanto se siamo pronti a riconoscere e ad accettare che siamo amati da Dio, raggiungiamo il luogo dove si può parlare di redenzione. Noi uomini possiamo dunque essere redenti soltanto grazie all'amore; l'essere redenti consiste essenzialmente nell'essere amati, come ha osservato esplicitamente Papa Benedetto XVI nella sua enciclica sulla speranza cristiana, "Spe salvi": "Se esiste questo amore assoluto con la sua certezza assoluta, allora – soltanto allora – l'uomo è «redento», qualunque cosa gli accada nel caso particolare. È questo che si intende, quando diciamo: Gesù Cristo ci ha «redenti»."<sup>18</sup>

A questa idea se ne collega un'altra, ovvero che la redenzione non sopraggiunge a noi uomini dall'esterno, ma viene a noi dall'interno. Nel nostro intimo, noi uomini siamo toccati in modo più intenso e più personale dall'amore. L'amore è essenzialmente uno "schierarsi a favore dell'esistenza dell'amato"<sup>19</sup>, un Sì totale nei confronti dell'amato per il fatto che esiste e che è un bene che esista. L'amore di Gesù Cristo che sta dalla parte di coloro che egli ama non ha confini. L'amore cerca noi uomini proprio là dove abbiamo più bisogno di lui e dove, dunque, non possiamo fare a meno della redenzione. Come l'amore dei genitori per i figli può essere messo alla prova - e di fatti è spesso messo alla prova - quando i figli si allontanano, vanno per la loro strada e a volte prendono quella sbagliata, ma i genitori continuano ad essere dalla loro parte, così Dio continua ad amarci anche quando prendiamo le distanze da lui. Egli non ci serba rancore per la nostra mancanza di fedeltà e non attua alcuna vendetta, a differenza di ciò che facciamo spesso noi uomini. Piuttosto, si occupa di noi con amorevole premura, concedendoci così un futuro nuovo, di redenzione.

Poiché l'amorevole premura di Dio per noi uomini non ha confini, egli ci ha amati sino alla fine, pagando il suo amore con la vita. Ha portato il fardello più pesante di questo mondo, ovvero il carico dei peccati, prendendo su di sé la croce: per noi uomini e per la nostra redenzione. L'amore e la croce non sono dunque contrapposti, ma sono inscindibilmente legati. La croce di Gesù ci rivela la logica del suo amore radicale e ci mostra che Dio non si è accontentato di professare il suo amore per noi a

---

18. Benedetto XVI, *Spe salvi*, n. 26.

19. J. Ratzinger, *Vorfragen zu einer Theologie der Erlösung*, in: L. Scheffczyk (Hrsg.), *Erlösung und Emanzipation* (Freiburg i. Br. 1973) 141-155, zit. 148.

parole, ma ha pagato per questo amore un caro prezzo, versando per noi uomini il suo sangue sulla croce ed accogliendoci in maniera definitiva. La croce di Gesù ci manifesta l'agire coerente di un buon pastore che ama senza limiti, che vuole essere vicino a noi uomini nel baratro più profondo e nelle catacombe più nascoste di una vita cosparsa di croci, per redimerci con il suo amore. La croce è dunque la manifestazione dell'amore più grande del nostro redentore.

*b) Il primato soteriologico dell'accogliere rispetto al fare*

Nel suo messaggio soteriologico essenziale, la dottrina della giustificazione per fede afferma che là dove si tratta della salvezza degli uomini, Dio stesso agisce su di essi; di conseguenza, non è l'uomo che ha bisogno di giustificarsi davanti a Dio, né d'altronde è in grado di farlo, ma è Dio che giustifica l'uomo, ovvero lo accoglie. L'uomo non deve compiere quest'azione o quest'altra, ma deve fare una cosa sola, in maniera coerente: deve compiere un passo fuori da se stesso e affidarsi completamente ad un altro, ovvero a Dio. Il motivo della giustificazione non è ciò che l'uomo offre o fa, ma è la premura amorosa e misericordiosa di Dio per l'uomo. Giustificazione non significa conteggio di azioni e prestazioni dell'uomo, ma riconoscimento della grazia di Dio. È Dio che accetta l'uomo anche se inaccettabile e che lo giustifica, nonostante questa sua inaccettabilità. Da parte sua, l'uomo deve semplicemente accogliere quanto Dio compie: questo significa avere fede. Fede, secondo la breve, insuperabile espressione di Paul Tillich, significa appunto: "accettare il fatto che vengo accettato, nonostante sia inaccettabile."<sup>20</sup>

La dottrina della giustificazione porta dunque alla luce tutta la profondità del concetto biblico di "fede". Nella fede, che è piena fiducia in Dio, avviene quell'unica cosa essenziale, che è stata definita "rivoluzione copernicana nella vita dell'individuo" da Papa Benedetto XVI in una delle sue prime pubblicazioni, ovvero il fatto che non ci consideriamo più come il centro del mondo intorno al quale gli altri devono ruotare, e che, piuttosto, iniziamo ad accettare con massima serietà "che siamo una delle tante creature di Dio, che si muovono insieme intorno a Dio, centro di tutto".<sup>21</sup> La fede è quell'atto originario con il quale l'uomo non cerca più in se stesso il centro della vita, ma fa affidamento e si radica nella profondità della sua esistenza, che può essere soltanto Dio.

Pertanto, la fede biblica nella giustificazione contiene il messaggio liberatorio secondo cui l'uomo può avere la certezza di essere accolto da Dio in maniera definitiva nel suo essere uomo senza dover far niente e senza poter far niente al riguardo. Questa esperienza di essere riconosciuto e amato come uomo, indipendentemente dalle proprie prestazioni ed, in alcune circostanze, nonostante le proprie prestazioni, o comunque in maniera distinta da esse, l'uomo può farla soltanto nell'incontro personale con Dio. La fede cristiana nella giustificazione si rivela dunque avvocata della grazia nel mezzo della società odierna, così tanto minacciata da una mancanza di misericordia individuale e strutturale che si basa essenzialmente sull'idea che l'uomo vada identificato con le proprie prestazioni.

---

20. P. Tillich, *Systematische Theologie*. Band III (Stuttgart 1966) 254-258.

21. J. Ratzinger, *Vom Sinn des Christseins*. Drei Predigten (München 1966) 58.

Il grande beneficio per l'uomo offerto dalla fede cristiana nella giustificazione consiste invece nella differenza fondamentale che essa vede tra l'uomo e le sue prestazioni. Nell'essere uomo dell'uomo, essa opera infatti una distinzione tra essere persona e essere attore. Davanti ad ogni agire, la fede cristiana nella giustificazione prende molto sul serio l'uomo come persona fundamentalmente distinta dalle sue azioni, una persona che diventa tale non per il suo agire, ma per il fatto di essere accolta da Dio. Ad agire l'uomo inizia soltanto spinto dall'amore, che scaturisce dalla fede. Dal punto di vista soteriologico, da ciò deriva la conseguenza senz'altro più fondamentale, ovvero che la prestazione dell'uomo è un suo diritto, ma in nessun modo la sua giustificazione. L'uomo è infinitamente più del bilancio delle sue azioni e soprattutto infinitamente più del bilancio delle sue cattive azioni. Questo è il motivo per cui la pena di morte – solo per citare un esempio – è totalmente incompatibile con la dottrina della giustificazione. La pena di morte cancella la distinzione cruciale tra essere persona ed essere attore ed identifica completamente il crimine dell'uomo con la sua persona. Ciò contraddice in pieno la misericordia.

La conseguenza fondamentale della fede cristiana nella giustificazione è l'inversione radicale del rapporto, ormai consolidato nella vita quotidiana, tra essere e fare, tra persona e opera, tra grazia e prestazione: non è assolutamente la prestazione che fa dell'uomo un uomo; piuttosto, è l'uomo che è stato reso in grado di compiere prestazioni. Non sono le opere che fanno una persona; è la persona che, creata, liberata e redenta da Dio, compie le opere. Neppure le opere buone fanno buone le persone; piuttosto, soltanto le buone persone sono capaci di fare buone opere.

In ciò risiede il messaggio della fede biblica nella giustificazione, che al tempo della Riforma è stato rivitalizzato e che oggi possiamo professare in una comunione ecumenica. Esso è di fondamentale importanza anche per la Chiesa cattolica, come dimostra soprattutto il posto occupato, all'interno del Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica, dalla dottrina della grazia e della giustificazione. A prima vista, può sorprendere se non addirittura infastidire il fatto che tale dottrina venga presentata nel mezzo della sezione del Catechismo intitolata "La vita in Cristo" che si occupa di etica, e dunque nel contesto di una riflessione antropologica sul giusto agire dell'uomo. Ma questa prima impressione viene superata se si considera che l'etica cristiana, nella prospettiva cattolica, non è semplicemente un'etica basata sulla legge, ma un'etica dialogica, che fa derivare l'agire morale dell'uomo dal suo incontro personale con Dio, ovvero non lo intende come un agire autarchico e autonomo, ma come risposta al dono dell'amore e dunque come un essere accolti all'interno della dinamica dell'amore di Dio, l'unico che può rendere l'uomo davvero libero. Da questo punto di vista, l'agire etico è al contempo un vero e proprio dono, poiché il dono non diminuisce o annulla la capacità dell'uomo di agire, ma permette all'uomo di essere pienamente se stesso.

### *c) La collaborazione tra la grazia di Dio e la libertà dell'uomo*

Dobbiamo ora ritornare alla questione dell'importanza delle opere nella fede cristiana e chiederci in maniera più approfondita se la fede cristiana nella giustificazione, in riferimento alla salvezza, non preveda alcuna collaborazione da parte dell'uomo. Più in particolare, si tratta di capire se e come l'uomo, dopo l'introduzione del dono della salvezza da parte di Dio, può collaborare a tale salvezza, fino a che punto può agire in virtù della nuova forza infusagli dalla grazia divina, e quale peso abbia anche il suo operato nel momento del giudizio di Dio, di modo che gli possa essere attribuita una

parte di responsabilità non solo nel caso di una eventuale condanna, ma anche nel caso della sua salvezza. Con ciò abbiamo toccato il tema sicuramente più delicato e difficile del consenso sulla dottrina della giustificazione. Non a caso, la “Dichiarazione Congiunta sulla dottrina della giustificazione” sottolinea che i cattolici, quando affermano il “carattere meritorio” delle buone opere, intendono evidenziare “la responsabilità dell’uomo nei confronti delle sue azioni”, senza contestare con ciò “il carattere di dono delle buone opere, e tanto meno negare che la giustificazione stessa resta un dono immeritato della grazia”<sup>22</sup>. Diversamente, tra i riformatori fu soprattutto Martin Lutero a muoversi in maniera decisa nella direzione di una risposta negativa a tali domande, in particolare nella disputa appassionata che egli ebbe con l’umanista Erasmo da Rotterdam e con la visione ottimista della libertà umana espressa nel suo “De libero arbitrio”. Rispondendo a ciò, Lutero si spinse sino a dire in “De servo arbitrio”, con una tagliente incisività difficilmente superabile, che l’uomo è come un animale da sella, cavalcato o da Dio o dal diavolo<sup>23</sup>. Simili sferzanti affermazioni ci inducono a chiederci se sia possibile avere una visione ecumenica comune del rapporto tra l’agire divino e l’agire umano, ovvero tra la grazia di Dio e la libertà dell’uomo nell’evento salvifico, alla luce della fede nella giustificazione.

Indubbiamente, il consenso ecumenico s’impenna sul fatto che il fulcro dell’interpretazione riformatrice della fede è la dottrina della giustificazione dell’uomo non in virtù delle sue opere, ma esclusivamente in virtù della vera fede in Gesù Cristo. “Giustizia” non significa e non implica più un fare - come avveniva nella tradizione aristotelica secondo cui l’uomo era giustificato se agiva giustamente -, ma un “essere in virtù di Dio: il dono di Dio nella fede in Gesù Cristo”<sup>24</sup>. Ma questo solleva precisamente la domanda seguente: il carattere incondizionato della grazia di Dio che giustificata lascia spazio ad una collaborazione dell’uomo - o addirittura la attiva - rendendola possibile e sostenendola, oppure l’onnipotenza di Dio comporta anche il suo agire da solo, che implica l’accettazione, da parte dell’uomo, di una mera passività?<sup>25</sup>

A questa domanda di grande importanza ecumenica si può trovare una risposta soltanto partendo dalla testimonianza biblica di Dio. Tale testimonianza evidenzia che noi uomini riceviamo da Dio tutto ciò che siamo e tutto ciò che siamo in grado di fare, e che l’agire umano non è commensurabile con quanto Dio ci dona, ma anche che il Dio di cui parla la Bibbia vuole essere un vero e proprio Dio della relazione; per questo, Dio chiama l’uomo a porsi davanti a lui, cosicché ciò che l’uomo è e ciò che l’uomo fa conta, nonostante l’incommensurabilità tra uomo e Dio; e Dio

---

22. Dichiarazione Congiunta sulla dottrina della giustificazione, n. 38.

23. M. Luther, WA 18, 635.

24. Ch. Schad, Rechtfertigung: Gottes Ja zu uns!, in: H. Schwier / H.-G. Ulrichs (Hrsg.), Nötig zu wissen. Heidelberger Beiträge zum Heidelberger Katechismus (Heidelberg 2012) 103-107, zit. 105.

25. Vgl. W. Kasper, Zum gegenwärtigen Stand des ökumenischen Gesprächs zwischen den Reformatorischen Kirchen und der Katholischen Kirche, in: Ders., Wege zur Einheit der Christen = Gesammelte Schriften. Band 14 (Freiburg i. Br. 2012) 299-318, bes. 306-310. Vgl. auch K. Koch, Der Heidelberger Katechismus in katholischer Sicht heute, in: M. E. Hirzel, F. Mathwig, M. Zeindler (Hrsg.), Der Heidelberger Katechismus – ein reformierter Schlüsseltext = reformiert! Band 1 (Zürich 2013) 287-306.

invita l'uomo a collaborare alla sua opera: "Non siamo le marionette di Dio, alle quali non si chiederebbe né si permetterebbe di agire in maniera responsabile davanti a lui."<sup>26</sup>

La testimonianza biblica della relazione che Dio ha con l'uomo deve essere approfondita partendo dalla cristologia e dalla soteriologia. Nella fede cristiana, è evidente che la redenzione è un processo che, destinato all'uomo, ha origine in Dio. Il fulcro decisivo della fede cristiana nella redenzione non è l'ira di Dio che deve essere mitigata dall'uomo, ma l'amore che Dio rivolge liberamente all'uomo. Non è l'uomo che riconcilia Dio con sé, ma è Dio che, nel suo amore gratuito, perdona l'uomo. La morte di Gesù sulla croce non è il prezzo che l'umanità peccatrice, per espriare la propria colpa, paga a Dio, offeso dai peccati degli uomini. La morte di Gesù è piuttosto il dono che Dio stesso fa di sé e del suo amore a noi uomini. Da un lato, questa dimensione catabasica della soteriologia cristiana va sottolineata chiaramente. Dall'altro, essa non deve offuscarne la dimensione anabasica. Gesù Cristo, infatti, non è soltanto il Dio che si è abbassato fino a noi uomini, ma è anche l'uomo che si è innalzato sino a Dio: "Gesù non è soltanto l'epifania dell'amore divino, che deve essere vista e compresa esclusivamente dall'alto verso il basso, ma è anche un rappresentante dell'umanità, nel quale la natura umana cede se stessa a Dio in ciò che ha di più prezioso e di più puro."<sup>27</sup> Pertanto, anche la morte in croce di Gesù deve essere intesa non soltanto come un dono amorevole che Dio fa di se stesso a noi uomini, ma anche come un auto-consegnarsi amorevole, senza riserve, dell'uomo Gesù a Dio.

Le due dimensioni dell'evento salvifico, catabasica e anabasica, sono indissociabili e si compenetrano; detto in altre parole: la riconciliazione "non è una discesa senza ascesa"<sup>28</sup>. Soltanto alla luce di questa prospettiva fondamentale cristologica-soteriologica possono essere affrontate anche le tematiche ecumeniche tuttora controverse, tra cui in particolare la questione ecclesiologica consistente nel capire se un'interpretazione sacramentale dell'azione redentrice di Dio, secondo la quale tale azione avviene sempre anche tramite la mediazione di ciò che è terreno-umano e di ciò che è ecclesiale, sia compatibile con la dottrina della giustificazione. Alla base della questione ecclesiologica vi è quella agiologica e mariologica: si tratta di comprendere se, nella redenzione donataci attraverso Cristo, abbia un ruolo anche l'intercessione dei santi in generale e di Maria in particolare. Per la fede cattolica, è evidente che la venerazione dei santi è una forma di adorazione di Dio, come evidenzia la Prefazio dei Santi: "Nella festosa assemblea dei santi risplende la tua gloria, e il loro trionfo celebra i doni della tua misericordia." Quando si venera un santo, si adora quel Dio che a lui è venuto e che da lui è stato accolto. In questo senso, l'invocazione dei santi non nega minimamente l'unicità della mediazione di Gesù Cristo; piuttosto, grazie a tale mediazione, i Santi anche in cielo, da dove ci aiutano, possono continuare a vivere l'amore per il prossimo. Quello che possiamo dire per i santi, lo possiamo dire ancora di più per Maria, che è stata scelta da Dio affinché diventasse la madre di suo Figlio; il suo contributo alla storia della salvezza è stato però reso possibile soltanto dalla grazia

---

26. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Wie weit trägt der Konsens über die Rechtfertigungslehre?* in: *IkaZ. Communio* 29 (2000) 424-437, zit. 433.

27. J. Ratzinger, *Theologie und Verkündigung im Holländischen Katechismus*, in: *Ders., Dogma und Verkündigung* (München 1973) 65-83, zit.77.

28. K.-H. Menke, *Das unterscheidend Christliche. Beiträge zur Bestimmung seiner Einzigkeit* (Regensburg 2015) 67.

divina. Nella figura di Maria incontriamo dunque la personificazione della dottrina della giustificazione, come sottolinea giustamente il documento “Communio Sanctorum”: “secondo il pensiero cattolico, la Madre di Cristo è la personificazione dell’evento della giustificazione per sola grazia e per sola fede”<sup>29</sup>.

Queste prospettive, a cui si è accennato solo brevemente, devono essere naturalmente approfondite nei dialoghi ecumenici per poter conseguire solidi consensi. Ma da quanto detto finora dovrebbe risultare evidente anche che si potrà rispondere a queste difficili domande soltanto se verrà chiarita la questione fondamentale, comprendendo cioè se, nell’evento della giustificazione, l’uomo è solo oggetto dell’agire salvifico di Dio, oppure, come soggetto della fede, egli collabora con Dio, conformemente a quanto espresso dal Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica: “La giustificazione stabilisce la collaborazione tra la grazia di Dio e la libertà dell’uomo. Dalla parte dell’uomo essa si esprime nell’assenso della fede alla Parola di Dio che lo chiama alla conversione, e nella cooperazione della carità alla mozione dello Spirito Santo, che lo previene e lo custodisce.”<sup>30</sup> Si capisce che la libertà dell’uomo, di cui parla il Catechismo, è una libertà a cui siamo pervenuti attraverso Cristo. Secondo la fede biblica, l’uomo all’origine non è libero, seppure sia destinato e chiamato alla libertà. Egli dipende dunque da Dio, fondamento assoluto della sua libertà, affinché possa essere liberato dalla sua schiavitù ed affinché possa impiegare davvero liberamente questa libertà ricevuta, come ha riassunto in maniera incisiva Paolo: “Cristo ci ha liberati perché restassimo liberi; state dunque saldi e non lasciatevi imporre di nuovo il giogo della schiavitù” (Gal 5,1). Nel discorso sulla liberazione dell’uomo operata da Dio e sul suo passaggio dalla schiavitù alla libertà, si trova l’interpretazione dell’evento della giustificazione nel contesto della dottrina cristiana sulla libertà, conformemente a quanto affermato da Paolo e ripreso in modo nuovo da Martin Lutero nel suo scritto “Sulla libertà del cristiano”.

#### **4. La testimonianza ecumenica del primato dell’amore**

Per comprendere in maniera più approfondita la collaborazione tra grazia di Dio e libertà dell’uomo nel quadro della salvezza, può essere utile riflettere sul paragone utilizzato dal teologo medievale Bonaventura per illustrare la forza della speranza escatologica. Bonaventura raffronta il movimento della speranza al volo dell’uccello, che si libra nell’aria e che dall’aria si lascia portare. Ma per volare, l’uccello deve innanzitutto stendere le ali più che può ed impiegare, nel loro movimento, tutte le sue energie. Lui stesso deve poi mettersi in moto per spiccare il volo e salire ad alta quota. Vivere nella speranza significa dunque volare. Chi spera, infatti, deve sforzarsi, come fa l’uccello, di muoversi e di muovere tutte le sue membra, per contrastare la forza di gravità che tira verso il basso, per raggiungere le vere altezze e per lasciarsi portare dall’aria.<sup>31</sup> Con questo paragone, Bonaventura suggerisce che la grande speranza della fede non rende superfluo l’agire dell’uomo, ma gli consente al contrario di acquisire la giusta forma e la sua libertà. Volare richiede tutte le nostre energie; ma è possibile

---

29. Bilaterale Arbeitsgruppe der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz und der Kirchenleitung der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands, *Communio Sanctorum*. Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 2000) Nr. 267.

30. Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica, n. 1993.

31. Bonaventura, *Dominica I. Adv. Sermo XVI*.

soltanto se ci affidiamo totalmente all'aria che ci circonda e che ci porta. Come l'uccello può volare perché sa essere leggero, così anche il cristiano sarà in grado di volare meglio se non darà a se stesso troppo peso e se, soprattutto, non si lascerà schiacciare dalla forza di gravità dei peccati.

Nella stessa direzione punta un'immagine analoga utilizzata da Martin Lutero per chiarire il rapporto tra fede ed opere: "Il Vangelo è come una brezza fresca e delicata nella grande calura estiva, è consolazione nell'angoscia della coscienza... Ma non appena la brezza del Vangelo ha dato ristoro e conforto alle nostre forze, noi non dobbiamo rimanere indolenti, coricarci e russare; ovvero, quando lo Spirito di Dio ha appagato, acquietato e consolato la nostra coscienza, allora dobbiamo dimostrare anche la nostra fede con le buone opere che Dio ci ha comandato ed indicato nei dieci comandamenti."<sup>32</sup> Di fatti, chi, nella fede, è sollevato dalla tormentosa preoccupazione della propria salvezza può e deve farsi carico delle preoccupazioni degli uomini e del mondo.

Se teniamo a mente queste similitudini, comprendiamo anche perché il teologo cattolico Otto Hermann Pesch, esperto di Lutero, ha definito la disputa scoppiata al tempo della Riforma sulla fede e sulle opere come "la più superflua di tutte le questioni controverse"<sup>33</sup>. Il cruciale messaggio della giustificazione dell'uomo per fede, riscoperto durante la Riforma, non ci divide come cristiani, ma ci unisce. E che non debba mai dividerci, nonostante sia avvenuto proprio questo per secoli, lo dimostra anche una testimonianza risalente ad un'epoca che precede l'apertura ecumenica della Chiesa cattolica durante il Concilio Vaticano Secondo, ovvero la testimonianza di Santa Teresa del Bambin Gesù (1873-1897), che il Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica presenta al fine di spiegare la propria interpretazione della dottrina della giustificazione: "Dopo l'esilio della terra, spero di gioire di te nella Patria; ma non voglio accumulare meriti per il cielo: voglio spendermi *per il tuo solo amore* [...]. Alla sera di questa vita comparirò davanti a te con le mani vuote; infatti non ti chiedo, o Signore, di tener conto delle mie opere. Tutta la nostra giustizia non è senza macchie ai tuoi occhi. Voglio perciò rivestirmi della tua *giustizia* e ricevere dal tuo *amore* l'eterno possesso di *te stesso*."<sup>34</sup>

Non è un caso che Santa Teresa abbia respinto l'immagine tradizionale della santità, che vede il santo come un eroe delle virtù, come uno "sportivo" capace di altissime prestazioni religiose. Per lei, la santità cristiana non si realizza in qualcosa di sensazionale e di eroico, ma vive nel quotidiano sotto il velo della discrezione di una fede non vistosa, così che è la fede stessa il contenuto essenziale della santità. Teresa è convinta che la santità consista non tanto in esercizi e prestazioni religiose, ma in un atteggiamento esistenziale di fondo nutrito dalla fede, nella vita di tutti i giorni. Per questo, ha distolto lo sguardo dalle buone azioni e dalle opere pie, annunciando e lodando piuttosto, con letizia, la grazia di Dio. Ella sapeva infatti che, nella vita della fede, in fin dei conti, tutto è grazia e che niente è così lontano dall'esistenza cristiana quanto la pia speculazione sulla ricompensa celeste per le opere buone: "Dobbiamo fare tutto ciò possiamo fare, per amore di Dio, ma è indispensabile in verità riporre tutta la nostra fiducia nell'Unico che santifica le nostre opere e che può santificarci senza di esse."

---

32. M. Luther, WA 40 III, 386.

33. O. H. Pesch, *Hinführung zu Luther* (Mainz 1982) 162.

34. Catechismo della Chiesa cattolica, n. 2011.

Questa è, nelle parole di una santa cattolica della fine del XIX secolo, la dottrina della giustificazione pura. Teresa, infatti, non solo ha annunciato il messaggio pienamente cristiano del “per sola grazia”, ma lo ha testimoniato con la sua stessa vita. Sforzandosi di vivere in tutto nella grazia di Dio, ha anticipato l’intesa ecumenica tra la Chiesa cattolica e le Chiese nate dalla Riforma, e questo è avvenuto sulla “piccola via” che ella ha intrapreso, un cammino sul quale la “sola fide” si riconcilia persino con la “sola caritate”, ed in prima linea non con l’amore umano, ma con l’amore di Dio per noi uomini.

È un segno promettente il fatto che questa visione ecumenica di una santa si sia realizzata. Con ciò, anche la tradizionale opposizione tra pietà cattolica e pietà protestante è stata superata, come mostra quanto scrive il grande teologo protestante e martire cristiano del regime nazista, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, parlando di una conversazione avuta una volta con un sacerdote francese: “Ci eravamo posti la semplice domanda di cosa volessimo realizzare in fondo con la nostra vita. Egli disse: voglio diventare un santo... Mi colpì molto in quel momento. Tuttavia dissentii, dicendo più o meno: io voglio imparare a credere.” Se Dietrich Bonhoeffer avesse conosciuto Santa Teresa d’Avila, probabilmente non avrebbe più visto una contrapposizione tra il diventare santi e l’imparare a credere, comprendendo che, per questa santa cattolica, il fulcro della santità cristiana è proprio la fede. Sicuramente, Teresa di Lisieux e Dietrich Bonhoeffer si saranno già accordati al riguardo, in cielo. A noi, nella nostra vita e nella nostra convivenza ecumenica, rimane il compito di trarre le giuste conseguenze da questa bella testimonianza di consenso ecumenico sulla dottrina della giustificazione, anche nelle sue diverse prospettive spirituali sviluppatesi all’interno delle varie tradizioni confessionali. E questo possiamo e dobbiamo farlo in particolare nel 2017, anno della commemorazione comune della Riforma, commemorazione che sarebbe stata impensabile senza un consenso ecumenico sulla dottrina della giustificazione.

**Conferenza per il Dies Academicus dell'anno accademico 2016-2017,  
Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma  
15 marzo 2017**

*Cristiani uniti per un mondo in frantumi*

Reverendo Padre Rettore,  
Stimati docenti,  
Cari studenti,  
Signori e signore,

Vi ringrazio di cuore per avermi invitato al Dies Academicus dell'anno accademico 2016-2017. È per me un onore ed una gioia poter parlare in questa Università, alla cui opera si è riferito Papa Benedetto XVI durante la sua visita del 3 novembre 2006, non esitando a qualificarla “come uno dei più grandi servizi che la Compagnia di Gesù fa alla Chiesa universale”<sup>1</sup>. Come Presidente del Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione dell'unità dei cristiani, trovo che sia un'occasione davvero particolare, nell'anno in cui ricorre il cinquecentesimo anniversario della Riforma, essere invitato a tenere una conferenza proprio nell'Università che fu fondata da Sant'Ignazio di Loyola nel 1551, all'inizio della Controriforma. La Controriforma dovrebbe essere definita in maniera più calzante “Riforma cattolica”, ad indicare che non esiste solo “una” Riforma e che lo stesso Sant'Ignazio dovrebbe essere considerato come un “riformatore” all'interno della Chiesa. Per questo, desidero innanzitutto lasciare la parola ad un gesuita, che, con il suo giudizio, ci conduce al centro della nostra tematica. Si tratta di Alfred Delp, ucciso a causa della sua opposizione all'ideologia nazionalsocialista il 2 febbraio 1945 a Berlino Plötzensee. In un articolo scritto all'inizio del suo ultimo anno di vita sul “Destino delle Chiese”, egli aveva profetizzato che la capacità, da parte della Chiesa, di trovare di nuovo una via verso gli uomini sarebbe dipesa da una questione basilare: “se le Chiese credono che l'umanità possa sopportare ancora una volta l'immagine di una cristianità litigiosa, hanno chiuso. Dobbiamo accettare di portare il peso della divisione sia come destino storico sia come croce. Nessuno di coloro che oggi sono in vita lo vorrebbe fare di nuovo. Al contempo, quella divisione deve essere anche la nostra permanente vergogna, perché non siamo stati in grado di conservare intatta l'eredità di Cristo, il suo amore.”<sup>2</sup> Alla luce di questa chiara diagnosi, è facile capire anche perché Alfred Delp, già durante la seconda guerra mondiale, sia giunto ad un'altra conclusione inequivocabile, affermando che noi siamo diventati terra di missione soprattutto in Europa e che dobbiamo prenderne atto<sup>3</sup>. Nel comprendere il nesso inscindibile tra missione ed ecumenismo, Alfred Delp ci introduce anche alle origini storiche del movimento ecumenico.

---

1. Benedetto XVI, Discorso durante la visita alla Pontificia Università Gregoriana, il 3 novembre 2006.

2. A. Delp, *Das Schicksal der Kirchen* (1944/45), in: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band IV: *Aus dem Gefängnis*, hrsg. von Roman Bleistein (Frankfurt a. M. 1984) 318-323, zit. 319.

3. A. Delp, *Vertrauen zur Kirche*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Band I: *Geistliche Schriften*, hrsg. von Roman Bleistein (Frankfurt a. M. 1982) 263-283, zit. 280.

## 1. La sinfonia di ecumenismo e missione

All'origine del movimento ecumenico nel secolo scorso vi è il movimento missionario, il cui orientamento trovò particolare espressione nella prima Conferenza Mondiale sulla Missione tenutasi nel 1910 ad Edimburgo in Scozia. Allora era ben chiaro lo scandalo insito nel fatto che le varie Chiese e Comunità ecclesiali si facevano concorrenza nel lavoro missionario ed in tal modo minavano la credibilità dell'annuncio del Vangelo di Gesù Cristo soprattutto nei continenti più lontani, poiché avevano portato in altre culture, insieme al Vangelo di Cristo, anche le divisioni della Chiesa in Europa. I partecipanti alla Conferenza erano consapevoli che la mancanza di unità tra i cristiani costituiva il maggiore ostacolo alla missione nel mondo. Ma dato che una testimonianza credibile dei cristiani nel mondo è possibile solo quando le Chiese riescono a sanare le loro divisioni nella fede e nella vita ecclesiale, ad Edimburgo soprattutto il vescovo anglicano missionario Charles Brent esigette che si compissero intensi sforzi per il superamento di quelle differenze relative alla dottrina e all'ordinamento delle Chiese che ostacolano il cammino verso l'unità. In virtù di questa presa di coscienza, da Edimburgo scaturirono due ulteriori movimenti che continuano tuttora ad accompagnare l'ecumenismo.<sup>4</sup>

Il primo è il "movimento per un cristianesimo pratico" recante il nome di "Life and Work". Fondato a Costanza nel 1914, esso si è prefisso come obiettivo quello di promuovere un'intensa collaborazione tra le Chiese, facendo fronte alle grandi sfide della società, tra le quali figurava in primo piano, all'epoca, lo sforzo di pervenire ad un'intesa e ad una pace tra i vari popoli. L'intento di tale movimento era soprattutto contribuire alla soluzione di problemi sociali, come pure offrire "un'anima cristiana" ai tentativi politici di riunificazione del mondo di allora, come ad esempio alla Società delle Nazioni, nella convinzione che i cristiani debbano agire insieme in un mondo minacciato da divisioni e da guerre.

Da Edimburgo si sviluppò anche il secondo ramo del movimento ecumenico, ovvero "Faith and Order", il movimento per la fede e la costituzione delle Chiese, che, nel 1948, diventò una Commissione indipendente all'interno del Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Da Edimburgo in poi, è risultato infatti sempre più evidente che gli obiettivi pratici della collaborazione ecumenica possono essere realizzati soltanto se le Chiese riescono innanzitutto a giungere ad un'intesa sui problemi – fonte di divisione – relativi alla dottrina della fede e alle costituzioni teologicamente importanti delle Chiese. In questo secondo ramo del movimento ecumenico, di centrale rilevanza è dunque la ricerca dell'unità nella fede.

I tre movimenti più sopra citati rappresentano le diverse sfide con le quali l'ecumenismo si deve confrontare. "Faith and Order" si occupa di questioni di fede specifiche all'ambito teologico, al fine di far avanzare la ricerca dell'unità delle Chiese nella professione di un'unica fede, nella comunione liturgica e nei sacramenti, nella costituzione delle Chiese e nel ministero. "Life and Work" affronta le sfide secolari dell'ecumenismo, concentrandosi sulla collaborazione tra le Chiese, che offrono il loro servizio al mondo. Il movimento missionario s'incentra soprattutto sulla testimonianza

---

4. Vgl. W. Pannenberg, *Entwicklung und (Zwischen-)Ergebnisse der ökumenischen Bewegung seit ihren Anfängen*, in: H. Fries u.a., *Das Ringen um die Einheit der Christen. Zum Stand des evangelisch-katholischen Dialogs* (Düsseldorf 1983) 14-30, bes. 17-20.

comune dei cristiani nel mondo e davanti al mondo. Da ciò risulta evidente non solo che il movimento ecumenico ha preso, sin dall'inizio, diverse direzioni e deve tuttora continuare a farlo, ma anche e soprattutto che il movimento ecumenico ed il movimento missionario sono inscindibili, come ha sottolineato giustamente il Cardinale Walter Kasper: "Una Chiesa missionaria deve essere anche una Chiesa ecumenica; una Chiesa impegnata ecumenicamente è il presupposto di una Chiesa missionaria."<sup>5</sup>

Dicendo questo, menzioniamo una delle priorità di fondo che era anche del Concilio Vaticano Secondo. Il Concilio individua infatti il motivo dello stretto legame tra missione ed ecumenismo nel fatto che la missione è un movimento escatologico, nel quale la Chiesa accoglie in sé le grandi eredità delle culture dei popoli, le purifica, le arricchisce e si lascia da loro arricchire. Poiché la Chiesa è, per sua natura, missionaria, il Concilio vede anche la Chiesa come un movimento escatologico, più precisamente come popolo di Dio nel suo pellegrinaggio terreno tra il "già" e il "non ancora". In questa dinamica escatologica della Chiesa il Concilio ha integrato anche il movimento ecumenico, il quale consiste nel reciproco scambio di doni tra le Chiese divise, uno scambio che la Chiesa arricchisce e dal quale si lascia arricchire per riacquistare la sua vera pienezza cattolica. In questa prospettiva, il movimento missionario ed il movimento ecumenico sono strettamente interconnessi; missione ed ecumenismo si rivelano come le due forme della dinamica escatologica della Chiesa.

Ciò che il Concilio ha risvegliato nella coscienza della Chiesa in maniera rinnovata per quanto riguarda lo stretto legame tra evangelizzazione e ricerca dell'unità dei cristiani è in realtà antico quanto antico è il cristianesimo stesso e risale alla preghiera pronunciata nel cenacolo da Gesù prima della sua passione e della sua morte, quando egli invocò l'unità dei suoi discepoli con un intento specifico: "*perché...* il mondo sappia che tu mi hai mandato" (Gv 17,21). Con questa proposizione finale della preghiera del Signore, l'evangelista Giovanni suggerisce che l'unità dei discepoli di Gesù non è un fine in sé, ma è al servizio della credibilità dell'annuncio del Vangelo di Gesù Cristo. Facendo proprio l'intento di Gesù, il Concilio Vaticano Secondo ricorda che il compito missionario della Chiesa può essere assunto in maniera credibile soltanto se viene rivitalizzato l'obiettivo originario del movimento ecumenico, consistente nel ripristino dell'unità visibile dei cristiani separati. L'evangelizzazione deve avere una chiave di violino ecumenica, affinché la sua melodia non risulti cacofonica ma sinfonica, conformemente a quanto ha osservato in maniera pregnante Papa Francesco nella sua Esortazione apostolica "Evangelii gaudium": "Data la gravità della controtestimonianza della divisione tra cristiani, particolarmente in Asia e Africa, la ricerca di percorsi di unità diventa urgente. I missionari in quei continenti menzionano ripetutamente le critiche, le lamentele e le derisioni che ricevono a causa dello scandalo dei cristiani divisi." Pertanto, per Papa Francesco "l'impegno per un'unità che faciliti l'accoglienza di Gesù Cristo smette di essere mera diplomazia o un adempimento forzato, per trasformarsi in una via imprescindibile dell'evangelizzazione"<sup>6</sup>.

---

5. Walter Kasper, Eine missionarische Kirche ist ökumenisch, in: Ders., Wege zur Einheit der Christen = Gesammelte Schriften. Band 14 (Freiburg i. Br. 2012) 621-634, S. 623.

6. Francesco, Evangelii gaudium, n. 246.

## 2. Lo scandalo della divisione e la benedizione del movimento ecumenico

Missione ed ecumenismo sono strettamente legati anche in virtù del fatto che la missione cristiana si rivolge all'umanità intera e mira al raggiungimento dell'unità del genere umano. Rispetto a questo obiettivo, la Chiesa concepisce se stessa, conformemente a quanto evidenziato nel primo articolo della Costituzione dogmatica sulla Chiesa "Lumen gentium", come sacramento della salvezza, ovvero come "il segno e lo strumento dell'intima unione con Dio e dell'unità di tutto il genere umano"<sup>7</sup>. Si pone allora la cruciale questione di capire come la Chiesa possa essere sacramento di unità per l'umanità intera quando continua a mostrare al mondo il deplorabile spettacolo della sua stessa frammentarietà. Ecco il motivo più profondo per cui il Concilio Vaticano Secondo ha avuto il coraggio di denunciare la divisione tuttora esistente della cristianità come "scandalo al mondo" perché "danneggia la più santa delle cause: la predicazione del Vangelo ad ogni creatura"<sup>8</sup>.

Per comprendere la posta in gioco del movimento ecumenico, dobbiamo far fronte a questo scandalo, in particolare nell'anno in cui commemoriamo l'inizio della Riforma di cinquecento anni fa. Di fatti, l'intento dei riformatori non era assolutamente quello di dividere la Chiesa, ma di rinnovarla. Tuttavia, dato che la Riforma della Chiesa non è riuscita, essa ha condotto alla fine alla rottura dell'unità della Chiesa e alla sua divisione. Le conseguenze della Riforma, certamente non volute ma aventi una reale incidenza, non sono il rinnovamento universale della cristianità e la sua unità conformemente alla Sacra Scrittura ed al messaggio degli apostoli, ma la frammentazione ed il confessionalismo con il suo carico di feroci ostilità e persino di guerre cruenti, guerre che hanno sconvolto l'Europa, come quella dei Trent'anni, che ha trasformato il continente europeo in un mar rosso di sangue.

La pace di Augusta del 1555 contribuì, è vero, ad una certa pacificazione. Tuttavia, il principio di base del "cuius regio eius religio", elevato a legge imperiale, condusse, come ripercussione a distanza, alla formazione di stati nazionali secolari con forti confini confessionali, sviluppo, questo, che va considerato come un pesante fardello ereditato dal tempo della Riforma. Spingendosi ancora oltre, la secolarizzazione moderna, intesa come processo che ha svuotato la fede cristiana della sua missione, per assicurare la pace sociale nel senso della fondazione, del mantenimento e del rinnovamento dell'ordine sociale, deve essere vista come conseguenza certamente non voluta e non prevista, ma pur sempre tragica e d'ampia portata, della divisione della Chiesa in occidente nel XVI secolo; va vista cioè come "privatizzazione per così dire 'fatta in casa' del cristianesimo"<sup>9</sup>. L'emancipazione del mondo culturale moderno innanzitutto dalle opposizioni tra le Chiese confessionali in lotta tra loro ed infine dal cristianesimo in generale è da ritenersi risultato e conclusione -per esaurimento- della divisione della Chiesa e delle sanguinose guerre di religione del XVI e del XVII secolo. Poiché, quale tragico effetto di tali guerre, il cristianesimo è stato percepito storicamente soltanto nella forma delle diverse confessioni che si sono osteggiate fino allo spargimento del sangue, questa costellazione storica ha comportato come inevitabile conseguenza il fatto che, per dare un nuovo fondamento alla pace sociale,

---

7. Lumen gentium, n. 1.

8. Unitatis redintegratio, n. 1.

9. J. B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (Mainz 1977) 31.

non si è tenuto conto delle differenze confessionali ed in seguito del cristianesimo in generale, come ha evidenziato l'ecumenista protestante Wolfhart Pannenberg: "Là dove la secolarizzazione dell'epoca moderna ha preso la forma di un allontanamento dal cristianesimo, questo ha toccato le Chiese non come un destino dal di fuori, ma come conseguenza dei loro peccati contro l'unità, come la conseguenza della divisione della Chiesa del XVI secolo e delle inconcludenti guerre di religione del XVI e del XVII secolo, che non hanno lasciato altra scelta a coloro che abitavano in territori confessionalmente misti se non ricostruire la loro convivenza su un fondamento comune non insidiato dalle lotte confessionali."<sup>10</sup>

Questo giudizio implica, in senso inverso, che il ripristino della missione pubblica del cristianesimo quale servizio all'unità e alla pace sociale presuppone il superamento delle divisioni ereditate dal passato, in un'unità dei cristiani ritrovata. Se, di fatti, la privatizzazione moderna della fede cristiana è dovuta essenzialmente alla divisione della Chiesa in Europa, allora il cristianesimo, soprattutto in Europa, potrà nuovamente assumere un'importanza per tutta la società soltanto quando la divisione della Chiesa sarà superata. Il processo ecumenico non potrà dunque essere privo di conseguenze sul modo in cui la cultura secolare dell'epoca moderna si rapporta al tema della religione in generale e del cristianesimo in particolare. I motivi che hanno indotto, da un punto di vista storico, al rifiuto della religione e delle Chiese cristiane da parte della cultura moderna non potranno più essere fatti valere davanti ad una forma di cristianesimo che avrà superato le divisioni. Soltanto se risolverà le sue scissioni, il cristianesimo riuscirà dunque, soprattutto in Europa, ad affermare in maniera credibile la verità della religione davanti al secolarismo. Sarà possibile difendere la rivendicazione della verità da parte della fede cristiana ed annunciare la salvezza di Dio per tutti gli uomini in un mondo così pieno di sciagure soltanto se lo si farà in uno spirito ecumenico di riconciliazione.

### **3. La capacità e la missione della Chiesa cristiana di promuovere la pace**

Ricordare il complesso contesto storico che fa da sfondo alla situazione sociale odierna del cristianesimo può aiutare a comprendere meglio anche l'importanza fondamentale del movimento ecumenico nelle società moderne. Già al momento della sua nascita nel XX secolo, che è passato alla storia come uno dei secoli più brutali e disumani, il movimento ecumenico è apparso come un faro luminoso nel mare di sangue che sommergeva l'Europa e come un movimento di pace. Questa stessa importanza il movimento ecumenico la riveste anche e soprattutto nel mondo di oggi, oppresso da ingiustizie sociali, dalla tragedia umana dei migranti, da conflitti armati e da attacchi terroristici, un mondo in cui, come osserva Papa Francesco, ha luogo la terza guerra mondiale a pezzetti. Di fatti, soltanto un cristianesimo unificato al suo interno può rivelarsi esemplare per la convivenza degli uomini nella pace e nella giustizia; e soltanto un cristianesimo riconciliato ecumenicamente può assumere quella missione che ha descritto il Concilio Vaticano Secondo affermando che il cristianesimo, nella sua costituzione ecclesiale, è chiamato a vivere e ad operare come segno e strumento di

---

10. W. Pannenberg, *Einheit der Kirche als Glaubenswirklichkeit und als ökumenisches Ziel*, in: Ders., *Ethik und Ekklesiologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen 1977) 200-210, zit. 201. Zum Ganzen vgl. Ders., *Christentum in einer säkularisierten Welt* (Freiburg i. Br. 1988).

unità degli uomini in un mondo così lacerato da divisioni, da ostilità e da interessi contrapposti. Nel processo di riunificazione ecumenica dei cristiani si può e si deve ravvisare dunque “il più ampio contributo del cristianesimo contemporaneo all’avvenire politico dell’umanità ed in particolare a quello del mondo occidentale”<sup>11</sup>.

Il movimento ecumenico può essere segno e strumento di unità per il genere umano soprattutto perché si trova di fronte allo stesso problema fondamentale che interessa tutte le società, ovvero la questione di come, nella vita sociale e politica, pluralità e tolleranza possano conciliarsi con l’esigenza fondamentale di uno spirito unitario che unisce tutti gli uomini a vantaggio del bene comune, senza cadere in un pluralismo anarchico o in un’uniformità monolitica. La storia dell’umanità ha dimostrato a sufficienza di essersi sempre mossa tra questi due estremi e di dover continuamente trovare una via di mezzo in grado di conciliarli.

La missione ed il compito specifici dell’ecumenismo cristiano consistono precisamente nel superare questi due estremi e nel contribuire alla conciliazione tra i loro momenti di verità, dato che l’ecumenismo può avere successo soltanto nella forma di un’unità nella diversità e di una diversità nell’unità. L’obiettivo del movimento ecumenico è far sì che le varie Chiese, attraverso un processo di riconciliazione e di superamento di quelle differenze che sono tuttora causa di divisione della Chiesa, diventino un’unica Chiesa pur rimanendo Chiese e possano esprimere in maniera visibile questa unità nella diversità. Il movimento ecumenico è dunque chiamato a presentarsi in un certo senso come terza realtà, di fronte ad un pluralismo scollegato e ad una rigida uniformità, portando alla luce ciò che in entrambi gli estremi c’è di vero e di autentico. Questa terza realtà, in cui si conciliano la libertà del singolo e la necessità della collettività, è la Chiesa cristiana, ovvero “il popolo internazionale e universale che esiste in comunità riconoscibili di uomini, raggruppate in famiglie, e che non riconosce altra signoria se non quella della grazia di Dio.”<sup>12</sup>

Quando questa terza realtà illumina la società, facendosi segno e strumento, allora il movimento ecumenico contribuisce alla riconciliazione tra unità e diversità e favorisce così la pace sociale. Il processo ecumenico di riunificazione dei cristiani dimostra, nel momento in cui si compie, la sua capacità e la sua volontà di essere promotore di pace nel mondo. Soltanto quando le Chiese cristiane riescono a riconciliarsi ed intraprendono questo necessario processo di purificazione, esse possono operare in maniera credibile ed efficace a favore del mantenimento, della promozione e del rinnovamento della pace nel mondo, come ha giustamente sottolineato il Vescovo protestante Wolfgang Huber: “Al superamento delle ostilità in campo politico e sociale, i cristiani e le Chiese possono contribuire soltanto se hanno la volontà e la capacità di abbattere i muri anche tra loro, ovvero di vivere ecumenicamente. Il loro contributo alla pace è inscindibile dalla loro capacità di vivere in pace.”<sup>13</sup>

---

11. W. Pannenberg, *Zukunft und Einheit der Menschheit*, in: Ders., *Ethik und Ekklesiologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen 1977) 166-186, zit. 185.

12. L. Weimer, *Die Lust an Gott und seiner Sache, oder: Lassen sich Gnade und Freiheit, Glaube und Vernunft, Erlösung und Befreiung vereinbaren* (Freiburg i. Br. 1981) 529.

13. W. Huber, *Christlicher Glaube vor dem Problem militärischer Gewalt*, in: Ders., *Streit um die Wahrheit und die Fähigkeit zum Frieden. Vier Kapitel ökumenische Theologie* (München 1980) 81-116, zit. 181

#### 4. Vivere come messaggeri riconciliati della riconciliazione

L'ecumenismo cristiano può compiere questa missione di pace soltanto se è riconciliato al suo interno e se vive il binomio di unità e pluralità in una diversità riconciliata. L'ecumenismo deve continuamente sforzarsi e pregare affinché ciò sia realizzato, poiché tale riconciliazione può essere operata soltanto dallo Spirito Santo. L'esperienza ci mostra che noi cristiani siamo ripetutamente tentati, da un lato, di generare diversità, chiudendoci però in particolarismi ed esclusivismi e creando divisioni, e, dall'altro, di realizzare l'unità secondo la nostra prospettiva umana, producendo standardizzazione e uniformità. Al contrario, lo Spirito Santo -soltanto lui- può far scaturire diversità e pluralità e realizzare, al contempo, unità. Lo Spirito dona l'unità nella diversità o, più precisamente, l'unità nella diversità riconciliata. Per definire in maniera più particolareggiata questa forma specifica di unità, Papa Francesco fa ricorso alla figura matematica del poliedro, che descrive in questi termini nella sua Esortazione apostolica "Evangelii gaudium": il modello dell'unità non può essere la sfera, "dove ogni punto è equidistante dal centro e non vi sono differenze tra un punto e l'altro". Il modello dell'unità è piuttosto il poliedro, "che riflette la confluenza di tutte le parzialità che in esso mantengono la loro originalità".<sup>14</sup>

L'impegno ecumenico è essenzialmente un lavoro di riconciliazione. Questa dimensione fondamentale è stata richiamata all'attenzione dalla Settimana di Preghiera per l'unità dei cristiani del 2017, che si è ispirata alle parole scritte dall'apostolo Paolo nella sua lettera alla comunità di Corinto: "L'amore di Cristo ci spinge verso la riconciliazione". Non è un caso che questo tema sia stato scelto dalla Comunità di lavoro delle Chiese cristiane in Germania nell'anno della commemorazione della Riforma, nella consapevolezza che, se da un lato la Riforma ci ha permesso di riscoprire il vangelo della giustificazione dell'uomo per grazia divina, dall'altro essa è stata anche contrassegnata da dolorose divisioni e da terribili guerre confessionali. Entrambi gli aspetti sono stati evidenziati da Papa Francesco e dal Vescovo Mounib Younan, Presidente della Federazione Luterana Mondiale, nella loro Dichiarazione congiunta, firmata a Lund, in Svezia: "Mentre siamo profondamente grati per i doni spirituali e teologici ricevuti attraverso la Riforma, confessiamo e deploriamo davanti a Cristo il fatto che luterani e cattolici hanno ferito l'unità visibile della Chiesa."<sup>15</sup>

Di fronte a questi due aspetti, la riconciliazione rappresenta il comandamento della situazione ecumenica attuale: innanzitutto, la riconciliazione tra i cristiani stessi, e poi il contributo che deve essere apportato dall'ecumenismo cristiano nel mondo di oggi così poco riconciliato. A ciò ci esorta Paolo nel già citato quinto capitolo della seconda lettera ai Corinzi: "Noi fungiamo quindi da ambasciatori per Cristo, come se Dio esortasse per mezzo nostro. Vi supplichiamo in nome di Cristo: lasciatevi riconciliare con Dio" (v. 20). Ecco quale è, per Paolo, la conseguenza logica, dal punto di vista della fede, della riconciliazione di Dio in Gesù Cristo. Se i cristiani accolgono il dono della riconciliazione e si lasciano riconciliare da Dio in Cristo, essi sono anche chiamati e tenuti ad annunciare la riconciliazione di Dio, a lavorare a favore della riconciliazione e ad operare come ambasciatori della riconciliazione nel mondo odierno,

---

14. Francesco, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 236.

15. Dichiarazione congiunta in occasione della commemorazione congiunta cattolico-luterana della Riforma, il 31 ottobre 2016.

e questo per il compito ed il potere affidato loro da Gesù Cristo stesso. Come cristiani, siamo inviati a cancellare dal mondo ciò che è vecchio e antiquato, ovvero la colpa, e a portare ciò che è nuovo, ovvero il perdono. In questo consiste il compito della riconciliazione per il quale i discepoli di Gesù Cristo sono inviati nel mondo.

## 5. L'ecumenismo come lavoro cristiano di riconciliazione

I cristiani possono contribuire in maniera credibile alla riconciliazione degli uomini soltanto se essi stessi si riconciliano tra loro e riescono a ripristinare quell'unità che è stata lacerata e che è andata persa a causa delle varie divisioni nel corso della storia. L'ecumenismo è, nel suo più intimo fulcro, lo sforzo di ripristinare l'unità dei cristiani e dunque, essenzialmente, un lavoro di riconciliazione, come è stato più volte mostrato nella storia del movimento ecumenico.

In riferimento all'urgente necessità di riconciliazione tra oriente ed occidente nel mondo cristiano, diviso dall'XI secolo in poi, una pietra miliare decisiva è stata posta certamente dall'evento verificatosi il 7 dicembre 1965, quando, poco prima della conclusione del Concilio Vaticano Secondo, nella cattedrale del Fanar a Costantinopoli e nella basilica di San Pietro a Roma, fu letta la Dichiarazione comune dei più alti rappresentanti delle due Chiese, il Patriarca ecumenico Athenagoras ed il Beato Papa Paolo VI, con la quale si decideva di “togliere dalla memoria e dal mezzo della Chiesa” le reciproche sentenze di scomunica dell'anno 1054, per evitare che esse siano “un ostacolo al riavvicinamento nella carità”<sup>16</sup>. Con tale atto memorabile, il veleno della scomunica è stato tolto dall'organismo ecclesiale ed il simbolo della divisione è stato sostituito dal simbolo della carità. Questo atto è diventato il punto di partenza della riconciliazione tra la Chiesa cattolica e la Chiesa ortodossa, il cui obiettivo fu descritto dal Patriarca ecumenico Athenagoras cinquant'anni fa, con le seguenti, appassionate parole: “È giunta l'ora del coraggio cristiano. Ci amiamo gli uni gli altri; professiamo la stessa fede comune; incamminiamoci insieme verso la gloria del sacro Altare comune, per fare la volontà del Signore, affinché la Chiesa rifulga, il mondo creda e la pace di Dio venga su tutti.”<sup>17</sup>

La riconciliazione è altrettanto necessaria per quanto riguarda la grande divisione prodottasi nel mondo cristiano d'occidente nel XVI secolo. Poiché i riformatori intendevano rinnovare e non dividere la Chiesa, la Riforma deve essere considerata in senso positivo anche dai cattolici come un processo di riforma della Chiesa attraverso la riscoperta del Vangelo della grazia divina gratuita. Tuttavia, la Riforma non ha condotto al rinnovamento di tutta la Chiesa; piuttosto, la Chiesa si è divisa e sono scoppiate sanguinose guerre confessionali. Davanti a questo volto bifronte, da un lato siamo grati per i doni che ci sono stati offerti tramite la Riforma, dall'altro però abbiamo validi motivi per riconoscere apertamente le nostre colpe, per pentirci e per tentare di riconciliarci. Un simile cammino fu già intrapreso al tempo della Riforma da Papa Adriano VI nel messaggio rivolto alla Dieta di Norimberga nel 1522,

---

16. Déclaration commune du pape Paul VI et du patriarche Athénagoras exprimant leur décision d'enlever de la mémoire et du milieu de l'Église les sentences d'excommunication de l'année 1054, in: Tomos Agapis. Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970) (Rome-Istanbul 1971), Nr. 127.

17. Télégramme du patriarche Athénagoras au pape Paul VI, à l'occasion de l'anniversaire de la levée des anathèmes le 7 décembre 1969, in: Tomos Agapis. Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970) (Rome – Istanbul 1971) Nr. 277.

quando il pontefice ammise e deplorò gli sbagli ed i peccati commessi dalle autorità della Chiesa cattolica. Durante e dopo il Concilio Vaticano Secondo, i vari papi che si sono susseguiti hanno chiesto più volte perdono per il male che i cattolici hanno causato ai membri delle altre Chiese. Al riguardo, ricordiamo in particolare il grande gesto penitenziale del Santo Papa Giovanni Paolo II che, durante le celebrazioni dell'Anno Santo, nella "Giornata del Perdono", ha confessato le grandi colpe del passato, e ricordiamo anche Papa Francesco, il quale, in occasione della sua visita al tempio valdese di Torino, ha chiesto "perdono per gli atteggiamenti e i comportamenti non cristiani, persino non umani" che, nella storia, i cattolici hanno avuto nei confronti dei valdesi<sup>18</sup>.

Da parte protestante, va rammentata la Dichiarazione nella quale la Federazione Luterana Mondiale, durante la sua plenaria del 1979, ha affermato la sua disponibilità a riconoscere "come il giudizio dei riformatori nei confronti della Chiesa romano-cattolica e della teologia del suo tempo spesso non fosse privo di distorsioni polemiche, che, in parte, hanno ancora un impatto nel presente", ed ha deplorato il fatto "che i nostri fratelli romano-cattolici, a causa di tali rappresentazioni polemiche, siano stati offesi e fraintesi"<sup>19</sup>. Degna di essere ricordata è anche l'ammissione delle proprie colpe fatta dalla Federazione Luterana Mondiale che riunita in plenaria, davanti agli anabattisti, ha riconosciuto il proprio "profondo rammarico e dolore per la persecuzione dei battisti perpetrata dalle autorità luterane" ed in particolare per il fatto "che i riformatori luterani hanno giustificato teologicamente tale persecuzione". Questo riconoscimento delle proprie colpe è sfociato nel 2010 in un servizio liturgico penitenziale, con il quale la Federazione Luterana Mondiale e la Conferenza Mennonita Mondiale si sono riconciliate.

## 6. L'ecumenismo cristiano al servizio dell'avvenire del mondo

La riconciliazione presuppone il riconoscimento della propria colpa, la disponibilità a fare penitenza e la purificazione della memoria storica, alla quale Papa Francesco ha esortato in particolare in riferimento alla commemorazione comune della Riforma: "Non possiamo cancellare ciò che è stato, ma non vogliamo permettere che il peso delle colpe passate continui ad inquinare i nostri rapporti. La misericordia di Dio rinnoverà le nostre relazioni."<sup>20</sup> Misericordia e riconciliazione devono essere infatti le prospettive principali del cammino ecumenico, sul quale i cristiani vengono spinti dall'amore di Cristo. Per l'amore, le legittime differenze tra le varie confessioni non rappresentano più, come era il caso nel passato, soltanto degli ostacoli, ma anche la possibilità di un reciproco arricchimento nella fede. Il vero amore non cancella le differenze, ma le fa convergere riconciliate in una più profonda unità.

Noi cristiani dobbiamo questa testimonianza al mondo odierno. Per poterci mettere al servizio della riconciliazione degli uomini e dei popoli, ci dobbiamo

---

18. Francesco, Discorso durante la sua visita pastorale al tempio valdese di Torino, il 22 giugno 2015.

19. Erklärung der Fünften Vollversammlung des LWB zum Besuch Kardinal Willebrands, in: Chr. Krause / W. Müller-Römheld (Hrsg.), *Evian 1970. Offizieller Bericht der Fünften Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes* (Witten – Frankfurt – Berlin 1970) 207f.

20. Francesco, Omelia durante la celebrazione dei vesperi nella solennità della conversione di San Paolo apostolo, nella Basilica di S. Paolo fuori le Mura, il 25 gennaio 2016.

continuamente impegnare nella nostra stessa riconciliazione e dobbiamo fare di tutto affinché si realizzi la grande speranza che ha sempre animato il Santo Papa Giovanni Paolo II. Egli era convinto che, dopo il primo millennio della storia della Chiesa, che era stato il tempo della Chiesa indivisa, e dopo il secondo millennio, che aveva comportato in oriente tanto quanto in occidente profonde divisioni nella Chiesa, il terzo millennio avesse il grande compito di ripristinare la perduta unità dei cristiani. Giovanni Paolo II sapeva che noi cristiani dobbiamo essere “più disposti a imboccare il cammino di quell’unità per la quale Cristo pregò alla vigilia della Sua Passione”. Di fatti, il valore di questa unità è enorme: “Si tratta in un qualche senso del futuro del mondo, si tratta del futuro del Regno di Dio nel mondo. Le debolezze e i pregiudizi umani non possono distruggere ciò che è il disegno di Dio riguardo al mondo e all’umanità. Se valutiamo tutto questo, possiamo guardare al futuro con un certo *ottimismo*. Possiamo aver fiducia che «Colui che ha iniziato in noi quest’opera buona la porterà a compimento» (cfr. Fil 1,6).”<sup>21</sup>

Se facciamo nostra questa convinzione di Papa Giovanni Paolo II, ci apparirà ancora più chiaramente l’importanza fondamentale che l’ecumenismo cristiano riveste nel mondo odierno. L’impegno cristiano a favore della riconciliazione nel mondo inizia con la riconciliazione dei cristiani e delle Chiese cristiane, per poter poi risplendere nella vita quotidiana e nella convivenza degli uomini e dei popoli. Il contributo decisivo che noi cristiani dobbiamo apportare per l’avvenire della nostra società consiste nel riconciliarci tra noi e nel vivere come persone riconciliate. Il superamento ecumenico delle divisioni del mondo cristiano è il presupposto indispensabile affinché il cristianesimo possa diventare segno e strumento di unità e di pace per l’umanità intera.

Ciò vale in particolar modo davanti alla crescente globalizzazione, che, per noi cristiani, deve essere un ulteriore motivo per consolidare ed intensificare la collaborazione ecumenica al servizio del bene integrale di tutta la famiglia umana, come ha osservato Papa Francesco nel suo messaggio rivolto alla X Assemblea generale del Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese riunitosi a Busan in Corea nel novembre 2013: “Il mondo globalizzato nel quale viviamo esige da noi che rendiamo insieme una testimonianza comune della dignità riconosciuta da Dio ad ogni essere umano, in favore di una promozione concreta delle condizioni culturali, sociali e giuridiche che permettano agli individui, come pure alle società, di crescere nella libertà.”<sup>22</sup>

Per questa importante missione, abbiamo bisogno di quella sapienza che ha trovato sede in Maria, come ci mostra lo stemma della Pontificia Università Gregoriana. Preghiamo allora Maria affinché ella interceda per tutti noi, aiutandoci a ricomporre l’unità dei cristiani e a diventare, così, segno e strumento di speranza per un mondo in frantumi.

---

21. Giovanni Paolo II, *Varcare la soglia della speranza* (Milano 1994) 164.

22. Francesco, *Messaggio al Cardinale Kurt Koch per la X Assemblea plenaria del Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese a Busan, in Corea, il 4 ottobre 2013*.

## Conférence de carême en la Basilique de Fourvière Lyon, 19 mars 2017

*L'unité de l'Église dans la profession de foi et dans le mouvement œcuménique  
Perspective catholique*

### 1. Unité dans le Credo et dans la réalité ecclésiale

Dans le Credo apostolique, nous chrétiens professons notre foi en la «sainte Église catholique». Dans la grande profession de foi de Nicée-Constantinople – ainsi que dans d'autres formulations grecques du Credo au quatrième siècle – la profession de foi en l'unité de l'Église est non seulement ajoutée, mais également soulignée et mise au premier plan, partant de la conviction que la sainteté de l'Église du seul Dieu et du seul Seigneur Jésus Christ exige absolument son unité. Car l'unité de tous les chrétiens au sein d'une unique Église n'est pas simplement un objectif souhaitable en soi, que l'on pourrait éventuellement négliger sans porter atteinte à la foi chrétienne. Nous devons au contraire, comme l'œcuméniste protestant Wolfhart Pannenberg, affirmer clairement que « l'Église n'est pas pleinement réalisée sans l'unité de tous les chrétiens. »<sup>1</sup>

Le lien étroit entre la profession de foi chrétienne en Jésus Christ en tant que seul Seigneur de l'Église et profession de foi en l'unité de celle-ci s'exprime dans l'Écriture sainte et dans la tradition chrétienne principalement par le fait que l'Église est définie comme Corps et le Christ en lequel nous croyons comme sa Tête. Cette image de la tête et du corps doit ici être comprise de manière radicale. Car d'une part le corps sans la tête n'est plus un corps, mais un cadavre, et l'Église ne serait donc plus qu'une caricature d'elle-même si elle n'avait pas au centre sa tête, le Christ. Si d'autre part le Christ en tant que tête de son Église a un corps visible et veut être présent dans son corps, alors il ne peut y avoir qu'une Église. Car le Christ n'a pas plusieurs corps, mais il s'unit à *seul* corps, l'Église. Ou pour l'exprimer par une autre image: si la relation du Christ avec son Église est si étroite que l'on peut parler d'une relation entre époux et épouse, la conséquence logique au niveau de la foi est que le Christ n'est en aucun cas polygame, mais monogame et fidèle à son unique épouse.

Si nous considérons l'union étroite entre Jésus Christ et son Église, qui est son corps, et si donc l'Église elle-même repose entièrement sur l'unité, une contradiction scandaleuse apparaît dans la situation actuelle de la chrétienté: d'une part, tous les chrétiens s'accordent sur le grand symbole de la foi, dans lequel ils croient en « l'Église, une, sainte, catholique et apostolique»; mais d'autre part, les chrétiens qui croient en cette unique Église vivent dans des Églises et Communautés ecclésiales séparées, et sont confrontés à la question obsédante de savoir où se trouve concrètement l'Église *une* voulue par le Christ.

Cette contradiction entre la profession de foi commune en une seule Église et la réalité historique et empiriquement tangible de la division a été abordée avec sensibilité par le Concile Vatican II qui, dans son Décret sur l'œcuménisme *Unitatis redintegratio*, part de la conviction théologique fondamentale que le Christ a fondé « une seule et unique Église ». Cette conviction de foi doit cependant se confronter à la réalité

---

1. W. Pannenberg, Das Glaubensbekenntnis. Ausgelegt und verantwortet vor den Fragen der Gegenwart, Hamburg 1972, 153.

qu'on constate tant dans l'histoire qu'aujourd'hui, à savoir qu'il existe une pluralité d'Églises et de Communautés ecclésiales qui prétendent toutes devant les hommes être « le véritable héritage de Jésus Christ ». Face à l'impression désastreuse que « le Christ lui-même [serait] divisé », le Concile se vit contraint d'affirmer que la division persistante de l'Église s'oppose « ouvertement à la volonté du Christ », est « pour le monde un objet de scandale » et « fait obstacle à la plus sainte des causes: la prédication de l'Évangile à toute créature ». Le Concile a donc indiqué l'objectif majeur du Décret sur l'œcuménisme dès sa première phrase: « Promouvoir la restauration de l'unité entre tous les Chrétiens, c'est l'un des buts principaux du saint Concile œcuménique de Vatican II. »<sup>2</sup>

Le Concile Vatican II, comme toute la tradition chrétienne, est convaincu que l'unité est une catégorie fondamentale de la foi chrétienne et que, sans recherche de l'unité de l'Église, la foi chrétienne renoncerait à elle-même. Nous chrétiens devons donc avoir le courage et l'humilité de regarder en face le scandale permanent d'une chrétienté divisée et de maintenir vivante la question de l'unité de l'Église avec une aimable ténacité. Pour ce faire, nous serions bien inspirés de chercher des indications dans l'Écriture Sainte.

## **2. Dimensions de l'unité de l'Église dans la prière sacerdotale de Jésus**

L'indicateur le plus important dans l'Écriture Sainte se trouve dans la prière d'adieu de Jésus, où l'invocation de l'unité de ses disciples revêt un rôle tout particulier. Le regard de Jésus y dépasse la communauté des disciples et se dirige vers tous ceux qui « croiront en leur parole » (Jn 17, 20). Puisque notre actualité œcuménique est aussi incluse dans la prière sacerdotale de Jésus, on y trouve exprimé de la meilleure façon possible quelles sont et doivent être les plus profondes dimensions du devoir œcuménique à la lumière de la foi. Si l'unité des disciples était au cœur de la prière de Jésus, alors l'œcuménisme chrétien ne peut que s'insérer dans cette prière, en faisant sien ce qui Lui tenait à cœur. S'il n'est pas seulement une entreprise philanthropique menée entre des humains, mais s'il est fondé et motivé de façon réellement christologique, l'œcuménisme ne peut finalement être rien d'autre qu'une participation à la prière sacerdotale de Jésus. En s'appuyant sur ce fondement biblique de l'œcuménisme, on cherchera, dans ce qui suit, à préciser les dimensions élémentaires de l'œcuménisme à partir de ce texte très familier mais inépuisable de Jean 17 et à consolider notre responsabilité œcuménique dans la recherche de l'unité de la foi, qui nous est promise comme un don et confiée comme une tâche.<sup>3</sup>

### *a) Dimension spirituelle: la prière pour l'unité*

La dimension spirituelle de l'unité des chrétiens est à mentionner en premier lieu. Car la prière de Jésus « Que tous soient un » montre qu'Il ne commande pas l'unité à ses disciples et ne la réclame pas d'eux, mais il prie pour eux. Ce constat, simple et élémentaire, est de grande signification pour la recherche œcuménique de l'unité de

---

2. Unitatis redintegratio, n° 1.

3. Vgl. K. Kardinal Koch, Christliche Ökumene im Licht des Betens Jesu. „Jesus von Nazareth“ und die ökumenische Sendung, in: J.-H. Tück (Hg.), Passion aus Liebe. Das Jesus-Buch des Papstes in der Diskussion, Mainz 2011, 19-36.

l'Église. La prière pour l'unité est le signe décisif qui préfigure tous les efforts œcuméniques. Sans prière, il ne saurait y avoir d'unité, comme le souligne toujours le Pape François: « L'engagement œcuménique répond en premier lieu à la prière du Seigneur et se fonde essentiellement sur la prière. »<sup>4</sup>

La dimension spirituelle a trouvé très tôt son expression visible dans le fait que la Semaine de prière pour l'unité des chrétiens est née au début du mouvement œcuménique et a été dès l'origine une initiative œcuménique. C'est la prière pour l'unité des chrétiens qui a ouvert la voie au mouvement œcuménique qui, dès le commencement, a été un mouvement de prière, comme le Pape Benoît XVI l'a exprimé de façon parlante: « La barque de l'œcuménisme n'aurait jamais quitté le port si elle n'avait pas été poussée par ce vaste courant de prière et par le souffle de l'Esprit Saint. »<sup>5</sup> Un tel mouvement de prière n'est pas un début qu'on pourrait laisser derrière soi; c'est bien plutôt un début qui continue de marcher à nos côtés, aujourd'hui encore, et qui doit accompagner tous les efforts œcuméniques.

Dans notre quête du rétablissement de l'unité des chrétiens, la principale place doit être donnée à la prière. Par la prière pour l'unité, nous chrétiens, nous exprimons que, pour notre foi, l'unité ne peut être rétablie par nos seuls efforts et que nous ne pouvons pas en déterminer la forme ou le moment. Nous chrétiens, nous pouvons provoquer des divisions; notre passé et notre présent le montrent. Mais nous ne pouvons recevoir notre unité que comme un don. La prière pour l'unité rappelle que tout n'est pas faisable également dans le domaine œcuménique et que nous devons laisser de l'espace à l'action indisponible de l'Esprit saint et avoir confiance en lui au moins autant que dans nos propres efforts.

La prière pour l'unité est la meilleure préparation pour la recevoir comme don de l'Esprit Saint. Parce que nous savons dans la foi, comme chrétiens, que l'unité « est d'abord un don de Dieu, pour lequel nous devons prier incessamment », nous devons aussi être conscients de notre responsabilité de « préparer les conditions, de cultiver le terrain du cœur, afin que cette extraordinaire grâce soit accomplie »<sup>6</sup>. La centralité de la prière montre clairement que l'œcuménisme est surtout une tâche spirituelle et que l'œcuménisme spirituel est le cœur de l'œcuménisme chrétien ou, comme le souligne le Concile Vatican II, « l'âme de tout le mouvement œcuménique »<sup>7</sup>. La crédibilité de l'œcuménisme se joue dans la vigueur spirituelle avec laquelle les chrétiens s'insèrent dans la prière sacerdotale de Jésus, qui est le cœur de l'unité des chrétiens: « Nous deviendrons un si nous nous laissons attirer dans cette prière. »<sup>8</sup>

---

4. François, Discours aux participants au colloque œcuménique de religieux et religieuses organisé par la Congrégation pour les Instituts de Vie consacrée et les Sociétés de Vie apostolique, le 24 janvier 2015.

5. Benoît XVI, Homélie lors de la célébration des vêpres en conclusion de la Semaine de prière pour l'Unité des Chrétiens, le 25 janvier 2008.

6. François, Discours à la délégation du Patriarcat œcuménique de Constantinople, le 28 juin 2013.

7. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n° 8.

8. Benoît XVI, Homélie lors de la célébration œcuménique dans l'église de l'ex-couvent augustinien de Erfurt, le 23 septembre 2011.

b) *Dimension corporelle: l'unité visible*

Le primat et la centralité de la dimension spirituelle de l'unité des chrétiens seraient mal compris si on en concluait que l'unité des chrétiens est une réalité seulement spirituelle et de ce fait invisible. Cela contredirait la deuxième intention de la prière sacerdotale de Jésus dans laquelle il prie pour l'unité de ses disciples d'une manière très spécifique : « Afin que tous soient un. Comme toi, Père, tu es en moi et moi en toi, qu'eux aussi soient en nous, afin que le monde croie que tu m'as envoyé. » Pour que le monde puisse croire, il faut qu'il puisse voir l'unité. L'unité de l'Église qu'il faut retrouver ne peut pas être une unité invisible ; il faut que cette unité prenne une figure visible dans notre monde.

Le Pape Benoît XVI a consacré des efforts importants à faire redécouvrir que l'unité de l'Église était une unité en corps, notamment dans son exégèse de la prière sacerdotale de Jésus et dans sa confrontation œcuménique avec Rudolf Bultmann sur ce point.<sup>9</sup> Pour cet exégète protestant, l'unité authentique des disciples, spécialement dans l'Évangile de Jean, est une unité « invisible », car « elle n'est en rien un phénomène mondain ». De ces deux affirmations, Benoît XVI approuve entièrement la seconde, mais il conteste fondamentalement la première. Pour obtenir une conception viable de l'unité de l'Église, il vaut la peine de réfléchir un peu à cette double réponse : L'unité des disciples et donc aussi l'unité de l'Église à venir, pour laquelle Jésus a prié, n'est pas « un phénomène mondain » et par principe ne peut pas l'être : c'est une évidence pour Benoît XVI, comme il l'affirme expressément: « L'unité ne vient pas du monde, on ne l'obtient pas par ses propres forces. Les forces mondaines conduisent aux divisions, on le voit bien. Dès que le monde influence l'Église et le christianisme, il produit des divisions. L'unité ne peut venir que du Père à travers le Fils.»<sup>10</sup> Mais autant Benoît XVI est d'accord avec l'exégète protestant sur le fait que l'unité des disciples ne peut pas provenir du monde, autant il en conteste la conclusion, à savoir que l'unité serait de ce fait « invisible ». Même si l'unité n'est en rien un phénomène mondain, l'Esprit Saint n'en agit pas moins dans le monde. L'unité des disciples doit donc être telle que le monde puisse la reconnaître et parvenir ainsi à la foi, comme le Pape Benoît XVI le souligne expressément: « Ce qui ne provient pas du monde peut et doit absolument être quelque chose qui soit efficace dans et pour le monde et qui soit aussi perceptible par lui. La prière de Jésus pour l'unité a précisément pour but que, par l'unité des disciples, la vérité de sa mission se rende visible aux hommes. »<sup>11</sup> Benoît XVI souligne même que « Jésus est légitimé » par l'unité visible des disciples dans le monde, une unité humainement inexplicable, qui ne vient pas du monde : « Il devient évident qu'il est vraiment le Fils ».<sup>12</sup>

L'accent mis sur la visibilité de l'unité des disciples et de l'Église, et donc sur la dimension corporelle de l'unité de l'Église en corps, explique pourquoi Vatican II voit cette unité visible déjà donnée dans le sacrement du baptême. Le décret *Unitatis Redintegratio* sur l'œcuménisme voit dans le baptême le fondement intérieur et l'expression visible de l'appartenance de tous les baptisés à l'Église : « Ceux qui croient

---

9. J. Ratzinger – Benoît XVI, Jésus de Nazareth - De l'entrée à Jérusalem à la Résurrection Paris 2011, spécialement pp. 109-119.

10. Ibid. 118.

11. Ibid. 118-119.

12. Ibid. 119.

au Christ et qui ont reçu valablement le baptême se trouvent dans une certaine communion, bien qu'imparfaite, avec l'Église catholique. »<sup>13</sup> Le baptême fonde ainsi le « lien sacramentel d'unité existant entre ceux qui ont été régénérés par lui ». Cependant, le baptême n'est « que le commencement et le point de départ », car il est entièrement ordonné « à l'acquisition de la plénitude de la vie dans le Christ » et est donc destiné « à la profession de foi intégrale, à la totale intégration dans l'économie du salut, telle que le Christ l'a voulue et enfin, à la totale insertion dans la communion eucharistique »<sup>14</sup>. Ainsi se dessine le cheminement œcuménique vers l'unité visible de l'Église, comme un chemin qui conduit de la communion fondamentale dans le baptême, et de sa reconnaissance mutuelle, à la pleine communion dans l'Eucharistie, la célébration du Corps du Christ, dans laquelle se manifeste le plus clairement la dimension corporelle de l'unité des chrétiens.

*c) Dimension trinitaire: l'unité dans la diversité*

Comme l'unité de l'Église doit être visible et en corps, une autre question se pose : comment une telle unité doit-elle se présenter concrètement ? Une troisième indication de la prière sacerdotale de Jésus y répond quand il prie avec ces paroles : « Qu'ils soient un, comme nous sommes un, moi en toi et toi en moi ». Jésus lui-même voit le fondement le plus profond de l'unité des disciples dans l'unité d'amour entre le Père, le Fils et le Saint Esprit dans la vie de Dieu. Le Dieu trinitaire, qui est une communion vivante dans l'unité relationnelle originaire de l'amour, est l'archétype le plus transparent de l'unité des chrétiens. À la lumière du mystère de l'amour trinitaire, l'Église apparaît comme le lieu prédéterminé du salut par le Dieu trinitaire ou, ainsi que Vatican II l'a mis en évidence, comme « un peuple qui tire son unité de l'unité du Père et du Fils et de l'Esprit Saint »<sup>15</sup>. L'unité des chrétiens est finalement fondée dans la communion trinitaire et l'Église est à l'image de la Trinité.

En méditant davantage ce mystère de foi, on voit que deux dimensions, de même origine, existent au sein de la vie trinitaire. D'abord dans la vie trinitaire, il y a place pour l'Autre et donc pour la pluralité et la différence. Car le Père est différent du Fils, et le Fils lui aussi est différent du Saint Esprit. Au sein de la Trinité divine on trouve une merveilleuse différence entre les personnes. On trouve aussi en Dieu une merveilleuse unité de la vie divine. Bien que le Père soit différent du Fils et que le Fils, à son tour, soit différent du Saint-Esprit, les personnes divines participent à un dialogue céleste au même registre d'existence. Car le Père est Dieu, le Fils est Dieu et le Saint Esprit est Dieu. Le Dieu trinitaire est en lui-même une vivante communion dans l'originaires unité de leur relation de l'amour.

À la lumière de ce mystère de Dieu, l'Église est appelée à vivre comme icône de la Trinité. Dès lors, si l'unité de l'Église doit représenter sur terre la communion du Dieu trinitaire, cette unité ne pourra être qu'une unité dans la diversité et une diversité dans l'unité. Une telle unité dans la diversité ne peut être qu'un don de l'Esprit saint. Seul le Saint-Esprit peut susciter la diversité et la différence en même temps que l'unité, alors que, nous autres humains, nous sommes toujours tentés soit de vouloir engendrer

---

13. Unitatis redintegratio, n° 3.

14. Unitatis redintegratio, n° 22.

15. Lumen gentium, n° 4.

de la différence, tout en nous enfermant dans les particularismes et les exclusivismes et en créant des divisions, soit d'instaurer l'unité selon nos conceptions humaines, en unifiant par l'uniformisation. Seul le Saint-Esprit donne l'unité dans la diversité, ou comme le Pape François l'exprime avec Oscar Cullmann, théologien luthérien : « Unité dans la diversité réconciliée ».

Pour trouver l'unité dans la diversité, nous chrétiens encore séparés, nous pouvons déjà être unis dans la mesure où nous retirons leur venin aux divisions, en faisant nôtre ce qui est fécond en elles et en accueillant ce qui est positif dans la différence ; tout cela à la lumière du mystère de l'amour trinitaire que le Pape Benoît XVI a décrit avec délicatesse: « L'amour véritable n'efface pas les différences légitimes, mais les harmonise en une unité supérieure, qui n'est pas imposée de l'extérieur, mais donne forme de l'intérieur, pour ainsi dire, à l'ensemble. »<sup>16</sup> Ainsi pouvons-nous entrevoir cette forme d'unité de l'Église qui est déjà possible aujourd'hui. Il ne s'agit pas tant d'échanger des idées et des théories, l'échange de dons est bien plus profond. C'est bien plus qu'un exercice théorique car, de ce fait, on apprend à connaître les différentes communautés chrétiennes dans la profondeur de leurs traditions, à les comprendre et à apprendre d'elles. Car aucune Église n'est si pauvre qu'elle ne puisse faire un apport irremplaçable à la communauté des chrétiens plus vaste. Aucune Église n'est si riche qu'elle n'ait pas besoin d'un enrichissement de la part des autres Églises, ceci dans la conviction que ce que l'Esprit saint a semé dans les autres communautés chrétiennes est « un don à recevoir et qui nous est aussi destiné »<sup>17</sup>.

#### d) Dimension missionnaire: une unité crédible

Au-delà de cette unité provisoire, le regard s'élargit et nous conduit à l'intention spéciale de la prière sacerdotale de Jésus pour l'unité de ses disciples : « Qu'ils soient parfaitement un *pour que* le monde sache que c'est Toi qui m'as envoyé et que tu les as aimés comme tu m'as aimé ». Dans cette phrase finale, on voit clairement que l'unité des disciples n'est pas une fin en soi mais qu'elle est au service de la crédibilité de la mission de Jésus Christ et de son Église dans le monde et qu'elle y constitue la condition indispensable d'un témoignage crédible.

Cette finalité de la recherche œcuménique de l'unité avait déjà été illustrée au siècle dernier d'une manière spéciale par la première Conférence pour la mission mondiale à Édimbourg en 1910. Les participants à cette conférence avaient sous les yeux le scandale de la concurrence entre les missions des différentes Églises et Communautés ecclésiales : elle nuisait à une prédication crédible de l'Évangile surtout dans les cultures éloignées car, avec l'Évangile, elles importaient dans ces cultures les divisions européennes de l'Église. Une douloureuse prise de conscience se fit là : l'absence d'unité entre les chrétiens nuisait à la crédibilité du témoignage chrétien dans le monde.

La division du christianisme a représenté l'obstacle le plus important à la mission mondiale. C'est toujours vrai aujourd'hui, comme le Pape François le rappelle avec clarté dans son exhortation apostolique *Evangelii gaudium*: « Étant donné la gravité

---

16. Benoît XVI, Homélie lors de la célébration des vêpres en conclusion de la Semaine de prière pour l'Unité des Chrétiens, le 25 janvier 2006.

17. François, *Evangelii gaudium*, n° 246.

du contre témoignage de la division entre chrétiens, particulièrement en Asie et en Afrique, la recherche de chemins d'unité devient urgente. Les missionnaires sur ces continents répètent sans cesse les critiques, les plaintes et les moqueries qu'ils reçoivent à cause du scandale des chrétiens divisés. » De ce fait, pour le Pape François, « l'engagement pour l'unité qui facilite l'accueil de Jésus Christ ne peut être pure diplomatie, ni un accomplissement forcé, pour se transformer en un chemin incontournable d'évangélisation. »<sup>18</sup>

Cette urgence œcuménique entraîne que, dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, on ne saurait témoigner avec sérieux de Jésus Christ qu'ensemble, de manière œcuménique, c'est-à-dire que si les Églises chrétiennes surmontent leurs divisions pour vivre dans l'unité d'une diversité réconciliée. L'œcuménisme et la mission sont indissociables. Si la mission consiste essentiellement à rendre témoignage de l'amour de Dieu qu'il nous a révélé en son fils et, à travers ce témoignage, à porter Dieu aux hommes et les hommes à Dieu, alors le cœur de la mission chrétienne doit être l'annonce de Dieu que nous devons réaliser aujourd'hui de façon œcuménique. Le Pape Benoît XVI y a vu à juste titre la tâche œcuménique la plus urgente d'aujourd'hui : « Notre premier service œcuménique en ce temps doit être de témoigner ensemble de la présence du Dieu vivant et par là de donner au monde la réponse dont il a besoin. »<sup>19</sup>

*e) Dimension du martyre: témoigner de l'unité au prix de sa vie*

Les martyrs sont les témoins les plus crédibles de la foi car ils ont donné leur vie pour elle et ils nous rendent attentifs à la signification du martyre pour l'unité des chrétiens.<sup>20</sup> La question du martyre est d'une exceptionnelle urgence dans le monde d'aujourd'hui où l'on dénombre plus de persécutions des chrétiens que durant les premiers siècles.<sup>21</sup> Aujourd'hui 80% des êtres humains persécutés pour leur foi sont des chrétiens. Dans le monde actuel, la religion chrétienne est la plus persécutée de toutes. Toutes les Églises et Communautés ecclésiales ont leurs martyrs. Aujourd'hui les chrétiens ne sont pas persécutés parce qu'ils sont catholiques ou orthodoxes, protestants ou pentecôtistes, mais parce qu'ils sont chrétiens. Le martyre est aujourd'hui œcuménique et l'on doit parler d'un œcuménisme spécifique des martyrs<sup>22</sup>, comme le saint Pape Jean-Paul II l'a déjà souligné en termes pressants, en 1994, dans sa Lettre Apostolique *Tertio millennio adveniente* : « Au terme du deuxième millénaire, l'Église est devenue à nouveau une Église de martyrs. Les persécutions à l'encontre des croyants — prêtres, religieux et

---

18. François, *Evangelii gaudium*, n° 246.

19. Benoît XVI, Homélie lors de la célébration œcuménique dans l'église de l'ex-couvent augustinien de Erfurt, le 23 septembre 2011.

20. Vgl. P.-W. Scheele, *Zum Zeugnis berufen. Theologie des Martyriums*, Würzburg 2008; E. Schockenhoff, *Entschiedenheit und Widerstand. Das Lebenszeugnis der Märtyrer*, Freiburg i. Br. 2015.

21. Vgl. H. Moll, *Martyrium und Wahrheit. Zeugen Christi im 20. Jahrhundert*, Weilheim-Bierbronn 2009; A. Riccardi, *Salz der Erde, Licht der Welt. Glaubenszeugnis und Christenverfolgung im 20. Jahrhundert*, Freiburg i. Br. 2002.

22. Vgl. Kardinal W. Kasper, *Ökumene der Märtyrer. Theologie und Spiritualität des Martyriums*, Norderstedt 2014; R. Prokschi / J. Marte (Hg.), *Europa, vergiss Deine Märtyrer nicht! Aus jüdischer und christlicher Sicht*, Klagenfurt 2006; K. Cardinal Koch, *Christenverfolgung und Ökumene der Märtyrer. Eine biblische Besinnung*, Norderstedt 2016.

laïcs — ont provoqué d'abondantes semailles de martyrs dans différentes parties du monde. Le témoignage rendu au Christ jusqu'au sang est devenu un patrimoine commun aux catholiques, aux orthodoxes, aux anglicans et aux protestants. »<sup>23</sup> Dans son encyclique *Ut unum sint* de 1995, plaidoyer passionné pour l'œcuménisme, le Pape Jean-Paul II a consacré toute une section à l'œcuménisme des martyrs, soulignant que nous chrétiens, nous avons déjà « un martyrologe commun d'un point de vue théocentrique », ce qui nous fait voir « en profondeur que Dieu entretient chez les baptisés la communion dans l'exigence suprême de la foi, manifestée par le sacrifice de la vie »<sup>24</sup>.

Dans l'œcuménisme des martyrs, Jean-Paul II avait déjà décelé une unité fondamentale entre les chrétiens et exprimé l'espoir, à partir de là, que les martyrs nous aident à trouver la pleine unité. Alors que sur cette terre les chrétiens et les Églises vivent encore dans une communion imparfaite entre eux, dans la gloire céleste, les martyrs vivent déjà en une pleine communion accomplie les uns avec les autres. Selon Jean-Paul II, « le témoignage courageux de nombreux martyrs de notre siècle, y compris ceux qui sont membres d'autres Églises et d'autres Communautés ecclésiales qui ne sont pas en pleine communion avec l'Église catholique, atteste de la manière la plus éloquente que tous les facteurs de division peuvent être dépassés et surmontés dans le don total de soi-même pour la cause de l'Évangile »<sup>25</sup>. Avec l'œcuménisme des martyrs ou, comme le Pape François a coutume de le dire, avec l'œcuménisme du sang, on retrouve la conviction de l'Église ancienne, rapportée par Tertullien, selon laquelle le sang de martyrs est la semence de nouveaux chrétiens. Aujourd'hui aussi, nous pouvons donc espérer que le sang de tant de martyrs en notre temps sera la semence de la pleine unité du Corps du Christ.

Dans l'œcuménisme des martyrs, nous trouvons le cœur de toute recherche œcuménique de l'unité de l'Église, comme le Pape François a su l'exprimer en une phrase mémorable : « Si l'ennemi nous unit dans la mort, qui sommes-nous pour nous diviser dans la vie? »<sup>26</sup> N'est-il pas honteux, en fait, que les persécuteurs des chrétiens aient une vision plus juste de l'œcuménisme que celle que, nous chrétiens, nous en avons, car ils démontrent que les chrétiens sont profondément unis? Parce que tant de chrétiens souffrent ensemble dans le monde actuel, l'œcuménisme du sang est même, pour le Pape François, « le signe le plus évident » de l'œcuménisme aujourd'hui<sup>27</sup>.

*f) Dimension eschatologique: l'unité dans le Christ qui revient*

La sensibilité actuelle envers les martyrs chrétiens et la recherche œcuménique de l'unité de l'Église sont liées de façon indissoluble : « Les martyrs appartiennent à toutes les Églises et leurs souffrances sont un "œcuménisme de sang", qui transcende les divisions historiques entre les chrétiens, nous appelant tous à promouvoir l'unité visible des disciples du Christ. »<sup>28</sup> Ce n'est pas seulement la responsabilité kairologique que les

---

23. Jean-Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n° 37.

24. Jean-Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, n° 84.

25. Jean-Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, n° 1

26. François, Discours aux membres du Renouveau charismatique le 3 juillet 2015.

27. François, Message à l'occasion du Global Christian Forum du 1er novembre 2015.

28. Déclaration commune de Sa Sainteté François et de Sa Sainteté Karekin II à Saint Etchmiadzin, République d'Arménie, le 26 juin 2016.

chrétiens doivent assumer de manière œcuménique. L'œcuménisme des martyrs renvoie aussi et surtout à la dimension eschatologique de l'unité de l'Église avec laquelle on conçoit la recherche de l'unité à la lumière de l'accomplissement.

Nous rencontrons cette vision eschatologique de l'unité de l'Église exprimée de manière très provocante par le poète et philosophe des religions russe Vladimir Sergueïevitch Soloviev dans son « Court récit sur l'Antéchrist », qui contient un double message: d'une part, au moment de la décision finale devant Dieu, on verra que dans toutes les communautés, chez Pierre, Paul et Jean, se trouvent des partisans de l'Antéchrist faisant cause commune avec lui, mais aussi de vrais chrétiens qui restent fidèles au Seigneur jusqu'à son retour. D'autre part, face au Christ qui revient, ceux qui, autour de Pierre, Paul et Jean, sont séparés vont se reconnaître comme frères. Avec ce récit, Soloviev n'a sûrement pas voulu reporter l'unité des disciples jusqu'au dernier jour ou la renvoyer à l'eschatologie. La séparation finale entre les partisans de l'Antéchrist et les fidèles disciples du Christ se fera certainement au jour de la moisson eschatologique. Mais comme la foi chrétienne envisage la vie éternelle comme la vraie vie, la vision de Soloviev nous met au défi, nous chrétiens, de nous rencontrer dès maintenant dans la lumière eschatologique dans laquelle Pierre, Paul et Jean sont inséparablement unis.

La recherche de l'unité de l'Église demande de vivre dès maintenant à la lumière eschatologique, plus précisément à la lumière du Christ qui revient, bien conscient que la meilleure manière de rechercher l'unité est de vivre selon l'Évangile. Lorsqu'on prend au sérieux la dimension eschatologique de l'unité de l'Église, on ne ressent aucune contradiction entre la recherche passionnée de l'unité et la conscience paisible du fait que nous ne pouvons pas la faire par nos propres efforts, comme on le croit souvent aujourd'hui, car on les comprend comme deux faces d'une même réalité. Quand nous voyons l'unité de l'Église à la lumière de l'accomplissement, nous voyons qu'il nous faut reconnaître le caractère provisoire de nos efforts et ne pas tomber dans la tentation de faire par nous-mêmes ce que seul le Christ qui revient peut faire, et que sur ce chemin nous nous rapprochons les uns des autres. À cette lumière eschatologique, la recherche de l'unité de l'Église signifie purement et simplement qu'en nous mettant ensemble en marche vers le Christ qui revient, nous nous mettons aussi en marche vers l'unité entre nous ; et tout en étant séparés, nous sommes déjà unis dans notre foi commune au Christ : « Plus nous nous rapprochons du Christ en nous convertissant à son amour, plus nous nous rapprochons également les uns des autres. »<sup>29</sup>

### **3. Obstacles sur le chemin vers l'unité de l'Église**

La dimension eschatologique de l'unité de l'Église jette une nouvelle lumière sur la situation œcuménique actuelle et nous place face aux questions pressantes sur les raisons pour lesquelles nous n'avons pas encore atteint l'unité de l'Église et sur ce qui est nécessaire pour avancer sur ce chemin. Il faut tout d'abord attirer l'attention sur le fait que la recherche œcuménique de l'unité de l'Église se heurte aux forts vents contraires de l'esprit du temps, largement pluraliste et relativiste. Contrairement à la tradition chrétienne, qui a considéré l'unité comme le sens et le fondement de toute la réalité, c'est aujourd'hui à l'inverse le pluralisme qui est devenu le concept de base

---

29. Benoît XVI, Audience générale du 17 janvier 2007.

décisif dans la perception de ce qu'on appelle l'expérience postmoderne de la réalité. D'après l'article fameux de Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, la postmodernité valorise le pluralisme et se méfie du singulier. Une mentalité postmoderne est convaincue qu'on ne peut ni ne doit dépasser la pluralité de la réalité, sous peine d'être soupçonné d'avoir une pensée totalitaire, car si le tout de la réalité nous est donné, s'il nous est donné, ce ne peut être uniquement que de façon plurielle.<sup>30</sup> Ce rejet de principe de la pensée unitaire est une caractéristique de la postmodernité : « elle ne se contente pas de tolérer et d'accepter la pluralité, elle opte fondamentalement pour le pluralisme »<sup>31</sup>. Dans cette mentalité postmoderne, toute recherche de l'unité apparaît comme désuète et pré-moderne.

De plus, cette mentalité postmoderne influence désormais également la pensée œcuménique actuelle, où le pluralisme ecclésiologique est devenu largement plausible et en arrive à valoriser comme positive la pluralité et la diversité des Églises, au point que toute recherche de l'unité de l'Église devient suspecte. Il semble que l'on se soit non seulement satisfait de ce pluralisme des Églises et des Communautés ecclésiales, hérité de l'histoire, mais même qu'on s'en réjouisse positivement, si bien que la recherche œcuménique de l'unité visible de l'Église est jugée irréaliste et non souhaitable.

Le contexte a évolué et c'est la raison pour laquelle, aujourd'hui, il n'y a toujours pas de consensus entre les différentes Églises et Communautés ecclésiales sur ce qui appartient à l'unité de l'Église et en quoi consiste le but du mouvement œcuménique. Certes, les dialogues œcuméniques ont obtenu des consensus, encourageants et de grande portée, sur de nombreuses questions particulières, disputées jusqu'alors, qu'il s'agisse de la compréhension de la foi ou de la structure théologique de l'Église. Malgré cela, la plupart des différences qui demeurent restent liées à des compréhensions divergentes de l'unité de l'Église. Ce double constat constitue le paradoxe de la situation œcuménique actuelle, que l'Évêque Paul-Werner Scheele a formulé avec précision : « On est uni sur la nécessité de l'unité et désuni sur son contenu »<sup>32</sup>

Cette difficulté est fondamentalement liée au fait que chaque Église et chaque Communauté ecclésiale a et réalise son idée spécifique sur ce qu'est l'Église et son unité et s'efforce donc de projeter cette idée confessionnelle également au niveau du but de l'œcuménisme. Il y a donc au fond autant de conceptions du but œcuménique qu'il y a d'écclésiologies confessionnelles.<sup>33</sup> L'Église catholique, ainsi que l'Église orthodoxe, restent attachées à l'objectif initial commun de l'unité visible dans la foi, les sacrements et les ministères ecclésiaux. Par contre, un certain nombre d'Églises et de Communautés ecclésiales issues de la Réforme ont en grande partie abandonné cette

---

30. Vgl. W. Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, Weinheim 1987.

31. Vgl. W. Kasper, *Die Kirche angesichts der Herausforderungen der Postmoderne*, in: ders., *Theologie und Kirche*. Band 2, Mainz 1999, 249-264, bes. 252-255: Absage an das Einheitspostulat: Der pluralistische Grundzug der Postmoderne, zit. 253.

32. P.-W. Scheele, *Ökumene – wohin? Unterschiedliche Konzepte kirchlicher Einheit im Vergleich*, in: St. Ley – I. Proft – M. Schulze (Hg.), *Welt vor Gott. Für George Augustin*, Freiburg i. Br. 2016, 165-179. zit. 165.

33. Vgl. G. Hintzen / W. Thönissen, *Kirchengemeinschaft möglich. Einheitsverständnis und Einheitskonzepte in der Diskussion*, Paderborn 2001; F. W. Graf / D. Korsch (Hg.), *Jenseits der Einheit. Protestantische Ansichten der Ökumene*, Hannover 2001.

conception de l'unité et l'ont remplacée par le postulat de la reconnaissance mutuelle des différentes réalités ecclésiales en tant qu'Églises et donc en tant que parties de l'unique Église de Jésus Christ. Elles ne postulent certes pas un principe d'unité non visible de l'Église; cependant l'unité visible ne subsiste plus que dans l'addition de toutes ces réalités ecclésiales.

Le manque d'accord sur ce qu'est l'unité de l'Église, qui est le but du mouvement œcuménique, est donc dû de manière non négligeable à un manque d'accord œcuménique sur la nature de l'Église et de son unité. La conséquence logique est qu'une clarification œcuménique de la compréhension de l'Église et de l'unité doit être le thème central des dialogues œcuméniques d'aujourd'hui et de demain. Cela vaut d'autant plus dans le dialogue avec les Églises et Communautés ecclésiales issues de la Réforme, dans lesquelles est née une nouvelle forme d'être Église, en quelque sorte un nouveau type d'Église. Cette clarification pourrait préparer une future Déclaration commune sur l'Église, l'eucharistie et le ministère – analogue à la «Déclaration commune sur la Doctrine de la justification», signée à Augsburg en 1999 – qui ouvrirait certainement une étape décisive vers une communion visible des Églises<sup>34</sup>. Une telle clarification s'impose également dans la perspective de la commémoration de la Réforme qui a lieu cette année, car les réformateurs ne voulaient aucunement diviser l'Église, mais ils souhaitaient la renouveler en repartant de l'Évangile. On peut donc voir dans les efforts œcuméniques pour rétablir l'unité de l'Église la reprise du souhait des réformateurs et en quelque sorte la réussite – quoique tardive – de leur œuvre.

Clarifier la compréhension de l'Église et de l'unité est un impératif urgent du moment œcuménique actuel, pour pouvoir parvenir à un consensus plus vaste sur ce qui fait l'unité de l'Église. En effet, si les différents partenaires du dialogue œcuménique ne poursuivent pas un objectif commun, mais conçoivent de manières très différentes ce qu'ils entendent par unité de l'Église, le danger est grand qu'ils prennent des directions différentes pour découvrir ensuite qu'ils sont peut-être encore plus éloignés les uns des autres qu'auparavant. Dès 1980, la Commission mixte catholique-luthérienne avait mentionné cette difficulté en termes clairs dans son texte de consensus «Voies vers la communion»: «Nous avons besoin d'une "vision commune", car nous continuerons de vivre en nous éloignant les uns des autres si nous ne poursuivons pas un but commun. Et si nous concevons ce but de façon opposée, la logique nous entraînera nécessairement dans des directions opposées.»<sup>35</sup>

#### **4. Perspectives in via: un chemin commun vers l'unité**

Ce danger n'a nullement reculé au cours des dernières décennies. Il est donc opportun de rechercher dans la situation œcuménique actuelle des voies permettant de parvenir à un plus grand consensus sur l'unité de l'Église. Pour cela, l'étude de la Commission Foi et Constitution du Conseil œcuménique des Églises intitulée «L'Église - Vers une vision commune» propose une démarche utile. Elle s'efforce de présenter «une vision globale, multilatérale et œcuménique de l'essence, du propos et de la mission de

---

34. Vgl. K. Koch, *Auf dem Weg zur Kirchengemeinschaft. Welche Chance hat eine gemeinsame Erklärung zu Kirche, Eucharistie und Amt?* in: *Cath* 69 (2015) 77-94.

35. *Voies vers la communion* n.2, dans Commission internationale catholique-luthérienne, *Face à l'unité. L'ensemble des textes adoptés (1972-1985)*, introduits et présentés par Harding Meyer et Hervé Legrand, Paris, 1986, p.141..

l'Église » et peut être considéré comme une précieuse déclaration ecclésiologique œcuménique *in via*.<sup>36</sup> Cependant, même cette étude, malgré ses qualités, ne parvient pas à faire avancer l'entente théologique concernant la majeure partie des thèmes ecclésiologiques controversés au-delà de la formulation des questions qui restent ouvertes.

Nous devons approfondir encore notre réflexion et prendre au sérieux l'image du chemin commun vers l'unité. La dimension *in via* de la quête œcuménique d'unité de l'Église peut se décrire au mieux par les événements vécus par les disciples sur le chemin d'Emmaüs. En nous penchant sur cette péricope pascale de l'Évangile de Luc (24,15-35), nous nous interrogerons ensuite sur ce que cette image peut nous dire au sujet des pas encore à faire sur le chemin de l'unité de l'Église.

Tout d'abord, il faut prendre au sérieux l'image du chemin. Dans la situation œcuménique actuelle, il est important que chrétiennes et chrétiens, vivant dans diverses Communautés ecclésiales, soient en marche sur le chemin de l'unité et fassent ensemble tout ce qu'ils peuvent faire. Cette perspective tient fortement au cœur du Pape François qui a exprimé ses convictions œcuméniques en des termes concis : « L'unité ne viendra pas comme un miracle à la fin : l'unité vient dans le cheminement, c'est l'Esprit Saint qui la fait dans le cheminement. »<sup>37</sup> Pour le Pape François, il est très important que l'unité croisse en marchant et être ensemble en chemin signifie déjà pratiquer l'unité. Il convient d'approfondir cette perspective aujourd'hui et surtout de la vivre concrètement. Être ensemble sur le même chemin vers l'unité de l'Église, telle est la première indication que nous offre la profonde histoire du chapitre pascale de Luc.

Le chemin des disciples d'Emmaüs n'est certes pas un voyage à l'aveuglette. Ils sont remplis de tristesse à cause de ce qui s'est passé à Jérusalem et partagent leur trouble entre eux et avec leur compagnon inconnu. Nous en recevons une deuxième indication : l'œcuménisme authentique vit du partage de la vie des autres, de leurs joies et de leurs peines, comme Paul l'a exprimé avec une belle image : « Quand un membre souffre, tous les membres souffrent avec lui; quand un membre est honoré, tous les membres se réjouissent avec lui. Or, vous êtes le Corps du Christ, et chacun de vous pour sa part est un de ses membres. » (1 Co 12, 26-27). Telle est la règle de vie de la communauté œcuménique qui engage à la solidarité entre les chrétiens et les Églises chrétiennes, dans la bonne comme dans la mauvaise fortune, et approfondit l'unité.

En échangeant sur leur expérience de la souffrance, les disciples sont à la recherche d'une parole libératrice sur le chemin d'Emmaüs et la reçoivent de leur compagnon de route inconnu qui leur explique l'Écriture sainte. Il ressort de ce texte une troisième indication : les chrétiens se rapprochent les uns des autres quand ils écoutent ensemble la Parole de Dieu et qu'ils échangent à son sujet. Tel est l'appel spécial de la commémoration de la Réforme en 2017. En effet, la Réforme et le schisme qui s'en est suivi au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle ont été liés à une interprétation controversée de la Bible et ils ont en quelque sorte atteint l'Écriture sainte elle-même. C'est pourquoi on ne pourra surmonter la séparation et rétablir l'unité que par la lecture commune de

---

36. Die Kirche auf dem Weg zu einer gemeinsamen Vision. Eine Studie der Kommission für Glauben und Kirchenverfassung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen (ÖRK), Gütersloh – Paderborn 2015.

37. François, Homélie lors de la célébration des vêpres en la solennité de la conversion de Saint Paul apôtre, le 25 janvier 2014.

l'Écriture sainte. Plus nous approfondirons le mystère de Jésus Christ et de sa Parole, et plus nous nous retrouverons ensemble.

Les yeux des disciples d'Emmaüs ne se sont cependant ouverts que lorsque le Seigneur a rompu le pain avec eux et fait revivre dans leur cœur un profond désir d'unité. La quatrième indication nous apprend que le cheminement commun des disciplines débouche sur la fraction du pain, ce qui indique aussi que la recherche commune de l'unité de l'Église doit avoir pour but la communion eucharistique.

Après leur rencontre personnelle avec le Seigneur ressuscité, les disciples se remettent en marche : « Ils se levèrent à l'heure même. » Nous trouvons là une cinquième indication littérale : les chrétiens, qui trouvent leur unité dans la rencontre du Christ, ne restent pas confortablement assis, mais ils se lèvent et, comme les disciples, ils annoncent ce dont ils ont fait l'expérience, sachant bien que la crédibilité de leur témoignage dépend du fait qu'ils ne le brandissent pas les uns contre les autres ni indépendamment les uns des autres mais ensemble. La communauté œcuménique engagée sur un chemin commun est toujours une communauté de témoignage et de service.

À la lumière de ces cinq indications, la question se pose exhaustivement de la façon dont il faut comprendre l'unité de l'Église. Nous en trouvons une définition utile dans la description de la communauté primitive à Jérusalem selon les Actes des Apôtres qui disent des premiers chrétiens : « Ils se montraient assidus à l'enseignement des Apôtres, aux réunions communes, à la fraction du pain et aux prières. » (Ac 2, 42). Trois éléments surtout apparaissent constitutifs pour l'unité de l'Église : l'unité dans la foi, la célébration liturgique et la communion fraternelle. Sur ce fondement biblique, l'unité de l'Église est comprise comme une unité dans la foi, dans les sacrements et dans la vie de communauté avec des témoins qui ont été appelés et donc aussi dans les ministères de l'Église. Du point de vue catholique, cette unité se réfère aussi au ministère confié au successeur de Pierre, qui est fondamentalement un ministère de l'unité et qui, comme l'a souligné surtout le Pape Jean-Paul II, trouve dans le domaine de l'œcuménisme « son explication toute particulière »<sup>38</sup>.

Cette conception de l'unité de l'Église qui sert d'orientation à l'Église catholique est heureusement aussi reçue en grande partie par le mouvement œcuménique. Dans le troisième article de sa Constitution, le Conseil œcuménique des Églises exprime comme sa tâche première « de s'appeler mutuellement à tendre vers l'unité visible en une seule foi et en une seule communauté eucharistique, exprimée dans le culte et dans la vie commune en Christ, à travers le témoignage et le service au monde, et de progresser vers cette unité afin que le monde croie. »<sup>39</sup>.

Lorsque l'on donne, comme but à l'unité des chrétiens, la communion dans la foi, dans la liturgie, dans le témoignage et le service, on voit que ce but est décrit au mieux comme « la communion la plus complète possible avec des communions les plus complètes possibles ». Cette description implique un jugement clair, à savoir que la communion existant actuellement au plan œcuménique est à comprendre comme une

---

38. Johannes Paul II., *Die Schwelle der Hoffnung überschreiten*, Hamburg 1994, 181.

39. *Verfassung und Satzungen des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen*, in: H. Krüger und W. Müller-Römheld (Hg.), *Bericht aus Nairobi 1975. Ergebnisse – Erlebnisse – Ereignisse. Offizieller Bericht der Fünften Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1976 327-377, zit. 327.

« communion encore incomplète entre des communions incomplètes à des degrés divers et de différentes manières », si bien que chacune de ces communautés a l'obligation de rechercher la pleine communion et de la mettre en œuvre pour arriver à la pleine communion de toutes les communions.<sup>40</sup>

Le cœur de la responsabilité œcuménique se trouve donc dans le souci passionné du rétablissement de cette communion que Paul décrit dans sa salutation aux Philippiens: « Ayez le même amour, une seule âme, un seul sentiment » (Ph 2, 5). Parce que cette communion tient tellement à cœur à Jésus, nous avons toute raison de continuer notre cheminement œcuménique en toute sérénité passionnée et en toute passion sereine. Alors nous verrons « la Gloire » que Dieu a donnée au Christ, dont la connaissance est l'aboutissement de toute sa prière sacerdotale : « Afin qu'ils voient ma gloire, la gloire que tu m'as donnée, car tu m'as aimé dès la création du monde » (Jn 17, 24). Rendre possible la vision de cette gloire et en rendre témoignage dans le monde, telle est la mission du mouvement œcuménique et de sa quête engagée de l'unité de l'Église.

---

40. P.-W. Scheele, Ökumene wohin? Unterschiedliche Konzepte kirchlicher Einheit im Vergleich, in: Ley – I. Proft – Schulze (Hg.), Welt vor Gott. Für George Augustin, Freiburg i. Br. 2016, 165-179, zit. 174.

**Conferenza “Insieme nella testimonianza fino al martirio. Cattolici e Ortodossi  
e le sfide del XXI secolo”, Pontificia Accademia di Scienze Sociali,  
Casino Pio IV, Città del Vaticano, 24 maggio 2017**

*L'ecumenismo dei martiri. Segno di speranza nell'unità del Corpo di Cristo*

### **1. Il martirio come esperienza cristiana comune**

Alla fine del secondo millennio ed all'inizio del terzo, la cristianità è diventata nuovamente, ma con una recrudescenza senza precedenti, una Chiesa di martiri. Ci sono addirittura più martiri oggi che al tempo delle persecuzioni cristiane dei primi secoli. L'ottanta per cento di tutti coloro che vengono perseguitati attualmente a causa della loro fede sono cristiani. La fede cristiana è, nel mondo odierno, la religione più perseguitata<sup>1</sup>. Questa triste realtà ci ricorda inesorabilmente che la Chiesa è sempre Chiesa nel martirio, in cui il battesimo nel nome di Gesù Cristo si radicalizza nel battesimo di sangue. Se l'essere cristiani è davvero sequela di Gesù Cristo, che si mostra a noi sulla croce come modello di primo martire, allora, per principio, l'essere cristiani non può eludere il martirio. In maniera realistica dobbiamo piuttosto partire dal presupposto che la sequela di Gesù Cristo può sempre comportare il martirio, che è il segno supremo dell'amore e della comunione. I martiri sono i testimoni più credibili della fede, poiché testimoniano la verità di Cristo con la loro intera esistenza, fino all'ultima goccia del loro sangue. Ed, al contempo, confermano che il martirio appartiene alla natura ed alla missione della Chiesa sin dalle origini: “I martiri della Chiesa non sono un fenomeno marginale, ma sono al centro stesso della Chiesa.”<sup>2</sup>

Il martirio è un'esperienza fondamentale del cristianesimo nel mondo odierno, dove tutte le Chiese e le Comunità cristiane hanno i propri martiri. Oggi i cristiani non sono perseguitati perché appartengono ad una specifica comunità di fede cristiana, ma perché sono cristiani. Essendo oggi il martirio ecumenico, si deve parlare di un vero e proprio ecumenismo dei martiri<sup>3</sup>. In tutta la sua tragicità, esso contiene però anche una grande promessa: Come la Chiesa antica era convinta che il sangue dei martiri fosse seme di nuovi cristiani, anche noi oggi possiamo serbare la speranza e la salda fiducia che il sangue di così tanti martiri del nostro tempo un giorno sarà seme della piena unità ecumenica del Corpo di Cristo.

Di questa speranza ha reso, ad esempio, una bella testimonianza l'esarca cattolico Leonid Fjodorow, quando ha espresso la sua profonda convinzione che “la

---

1. Vgl. R. Backes, „Sie werden euch hassen“. Christenverfolgung heute (Augsburg 2005); R. Guitton, Cristianophobia. La nuova persecuzione (Torino 2009); Kirche in Not (Hrsg.), Christen in grosser Bedrängnis. Diskriminierung und Unterdrückung. Dokumentation 2016 (München 2016); A. Riccardi, Salz der Erde, Licht der Welt. Glaubenszeugnis und Christenverfolgung im 20. Jahrhundert (Freiburg i. Br. 2002).

2. P.-W. Scheele, Das Martyrium – verbindendes Element der christlichen Communio, in: G. Augustin und M. Schulze (Hrsg.), Freude an Gott. Auf dem Weg zu einem lebendigen Glauben. Festschrift für Kurt Kardinal Koch zum 65. Geburtstag (Freiburg i. Br. 2015) 185-202, zit. 185. Vgl. Ders., Zum Zeugnis berufen. Theologie des Martyriums (Würzburg 2008).

3. Vgl. Kardinal W. Kasper, Ökumene der Märtyrer. Theologie und Spiritualität des Martyriums (Norderstedt 2014); R. Prokschi / J. Marte (Hrsg.), Europa, vergiss Deine Märtyrer nicht! Aus jüdischer und christlicher Sicht (Klagenfurt 2006); K. Cardinal Koch, Christenverfolgung und Ökumene der Märtyrer. Eine biblische Besinnung (Norderstedt 2016).

riunificazione della Russia ortodossa con la Santa Sede Apostolica è una missione di ordine assolutamente sovranaturale” e, come tale, non può essere concepita “senza martirio”<sup>4</sup>. La testimonianza che Fjodorow ha reso nel contesto della riconciliazione della Chiesa tra Oriente ed Occidente vale certamente anche per l’ecumenismo in generale, in quanto i martiri non soltanto sono un grande aiuto sul cammino verso l’unità in Cristo e nel suo Corpo, ma realizzano già questa unità ed offrono pertanto la forma suprema della testimonianza comune: il martirio è un “elemento unificante della comunione cristiana”<sup>5</sup> in un senso molto profondo. In fondo, è un nostro dovere nei confronti dei martiri stessi approfondire il mistero del martirio cristiano.

## 2. In cammino verso una visione ecumenica del martirio

“Noi siamo uniti sullo sfondo dei martiri, non possiamo non essere uniti.” Queste parole, pronunciate dal santo Papa Giovanni Paolo II al termine della “Via crucis” al Colosseo, il venerdì santo del 1994, esprimono il motivo di fondo alla base del suo grande impegno ecumenico. Per Papa Giovanni Paolo II, infatti, l’ecumenismo dei martiri è la forma più credibile dell’ecumenismo: “L’ecumenismo dei santi, dei martiri, è forse il più convincente. La *communio sanctorum* parla con voce più alta dei fattori di divisione.”<sup>6</sup> Nel porre questo accento sull’ecumenismo dei martiri, il Papa ha dimostrato anche di riconoscere esplicitamente, rendendo loro omaggio, i cristiani di altre Chiese e Comunità cristiane che hanno dato la vita per la loro fede in Gesù Cristo come martiri e testimoni della fede dell’unica, indivisa cristianità.

Per comprendere l’importanza di questa pratica del mutuo riconoscimento dei martiri cristiani, diventata oggi normale, è utile gettare un breve sguardo alla storia, che ci mostra come, in realtà, per molto tempo vigesse la pratica contraria. Venivano riconosciuti come martiri soltanto coloro che, con la loro vita, rendevano testimonianza della verità integrale di Cristo. Poiché non si poteva ammettere che potesse esserci un simile Sì alla verità integrale di Cristo anche al di fuori della Chiesa cattolica, non era possibile riconoscere, come tale, il martirio avvenuto in altre Comunità cristiane. Questo atteggiamento contrassegnava già il cristianesimo dei primi tempi, quando venivano riconosciuti come martiri soltanto i testimoni della fede della Chiesa cattolica, mentre il sacrificio della vita di chi apparteneva a comunità eretiche era considerato privo di valore e nullo. Nello scontro con i donasti, ad esempio, Cipriano ed Agostino insistevano sul fatto che potevano esserci veri martiri solo nella Chiesa cattolica, mentre i seguaci di correnti eretiche perseguitati a causa della loro fede non potevano essere riconosciuti, per principio, come martiri.<sup>7</sup> Ancora più restrittivo è diventato il concetto di martirio dopo gli scismi nella Chiesa, quando i fedeli delle varie Chiese cristiane hanno dato la vita per rimanere fedeli alla professione di fede cristiana osservata nella propria confessione, non raramente uccidendosi gli uni gli altri; tuttavia, ciascuna

---

4. Vgl. I. Ossipowa, Wenn die Welt euch hasst... Die Verfolgung der katholischen Kirche in der UdSSR (Anweiler 2000) 69.

5. P.-W. Scheele, Das Martyrium – verbindendes Element der christlichen Communio, in: G. Augustin und M. Schulze (Hrsg.), Freude an Gott. Auf dem Weg zu einem lebendigen Glauben. Festschrift für Kurt Kardinal Koch zum 65. Geburtstag (Freiburg i. Br. 2015) 185-202.

6. Giovanni Paolo II, Tertio millennio adveniente, n. 37.

7. Vgl. P. Gemeinhart, Märtyrer und Martyriumsdeutungen von der Antike bis zur Reformation, in: ZKG 120 (2009) 289-322, zit. 305.

comunità era solita riconoscere come martiri soltanto i propri testimoni della fede, seppure tutti concepissero il proprio martirio come testimonianza resa a Cristo. Questa situazione assolutamente paradossale ha condotto ad una “confessionalizzazione intra-cristiana” del concetto di martirio “che riconosceva solo i martiri della propria Chiesa come tali e che negava alla morte violenta degli altri cristiani la qualifica religiosa di martirio”<sup>8</sup>.

Questa visione confessionalmente restrittiva è stata superata con il Concilio Vaticano Secondo, grazie ad un nuovo sguardo rivolto a quelle Chiese cristiane e Comunità ecclesiali che non sono ancora in piena comunione con la Chiesa cattolica, ma con le quali la Chiesa cattolica sa di essere “per più ragioni congiunta”<sup>9</sup>. Il motivo di questo legame è ravvisato dal Decreto sull’ecumenismo “Unitatis redintegratio” innanzitutto nel battesimo, che costituisce “il vincolo sacramentale dell’unità che vige tra tutti quelli che per mezzo di esso sono stati rigenerati”<sup>10</sup> e che fa sì che ci sia “una certa comunione, sebbene imperfetta, con la Chiesa cattolica”<sup>11</sup>. Il decreto sottolinea dunque che “tra gli elementi o beni dal complesso dei quali la stessa Chiesa è edificata e vivificata, alcuni, anzi parecchi ed eccellenti, possono trovarsi fuori dei confini visibili della Chiesa cattolica”, come “la parola di Dio scritta, la vita della grazia, la fede, la speranza e la carità, e altri doni interiori dello Spirito Santo ed elementi visibili”<sup>12</sup>. Tra questi elementi, la Costituzione dogmatica sulla Chiesa “Lumen gentium” annovera in modo particolare “una certa vera unione nello Spirito Santo, poiché anche in loro egli opera con la sua virtù santificante per mezzo di doni e grazie e ha dato ad alcuni la forza di giungere fino allo spargimento del sangue”<sup>13</sup>. Con queste importanti affermazioni del Concilio, è stata riconosciuta la realtà del martirio anche in altre Chiese cristiane. Già durante il Concilio, il beato Papa Paolo VI confermò tale nuova visione, quando, il 18 ottobre 1964, durante la 103.ma congregazione generale, proclamò santi i martiri dell’Uganda e rese omaggio così anche agli anglicani che avevano sperimentato le stesse sofferenze dei loro fratelli cattolici.

### 3. L’unità come dono dei martiri

Il riconoscimento dei martiri di altre Chiese cristiane e la comune reverenza riservata loro stava particolarmente a cuore al santo Papa Giovanni Paolo II. Su questo aspetto egli aveva già attirato l’attenzione nella sua Lettera apostolica “Tertio millennio adveniente” del 1994, scritta in vista del Giubileo dell’Anno 2000, sottolineando con parole incisive: “Al termine del secondo millennio, la Chiesa è diventata nuovamente Chiesa di martiri. Le persecuzioni nei riguardi dei credenti - sacerdoti, religiosi e laici - hanno operato una grande semina di martiri in varie parti del mondo. La testimonianza resa a Cristo sino allo spargimento del sangue è divenuta patrimonio comune di cattolici, ortodossi, anglicani e protestanti”<sup>14</sup>. All’ecumenismo dei martiri Giovanni

---

8. E. Schockenhoff, *Entschiedenheit und Widerstand. Das Lebenszeugnis der Märtyrer* (Freiburg i. Br. 2015) 171.

9. *Lumen gentium*, n. 15.

10. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 22.

11. *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 3.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Lumen gentium*, n. 15.

14. Giovanni Paolo II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 37.

Paolo II, nella sua appassionata enciclica sull'impegno ecumenico "Ut unum sint" del 1995, aveva già dedicato un'intera sezione, sottolineando che "in una visione teocentrica, noi cristiani già abbiamo un Martirologio comune", che ci mostra "come, ad un livello profondo, Dio mantenga fra i battezzati la comunione nell'esigenza suprema della fede, manifestata col sacrificio della vita"<sup>15</sup>. Nell'ecumenismo dei martiri, Giovanni Paolo II ravvisava già un'unità di fondo tra i cristiani; egli espresse così la speranza che i martiri possano aiutarci a trovare la piena comunione. Mentre noi cristiani e noi Chiese viviamo ancora, su questa terra, in una comunione imperfetta, i martiri nella gloria dei cieli vivono già in una comunione piena e perfetta: "La testimonianza coraggiosa di tanti martiri del nostro secolo, appartenenti anche ad altre Chiese e Comunità ecclesiali non in piena comunione con la Chiesa cattolica" sono, per Giovanni Paolo II, "la prova più significativa che ogni elemento di divisione può essere trasceso e superato nel dono totale di sé alla causa del Vangelo"<sup>16</sup>.

La dimensione ecumenica del martirio è stata messa in evidenza da Papa Giovanni Paolo II soprattutto con la celebrazione comune tenutasi al Colosseo, luogo estremamente simbolico dal punto di vista storico, nel Giubileo dell'Anno 2000, quando, alla presenza di alti rappresentanti di varie Chiese e Comunità ecclesiali, il Papa commemorò i martiri del ventesimo secolo, ascoltandone le testimonianze di fede, tra cui quelle del metropolita ortodosso Serafim, del pastore protestante Paul Schneider e del padre cattolico Maximilian Kolbe. Tale celebrazione ha permesso di sperimentare la profonda comunione nella fede che unisce i cristiani delle varie Chiese e Comunità ecclesiali, nonostante le differenze e gli ostacoli tuttora esistenti. Di fatti, nella persecuzione comune, ad esempio nei campi di concentramento nazisti e nei gulag comunisti, i cristiani e le Comunità ecclesiali si sono ravvicinati, hanno scoperto ciò che li accomuna nella fede ed hanno allacciato un'amicizia.

Lo sforzo di valorizzare l'importanza dell'ecumenismo dei martiri è stato proseguito da Papa Benedetto XVI, che ha accentuato soprattutto la dimensione cristologica del martirio: la "forza per affrontare il martirio" nasce "dalla profonda e intima unione con Cristo". Il martirio e la vocazione al martirio "non sono il risultato di uno sforzo umano, ma sono la risposta ad un'iniziativa e ad una chiamata di Dio, sono un dono della Sua grazia, che rende capaci di offrire la propria vita per amore a Cristo e alla Chiesa, e così al mondo"<sup>17</sup>. Papa Benedetto XVI, durante la sua visita nel 2008 alla Basilica di San Bartolomeo all'Isola Tiberina, dedicata ai martiri del ventesimo secolo, ha osservato che apparentemente sembra "che la violenza, i totalitarismi, la persecuzione, la brutalità cieca" si rivelino più forti, mettendo a tacere la voce dei testimoni della fede, i quali "possono umanamente apparire come sconfitti della storia", ma che Gesù risorto illumina la loro testimonianza, così che "la forza dell'amore", che

---

15. Giovanni Paolo II, *Ut unum sint*, n. 84.

16. Giovanni Paolo II, *Ut unum sint*, n. 1.

17. Benedetto XVI, *Messaggio durante l'udienza generale*, l'11 agosto 2010.

“sfida e che vince la morte”, si rivela vittoriosa “anche nell’apparente sconfitta”<sup>18</sup>. Il martirio è, in effetti, la „suprema testimonianza d’amore“<sup>19</sup>.

Anche Papa Francesco non si stanca mai di far riferimento all’ecumenismo dei martiri o, come lui lo definisce, all’ “ecumenismo del sangue”. Papa Francesco parte dalla constatazione che i cristiani oggi non vengono perseguitati perché sono protestanti od anglicani, cattolici od ortodossi, ma perché sono cristiani. Sono dunque soprattutto gli stessi persecutori a suggerirci l’ecumenismo del sangue. Infatti “per i persecutori, noi non siamo divisi, non siamo luterani, ortodossi, evangelici, cattolici... No! Siamo uno! Per i persecutori siamo cristiani! Non interessa altro. Questo è l’Ecumenismo del sangue che oggi si vive.”<sup>20</sup> Nell’ecumenismo dei martiri incontriamo anche una grande sfida, che Papa Francesco ha riassunto con questa frase incisiva: “Se il nemico ci unisce nella morte, chi siamo noi per dividerci nella vita?”<sup>21</sup> Non è allora una vergogna che i persecutori dei cristiani abbiano una migliore visione ecumenica di noi stessi, poiché hanno capito che i cristiani sono fondamentalmente una cosa sola? Essendo la sofferenza di così tanti cristiani nel mondo odierno un’esperienza comune, l’ecumenismo del sangue rappresenta per Papa Francesco addirittura il “segno più convincente” dell’ecumenismo oggi<sup>22</sup>.

#### 4. Martiri per l’unità cristiana

La consapevolezza dell’importanza dei martiri cristiani odierni e la ricerca ecumenica dell’unità sono indissociabili: “I martiri appartengono a tutte le Chiese e la loro sofferenza costituisce un ‘ecumenismo del sangue’ che trascende le divisioni storiche tra cristiani, chiamando tutti noi a promuovere l’unità visibile dei discepoli di Cristo.”<sup>23</sup> Nell’ecumenismo dei martiri meritano di essere menzionati in particolare quei martiri cristiani che, consapevolmente, hanno dato la loro vita per la santa causa dell’unità dei cristiani. Come esempio tra i molti, si ricordi il sacerdote cattolico Max Josef Metzger<sup>24</sup>, che già molto tempo prima dell’incarcerazione da parte dei nazisti si era impegnato a favore del movimento ecumenico, e che intese la sua imminente esecuzione come sacrificio espiatorio offerto al Signore per la pace nel mondo e per l’unità della Chiesa, priorità, queste, che egli aveva profondamente a cuore: “Sarei felice se con il dono della mia vita contribuissi a realizzare ciò a cui aspira la mia vita senza visibile successo.”<sup>25</sup> E poco tempo prima della sua esecuzione il 17 aprile 1944, egli scrisse parole che possono essere considerate il suo lascito: “Adesso il Signore vuole da me il sacrificio della vita.

---

18. Benedetto XVI, Omelia durante la commemorazione dei martiri del XX e del XXI secolo nella Basilica di San Bartolomeo all’Isola Tiberina a Roma, il 7 aprile 2008.

19. Vgl. R. Weimann, Il martirio. Suprema testimonianza d’amore, in: *Deus caritas est. Porta di Misericordia*. Atti del Simposio internazionale nel decimo anniversario dell’Enciclica. A cura di M. Graulich e R. Weimann (Città del Vaticano 2016) 123-141.

20. Francesco, Discorso ai membri della “Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships” il 31 ottobre 2014.

21. Francesco, Discorso al Movimento del Rinnovamento nello Spirito, il 3 luglio 2015.

22. Francesco, Messaggio in occasione del Global Christian Forum del 1 novembre 2015.

23. Dichiarazione comune di Papa Francesco e del Catholicos Karekin II ad Etschmiadzin, nella Repubblica armena, il 26 giugno 2016.

24. Vgl. J. Ernesti, *Ökumene im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn 2007) 182-219.

25. *Ibid* 137.

Pronuncio il mio lieto Sì alla sua volontà. Gli ho offerto la vita per la pace del mondo e per l'unità della Chiesa. La vuole. Possa egli benedirli!"<sup>26</sup>

Max Josef Metzger può essere annoverato tra quei martiri cristiani a proposito dei quali Papa Giovanni Paolo II ha affermato che "la comunione più vera [...] con Cristo che effonde il suo sangue e, in questo sacrificio, fa diventare vicini coloro che un tempo erano lontani (cfr. Ef 2,13)"<sup>27</sup> permette anche una più intensa comunione tra i cristiani. Come Gesù è andato incontro alla morte "per riunire insieme i figli di Dio che erano dispersi" (Gv 11,52), così quei cristiani hanno accettato consapevolmente il loro martirio per l'unità dei cristiani. Non soltanto sono diventati punti di riferimento credibili sul cammino verso l'unità visibile dei cristiani, ma hanno già realizzato questa unità. Infatti, in questi martiri, è presente la cristianità indivisa ed è già superata la divisione della Chiesa."<sup>28</sup>

In questa "Una Sancta in vinculis", come il martire protestante Dietrich Bonhoeffer definì lo stretto legame ecumenico esistente tra i cristiani delle varie Chiese nella loro resistenza ai violenti regimi nazista e comunista, incontriamo la forma più credibile della testimonianza comune, sulla quale si basa la speranza nell'unità, testimonianza che ci esorta a continuare a costruire sul fondamento dell'unità posto dai martiri per l'unità cristiana e ad annunciare, rendendo una comune testimonianza, il Vangelo di Gesù Cristo nel mondo odierno: nell'umiltà e nell'amore.

---

26. Ibid 218.

27. Giovanni Paolo II, *Ut unum sint*, n. 84.

28. E. Schockenhoff, *Entschiedenheit und Widerstand. Das Lebenszeugnis der Märtyrer* (Freiburg i. Br. 2015) 157.

**Conference on the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther's Posting of the  
Ninety-Five Theses  
Catholic University of America, Washington, 30 May 2017**

*Martin Luther's Reformation and the Unity of the Church:  
A Catholic Perspective in Light of the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue*

“While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the Church”. With these words in the Joint Declaration they signed during the ecumenical prayer service on the occasion of the Catholic and Lutheran commemoration of the Reformation in the Lutheran Cathedral in Lund on 31 October 2016,<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan, the President of the Lutheran World Federation, gave expression to what we can jointly say today from an ecumenical perspective about the 16th century Reformation. In the foreground, one finds on the one hand gratitude for all that the Reformation brought about as regards positive religious and theological insights and which Lutherans and Catholics can jointly testify today, and on the other hand confession of guilt and repentance in view of the fact that the Reformation did not at that time lead to the renewal of the Church but to schism. The accents can certainly be placed differently here: Lutheran Christians will in the first instance connect the Reformation with the rediscovery of the gospel of mankind’s justification solely through God’s grace and its acceptance in faith. Catholic Christians are accustomed to associate the Reformation particularly with schism and the lost unity of the church. But even if the accents are placed differently, both accents belong indissolubly together in any Reformation commemoration today. This is also expressed in the title of the document drafted by the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity with a view to the joint Reformation commemoration in 2017, bearing the significant title “From Conflict to Communion”.<sup>2</sup> A joint Reformation commemoration must take the conflict as seriously as the communion, and above all make a contribution towards enabling Lutheran and Catholic Christians to progress along the path from conflict to communion.

### **1. Rediscovered community in the faith**

In the first place we must express a word of gratitude, especially since in 2017 we commemorate not only 500 years of the Reformation but also 50 years of intensive dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics, in which we have been privileged to discover how much we have in common. This dialogue is not only the first that the Catholic Church commenced immediately after the Second Vatican Council but also the one that over the past half century has proved very fruitful. It has facilitated on the Catholic side a more positive view of the Reformation and on the Lutheran side a more nuanced view of the circumstances of western Christianity in the late Middle Ages.

---

1. Joint Declaration on the occasion of the joint Lutheran and Catholic commemoration of the Reformation held on 31 October 2016.

2. From Conflict to Communion | Lutheran–Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity (Leipzig and Paderborn 2013).

a) *Revision of the Catholic image of Luther*

The path from conflict to communion began above all with a critical reappraisal overcoming the traditional negative image of Martin Luther in the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup> An extremely polemical image had been presented and propagated already in his lifetime by Johannes Cochläus, who in his “*Commentaria de actis et scriptis Martini Lutheri*” in 1549 – just three years after Luther’s death – incriminated Luther as destroyer of the unity of the Church, corrupter of morals and impudent revolutionary “who had through his heresies plunged countless souls into ruin and brought unending misery to Germany and the whole of Christendom”.<sup>4</sup> This negative view remained one of the most important references of the Catholic image of Luther for centuries. Its after-effects were still evident at the beginning of last century in the work of the Dominican Heinrich Suso Denifle, who did in fact locate Luther in a positive perspective in the context of scholastic theology, but still raised the old polemics once more, claiming above all that Luther had invented the doctrine of justification through faith and not through works – which certainly forms the crux of his theological thought – solely for the purpose of “being able to feel all the more carefree and secure while living his dissolute life”.<sup>5</sup>

The historic breakthrough to a more positive and at least more nuanced image of Luther within Catholic research on him was achieved by the Church historian Joseph Lortz, who has rendered a great service through his thorough historical research into the Reformation in Germany in particular,<sup>6</sup> which has been well-received in ecumenical discussion.<sup>7</sup> In the light of the biblical, liturgical and ecumenical movement between the two World Wars, Lortz described the great religious impulses by which Luther was guided; he characterised Luther as a monk who took his Christian life and his life in orders very seriously. Against the background of the crisis of the Church and theology in the late Middle Ages he responded with great theological understanding to Luther’s critique, and on that basis formulated his now famous thesis that “Luther had in his own person wrestled into submission a Catholicism that was not Catholic.”<sup>8</sup> This view can be understood as a decisive turning point in the struggle for an historically adequate and theologically appropriate image of Luther in the Catholic Church. Closely connected with this is the perception of Luther as deeply rooted within Catholic

---

3. Cf. W. Beyna, *Das moderne katholische Lutherbild* (Essen 1969); D. Blum, *Der katholische Luther. Begegnungen – Prägungen – Rezeptionen* (Paderborn 2016).

4. See the representation of Johannes Cochläus by H. Jedin, *Wandlungen des Lutherbildes in der katholischen Kirchengeschichtsschreibung*, in: K. Forster (Hrsg.), *Wandlungen des Lutherbildes* (Würzburg 1966) 80.

5. H. Denifle, *Luther und Luthertum in ihrer ersten Entwicklung. Zwei Bände* (Mainz 1904 / 1909).

6. J. Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland. Zwei Bände* (Freiburg i. Br. 1962).

7. Cf. R. Decot and R. Vinke (Hrsg.), *Zum Gedenken an Joseph Lortz (1887-1975). Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte und Ökumene* (Stuttgart 1989).

8. J. Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland. Erster Band: Voraussetzungen – Aufbruch – Erste Entscheidung* (Freiburg i. Br. 1962) 176.

thinking, and thence the rediscovery of the “Catholic Luther”<sup>9</sup> as it were, and the unlocking of his ecumenical significance.<sup>10</sup> On the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther’s birth in 1983, in conjunction with an evaluation of the essential concerns of the Reformer, the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission in ecumenical communion gave expression to this positive view with the conviction: “Christians, whether Lutheran or Catholic, cannot disregard the person and the message of this man.” Luther’s particular ecumenical significance was honoured with the title “Witness to the gospel!”<sup>11</sup>

This new view of Martin Luther also received official ecclesial affirmation when the second president of the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, spoke very positively of Martin Luther in his keynote address to the fifth General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Evian-les-Bains in 1970, in the conviction that “a more just assessment of the person and work of Martin Luther” on the Catholic side was a necessary path “towards restoring lost unity”. In this basic attitude Cardinal Willebrands acknowledged the Reformer as a “teacher of the faith”: “He may be a shared teacher for us in the fact that God must always be the Lord and that our most important human response has to remain absolute trust and reverence of God.”<sup>12</sup>

This positive estimation of Luther has subsequently been taken up by various popes. In his message on the occasion of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther’s birth, Pope John Paul II referred to the scholarly endeavours of Lutheran and Catholic researchers in which “Luther’s deep religiosity, driven by a burning passion for the question of eternal salvation” has been convincingly demonstrated.<sup>13</sup> And in the year of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the Reformer, Pope John Paul II paid a special tribute to

---

9. Cf. J. Brosseder, *Der katholische Luther*, in: G. Frank / A. Käuflein / T. Licht (Hrsg.), *Von der Reformation zur Reform. Neue Zugänge zum Konzil von Trient* (Freiburg i. Br. 2015) 65-96; P. Neuner, *Luther – katholisch gesehen*, in: U. Swarat und Th. Söding (Hrsg.), *Heillos gespalten? Segensreich erneuert? 500 Jahre Reformation in der Vielfalt ökumenischer Perspektiven* (Freiburg i. Br. 2016) 119-135; P. Neuner, *Martin Luthers Reformation. Eine katholische Würdigung* (Freiburg i. Br. 2017); W. Thönissen, *Gerechtigkeit oder Barmherzigkeit? Das ökumenische Ringen um die Rechtfertigung* (Leipzig – Paderborn 2016), bes. 177-200; Luther: Implizite Rezeption durch die kirchliche Lehre; W. Thönissen / J. Freitag / A. Sander (Hrsg.), *Luther: Katholizität und Reform. Wurzeln – Wege – Wirkungen* (Leipzig – Paderborn 2016).

10. Cf. H. F. Geisser u. a., *Weder Ketzler noch Heiliger. Luthers Bedeutung für den ökumenischen Dialog* (Regensburg 1982); U. Hahn / M. Mügge (Hrsg.), *Martin Luther – Vorbild im Glauben. Die Bedeutung des Reformators im ökumenischen Gespräch* (Neukirchen 1996); K. Lehmann (Hrsg.), *Luthers Sendung für Katholiken und Protestanten* (München – Zürich 1982); P. Manns – H. Meyer (Hrsg.), *Ökumenische Erschliessung Martin Luthers* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1983); O. H. Pesch (Hrsg.), *Lehren aus dem Luther-Jahr. Sein Ertrag für die Ökumene* (München – Zürich 1984).

11. Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission, “Martin Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ” I.1, in Jeffrey Gros, FSC, 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: WCC Publications, 2000), 438.

12. J. Cardinal Willebrands, *Gesandt in die Welt*, in: Willebrands, *Mandatum Unitatis. Beiträge zur Ökumene* (Paderborn 1989) 112-125, cit. 124.

13. John Paul II, *Message on 31 October 1983 to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, President of the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity*.

Luther's "attentiveness towards the word of God and the high value of his demand for a scriptural theology and his will for a spiritual renewal of the Church".<sup>14</sup> Pope Benedict XVI went even further during his visit to the former Augustinian Convent in Erfurt where Luther had studied theology and been ordained to the priesthood, in highlighting the passionate search for God in the life and work of Martin Luther: "What constantly exercised him was the question of God, the deep passion and driving force of his whole life's journey."<sup>15</sup> Pope Benedict at the same time stressed that Luther was not simply searching for any God, but believed in the God who has shown us his face in the man Jesus of Nazareth, and that he therefore expressed his concrete and profound passionate search for God in the Christocentrism of his spirituality and theology. This emphasis on the centrality of the question of God and on Christocentrism as the heart's concern of the Christian, theologian, and Reformer Martin Luther, rounds out the image of Luther in the Catholic Church. We would therefore be happy to endorse Cardinal Walter Kasper's opinion when he calls the decision to celebrate the Reformation commemoration as a "joint celebration of Christ" as the "best ecumenical idea I know of for the year 2017."<sup>16</sup>

*b) The more nuanced Protestant view of the late Middle Ages*

The positive endeavours on the Catholic side are matched by welcome developments on the Lutheran side, above all towards a more nuanced evaluation of the late Middle Ages and the situation of the Catholic Church at that time. In the first instance, of course, we must remember that the negative and polemical image of Luther in the tradition of the Catholic Church is also to be understood as a reaction to the mirror-image heroic view of Luther in the Protestant tradition, as it came to light in the Reformation celebrations in particular.<sup>17</sup> That is especially true of the first centennial celebration of the beginning of the Reformation in 1617, which was imbued with a spirit of anti-Catholic polemics and aggressive rhetoric, as Luther was seen above all as the champion against Rome and in particular the papacy, from which he had liberated Christianity. Pietism revered Luther as the great religious genius, and in the age of Enlightenment he was glorified as the liberator from the gloom of the Middle Ages and the founder of the modern period. During the Reformation celebration in 1917 Luther was not only celebrated as the creator of the German language, but also as the personification of the authentic German. Even in the immediate aftermath of the European catastrophe of the First World War the Protestant theologian Adolf von Harnack was able to claim outright that modernity had begun in Germany and had

---

14. John Paul II, Address to the representatives of the Evangelische Kirche and the Working Group of the Christian Churches in Germany, Paderborn 22 June 1996.

15. Benedict XVI, Meeting the Council of the EKD in the Augustinian Convent in Erfurt, 23 September 2011.

16. W. Cardinal Kasper, *Martin Luther. Eine ökumenische Perspektive* (Ostfildern 2016) 56.

17. Cf. Th. Kaufmann, *Reformationsgedenken in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 107 (2010) 285-324; P. Neuner, *Martin Luthers Reformation. Eine katholische Würdigung* (Freiburg i. Br. 2017) 36-49; D. Wendebourg, *Vergangene Reformationsjubiläen. Ein Rückblick im Vorfeld von 2017*, in: H. Schilling (Hrsg.), *Der Reformator Martin Luther 2017. Eine wissenschaftliche und gedenkpolitische Bestandsaufnahme* (Berlin 2014) 261-281.

radiated throughout the world from there: “Modernity began with Luther’s Reformation, and indeed it was the hammer blows on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1517 which initiated it.”<sup>18</sup>

Such characterisations of Luther as a heroic figure in the most diverse contexts are no longer possible today even in Protestant history writing. For it has become clear on the one hand that Martin Luther himself was far more deeply rooted in the feeling and thinking of the medieval world than has previously been admitted. This location is evident in his life, above all in his predominantly apocalyptic tone, in which he saw himself placed in the midst of the final eschatological battle between Christ and the Antichrist, and therefore not only discovered the Antichrist in the Pope but also saw the devil at work in most of his opponents.<sup>19</sup> Against this background it has finally become possible even for Protestant history writing to objectively put a name to the dark sides in the life and work of Martin Luther, such as his demeaning and spiteful utterances about Jews,<sup>20</sup> his vehement attacks against the peasants during the Peasant War, and his advocacy and theological justification of the persecution of the Anabaptists by the Lutheran authorities, with the result that the Free Church traditions see themselves not as subjects of the Lutheran Reformation but as its victims.<sup>21</sup> Finally, one must not forget his increasingly crude attacks against the Catholic Church and above all against the papacy, such as his invective against the Council of Trent, which sinks to a nadir which can hardly be rivalled: “We should take him – the pope, the cardinals, and whatever riffraff belongs to His Idolatrous and Papal Holiness – and (as blasphemers) tear out their tongues from the back, and nail them on the gallows in the order in which they hang their seals on the bulls ... Then one could allow them to hold a council, or as many as they wanted, on the gallows, or in hell among all the devils.”<sup>22</sup>

At this point however, the accent is to be placed on the fact that it has become clear in Protestant history writing that Luther himself was deeply grounded both existentially and theologically in the Middle Ages, and indeed within the mystical and monastic tradition of the late Middle Ages. This is true above all with respect to Bernard of Clairvaux, in whose work Luther’s interpretation of Holy Scripture as the encounter between Christ and mankind and even his theology of justification by grace are already prefigured.<sup>23</sup> Together with the discovery of Luther’s profound roots in the late Middle Ages has come the more sensitive perception that the Middle Ages were by

---

18. A. von Harnack, *Die Reformation und ihre Vorstellung*, in: Ders., *Erforschtes und Erlebtes* (Giessen 1923) 71-140, zit. 110.

19. Cf. H. A. Obermann, *Luther. Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel* (Berlin 1981); H. Schilling, *Martin Luther. Rebelle in einer Zeit des Umbruchs. Eine Biographie* (München 2012).

20. Cf. H. Kremers, *Die Juden und Martin Luther – Martin Luther und die Juden. Geschichte – Wirkungsgeschichte – Herausforderung* (Neukirchen 1985).

21. Cf. W. Spangenberg (Hrsg.), *Luther und die Reformation in freikirchlicher Sicht* (Göttingen 2013).

22. M. Luther, *Wider das Papsttum in Rom, vom Teufel gestiftet*. (Luther’s Works, American Edition, Fortress Press/Philadelphia, 1966, volume 41:308, translated by Eric W Gritsch).

23. Cf. F. Posset, *Luther und der letzte der Kirchenväter, Bernhard von Clairvaux. Der Bernhardfaktor in Luthers Leben und Werken*, in: W. Thönissen / J. Freitag / A. Sander (Ed.), *Luther: Katholizität und Reform. Wurzeln – Wege – Wirkungen* (Leipzig – Paderborn 2016) 29-59.

no means as dark as they have been painted so willingly and for so long. For on the one hand the late Middle Ages developed an authentic theology of piety for the laity, so that the Protestant church historian Bernd Moeller was able to judge that the 15<sup>th</sup> century could be appraised as one of the most ecclesially pious periods of the Middle Ages.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, it has been rediscovered that in the late Middle Ages diverse and far-reaching reforms did take place, and that church reform was on the whole one of the great themes of the late Middle Ages. Thus the internal Church reform movement intended by Luther did not stand in isolation in the landscape of the time but must be seen within this broader context.

A reminder of the ecclesial situation in Spain at the beginning of the 16th century serves as a striking example of where the real impulses to religious reforms in the Catholic Church originated, above all from a number of reform orders strongly influenced by the spirituality of the *devotio moderna* from the Netherlands. Such reform endeavours were substantially advanced by the promotion of book printing by the then Archbishop of Toledo, Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros, who had already in 1517 enabled the publication of the first polyglot edition of the whole Sacred Scripture. In view of this religious and ecclesial reform potential in Spain the Berlin historian Hans Schilling judges rightly that in Luther's day the Iberian Peninsula already "achieved precursors to reforms" which were "elsewhere only enforced by the Reformation revolt and the subsequent Tridentine reform". From that he draws the conclusion: "That had like nothing else made Spain impervious to the Lutheran 'heresy'."<sup>25</sup> Or to formulate it more positively: If a similar ecclesial reform to that in Spain had been able to prevail throughout the whole church, and if Martin Luther's call to reform and repentance had found open ears among the bishops of the time and of the Pope in Rome, the reform intended and initiated by him would not have become the Reformation. For the fact that the original reform of the Church became instead a Church-dividing Reformation the Catholic Church of the time must bear its share of the blame, as the Catholic ecumenist Wolfgang Thönissen expressed in the concise formula: "Because the reform of the church and the Empire did not succeed, the Reformation was the result."<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Church reform and Church schism

On the other hand however we are compelled to conclude that the Catholic Church at that time was not only extremely in need of reform but also capable of reform. The Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century therefore cannot be considered the only response to the need for reform of the Church, and can therefore not stake an exclusive claim to the reform of the Church as a whole; with his original concern for reform Luther stood in a long and great tradition of Catholic renewal before him, which in crisis situations in the Church had always reiterated that in its life and in its mission the word of God must be accorded primacy. We could recall the two founders

---

24. B. Moeller, Frömmigkeit in Deutschland um 1500, in: Ders., Die Reformation und das Mittelalter. Kirchenhistorische Aufsätze (Göttingen 1991) 73-85, zit. 81.

25. H. Schilling, Luther und die Reformation 1517-2017, in: U. Swarat und Th. Söding (Hrsg.), Heillos gespalten? Segensreich erneuert? 500 Jahre Reformation in der Vielfalt ökumenischer Perspektiven (Freiburg i. Br. 2016) 17-28, zit. 22.

26. W. Thönissen, Gerechtigkeit oder Barmherzigkeit? Das ökumenische Ringen um die Rechtfertigung (Leipzig – Paderborn 2016) 40.

of the mendicant orders, Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, who in the first instance did not at all intend to found new orders but to renew the Church from within, and indeed by daring to live the Gospel in the evangelical form of life *sine glossa*, in its literal totality. Or we could think of Saint Carlo Borromeo who, on taking possession of his episcopal seat in the Lombard metropolis of Milan, diagnosed the most widespread failings of the clergy in the absence of preaching, and saw his primary mission as bishop to be “a witness, to proclaim the mysteries of Christ, to preach the gospel to every creature”.<sup>27</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has rightly claimed of the great bishop of Milan that his “last great echo” in our century was the figure of John XXIII, who intended with his Council above all to renew that impulse to renewal “which had lit up in Borromeo”.<sup>28</sup> The Second Vatican Council may therefore be acknowledged as a reform Council which was intended to once more restore to the word of God the centrality due to it in the life and mission of the Church.<sup>29</sup> By taking up and fulfilling important demands made by Martin Luther, such as the rediscovery of the common priesthood of all the baptised, the celebration of divine worship in the language of the people and the option of distribution of the cup to the laity, the Second Vatican Council has even prompted the assessment that in the Council, Martin Luther had in fact “found his Council”,<sup>30</sup> which he had called for in his lifetime and which was convoked in Trent only when the unity of the Church could no longer be saved.

*a) The necessity of the Church's renewal in the light of the Gospel*

Only against this broader background is it possible to properly acknowledge Martin Luther's actual intention. He in no way intended a breach with the Catholic Church or the founding of a new church; his goal was instead a thoroughgoing renewal of the whole of Christianity in the spirit of the Gospel and not a reformation in the sense of the ultimately shattered unity of the Church, as the Protestant ecumenist Wolfhart Pannenberg has repeatedly pointed out: “Luther intended a reform of the whole of Christendom; his goal was anything but a separate Lutheran Church.”<sup>31</sup> The Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century is therefore to be understood and acknowledged as a process of the reform of the Church through the rediscovery of the Gospel as its foundation, or more precisely of the Gospel of the justification of sinful mankind not through works but through faith in Jesus Christ. Accordingly “justice” no longer means or implies a “doing” – as in the Aristotelian tradition by which a person becomes

---

27. Cited by G. Alberigo, Karl Borromäus, Geschichtliche Sensibilität und pastorales Engagement (Münster 1995) 39-40.

28. J. Ratzinger, Opfer, Sakrament und Priestertum in der Entwicklung der Kirche, in: Ratzinger., Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie (München 1982) 263-281, zit. 279.

29. Cf. K. Koch, Was bedeutet heute „Reform“ der katholischen Kirche in der Schweiz?. Zur Lage der Konzilsrezeption, in: M. Delgado / M. Ries (Hrsg.), Karl Borromäus und die katholische Reform. Akten des Freiburger Symposiums zur 400. Wiederkehr der Heiligsprechung des Schutzpatrons der katholischen Schweiz (Freiburg / CH –Stuttgart 2010) 365-394.

30. A. Brandenburg, Martin Luther gegenwärtig. Katholische Lutherstudien (Paderborn 1969) 146.

31. W. Pannenberg, Problemgeschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie in Deutschland (Göttingen 1997) 25.

righteous through right action – but rather a “being, precisely being through God: a gift of God in faith in Jesus Christ”.<sup>32</sup> Martin Luther and his Wittenberg Reformation give clear evidence of the fact that a true reform of the Church can only be realised through the concentration of Christian existence and ecclesial life on the person of Jesus Christ as the living word of God, in whom the Church finds its true identity.”<sup>33</sup>

These crucial concerns of Luther can also and especially be grasped in the events of 1517, more precisely on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, to which this Reformation commemoration of 2017 refers, in remembrance of the so-called posting of the 95 Theses on indulgences on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg by the monk and professor Martin Luther. This date is generally considered as the beginning of the Reformation in Germany. But already in 1962 the Catholic Church historian Erwin Iserloh judged this so-called posting of the theses to be a legend;<sup>34</sup> and since then many historians support the conviction that the nailing of Luther’s 95 Theses did not take place at all in the manner that has been traditionally handed down, which is by the way substantiated by the fact that Luther himself at no time in his life spoke of posting the theses, although the 31<sup>st</sup> of October remained in his memory as the day on which he moved against indulgences. In this sense the Protestant church historian Volker Leppin sums up the current state of research in the words: “If one wants to take Luther at his word, one can hardly claim for the date of the 31<sup>st</sup> of October anything more than: The posting of the theses did not take place”.<sup>35</sup> From the historical perspective therefore we can most likely assume that Luther sent his theses on indulgences to Archbishop Albrecht and to his local bishop Hieronymus Schulz and at the same time understood the publication of his theses as an invitation to an academic disputation, with which theses, as the Protestant church historian Thomas Kaufmann states, he primarily wished to confront “the loss of credibility of his beloved Church”, and rescue “the Roman papal Church he loved”.<sup>36</sup> With regard to the intent of his action, the publication of his theses is in no way to be understood as the beginning of the Reformation in the sense of the ultimately broken unity of the Church, and even the theses themselves can in no way be considered a revolutionary document: they present a thoroughly Catholic issue and remain within the bounds of acceptability in the Catholic theology of the time.<sup>37</sup> With his theses Luther did not in any case wish to break with the Catholic Church but to renew it.

---

32. Ch. Schad, Rechtfertigung: Gottes Ja zu uns, in: H. Schwier / H.-G. Ulrichs (Hrsg.), Nötig zu wissen. Heidelberger Beiträge zum Heidelberger Katechismus (Heidelberg 2012) 103-107, zit. 105.

33. Cf. K. Kardinal Koch, Die identitätsstiftende Kraft des Wortes Gottes im Licht des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, in: P. Klasvot / B. Neumann (Hrsg.), Reform oder Reformation? Kirchen in der Pflicht (Leipzig – Paderborn 2014) 71-100.

34. E. Iserloh, Luthers Thesenanschlag – Tatsache oder Legende? (Wiesbaden 1962).

35. V. Leppin, Der „Thesenanschlag“ – viel Lärm um nichts? in: U. Wolff, Iserloh. Der Thesenanschlag fand nicht statt (Münster 2016) 239-245, zit. 245.

36. Th. Kaufmann, Reformation und Reform – Luthers 95 Thesen in ihrem historischen Zusammenhang, in: P. Klasvot / B. Neumann (Hrsg.), Reform oder Reformation? Kirchen in der Pflicht (Leipzig – Paderborn 2014) 23-41, zit. 26. Vgl. auch Ders., Der Anfang der Reformation (Tübingen 2012).

37. In the reverse direction the Protestant church historian Berndt Hamm has established astonishing coherencies between the proclamation of indulgences in the late medieval Church

The events of 1517 demonstrate, on the one hand, that the momentous conflict that erupted regarding the practice of indulgences involved not only theological questions in the narrow sense but also divergent spiritualities and piety-related attitudes. It is surely no coincidence that Luther's conflict with the Catholic Church was sparked by the common indulgence piety practice of the time, which Luther was unable to reconcile with his own spiritual experience centred on the gospel of justification by grace alone accepted in faith. On the other hand, it is equally clear that it did not result in a breach between Luther and the Catholic Church in 1517, that the unity of the Church was at that time not yet destroyed, and Martin Luther was still living and working in communion with the Catholic Church. Since the 2017 Reformation commemoration refers back to this time involves Lutherans and Catholics to the same extent, this must be seen as a further reason why the Reformation commemoration today cannot be celebrated other than in ecumenical communion.

The controversy over Luther's theses on indulgences subsequently focussed increasingly on the question of the Church and the question of the ecclesial ministry which can speak and act in the name of the Church. In Luther's Augsburg Disputation with Cajetan in 1518 and in the Leipzig Disputation with Eck in 1519, the understanding of the Church, and more precisely the question of the authority of Councils and the Pope, formed the crux of the disputes.<sup>38</sup> While Luther in his early period shared the Catholic understanding of the Church to a great extent,<sup>39</sup> in the later phase of his life and work he fundamentally called into question the Catholic understanding of church and ministry, above all in his reforming treatise "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" of 1520,<sup>40</sup> with its pointed emphasis of the common priesthood of all believers. And in his second treatise "De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae",<sup>41</sup> also in 1520, he also rejected the sacramental order of the Catholic Church, at least in the manner in which he had encountered it at that time. With these and other writings he had, as rightly stated by Cardinal Walter Kasper, initiated "a breach with the Catholic understanding of the Church".<sup>42</sup>

In this sense the Reformation of the 16th century led to the formation of a different type of church characterised by the fact that the churches derived from the Reformation want to be church in a different way: "As they themselves insist, it is precisely not the same mode in which the Churches of the great tradition of antiquity

---

and the message of grace favoured by the Reformation, so that he not only speaks of the "gospel of the Reformation", but also of the "gospel of the indulgence". Cf. B. Hamm, *Ablass und Reformation. Erstaunliche Kohärenzen* (Tübingen 2016) 5.

38. Cf. E. Iserloh, *Die protestantische Reformation*, in: Iserloh, J. Glazik, H. Jedin (Hrsg.), *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte. Band IV: Reformation, Katholische Reform und Gegenreformation* (Freiburg i. Br. 1979) 56 ff. und 64 ff.

39. Cf. Th. Dieter, *Die Eucharistische Ekklesiologie Joseph Ratzingers – eine lutherische Perspektive*, in: Ch. Schaller (Hrsg.), *Kirche – Sakrament und Gemeinschaft. Zu Ekklesiologie und Ökumene bei Joseph Ratzinger = Ratzinger-Studien. Band 4* (Regensburg 2011) 276-316, esp. 288-299: *Kirche als Gemeinde bei Luther*.

40. M. Luther, WA 6, 381-469.

41. M. Luther, WA 6, 497-573

42. W. Kardinal Kasper, *Martin Luther. Eine ökumenische Perspektive* (Ostfildern 2016) 31.

are Churches, but is based on a new understanding”.<sup>43</sup> That this judgement does not simply represent a Catholic outsider’s view but represents the Protestant churches’ understanding of themselves is demonstrated for example by the basic text of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the Reformation commemoration in 2017 entitled “Justification and Freedom”, in which it is emphatically stressed that the insights of the Reformers had led to a “complete restructuring of the church’s essence”. This new polity is further heightened to the extent that pastors, male and female, exist “only for the sake of order”, since in principle “every Christian can administer the sacraments, i.e., impart baptism and dispense the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>44</sup>

In the Reformation period the disputes between Luther and his Catholic adversaries on the all-important question of the nature of the Church were unfortunately unable to lead to a satisfactory conclusion. In view of that, this question must today constitute a key element on the agenda in ecumenical dialogues between the Catholic Church and the churches which emerged from the Reformation. It is therefore to be hoped that 500 years later the Reformation commemoration today will lead to further clarification of this ecclesiological question.

*b) The schism of the Church and its fateful consequences*

The renewal of the whole Church originally intended by Martin Luther with his rediscovery of the biblical message of justification by grace alone was not able to attain fulfilment at that time but instead led in schism. This historical paradox was expressed already in 1950 by the Catholic church historian and ecumenist Joseph Lortz in the memorable words: “The Reformation set out to reform the head and the members of the one Church that belongs to all Christians. That was not achieved, and what has happened instead was the rupture that split the church and Christendom apart.”<sup>45</sup> That this schism occurred is not least due also to political factors. While Luther was originally intent on an internal ecclesial movement of the renewal of Christianity in its entirety in the spirit of divine truth, the splitting of the Church and the resulting establishment of a separate new Lutheran church structure were primarily the result of political decisions, whereby Luther himself to an extent sought refuge and support from political powers and was over time increasingly manipulated by certain princes for their own interests.

We must furthermore recall with shame that in the 16th and 17th centuries the schism resulted in cruel confessional conflicts, above all the Thirty Years War which transformed Europe into a Red Sea of blood. In particular, the first centennial celebration of the beginning of the Reformation in 1617 was overshadowed by such warlike conflicts. At the time it was clear that Europe was moving towards a momentous conflict and even a cruel religious war. The first centenary celebration of the Reformation – which was at the same time the origin of Reformation Day – was characterised by anti-Catholic polemics and aggressive rhetoric, as the Lutheran pastor

---

43. Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (London–San Francisco 2010) 95.

44. *Rechtfertigung und Freiheit. 500 Jahre Reformation 2017. Ein Grundlagentext des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)* (Gütersloh 2014) 90-91. *Justification and Freedom, foundational text of the EKD*, 2014

45. J. Lortz, *Wie kam es zur Reformation?* (Einsiedeln 1950) 8.

and General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Olav Fykse Tveit, states frankly: “The first celebration in memory of 1517 was the prelude to a series of destructive religious wars, the 30 Years War, which turned the remembrance of Luther’s courageous deed in 1517 into a weapon.”<sup>46</sup>

It is impossible to suppress the fatal consequences of the schism in the Western church and the subsequent bloody confessional wars of the 16th and 17th centuries in the life of European society.<sup>47</sup> Because as a consequence of the confessional wars Christianity was historically tangible only in the form of various confessions that were fighting against one another to the death, this historical constellation had to have the inevitable consequence that confessional peace could only be bought at the costly price of disregarding confessional differences – and in the long term Christianity itself – in order to give the social peace a new foundation. Modern secularisation – or more precisely the process of depriving the Christian faith of its mandate for social peace, and as a consequence its privatisation – is to be judged as an unwanted and unintended but tragic ramification of the splitting of the Western church and thus to a large extent the fault of Christianity itself, as the Protestant ecumenist Wolfhart Pannenberg above all has rightly diagnosed: “Where the secularisation of the modern world has taken the form of an alienation from Christianity, it did not befall the churches as an external fate, but as the consequence of their own sins against unity, as a consequence of the church division of the 16th century and the indecisive religious wars of the 16th and 17th, which left the people in confessionally mixed territories no choice than to restructure their co–existence upon a common foundation untouched by confessional conflicts.”<sup>48</sup>

Considered in historical retrospect we may judge that the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555 was indeed able to achieve a certain degree of pacification for a time, but the principle “*Cuius regio, eius religio*”, which was elevated to an Imperial law at that time, led to a political ecclesial system in which the religious freedom of the individual Christian was not guaranteed but placed at the disposal of the ruler of the land, insofar as the possibility of choice between the Catholic or the Lutheran community was not given to individual Christians but to their rulers. The development of secular nation states with strong denominational boundaries must therefore be seen as a consequence of these tragic conflicts and developments, and therefore as a great burden of guilt left from the Reformation era for which both sides in the conflict must bear great responsibility.

---

46. O. F. Tveit, *Das Erbe der Reformation und seine Bedeutung für die ökumenische Bewegung heute*, in: P. Bosse-Huber, S. Fornerod, Th. Gundlach, G. W. Locher (Hrsg.), *500 Jahre Reformation. Bedeutung und Herausforderungen. Internationaler Kongress der EKD und des SEK auf dem Weg zum Reformationsjubiläum 2017 vom 6. bis 10. Oktober 2013 in Zürich* (Zürich-Leipzig 2014) 109-124, zit. 110.

47. Cf. K. Koch, *Christsein in einem neuen Europa. Provokationen und Perspektiven* (Freiburg/Schweiz 1992), bes. 137-166: *Ökumenische Herausforderung: Tragik oder Befreiung der Reformation? Unzeitgemässe Überlegungen aus ökumenischer Sicht*.

48. W. Pannenberg, *Einheit der Kirche als Glaubenswirklichkeit und als ökumenisches Ziel*, in: Ders., *Ethik und Ekklesiologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen 1977) 200-210, zit. 201. On the question as a whole see Pannenberg, *Christentum in einer säkularisierten Welt* (Freiburg i. Br. 1988).

When we call to mind these fateful historical developments and above all take cognisance of the fact that Catholics and Lutherans have wounded the one body of Christ in which they have become members through baptism, and have committed violence against one another in the name of faith, they have every reason for self-recrimination and repentance for the misunderstandings, wrongs and hurts that they have perpetrated against one another over the past 500 years. A first step in this direction was taken by Pope Hadrian VI, who was open to the renewal of the Catholic Church, but who was not given the opportunity to prevent the schism. With his message to the Diet of Nuremberg in 1522 he regretted the mistakes and sins of the authorities of the Catholic Church. As his successors the Popes during and after the Second Vatican Council have again and again asked for forgiveness for what Catholics perpetrated against the members of other churches. Here we think of Pope Paul VI, who in his opening address at the beginning of the second session of the Second Vatican Council expressed a plea for forgiveness for all offences that have occurred through the Roman Catholic Church;<sup>49</sup> of Pope John Paul II, who during the celebration of the Holy Year 2000 on the “Day of Pardon” confessed great historical guilt;<sup>50</sup> and Pope Francis, who on his visit to the Waldensian Church in Turin asked for “forgiveness for unchristian-like and even inhuman attitudes and conduct which, historically, we have had against you”.<sup>51</sup>

On the Lutheran side we recall above all the declaration of the Lutheran World Federation at its Fifth General Assembly in Evian in 1970 which declared its readiness to see “how the judgement of the Reformers on the Roman Catholic Church and the theology of the time was not free from polemical distortions which in part remain in effect to this day”, and therefore sincerely regretted “that our Roman Catholic brothers have been offended and misunderstood by such polemical representations”.<sup>52</sup>

### 3. Renewal of the Church and restoration of unity

Such a joint public act of repentance must today, too, form a significant component of an honest joint Reformation commemoration and it must be accompanied by the purification of historical memory, as Pope Francis has admonished: “We cannot erase what is past, nor do we wish to allow the weight of past transgressions to continue to pollute our relationships. The mercy of God will renew our relationships.”<sup>53</sup> It follows that mercy and reconciliation must be an important guiding perspective on the ecumenical course of the future, to which we will turn our attention in conclusion.

---

49. Ench. Vat. Vol I Documenti del Concilio Vaticano II, 104 f.

50. John Paul II, Homily during the Holy Mass on the Day of Pardon in the Holy Year 2000 on 12 March 2000.

51. Francis, Address at the Waldensian Temple on 22 June 2015.

52. Erklärung der Fünften Vollversammlung des LWB zum Besuch Kardinal Willebrands, in: Chr. Krause / W. Müller-Römheld (Hrsg.), Evian 1970. Offizieller Bericht der Fünften Vollversammlung des Lutherischen Weltbundes (Witten – Frankfurt – Berlin 1970) 207f.

53. Francis, Homily at the Vespers for the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul held in the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls on 25 January 2016.

a) *Distinction and connection between reform and Reformation*

As a result of our reflections thus far, we must distinguish between the reform of the Church in the sense of her always necessary renewal, and the Reformation in the sense of the ultimately shattered unity of the Church, but at the same time the two must be seen in connection with one another. History documents the fact that the concept and the reality of reform have a home within the Catholic Church too, which understands itself as an *Ecclesia semper reformanda*, and consequently the Reformation does not represent the only response to the necessity for reform in the Catholic Church. Since reform therefore demonstrates a greater radius than Reformation, the question arises even more pertinently of precisely how the constantly necessary reform of the Church and the historical process of the Reformation relate to one another. The historical fact that Martin Luther's reforming work led to the Reformation and subsequently to church schism and the development of new ecclesial communities prompts us to name the difference between reform and Reformation.

This difference can be defined with the church historian Cardinal Walter Brandmüller that reform "can never have the result that that which has been reformed is no longer identical with that which was previously to be reformed".<sup>54</sup> Reform involves the concrete appearance and realisation but not the essence of that which is to be reformed. Otherwise it would not represent a reform but a transformation of essence which would make that which is to be reformed into something else with respect to what was before. The word reform however indicates that the Church in the original sense has by means of historical developments lost its form and reveals a deformation, and must be restored to its original and authentic form. True reform of the Church has to be re-form in its original meaning, that is restoration and restitution of the true form of the one Church, or with the apt formula of the Catholic biblical theologian Thomas Söding "restoration of the original, the essential and authentic – or at least the earnest endeavour to that end".<sup>55</sup> In the light of this definition arises the fundamental question from the perspective of ecumenism, whether the 16th century Reformation understood itself as a reform of the Church or whether it did not in a much more radical sense lead to a transformation of the essence.

In order to approach an answer to this question, it seems appropriate to call to mind the undoubtedly most radical reformer in the history of the Church, namely Saint Francis of Assisi. Historical memory of him brings to light that it was not the mighty Pope Innocence III, who in those troubled times preserved the Church from collapse and renewed it, but the humble and insignificant monk; but also brought to light is the fact that Francis of Assisi reformed the Church not in any way that induced schism, and without or against the Pope, but only in communion with him. Saint Francis of Assisi is the successful example of a radical church reform in unity with the whole Church and with the ecclesial hierarchy, and he shows that reform is a positive word also in the Catholic Church, but that the Catholic principle of a permanent need for reform seeks to avoid any breach with the ecclesial community and the Pope as guarantee of unity. By contrast, the church reforms of the Reformers all led to schism,

---

54. W. Brandmüller, *Die Reformation Martin Luthers in katholischer Sicht*, in: Ders., *Licht und Schatten. Kirchengeschichte zwischen Glaube, Fakten und Legenden* (Augsburg 2007) 102-120, zit. 108.

55. Th. Söding, *Umkehr der Kirche. Wegweiser im Neuen Testament* (Freiburg i. Br. 2014)

which in addition continued to lead to further divisions and fragmentations within Protestantism, and indeed already in Luther's lifetime. It seems therefore that church reform and maintaining unity represented an insurmountable contradiction in the Reformation of the 16th century.

*b) Church reform and the endeavour for unity*

A significant counter-testimony is provided by the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 and the Augsburg Confession prepared for this important event, with which the reformers wanted to testify that they stood in agreement with the faith of the Catholic Church. The *Confessio Augustana* is essentially due to the tireless efforts of the great Reformer Philipp Melanchthon,<sup>56</sup> who even in the moment when he perceived that his efforts at the Diet of Augsburg were failing and that unity could no longer be maintained held fast to the unity of the Church right up to the limits of what was possible, in the conviction that the renewal of the Church and maintaining its unity were indissolubly linked. Melanchthon proved to be "the great ecumenist of his age", who – under the existing historical conditions – sought to "plumb the ultimate possibilities for maintaining the unity of the Church".<sup>57</sup> The Augsburg Confession drafted by him is not a document of schism, but of the determined intent for reconciliation and maintaining unity, as the Joint Roman Catholic–Evangelical Lutheran Commission claimed in its statement on the Augsburg Confession on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of its publication in 1980: "The express purpose of the Augsburg Confession is to confess the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Its concern is not with peculiar doctrines nor indeed with the establishment of a new Church (CA 7,1), but with the preservation and renewal of the Christian faith in its purity in harmony with the Ancient Church, and 'the Church of Rome' too, and in agreement with the witness of Holy Scripture".<sup>58</sup>

If one takes the self-understanding of the *Confessio Augustana* seriously, one must – with the Protestant ecumenist Wolfhart Pannenberg – consider the historical fact that Martin Luther's reform concerns could not be fulfilled at that time, but instead gave rise to separate evangelical churches which split from the Catholic Church, not as the "success" of the Reformation but its "failure" or at least an emergency measure.<sup>59</sup> The real success of the Reformation will by contrast only be fulfilled when the inherited divisions between Christians are overcome, in the restoration of the unity of the renewed Church in the spirit of the Gospel. To that extent the ecumenical search for

---

56. Cf. G. Frank (Hrsg.), *Der Theologe Melanchthon* (Stuttgart 2000); J. Haustein (Hrsg.), *Philipp Melanchthon. Ein Wegbereiter für die Ökumene* (Göttingen 1997); St. Rein und J. Weiss (Hrsg.), *Melanchthon - neu entdeckt* (Stuttgart 1997).

57. W. Thönissen, *Gerechtigkeit oder Barmherzigkeit? Das ökumenische Ringen um die Rechtfertigung* (Leipzig-Paderborn 2016) 138.

58. *All Under One Christ. Report of the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission on the Augsburg Confession, 1980*, in: H. Meyer / H. J. Urban / L. Vischer (Hrsg.), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Sämtliche Berichte und Konsenstexte interkonfessioneller Gespräche auf Weltebene 1931-1982* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1983) 323-328, zit. 325. *Growth n Agreement, All under one Christ*

59. W. Pannenberg, *Reformation und Einheit der Kirche*, in: Ders., *Ethik und Ekklesiologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Göttingen 1977) 254-267, zit. 255.

the restoration of Christian unity signifies the – even though terribly belated – fulfilment of the Reformation itself.

This envisaged goal was not achieved at the Diet of Augsburg with the *Confessio Augustana*. It is, as Pope John Paul II emphasised in his address on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the *Confessio Augustana*, the “last powerful attempt at reconciliation”, which however by its failure brought about the visible schism.<sup>60</sup> For John Paul II however the *Confessio Augustana* is explicit testimony to the fact that the constant renewal of the Church in the power of the Gospel and the conserving – or where necessary, restoration – of its unity are indissolubly intertwined. This constituted the fundamental concern too of the Second Vatican Council, for there were above all two main concerns that moved Saint Pope John XXIII to convene the Council, namely the renewal of the Catholic Church and the restoration of Christian unity. The same fundamental conviction also motivated Pope Paul VI, for whom the ecumenical question was also and indeed especially a leitmotif of the renewal of the Catholic Church, so that one must speak of the essential reciprocity between the ecumenical opening of the Catholic Church and the renewal of its ecclesiology.<sup>61</sup> This reciprocity forms also the foundation for the way the Second Vatican Council identified the ecumenical movement as a conversion movement and viewed conversion as the elixir of life of true ecumenism:<sup>62</sup> “There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from newness of attitudes, from self-denial and unstinted love that yearnings for unity take their rise and grow towards maturity.”<sup>63</sup> In this light the *Confessio Augustana* represents in retrospect the determined effort of the Wittenberg Reformation to renew the Church and thereby to rescue its endangered unity. This confession can therefore not be underestimated in its ecumenical significance,<sup>64</sup> as the Ecumenical Working Group of Lutheran and Catholic Theologians rightly judges: “It is possible that the churches of Western Christendom were indeed at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 as close to one another as they have never

---

60. John Paul II, Address on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the *Confessio Augustana*, 25 June 1980.

61. Cf. H. J. Pottmeyer, *Die Öffnung der römisch-katholischen Kirche und die ekklesiologische Reform des 2. Vaticanums. Ein wechselseitiger Einfluss*, in: Paolo VI e l'Ecumenismo. Colloquio Internazionale di Studio Brescia 1998 (Brescia – Roma 2001) 98-117.

62. Cf. K. Koch, *Innere Reform und Umkehr als Voraussetzung von Ökumene*, in: E. Dieckmann / K. Kardinal Lehmann (Hrsg.), *Blick zurück nach vorn. Das Zweite Vaticanum aus der Perspektive der multilateralen Ökumene* (Würzburg 2016) 161-186.

63. *Unitatis redintegratio*, 7.

64. Cf. *Confessio Augustana. Bekenntnis des einen Glaubens. Gemeinsame Untersuchung lutherischer und katholischer Theologen* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1980); H. Fries u. a., *Confessio Augustana. Hindernis oder Hilfe?* (Regensburg 1979); B. Lohse und O. H. Pesch (Eds.), *Das Augsburger Bekenntnis von 1530 damals und heute* (München – Mainz 1980); H. Meyer, H. Schütte and H.-J. Mund (Eds.), *Katholische Anerkennung des Augsburger Bekenntnisses. Ein Vorstoss zur Einheit zwischen katholischer und lutherischer Kirche* (Frankfurt a. M. 1977). Cf. also K. Koch, *Die Confessio Augustana – Ein katholisches Bekenntnis?* in: Koch, *Gelähmte Ökumene. Was jetzt noch zu tun ist* (Freiburg i. Br. 1991) 65-106.

been since.”<sup>65</sup> On that basis it would be appropriate to celebrate in 2030 the 500th anniversary of the Diet of Augsburg and the *Confessio Augustana* proclaimed there in at least as intensive ecumenical community as the Reformation commemoration in 2017.

#### 4. On the way to binding ecclesial community

There is an additional reason for the *Confessio Augustana* retaining its prime significance: for ecumenical dialogues that are to prepare ecclesial decisions, it is ultimately not sufficient for the position of one individual theologian – even if that theologian is the great Reformer Martin Luther – to serve as their foundation; that must instead be perceived in the ecclesial confessional writings. In the same way, for binding statements of ecumenical consensus, documents by ecumenical commissions do not suffice, no matter how deserving they may be. Only those texts can lead us forward into the future that have actually been received by their respective churches and authoritatively accepted by their leaders. Therein we can and must see the particular significance of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification”, which was agreed between the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on 31 October 1999 in Augsburg, which represents a milestone in the ecumenical encounter between the Catholic Church and Lutheranism.<sup>66</sup> With this document a wide-ranging consensus was reached in what was surely the most central question leading to the Reformation and the subsequent schism in the 16th century.

The formula “consensus in fundamental truths of the doctrine of justification“ used in the Joint Declaration of course expresses the fact that unity was nevertheless not achieved thereby, since no full consensus has yet been reached above all on the consequences of this doctrine for the understanding of the Church and the question of ministry.<sup>67</sup> Since the still remaining questions converge on the precise understanding of what the Church is, the ecclesiological implications of the consensus that has been reached must be placed on the agenda of ecumenical conversations. Work on this question will form a further important step on the path towards ecumenical agreement between Lutherans and Catholics, which could ultimately issue in the drafting of a future Joint Declaration, analogous to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, on Church, Eucharist and Ministry.<sup>68</sup> I note with gratitude

---

65. V. Leppin und D. Sattler (Hrsg.), *Reformation 1517-2017. Ökumenische Perspektiven* (Freiburg i. Br. – Göttingen 2014) 67.

66. *Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre* (Frankfurt a. M. – Paderborn 1999). Vgl. auch *Lutherischer Weltbund und Päpstlicher Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen* (Hrsg.), *10 Jahre Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre* (Frankfurt a. M. – Paderborn 2011); W. Klaiber (Hrsg.), *Biblische Grundlagen der Rechtfertigungslehre. Eine ökumenische Studie zur Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre* (Leipzig – Paderborn 2012).

67. Cf. B. J. Hilberath / W. Pannenberg (Hrsg.), *Zur Zukunft der Ökumene. Die „Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“* (Regensburg 1999); E. Pulsfort / R. Hanusch (Hrsg.), *Von der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung“ zum „Gemeinsamen Herrenmahl“? Perspektiven der Ökumene im 21. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg 2002).

68. Cf. K. Koch, *Auf dem Weg zur Kirchengemeinschaft. Welche Chance hat eine gemeinsame Erklärung zu Kirche, Eucharistie und Amt?* in: *Catholica* 69 (2015) 77-94.

that the national dialogue in Finland is dealing with this subject, and in Lutheran–Catholic dialogue in the USA a “Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist” has already been drafted on this issue.<sup>69</sup> Such a joint declaration would undoubtedly be a decisive step towards visible church communion, which is the goal of all ecumenical endeavours, and to raise awareness of this goal is an important task of the common commemoration of the Reformation.

It is indeed no coincidence that my reflections have merged into the question of the essential nature of the Church, for this question was also the crux of the 16th century Reformation. Deepening the discussion on this ecumenically urgent issue must be an obligation of the Reformation commemoration. To celebrate it and then to simply accept the status quo or even abandon the goal of unity entirely and rest content with the existing plurality of churches would not do justice either to the intentions of the Reformers or the expectations of the Reformation commemoration. After 500 years of division, of prolonged opposition and juxtaposition, we must strive for a binding communion and put it into effect already today. In this common endeavour Catholics will affirm what the Reformation means to them and what they can learn from it, and Protestant Christians will testify to what they can learn from the Catholic Church today and what enrichment they can receive from it.

A common Reformation commemoration will only represent an ecumenical opportunity if the year 2017 is not the conclusion but a new beginning in the ecumenical struggle for full communion between Lutherans and Catholics, celebrated in the triad chord of gratitude, repentance, and hope – from which no component can be omitted if the Reformation commemoration is to be perceived as a symphony.

---

69. Bishop’s Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist* (2015).

**Symposium „Jesus der Christus im Glauben der einen Kirche. Christologie –  
Kirchen des Ostens – Ökumenische Dialoge“  
an der Philosophisch–Theologischen Hochschule St. Georgen in Frankfurt  
am 21. September 2017**

*Jesus der Christus: Grund der Einheit Oder Motiv der Trennung?*

Das, was uns Christen eint, ist viel grösser als das, was uns noch trennt; und glücklicherweise konnte bei den Kirchenspaltungen in der Geschichte der Bruch nicht bis in die Mitte des Glaubens vordringen und sie zerstören. Diese beiden Urteile sind in der heutigen ökumenischen Diskussion Allgemeingut geworden und geben einen breiten ökumenischen Konsens wieder. Ihm scheint freilich der Titel des Vortrags zu widersprechen, wenn er das Motiv der Trennung auch im Glauben an Jesus Christus ausfindig macht - zumindest als Frage. Wie aber soll denn der Glaube an Jesus Christus Grund der Trennung sein können, wenn uns mehr eint als trennt und wenn die Spaltungen nicht bis in die Mitte des Glaubens vordringen konnten? Denn welche andere Mitte als das Bekenntnis zu Jesus Christus könnte es denn im christlichen Glauben geben? Heute ist deshalb evident geworden, dass der Glaube an Jesus Christus nicht trennt, sondern eint. In der Geschichte der Kirche hingegen ist der Glaube an Jesus Christus nicht nur Grund der Einheit, sondern auch Motiv der Trennung gewesen. Diesem schwer wiegenden Sachverhalt müssen wir uns zuwenden, um durch die Wahrnehmung der Überwindung dieses elementaren Ärgernisses erst recht die Einheit unter uns Christen im Glauben an Jesus Christus wiederzufinden, der selbst am Abend vor seinem Leiden gebetet hat, dass die Jünger eins sein sollen, damit die Welt glauben kann, dass er der von Gott in die Welt Gesandte ist.

### **1. Das Christusbekenntnis im Dialog mit den Kirchen des Ostens**

Jesus Christus ist „der einzig geborene Sohn und Herr, der in zwei Naturen unvermischt, unveränderlich, ungetrennt und unteilbar erkannt wird, wobei nirgends wegen der Einung der Unterschied der Naturen aufgehoben ist, vielmehr die Eigentümlichkeit jeder der beiden Naturen gewahrt bleibt und sich in einer Person und einer Hypostase vereinigt“. Mit diesen Worten hat das Vierte Ökumenische Konzil von Chalkedon im Jahre 451 nach einem langen und intensiven, kontroversen und harten Ringen in der frühen Kirche das einmalige und einzigartige Geheimnis Jesu Christi umschrieben, und zwar mit dem Ziel, die grundlegende Glaubensüberzeugung festhalten zu können, dass Jesus Christus derselbe ist „vollkommen in der Gottheit“ und derselbe ist „vollkommen in der Menschheit“, derselbe ist „wahrhaft Gott und wahrhaft Mensch aus vernunftbegabter Seele und Leib“, und derselbe ist „der Gottheit nach dem Vater wesensgleich und der Menschheit nach uns wesensgleich, in allem uns gleich ausser der Sünde“<sup>1</sup>. Über diesen Konzilsentscheid hat Papst Benedikt XVI. bereits in den siebziger Jahren geurteilt, das Konzil von Chalkedon sei für ihn „die grossartigste und kühnste Vereinfachung des komplizierten, äusserst vielschichtigen Traditionsbefunds auf eine einzige, alles andere tragende Mitte hin: Sohn Gottes,

---

1. P. Hünermann (Hrsg.), Heinrich Denzinger, Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen (Freiburg i. Br. 1991) Nr. 301 und 302.

gleichen Wesens mit Gott und gleichen Wesens mit uns“. Und Joseph Ratzinger hat hinzugefügt, im Gegensatz zu vielen anderen Möglichkeiten, die im Laufe der Geschichte versucht worden sind, habe Chalkedon Jesus „theo-logisch ausgelegt“, und dies sei „die einzige Auslegung, die der ganzen Breite der Überlieferung gerecht zu werden“ vermöge und „die volle Wucht des Phänomens aufnehmen“ könne, und hier eröffne sich „das Ganze“ im Unterschied zu allen anderen Auslegungen, die „irgendwie zu schmal sind“, weil jeder andere Begriff nur einen Teil erfasse und einen anderen ausschliesse.<sup>2</sup>

a) *Christologische Streitigkeiten nach dem Konzil von Chalkedon*

Führt man sich die christologische Lehrentscheidung des Konzils von Chalkedon und das beinahe hymnische Lob des damaligen Theologen Joseph Ratzinger über dieses Konzil vor Augen, kann man nur äusserst erstaunt das geschichtliche Faktum zur Kenntnis nehmen, dass diese Lehrentscheidung Ursache und Grund der ersten grossen Kirchenspaltungen im fünften Jahrhundert gewesen ist, die bis heute noch nicht ganz überwunden sind. Diejenigen Kirchen, die das Konzil nicht angenommen haben, werden als Orientalisch-Orthodoxe Kirchen bezeichnet, zu denen die Koptisch-Orthodoxe Kirche, die Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kirche, die Armenisch-Apostolische Kirche, die Äthiopisch-Orthodoxe Kirche, die Eritreisch-Orthodoxe Kirche und die Malankara Orthodox-Syrische Kirche gehören.<sup>3</sup> Diese Kirchen sind heute wegen ihrer weiteren Verbreitung auch in der westlichen Welt und vor allem wegen der konfliktuösen Entwicklungen in der arabischen Welt vermehrt im öffentlichen Bewusstsein präsent. Weil sie das Konzil von Chalkedon, das Vierte Ökumenische Konzil nicht akzeptiert haben, werden sie auch die Kirchen der ersten drei Ökumenischen Konzilien genannt. In einer besonderen geschichtlichen Situation befindet sich die Assyrische Kirche des Ostens, auch als Ostsyrische Kirche bezeichnet, die nur das Konzil von Nicaea im Jahre 325 und das Konzil von Konstantinopel im Jahre 381, nicht aber das Konzil von Ephesus im Jahre 431 rezipiert hat. Weil die christologische Lehrentscheidung des Konzils von Chalkedon der Grund der Trennungen gewesen ist, unterscheidet man zwischen den chalkedonischen Kirchen, zu denen die Orthodoxen Kirchen, die Katholische Kirche und die aus der Reformation hervorgegangenen Kirchen gehören, und den nicht-chalkedonischen Kirchen.

In der damaligen Zeit ist es nicht einfach gewesen, kirchliche Glaubensverantwortung und Reichspolitik voneinander zu unterscheiden oder gar zu trennen, weshalb bei den Kirchenspaltungen im fünften Jahrhundert gewiss auch politische Motive eine nicht nur unbedeutende Rolle gespielt haben. Der theologische Grund für die Spaltungen ist aber der Streit um eine adäquate und vor allem rechtgläubige Formulierung des Christusbekenntnisses gewesen. Um besser verstehen zu können, worum es sich bei diesem Streit gehandelt hat, legt es sich nahe, sich zunächst vor Augen zu führen, was beiden Seiten in diesem Streit gemeinsam gewesen ist. Dies ist das Christusbekenntnis, das von den Konzilien von Nicaea und Konstantinopel bezeugt worden ist: Wir glauben an „(den) einen Herrn, Jesus Christus,

---

2. J. Ratzinger, Was bedeutet Jesus Christus für mich? in: Ders., Dogma und Verkündigung (München 1973) 137-140, zit. 138.

3. Vgl. Ch. Lange – K. Ponggéra (Hrsg.), Die altorientalischen Kirchen. Glaube und Geschichte (Darmstadt 2010); P. Siniscalco, Le Antiche Chiese Orientali. Storia e letteratura (Roma 2005).

den Sohn Gottes, als Einziggeborener aus dem Vater gezeugt, das heisst aus dem Wesen des Vaters, Gott aus Gott, Licht aus Licht, wahrer Gott aus wahren Gott, gezeugt, nicht geschaffen, wesensgleich dem Vater, durch den alles geworden ist, was im Himmel und auf der Erde ist, der wegen uns Menschen und um unseres Heiles willen herabgestiegen und Fleisch und Mensch geworden ist“<sup>4</sup>. Da auf der einen Seite Jesus Christus als „wesensgleich mit dem Vater“ prädiert wird, handelt es sich dabei um ein eindeutiges Bekenntnis zum Gott-Sein Jesu Christi. Und da auf der anderen Seite von Christus ausgesagt wird, dass er Fleisch und Mensch geworden ist, wird auch ein eindeutiges Bekenntnis zum Mensch-Sein Jesu Christi abgelegt.

Die Frage, die sich von daher dem Glaubensbewusstsein aufdrängte, war diejenige, wie denn der Sohn Gottes, der ganz Gott ist, überhaupt Mensch werden kann, ohne dass er aufhören müsste, Gott zu sein, wie sich also in Jesus Christus das Gott-Sein und das Mensch-Sein miteinander verhalten und wie dieses Verhältnis in theologischer Begrifflichkeit adäquat zum Ausdruck gebracht werden kann. Wie wir gesehen haben, antwortete das Konzil von Chalkedon, das die Glaubensbekenntnisse von Nicaea und Konstantinopel selbstverständlich voraussetzt, mit der Aussage, dass Christus eine Person in zwei Naturen ist, die als „unvermischt, unveränderlich, ungetrennt und unteilbar“ erkannt werden. Da entschieden hervorgehoben wird, dass der Unterschied der Naturen wegen der Einung niemals aufgehoben ist, die Eigentümlichkeit von jeder der beiden Naturen vielmehr bewahrt ist, wird diese christologische Lehrentscheidung von Chalkedon als „Zwei-Naturen-Lehre“ oder mit dem Fachterminus als „Dyophysitismus“ bezeichnet.

Diejenigen Kirchen, die diese christologische Formel nicht annehmen konnten, sondern der vor allem in Alexandria lebendigen Glaubensüberlieferung, dass die eine göttliche Natur in Jesus von Nazareth Fleisch geworden ist, treu bleiben wollten, verstanden die chalkedonische Aussage „in zwei Naturen“ dahingehend, das Konzil würde von zwei Subjekten reden und damit eine Zwei-Söhne-Lehre vertreten. Um eine solche Häresie zu überwinden, betonten sie deshalb, dass in Christus nicht zwei Naturen, sondern eine Natur gegeben ist. Aus diesem Grunde wurden die Gegner des Konzils als „Monophysiten“ bezeichnet, was allerdings ihrer christologischen Überzeugung nicht angemessen ist, da sie keine Mono-Natur vertraten, sondern von der einen Natur in Christus aussagten, dass sie nicht „in zwei“, sondern „aus zwei“ besteht. Indem sie ihre Glaubensüberzeugung mit der Mia-Physis-Formel zum Ausdruck brachten, ist es adäquater, ihre Position als „Miaphysitismus“ zu bezeichnen.

Einen nochmals anderen Weg ist die Assyrische Kirche des Ostens gegangen, die, wie gesagt, bereits das Konzil von Ephesus im Jahre 431 nicht angenommen und damit auch die auf diesem Konzil ausgesprochene Verurteilung des Nestorius als ungerecht betrachtet hat. Sie ist deshalb in der Geschichte in polemischer Absicht als „nestorianische Kirche“ charakterisiert worden. Da sie in ihrer Theologie weithin dem bedeutenden Exegeten und Theologen Theodor von Mopsuestia im fünften Jahrhundert gefolgt ist, ist sie adäquater als „Theodorianische Kirche“ zu bezeichnen. Sie hat sich nicht gegen die Aussage von zwei Naturen in Christus gewandt, sondern gegen die von einer Hypostase, mit deren Annahme man die reine Lehre verlassen

---

4. P. Hünermann (Hrsg.), Heinrich Denzinger, Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen (Freiburg i. Br. 1991) Nr. 125.

habe. Demgemäss gibt es in der Sicht der Assyrischen Kirche in Christus zwei Naturen mit ihren hypostases (gnome) und ein prosopon der Sohnschaft.

Auf nicht wenige Christen heute dürften diese christologischen Auseinandersetzungen im fünften Jahrhundert den Eindruck von theoretischen Streitereien oder, wie es heute gerne heisst, von akademischen Spitzfindigkeiten machen. Die äusserst starke und teilweise erbitterte Polemik, mit der diese christologischen Auseinandersetzungen damals geführt worden sind, weisen allerdings nicht einfach nur auf theologische oder bischöfliche Streitlust hin, sondern auf ein viel tiefer liegendes Motiv. Für beide Seiten handelte es sich vor allem um eine soteriologische Frage, bei deren Beantwortung das Heil der Menschen auf dem Spiel steht. Da die Menschen in der damaligen Zeit sehr stark unter der Erfahrung der Vergänglichkeit und der Sterblichkeit litten, richtete sich ihre entscheidende Existenzfrage darauf, wie das endliche Seiende am unendlichen Sein so Anteil gewinnen kann, dass es gegen die Vergänglichkeit alles Irdischen und gegen das eigene Vergehen im Tod Bestand im ewigen Sein Gottes gewinnen kann. Von daher war es für die damaligen Menschen evident, dass ein blosser Mensch die Menschen nicht erlösen kann, weil dies nur Gott vermag. Auf der anderen Seite war ebenso klar, dass der transzendente Gott sich nicht einfach mit etwas Geschöpflichem verbinden kann. Von daher stellten sich die bedrängenden Fragen, wie es zu einer Einheit von Gottheit und Menschheit überhaupt kommen kann und ob in Christus eine oder zwei Naturen existieren. Und noch prinzipieller ergaben sich die Fragen, was unter Natur und was unter hypostasis, prosopon und persona zu verstehen ist. Über diese Fragen wurden heftige Auseinandersetzungen geführt, die die Spaltung zwischen den chaledonischen und den nicht-chaledonischen Kirchen provoziert haben, die sich im Laufe der Geschichte immer mehr voneinander entfremdet haben.

#### *b) Christologische Konsenserklärungen in den ökumenischen Dialogen*

Zu einer Wiederannäherung zwischen diesen Kirchen ist es erst im ökumenischen Zeitalter gekommen. Weil es bei den Kirchenspaltungen im fünften Jahrhundert um das Christusbekenntnis und damit um die innerste Mitte des christlichen Glaubens ging, versteht es sich leicht, dass bei den beginnenden ökumenischen Gesprächen mit den Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen in erster Linie christologische Fragen zu behandeln gewesen sind. Ein wichtiger Anstoss ist dabei von der Philosophisch-Theologischen Hochschule St. Georgen in Frankfurt ausgegangen, an der der spätere Kardinal Alois Grillmeier als Professor für Dogmatik und Dogmengeschichte gewirkt hat.<sup>5</sup> Er nahm das 1500-jährige Jubiläum des Konzils von Chalkedon im Jahre 1951 zum Anlass, es mit einer Festschrift zu würdigen. Aus diesem Projekt ist das wissenschaftliche Werk „Das Konzil von Chalkedon“ entstanden, das er zusammen mit Pater Heinrich Bacht in drei Bänden herausgegeben hat, das sich durch eine grosse ökumenische Offenheit für andere christliche Kirchen auszeichnet und in dem Studien über die Christologie auch in nicht-chalkedonischen Kirchen enthalten sind. Diese Forschungsarbeit mit ökumenischer Sinnrichtung hat Pater Grillmeier auch in seinem grossen christologischen Werk „Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche“ weitergeführt und

---

5. Vgl. Th. Hainthaler, „Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche“. Christologische Forschungen und ökumenischer Dialog mit Kirchen des Ostens, in: *Catholica* 71 (2017) 183-204.

dabei als erfreuliches Ergebnis formulieren können, „dass bei allen Verschiedenheiten mit ihren kulturellen und geistigen Vorbedingungen die grossen Gebiete des Orbis christologicus, sive orientalis, sive occidentalis, in der Substanz des Christusglaubens eins sind, dies vor allem vom Taufkerygma und vom Alltagsglauben der Kirchen her“. Dabei legte Grillmeier Wert darauf, dass er den Nachweis der Gemeinsamkeit unter den christlichen Kirchen „nicht in erster Linie auf dem Gebiet der théologie savante oder auf der Ebene der spekulativen Christologie“ legen wollte, „sondern vielmehr auf der Gemeinsamkeit des Glaubens und der Verkündigung“<sup>6</sup>.

Eine wichtige Fortsetzung und Vertiefung dieses erfreulichen Ergebnisses ist von der von Kardinal Franz König in Wien gegründeten Stiftung Pro Oriente ermöglicht worden, mit der er das Ziel verfolgte, auf inoffizieller Ebene Gespräche in Bewegung zu bringen, die auf der offiziellen Ebene noch nicht geführt werden konnten, und zwar in der Überzeugung, dass es, wie er selbst sagte, nicht „möglich gewesen wäre, eine ähnliche freundliche Atmosphäre im Vatikan für die ersten Gespräche seit Jahrhunderten mit unseren Schwesterkirchen im Osten zu schaffen. Die Ängste und Feindseligkeiten, die sich über die Jahrhunderte gesammelt hatten, wären ein zu grosses Hindernis gewesen“<sup>7</sup>. Mit diesem grossen Dienst des ökumenischen Brückenbaus in der Christenheit zwischen Ost und West hat Pro Oriente auch den ökumenischen Dialog mit dem Orientalischen Christentum intensiv gepflegt und gefördert.<sup>8</sup> Dies gilt bereits von der ersten Pro-Oriente-Konsultation, die im Jahre 1971 in Wien mit Vertretern der Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen stattgefunden und sich die Aufgabe vorgenommen hat, den grossen Konflikt um das Konzil von Chalkedon zu analysieren und damit die belastende Vergangenheit aufzuarbeiten. Diese Konsultation endete mit dem erfreulichen Ergebnis einer weitgehenden Übereinstimmung im Christusglauben, die mit der so genannten „Wiener christologischen Formel“ zum Ausdruck gebracht wurde. In dieser Formel wird die Einheit von Gottheit und Menschheit in Jesus Christus deutlich hervorgehoben und zugleich deren Unterschiedenheit ebenso deutlich festgehalten, ohne dabei die umstrittenen Fachtermini wie *physis*, *hypostasis* und *prosopon* zu verwenden. Damit ist sichtbar geworden, dass es sich bei den christologischen Streitigkeiten im fünften Jahrhundert wesentlich auch um ein Sprachproblem gehandelt hat, insofern man von verschiedenen philosophischen Begriffen wie „Natur“ und „Person“ ausgegangen ist, im Grunde jedoch denselben Christusglauben bezeugen wollte.<sup>9</sup>

Diese wichtigen ökumenischen Vorarbeiten haben die späteren offiziellen Dialoge und die auf sie folgenden christologischen Erklärungen zwischen dem Bischof

---

6. A. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*. Band 2/1: *Das Konzil von Chalkedon (451). Rezeption und Widerspruch (451-518)* (Freiburg i. Br. 1986) VII-VIII.

7. F. König, *Offen für Gott – offen für die Welt. Kirche im Dialog* (Freiburg i. Br. 2005) 72-73.

8. Vgl. D. Winkler, *Ökumene zwischen Stolper- und Meilensteinen. Der Dialog von Pro Oriente mit den orientalisch-orthodoxen Kirchen*, in: J. Marte, R. Prokschi (Hrsg.), *Denkwerkstatt Pro Oriente. Erfolgsgeschichte eines Ost-West-Dialogs (1964-2014) = Pro Oriente Band XXVIII* (Innsbruck-Wien 2014) 100-123.

9. Vgl. E. Ch. Suttner, *Vorchalcedonische und chalcedonische Christologie. Die eine Wahrheit in unterschiedlicher Begrifflichkeit*, in: Ders., *Kirche in einer zueinander rückenden Welt. Neue Aufsätze zu Theologie, Geschichte und Spiritualität des christlichen Ostens* (Würzburg 2003) 155-170.

von Rom und Oberhäuptern von verschiedenen Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen vorbereitet, zunächst mit der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche. Bereits im Oktober 1971 kam es in Rom zu einer Begegnung zwischen Papst Paul VI. und dem Syrischen Patriarchen von Antiochien Mar Ignatius Yaqub III. Beide Kirchenoberhäupter stellten dabei in ihrer gemeinsamen Erklärung fest, „dass im Glauben an das Mysterium des Wortes Gottes, das Fleisch und wahrhaft Mensch geworden ist, kein Unterschied besteht, auch wenn über Jahrhunderte hin Schwierigkeiten auf Grund verschiedener theologischer Ausdruckweise im Bekenntnis des Glaubens entstanden sind“<sup>10</sup>. Diese Übereinstimmung im Christusbekenntnis wurde nochmals bestätigt beim Besuch des Syrisch-Orthodoxen Patriarchen von Antiochien und des Ganzen Ostens, Ignatius Zakka I. Iwas, bei Papst Johannes Paul II. in Rom im Juni 1984. In ihrer gemeinsamen Erklärung hoben beide Kirchenführer hervor, „dass die Verwirrungen und die Schismen, die zwischen ihren beiden Kirchen in den späteren Jahrhunderten auftraten, in keiner Weise die Substanz ihres Glaubens betrafen oder berührten; denn diese entstanden nur durch die Unterschiede in der Terminologie, in der Kultur und durch die verschiedenen Formeln, die von den unterschiedlichen theologischen Schulen formuliert wurden, um denselben Inhalt zum Ausdruck zu bringen“. Auf Grund dieser Erkenntnis gebe es heute „keine reale Grundlage mehr für die traurigen Trennungen und Schismen, die als deren Folgen zwischen uns entstanden betreffend der Lehre der Inkarnation“: „In Worten und Leben bekennen wir die wahre Lehre bezüglich Christus, unserem Herrn, ungeachtet der Unterschiede in der Interpretation solcher Lehren, wie sie zur Zeit des Konzils von Chalkedon aufkamen.“<sup>11</sup> Mit dieser Erklärung wurden 1500 Jahre nach dem Konzil von Chalkedon die christologischen Differenzen zwischen der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche und der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche in einer offiziellen Weise bereinigt. Auf dieser Gemeinsamen Erklärung aufbauend haben beide Kirchenführer ein pastorales Abkommen mit der Ermöglichung des wechselseitigen Empfangs der Sakramente der Busse, der Eucharistie und der Krankensalbung in Notfällen unterzeichnet.<sup>12</sup> Über dieses pastorale Abkommen hat Theresia Hainthaler mit Recht geurteilt: „Bis heute ist es das erste Mal in der Geschichte der Ökumene, dass die katholische Kirche und eine andere Kirche eine solche Möglichkeit akzeptiert und autorisiert haben.“<sup>13</sup> Dass trotz weiter bestehender Kirchentrennung eine begrenzte *communicatio in sacris* ermöglicht worden ist, verdient in der Tat das Attribut „historisch“.

---

10. Gemeinsame Erklärung des Papstes Paul VI. und des syrischen Patriarchen von Antiochien Mar Ignatius Yaqub III. vom 27. Oktober 1971, in: H. Meyer, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer (Hrsg.), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. 1931-1982* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1983) 528-529.

11. Erklärung von Papst Johannes Paul II. und dem syrisch-orthodoxen Patriarchen von Antiochien und dem Ganzen Osten, Ignatius Zakka I. Iwas, zu gegenseitigen pastoralen Hilfen 23. Juni 1984, in: H. Meyer, D. Papandreou, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer (Hrsg.), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Band 2: 1982-1990* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1992) 571-574.

12. Vgl. J. Oeldemann, *Gemeinsamer Glaube und pastorale Zusammenarbeit. 25 Jahre Weggemeinschaft zwischen der Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche und der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche* (Basel 2011).

13. Th. Hainthaler, *Die Gemeinsame Erklärung vom 23. Juni 1984. Theologische Aussage und ökumenische Bedeutung*, in: J. Oeldemann, *Gemeinsamer Glaube und pastorale Zusammenarbeit* (Basel 2011) 24-51, zit. 27.

Gemeinsame Erklärungen über die christologischen Differenzen und deren Überwindung hat der jeweilige Bischof von Rom auch mit anderen Kirchenführern vereinbart. Zu erinnern ist vor allem an die Gemeinsame Erklärung zwischen Papst Paul VI. und dem Koptisch-Orthodoxen Patriarchen Shenuda III. am 10. Mai 1971 in Rom. In dieser Erklärung, mit der der offizielle koptisch-katholische Dialog begründet worden ist, wird im Blick auf das Christusbekenntnis festgehalten, dass „Jesus Christus, vollkommener Gott in Bezug auf seine Gottheit und vollkommener Mensch in Bezug auf seine Menschheit ist. In ihm ist seine Gottheit verbunden mit seiner Menschheit in einer wirklichen vollkommenen Einheit ohne Vermischung, ohne Vermengung, ohne Verschmelzung, ohne Veränderung, ohne Teilung, ohne Trennung. Seine Gottheit hat sich nie von seiner Menschheit getrennt, nicht einmal einen Augenblick, nicht einen Atemzug lang. Er, der ewige und unsichtbare Gott, wurde sichtbar im Fleisch und nahm Knechtsgestalt an. In ihm sind alle Eigenschaften der Gottheit und alle Eigenschaften der Menschheit zugleich in einer wirklichen, vollkommenen, unteilbaren und untrennbaren Einheit bewahrt.“<sup>14</sup> Für den heute amtierenden Papst-Patriarchen Tawadros II. ist dieses Ereignis von so grundlegender Bedeutung, dass er anlässlich des 40. Jahrestags der Unterzeichnung dieser Erklärung Papst Franziskus in Rom besuchte und anregte, den 10. Mai in beiden Kirchen als Gedenktag und Tag der Freundschaft zu feiern.

Anlässlich des Besuchs des Obersten Patriarchen und Katholikos aller Armenier, Karekin I. bei Papst Johannes Paul II. in Rom am 13. Dezember 1996 haben beide Kirchenführer in ihrer Gemeinsamen Erklärung festgehalten, dass in der Geschichte „sprachliche, kulturelle und politische Faktoren“ ungeheuer viel zu den „theologischen Meinungsverschiedenheiten“ beigetragen haben, „die in der Terminologie, in der die betreffenden Lehrsätze formuliert wurden, zum Ausdruck kamen“, dass beide Kirchen heute aber den Glauben an Jesus Christus gemeinsam bekennen: „Vollkommen in seiner Gottheit, vollkommen in seiner Menschheit, ist seine Gottheit mit seiner Menschheit vereint in der Person des einziggeborenen Sohnes Gottes in einer Verbindung, die real, vollkommen, unvermischt, unveränderlich, ungetrennt und unteilbar ist.“<sup>15</sup> Eine ähnliche Gemeinsame Erklärung hat Papst Johannes Paul II. auch mit dem Katholikos Aram I. von Kilikien bei seinem Besuch in Rom am 25. Januar 1997 abgegeben.<sup>16</sup>

Man darf dankbar anerkennen, dass es eine ganze Reihe von bilateralen christologischen Erklärungen zwischen der Katholischen Kirche und verschiedenen Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen gibt. Zugleich gilt es festzuhalten, dass es bisher aber noch keine christologische Erklärung gibt, die für die gesamte Orientalisch-Orthodoxe Kirchenfamilie gelten könnte, und dass die christologische Frage auch noch nicht auf

---

14. Gemeinsame Erklärung des Papstes Paul VI. und des koptischen Papst-Patriarchen Shenuda III. vom 10. Mai 1973, in: H. Meyer, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer (Hrsg.), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung, 1931-1982* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1983) 529-531.

15. Gemeinsame Erklärung von Papst Johannes Paul II. und dem Obersten Patriarchen und Katholikos aller Armenier, Karekin I., Rom, 13. Dezember 1996, in: H. Mayer, D. Papandreu, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer (Hrsg.), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung, Band 3: 1990-2001* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 2003) 582-584.

16. Gemeinsame Erklärung von Katholikos Aram I. von Kilikien und Papst Johannes Paul II., Rom, 25. Januar 1997, in: a.a.O. (Anm. 16) 584-587.

der Traktandenliste der Gemischten Internationalen Kommission für den theologischen Dialog zwischen der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche und den Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen zu finden ist, die im Jahre 2003 ihre Arbeit aufgenommen und bisher zwei Dokumente vorgelegt hat, nämlich zuerst über „Wesen, Verfassung und Sendung der Kirche“ und anschließend über *Communio* und *Communicatio* der Kirchen in den ersten fünf Jahrhunderten. Gegenwärtig befindet sich die Kommission in der dritten Phase und beschäftigt sich mit Fragen der Sakramentenlehre. Es versteht sich aber von selbst, dass die christologische Frage auch noch mit der ganzen Kirchenfamilie zu besprechen sein wird, um auf dem Weg zur eucharistischen Gemeinschaft einen wesentlichen Schritt weiter zu kommen.

*c) Einbeit im Glauben und Unterschied in der Terminologie*

Es wären noch viele weitere ökumenische Dialoge über die christologische Frage zu erwähnen, nämlich zunächst die Dialoge zwischen der Orthodoxie, die auf dem Boden und in der Tradition von Chalkedon steht, und den Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen. Diese Dialoge haben bereits in den sechziger Jahren in einer inoffiziellen Weise begonnen und sind seit 1985 in einen offiziellen Dialog überführt worden. Zu nennen sind ferner die Dialoge der Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen mit dem Reformierten Weltbund und mit den Anglikanern. Auf sie einzugehen ist hier freilich nicht der Ort<sup>17</sup>. Auf zwei Sachverhalte soll aber noch eigens hingewiesen werden.

Erstens fällt auf, dass in verschiedenen Dialogen über die christologische Frage die ökumenische Methode des so genannten differenzierenden Konsenses angewandt worden ist und sich als fruchtbar erwiesen hat. Mit dieser Methode wird formuliert, was als gemeinsam erkannt worden ist, und werden zugleich die verbleibenden Unterschiede benannt, die aber kein kirchentrennendes Gewicht mehr haben. Diese Methode zeigt sich vor allem in der Erklärung über die Christologie der Gemeinsamen Kommission der Katholischen Kirche und der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche vom August 1976. In dieser Erklärung wird sowohl die Formel von den zwei Naturen, die im Konzil von Chalkedon verwendet worden ist, als auch die *Mia-Physis*-Formel der damaligen Gegner des Konzils von Chalkedon als gültig beurteilt. Zugleich werden die beiden Formeln durchsichtig gemacht für die Anliegen, die mit ihnen zum Ausdruck gebracht worden sind, und es wird erklärt, was mit der jeweiligen Begrifflichkeit auf katholischer und koptischer Seite gemeint gewesen ist<sup>18</sup>. Ein analoges Vorgehen findet sich auch in der Erklärung der Gemeinsamen Kommission der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche und der Malankarischen Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche vom Juni 1990. In ihr wird festgestellt, dass der Inhalt des Glaubens in beiden Kirchengemeinschaften derselbe ist, dass aber in der Formulierung dieses Inhalts im Laufe der Geschichte Unterschiede in Terminologie und Akzentsetzung aufgetreten sind. Beide Kirchengemeinschaften sind freilich der Überzeugung, „dass diese

---

17. Vgl. Th. Hainthaler, *Hermeneutische Aspekte bei christologischen Erklärungen mit den Kirchen des Ostens*, in: S. Ernst, G. Gäde (Hrsg.), *Glaubensverantwortung in Theologie, Pastoral und Ethik = Festschrift für Peter Knauer* (Freiburg i. Br. 2015) 146-171.

18. Erklärung über die Christologie der Gemeinsamen Kommission der Katholischen Kirche und der Koptisch-Orthodoxen Kirche (Wien, 26.-29. August 1976), in: H. Meyer, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer (Hrsg.), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung, 1931-1982* (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1983) 541-542.

Unterschiede dergestalt sind, dass sie in derselben Gemeinschaft zusammen bestehen können und uns daher nicht zu trennen brauchen und trennen sollten“<sup>19</sup>. Die genannte ökumenische Methode ist auch in anderen ökumenischen Zusammenhängen, vor allem in der Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre zwischen dem Lutherischen Weltbund und dem Päpstlichen Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen, angewandt worden und hat sich auch hier als fruchtbar erwiesen.

Zweitens sei eigens auf die Gemeinsame christologische Erklärung der Katholischen Kirche und der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens hingewiesen, die nicht als der Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchengemeinschaft zugehörig betrachtet wird. In der gemeinsamen Erklärung, die von Papst Johannes Paul II. und Mar Dinkha, dem Katholikos und Patriarchen der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens in Rom am 11. November 1994 unterzeichnet worden ist, werden die Streitigkeiten in der Vergangenheit, die zu Anathematismen geführt haben, bedauert, es wird eingestanden, dass die so entstandenen Spaltungen „grösstenteils auf Missverständnisse zurückzuführen waren“, und es wird festgestellt, „dass wir uns heute geeint“ wissen „im Bekenntnis des gleichen Glaubens an den Sohn Gottes, der Mensch wurde, damit wir durch seine Gnade Kinder Gottes werden konnten“. Von besonderer Bedeutung ist dabei, dass sowohl die Vorstellung von zwei Subjekten in Christus als auch eine Adoptionschristologie abgelehnt wird: „Christus ist daher kein <gewöhnlicher Mensch>, den Gott adoptiert hat, um in ihm zu wohnen und ihn zu inspirieren, wie er es in den Gerechten und Propheten getan hat. Doch das gleiche göttliche Wort, von seinem Vater gezeugt vor aller Zeit ohne Anfang in Bezug auf seine Gottheit, wurde in der Endzeit in Bezug auf seine Menschheit von einer Mutter ohne einen Vater geboren. Die menschliche Natur, die die Jungfrau Maria geboren hat, war immer die des Sohnes Gottes selbst.“<sup>20</sup> Die Erklärung geht schliesslich auch auf die Bedeutung der gemeinsamen Christologie für die Ekklesiologie und die Lehre der Sakramente ein, weshalb im Anschluss an diese christologische Erklärung im offiziellen Dialog zwischen der Katholischen Kirche und der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens ein gemeinsames Dokument über die Sakramente erarbeitet worden ist, das mit dem Titel „Comon statement on <sacramental life>“ im November 2017 unterzeichnet werden konnte.

#### *d) Vertiefung des Christusglaubens und bleibende Aktualität*

Im Rückblick auf die Vielfalt der gemeinsamen christologischen Erklärungen drängt sich eine zweifache Feststellung auf. Die erste ist eine traurige. Sie beinhaltet das Urteil, dass ein wesentlicher Grund der grossen christologischen Streitigkeiten und der anschliessenden Kirchentrennungen im fünften Jahrhundert ein Konzil gewesen ist, nämlich das Konzil von Chalkedon. Dabei handelt es sich um eine Einsicht, die man in der ganzen Kirchengeschichte verfolgen kann, dass nämlich die Zeiten, die auf ein

---

19. Erklärung der Gemeinsamen Kommission der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche und der Malankarischen Syrisch-Orthodoxen Kirche, 3. Juni 1990, in: H. Meyer, D. Papandreu, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer (Hrsg.), Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Band 2: 1982-1990 (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1992) 578-580.

20. Gemeinsame christologische Erklärung der Katholischen Kirche und der Assyrischen Kirche des Ostens, Rom, 11. November 1994, in: H. Meyer, D. Papandreu, H. J. Urban, L. Vischer (Hrsg.), Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Band 3: 1990-2001 (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 2003) 597-601, zit. 597.

Konzil folgten, beinahe immer schwierige Zeiten gewesen sind, weil die Konzilien oft zunächst Erschütterungen des kirchlichen Gleichgewichts ausgelöst haben und zu Faktoren einer tiefen Krise geworden sind. Davon legt ein beredtes Zeugnis vor allem die Antwort ab, die im vierten Jahrhundert Gregor von Nazianz, immerhin zusammen mit Basilius von Caesarea und Johannes Chrysostomos einer der drei heiligen Hierarchen, gegeben hat, als er vom Kaiser eingeladen und gebeten wurde, am Ersten Konzil von Konstantinopel teilzunehmen. In Erinnerung an das Konzil von Nizaea im Jahre 325 und vor allem an die Zeit nach dem Konzil, die weithin einem grossen Chaos gleich, antwortete Gregor von Nazianz: „Um die Wahrheit zu sagen, so halte ich dafür, dass man jedes Konzil der Bischöfe fliehen sollte, da ich einen glücklichen Ausgang noch bei keinem Konzil erlebte...“<sup>21</sup> Es ist in der Tat paradox, dass Konzilien, die zur Selbstvergewisserung des Glaubens oder zu seiner Verteidigung angesichts von verbreiteten Häresien und insofern zur Wiederherstellung der kirchlichen Einheit einberufen werden, offensichtlich immer auch spalterische Keime in sich tragen, die sich dann nach dem Konzil auswirken. Die ersten grossen Kirchenspaltungen im fünften Jahrhundert sind dafür ein deutlicher Beleg.

Dies ist freilich nur die eine Seite. Auf der anderen Seite darf man mit Joseph Ratzinger ebenso klar festhalten, dass die grossen Konzilien des vierten und fünften Jahrhunderts, vor allem das Konzil von Chalkedon, in der Geschichte „Leichttürme der Kirche“ geworden sind, „die den Weg in die Mitte der Heiligen Schrift weisen und, indem sie ihre Auslegung prägen, zugleich die Identität des Glaubens im Wandel der Zeit klären“<sup>22</sup>. Diese positive Sicht hat sich in der Weiterentwicklung des christologischen Glaubens vor allem beim Dritten Konzil von Konstantinopel im Jahre 680/81 gezeigt, in dessen Licht auch die christologische Formel von Chalkedon in neuer Weise verstanden werden konnte. Denn der dieser Formel inhärente Parallelismus der beiden Naturen in Christus konnte im Sinne einer naturalistischen Verschmelzung der beiden Wesenheiten oder im Sinne von zwei nicht nur verschiedenen, sondern auch getrennten Naturen in Christus missverstanden werden, und sie ist deshalb eine wesentliche Ursache der Spaltungen nach dem Konzil von Chalkedon geworden. Von daher drängte sich die weitere Aufgabe auf, die Weise der Einheit zu klären, die zwischen dem wahren Menschsein und dem wahren Gottsein in Christus besteht. Das grosse Verdienst des Dritten Konzils von Konstantinopel besteht dabei darin, dass es die chalkedonische Aussage, dass Christus eine Person in zwei Naturen ist, wesentlich auf ihre personalen und existentiellen Dimensionen hin vertiefte, und zwar dadurch, dass es von der Überzeugung ausging, „dass zur Vollständigkeit der menschlichen Natur auch die denkbar höchste Vollkommenheit der Aktuierung dieser Natur gehört“, und dass es deshalb Christus auch „ein wirklich menschliches Wollen“ zusprach<sup>23</sup>. Indem das Konzil von daher der Frage nachging, wie in Christus zwei Willen miteinander leben und wirken können, hat es gelehrt, dass der menschliche Wille Jesu mit dem Willen des Logos ganz eins und damit reines Ja zum

---

21. Gregor von Nazianz, Ep. 130 Ad Procopium.

22. J. Kardinal Ratzinger, Bilanz der Nachkonzilszeit – Misserfolge, Aufgaben, Hoffnungen, in: Ders., Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie (München 1982) 383-395, zit. 385.

23. K.-H. Menke, Jesus ist Gott der Sohn. Denkformen und Brennpunkte der Christologie (Regensburg 2008) 271.

Willen des Vaters ist. Dies bedeutet, dass der menschliche Wille Jesu auf keinen Fall geleugnet werden darf, dass aber auch nicht zwei verschiedene Willenskräfte nebeneinander stehen, sondern dass die beiden Willen Jesu wirklich geeint sind im Ja-Wort des menschlichen Willens Jesu zum göttlichen Willen des Logos, wobei die beiden Willen nicht in naturaler, sondern in personaler Weise ein Wille sind. Da der Wille des Menschen Jesus nicht vom göttlichen Willen absorbiert ist, sondern in Freiheit ein einziger Wille in ihm ist, kann die Einheit des Menschen Jesus mit Gott keine Minderung oder gar Amputation des Menschseins Jesu bedeuten, sondern wird diese Einheit des Menschseins und seiner Freiheit vielmehr zur Vollendung gebracht: „Wenn Gott sich seinem Geschöpf Mensch verbindet, so verletzt und verringert er es nicht; er bringt es erst zu seiner vollen Ganzheit.“<sup>24</sup>

Diese personale Synthese der Freiheiten<sup>25</sup>, deren denkerischen Durchdringung sich im siebten Jahrhundert der grosse Theologe Maximus Confessor gewidmet hat, dessen Theologie Hans Urs von Balthasar ins christologische Gespräch der jüngeren Vergangenheit eingebracht hat<sup>26</sup>, hat gewiss in einer grundlegenden Weise die gemeinsamen christologischen Erklärungen in den zurück liegenden ökumenischen Dialogen beeinflusst und ermöglicht. Von daher drängt sich die zweite Konsequenz aus den bisherigen Überlegungen auf, nämlich die Frage nach der bleibenden Aktualität dieser christologischen Erklärungen in der kirchlichen und ökumenischen Situation heute. Diese Frage ist deshalb äusserst bedrängend, weil sich das Glaubensbewusstsein in der heutigen Situation von den christologischen Grundüberzeugungen des Konzils von Chalkedon und der christologischen Erklärungen in der jüngeren Vergangenheit in einer grundlegenden Weise unterscheidet. Denn im durchschnittlichen Glaubensbewusstsein heute geht es nicht mehr um die Alternative zwischen der Zwei-Naturen-Formel oder der Mia-Physis-Formel; die heutige Situation müsste eher in der Formel zum Ausdruck gebracht werden: „Jesus als Mensch ja – Christus als Sohn Gottes nein“. Viele Menschen und selbst Christen lassen sich zwar durchaus berühren von den menschlichen Dimensionen in Jesus von Nazareth; ihnen bereitet aber das Bekenntnis, dieser Jesus sei der eingeborene Sohn Gottes, der als der Auferweckte und in der Person des Heiligen Geistes unter uns gegenwärtig ist, und insofern der kirchliche Christusglaube weithin Mühe. Selbst innerhalb der Kirche will es heute oft nicht mehr gelingen, in Jesus nicht einfach einen – wenn auch hervorragenden und besonders guten – Menschen zu sehen, sondern im Menschen Jesus das Antlitz des Sohnes Gottes selbst wahrzunehmen. Es ist zwar erstaunlich und auch erfreulich, dass auch heute in der kritischen Situation, in der sich das Christentum besonders in Europa befindet, die Gestalt Jesus von Nazareth gegenwärtig ist und dass seine Gestalt sogar ausserhalb des Christentums auf die Menschen zugeht, bis hin nach Indien, wo viele Hindus das Bild von Jesus in ihr Haus und ihr Herz aufgenommen haben. Darüber

---

24. J. Kardinal Ratzinger, *Christologische Orientierungspunkte*, in: Ders., *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten. Versuche zu einer spirituellen Christologie* (Einsiedeln 1984) 13-40, zit. 34.

25. Vgl. K. Koch, *In Liebe erlöste Freiheit. Besinnung auf das anthropologische Geheimnis des Christusglaubens*, in: G. Augustin / M. Brun / E. Keller / M. Schulze (Hrsg.), „Christus – Gottes schöpferisches Wort“. *Festschrift für Christoph Kardinal Schönborn* (Freiburg i. Br. 2010) 371-402.

26. H. U. von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie. Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenntners* (Freiburg i. Br. 1941).

dürfen wir uns auch als Christen freuen. Doch mit der Wahrnehmung einer vielfältigen Gegenwart der Gestalt Jesus auch in der heutigen Welt müssen wir zugleich in der heutigen Christenheit einen beunruhigenden Bedeutungsverlust des christlichen Glaubens an Jesus als den Christus feststellen, in dem Gott selbst Mensch geworden ist.

Mit diesem christologischen Bekenntnis aber steht und fällt der christliche Glaube. Denn wenn Jesus, wie heute selbst nicht wenige Christen annehmen, nur ein Mensch gewesen wäre, der vor zweitausend Jahren gelebt hat, dann wäre er unwiderruflich in die Vergangenheit zurück getreten, und nur unser eigenes fernes Erinnern könnte ihn mehr oder weniger deutlich in unsere Gegenwart bringen. So aber könnte Jesus nicht „Gott von Gott“ und „Licht vom Licht“ und damit auch jenes Licht sein, das uns Menschen in unserer Lebensnacht aufsucht und heimsucht. Nur wenn der kirchliche Glaube wahr ist, dass Gott selbst Mensch geworden ist und Jesus Christus wahrer Gott und wahrer Mensch ist und so Anteil hat an der Gegenwart Gottes, die alle Zeiten umgreift, schenkt Jesus Christus nicht bloss gestern, sondern auch heute seine Gegenwart mitten unter uns Menschen.

## **2. Die christologische Frage in den katholisch-protestantischen Dialogen**

Die Beschäftigung mit den gemeinsamen christologischen Erklärungen wird von daher auch zur Gewissensfrage, wie es um den Christusglauben in der Kirche und in der Ökumene heute steht. Diese Gewissensfrage stellt sich dabei nicht nur im Blick auf den ökumenischen Dialog zwischen Ost und West, sondern auch im Blick auf den ökumenischen Dialog in der Westkirche. Von christologischen Erklärungen ist in der heutigen ökumenischen Situation zwar zumeist nur im Zusammenhang der Dialoge mit den Orientalisch-Orthodoxen Kirchen die Rede. Doch auch in den katholisch-protestantischen Dialogen stehen hinter nicht wenigen bisher kontrovers verhandelten Themen auch christologische Fragen, auf die kurz hingewiesen werden soll, zumal im gegenwärtigen Jahr des Reformationsgedenkens.

### *a) Rechtfertigungslehre und Christologie*

Diese Annahme lässt sich vor allem verifizieren bei der Rechtfertigungslehre, die die wohl zentralste Frage gewesen ist, die im 16. Jahrhundert zur Reformation und anschliessend zur Kirchenspaltung geführt hat, über die aber in der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“, die vom Lutherischen Weltbund und vom Päpstlichen Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen am 31. Oktober 1999 in Augsburg unterzeichnet worden ist, ein weitgehender Konsens erzielt werden konnte, der als ökumenischer Meilenstein gewürdigt werden darf. Bei diesem erfreulichen differenzierenden Konsens sind dennoch einige Fragen offen geblieben, die vor allem das Verhältnis zwischen Glaube und Werk und - ihm zugrundeliegend - das Verhältnis zwischen dem Wirken der Gnade Gottes und dem freien Mitwirken des Menschen betreffen. Dass damit ein schwieriger und sensibler Punkt im ökumenischen Gespräch zwischen Katholiken und Lutheranern angesprochen ist, lässt sich auch daran ablesen, dass die „Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“ eigens hervorhebt, dass Katholiken, wenn sie an der „Verdienstlichkeit“ der guten Werke festhalten, damit die „Verantwortung des Menschen für sein Handeln herausstellen“ wollen, damit aber

„nicht den Geschenkcharakter der guten Werke bestreiten, geschweige denn verneinen, dass die Rechtfertigung selbst unverdientes Gnadengeschenk bleibt“<sup>27</sup>.

Gemäss der „Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre“ besteht ökumenischer Konsens darin, dass die Rechtfertigung des Menschen nicht durch seine Werke, sondern allein durch die Gnade Gottes und ihre Annahme im Glauben geschieht. Demgemäss bedeutet und impliziert „Gerechtigkeit“ nicht mehr – wie in der aristotelischen Tradition, in der der Mensch dadurch gerecht wird, dass er gerecht handelt - ein Tun, sondern ein Sein durch Gott: „Geschenk Gottes im Glauben an Jesus Christus“<sup>28</sup>. Damit aber stellt sich erst recht die Frage, ob die Bedingungslosigkeit der rechtfertigenden Gnade Gottes ein von ihr ermöglichtes und getragenes Mittun des Menschen zulässt und sogar freisetzt oder ob die *Alles*-Wirksamkeit Gottes auch seine *Allein*-Wirksamkeit bedeutet, mit der aufseiten des Menschen bloss noch reine Passivität angenommen werden könnte und müsste.<sup>29</sup> Während die protestantische Tradition dahin tendiert, diese Frage zu bejahen, betont die katholische Tradition, dass die *Alles*-Wirksamkeit Gottes die menschliche Mitwirkung auch und gerade im sakramentalen Leben der Kirche und im sittlichen Leben fördert und fordert. Auch in katholischer Sicht empfängt der Mensch zwar alles, was er ist und tun kann, von Gott und bleibt das menschliche Tun stets inkommensurabel mit dem, was Gott uns schenkt. Da aber der biblisch offenbare Gott ein wirklicher Gott der Beziehung ist und deshalb den Menschen zum Gegenüber zu sich selbst beruft, wird er von Gott zum Mitwirken mit ihm gerufen und zählt vor ihm trotz aller Inkommensurabilität das, was der Mensch ist und tut. Der Mensch ist deshalb nicht nur Objekt des Heilshandelns Gottes, sondern wirkt als Subjekt des Glaubens auch mit, wie der Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche hervorhebt: „Die Rechtfertigung begründet ein Zusammenwirken zwischen der Gnade Gottes und der Freiheit des Menschen. Sie äussert sich dadurch, dass der Mensch dem Wort Gottes, das ihn zur Umkehr auffordert, gläubig zustimmt und in der Liebe mit der Anregung des Heiligen Geistes zusammenwirkt, der unserer Zustimmung zuvorkommt und sie trägt.“<sup>30</sup>

Diese ökumenisch bedeutsame Frage lässt sich letztlich nur mit der Christologie und Soteriologie in adäquater Weise beantworten. Auf der einen Seite versteht es sich im christlichen Glauben von selbst, dass es sich beim Rechtfertigungsgeschehen eindeutig um einen Vorgang handelt, der von Gott her auf den Menschen zu geht. Die entscheidende Mitte des Christusglaubens besteht gerade nicht im Zorn Gottes, den der Mensch besänftigen müsste, sondern in der Liebe Gottes, mit der er den Menschen frei liebt. Nicht der Mensch versöhnt Gott, sondern

---

27. Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre des Lutherischen Weltbundes und der Katholischen Kirche, in: H. Meyer / D. Papandreou / H. J. Urban / L. Vischer (Hrsg.), Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Band 3: 1990-2001 (Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 2003) 419-441, zit. 429.

28. Ch. Schad, Rechtfertigung: Gottes Ja zu uns! in: H. Schier / H.-G. Ulrichs (Hrsg.), Nötig zu wissen. Heidelberger Beiträge zum Heidelberger Katechismus (Heidelberg 2012) 103-107, zit. 105.

29. Vgl. K. Koch, Der Heidelberger Katechismus in katholischer Sicht heute, in: M. E. Hirzel, F. Mathwig, M. Zeindler (Hrsg.), Der Heidelberger Katechismus – ein reformierter Schlüsseltext = reformiert! Band 1 (Zürich 2012) 287-306.

30. Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche, Nr. 1993.

Gott vergibt in freier Liebe dem Menschen. Der Tod Jesu am Kreuz ist keineswegs der Kaufpreis, den eine sühnende Menschheit Gott, der wegen der Sünde der Menschen beleidigt ist, übereicht; der Tod Jesu ist vielmehr die Selbstpreisgabe Gottes und seiner Liebe für uns Menschen. Diese *katabatische* Dimension der Christologie und Soteriologie ist für den christlichen Glaubens grundlegend. Sie darf aber auf der anderen Seite die *anabatische* Dimension der Christologie nicht zum Verschwinden bringen. Denn Jesus Christus ist nicht nur der zu uns Menschen herabsteigende Gott; er ist vielmehr auch der zu Gott aufsteigende Mensch: „Jesus ist nicht nur die Epiphanie der göttlichen Liebe, streng von oben nach unten zu sehen und zu verstehen, er ist auch Repräsentant der Menschheit, in dem die menschliche Natur sich selbst, ihr Köstlichstes und Reinstes Gott übereignet.“<sup>31</sup> Auch und gerade der Kreuzestod Jesu ist nicht nur als liebende Selbstpreisgabe Gottes an uns Menschen zu verstehen, sondern auch als das ohne Vorbehalt liebende Sich-Ausliefern des Menschen Jesus an Gott. Denn die katabatische und die anabatische Dimension des Erlösungsgeschehens lassen sich nicht trennen, sie greifen vielmehr ineinander, oder mit anderen Worten: das Versöhnungsgeschehen ist „kein Deszendenzgeschehen ohne Aszendenzgeschehen“<sup>32</sup>.

*b) Glaube an Jesus Christus und Leben in seinem Leib*

Im Licht dieser christologisch-soteriologischen Grundperspektive stellt sich eine weitere Frage, die freilich in der ökumenischen Diskussion nur spärlich behandelt wird und auch in den christologischen Erklärungen kaum angesprochen ist, aber von grundlegender Bedeutung ist, nämlich die Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen Christus und der Kirche, die sein Leib ist. Für Paulus versteht sich dieses Verhältnis von selbst und er sieht es in der Taufe begründet, von der er sagt, wir alle seien in ihr „in einen einzigen Leib“ aufgenommen (1 Kor 12, 13). Mit diesem Bild wagt es Paulus, Christus und Kirche auf das Engste miteinander zu verbinden. Damit will er natürlich Christus und Kirche in keiner Weise miteinander identifizieren. Denn die Kirche bleibt die Magd, die sich am Willen Christi zu orientieren hat. Und Christus ist das Haupt seines Leibes, das es radikal ernst zu nehmen gilt, da ein Leib ohne Haupt kein Leib mehr ist, sondern ein Leichnam. Auf der anderen Seite lassen sich aber Christus und Kirche auch nicht voneinander trennen; Christus und Kirche bilden in der Sicht des Paulus vielmehr einen Leib, freilich in dem analogen Sinne, in dem Bräutigam und Braut ein Fleisch und damit ein Leib werden und damit in der Weise, dass sie in ihrer unlöslichen geistigen und leiblichen Vereinigung dennoch unvermischt bleiben.

Mit diesem gewiss gewagten Bild will Paulus den wichtigen Sachverhalt in Erinnerung rufen, dass „in Christus sein“ als Geschenk der Taufe gleichbedeutend ist mit „im Leib Christi“ sein und dass folglich Zugehörigkeit zu Christus und Gliedschaft in der Kirche als seinem Leib unlösbar zusammen gehören. Sie lassen sich nicht voneinander trennen, wie allerdings ein Slogan vorgibt, der vor einigen Jahrzehnten Mode geworden ist und besagt: „Jesus ja – Kirche nein“. Zwischen Jesus und der Kirche kann es aber keinen Widerspruch geben, und zwar trotz der vielen Sünden der

---

31. J. Ratzinger, *Theologie und Verkündigung im Holländischen Katechismus*, in: Ders., *Dogma und Verkündigung* (München 1973) 65-83, zit. 77.

32. K.-H. Menke, *Das unterscheidend Christliche. Beiträge zur Bestimmung seiner Einzigkeit* (Regensburg 2015) 67.

Menschen, die die Kirche bilden. Der Slogan „Jesus ja – Kirche nein“ ist mit der Intention Jesu nicht vereinbar und deshalb nicht christlich, wie Papst Benedikt XVI. mit wünschenswerter Klarheit betont hat: „Dieser individualistisch ausgesuchte Jesus ist ein Phantasie-Jesus. Wir können nicht Jesus ohne jene Wirklichkeit haben, die er geschaffen hat und in der er sich mitteilt. Zwischen dem fleischgewordenen Sohn Gottes und seiner Kirche gibt es eine tiefe, untrennbare und geheimnisvolle Kontinuität, kraft der Christus heute in seinem Volk gegenwärtig ist.“<sup>33</sup> Um diese tiefe Sicht des Glaubens zu unterstützen, hat Papst Franziskus das eindruckliche Bild von Name und Nachname des Christen verwendet: „Wenn der Name lautet <Ich bin Christ>, so lautet der Nachname <Ich gehöre zur Kirche>.“ Es kann deshalb gar keine rein individuellen Christen geben. Die christliche Identität besteht vielmehr in der Zugehörigkeit: „Wir sind Christen, weil wir zur Kirche gehören.“<sup>34</sup>

Da die Taufe den Täufling in die Kirche als in den Leib Christi eingliedert, können wir Christus nicht ohne seinen Leib haben. Dabei handelt es sich freilich um eine Aussage, die in den ökumenischen Gesprächen noch keineswegs geklärt ist. Wenn wir aber die intime Zusammengehörigkeit von Christus und seiner Kirche, die sein Leib ist, bedenken, dann ergibt sich eine elementare Einsicht für die ökumenische Verantwortung. Es wird uns neu bewusst, dass Jesus nur *eine* Kirche gewollt hat und es letztlich nur *eine* Kirche geben kann. Vielleicht ist es in der heutigen ökumenischen Situation notwendig, diese Glaubenswahrheit einmal in pointierter Weise auszudrücken: Da die Beziehung Christi zu seinem Leib so eng ist, dass man von einem Verhältnis zwischen Bräutigam und Braut sprechen darf, sind wir zur Rechenschaft des Glaubens verpflichtet, dass Christus auf keinen Fall polygam, sondern konsequent monogam ist. Christus hat nicht viele Leiber, sondern verbindet sich mit dem einen Leib seiner Kirche.

Die ökumenische Suche nach der sichtbaren Darstellung dieses einen Leibes Christi ist für die Glaubwürdigkeit des Christusklaubens von grundlegender Bedeutung.<sup>35</sup> Sie entspricht ganz der Sinnrichtung des Hohepriesterlichen Gebetes Jesu, in dem er um die Einheit unter seinen Jüngern mit der spezifischen Intention gebetet hat, „damit die Welt erkennt, dass du mich gesandt hast und die Meinen ebenso geliebt hast wie mich“ (Joh 17, 23). Mit diesem Finalsatz kommt unmissverständlich zum Ausdruck, dass die Einheit unter den Jüngern kein Selbstzweck ist, sondern im Dienst an der Glaubwürdigkeit der Sendung Jesu Christi und seiner Kirche in der Welt steht und die unerlässliche Voraussetzung für ein glaubwürdiges Zeugnis in der Welt darstellt.

Damit dringen wir bis in die innerste Mitte der christologischen Frage in den ökumenischen Dialogen vor. Die Christologie ist nicht einfach ein Thema, das neben anderen Themen in den ökumenischen Gesprächen zu behandeln ist, wobei nicht nur die theo-ontologische Konstitution Jesu Christi, sondern auch sein Verhältnis zu seinem Leib zu bedenken ist. Doch in einem viel grundlegenden Sinn ist die ökumenische Suche nach der sichtbaren Einheit der Kirche selbst ein elementares

---

33. Benedikt XVI., Katechese bei der Generalaudienz am 15. März 2006.

34. Franziskus, Katechese bei der Generalaudienz am 25. Juni 2014.

35. Vgl. K. Kardinal Koch, Lob der Vielfalt - Gerät den christlichen Kirchen die Einheit aus dem Blick? in: St. Kopp / W. Thönissen (Hrsg.), Mehr als friedvoll getrennt? Ökumene nach 2017 (Freiburg i. Br. 2017) 15-40.

christologisches Thema. Mit ihm ist die Verheissung verbunden, dass Christen umso mehr zueinander finden werden, desto mehr sie sich in Christus hinein verwurzeln. Wer in das Geheimnis Jesu Christi eintaucht, wird in seinem Leib wieder auftauchen. Hier liegt der tiefste Grund, dass Jesus Christus unmöglich ein Motiv der Trennung sein kann, sondern Grund der Einheit unter den Christen sein muss und ist. So verhält es sich jedenfalls, wenn Christen ihren eigenen Namen ernst nehmen und sich als Brüder und Schwestern Jesu Christi und deshalb als Brüder und Schwestern untereinander in Jesus Christus verstehen und als sein Leib in der Welt leben.

**Colloque international « En 500 après Martin Luther. Réception et conflits  
d'interprétation (1517-2017) »**  
**Institut Catholique de Toulouse, 19 octobre 2017**

*Les implications personnelles des Papes Jean-Paul II et Benoît XVI  
dans le dialogue avec les luthériens*

En 2017, nous commémorons non seulement le début de la Réforme, il y a cinq cents ans, mais nous jetons aussi un regard rétrospectif sur cinquante ans de dialogue œcuménique entre luthériens et catholiques. Le dialogue avec la Fédération luthérienne mondiale a été le premier à être entamé par l'Église catholique immédiatement après le Concile Vatican II. Il s'est avéré très fructueux et a trouvé son point culminant dans la commémoration luthérienne-catholique commune de la Réforme qui s'est tenue à Lund, en Suède, le 31 octobre 2016. Le fait que, dans un colloque international sur la Réforme de Martin Luther et ses différentes réceptions et interprétations, l'on s'interroge également sur les implications personnelles du Pape Jean-Paul II et du Pape Benoît XVI dans le dialogue catholique-luthérien, est un beau signe de la valeur attribuée au grand engagement œcuménique de ces deux Papes. Afin de mieux illustrer leurs contributions à cet important dialogue, il me semble utile de décrire brièvement, en un premier temps, leur attitude œcuménique de fond, puis de l'aborder de façon plus concrète dans la perspective du dialogue avec les luthériens.

### **1. La contribution de Jean-Paul II au dialogue avec les luthériens**

« Il faut du moins que l'an deux mille nous trouve moins divisés, plus disposés à emprunter la voie de l'unité pour laquelle le Christ pria la veille de sa Passion. L'enjeu de cette unité est énorme. Il s'agit d'une certaine manière, de l'avenir du monde, de l'avenir du Royaume de Dieu dans le monde. Les faiblesses et les obstacles humains ne peuvent empêcher la réalisation du dessein de Dieu pour le monde et pour l'humanité. »<sup>1</sup> À travers ces paroles émouvantes et pleines de confiance écrites par le Pape Jean-Paul II dans son livre « Entrez dans l'espérance », paru en 1994 en vue de l'entrée dans le nouveau millénaire, s'expriment clairement son puissant espoir œcuménique et son engagement résolu en faveur de la recherche de l'unité des chrétiens.

#### *a) Un tournant exaltant vers l'unité*

La confiance du Pape Jean-Paul II reposait sur la conviction qu'après le premier millénaire de l'histoire du christianisme, qui fut l'époque de l'Église indivise, et après le deuxième millénaire, qui conduisit à de profondes divisions en Orient comme en Occident, le troisième millénaire allait avoir pour grande tâche de restaurer l'unité perdue des chrétiens. Dans les divisions historiques, le Pape Jean-Paul II non seulement a vu la « rupture de l'unité des chrétiens » et le « fruit amer des péchés des chrétiens », mais il a également cherché à discerner le côté positif que ces divisions pouvaient dissimuler, et c'est la raison pour laquelle il posa cette question : « Les divisions ne

---

1. Jean-Paul II, *Entrez dans l'espérance*, Paris 1994, p. 226.

vont-elles finalement pas permettre à l'Église de découvrir la multiplicité des richesses contenues dans l'Évangile et dans la Rédemption du Christ ? Peut-être ces richesses n'auraient-elles pas pu être découvertes autrement. »<sup>2</sup>

Le fort engagement œcuménique du Pape Jean-Paul II manifeste également son opiniâtre fidélité au Concile Vatican II auquel il participa en personne<sup>3</sup>, qu'il vécut lui-même comme un jalon dans le renouvellement de l'Église, et qu'après la conclusion du Concile il tenta d'appliquer dans le diocèse de Cracovie qui lui avait été autrefois confié en Pologne, comme il l'écrivit dans sa première « Étude pour la mise en œuvre du Concile Vatican II », en pensant plus particulièrement à la question œcuménique : « L'émergence d'une position œcuménique et son développement ordonné sont, selon les enseignements de Vatican II, l'un des principaux signes et en même temps l'une des preuves du renouvellement de l'Église ».<sup>4</sup> De même, au cours de son ministère pétrinien, Jean-Paul II fit toujours référence au Concile Vatican II,<sup>5</sup> qu'il reconnaissait comme un grand don pour l'Église et qui pour lui représentait aussi la « boussole fiable » capable de « nous orienter sur le chemin du siècle qui commence »<sup>6</sup>. Du point de vue œcuménique également, l'activité législative de Jean-Paul II fut particulièrement significative, avec la promulgation du nouveau Codex de droit canonique, le Codex Iuris Canonici, en 1983, et du code des Églises catholiques orientales, le Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, promulgué pour la première fois dans l'histoire en 1990.<sup>7</sup> Car Jean-Paul II vit dans le renouvellement des codes ecclésiastiques le « grand effort » fourni pour « traduire en langage canonique »<sup>8</sup> la doctrine du Concile Vatican II, et plus précisément l'ecclésiologie conciliaire. Les deux codes contiennent les engagements juridiques explicites de tous les catholiques pour participer au mouvement œcuménique.<sup>9</sup>

Toujours en raison de cette position fondamentalement favorable à l'œcuménisme, Jean-Paul II fut aussi le premier pape à écrire une encyclique sur l'œcuménisme, « Ut unum sint », dans laquelle il décrit le chemin œcuménique comme étant le chemin de l'Église, le considérant ancré dans le désir d'unité du Christ : « Croire au Christ signifie vouloir l'unité; vouloir l'unité signifie vouloir l'Église; vouloir l'Église signifie vouloir la communion de grâce qui correspond au dessein du Père de toute

---

2. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

3. Cf. R. Skrzypczak, Karol Wojtyła al Concilio Vaticano II. La Storia e i Documenti, Verona 2011.

4. K. Wojtyła, Quellen der Erneuerung. Studie zur Verwirklichung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, Freiburg i. Br. 1981, p. 284.

5. Cf. Z. J. Kijas et A. Dobrzynski (éd.), Cristo – Chiesa – Uomo. Il Vaticano II nel Pontificato di Giovanni Paolo II, Città del Vaticano 2010. Cf. en outre G. Marengo, Giovanni Paolo II e il Concilio. Una sfida e un compito, Siena 2011.

6. Jean-Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, p. 57.

7. Cf. K. Koch, « L'attività legislativa di Giovanni Paolo II e la promozione dell'unità dei cristiani », in L. Gerosa (éd.), *Giovanni Paolo II: Legislatore della Chiesa. Fondamenti, Innovazioni e Aperture. Atti del Convegno di Studio*, Città del Vaticano 2013, p. 160-177.

8. Johannes Paul II., « Sacrae disciplinae leges », in *Codex Iuris Canonici. Codex des kanonischen Rechts. Lateinisch-deutsche Ausgabe*, Kevelaer 1983, p. VIII-XXVII, cit. p. XIX. Traduction ad hoc.

9. Cf. K. Koch, « Il Vescovo e l'ecumenismo », in: Congregazione per i Vescovi (éd.), *Duc in altum. Pellegrinaggio alla tomba di San Pietro. Incontro di riflessioni*, Città del Vaticano 2013, p. 249-261.

éternité.<sup>10</sup> Dans cette conviction il souligna, sans aucune ambiguïté, que malgré les différents doutes tant des partisans de l'œcuménisme que de ses opposants, la décision de l'Église catholique en faveur de l'œcuménisme était irrévocable : « Au Concile Vatican II, l'Église catholique s'est engagée de manière *irréversible* à prendre la voie de la recherche œcuménique, se mettant ainsi à l'écoute de l'Esprit du Seigneur qui apprend à lire attentivement les 'signes des temps'. »<sup>11</sup>

Le défi posé par une nouvelle évangélisation dans le monde d'aujourd'hui apparut au Pape Jean-Paul II comme un signe des temps particulièrement pressant.<sup>12</sup> Il prit ainsi conscience que la mission de proclamer l'Évangile serait entravée tant que les chrétiens resteraient divisés et que les divisions entre chrétiens nuiraient à la crédibilité de l'Évangile. Car « la désunion est un scandale, un obstacle à la diffusion de l'Évangile. Nous avons le devoir de travailler, avec la grâce de Dieu, à surmonter cet obstacle le plus tôt possible. »<sup>13</sup> Puisque le mandat de l'évangélisation concerne dans la même mesure l'ensemble des chrétiens, cela signifie entre autres qu'ils doivent « aller les uns vers les autres, avancer ensemble, et que cela doit partir de l'intérieur » : « Évangélisation et unité, évangélisation et œcuménisme sont liés l'un à l'autre de manière indissoluble ». <sup>14</sup> C'est dans ce lien que réside la raison profonde pour laquelle, selon Jean-Paul II, l'unité de l'Église appartient « à son essence de façon inaliénable », elle n'est « pas une fin en soi »<sup>15</sup> et, par conséquent, la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens constitue une tâche pastorale essentielle. Précisément parce que la nouvelle évangélisation était une question qui lui tenait à cœur, il s'engagea comme évêque de Rome à surmonter la division de la chrétienté, convaincu par cette interrogation : « Comment annoncer l'Évangile de la réconciliation sans s'engager en même temps à travailler pour la réconciliation des chrétiens ? »<sup>16</sup>

On comprendra donc que, dès le début, le Pape Jean-Paul II considéra son ministère pétrinien d'unité non seulement dans l'Église catholique mais aussi comme service de la plus vaste unité œcuménique de tous les chrétiens et que dans son pontificat la tâche œcuménique lui soit apparue comme l'une de ses priorités pastorales qu'il vécut avec passion et dont il témoigna par de nombreux gestes œcuméniques. Car il était profondément persuadé que le Ministère du successeur de Pierre est « le ministère de l'unité » et que « cette responsabilité s'exerce jusque dans la dimension œcuménique » : « La tâche du Pape est de chercher inlassablement les voies qui permettent d'affermir l'unité ». <sup>17</sup> Ayant opté pour cette position œcuménique fondamentale très ouverte, le Pape Jean-Paul II a consacré des pages essentielles au « ministère d'unité de l'Évêque de Rome » dans la partie finale de son Encyclique

---

10. Jean-Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, p. 9.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

12. Cf. K. Koch, « Neuevangelisierung mit ökumenischem Notenschlüssel », in: Z. Glaeser (éd.), *Człowiek Dialogu*, Opole 2012 (*Opolska Biblioteka Teologiczna 125*), p. 291-310.

13. Jean-Paul II, Discours aux délégués des Commissions œcuméniques nationales, le 23 novembre 1979.

14. Johannes Paul II., *Ansprache in der Ökumenischen Wortfeier im Dom zu Paderborn am 22. Juni 1996*.

15. Johannes Paul, *Ansprache an die Vertreter anderer christlicher Konfessionen in Mainz am 17. November 1980*.

16. Jean-Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, p. 98.

17. Jean-Paul II, *Entrez dans l'espérance*, Paris 1994, p. 231.

œcuménique « Ut unum sint » et, à cet égard, a invité toutes les Églises et Communautés ecclésiales à engager avec lui un dialogue patient sur la primauté de l'Évêque de Rome, dans le but de trouver une « forme d'exercice de la primauté » qui soit « sans renoncement aucun à l'essentiel de sa mission » mais qui soit « ouverte à une situation nouvelle », afin que, pour être plus précis, ce ministère puisse « réaliser un service d'amour reconnu par les uns et par les autres »<sup>18</sup>.

b) *L'engagement pour la promotion du dialogue catholique-luthérien*

Ce n'est qu'en ayant à l'esprit ce plus vaste contexte que les déclarations du Pape Jean-Paul II sur le dialogue catholique-luthérien peuvent être comprises et correctement situées. Pendant son long pontificat se sont continuellement présentées d'importantes occasions au cours desquelles il s'est explicitement exprimé en faveur du dialogue avec les luthériens. Une circonstance mémorable fut le 500<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du réformateur Martin Luther, le 10 novembre 1983. Dans son message au Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, Président de ce qui était alors le Secrétariat pour l'unité des chrétiens, le Pape Jean-Paul II se référa aux efforts scientifiques des chercheurs évangéliques et catholiques qui ont conduit « à dessiner un portrait plus complet et plus nuancé de la personnalité de Luther et de la trame complexe de la réalité historique, sociale, politique et ecclésiale de la première moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle »<sup>19</sup>. Le Pape souligna expressément la « profonde religiosité de Luther », « qu'agitait une brûlante passion pour la question du salut éternel ». Selon Jean-Paul II, les efforts scientifiques ont aussi montré que « la rupture de l'unité ecclésiale intervenue par la suite ne peut être simplement réduite au manque de compréhension de la part des autorités de l'Église catholique, ni au manque de compréhension du véritable catholicisme de la part de Luther » et que l'origine des décisions qui furent prises à cette époque était beaucoup plus profonde : « Dans la dispute sur la relation entre foi et tradition étaient en jeu des questions fondamentales sur la juste interprétation et sur la réception de la foi chrétienne, lesquelles portaient en elles un potentiel de division ecclésiale que seules les raisons historiques ne sauraient expliquer. »

Par ailleurs, lors de la commémoration du 500<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la naissance de Martin Luther, le Pape ne dissimula pas que pour l'Église catholique son nom avait été lié au cours des siècles à la « mémoire d'une époque douloureuse », mais que son anniversaire était une occasion propice « à une réflexion dans la vérité et l'amour chrétien sur les événements historiques de la Réforme ». Dans la recherche du rétablissement de l'unité, le Pape jugeait avant tout qu'un double effort était nécessaire par rapport à la figure de Martin Luther. D'une part, il était important de poursuivre un travail historique minutieux afin d'obtenir une « image plus juste du réformateur ainsi que de toute l'époque de la Réforme et des personnes qui y participèrent ». À ce sujet, il estime que lorsqu'il y a culpabilité, que ce soit d'un côté ou de l'autre, il convient de la reconnaître ; et là où le point de vue a été déformé par la polémique, il faut le rectifier, et ceci, également, de quelque côté que ce soit. D'autre part, la clarification historique doit aller de pair avec le dialogue de la foi à travers lequel nous cherchons aujourd'hui l'unité, et qui a son solide

---

18. Jean-Paul II, *Ut unum sint* 95. Cf. W. Kasper (éd.), *Il ministero petrino. Cattolici e ortodossi in dialogo*, Roma 2004.

19. Johannes Paul II., Message au Card. Johannes Willebrands, Président du Secrétariat pour l'unité des chrétiens, le 31 octobre 1983.

fondement dans ce qui, selon les confessions évangéliques-luthériennes, nous lie encore après la séparation, notamment « dans la Parole de l'Écriture, dans les Confessions de foi, dans les Conciles de l'Église des premiers siècles ».

Lors de l'Avent de l'année 1983 au cours duquel fut commémoré le 500<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la naissance de Luther, le Pape Jean-Paul II se rendit en visite auprès de la communauté évangélique-luthérienne de Rome et, en cette circonstance, déclara avec confiance « voir se lever dans le lointain une aurore, l'avènement du rétablissement de notre unité et de notre communion ». Puisque l'unité est un fruit du renouvellement quotidien, de la conversion et de la repentance, elle s'avère aussi « la meilleure façon de se préparer à l'avènement de Dieu dans notre monde »<sup>20</sup>.

Une autre occasion de rappeler l'importance de Martin Luther se présenta au Pape Jean-Paul II en 1996, lors du 450<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la mort du réformateur. De l'avis du Pape Jean-Paul II, après un si long temps, cette commémoration permettait de « mieux comprendre la personne et le travail du réformateur allemand et d'être plus respectueux envers lui »<sup>21</sup>. Le Pape rendit notamment hommage au dialogue luthérien-catholique dont l'importante contribution aide à « surmonter toutes les polémiques et à parvenir à un point de vue commun ». Le Pape souligna explicitement que l'appel de Luther à la réforme de l'Église était, dans son intention originelle, un « appel à la pénitence et au renouvellement qui, dans la vie de chaque personne, doivent commencer ». Pour lui, que ce début ait toutefois porté au schisme aurait eu pour cause les défaillances de l'Église catholique dont, en des paroles émouvantes, s'était déjà plaint le Pape Adrien VI, mais aussi la ferveur même de Luther « qui l'aurait entraîné bien au-delà de ses intentions initiales jusqu'à une critique radicale de l'Église catholique, de sa règle de vie et de sa doctrine ». Et dans son discours aux représentants de l'Église évangélique et à la Communauté de travail des Églises chrétiennes en Allemagne, le 22 juin 1996 à Paderborn, le Pape souligna non seulement l'œuvre extraordinaire accomplie par Luther pour le développement de la langue allemande et du patrimoine culturel allemand, mais aussi que commémorer la figure de Luther faisait émerger de plus en plus clairement « la grande importance de son exigence d'une théologie proche des Écritures et de sa volonté de renouvellement spirituel de l'Église ». En reconnaissant « l'attention accordée à la Parole de Dieu » par Luther, le Pape Jean-Paul II a également souligné que des « problèmes fondamentaux dans le rapport entre foi, Écriture, Tradition et Église tels que Luther les a vus », à ce jour n'ont pas encore été suffisamment éclaircis<sup>22</sup>.

Un événement majeur au cours duquel Jean-Paul II exprima explicitement son point de vue sur le dialogue catholique-luthérien fut la célébration du 450<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la « Confessio Augustana » en 1980 laquelle, pour l'essentiel, fut rédigée par le réformateur Philipp Melancthon et présentée par les représentants de la Confession évangélique-luthérienne à l'Empereur Charles V et au Reichstag à Augsbourg, en 1530, pour

---

20. Johannes Paul II., Ansprache während des Ökumenischen Treffens mit der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinde Roms am 11. Dezember 1983. Cf. à ce propos J. Krüger et J.-M. Kruse (éd.), *Ökumene in Rom. Erfahrungen, Begegnungen und Perspektiven der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchengemeinde Rom*, Karlsruhe 2010, en part. p. 112-135.

21. Johannes Paul II., Ansprache in der Ökumenischen Wortfeier im Dom zu Paderborn am 22. Juni 1996.

22. Johannes Paul II., Ansprache an die Vertreter der Evangelischen Kirche und der Arbeitsgemeinschaft christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland in Paderborn am 22. Juni 1996.

témoigner de la foi de l'Église une, sainte, catholique et apostolique, pour prouver qu'ils étaient en accord avec la foi de l'Église catholique et sauvegarder l'unité de l'Église alors gravement mise en danger. Hélas, et en dépit de la bonne volonté et du combat opiniâtre mené par toutes les parties impliquées, la « Confessio Augustana » ne permit pas d'atteindre auprès du Reichstag d'Augsbourg le but que l'on s'était fixé. Ce fut, comme le souligna le Pape Jean-Paul II dans son discours à l'occasion du 450<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la « Confessio Augustana », « la dernière vigoureuse tentative de réconciliation » qui échoua, ce qui conduisit à la nette division que l'on sait.<sup>23</sup> Jean-Paul II était toutefois convaincu que si la « construction de ponts » fut à l'époque sans succès, « les principaux piliers de ces ponts » s'étaient conservés dans toute leur intégrité malgré les vicissitudes du temps. À ses yeux, ceci était clairement apparu avant tout dans l'intense et long dialogue qui s'était instauré entre l'Église catholique et les luthériens, grâce au Concile Vatican II, et avait permis de découvrir d'une manière toute nouvelle « l'importance et la solidité des fondements communs de notre foi chrétienne ». Lors de sa visite à Augsburg en 1987, le Pape Jean-Paul II faisant de nouveau référence à cet événement mémorable dans l'histoire du christianisme occidental, posa cette question subtile : « Aux alentours de 1530, nombreux étaient encore ceux qui s'efforçaient d'œuvrer en faveur de la réconciliation et de la communion. Quel cours aurait suivi l'histoire, quelles opportunités missionnaires seraient apparues sur les nouveaux continents récemment découverts s'il avait été possible à l'époque de vaincre les divisions et de clarifier de manière compréhensible les sujets de dispute ! »<sup>24</sup>

Un résultat particulièrement important et beau du dialogue luthérien-catholique a été la signature entre la Fédération luthérienne mondiale et – par mandat du Magistère - le Conseil pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens de la « Déclaration commune sur la doctrine de la justification », à Augsburg, le 31 octobre 1999.<sup>25</sup> Cette signature conjointe a revêtu une importance très particulière car l'interprétation contradictoire de l'annonce néotestamentaire de la justification de l'homme par la grâce de Dieu dans la foi en Christ a représenté, au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, le point central des débats théologiques. Qu'un vaste consensus sur des questions fondamentales ait pu être atteint en affrontant précisément le thème majeur qui conduisit à la Réforme et, en définitive, à la division de la chrétienté en Occident, mérite d'être reconnu comme un événement œcuménique particulier. Le jour de la signature, dans son discours pour l'Angélus, le Pape Jean-Paul II y vit en effet « une pierre milliaire sur la route difficile de la recomposition de la pleine unité » et considéra comme extrêmement significatif « qu'elle soit posée précisément dans la ville où, en 1530, avec la Confessio Augustana fut écrite une page décisive de la Réforme luthérienne ». Pour être plus exact, le Pape Jean-Paul II décrivit la « Déclaration commune sur la doctrine de la justification » comme une « étape sur la voie [...] de

23. Johannes Paul II., Ansprache aus Anlass des 450. Jahrestages der „Confessio Augustana“ am 25. Juni 1980.

24. Johannes Paul II., Predigt in der Ökumenischen Wortfeier in der Katholischen Kirche St. Ulrich und Afra in Augsburg am 4. Mai 1987.

25. « Fédération luthérienne mondiale et Conseil Pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens, Déclaration commune sur la doctrine de la justification », dans *Service d'information*, 98 (1998/III), p. 85-95.

l'unité et de la communion entre les chrétiens » et elle représentait pour lui « une base sûre pour la poursuite de la recherche théologique dans le domaine œcuménique et pour affronter les difficultés qui l'accompagnent ».<sup>26</sup>

Ayant conscience de la tâche qui restait à accomplir, le Pape Jean-Paul II, lors de sa première visite en Allemagne en 1980, suscita la naissance et la mise en œuvre d'un autre projet œcuménique important. Celui-ci devait répondre au fait historique que les disputes théologiques portant principalement sur l'annonce néotestamentaire de la justification de l'homme par la grâce de Dieu se sont répercutées aussi bien dans les écrits confessionnels luthériens que, lors du Concile de Trente, dans les condamnations doctrinales de ce dernier qui, jusqu'à nos jours, ont conservé une force indérogeable et sont donc également demeurées source de division ecclésiale. C'est dans ce contexte que fut lancée en 1980 l'étude intitulée « Les anathèmes du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle sont-ils encore actuels ? » qui devait traiter, dans le cadre du dialogue œcuménique, des condamnations doctrinales de l'Église catholique et des écrits confessionnels évangéliques au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle d'un point de vue historique et systématique, et qui en définitive porta à conclure qu'un consensus œcuménique sur les vérités fondamentales de la foi chrétienne pouvait être formulé, que les différences théologiques restantes ne mettaient plus en cause le consensus atteint et que, par conséquent, les condamnations doctrinales pertinentes prononcées au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle du côté protestant comme du côté catholique, ne concernaient plus les partenaires œcuméniques actuels.<sup>27</sup> Lors d'une nouvelle visite pastorale en Allemagne en 1996, le Pape Jean-Paul II évoqua ce document, en reconnaissant l'excellent résultat obtenu qui a permis que les nombreuses controverses du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle apparaissent sous une lumière nouvelle, résultat qu'en conclusion il résuma en ces termes : « Des fossés, que les générations précédentes considéraient comme infranchissables, ont été comblés ».<sup>28</sup> En particulier, Jean-Paul II a reconnu que cette étude a contribué à une « plus profonde compréhension des déclarations doctrinales du Concile de Trente » et permis que soient élaborés « une multitude d'accords et de convergences sur des questions essentielles de la foi ». Cela était particulièrement vrai en ce qui concerne la doctrine de la justification, dans laquelle un accord fondamental avait été atteint sur des questions de grande importance. Malgré cela, toutes les différences n'étaient pas éliminées et, au contraire, le « lien théologique entre la perception luthérienne de la justification et la doctrine catholique sur le baptême et l'Église » nécessitait d'être approfondi lors de conversations œcuméniques ultérieures.

Jean-Paul II soulignait expressément que tout accord œcuménique acquis devait reposer sur une « approche renouvelée du témoignage biblique ». En ce sens, Jean-Paul II, lors d'une rencontre avec le Conseil de l'Église évangélique en Allemagne, rappela les conférences que Luther tint en 1516 et 1517 sur la Lettre aux Romains, dans lesquelles il enseignait que « la foi chrétienne, par laquelle nous sommes justifiés, ne consiste pas à simplement croire au Christ, ou plus exactement à la personne du Christ, mais à croire à ce qui est du Christ ». Pour Jean-Paul II, l'important était bien

---

26. Johannes Paul II., Angelus am 31. Oktober 1999.

27. Cf. K. Lehmann, W. Pannenberg, P. Jundt, J. Hoffmann et H. Meyer, *Les anathèmes du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle sont-ils encore actuels ? Les condamnations doctrinales du Concile de Trente et des Réformateurs justifient-elles encore la division de nos Églises ?*, Paris 1989.

28. Johannes Paul II., *Ansprache an die Vertreter der Evangelischen Kirche und der Arbeitsgemeinschaft christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland in Paderborn am 22. Juni 1996*.

aussi de discerner « ce qui est du Christ », et il concluait que « ce qui est du Christ », selon la conviction catholique, « concerne l'Église du Christ, sa mission, son message et ses sacrements, de même que les ministères qui sont au service de la Parole et du sacrement »<sup>29</sup>. Pour Jean-Paul II, ces problèmes non résolus, qui divisent encore catholiques et luthériens, doivent être pris en considération ensemble, naturellement non pas « pour creuser encore davantage les fossés mais pour les combler ». C'est pourquoi Jean-Paul II s'opposait-il catégoriquement à Martin Luther sur un point : « Nous ne pouvons en rester à la constatation que 'nous sommes et resterons à jamais divisés et antagonistes' ».

## 2. Benoît XVI et le dialogue catholique-luthérien

Lorsque l'on réfléchit à l'engagement œcuménique du Pape Jean-Paul II, vient spontanément à l'esprit l'affirmation du Pape Benoît XVI sur son prédécesseur qui, ce sont ses paroles, « dès le début » a ressenti la division de la chrétienté « comme une blessure qui l'affectait très personnellement » et considérait comme un devoir pour lui de « tout faire pour prendre le tournant conduisant vers l'unité »<sup>30</sup>. Cet effort, le Pape Benoît XVI l'a poursuivi à sa manière. Le souci œcuménique a été une perspective constante de sa pensée théologique en tant que professeur, évêque et pape. Il s'est beaucoup dépensé pour que le dialogue œcuménique progresse et l'a enrichi de nombreuses réflexions théologiques dans lesquelles, en raison de son origine allemande, le dialogue luthérien-catholique a toujours été présent.<sup>31</sup>

### a) *Au service de l'unité dans la foi*

« L'unité de l'Église, en un mot, ne peut jamais être autre qu'une unité dans la foi des Apôtres, dans la foi confiée à chaque nouveau membre du Corps du Christ durant le rite du Baptême. C'est cette foi qui nous unit dans le Seigneur, qui nous rend participants de son Esprit Saint, et qui ainsi, aujourd'hui encore, nous rend participants de la vie de la Sainte Trinité, modèle de la koinonia de l'Église ici-bas. »<sup>32</sup> Ces paroles que le Pape Benoît XVI a prononcées en conclusion de la prière du soir à l'abbaye de Westminster, à l'occasion de son voyage apostolique en Grande-Bretagne en septembre 2010, peuvent être considérées comme un condensé de son effort œcuménique dont nous ferons une brève esquisse dans la poursuite de cette présentation.

En choisissant pour thème de sa thèse d'agrégation la compréhension de Saint Bonaventure de la révélation divine et de l'histoire, Joseph Ratzinger s'était déjà placé dans une perspective œcuménique en proposant un examen approfondi de la recherche d'une compréhension théologiquement adéquate de la révélation de Dieu et des questions théologiques se référant à ce thème, d'une part, entre nature et grâce et,

---

29. Johannes Paul II., Ansprache an den Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Mainz am 17. November 1980.

30. J. Ratzinger / Benedikt XVI., « Die Einheit von Mission und Person in der Gestalt von Johannes Paul II. Zwanzig Jahre einer Geschichte », in *Id., Johannes Paul II. Mein geliebter Vorgänger*, Augsburg 2008, p. 15-42, *cit.* p. 40.

31. Cf. T. Lindfeld, « Der Papst aus Deutschland. Zum ökumenischen Profil Joseph Ratzingers », in *Catholica*, 62 (2008), p. 302-314.

32. Benoît XVI, Discours du Saint-Père au terme de la prière du soir à l'Abbaye de Westminster, à Londres, le 17 septembre 2010.

d'autre part, entre la métaphysique et l'histoire du salut dans le contexte du dialogue évangélique-catholique. On peut estimer que sa contribution œcuménique réside avant tout dans le fait qu'il a fortement souligné le caractère d'action de la révélation divine et a développé une vision du lien entre Écriture et Tradition qui s'est avérée œcuménique.<sup>33</sup>

En tant que professeur, Joseph Ratzinger fut parmi les théologiens catholiques l'un des premiers à dissenter dans ses cours universitaires sur les écrits réformateurs et à aborder une multitude de thèmes œcuméniques, tels que certains problèmes fondamentaux de la Confessio Augustana, du *Tractatus de Potestate Papae* de Melanchthon ou la *Disputatio* de Leipzig<sup>34</sup>, de telle manière que le théologien catholique Josef Wohlmuth raconta qu'il eut l'impression que Joseph Ratzinger « non seulement s'intéressait aux questions de la Réforme » mais qu'il y avait « également puisé dans une perspective théologique ».<sup>35</sup> Dans le cadre du vif débat qui eut lieu dans les années soixante-dix et quatre-vingt sur une éventuelle reconnaissance par l'Église catholique de la Confessio Augustana, à savoir l'écrit confessionnel qui est le socle fondamental sur lequel repose le luthéranisme, Joseph Ratzinger avait clairement exigé qu'une reconnaissance catholique de la Confession d'Augsbourg soit subordonnée à sa reconnaissance évangélique, et plus précisément à la reconnaissance du fait que l'Église peut enseigner en tant qu'Église : « La 'reconnaissance' évangélique serait dans tous les cas le premier prérequis interne d'une reconnaissance catholique et, en même temps, un processus spirituel qui créerait une réalité œcuménique. »<sup>36</sup> Rappelons que durant son activité en tant que professeur universitaire, Joseph Ratzinger a été membre de divers groupes de travail œcuméniques et d'organes de consultation et a participé à différents colloques et réunions œcuméniques.

De l'époque où il fut archevêque et cardinal, il convient avant tout de mentionner l'importante responsabilité qu'il a exercée dans la Commission œcuménique mixte, créée après la visite du Pape Jean-Paul II en Allemagne en 1980, commission qu'il présida avec l'Évêque régional évangélique Eduard Lohse. C'est à eux deux que l'on doit la proposition riche de promesses et qui, dans les années suivantes, se révéla fructueuse, de rechercher dans le cadre des futurs dialogues œcuméniques si les condamnations doctrinales mutuelles du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle concernaient encore les partenaires actuels et si elles devaient encore être considérées source de division entre les Églises. L'Évêque régional évangélique Johannes Hanselmann a également rappelé avec gratitude que si la Déclaration commune sur la doctrine de la justification a bien pu être

---

33. J. Ratzinger, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura*, München 1955. La thèse de doctorat d'État de Joseph Ratzinger publié intégralement pour la première fois est à présent disponible : *Offenbarungsverständnis und Geschichtstheologie Bonaventuras*, Freiburg i. Br. 2009, (*Gesammelte Schriften* 2), p. 53-659.

34. Cf. J. Ratzinger / Papst Benedikt XVI., *Das Werk. Veröffentlichungen bis zur Papstwahl*. Hrsg. vom Schülerkreis, Augsburg 2009, en part. p. 401-406 : « Übersicht über die Lehrveranstaltungen in Freising, Bonn, Münster, Tübingen und Regensburg ». Cf. en outre G. Valente, *Ratzinger Professore. Gli anni dello studio e dell'insegnamento nel ricordo dei colleghi e degli allievi (1946-1977)*, Milano 2008.

35. J. Wohlmuth, « Anwalt der Einheit. Der Theologe Joseph Ratzinger und die Ökumene », in *Der christliche Osten*, LX (2005), p. 265-277, *cit.* p. 265.

36. J. Kardinal Ratzinger, « Klarstellungen zur Frage einer „Anerkennung“ der Confessio Augustana durch die katholische Kirche », in *Id.*, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine zur Fundamentalthologie*, München 1982, p. 230-240, *cit.* p. 235.

signée à Augsbourg en 1999, après différentes difficultés, c'est au Cardinal Ratzinger qu'en revient le grand mérite.<sup>37</sup>

L'engagement œcuménique de Joseph Ratzinger a toujours été accompagné d'une intense réflexion théologique sur les questions œcuméniques ; en témoigne de manière éloquent l'imposant chapitre œcuménique du huitième volume de ses « Œuvres complètes » consacré à la doctrine de l'Église<sup>38</sup>. Les trois cents pages et plus qui y sont dédiées aux questions œcuméniques montrent que Joseph Ratzinger n'appartient pas aux œcuménistes dans un sens strictement professionnel, mais qu'en tant que spécialiste de la théologie systématique il s'est beaucoup penché sur la dimension œcuménique de la pensée théologique et compte, à juste titre et sans l'ombre d'un doute, parmi « les théologiens catholiques œcuménistes actuels les plus convaincants »<sup>39</sup>.

Dans ce contexte, il n'est pas surprenant que Joseph Ratzinger, en tant que Pape, ait également accordé à la cause œcuménique une priorité particulière dans son pontificat, comme il l'avait déjà annoncé de façon programmatique dans son premier message après son élection au Siège de Pierre, en affirmant que le devoir prioritaire du successeur de Pierre doit consister, à ses yeux, à « travailler sans épargner ses forces à la reconstruction de l'unité pleine et visible de tous les fidèles du Christ » : « Telle est son ambition, tel son devoir pressant. »<sup>40</sup> Si nous regardons les huit années ou presque du ministère pétrinien du Pape Benoît XVI, nous pouvons constater avec gratitude que le souci œcuménique a, pour ainsi dire, été comme un fil rouge présent tout au long de son pontificat et qu'il n'a eu de cesse de le répéter clairement en diverses occasions.<sup>41</sup>

#### b) *Unité et différence entre Église catholique et luthéranisme*

Dans la vaste réflexion qu'il a consacrée à la compréhension œcuménique de Joseph Ratzinger, le théologien protestant Thorsten Maasen a rendu hommage à sa pensée œcuménique, estimant qu'il est « exemplaire dans ses efforts pour pratiquer sans compromis une théologie œcuménique honnête » et qu'il s'est penché avec tant d'insistance sur la nécessité de l'œcuménisme que ce dernier devrait absolument trouver sa place au sein de l'Église<sup>42</sup>. Ce jugement nuancé vaut également dans le cadre de l'engagement de Joseph Ratzinger - Benoît XVI en faveur du dialogue luthérien-catholique.

---

37. La contribution importante à la réussite de la Déclaration commune de Joseph Ratzinger a été appréciée en détail de P. Neuner, « Joseph Ratzingers Beitrag zur Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre », in *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift*, 56 (2005), p. 435-448.

38. J. Ratzinger, *Kirche – Zeichen unter den Völkern*, Freiburg i. Br. 2010 (*Gesammelte Schriften* 8/2), en part. p. 693-1018 : « Teil E : Die Wiedergewinnung der sichtbaren Einheit der Kirche ».

39. W. Thönissen, « Katholizität als Strukturform des Glaubens. Joseph Ratzingers Vorschläge für die Wiedergewinnung der sichtbaren Einheit der Kirche », in Ch. Schaller (éd.), *Kirche – Sakrament und Gemeinschaft. Zu Ekklesiologie und Ökumene bei Joseph Ratzinger*, Regensburg 2011 (*Ratzinger-Studien* 4) p. 254-275, *cit.* p. 255.

40. Benoît XVI, Premier message au terme de la Missa pro Ecclesia concélébration eucharistique avec les cardinaux électeurs dans la chapelle sixtine, le 20 avril 2005.

41. Cf. K. Koch, « Einheit in Christus und in seinem Leib. Ökumenisches Lehramt im Pontifikat von Papst Benedikt XVI. », in *Id.*, *Bund zwischen Liebe und Vernunft. Das theologische Erbe von Papst Benedikt XVI.*, Freiburg i. Br. 2016, p. 141-165.

42. Th. Maasen, *Das Ökumenerständnis Joseph Ratzingers*, Göttingen 2011, p. 366.

La déclaration la plus positive du Pape Benoît XVI, quant aux intentions du réformateur Martin Luther, fut indubitablement celle qu'il fit à l'occasion de sa visite à l'ancien monastère augustinien d'Erfurt en 2011, lorsqu'il rendit hommage à la recherche passionnée de Dieu qui anima la vie et l'œuvre de Luther : « Ce qui l'a animé, c'était la question de Dieu, qui fut la passion profonde et le ressort de sa vie et de son itinéraire tout entier. 'Comment puis-je avoir un Dieu miséricordieux ?' Cette question lui pénétrait le cœur et se trouvait derrière chacune de ses recherches théologiques et chaque lutte intérieure. »<sup>43</sup> Le Pape Benoît XVI a en même temps souligné que Luther ne croyait pas à n'importe quel Dieu, mais qu'il cherchait ce Dieu qui avait montré son visage très concret à travers l'homme Jésus de Nazareth et qui nous avait parlé, à nous les êtres humains. Martin Luther a donc concrétisé et approfondi sa recherche passionnée de Dieu dans le christocentrisme de sa spiritualité et de sa théologie : « La pensée de Luther, sa spiritualité tout entière était complètement christocentrique : 'Ce qui promeut la cause du Christ' était pour Luther le critère herméneutique décisif dans l'interprétation de la Sainte Écriture. »<sup>44</sup>

La centralité de la question de Dieu et le christocentrisme sont aux yeux du Pape Benoît XVI les soucis fondamentaux de Martin Luther et constituent le grand héritage qu'ils nous a laissé et qui aujourd'hui doit être perçu dans un esprit œcuménique. Voici pourquoi c'est avant tout dans l'annonce de Dieu dans nos sociétés largement sécularisées que Benoît XVI a reconnu dans la succession de Luther le service œcuménique, également à notre époque : « Témoigner de ce Dieu vivant est notre tâche commune à l'époque actuelle. »<sup>45</sup>

Dans ce grand éloge, on remarque en premier lieu une proximité intérieure entre le Pape Benoît XVI et Martin Luther. Le Pape Benoît XVI, qui est intimement attaché à l'idée d'une théologie reposant sur une rencontre personnelle avec Dieu, apprécie dans la théologie de Luther le fait qu'elle ne soit pas une théologie de bureaucrate cédant aux idées, mais une théologie existentielle émanant d'une lutte personnelle : pour Luther, la théologie « n'était pas une question académique, mais une lutte intérieure avec lui-même, puis une lutte au sujet de Dieu et avec Dieu »<sup>46</sup>. Le fait que la théologie de Luther ait été modelée de manière très élémentaire par son expérience personnelle, est de l'avis de Benoît XVI d'une grande importance mais cependant aussi sa limite.<sup>47</sup>

La limite problématique dans la théologie de Luther réside, selon Benoît XVI, dans l'absolutisation de son approche personnelle, et c'est la raison pour laquelle il parle d'une « personnalisation radicale de l'acte de foi » chez Luther qu'il trouve « dans un face-

---

43. Benoît XVI, Discours lors de la rencontre avec les représentants du Conseil de l'Église évangélique en Allemagne, dans la Salle du Chapitre de l'ex-couvent augustinien de Erfurt, le 23 septembre 2011.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Benoît XVI, Discours lors de la célébration œcuménique dans l'église de l'ex-couvent augustinien de Erfurt, le 23 septembre 2011.

46. Benoît XVI, Discours lors de la rencontre avec les représentants du Conseil de l'Église évangélique en Allemagne, dans la Salle du Chapitre de l'ex-couvent augustinien de Erfurt, le 23 septembre 2011.

47. Cf. J. Corkery, « Luther and the Theology of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI », in D. Marmion, S. Ryan et G. E. Thiessen (éd.), *Remembering the Reformation. Martin Luther and Catholic Theology*, Minneapolis 2017, p. 125-141.

à-face passionnant et, d'un certain point de vue, exclusif entre Dieu et l'homme ». Ce personnalisme va si loin que l'homme doit toujours accourir de nouveau au « Dieu qui pardonne, contre un Dieu ou un Christ qui apparaît, exige et juge 'sub contrario', comme 'diable' »<sup>48</sup>. Selon Benoît XVI, derrière cette dialectique dans la compréhension théologique de Dieu se cache chez le Réformateur une dialectique dans l'existence humaine que le Pape perçoit également dans l'expérience personnelle de Martin Luther. Car sa biographie est caractérisée par la crainte de Dieu qui l'a frappé jusqu'au fondement de son existence, dans la tension qu'il ressentait entre exigence divine et sens du péché, Dieu lui apparaissant aussi et carrément comme « sub contrario », plus exactement comme le diable qui veut détruire l'homme. Pour pouvoir échapper au lourd fardeau de l'expérience du péché, Luther devait nécessairement trouver la certitude du salut, à savoir que malgré tout Dieu le sauvait et l'acceptait, et que cette acceptation était inébranlable. Cette certitude, qui pour lui fut la véritable expérience de la rédemption, il l'a constamment cherchée et trouvée dans la certitude du principe « par la foi seule » : « À l'expérience accablante de son moi empirique, il a sans cesse opposé comme contrepoids le principe 'par la foi seule' et y a ainsi trouvé toute l'essence du christianisme, qu'à partir de cette position il a réorganisé et repensé dans son ensemble ».<sup>49</sup>

Cette personnalisation radicale de l'acte de foi chez Luther a des conséquences qui, selon le Pape Benoît XVI, débouchent sur une tension constante vis-à-vis de la compréhension catholique de la foi. Puisque, selon Luther, la foi offre avant tout l'assurance de son propre salut, la certitude de la foi et la certitude de l'espérance s'identifient l'une avec l'autre. Tandis que du point de vue catholique, la certitude de la foi se réfère à ce que Dieu a fait et à ce qu'atteste l'Église, et la certitude de l'espérance se réfère au salut des personnes individuelles, chez Luther c'est cette dernière certitude qui est déterminante, de telle sorte que la charité n'est plus considérée comme forme intérieure de la foi mais est séparée du concept de foi : « La formule 'sola fides', sur laquelle Luther a tant insisté, signifie justement cette exclusion de la charité du problème du salut. La charité appartient au domaine des 'œuvres' et devient, en conséquence, profane ».<sup>50</sup> À ceci se trouve étroitement liée une autre conséquence, à savoir que, pour Luther, la foi, de par sa nature, ne peut plus se concilier avec la foi de l'Église tout entière et que l'Église ne peut se porter garante de la certitude du salut personnel de chaque individu ». Au contraire, du point de vue catholique, l'Église est contenue dans l'approche intérieure de la foi car, dans cette perspective, l'action salvifique de Dieu ne se réfère « pas de manière aussi exclusive à l'individu et à sa conscience », mais l'on admet que Dieu, « précisément, agit aussi à travers le Corps du Christ »<sup>51</sup>.

Pour Benoît XVI, cette nouvelle vision globale de la foi chrétienne chez Luther se trouve condensée de la plus explicite manière qui puisse être dans la dialectique de la loi et de l'Évangile qu'il perçoit également comme le fondement de la

48. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, « Luther et l'unité des Églises », in *Id, Église, œcuménisme et politique*, Paris 1987, p. 137-182, ici p. 154.

49. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, « Wie weit trägt der Konsens über die Rechtfertigungslehre? », in *Communio. Internationale katholische Zeitschrift*, 29 (2000), p. 425-437, cit. p. 427-428.

50. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, « Luther et l'unité des Églises », in *Id, Église, œcuménisme et politique*, Paris 1987, p. 137-182, ici p. 153-154.

51. *Ibid.* p. 172.

doctrine de la justification chez Luther. Il est donc clair que pour Benoît XVI, même après la signature, en 1999, par la Fédération luthérienne mondiale et le Conseil pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens de la « Déclaration commune sur la doctrine de la justification » qui, selon lui, constitue « une pierre milliaire importante sur notre chemin commun vers l'unité pleine et visible », certaines questions demeurent ouvertes. Afin de pouvoir continuer à bâtir sur cet important résultat, il faut donc accepter, comme l'a souligné le Pape Benoît XVI dans une allocution adressée au Président de la Fédération luthérienne mondiale en 2005, « que des différences demeurent en ce qui concerne la question centrale de la justification » et que « celles-ci doivent être affrontées, ainsi que les façons dont la grâce de Dieu est transmise dans l'Église et à travers celle-ci »<sup>52</sup>.

On évoque donc ici une différence fondamentale dans la compréhension de l'Église, thème qui a déjà été traité, en 2000, dans la Déclaration de la Congrégation pour la doctrine de la foi « sur l'unicité et l'universalité salvifique de Jésus Christ et de l'Église », intitulée « Dominus Iesus »<sup>53</sup>, laquelle affirme que pour l'Église catholique la validité de l'épiscopat et la pleine validité de l'Eucharistie sont constitutifs. En ce sens, les Églises orthodoxes peuvent donc être considérées des Églises sœurs, alors que les Églises et les Communautés ecclésiales issues de la Réforme ne peuvent être considérées comme des « Églises au sens propre ». Afin de surmonter les malentendus que cette déclaration a suscités, principalement en raison de la délicate formule « ne sont pas des Églises au sens propre », le Pape Benoît XVI a par la suite choisi une autre terminologie selon laquelle, avec la Réforme, est apparu un « nouveau type » d'Église, pour ainsi dire « une nouvelle manière de comprendre l'Église ». Car les Églises et les Communautés ecclésiales issues de la Réforme sont « Église, mais d'une autre manière. Et justement pas de la même manière que les Églises de la grande tradition de l'Antiquité, mais en se fondant sur une nouvelle conception d'après laquelle l'Église ne réside pas dans l'institution, mais dans la dynamique de la Parole qui rassemble les hommes et en fait une communauté »<sup>54</sup>.

Par bienveillance vis-à-vis de cette vision évangélique, le Pape Benoît XVI a voulu poursuivre le dialogue œcuménique avec les luthériens non seulement en le plaçant « dans un contexte de questions 'institutionnelles' », mais il a aussi et surtout voulu approfondir la « source authentique de tout le ministère dans l'Église ».<sup>55</sup> Comme il l'a souligné dans son discours lors de la rencontre œcuménique qui s'est tenue à Cologne en 2006, les questions ecclésiologiques et surtout la question du ministère sont en effet d'importants problèmes œcuméniques, mais elles proposent une « délimitation du problème » qu'il n'apprécie pas « puisqu'il semble que nous devrions à présent débattre des institutions plutôt que de la Parole de Dieu ». Cependant, la question œcuménique véritable, surtout dans le dialogue avec les Églises issues de la Réforme, n'est pas pour le Pape Benoît XVI le problème du ministère ecclésial, mais « la forme

---

52. Benoît XVI, Discours au Président de la Fédération luthérienne mondiale, le 7 novembre 2005

53. Publié dans *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 92 (2000) p. 742-765.

54. Benoît XVI, Lumière du monde. Le Pape, l'Église et les signes des temps. Un entretien avec Peter Seewald, Paris 2011, p. 131-132.

55. Benoît XVI, Discours au Président de la Fédération luthérienne mondiale, le 7 novembre 2005

que prend la présence de la Parole dans le monde», plus précisément la question ecclésiologique que représente « cet entrelacs entre Parole, témoin et règle de foi » et par conséquent la « question de la Parole de Dieu, de sa souveraineté et de son humilité » « puisque le Seigneur confie sa Parole aux témoins et concède l'interprétation qui doit toutefois être toujours mesurée à la 'regula fidei' et au sérieux de la Parole »<sup>56</sup>.

Dans cette interprétation martyrologique du problème central de l'œcuménisme, à savoir que la Parole de Dieu n'est présente que dans le témoin apostolique comme Parole vivante de Dieu, et que le témoin, pour sa part, n'est témoin que lorsqu'il témoigne de la Parole de Dieu, n'apparaît pas uniquement la preuve que le Pape Benoît XVI s'intéresse principalement à ce qui, dans l'effort œcuménique, est unifiant. On comprend également la raison pour laquelle chez le Pape Benoît XVI, on trouve une double lecture de la vie et de l'œuvre de Martin Luther : d'une part, il souligne que, « par ses catéchismes, ses chants, ses livres liturgiques », Luther a établi « une tradition de vie ecclésiale » « à partir de laquelle on peut le lire comme le 'père' de cette vie ecclésiale » et « l'interpréter au sens d'une ecclésialité évangélique ». D'autre part, Benoît XVI souligne que Luther a aussi créé « une œuvre théologique et polémique d'une radicalité révolutionnaire qu'il n'a pas reniée lors de sa liaison politique avec les princes et de son tournant contre la gauche réformatrice », si bien que l'on peut comprendre également Luther à travers son « évasion violente de la Tradition ». Le Pape Benoît XVI ne voit cependant pas de contradiction entre ces deux aspects de Luther ; au contraire, il désire recommander une lecture de Luther « qui garde en vue le fond révolutionnaire dans les écrits ecclésiaux et le Luther pieux dans ses œuvres polémiques »<sup>57</sup>.

Partant de cette vision nuancée, le Pape Benoît XVI, compte tenu des divisions historiques de l'Église, n'a eu de cesse de rappeler la nécessaire « purification de la mémoire » et a vu dans le « repentir intérieur » la condition préalable indispensable au progrès sur le chemin œcuménique. Cependant, comme il l'a fait lors de sa visite à la Communauté évangélique luthérienne à Rome en mars 2010, il a souligné à maintes reprises que nous avons des raisons d'être reconnaissants et heureux de ce que nous pouvons faire de façon œcuménique aujourd'hui. C'est dans cette confiance que le Pape Benoît XVI remarquait déjà en 2011 qu'en 2017, en prévision de la commémoration du 500<sup>e</sup> anniversaire du début de la Réforme, luthériens et catholiques auraient l'opportunité de « célébrer dans le monde entier une commémoration œcuménique commune, de lutter au niveau mondial pour les questions fondamentales, non pas sous forme d'une célébration triomphaliste, mais comme une profession commune de notre foi dans le Dieu Un et Trine, dans l'obéissance commune à notre Seigneur et à sa parole ».<sup>58</sup>

### 3. Perspectives : engranger les fruits du dialogue

Toutefois, seul le Pape François a pu prendre part à cette commémoration luthérienne-catholique commune de la Réforme, lorsque le 31 octobre 2016, dans la cathédrale

---

56. Benoît XVI, Discours lors de la Rencontre œcuménique à Cologne, le 19 août 2005.

57. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, « Luther et l'unité des Églises », in *Id.*, *Église, œcuménisme et politique*, Paris 1987, p. 137-182, ici p. 142-143.

58. Benoît XVI, Discours lors d'une audience privée à la Délégation de l'Église unie évangélique luthérienne allemande (VELKD), le 24 janvier 2011.

luthérienne de Lund en Suède, avec le président et le secrétaire général de la Fédération luthérienne mondiale il en a présidé la célébration œcuménique et affirmé dans la Déclaration commune qui fut signée en cette circonstance : « Alors que nous sommes profondément reconnaissants pour les dons spirituels et théologiques reçus à travers la Réforme, nous confessons aussi devant le Christ que luthériens et catholiques ont blessé l'unité visible de l'Église et nous le déplorons »<sup>59</sup>.

Ces paroles expriment ce qu'aujourd'hui il est possible de dire ensemble dans une perspective œcuménique sur la Réforme du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Au premier plan, il y a la gratitude pour tout ce que la Réforme a suscité comme perspectives religieuses et théologiques positives et pour ce dont luthériens et catholiques témoignent ensemble aujourd'hui. D'autre part, il y a la confession de notre faute et la repentance parce que la Réforme n'a pas conduit, à l'époque, au renouvellement de l'Église mais à sa division. À cet égard, il se peut que l'on choisisse de mettre l'accent sur tel ou tel aspect : pour les chrétiens luthériens, la Réforme sera avant tout perçue comme la redécouverte de l'Évangile de la justification de l'homme par la grâce de Dieu seule et son acceptation dans la foi. Les chrétiens catholiques, quant à eux, ont l'habitude d'associer la Réforme également et d'abord à la division de l'Église et à l'unité perdue. Mais même si l'on insiste sur tel ou tel aspect, ces deux positions sont aujourd'hui, ensemble et de manière indissoluble, partie intégrante d'une commémoration commune. C'est également ce qu'exprime de manière significative le titre donné au document établi par la Commission luthéro-catholique romaine sur l'unité dans la perspective d'une commémoration conjointe de la Réforme en 2017 : « Du conflit à la communion »<sup>60</sup>. Une commémoration commune de la réforme doit prendre en compte aussi sérieusement le conflit que la communion et, plus que tout, faire en sorte que luthériens et catholiques avancent sur le chemin menant du conflit à la communion.

Alors que l'année de commémoration de la Réforme touche à sa fin, nous pouvons constater d'ores et déjà que cette commémoration de la Réforme a été la première dans l'histoire à ne pas avoir suscité, de part et d'autre, de polémiques confessionnelles. On peut y voir les fruits de l'intense dialogue œcuménique qui, tout au long des dernières cinquante années, a été promu entre luthériens et catholiques et a reçu le soutien des Pape Jean-Paul II, Benoît XVI et François. Cela mérite que nous poursuivions à l'avenir notre travail en nous basant sur ce résultat positif, tout d'abord dans la perspective de l'année 2030, lorsque nous commémorerons le 500<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de la Confessio Augustana que Philipp Melancthon avait rédigée pour la Diète d'Augsbourg afin de témoigner que les évangéliques étaient en accord avec la foi de l'Église. La Confession d'Augsbourg n'est donc pas un document fauteur de division, mais un texte montrant une volonté déterminée de réconciliation et de préservation de l'unité, ainsi que le précisait la Commission de dialogue catholique romaine - évangélique-luthérienne dans sa prise de position sur la Confession d'Augsbourg à l'occasion du 450<sup>e</sup> anniversaire de sa publication en 1980 : « C'est l'intention déclarée de

---

59. Déclaration commune à l'occasion de la commémoration commune catholique-luthérienne de la Réforme, le 31 octobre 2016

60. « Du conflit à la communion, Commémoration luthéro-catholique romaine commune de la Réforme en 2017, Rapport de la Commission luthéro-catholique romaine sur l'unité, Conseil Pontifical pour la promotion de l'unité des chrétiens », in *Service d'information*, n. 144 (2014-II), p. 79-112.

la Confession d'Augsbourg de témoigner de la foi de l'Église une, sainte, catholique et apostolique. Il ne s'agit pas de doctrines spéciales, ni même de la fondation d'une nouvelle église (CA 7, 1), mais de la préservation et du renouvellement de la foi chrétienne - en accord avec l'Église primitive et 'également avec l'Église romaine', conformément à ce dont témoignent les Saintes Écritures. »<sup>61</sup>

Le but envisagé n'a pu être atteint à la Diète d'Augsbourg avec la Confessio Augustana. Ce fut la dernière tentative de sauver l'unité menacée, mais à l'époque, cette tentative échoua. Toutefois, puisque les luthériens et les catholiques n'ont presque jamais été aussi proches dans l'histoire qu'en ce temps-là, il convient aujourd'hui encore de ne pas surestimer la Confession d'Augsbourg dans sa signification œcuménique<sup>62</sup>. Par conséquent, ceci est un clair encouragement à commémorer en 2030 le cinquantième anniversaire du Reichstag d'Augsbourg et de la proclamation de la Confessio Augustana dans une communion œcuménique au moins aussi intense que celle que nous avons vécue en 2017, lors de la commémoration de la Réforme, et à y voir une heureuse opportunité de prendre d'autres mesures indérogeables susceptibles de nous faire progresser vers l'unité. Ainsi, les implications personnelles des papes dans le dialogue avec les luthériens pourront-elles porter à des résultats encore plus positifs.

---

61. « Alle unter einem Christus. Stellungnahme der Gemeinsamen Römisch-Katholischen/Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kommission zum Augsburgischen Bekenntnis, 1980 », in H. Meyer, H. J. Urban et L. Vischer (éd.), *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung. Sämtliche Berichte und Konsentexte interkonfessioneller Gespräche auf Weltebene 1931-1982*, Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1983, p. 323-328, cit. p. 325.

62. Vgl. Confessio Augustana. Bekenntnis des einen Glaubens. Gemeinsame Untersuchung lutherischer und katholischer Theologen, Paderborn – Frankfurt a. M. 1980 ; H. FRIES et al., Confessio Augustana. Hindernis oder Hilfe ?, Regensburg 1979 ; B. Lohse et O. H. Pesch (éd.), Das Augsburgische Bekenntnis von 1530 damals und heute, München – Mainz 1980 ; H. MEYER, H. Schütte et H.-J. Mund (éd.), Katholische Anerkennung des Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses. Ein Vorstoss zur Einheit zwischen katholischer und lutherischer Kirche, Frankfurt a. M. 1977. Cf. aussi K. Koch, « Die Confessio Augustana – Ein katholisches Bekenntnis ? », in Id., *Gelähmte Ökumene. Was jetzt noch zu tun ist*, Freiburg i. Br. 1991, p. 65-106.

## Jubiläum 600 Jahre Papstwahl in Konstanz Konzilsgebäude, Konstanz, 11. November 2017

*Die Papstwahl beim Konzil von Konstanz und ihre ekklesiologische  
und ökumenische Bedeutung*

Für Ihre Einladung zum Jubiläum 600 Jahre Papstwahl in Konstanz danke ich Ihnen ganz herzlich. Ich bin Papst Franziskus dankbar, dass er mich als seinen Sondergesandten nach Konstanz gesandt hat; und ich darf Ihnen seine herzlichen Grüsse und Segenswünsche überbringen. Es freut mich, zu Ihnen sprechen zu dürfen im Rahmen eines Festvortrags, in dem es gilt, uns die grossen Ereignisse vor 600 Jahren vor Augen zu führen und sie dankbar zu feiern und uns auf ihre bleibende Bedeutung im Leben der Kirche und in den ökumenischen Beziehungen heute zu besinnen.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Licht und Schatten eines Jubiläums

Bei einer Sedisvakanz des Stuhls des Bischofs von Rom wird das Konklave, bei dem die Kardinäle den neuen Papst zu wählen haben, mit grosser Spannung erwartet; und der erste Auftritt des neu gewählten Papstes mit der frohen Ankündigung „Habemus Papam“ löst Freude aus, wie die Welt beim letzten Mal am 13. März 2013 erfahren konnte. Auch der heutige Festtag ist zunächst ein Anlass zu freudiger Erinnerung an die einzige Papstwahl, die nördlich der Alpen vorgenommen worden ist, genauer an die im Konklave während des Konzils von Konstanz durchgeführte Wahl des noch nicht ganz fünfzigjährigen Oddo di Colonna zum Papst, der sich den Namen Martin V. gegeben hat. Dass diese bedeutenden Ereignisse im Konstanzer Kaufhaus und auf dem Konstanzer Münsterhof stattgefunden haben, darauf ist die Stadt Konstanz mit Recht stolz und begeht sie mit einem Festakt im Konzilsgebäude und mit einem Ökumenischen Festgottesdienst und einem Pontifikalamt im Münster.

Der cantus firmus dankbarer Erinnerung weist freilich auch einen schmerzvollen Kontrapunkt auf, und das heutige Jubiläum ist Anlass nicht nur zu freudiger Erinnerung, sondern auch zu tiefer Trauer. Denn mit der Papstwahl und der Papstkrönung in Konstanz konnte das Grosse Schisma in der Kirche des Westens im späten Mittelalter beendet werden, das beinahe vierzig Jahre gedauert hat, das die wohl gefährlichste Krise und den folgenreichsten Autoritätsverlust darstellt, den das Papsttum in seiner ganzen Geschichte erfahren hat. Ohne auch diesen dunklen Hintergrund zu vergegenwärtigen, lässt sich die grosse Bedeutung des am heutigen Festtag erinnerten Ereignisses in Konstanz kaum verstehen. Dabei legt es sich nahe, in der Geschichte weiter zurück zu gehen.

---

1. Im Folgenden beziehe ich mich auf diese Referenzen: W. Brandmüller, Das Konzil von Konstanz 1414-1418. Zwei Bände (Paderborn 1991 und 1998); E. Iserloh und K. A. Fink, Das abendländische Schisma und die Konzilien, in: H. Jedin (Hrsg.), Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte. Band III: Die mittelalterliche Kirche. Zweiter Halbband: Vom kirchlichen Hochmittelalter bis zum Vorabend der Reformation (Freiburg i. Br. 1973) 490-588; K. Schatz, Der Päpstliche Primat. Seine Geschichte von den Ursprüngen bis zur Gegenwart (Würzburg 1990), bes. 126-154: Die Krise des Primats im Spätmittelalter.

Als nach der langen Zeit des Avignoneser Exils (1309-1376), während dem beinahe ausschliesslich französische Päpste regiert haben, im Jahre 1378 wieder ein Papst in Rom gewählt werden konnte, und zwar diesmal kein Franzose, sondern ein Italiener, schien es, dass die Kirche wieder in ihre normale Lebenssituation zurück kehren konnte. Der neu gewählte Papst Urban VI. erwies sich zwar als reformbewusst, sah sich aber nicht in der Lage, in dem noch zum grössten Teil französisch besetzten Kardinalskollegium die nationalen Gegensätze zu überwinden. Dies hatte zur Folge, dass die französischen Kardinäle bereits nach etwas mehr als drei Monaten die Wahl von Urban VI. angefochten und als ungültig erklärt und einen anderen Papst gewählt haben, der sich den Namen Clemens VII. gegeben hat. Damit entstand das grösste und längste Papst-Schisma in der Geschichte, das die Christenheit in zwei Hälften gespalten hat: Auf der Seite von Urban VI. und seinen Nachfolgern in Rom standen Italien, Deutschland, England, Nord- und Ost-Europa, während Frankreich, Schottland und die Pyrenäenhalbinsel (ausser Portugal) Clemens VII. und seinem Nachfolger Benedikt XIII., die wieder in Avignon residierten, anhängen.

Die Christenheit stand damit vor der schwierigen Aufgabe, wie sie dieser Sackgasse entkommen und die Einheit wieder herstellen konnte. Zunächst wurde versucht, eine Lösung auf dem Weg zu finden, dass einer der beiden oder beide Päpste ihren Rücktritt erklären würden, um zur Wahl eines neuen Papstes schreiten zu können. Zunächst schien es, dass dieser Weg zum Erfolg führen würde, da beide Päpste ein Treffen in Savona an der Riviera vereinbart haben, wo sie gemeinsam ihren Rücktritt erklären würden. Da der vorgesehene „Papst-Gipfel“ jedoch nicht zustande kam, war die letzte Chance für das gespaltene Papsttum, gleichsam aus eigenen Kräften die Einheit der Kirche wieder herzustellen, vertan. Da dieser Versuch, auf dem üblichen Weg eine Papstwahl vorzunehmen, scheiterte, wurde nun der Weg mit einem Konzil eingeschlagen. Das Kardinalskollegium berief im Jahre 1409 ein allgemeines Konzil nach Pisa ein, und zwar im Bewusstsein, gegenüber häretischen Päpsten im Sinne des Notrechts die Römische Kirche zu vertreten. Dieses Konzil machte beiden Päpsten den Prozess, setzte sie als „Häretiker“ und „Schismatiker“ ab und wählte als neuen Papst Alexander V., dem bereits ein Jahre später Johannes XXIII. nachfolgte. Da die beiden bisherigen Päpste jedoch ihren Rücktritt nicht erklärten, regierten in der einen Kirche nun drei Päpste, so dass man von einer „verfluchten Dreifaltigkeit“, einer „Trinitas non benedicta, sed maledicta“ sprach.

## **2. Ringen zwischen Konzil und Papsttum**

Die Katastrophe wurde damit nur noch verschärft, und es blieb als einziger Ausweg ein Konzil, das in Zusammenwirken zwischen dem Nachfolger des zu Pisa gewählten Papstes, Johannes XXIII., und König Sigismund vereinbart und nach Konstanz einberufen wurde. Zunächst versuchte man auf diplomatischem Weg die beiden Päpste Gregor XII. und Benedikt XIII. zum freiwilligen Rücktritt zu bewegen. Dornenvoll jedoch war die Frage, was mit Papst Johannes XXIII. geschehen sollte. Denn er war der Nachfolger des auf dem Konzil von Pisa gewählten Papstes, das Konzil von Konstanz ist von ihm einberufen worden und er hatte den grössten Teil der Christenheit hinter sich. Auf der anderen Seite erschien es aber als kaum denkbar, dass die beiden „Päpste“ Gregor XII. und Benedikt XIII. zugunsten von Papst Johannes XXIII. resignieren würden. Von daher wurde auch dem Pisaner Papst nahe gelegt, im Dienst der Einheit der Kirche den Rücktritt zu erklären. Nachdem Johannes XXIII. zunächst zugestimmt

hatte, floh er jedoch in der Verkleidung eines Stallknechtes von Konstanz nach Schaffhausen und später nach Breisach, von wo aus er sein Rücktrittsversprechen als erzwungen und damit ungültig erklärte und die Kardinäle aufforderte, das Konzil zu verlassen und zu ihm zu kommen.

In dieser schweren Stunde, die gewiss die grösste Krise des Konzils von Konstanz gewesen ist, wurde entschieden, auch ohne Papst das Konzil weiterzuführen, und zwar auf der Basis des am 6. April 1415 beschlossenen Dekrets „Haec sancta“, mit dem das Konzil seine eigene, unmittelbar von Christus stammende Autorität feierlich erklärt hat. Aus der Überzeugung, dass das Konzil „im Heiligen Geist legitim versammelt“ ist und die Kirche repräsentiert, zog es die praktische Konsequenz, dass alle in der Kirche, inklusive der Papst, verpflichtet sind, dem Konzil zu gehorchen in jenen Dingen, „die den Glauben, die Bereinigung des gegenwärtigen Schismas sowie die allgemeine Reform der Kirche Gottes in Haupt und Gliedern betreffen“. Auf der Grundlage dieses Dekrets wurde Johannes XXIII. der Prozess gemacht, er wurde verhaftet und abgesetzt. Während Gregor XII. seinen Rücktritt erklärte, wurde Benedikt XIII. zwar abgesetzt, betrachtete sich selbst aber als den einzig legitimen Papst und exkommunizierte die ganze übrige Christenheit. Angesichts dieser Situation gab das Konzil der Wahl eines neuen Papstes den Vorrang vor der ebenso dringlichen Frage der „Reform der Kirche an Haupt und Gliedern“. Vor der Wahl des neuen Papstes verabschiedete das Konzil aber noch das Dekret „Frequens“, mit dem die zukünftigen Päpste verpflichtet werden, in regelmässigen Abständen, zunächst alle fünf und dann alle zehn Jahre, Konzilien abzuhalten. Schliesslich wurde der neue Papst gewählt, der sich den Namen Martin V. gegeben hat.

Mit seiner Wahl konnte nicht nur das Grosse Schisma beendet werden, sondern hatte die Kirche seit beinahe vierzig Jahren wieder ein anerkanntes Haupt, wie Papst Paul VI. anlässlich der 550-Jahrfeier des Konzils von Konstanz in seiner Botschaft an Erzbischof Herman Schäuferle hervorgehoben hat, dass dem Konzil in Konstanz mit Recht zugeschrieben wird, dass es die gefährdete Einheit der Kirche wiederhergestellt hat und dass dies vor allem durch die Wahl Martins V. zum Papst geschehen ist: „Durch die Tatsache, dass diese Wahl auf äusserst schwierige Zeitläufe folgte, erwies sich das oberste Hirtenamt wiederum als Fundament der kirchlichen Einheit und wurde als solches allgemein anerkannt. So ragt das Konzil als Zeichen der Treue zur Kirche und zugleich zum Nachfolger des heiligen Petrus, auf welchen Christus die Kirche gebaut hat, hervor.“

Die einmütige Wahl von Papst Martin V. am 11. November 1417 ist die eigentliche geschichtsträchtige Tat des Konzils von Konstanz gewesen und verleiht ihm seine wahre historische Bedeutung. Sie steht im Mittelpunkt auch des heutigen Jubiläums von 600 Jahren Papstwahl beim Konzil von Konstanz mit dem treffenden Titel „Habemus papam“. Darauf ist die Stadt Konstanz mit Recht stolz. Nicht weniger dankbar ist freilich die Christenheit dafür, dass mit der Papstwahl in Konstanz das grosse Schisma in der westlichen Kirche beendet und damit auch Europa wieder geeint werden konnte. Dankbarkeit und Freude können aber nicht darüber hinweg sehen lassen, dass in diesem Licht auch der Schatten sichtbar geworden ist, der schliesslich zum Konzil von Konstanz geführt hat, nämlich die wohl grösste Krise des Papsttums in seiner Geschichte. Denn es ist als Tragik zu beurteilen, dass ausgerechnet das Papsttum, dessen Sendung darin besteht, der Einheit der ganzen Kirche zu dienen, zur Ursache von Schisma und Spaltung geworden ist.

Von daher kann man verstehen, dass mit dem Konzil von Konstanz die weitere Frage verbunden ist, ob im Leben der Kirche angesichts des Scheiterns des Papsttums nicht dem Konziliarismus die Zukunft gehört, dem gemäss das Konzil den Primat vor dem Papst hat, sei es in der mildereren Form, dass das Konzil in bestimmten Ausnahmesituationen, beispielsweise bei einem häretisch gewordenen Papst oder bei einem Schisma, als Kontrollinstanz über dem Papst steht, oder sei es in seiner radikalen Form, dass sich das Konzil als volle Repräsentanz der Kirche und deshalb auch als Träger aller kirchlichen Vollmachten versteht. Die Beantwortung dieser Frage hängt von der Interpretation des Dekrets „Haec sancta“ ab, das das Konzil am 6. April 1415 beschlossen hat.<sup>2</sup> Auszugehen ist dabei davon, dass beim Konzil von Konstanz zu dem Zeitpunkt, als dieses Dekret verabschiedet worden ist, nur die Gefolgschaft des Pisaner Papstes Johannes XXIII. anwesend gewesen ist, nicht hingegen diejenige des römischen Papstes Benedikt XIII., so dass es sich noch nicht um ein allgemeines Konzil der Kirche gehandelt hat. Wohl auch deshalb haben die Konzilsväter es zugelassen, dass Gregor XII., bevor er abdankte, das Konzil zuerst noch einmal einberufen und die Einberufungsbulle verkünden konnte. Das Konzil hat deshalb die Papstwahl als situationsbedingten Akt der Notwehr der Kirche in einer hoffnungslos verfahrenen Situation, in der das Papsttum selbst mit seinem Dienst an der Einheit versagt hat, verstanden und vollzogen; es hat aber keineswegs die Oberhoheit des Konzils über den Papst als Dogma definiert.

Beim Konzil von Konstanz hat es gewiss auch eine Gruppe gegeben, die die Oberhoheit des Konzils über den Papst dogmatisch definieren wollte; und die konziliaristische Idee hat auch nach dem Konzil weiter gewirkt. Dass sie aber keine Lösung des Problems darstellt, ist ebenfalls nach dem Konzil deutlich geworden. Zunächst hat sich gezeigt, dass sich das Dekret „Frequens“ als wenig realistisch erwiesen hat. Denn bereits fünf Jahre nach Konstanz wurde das nächste Konzil in Pavia und Siena einberufen; es war aber so schlecht besucht, dass es bald wieder aufgelöst wurde. Das nächste Konzil wurde dann sieben Jahre später nach Basel einberufen, das freilich auch unter der geringen Zahl der anwesenden Bischöfe litt und bei dem die fundamentale Strukturfrage im Vordergrund stand, ob der Papst über dem Konzil oder das Konzil über dem Papst steht. Diese grundsätzliche Frage war dabei von der konkreten Frage provoziert, ob der Papst das Recht habe, ein Konzil aufzulösen und an einen anderen Ort zu verlegen. Denn Papst Eugen IV. hatte vor, das Konzil von Basel nach Ferrara und später nach Florenz zu verlegen, um den Griechen entgegen zu kommen, die Unionsverhandlungen wünschten und für die eine italienische Stadt günstiger als eine nordalpine zu erreichen war. Da die gemässigte Minderheit dem Ruf des Papstes folgte, während die Mehrheit in Basel verblieb, kam es zu einer gefährlichen Spaltung zwischen Papst und Konzil, zumal die Mehrheit in Basel das Dekret „Sacrosancta“ beschloss und mit ihm definierte, dass das Allgemeine Konzil über dem Papst stehe, dass der Papst ein Konzil weder auflösen noch vertagen noch verlegen dürfe und dass derjenige, der diesen Wahrheiten widerspricht, ein Häretiker

---

2. Vgl. R. Bäumer, Die Interpretation und Verbindlichkeit der Konstanzer Dekrete, in: Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift 116 (1968) 44-52; W. Brandmüller, Besitzt das Konstanzer Dekret Haec sancta dogmatische Verbindlichkeit? in: Römische Quartalschrift 62 (1967) 1-17; H. Jedin, Bischöfliches Konzil oder Kirchenparlament? Ein Beitrag zur Ekklesiologie der Konzilien von Konstanz und Basel (Basel 1966).

sei. Da Papst Eugen IV. diese Konzilsdefinitionen ablehnte, wurde er vom Konzil als Häretiker abgesetzt und mit Felix V. ein neuer Papst gewählt. Damit entstand ein neues Papst-Schisma, freilich mit dem Unterschied, dass nun nicht nur zwei Päpste einander gegenüberstanden, sondern auch gleichsam zwei Konzilien, so dass nicht nur eine Glaubenspaltung zum Greifen nahe war, sondern auch der Konziliarismus in eine tiefe Krise geriet.

### 3. Ökumenische Annäherungen an das Papstamt

Die schwierige Situation in der Kirche nach dem Konzil von Konstanz können wir nicht weiter verfolgen, sie kann aber auch am heutigen Jubiläum nicht ausgeblendet werden. Das heutige Jubiläum hält aber in theologischer Hinsicht in der Kirche eine Frage wach, die auch heute nichts an Aktualität eingebüsst hat. Auch wenn das Konzil von Konstanz mit dem Dekret „Haec sancta“ den Konziliarismus nicht dogmatisch definiert hat, knüpft es mit seinem Verhalten und seinen Entscheidungen doch an die synodale Tradition der frühen Kirche an und revitalisiert elementare Dimensionen der alten *Communio-Ekklesiologie*, in der nach einem guten Verhältnis zwischen Papst und Konzil zu fragen ist. Denn in der *Communio-Ekklesiologie* kann es nicht nur darum gehen, die Kirche an den Papst zu binden, sondern auch den Papst an die Kirche. So hat der bedeutende katholische Schweizer Theologe und Kardinal Hans Urs von Balthasar als ekklesiologische Grundfrage formuliert, wie sich das Papsttum in der Gesamtkirche integrieren lässt.<sup>3</sup> In diesem Sinn hinterlässt uns das Konzil von Konstanz die Aufgabe, nach einem gesunden Gleichgewicht zwischen Primat und Synodalität im Leben der Kirche zu suchen. Diese Frage stellt sich freilich nicht nur im Leben der Katholischen Kirche, sondern auch im ökumenischen Dialog mit anderen christlichen Kirchen über die Frage des Papsttums. Dieser Frage wollen wir uns im zweiten Teil des Vortrags zuwenden.

#### a) Unterscheidung zwischen Wesen und Ausübung des Primats

Bei dieser Frage wiederholt sich in ökumenischer Hinsicht die beim Konstanzer Konzil sichtbar gewordene Grundproblematik, freilich – Gott sei es gedankt – nicht in dem Sinn, dass sich verschiedene Päpste einander gegenüberstehen würden, sondern dass das Papsttum selbst als grosses Hindernis auf dem Weg zur Wiederherstellung der Einheit der Christen wahrgenommen wird. Es macht das Verdienst von Papst Paul VI. aus, dass er bei seinem Besuch im damaligen Sekretariat für die Einheit der Christen im Jahre 1967 in freimütiger und ehrlicher Weise ausgesprochen hat, dass die Frage des Papstamtes eines der wichtigsten ökumenischen Probleme darstellt: „Der Papst ist, wir wissen es wohl, ohne Zweifel das schwerwiegendste Hindernis auf dem Weg des Ökumenismus.“<sup>4</sup>

Auf dieses ehrliche Bekenntnis hat Papst Johannes Paul II. in seiner Enzyklika über den Einsatz für die Ökumene „*Ut unum sint*“ zurück gegriffen, indem er erklärt hat, dass das Amt des Bischofs von Rom „eine Schwierigkeit für den Grossteil der anderen Christen“ darstellt, „deren Gedächtnis durch gewisse schmerzliche

---

3. H. U. von Balthasar, *Der antirömische Affekt. Wie lässt sich das Papsttum in der Gesamtkirche integrieren* (Freiburg i. Br. 1974).

4. Dokumentiert in: AAS 59 (1967) 498.

Erinnerungen gezeichnet ist“<sup>5</sup>. Johannes Paul II. ist aber überzeugt gewesen, dass das Amt, das dem Nachfolger des Petrus übertragen ist, in erster Linie ein Amt der Einheit ist und dass es im Lebensbereich der Ökumene „seine ganz besondere Erklärung“ findet<sup>6</sup>. In dieser Überzeugung hat er im Schlussteil seiner Ökumeneenzyklika grundlegende Gedanken dem „Dienst des Bischofs von Rom an der Einheit“ gewidmet und in diesem Zusammenhang die Bitte an die eigene Kirche, aber auch an die gesamte Ökumene ausgesprochen, sich mit ihm auf einen geduldigen brüderlichen Dialog über den Primat des Bischofs von Rom einzulassen, und zwar mit dem Ziel, eine Form der Primatsausübung zu finden, „die zwar keineswegs auf das Wesentliche ihrer Sendung verzichtet, sich aber einer neuen Situation öffnet“, genauer dahingehend, dass dieses Amt „einen von den einen und anderen anerkannten Dienst der Liebe zu verwirklichen vermag“<sup>7</sup>.

Die grundlegende Unterscheidung zwischen dem Wesen des Primats des Bischofs von Rom und der konkreten Form seiner Ausübung hat auch Papst Benedikt XVI. verschiedentlich aufgegriffen und die damit verbundene Einladung an die Ökumene erneuert, beispielsweise bei seiner Begegnung mit Vertretern der Orthodoxen Kirchen in Freiburg im Breisgau im September 2011: „Wir wissen, dass es vor allem die Primatsfrage ist, um deren rechtes Verständnis wir weiter geduldig und demütig ringen müssen. Ich denke, dabei können uns die Gedanken zur Unterscheidung zwischen Wesen und Form der Ausübung des Primates, die Papst Johannes Paul II. in der Enzyklika *Ut unum sint* (Nr. 95) vorgenommen hat, weiterhin fruchtbare Anstöße geben.“<sup>8</sup> In dieser Sinnrichtung hatte Papst Benedikt XVI. bereits in den siebziger Jahren den weitsichtigen Vorschlag unterbreitet, Rom müsse für die Wiedervereinigung vom Osten „nicht mehr an Primatslehre fordern, als auch im ersten Jahrtausend formuliert und gelebt wurde“<sup>9</sup>.

Papst Franziskus seinerseits geht den von seinen Vorgängern bereiteten Weg in grosser Offenheit weiter, indem er ebenfalls deutlich unterscheidet zwischen dem, was für den Primat wesentlich ist, und dem, was zur konkreten und teilweise geschichtlich bedingten Form seiner Ausübung gehört, und indem er zugleich eingesteht, dass wir auf diesem Weg der Unterscheidung bisher „wenig vorangekommen“ sind. Papst Franziskus ist aber überzeugt, dass eine „übertriebene Zentralisierung“ das „Leben der Kirche und ihre missionarische Dynamik“ kompliziert und dass deshalb auch das Papsttum und die zentralen Strukturen der Universalkirche es nötig haben, dem Aufruf zu einer pastoralen Neuausrichtung zu folgen: „Meine Aufgabe als Bischof von Rom ist es, offen zu bleiben für die Vorschläge, die darauf ausgerichtet sind, dass eine Ausübung meines Amtes der Bedeutung, die Jesus Christus ihm gegeben hat, treuer ist und mehr den gegenwärtigen Notwendigkeiten der Evangelisierung entspricht.“<sup>10</sup>

---

5. Johannes Paul II., *Ut unum sint*, Nr. 88.

6. Johannes Paul II., *Die Schwelle der Hoffnung überschreiten* (Hamburg 1994) 181.

7. Johannes Paul II., *Ut unum sint*, Nr. 95.

8. Benedikt XVI., *Ansprache bei der Begegnung mit Vertretern der Orthodoxen Kirchen in Freiburg i. Br. am 24. September 2011*.

9. J. Kardinal Ratzinger, *Die ökumenische Situation – Orthodoxie, Katholizismus und Reformation*, in: Ders., *Theologische Prinzipienlehre* (München 1982) 203-214, zit. 209.

10. Franziskus, *Evangelii gaudium*, Nr. 32.

Alle Päpste haben seit dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil zum Gespräch über das Papstamt eingeladen und wesentliche Schritte auf eine ökumenische Verständigung über das Amt des Bischofs von Rom hin unternommen. Um diese perspektivenreichen Initiativen aufzugreifen und zu vertiefen, haben in den vergangenen Jahren das Päpstliche Komitee für die Geschichtswissenschaften<sup>11</sup>, die Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre<sup>12</sup> und der Päpstliche Rat zur Förderung der Einheit der Christen<sup>13</sup> wissenschaftliche Symposien über Theorie und Praxis des Primats des Bischofs von Rom durchgeführt. Hinzu kommt, dass sich die theologische Wissenschaft seit längerer Zeit mit der Frage einer ökumenischen Sicht des Papstamtes abarbeitet, was bereits durch die Tatsache belegt werden kann, dass die theologischen und ökumenischen Publikationen über diese Frage einige Bücherregale füllen.

*b) Versöhnung von Primat und Synodalität*

Mit der Unterscheidung zwischen dem Wesen des Primats des Bischofs von Rom und der konkreten Form seiner Ausübung und damit auch zwischen dem Unaufgebbaren und dem Revidierbaren in der Gestalt des Papstamtes<sup>14</sup> ist ohne Zweifel das Tor für eine ökumenische Verständigung über Theologie und Praxis des Primats des Bischofs von Rom geöffnet. In der ökumenischen Diskussion ist freilich auch deutlich geworden, dass es äusserst schwierig ist, den Dialog über das Papstamt direkt anzugehen. Denn bei der Frage des Primats des Bischofs von Rom handelt es sich keineswegs um eine isolierte Einzelfrage. Sie stellt vielmehr gleichsam die Spitze eines Eisbergs dar, insofern bei dieser Frage die ungelösten ökumenischen Probleme vor allem des Kirchenverständnisses und des kirchlichen Amtes mit auf den Tisch kommen.

Anlässlich des heutigen Jubiläums 600 Jahre Papstwahl beim Konzil von Konstanz und dem damit verbundenen Ringen zwischen Konzil und Papsttum ist es angezeigt, sich auf die Frage nach dem Verhältnis zwischen Synodalität und Primat zu konzentrieren. Die Diskussion dieser Frage verfolgt dabei das Ziel, Wege zu erkunden, auf denen aus dem „Haupthindernis“, das das Papstamt für die Wiederherstellung der Einheit der Kirche darstellt, eine „Hauptmöglichkeit“ für dasselbe Anliegen werden kann. Dabei kann es im ökumenischen Dialog nicht darum gehen, einen Kompromiss auf dem kleinstmöglich gemeinsamen Nenner anzuvisieren. Es müssen vielmehr die jeweiligen Stärken beider Partner im ökumenischen Dialog miteinander ins Gespräch gebracht werden, und zwar in der Hoffnung auf Lernbereitschaft auf beiden Seiten und in der Bewährung des Grundprinzips des ökumenischen Dialogs, das in der Sicht von Papst Franziskus nicht einfach darin besteht, „Informationen über die anderen zu erhalten, um sie besser kennen zu lernen“. Es geht vielmehr darum, „das, was der Geist

---

11. Pontificio Comitato di Scienze Storiche (ed.), *Il Primato del Vescovo di Roma nel primo millennio. Ricerche e testimonianze. Atti del Symposium storico-teologico* (Città del Vaticano 1991).

12. *Il primato del Successore di Pietro nel Mistero della Chiesa. Considerazioni della Congregazione per la Dottrina della fede*, in: *Documenti e Studi* 19 (Città del Vaticano 2002) 9-21.

13. W. Kasper (ed.), *Il ministero petrino. Cattolici e ortodossi in dialogo* (Roma 2004).

14. Vgl. K. Koch, *Unaufgebbares und Revidierbares in der Gestalt des Papsttums aus römisch-katholischer Sicht*, in: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 52 (2005) 5-30.

bei ihnen gesät hat, als ein Geschenk aufzunehmen, das auch für uns bestimmt ist“. Denn Ökumene ist nicht einfach ein Austausch von Ideen, sondern viel elementarer ein „Austausch von Gaben“, in dem wir von den anderen viel lernen können.<sup>15</sup>

In dieser Sinnrichtung hat Papst Franziskus hervorgehoben, dass die Katholische Kirche vor allem im Dialog mit den Orthodoxen Kirchen die Möglichkeit hat, „etwas mehr über die Bedeutung der bischöflichen Kollegialität und ihre Erfahrung der Synodalität zu lernen“<sup>16</sup>. Die Katholische Kirche wird deshalb eingestehen müssen, dass sie in ihrem Leben und in ihren ekklesialen Strukturen noch nicht jenes Mass an Synodalität entwickelt hat, das theologisch möglich und notwendig wäre. In dieser selbstkritischen Erkenntnis besteht eine wichtige Voraussetzung, um überzeugend dartun zu können, dass sich das synodale und das primatiale Prinzip einander keineswegs ausschliessen, sondern sich wechselseitig fordern und fördern. Eine glaubwürdige Verbindung des primat-hierarchischen mit dem synodal-communialen Prinzip wird auf Seiten der Katholischen Kirche eine wesentliche Hilfe für das weitere ökumenische Gespräch sein. In der notwendigen Verstärkung der Synodalität im Leben der Katholischen Kirche muss man zweifellos ihren wichtigsten Beitrag für die Anerkennung des Primats des Bischofs von Rom in der Ökumene erblicken.

Auf der anderen Seite könnten die Orthodoxen und Protestantischen Kirchen im ökumenischen Dialog lernen, dass ein Primat auch auf der universalen Ebene der Kirche nicht nur möglich und theologisch legitim, sondern auch notwendig ist, und dass es sich von daher nahe legt, auch in ökumenischer Sicht über ein Amt der Einheit auf der universalen Ebene nachzudenken. Im ökumenischen Dialog mit den Orthodoxen Kirchen kann dabei von der Tatsache ausgegangen werden, dass sie selbst eine Rangordnung der Apostolischen Sitze in der Reihenfolge Rom, Konstantinopel, Alexandrien, Antiochien und Jerusalem kennen und deshalb anerkennen, dass Rom den ersten Sitz inne hat und dem Bischof von Rom ein Ehrenprimat zukommt. Die entscheidende Frage, die es im ökumenischen Dialog mit den Orthodoxen Kirchen zu klären gilt, besteht dabei darin, welche Sendung und welche Vorrechte in der wieder gefundenen Einheit der Kirche in Ost und West dem Bischof von Rom zukommen werden.

Als sehr viel schwieriger stellt sich die Frage des Primats des Bischofs von Rom im ökumenischen Dialog mit den aus der Reformation hervorgegangenen Kirchen dar. Denn mit der Reformation ist ein anderer Typ des Kircheseins wirksam geworden, der durch eine eindeutige Fokussierung des Kirchenverständnisses auf die Gemeinde charakterisiert ist. Sie impliziert, dass die universale Dimension der Kirche wenig zum Tragen kommt, so dass sich die Frage nach einem Amt der Einheit auf der universalen Ebene der Kirche im Grunde nicht stellt. Um den ökumenischen Dialog über eine mögliche Anerkennung des Papstamtes des Bischofs von Rom voranzubringen, braucht es in erster Linie eine Klärung des Kirchenverständnisses, insbesondere des Verhältnisses zwischen Ortskirche und Universalkirche, und den glaubwürdigen theologischen Aufweis, dass ein Primat die synodale Dimension, die für die Protestantischen Kirchen charakteristisch ist, nicht in Frage stellt, sondern zu stärken vermag.

---

15. Franziskus, *Evangelii gaudium*, Nr. 246.

16. Ebd.

#### 4. Ökumenische Verständigung über das Papstamt in katholischer Sicht

Von daher zeigt sich nochmals, dass der wesentliche Beitrag der Katholischen Kirche zu einer ökumenischen Verständigung über das Papstamt in der Revitalisierung der Synodalität besteht. Für Papst Franziskus ist es evident, dass das katholische Engagement, eine synodale Kirche aufzubauen, „reich an Auswirkungen auf die Ökumene“ ist und auch eine neue Sicht über das Papstamt ermöglicht: „Ich bin überzeugt, dass in einer synodalen Kirche auch die Ausübung des petrinen Primats besser geklärt werden kann. Der Papst steht nicht allein über der Kirche, sondern er steht in ihr als Getaufte unter den Getauften, im Bischofskollegium als Bischof unter den Bischöfen und ist – als Nachfolger des Apostels Petrus – zugleich berufen, die Kirche von Rom zu leiten, die in der Liebe allen Kirchen vorsteht.“<sup>17</sup>

Damit ist das entscheidende Stichwort genannt, wie der Primat des Bischofs von Rom in der Katholischen Kirche zu verstehen ist und wie er bereits von Ignatius von Antiochien in seinem Brief an die Römer im Jahre 110 zum Ausdruck gebracht worden ist, indem er die Kirche von Rom mit der Kathedra ihres Bischofs als jene Kirche gewürdigt hat, die den „Vorsitz in der Liebe“ inne hat. Dabei gilt es zu bedenken, dass in der frühen Kirche das Wort „Liebe – agape“ auch und besonders das Geheimnis der Eucharistie bezeichnet, in der die Liebe Christi zu seiner Kirche intensiv erfahren wird. Damit wird sichtbar, dass der Primat des Bischofs von Rom nicht eine allein juristische Größe darstellt, sondern letztlich nur von der Eucharistie her zu verstehen ist. Denn die Kirche, die sich als weltweites Netz von Eucharistiegemeinschaften versteht, braucht auch auf der universalen Ebene einen vollmächtigen Dienst an der Einheit. Der Bischof von Rom nimmt deshalb seine besondere Verantwortung vor allem dadurch wahr, dass er den „Vorsitz in der Liebe“ lebt und in der Eucharistie aller Ortskirchen auf der ganzen Welt zu einer universalen Kirche verbindet und damit Kirche als *Communio ecclesiarum* und als *Communio ecclesiae* erfahrbar werden lässt.

Den Vorsitz in der Liebe ausüben bedeutet – mit den tiefen Worten von Papst Benedikt XVI. – „die Menschen in eine eucharistische Umarmung – in die Umarmung Christi – hineinziehen, die jede Schranke und jede Fremdheit überwindet und aus den mannigfachen Verschiedenheiten die Gemeinschaft bildet“<sup>18</sup>. Der Dienst des Bischofs von Rom ist folglich als Primat der Liebe im eucharistischen Sinn zu verstehen, der in der Kirche um eine Einheit besorgt ist, die eucharistische Gemeinschaft ermöglicht und schützt und glaubwürdig und wirksam verhindert, dass ein Altar gegen einen anderen Altar gestellt wird, wie dies im Großen Papst-Schisma im späten Mittelalter in eklatanter Weise zu Tage getreten ist. Der Primat des Bischofs von Rom steht im Dienst der eucharistischen Einheit der Kirche und trägt dafür Sorge, dass die Kirche immer wieder von der Eucharistie her Mass nimmt, und er erweist sich in dieser Weise als Bindeglied der Katholizität der Kirche.

Den Petrusdienst des Bischofs von Rom von der Eucharistie her zu verstehen, dazu ist die Kirche von Konstanz in besonderer Weise berufen, der die Ehre zukommt, den Heiligen Konrad als Patron zu haben. Er wird zumeist mit einem Kelch

---

17. Franziskus, Ansprache bei der 50-Jahr-Feier der Errichtung der Bischofssynode am 17. Oktober 2015.

18. Benedikt XVI., Predigt in der Eucharistiefeier mit den neuen Kardinälen am 19. Februar 2012.

in der Hand und mit einer Spinne darüber dargestellt. Damit wird die Legende bildlich wiedergegeben, der gemäss der Heilige Konrad bei einem Pontifikalamt eine in den konsekrierten Wein gefallene giftige Spinne ohne Bedenken mit getrunken hat. Selbst wenn es sich dabei um eine Legende handelt, kommt mit ihr doch die eindrückliche Ehrfurcht des Heiligen Konrad vor dem Geheimnis der Eucharistie zum Ausdruck, von der her er sein Bistum in der keineswegs leichten Zeit seines Episkopats geleitet hat.

Wird der Petrusdienst des Bischofs von Rom wie aller Bischöfe von der Eucharistie her verstanden, wird auch einsehbar, dass sein Vorsitz in der Liebe und sein Vorsitz in der Lehre des Glaubens unlösbar zusammengehören. Auf der einen Seite ist der Vorsitz im Glauben an den Vorsitz in der Liebe gebunden. Der Vorsitz des Bischofs von Rom im Glauben muss Vorsitz in der Liebe sein. Denn die Lehre der Kirche vermag die Menschen nur zu erreichen, wenn sie zur Liebe führt. Auf der anderen Seite gründet die Liebe, der der Bischof von Rom in besonderer Weise zu dienen hat, im Glauben. Denn der Vorsitz in der Liebe besteht in erster Linie in der Verpflichtung zum Gehorsam gegenüber dem Willen Gottes. Der Primat des Bischofs von Rom ist ein Primat des Glaubensgehorsams gegenüber dem Evangelium, wie dies die Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre im Jahre 1998 und damit unter dem Vorsitz des damaligen Kardinal Joseph Ratzinger in ihren Erwägungen über den „Primat des Nachfolgers Petris im Geheimnis der Kirche“ ausgesprochen hat: „Der römische Bischof steht – wie alle Gläubigen – unter dem Worte Gottes und unter dem katholischen Glauben. Er ist Garant für den Gehorsam der Kirche und in diesem Sinn *servus servorum*. Er entscheidet nicht nach eigener Willkür, sondern ist Stimme für den Willen des Herrn, der zum Menschen in der von der Überlieferung gelebten und interpretierten Schrift spricht. Mit anderen Worten: Die *episkope* des Primats hat die Grenzen, die aus dem Gesetz Gottes und der in der Offenbarung enthaltenen, unantastbaren göttlichen Stiftung der Kirche hervorgehen.“<sup>19</sup>

Der Bischof von Rom, dessen primatiale Aufgabe darin besteht, die Kirche zum Gehorsam gegenüber dem Wort Gottes zu verpflichten, ist berufen, sich selbst als der exemplarisch Gehorsame zu erweisen. Er kann sich deshalb nicht im Sinne einer Monarchie politischer Art als Herrscher verstehen, der sich nur nach seinem Willen richten würde und in Abhängigkeit von weltlichen Monarchen steht. Auch dies ist eine bleibende Lektion aus der Zeit des Konstanzer Konzils. Der Bischof von Rom kann seinen Dienst aber auch nicht auf einen blossen Ehrevorrang beschränken. Sein Primat ist vielmehr letztverbindlicher Dienst am Glauben und glaubwürdiger Dienst an der Liebe und so Dienst an der Einheit der Kirche und auch Dienst an der Einheit der Christen. In diesem Sinn hat Papst Franziskus während seines Besuchs beim Ökumenischen Patriarchen Bartholomaios I. in Konstantinopel im Jahre 2015 versichert, „dass die katholische Kirche, um das ersehnte Ziel der vollen Einheit zu erreichen, nicht beabsichtigt, irgendeine Forderung aufzuerlegen als die, den gemeinsamen Glauben zu bekennen, und dass wir bereit sind, im Licht der Lehre der Schrift und der Erfahrung des ersten Jahrtausends gemeinsam die Bedingungen zu suchen, um mit diesen die notwendige Einheit der Kirche unter den gegenwärtigen

---

19. Il primato del Successore di Pietro nel Mistero della Chiesa. Considerazioni della Congregazione per la Dottrina della fede, in: Documenti e Studi 19 (Città del Vaticano 2002) 9-21, Nr. 7.

Umständen zu gewährleisten: das Einzige, was die katholische Kirche wünscht, und ich als Bischof von Rom, <der Kirche, die den Vorsitz in der Liebe führt“, anstrebe, ist die Gemeinschaft mit den Orthodoxen Kirchen.“<sup>20</sup> Dasselbe Ziel gilt natürlich auch im Blick auf die Protestantischen Kirchen und kirchlichen Gemeinschaften.

Unter diesen Voraussetzungen bestehen Hoffnung und Aussicht auf einen ökumenischen Konsens über das Papstamt, so dass der Primat des Bischofs von Rom ganz im Dienst an der einen und ungeteilten Kirche in Ost und West stehen könnte. Das Papstamt wäre dann nicht mehr das „schwerwiegendste Hindernis auf dem Weg des Ökumenismus“, sondern Promotor der ökumenischen Verständigung und Garant der Einheit der Kirche. Auch aus diesem Grund versteht die Katholische Kirche das Papstamt als ein grosses Geschenk, das sie von Christus erhalten hat, ein Geschenk freilich, das sie nicht für sich behalten, sondern in ökumenischer Gemeinschaft mit der ganzen Christenheit teilen möchte. Es ist deshalb ein schönes Zeichen, dass das 600-jährige Jubiläum der Papstwahl in Konstanz in ökumenischer Gemeinschaft gefeiert wird und nach diesem Festakt in einen ökumenischen Festgottesdienst im Konstanzer Münster einmündet, in dem wir darum beten wollen, dass sich der Wille unseres gemeinsamen Herrn erfüllt, dass alle eins sein sollen, „damit die Welt erkennt, dass du mich gesandt hast und die Meinen ebenso geliebt hast wie mich“ (Joh 17. 23).

---

20. Franziskus, Ansprache in der Patriarchatskirche St. Georg, Istanbul am 30. November 2014.

**Per il decimo anniversario dell'opera "Gesù di Nazaret" di Benedetto XVI,  
Auditorium Celestino V, Campobasso, 27 novembre 2017**

*Sinfonia di amore e verità nella libertà. Joseph Ratzinger/Benedetto XVI testimone grato  
della fede pasquale*

### **1. Cammino cristiano dal Sabato Santo verso la Pasqua**

Un detto popolare dice che bisogna celebrare le feste quando cadono. A volte cadono addirittura in una data particolarmente appropriata e significativa. Questo vale in modo particolare per il novantesimo compleanno del nostro Papa emerito Benedetto XVI che quest'anno coincide con il giorno di Pasqua. Si tratta di una bella coincidenza soprattutto perché con l'avvenimento pasquale della Risurrezione di Gesù Cristo stanno o cadono la fede cristiana e il suo annuncio, come Papa Benedetto XVI con particolare insistenza sottolinea nel suo libro su Gesù di Nazareth: «Gesù è esistito soltanto nel passato o *esiste* invece anche nel presente? L'una o l'altra risposta dipende dalla Risurrezione. Nel rispondere "sì" oppure "no" a quella domanda, non ci si pronuncia su di un singolo avvenimento accanto ad altri; ci si pronuncia sulla figura di Gesù come tale»<sup>1</sup>. La felice coincidenza del novantesimo compleanno con la festa della Risurrezione del Signore, la Festa di tutte le feste cristiane, ci riporta al contempo al primo giorno di vita di Joseph Ratzinger. Il giorno della sua nascita, il 16 aprile del 1927 era Sabato Santo, al mattino del quale egli fu subito battezzato con l'acqua pasquale appena benedetta. Joseph Ratzinger più tardi, in uno sguardo retrospettivo sulla sua vita, ha interpretato alla luce della fede il fatto di essere stato condotto, subito dopo la sua nascita, alla sua rinascita in Cristo con la nuova acqua della vita pasquale: «Personalmente sono sempre stato grato – scriverà – per il fatto che, in questo modo, la mia vita sia stata fin dall'inizio immersa nel mistero pasquale, dal momento che non poteva che essere un segno di benedizione»<sup>2</sup>.

In questo modo si palesano al nostro sguardo spirituale due parole chiave che attraversano tutta la vita del cristiano e del teologo, del vescovo e del cardinale, del Papa e del Pontefice emerito: gratitudine e benedizione. Esse rappresentano le articolazioni più evidenti e credibili della vita cristiana nel mistero della Pasqua. Papa Benedetto XVI, che nacque e fu battezzato di Sabato Santo, nell'ouverture di Pasqua, sta di fronte a noi come testimone grato della fede pasquale. Fede che peraltro bisogna annunciare in un mondo in cui spesso si può percepire così poco della Pasqua e della vittoria divina della vita sulla morte e dell'amore sull'odio. Papa Benedetto XVI, nella sua predicazione e nella sua teologia, è stato sempre consapevole anche di questo sfondo oscuro della fede pasquale nel mondo. Ricordando la sua nascita e il suo battesimo egli ha espressamente sottolineato come non sia stato battezzato la Domenica di Pasqua ma il Sabato Santo e che proprio questo giorno caratterizza nel modo più profondo la natura dell'esistenza umana, «che ancora attende la Pasqua, non è ancora nella luce piena, ma fiduciosa si avvia verso di essa»<sup>3</sup>.

---

1. J. Ratzinger, *Gesù di Nazaret. La figura e il messaggio*, vol. 6/1 della *Opera omnia*, Città del Vaticano 2013, 661.

2. J. Ratzinger, *La mia vita. Ricordi (1927-1977)*, Cinisello Balsamo 1997, 6.

3. *Ibid.*

L'esistenza cristiana si compie nel pellegrinaggio terreno, nel camminare dal Sabato Santo verso la Pasqua. Infatti nella storia della salvezza è sempre al contempo Domenica di Pasqua e Sabato Santo. E questo "al contempo" porta al cuore delle convinzioni di fede e del pensiero teologico di Papa Benedetto XVI<sup>4</sup>, che consiste nella triade verità, amore e libertà.

## 2. Il legame tra verità e amore nella libertà

«Solo se la verità e l'amore sono in accordo, l'uomo può essere felice: solo la verità rende liberi»<sup>5</sup>. Con queste parole nette, Joseph Ratzinger ha condensato in una formula il nucleo del suo pensiero teologico. In questo modo egli tiene unito quel che è inscindibilmente legato, ma che la mentalità odierna spesso separa quando considera amore e verità come contrapposti, collegando la libertà unicamente all'amore, ma non alla verità. E invece, per Papa Benedetto XVI, amore e verità hanno così bisogno l'uno dell'altra e si nutrono talmente l'uno dell'altra che egli può affermare: «L'amore, senza la verità, diviene cieco e si trasforma in caricatura di se stesso – la verità senza l'amore diviene crudele e perde la sua stessa natura»<sup>6</sup>. Agli occhi di Benedetto XVI, il cristianesimo effettivamente è la religione dell'amore non soltanto per la sua origine ma anche nella sua natura più profonda. Il cristianesimo deriva dall'amore di Dio, il quale ci ama e conduce noi uomini all'amore, che noi ridoniamo a Dio e che di conseguenza ci diamo reciprocamente. Questo amore, tuttavia, non è qualcosa di comodo e a buon mercato, ma esige che noi ci apriamo anche alla sua verità, che è impegnativa. Qui di seguito vorrei continuare a riflettere su quest'intimo legame tra amore e verità nel pensiero teologico di Joseph Ratzinger.

### a) Servizio alla verità della fede

Quando, nel 1977, l'allora professore di Teologia a Regensburg Joseph Ratzinger fu consacrato arcivescovo di Monaco e Frisinga, scelse come motto per il suo ministero episcopale le parole tratte dalla terza lettera di Giovanni (versetto 8): «Noi dobbiamo perciò accogliere tali persone per cooperare alla diffusione della verità»<sup>7</sup>. In questo modo egli non ha fatto altro che esprimere il modo in cui concepiva la sua vocazione di teologo: essere intellettualmente a servizio della verità che Dio ha rivelato nella sua storia con l'umanità.

L'idea-guida dell'essere cooperatore della verità rappresenta il filo rosso della vita e dell'opera di Joseph Ratzinger come cristiano e come teologo, come vescovo e come Papa; e testimonia l'intima e profonda continuità che attraversa l'intera sua biografia evidenziata a ragione da Sigrified Wiedenhofer nella sua approfondita

---

4. Cfr. K. Koch, *Il mistero del granello di senape. Fondamenti del pensiero teologico di Benedetto XVI*, Torino 2012.

5. J. Ratzinger, *Glaube als Vertrauen und Freude – Evangelium*, in Idem., *Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine der Fundamentaltheologie*, München 1982, 78-87, qui 84 (trad. it. Idem, *Gesù di Nazaret. Scritti di cristologia*, vol 6/2, Città del Vaticano 2015, 391).

6. J. Ratzinger, *Gottes Wort ist niemands Knecht. Zum Wesen christlicher Existenz*; Predigt bei einem Gottesdienst am Hochfest des Hl. Korbinian im Freisinger Mariendom am 18. November 1981, München 1981, 7.

7. Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Vorwort*, in Idem, *Mitarbeiter der Wahrheit. Gedanken für jeden Tag*, München 1979.

esposizione della teologia di Joseph Ratzinger: «Tra le encicliche che scrisse da Papa e le sue prime interpretazioni teologiche dei contenuti centrali della fede cristiana non sussiste alcuna differenza in termini di principio, né nella forma né nel contenuto»<sup>8</sup>. Da un lato, Joseph Ratzinger ha inteso il suo pensiero teologico sempre e prioritariamente come un “pensare insieme a tutta la Chiesa”, dunque concependolo – in questo senso elementare – come servizio ecclesiale alla verità della fede della Chiesa oggettivamente data. Dall’altro, la chiamata all’ufficio di vescovo, di Prefetto della Congregazione per la Dottrina della fede e di Papa non ha mai coinciso in lui con l’abbandono della teologia. La convinzione di essere stato chiamato in primo luogo a essere teologo, e con ciò servitore della verità, ha rappresentato una responsabilità alla quale egli è rimasto fedele anche da Papa. In un mondo come quello di oggi nel quale è grande il pericolo che l’uomo, a fronte della grandezza del suo sapere e delle sue capacità, capiti di fronte alla questione della verità, egli ha visto e concepito la profonda natura del suo servizio di pastore nel «mantenere desta la sensibilità per la verità; invitare sempre di nuovo la ragione a mettersi alla ricerca del vero, del bene, di Dio e, su questo cammino, sollecitarla a scorgere le utili luci sorte lungo la storia della fede cristiana, e a percepire così Gesù Cristo come la luce che illumina la storia e aiuta a trovare la via verso il futuro»<sup>9</sup>.

Perciò, il ministero pastorale del Papa consiste nel servizio delegato di insegnamento della verità della fede e in particolar modo comporta un impegno a servizio dell’obbedienza alla fede, come Papa Benedetto XVI affermò nella Basilica Lateranense in occasione della presa di possesso della Cathedra di vescovo di Roma. Questa Cathedra per lui è simbolo di quella potestà d’insegnamento che non può essere altro che “potestà dell’obbedienza e del servizio” affinché la Parola di Dio, e perciò la verità, possa risplendere nel mondo e indicare agli uomini la strada della vita. Consistendo, la missione del vescovo di Roma, nel vincolare tutta la Chiesa all’obbedienza verso la Parola di Dio e nel dare prova di sé come di colui che è obbediente in modo esemplare, il suo servizio deve garantire l’obbedienza a Cristo e alla Sua verità; cosa che, con parole di Benedetto XVI, significa che il Papa «non deve proclamare le proprie idee, bensì – di fronte a tutti i tentativi di adattamento e di annacquamento, come di fronte a ogni opportunismo – vincolare costantemente se stesso e la Chiesa all’obbedienza verso la Parola di Dio»<sup>10</sup>.

La più profonda ragione dell’obbedienza della fede, che deve essere pretesa tanto dal teologo quanto dal Papa, agli occhi di Joseph Ratzinger risiede nel fatto che la verità – al cui servizio stanno sia il teologo sia il Papa – a loro è data. Nella teologia, la Parola di Dio precede sempre il pensiero. Il pensiero teologico è, nel senso migliore del termine, pensiero riflesso e riflessivo. La teologia cristiana è il riflettere disciplinato su quanto Dio ha precedentemente pensato e detto a noi, e in questo senso essa parte da una risposta che non ha trovato o addirittura inventato da sé, ma che è molto più grande del proprio pensare e a cui deve commisurarsi – come Papa Benedetto ha affermato in un discorso sull’eredità spirituale e intellettuale del grande teologo cattolico

---

8. S. Wiedenhofer, *Die Theologie Joseph Ratzingers / Benedikts XVI. Ein Blick auf das Ganze* (= Ratzinger-Studien, Band 10), Regensburg 2016, 27.

9. Benedetto XVI, Testo dell’allocuzione che il Santo Padre *Benedetto XVI* avrebbe pronunciato nel corso della Visita all’Università degli Studi “*La Sapienza*” di Roma il 17 gennaio 2008.

10. Benedetto XVI, Omelia in occasione della Celebrazione eucaristica e della presa di possesso della Cattedra di Vescovo di Roma, Basilica Lateranense, il 7 maggio 2005.

Romano Guardini: «Non è il nostro pensare il principio che stabilisce il metro di misura, ma Dio, che supera il nostro metro di misura e non può essere ridotto ad alcuna entità creata da noi. Dio rivela se stesso come la verità, ma essa non è astratta, bensì si trova nel concreto-vivente, nella figura di Gesù Cristo in ultima analisi»<sup>11</sup>.

Da questo precedere, la Parola di Dio, il proprio pensiero, derivano due conseguenze che sono di fondamentale importanza per il pensiero teologico di Joseph Ratzinger. Dal momento che la Parola di Dio precede la teologia cristiana e insieme la rende possibile, per sua natura presuppone in primo luogo un'auctoritas, e più precisamente quell'autorità della verità che, nella fede cristiana, porta il nome di "Rivelazione". La teologia cristiana nel suo nucleo essenziale è pensare la Rivelazione di Dio, un pensare che non trova esso stesso i propri contenuti ma li riceve dalla Rivelazione, «per poi comprenderli nel profondo rapporto che li lega e nella loro ragionevolezza»<sup>12</sup>. La teologia cristiana, nel suo senso più elementare, è teologia della Rivelazione<sup>13</sup>; e il concetto di Rivelazione è come il cono di luce nel quale tutte le altre realtà teologicamente significative devono essere osservate e comprese. A questo riguardo, nel pensiero di Joseph Ratzinger, il concetto di Rivelazione di Dio indica in primo luogo l'atto con il quale Dio si mostra all'uomo e si promette a lui come amore, e non il risultato oggettivizzato di questo atto.

A partire da qui emerge anche la seconda conseguenza che deriva dal precedere, la Parola di Dio, il proprio pensiero. Essa consiste nel fatto che la prima risposta alla Rivelazione di Dio non è la teologia, ma la fede e che – di conseguenza – la teologia intende correttamente se stessa solo se si compie nel servizio della fede. La verità che la teologia cristiana cerca di riconoscere è accessibile per noi solo nella fede. La fede è «un nuovo inizio del pensiero a noi donato, che non possiamo noi stessi porre oppure sostituire»<sup>14</sup>. Di conseguenza, misura e criterio della fede e del suo annuncio non può essere la teologia; è la fede vissuta e meditata, al contrario, che deve rappresentare la misura e il criterio della teologia.

È sulla base di questo primato della fede sulla teologia che Joseph Ratzinger, da teologo, da vescovo e da papa, si è sempre battuto per la difesa della fede dei semplici, vedendo la particolare responsabilità del magistero ecclesiale di essere avvocato della fede del Popolo di Dio, più esattamente di «incarnare la voce della fede semplice e delle sue semplici convinzioni originarie». In questo lottare per la comune fede battesimale Joseph Ratzinger scorge addirittura una «funzione democratica» dei vescovi<sup>15</sup>: «Non sono gli intellettuali il metro di misura dei semplici, ma i semplici quello degli intellettuali. Non sono le interpretazioni intellettuali il metro di misura della

---

11. Discorso del Santo Padre Benedetto XVI in occasione del Convegno promosso dalla Fondazione "Romano Guardini" di Berlino sul tema: "Eredità spirituale e intellettuale di Romano Guardini", il 29 ottobre 2010.

12. J. Ratzinger, *Glaube, Philosophie und Theologie*, in Idem, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie. Versuche zu ihrer Ortsbestimmung im Disput der Gegenwart*, Einsiedeln 1993, 11-25, qui 14.

13. Cfr. K. Koch, *Offenbarung der Liebe Gottes und Leben der Liebe in der Glaubensgemeinschaft der Kirche*, in Idem, *Bund zwischen Liebe und Vernunft. Das theologische Erbe von Papst Benedikt XVI*, Freiburg i. Br. 2016, 18-53.

14. J. Ratzinger, *Vom geistlichen Grund und vom kirchlichen Ort der Theologie*, in Idem, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie*, Einsiedeln 1993, 39-62, qui 48.

15. J. Ratzinger, *Kirche und wissenschaftliche Theologie*, in Idem, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie*, München 1982, 339-348, qui 348.

professione di fede battesimale, ma è la professione di fede battesimale, nella sua semplice letteralità, il metro di misura della teologia»<sup>16</sup>.

Dietro questo schierarsi a favore della comune fede battesimale si cela non un disprezzo del semplice fedele ma, al contrario, una visione positiva dell'uomo, nel senso che Benedetto XVI è convinto che l'uomo è capace di conoscere e riconoscere la verità. Con sant'Agostino – la cui riflessione teologica è mossa dalla domanda di fondo su che cosa l'uomo desideri più fortemente se non la verità («Quid enim fortius desiderat anima quam veritatem?»<sup>17</sup>) –, Joseph Ratzinger considera l'uomo non solo capace di verità, ma anche e soprattutto un essere vivente che ha bisogno della verità, la cui aspirazione più profonda è volta alla conoscenza della verità.

Con la parola verità si esprime il centro dell'interesse di Joseph Ratzinger teologo, predicatore e maestro della fede. L'opera dell'intera sua vita ruota intorno al carattere donato e riconoscibile della verità. Infatti appartiene alla natura della fede cristiana che essa vi cerchi la sua propria ragione, la ragionevolezza di tutto il reale e la ragione stessa; e che perciò avanzi la pretesa di essere vera. Chi fa propria questa pretesa elementare – e in questo consiste il peculiare compito della teologia cristiana – dovrà egli stesso avere a cuore e mettere al centro la credibilità della verità e la ragionevolezza della fede, e dunque la profondissima correlazione tra fede e ragione. Il dialogo tra fede e ragione è stato particolarmente a cuore al teologo Joseph Ratzinger e a Papa Benedetto XVI.<sup>18</sup> Perché egli è profondamente convinto che ambedue dipendono l'una dall'altra e che soltanto nel loro dialogo reciproco possono essere superate le malattie della fede e le patologie della ragione. Perché senza la ragione, la fede rischia di occultare la sua verità e di diventare fondamentalista; esattamente come, al contrario, la ragione senza la fede rischia di diventare unilaterale e unidimensionale.

*b) Il messaggio cristiano di Dio come logos e amore*

Papa Benedetto XVI attribuisce così tanta importanza al dialogo critico tra fede e ragione perché Dio stesso è logos. Nella concezione cristiana della fede, Dio come logos non va inteso semplicemente come il fondamento di tutte le cose nel senso di una ragione matematica, ma anche e soprattutto come amore creatore con il quale Egli stesso si fa riconoscere dall'uomo, rivolgendosi e donandosi a lui. La fede cristiana ci presenta Dio come fondamento e origine creatrice di tutta la realtà e al contempo come Colui che ama con tutta la passione propria di un vero amore: Dio è logos e caritas, ragione creatrice e amore. In questo sta la specificità e la bellezza unica della fede cristiana, che Papa Benedetto XVI sintetizza in un'unica frase: «il cristianesimo è grande perché l'amore è grande»<sup>19</sup>.

In questo modo si è toccato senza dubbio il tema decisivo e quanto mai vitale di Joseph Ratzinger teologo e annunciatore della Parola, che egli già ampiamente

---

16. J. Ratzinger, Was ist Freiheit des Glaubens? Silvesterpredigt 1979, in Idem, Zeitfragen und christlicher Glaube, Würzburg 1982, 7-27, qui 21.

17. Sant'Agostino, Commento al Vangelo di Giovanni 26,5.

18. Cfr. G. Cottini, L'Avvenimento della conoscenza. Un itinerario tra i discorsi di Benedetto XVI al mondo della cultura, dell'Università, della scienza. Con un'antologia di testi del Papa, Milano 2011.

19. J. Ratzinger, *Gott und die Welt. Glauben und Leben in unserer Zeit*. Ein Gespräch mit Peter Seewald, Stuttgart 2000, 190.

sviluppa in una delle sue prime opere, Introduzione al cristianesimo, e che poi si ritrova nella sua prima enciclica sull'amore cristiano, *Deus caritas est*, nella quale Papa Benedetto XVI rappresenta l'amore come l'autentico centro del cristianesimo, dell'idea cristiana di Dio come di un Dio in relazione con se stesso e dunque anche con l'uomo, insieme alla concezione dell'uomo come immagine di Dio che da essa deriva.

Dio è logos e amore, e questo nell'unità inscindibile della Rivelazione. Solo dove l'amore è identico alla verità e la verità è legata all'amore, esso si rivela come amore vero e amore per la verità. Quest'unità della Rivelazione di verità e amore si manifesta nel modo più chiaro nel mistero di Gesù Cristo, nel quale la verità di Dio risplende definitivamente e l'amore di Dio per noi uomini diviene carne. Infatti l'originario fondamento divino di tutto ciò che esiste nell'uomo Gesù di Nazareth si è mostrato concretamente, si è donato come amore e ha rivelato il suo vero volto. Gesù Cristo è «il volto di Dio per noi»<sup>20</sup>, con il quale Dio amorevolmente si volge al nostro volto umano così che possa avvenire la vera comunicazione tra Dio e uomo, tra cielo e terra: «Il Figlio divenuto carne è la “comunione” tra Dio e l'uomo»<sup>21</sup>.

Cristo inaugura la possibilità di questa comunicazione nient'altro che nella rappresentanza vicaria, in quanto egli, con la sua morte vicaria di amore, ha superato la morte di peccato dell'uomo e, con questo meraviglioso scambio di posto, ha operato la salvezza dell'uomo. Sulla croce, Gesù ha caricato su di sé la forza di gravità del peccato, a favore di noi uomini e per la nostra redenzione. Per questo l'amore di Dio si mostra nel modo più diretto e concreto sulla croce di Gesù, che rappresenta la più radicale conseguenza dell'amore di Dio per noi uomini. Sulla croce, Gesù Cristo, il Buon Pastore degli uomini, è diventato egli stesso agnello e si è messo dalla parte degli agnelli maltrattati, redimendoli: «Dio viene come agnello; è questa la redenzione del mondo»<sup>22</sup>. Nella croce di Gesù diviene chiaro che l'amore – se veramente deve redimere – non può darsi senza il sacrificio, senza dare perciò la propria vita a favore dell'altro. La Croce è il segno più evidente ed efficace che Dio non si accontenta di dichiarazioni d'amore a parole verso noi uomini, ma che ha pagato egli stesso un alto prezzo per il suo amore: sulla Croce ha versato il sangue del suo cuore per noi uomini e ci ha accolto definitivamente.

Quel che vale per la redenzione dell'uomo, a maggior ragione va affermato per il suo compimento escatologico. Infatti l'amore illimitato e infinito di Dio vuole l'eternità per ogni uomo. La fede cristiana dona a noi uomini questa certezza, se viviamo in quella grande speranza che solo Dio può essere, Lui che può anche donarci quel che da soli non siamo capaci di darci, e cioè la vita eterna. Papa Benedetto XVI ha descritto questa grande speranza con parole incisive: «Io sono definitivamente amato e qualunque cosa accada – io sono atteso da questo Amore»<sup>23</sup>. Si evidenzia così che l'uomo non può in nessun modo conquistare la vita eterna da sé, ma che essa è un dono del Dio che ama. L'immortalità non fa parte dell'uomo stesso e nemmeno è

---

20. J. Ratzinger, «Wer mich gesehen hat, hat den Vater gesehen» (Gv 19, 4). *Das Antlitz Christi in der Heiligen Schrift*, in Idem, *Unterwegs zu Jesus Christus*, Augsburg 2003, 11-30, qui 26.

21. J. Ratzinger, *Schauen auf den Durchbohrten. Versuche zu einer spirituellen Christologie*, Einsiedeln 1984, 74-75.

22. J. Ratzinger, *Freude in Christus*, in: Idem, *Annunciatori della Parola e servitori della vostra gioia. Teologia e spiritualità del sacramento dell'Ordine*, vol. XII della *Opera omnia*, Città del Vaticano 2013, 717.

23. Benedetto XVI, *Spe salvi* 3.

semplicemente un dato di fatto naturale, ma si fonda sulla relazione con chi è eterno e dona la vita eterna. La speranza cristiana di vita eterna presenta un carattere dialogico, che segna in modo speciale la riflessione escatologica di Joseph Ratzinger<sup>24</sup>, rivelandosi segno inconfondibile di essa: «L'uomo non può più andare a fondo, *perché* è conosciuto e amato da Dio. Se ogni amore vuole l'eternità, l'amore di Dio non solo la vuole, ma la opera, ed è eternità esso stesso»<sup>25</sup>.

c) *Testimone della libertà liberata nella verità e nell'amore*

Dio è amore: questa è la verità centrale della fede cristiana; e solo questa verità rende liberi. Siamo così giunti alla terza parola chiave del pensiero teologico di Joseph Ratzinger: la libertà.<sup>26</sup> Questa parola costituisce, da un lato, la dignità dell'uomo, dall'altro è soggetta al pericolo di essere abusata soprattutto laddove la libertà si pone contro la verità sull'uomo e non è collegata alla verità. Per questo la libertà umana, specialmente nella modernità, è segnata da quell'ambivalenza<sup>27</sup> che Papa Benedetto XVI ha espresso in modo magistrale: «La libertà, potremmo dire, è un trampolino di lancio per tuffarsi nel mare infinito della bontà divina, ma può diventare anche un piano inclinato sul quale scivolare verso l'abisso del peccato e del male e perdere così anche la libertà e la nostra dignità»<sup>28</sup>.

Alla base dell'analisi di quest'ambivalenza sta il convincimento di Papa Benedetto XVI che l'uomo non ha di per sé sic et simpliciter la libertà e non è libero per definizione, ma che è chiamato alla libertà, e perciò ha bisogno di essere liberato per avere la sua libertà. Poiché l'uomo di continuo è esposto alla tentazione di ricadere al di qua della sua chiamata alla libertà e di abusarne in modo “carnale”, ha sempre bisogno di essere liberato dalla sua mancanza di libertà; e questo attraverso l'incontro personale con Dio quale fondamento assoluto della libertà. Infatti la libertà può crescere solo nell'incontro con la libertà, e con quella assoluta libertà di Dio che non è affatto in concorrenza, ma al contrario garante della libertà umana. L'uomo che si mette totalmente nelle mani di Dio non perde affatto la sua libertà, come incisivamente sottolinea Papa Benedetto XVI: «L'uomo che si abbandona totalmente nelle mani di Dio non diventa un burattino di Dio, un noioso essere che annuisce». Al contrario: «Solo l'uomo che si affida totalmente a Dio trova la vera libertà, la vastità grande e creativa della libertà del bene»<sup>29</sup>.

---

24. Cfr. G. Nachtwei, *Dialogische Unsterblichkeit. Eine Untersuchung zu Joseph Ratzingers Eschatologie und Theologie* (Leipzig 1986); Idem (a cura di), *Hoffnung auf Vollendung. Zur Eschatologie von Joseph Ratzinger* (= Ratzinger-Studien Band 8, Regensburg 2015).

25. J. Ratzinger - Benedetto XVI, *Schwierigkeiten mit dem Apostolicum. Höllenfahrt – Himmelfahrt – Auferstehung des Fleisches*, in Idem, *Grundsatzreden aus fünf Jahrzehnten*, Regensburg 2005, 43-60, qui 55.

26. Cfr. K. Koch, *La libertà redenta nell'amore. Fede e libertà secondo Benedetto XVI*, in: Idem, *Il mistero del granello di senape. Fondamenti del pensiero teologico di Benedetto XVI*, Torino 2012, 91-126,

27. Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Freiheit und Wahrheit*, in Idem, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2003, 187-208.

28. Benedetto XVI, *Omelia in occasione della visita all'Istituto penale per minori “Casal del Marmo” di Roma, il 18 marzo 2007.*

29. Benedetto XVI, *Omelia in occasione della Solennità dell'Immacolata Concezione della Beata Vergine Maria, il 8 dicembre 2005.*

Nell'incontro personale con Dio, il cristiano fa anche esperienza del fatto che la libertà non è affatto in contrasto con l'essere vincolati e la fedeltà, ma che piuttosto libertà e fedeltà hanno bisogno l'una dell'altra e si nutrono vicendevolmente: è realmente libero solo colui che sa anche essere fedele; e può essere veramente fedele solo chi è libero. La libertà è la ricompensa che la fedeltà ottiene; e la fedeltà è il prezzo da pagare per la libertà. Per questo, la vera espressione della libertà è «la capacità di decidersi per un dono definitivo, nel quale la libertà, donandosi, ritrova pienamente se stessa»<sup>30</sup>. Questo rapporto di reciproco condizionamento fra la libertà e l'essere vincolati, per papa Benedetto XVI vale soprattutto riguardo al carattere vincolante della verità. Perché non può esserci libertà che non si cura della verità, consistendo invece la vera libertà nel procedere sulla via della verità: «Solo quando la verità vale per se stessa e solo quando riconoscerla vale più di tutti i successi, solo allora siamo liberi. Perciò solo la libertà della verità è vera libertà»<sup>31</sup>.

La riflessione sulla natura più intima della libertà ci ha ricondotto al legame tra amore e verità, che rappresenta il cuore dell'intera riflessione teologica di Joseph Ratzinger - Benedetto XVI e che può essere considerato il *cantus firmus* della sua vita e del suo operare. Il mettere a tema logos e amore come pilastri di tutto il reale non rappresenta solo il filo rosso che attraversa tutta la sua opera teologica, ma anche il Leitmotiv di tutto il suo pontificato<sup>32</sup>.

### **3. Riforma interna a partire dal centro della fede**

Su questa base non può stupire il fatto che l'amore abbia rappresentato anche l'autentica chiave musicale del suo ministero petrino. Benedetto XVI ha inteso il suo pontificato in primo luogo come primato del ministero di amore, vivendolo in base alle parole di sant'Ignazio di Antiochia che, nella Lettera ai Romani scritta intorno all'anno 100, aveva reso omaggio alla Chiesa del Vescovo di Roma definendola come quella che «presiede nella carità», nella convinzione che la presidenza del successore di Pietro nella fede e nel suo insegnamento e la sua presidenza nella carità siano indissociabili. Da un lato, il primato della carità si fonda sul primato della fede, al cui centro sta l'annuncio dell'amore di Dio per noi uomini e l'amore degli uomini tra loro. Dall'altro, il presiedere nella fede è inscindibilmente legato al presiedere nella carità, poiché l'insegnamento di fede della Chiesa può raggiungere gli uomini soltanto se li conduce alla carità e perché «una fede senza amore non sarebbe più un'autentica fede cristiana»<sup>33</sup>. Il presiedere del Vescovo di Roma nella fede deve essere dunque un presiedere nella carità<sup>34</sup>.

---

30. Benedetto XVI, Discorso all'apertura del convegno ecclesiale della diocesi di Roma su famiglia e comunità cristiana, il 6 giugno 2005.

31. J. Ratzinger - Benedikt XVI, Interpretation – Kontemplation – Aktion. Überlegungen zum Auftrag einer Katholischen Akademie, in: Grundsatzreden in fünf Jahrzehnten, Regensburg 2005, 139-155, qui 146.

32. Cfr. K. Koch, L'enciclica "Deus caritas est" nel contesto del Pontificato di Papa Benedetto XVI, in: M. Graulich – R. Weimann (a cura di), "Deus caritas est" Porta di Misericordia. Atti del Simposio internazionale nel decimo anniversario dell'Enciclica, Città del Vaticano 2016, 9-31.

33. Benedetto XVI, Omelia durante la celebrazione eucaristica con i nuovi cardinali, il 19 febbraio 2012.

34. Cfr. K. Koch, Die Primatstheologie von Joseph Ratzinger / Benedikt XVI. in ökumenischer Perspektive, in M.C. Hastetter – Ch. Ohly (a cura di), Dienst und Einheit. Reflexionen zum

Il titolo onorifico del “presiedere nella carità” per Benedetto XVI fa emergere qualcosa di ancor più concreto e profondo. Infatti, nella Chiesa primitiva, la parola amore – “caritas” – designava al contempo il mistero dell’Eucaristia, nella quale è possibile fare esperienza nel modo più intenso dell’amore di Gesù Cristo per la sua Chiesa. Per Papa Benedetto XVI è di fondamentale importanza che il ministero petrino possa essere inteso in ultima analisi solo in riferimento a quella rete eucaristica mondiale che è la Chiesa, e che di conseguenza il primato del Vescovo di Roma non sia solo un elemento giuridico e ancora meno un’aggiunta esterna all’ecclesiologia eucaristica, ma sia fondato proprio in essa. Il ministero petrino è servizio all’unità eucaristica della Chiesa e di esso fa concretamente parte la missione di «attirare gli uomini in un abbraccio eucaristico – l’abbraccio di Cristo –, che supera ogni barriera e ogni estraneità, e crea la comunione dalle molteplici differenze»<sup>35</sup>.

Alla luce di quest’affinità tra ministero petrino ed Eucaristia si evince quale importanza fondamentale assume la celebrazione dell’Eucaristia non solo nel ministero petrino ma in generale nel pensiero teologico di Joseph Ratzinger. L’Eucaristia, nella quale Cristo logos «è diventato per noi nutrimento, in quanto amore»<sup>36</sup>, è per Benedetto XVI l’atto dell’adorazione più elementare e grande della Chiesa. Per Benedetto XVI, quel che vale per l’Eucaristia si deve dire in generale per la liturgia. Essa non è semplicemente il particolare compimento di un atto nella Chiesa e nemmeno un’espressione della vita della Chiesa fra le altre, bensì il suo elementare atto fondamentale; nel senso che la liturgia non solo edifica la Chiesa, ma la tiene anche in vita e la fa sempre rinascere di nuovo. La liturgia è come il cuore della Chiesa, dal quale sgorga il sangue della fede nella vita quotidiana della Chiesa.

Per una vita intera Joseph Ratzinger, come teologo, vescovo e papa, si è prodigato affinché la liturgia venisse celebrata nella sua bellezza: perché essa è la celebrazione della presenza e dell’opera del Dio vivo che vuole immetterci nel mistero di questo Dio<sup>37</sup>. Chi considera questo primato di Dio nella liturgia comprenderà come, per Papa Benedetto, è dalla liturgia che deve prendere le mosse anche ogni riforma della Chiesa, perché solo così una riforma potrà essere rinnovamento della fede a partire dal suo cuore pulsante. Nel senso originario del termine, infatti, riforma è un processo spirituale; essa è ri-forma, vale a dire ristabilimento e riacquisizione della vera forma della Chiesa.

Per Papa Benedetto XVI, il Concilio Vaticano II ha inteso e realizzato una riforma della Chiesa di questo genere. Il grande sforzo di Papa Benedetto XVI consiste proprio nel richiamare alla memoria questa riforma della Chiesa che il Concilio voleva e

---

petrinischen Amt in ökumenischer Perspektive. Festschrift für Stephan Otto Horn zum 80. Geburtstag, Sankt Ottilien 2014, 15-37.

35. Benedetto XVI, Omelia durante la celebrazione eucaristica con i nuovi cardinali, il 19 febbraio 2012

36. Benedetto XVI, *Deus caritas est* 13.

37. Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Das Fest des Glaubens. Versuche zur Theologie des Gottesdienstes*, Einsiedeln 1981; Idem, *Ein neues Lied für den Herrn. Christusglaube und Liturgie in der Gegenwart*, Freiburg i. Br. 1995; Idem, *Der Geist der Liturgie. Eine Einführung*, Freiburg i. Br. 2000.

nel recuperare e realizzare gli obbiettivi fondamentali che esso si pose<sup>38</sup>. Egli si è speso intensamente per un'interpretazione autentica del Concilio e per la sua ricezione nella vita della Chiesa; e si è perciò battuto per una "ermeneutica della riforma" che punta alla riforma dell'unica Chiesa salvaguardando la sua continuità e identità di fondo, per rinnovare la Chiesa a partire dalle sue fonti e dunque da ciò che era all'origine<sup>39</sup>. Secondo papa Benedetto XVI, al Concilio fu demandato il compito di «far risplendere la verità e la bellezza della fede nell'oggi del nostro tempo, senza sacrificarla alle esigenze del presente né tenerla legata al passato: nella fede risuona l'eterno presente di Dio, che trascende il tempo e tuttavia da noi può essere accolto soltanto nel nostro irripetibile oggi»<sup>40</sup>. Di conseguenza, il Concilio concentrò i suoi sforzi nell'approfondimento della questione di Dio e nella concretizzazione di essa nella cristologia, nella vita e nell'annuncio della Chiesa.

#### 4. La Chiesa come spazio vitale della fede e della teologia

Secondo Papa Benedetto XVI, centralità della questione di Dio e cristocentrismo furono anche le due principali istanze del riformatore Martin Lutero. Lo ha ricordato in occasione del discorso pronunciato, nel 2011, *nell'ex-Convento degli Agostiniani di Erfurt. Nella vita e nell'opera di Lutero, Benedetto XVI ha reso omaggio alla sua appassionata ricerca di Dio*: «Ciò che non gli dava pace era la questione su Dio, che fu la passione profonda e la molla della sua vita e dell'intero suo cammino»<sup>41</sup>. Inoltre Papa Benedetto ha sottolineato come Lutero non credesse in un Dio qualsiasi, ma in quel Dio che ci ha mostrato il suo volto concreto nell'uomo Gesù di Nazareth e come Lutero abbia approfondito la sua appassionata ricerca di Dio, concretizzandola nel cristocentrismo della sua spiritualità e della sua teologia.

Se si collega quest'omaggio a Lutero all'istanza fondamentale propria del teologo e Papa Benedetto XVI, emerge anche la costante dimensione ecumenica che caratterizza il suo pensare e agire. Poiché totalmente cristocentrico, il suo magistero è stato anche un magistero coerentemente ecumenico<sup>42</sup>, al cui centro sta il messaggio dell'amore di Dio che in Gesù Cristo è divenuto carne. Papa Benedetto lo ha testimoniato in modo particolare con la sua trilogia su Gesù di Nazareth, per la cui stesura egli ha speso tempo ed energia oltre al faticoso lavoro quotidiano del ministero petrino. Il necessario rinnovamento della fede e della Chiesa oggi, come anche la

---

38. Cfr. K. Koch, *Theologe und Papst des Konzils. Joseph Ratzinger - Papst Benedikt XVI. und das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, in: Idem, *Bund zwischen Liebe und Vernunft. Das theologische Erbe von Papst Benedikt XVI.*, Freiburg i. Br. 2016, 54-93.

39. Benedetto XVI, *Discorso alla Curia Romana per la presentazione degli auguri natalizi*, il 22 dicembre 2005. Cfr. K. Koch, *Il Concilio Vaticano II tra innovazione e tradizione. L'ermeneutica della riforma tra l'ermeneutica di una discontinuità frammentaria e l'ermeneutica di una continuità storica*, in: *Papa Benedetto XVI e il circolo degli studenti – Card. Kurt Koch, Il Concilio Vaticano II. L'ermeneutica della riforma*, Città del Vaticano 2013, 21-80.

40. Benedetto XVI, *Omelia in occasione della Santa Messa per l'apertura dell'Anno della Fede*, 11 ottobre 2012.

41. Benedetto XVI, *Incontro con i rappresentanti del Consiglio della "Chiesa Evangelica in Germania"*, il 23 settembre 2011.

42. Cfr. K. Koch, *Die Ökumenische Dimension im Pontifikat von Benedikt XVI.*, in J.-H. Tück (Hrsg.), *Der Theologenpapst. Eine kritische Würdigung Benedikts XVI.* (Freiburg i. Br. 2013) 313-331.

ricostituzione ecumenica della sua unità, infatti, è con il rinnovamento della cristologia che deve essere realizzato.

Teologia e pontificato di Benedetto XVI hanno avuto un indirizzo ecumenico anche perché egli ha concepito e compiuto la sua ricerca teologica sempre a servizio della Chiesa e come autentico servizio ecclesiale. Joseph Ratzinger ha molto contribuito al rinnovamento della dottrina cattolica sulla Chiesa, a partire dalla sua tesi di dottorato sul concetto di Chiesa in sant'Agostino<sup>43</sup> sino alla preparazione e alla ricezione dell'ecclesiologia del Concilio Vaticano II<sup>44</sup>. Per lui, tuttavia, la Chiesa non è in primo luogo tema della teologia, ma – quale «soggetto vivo e immutabile attraverso i mutamenti della storia» – essa è lo spazio vitale nel quale si compie la teologia in quanto è riflessione di fede<sup>45</sup>. La fede cristiana, infatti, è caratterizzata da due elementi: da un lato dal “tu”, dal rapporto personale del singolo cristiano con Dio, dall'altro dal “noi”, nel senso che la fede del singolo cristiano è sempre un “credere con” la fede della Chiesa e il singolo cristiano può vivere la sua fede solo all'interno della comunità di fede della Chiesa.

Anche questa doppia realtà è già iscritta nel compleanno di Joseph Ratzinger. In occasione del suo ottantesimo compleanno, egli vide nel dato biografico per cui nascita e rinascita gli erano state donate nello stesso giorno, all'inizio della festa di Pasqua, anche un segno del fatto che nascita e rinascita sono legate, come «famiglia terrena e grande famiglia di Dio» e che esse rappresentano «il grande dono delle molteplici misericordie di Dio, il fondamento sul quale ci appoggiamo»<sup>46</sup>. Nella vita di Joseph Ratzinger si è aggiunto un ulteriore dono, vale a dire la sua chiamata al servizio nella Chiesa: come sacerdote, come vescovo e come Papa. Queste diverse dimensioni nella biografia di Joseph Ratzinger – l'uomo in una famiglia terrena, il cristiano battezzato nella famiglia della Chiesa, il teologo al servizio della comunità di fede della Chiesa e il vescovo e Papa come pastore del gregge a lui affidato – sono talmente legate l'una all'altra da portare il teologo cattolico Thomas Marschler a esprimere il seguente giudizio: «Mai prima d'ora è stato possibile riconoscere a tal punto dietro il ministero petrino il teologo, il cristiano e addirittura l'uomo, come nel caso di Benedetto XVI»<sup>47</sup>.

Il novantesimo compleanno di Joseph Ratzinger - Benedetto XVI ci offre un'occasione gradita per esprimergli il nostro “grazie” di cuore per questa convincente sinfonia nella sua biografia e soprattutto per ringraziare il Dio trino per averci donato questo fedele testimone della fede pasquale.

---

43. J. Ratzinger, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche*, München 1951.

44. Cfr. J. Ratzinger, *Kirche – Zeichen unter den Völkern = Gesammelte Schriften*. Band 8/1 und 8/2, Freiburg i. Br. 2010.

45. J. Ratzinger, Zur „Instruktion über die kirchliche Berufung des Theologen“, in: Idem, *Wesen und Auftrag der Theologie. Versuche zu ihrer Ortsbestimmung im Disput der Gegenwart*, Einsiedeln 1993, 89-107, qui 93.

46. Benedetto XVI, Omelia durante la Santa Messa per il suo 80° compleanno, il 15 aprile 2017.

47. Th. Marschler, *Der Papst in der ersten Person Singular*, in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, vom 20. März 2009, Seite 11.

**Conference organized by the Apostolic Vicariate of Istanbul on the occasion of  
the 50th anniversary of the visit of Pope Paul VI to Istanbul  
Istanbul, 28 November 2017**

*The Ecumenical Path of the Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church*

Of all the Christian churches and ecclesial communities, the Orthodox is without any doubt the closest to Catholics from the theological perspective. Catholics and Orthodox have maintained the same early church structure, namely the fundamental sacramental–eucharistic and episcopal structure of the Church, in the sense that in both churches the unity in the eucharist and in the episcopal ministry are considered constitutive of being church. When we reflect on how close the communion between the two churches is, we also feel compelled to overcome the ecclesial schism between East and West and to restore eucharistic communion once more. In order to understand and evaluate the path of reconciliation between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church it seems appropriate to briefly revisit its beginning over fifty years ago.

**1. The beginning of the legally binding restoration of charity**

In its official form the bilateral ecumenical dialogue dates its beginning to the historical meeting between the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople and the Bishop of Rome, the blessed Pope Paul VI, on the 5th and 6th of January 1964 in Jerusalem. The mutual will for the restoration of charity between the two churches proclaimed by this meeting and sealed with a fraternal embrace remains vivid in our minds as an icon of readiness for reconciliation and – since *agape* and the fraternal embrace in fact represent the terminus and rite of eucharistic unity – unification in eucharistic communion, which must be the goal of this shared path. For wherever *agape* is present in its truest sense as an ecclesial reality it must, in order to be credible, also become eucharistic *agape*. That accords with the intention of Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI, who perceived in this event in Jerusalem the dawn of a new day in which future generations will together glorify the one Lord by participating in the same body and blood of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

This memorable encounter in Jerusalem paved the way for the historical event of the 7th of December 1965 when in the Patriarchal Church of Saint George in Phanar in Constantinople and in the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome the highest representatives of both churches removed, as the Joint Declaration states, both “from the memory and from the midst of the church” the reciprocal *anathemas* of 1054, so that they can no longer hinder “closer relations in charity”.<sup>2</sup> As the events of 1054 were thus

---

1. Cf. Atenagora con Olivier Clément, Umamesimo spirituale. Dialoghi tra Oriente e Occidente. A Cura di Andrea Riccardi (Cinisello Balsamo 2013), esp. 406-427: Gerusalemme; Dialogue of Love. Breaking the Silence of Centuries. Ed. by J. Chryssavgis (New York 2014); J. Ernesti, Paul VI. Der vergessene Papst (Freiburg i. Br. 2012), esp. 86-91: „Ökumenische Wallfahrt“ ins Heilige Land; V. Martano, L’Abbraccio di Gerusalemme. Cinquant’anni fa il storico incontro tra Paolo VI e Athenagoras (Milano 2014); E. Morini, È vicina l’unità tra cattolici e ortodossi? Le scomuniche del 1054 e la riconciliazione del 1965 (Magnano 2016).

2. Déclaration commune du pape Paul VI et du patriarche Athenagoras exprimant leur décision d’enlever de la mémoire et du milieu de l’Eglise les sentences d’excommunication de l’année 1054, dans: Tomos Agapis. Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970) (Rome – Istanbul 1971), Nr. 127.

consigned to oblivion in this way, it was at the same time declared that they no longer pertain to the official deposit of the churches. With this act the poison of excommunication was drawn from the organism of the church, and the “symbol of schism” was replaced by the “symbol of love”: “The relationship of ‘love grown cold’, of contradictions, mistrust and antagonism, has been replaced by the relationship of love, of fraternity, symbolised by the fraternal embrace”.<sup>3</sup>

These acts became the starting point for the ecumenical dialogue of charity, which was intensified over the following years through reciprocal visits and a lively exchange of communications which are documented in the “*Tomos Agapis*”. Today we recall above all the visit of Pope Paul VI to Patriarch Athenagoras on the 25th of July fifty years ago. The dialogue of charity has found a gracious continuity in the beautiful tradition of reciprocal visits between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome on their respective patronal festivals or for especially important occasions. It has, for example, become a noteworthy custom for the popes to travel to the Phanar in Constantinople soon after the beginning of their pontificate; and vice versa it was a beautiful sign of a mature friendship that the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew came to Rome for the inauguration of Pope Francis, which can be regarded as the first event in the ecumenical relationships between Rome and Constantinople.

Today and in the future the dialogue of charity must be deepened, in no small measure due to the fact that in our history differing spiritualities have to a great extent been at least a contributing factor in the ecclesial schism, as Cardinal Walter Kasper has rightly stated: “Christianity did not primarily talk its way apart quarrelling over different doctrinal formulae, but grew apart leading different lives”.<sup>4</sup> This development is to a large extent based on the fact that in Eastern and Western Christianity the gospel of Jesus Christ was from the start received in a different way and lived and handed down in different traditions and cultural forms. In the first millennium Eastern and Western Christianity still lived in the one church with such differences, but they became increasingly estranged from one another and could no longer understand one another, with the result that this mutual alienation must be seen as the underlying cause of the ultimate split.<sup>5</sup> Overcoming such estrangement, which has in the past led to misunderstandings and polemics, can only be achieved through love and patience.

## **2. From the dialogue of charity to the dialogue of truth**

The dialogue of charity is also the environment in which the dialogue of truth can flourish, that is the thorough theological inquiry into the divisive differences that must be overcome in order to enable ecclesial communion. The two dialogues belong together as inseparably as love and truth. For love without truth is empty and mere sentiment, and truth without love is blind and cold. The dialogue of charity forms the prerequisite for the dialogue of truth and must always accompany it. The beginning of theological dialogue was proclaimed in a joint declaration on the occasion of the first

---

3. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Rom und die Kirchen des Ostens nach der Aufhebung der Exkommunikationen von 1054*, in: Ders., *Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine zur Fundamentalthologie* (München 1982) 214–230, cit. 229.

4 W. Cardinal Kasper, *Wege der Einheit. Perspektiven für die Ökumene* (Freiburg i. Br. 2005) 208.

5 Cf. Y. Congar, *Zerrissene Christenheit. Wo trennten sich Ost und West?* (Wien 1959).

visit by Pope John Paul II to the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I on the Feast of Saint Andrew in 1979.<sup>6</sup> Already in the following year the first two plenary assemblies of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue held in Patmos and Rhodes served as the preparation for the dialogue with regard to the methodology and the subject matters to be dealt with in the first phase of the dialogue.

a) *Becoming one in faith and the persistent problem of uniatism*

The theological dialogue can proceed from the encouraging starting point that the Catholic and Orthodox Churches share an extensive common basis of faith convictions, so that the ecumenical dialogue was in the first instance able to concentrate on consolidating the shared foundations of the faith. The ecumenical dialogue proved extremely fruitful in the first decade from 1980 to 1990, in which far-reaching convergences were achieved between Catholic and Orthodox theology in fundamental questions of the faith and important theological issues. The beginning was made with the question of the understanding of the Church, which was issued by the Plenary Assembly of the Commission in Munich in 1982 in the document entitled “The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity”. The following Plenary Assemblies in Chania on the Island of Crete in 1984 and in Bari in 1987 dealt with subject “Faith, Sacrament and the Unity of the Church”. The Plenary Assembly in New Valamo in Finland in 1988 reflected on the vocation of ordained ministry in the church and issued the document “The Sacrament of Ordination in the Sacramental Structure of the Church”. At that time an envisaged assembly in Freising in 1990 was intended to discuss the theological and canonical consequences of the sacramental nature of the church, and above all the question of the reciprocal relationships between authority and conciliarity in the Church.

But that did not eventuate because in the second decade, in the years from 1990 to 2000, the ecumenical conversations became increasingly difficult. The essential cause was the new situation ushered in by the political turning point in 1989. The political transformations in Eastern Europe led – in the Ukraine, in Siebenbürgen and in Romania above all – to the return from the catacombs into public life of the Catholic Eastern Churches which had been brutally suppressed and forcibly integrated into the Orthodox Church under the Stalinist dictatorship. On the Orthodox side this development re-inflamed the old polemics of uniatism and proselytism, leading to a dramatic worsening of the atmosphere of dialogue. The Plenary Assemblies of the Commission in Balamand in 1993 and in Baltimore in 2000 dealt with these difficult problems, without arriving at a constructive result, with the consequence that the work of the Commission was suspended. In spite of a long period of theological progress, the theological dialogue was ship-wrecked by the problem of uniatism, and it seemed to have returned to ground zero, at least as far as the solution of this thorny issue was concerned.

The ecumenical dialogue had thus reached a critical phase. On the one hand, the question of uniatism represents a lasting trauma for the Orthodox Churches which must be dealt with sensitively on the part of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, this question can only be solved if the more fundamental question of the communion

---

6. The Declaration in Greek and French was published in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 December 1979.

with Rome and the primacy of the Bishop of Rome can be dealt with in depth, with the consequence that progress could only be made by returning to this issue of principle. And that occurred in 2006.

*b) History and theology of primacy*

The Plenary Assemblies in Belgrade in 2006 and in Ravenna in 2007 turned back to the document that had been prepared for the Assembly in Freising in 1990, and issued it under the title “Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church. Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority”. This document gives expression above all to the twofold conviction that synodality and primacy are mutually dependent on one another and that this correlation is realised on all levels of the church – local, regional and universal. Catholics and Orthodox were thereby able to jointly declare for the first time that the church requires a *protos* on all levels of its life, including the universal. In conclusion the document gives expression to the conviction of the Commission that the reflections offered here represent a “positive and significant progress in our dialogue” and deliver a “firm basis for future discussion of the question of primacy at the universal level of the Church”<sup>7</sup>. This result can be deemed a milestone in Orthodox–Catholic dialogue.

This hopeful step has however been overshadowed by the fact that on the one hand the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate did not recognise the Ravenna document and in 2013 issued its own declaration on the question of primacy on the universal level of the Church, and on the other hand that the ecumenical dialogue has become very difficult since Ravenna. In Ravenna the plan was indeed made that the Commission should as the next step follow up with a historical study of the question of what role the Bishop of Rome had played in the first millennium in which East and West were united, in order to then in a second step analyse the different developments in East and West in the second millennium, and finally in a third step to develop a shared understanding of the primacy in the third millennium. After very difficult Plenary Assemblies in Cyprus in 2009, Vienna in 2010 and Amman in 2014 it was not possible until the assembly in Chieti in 2016 to issue a new document with the title “Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church”.

Last September the Coordinating Committee met on the Island of Leros in a positive atmosphere, planning the future dialogue and deciding to devote future reflection to the subject “On the way to unity in the faith: theological and canonical questions”. Thus those problems which need to be solved in order to find unity in the faith must firstly be identified. The first question to be tackled is “Primacy and Synodality in the Second Millennium and Today”. Beside various other questions the question of so-called “uniatism” is also to be dealt with within this broader context.

### **3. Catholic perspective for the future**

I am confident that with this resolution the Commission can follow a constructive path into the future. The path ahead will indeed not become easier, for it cannot be a matter of finding a compromise with the lowest common denominator. Instead, the respective

---

7. No. 46

strengths of both churches will be engaged in conversation with one another on the basis of the fundamental principle of ecumenical dialogue consisting in the mutual exchange of gifts. I trust I may be permitted in conclusion to sketch a brief perspective for the future, in which of course my task can be only to outline what the Catholic Church can learn from this dialogue and can itself contribute to it following critical self-examination.

a) *Distinction between the essence and the exercise of primacy*

The starting point is to acknowledge that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is perceived to be a serious obstacle to the restoration of Christian unity. It is to the credit of Pope Paul VI that during a visit to the then Secretariat for Christian Unity in 1967 he expressed in a free and frank manner that the question of the papal ministry represents one of the most important ecumenical problems: “The Pope is, we know all too well, without doubt the gravest obstacle on the path of ecumenism.”<sup>8</sup>

In his encyclical on the commitment to ecumenism “*Ut unum sint*” Pope John Paul II referred back to this honest confession when he declared that the ministry of the Bishop of Rome “constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections”.<sup>9</sup> John Paul II was however convinced that that the ministry handed down to the successor of Peter is in the first instance a ministry for unity and that it finds its “quite particular explanation in the sphere of ecumenism”.<sup>10</sup> With this conviction he devoted the conclusion of his encyclical on ecumenism to fundamental thoughts on the “ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome”. In this context he expressed the request to his own Church but also to the whole of ecumenism to engage with him in a patient and fraternal dialogue on the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, with the particular goal of finding “a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation ... in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognized by all concerned”.<sup>11</sup>

The fundamental distinction between the essence of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the concrete form of its exercise was also taken up by Pope Benedict XVI on various occasions, renewing the related invitation to the ecumenical community, for example in his encounter with representatives of the Orthodox churches in Freiburg im Breisgau in September 2011. “We know that above all it is the question of primacy that we must continue patiently and humbly struggling to understand aright. In this regard, I think that the ideas put forward by Pope John Paul II in the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (no. 95) on the distinction between the nature and form of the exercise of primacy can yield further fruitful discussion points.”<sup>12</sup> For his part, Pope Francis follows the path his predecessors have prepared with great openness, in that he too clearly distinguishes between what is essential to the primacy and what pertains to the concrete and in part historically determined form in which it is

---

8. Documented in: AAS 59 (1967) 498.

9. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 88.

10. Johannes Paul II., *Die Schwelle der Hoffnung überschreiten* (Hamburg 1994) 181.

11. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, 95.

12. Benedict XVI, Address at the encounter with representatives of the Orthodox churches in Freiburg i. Br., 24 September 2011.

exercised. At the same time he admits that until now we “have made little progress” towards making this distinction. Pope Francis is however convinced that “an excessive centralisation complicates the life of the Church and its missionary dynamism”, and that it is necessary for the papacy as well as the central structures of the universal church to heed the call for a pastoral new direction. “It is my duty, as the Bishop of Rome, to be open to suggestions which can help make the exercise of my ministry more faithful to the meaning which Jesus Christ wished to give it and to the present needs of evangelization.”<sup>13</sup>

b) *Reconciliation of primacy and synodality*

With this in mind Pope Francis stressed in “*Evangelii gaudium*” that “in the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality.”<sup>14</sup> The Catholic Church must indeed admit that it has not yet developed that measure of synodality in its life and ecclesial structures that would be theologically possible and necessary, and that a credible combination of the hierarchical and the synodal–communal principle could be an essential aid towards further ecumenical conversation with the Orthodox. The strengthening of synodality is an essential ecumenical contribution by the Catholic Church towards a possible recognition of the primacy. For Pope Francis it is evident that the Catholic engagement to build up a synodal church is “rich in ramifications for ecumenism” and also enables a new view of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome: “I am persuaded that in a synodal Church, greater light can be shed on the exercise of the Petrine primacy. The Pope is not, by himself, above the Church; but within it as one of the baptized, and within the College of Bishops as a Bishop among Bishops, called at the same time — as Successor of Peter — to lead the Church of Rome which presides in charity over all the Churches.”<sup>15</sup>

That is the crucial keyword as to how the primacy of the Bishop of Rome in the Catholic Church is to be understood and how it was expressed already by Ignatius of Antioch in his letter to the Romans in the year 110, in which he honoured the Church of Rome with the *cathedra* of its bishop as that church which “presides in charity”. Here it is important to bear in mind that in the early church the word “charity=agape” also and in particular was the term for the mystery of the eucharist in which Christ’s charity for his church is intensively experienced. The Catholic Church must therefore profoundly and credibly demonstrate that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome does not represent simply a juridical entity and is by no means a merely external adjunct to eucharistic ecclesiology but is grounded in it. The primacy of the Bishop of Rome can therefore ultimately only be understood on the basis of the eucharist, more precisely of the worldwide eucharistic network of eucharistic communions which constitutes the innermost essence of the church. In this sense the primacy of the Bishop of Rome stands in the service of the eucharistic unity of the church and is to ensure that the church continues to take its measure from the eucharist and is experienced as *communio ecclesiarum* and as *communio ecclesiae*.

---

13. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 32.

14. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 246.

15. Francis, Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015.

The success of a credible synthesis of primacy and synodality depends above all on the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as a primacy of obedience to the gospel, as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1998 – under the presidency of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger – stated in his considerations in “The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church”: “The Roman Pontiff – like all the faithful – is subject to the Word of God, to the Catholic faith, and is the guarantor of the Church’s obedience; in this sense he is *servus servorum Dei*. He does not make arbitrary decisions, but is spokesman for the will of the Lord, who speaks to man in the Scriptures lived and interpreted by Tradition; in other words, the *episkope* of the primacy has limits set by divine law and by the Church’s divine, inviolable constitution found in Revelation.”<sup>16</sup>

If the Bishop of Rome understands and exercises his primacy in this sense there is a prospect and a hope that the primacy of the Bishop of Rome is no longer the “gravest obstacle on the path of ecumenism” but a promotor of ecumenical understanding and guarantor of Christian unity in shared faith. In this sense Pope Francis, during his visit to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Constantinople in 2014 gave the assurance to “each one of you here that, to reach the desired goal of full unity, the Catholic Church does not intend to impose any conditions except that of the shared profession of faith. Further, I would add that we are ready to seek together, in light of Scriptural teaching and the experience of the first millennium, the ways in which we can guarantee the needed unity of the Church in the present circumstances. The one thing that the Catholic Church desires, and that I seek as Bishop of Rome, ‘the Church which presides in charity’, is communion with the Orthodox Churches.”<sup>17</sup>

Understood and exercised in this way the primacy of the Bishop of Rome could stand more fully in the service of the restoration of the one undivided church in East and West which will find its fulfilment in the restoration of eucharistic communion as in the words of the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in 1968: “This is the time for Christian courage. Let us love one another in order to confess our former common faith: let us make our way together before the glory of the holy common altar in order to fulfil the will of the Lord so that the church may shine, so that the world may believe and the peace of God may be with us all.”<sup>18</sup>

I am pleased to have this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew for continuing to follow this ecumenical path with the Catholic Church in the same spirit and to actively support the theological dialogue even in its difficult phases. To be permitted to work together on this great project of reconciliation between East and West and to pray for the time when this path that began so promisingly fifty years ago will reach its goal in eucharistic agape is a serious obligation, but in the first instance a great grace for which we glorify the Triune God in gratitude.

---

16. Il primato del Successore di Pietro nel Mistero della Chiesa. Considerazioni della Congregazione per la Dottrina della fede, in: Documenti e Studi 19 (Città del Vaticano 2002) 9-21, Nr. 7.

17. Francis, Address in the Patriarchal Church of St George, Istanbul, 30 November 2014.

18. Télégramme du patriarche Athénagoras au pape Paul VI, à l’occasion de l’anniversaire de la levée des anathèmes le 7 décembre 1969, dans : Tomos Agapis. Vatican-Phanar (1958-1970) (Rome – Istanbul 1971) Nr. 277.

## HOMILIES

**In occasione dell'incontro del Consiglio di Gestione del Comitato Cattolico  
per la Collaborazione Culturale, nella Cappella della Domus Sanctae Marthae,  
Città del Vaticano, 4 gennaio 2017**

*“Ecco l'agnello di Dio, ecco colui che toglie il peccato del mondo!” [Gv 1,29]*

Con la Festa del Battesimo del Signore, celebrata domenica scorsa, siamo tornati al tempo ordinario del calendario liturgico. Ma, subito dopo il Natale, guardando alla figura di Giovanni Battista presentatoci nel Vangelo odierno, ovvero alla figura per eccellenza dell'Avvento, capiamo che anche dopo il Natale non possiamo lasciarci alle spalle l'Avvento, ma dobbiamo sempre ritornare ad esso. La Chiesa, infatti, non vive soltanto nelle quattro settimane che precedono il Natale, ma vive sempre nell'Avvento. La Chiesa è una comunità di fede che è segnata interamente dall'Avvento, e non ha altro compito se non quello di indicare, con la sua vita e con le sue parole, il Cristo che viene. Cristo ci precede sempre e noi possiamo solo seguirlo – come ha fatto Giovanni Battista che non ha mai indicato se stesso, ma ha sempre indicato colui che viene. E lo ha fatto con parole che esprimono la più profonda identità di Gesù Cristo: “Ecco l'agnello di Dio, ecco colui che toglie il peccato dal mondo.”

### **La redenzione come venuta dell'agnello nel mondo**

La descrizione di Gesù Cristo come agnello risulta, per l'uomo odierno, meno pregnante di significato rispetto alla ricchezza di contenuto che le veniva invece attribuita nella Sacra Scrittura. L'Antico Testamento parla di agnello soprattutto nel contesto della tradizione della Pasqua: col sangue dell'agnello pasquale venivano cosparsi gli stipiti delle porte in segno di redenzione del popolo di Israele ed il pranzo pasquale simbolizzava l'uscita del popolo di Dio dalla schiavitù, con l'entrata nella terra promessa. Nel Nuovo Testamento, l'immagine dell'agnello viene riferita a Gesù Cristo, creduto e adorato come l'agnello pasquale sacrificato. In particolare, l'agnello è menzionato ventotto volte nell'Apocalisse di Giovanni, che annuncia ripetutamente che la redenzione “appartiene al nostro Dio seduto sul trono e all'Agnello” (Ap 7,10).

In contrasto con il ricco significato che riveste nella Sacra Scrittura, l'immagine dell'agnello produce nell'uomo di oggi, al primo impatto, un effetto alquanto innocuo e si tinge forse di un certo romanticismo. Ma assume tutto il suo peso e la sua chiara importanza quando ci chiediamo cosa significa più precisamente il fatto che Gesù sia venuto nel mondo come agnello. Egli si è presentato a noi uomini come non ci aspettavamo minimamente. Di fatti, noi uomini non ci aspetteremmo come un agnello Gesù, colui che, secondo quanto ci annuncia Giovanni, toglie i nostri peccati e ci porta la redenzione, piuttosto ce lo aspetteremmo come un leone che, con la sua forza, scardina il mondo e le sue strutture e crea un mondo nuovo. Non è un caso che i sovrani del nostro mondo si siano sempre fregiati dell'immagine del leone, per celebrare in maniera dimostrativa la loro potenza ed il loro dominio. Eppure, Gesù non è venuto nel mondo come un leone. E neppure come una lupa, simbolo usato dall'antica Roma per presentare se stessa quale redentrica del mondo, con la potenza del suo ordine militare e giuridico. Giovanni Battista ci mostra piuttosto che la nostra redenzione non viene nel mondo grazie ad animali grandi e possenti, ma che Gesù viene a noi uomini come agnello, ovvero nella forza del suo amore indifeso, che è l'attuazione concreta

della sua potenza. Gesù Cristo è il buon pastore degli uomini proprio perché egli stesso si è fatto agnello e si è schierato dalla parte degli agnelli oppressi: “Dio viene come agnello; questa è la redenzione del mondo.”<sup>1</sup>

In questa figura indifesa risiede anche il motivo per cui la redenzione di Dio nel nostro mondo è sempre presente solo come realtà contestata. Cristo infatti, che è venuto come agnello, neanche oggi può essere sopportato da coloro che se lo aspettano come leone e come lupo. E non è apprezzato da coloro che sono, essi stessi, leoni e lupi. Essi non vedono in lui la redenzione, ma si gettano sull’agnello e lo fanno a pezzi. Del mistero di Gesù Cristo fa sempre parte, dunque, anche la croce. L’essere agnello e la croce sono inscindibilmente legati.

### **La frazione del pane eucaristico da parte dell’agnello**

Nel momento del passaggio al tempo ordinario del calendario liturgico, ci troviamo davanti a questo mistero fondamentale della fede cristiana, che è al centro della festa del Natale, e siamo chiamati ad approfondirlo. Il luogo principale dove possiamo farlo è la celebrazione dell’Eucaristia, che riprende le parole pronunciate da Giovanni Battista nel Vangelo odierno: “Ecco l’agnello di Dio, ecco colui che toglie il peccato del mondo!” A queste parole si riferisce la liturgia nell’Agnus Dei, che accompagna la frazione del pane: “Agnello di Dio, che togli i peccati del mondo”. A sua volta, l’Agnus Dei sfocia nell’invito alla comunione, espresso con le parole. “Ecco l’agnello di Dio che toglie i peccati dal mondo” e “Beati gli invitati al pranzo nuziale dell’agnello.”

L’immagine dell’agnello nella liturgia eucaristica richiama più precisamente il rito della frazione del pane: come nel pranzo pasquale ebraico l’agnello viene diviso e spartito tra tutti i partecipanti, così, nella celebrazione eucaristica, il pane dell’agnello sacrificato viene spezzato, a simboleggiare il fatto che il corpo stesso del Signore è stato spezzato nella morte in croce. La frazione del pane rende visibile ciò che proclamano le parole d’istituzione “Questo è il mio Corpo offerto in sacrificio per voi”. Il pane viene spezzato nell’Eucaristia come è stata spezzata la vita di Gesù sulla croce. Nei tempi antichi, questo era espresso in maniera ancora più evidente nelle preghiere eucaristiche, ad esempio nell’anafora della Tradizione Apostolica all’inizio del III secolo, in cui si diceva: “Questo è il mio corpo che per voi sta per essere spezzato”. E nella preghiera eucaristica di Sant’Ambrogio di Milano nel IV secolo si diceva: Gesù spezzò il pane “e dette ciò che era stato spezzato agli apostoli e ai suoi discepoli dicendo: Prendete e mangiatene tutti, questo è il mio corpo che è stato spezzato per molti.” La frazione del pane nella celebrazione eucaristica è dunque immagine e rappresentazione della morte in croce di Gesù, che ha dato la sua vita per noi, affinché possiamo avere una vita nella pienezza e nella pace.

Gesù Cristo è il vero agnello, il cui corpo è stato spezzato sulla croce per la remissione dei peccati, l’agnello che riceviamo nell’Eucaristia. Iniziamo dunque a capire che, sin dall’origine, la frazione del pane era l’azione più antica e più importante per prepararsi ad accogliere l’Eucaristia, tanto che al tempo degli apostoli essa dette il nome all’intera celebrazione eucaristica. Nella comunità primitiva, lo spezzare il pane divenne il segno decisivo di riconoscimento del Cristo risorto, come mostra in modo molto

---

1. J. Ratzinger, Freude in Christus, in: Ders., Gesammelte Schriften. Band 12: Kùnder des Wortes und Diener Eurer Freude. Theologie und Spiritualitat des Weihe sakramentes (Freiburg i. Br. 2010) 642-649, zit. 643.

bello il racconto dei discepoli sulla strada di Emmaus: di ritorno da Emmaus “Essi poi riferirono ciò che era accaduto lungo la via e come l’avevano riconosciuto nello spezzare il pane.” (Lc 24,35). E negli Atti degli Apostoli si dice, a proposito della giovane comunità cristiana: “Erano assidui nell’ascoltare l’insegnamento degli apostoli e nell’unione fraterna, nella frazione del pane e nelle preghiere” (Atti 2,42).

### **La comunione nello spezzare il pane**

Il gesto di spezzare il pane, per distribuirlo ai presenti, si rifà al simbolismo della frazione del pane conosciuto già presso il popolo di Israele. Sia durante il pranzo pasquale che durante il pranzo settimanale dello shabbat, lo spezzare il pane era un rito di apertura: il pane spezzato è segno della comunità raccolta intorno alla mensa. Ricevendo uno dei pezzetti del pane spezzato, il commensale entra a far parte di una comunità. Chi ha ricevuto un pezzetto di pane appartiene alla comunità benedetta da Dio. In senso analogo, anche il pane che viene frazionato durante la celebrazione eucaristica permette di partecipare al Corpo di Cristo, che è il vero agnello pasquale, e, attraverso la partecipazione al Corpo di Cristo, tutti vengono resi partecipi della Chiesa quale Corpo di Cristo. Anche questa realtà trova espressione, in maniera visibile, nell’azione liturgica della frazione del pane, in cui si realizza l’unità di tutti nell’unico Pane. Poiché questo pane viene diviso tra fratelli e sorelle, esso è segno efficace dell’amore fraterno che regna tra coloro che celebrano l’Eucaristia. La frazione del pane mostra che noi tutti mangiamo nella comunione dell’unico Pane di vita, che è Gesù Cristo, e diveniamo in tal modo noi stessi un unico Corpo.

Se colui che ha ricevuto un pezzo del pane spezzato appartiene alla chabura, alla famiglia, è evidente allora che, nell’Antico Testamento, si considera come peggiore abuso di fiducia che possa essere commesso quello del tradimento di uno dei commensali da parte di un altro. Il tradimento di Giuda risulta particolarmente spregevole perché avviene dopo che Gesù gli ha offerto un pezzetto di pane, rendendolo così partecipe della comunione con lui. In questo senso, anche San Bernardo di Chiaravalle ha potuto dire che la più grande amarezza è stata recata alla Chiesa non dai suoi nemici, ma dai suoi “compagni di casa” con la loro pace tollerante: “ecce in pace amaritudo mea amarissima”<sup>2</sup>.

Di questa amaritudo amarissima anche noi facciamo spesso l’esperienza nel lavoro ecumenico, quando ci sforziamo di giungere all’unità dei cristiani e tuttavia non possiamo realizzare la vera unità nella frazione del pane. Questo dolore è il motivo principale per cui non dobbiamo mai rassegnarci nel nostro lavoro ecumenico, ma dobbiamo impegnarci affinché tutti i battezzati nel nome del Dio uno e trino, insieme a Giovanni Battista, possano professare insieme, anche in riferimento all’Eucaristia: “Ecco l’agnello di Dio, ecco colui che toglie il peccato dal mondo.” In questa celebrazione eucaristica, preghiamo l’agnello di Dio affinché tolga anche il peccato della divisione dei cristiani tuttora esistente, così che la frazione del pane non escluda più nessuno, ma riunisca tutti nella chabura di Dio.

Prima lettura: Is 49,3,5-6  
Seconda lettura: 1 Cor 1,1-3  
Vangelo: Gv 1,29-34

---

2. Bernardo di Chiaravalle, Sermones super Cantica Cantorum 33.,16.

**Predigt in der Ökumenischen Vesper in der Basilika des Klosters Wiblingen,  
Ulm, am 2. April 2017**

*Geistlicher Appell zur Einheit*

Der Brief an die Epheser, aus dessen viertem Kapitel wir einen Abschnitt gehört haben, enthält die bedeutendsten theologischen Aussagen im Neuen Testament über die Kirche und ist ein leidenschaftlicher geistlicher Appell an alle Getauften, die Einheit in der Kirche und die Einheit der Kirche zu wahren. Mit wünschenswerter Klarheit wird zum Ausdruck gebracht, dass die Einheit eine Grundkategorie des christlichen Glaubens ist und bleibt und so sehr zur Kirche gehört, dass sich der christliche Glaube ohne Suche nach Einheit selbst aufgeben würde.

**Ein Haupt und ein Leib**

Wie ernst es Paulus mit diesem Appell meint, wird zunächst an der Feststellung deutlich, dass er aus dem Gefängnis schreibt, in dem er sich „um des Herrn willen“ aufhält (4, 1). Denn in einer solchen bedrängenden Situation gibt man sich nicht mit Allotria ab, sondern bringt das zum Ausdruck, was einem wirklich auf der Seele brennt. Wie wichtig Paulus die Einheit der Kirche ist, wird noch mehr daraus ersichtlich, dass er sie in der Geschichte Gottes mit seiner Menschheit begründet: Bereits vor der Erschaffung der Welt hat Gott durch Christus die Kirche erwählt und sie als sein Volk zusammengerufen. Alle Glieder der Kirche sind durch die Taufe der Macht der Finsternis entrissen und mit Christus innig verbunden. In der Kirche ist deshalb ein neues Menschengeschlecht entstanden, in dem Christus Frieden gestiftet hat.

Aus dieser heilsgeschichtlichen Schau werden im zweiten Teil des Briefes ethische Folgerungen gezogen, deren erste in der Pflicht besteht, „die Einheit des Geistes zu wahren durch den Frieden, der euch zusammenhält: Ein Leib und ein Geist – ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe, ein Gott und Vater aller“ (4, 3-4). Die Einheit der Kirche folgt aus dem Bekenntnis zu Jesus Christus als dem einen Herrn. Diesen engen Zusammenhang zwischen dem christlichen Bekenntnis zu Jesus Christus als dem einen Herrn der Kirche und dem Bekenntnis zur Einheit der Kirche hat die christliche Tradition auf der Grundlage des Epheserbriefes dadurch zum Ausdruck gebracht, dass die Kirche als Leib bezeichnet und Christus als sein Haupt geglaubt wird.

Die heutige Lesung aus der Heiligen Schrift lädt uns ein, das Bild von Haupt und Leib sehr ernst zu nehmen: Auf der einen Seite ist der Leib ohne das Haupt kein Leib mehr, sondern ein Leichnam; und deshalb verkommt die Kirche zu einer Karikatur ihrer selbst, wenn in ihrem Mittelpunkt nicht Christus als ihr Haupt steht. Auf der anderen Seite hat Christus als Haupt seiner Kirche einen sichtbaren Leib und will in seinem Leib gegenwärtig sein, weshalb es nur *eine* Kirche geben kann. Denn Christus hat nicht viele Leiber, sondern verbindet sich mit dem *einen* Leib, der die Kirche ist. Oder mit einem anderen Bild ausgedrückt: Wenn die Beziehung Christi zu seiner Kirche so eng und intim ist, dass man von einem Verhältnis von Bräutigam und Braut sprechen darf, dann drängt sich die glaubenslogische Konsequenz auf, dass Christus auf keinen Fall polygam, sondern monogam und treu zu seiner einen Braut ist.

## **Einheit im postmodernen Gegenwind**

Die starke Betonung der Einheit der Kirche wird vielen Christen heute als etwas überzogen erscheinen. Doch genau sie ist gemeint und gewollt, wenn evangelische und katholische Christen entschieden haben, das Reformationsgedenken in diesem Jahr als Christusfest zu begehen. Denn damit bekennen wir uns zu unserem gemeinsamen Herrn und damit auch zum einen Haupt seiner Kirche. Wenn wir diese intime Zusammengehörigkeit von Jesus Christus und seiner Kirche, die sein Leib ist, bedenken, dann wird in der heutigen Situation der Christenheit ein ärgerlicher Zwiespalt sichtbar: Auf der einen Seite stimmen alle Christen im Bekenntnis des Glaubens der „einen, heiligen, katholischen und apostolischen Kirche“ überein. Auf der anderen Seite aber leben wir Christen, die sich zur einen Kirche bekennen, noch immer in verschiedenen, voneinander getrennten Kirchen, und es stellt sich uns die bedrängende Frage, was die Insistenz auf der Einheit der Kirche in der heutigen Lesung für uns bedeutet.

Diesbezüglich stelle ich in der heutigen Christenheit keine einheitliche Antwort fest. Auf der einen Seite höre ich den leidenschaftlichem Zwischenruf, dass fünf-hundert Jahre Spaltung genug sind, dass wir unsere trennenden Mauern überwinden und endlich die Einheit wieder finden müssen. Auf der anderen Seite hat eine jüngst durchgeführte Meinungsumfrage ergeben, dass die Mehrheit der Befragten die Einheit der Kirchen gar nicht wünscht.

Dieses Ergebnis dürfte auch damit zusammenhängen, dass die ökumenische Suche nach der Einheit der Kirche im heute selbstverständlich gewordenen pluralistischen und relativistischen Zeitgeist einem starken Gegenwind ausgesetzt ist. Im Unterschied zur christlichen Tradition, in der die Einheit als Sinn und Grund der Wirklichkeit überhaupt betrachtet worden ist, steht heute umgekehrt der Pluralismus im Mittelpunkt der so genannten postmodernen Wirklichkeitserfahrung. Die postmoderne Grundüberzeugung besagt, man könne und dürfe denkerisch nicht hinter die Pluralität der Wirklichkeit zurück gehen, wenn man sich nicht dem Verdacht eines totalitären Denkens aussetzen wolle. Weil Postmoderne das Zulassen von Mehrzahl und das Verdächtigen jedes Singulars als Prinzip bedeutet, erscheint die Suche nach Einheit als vormodern und antiquiert. Diese postmoderne Mentalität ist teilweise auch in der ökumenischen Situation heute wirksam geworden, wenn gerade die Vielzahl und Vielfalt der vorhandenen Kirchen als positive Realität betrachtet wird und jede Suche nach der Einheit der Kirche als verdächtig beurteilt wird.

## **Geistgewirkte Einheit in Vielfalt**

In dieser Situation lädt uns die heutige Lesung ein, in liebenswürdiger Hartnäckigkeit die Frage nach der Einheit der Kirche wach zu halten. Überzeugend kann dies freilich nur geschehen, wenn wir auch die Sorge ernst nehmen, die bei jenen Christen anzutreffen ist, die die ökumenische Suche nach der sichtbaren Einheit der Kirche als nicht wünschenswert einschätzen. Hier macht sich die Angst bemerkbar, bei der starken Betonung der Einheit sei überhaupt kein Platz mehr für Vielfalt und Vielheit.

Diese Befürchtung hat freilich keinen Anhalt im zweiten Teil der heutigen Lesung, in der die Vielfalt der Berufungen und Gnadengaben beschrieben wird, die gerade in ihrer Vielfalt dem Aufbau der einen Kirche dienen. Im christlichen Glauben geht es um eine ganz spezifische Gestalt der Einheit, nämlich eine Einheit in Vielfalt und eine Vielheit in Einheit. Der christliche Glaube ist dabei überzeugt, dass wir eine

solche Einheit in der Verschiedenheit nur vom Heiligen Geist als Geschenk empfangen können. Er schenkt sie uns, weil er uns in das innerste Gottesgeheimnis des christlichen Glaubens hinein führt, in das Geheimnis des dreifaltigen Gottes, in dem zwei Dimensionen gleichursprünglich existieren. Im Dreieinen Gott besteht erstens Lebensraum für den Anderen und deshalb für Vielheit und Verschiedenheit. Der Vater ist anders als der Sohn, und der Sohn wiederum ist anders als der Heilige Geist. Es lebt in der göttlichen Dreieinigkeit eine wunderschöne Verschiedenheit der Personen. Es gibt in Gott aber auch eine wunderbare Einheit des göttlichen Wesens. Wiewohl der Vater anders ist als der Sohn und der Sohn wiederum anders als der Heilige Geist, leben die göttlichen Personen als himmlische Dialogpartner doch auf derselben Seinsebene. Denn der Vater ist Gott, der Sohn ist Gott und der Heilige Geist ist Gott. Der Dreieine Gott ist in sich lebendige Gemeinschaft in der ursprünglichen Beziehungseinheit der Liebe.

Im Licht dieses Gottesgeheimnisses erscheint die Kirche als der vom Dreieinen Gott her vorgegebene Raum des Heils oder, wie das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil hervorgehoben hat, als „das von der Einheit des Vaters, des Sohnes und des Heiligen Geistes geeinte Volk“<sup>1</sup>. Im Licht des christlichen Gottesgeheimnisses ist die Kirche berufen, die Gemeinschaft des Dreieinen Gottes in der Welt darzustellen und als Ikone der Trinität zu leben.

### **Einheit bereits auf dem Weg zu ihr leben**

In dieser Sinnrichtung, in der Verschiedenheit Einheit zu finden, können wir Christen auch als noch Getrennte bereits jetzt eins sein, wenn wir die Spaltungen entgiften, in ihnen das Fruchtbare annehmen und von der Verschiedenheit das Positive empfangen, und zwar wiederum im Licht des trinitarischen Liebesgeheimnisses, das Papst Benedikt XVI. einmal sehr schön beschrieben hat: „Die wahre Liebe löscht legitime Unterschiede nicht aus, sondern bringt sie miteinander in Einklang in einer höheren Einheit, die nicht von aussen auferlegt wird, sondern die von innen heraus dem Ganzen zuzusagen Form gibt.“<sup>2</sup>

Damit wird der Blick frei auf das Leben jener Einheit der Kirche, die bereits heute möglich ist. Das ökumenische Zusammenleben besteht nicht einfach im Austausch von Ideen und Theorien, sondern viel grundlegender im Austausch von Gaben. Und dieser ist viel mehr als eine allein theoretische Übung, sondern dient dazu, die verschiedenen christlichen Gemeinschaften mit ihren Traditionen in der Tiefe kennen zu lernen, sie zu verstehen und aus ihnen zu lernen. Denn keine christliche Gemeinschaft ist so arm, dass sie nicht einen unverwechselbaren Beitrag zur grösseren Gemeinschaft der Christenheit leisten könnte. Keine christliche Gemeinschaft ist aber auch so reich, dass sie nicht der Bereicherung durch andere bedürfen würde, und zwar in der Überzeugung, das, was der Heilige Geist in anderen christlichen Gemeinschaften gewirkt hat, „als ein Geschenk aufzunehmen, das auch für uns bestimmt ist“<sup>3</sup>.

Solche Einheit in Verschiedenheit können wir bereits heute leben. Wir tun es aber nur glaubwürdig, wenn wir dabei nicht stehen bleiben und uns damit begnügen,

---

1. Lumen gentium, Nr. 4.

2. Benedikt XVI., Predigt in der Feier der Vesper zum Abschluss der Gebetswoche für die Einheit der Christen am 25. Januar 2006.

3. Franziskus, Evangelii gaudium, Nr. 246.

friedlich nebeneinander zu leben, sondern wenn wir uns gemeinsam auf den Weg machen, um die verloren gegangene Einheit der Kirche wieder zu finden. Das schulden wir keinem Geringeren als dem Reformator Martin Luther, der die Kirche weder spalten noch eine eigene Kirche gründen, sondern die Kirche erneuern wollte. Nichts bringt dies deutlicher zum Ausdruck als seine aufgebrachte Reaktion, als er hörte, dass seine Anhänger sich als „Lutheraner“ bezeichnet haben: „Zum ersten bitte ich, man wolle meines Namens schweigen, und sich nicht <lutherisch>, sondern <Christ> nennen, Was ist Luther?...Wie käme denn ich armer, stinkender Madensack dazu, dass man die Kinder Christi mit meinem heillosen Namen benennen sollte? Nicht so, liebe Freunde, lasst uns die Parteinamen tilgen und Christen nennen, dessen Lehre wir haben.“<sup>4</sup> Hinter einem solchen demütigen Bekenntnis dürfen natürlich auch wir Katholiken nicht zurückstehen. Denn die Suche nach der Einheit schulden wir zuerst und zuletzt Jesus Christus, dem Haupt seiner einen Kirche selbst.

In diesem Geist der demütigen Einsicht bitten wir den gemeinsamen Herrn, dass er uns während des Reformationsgedenkens die Gnade schenke, jene Einheit wieder zu finden, die dem Willen Christi entspricht und die uns in der heutigen Lesung eindringlich vor Augen geführt wird: „Ein Leib und ein Geist, wie euch durch eure Berufung auch eine gemeinsame Hoffnung gegeben ist; ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe, ein Gott und Vater aller, der über allem und durch alle und in allem ist.“ Amen.

Lesung: Eph 4, 1-16

---

4. WA 8, 685.

**Predigt im Ökumenischen Festgottesdienst anlässlich der  
Ausstellungseröffnung „Dialog der Konfessionen. Bischof Julius Pflug  
und die Reformation“ im Dom St. Peter und Paul in Zeitz am 4. Juni 2017**

*Im Geist von Bischof Julius Pflug ökumenische Botschafter der Versöhnung Sein*

**Versöhnung als Geschenk Gottes**

Im Evangelium, das in der Katholischen Kirche am Pfingstfest vorgesehen ist, wird uns berichtet, dass am Abend von Ostern der auferstandene Christus in die Mitte seiner Jünger, die aus Angst hinter verschlossenen Türen versammelt sind, kommt und ihnen seinen Friedensgruss zuspricht. Dann haucht er sie an und spricht zu ihnen: „Empfangt den Heiligen Geist. Wem ihr die Sünden vergebt, dem sind sie vergeben; wem ihr die Vergebung verweigert, dem ist sie verweigert“ (Joh 20, 22-23). In der Sicht des Evangelisten Johannes sind Sündenvergebung und Versöhnung in der Kraft des Geistes Gottes das erste Ostergeschenk des auferstandenen Herrn und zugleich sein Auftrag an die Kirche im Werden.

Die Botschaft des Pfingstevangeliums enthält eine besondere Aktualität im Jahr des Gedenkens an den Beginn der Reformation vor fünfhundert Jahren und hier in Zeitz im Besonderen bei der Erinnerung an Bischof Julius Pflug, der sich als letzter katholischer Bischof von Naumburg in der Reformationszeit und angesichts der drohenden Spaltung intensiv um Versöhnung und die Wahrung der Einheit bemüht hat und den man deshalb als frühen Ökumeniker würdigen darf. Wir können ihn deshalb gar nicht besser ehren als dadurch, dass wir auf die befreiende Botschaft von der Versöhnung hören, die der Apostel Paulus in seinem zweiten Brief an die Korinther entfaltet hat und aus der ich vor allem drei Perspektiven hervorheben möchte:

Beginnen wir dabei mit dem Elementarsten und Tiefsten: „Gott war es, der in Christus die Welt mit sich versöhnt hat, indem er den Menschen ihre Verfehlungen nicht anrechnet“ (2 Kor 5, 19). Diese tiefe Weisheit des Paulus haben die Reformatoren, allen voran Martin Luther, neu in Erinnerung gerufen und dabei betont, dass nicht wir Menschen zu Gott gehen und ihm eine ausgleichende Gabe bringen müssen, um ihn zu versöhnen. Denn Gott wartet nicht, bis wir Menschen kommen und uns versöhnen. Aller menschlichen und allzu menschlichen Erfahrung nach müsste Gott da lange warten. Es ist vielmehr Gott, der den Menschen entgegen geht und sie versöhnt – wie im Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn der Vater, der bei seinem Sohn auf keine Vorleistungen oder auf Genugtuung wartet, sondern seinem Sohn entgegen läuft, um ihm seine Versöhnung anzubieten. Versöhnung ist die unableitbare Initiative, die Gott ergreift, und ein Geschenk, das er allen Menschen und dem ganzen Kosmos macht.

In dieser Botschaft besteht das Unerhörte des christlichen Glaubens und gleichsam die Wende, die das Christentum in die Religionsgeschichte hinein getragen und die die Reformation neu zum Leuchten gebracht hat. Das Unerhörte dieser Botschaft dürfen wir auch uns gerade im Jahr des Reformationsgedenkens gesagt sein lassen, anlässlich dessen wir in der Geschichte auch viel Unversöhntem und sogar Kriegerischem begegnen und wir zur Versöhnung gerufen sind. Dabei ist es hilfreich, im Glauben darum zu wissen, dass wir Christen, konkret wir Katholiken und Evangelische, sich nur wirklich versöhnen können, wenn wir uns zunächst die Versöhnung zusprechen lassen, die Gott uns schenkt.

## **Hoher Preis der Versöhnung**

Damit öffnet sich der Blick auf die zweite Perspektive, die uns Paulus vor Augen führt: Gott „hat den, der keine Sünde kannte, für uns zur Sünde gemacht, damit wir in ihm Gerechtigkeit Gottes würden“ (2 Kor 5, 21). Das Versöhnungshandeln Gottes in Jesus Christus ist keine billige Angelegenheit, sondern harte Arbeit, oder mit dem christlichen Märtyrer Dietrich Bonhoeffer gesprochen, keine billige, sondern teure Gnade. Gottes Versöhnung ist nichts weniger als konsequente Feindesliebe, wie sie in letzter Tiefe am Kreuz Jesu offenbar geworden ist. Denn gemäss unserer menschlichen Logik hätte die Grausamkeit des Kreuzestodes Jesu Rache bis zum Letzten bedeuten müssen, damit die Welt wieder in Ordnung wäre. Gott aber hat am Kreuz Jesu aller Macht und Vergeltung ein klares Ende gesetzt. Die einzige „Rache“, die Gott kennt, ist sein kompromissloses Nein zur Vergeltung und seine Versöhnung bis zum Ende. Das Kreuz Jesu ist Gottes Liebe in ihrer radikalsten Form, gleichsam sein grosser Versöhnungstag, der universale Yom Kippur.

Martin Luther hat mit Recht die Botschaft vom Kreuz Jesu in den Mittelpunkt seiner Reformation gestellt. Er lädt uns damit ein, der Ernsthaftigkeit der Versöhnung Gottes in Jesus Christus ansichtig zu werden. Dazu ist es notwendig zu bedenken, dass Jesus als Lamm Gott mit der Welt versöhnt hat. Er begegnet uns damit in einer Weise, die wir Menschen niemals erwartet hätten. Wir würden ihn nämlich nicht als Lamm, sondern als Löwen erwarten, der mit seiner Kraft die Welt und ihre Strukturen aus den Angeln hebt und eine neue Welt schafft. Es ist kein Zufall, dass sich die Herrscher unserer Welt immer wieder mit dem Bild des Löwen dargestellt haben, um ihre Macht und Herrschaft demonstrativ zu feiern. Der christliche Glaube aber verkündet uns, dass die Versöhnung nicht durch die grossen und mächtigen Tiere in unsere Welt kommt, dass Jesus vielmehr als Lamm zu uns Menschen kommt und damit in der Kraft seiner wehrlosen Liebe, die freilich die konkrete Wirkweise seiner Macht ist.

Jesus Christus als Lamm vor Augen wird uns auch für unseren Versöhnungsauftrag zwischen uns Christen bewusst, dass Versöhnung nicht in der potenten Attitüde des Löwen, sondern in der feinen Demutsgeste des Lammes möglich ist und dass Versöhnung nur dort geschieht, wo jemand – wie Gott selbst - den ersten Schritt wagt und deshalb den anderen einlädt, sich auf denselben Weg zu begeben.

## **Botschafter der Versöhnung sein**

Wenn wir Christen von Gott das Geschenk der Versöhnung empfangen und uns von Gott in Jesus Christus versöhnen lassen, dann sind auch wir berufen und verpflichtet, Gottes Versöhnung zu verkünden, für die Versöhnung zu arbeiten und als Botschafter der Versöhnung zu leben und zu wirken. Dies ist die dritte Perspektive, gleichsam die glaubenslogische Konsequenz aus dem Versöhnungshandeln Gottes: „Wir sind also Gesandte an Christi statt, und Gott ist es, der durch uns mahnt: Wir bitten an Christi statt: lasst euch mit Gott versöhnen“ (2 Kor 5, 20).

Für die Versöhnung unter den Menschen glaubwürdig wirken können wir Christen freilich nur, wenn wir uns selbst untereinander versöhnen und jene Einheit wiederfinden, die durch die Kirchenspaltung verwundet und verloren gegangen ist. Ökumene als Bemühen um die Wiederherstellung der Einheit der Christen ist wesentlich Versöhnungsarbeit, und zwar auf dem Weg „vom Konflikt zur Gemeinschaft“. Solche Versöhnung ist notwendig im Blick auf die grosse Spaltung in der westlichen Christenheit im 16. Jahrhundert. Die Reformatoren, allen voran Martin

Luther, wollten die Kirche nicht spalten, sondern sie im Geist des christlichen Evangeliums erneuern. Die Reformation bedeutet deshalb in erster Linie einen Vorgang der Erneuerung der Kirche durch die Wiederentdeckung des Evangeliums von der Rechtfertigung des Menschen durch die unverdientbare Gnade Gottes. Die damit intendierte Erneuerung der ganzen Kirche ist damals aber nicht gelungen. Es ist vielmehr zur Kirchenspaltung gekommen, und im Anschluss daran haben im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert grausame Glaubenskriege stattgefunden, in denen sich Katholiken und Lutheraner bis aufs Blut bekämpft haben, vor allem der Dreissigjährige Krieg, der das damalige Europa in ein rotes Meer von Blut verwandelt hat.

Die Reformation enthält deshalb zwei Seiten: Auf der einen Seite sind wir dankbar für die Gaben, die uns durch die Reformation geschenkt worden sind. Auf der anderen Seite haben wir angesichts der traurigen Geschichte, in der der eine Leib Christi verwundet worden ist und wir Christen im Namen des Glaubens Gewalt gegeneinander ausgeübt haben, allen Grund, Schuld zu bekennen, Busse zu tun und uns im Licht der Versöhnungshandeln Gottes zu versöhnen. Dazu müssen wir jene Reinigung des geschichtlichen Gedächtnisses vollziehen, die Papst Franziskus im Blick auf das Reformationsgedenken anmahnt: „Wir können Geschehenes nicht auslöschen, aber wir wollen nicht zulassen, dass die Last vergangener Schuld weiter unsere Beziehungen vergiftet. Die Barmherzigkeit Gottes wird unsere Beziehungen erneuern.“<sup>1</sup>

Barmherzigkeit und Versöhnung müssen die Leitperspektiven des ökumenischen Weges gerade im Jahr des Reformationsgedenkens sein. Dies wird uns umso mehr gelingen, desto entschiedener wir uns an jenem Gott orientieren, der uns in der heutigen Lesung vor Augen geführt ist, den Martin Luther leidenschaftlich in Erinnerung gerufen und im Glauben an ihn Bischof Julius Pflug sich als weiser Vermittler in einer bedrängenden Zeit für die Versöhnung und Einheit unter den Christen eingesetzt hat. Diesen Gott der grenzenlosen Versöhnung können wir Christen in der heutigen Welt nur gemeinsam und als Versöhnte glaubwürdig verkünden. Und diesen Gott in ökumenischer Gemeinschaft in unserer heute weithin säkularisierten Gesellschaft, in der Gott oft genug auf die Ersatzbank gesetzt wird, wieder in die Mitte zu rücken, ist der wichtigste Auftrag, dem wir Christen heute in ökumenischer Gemeinschaft verpflichtet sein müssen. Dann wird die Welt auch heute erkennen können, dass Versöhnung die kostbare Perle des christlichen Glaubens und ein grossartiges Angebot für das Leben und Zusammenleben der Menschen ist.

Mögen das Reformationsgedenken in diesem Jahr und im Speziellen die Erinnerung an Bischof Julius Pflug uns zur Glaubenserkenntnis und zum Glaubensbekenntnis bewegen: Versöhnung – Gott sei Dank! Denn Versöhnung ist in erster Linie nicht eine Forderung an uns Menschen, die uns schnell überfordert, sondern Konsequenz des Glaubens, der befreit, und damit unsere Antwort des Glaubens auf jene Versöhnung, die Gott uns schenkt – aus Gnade und damit gratis. Amen.

Lesung: 2 Kor 5, 17-21

---

1. Franziskus, Predigt in der Vesper am Hochfest der Bekehrung des Apostels Paulus in der Basilika St. Paul vor den Mauern am 25. Januar 2016.

## Omelia durante la celebrazione dei Vespri nella Basilica di San Nicola di Bari, 28 luglio 2017

*Ritrovare l'unità in Cristo con l'intercessione di San Nicola*

### **L'unità nella fede in Gesù Cristo e nel suo Corpo**

“Per me infatti il vivere è Cristo e il morire un guadagno” (Fil 1,21). Con queste profonde parole, Paolo esprime, nella lettura odierna, il segreto della sua vita ed il suo più intimo desiderio, ovvero quello di glorificare Cristo nel suo corpo, “sia che io viva sia che io muoia”. Se lasciamo agire in noi la testimonianza di questa intima unione con Cristo, inizieremo a comprendere perché la Chiesa abbia scelto questa testimonianza di San Paolo come lettura liturgica nella Festa della Traslazione della Reliquia di San Nicola. San Nicola ha vissuto infatti una simile unione con Cristo ed ha reso a Cristo una testimonianza altrettanto credibile. Egli ha offerto tale testimonianza con la sua vita e l'ha dimostrata, durante il Concilio di Nicea, con il suo determinato impegno contro l'eresia dell'arianesimo, ovvero contro quella dottrina che professava Gesù come uomo ma non come Dio.

Se gettiamo uno sguardo alla cristianità odierna, con onestà, dobbiamo riconoscere che questa eresia non appartiene solo al passato, ma è tornata ad essere attuale. Molte persone e anche molti cristiani oggi sono profondamente toccati dalla dimensione umana di Gesù di Nazareth; tuttavia, hanno difficoltà nell'accettare la professione di fede secondo la quale Gesù è il Figlio unigenito di Dio e, di conseguenza, la fede cristologica della Chiesa. Oggi, persino all'interno della Chiesa, spesso si vede in Gesù semplicemente un uomo, certamente eccezionale ed estremamente buono, ma non si riesce più distinguere nell'uomo Gesù il volto del Figlio di Dio.

Ma con questa professione di fede in Gesù Cristo sta o cade la fede cristiana. Di fatti, se Gesù fosse stato semplicemente un uomo, allora egli sarebbe relegato irreversibilmente al passato e soltanto il nostro remoto ricordo potrebbe riportarlo, in maniera più o meno chiara, al presente. Ma, se così fosse, Gesù non sarebbe quella luce che, nella notte dell'esistenza, ci raggiunge e viene a visitarci, non solo per condividere la notte con noi uomini, ma per far risplendere, nella notte, la sua luce, mettendo fine alla notte. Soltanto se è vera la nostra fede in Dio fattosi uomo ed in Gesù Cristo come vero uomo e vero Dio e, dunque, come colui che ci permette di prendere parte al presente di Dio che abbraccia tutti i tempi, Gesù Cristo può essere anche oggi – e non solo ieri – il nostro vero contemporaneo e la luce della nostra vita.

### **L'ecumenismo dei santi**

È particolarmente significativo ricordare la bella testimonianza di Cristo resa da San Paolo e da San Nicola questa sera, nel momento in cui la reliquia di San Nicola torna al suo luogo di origine dopo la permanenza a Mosca e a San Pietroburgo, dove è stata accolta soprattutto dalla profonda venerazione delle sorelle e dei fratelli ortodossi ed ha così contribuito all'importante causa della riunificazione della Chiesa in Oriente e in Occidente. Infatti, soltanto se approfondiamo la nostra comunione di fede in Gesù Cristo, il vero Figlio di Dio, ci riavviciniamo anche gli uni agli altri come cristiani e ci riscopriamo parte dell'unico Corpo di Cristo.

Di ciò ha reso una credibile testimonianza soprattutto San Nicola. Egli ha vissuto al tempo della cristianità indivisa e, pertanto, la sua intercessione ed il suo aiuto sono particolarmente importanti per la ricomposizione dell'unità della Chiesa in Oriente e in Occidente. Il fatto che la reliquia di San Nicola di Bari sia stata portata a Mosca e a San Pietroburgo affinché i fedeli potessero venerarla è frutto di un evento ecumenico, ovvero dello storico incontro avvenuto a L'Havana il 12 febbraio 2016 tra Papa Francesco ed il Patriarca russo-ortodosso Kyrill. La traslazione della reliquia dall'Italia alla Russia è un bel segno dell'ecumenismo dei santi, la cui importanza è stata sottolineata da Papa Francesco e dal Patriarca Kyrill nella loro dichiarazione comune: "Rendiamo grazie a Dio per i doni ricevuti dalla venuta nel mondo del suo unico Figlio. Condividiamo la comune Tradizione spirituale del primo millennio del cristianesimo. I testimoni di questa Tradizione sono la Santissima Madre di Dio, la Vergine Maria, e i Santi che veneriamo. Tra loro ci sono innumerevoli martiri che hanno testimoniato la loro fedeltà a Cristo e sono diventati 'seme di cristiani'" (§4).

La traslazione della reliquia di San Nicola in Russia, affinché potesse essere offerta anche alla venerazione dei fedeli ortodossi, è stata un'opportunità particolarmente proficua per ancorare nella fede del popolo di Dio la ricerca ecumenica della riconciliazione della Chiesa in Oriente e in Occidente. Di sicuro, è estremamente positivo che i capi delle diverse Chiese si incontrino e cerchino vie di conciliazione ecumenica. Ma l'unità può essere conseguita soltanto se è l'intero popolo di Dio a contribuirvi. La traslazione in Russia, per la venerazione dei fedeli, della reliquia di San Nicola è stato un servizio ecumenico significativo e molto bello a questa causa. Riportando oggi la reliquia al suo luogo d'origine, abbiamo ottimi motivi per esprimere la nostra gratitudine. Siamo grati a Papa Francesco ed al Patriarca Kyrill, che hanno preparato il terreno per questo evento ecumenico; ringraziamo Sua Eccellenza l'Arcivescovo di Bari-Bitonto, Mons. Francesco Cacucci, ed il Rettore della Basilica di San Nicola di Bari, Padre Ciro Capotosto, che hanno permesso con grande generosità la traslazione della reliquia; esprimiamo infine la nostra riconoscenza a tutti voi, cari fedeli della diocesi di Bari-Bitonto, che avete acconsentito alla traslazione, rendendo servizio all'ecumenismo dei santi ed accompagnando la reliquia con la vostra preghiera.

Con questo evento, San Nicola ha assunto nuovamente una grande rilevanza ecumenica. In occasione della ricollocazione della reliquia, vi chiedo dunque, nel Santuario di San Nicola, di continuare a pregare in modo particolare per l'unità dei cristiani e di invocare l'intercessione del vostro Santo. San Nicola, infatti, come tutti i santi della nostra Chiesa che sono già uniti in cielo, è tra i nostri migliori intercessori ed accompagnatori sul cammino ecumenico, e può aiutarci a realizzare l'unità dei cristiani.

### **L'ecumenismo dei confessori e dei martiri**

San Nicola riveste una particolare importanza ecumenica anche per un altro motivo. Durante una persecuzione contro i cristiani, egli fu arrestato e, per un certo tempo, incarcerato; per questo, ha ricevuto il titolo onorifico di "confessore". San Nicola fa parte dell'ampia schiera di cristiani perseguitati, una schiera che comprende anche molti cristiani di oggi. Oggi tutte le Chiese hanno i loro confessori e i loro martiri. I cristiani non sono perseguitati perché appartenenti ad una specifica confessione cristiana, ma perché cristiani. Si deve dunque parlare di un vero e proprio ecumenismo di confessori e di martiri.

Questo ecumenismo, per quanto tragico, comporta anche una grande promessa: la testimonianza di così tanti confessori e martiri del nostro tempo si rivelerà un giorno seme della piena unità ecumenica del Corpo di Cristo. Mentre noi cristiani e noi Chiese su questa terra viviamo una comunione ancora imperfetta, i confessori ed i martiri nella gloria celeste sono già in una comunione piena e perfetta.

Essi non solo accompagnano e sostengono con la loro intercessione i nostri sforzi ecumenici tesi a realizzare la riconciliazione soprattutto tra i cristiani e le Chiese in Oriente e in Occidente, ma ci aiutano anche a crescere nella fede in Gesù Cristo e a trovare una gioia rinnovata nella professione di fede in Cristo, affinché possiamo, sulla scia di San Paolo, confessare con lieta gratitudine: “per me il vivere è Cristo e il morire un guadagno”. Se, in tal modo, poniamo Cristo al centro della vita cristiana e della comunità ecclesiale, dimostriamo di essere amici credibili di San Nicola e di trovarci sul giusto cammino verso l’unità nel Corpo di Cristo. Amen.

Lettura: Fil 1, 19-21

—

### **Homilie im Pontifikalamt anlässlich des Jubiläums 600 Jahre Papstwahl in Konstanz im Konstanzer Münster am 12. November 2017**

*Primat des Christusbekenntnisses. Die schöne Sendung des Petrus und seines Nachfolgers*

Im menschlichen Leben liegen Licht und Schatten oft nahe beieinander. Nicht selten kommt das Licht erst wirklich zur Geltung, wenn man den dunklen Hintergrund nicht verdrängt, sondern wahrnimmt. Diese Weisheit gilt auch für die Kirchengeschichte und im Besonderen für das heutige Jubiläum. In dankbarer Freude feiern wir die Papstwahl beim Konzil von Konstanz vor 600 Jahren, die die einzige gewesen ist, die nördlich der Alpen vorgenommen worden ist. Der dunkle Hintergrund dieses freudigen Ereignisses ist freilich die Erinnerung an das grosse Schisma in der Kirche des Westens, das die Christenheit beinahe vierzig Jahre lang erschüttert hatte. Dieses konnte erst mit der Wahl von Papst Martin V. beendet werden. Licht und Schatten scheinen freilich auch und bereits bei jener Gestalt auf, deren Nachfolger der Papst ist, nämlich beim Heiligen Petrus. In der Heiligen Schrift wird er uns als schwacher Mensch vor Augen geführt, und zwar bis dahin, dass er den Herrn verleugnet hat und geflohen ist. Gerade er aber ist von Christus zum Felsen der Kirche erwählt worden, und damit ist die menschliche Schwachheit zum Zeichen der göttlichen Vorsehung geworden. Wenn wir diese Spannung zwischen menschlichem Stolperstein und erwähltem Felssein bedenken, sind wir gut beraten, unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf jene Sendung zu richten, mit der Jesus Petrus und damit auch seinen Nachfolger betraut hat. Dabei sind es vor allem drei biblische Situationen, in denen der Auftrag Jesu in besonderer Weise an den Tag tritt und die wir näher betrachten wollen.

#### **Christus bekennen und zu ihm hin führen**

Die erste Situation begegnet uns im heutigen Evangelium nach Matthäus, wo Jesus den Simon bei seinem neuen Namen, den er ihm gegeben hat – „Petrus“ - behaftet und ihm verheisst, dass er jener Fels ist, auf dem er seine Kirche bauen will, und dass die Mächte

der Unterwelt sie nicht überwältigen werden. Die Voraussetzung für diese Verheissung besteht aber darin, dass sich Petrus ganz zu seinem Herrn bekennt.

Der Ernst dieses Geschehens wird freilich erst sichtbar, wenn wir bedenken, wo es sich ereignet. Die Szene spielt sich in Cäsarea Philippi bei den Quellen des Jordan und damit am Rande des jüdischen Landes, gleichsam an der Grenze zur heidnischen Welt und damit an der Peripherie ab. Wichtiger als der geographische Ort ist der zeitliche Kontext im Leben Jesu. Er steht am entscheidenden Wendepunkt seines irdischen Weges. Bald wird er nach Jerusalem aufbrechen, und er eröffnet deshalb seinen Jüngern zum ersten Mal, dass sein Weg in die Heilige Stadt führe und dass er ein Weg des Kreuzes sei: „Von da an begann Jesus seinen Jüngern zu erklären, er müsse nach Jerusalem gehen und von den Ältesten, den Hohepriestern und den Schriftgelehrten vieles erliden, er werde getötet werden, aber am dritten Tag werde er auferstehen“ (Mt 16, 21).

In dieser sehr kritischen Situation stellt Jesus den Jüngern die Frage, für wen ihn die Menschen halten. Die Auskunft der Jünger über die Ansichten der Leute mag interessant sein, aber sie genügt Jesus nicht. Er stellt vielmehr an die Jünger die ganz persönliche Frage: „Ihr aber, für wen haltet ihr mich?“ Auf diese Frage antwortet Petrus ebenfalls persönlich mit jenem Bekenntnis, das zum Ursprung des christlichen Glaubensbekenntnisses überhaupt geworden ist: „Du bist der Messias, der Sohn des lebendigen Gottes.“ Petrus ist der Fels also gerade darin, dass er sich stellvertretend und im Namen der anderen Jünger zu Jesus bekennt, und zwar aus innerer Betroffenheit heraus. Denn dieses Bekenntnis kann nicht einfach ein rein objektiver oder gar neutraler Satz sein – wie bei den Leuten –; es muss vielmehr aus Überzeugung geschehen, wenn es das innere Geheimnis Jesu berühren will. Die Sendung des Petrus und damit auch seines Nachfolgers heute besteht in erster Linie darin, mit seinem Bekenntnis zu Jesus Christus uns allen voranzugehen und uns zu Christus zu führen und uns zu helfen, in dieses Glaubensbekenntnis einzustimmen.

### **Die Brüder und Schwestern eucharistisch stärken**

Wechseln wir die Szene und schauen wir auf den Evangelisten Lukas. Die besondere Aufgabe, die Jesus Petrus überträgt, besteht darin, dass er seine Brüder stärken soll. Zum tieferen Verständnis ist auch hier der Kontext wichtig, in dem dieser Auftrag ausgesprochen wird. Zunächst kündigt Jesus dem Petrus ungeschminkt dessen Verleugnung an: „Simon, Simon, der Satan hat verlangt, dass er euch wie Weizen sieben darf“ (Lk 22, 31). Diese Worte erinnern an das alttestamentliche Buch Hiob, in dem der Satan von Gott die Zustimmung verlangt, Hiob Schaden zuzufügen und damit zu demonstrieren, dass es wahre Frömmigkeit gar nicht geben kann. Auch hier ist wiederum die Schwachheit Petri angesprochen, die mit seiner Sendung zusammen gehen muss.

Jesus kündigt aber nicht nur die Erprobung des Petrus an, sondern er spricht auch seinen Schutz zu mit den Worten: „Ich aber habe für dich gebetet, dass dein Glaube nicht erlischt.“ In diesem Gebet Jesu darf Petrus in seiner Sendung Zuflucht finden. Denn das Gebet ist die Macht Jesu, mit der er die Macht des Bösen begrenzt. Das Gebet Jesu beschützt den Glauben, den Petrus bei Cäsarea Philippi bekannt hat. Damit zeigt sich, dass die Sendung des Petrus im Gebet Jesu verankert ist und von diesem Gebet begleitet wird.

Lukas zeigt zudem sehr schön, dass Jesus dem Petrus den Auftrag beim Letzten Abendmahl anvertraut, in dem auch das Geschenk der Eucharistie an die Kirche ihr Fundament hat. Die Kirche ist deshalb in ihrem Innersten eucharistische Gemeinschaft, in der Christus uns seine Liebe schenkt, die bis in den Tod gegangen ist. Diese Liebe Jesu Christi darf die Kirche in der Eucharistie immer wieder und besonders intensiv erfahren; und in ihr findet sie ihre tiefste Einheit.

Im Dienst dieser Einheit steht in besonderer Weise die Kirche von Rom mit ihrem Bischof, die der Heilige Ignatius von Antiochien in seinem Brief an die Römer als jene Kirche bezeichnet hat, die den „Vorsitz in der Liebe“ hat. Mit diesem „Vorsitz in der Liebe“ nimmt der Nachfolger des Petrus jene Sendung wahr, die Jesus dem Petrus anvertraut hat. Im Evangelium des Lukas verdeutlicht Jesus diesen Auftrag mit den Worten: „Wenn du dich wieder bekehrt hast, dann stärke deine Brüder.“ Der Auftrag des Petrus und seines Nachfolgers besteht also darin, seine ganze Energie zu investieren, dass der Glaube an Jesus Christus niemals verstummt, sondern dass er ihn immer wieder stärkt und dazu auf die betende Unterstützung Jesu angewiesen ist. Damit er diese Aufgabe wahrnehmen kann, muss er sich selbst bekehren, genauer von der Versuchung ablassen, seine eigenen Ideen in den Vordergrund zu stellen. Denn er ist nicht berufen, Jesus *voran*-zugehen, sondern ihm *nach*-zufolgen und seine Brüder und Schwestern zur Nachfolge Jesu einzuladen.

### **Die Schafe in Liebe weiden**

Wechseln wir nochmals die Szene und blicken in das Johannesevangelium. Hier ist es der auferstandene Christus, der Petrus am See von Tiberias begegnet, sich ihm offenbart und ihm die Sendung anvertraut, seine Schafe zu weiden. Auch hier ist der Kontext von entscheidender Bedeutung. Bevor Jesus Petrus beauftragt, stellt er ihm die ernsthafte Frage: „Simon, Sohn des Johannes, liebst du mich mehr als diese?“ (Joh 21, 15). Wie ernst es Jesus mit dieser Frage ist, zeigt sich daran, dass er diese Frage dreimal wiederholt. Damit macht Jesus unmissverständlich deutlich, dass die Liebe zu ihm das wichtigste Kriterium für eine spezifische Berufung in seine Nachfolge ist.

Für geschulte Ohren von uns modernen Christen und Christinnen mag diese Konzentration auf das eine Kriterium der Liebe zu Jesus Christus seltsam klingen: etwas spiritualistisch und abgehoben. Doch wir können den biblischen Text drehen und wenden, wie wir wollen, wir kommen nicht an der Feststellung vorbei: Der Auferstandene fragt Jesus nicht nach seinem künftigen pastoralen Programm und schon gar nicht nach dem kirchenpolitischen Kurs, den er einzuschlagen gedenkt. Der Auferstandene fragt Petrus nicht einmal danach, ob ihn die anderen Jünger und das Volk Gottes wohl annehmen werden. Nein, Christus fragt Petrus allein nach seiner Liebe zu ihm: „Simon, Sohn des Johannes, liebst du mich mehr als diese?“

Die Liebe zu Christus ist die Grundbedingung für Petrus und seinen Nachfolger, der berufen ist, diese Liebe Christi zu verkünden und in den Sakramenten zu feiern. Denn die Schafe Jesu kann nur derjenige weiden, der in liebender Freundschaft mit Christus verbunden ist. Damit kommt an den Tag, was das innerste Wesen der Sendung des Petrus und seines Nachfolgers ist. Das Johannesevangelium gibt uns darauf die schöne Antwort: Petrus und sein Nachfolger leben von derjenigen Liebe, mit der Christus selbst uns liebt. Der Papst wird deshalb dadurch immer besser Papst und die ganze Kirche wird dadurch immer besser Kirche, dass sie die zum Äussersten gehende Liebe Jesu Christi sichtbar darstellen und bezeugen.

### **In Gehorsam „Vikar“ Christi sein**

Wenn wir diese drei Szenen zusammen sehen, wird uns bewusst, wie tief die Sendung des Petrus und seines Nachfolgers im ganzen Neuen Testament begründet ist. Und es wird sichtbar, worin die Sendung des Petrusnachfolgers besteht, nämlich im Bekenntnis des Glaubens an Jesus Christus als Dienst an der Einheit der Kirche und an der Einheit aller Christen. Wie Petrus das Bekenntnis zu Jesus Christus abgelegt und so zum Felsstein der Einheit geworden ist, so besteht die Aufgabe des Nachfolgers des Petrus darin, Anführer im Bekenntnis des Glaubens an Jesus Christus zu sein. Die Kathedra des Bischofs von Rom ist vor allem die Kathedra dieses Christusbekenntnisses, und er steht in der Pflicht, von dieser Kathedra aus zu verkünden und immer zu wiederholen, dass Christus der Herr ist.

In diesem Sinn ist der Papst wirklich Stellvertreter Christi, dass er sein Treuhänder ist und für ihn steht und einsteht. Oder mit den Worten von Papst Benedikt XVI.: „Der Papst ist kein absoluter Herrscher, dessen Denken und Willen Gesetz sind. Im Gegenteil: Sein Dienst garantiert Gehorsam gegenüber Christus und seinem Wort.“<sup>1</sup> Der Nachfolger des Petrus will uns helfen, uns zu Christus zu bekennen und ihn zu lieben.

Das ist auch der tiefste Sinn des heutigen Jubiläums. Denn die Kirche braucht diesen Dienst des Petrusnachfolgers; deshalb sind wir dem Konzil von Konstanz dankbar, dass es in den grossen Wirren der damaligen Zeit der Kirche einen neuen Papst in der Person von Martin V. geschenkt hat. Und wir sind Christus dankbar, dass er uns immer wieder einen Nachfolger des Petrus schenkt, der den „Vorsitz in der Liebe“ hat und dem wir in der Eucharistie in besonderer Weise verbunden sind. Amen.

---

1. Benedikt XVI., Predigt in der Eucharistiefeier anlässlich der feierlichen Inbesitznahme der Kathedra des Bischofs von Rom in der Lateranbasilika am 7. Mai 2005.

## GREETINGS AND MESSAGES

### Grusswort beim Gemeinsamen Buss- und Versöhnungsgottesdienst Hildesheim, 11. März 2017

*Erinnerung heilen – Jesus Christus bezeugen*

Am heutigen Buss- und Versöhnungsgottesdienst teilzunehmen ist mir eine grosse Freude, und ich darf Sie auch im Namen des Heiligen Vaters Franziskus herzlich begrüssen. Das heutige ökumenische Ereignis ist ein eindrucksvolles Zeugnis für Jesus Christus, unseren gemeinsamen Herrn und Gott, der uns zu Versöhnung und Einheit ruft. Dankbar nehme ich hier in Deutschland, einem der wichtigen Geburtsländer der Reformation, authentische Sehnsucht nach einer weiteren Annäherung unter uns Christen wahr, die verheissungsvolle Wege in die Zukunft ermöglichen wird.

Wenn Versöhnung das Vorzeichen eines gemeinsamen Reformationsgedenkens ist, dann stehen zwei zentrale Elemente im Vordergrund. An erster Stelle verdient die Dankbarkeit für all das erwähnt zu werden, was die Reformation an positiven spirituellen und theologischen Einsichten gebracht hat und was evangelische und katholische Christen heute gemeinsam bezeugen. Im Jahre 2017 erinnern wir nicht nur fünfhundert Jahre Beginn der Reformation, sondern auch fünfzig Jahre intensiven Dialog zwischen Lutheranern und Katholiken, in dem wir entdecken durften, wie viel uns gemeinsam ist. Der Dialog mit dem Lutherischen Weltbund ist der erste gewesen, den die Katholische Kirche gleich nach dem Konzil begonnen hat und der sich als sehr fruchtbar erweisen hat.

Die Hände, die sich evangelische und katholische Christen in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten gereicht haben, lassen sich nicht mehr los. Sie falten sich aber ebenso gemeinsam zur inständigen Bitte um Vergebung für die grosse Schuld, die katholische und evangelische Christen in der Geschichte auf sich geladen haben. Denn die Reformation hat nicht, wie die Reformatoren es beabsichtigt haben, zur Erneuerung der ganzen Kirche geführt, sondern zu ihrer Spaltung. Im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert haben grausame Konfessionskriege stattgefunden, in denen sich Christen bis aufs Blut bekämpft haben. Angesichts dieser tragischen Geschichte, in der der Leib Christi verwundet worden ist und Christen im Namen der Religion Gewalt gegeneinander ausgeübt haben, haben katholische und evangelische Christen allen Grund, Klage zu erheben und Busse zu tun für die Missverständnisse, Böswilligkeiten und Verletzungen, die sie einander in den vergangenen fünfhundert Jahren angetan haben.

Für unseren weiteren Weg brauchen wir als geistliche Wegzehrung die Reinigung des geschichtlichen Gedächtnisses, die Papst Franziskus mit den Worten anmahnt: „Wir können Geschehenes nicht auslöschen, aber wir wollen nicht zulassen, dass die Last vergangener Schuld weiter unsere Beziehungen vergiftet. Die Barmherzigkeit Gottes wird unsere Beziehungen erneuern.“<sup>1</sup> Dass Barmherzigkeit und Versöhnung die Leitperspektiven des ökumenischen Weges gerade im Jahr des Reformationsgedenkens sind, ist die Botschaft der heutigen Versammlung hier in der Michaeliskirche in Hildesheim. Bitten wir den gnädigen und barmherzigen Gott, dass

---

1. Franziskus, Predigt in der Vesper am Hochfest der Bekehrung des Apostels Paulus in der Basilika St. Paul vor den Mauern am 25. Januar 2016.

vom heutigen gemeinsamen Gottesdienst Signale der Versöhnung und des Aufbruchs ausgehen, und zwar nicht nur in Deutschland, sondern für die ganze christliche Welt. Indem wir Gott danken, dass wir zum ersten Mal in der Geschichte den Reformationstag in ökumenischer Gemeinschaft begehen können, verpflichten wir uns, zusammen zu bleiben in der spannenden Zuversicht, wohin uns der Heilige Geist führen wird.

---

**Messaggio per la “Settimana ecumenica”  
Castel Gandolfo, 9-13 maggio 2017**

Cari fratelli e sorelle in Cristo,

Vi siete riuniti al Centro Mariapoli per la “settimana ecumenica”, per vivere ed approfondire l’unità nella fede in Gesù Cristo. Molto volentieri sarei venuto da voi oggi, all’inizio di questa settimana. Ciò non mi è possibile purtroppo, poiché mi trovo al momento in Namibia per partecipare, in questo anno di commemorazione della Riforma, alla Plenaria della Federazione Luterana Mondiale. Tengo però a trasmettervi, in questo modo, il mio caloroso saluto. Sono grato al Movimento dei Focolari per aver organizzato, per la 59.ma volta, questa “settimana ecumenica” e per promuovere l’ecumenismo della vita, così importante. Ringrazio tutti voi, cari fratelli e sorelle, per la vostra partecipazione a questa settimana e per la condivisione delle vostre esperienze di convivenza ecumenica e di ricerca comune dell’unità, quell’unità che è andata persa nel corso della storia.

Questa settimana s’incentra sul tema “Camminando insieme – cristiani sulla via verso l’unità”. Si tratta di un titolo assai promettente. Infatti, la comunione tra i cristiani è essenzialmente una comunione di fedeli che camminano insieme. I cristiani che vivono in diverse Comunità ecclesiali sono, insieme, in cammino verso l’unità e vivono nella comunione tutto ciò che possono intraprendere insieme. L’esperienza dell’ecumenismo di vita ci mostra che l’unità cresce “camminando insieme” e che camminare insieme significa già vivere e realizzare l’unità. Questo atteggiamento sta particolarmente a cuore a Papa Francesco, che ha espresso la sua convinzione ecumenica con parole incisive: “L’unità non verrà come un miracolo alla fine: l’unità viene nel cammino, la fa lo Spirito Santo nel cammino.”<sup>1</sup>

Essere in cammino, insieme: ecco in cosa consiste essenzialmente l’ecumenismo oggi. Ma questo cammino non è una gita senza meta; esso ha un traguardo preciso ed un nome concreto: Gesù Cristo. Come cristiani, siamo in cammino insieme verso di lui e soprattutto verso quel luogo in cui egli ci donerà l’unità, ovvero sotto la croce: “Il Gesù abbandonato” è la “chiave dell’unità”. Più progrediamo insieme nel cammino verso di lui, più ci avviciniamo insieme anche all’unità tra di noi.

Cari fratelli e sorelle, in questi giorni che trascorrerete a Castel Gandolfo vi auguro di approfondire questa esperienza e di viverla come comunione ecumenica di fedeli che camminano insieme. In unione di preghiera, trasmetto a tutti quanti voi il mio più cordiale saluto.

---

1. Francesco, Omelia durante la celebrazione dei Vespri nella Solennità della conversione di San Paolo Apostolo il 25 gennaio 2014.

## **Greetings at the 12th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation Windhoek, Namibia, 12–17 May 2017**

It is my privilege to convey to you the greetings and blessings of the Catholic Church and of Pope Francis in particular. I am delighted to be present personally at the 12th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation taking place in the year of the Reformation commemoration. In this year we commemorate not only 500 years of the Reformation, but also 50 years of intensive dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics, through which we have been able to discover once more how much we have in common in the faith.

The dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation was the first that the Catholic Church commenced immediately after the Second Vatican Council, and has proved to be very fruitful. A milestone in this dialogue was certainly the signing of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” on 31 August 1999 in Augsburg. It is a gift of grace that it has become possible to achieve a fundamental consensus in the doctrine that led to dispute and ultimately to the schism in the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. On the foundation of what had been achieved, we Catholics were pleased to accept the invitation of the Lutheran World Federation to celebrate together the Reformation commemoration. How that had become possible was demonstrated by Lutherans and Catholics in the joint document “From Conflict to Communion”. That text paved the way for the joint commemoration of the Reformation that took place in the Lutheran Cathedral in Lund in Sweden on 31 October 2016, in a joint worship service presided over by Pope Francis on the Catholic side and by LWF President Bishop Munib Younan and General Secretary Reverend Martin Junge on behalf of the Lutheran side. This event has been widely understood and acknowledged as a promising ecumenical signal.

In their joint declaration Bishop Younan and Pope Francis affirmed: “While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the Church.”<sup>1</sup> These words give expression to the two central elements which occupy the foreground of a joint Reformation commemoration.

In the first place gratitude is to be expressed for all the positive spiritual and theological insights brought about by the Reformation and which Lutheran and Catholic Christians today confess jointly, above all with regard to the relationship of Scripture and tradition, the eucharist, ecclesial ministry and the doctrine of justification by grace. After a long history of separation it has been become possible over the past half century, through intensive dialogue, to overcome the previous divisive confessionalism and to perceive that the schism of Western Christianity following the Reformation has not been able to destroy the roots of the Christian faith.

The hands that Lutheran and Catholic Christians have extended to one another over the past decades will not be drawn back again. Not only, but these hands, also together, are joined in heartfelt prayer for forgiveness for the great guilt that has burdened Lutheran and Catholic Christians through history. For the Reformation did

---

1. Joint Declaration on the occasion of the joint Catholic–Lutheran Reformation commemoration on 31 October 2016.

not lead to the renewal of the whole Church as Martin Luther intended, but to schism. With and after the schism, cruel confessional conflicts took place in the West in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which Christians fought against one another to the death, above all in the Thirty Years War which transformed Europe into a Red Sea of blood. In view of this tragic history in which the one body of Christ was wounded and Christians committed violence against one another in the name of religion, Catholic and Lutheran Christians have every reason to lament and be penitent for the misunderstandings, malicious acts and injuries they have inflicted on one another over the past 500 years.

Gratitude and the plea for reconciliation go hand in hand and form as it were the two sides of a joint Reformation commemoration as expressed in the statement “From Conflict to Communion”. For a joint Reformation commemoration must take the conflict as seriously as the communion, and above all make a contribution enabling Lutheran and Catholic Christians to progress along the path from conflict to communion.

As spiritual nourishment along this path we have been given the purification of historical memory, as Pope Francis cautions in the words: “We cannot erase what is past, nor do we wish to allow the weight of past transgressions to continue to pollute our relationships. The mercy of God will renew our relationships.”<sup>2</sup> If mercy and reconciliation form the guiding perspectives of the ecumenical path, above all in this year of the Reformation commemoration, we can walk together through the open door to a positive future.

In gratitude for the fruitful collaboration which the Catholic Church has experienced with the Lutheran World Federation and its leadership, I wish you every success in this 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly and God’s blessings for your future undertakings. And in thanking you on behalf of the Catholic Church for the fact that we are able to celebrate a centenary of the Reformation in ecumenical communion for the first time in history, I live in hope that we can continue to walk the path into the future together, liberated by God’s grace and accompanied by the Holy Spirit who will show us the way.

---

2. Pope Francis, Homily at the Vespers on the Solemnity of the conversion of the Apostle Paul, in the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls, 25 January 2016.

---

**Welcome message to Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi,  
new Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome  
Caravita, Rome, 26 October 2017**

Your Grace,  
Dear Archbishop Bernard,  
Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Your Grace’s special representative to the Holy See reflects the great hope for unity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church that followed the second Vatican Council. That hope lives on, and must live on in the heart of every Anglican and Roman Catholic, because it is the hope expressed in the prayer of our Lord on the night before he died, “that they may be one” (Jn 17: 11). We have been extraordinarily blessed by past representatives of your Grace and your predecessors, all

of whom have graced us with their gifts. They have been a much valued point of contact that has enabled us to understand developments and the challenges of the worldwide Anglican Communion within a context of friendship.

There is an important ecumenical principle: “In necessariis unitas, in aliis libertas, in omnibus caritas,” that is, “In essentials unity, in all else liberty, in everything charity.” This phrase, which was important in the early Church, found its way into the second Vatican Council’s document on ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (§ 4) and it continues to guide our ecumenical work. We seek to find agreement on the essential truths of our faith, we rejoice in the diversity of expressions of Christian faith that we find in the spirituality, theology and worship of our Christian brothers and sisters, and in all things charity prevails.

The Anglican Centre and the role of the special representative to the Holy See might best be thought of in these terms. Through the courses and the opportunities for conversation between Anglicans, Catholics and other Christians we strive to find agreement in all that is essential to Christian faith. Through the worship and spirituality of the Centre, we Catholics can learn to love the rich liturgical and spiritual heritage of the Anglican Communion. However, most important of all is the establishment and maintenance of bonds of charity. Archbishop Bernard, you give a personal expression to that charity. We welcome you. You are already a friend. We look forward to deepening that friendship in the coming years as we continue to work towards that unity in faith for which our Lord prayed. We wish you and your wife, Mathilde, every blessing for your time with us here in Rome.

—

**Saluto al Convegno “Lutero, la Riforma, Sant’Agostino e l’Ordine Agostiniano”  
Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, Roma, 9 novembre 2017**

Rivolgo il mio cordiale saluto a tutti i partecipanti al Convegno odierno su “Lutero, la Riforma, Sant’Agostino e l’Ordine Agostiniano”, e vi auguro un proficuo incontro. Il titolo del Convegno, abbracciando un tema così ampio, incentra l’attenzione su un importante aspetto. Durante l’anno della commemorazione della Riforma e nel periodo della sua preparazione, si è molto discusso su chi era Lutero e su quale sia stata la sua influenza nel suo tempo e nella storia. Ma è possibile capire un uomo soltanto se non ci si limita a chiedere chi sia stato e cosa abbia fatto. Si può capire un uomo soltanto se ci si interroga anche su quale sia stata la sua origine, se si cercano le sue radici. Ciò vale anche per quanto riguarda lo sforzo di comprendere Martin Lutero. Se è vero che il riformatore non può essere compreso senza tener presente il suo impatto, è altrettanto vero che egli non può essere capito senza considerare le sue radici. Una radice importante è proprio al centro del Convegno odierno, ovvero Sant’Agostino. Ricordare tale radice e considerarla più attentamente è una particolare missione dell’Ordine Agostiniano, al quale apparteneva lo stesso Lutero. A ciò ha fatto riferimento anche il Professor Christoph Marksches, autorevole storico della Chiesa, protestante, in occasione del conferimento del dottorato honoris causa che gli è stato tributato dall’Istituto Patristico Augustinianum nell’anno della commemorazione della Riforma.

Comprendere Lutero non solo concentrandosi su di lui e sul tempo a cui apparteneva, ma anche e soprattutto alla luce del suo radicamento nella storia è un

compito importante che è andato delineandosi in maniera sempre più netta negli ultimi decenni. Nel quadro della ricerca compiuta sulla figura del riformatore, è stato evidenziato anche che Martin Lutero, sia da un punto di vista esistenziale che teologico, era profondamente radicato nel medioevo, ed in particolare nella tradizione mistica e monastica del tardo medioevo. Ciò vale soprattutto in riferimento a Bernardo di Chiaravalle, nel quale troviamo già l'anticipazione dell'interpretazione di Lutero della Sacra Scrittura come incontro tra Cristo e l'uomo e perfino il punto di partenza della sua teologia della giustificazione per sola grazia nella fede in Gesù Cristo. Dal canto suo, Bernardo può aver ripreso questo pensiero da Agostino, per il quale la giustizia di Dio "è quella per la quale diventiamo giusti noi per sua grazia, e la salvezza del Signore è quella con la quale egli salva noi"<sup>1</sup>.

La riscoperta di tali radici ha contribuito in maniera decisiva al fatto che, in tempi recenti, sia stato possibile formulare un ampio consenso ecumenico sulla dottrina della giustificazione, che Lutero aveva posto al centro della sua teologia e della sua predicazione. Ciò ha trovato la sua forma più evidente nella "Dichiarazione congiunta sulla dottrina della giustificazione", che è stata firmata ad Augsburg il 31 ottobre 1999 dalla Federazione Luterana Mondiale e dal Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione dell'unità dei cristiani e che è stata definita da Papa Giovanni Paolo II "una pietra miliare sulla non facile strada della ricomposizione della piena unità tra i cristiani". Essa può essere considerata infatti come un risultato ecumenico di grande impatto, poiché, in merito alla questione centrale che aveva condotto alla Riforma ed in seguito alla divisione della cristianità occidentale, ha permesso di pervenire ad un ampio consenso sulle questioni fondamentali, così che la dottrina della giustificazione non costituisce più un elemento di discordia tra le Chiese.

Questi sviluppi hanno favorito anche la riscoperta delle radici di Martin Lutero nel pensiero cattolico, la riscoperta cioè del "Lutero cattolico". Si è delineata in tal modo, nel contesto della ricerca cattolica su Lutero, un'immagine più differenziata del riformatore, un'immagine che è stata ripresa anche da vari pontefici. Papa Giovanni Paolo II, ad esempio, ha elogiato in particolar modo l'"attenzione per la Parola di Dio" dimostrata da Lutero e l'"alto valore della sua richiesta di una teologia vicina alle Sacre Scritture e della sua volontà di un rinnovamento spirituale della Chiesa"<sup>2</sup>. E Papa Benedetto XVI, durante la sua visita all'ex-convento agostiniano di Erfurt, dove Lutero studiò teologia e fu ordinato sacerdote, ha riconosciuto con gratitudine la centralità della questione su Dio nella vita e nell'opera di Lutero, come pure l'importanza del suo cristocentrismo.

Lo sforzo di scrivere insieme, in comunione ecumenica, la storia della Riforma e della sua influenza sulla Chiesa cattolica ha fatto un ulteriore passo avanti. Questo è avvenuto con il documento "Dal conflitto alla comunione", che è stato redatto dalla Commissione luterana-cattolica per l'unità, dietro mandato della Federazione Luterana Mondiale e del Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione dell'unità dei cristiani, come preparazione ad una riflessione comune sulla Riforma. Questo documento è servito anche come base della commemorazione comune della Riforma che, tenutasi a Lund il 31 ottobre 2016, è stata presieduta congiuntamente sia da Papa Francesco che dal

---

1. Agostino, *De Spiritu et littera*, 32, 56 = PL 44, 237.

2. Giovanni Paolo II, *Discorso ai rappresentanti delle Chiese evangeliche e del Gruppo di lavoro delle Chiese cristiane in Germania a Paderborn*, il 22 giugno 1996.

Presidente e dal Segretario Generale della Federazione Luterana Mondiale. Nella dichiarazione comune rilasciata in tale occasione, essi hanno dato voce a una duplice confessione: “Mentre siamo profondamente grati per i doni spirituali e teologici ricevuti attraverso la Riforma, confessiamo e deploriamo davanti a Cristo il fatto che luterani e cattolici hanno ferito l’unità visibile della Chiesa.”<sup>3</sup>

In tal modo, essi hanno espresso ciò che oggi, da un punto di vista ecumenico, è possibile affermare insieme sulla Riforma di Martin Lutero. In primo piano vi è la gratitudine per tutto ciò che la Riforma ha portato di positivo a livello di visione religiosa e teologica e per quello che luterani e cattolici possono testimoniare oggi congiuntamente. Di fatti, quest’anno non ricordiamo soltanto l’inizio della Riforma di cinquecento anni fa, ma anche i cinquant’anni di dialogo ecumenico tra luterani e cattolici. Il dialogo con la Federazione Luterana Mondiale è stato il primo avviato dalla Chiesa cattolica subito dopo il Concilio Vaticano Secondo e si è rivelato molto fruttuoso.

In questo dialogo è stato messo nuovamente in risalto il fatto che, nelle intenzioni originarie di Martin Lutero, non vi era assolutamente la volontà di giungere ad una divisione della Chiesa e alla fondazione di una nuova Chiesa. La sua chiara priorità era piuttosto il rinnovamento della Chiesa cattolica, che, tuttavia, non poté realizzarsi in quel momento. Dopo che la Chiesa cattolica dimostrò di non essere pronta ad accogliere l’invito di Lutero alla riforma ed al rinnovamento, Lutero si predispose a compiere la rottura con la Chiesa del suo tempo. Al posto del rinnovamento, si giunse alla divisione nella Chiesa e alle cruente guerre di religione del XVI e XVII secolo. Per questo, la seconda nota fondamentale della commemorazione comune della Riforma è il riconoscimento delle proprie colpe ed il pentimento per le ferite che cattolici e luterani si sono reciprocamente inflitti negli ultimi cinquecento anni.

Gratitudine e pentimento sono aspetti inscindibilmente legati, come lascia intuire il titolo stesso del sopra citato documento ecumenico, “Dal conflitto alla comunione”. Una riflessione ecumenica sulla Riforma di Martin Lutero deve prendere sul serio tanto il conflitto quanto la comunione e, soprattutto, deve aiutare luterani e cattolici a progredire sul cammino che dal conflitto conduce alla comunione. Il terzo aspetto cruciale è, allora, la speranza: la speranza che, partendo da una commemorazione comune della Riforma, si possano compiere nuovi passi verso l’unità.

Questa speranza potrà tanto più realizzarsi quanto noi rifletteremo su ciò che luterani e cattolici hanno in comune e su quali aspetti comuni possono riscoprire in Martin Lutero. In tale contesto si iscrive anche, ed in modo particolare, la questione su quanto Lutero fosse radicato nel pensiero teologico di Sant’Agostino e quale influenza abbia avuto Agostino sul monaco agostiniano e riformatore Martin Lutero. Personalmente, sono molto grato all’Istituto Patristico Augustinianum per aver voluto dedicare un convegno a tale tema. A tutti i partecipanti auguro una proficua riflessione e fruttuose intuizioni, che contribuiscano a ritrovare la comunione ecclesiale tra luterani e cattolici.

---

3. Dichiarazione comune in occasione della commemorazione comune cattolico-luterana della Riforma, il 31 ottobre 2016.

**Grusswort beim Nationalen Festgottesdienst „500 Jahre Reformation“  
Bern, 18. Juni, 2017**

Ich freue mich, bei Ihrem Nationalen Festgottesdienst „500 Jahre Reformation“ anwesend zu sein, und ich darf Ihnen Grüsse und Segenswünsche der weltweiten Katholischen Kirche und von Papst Franziskus überbringen. Dieser Gruss ist auch ein sichtbares Zeichen dafür, was reformierte und katholische Christen miteinander verbindet.

Das, was uns im Glauben gemeinsam ist, kann man kaum besser zum Ausdruck bringen als mit dem Leitwort des heutigen Gottesdienstes: „Wo dein Schatz ist, ist dein Herz“. Damit ist auch die Kernmitte des reformatorischen Glaubens angesprochen, die Martin Luther mit den Worten ausgedrückt hat: „Das Trauen und Glauben des Herzens macht beide, Gott und Abgott... Worauf du nun dein Herz hängst und dich verlässt, das ist eigentlich dein Gott.“ Dass sich in unserem Herzen entscheidet, ob wir Gottesdienst oder Götzendienst vollziehen, hat Huldrych Zwingli mit der Weisheit zum Ausdruck gebracht: „Zu wem der Mensch seine Zuversicht hat, der ist sein Gott.“

Gott zu erkennen und ihm mit Freude zu dienen: Dies ist der Grundauftrag von uns Christen zumal in der heutigen Gesellschaft, in der Gott, der wahre Schatz unseres Lebens, oft genug mit weltlichen Wirklichkeiten verwechselt wird. Wir machen gerade heute immer wieder die Erfahrung, dass dort, wo Gott nicht als gegenwärtig wahrgenommen wird, sich das Unendliche seine eigenen Paradiese schafft, die freilich nur dem Schein nach unendlich sind. Von daher gibt es nichts Wichtigeres, als in den weithin säkularisierten Gesellschaften die Gegenwart des lebendigen Gottes zu bezeugen. Glaubwürdig können wir dies heute nur in ökumenischer Gemeinschaft tun. Die grösste gemeinsame Herausforderung an die Ökumene nehme ich deshalb in der Zentralität der Gottesfrage wahr.

Als Christen glauben wir freilich nicht an irgendeinen Gott, sondern an jenen Gott, der uns im Menschen Jesus von Nazareth sein konkretes Gesicht gezeigt und sich in seinem Wort zu erkennen gegeben hat. Auf Christus und sein Evangelium zu hören ist der elementare Anspruch der Reformation, wie er in der Grunddevise Zwinglis verdichtet ist: „Losend dem Gotzwort“. Zwingli ist es vor allem um die Ehre Gottes und von daher um den Trost der Gewissen der Menschen gegangen.

Zentralität der Gottesfrage und Christozentrik sind die Herzensanliegen der Reformation. Wenn sich reformierte und katholische Christen heute gemeinsam darauf konzentrieren, geben sie ihren Beitrag für die Überwindung der Spaltung, die uns seit fünfihundert Jahren belastet, und wird ein Reformationsgedenken in wahrhaft ökumenischer Gemeinschaft möglich. Dafür bin ich ebenso dankbar wie für die Gemeinschaft im Glauben, die in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten gewachsen ist. Ich wünsche den reformierten Schwestern und Brüdern neue Freude an der reformatorischen Botschaft des „solus Deus“, dem wahren Schatz unseres Herzens, und ich hoffe, dass wir auch weiterhin gemeinsam den Weg in die Zukunft gehen und uns dabei vom Heiligen Geist den Weg weisen lassen.

**Address Upon the Conferral of the ‘Gold Medal’, Comenius University  
Bratislava, 1 October 2017**

Dear Magnificent Rector,  
Distinguished members of the Academic Senate,  
Dear teachers and students,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much, Rector Karol Mičieta, for your kind words and for the prestigious ‘Gold Medal’ conferred upon me by you on behalf of the Comenius University. It is a great honour for me to be welcomed by your Academic Senate and to have received this award, which has been bestowed upon so many illustrious recipients, including Cardinal Angelo Sodano and Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec. I will keep this medal as a cherished memory of my visit to this beautiful city of Bratislava.

Your university is named after Jean Amos Comenius, a 17th century pastor from the Hussite tradition, considered to be one of the fathers of modern pedagogy, and sometimes also a precursor of ecumenism. In this year in which we commemorate the Reformation, this name obviously cannot leave me indifferent.

Aware of the extent to which Comenius suffered from the religious intolerance of his time, I would first like to rejoice in the positive ecumenical relations in Slovakia today. The recent agreements between some of the churches in your country on the issue of ecclesiastical property confiscated during the communist era or on the mutual recognition of baptism are often cited as examples. Last night, at the magnificent International Ecumenical Concert organized by the NAPS – Our Activities pro Slovakia Institute, I was able to see how ecumenism is a foundational value and a reality lived in your country. I also do not forget that your university comprises a faculty of Catholic theology and a faculty of Lutheran theology. Good ecumenical relations are not only a sign of Christian maturity, but also, I am sure, a valuable social testimony in your country.

Building a common future is impossible without first reflecting on the past. In this regard, I would also like, with reference to Comenius, to acknowledge the work of reconciliation that has been undertaken on the long-contested figure of Jan Hus. This exemplary process enabled even the signing of a joint declaration between Catholics and Protestants rehabilitating the historical and spiritual heritage of this important but long divisive figure of Christianity in this region. The work of the ‘purification of memory’ which enables the process of reconciliation relies on scholarly historical studies. It is here that the university can and must play a role in ecumenism by promoting a common rereading of history, which has become an integral part of the ‘dialogue of truth’ between our churches.

In referring to the figure of Jean Amos Comenius, I would finally like to refer to the field of education, in which he left a remarkable trace. The educational work of the Reformation was largely based on the conviction that an educated population could directly access the sacred texts. Comenius, for his part, founded his pedagogical principles on a true religious philosophy, a ‘pedagogy of unity’: “*omnia ab Uno, omnia ad Unum*, all from one and all towards one”. Without wishing to discuss this approach here, I would say that modern ecumenism has changed the way we teach. The Decree on Ecumenism ‘Unitatis redintegratio’ of the Second Vatican Council demands that “[s]acred theology and other branches of knowledge, especially of an historical nature,

must be taught with due regard for the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond more exactly with the facts” (UR 10). In other words, it is not only a teaching of ecumenism that must be promoted, but also a genuine ecumenism of teaching enabling the critical integration of different points of view. Indeed, to “correspond more exactly with the facts” is an objective of ecumenism, but also of all academic undertaking.

To conclude, I cannot fail to mention here a recent event and that is most likely dear to many of you. Two days ago, Cardinal Angelo Amato celebrated in this city the beatification of Don Tito Zeman as a martyr, persecuted for organizing the clandestine passage to Turin of young Salesians so that they could continue their formation there. May the example of Blessed Tito inspire and encourage us in our concern for the formation of the younger generations!

Dear Rector, and dear faculty members of this venerable university, I thank you again for your warm welcome and for the honour you have bestowed upon me. It is a source of great joy to be able to visit your country and to meet with representatives of the different churches, the State and civil society. On behalf of the Holy See and on my own behalf, let me extend my most sincere wishes for your undertakings devoted to teaching and scholarly research, a work that is so precious for the promising future of your noble nation.

---

**Message to the Asian Consultation of the Bishops’ Commissions for  
Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue  
Bangkok, Thailand  
(16-20 October 2017)**

*The 2017 Asian Consultation of the Bishops’ Commissions for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, organized by the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conference (FABC), was held in the Camillian Pastoral Care Center in Bangkok, Thailand, from 16-20 October 2017. There were presentations from 14 FABC member conferences on the topic of ecumenism. These included the situation of each conference, their activities, challenges, what is done for education on ecumenism, their activities for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and suggestions for future ecumenical work. We publish here the message of Cardinal Kurt Koch to Archbishop Felix Machado, Chairman of the OEIA, presented at the gathering.*

To His Excellency, Archbishop Felix Machado,  
Bishop of Vasai (India),  
Chairman – Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC)

Your Excellency,

On the occasion of the Asian Consultation of the Bishops’ Commissions for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, I send warm fraternal greetings and prayerful good wishes on behalf of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, to you and to the other participants and guests gathered in Bangkok, Thailand from October 16-20.

Since the first *Asian Bishop's Meeting* in 1970, when blessed Pope Paul VI gathered with 180 bishops of Asia in Manila, Philippines, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has promoted an all-encompassing vision of being Church in Asia. Part of this vision included the collaboration of the member conferences in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Since 1974, this collaboration and dialogue has been the specific task of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA). This Council follows with particular interest the efforts of the FABC-OEIA in the unique context of Asia, where the Catholic Church is a small minority in the massive continent of great ancient religions.

I am pleased to know that fourteen Bishops' Conferences from sixteen countries, and the Diocese of Hong Kong, will be represented in the present Consultation. The in-depth discussions you will have describing each conference's ecumenical situation, activities, challenges, reception and plans for the future, will no doubt provide valuable and concrete insights on how to carry out more effectively the mission of the Church, which Pope Francis has said "impels us to undertake a constant pilgrimage across the various deserts of life, through the different experiences of hunger and thirst for truth and justice" [Message of Pope Francis for *World Mission Day*, 4 June 2017].

Finally, I am encouraged by your proposed plans to bring religious leaders together with the Catholic Bishops at Ayutthaya, Thailand, in 2018, to pray for peace and harmony in Asia. In a world marked by confusion and uncertainty, disappointment and frustration, terror and violence, such gatherings of ecumenical and interreligious leaders is a powerful sign that those who love God journey in the world with what Pope Francis has called a "logic of hope", following the radical pattern of the Lord Jesus: "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves" (*Mt* 10:16) [cf. *General Audience*, 28 June 2017]. With hearts overflowing with love we overcome the world and experience God's peace even in the worst of times (cf. *Jn* 16:33).

I join you in giving thanks to Almighty God for the ecumenical progress that has already been made through the grace of the Holy Spirit and the good work of the OEIA. I pray that your gathering in Bangkok will be a fruitful sign of hope and encouragement to all those who strive for reconciliation through justice and peace. Upon all, I cordially invoke the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, knowledge and counsel. With my personal prayers and best wishes.

## OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE DICASTERY

### **Catholic, Lutheran, Mennonite, Trilateral Dialogue Commission on Baptism Augsburg, Germany (9–14 February 2017)**

Representatives of the Catholic Church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity), the Lutheran World Federation, and the Mennonite World Conference met in Augsburg, Germany, 9–14 February, for the fifth meeting of the International Trilateral Dialogue Commission on the understanding and practice of Baptism in light of the current missional challenges facing all three Christian communities.

The meeting in Augsburg concluded a five year dialogue process. The commission discussed and developed its final report on “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church” which was drafted by Professors Theo Dieter (Lutheran, France), William Henn (Catholic, US/Vatican) and John Rempel (Mennonite, Canada). The trilateral commission agreed on a further process to finalize the report which summarizes the rich discussions that have taken place over the last five years on three fundamental themes: 1) the relation of Baptism to sin and salvation, 2) the celebration of Baptism and its relation to faith and to membership in the Christian community, 3) the living of Baptism in Christian discipleship. The report will be published in early 2018.

The meeting was hosted by the Mennonite World Conference and took place in Catholic St. Ulrich’s conference centre. The meeting took place at the same time and place as the Executive Committee and the permanent working commissions of the Mennonite World Conference. During the meeting, the commission gathered together in morning devotions and bible studies. In the evenings they joined the members of the MWC in evening prayers. The members of the commission participated in a tour led by Augsburg Mennonite Wolfgang Krauss introducing the Anabaptist and Mennonite history of the city.

Participants in the meeting on behalf of the Catholic Church were Archbishop Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga, IMC (co-chair, Colombia); Rev. Prof. William Henn, OFM Cap (USA/Italy); Rev Prof. Luis Melo, SM (Canada); Sister Prof. Dr Marie-Hélène Robert, NDA (France); and Rev Avelino González-Ferrer (co-secretary, USA/Vatican). Lutheran delegation members were Prof. Dr. Friederike Nüssel (co-chair, Germany); Bishop Emeritus Dr Musawenkosi Biyela (South Africa); Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter (France); and Rev Dr Kaisamari Hintikka (co-secretary, Finland/Switzerland). Mennonites were Prof. Dr Alfred Neufeld (co-chair, Paraguay); Prof. Dr Fernando Enns (Germany); Rev Rebecca Adongo Osiro (Kenya); Prof. Dr John Rempel (Canada); Rev Dr Larry Miller (co-secretary, France). A member of the Lutheran delegation, Rev Dr KS Peter Li (Hong Kong, China) was not able to attend the meeting.

**Disciples of Christ – Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue**  
**Bayamón, Puerto Rico**  
**(23-28 June 2017)**

The fifth session of the fifth phase of the Disciples of Christ – Roman Catholic International Commission for Dialogue took place in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, June 23-28, 2017. The general theme for the current phase of dialogue is “Christians Formed and Transformed by the Eucharist”. After an introductory meeting in Nashville, TN, USA in January 2014, the Commission approached the topics related to what it means to be *formed* by the Eucharist discussing the following themes: “The Structure of Liturgies among Catholics and Disciples” (Rome, June 2014) and “The Significance of Eucharistic Catechesis – Knowing by Doing” (Bethany, WV, June 2015). In 2016, the Commission moved its study focus to “Christians Being *Transformed* by the Eucharist”, and the 2016 session was held in Calgary, AB, Canada, discussing the general theme “The Eucharist and Relationships within the Church”. This year’s session approached topics related to the theme “Living the Sacraments”. The overall goal of the dialogue, which started in 1977, is to seek full visible unity between the two communions.

The Disciples Co-Chair of the Dialogue is Rev Dr. Newell Williams, President of the Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX, USA. The Catholic Co-Chair of the Dialogue is the Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, WI, USA.

Papers were prepared by the Most Reverend David Ricken, “Transformed by the Eucharist: Living Encounter with Jesus Christ”, and for the Disciples of Christ, Rev. Dr. Newell Williams, “Transformed by the Eucharist: Coming Face to Face with the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ”. A biblical paper entitled “Breaking the Rules: Jesus Transformed by His Experience” was presented by Dr. Mary L. Coloe, pbvm, of the Catholic Church. At this session, the Commission also worked on a very preliminary draft which will be finalized in Green Bay, WI, USA in 2018. Each day of the dialogue began and concluded with prayer together led alternately by Disciples and Catholics.

While in Puerto Rico, the Commission, at the invitation of the Most Reverend Roberto Conzález Nieves, Archbishop of San Juan, attended the Holy Mass on the Feast of Saint John the Baptist at Catedral de San Juan Bautista on June 24. The following day, they attended the Sunday worship service at Primera Iglesia Cristiana Cental (Discipulos de Cristo), the first Disciples congregation to be founded in Puerto Rico. The Commission was greeted by Pastor Gamaliel Ortiz. After the worship service, the Commission members interacted with the church members over lunch. On June 26, Rev Miguel Morales, General Pastor of the Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico, invited the Commission to the Puerto Rican Disciples national office for dinner and conversation. The Commission was joined by the Disciples local church pastors and national staff along with Rev Carlos Algarín, Catholic episcopal vicar of Bayamón. The Commission expressed thanks and appreciation to both Catholic and Disciples communities in Puerto Rico for their hospitality and support.

In reflecting on this meeting of the dialogue team, Dr. Merryl Blair, Disciples, said, “While we have been talking about how we are formed and transformed by the Eucharist, so we are also experiencing the transforming joy of being welcomed into each other’s worship. We affirm together that we encounter Christ in the Eucharist, and leave, transformed, to live as a community of hope, love and compassion”.

At the end of the meeting, Mr Julien Hammond, Catholic, affirmed, “Our experience in Puerto Rico has been extraordinary. Not only were we treated to the most gracious hospitality by both our Catholic and Disciples hosts, but we witnessed a high degree of real (if still incomplete) communion between our two churches on this island. Our study on “Christians being transformed by the Eucharist” took on a special meaning and impetus in the context of the Puerto Rican experience.

The members from the Disciples of Christ are: Rev Dr D. Newell Williams, Brite Divinity School (Fort Worth, TX, USA, Co-Chair); Rev Dr Thomas F. Best, (Belmont, MA, USA); Rev Dr Merryl Blair, Stirling Theological College, University of Divinity, (Melbourne, Australia); Rev Dr David M. Thompson, University of Cambridge, UK; and Rev Paul S. Tche, Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (Indianapolis, IN, USA). The following Disciples were unable to attend: Rev Dr Robert Welsh (Indianapolis, IN, USA, Co-Secretary); Rev Dr James O. Duke, Brite Divinity School (Fort Worth, TX, USA); and Rev Angel Luis Rivera, Latin America and Caribbean Executive, Global Ministries (IN, USA). This year, Rev Dr Hector M. Rivera from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico attended the meeting as an observer.

The members of the Catholic team are: Most Revered David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay (WI, USA, Co-Chair); Msgr Dr Juan Usma Gómez, Bureau Chief of Western Section, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Vatican City/Colombia, Co-Secretary); Msgr Dr Michael Clay, Associate Dean for Seminary and Ministerial Studies, School of Theology and Religious Studies, The Catholic University of America (Washington D.C., USA); Dr Mary Coloe, pbvm, University of Divinity (Melbourne, Australia); Mr Julien Hammond, Ecumenical Officer, Archdiocese of Edmonton (Canada); Rev Dr Joseph T. Shenosky, Vice-Rector, Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary (Philadelphia, PA, USA); and Rev Dr Michael G. Witzcak, School of Theology and Religious Studies, the Catholic University of America (Washington D.C., USA).

---

**Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches  
and the Catholic Church  
Lisbon, Portugal  
(12–15 September 2017)**

The Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church (JWG) established in 1965 to monitor and strengthen cooperation, met from September 12-15, 2017 at the Mother house of the Congregation of the Franciscan Hospitaller Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Lisbon with the support of the Ecumenical Commission of the Episcopal Conference of Portugal headed by Bishop D. Manuel da Silva Rodrigues Linda. The meeting included an encounter with representatives of churches in Lisbon and a visit to the Catholic Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima during the centenary celebrations.

The role of culture, religion, and dialogue in peace-building and the challenges and opportunities for ecumenical cooperation concerning migrants and refugees were discussed in depth at this meeting in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ according to

the Gospel. During the current mandate (2014 – 2021), the 20-member JWG is chaired by the two co-moderators Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste from the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland, Diarmuid Martin.

The JWG formed two theme groups on peace-building and the concerns of migrants and refugees. These groups work both between and during plenary meetings to address the issues before them, identify possibilities for greater partnership and practical recommendations for collaboration. Their work is accompanied by staff of the Holy See and the WCC with particular expertise in these areas of work.

The goal of the peace-building group is to identify the positive contributions churches can make together to the resolution of conflicts and prevention of violence. The group recognizes the fact that culture, religion and even dialogue can be misused to spark violence and conflict. There is a growing awareness among faith communities that peace-building needs the constructive involvement of the churches. It is important to build on already existing successful examples of ecumenical cooperation and to identify new possible ways in which the churches can witness to just peace.

The current situation of migrants and refugees is a significant “sign of the times.” It requires a common response by all churches and their cooperation with others working in the field. Churches are called to strengthen their collaboration in welcoming, protecting, integrating and empowering refugees and migrants. While migration has always been part of human history, the current reality of forced migration, the rejection of refugees and racist attitudes in many places are of growing concern for churches. The churches are committed to strengthening a culture of openness and inclusiveness.

The JWG will present pastoral recommendations for the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC on both issues. The aim of these recommendations is to bring the churches to greater unity in addressing areas of vital concern.



**Lutheran, Mennonite, Catholic Trilateral Dialogue Commission on Baptism  
Strasbourg, France  
(15-19 September 2017)**

A group of theologians met in Strasbourg, 15-19 September, to finalize the report “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church” of the trilateral dialogue between Lutherans, Mennonites and Catholics.

The drafters, Professors Theodor Dieter (Lutheran), William Henn (Catholic), John Rempel and Fernando Enns (Mennonite) will present a final report to the respective Christian world communions. This will conclude the current phase of the work of the dialogue commission, which met five times between 2011 and 2017, discussing study reports on baptism.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference set up the trilateral dialogue to discuss the theme “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church”. During the five years of dialogue, the Commission has discussed issues such as the relation of baptism

to sin and salvation; celebration of baptism and its relation to faith and to membership in the Christian community; and how baptism is lived out in Christian discipleship. The Commission is made of five members each from the three partners, including staff members and co-secretaries. The final report on baptism is expected to be introduced to the LWF at its June 2018 Council meeting.

The team drafting the final report from the trilateral dialogue, and colleagues supporting them during the meeting in Strasbourg: Prof. Theodor Dieter (Lutheran), Prof. John Rempel, Rev. Dr. Larry Miller and Prof. Fernando Enns (Mennonite) and Rev. Avelino Gonzalez and Prof. William Henn (Catholic).

—

### **Joint Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the Conclusion of the Year of the Common Commemoration of the Reformation, 31 October 2017**

On 31st of October 2017, the final day of the year of the Common Ecumenical Commemoration of the Reformation, we are very thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, a commemoration that we have shared together and with our ecumenical partners globally. Likewise, we begged forgiveness for our failures and for the ways in which Christians have wounded the Body of the Lord and offended each other during the five hundred years since the beginning of the Reformation until today.

We, Lutherans and Catholics, are profoundly grateful for the ecumenical journey that we have travelled together during the last fifty years. This pilgrimage, sustained by our common prayer, worship and ecumenical dialogue, has resulted in the removal of prejudices, the increase of mutual understanding and the identification of decisive theological agreements. In the face of so many blessings along the way, we raise our hearts in praise of the Triune God for the mercy we receive.

On this day we look back on a year of remarkable ecumenical events, beginning on 31st October 2016 with the joint Lutheran - Catholic common prayer in Lund, Sweden, in the presence of our ecumenical partners. While leading that service, Pope Francis and Bishop Munib A. Younan, then President of the Lutheran World Federation, signed a joint statement with the commitment to continue the ecumenical journey together towards the unity that Christ prayed for (cf. *Jn* 17:21). On the same day, our joint service to those in need of our help and solidarity has also been strengthened by a letter of intent between Caritas Internationalis and the Lutheran World Federation World Service.

Pope Francis and President Younan stated together: “Many members of our communities yearn to receive the Eucharist at one table, as the concrete expression of full unity. We experience the pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God’s redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table. We acknowledge our joint pastoral responsibility to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of our people to be one in Christ. We long for this wound in the Body of Christ to be healed. This is the goal of our ecumenical endeavours, which we wish to advance, also by renewing our commitment to theological dialogue.”

Among the blessings of this year of Commemoration is the fact that for the first time Lutherans and Catholics have seen the Reformation from an ecumenical perspective. This has allowed new insight into the events of the sixteenth century which led to our separation. We recognize that while the past cannot be changed, its influence upon us today can be transformed to become a stimulus for growing communion, and a sign of hope for the world to overcome division and fragmentation. Again, it has become clear that what we have in common is far more than that which still divides us.

We rejoice that the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, solemnly signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in 1999, has also been signed by the World Methodist Council in 2006 and, during this Commemoration Year of the Reformation, by the World Communion of Reformed Churches. On this very day it is being welcomed and received by the Anglican Communion at a solemn ceremony in Westminster Abbey. On this basis our Christian communions can build an ever closer bond of spiritual consensus and common witness in the service of the Gospel.

We acknowledge with appreciation the many events of common prayer and worship that Lutherans and Catholics have held together with their ecumenical partners in different parts of the world, as well as the theological encounters and the significant publications that have given substance to this year of Commemoration.

Looking forward, we commit ourselves to continue our journey together, guided by God's Spirit, towards the greater unity according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ. With God's help we intend to discern in a prayerful manner our understanding on Church, Eucharist and Ministry, seeking a substantial consensus so as to overcome remaining differences between us. With deep joy and gratitude we trust "that He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (*Phil* 1:6).

# COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

## Audience with a Delegation of the European Jewish Congress (27 January 2017)

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Friday, 27 January, the Holy Father met with a five-member Delegation of the European Jewish Congress, accompanied by Fr Norbert Hofmann, SDB, Secretary of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

In an interview with Vatican Radio, Fr Hofmann said the Pope "began the dialogue by mentioning the importance of this Day for the Jews, but also for us, because remembering the victims of the Holocaust" helps to ensure "that this human tragedy never happens again".

According to Fr Hofmann, the Pontiff and the members of the Delegation spoke of the values shared by Christians and Jews and of the need to strengthen them in a world where moral values have been sorely put to the test. The importance of education and the family were also discussed during the cordial meeting.

ORE, 3 February 2017



*Pope Francis meets delegation of the European Jewish Congress, 27 January 2017*

© Vatican Media

## Audience with a Delegation of the Anti-Defamation League (9 February 2017)

*“Faced with too much violence spreading throughout the world, we are called to a greater nonviolence”, and to promote a culture of respect which favours religious freedom everywhere and protects “believers and religions from every form of violence and exploitation”. Pope Francis made this appeal during an audience with a delegation of the Anti-Defamation League on Thursday morning, 9 February, in the Hall of Popes. The following is the English text of the Holy Father’s address.*

### Address of Pope Francis

Dear Friends,

I offer you a warm welcome, and I thank you for your kind words. My predecessors, Saint John Paul II and Benedict XVI, also received delegations from your organization, which has maintained relations with the Holy See since the Second Vatican Council. I am grateful that these contacts have intensified: as you noted, our meeting here is a further testimony, beyond that of our shared commitment, to the valuable power of reconciliation, which heals and transforms relationships. For this we give thanks to God, who surely rejoices in the sincere friendship and fraternal sentiments which today inspire Jews and Catholics. Thus, with the Psalmist we too can say: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore” (Ps 133: 1, 3b).

Whereas the culture of encounter and reconciliation engenders life and gives rise to hope, the “non-culture” of hate sows death and reaps despair. Last year I visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp. There are no adequate words or thoughts in the face of such horrors of cruelty and sin; there is prayer, that God may have mercy and that such tragedies may never happen again. To this end let us continue to help one another, as Pope John Paul II so desired, “to enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will never again be possible” (*Letter on the Occasion of the Publication of the Document “We Remember: a Reflection on the Shoah”*, 12 March 1998): a future of genuine respect for the life and dignity of every people and every human being.

Sadly, anti-Semitism, which I again denounce in all its forms as completely contrary to Christian principles and every vision worthy of the human person, is still widespread today. I reaffirm that “the Catholic Church feels particularly obliged to do all that is possible with our Jewish friends to repel anti-Semitic tendencies” (Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable*, 47).

Today more than ever, the fight against anti-Semitism can benefit from effective instruments, such as information and formation. In this regard, I thank you for your work and for combining efforts to counter defamation with education, promotion of respect for all, and protection of the weakest. Caring for the sacred gift of all human life and safeguarding its dignity, from conception to death, is the best way of preventing every type of violence. Faced with too much violence spreading throughout the world, we are called to a *greater* nonviolence, which does not mean passivity, but active promotion of the good. Indeed, if it is necessary to pull out the weeds of evil, it is even more vital to sow the seeds of goodness: to cultivate justice, to foster accord, to sustain integration, without growing weary; only in this way may we gather the fruits of

peace. I encourage you in this work, in the conviction that the best remedies against the rise of hatred consist in making available the means necessary for a dignified life, in promoting culture and favoring religious freedom everywhere, as well as in protecting believers and religions from every form of violence and exploitation.

I am grateful to you also for the dialogue which, at various levels, you maintain with the Catholic Church. Upon our shared commitment and our journey of friendship and fraternal trust, I invoke the Almighty's blessings: in his munificence may he accompany us and help us to bring forth the fruits of goodness. *Shalom alechem!*

ORE, 17 February 2017

---

**Audience with Rabbi Abraham Skorka and a Delegation of Jewish leaders for  
the presentation of a new edition of the Torah  
(23 February 2017)**

*The "fruit of an 'alliance' between people of different nationalities, ages and religions" is how Pope Francis described the special edition of the Torah presented to him by Rabbi Abraham Skorka on Thursday morning, 23 February, during an audience in the Clementine Hall, where the Pontiff received the editorial group which worked on the publication. The following is the English text of the Holy Father's address, which he delivered in Italian.*

**Address of Pope Francis**

Dear Friends,

I offer a warm welcome to all of you, who have come to present me with a new and precious edition of the Torah. I thank Rabbi Abraham Skorka, brother and friend, for his kind words, and I am very grateful to all of you for this thoughtful gesture, which brings us together today around the Torah as the Lord's gift, his revelation, his word.

The Torah, which Saint John Paul II called "the living teaching of the living God" (Address for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Declaration "Nostra Aetate", 6 December 1990, 3), manifests the paternal and visceral love of God, a love shown in words and concrete gestures, a love that becomes covenant. The very word covenant is resonant with associations that bring us together. God is the greatest and most faithful covenantal partner. He called Abraham in order to form from him a people who would become a blessing for all peoples of the earth. God desires a world in which men and women are bound to him and as a result live in harmony among themselves and with creation. In the midst of so many human words that lead to tragic division and rivalry, these divine words of covenant open before all of us paths of goodness to walk together. This publication is itself the fruit of a "covenant" between persons of different nationalities, ages and religious confessions, who joined in this common effort.

The fraternal and institutional dialogue between Jews and Christians is now well-established and effective, made so by encounters that are ongoing and collaborative. The gift that you are making to me today is fully a part of this dialogue, which finds expression not only in words but also in gestures. The extensive introduction to the text and the editor's note emphasize this dialogical approach and

communicate a cultural vision of openness, mutual respect and peace that accords with the spiritual message of the Torah. The important religious figures who have worked on this new edition have paid special attention both to the literary aspect of the text and to the full-colour illustrations that add further value to the publication.

Every edition of sacred Scripture, however, possesses a spiritual value that infinitely surpasses its material value. I ask God to bless all those who contributed to this work and, in a particular way, to bless all of you, to whom I renew my personal gratitude. Thank you.

ORE, 3 March 2017

---

**Audience with a Delegation of Rabbis for the presentation of the statement  
‘Between Jerusalem and Rome’  
(31 August 2017)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a cordial welcome to all of you, and in a special way to the representatives of the Conference of European Rabbis, the Rabbinical Council of America, and the Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in dialogue with the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. I thank Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt for his kind greeting in your name.

In our shared journey, by the graciousness of the Most High, we are presently experiencing a fruitful moment of dialogue. This is reflected in the Statement *Between Jerusalem and Rome* which you have issued and which you present to me today. This document pays particular tribute to the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, whose fourth chapter represents the “Magna Charta” of our dialogue with the Jewish world. Indeed, the ongoing implementation of the Council’s Declaration has enabled our relations to become increasingly friendly and fraternal. *Nostra Aetate* noted that the origins of the Christian faith are to be found, in accordance with the divine mystery of salvation, in the Patriarchs, in Moses and in the Prophets. It also stated that, given the great spiritual heritage we hold in common, every effort must be made to foster reciprocal knowledge and respect, above all through biblical studies and fraternal discussions (cf. No.4). Consequently, in recent decades, we have been able to draw closer to one another and to engage in an effective and fruitful dialogue. We have grown in mutual understanding and deepened our bonds of friendship.

The Statement *Between Jerusalem and Rome* does not hide, however, the theological differences that exist between our faith traditions. All the same, it expresses a firm resolve to collaborate more closely, now and in the future. Your document is addressed to Catholics, speaking of them as “partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world blessed with peace, social justice and security”. It goes on to say that “despite profound theological differences, Catholics and Jews share common beliefs” and also “the affirmation that religions must use moral behavior and religious education – not war, coercion or social pressure – to influence and inspire”. This is most important: may the Eternal One bless and enlighten our cooperation, so that together we can accept and carry out ever better his plans, “plans for welfare and not for evil”, for “a future and a hope” (*Jer 29:11*).

On the occasion of your welcome visit, I would like to express to you and to your communities beforehand my best wishes for the Jewish New Year which will begin in a few weeks. *Shanah tovah!* Once more I thank you for coming and I ask you to remember me in your prayers. Finally, I would invoke upon you, and upon all of us, the blessing of the Most High for the shared journey of friendship and trust that lies before us. In his mercy, may the Almighty bestow his peace upon us and upon the entire world. *Shalom alechem!*

---

**Bilateral Commission Meeting of the Delegations of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews – Joint Reflections on the Declaration 'Between Jerusalem and Rome' Jerusalem, 12-14 November 2017 – 23-25 Mar Cheshvan 5778**

1. The 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Bilateral Commission opened with a welcome dinner hosted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation which continued its generous facilitation of the meetings in Jerusalem. The following morning, members of the respective delegations were treated to a guided tour of the recent archeological excavations at the City of David, of profound significance to both faith traditions. Later in the day, after a welcome by Rabbi Rasson Arussi, Chairman of the Chief Rabbinate's delegation, briefings on the current situation of Christians in the Middle East were provided by representatives of the Israeli Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior.

2. Cardinal Peter Turkson, Chairman of the Catholic delegation, opened the formal deliberations of the bilateral commission which focused on the Orthodox Jewish document presented on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017 to Pope Francis in the Vatican, entitled "Between Jerusalem and Rome".

3. The Catholic analysis of the unique significance of the document opened with a reiteration of its statement that "Despite irreconcilable theological differences, we Jews view Catholics as our partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world blessed with peace, social justice and security"; and accordingly the Catholic side affirmed that "The patrimony of faith, shared by Catholics and Jews is well capable of sustaining common commitment to the service of all humanity".

4. The Catholic reflection also highlighted "...that the bond that the Church recognizes with Israel on the basis of divine election is unique, and so strong that the document of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 'The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable', published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (10<sup>th</sup> December 2015), does not hesitate to affirm: "The dialogue with Judaism occupies a unique position for Christians; Christianity is by its roots connected with Judaism as with no other religion.'"

5. The Jewish presentation provided an historical, cultural and theological overview of the various reactions to *Nostra Aetate* (Number 4), acknowledging that even prior to 1965, "many Jewish leaders were skeptical of the sincerity of the Church's overtures to the Jewish community, due to the long history of Christian anti-Judaism." However "over time, it has become clear that the transformation in the Church's attitudes and teaching are not only sincere but also increasingly profound, and we are entering an era of growing tolerance, mutual respect, and solidarity between members of our respective faiths." Pope Saint John Paul II's contribution to this process,

building on the pioneering role of Pope Saint John XXIII, was emphasized, as impacting profoundly on the Jewish world in general and in Israel in particular. The establishment of bilateral relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel following the signing of the Fundamental Agreement in December 1993, served to substantiate the transformation.

6. While previous Jewish statements had acknowledged this new reality, “Between Jerusalem and Rome” is the first ever official statement from the leadership organizations of Jewish Orthodoxy worldwide, to express appreciation for this transformation and to affirm the partnership between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People in combating the violent scourges that afflict our world today, and in working together for a better world for all humanity.

7. With this increasing appreciation within the Jewish world of “the strategic importance of the relationship with the Catholic Church, and even of the theological as well as moral imperatives for deepening this mutual relationship, the opportunity to work together for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth” becomes our common imperative.

8. The bilateral commission reiterated its repudiation of the instrumentalization of religion for violent ends, and reaffirmed the obligation that our religions demand to preserve the sanctity and dignity of human life. In this regard, religion must not be part of the problem but must be part of the solution.

9. The need to make the achievements in the field of Catholic-Jewish relations and the work of the Bilateral Commission more widely known was stressed. Accordingly various proposals were put forward to this end, in particular the collaboration with institutions of higher education and the mass media.

10. In giving thanks to Our Father in Heaven for the gift of our friendship experienced within the Bilateral Commission, the prayer was expressed that such fraternity will extend throughout our world and He will instill His full Blessing of Peace within us, making us instruments of His Peace for all.

Jerusalem, November 14, 2017–MarCheshvan 25, 5778

Rabbi Rasson Arussi  
(Chairman of the Jewish Delegation)  
Rabbi David Rosen  
Rabbi Prof. Daniel Sperber  
Rabbi Prof. Avraham Steinberg  
Rabbi Moshe Dagan  
Mr Oded Wiener

Peter Cardinal Turkson  
(Chairman of the Catholic Delegation)  
Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa O.F.M  
Archbishop Bruno Forte  
Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo  
Msgr Pier Francesco Fumagalli  
Msgr Marco Formica  
Fr. Norbert J. Hofmann S.D.B.

## ACTIVITIES OF THE CARDINAL PRESIDENT

### Conferenza stampa nel Museo ebraico di Roma in occasione della mostra sulla Menorah, 20 febbraio 2017

Come Presidente della Commissione per i rapporti religiosi con l'ebraismo della Santa Sede sono molto lieto di questa iniziativa intrapresa congiuntamente dal Museo della comunità ebraica di Roma e dai Musei Vaticani, nell'organizzazione della mostra intitolata "La Menorah: culto, storia e mito". Per la prima volta nella storia di questi musei ha luogo una collaborazione così stretta, che è anche frutto del dialogo tra ebrei e cattolici in corso ormai dal tempo della promulgazione della Dichiarazione Conciliare "Nostra aetate" del 1965. Colgo dunque l'occasione per congratularmi con coloro che hanno avuto l'idea di questa mostra e con tutti coloro che si sono impegnati, con competenza, con pazienza e con determinazione, nella sua realizzazione. Sono fiducioso che il loro lavoro –quello già compiuto e quello che rimane da fare- porterà frutti visibili e grande soddisfazione.

Questa mostra organizzata congiuntamente è un segno chiaro ed eloquente delle proficue relazioni tra ebrei e cattolici. Con gioia e gratitudine prendiamo atto della collaborazione riuscita tra la comunità ebraica di Roma, il Vicariato di Roma, la Conferenza episcopale italiana e la Santa Sede. Il giorno successivo alla sua elezione sul soglio pontificio, il 14 marzo 2013, Papa Francesco inviava alla comunità ebraica di Roma una lettera in cui affermava la sua decisa volontà di promuovere il dialogo: "Spero vivamente di poter contribuire al progresso che le relazioni tra ebrei e cattolici hanno conosciuto a partire dal Concilio Vaticano II, in uno spirito di rinnovata collaborazione e al servizio di un mondo che possa essere sempre più in armonia con la volontà del Creatore". Papa Francesco ha davvero realizzato quanto annunciato in tale occasione, contribuendo all'intensificazione delle relazioni, qui a Roma, tra la comunità ebraica e la Santa Sede. Ad esempio, l'11 ottobre 2013, egli ha ricevuto in Vaticano una delegazione della comunità ebraica ed il 17 gennaio 2016 ha visitato il Tempio Maggiore, ribadendo che ebrei e cristiani appartengono ad un'unica famiglia, la famiglia di Dio.

Ampie possibilità di collaborazione si offrono in campo culturale ad ebrei e cristiani, soprattutto in riferimento alle radici ebraiche della fede cristiana, che meritano una rinnovata valorizzazione. Già "Nostra aetate" (n. 4) sottolineava il patrimonio spirituale comune di entrambe le comunità. La conoscenza reciproca ed il reciproco apprezzamento vanno dunque continuamente promossi, soprattutto tramite studi biblici e teologici e tramite incontri fraterni che mantengano vivi i nostri scambi.

La mostra in questione pone al centro un simbolo religioso fondamentale per l'ebraismo, che riveste però anche in ambito cristiano una considerevole importanza. La menorah, che si trovava originariamente nel primo Tempio di Gerusalemme, è diventata il simbolo stesso dell'identità ebraica, ma è stata accolta anche nel contesto liturgico cristiano. Ad esempio, a partire dall'età carolingia, l'arte cristiana s'ispirò alle forme della menorah per i candelabri a sette braccia che vennero posti in diverse chiese a scopo liturgico.

Questa mostra sulla menorah potrà dunque offrire un ulteriore impulso alla conoscenza del nostro patrimonio spirituale comune e all'intensificazione delle relazioni tra ebrei e cattolici nella nostra città, dove le due comunità vivono l'una accanto all'altra ormai da secoli. Auguro a questa iniziativa un buon esito, fiducioso che i suoi numerosi

visitatori non solo saranno soddisfatti intellettualmente per aver imparato qualcosa di nuovo, ma saranno anche stimolati nell'apprendere qualcosa di più a proposito del dialogo e delle relazioni tra ebrei e cattolici.

—

## **Ben Gurion University of the Negev – Beer-Sheva, 6 November 2017**

### *Presentation of the Ladislaus Laszt Ecumenical and Social Concern Award*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many thanks for your words of greeting and your warm welcome at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. I am here for the first time in my life, but having been a professor in Switzerland I feel very comfortable in academic circles. I wish to extend my gratitude for your kind invitation and, of course, especially for bestowing upon me the Ladislaus Laszt Ecumenical and Social Concern Award. I am deeply honored and delighted to have been chosen as somebody who is committed to ecumenical and Jewish-Catholic dialogue. In expressing my gratitude for this great honor I would like to refer briefly to the theological foundations of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

### **The Uniqueness of Jewish-Christian Relations**

For Christians Judaism is not just one religion among many, as the relationship between Christianity and Judaism involves an individual and unique connection. The history of this relationship has undoubtedly been very complex, oscillating between proximity and distance, between familiarity and alienation, between love and hate – and it has been so from the very beginning. On the one hand Jesus cannot be understood without Judaism; in fact, the early Christian congregation quite naturally participated in the Jewish liturgy in the temple. On the other hand, the schism between synagogue and church formed the first split in the history of the church, which the Catholic theologian Erich Przywara defined as the “primal rift”.<sup>1</sup> Even though contemporary research tends to accept that the process of estrangement and dissociation between Judaism and Christianity extended over a longer period than previously assumed and surely only gradually took shape during the first centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD, there is nevertheless no question that this process of alienation was set in place at the very beginning of Jewish–Christian relations, and the relationship between Jews and Christians was marked by conflict already at an early stage. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger outlined that conflict in these words: “The church was regarded by her mother as an unnatural daughter, while the Christians regarded the mother as blind

---

1. “The rift between the Eastern and the Western church, the rift between the Roman church and the pluriversum of the Reformation (the countless churches and sects) form part of the primal rift between Judaism (the non-Christian Jews) and Christianity (the ‘Gentiles’ in the language of the Pauline letters).” Cf. E. Przywara, *Römische Katholizität – All-christliche Ökumenizität*, in: J. B. Metz u.a. (Hrsg.), *Gott in Welt. Festgabe für K. Rahner. Band 2* (Freiburg i. Br. 1964) 524–528, zit. 526.

and obstinate.”<sup>2</sup> While this image reminds us that the conflicts between Jews and Christians were still like family quarrels, the relationship between Jews and Christians deteriorated progressively as the awareness of belonging to the same family was gradually lost. It has therefore in the course of history been exposed to great strain and hostility, which has in many cases unfortunately led to anti-Jewish attitudes involving outbreaks of violence and pogroms against the Jews.

The distinctive uniqueness of Jewish-Christian relations in its negative aspect is permanently connected with its history in the past century. The mass murder of European Jews, planned and executed with industrial perfection by the National Socialists, had a unique impact on the Jewish-Christian relationship. The Shoah must be judged as the lowest possible nadir of that primitive racist anti-Semitism of Nazi ideology which had developed already in the 19th century. This thoroughly racist anti-Semitism is of course fundamentally alien to Christianity, and was repeatedly sharply condemned by Popes Pius XI and Pius XII above all. The Shoah can and should not, however, be attributed to Christianity as such: it was in fact led by a godless, anti-Christian and neo-pagan ideology. If the Shoah must be judged as the horrific nadir of a neo-pagan worldview which intended to annihilate not only Judaism but also the Jewish heritage in Christianity, one can also understand that Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau wished to give expression to this fatal connection: “By destroying Israel they ultimately wanted to tear up the taproot of the Christian faith and to replace it with a faith of their own invention: faith in the rule of man, the rule of the powerful.”<sup>3</sup> In these words one should recognise the conviction that Christianity is most profoundly rooted in Judaism, and that Christianity could not exist without these vital Jewish roots.<sup>4</sup> Yet we Christians cannot dismiss our complicity in the horrific developments, and above all to confess that Christian resistance to the boundless inhuman brutality of the ideologically and racially based National Socialism did not display that vigour and clarity which one should by rights have expected. Resistance by Christians may well have also been so inadequate because a theological Christian anti-Judaism had been in effect for centuries, fostering a widespread anti-Semitic apathy against the Jews. Thus an ancient anti-Jewish legacy was embedded in the furrows of the souls of not a few Christians. We Christians must therefore sincerely regret that only the unparalleled crime of the Shoah was able to bring about a genuine re-thinking in our relationship with Judaism.

### **A New Beginning in the Relationship between Jews and Christians**

In this regard the fourth chapter of the Second Vatican Council declaration “*Nostra aetate*”, which the German Cardinal Augustin Bea was commissioned to prepare and which was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1965 after controversial discussions during the last session of the Council, enabled a fundamental new beginning in the relationship

---

2. J. Cardinal Ratzinger, *Das Erbe Abrahams*, in: Ders., *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio* (Augsburg 2002) 235-238, zit. 237.

3. Benedict XVI, “I could not fail to come here”. *Auschwitz-Birkenau: Visit to the Auschwitz Camp on 28 May 2006*.

4. Cf. C. Sedmak, *Europa und eine Ethik des Gedächtnisses: Papst Benedikt und der Holocaust*, in: Ders. / St. O. Horn (Hrsg.), *Die Seele Europas. Papst Benedikt XVI. und die europäische Identität* (Regensburg 2011) 155-183.

between Jews and Christians.<sup>5</sup> With this declaration the Second Vatican Council not only repudiated and condemned all outbreaks of hatred, persecutions, slanders and manifestations of force directed against the Jews on the part of so-called Christians. In a positive sense the Council also affirmed the shared patrimony of Jews and Christians, and pointed to the Jewish roots of Christianity. Finally the Council expressed the ardent desire that the reciprocal understanding and the resulting mutual respect of Jews and Christians be fostered. This demands above all that the unique and distinctive individual relationship between Christianity and Judaism must be recalled into Christian consciousness and remain present there, as it was expressed by Pope John Paul II in the vivid and impressive words: “The Jewish religion is not something ‘extrinsic’ to us but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism we therefore have a relationship we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and in a certain way it could be said, our elder brothers.”<sup>6</sup> These instructions contained in “*Nostra aetate*” (no.4) have been reaffirmed and reinforced on a number of occasions by the popes in the period since the Council, not least through the visits to the Great Synagogue in Rome by Pope John Paul II on 13 April 1986, by Pope Benedict XVI on 17 January 2010 and by Pope Francis on 17 January 2016. This declaration remains the crucial compass of all endeavours towards Jewish–Catholic dialogue, and after more than fifty years we can claim with gratitude that this theological re–definition of the relationship with Judaism has directly brought forth rich fruits throughout its reception history. It seems that as far as content is concerned the Council Fathers at that time took into consideration almost everything which has since proved to be significant in the history of the dialogue. On the Jewish side it has been particularly positively emphasised that the Conciliar Declaration took up an unambiguous position against every form of anti-Semitism. It is not least on that basis that Jews are and remain borne up by the hope that they can rest assured that in the Catholic Church they have a reliable ally in the struggle against anti-Semitism.

With regard to the reception history of Conciliar documents, one can without doubt dare to assert that “*Nostra aetate*” (no.4) is to be reckoned among those Council texts which have in a convincing manner been able to effect a fundamental re–orientation of the Catholic Church following the Council. This of course only becomes clear to us when we consider that previously there was in part a great reluctance regarding contacts between Jews and Catholics, arising in part from the history of Christianity with its discrimination against Jews extending even to forced conversions. The fundamental principle of respect for Judaism expressed in “*Nostra aetate*” (no.4) has over the course of recent decades made it possible for groups which initially confronted one another with scepticism to step by step become reliable partners and even good friends, capable of coping with crises together and overcoming conflicts positively.

---

5. Cf. A. Cardinal Bea, *Die Kirche und das jüdische Volk* (Freiburg i. Br. 1966), esp. 21–25: *Hinweise zur Geschichte und Entwicklung des Konzilsdokuments*.

6. John Paul II, *Ringraziamo il Signore per la ritrovata fratellanza e per la profonda intesa tra la Chiesa e l'Ebraismo. Allocuzione nella Sinagoga durante l'incontro con la Comunità Ebraica della Città di Roma il 13 aprile 1986*, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II IX, 1 1986* (Città del Vaticano 1986) 1024–1031, cit. 1027.

## Israel and the Church, the Old and the New Testament

The discourse of Jewish roots is indeed to be understood in a strictly theological sense, as already demonstrated by the expressive image of Saint Paul, who spoke of the root of Israel into which the wild branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom 11:16–20). This image represents for Paul the key to thinking of the relationship between Israel and the church in the light of faith: “Nothing but a single olive tree. God’s whole history with humanity is like an olive tree with sacred roots and branches cut out and grafted in and artificially ennobled in this way. All God’s dealings are like his way of dealing with this tree.”<sup>7</sup> With this image Paul gives expression to a duality with regard to the unity and divergence of Israel and the church: on the one hand the image is to be taken seriously in the sense that the grafted wild branches have not grown out of the root itself and or sprung from it but represent a new reality and a new work of salvation by God, so that the Christian church cannot merely be understood as a branch or a fruit of Israel. On the other hand, the image is also to be taken seriously in the sense that the church is only able to survive when it draws nourishment and strength from the root of Israel, and that the grafted branches would wither or even die if they were cut off from the root of Israel. Speaking literally rather than metaphorically, this means that Israel and the church are related to and interdependent on one another, precisely because they exist in a state not only of unity but also of difference. Israel and the church thus remain to that extent bound up with one another, and indeed both unmixed yet undivided.

Unity and difference between Judaism and Christianity come to the fore in the first instance with the testimonies of divine revelation. Because Israel is the beloved people of God’s covenant which has never been revoked or repudiated, Israel’s book of the covenant, the Old Testament, is part of the lasting heritage of the Christian church. With the existence of the Old Testament as an integral part of the one Christian bible, there is a deeply rooted sense of the intrinsic inseparability and kinship between Judaism and Christianity. The roots of Christianity lie in the Old Testament, and Christianity constantly draws nourishment from this Old Testament root. On the other hand the existence of the New Testament also brings with it a fundamental tension into the relationship of the two faith communities insofar as Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New, in the conviction expressed by Augustine in the indelible formula: “In the Old Testament the New is concealed and in the New the Old is revealed”.<sup>8</sup> The New Testament sees itself as the fulfilment of what is promised in the Old, but fulfilment cannot mean substitution. This crucial distinction is evident already from the historical fact that Judaism too found itself compelled to adopt a new reading of the Old Testament after the catastrophe of the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70. Since only the Pharisees survived the catastrophe of the destruction of the temple, they developed their particular mode of reading and interpreting the Old Testament in a period during which there was no temple, taking the Torah as its centre. Since the Christian church and post-biblical rabbinical and Talmudic Judaism developed in parallel and since both modes each involved a new interpretation of the Old Testament, the crucial new question must be precisely how

---

7. Cf. K. Berger, *Gottes einziger Ölbaum. Betrachtungen zum Römerbrief* (Stuttgart 1990) 229.

8. Augustinus, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 2, 73.

these two modes are related to one another. Regarding the different interpretations of the Holy Scriptures the Pontifical Biblical Commission formulated in its 2001 document: “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible”, that Christians can and must admit “that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish scriptures of the Second Temple period, analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion”; it then draws the conclusion: “Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible.”<sup>9</sup>

### **God’s covenant with Israel never revoked**

A promising future for Jewish–Christian dialogue must take into account the fact that God concluded with Abraham a covenant which is of fundamental significance for Jewish–Christian dialogue. For Abraham is not only the father of Israel but also the father of the faith of Christians. In this covenant community it must be evident for Christians that the covenant that God concluded with Israel has never been revoked but remains valid on the basis of God’s unfailing faithfulness to his people, and consequently the New Covenant which Christians believe in can only be understood as the surpassing affirmation and fulfilment of the Old, and never as a replacement. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*” confirms this theological statement: “We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for ‘the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29). The Church, which shares with Jews an important part of the sacred Scriptures, looks upon the people of the covenant and their faith as one of the sacred roots of her own Christian identity (cf. Rom 11:16-18)” (n. 247).

We as Christians are also convinced that through the new covenant the Abrahamic covenant has obtained that universality for all peoples which was originally intended. Israel and the church remain bound up with one another according to the covenant and interdependent on one another, by accepting one another in a profound internal reconciliation drawn from the depths of their respective faiths, thus becoming a sign and instrument of reconciliation to the world.

In this conviction, I renew my gratitude for the conferral of the Ladislaus Laszt Ecumenical and Social Concern Award, and I extend to the Ben Gurion University of the Negev my best wishes for further fruitful scholarly work and the blessing of the Almighty.

---

9. II. A. 7.22.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having read the topic of our panel my first idea was that God always was, is and will be and therefore there is no need to return to God because perhaps it has merely been the case that he was for a certain period absent on holidays and therefore not reachable. In the book of Isaiah God clearly states that he is always present saying: "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said 'Here am I, here am I,' to a nation that did not call on my name" (Is 65:1). Therefore, there is the legitimate suspect that it is a matter of the human being having the impression that God is absent or he/she is refusing to seek him. When the Eternal One appeared in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush he introduced himself to Moses as the One who is close to his people: "I am who I am" (Ex 3,14). He saw their affliction and heard the cry of his people oppressed by Egyptian slavery and was ready to intervene for them. So it seems merely to be the perception of the human being complaining about the absence of God and feeling abandoned by him.

It seems that people of the modern era do not need a God when they are healthy, everything works well and they can be masters of their own destiny. It is only in times of distress and affliction when human limits threaten their wellbeing that they seek help by imploring God. What are the challenges and fears in our societies in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? When we look into the situation of the world today and allow ourselves to be moved by man's growing fear of current social and political developments we encounter a growing egoism, a stronger nationalism and an economic situation that has as its only goal the maximization of profits. The dramatic extent of fears become clearly visible when we take a brief look back into history and the evident trust expressed there in a better future for humanity. Since war always means the defeat of humanity, since the end of the Second World War the conviction that mankind must put an end to war has become entrenched in human thinking, and is repeated endlessly as a litany. At the same time, the absolute priority of politics and diplomacy has been constantly stressed, so that war can no longer be seen, as it was previously, as the continuation of politics by other means, but must instead be condemned as the failure of politics. And in order to better secure world peace and more effectively prevent the escalation of violence and military conflict, people have set great trust in the creation of international law organisations. These have without doubt been the great achievements of humanity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the third millennium, however, these essential convictions seem to have been to a large extent forgotten and unlearned once more, as demonstrated not least by the terrible wars that have become the order of the day. But even the failure of politics and the powerlessness of international laws are becoming increasingly apparent. Humanity has become all the poorer through the loss of this great hope, and its trust in a better future has suffered massive damage. In that we must perceive the result of a creeping and increasingly manifest erosion of those fundamental humane convictions which we had hoped would come to form an abiding good of humanity. The first decade of the new millennium has shown how brittle these convictions are. Military conflicts in so many trouble spots, appalling terrorism, massive migratory flows, and the global financial crisis confront us with major new questions. Above all, we find that many certainties that had previously

sustained us have been put into question. We have had to discover that we can no longer rest assured of the political and economic certainties we had taken for granted. We have become insecure and vulnerable, and our trust in a positive future of humanity has been shaken to the core.

Taking into account these developments which have given rise to many new fears, we cannot ignore the question: what can we still rely on in this world and what can we still trust? Developments in today's world are to be understood as signs of the times which urge and demand a response of faith. This response can only be: God is the only reality which the most terrible terrorism cannot destroy, and which the greatest wealth in the world can neither buy nor sell. It is therefore fitting to seek and find new trust in God. If we commence to root ourselves in God, we certainly gain new confidence in the human being, who is called to live as the image of God in our world. In the same way, it is natural to respond to the globalisation of the economy and the market in the contemporary world with the religious and ethical globalisation of responsibility and love.

Let's have a look at the biblical faith that differs from human trust in that it entrusts itself to the living God alone, and relies solely on him. To take oneself outside of one's own hands and to allow oneself to fall utterly into the hands of an other, is ultimately possible only with God. Faith in the biblical sense of reliance and trust in God is that steadfastness in God by which man gains a firm hold on life, as the Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg rightly says: "Only trust in God fulfils the full sense of the biblical word faith."<sup>1</sup> To what extent man is unable to live without faith and trust is evident from what he sets his heart on. And this in turn is revealed for example by what sacrifices he is prepared to make. Think of the victims of road accidents, the sacrifices states are willing to make in their wars, the sacrifices we humans demand in our exploitation of nature, or the everyday sacrifices we humans make in the name of power, honour and prestige. "God" can obviously be given the most varied names in human lives. In my life "my God" is precisely that in which I ultimately place my trust and on which I set my heart. The German reformer of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Martin Luther gave a vivid example of this: "Many a one thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and, possessions; he trusts in them and boasts of them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Lo, such a man also has a god, Mammon by name, i.e., money and possessions, on which he sets all his heart, and which is also the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure, and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has none doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God. For very few are to be found who are of good cheer, and who neither mourn nor complain if they have not Mammon. This [care and desire for money] sticks and clings to our nature, even to the grave."<sup>2</sup> This example has gained new currency in today's world, more than ever infected with a 'money-dominated pantheism', in which money has advanced to become an earthly God.<sup>3</sup> This very example makes abundantly clear that the crucial

---

1. W. Pannenberg, „Extra nos“ – Ein Beitrag Luthers zur christlichen Frömmigkeit, in: A. Raffelt (Hrsg.), *Weg und Weite*. Festschrift für Karl Lehmann (Freiburg i. Br. 2001) 197-205.

2. *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen 1976) 161.

3. F. Wagner, *Geld oder Gott? Zur Geldbestimmtheit der kulturellen und religiösen Lebenswelt* (Stuttgart 1984) 134.

difference setting such a priority apart from biblical faith does not consist in the opposites of trusting or not trusting, nor even in the opposition of belief and unbelief, but much more radically in the opposition of “god or idol”, and thus of faith and superstition. The crucial question posed by biblical faith is the question: in what do we place our trust, in whom do we have faith? As people of faith, we rely on God to whom we are called because he has already called us to himself.

---

**Ben Gurion University of the Negev – Beer–Sheva, 7 November, 2017**

*Christianity and the Other*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we speak about Christianity, we have to start with Jesus Christ. Jesus is his name, Christ the title that means in Greek “The Anointed One” which corresponds to ‘Messiah’. Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God. But without doubt he was Jewish and raised according to the Jewish traditions of his time. Jesus was a Jew by faith, a Jew in his ethical rigour, in his love for the Torah, in his fondness for extended metaphors and parables, and in the apocalyptic urgency of his teaching. Jesus’ Jewishness is essential to Christianity. To Christians Jesus was the Messiah – itself a Jewish concept – whose coming had been foretold in Jewish scripture for centuries. Christians believe that it is Jewish history that Jesus fulfils. For Christians Jesus was there well before his actual coming, in the fervid longings of a people who had suffered exile, dispossession and, at the time of Jesus, occupation under the Romans. Jesus is also the Son of God but not in the sense of a human father and a son. Jesus is God’s Son in the sense that He is God made manifest in human form (cf. Jn 1:14). Jesus is God’s Son in that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament an angel announces to Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God” (Lk 1:35).

**The Essence of Christianity**

Taking this into account, one can ask what is Christianity about? In the centre of this religion there is first of all not a set of doctrinal statements or rules nor a code of behaviour but a living person, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. And what is the essence of Christianity? The centre of Christianity is the death and resurrection of Jesus. Everything else in the New Testament – whether it be a command to love others or to keep ourselves pure from sin or any other topic – stems from the death and resurrection of Jesus. Everything Jesus himself said and did revolved around this. If we take that away, Christianity has no foundation, no basis. Without a thorough appreciation of the centrality of the death of the crucified Jesus and his resurrection one will never truly learn how to live the Christian life. Christianity is possible only because Jesus died and was raised. Without his death there would be no forgiveness for the sins. And without his resurrection there would be no hope of eternal life. If Jesus had remained in his tomb one would have no reason to pay attention to anything he said. Furthermore, the death and resurrection is not just a historical event. It is much more.

It is the pattern by which a Christian has to live. Being Christ-like means living a life that is characterized by death to sin and new life for God. Christians die to sin and are buried with Christ in baptism, then they are raised out of the water to live a new life with him (cf. Rom 6:4). As disciples of Christ Christians must follow him in the way of the cross, the way of sacrifice, the way of dying unto sin in obedience to the will of God. Every other moral command in the New Testament is simply spelling out how a crucified and resurrected person ought to live. Christians must be able to say with the Apostle Paul “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Crucified with him, and living a new life with him: that is the essence of being a Christian.

### **Who is the Other?**

Being a Christian means that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is decisive about how to live and how to conduct a life according to the will of God. Thus, approaching the question who is the Other for Christians, first it should be understood who was the Other for Jesus. In the New Testament we find the following story:

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him ‘What is written in the law? How do you read?’ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind: and your neighbour as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have answered right; do this, and you will live.’” But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down the road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; the he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?’ He said, ‘The one who showed mercy on him.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Lk 10:25-37).

This would mean that the neighbour, the Other One, is first of all a person in need who depends on the help of other people: the poor, the sick, the old and handicapped, the homeless, the prisoner, the beggar, the people at the margin of society. In the Torah one finds the two commandments to love God and to love the neighbour separately but Jesus binds both together: by loving the people in need through visible charitable deeds one is demonstrating that he is also loving God: in this sense “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). Another New Testament text demonstrates this insight very clearly; the framework is here the Last Judgement: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of

the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’” (Mt 25:31-40). This would mean that somebody who takes care of a person in need is taking care of Jesus himself. It is in the face of the needy one that one recognizes the features of Christ himself.

The story of the “Good Samaritan” who took care of the man who fell among robbers tells us also another thing: the Other One is the stranger. Taking into account that the Jews at the time of Jesus did not get along with the Samaritans and saw them as alien strangers with whom they should avoid any contact it is very surprising that precisely a Samaritan who helps the wounded man. People of the Jewish establishment like the priest and the Levite passed by and were not willing to help the victim because they feared becoming impure. But in this story an unwelcome and hated stranger becomes the neighbour, the Other One, and the person taking care of the afflicted man therefore fulfils the divine commandment.

### **Children of Abraham**

In the Old Testament we learn about a stranger whom Abraham met and who became his guest. The reader of Genesis 18:1-15 in the Old Testament knows from the beginning of this story that the stranger is the Lord himself. Abraham took care of the stranger and he obtained from him the promises to have a son and to become a mighty nation. He believed in these promises and received his son Isaac though his wife Sarah were old, advanced in age. He can be seen as the “father of faith” because he relied exclusively on God’s word. He left his country, his kindred, and his father’s house to enter into the promised land and he received the message that of him will be made a great and blessed nation (cf. Gen 12:1-3). Having a deep faith means relying on God’s word alone and leaving all behind. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only son according to the commandment of God (cf. Gen 22:2). This was a test of Abraham’s faith, he obeyed in all to the voice of the Almighty. So he was rewarded by him: “Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore” (Gen 22:16-17). Because Abraham trusted God fully, he became a model of faith, an example of obedience to the word of God. Therefore to be children of Abraham would mean to imitate his faith fixing ourselves in the promising word of God. Trusting in God alone and his word means to be “children of Abraham”.

Pope John Paul II called the Jews “our elder brothers in the faith of Abraham”. Christians and Jews are brothers, they have the same father and in a certain sense are raised in one family with the same traditions. The ways of brothers are the same ones during the first period of family life, but then everybody has different ways to go. The faith of our forefather Abraham in the one and unique God of Israel connects Jews and Christians, yet at the same time the Christian faith differs from other faiths by virtue of Jesus Christ, the son of God, whom Christians confess as Messiah come to the world to save all who belong to him. With the vocation of Abraham in the

Bible the history of salvation starts as a family story, and God's beloved people have famous biblical figures as points of identification. The God of Israel is first represented as God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as God of the forefathers. Christians and Jews have the same God of Israel, but the way of perceiving this God is quite different. For Christians the way to God cannot refrain from Jesus Christ, because he himself is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). For Jews God has revealed himself by his word given in the Torah and the way towards him consist in observing his commandments. Jesus is for Christians the word of God that "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). If we speak of our common father in faith Abraham we have to take into account that our faiths are different, although we believe in the same God.

In the New Testament Jesus states that the children of Abraham are doing the same as what Abraham did. In the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John (cf. 8:31-59) the Jews were particularly called "children of Abraham"; it seems to be an honourable expression for religious Jews who are taking serious God's commandments. But there the figure of Abraham becomes relative to Jesus himself who claims to know God and to have seen Abraham. In John 8:58 Jesus states: "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am". This claim caused troubles among the Jews of the New Testament period because Jesus saw himself superior to Abraham. Also for Christians today the figure of Jesus Christ is more important than Abraham, because their whole destiny depends on the relationship to the only "Son of God". They are baptized into Jesus Christ, into his death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:3-4) and they hope to be saved by and through him. If Christians are to be called "children of Abraham", it should be taken into account that they belong first and primarily to Jesus Christ, who believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a Jew of his times. Therefore, Christians can only be called "children of Abraham" if they show the same behaviour as Abraham, the "father of faith", who relied exclusively on God and his promising word.

The term "children of Abraham" is not central for the Christian faith though we share the faith of Abraham in the one and unique God. The faith of Abraham was also the faith of Jesus as Jew. He observed the commandments of the Torah and lived according to the religious traditions of his time. But the particular point of Christian faith is the belief in Jesus Christ as the word of God sent to our world to save all who belong to him. He is our "living Torah" that became flesh and through him God's plan of salvation will be realized.

### **Christians and Jews**

The figure of Abraham is important for Jews as well as for Christians but they see it under different perspectives. The God of Abraham is also the God of Jesus. Thus, Jews and Christians share the same faith in God, who is not an unreachable ruler of heavens: He is the God of the Covenant, the God of dialogue that turns to people as friends, speaks to them and with them. He loves his people and humankind, and He remains faithful to his love despite all human failures. He reaches out towards men, is committed in their history and listens to their cries and suffering. He is especially with the poor and the oppressed. He is a sympathetic and empathetic God, a God that shares in the suffering, but is not overwhelmed by it and remains the sovereign God of history, guiding everything and leading everything towards his final Kingdom. He lives both in heaven and among us human beings.

Jews and Christians believe that God created man in his own image after his likeness (Gen 1:26), so that therefore every human person possesses an infinite dignity which deserves absolute respect from his neighbour. The Bible affirms the sanctity and inviolable dignity of the human being – of every human being regardless of his or her cultural, national or religious belonging. This universalistic biblical view is one of the very foundations and sources of modern theory and policy of human rights. This common heritage gives a common responsibility to Jews and Christians for the defence and promotion of human rights and of human life in the world, and this is the best we can do for peace and freedom in the world. Against all nationalistic narrowness and materialistic depreciation of the person, we have to insist on the dignity and greatness of the human being. We have to stand against the immoralities and idolatries that harm and degrade human dignity. But the Bible is thoroughly realistic: it knows the misery of the human being. It knows that our world is no paradise and speaks therefore of paradise lost, of hard labour, guilt, suffering and death, of enmity between individuals and between nations, of poverty, injustice, lies, defamation and persecutions, of the experience of meaninglessness and hopelessness. The Bible and both our religious traditions do not leave us alone with these feelings, for they speak of hope due to salvation.

Between Christians and Jews deep and fundamental differences remain. But despite all remaining differences, we have a common mission. It is more important to note after all that our differences are not so extreme as to prevent us from bearing common witness to the God of the Covenant. Such common witness is particularly urgent in today's world – a world that has become secular and profane, and often doubts the sense of life and history. It is our common task and mission to help people find sense, courage and hope. Jews can show the path to true happiness in life through the way of the Torah, the Ten Commandments, which, according to the Bible, are not to be seen as burdens and limitations but as guides and signposts to happiness and human fulfilment. Christians, however, can show the way to happiness by conducting a Christ-like life embedded in the mystery of his death and resurrection.

Current scientific and technological progress have raised new and difficult ethical questions. As Jews and Christians, we possess an immense human, religious and ethical potential against the great destructive potentials in our world – potentials which can nevertheless help to build up a new civilisation of life. We have therefore a common responsibility for the future in this century, as well as for the next generation. We should not only look back to the negative sides of our history; today we are called to look forward and initiate a new common history for the good of humankind. It is our deep conviction that Christians and Jews have embarked upon a new phase of their relationship. In the book of our common history, a new page has been opened. In our current situation, we can no longer afford to be apart from each other or fight with each other. As difficult as it may be, we must build bridges between us, or better: we must dare to walk on bridges that have existed as long as we have existed as Jews and Christians.

The Bible considers humans as dialogical beings in relation with God, and in relation with one another. Not without good reason has it been that Jewish thinkers like Martin Buber have ardently proposed the paradigm of dialogical thought to a civilization marked by individualism, and have inspired us to discern that it is in the countenance of the other, in confronting the otherness of the other, that we discover

ourselves. Not only do we undertake dialogue, we are dialogue. Meanwhile “dialogue” has become a fashionable byword grown shabby by overuse. The word refers to ecumenical, interreligious, social, inner-church, and also to Jewish-Christian dialogue. Often such dialogue does not go beyond polite expressions of friendliness. That is still better than violent dispute. But is there not also the danger of minimization, of just tolerating each other, the risk of indifferentism, patchwork identity? In this sense one does not or cannot authentically bear and respect the otherness of the other. The Jewish-Christian dialogue cannot be of that kind. Jews and Christians, with all they have in common in their fundamental understandings, in the fundamental conceptions which are constitutive for their respective identities, are and remain different. These differences concern their religious convictions on the question of God and Christ, their notions of world redemption or otherwise. Therefore we should not approach the Jewish-Christian dialogue with naïve expectations of a harmonious understanding.

Yet, precisely when we do not simple-mindedly ignore our otherness, but rather bear with it, can we learn from each other. There is considerable ignorance on both sides, and ignorance is one of the roots of reciprocal prejudice. Ultimately, relations between Jews and Christians cannot be reduced to a simple formula and even less so can it be raised to a higher synthesis. Franz Rosenzweig for example has spoken of a mutual completion. An image for the dialogue is found in the interpretation of the prophet Zechariah by rabbinical theology. The prophet looks into the messianic future where the peoples are taken into the alliance with Israel. “On that day the Lord will be one and his name one” (14:9). According to rabbinical interpretation all of us, Jews and all peoples, will stand shoulder to shoulder. Only at the end of time shall the historically indissoluble relation between Israel and the Church find a solution. Until then though they may not be united in one another’s arms, neither should they turn their backs to each other. They should stand shoulder to shoulder as partners, and – in a world where the glimmer of hope has grown faint – together they must strive to radiate the light of hope without which no human being and no people can live. Young people especially need this common witness to the hope of peace in justice and solidarity. Never again contempt, hatred, oppression and persecution between races, between cultures and between religions! Jews and Christians together can maintain this hope. For they can testify from the bitter and painful lessons of history that – despite otherness and foreignness and despite historical guilt – conversion, reconciliation, brotherhood, peace and friendship are possible.

—

**Remarks for Celebrating the First Day of Hanukkah on the occasion of the visit  
to the Vatican of a Delegation of the International Jewish Committee on  
Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), 12 December 2017**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is for me a great pleasure to welcome all of you today in the library of our office. I would like especially to welcome the Ambassador of Israel to the Holy See, His Excellency Oren David, together with his embassy staff. Our gathering today traces its origins to your idea that we should meet in the Vatican to celebrate the first day of the

Jewish feast of Hanukkah. Our Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews is grateful for this initiative and for the opportunity to work together with the Embassy of Israel to the Holy See to realize it.

There is also a further reason for this celebration today, as we have special guests from the United States of America, a leadership delegation from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) which is meeting with various people in the Vatican. Since its foundation in 1970, this international committee has been the official partner of our Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. I warmly welcome the current chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations, Rabbi Daniel Polish. One goal of your visit is to organize the next steps in Jewish–Catholic dialogue and to plan activities in the near future. It is a source of great joy that we have been able to work together and to consolidate our friendship into a solid and firm partnership.

Jews celebrate in these days the feast of Hanukkah, a celebration that calls to mind the re-dedication of the former Temple in Jerusalem which was “par excellence” the place of the presence of the Almighty. Christians meanwhile are preparing for the feast of Christmas, which reminds them of the birth of Jesus Christ in whom the presence of God became manifest. According to the Jewish tradition a candle will be lit every day of the eight–day feast of Hanukkah. In the psalms, light is compared with the Word of God: “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps 119:105). For Christians, however, the light is Christ himself, as the Gospel of John says: “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). For both faith traditions the Word of God is the most important point of orientation; it is light, life and truth. Pope Francis made a comparison on our respective attitudes to the Word of God when he stated during a private audience for the members of the International Council of Christians and Jews on June 30, 2015: “The Christian confessions find their unity in Christ; Judaism finds its unity in the Torah. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh in the world; for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah. Both faith traditions find their foundation in the One God, the God of the Covenant, who reveals himself through his Word. In seeking a right attitude towards God, Christians turn to Christ as the fount of new life, and Jews to the teaching of the Torah”. In this sense the light of the candle this evening should remind us that the Word of God is a lamp for both Jews and Christians on their way into the future.

---

# DOCUMENTATION SUPPLEMENT

## DIALOGUE DOCUMENTS

### ‘SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION’ AND ‘THE CHURCH IN SALVATION’ – CATHOLICS AND EVANGELICALS EXPLORE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

*A Report of the International Consultation between  
the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance (2009-2016)*

#### **The Status of this Report**

*The Report published here is the work of the International Consultation between the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance. It is a study document produced by participants in the Consultation. The authorities who appointed the participants have allowed the Report to be published so that it may be widely discussed. It is not an authoritative declaration of either the Catholic Church or of the World Evangelical Alliance, which will both also evaluate the document.*

## INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE FRAME FOR OUR CONSULTATION

### **The Biblical Foundations for this Consultation**

1. The love of God has been poured out by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers (*Rom 5:5*). This love summons Christians to follow Christ, embracing the way of the cross in humble self-giving (*Phil 2: 1-11*). In this spirit of love all are called to strive for what makes for peace and for building up the body, with all concerned for the whole community, the strong caring for the weak (*Rom 14:19-15:2*). Being joined to Christ through faith, each person is personally associated with Christ and becomes a member of his body. But what is the Church, and who belongs to the Church, which is his body? We take consolation in knowing that the Lord knows his own and his own

know him (*Jn* 10:14). Evangelicals understand that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the very moment one enters into a relationship with Christ through a personal commitment in confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior (*Mt* 16: 16) and is baptized, one belongs to the Church, the community which he established (*Mt* 16:18).<sup>1</sup> As a fruit of this faith, the Christian undertakes the path of life-long discipleship. Catholics understand that a person is received into the Church at the moment of Baptism, whether as an infant or an adult, and it is expected that the person's initiation into the church will be deepened through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is sealed through confirmation and participation in the Eucharist, as they seek to live as his disciples.

2. The unity of the body of Christ is founded on “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (*Eph* 4:5). The church celebrates unity with Christ and with one another in the Lord's Supper/Eucharist in which his death and resurrection are proclaimed and celebrated until he comes in glory. At his second coming it will then be revealed in the heavenly community who belongs to the unity of the body of Christ throughout the ages and from all countries and languages. Then, the whole creation will be incorporated into the eternal doxology of praise to God (*Rev* 5:11-14; *Phil* 2:10-11; *Rom* 8:19-23; *1 Cor* 15:28). While we look forward to the final consummation of all things, we are called in the Church to be Christ's body in the here and now.

3. Christ's prayer for unity in John 17 takes as its premise that his present and future disciples be brought into the unity that he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This unity testifies to the world that “you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (*Jn* 17:23). There is a unity which the church receives, and which God has given.<sup>2</sup> But unity also comes to us as a task, one that can only be accomplished by the Spirit working in and through us. The Apostle Paul makes an appeal “that there be no dissensions among you and that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (*1 Cor* 1:10).

4. We realize that in the history of the Church, continuing even to today, divisions have damaged the visible unity of the Church and shaken the credibility of the Gospel that is to be preached in the world. Unity is something deeply desired by our Lord and empowered by his Spirit. Therefore, the Church may not remain comfortable when the body of Christ is divided (cf. *1 Cor* 12:25), but is called to strive for the greatest possible unity which Christ himself calls for (*Jn* 17:20-23; *Phil* 2:5). In doing so, we are agreed that the Church must make every effort to preach the Gospel in its truth and purity, though we have not always understood what that means in the same way. We recognize

---

1. As stated in the document *Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission* (ERCDOM): “Conversion and baptism are the gateway into the new community of God, although Evangelicals distinguish between the visible and invisible aspects of this community. They see conversion as the means of entry into the invisible church and baptism as the consequently appropriate means of entry into the visible church” (4.3).

2. As affirmed in the WEA Statement of Faith: “We believe in ... The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ” and in the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* I: “Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.”

that in the history of the Church, striving for the truth of the Gospel has not always resulted in unity or resolved all of our differences. But we also welcome the renewed effort to address these divisions in our present consultation.

### **The Challenges Encountered Among Evangelicals and Catholics**

5. According to the reports our consultation commissioned from 22 countries and from five continents, relations between Catholics and Evangelicals vary according to the regions, local history, public recognition and role in society as well as other new and emerging circumstances. While mutual ignorance and mistrust, fears and prejudices, as well as majority/minority dynamics have prevented relations from being improved in certain countries, in other areas where Catholics and Evangelicals are challenged by the contemporary society, or exist as minorities threatened by religious persecutions, or work in common efforts to confront poverty or various natural disasters, collaboration has been established at different levels.

6. There is a wide range in the quality of local relationships. Sometimes relations are characterized by open rivalry and opposition in the missionary field, marred by accusations and counter-accusations of proselytism, persecution, inequality, idolatry, and/or rejection of the recognition of the Christian identity of the other. At other times or places, relationships are characterized by open collaboration in the public sphere, especially in family matters and ethical and moral campaigns at every level, as well as prayer initiatives and evangelistic and common charitable campaigns inspired by the Bible.

7. Members of the Consultation are happy to note that in most parts of the world there is a consciousness of the need to improve our relationship. Catholics and Evangelicals are convinced that “Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings.”<sup>3</sup> In accordance with the principles of the Gospel, important steps can be taken together through mutual knowledge and recognition, healing of memories, theological dialogue, as well as encouraging local collaboration between Catholics and Evangelicals wherever possible and appropriate.

### **The Contemporary Challenges to the Christian Witness**

8. Neither Catholics nor Evangelicals can escape the challenges that an increasingly globalized context poses, where the paradigm is shifting more and more to a secular view of society and culture. This raises the question of how the gospel can be preached adequately in this context without giving in to the pressure to conform to the world. Challenges come to us in different forms:

- There is a creeping secularism that is antagonistic to the Christian faith as we live as strangers in an increasingly strange land (*1 Pet* 1: 1). In many places religion has

---

3. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Council of Churches and World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, Preamble, Geneva, 28 June 2011.

been relegated largely to the private sphere of the individual with little or no public presence of religion allowed. Many people have forgotten that they have forgotten God. There is an increasing erosion of the churches themselves which affects their impact on society and culture. This erosion is not only in the West; this is a global challenge. It is an erosion whose long-term effects are not yet fully understood.

- Our age is experiencing an ethical disorientation, one that often disallows God and his revelation to serve as any type of reference point for ethical discussion. In sexual morality, there is an underlying assumption that everyone is free to do what is perceived to be right in their own eyes; there is no longer basic agreement on the definition of marriage; sexual orientation now is the accepted way of defining who we are as human beings and the redefinition of marriage to include same-sex unions is more and more common. The dignity and sanctity of human life at all stages is under attack. Euthanasia, assisted suicide, abortion, and some genetic and reproductive technologies threaten and undermine the basic understanding of what it means to be human. This in turn also has repercussions for the primary foundation of society - the family.
- Religious and ideological diversity is the norm in many societies and cultures around the globe. Although that is not necessarily problematic, it does serve as a challenge to the church because the truth of the Gospel can be seen as just one option among many. The exclusive claims of Christ himself (*Jn* 14:6) are perceived by some as a direct affront to the dominant controlling ethos of toleration. Religious pluralism has had the unintended consequence of intensified violence caused by an increasingly polarized religious environment. A perceived lack of conviction on the one hand is met with religious radicalization on the other. In such a polarized context, those on the extremes use their religious convictions to justify violence against those with whom they disagree. In this context, we note with dismay and sadness that Christians are persecuted in many countries around the world today. It is our duty to pray for the persecuted church and to stand up for religious freedom wherever it is denied.

### **Response to these Challenges and Our Shared Beliefs**

9. To what extent can Evangelicals and Catholics continue to face such challenges alone and apart from one another? What of our present situation? The participants in this consultation, appointed by the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, are convinced that the urgency of the present situation makes it imperative that we as Evangelicals and Catholics speak and act together wherever we can to confront these challenges. We are called together by Christ so that the world may come to realize his presence in a world that is fractured and fragmented - a world which he loved even to the point of death and still loves (*Jn* 3:16; 17:20-23). One purpose of this consultation has been to explore areas of common concern. Part of discerning what we can do together has been learning more about each other's personal faith and commitment to Christ's Gospel and his mission to save a dying world. We have also sought to explore more deeply those issues which continue to divide us. We do so because our divided witness weakens our response to these challenges in the eyes of the world. While we recognize our enduring divisions,

we can acknowledge the work that each other is doing and even consider working together in as many areas as possible.

10. We as Catholics and Evangelicals are in agreement that Christians believe: that God is triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons in one God (*Gen* 1:1-3; *Mt* 28:19; *Jn* 1:1; 10:30, etc.); that he created all things, both visible and invisible, by his Word (*Gen* 1; *Jn* 1:3; *Col* 1: 16-17); that human beings brought sin into this world, and as a result, all are born sinful and in need of forgiveness and reconciliation with God (*Rom* 3:20-23); that the Word, the second person of the Trinity, became flesh (*Jn* 1:14) as our Lord and Savior, true God and true man in one person (*Col* 1:19); that he came to earth as both God and man to save us from our sins (*Phil* 2:5-11; *Col* 2:9), that he was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified for our sins, died, and was buried, he descended into hell (*1 Pt* 3:18-19) and rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of the Father and will judge the living and the dead on the last day. We believe in the Holy Spirit who leads us to repentance, calls us to faith, justifies us by grace through faith, and enlightens us with the Word of God as he inspired the Apostles and prophets; therefore we believe that all Christians of any community can have a living relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit which the Spirit himself enables; it is the responsibility and privilege of all Christians to proclaim the saving Gospel to all who have not repented, believed and committed their lives to Jesus Christ (*2 Cor* 5:18); we also believe that the Spirit calls and gathers all believers into his one, holy, catholic,<sup>4</sup> apostolic Church where we strengthen and build one another up in the body of Christ as we receive his gifts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (*1 Cor* 11:23-34; *1 Cor* 12:12; *Mt* 28:19; *Mk* 16:16; *Mt* 26: 26-29). We look forward to the resurrection of the body and to the time when we will see God face to face and live with him forever (*1 Cor* 15; *1 Cor* 13:12).

11. While we rejoice in holding these elements of faith in common, we also recognize that we are called to grow in understanding of those areas where there has not been full agreement, and address them directly. Two long-standing differences of great significance have been our understandings of the authority of Scripture and Tradition, and the role of the Church in salvation. There are other important areas of disagreement which we hope to address in future discussions, but due to limits of time and resources, in this text we will address only these two historically divisive issues.

12. Finally, in this introduction it is important to note that the Evangelical movement itself constitutes a highly differentiated ecumenical network. The World Evangelical Alliance brings together Evangelical Christians from Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist and Pentecostal traditions, This diversity has significant consequences particularly for ecclesiology – that is, questions pertaining to ministry, authority and ecclesial structures, sacraments, and the nature of the church. These Churches differ greatly in their relationship to the Catholic Church. In view of the doctrinal issues raised in our dialogue, such differences were clearly in evidence. The challenge is made more complex when considering that the Evangelical movement has chosen not to

---

4. The word “catholic” in the creed means “universal.”

address ecclesiological differences among the members of the WEA, but rather, to focus on cooperation in common prayer, evangelism, and witness.<sup>5</sup>

### **Method of the Consultation**

13. The current round of consultations has built upon the Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (1977-84), the 1993 Venice Consultation between the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of Koinonia document (2002). The current consultation brought together 13 participants from 10 different countries on 5 continents, ensuring that many different perspectives would be given voice in our discussions.

14. The members of this consultation were given the mandate to enter into conversation representing our diverse communities, seeking greater mutual understanding, and attempting to identify the state of our relations and how they might proceed appropriately and responsibly. Over the past six years, we met in São Paulo, Brazil; Rome, Italy; Chicago, USA; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Bad Blankenburg, Germany; and Saskatoon, Canada. In all of these places we met with local Evangelicals and Catholics and heard areas of concern and examples of cooperation in each of their regions. At our meetings, we presented papers, explained our positions, argued, asked questions, prayed together (and separately) for God's reconciling grace, gained insights - and asked more questions. We were not in the business of compromise and negotiation, but rather of respectful and frank conversation, aware that nothing other than a deep honesty, graciously articulated, would serve our communities well. When we gathered, we sought to be faithful to Jesus Christ even when we encountered disagreements. The way forward was for us firstly to map out convergences, building on previous consultations, and on the basis of our respective teachings and practices; secondly, to name aspects of the other tradition which give us encouragement, where we rejoice in seeing God at work, and where we may learn from the other; thirdly, with the help of the dialogue partner, to formulate questions to each other in a respectful and intelligent way (hence the term 'fraternal'), thus identifying issues we were not able to resolve in this round of consultation, which still need to be addressed by our respective communities. With mutual trust and respect, we have sought to undertake this task in a way which also records the understanding we have gained, the insights which allow us to pose the questions differently than we may have done prior to the current round of consultation. With prayer and a desire to be true to our calling and our convictions, we have posed questions that are intended to stimulate further discussion between Catholics and Evangelicals that will spill over into our own respective communities where we would like to see the conversation continue. It is our fervent hope that the Holy Spirit would enable us to go deeper in our self- understanding as we learn from each other about the God who loves us all and gave himself for us.

---

5. On the ecclesiological convergences and differences between the Evangelical and Catholic understandings, see Church, Evangelization, and the Bonds of Koinonia; A Report of the International Consultation between the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance (1993-2002), especially Part 1, "Catholics, Evangelicals, and Koinonia", Sections B and C.

## **PART 1: THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING AND ACTIVE: EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS REFLECT TOGETHER ON THE SCRIPTURES AND THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION**

### INTRODUCTION

15. Catholics and Evangelicals have long seen ourselves as standing in opposition to each other regarding the authority of Scripture, and its relation to Tradition. From the time of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, our respective positions seemed well summarized by two radically distinct alternatives: *Scripture alone* or *Scripture and Tradition*. Churches of the Reformation, which are an important part of an Evangelical inheritance, continue to be convinced that the Bible will always be the ultimate authority in matters of faith, doctrine and practice, that the church can and has erred, and that authority is only to be sought in the Word of God. Catholics have stressed the *need for* and the authority *of the* Church's teaching office in the interpretation of the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

16. Meeting in our present context, five hundred years after the beginning of the Reformation era, Evangelicals and Catholics taking part in this consultation were able to discern that we have come a long way from the disputes and battle lines of the 16th century. This is not to say that we are now in or nearing full agreement, but we have come to realize that we can rejoice in the growing centrality of the Scriptures in the lives of Catholics as well as Evangelicals. We also rejoice in the convergences apparent to us in our understanding of the significance of the Apostolic Tradition and the transmission of faith through the generations.<sup>7</sup>

17. Under the headings of "Scripture," "Apostolic Tradition," and "Scripture and Tradition", we begin by identifying common ground or convergences; then proceed, in light of a deeper understanding of the other, by indicating areas where each finds encouraging developments within the ecclesial life of the other; then by posing, in a friendly but direct way, remaining questions that challenge the other community to articulate the theological foundations of its convictions in order to search for common ground.

### **1. The Scriptures**

#### **A. Our Common Ground**

18. Through discussion, and a study of our respective documents, Evangelicals and Catholics have come to find much common ground regarding the revelation of God and the place of the Scriptures in the Church. We as Evangelicals and Catholics firmly believe that God has spoken to humanity, revealing his divine self - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - to us, and also revealing God's will for the human race. Together, we believe that the fullness of revelation is found in Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, the eternal Word made flesh. In Jesus, the innermost truth about God is revealed. Through his words and deeds, his miracles and teaching, and above all in his death for

---

6. Regarding the use of the word "Church" in this document, see paragraphs 50 and following.

7. See section 2 on the Apostolic Tradition, beginning with paragraph 29.

our sins and his resurrection he has freed us from sin and has brought redemption, has shown us the face of God, and has taught us what it is to be human.

19. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension to the Father, the Holy Spirit descended upon the community of his disciples, who went forth proclaiming what they had received from and witnessed in Jesus. This proclamation was faithfully recorded in the books which eventually comprised the New Testament. Jesus himself had understood the Old Testament to be the written Word of God, revealed to the chosen people of Israel (*Jn* 5:39). By his authority, the Christian Church from its very beginning accepted the Old Testament (eventually alongside the New Testament) as the only written Word of God.<sup>8</sup> The Bible is the written Word of God in an altogether singular way (*2 Tim* 3:16).

20. Catholics and Evangelicals rejoice in affirming together that the Scriptures are the highest authority in matters of faith and practice (*2 Pet* 1:20-21).<sup>9</sup> The purpose of the Scriptures, consistent with the purpose of God's revelation, is to lead people into faith in Christ, who is "the way, the truth and the life" (*Jn* 14:6). Christians approach the Scriptures mindful of their internal coherence as the speech of God, and that they are to be read in light of the fullness of God's revelation in Christ. We hold that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God uses human authors with human language to communicate his Word through the sacred texts of Scripture. It follows that the Scriptures teach solidly, faithfully, without error and efficaciously leading us into all truth. We agree that we know Christ through the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit, and hold the authenticity and historicity of what the Gospels record of the life, teaching and deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus. We await no further public revelation before the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (*Heb* 1: 1-2).

21. The Bible has a central role in all Christian ministry and in the worship and life of the Church. The use of the Scriptures in worship and teaching was essential to the shaping of the canon. In the first centuries, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognized and received from among many writings these 27 books as the canon of the New Testament. Although Evangelicals and Catholics have different views of the extent of the Old Testament canon that has been recognized, we can nonetheless agree that the Old Testament Scriptures testify to the promise of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ (*Lk* 24:27; *Jn* 5:39). These Scriptures are authoritative for the Church.

22. Evangelicals and Catholics are in agreement that prayer should accompany the reading and study of the Scriptures and that the Holy Spirit can and will lead us into all truth (*Jn* 16:13). We also agree that the written Word of God is foundational to theology and catechesis. As the Church Father Jerome said, "ignorance of the

---

8. As stated in Lausanne Movement, *Cape Town Commitment*, 2010. Part 1.6: "We affirm that the Bible is the final written word of God, not surpassed by any further revelation, but we also rejoice that the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of God's people so that the Bible continues to speak God's truth in fresh ways to people in every culture."

9. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* 79.

Scriptures is ignorance of God.”<sup>10</sup> Finally, Catholics and Evangelicals believe that we are called to shape our lives in all their dimensions according to the Scriptures. We firmly believe that the closer we come to Christ, the closer we come to one another; so too, the more we attend to the Scriptures and live by them, the closer we draw to God and to one another, as individuals and as communities.

## **B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other**

23. As **Catholics**, we are encouraged by ...

- The Evangelicals’ faithfulness to the great commission, their engagement in proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and their zeal for evangelizing;
- The Evangelical commitment to a morality and ethics based on the Scriptures, and to a moral life lived according to the Scriptures;
- The place of Scripture in the devotional and theological life of Evangelicals;
- The recognition that Scripture needs to be read in community;
- The move among some Evangelicals towards reading Patristic interpretations of Scriptures (such as that found in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* or *The Church’s Bible*);
- Finally, the role the Bible has in shaping community among Evangelicals.

24. As **Evangelicals**, we are encouraged by ...

- The stronger witness to the Word of God in the Catholic Church of today. We rejoice in the renewed emphasis on Scripture as the foundation for faith and practice as found, for instance, in parts of Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (1965) and in the Apostolic Exhortation from Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010);
- Seeing that the Scriptures are considered as “the highest authority in matters of faith” (*Ut Unum Sint* 79) in the Catholic Church;
- The fact that Catholics see the written Word of God as authoritative and as the standard and foundation for all matters of faith and life;
- Finally, the Catholic Church’s efforts with regard to the translation and distribution of the Scriptures among both clergy and laity and the further pastoral encouragement to not only have the Scriptures but to read and study them.

## **C. Fraternal Questions of Concern**

25. As **Catholics**, we believe along with Evangelicals that the Scriptures are the normative account of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. With you, we believe that Jesus Christ is the definitive Word spoken by God. Catholics are also encouraged by the Evangelical acknowledgement of the oral tradition (*kerygma, viva vox evangelii*, the preached Word of God) preceding the written New Testament. Nonetheless, we would like to ask:

- Whether the Evangelicals’ equation at times of the Word of God with the Sacred Scripture adequately takes into consideration the Incarnation of the Word as a person rather than as a text?

---

10. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Book 18, Prologue; PL 24: 17b.

- Does the principle of *sola Scriptura* and its identification of the Word with Scripture, with seemingly no reference to Tradition, unduly limit our receiving of God’s revelation?
- Does the Evangelical stance on Scripture alone sufficiently account for the ongoing value and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church in preserving her doctrine and teaching, especially in the articulation and development of the Tradition?
- We observe diverse interpretations of the Scriptures even among well-intentioned Christians. If the sense of the Sacred Scripture were plainly evident, as Evangelicals maintain, would it not be easier than it is to maintain unity among Christians?

26. Nonetheless, we are grateful that Evangelicals take the Scriptures and the challenges they present to us seriously in forming our understanding of who God is and how God works in the world, and have avoided relativizing the Scriptural message in addressing the modern world.

27. As **Evangelicals**, rejoicing in the growing role that Scripture has taken in the life of the Catholic Church, we would nonetheless like to ask Catholics ...

- We both agree that the holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God and, therefore, are the true, unchangeable revelation of God. However, we continue to struggle with how, according to Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* 9, “both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence” – a basic restatement of the fourth session of the Council of Trent (1546). How are these positions compatible?
- Regarding the inerrancy of the Scriptures in *Dei Verbum* 11, with which we joyfully concur, we would like clarification on the implications of this stance on inerrancy and what it means in relationship to the challenges that the modern historical-critical method poses and which a number of interpreters within the contemporary Catholic Church seem to favor;
- How their understanding that the Bible is the supreme authority for faith and doctrine can be reconciled with the most recent dogmatic pronouncements since the 19th century (for instance, the 1854 dogma of the Immaculate Conception, or the 1950 dogma of the bodily assumption of Mary) which seem to us as Evangelicals to have little, if any, clear explicit Biblical support;
- And finally, we would like to ask Catholics about the authority given to Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament in the formation of doctrine when it seems that many in the ancient church distinguished the Apocryphal books from the canonical books as not being authoritative in matters of doctrine or practice.

28. None of these questions should take away from the fact that we are truly grateful for the stronger witness that Catholics have shown in their defense of Scriptural truth and our united appeal to the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and life. The fact that Scripture has become a growing focus in Catholic piety and church life is extremely encouraging to us as Evangelicals.

## 2. Apostolic Tradition

### A. Our Common Ground

29. Catholics and Evangelicals, while looking back to the history of the spreading of the Gospel, recognize and rejoice in the action of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the church, evangelizing people and transforming cultures. The Holy Spirit has a history. We have witnessed that the Holy Spirit has never ceased to act in history by giving birth to true believers and summoning us to remain faithful to the revealed truth, “No one can say that ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, we listen to what our predecessors in faith have received from God, how they have understood the Scriptures, and how they have lived the Christian life (Heb 11).

30. Paul says, “what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). This passing on of the faith is a dynamic process that continues in the life of the church at different times and places, with constant reference to the Scriptures, which remain the highest authority in matters of faith and life (cf. *Ut Unum Sint* 79). Catholics and Evangelicals believe that the revealed Word of God to which the apostolic church once and for all bore witness in the Scriptures is received and communicated through the ongoing life of the whole Christian community. As a church, led by the Spirit, generation after generation we pass on the apostolic witness that we have received from our forebears and teachers in the faith.

31. This Consultation has been able to affirm the above as valued and appreciated by Evangelicals and Catholics alike. We have defined “tradition” differently, but we have all done so with reference to this dynamic process of passing on the apostolic faith in time. In this context, it is important to look back to the period of the Reformation. The Reformers were seeking to deal with traditions and practices that had arisen in the church that they believed not only had no Scriptural warrant but were in contradiction to Scripture. They were not seeking to jettison tradition altogether. Luther, and to a certain extent, Calvin, had a critical, but overall favorable view of the tradition.<sup>11</sup> They saw much value in the creeds and the confessions of the church and often appealed to the ancient church as an authority for their interpretation of Scripture. All of these fell within the purview of their understanding of tradition.

32. In our contemporary context, there is a shared sense of the post-modern critique of individualism by both Evangelicals and Catholics that realizes and recognizes the importance of community in strengthening and supporting the individual members of the body of Christ. Both Evangelicals and Catholics understand that the individual in concert with the whole community throughout space and time – past, present and

---

11. The Reformers confessed the three ecumenical Creeds, Melanchthon and Luther often quoted the Church Fathers, including many citations of them in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, which later included a *Catalog of Testimonies* compiled by Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz; for Calvin’s use of the Church Fathers, see also Anthony Lane’s *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1991).

future – are important components for supporting the body of Christ and remaining in the faith that has been passed on from generation to generation through the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

33. Evangelicals and Catholics both can have a critical appreciation of the contributions the Church Fathers have made to the Christian faith, even as we continue to grow in our understanding of tradition's role in the subsequent articulation of the faith of the Apostolic community. Further exploration is needed into the role of the historic liturgy in explicating and internalizing Scripture, and aspects of the sacramental life of the church which have had such an enduring history; these are also areas where there is much more we can learn from one another.

34. While giving thanks for some common ground in this dialogue, we need to note that Evangelicals and Catholics also have significant differences in their understanding of tradition and that these remain matters for further discussion.

35. The Catholic Church makes a key distinction when it treats the subject of tradition. In its primary sense, Tradition is the living transmission of what the apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, learned and handed down to us from Jesus' teaching and life. This "is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time ... (and) adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned" under the guidance of the Church's teaching office,<sup>12</sup> which "is not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on" (*Dei Verbum* 10).

36. Evangelicals remain uncomfortable with any concept of tradition that could possibly elevate tradition above Scripture. Catholics would agree. However, how this works out in our different communities continues to be a point of contention. Nonetheless, we all want to affirm an openness to tradition that does not contradict Scripture.

## **B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other**

37. As **Evangelicals**, we are encouraged by and have benefited from ...

- The fact that the Catholic Church has fostered the *ressourcement* movement<sup>13</sup> in a recovery of the full patristic tradition for the whole church;
- The Catholic Church's commitment to upholding the historic deposit of faith (*depositum Fidei*) -- the unchanging truth of the Christian faith (*Jude* 3; *1 Tim* 6:20; *2 Tim* 1:13-14) – in the face of the challenges that modern secularism and its philosophical values pose;

---

12. Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 84.

13. A movement in the 20th century among Catholic scholars that engaged in a recovery of the ancient sources for use in liturgy, theology, and Biblical interpretation.

- The fact that Reformation emphases, such as the centrality of the Word and the importance of preaching in worship, are considered and recognized as part of the rich tradition of the whole church.
38. As Catholics, we are encouraged by and have benefited from ...
- The increasing Evangelical recognition of the continuous action of the Holy Spirit in the 2,000 year history of the church;
  - The Evangelical engagement with patristic writings and other sources of the Church of the first centuries (*ad fontes*) by some Evangelical scholars and their communities;
  - Seeing among some Evangelicals an understanding of the differentiation between Apostolic Tradition and local traditions.

### C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

39. **As Evangelicals**, we have learned the reasons for some aspects of Catholic popular piety that may have positive benefit. We have also been pleased to hear that in many instances Catholics have sought to address some of the excesses in their piety.<sup>14</sup> We would nonetheless like to discern from Catholics ...

- Whether there is a critical principle that Catholics use to address what Evangelicals view as extra-biblical teachings that form the basis for certain aspects of Catholic Tradition, for example, the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception?
- How do you ensure that the development of doctrine and the appearance of new traditions remain faithful to the teaching of the whole of Scripture if some doctrines and traditions seem to be attested more from an implicit Scriptural attestation rather than an explicit Scriptural witness?
- Mindful that Evangelical piety has its own share of questions concerning our own practices, Evangelicals nonetheless would like to ask Catholics how they deal with a piety that often seems to be shaped more by tradition(s) than by Scripture (for example, Marian piety and the cult of the saints)?

40. Again, these questions should not detract from what we can say and do together as we rejoice in the faith once received and passed on throughout all generations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who has promised to lead us into all truth (*Jn 16:13*).

41. As Catholics, we have come to a new appreciation of how Evangelicals increasingly speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Church, and how some Evangelicals are turning to the Church Fathers. But we would ask:

- How does the evaluation of whether to accept or reject what the Church Fathers have to say occur? For example, in addition to Baptism and Eucharist, why are what Catholics refer to as other sacraments a challenge for Evangelicals to accept when the church in the first centuries accepted them as such (and some of them

---

14. cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (Vatican City, 2001).

have explicit Scriptural warrant, for instance, forgiveness of sins, *Jn* 20:23 and *Mt* 16:19, and the sacrament of the sick, *James* 5:14-15)?

- Is the tendency to rediscover the Church Fathers a Global North development, or is this trend shared by Evangelicals in the Global South? In what sense is the teaching of the Church Fathers affecting the life of the Church?
- We have been made aware through our consultation that the World Evangelical Alliance brings together Christian communities with a common statement of faith, but also with great diversity, including diverging understandings of tradition. There are those who see tradition as of minimal importance to the present and future life of the church and those who are increasingly attentive to tradition. What are the values at stake in this process? Given your vision of unity and the diversity among Evangelicals, how do you discern whether the unity you uphold is a sufficient response to the summons to unity in the New Testament (*Jn* 17:20-21; *1 Cor* 1:10)?

42. Even as we ask these questions of brotherly concern, seeking further clarification, we rejoice in the faithful witness we have seen among Evangelicals to the unchanging truth of the Gospel.

### **3. Scripture And Tradition**

#### **A. Our Common Ground**

43. There has been mutual suspicion and distrust, and perhaps a bit of caricature of one another's views regarding Scripture and tradition and the relationship between the two. Behind such criticism and distrust lie not only misrepresentations and misinterpretations but also real differences in doctrine and practice that have divided us and continue to prevent us from testifying to our unity in faith (*Jn* 17:11). As Evangelicals and Catholics, we seek to live as disciples of Jesus and come together in the task of mutual conversation, consolation, and the search for reconciliation. Our goal is to come to a clearer understanding of the truth of God's Word even as we acknowledge the need to be taught by our mutual, as well as our separated pasts. The words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, remind us, however, that "our quarrelling ancestors were in reality much closer to each other when in all their disputes they still knew that they could only be servants of one truth which must be acknowledged as being as great and as pure as it has been intended for us by God."<sup>15</sup>

44. There is a realization among both Evangelicals and Catholics that Scripture need not necessarily be pitted over against tradition or over against the Church, nor need tradition and church teaching be opposed to Scripture. Both Evangelicals and Catholics have seen progress in moving beyond the disputes of the 16th century with the Reformers and Trent, even while acknowledging the continuing validity of many of their critical insights. In the context of conversations with other worldwide communions deriving from the Reformation, the Catholic Church has gained insights and come to a greater appreciation of the Reformers. These dialogues have made

---

15. Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 98.

significant progress in articulating a shared understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition.<sup>16</sup> There is a noticeable return among many Evangelicals to the sources (*ad fontes*), which includes reading the ancient Christian writers, gaining a new appreciation for the Creeds of the church, and becoming reacquainted with their Christian past before the 16th century. In an increasing number of Evangelical circles at the beginning of the 21st century, the tradition and insights of the Fathers, as well as those who came after, are being appealed to in aiding Biblical interpretation and doctrinal exegesis, albeit with a critical eye, something Catholics also would affirm. Evangelicals would stop short of saying that the interpretation of the Fathers is authoritative, but have also begun to realize that they ignore the interpretation of the Fathers to their own peril. The Fathers knew their Bibles better than most of us. They are our teachers in the faith, teachers who have years if not, cumulatively, centuries of experience. We can also learn much from their doctrinal treatises which were, more often than not, simply focused exegesis that took into account the whole of Scripture in explicating a particular doctrine. We have together identified what might be called an interweaving and interconnection between Scripture and tradition.<sup>17</sup> Tradition can serve as an important touchstone for the interpretation of Scripture and its explication of doctrine, even as Evangelicals remain committed to *sola scriptura*.

## **B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other**

### 45. **As Evangelicals**, we are encouraged by ...

- The movement we perceive occurring with many - both laity and clergy - in the Catholic Church who see the increasing importance of Scriptural study in their worship and devotional lives;
- The insistence of Catholics on the importance of the community of the church in our encounter with Scripture, while still recognizing the importance of individual conscience, personal conversion and the value of our own Evangelical sense of a deepening personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- The discerning eye of the Catholic reading of the Church Fathers, in whom there is much wisdom to be found, notably in their exegesis of Scripture. They are our common teachers, but Scripture is the authoritative text.

### 46. **As Catholics**, we are encouraged by ...

- The Evangelical reading of the Church Fathers and the recognition by them of the reverence the Fathers held for the Sacred Scripture; the growing Evangelical recognition of the importance of the patristic interpretation in engaging Sacred Scripture;
- The value of fraternal correction by prominent Evangelical leaders as a “sort of authority” in the Evangelical world;
- The keeping of a *sensus fidelium* among those in the Evangelical movement witnessing to a continuity of the Biblical witness;

---

16. Cf. Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: Continuum, 2009), 87-89.

17. Another term that has been used is ‘coinherence.’ See *Evangelicals and Catholics Together, Your Word is Truth* (2002) for further explanation.

- A growing attentiveness among Evangelicals regarding the importance of community particularly in strengthening the individual members within the context of the Christian community.

### C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

47. **Evangelicals** realize in light of all these encouraging signs and the convergences we have found, there is much to celebrate. And yet questions still remain that must be addressed. We would still like to ask Catholics ...

- How the statement that “the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God” (*Ut Unum Sint* 79) can be reconciled with the statement of *Dei Verbum* that “both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence” (*Dei Verbum* 9), the latter of which to us seems to put Scripture and Tradition on the same level?
- In light of new relationships developing between Evangelicals and Catholics, how the principle of *Sola Scriptura* has been received and incorporated into the life of contemporary Catholics and Catholic theology?
- Recognizing our own sinfulness and need for correction, Evangelicals would further like to ask Catholics if the Church can recognize mistakes in its tradition expressed in its devotional piety, in light of human fallibility, and if so, could those mistakes be corrected in the light of Scripture?
- Since Paul exhorts us “not to go beyond what is written” (*1 Cor* 4:6) and even the people of Berea in Acts 17:11 examined the Scriptures to see if everything the Apostles said was true, how therefore would Catholics reconcile this with papal infallibility?
- Understanding that on the one hand Christ has promised that his Holy Spirit would lead his church “into all truth” (*Jn* 16:13), but on the other hand that Scripture itself declares that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (*2 Tim* 3:16), Evangelicals would want to ask Catholics if the guidance of the Holy Spirit works in the same way in the subsequent life of tradition as it does in Scriptural inspiration of the written text?
- Is there a sense of what Evangelicals call *Ecclesia semper reformanda* (the church always reforming) in the Catholic Church today?
- In light of the Catholic stance on Scripture and Tradition, how do Catholics deal with clergy and lay members, nuns and professors at Universities, for instance, who disagree with Scripture and the Church? What is the process for dissent and is it followed?

48. **Catholics** also realize the helpful convergence that is developing between Evangelicals and Catholics in the mutual affirmation of the authoritative nature of Scripture and an increasing appreciation of tradition. We still wish to ask Evangelicals the following questions:

- We see the strong Evangelical practice of using Scripture to interpret Scripture, working with an understanding of the internal coherence of the biblical message. We also appreciate your understanding that the Scriptures are read in the context

of the Christian community while stressing the role of the Holy Spirit in the reading and interpretation of Scripture. Yet we note that among Evangelicals, just as among Catholics, differing and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures arise. Without reference to a magisterium, how do Evangelicals maintain unity and guard against internal conflict in their interpretation of Sacred Scripture? What role does tradition play in the interpretation of Scripture? Faced with differing interpretations of Scripture, what is the methodology for discernment and discipline within the Church?

- Evangelicals have maintained a strong traditional morality, for which we are grateful. We nonetheless want to ask how you guard against moral relativism when it arises in the teaching of individual pastors or lay people?
- Given that Evangelicals believe that the Holy Spirit is active in history and that the Spirit leads us to unity, where do you see the Spirit at work in the Reformation period which brought about division in the Church? Is the Holy Spirit active solely in the Reformers and their communities or also in the Catholic Church of that period? How are the 16th century Reformers viewed by Evangelicals today, and what role do their teachings play in the life of Evangelicals? How do communities formed after the Reformation period link themselves to the Reformation?
- Liturgical renewal has been a pronounced feature of ecclesial life over the past century. We see a diversity of liturgical and spiritual practices within Evangelical worship and devotional life, at times drawing on practices that derive from the early church. Could Evangelicals look to the sacramental and liturgical forms expressed in the period of the Church Fathers as an expression of the Word of God in the life of the Church? If so, how might this affect doctrine and practice?

49. Rejoicing in the saving message of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who died for sinners to bring them forgiveness and life, Catholics and Evangelicals together affirm that Scripture is the authoritative rule and norm for faith and life. Jesus Christ, the Word through whom God has revealed himself, speaks through and in his Word to a world in urgent need of the Gospel. God has also given his church his Holy Spirit who not only inspired the Scriptures but ensures that the truth of the Gospel endures and is transmitted in the life of the church as it proclaims that Gospel truth anew in every day and age. Differences remain concerning how we perceive Tradition and its relationship to Scripture and concerning the level of authority Tradition holds. Ongoing mutual questioning does not, however, bring our conversation to an end, but should motivate each of us to dig deeper into our theology, practice, and piety, and continue our discussion for the sake of the Gospel and its mission. Only as we stand together with the Word facing the world through the power of the Spirit can we hope to offer a message that has stood the test of time and remains unchanging. To this world, we offer Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever (*Heb*, 13:8).

## PART 2: GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION IN THE CHURCH: EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS REFLECT TOGETHER ON SALVATION AND THE CHURCH

### A. Our Common Ground

50. Christ's redeeming death and resurrection took place once and for all in history. Christ's death on the cross, the culmination of his whole life of obedience, was the one, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. There can be no repetition of or addition to what was then accomplished once for all by Christ.<sup>18</sup> The gift of salvation is freely given, freely received (*Rom* 3:24; *1 Cor* 2:12). For Catholics and Evangelicals alike, the question of salvation in Jesus Christ is of supreme importance; it plays a defining role in our lives of faith and in the shaping of our theologies. Salvation is a free gift of God (*Eph* 2:8-9). It does not come simply by being born of a Christian family, not even by being a formal member of a Christian church; it is God's gracious initiative. "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (*Ps* 3:8). Salvation denotes God's total plan and desire for humanity and responds to the fundamental human need for redemption. Acts of the Apostles assures us that this salvation comes to us through Jesus, and that "there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:12).

51. Wherever two or three come together in that name, Christ is there (*Mt* 18:20). The Scriptures tell us that from the very beginning the Church was part of God's plan of salvation (*Eph* 1: 4-10, 22-23). Beginning with Adam and Eve and extending throughout the covenant history recorded in Scripture, God has formed for himself a people, Israel, who are called out (*ekklesia*) from the world into a community that is then sent back out to be a light to the nations (*Is* 60:3). The fullness of this community is found in Christ the Word Incarnate, Israel reduced to One, who came to earth to redeem his people by saving them from their sins through his suffering, death on the cross, and his resurrection to life. God made known to the world this plan of salvation in his Son (*Jn* 3: 16) who has brought forth a new covenant people (*Jer* 31 :31- 34; *Rom* 9) in the community of His Church. He tells us that he himself will build this Church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (*Mt* 16:18). Christ tells us later how he provides for his Church in Matthew 18:15-20 and John 20:23 by ensuring that the forgiveness of sins that he won for us and for our salvation is and always will be central to the purpose and message of the church. He has given the gift of ministers to his Church (*1 Cor* 12: 28; *Eph* 4: 11-13) who are then called to be stewards of the mysteries and servants of God's people (*1 Cor* 4:1). The primary task to which Christ has called the Church, its ministers, and people is to go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching all that Christ has commanded us (*Mt* 28:19-20). He gave the promised Holy Spirit to his Church at Pentecost to empower the Church in its mission. As such, the Church is evangelized by God, but it also evangelizes for God. The disciples who are created by this work of God the Holy Spirit are then cultivated and grow in their faith as a community of believers (*Acts* 2:42-47) whose faith and trust is in the One who has saved them. The Spirit flourishes in this community, which Christ has called his

---

18. Neither Catholics nor Evangelicals hold to the idea that Christ is re-sacrificed in the Eucharist by the presiding priest.

Church, enlivening it with his gifts (*Acts* 2:1-4; *1 Cor* 12; *Rom* 8:10-11) to witness to the world the love of God while also strengthening and building one another up in the body of Christ (*1 Thess* 5:11).

52. The Apostle Paul provides two primary metaphors (there are others) which describe this community. 1 Corinthians 12 describes the Church as the body of Christ with Christ himself as the head. Apart from the head, there is no body, just as there are no branches without a vine (*Jn* 15). Salvation comes by being grafted on to the body of Christ through the work of the Spirit since no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit (*1 Cor* 12: 3) and a branch cut off from the vine will wither and die (*Jn* 15:1-6). As Jesus said, apart from him we can do nothing (*Jn* 15:5). The body cannot exist apart from the Spirit, nor can it exist apart from the head which is Christ. But with the head and the Spirit there is indeed a body, a communion of forgiven saints who, animated by the Spirit, produce works which God prepared in advance for us to do, not to merit salvation but to give glory to him (*Eph* 2:10) and to draw still others to his body, the Church (*Mt* 5:16; 28:19-20).

53. A second metaphor for the Church related to that of the body is what Paul presents in Ephesians 5. There he presents the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ, with Christ, again “as the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior ... who loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (*Eph* 5:23, 25-27). In this metaphor, we see the sacrificial giving of the Bridegroom’s very life in order to present the bride as his own by virtue of giving his own flesh on the cross. Through his sacrifice of himself, Christ has cleansed his bride, presenting her pure and undefiled, so that he also may take her to be his own to live with him in holiness and righteousness. The Church is not the one who sacrificed, nor is it the one who cleanses. Rather it is the Bridegroom who sacrifices himself for his bride and cleanses her, he is the one who feeds and cares for her, i.e., for the members of his body (*Eph* 5:29-30). The bride, the Church, is in this sense joined to and submits to her Beloved; as such, she does what he himself has given her to do, promising that he will be with her until the very end of the age (*Mt* 28:19-20).

54. The Church, then, is God’s gift to the world. While not all Evangelicals agree that the Creeds are authoritative, Catholics and Evangelicals can affirm that in the Creeds we found an expression of core Biblical teaching in many areas of doctrine, including the Church. After professing the Christian faith in God the Father and his work, in our Lord Jesus Christ and his life, and in the Holy Spirit and his sanctification of believers, we say that we believe “in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”. Christians profess faith in the Church which exhibits the marks of unity, holiness, catholicity<sup>19</sup> and adherence to the apostolic faith and teaching. But we do not believe in the Church in the same way that we believe in the divine persons of the Trinity confessed earlier in

---

19. See footnote 4.

the Creed.<sup>20</sup> When we say “we believe in God the Father. .. in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God ... and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,” we profess our faith in the work of salvation of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. We put our confidence and faith in our triune God. We trust him and commit ourselves totally to him, our rock and our salvation. Our faith is in God alone, our salvation comes from him (*Ps* 62:2). The Church and its ministers are in service to this salvation wherever the marks of the true Church are found. The pure preaching of the Gospel and the right use of the sacraments/ordinances which Christ commanded his Church to observe (*Mt* 28:19; *Mk* 16:15-16; *Lk* 22:19-20; *1 Cor* 11:23-25) are life-giving gifts for the nurturing and feeding of his flock.<sup>21</sup>

55. The Church is in service to the Gospel, as Paul says, because when Christ has reconciled us to himself he has also given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (*2 Cor* 5:19). The world will not hear this message of reconciliation apart from the Church, her ministers, and her people, who are to proclaim this message so that people may hear it (*Rom* 10:14-17; *Mt* 28:19-20). “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (*Rom* 10: 14 NRSV). Therefore, the Church has the obligation and privilege to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Church, as the body of Christ, is the usual place where the offer of salvation is heard and extended. By the power of the Holy Spirit, she proclaims Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to repent and come to him personally and so be reconciled to God and become part of his community of faith (*Mt* 4: 17). Salvation presupposes a conversion, a turning to God, and regeneration as we receive God’s grace, resulting in a reorientation of life according to the new life revealed in Jesus Christ. For many if not most Evangelicals, baptism is the primary means by which God incorporates people into his Church (*Mt* 28:19). Once in the Church, it is expected that members of Christ’s body will live out their Christian life in faithful service to him and one another.

## **B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other**

56. **As Evangelicals** we are encouraged by:

- The seriousness shown by Catholics in upholding the Apostles’ Creed especially as it speaks of the glorious reality of the Triune God and his gracious work that brings about “the remission of sins”;

---

20. The English translation of the Creed can be misleading, because in Latin we say: *Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem ... Et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum ... Et in Spiritum Sanctum ... Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam*. We “believe in” the Divine Persons, but the Latin text does not include “in” before “the Church.”

21. Catholics would also point to *Acts* 2: 11 (Confirmation); *In* 20:22-23 (Penance and Reconciliation); *Js* 5:14-15 (Anointing of the sick); *Num* 11:25; *1Tim* 2:5; *Heb* 5:10 (Holy Orders); *Matt* 19:6; *Gen* 1 :28; *Mk* 10:9 (Matrimony) to refer to the other five sacraments.

- The renewed emphasis in Catholic teaching on the biblical metaphors of the church as they also relate to salvation (e.g. the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit), the diminished role of past understandings of the church that seemed to exclude other Christians from the possibility of salvation (e.g. *societas perfecta*, *ark of salvation*); and the view that “separated churches and ecclesial communities” are used by Christ as a means of salvation;
- The more recent focus of the church and her ministers on the ministry and preaching of the Word as an increasingly important aspect of Christian faith and life both corporately and individually;
- The communal dimension of salvation we see evidenced over against individualistic tendencies which have characterized some trends in Protestantism;
- The insistence on the centrality of conversion, the many Catholic initiatives to take the Gospel of salvation to the whole world, as well as the more recent emphasis on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ for salvation.

57. **As Catholics**, we are encouraged by ...

- The Evangelical trust and confidence in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and the continuous loyalty of Evangelicals to the biblical teaching regarding God’s promise of salvation as a matter of primary importance;
- The recognition that the strong Evangelical focus on the saving character of Christ’s death is coupled with an equally strong focus on his resurrection from the dead and the hope which comes from it;
- The Evangelical conviction that there is no such a thing as a completely private Christianity; in other words, their understanding of salvation as relational, linking conversion and regeneration by water and the Word, leading to new life in Christ; and the conviction that conversion to Jesus Christ necessarily entails incorporation into the Church;
- The Evangelical conviction that salvation is not reducible to such things as formal church membership, but summons forth an active life of discipleship;
- The Evangelical understanding that Christian faith leads to a strong commitment to evangelization and mission for the sake of the salvation of all.

**C. Fraternal Comments and Questions of Concern**

58. As foregrounding for our questions, we as Evangelicals would like to, first of all, make the following observation. We have noted and appreciated the Catholic emphasis in our discussions on the love and mercy of God when dealing with the question of the assurance of salvation. We can see that Catholics are convinced of both the love of God and the mercy of God, as well as the fact that God takes sin seriously. Therefore, when Catholics are asked about whether they can be sure of salvation, they will respond in hope and trust but also with what appears to Evangelicals as uncertainty. The uncertainty stems from the fact, they tell us, of being confronted by almighty God who is transcendent and holy but also all merciful, and yet still before whom we are unworthy because of our sin; this is the cause for the Catholic reticence about language of assurance of salvation, whereas Evangelicals speak of their confidence in being saved. But Evangelicals have come to realize that when Catholics speak of hope, they do so in the context of Romans 5:1-5 and 8:24-25 where it speaks of a hope that does

not disappoint which is grounded in Christ. We also understand that Catholics are also concerned that the doctrine of the assurance of salvation of which Evangelicals speak can be misused to imply that those who do not express such assurance do not have faith, which is indeed what some Evangelicals often mean to say.

59. As Evangelicals, we appreciate the insight into the mercy of God and the humility that Catholics express in the face of the holiness of God. We understand that they do not feel it is their place to speak for God in saying that they can be sure of their own personal salvation: they would consider this as presuming on God. When Catholics are asked whether they are saved, they often will say “I hope,” or “I trust.” As Evangelicals, we have come to realize through our discussion that when Catholics say they hope they are saved, they are not necessarily saying “I hope I can do something to please God” or “I hope I’m good enough,” but they may well be saying that they trust that God is love and that God is faithful, and they are putting their hope in that love and faithfulness which is beyond anything they or we deserve. This love is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And they hope for salvation, then, because they have experienced the mercy of God through the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and trust in his promise. To say, however, that they are saved as an accomplished fact, we understand, would be perceived as presumption on their part and is not in line with Catholic teaching.

60. **Evangelicals would still like to ask Catholics**, however:

- What practical hope and comfort can you give to those with troubled consciences or those who have fear concerning their eternal destiny, if they can only offer hope (Abraham’s “hope against hope”, *Rom* 4:18)? Can Catholics live with the hope of the promise without the assurance of the fulfillment? What makes Catholics hesitate *or doubt* when we have the clear promises in Scripture that forgiveness is ours in Christ Jesus and that Christ himself wills our salvation (see *Gen* 3:15; *Ex* 15:2-3; *Pss* 62:2-3, 6- 9; *Is* 53:3-12; *Jn* 3:16, 10:27-30; *Rom* 8:1-5, 26-39; *2 Cor* 5:17-21; *Eph* 1:1-14,2:8-10; *1 Thess* 5:9-11; *1 Tim* 2:4; as well as many others)?
- In the Second Vatican Council, you speak of the possibility of God offering salvation even to those who have not received the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium* 16) and that this belief is grounded in God’s mercy. We Evangelicals have come to appreciate through our discussions the fact that you want to emphasize the mercy and love of God and that this view is grounded in the confidence you have that God loves all and wants all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (*1 Tim* 2:4). The fact that Scripture does say that God is love (*1 Jn* 4:8), that God will be all in all (*Eph* 1:23), and every knee will bow in heaven and earth and under the earth (*Phil* 2: 10-11) do emphasize the mercy of God, which we would also want to emphasize. And yet we still wonder if saying something on which Scripture has not spoken, i.e., the view that even those who have not received the Gospel can be saved, could still be misconstrued by some Catholics to lead to the conclusion that there is no need to evangelize (*Mt* 28: 19-20)?
- From the Evangelical point of view, Christ’s forgiveness, in view of the Last Judgement and beyond, not only does away with sin as enmity against God but also all the consequences of sin. There is no further need for cleansing after death

because that cleansing has occurred by Christ on the cross which we appropriate by faith. In our discussions, when Evangelicals heard Catholics speak of purgatory, we heard you speak about the transforming work of God's mercy that you believe goes on even after death, where the purging of the effects of sin still needs to occur before one approaches the throne of God. While we understand that you do not see this purging as meritorious, we still would like to ask on the one hand where this can be found in Scripture, but also why purgatory is still needed if Christ has redeemed us completely in both soul and body? In this connection, we would also like to ask: If you truly believe in an all merciful and loving God who redeems us in Christ and that it is not by your merits that you are saved and salvation is given why do you continue to use the language of the treasury of merit, satisfaction, and indulgences?

- As far as churches which baptize infants, we require preparation for baptism. We Evangelicals understand that Catholics too require preparation for baptism and spiritual formation for the parents of the children, which is very important. But we also understand that the family many times does not appear in church after the Baptism which seems to make Baptism simply into a work that is performed. We would like to ask what follow-up occurs when an infant is baptized? Is the impression given that Baptism is just simply a work that needs to be performed? We were glad to hear that there is an emphasis on catechesis which needs to occur with the baptismal family, but what is the role of discipleship in relation to Baptism? Is the Church doing enough after the child is baptized to ensure disciples are being made? What is the role of the clergy in this as well as the larger Church community?
- We have come to understand in our discussions that the sacraments play a central role in salvation, especially Baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist. We also have discerned that the efficacy of the sacraments in the Catholic Church is largely bound and tied together with the sacraments of ordination and more specifically episcopal ordination. On the one hand, we are grateful to hear you saying that our sacramental acts do accomplish something, although you are unclear what that something is. We also want to reaffirm that we know you do recognize our baptisms as valid and do not require a rebaptism. Nonetheless, because you tie the efficacy and benefit of the sacraments to the episcopal orders we still need to ask: Does not the way that your church restricts the full benefit of church acts to the ordained clergy of the Catholic Church still end up devaluing and ultimately calling into question what, if any, benefit occurs for the salvation of members in Evangelical churches? In other words, if the sacraments are central to the life of the church, but the sacraments of Evangelical churches (at least those which have them) do not accomplish as much in our churches as they do in Catholic churches, does not that end up saying that our ministry is less effective than the ministry which occurs in the Catholic Church? This also becomes a key issue with regard to absolution. Can Evangelicals who confess their sins and receives forgiveness from their pastor - or from a fellow Christian in those without ordained clergy - know for sure that their sins are forgiven?

61. As foregrounding to our questions, we as Catholics would note that our conversations have brought us much clarity into the Evangelical understanding of the

assurance of salvation. As Catholics, we had thought that when you spoke of having been saved, you were saying that there was nothing further to be done; that you had a “once saved always saved” mentality; and that you believed that you could then do whatever you wished and it wouldn’t affect your salvation. We have now come to understand that this moment of assurance of salvation is a decisive point to be followed by turning back to Christ day by day, trusting in him only and referring daily to what God has done for you by his grace. We have been grateful to learn that you stress the need to be diligent in daily living your faithfulness to Christ through repentance and faith.

62. We have also learned that Evangelicals distinguish between certainty and security. In terms of a morally rational self-awareness of Christians, there may never be a certainty of salvation in the formal sense, but a certainty which gives peace with God to the conscience burdened with temptations. This happens when with faith you boldly appeal to God’s promise in his Word in the face of your own weakness and temptation. We had heard in your claim of assurance or certainty a presumption, perhaps even an arrogance, in the self-referential claim that “you have decided” to follow Jesus and were thus saved. Now we hear your focus on the promise of God, and your trust in that promise, which places things squarely on Christ’s shoulders. Your assurance doesn’t come from yourself, but from the work that God has done in Jesus Christ and in his paschal mystery. The Gospel is the Good News of the promise of salvation, and you trust God and his promises, and thus have assurance and certainty. There is not as big a gap between Catholic language of trust and hope and Evangelical language of assurance as we had thought. We too believe that God wants to forgive and redeem us, that God the Son died to forgive us and to reveal a boundless mercy to us. We too have heard this promise in the Scriptures, have felt it stirring in our inmost being, and hear in the Gospel an invitation to live in joy because God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, in all of this, we have found more common ground than we had anticipated.

63. **Catholics nonetheless would like to ask Evangelicals the following questions:**

- We often find the language that we hear from you - in the personal claim that “I am saved” and in the hymn refrains “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine,” and “I have decided to follow Jesus” - seems to place the focus on the person’s decision and personal conviction, and not God’s decision. The subsequent question to others “are you saved?” often lacks the nuance of the way in which God calls and converts us. In practice, how does this language move past a self-referential focus to place the emphasis on the great mercy and faithfulness of God?
- We have come to understand that there is some divergence among Evangelicals about whether or not you can lose your salvation and that there is no one definition of “assurance of salvation”. Addressing in particular Evangelicals who hold that the gift once received cannot be lost, how do you deal with those who turn away from the faith or don’t seem to take seriously the daily challenge to be faithful to the Gospel? How do you deal with sin committed after giving your life to the Lord? And how do you interpret *Heb 6:4-6*, which speaks of turning away from the Gospel after having “tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come”?

- How does the confidence that comes with the assurance of salvation allow you, in your evangelizing efforts, to recognize with humility the many ways that God has been at work in the other (mindful that God's engagement with others is always larger than our efforts); in particular, what is an appropriate pastoral approach to those who do not claim the same assurance of salvation, although they confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and profess the Gospel of salvation?
- When Catholics listen to Evangelicals, we understand the desire for an explicit biblical warrant for doctrines such as purgatory. We also understand that Evangelicals wish to affirm the efficacy of the saving action of Jesus' death on the cross. For Catholics, purgatory is the state of those who die in God's friendship, assured of their eternal salvation, but who still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven. We believe that because of the communion of saints, the faithful who are still pilgrims on earth are able to help the souls in purgatory by offering prayers in suffrage for them, especially the Eucharist. While the explicit scriptural warrant for purgatory is in the book of Maccabees in the Septuagint (*2 Macc* 12:46), which is not accepted as Scriptural by Evangelicals, there is reference in the Old Testament to punishment for sin even after one has received forgiveness (*2 Sam* 12:13-18). In the New Testament, as well as in the Old Testament (*Ps* 15:1-2), there is reference to the need for purification because nothing unclean will enter the presence of God in heaven (*Rev* 21:27 and *Mt* 5:48). *Heb* 12:22-23 speaks about a way, a process, through which the spirits of the "just" are "made perfect." *1 Cor* 3:13-15 and *Mt* 12:32 affirm there is a place or state of being other than Heaven or Hell. While affirming the once for all saving power of the cross, which Catholics also affirm, might there be an openness from Evangelicals to the possibility of recognizing such an intermediate state of purification as compatible with Scripture? Could you understand the communion of saints as having a role to play in this period of purification?
- Regarding the possibility of salvation for the non-Christians, we have heard from you that Evangelicals do not want to presume on the mercy of God and extend hope beyond what Scripture explicitly states in this regard. We also appreciate and agree that the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all creatures, and share a sense of obligation and privilege to preach Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the Gospel message. Yet faced with those who died without having heard the Gospel preached, or heard it proclaimed in a way that lacked integrity, we would suggest that the great mercy revealed in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' dying and rising gives us grounds for a profound hope that such persons should not be automatically excluded from God's salvific plan and they too can obtain eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. The Second Vatican Council noted that a sharing in the paschal mystery is made possible "not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is, therefore, a universal one, we are obliged to hold that the holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery in a manner known to God" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Ad Gentes* 7). While it is neither our mission nor our biblical calling to give a definite answer to what God will do, we trust that God's mercy is much greater than ours and dare to hope that God's offer of salvation will extend well beyond the parameters of the Church. This

affirmation, however, does not exempt Christians from proclaiming the Gospel unto the ends of the earth; this mission remains of utmost importance. We would ask Evangelicals if the same paschal mystery which allows you to speak of an assurance of salvation for believers would not allow you to have a more hope-filled view of the possibility of God offering salvation to non-believers in a way that is known only to God?

- In our conversations, we have appreciated the emphasis Evangelicals place on eternal salvation, which of course is central to the Scriptures. And yet in our conversations, we often heard an emphasis on salvation in the next life without much consideration for the human condition in this life. Perhaps this was due to the limited number of topics discussed. Still, we would want to ask: does the fact that you are saved make any difference for this life (*Is* 58:6-7; *Heb* 13:1-3; *Mt* 25:31-46)? Could there be some benefit to balancing your concern for the next life with Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God for this life with its concerns for social justice and the welfare of humanity? Might we look for transformation in the present world as well as the world to come?
- There is much to appreciate among Evangelicals with their vibrant worship life and the commitment many of the churches seek from their membership. We understand that there are differences among Evangelicals regarding the role of the sacraments in the life of the Church. There does seem to be at least some agreement that Baptism and the Lord's Supper play an important part in our Lord's teaching about the Church and the benefits they bring to the believer (*Mt* 28:19; *Mk* 16:16; *Jn* 3:3; *Tit* 3:4-7; *Mt* 26:26-29; *Mk* 14:22-25; *Lk* 22:14-23; *Jn* 6; *1 Cor* 11:17-34).<sup>22</sup> Mindful of the differences between various Evangelicals about the place of the sacraments in the life of the Church, Catholics would want to ask differing questions to different Evangelical churches, including the following: Why have the sacraments lost their primary role, and what might you be missing by not celebrating the sacraments? How can they be recovered as gifts of God to his people as expressed in the New Testament? Do all forms of worship and sacred actions have the same value in your tradition? Is it contrary to the New Testament to define sacred actions as signs and instruments of salvation? Is the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Supper not a privileged place where the Gospel is heard and the faith is lived, proclaimed and professed? Could Evangelicals gain insight about the sacraments/ordinances by retrieving the teachings of the different Reformers? Could Evangelicals begin to study how these gifts of God might be put to a deeper and more prominent use in the life of the Church?

---

22. Catholics understand that there are seven sacraments, all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, though the Church identifies Baptism and Eucharist as major sacraments. The sacraments are "the masterworks of God" (St Augustine, *De civo Dei*. 22,17) "powers that come forth from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving" (CCC 1116; cf. *Lk* 5: 17,6:19; 8:46). The sacraments are for the Church and they make the Church, since "they manifest and communicate... the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons" (CCC 1118). Catholics are convinced that in a sacrament, the Church does more than profess and express its faith; it makes present the mystery it is celebrating.

64. Catholics and Evangelicals rejoice in the gifts of salvation and the Church which God has given to the world he loves so much. They are gifts freely given, and freely received. The Scriptures tell us that from the beginning the Church has been a part of God's plan for salvation (*Eph* 1:4-10, 22-23). Christ has told us how he provides for his Church ensuring that the forgiveness of sins he won for us and for our salvation will always remain central to the purpose and message of the Church. Both Evangelicals and Catholics rejoice in the gift of the ministry of reconciliation which is given to the Church by Jesus Christ. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NRSV). Having received this gift from the crucified and risen Lord, the Church is then entrusted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to deliver that message of hope and forgiveness to our world in desperate need of reconciliation with its creator. In the words of the Samuel J. Stone hymn sung by many Catholics and Evangelicals:

The Church's one foundation  
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,  
She is His new creation  
By water and the Word.  
From heaven He came and sought her  
To be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He bought her  
And for her life He died.

#### CONCLUSION

65. We are committed Christians - Catholics and Evangelicals - from Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil, the Philippines, Ghana/Kenya, Spain, Italy, Germany, Canada and the USA. We come from places where there are very good relations and places where the relations are marred by tension and mistrust. But we were entrusted to represent our own ecclesial traditions faithfully and to reflect the realities of Catholic and Evangelical relations around the globe. It became clear early on that Evangelicals represent a wide diversity of Christian communities. Each community had its own perspective to offer which, while challenging at times, also offered the opportunity to discover the rich and legitimate diversity of the people of God, as well as the bonds of communion.

66. One purpose of this consultation was to learn from one another and also to challenge one another in what we believe, teach and confess. A second purpose was to clarify the current state of relations between us and to provide a way forward that would help us to improve those relations where there are difficulties and to support and encourage those places where the situation is more positive. During the consultation, we also had the opportunity to see the deep and committed faith of our partner even as we also were able to share our own faith experiences in an open and candid way. We also sought to address issues of doctrine and practice, always attentive to the perspective of the local communities.

67. Over the past six years, we have built up trust with our dialogue partners, allowing us to address difficult issues in a frank but gracious way. We invite our churches to take time to engage in a process of study and reflection on the issues, challenges, and

questions they will encounter in this document. Our consultation has learned that it is when we respect and treat one another in a Christian manner that our communities are able to make progress in our relationships with one another in Christ. In humility, we have learned that we must put aside our own self-assurances and focus on Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (*Jn* 14:6). We have also learned that we need to understand the words of the other as they are intended. We each came with preconceptions of the other, but we have opened up to listen to and discover how the other views the doctrines chosen for discussion in this consultation: Scripture and Tradition, and the Church and salvation. We entered into new experiences and insights that we might not have had otherwise. Through these experiences, we have come to know one another and ourselves better.

68. Our consultation has confirmed that real differences remain between Evangelicals and Catholics about certain aspects of the life of faith, but also that we share convictions about Jesus that ground our call to mission. As well, our communities share similar convictions about the Christian life: Christ is forming us by the Holy Spirit into a faithful people called together and sent into the world to obey and serve Him by participating in his life and mission. The Lord calls us not only to enter into conversation but to live out the implications of that conversation. The unity he desires for his disciples is not a theoretical unity but a lived one, “so that the world may believe” (*Jn* 17:21).

69. In this concluding section, it is our intent to address local communities of Evangelicals and Catholics worldwide, mindful of very diverse contexts and states of relations. We would invite them to consider both the convergences noted in the text above and the areas of divergence and mutual questioning. Where there have points of agreement or convergence, we would invite local communities to ask: what does this then make possible for us? What can we appropriately and responsibly undertake together, without compromising our convictions, without overstating our current level of agreement? How is the Lord asking us to grow together at this moment in time?

70. There are limits to what can be said in response to each of these questions. Furthermore, there will be differences from place to place. What is possible in Canada may not be possible in Guatemala; what is possible in Germany may not be possible in Spain.<sup>23</sup> We also recognize that it took our international consultation years of getting to know each other and engaging in discussion before some of these convergences could be confirmed. If at first glance in your local situation, significant steps forward do not seem possible, or the convergences named seem problematic, we would encourage you to ask each other the questions you have and to discuss them; and we would nevertheless encourage you to ask what small steps are possible here and now. In all of

---

23. In some parts of the world, Catholics and Evangelicals speak of engaging in “common mission.” By this they are not speaking about planting churches together, but rather, jointly pursuing humanitarian objectives, working together for justice, peace, human rights, and the common good. In other parts of the world, Evangelicals and Catholics would be very uncomfortable with language of common mission.

this, we are mindful that reconciliation is always the work of God, not us; but the Lord has invited us to play our part in our reconciliation towards one another.

71. In those areas where our conversation has noted convergences, we would invite you to ask the following questions:

- In light of those convergences, how is it possible to cooperate in building up the common good and strengthening the community? Are there things that are critical for our communities to do together now?
- In light of social and moral upheaval in the world around us, and of the world's need to hear the Gospel of Christ, how can we responsibly witness together to our shared values, addressing some of the social and political questions in our world that we are facing today? Should we take the opportunity of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation to reflect together afresh on what the Gospel means for us and how it brings good news to our needy world?
- While for some Evangelicals and Catholics, praying together is not seen to be acceptable, many would want to ask: Are there any times and places where it would be appropriate for us to pray together? If yes, what ought to shape our common prayer?

72. We would also invite you to ponder the divergences and questions which our document has noted. As we have stated, divergences and remaining questions need not signify the end of our relations, but can fruitfully set the agenda for future discussions. While convergences may appropriately lead us to common action and growth in our relations, further clarity about convergences and divergences alike can lead us to study, especially at a local level, so that what we hold in common and what separates us might be better understood. A key feature of this document was the mutual questioning in a spirit of striving to understand. Some of these questions we asked could be fruitfully discussed on a congregational level; others might be better discussed in ministerial associations or in seminaries and theology faculties. The questions that we have asked each other are not exhaustive. We have asked them in part to stimulate discussion, self-understanding, and learning, about the other, and about ourselves.

73. Perhaps we haven't been asking your questions at all. Perhaps your local experience suggests more convergences than we have named; perhaps less. We encourage you to ask further questions in your own context, using the methodology which we used. We invite you to consider gathering together a group of interested Evangelicals and Catholics in your area to hold a series of discussions on matters of importance in your own contexts. It needn't be complicated. Choose a subject that you would like to address, of mutual interest, and invite participants to offer presentations or share on what is being discussed. Enter into the process with your convictions, but also with humility and an open heart. Ask each other questions, and listen deeply to the responses of your conversation partner. Look for areas where you can encourage each other, where you can learn from the other. Try to answer each other's questions, and ask new questions. Pray that the Holy Spirit guide your conversations. The World Evangelical Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity would be grateful to hear the results of your conversations.

74. Finally, we invite you to view dialogue and consultation as a way of engaging your faith, and as a standing together before Christ. Christ is the truth and the fullness of truth can only be found in him. We invite you to consider joining us in pledging ourselves to mutual conversation, consolation, and continuation in admonishing and encouraging one another to remain faithful to the Word who gave us his word that he would be with us to the end of the age (*Mt 28:20*).

75. “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (*Eph 3:20-21*).

## **Appendix 1: Participants**

### **Catholic Participants**

Monsignor Juan Usma Gómez, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Vatican/Colombia, Coordinator (2009-2016) [*P S D*]  
Most Reverend Donald Bolen, Archbishop of Regina, Canada, (2009-2016) [*S D*]  
Monsignor Gregory J. Fairbanks, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity - Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, Philadelphia, USA (2009-2016)  
Ms Beatriz Sarkis Simões, Focolare Movement, Brasil (2009-2016)  
Most Reverend Rodolfo Valenzuela Núñez, Bishop of La Vera Paz, Guatemala (2009-2016)  
Dr Nicholas Jesson, (Local Participant), Ecumenical Officer, Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, Canada (2015-2016)

### **Evangelical Participants**

Rev Prof Dr Rolf Hille, Director of Ecumenical Affairs of WEA, Germany, Coordinator (2009- 2016) [*P S D*]  
Rev Dr Leonardo De Chirico, Alleanza Evangelica Italiana, Italia (2009-2016)  
Rev José De Segovia Barrón, Alianza Evangélica Española, España (2009-2013)  
Rev Prof Dr Joel C. Elowsky, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO (LC-MS), USA (LC-MS), USA, (2009-2016) [*S D*]  
Rev Prof Dr Timoteo D. Gener, Asian Theological Seminary, The Philippines (2009-2016)  
Rev Jaume Llenas, Alianza Evangélica Española, España (2014-2016)  
Rev Prof Dr James Nkansah-Obrempong, Vice-Chair, WEA Theological Commission, Kenya (2009-2016)  
Rev Prof Dr Claus Schwambach, General Director FLT - Faculdade Luterana de Teologia in São Bento do Sul, SC, Brasil, (2009-2016)  
Rev Dr Salomo Strauss, Evangelical Church of Württemberg, Germany (2009-2016)  
Rev James Kautt (Observer), International Christian Church Tübingen, Germany/USA (2009- 2014)

*P: Planning Committee*

*S: Steering Committee*

*D: Drafting Committee*

## **Appendix 2: Places and Papers**

2008 Rome: *Planning Committee Meeting*

2009 São Paulo (Brazil)

“The Common Ground on Dogmatic Questions and on Ethical Issues”

Gregory Fairbanks, “Foundations of Catholic Social Teaching”

James Nkansah-Obrempong, “Evangelical Views of Ethical Principles: Insights and Perspectives from Africa”

Beatriz Sarkis Simões, “Economy of Communion: A Catholic experience”  
(communication)

**Local contacts** with the Evangelical Ministry in São Paulo

2011 Rome (Italy)

“Scripture and Tradition”, and “The Authoritative Interpretation on the Word of God”

Donald Bolen, “Scripture and Tradition in Catholic Doctrinal Understanding”

Joel Elowsky, “Scripture and Tradition in an Evangelical Context.” *Concordia Journal*  
Winter 2016, 41-62.

José de Segovia, “The Question of Scripture and Tradition in Traditional Catholic Countries in Europe, like Spain”

“Scriptures in the Life and Mission of the Church” (communications)

Rodolfo Valenzuela “A Catholic Perspective from Latin America”

Prof. James Nkansah-Obrempong “Reflections from Africa”

Carlo Maria Martini, SJ, “The Central Role of the Word of God in the Life of the Church. The Bible in Pastoral Ministry”, (Excerpts from the Congress on Dei Verbum, Rome 2005)

Gregory J. Fairbanks, “Scriptures in the Life and Mission of the Church: An Historical Examination”

Beatriz Sarkis Simoes, “The Bible and Me: Christian Spiritual Journey”

Claus Schwambach, “Scriptures in the Life and Mission of the Brazilian Church”

Thomas Oden with Joel Elowsky, “Scripture in the Life and Mission of the American Church”

**Local contacts** with the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Walter Kasper

2012 Chicago (USA)

“The Role of the Church in Salvation and Preparation of the Questionnaires”

Leonardo DeChirico, “Salvation Belongs to the Lord: Evangelical Consensus in Dialogue with Roman Catholicism” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 39:4 (2015) 292-310

Jean-Marie Tillard, “Church and Salvation”, (On the sacramentality of the Church), ARCIC II.

**Local contacts.** Visit to the Billy Graham Center and Meeting with representatives of the Wheaton College

2013 Ciudad de Guatemala (Guatemala)

First Evangelical Responses to the Questionnaires.

Rolf Hille, “Some Fundamental Ecumenical Considerations Concerning Dialogue Between Roman Catholic And Evangelical Theologians”

**Local contacts** with Evangelical leaders from Guatemala and with the Apostolic Nuncio in Guatemala, the Most Reverend Nicolas Henry Marie Denis Thevenin

Working on the Draft

*Drafting Committee:* Rome March 2014.

2014 Bad Blankenburg (Germany). At the sources of the Reformation New First Completed Draft.

*Meeting with Evangelical leaders* at the Allianz Haus in Bad Blankenburg.

Study tour to some important historical sites of the Lutheran Reformation (Erfurt, Wittemberg, and Eisleben).

*Drafting Committee:* Boston (USA), March 2015.

2015 Saskatoon (Canada) Working of the Final Draft

**Local contacts** with members of the “Saskatoon Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue”.

*Drafting Committee* mandated with finalizing the text after consultation with all participants.

### **Appendix 3: Questionnaires**

#### **Catholic Questionnaire on Evangelical-Catholic Relations**

*Kindly answer this questionnaire openly and honestly*

*Bishops Conference of*

1. What is the breakdown (percentage) of Evangelical and Catholic populations in your area? Any further statistical information about Evangelicals in your area would be helpful. What contacts do you have with them?
2. Identify three common concerns jointly facing Evangelicals and Catholics in your region that could provide opportunities for common public witness. Have you engaged in common witness on those questions?
3. Are there occasions where Evangelicals and Catholics gather together in common prayer in your region, whether as the two communities, at broader ecumenical celebrations, or alongside other faith communities?
4. Do you have occasions to engage together in initiatives aimed at advocating the common good, or promoting justice and peace?
5. Are there any instances where Evangelicals and Catholics are engaging in common study (e.g. of the Bible) or dialogue in your area? Are you aware of the international consultations between Evangelicals and Catholics or national discussions which have taken place in some countries in recent decades?
6. Are there instances of cooperation between Evangelicals and Catholics in educational institutions or theological colleges/seminaries in your region? Do you do anything within your churches to deepen our understanding of the other, in order to move past misunderstandings and misconceptions?
7. Are there opportunities for Evangelical and Catholic leadership to regularly meet in your region? If so, do you take part? Are Evangelicals and Catholics fellow participants in ecumenical organizations in your area?
8. Have you had any other interaction with Evangelicals? How has your relationship been in the past (both positive and negative), and have those relations changed in recent years?
9. Has there been any noticeable change within Evangelical churches in recent decades? What are the implications of those changes for relations in your region?
10. What are the main challenges that you see in your context for Evangelical-Catholic relations and dialogue? What hinders our working together?
11. To what extent are Evangelical efforts at proclaiming the Gospel - evangelizing, looking to deepen the personal faith of the hearer - perceived on the Catholic side as

proselytism? Do you feel proselytism complicates Evangelical-Catholic relations in your region, and is there anything you are doing to address this?

12. How do you regard Evangelical communities - as ecclesial communities or as sects? How do you regard individual Evangelicals? Do you see them as fellow Christians, as brothers and sisters in Christ?

### **Evangelical Questionnaire on Catholic – Evangelical Relations**

*National Evangelical Alliance of*

1. To the best of your knowledge, what would you say is the approximate number of Evangelicals in your country?
2. What has been the tension between Evangelicals and Catholics in the past? What are the tensions today, if any? Have you seen any improvement in relations between the two?
3. Has your community (church) had contact with Catholics in the past? Is there contact with Catholics in the present? If so, what have they been (or what are they)?
4. Would your community (church) see Catholics as brothers and sisters in (insert term for geographical area) in Christ? Why or why not?
5. If you can, list three common concerns jointly facing Evangelicals and Roman Catholics in your region, which provide opportunities for common public witness (e.g., life issues, justice issues, political controversies)? Have you or your national alliance engaged in common witness on those questions?
6. In your experience, have you noticed any change in the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) in recent decades, for instance, since Vatican II? What are the implications of those changes for relations with Catholics in your region, if any?
7. Are there any instances where Evangelicals and Catholics are engaging in common study (i.e., of the Bible) or dialogue in your area?
8. Are you aware of the international consultations between Evangelicals and Catholics or national discussions which have taken place in some countries in recent decades?
9. Are Evangelicals and Catholics fellow participants in ecumenical or inter-Christian organizations in your area?
- 10.
11. *Are there opportunities for Evangelical and Catholic leadership to regularly meet in your region? If so, do you take part?*
11. Would you urge a born-again Catholic to remain in his / her church or not?

12. What are the main challenges that you see in your context for Evangelicals-Catholic relations and dialogue? What hinders our working together?

13. What do national alliances expect regarding the role of the World Alliance (WEA) in contact and dialogue with the RCC in helping national alliances? How can we (of the WEA) help national and regional alliances in facilitating dialogue with the Catholics on a national or regional level?

# THE CALL TO HOLINESS: FROM GLORY TO GLORY

*Report of the Joint International Commission for Dialogue Between The World Methodist Council  
and the Roman Catholic Church*

2016  
Tenth Series

## PREFACE

This report has been prepared by the Joint International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church for presentation to the World Methodist Council, meeting in Houston, Texas, USA, in 2016, and to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It is the tenth such report to be published in the fifty years since the Commission was established in 1967, following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Each report investigates historically divisive issues in Christian doctrine in order to identify the degree of convergence between Catholics and Methodists, and to name areas where further dialogue is necessary. The Commission's work has been published for study within and beyond our two communions, and to record the deepening communion in faith between Catholics and Methodists.

In its recent reports, the Commission has adopted the convention of referring to 'Methodists' and 'Catholics' (rather than 'Roman Catholics') without implying that Methodists are not catholic Christians. Except where quoting directly from other documents, including its earlier reports, the Commission has once again adopted this convention. Here 'Methodists' and 'Catholics' denote members of our two world communions, some of whom would describe themselves in other terms, such as Wesleyans or Nazarenes, Latin rite Catholics or Eastern rite Catholics. Nevertheless, since the term 'Catholic Church' is ambiguous, and since the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity appointed the Catholic members of the Commission, this report refers to the 'Roman Catholic Church'.

The present report builds on theological foundations painstakingly laid in previous reports and ideally will be read in conjunction with these earlier texts, all of which were originally published in printed form (and subsequently reprinted by the World Council of Churches in collected volumes of the reports of bilateral dialogues at a world level under the series title *Growth in Agreement*) and are now available on the Vatican website and on the World Methodist Council website.

The initial phase of the dialogue was exploratory, recording areas of basic agreement in two short reports: *The Denver Report* (Denver, 1971) and *Growth in*

*Understanding* (Dublin, 1976). A second phase began a more detailed investigation of core theological topics: *Towards an Agreed Statement on the Holy Spirit* (Honolulu, 1981); *Towards a Statement on the Church* (Nairobi, 1986); *The Apostolic Tradition* (Singapore, 1991); *The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996); and *Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Methodists and Roman Catholics* (Brighton, 2001). Since then, the Commission has concentrated its attention on the Church and sacraments, recording significant convergence in two substantial reports: *The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church* (Seoul, 2006); and *Encountering Christ the Saviour: Church and Sacraments* (Durban, 2011). In each case, the place of publication denotes the location in which the World Methodist Council was meeting at the time of the report's approval.

In 2011, the Commission published a synthesis text, *Together to Holiness: 40 Years of Methodist and Roman Catholic Dialogue*, summarizing the state of consensus and convergence on a range of topics in Christian doctrine, as recorded in its first eight reports. The synthesis text provides a useful overview of our bilateral dialogue between 1967 and 2006 but is not intended to replace the original reports.

The convergence registered in the present report is the result not just of bilateral conversations since the Durban report (2011), but of nearly fifty years of dialogue between Catholics and Methodists at a world level, as indicated by the numerous references to previous reports of the Commission. By custom, these are cited by the location associated with that particular report and paragraph number – thus (Nairobi §20).

Members of the Commission, appointed in equal number by the World Methodist Council and by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, include professional theologians proficient in relevant fields of study, as well as those with expertise and experience in ecumenism, and those who exercise a ministry of oversight as bishops and church leaders. In appointing members, account has been taken of the need for a diversity of geographical representation.

In order to learn from the regional variations in ecumenical relations, ecclesiastical culture and the social setting of Methodists and Catholics, the Commission met in a variety of locations: Buenos Aires, Argentina (2012); Atlanta, USA (2013); Assisi, Italy (2014); and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2015). A drafting sub-group met in Boston, USA, in March 2015, and then again in Rome, Italy, in March 2016, in order to finalise the text for publication.

The nature of ecumenical dialogue means that much of the available time was absorbed in theological conversation. Yet, the spiritual dimension must not be overlooked, since dialogue is never solely an intellectual exercise, but always involves personal encounter. As members of the Commission met together, spiritual ecumenism led to a deepening experience of the real, but imperfect, communion that already exists between Methodists and Catholics through our baptism into the body of Christ. Each day, wherever the Commission happened to be meeting, dialogue took place in the context of shared prayer and in a setting that enabled members to interact with the local Methodist and Catholic communities.

In the conclusion to the Durban report (2011), the Commission signalled its future intention by outlining a new topic for investigation: 'It is the whole question of the experience of salvation and the response of the believer to the gift of God's grace. Catholics and Methodists have different emphases in the way they speak about this,

which seem to underpin a number of other matters upon which they often diverge' (Durban §197). The present report fulfils this intention.

Since grace and holiness are central to the Christian life, a theological study is usefully illustrated by practical examples of holy living. Accordingly, the report is illustrated by reference to the lives of exemplary figures from the Catholic and Methodist traditions.

This report is dedicated to two outstanding ecumenical statesmen and former Co-Chairs of this Commission. Bishop Michael Putney (+2014) of Townsville, Australia, served as Catholic Co-Chair from 1996 until his diagnosis with terminal cancer in 2012. Reverend Professor Geoffrey Wainwright, Professor of Christian Theology at Duke University, North Carolina, USA, served as Methodist Co-Chair between 1986 and 2011. We thank God for their collegueship and for their dedicated service to ecumenism.

*Bishop Donald Bolen, Catholic Co-Chair*  
*Reverend Dr David M. Chapman, Methodist Co-Chair*

The Commission's members are:

*Catholic:*

Bishop Donald Bolen (Co-Chair), Canada (from 2013); Bishop Michael Putney (Co-Chair), Australia (2012); Reverend Mark Langham (Co-Secretary), Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (2012); Reverend Anthony Currer (Co-Secretary), Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (from 2013); Sister Dr Lorelei Fuchs, USA; Reverend Dr Gerard McCarren, USA; Bishop Joseph Osei-Bonsu, Ghana; Reverend Dr Jorge Scampini, Argentina; Bishop John Sherrington, England; Dr Clare Watkins, England.

*Methodist:*

Reverend Dr David M. Chapman (Co-Chair), Great Britain; Reverend Dr Karen Westerfield Tucker (Co-Secretary), USA; Reverend Dr Young-Ho Chun, Korea/USA; Reverend Dr Edgardo Colón-Emeric, USA; Reverend Dr James Haire, Australia (2012-13); Reverend Dr Trevor Hoggard, New Zealand; Bishop Chikwendu Igwe, Nigeria; Reverend Dr Reynaldo Ferreira Leão Neto, Brazil/Great Britain; Reverend Dr Priscilla Pope-Levison, USA (from 2014).

### **The Status of this Document**

The Report published here is the work of the international Methodist-Catholic Dialogue Commission. Commission members were appointed by the World Methodist Council or by the Holy See's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The authorities who appointed the Commission have now allowed the Report to be published so that it may be widely discussed. It is a joint report of the Commission, not an authoritative declaration by the Roman Catholic Church or by the World Methodist Council, which will study the document in due course.

## JESUS AND ZACCHAEUS

(Luke 19.1-10 NRSV)

*He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'*

The encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel is a story of divine grace and the call to holiness. Zacchaeus, an undeserving figure, is nevertheless graciously accepted by Jesus and drawn into a saving relationship with the Lord, which transforms his previously self-centred and selfish existence into holy living. On receiving Jesus' summons, Zacchaeus instantly resolves to make reparation for his sinful past by promising to give half of his possessions to the poor and repay fourfold all whom he had defrauded.

The background details of this Gospel story reinforce the drama of divine grace at work and its powerful salvific effect. Jericho, being a border city, was an important customs station and one of the wealthiest cities in Palestine, that benefitted economically from its location in the most fertile part of Judea and politically as the site of a Herodian palace. Altogether, the opportunities for imposing customs duties and raising other taxes were extensive. As a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus was responsible for the collection of tax and customs revenue and the supervision of subordinate officers. In such a position of power, Zacchaeus had ample opportunity to amass personal wealth through cheating and exploitation.

Zacchaeus may have possessed wealth and official status, but he was a social outsider since Jews generally despised tax collectors as traitors to Israel, defiled by a hated occupation and corrupted through greed. In the eyes of his Jewish compatriots, Zacchaeus' shortness in stature was more than physical: he was a nonentity, not worthy of the company of respectable Jews. From his lonely vantage point in the sycamore tree, Zacchaeus would be able to see Jesus unnoticed by the crowd.

Despite the intention and prior action of Zacchaeus, the real initiative in the story belongs to Jesus. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus has an uncanny insight into the secret affairs of others. Thus, Zacchaeus does not remain hidden from Jesus, who engages his anonymous observer in a life-giving personal encounter. By inviting himself into Zacchaeus' home, Jesus does something startling and significant: no matter how high their social status, Jews would not normally invite themselves into someone else's home. Moreover, scrupulous Jews such as the scribes and Pharisees would never enter the home of a tax collector and eat his food (implied in the offer of hospitality). By receiving Jesus as his guest, Zacchaeus is no longer an outsider.

The onlookers are scandalized at the social recognition conferred by Jesus upon such an obvious sinner. However, Jesus' gracious acceptance produces a deep

change in Zacchaeus' situation as his life is transformed inwardly and outwardly. Zacchaeus' response is to dispose of half his fortune towards meeting the needs of the poor and to make generous provision for putting right his past injustices in a very practical form of holy living. Thus, his restitution goes far beyond Pharisaic law, which required fourfold or fivefold restitution only for stolen oxen and sheep, and then only if slaughtered or sold in the presence of the requisite number of witnesses. In contrast, Zacchaeus' extravagant restitution reflects ancient accounts of discipleship in which a radical response with possessions was a sure sign of newly acquired devotion to the teacher. In this way, Luke vividly affirms that Zacchaeus has been drawn into a saving relationship with Jesus.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke equates the presence of Jesus with the coming of the kingdom of God and immediate salvation even for outsiders such as Zacchaeus. In Jesus, '[God] has raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his servant David' (*Lk* 1.69). At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus announces that Isaiah's prophecy of salvation has been fulfilled 'today' (*Lk* 4.21). Fittingly, Zacchaeus, the archetypal outsider, has received salvation 'today'. Where grace abounds, holiness enters in.

## INTRODUCTION

1. The story of Zacchaeus in Luke's Gospel illustrates beautifully how a loving God graciously calls all people to respond to an invitation to holy living in a familial relationship with God. From a Christian perspective, such a relationship is made possible by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. Catholics and Methodists describe the Christian response to this invitation in similar terms of growth in grace and holiness through an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ (*Denver* §55).

2. This agreement concerning the Christian life – an agreement that will be consolidated and developed in the present report – is encapsulated in the evocative idea of 'the call to holiness'. For Catholics, this idea echoes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council concerning 'The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church' (*LG*, Chapter 5); for Methodists, it is consistent with the historical mission of Methodism 'to spread scriptural holiness over the land'.<sup>1</sup>

3. The call to holiness is relational, dynamic, and holistic: it relates the God who calls and the people, individually and corporately, who respond to God's call in their particular historical and cultural context. The call to holiness relates the God who speaks to the world and those who hear and receive the divine word. In the book of Deuteronomy, God invites the people of Israel to 'choose life' that they might live fully (*Deut* 30.19), uniting in friendship a holy God and 'a people holy to the Lord' (*Deut* 14.2). The call to holiness is a transformative summons to life in a new community, joyfully living and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ: 'you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (*1 Pet* 2.9).

4. Entitled *The Call to Holiness*, this report considers how Catholics and Methodists understand the nature and effect of divine grace upon the human person and the implications for the Christian life. In so doing, it investigates grace and holiness

---

1. 'Large Minutes' (1763), WJW 10:845.

not simply as theological concepts, but in relation to their central place in the Christian life. For the God of grace calls people to holy living in a relationship of communion or fellowship (*koinonia*) with the Holy Trinity and with one another.

5. The call to holiness is also a call to unity in the Church, the body of Christ. Jesus prayed for his disciples to be sanctified in the truth that they might all be one (*Jn* 17.17, 21). Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other. The goal of dialogue between Catholics and Methodists remains that of full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life (Nairobi §20).

6. Among the theological foundations of the report, three are particularly noteworthy. The first is the trinitarian mission in salvation history as recorded in scripture and tradition. The Honolulu report (1981) established significant agreement in understanding the person and work of God the Son in relation to the person and work of God the Holy Spirit, in the design and purpose of God the Father in creation and redemption. Second is the Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (MAJDDJ) (2006/1999), which is an agreed statement concerning certain basic elements of the nature and effect of divine grace and its relationship with works of mercy and piety. The third is the theme so fruitfully explored in the Durban report (2011): the common participation of Christians in the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

7. The present report is divided into three sections. The first section, comprising Chapters One and Two, outlines a shared Christian anthropology and understanding of the nature and effect of divine grace and holiness in relation to the human person, noting certain aspects where Methodists and Catholics continue to differ in significant respects. The second section, comprising Chapters Three and Four, then draws upon a shared understanding of grace and holiness to investigate particular elements of holy living in the communion of saints. The third section, comprising Chapter Five, offers a summary of this report's convergences and divergences, and asks how the fruits of dialogue might have a transformative effect in Catholic and Methodist communities. An appendix contains a select number of appropriate prayers from our two traditions.

8. To aid the reader, it may be useful to outline the content of each chapter. Chapter One, 'The Mystery of Being Human', articulates a Christian anthropology as the theological basis for the chapters that follow. It considers: what it means for human beings to be created in the image and likeness of God in relation to the rest of creation; the fall and its effect upon humankind and creation; the longing for reconciliation; and the person of Jesus Christ as the full measure of human being. Catholics and Methodists can say much together about humankind in the plan and purpose of God.

9. Christian anthropology is necessarily bound up with the study of salvation or soteriology. Chapter Two, 'God's Work of Re-creating Humankind', describes the saving work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the mediation of divine grace before focusing on three particular aspects: the grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies. The chapter also addresses the historically divisive issues of the 'merit' accruing from good works of mercy and piety, and Christian 'assurance'.

10. Just as Christian anthropology leads to soteriology, consideration of the saving work of Christ is inseparable from ecclesiology, since the experience of grace and

holiness is always oriented towards the formation of relationships in the Church and the transformation of the world. Chapter Three, ‘God’s Holy People: The Saints Below’, considers the personal and ecclesial effect of grace and what it means to be called by God to holy living in the Church and in the world. The chapter describes the pilgrim Church itself as a household of grace. Holy living is described in relation to the sacraments, witnessing to the Gospel, devotional practices, and service in the world.

11. Since the living and the departed are joined together in love and praise within the household of grace, Chapter Four, ‘God’s Holy People: The Saints Above’, considers the eschatological effect of grace, and what this means for a communion among the saints which transcends death. The chapter explores a number of related topics: death and the hope of resurrection; judgement; purification and growth in grace beyond death; prayer for the departed saints; the intercession of the departed saints and Mary, the Mother of Jesus; the Lord’s return; images of final salvation; and the fulfilment of God’s design and purpose for humankind in a new heaven and a new earth.

12. The final chapter, ‘Growing in Holiness Together: Openings for Common Witness, Devotion, and Service’, reflects upon the close relationship between holiness and unity. The work of reconciliation between our world communions is itself a Spirit-led response to the summons of holiness. Tracing how the dialogue between Methodists and Catholics over the past fifty years has led to significant consensus and convergences, the text notes that each step towards greater communion in faith should translate into fruitful engagement in terms of common prayer, joint witness and mission, a renewed commitment to reconciliation, and a deepening relationship in the Lord. The chapter ends with a creedal summary of what Catholics and Methodists have been able to say together in this document, and raises a series of questions to be discussed at a local or regional level about the practical ecclesial implications of our agreements and convergences in faith.

13. The report’s subtitle, *From Glory to Glory*, reflects the transformative nature of the divine call to holiness, as attested by St Paul: ‘And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another’ (2 Cor 3.18). Charles Wesley drew on this same phrase in composing the hymn ‘Love divine, all loves excelling’,<sup>2</sup> a hymn that is still frequently sung by Methodists and Catholics today. The final stanza’s summary of life in Christ anticipates the final consummation of the call to holiness:

Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and sinless let us be;  
Let us see thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in thee;  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

---

2. WJW 7:547; first published in Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Those that Seek and Those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (London: Strahan, 1747), no. 9.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Mystery Of Being Human:

#### Created By God And Re-Created In Christ For Being In Communion With God

14. Human beings are a mystery to themselves. Without communion with God, the human is unfulfilled. As St Augustine famously said, ‘our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you’.<sup>3</sup> Humans are created with a desire for God, but the power of sin has corrupted this desire in unholy ways. The sin-sick heart is sought out by the Holy Spirit who intercedes ‘with sighs too deep for words’ (*Rom* 8.26) and witnesses to the human longing for God by crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ (*Rom* 8.15-16). Methodists and Catholics affirm that ‘The Father’s overflowing love created humanity for communion with himself, and that same creative love gathers together the followers of his Son into the visible community of the Church’ (Seoul §54).

15. Humans are made in the image of God. This affirmation is the point of departure in reflecting upon the dignity of every human being and the call to holiness. Even if it is not possible to find in the Bible a fully developed systematic anthropology, scripture offers profound insight into the human person. Its testimony to the mystery of the human starts with creation and finds its fulfilment in the mystery of Christ, truly God and truly human. The Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead (*Rom* 8.11) and spoke through the prophets (*Eph* 3.5) plays a crucial role in the completion and revelation of this mystery. In this way, the plan of God, revealed initially in the gift of creation, is confirmed and re-created in the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption.

16. The starting point for this chapter is that humanity is created by and for God. This consideration is followed by an assessment of the effects of sin on human nature and concludes with a reflection on humanity as re-created in Christ. The re-creation of the first Adam into the new is God’s gift, but a gift that can only be received by means of repentance and conversion. The re-creation of the human does not mean the annihilation of human nature. The new creation is not out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) but out of the old (*ex vetere*). The old creation is not discarded but transformed. God does not say, ‘Behold I make all new things,’ but rather, ‘Behold, I am making all things new’ (*Rev* 21.5). Ultimately, the origin and destiny of the human being are connected to who God is. This is why, even in the light of revelation, the topic for this chapter is treated not as a puzzle to be solved, but as a mystery to be approached with humility and reverence.

#### Created with the Gift of Life and Called Into Communion with the Creator

##### *Created for relationship with God*

17. The account of creation in Genesis (*Gen* 1.1-2.4) declares the uniqueness of human beings with respect to all other creatures: with humanity, God completes his work of creation. The special place and mission of human beings finds its foundation in the fact that they are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) (*Gen* 1.26-27). Being created in God’s ‘image and likeness’ is a gift and responsibility. The human being has

---

3. *Confessions*, Book I, Chapter 1.

been created to exist in relationship with God, to be addressed by God and to hear and receive God's word, and so to live in communion with him. Holiness is another name for this communion. The mystery of what it means to be made in the image of God is only fully revealed in Christ (cf. *2 Cor* 4.4; *Col* 1.15; *Heb* 1.3; *Phil* 2.6). While it is true that humans have been created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), it is also possible to affirm that they have been created out of the fullness (*ex plenitudine*) of Christ himself.

#### *Created for relationship with others*

18. From the very beginning, humanity has been created male and female (*Gen* 1.27). Genesis tells of how God gives to Adam a 'partner', Eve, because it is not good for him to be alone (cf. *Gen* 2.8, 20-24). Human beings are social beings created for relationship. The contemporary interpretation of gender is a controversial subject among Christians, one that this document does not address. As far as the call to holiness is concerned, it is important to underscore that human relationality finds expression not only in marriage, but also in friendships and in the realms of economics, politics, and culture. Sexual differentiation is a fundamental but not exclusive manifestation of the social dimension of human existence.

19. In the Christian vision, this social dimension is essentially grounded in the Trinity of Divine Persons, revealed in Christ. God is not a solitary being, but rather a perfect communion of Persons, who exist eternally in relationship with one another. By analogy, human beings, created in the image of the triune God, also find their identity in relation to God, one another, and the world. Only in the exercise of their social dimensions, and particularly in communion and interpersonal self-giving, can human beings truly be themselves. In the encounter with the other as person, humans find themselves before an image that has not been fashioned by human hands. The language of personhood refers not only to the identity of each individual, but also to the essential relationship with others that lies at the foundation of human community. No person as such is ever alone in the universe. Each person is always constituted with others and is called to form with them a community. Human beings find fulfilment to the extent that the essentially social nature of one's humanity is fulfilled within the relationships of family, community, and society. This is the reason why Christian ethics and morality cannot be reduced to the individual aspects; rather, responding to everything that pertains to the human being, morality attains to the social dimension as well. It is on the basis of this anthropological reality that John Wesley said: 'The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness'.<sup>4</sup> Life in community is integral to the life of grace and holiness.

#### *Created for relationship with creation*

20. According to the scriptures, God placed humanity in relation to creation. God both plants the Garden of Eden and assigns to Adam the task of naming the animals (*Gen* 2.9, 19-20). These stories yield a rich anthropology: humans are made for communion with each other and they are called to care for creation. But they will live only if they maintain their relationship with the God who has created them and given them his very life, and if they remain faithful to God's commands. The prohibition

---

4. John Wesley, Preface, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), p. viii.

against eating ‘of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ spells this out, ‘for in the day that you eat of it, you shall die’ (*Gen* 2.17). That tree symbolically evokes the insurmountable limits that the human being, as a creature, must freely recognize and respect with trust. This means that the relationship with God is essential for the human person, as the one absolute dimension from which every other dimension takes its point of reference. The human being was made to be in harmony with God, creation, and neighbour. Another name for this original harmony is holiness, and one of the chief obstacles to holiness is humanity’s refusal to embrace its creaturely limits as gift.

21. Humans need the world that surrounds them for their own subsistence. That is a fundamental experience. But that same relationship of dependence upon the world allows humans to perceive their transcendence of the world. Humanity’s work is a new phenomenon in the cosmos. The human being can be called ‘co-creator’ because with the creation of humans and their ability to transform the reality that surrounds them something new comes into being; new possibilities are found in nature which otherwise would never have been attained. These possibilities in nature, in turn, become new possibilities for humans themselves. Even as they are immersed in the world, human beings show by their very actions that they transcend the world; they are not simply cogs in a machine. Moreover, humans experience a persistent dissatisfaction with their accomplishments, between what they have and what they still desire. Thus, they can hardly expect the world to provide them with the ultimate meaning of life. The world cannot satisfy the longings of the human heart nor provide a satisfying meaning for human existence. Nevertheless, the world is filled with God’s grace, and in caring for it as commanded by the Creator, human beings begin to live their vocation oriented towards communion with the Creator.

22. The witness of Francis of Assisi is confirmation that ‘the dignity of the human race is that it is made in the “image” of God to be the royal representative of the ruler of creation by exercising “dominion” over the world (*Gen* 1.26). This “dominion” is not a license to exploit the earth, but to [nurture and] care for it, [even] as God does’ (HEFG §16). The Garden of Eden is named as the first space appointed for the living out of this vocation; it was a place of intimacy with God and harmony with creation (*Gen* 2.8). Humans now live estranged from this reality. At the same time, they long for the restoration of this original harmony. This longing lies at the root of the call to holiness. According to Pope Francis, ‘It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture’ (*Landato si*’ §66).

#### *The human being: body and soul*

23. Human beings are constituted body and soul. Being embodied, humans are subject to space and time and are therefore finite and mortal. Being ensouled, humans transcend the world and are called to immortality. This immortality makes no sense except in communion with God, guaranteeing the continuity of the personal subject between the present life and the fullness of the resurrection, in full conformity to the risen Christ. Thus, any authentic Christian understanding of holiness eradicates all forms of dualism or reductionism. An account of perfection that expects the soul to escape its embodied existence is incapable of recognizing the integrity of the human being in its rich and complex reality.

24. The human being is a mysterious unity. Scripture describes in various ways the embodied and ensouled dimensions of the human being, all of which are necessary to testify to the elusiveness of the reality that these seek to describe. Nevertheless, the human being in its entirety is created in the image of God, and therefore being embodied is essential to personal identity. This perspective excludes interpretations that situate the image of God only in one aspect of human nature or in one of its qualities or functions.

25. Christian theology affirms the goodness of the body. The body is also created by God and subject to final transformation in the resurrection. The negative views of embodiment, which have from time to time clouded the Christian witness to the gift of materiality, need to be eschewed. At the same time, the body is currently weak, fallen, and in need of transformation. In the words of St Paul, ‘we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies’ (*Rom* 8.23).

### **The Fall and Its Effect upon Humankind and Creation**

#### *The gift of freedom*

26. Created in God’s image in order to share in the communion of the divine life, human beings are constituted with the capacity freely to accept this communion. Humans receive the gift of freedom so that they can love. This freedom, like all aspects of human existence, is finite and limited. Freedom means not only the possibility of choosing between various specific goods or possibilities, but also, and above all, the ability to determine oneself according to one’s own choices. In spite of the obvious creaturely limitations that condition human beings, the power of self-determination is real. Methodists and Catholics believe that ‘there is a real moral order grounded in God; human dignity and freedom are real and crucial; [all people] are called to responsible living in community as well as individually’ (*Denver* §40). One should speak, therefore, not only of freedom *from* impediments or restrictions, whether internal or external, but also of freedom *for* responding to God’s invitation to be holy.

27. Yet with the gift of freedom also comes the possibility of freedom’s own failure. Instead of accepting the supreme good of sharing in the divine life, humans transgressed the limits that were constitutive of their creaturely existence. The human being, made by God in a state of freedom for holiness, abused this liberty at the urging of the Evil One (*Gen* 3). While a venerable line of theologians has not hesitated to identify ‘pride’ as the first sin, the origins of sin are mysterious. Using figurative language, scripture’s account of the fall affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of human history. Revelation declares that the whole of this history is marked by the original fault freely committed by the first parents of the human species, Adam and Eve. Indeed, this is the world as we encounter it, marked by goodness but also stained by human beings repeatedly turning away from or distorting their relationship with God, others and creation.

#### *The failure of freedom: the reality of sin*

28. Scripture portrays vividly the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve immediately lose their original holiness (*Gen* 3). The harmony in which they had found themselves is now destroyed. They fear God whom they conceive to be jealously guarding his divine prerogatives. They are estranged from the creation in

which God set them and experience even their own bodies as a source of shame. As a result of that first sin, the world is marred by sin. There is Cain's murder of his brother Abel and the corruption that follows in the wake of this act of violence. Likewise, sin frequently manifests itself in the history of Israel, especially as infidelity to the God of the covenant and as transgression of the Law.

#### *Human estrangement from God*

29. The reality of sin, which divine revelation discloses, resonates with human experience. Examining their hearts, humans find that they have inclinations towards evil and are engulfed by manifold ills which cannot come from the good Creator. When human beings refuse to acknowledge God as their Creator, they disrupt their proper relationship to their own ultimate goal as well as their relationship to themselves, other humans, and all created things. Therefore, humans are internally split. As a result, human life entails an unavoidable struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, humans find that they are incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully on their own and feel as though they are bound by chains (*Rom* 7.15ff).

30. Methodists and Catholics do not consider the fall as causing the destruction of the *imago Dei*. Catholic tradition has always insisted that sin can disfigure or deform God's image in the human being, but it cannot destroy it. Methodists similarly teach that the fall of Adam and Eve marred, but did not destroy, the image of God. The sinful person is still a human being made in the image of God.

#### *Not without hope*

31. God did not abandon human beings after the fall. On the contrary, according to Genesis 3.15, God continues to address his creatures, and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and humanity's restoration from this fall. Catholic tradition reads Genesis 3.15 as the first proclamation of the Gospel (*Protoevangelium*): the first announcement of the 'New Adam', of a battle between the serpent and the woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers. The Wesley brothers too heard in this verse an announcement of the redeemer, 'the woman's heavenly seed', 'the bruiser of the serpent's head', who would 'crush the fiend that crushed us all'.<sup>5</sup> Methodists and Catholics alike hold that God's saving purposes for humanity are evident from the beginning.

32. God's love for his fallen creatures is made concrete in salvation history. Methodists can affirm with Catholics that 'through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Saviour promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries' (*Dei Verbum* §3). In choosing Israel as his own people, God's call to holiness assumes historical and social particularity. Israel is called to be holy, as the Lord is holy (*Lev* 11.44). The people of faith named in Hebrews 11 give an eloquent witness to how God has been at work throughout the history of Israel, but also outside

---

5. Charles Wesley, *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, vol. 1 (Bristol: Farley, 1762), no. 22.

it in people such as Rahab (*Heb* 11.31). These persons lived in hope of the coming of one who would be ‘the pioneer and perfecter’ of their faith (*Heb* 12.2).

33. The incarnation of the eternal Word and the sending of the Spirit overcome the human estrangement from God, creation, and self, suffered in the fall. Scripture teaches that the remedy for sin has a greater effect than sin itself: ‘where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (*Rom* 5.20). In the profound words of Pope Francis, God ‘does not want anyone to be lost. His mercy is infinitely greater than our sins, his medicine is infinitely stronger than our illnesses that he has to heal.’<sup>6</sup> Thanks to God’s work of redemption, says John Wesley, ‘Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise.’<sup>7</sup> On account of the triune God’s work of salvation, the fall of the first Adam turns out to be a *felix culpa*, a happy fault,<sup>8</sup> because what is gained is greater than what is lost.

### **Christ, the New Adam, fully reveals the Mystery of the Human Being**

*Created as image of God and called to be image of Christ*

34. The created image (*imago Dei*) marred by sin is made a new creation in the image of Christ (*imago Christi*). The theme of the image of Christ is most clearly expressed by St Paul, who proclaimed Christ to be the image of God. Being re-created in the image of Christ does not replace the image of God. Men and women are called to put on Christ and become members of the one body of Christ by accepting his offer of salvation through faith (*Gal* 3.27-28). God the Father has made human beings to be conformed according to the image of the Son by the power of the Spirit, so that the Son might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (*Rom* 8.29). Just as the human being bears the image of the first Adam, moulded from the earth and filled with the breath of the Creator, so too are we made to bear the image of the heavenly Adam, Jesus Christ, in the sharing of his risen body (*1 Cor* 15.45-49). Christian hope looks to the return of Christ, who ‘will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory’ (*Phil* 3.21). Human destiny, therefore, is to be changed from the glory of the first Adam to the glory of the second (*2 Cor* 3.18). The Christian vocation to holiness is to be conformed to Christ and clothed with his image.

35. In his earthly life, Jesus lived out his eternal relationship as the Son of the Father, as he worked with his hands, loved with his heart, and thought with his mind. In the person of Jesus, all dimensions of human existence became places where his divine relationship with the Father was lived; thus, he hallowed all that it is to be human. The first Adam is a figure of the last Adam. In Christ, the dignity of the first Adam is affirmed, renewed, and elevated. Together, the mystery of creation and the mystery of redemption are the proper foundation for a true understanding of humanity.

36. Being re-created in the image of Christ has an eschatological orientation. Since orientation to Christ is the final goal of human existence, this must have been so from the beginning. The goal of creation and goal of salvation exist in an intimate relation. All has been made through Christ, and all is directed towards him (*1 Cor* 8.6; *Col* 1.15-

---

6. Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy: A Conversation with Andrea Tornielli*, trans. Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2016), p. 34.

7. John Wesley’s sermon, ‘The New Creation’, WJW 2:510, §18.

8. Cf. the Exsultet or Easter Proclamation.

20; *Eph* 1.3-10; *Jn* 1.3, 10; *Heb* 1.2-3). Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of everything (*Rev* 1.8; 21.6; 22.13). From this perspective, salvation is above all liberation from sin and reconciliation to God.

*The Christian life as a gift already received and as a call to be realized*

37. Christian life begins with the recognition of many gifts received: forgiveness, adoption, grace, virtues. These gifts give rise to responsibility; the giver calls the receiver to draw closer. The sisters and brothers of Christ are called to grow to the stature of Christ. Growing to the stature of Christ involves sharing in his divine sonship, that is to say, in the unique relation that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, has with his Father. This relationship is possible only through the gift of the Holy Spirit in whom all have access to the Father through Christ (*Eph* 2.18). In other words, holiness consists in living into one's baptismal identity. The holy ones are those who lead lives of constant repentance and conversion in gratitude for God's bounteous gifts and mercies.

38. In Christ, the true vocation of every human being is revealed. Since 'all things have been created through him and for him' (*Col* 1.16), everything finds in him its direction and destiny. By the Holy Spirit, the vocation of every human being can be realized. The Holy Spirit will bring to completion the final conformity of Christians to Christ in the resurrection of the dead on the final day. But even now Christians share in the glory of the Risen Lord. In time and in history, the end is near, even though not fully here.

**In Christ, All the Aspects of Human Existence are Re-created**

39. The drama of human existence unfolds in history between the creation and its final consummation. The full meaning of humanity's present existential situation can be found only in Christ. Christ is the one who gives the image of God in the human its true and definitive form: 'through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (*Col* 1.20). In the midst of their sinful existence, humans are pardoned and, through the Holy Spirit, they know the saving love of God and grow in conformity to Christ.

40. In Christ, human freedom attains its goal – freedom in the Spirit. The Spirit breaks the bonds of sin and self-centredness that enslave humans so that they can enjoy the freedom of the children of God. Jesus reveals the true nature of this freedom. In him, freedom manifests itself as receptivity to the Father and openness towards all people in an attitude of service, mercy and love. 'For freedom Christ has set us free', says St Paul (*Gal* 5.1). Freedom *from* sin means freedom *for* God in Christ and the Holy Spirit; freedom *from* slavish observance of the law means freedom *for* joyful obedience; freedom *from* death means freedom *for* leading a new life in God. Many saints in the history of the Church have witnessed to this freedom, particularly the martyrs, who freely offered their own lives out of love.

41. In Christ, human existence receives a new and deeper meaning; the whole creation is restored. The human being, as 'co-creator', is called to participate in this work of re-creation of the whole universe. It should not seem strange that from the first centuries, and following the example of the apostolic community (cf. *Acts* 2.42-44), many Christians have shared a fraternal life in community, placing in common all of their goods, and giving mutual encouragement in discipleship. In these ruled forms of life, which feature in both Catholic and Methodist traditions, Christians praise the

Creator and defend the dignity of the human and the integrity of creation. ‘In reality, the name for that deep amazement at [human] worth and dignity is the Gospel’ (*Redemptor hominis* §10). St Francis is an excellent bearer of this Gospel: ‘He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace’ (*Laudato si*’ §10). But it is not only in consecrated life that Christians participate in the renewal of the face of the earth. By living into their baptismal identity in the ordinary tasks of daily affairs, Christians contribute to the re-creation of the universe. In mutual self-giving and receiving within families, the Church, and wider society, people from all walks of life find the path to their own human fulfilment in love and their sanctification in Christ.

42. ‘The glory of God is the human person fully alive, and the life of the human person is the vision of God’, writes St Irenaeus of Lyon.<sup>9</sup> Human existence and the call to holiness need to be understood together. Being ‘changed from glory into glory’ does not diminish the human. Holiness humanizes. By the grace of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, humans are embraced in the love of God, and both discover and realize their true call. This assertion does not empty human life of its mystery. In the words of John, ‘we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’ (*1 Jn* 3.2).

#### *Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop*

Mary Helen MacKillop (1824–1909) was born in early colonial Melbourne, Australia, to Scottish parents. Although her father provided for her education, the family was never comfortably off, and Mary had to start work in her teens to help provide for her family. She took work as a governess and so began a life-long ministry in education.

In 1866, Mary and her parish priest Father Julian Tenison Woods fulfilled their dream to found a congregation of religious sisters that would serve the needs of the poor and provide education for children in remote areas. The Rule of Life that Woods and MacKillop produced for the community emphasized a commitment to poverty; depending on divine providence, the sisters were not allowed to own any personal possessions. The Josephites, as they became known, were unusual in that they lived alongside the communities they served, rather than in secluded convents. As well as schools, the order also ran other social institutions such as orphanages and homes for the elderly and sick, but all of its work was united by an unwavering desire to serve the poor, and the order refused to educate the children of affluent families. The order’s principal focus remained that of educating the poor and, as the need was great, both the order and their schools grew rapidly.

During her lifetime, Mary encountered opposition and false accusation, and suffered tribulation at the hands of certain church leaders and even some of her own sisters. For a brief time, she was even excommunicated by her bishop. Her deep faith and especially her devotion to the cross of Christ gave Mary the strength and courage she needed to continue her work, a work that often entailed travelling vast distances.

---

9. *Adversus haereses*, Book IV, Chapter 20.7.

Mary's vision had no boundaries and she enjoyed the support and friendship of people of all Christian traditions and faiths. She was even buried in a vault paid for by a lifelong Presbyterian friend. The Sisters of St Joseph and their companions who work in many parts of the world continue Mary's legacy by striving to bring dignity and love to all peoples.

*John Sung (Song Shangjie)*

John Sung (1901–1944) was the premier Chinese revivalist of the twentieth century, responsible for leading more than 100,000 people, or approximately 10% of all Chinese Protestants, to confess faith in Jesus Christ. As a young man, Sung had himself converted to Christianity after his life deteriorated because of mental illness. When, in the chaos of his mind, he found a way to name Jesus as Lord, his whole life became reordered around his Saviour.

This experience of divine healing shaped his proclamation of the Gospel. Travelling through China and Southeast Asia as a National Evangelist of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Sung preached a holiness message that emphasized full salvation: Jesus delivered people from both sin and sickness. Total restoration, he emphasized, was the result of entire sanctification, for only the Holy Spirit could cleanse hearts and restore bodies.

Those who responded to Sung's invitation to enter a holy life were to expect moral integrity to blossom in their lives, for God's Spirit would lead converts in paths of righteousness. Sung did not preach sinless perfection, but a vivified conscience. His own life provides an example. On one occasion he realized that a series of sermons inexplicably lacked power, until the Holy Spirit reminded him that in days past he had not given to a person who had asked of him (*Matt* 5:42). Sung tracked down the offended party, confessed his sin, and made restitution. Thus purified from unrighteousness, Sung rejoiced that God began once again to work through his preaching.

In some ways, Sung's understanding of holy living could sound puritanical, for he demanded that Christians avoid movies, smoking, novels, dancing, plays, and even picnics. Sung, however, explained his position differently. Religion was not the opiate of the people, he argued, but rather these mind-numbing and time-consuming forms of leisure. Instead of using their free time to indulge themselves, converts should spread the Gospel. He organized evangelistic teams everywhere he went, and charged them to save the nation by eradicating sin.<sup>10</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

### God's Work of Re-creating Humankind

43. Having given a shared account of humankind created in the image of God, it is now possible to consider what Catholics and Methodists can say together about God's work of re-creating humankind. This work reveals the full depth of God's love

---

10. Material on John Sung drawn from Daryl R. Ireland, 'John Sung: Christian Revitalization in China and Southeast Asia' (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2015).

because it involves overcoming humankind's estrangement from God as a result of sin. A central concept in this second chapter is that of 'grace'. Human salvation is possible only because a loving and merciful God undertakes the work of re-creating humankind through the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Beginning with a brief summary of the grace of God in the person and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, this chapter explores the nature and effect of divine grace in its personal and corporate aspects. The chapter concludes by investigating two related issues that have been contentious between Catholics and Protestants: the merit accruing from good works of mercy and piety, and whether it is appropriate to speak of an 'assurance' of salvation.

44. It is convenient for purposes of presentation to consider the effect of grace under three sub-headings: the grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies. However, these are not separate effects, as if the work of grace was simply a linear process, but rather related aspects of God's work of salvation and the call to holiness. In addressing the subject of grace, the Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is an important source of basic agreement between Catholics and Methodists (and Lutherans) concerning theological questions that have divided Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation.

### **The Grace of God in Jesus Christ**

45. Catholics and Methodists describe 'grace' in similar terms. For Catholics, grace is '*favour*, the *free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons [and daughters], partakers of the divine nature and eternal life' (CCC §1996). For Methodists, grace is 'God's sovereign love and favour, freely given to undeserving and hostile people' (CPM §10). The mystery of salvation is the work of a gracious God through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (*Jn* 3.16).

46. God's grace, then, is not an abstract idea but is saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh and the one 'full of grace and truth' (*Jn* 1.14). Christians confess that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (*1 Tim* 1.15), and his grace towards humankind is revealed in that 'he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross' (*Phil* 2.8). The grace of Jesus Christ (*2 Cor* 13.13) is directed towards the salvation of humankind, and it is 'from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace' (*Jn* 1.16).

47. In the mystery of salvation, the grace of Jesus Christ transforms the human nature and its condition, for 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (*2 Cor* 5.17-18). Being re-created as human beings 'in Christ' constitutes a new way of living in the world, reconciled to God and to one another. St Paul urges the members of Christ's body, the Church, to 'let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (*Phil* 2.5). In growing conformity with the mind of Christ, the Christian life is consciously patterned on his earthly life so that those 'in Christ' follow his example of holy living.

48. The saving love of God, which Christians proclaim for all people, is not confined to humankind as if the rest of creation were merely a stage for the drama of human salvation. While the focus of this present report concerns grace at work in human beings and communities, the full implications of the biblical view of salvation as

new creation are that the work of Christ leads to the fulfilment of God's purpose for the whole created order and not just for humankind. Consequently, holy living involves Christians witnessing together to the responsibility of humankind for stewardship of the earth (*Gen* 2.15b), which is God's good creation (Dublin §22; cf. HEFG).

### **The Grace of God and the Holy Spirit**

49. Luke–Acts describes how the Holy Spirit is constantly present and active in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that Mary conceives (*Lk* 1.35). The Spirit descends upon Jesus at his baptism 'in bodily form like a dove' (*Lk* 3.22). As a result, he is 'full of the Holy Spirit' (*Lk* 4.1) and 'filled with the power of the Spirit' (*Lk* 4.14). The Spirit anoints Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour (*Lk* 4.18-19).

50. Jesus promises that God the Father will give the gift of the Spirit to those who ask (*Lk* 11.13). The Spirit will teach the followers of Jesus what to say in a time of trial (*Lk* 12.12). The risen Lord tells the apostles, 'you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you' (*Acts* 1.8). On the day of Pentecost, the apostles are together 'filled with the Holy Spirit' (*Acts* 2.4), empowering Peter to proclaim that those who repent and are baptized 'will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (*Acts* 2.1-21). The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost establishes the Church as a worshipping community of faith (*Acts* 2.42-46) and not merely a collection of individuals.

51. The Holy Spirit continues to be present and active in the Church throughout the ages, testifying on behalf of Jesus (*Jn* 15.26), teaching the community of faith and reminding them of his words (*Jn* 14.26), and guiding the Church into the fullness of the truth revealed in Christ (*Jn* 16.13). The Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of grace' (*Heb* 10.29), who makes the grace of Christ present and active, drawing people into a deepening relationship of communion or fellowship with God and with one another. The effect upon the human person is profound: 'The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it' (CCC §1999).

52. The diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit are always a gift of grace in one form or another. The Spirit bestows these gifts individually for the common good of the Church (*1 Cor* 12.7; LG §12). There are varieties of spiritual gifts and corresponding services for building up the Church, but the same Spirit (*1 Cor* 12.4). Besides those spiritual gifts that are associated with the sacraments and authorised ministries, Catholics and Methodists attest the freedom of the Holy Spirit to bestow particular gifts or charisms 'just as the Spirit chooses' (*1 Cor* 12.11). In both Catholic and Methodist traditions, charismatic renewal among the baptised has been a recurring feature.

### **The Grace that Enables**

53. Catholics and Methodists 'confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation' (JDDJ §19). As sinners, they are incapable of attaining salvation by their own efforts or even of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance. Living under God's judgement, they are saved solely as a result of God's mercy. The initiative in salvation, therefore, rests with God, whose grace precedes and facilitates the human response. In all aspects of God's work of

salvation, the initiative, the agency, and the consummation are the work of the Holy Spirit, who brings Christ to us and leads us to faith in him (Honolulu §15).

54. The Holy Spirit is at work even before individuals come to faith in Jesus Christ since the preparation of people for the reception of grace is already a work of grace (CCC §2001). It is only by God's grace that human beings have the 'capacity to respond to salvation offered us through Jesus Christ'.<sup>11</sup> Such enabling grace, universally at work in human beings, is what the Council of Trent called 'prevenient grace' – a term later used by John Wesley in his account of salvation (Honolulu §14). Since human beings are never without enabling grace, there can be no radical separation of 'nature' and 'grace'; thus, God's work of salvation in Jesus Christ involves 'grace upon grace' (*Jn* 1.16).

55. Enabling grace is just that, however: it does not remove the need for a free human response to God's initiative in salvation. Catholics and Methodists reject the idea of universal salvation where this is interpreted as meaning that all will be saved whether or not they freely consent. For Catholics, enabling grace arouses and sustains human collaboration in God's work of salvation, but still requires a free response (CCC §§2001-2). Likewise, in Methodist understanding, enabling grace 'assists' but does not 'force' the human response.<sup>12</sup> Catholics and Methodists agree together that the 'person who is saved is saved by grace *with* free consent (in the case of an adult) but not saved *by* free consent' (JCS, p. 89). St Augustine expressed this eloquently: 'God, who has created human beings without them, will not save them without them'.<sup>13</sup>

56. The positive human response to God's saving love is what the New Testament calls repentance. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus proclaimed: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news' (*Mk* 1.15). For Methodists, 'Repentance is turning in sorrow away from sin and turning to God to seek forgiveness and new life in Jesus Christ' (CPM §4). Similarly, for Catholics, 'moved by grace, [a person] turns toward God and away from sin' (CCC §1989). Catholics and Methodists often refer to this first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit in terms of conversion.

57. The person of Mary, the Mother of the Lord, beautifully illustrates enabling grace at work to uniquely powerful effect. 'She embodies in a special way the freely-given, unmerited grace of God. Mary can be said to be a sign or icon of "grace alone" (*sola gratia*). By grace alone she was enabled freely and courageously to say her "Yes" to God's call to her: "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (*Lk* 1.38). By grace alone, Mary's poverty of spirit received the gift of becoming the mother of her Lord' (MML §8).

### The Grace that Justifies

58. One of the major controversies of the Reformation concerned the doctrine of justification. A foundational biblical text for the Reformers was Ephesians 2.8-9: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works so that no one may boast.' For Catholic theologians at

---

11. Saved by Grace: A Statement of World Methodist Belief and Practice (1986; repr. 1996) §7.

12. Cf. John Wesley's sermon, 'The General Spread of the Gospel', §11, WJW 2:489; MAJDDJ §4.1.

13. Cited in CCC §1847: *Sermo* 169, 11, 13: PL 38, 923.

that time, the Reformers' emphasis undermined the necessity for good works in the Christian life: 'faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead' (Jas 1.17). These contrasting perspectives became entrenched in seemingly irreconcilable doctrinal differences concerning justification.

59. Given the history of controversy between Catholics and Protestants concerning justification, it is of immense significance that today Catholics and Methodists together confess: 'By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works' (JDDJ §15). Even faith is not a human achievement since 'faith is itself God's gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers' (JDDJ §16).

60. The New Testament describes in various ways what it means for sinners to be 'justified' before God. Justification means liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (*Rom* 5.12-21) and from the curse of the law (*Gal* 3.10-14) through the forgiveness of sins (*Rom* 3.23-25; *Acts* 13.39; *Lk* 18.14). Justification unites a sinner with Christ and his death and resurrection (*Rom* 6.5). Justification means being accepted into a relationship of communion (*koinonia*) with God – already now, but then fully in God's coming kingdom (*Rom* 5.1f; JDDJ §11).

61. Although good works do not contribute to justification, they are its inevitable consequence. Faith in the saving action of God in Christ is always and necessarily active in love and thus results in good works of mercy and piety. Nevertheless, 'whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it' (JDDJ §25).

62. Justification occurs through the reception of the Holy Spirit and incorporation into the body of Christ (*Rom* 8.1f, 9f; *1 Cor* 12.12f), of which the sacrament of Baptism is the effective sign. New birth, cleansing, regeneration, and conversion are all terms used to describe the process by which people are brought by God from the state of sin into the new life in Christ (CPM §15; CCC §§1214, 1987).

63. The grace of justification re-creates the human person, though not necessarily in a permanent state of being. Catholics and Methodists reject the idea that the justified will always persevere in grace to the end. It always remains possible for the justified to depart from grace and fall back into a state of sin, though, even then, the grace of God makes it possible to repent afresh and receive the grace that justifies.

### **The Grace that Sanctifies**

64. Justification is not an isolated event in the Christian life but one aspect of a process of sanctification or being made holy through a deepening relationship with Christ in his body, the Church (Honolulu §13). 'Justification and sanctification go together as two sides of one coin: distinct but belonging together' (JCS, p. 88). Having received the grace of justification, the process of sanctification involves a deepening experience of sanctifying grace as the Christian grows in the image of Christ and is drawn more deeply into participation in the divine life of the Trinity (Seoul §110).

65. Sanctifying grace is not only interior to the human soul, but also involves a commitment to holy living in every sphere of human life (cf. *Rom* 12.1). Catholics and Methodists confess together that good works of mercy and piety are the fruit of justification and an obligation of holy living (JDDJ §37). As such, they belong to God's victory over sin and death. For Catholics, 'sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable

and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love' (CCC §2000). Similarly, for Methodists, sanctifying grace is an habitual disposition such that 'faith working through love' (*Gal* 5.6) produces good works in the lives of the faithful.

66. Holy living itself leads to growth in sanctifying grace. For Catholics, 'good works, made possible by grace and the working of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, so that the righteousness that comes from God is preserved and communion with Christ is deepened' (JDDJ §38). For Methodists, 'works [of mercy and piety] also help the believers to live their lives in communion with God and to be "co-workers with God" (*1 Cor* 3.7) in the field of God's mission and in ministry to the poor and to those who need the love of God most' (MAJDDJ §4.7; cf. BDUMC/ART 10).

67. Being committed to holy living should not make Christians complacent about the state of their lives. As noted above, justification is not necessarily a permanent state. Christians must be constantly aware of the danger of backsliding and being caught by the power of sin (cf. *1 Jn* 1.6-9; MAJDDJ §4.4). At the same time, awareness of the ever-present danger of sin should not lead Christians to doubt the effect of sanctifying grace in their lives.

### **The Universal Call to Holiness**

68. The grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies are aspects of God's saving love and call to holiness. As such, they are always and necessarily related directly or indirectly to the Church: the people of God, the body of Christ, and temple of the Holy Spirit. For the Church itself is a fruit of God's grace, and its nature and mission belong to the mystery of God's loving plan for the salvation of all humanity (Seoul §49).

69. Catholics affirm the 'universal call to holiness in the Church': since Christ is holy, 'in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or cared for by it, is called to holiness' (LG §39). The call to holiness similarly lies at the heart of Methodism, whose providential mission has been 'to reform the nation, particularly the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land'.<sup>14</sup>

70. The call to holiness is addressed to people in their cultural, social, and historical contexts and is thus personal and collective, transcending but not eradicating those contexts. In the Old Testament, God calls the people of Israel to be a light to the nations (*Deut* 7.6). In the New Testament, the Great Commission is to 'go therefore and make disciples of all nations' (*Matt* 28.19). As the visible community of those who have responded to the call to holiness, the Church in the New Testament already comprises Jews and Gentiles, 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (*1 Pet* 2.9).

71. As the people of God, 'The Church is called to be an effective sign to the world of the saving and gathering purpose of God for all humanity, and a foretaste of our final gathering by God in heaven' (Seoul §62). While elements of grace and holiness exist beyond the visible Church as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, these are

---

14. BDUMC, 'Our Distinctive Heritage as United Methodists', p. 49; cf. British Methodist 'Deed of Union', §4.

always and necessarily directed ultimately towards incorporation into Christ. All recipients of grace are thereby related or 'ordered' to the Church in some way.

72. As God's chosen agent and instrument of the call to holiness, the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of all things into the new creation in Christ. The work of evangelisation is directed towards bringing all peoples into the community of faith, and developing relationships and social structures that conform to the new creation in Christ.

### **Perfection in Love and Holiness**

73. Jesus exhorts his disciples to 'be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (*Matt* 5.48). While absolute perfection belongs to God alone, Catholics and Methodists agree together that 'sanctification is a process that leads to perfect love' (Honolulu §18) as Christians grow in grace and devote themselves to the love of God and neighbour. The culmination of holy living and personal growth in grace is perfect love, which Methodists call entire sanctification or Christian perfection (cf. *1 Thess* 5.23; Seoul §66).

74. For Methodists, Christian perfection is loving God 'with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind' and 'your neighbour as yourself' (cf. *Matt* 22.37-39; *1 Jn* 2.5; MAJDDJ §4.4). Such love 'does not imply an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations'.<sup>15</sup> Those who receive sanctifying grace will continue to struggle against temptation and sin. 'But in this struggle they are strengthened by the promise of the gospel that in Christ God has broken the power of sin.' Christian perfection is always God's gift and the work of grace and never the result of human merit or achievement (MAJDDJ §4.4).

75. Although Catholic theology generally does not refer to Christian perfection or entire sanctification as such, Catholic teaching affirms that 'all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity [...]. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbour. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history' (LG §40).

76. Catholics and Methodists affirm in their respective ways that perfection in love is possible before death. Catholics emphasise the difficulty in conquering sin because of temptation and self-deception (cf. *1 Jn* 1.8). Nevertheless, 'all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect' (LG §11). Methodists similarly recognize the reality of sin, but emphasise the possibility of perfection in love in the present life since there is no limit to the power of God's grace. For Wesley, such perfection, which is as much a process as a final state, is the deep desire and goal of holy living – the grace-enabled anticipation in time of the Christian's sanctification. An historical difference of emphasis between Catholics and Methodists should not obscure

---

15. John Wesley's sermon 'Christian Perfection', §1.9, WJW 2:104.

this substantial agreement concerning Christian perfection. The lives of the saints in the Catholic tradition and the lives of exemplary Christian persons in the Methodist tradition bear witness to the possibility of perfection in love.

77. Being brought into a final state of perfection in love and holiness is the work of grace. For Catholics, this final state of perfection is for most people attained through a post-death experience of purification, which is traditionally called ‘purgatory’. Methodists take seriously those passages in scripture that suggest a process of purification from the effects of sin, but do not accept the Catholic doctrine of purgatory as it was understood and rejected by the Reformers (cf. BDUMC/ART 14). This subject will be addressed in Chapter Four.

### **Good Works and Merit**

78. The question of whether and how Christians acquire ‘merit’ before God by virtue of their good works of mercy and piety has been controversial between Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation. The Reformers interpreted Catholic teaching on merit as contrary to their core theological conviction that justification is by grace through faith alone. Methodists inherited this perspective; for example, ‘we are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings’ (BDUMC/ART 9).

79. Today, however, Catholics and Methodists agree together that ‘by grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works’ (JDDJ §15). Good works of mercy and piety in the Christian life do not contribute to justification but are its fruit.

80. For Catholics, the possibility that good works in the Christian life acquire merit arises because God has freely chosen to involve human beings in the work of grace. The merit of good works is to be attributed primarily to the grace of God, and only in a derivative way to the faithful (CCC §2008). ‘When Catholics affirm the “meritorious” character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works, which are motivated by love of God and neighbour and not calculated to obtain benefit. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace’ (JDDJ §38).

81. Methodists similarly affirm that individuals freely cooperate with the work of grace in such a way that they are fully responsible for their actions.<sup>16</sup> Insofar, then, as good works motivated by love of God and neighbour are ‘pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith’ (BDUMC/ART 10), a gracious God will reward them corresponding to the ‘merits’ of the human actions involved. Thus, Jesus refers to a ‘reward’ from God the Father in response to almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (*Matt* 6.4, 6, 18).

82. Where Catholics and Methodists continue to differ concerns the possibility that the merit arising from the good works of Christians might aid the sanctification of others. For Catholics, such merit denotes the just recompense accruing to a community

---

16. Cf. John Wesley’s sermon, ‘Working out your own salvation’, WJW 3:199–209.

according to the benefit or harm done to it by one of its members (CCC §2006). In the Church, the merit of Christ is shared and celebrated by all. Since the Father's saving love enables Christians to become co-heirs with Christ (*Rom* 8.17), their prayers for undeserved reward will not go unanswered: 'Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God's wisdom' (CCC §2010).

83. While Catholics affirm the sufficiency and all-embracing value of God's saving action in Christ, nonetheless the bonds of love between Christians make possible a 'wonderful exchange' whereby 'the holiness of one profits others, well beyond the harm that the sin of one could cause others' (CCC §1475; *Indulgentiarum doctrina* §5). The 'treasury of the Church' comprises the infinite value of Christ's merits, together with the 'prayers and good works' of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints of God (CCC §§1476-77; *Indulgentiarum doctrina* §5). By virtue of its power of binding and loosing granted by Christ, the Church 'intervenes in favour of individual Christians and opens for them the treasury of the merits of Christ and the saints to obtain from the Father of mercies the remission of the temporal punishments due for their sins' (CCC §1478; *Indulgentiarum doctrina* §5). The Church's intervention, known as granting an 'indulgence', is on behalf of the departed saints being purified of their sins.

84. Methodists ask why, if Catholics affirm that it is sufficient to rely on the infinite value of Christ's merit to aid individual Christians in their struggle against sin, it should be necessary to maintain the concept of a treasury of merit accruing from the prayers and good works of the people of God. Recognizing the undeserving nature of prayerful appeals to God, Methodist prayers for God's mercy often refer to 'the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ'. To the Methodist way of thinking, any idea that the reward for good works might somehow supplement Christ's merit to the benefit of specific individuals undermines the sufficiency of his saving death and risks creating a mechanistic and transactional view of such works.

85. Nevertheless, the bonds of love between Christians lead Methodists to believe that the prayers of the faithful are mutually beneficial. Fervent intercessory prayer has always been at the heart of Methodist worship, whereby Methodists pray for the application of God's love and mercy for particular situations and people. Similarly, prayer meetings, in which the ordinary faithful gather to pray for specific concerns, have been a notable feature of Methodism and remain an integral part of congregational life in many Methodist churches. The efficacy of such prayers stems from the belief that God responds graciously and mercifully to interceding by the Church. In that sense, Methodists accept that good works of piety may benefit particular individuals.

86. Some Methodists would further accept that the prayers of the departed saints and the prayers of the saints on earth may also be mutually beneficial, albeit in ways that cannot be identified precisely in terms of their salvific effect. Following John Wesley's example, authorised liturgies in a number of Methodist churches make provision for a general prayer of intercession for the faithful departed. Further theological reflection on the implications of the bonds of love within the communion of saints may lead to greater convergence between Catholics and Methodists concerning the possibility of an 'exchange' whereby the holiness of one benefits others.

## The Assurance of Faith and Salvation

87. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen' (*Heb* 11.1). The Letter to the Hebrews urges that 'since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water' (*Heb* 10.19-22).

88. What the Letter to the Hebrews calls 'the assurance of things hoped for' or the 'full assurance of faith' stems from God's promises in Christ. Catholics and Methodists 'confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God. In spite of their own weakness and the manifold threats to their faith, on the strength of Christ's death and resurrection they can build on the effective promise of God's grace in Word and Sacrament and so be sure of this grace' (JDDJ §34).

89. Being sure of God's grace stems from the trustworthiness of God's promises and is confirmed by the interior work of the Holy Spirit: 'Christian religious experience includes the assurance of God's unmerited mercy in Christ, the inner witness of the Spirit that [Christians] are indeed children of God, pardoned and reconciled to the Father (*Rom* 8.12-17)' (Honolulu §24). Such experience of the 'full assurance of faith' is part of the Catholic and Methodist traditions. Famously, on 24 May 1738, John Wesley's heart was 'strangely warmed' in an experience of 'assurance' that God had taken away his sins and freed him from sin and death. In the Catholic tradition, there are lives of saints recorded that manifest this same joyous assurance of faith (e.g., Philip Neri).

90. But how, and in what sense, might it be possible to speak of an 'assurance of salvation'? In the past, when Catholics heard Methodists speak of having the assurance of salvation they considered this to be a presumptuous assertion based on subjective experience. For their part, when Methodists heard Catholics question such experience, they considered this to reject the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the difference is one of emphasis and does not constitute a substantial disagreement between Catholics and Methodists in understanding the nature of Christian assurance. The objective work of salvation and the subjective awareness of that salvation coalesce in dynamic personal experience.

91. For Catholics, to have faith is to trust in God. No one can have faith in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. Recognizing their own weaknesses, shortcomings, and failures, believers may yet be certain that God *intends* their salvation (JDDJ §36). 'Reflection on God's blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to even greater faith' (CCC §2005). Having confidence or an assurance that saving grace is at work in them should not lead Christians to suppose they are thereby assured of salvation in any sense that denies the possibility of falling away from grace.

92. For Methodists, the assurance of salvation comes 'through the promises given us in the Bible, by the inner assurance given us by the Holy Spirit, by the evidence in our actions of God's working within us, and through the encouragement of fellow Christians' (CPM §18). The experience of assurance is a treasured feature of Methodist piety, not as a guarantee of perseverance, which removes the need for hope, but as the

Holy Spirit's endowment of an inner conviction of having received saving grace (Seoul §120). As such, 'assurance of faith and assurance of salvation have always belonged to the core of Methodist preaching. Such assurance is not seen as the certainty of possession, but as the reliability of a relationship which is founded in God's love. This relationship is lived by using the "means of grace", especially searching the Scriptures and receiving the Lord's Supper' (MAJDDJ §4.6). The assurance of salvation does not amount to an assurance of final salvation since it remains possible to fall from grace.

*Phoebe Worrall Palmer*

Phoebe Worrall was born in New York City in 1807 to devout Methodist parents, who nurtured her in the Christian faith through prayer, Bible study, and twice-daily family worship. From childhood, Phoebe desired to experience the emotional and datable conversion attested by others, but her spiritual longing would persist until 1837, ten years after her marriage to the Methodist physician Walter Clarke Palmer. On July 26, what she subsequently would describe as the 'day of days', she perceived that the Holy Spirit was leading her into an absolute and unconditional covenant with God.

Motivated out of heartfelt love for God and the aspiration to promote holiness, Phoebe held weekly prayer meetings for women – a practice that soon spread beyond her home and eventually permitted men. A powerful public speaker and preacher, she appealed for her hearers to place everything upon God's altar that they might become perfect in love. Teaching that holiness necessarily issued forth in service to society and neighbour, Phoebe was an example by her support of the temperance movement and the abolition of slavery, and by her involvement with the Methodist Ladies' Home Missionary Society. She is credited with being a founding director of the Five Points Mission in the slums of Lower Manhattan.

Several publications bear her name, among them: *The Way of Holiness* (1843, which went through multiple printings), *Entire Devotion to God* (1845), and *Faith and its Effects* (1848). She was a regular contributor to *Guide to Holiness*, and at the end of her life was the publication's editor. Because of her life example and her literary contributions, Phoebe is often described as the 'mother of the holiness movement'. Phoebe Palmer died in New York City on 2 November 1874. She continued to hold Tuesday prayer meetings right up to the time of her death.

*Blessed Frédéric Ozanam*

Blessed Frédéric Ozanam combined his family life and professional life with a deep love for the poor and a dedication to relieving their suffering. His example has inspired many men and women within the Society of St Vincent de Paul throughout the world to be active in the care of the needy. The Society is well known and respected for its practical spirituality and ministry.

Born in Milan in 1813 and brought up in Lyon, Frédéric became a lawyer. He contributed to French Catholic intellectual life through his writings and association with leaders of the neo-Catholic movement of the early nineteenth century such as François-René de Chateaubriand, Jean-Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, and Charles René de Montalembert. He was also deeply involved in a discussion group with students, which often focused on the social teaching of the Gospel.

It was in this latter context that one of his adversaries pressed him regarding his Church's engagement with the poor of Paris. Stung by this challenge, Frédéric and a

friend began to visit the tenements of Paris. Moved with compassion for the destitute they found there, in May 1833 Frédéric founded the Society of St Vincent de Paul. This association of laymen served those in need, inspired by the example of St Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) and under the influence of Sister (now Blessed) Rosalie Rendu, Daughter of Charity, who was prominent in her service of the poor in the slums of Paris. During a cholera epidemic, his newly founded society assisted the sick and became living examples of Christian faith in action in the 12<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris.

Ozanam combined the intellectual and academic life of the university with his service of the poor and destitute. He died from consumption at the age of forty in 1853. Under his inspiration, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society has grown and is now present in countless parishes in many different countries. The practical spirituality of this organisation has helped many Catholic lay people to find a life of holiness serving the needs of those less fortunate than themselves.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### God's Holy People: The Saints Below

93. The life of holiness for the Christian is fundamentally a walking with the risen Christ. In Luke's Gospel, the first encounter with Jesus after the resurrection takes place on a road – where bewilderment, anxiety, and doubt are transformed on recognising Jesus' presence (Luke 24.13-35). Through conversations about the scriptures, and through fellowship and the breaking of bread, Cleopas and his companion meet their risen Lord, their hearts 'burning within them'. It is this encounter that turns them around on their road to go back to the disciples in Jerusalem. Here they share the good news of Jesus' resurrection and abiding presence, and move the apostolic household another step along the road of mission in and to the world. It is this same journey into holiness and mission to which this chapter now turns.

#### The Church: A Holy People

94. Catholics and Methodists affirm the social nature of holy living. 'Being a Christian has necessarily both a personal and a communal aspect. It is a vital relationship to God in and through Jesus Christ in which faith, conversion of life, and membership in the Church are essential. Individual believers are joined in a family of disciples, so that belonging to Christ means also belonging to the Church which is his body' (Nairobi §11). It is this belonging together as Christ's body that characterises the communal practice of holy living for Methodists and Catholics. We are called to be holy together, as Church.

95. Previous reports from this Commission reveal a substantial common understanding of the nature of the Church despite some obvious differences in our respective ecclesial practices. A shared conviction that the Church is essentially missionary, and a common commitment to the life of grace and holiness as socially embodied, are key beliefs: 'both Catholic and Methodist churches are now concerned with structures *and* with holiness and mission, and indeed with the relationship among them. We agree that the Church's structures must effectively serve both the holiness of its members and the mission of the Church' (Seoul §101; cf. CLP §4.7.10).

96. The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage, and so has the quality of both a present reality through the presence of the risen Jesus, who

walks with us, and of a promise of holiness towards which disciples travel, step by step. The Church on its pilgrim way is still possessed of the sins and failings of its members, yet unmistakably oriented towards its future fulfilment in God. It is in this sense that Catholics and Methodists confess together, in the words of the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, their belief in the church as holy.

97. The eschatological orientation of ecclesial life gives a theological context in which to locate and resolve some historically divisive issues, such as whether the Church itself is sinful. Catholics emphasise that the Church as an eschatologically present reality in the world is without sin, even though its individual members may be sinful. The Church is *sancta simul et semper purificanda* – 'at the same time holy and always in need of being purified' and so 'always follows the way of penance and renewal' (LG §8). The eschatological reality of the Church in Christ, however, does not find sinless expression in the fallen world, where church members, along with some church processes, bear the marks and weakness of sin.

98. Methodists, whilst also affirming the holiness of the Church, emphasise that ecclesial structures can themselves be affected by sin. The Methodist reluctance to claim that the Church is sinless reflects a sensitivity to the risks in such a proposition, which can lead to a failure to repent and reform when sin occurs in the Church. Holiness can never simply be reduced to a possession or an unquestioned characteristic of the Church, but must always be understood as God's action and free gift.

99. These contrasting emphases are not mutually exclusive, though they have implications for the way that Methodists and Catholics respectively speak of the Church, its institutional forms, and the possibility and limitations of authoritative discernment. The implications are significant and underlie many persisting differences and divisions among Christians, especially concerning the relationship between the Church 'visible' (its historical, institutional reality) and 'invisible' (its spiritual reality in Christ). Although Catholics and Methodists each understand these realities to be related to one another, they differ in the way they describe that relationship. For Methodists, the correlation between the visible and the invisible Church is less theologically precise than it is for Catholics. Whilst such basic ecclesiological differences are not addressed here, they shape the context in which Methodists and Catholics respectively practice holy living.

100. The idea of the pilgrim journey lies at the heart of all aspects of the Church and Christian life. The risen Christ appears on the road from Jerusalem, and in the gathering of disciples in Jerusalem (Lk 24.36ff), but his message is always the same – to move his friends from fear and doubt to faith and joy, so as to send them out into the world as witnesses to his resurrection (Lk 24.48-49). There is a proper sense in which Christian communities can be understood as 'households' of grace and holiness. As such, they are places of sending out and return, equipping the people of God for God's mission in and for the world. Thus, mission and service are characteristic of the call to holiness.

101. The Church, as the household of grace always preparing to set out on the road, is holy in that it communicates assuredly the blessings and graces of Christ's paschal mystery. This common belief in the Church as holy should never mask the realities of the Church as the home of sinners and a place of human brokenness or, to

use the words of Pope Francis, as a ‘field hospital’.<sup>17</sup> For the Christian community, holiness is lived through the practices of love despite, and in, our woundedness. As a people shaped by the Lord’s Prayer, Methodists and Catholics together know themselves to be a people totally dependent on God, the Father, who provides for all the needs of his children, and a forgiven people called to forgive and embody God’s loving plan for a broken world. The holiness of the Church is not the product of Christian endeavour, but rather a free gift of God, which calls for gratitude, humility, and a desire to share this gift with all.

102. The language of sacrament provides an approach for a shared understanding of the nature of the Church. This language is especially strong for Catholics, for whom ‘the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race’ (LG §1). As the body of Christ, the Church is not simply one means of grace among others, but is the essential means of grace for the world. At the same time, it is not that the Church *is* a sacrament, in the same way as the Eucharist, for example; rather, the Church is *like* a sacrament as a visible, concretely realised, and assured means of grace in the world.

103. Methodists also affirm that the Church is a means of grace. The Church itself, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God, is grace-filled and instrumental in conferring grace (CLP §1.4.1; §3.1.7; §3.2.1; cf. Seoul §102). Again, as the ‘redeemed fellowship’ in Christ, the Church is grace-filled; as the ‘redeeming fellowship’, it is a means of grace (BDUMC/CON 5). Methodists agree with Catholics that the Church is sacramental in character, although they reserve the term ‘sacrament’ to describe Baptism and the Eucharist alone (cf. Seoul §102).

104. Building on this common sense of the Church as the sacramental and missionary means of grace for the world, the sections that follow explore the ecclesial practices of the Church that seek to nurture the holy living and mission of God’s pilgrim people. Beginning with the liturgical celebration of sacraments and rites in our churches, the following sections move on to shared thinking around practices of social justice, ethics, and personal and public devotions before reflecting on our traditions’ approaches to dying and death as the end of the Christian’s pilgrimage on earth.

### **The Household of Grace: Holy Living and the Sacraments**

105. Just as Jesus, the incarnate Word, communicated with people through the senses, so in the Church Christians meet Christ in ways consistent with our human existence as embodied and social beings. The economy of salvation is sacramental in nature; God uses particular sensory experiences (sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste) in order to mediate grace assuredly, inviting men and women into a deepening relationship of communion or fellowship with God and one another, and calling them to holy living. Liturgies and worship practices, and especially the sacraments and preaching, are public ecclesial ways of nurturing holy living in the world.

106. For both Catholics and Methodists, the sacrament of Baptism is ‘a *vocation* – a continuous call into a life of pilgrimage toward the kingdom’ (Durban §68); ‘being

---

17. Pope Francis, in an interview with Antonio Spadaro SJ, August 2013: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html).

baptised is a living, continuous reality' (Durban §67). As a lifelong sacramental gracing of the Christian's journey, Baptism is that participation in Christ that enables our hearts to burn with the Spirit as we hear God's word, and brings us to communion with Christ in the breaking of bread, consecrating us for the holy work of God's mission.

107. Despite certain differences in belief regarding the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Methodists and Catholics affirm together that ongoing participation at the Eucharist renews the faithful for mission and holy living. In the breaking of the bread, Christ is truly present, and believers are sent out on the road to bear new witness to him. The Eucharist is food for the pilgrim journey which transforms disciples more and more into the likeness of God's own Son (cf. Seoul §94). For Catholics, the Eucharist is the 'source and summit of all the Christian life' (SC §7; LG §11). For Methodists, the Lord's Supper is among the chief means of grace.<sup>18</sup>

108. For Catholics, Baptism and Eucharist, along with confirmation, constitute the sacraments of initiation. Methodists regard Baptism as the single sacrament of initiation, but agree that Baptism usually culminates with participation in the Eucharist. Methodists may also have a supplementary rite of confirmation or some other liturgical form of reception into 'full membership' of the Church, which for some Methodists may be like a sacrament in character. Rites of confirmation, for Catholics and for Methodists who practise them, deepen the bonds of relationship that bind persons to the Christian community and strengthen growth in holiness for mission, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Durban §70).

109. Catholics identify four further sacraments: matrimony, holy orders, penance and reconciliation, and the anointing of the sick. Methodists recognise a sacramental character to these rites without naming them as sacraments. Such rites call upon the Lord to confer grace for the holiness of the individual Christian and that of the household of faith. The two principal rites of vocation for adults – marriage and orders – give structure to the household. Prior to each rite there is a strong tradition of discernment, a prayerful questioning: to what is God calling me, and where do I belong within the Christian community? These questions properly belong together. The grace given and the holiness sought in married or ordained life is always rooted in the context of the community of faith, but lived in service to the world beyond. Sacramental grace is always conferred upon the individual, but destined for the gracing of the wider community.

110. In addition to the married and ordained states, many Christians have felt called to holiness in the single life or in various forms of consecrated and community life. Historically, for Catholics, consecrated modes of life have often been inspired by a charismatic founder. In some cases, the emphasis has been a particular approach to prayer. In other cases, the *charism* has been a mode of evangelical life that reinvigorates the spiritual life of the Church. Still more communities were established to respond to particular needs such as poverty, education or health. For Catholics and Methodists alike, community life and emerging forms of consecrated life continue to be discovered and lived with integrity as Christians prayerfully discern how God is calling them to respond to the Gospel and the needs of the world. There is no hierarchy between the

---

18. John Wesley's sermon 'The Means of Grace', §II.1, WJW 1:381.

various states of Christian life: all are called to avenues to, and expressions of, holiness (cf. LG §39).

111. In all forms of life – and often very publicly in ordained ministry and married life – there are tragedies of sin, weakness, and human frailty. The earthly pilgrimage into holiness is marked not only by Christ’s presence but also by weakness and sin. Here, too, the ecclesial celebrations of our communities seek to nurture the holy life. Catholics and Methodists stand together in their commitment to a vision of the Church as a community close to those in want; close particularly to those whose sin, weakness, and marginalisation leaves them in need of compassion, accompaniment, and the binding of wounds. Holiness is not primarily about success in being good, but rather about being open in all the brokenness and giftedness of human life to God’s transforming grace.

112. In response to the reality of sin, weakness, and frailty, Catholics recognise two sacraments of healing: penance and reconciliation (commonly called ‘confession’), and the anointing of the sick. Whilst Methodists do not name such rites as sacraments, they count them among the ‘prudential means of grace’ (Nairobi §13; Brighton §§59-60).

113. Methodists have a long history of the careful and communal examination of conscience: in early Methodism, small groups such as the weekly class meeting provided a forum for such examination. The same desire to engage with the question ‘How is it with your soul?’ and to speak freely about obstacles to holy living can also be recognised in the Catholic instinct towards the confessional and the tradition of a nightly examination of conscience. For Catholics and Methodists, rites of self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation are intended to be core practices of a pilgrim people.

114. In continuation of Jesus’ healing ministry, Christians from earliest times prayed with, laid hands upon, and anointed those amongst them who were ill (Jas 5.14-15). Catholics and Methodists alike have seen caring for the sick as an intrinsic part of holy living, which has included the establishment of health facilities and places for tending to the infirm. In these and other ways, both our traditions find a place for physical frailty within the life of those called to holiness. Indeed, sickness itself can be transformed by grace into a particular form of holy living and service.

115. Whilst participation in these sacraments and rites does not, of itself, necessarily constitute holy living, nevertheless such events are particular and effective moments in the reception of grace strengthening a pilgrim people traversing a difficult terrain. For Methodists and Catholics, the graces conferred in the household of the Church are always oriented to the living of holiness in and for the world, which compels disciples out on to the road to recognise the Lord’s presence there in new and sometimes surprising ways.

### **Shared Practices of Holy Living**

116. The importance of the sacraments and other liturgical celebrations in the life of the Church should not be allowed to eclipse the many other practices of holiness in the world, which also are constituent of holy living. Central to these is the reading and study of the scriptures, in personal as well as communal settings. Sacred scripture is ‘the highest authority in matters of faith’ (*Ut unum sint* §79) and thus a privileged means of encountering the life of God. As we journey in holiness, ‘it is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who opens our minds to understand the Scriptures’ (Seoul §55), firing our hearts anew. For both Catholics and Methodists, public worship necessarily includes the faithful

reading of the scriptures, which is itself a means of grace for nurturing growth in holiness (Rio §107).

117. Both Catholic and Methodist traditions encourage Bible reading and study in small groups as well as regular personal reading of the scriptures. This aspect of holy living has undergone significant renewal among Catholics in the last two generations. At the Second Vatican Council, St Jerome's saying that 'ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ' was invoked in order to encourage 'all the Christian faithful [...] to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (*Phil* 3.8)' (*Dei Verbum* §25). This renewal of scriptural devotion draws our two communions into a deepening relationship, as increasingly Christians are able to read and study the scriptures together.

118. In different ways both Catholics and Methodists have sought to describe the characteristics of personal holiness from a particular reading of the scriptures, notably the Beatitudes and the New Testament Epistles. Thus John Wesley referred to a 'holy disposition' or 'holy tempers' as a way of giving a more detailed and practical account of what holiness looks like in the Christian. A holy 'disposition' or 'temper' is an orientation of the human heart (i.e., the will) towards God, resulting in particular behaviours. Holy tempers are 'stable, orienting dispositions' that stem from the love of God, arising out of grace and human responsibility. Hence, Wesley could speak of 'working out' one's own salvation. Such holy tempers include humility, meekness, and simplicity. In comparison, 'affections' are more 'transient' (Wesley's word), less enduring and habituated, and include the temporary experience of joy, hope, gratitude, fear, holy mourning, and peace. Tempers are foundational and even inform the affections.

119. This Wesleyan language of holy tempers, with its strong emphasis on basic dispositions and habits that shape the affections, has a good deal in common with the Catholic language of virtues. St Gregory of Nyssa makes clear the role of the virtues in the Christian call to holiness: 'The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God'.<sup>19</sup> As with Wesley's 'tempers', the virtues are not themselves acts, but rather orient the whole person to what is good and so shape a person's actions and decisions (cf. CCC §1803). For the Catholic tradition, growth in virtue requires human effort, especially in relation to the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. At the same time, it is the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which originate in God and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that are the foundation of all Christian moral life: 'they are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being' (CCC §1813).

120. The Christian life of holiness is characterised by the joyful proclamation of the risen Christ as he is encountered on the road: 'Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!' (*1 Cor* 9.16; cf. *Rom* 10.14-15). This witness requires a profound engagement with the complexity of the world and the diversity of human cultures. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, giving an account of Christian hope requires all the intelligence and skill that disciples can bring to the task. Methodists and Catholics agree together that Christians witness to the Gospel and evangelise not only, or even primarily,

---

19. St Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, 1.

through their words, but above all by holy living as characterised by personal faithfulness and Gospel-based action in the world.

121. Both Catholics and Methodists have long traditions of witness to the Gospel through active engagement with the world in service to God's reign, and can together speak with a common voice into the places of power and decision-making. Thus, holiness is practical as well as spiritual. Holy living is expressed socially in the pursuit of justice and in acts of mercy. It is, for example: to speak into political debates concerning the environment and how human beings are called to inhabit God's creation; to welcome the stranger, offer sanctuary to the foreigner, protect the vulnerable, and confront human enslavement and trafficking; to challenge unjust social structures and promote the development of the poor by working for improved access to education, healthcare and employment with a just wage; and to eradicate the structural causes of poverty.<sup>20</sup> Such holy living will require personal and corporate divestment of status and privilege in solidarity with those being served, so as to be a 'church that is poor and for the poor', thereby embodying God's compassion and love for the world.

122. Works of holiness in and for the world are deeply rooted in the practice of prayer in all its corporate and personal forms. Many of these are common to the Catholic and Methodist traditions: private and family prayers; the singing of Christian songs and hymns; pilgrimages to holy sites and shrines; quiet days and spiritual retreats. Similarly, both Catholics and Methodists encourage fasting and almsgiving as foundations both for growth in personal holiness and as acts of charity and solidarity with others. In many parts of the world, such holy practices are lived out ecumenically with fellow Christians.

### **Areas for Continuing Dialogue**

123. Whilst there is much that Methodists and Catholics hold in common in terms of holy living in the world, there are also areas of unease and difference. In particular, there are a number of devotional practices traditional in Catholic life that raise questions, and even some alarm, for Methodists. Particular areas of Methodist discomfort relate to the Catholic emphasis on certain bodily gestures, the use and veneration of images, the blessing of inanimate objects, and specific devotions regarding Mary, the saints, the veneration of relics, and adoration of the Eucharist. The particular concern is whether the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ is in danger of being obscured and whether the Gospel is in danger of being compromised by superstition. Whilst some Methodists appreciate the use of Christian images in worship, devotions and education, they also share John Wesley's concern that 'what were at first designed as monuments of edification, became the instruments of superstition'.<sup>21</sup>

---

20. This has been a major emphasis of recent teaching of Pope Francis; cf. 'A Church Seeking Justice: The Challenge of Pope Francis to the Church in Canada', Episcopal Commission for Justice and Peace of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2015) (<http://www.cccb.ca/site/images/stories/pdf/184-902.pdf>).

21. John Wesley, 'The Origin of Image-Worship among Christians', *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., vol. 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984; repr. 1872 ed.), p. 176.

124. Nevertheless, in many parts of the world, Methodists are beginning to rediscover a more sensual or embodied spirituality as a way towards holiness, through the use of candles and religious artefacts in worship, anointing with oil, and devotional practices related to the liturgical year. Such developments not only reflect something of the holistic spiritual sensibilities of contemporary Western culture, but also revive the strong sacramentality of the Wesleyan tradition, and so open ways into a deeper understanding of more especially Catholic devotions.

125. Devotional practices spring from the hearts and life of faithful people in particular places and times, and so necessarily reflect cultural and contextual features. This means that certain devotional practices in one part of the world may seem strange or even alien elsewhere, even to those of the same ecclesial tradition. The ecclesial discernment of what constitutes appropriate devotional practice is a delicate task for both Methodists and Catholics.

126. Characteristic of many traditional Catholic devotions is an instinct for the *embodied* nature of holiness. 'Genuine forms of popular religiosity are incarnate, since they are born of the incarnation of Christian faith in popular culture. For this reason they entail a personal relationship, not with vague spiritual energies or powers, but with God, with Christ, with Mary, with the saints. These devotions are fleshy, they have a face. They are capable of fostering relationships and not just enabling escapism' (*Evangelii Gaudium* §90). Yet the Roman Catholic Church also expresses caution in regard to some devotional practices that have taken exaggerated forms and may be considered false expressions of piety (cf. LG §67).<sup>22</sup> In this task, Catholics can be aided by the observations of their Methodist brothers and sisters.

127. Methodists and Catholics together recognise on the basis of scripture the unique role of Mary as Jesus' Mother and God-bearer (*Theotokos*) (*Matt* 1.18-25; *Lk* 1.26-29), holy exemplar (*Lk* 2.19, 51), advocate for the poor and lowly (*Lk* 1.46-55), and disciple (*Acts* 1.12-14). Catholics also name Mary as intercessor (*Jn* 2.5) and Mother of all Christians (*Jn* 19.26-27). Whereas Methodists have no tradition of Marian devotion, Catholics have a significant tradition of devotions relating to the Mother of Our Lord: Marian prayers and anthems, praying the rosary, feast days, processions, and pilgrimages to sites of Marian apparitions. Many of these Marian devotions raise concerns for Methodists.

128. For Catholics, authentic Marian devotion draws the Christian into a closer relationship with God's incarnation and humanity in Jesus through the mystery of Mary's motherhood by the power of the Spirit. Although Marian devotion as such is not obligatory, whenever Catholics address Mary as 'Mother' or pray to and with her, they are expressing a natural, loving response to the mystery of this faithful woman in whose flesh God becomes incarnate, and in whose maternal love and care all people can trust. Catholics look to Mary as one who knows Jesus in a privileged and unique way; Marian devotions are simply expression of love for her.

129. A staple of Catholic devotional life is the 'Hail Mary' and particularly the rosary. While the origins of the rosary remain obscure, it is clear that, through the middle ages, the development of the 150 Hail Marys arranged in fifteen meditations or mysteries became established as a lay alternative to the monastic recitation of the 150

---

22. See also Directory on Popular Piety in the Liturgy, 2001.

Psalms of the Divine Office: a means to holiness for the vast majority of the faithful who at that time would have been illiterate. These meditations reflect on the incarnation (joyful mysteries), the passion (sorrowful mysteries), and the resurrection (glorious mysteries). In 2002, Pope St John Paul II added five new mysteries (luminous mysteries), focusing on the life and ministry of Jesus. Catholics understand the rosary as ‘a Gospel prayer’ (*Marialis Cultus* §44), and its repeated prayers may be seen as means of entering into contemplation of the incarnation, ministry, suffering, and resurrection of Christ. Through its recitation, the Christian draws closer to Jesus in loving companionship with his Mother, the Mother of all Christians and the exemplary disciple: pondering, as she did, these things in her heart. ‘In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary’s company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of being conformed to him is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship’ (RVM §15). Catholics invite other Christians to recognise the spiritual benefit of praying the rosary to deepen their relationship with Jesus.

130. The Catholic practice of the veneration of relics causes concern for many Methodists. Though less common than it once was, the veneration of relics – often taken from the bodies or personal possessions of saints – is a long-established tradition within Catholicism. Permanent altars in Catholic churches typically include in their structure small relics of a saint related in some way to the community. This custom dates back to the ancient practice of celebrating the Eucharist in the catacombs or in cemeteries, where the tombs of the martyrs and other faithful departed were used as altars, thereby emphasising Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. Praying at the tombs of the saints, and venerating their relics, extends this practice. These affective actions give tangible expression to the real communion that the saints on earth have with the saints in heaven.

131. These devotional practices spring from the natural human desire to visit the graves of those we love, and to remember them by retaining certain of their possessions. Methodists similarly reverence special objects and places including the sites associated with significant figures in the Methodist tradition. Catholics would ask Methodists if they might be more accepting of the practice of venerating relics if understood in humanly affective ways. At the same time, Catholics might appropriately be challenged by the Methodist concerns about the attendant risk of idolatry; for even a very holy thing can become a focus for sinful idolatry. For both Catholics and Methodists, popular devotion to holy relics must always be properly discerned so that it does not detract from the worship of God alone.

### **Holy Dying**

132. Holy living comes to its natural conclusion in death as the end of the pilgrim journey on earth. Catholics and Methodists believe that holy dying is part of holy living, and that the people of God witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying. Edifying accounts of holy dying have inspired and encouraged the faithful in every generation as they contemplated the prospect of their own death. The possibility of seeking a ‘good death’ in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life is a powerful witness to the Gospel in the face of contemporary social trends where the end of life is regarded as a negative experience to be hastened.

133. In the Catholic tradition, a ‘good death’ has been a consistent theme for corporate and private prayer. At the end of life, the prayers and rites of the Church support holy living in the particular form of holy dying. Through repentance and the confession of sins in the sacrament of reconciliation, and in the anointing of the sacrament of healing, the dying person is strengthened to undertake his or her final journey. In these special circumstances, the dying person receives the Eucharist as ‘food for the journey’ (*viaticum*). The passing from this life through death is thus a profound moment of grace. Such a reverence for the end of life and the desire to enable holy dying continues to find expression today in the hospice movement advocated by Catholics and other Christians.

134. In a similar way, early Methodists believed that holy living prepared a person for the experience of holy dying, with a ‘good death’ regarded as a powerful and exemplary witness to Christ. Thus inspirational accounts of holy dying were often published in Methodist literature. Dying was viewed as an opportunity for further growth in grace, and so was often accompanied at the bedside by prayer, the singing of hymns, the reading of scripture, and sharing in the Lord’s Supper. Today, Methodists continue to follow these and similar rites and practices with the dying and at the time of death. Some liturgical resources draw upon prayers from the Catholic tradition, such as ‘Go forth, Christian soul’ (*Proficiscere*) (e.g., UMBW, p. 167; MWB, p. 431).

135. Methodists and Catholics share an understanding of dying as a graced experience, even in the face of suffering and loss. Therefore, holy dying is not simply a private affair or something exclusively for a spiritual elite. On the contrary, belief in holy dying informs Catholics and Methodists in their contribution to the spheres of public policy making and social and medical care, where the call to holiness finds expression in respecting the dignity of the dying and those close to them, and in presenting a vision of the end of life as a place of love, patience, care, and hope. At a time when, increasingly, dying is seen as ‘a waste of time’, and moves are being made towards the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide, Methodists and Catholics can speak together to political authorities to challenge some secular approaches to the end of life which demean the dying.

### **On the Road to Jerusalem — and Beyond**

136. This chapter has investigated the ways in which Catholic and Methodist churches enable and accompany God’s pilgrim people in their growth in holiness. Implicit in the living of holiness – through the encounter with the risen Christ in scripture and sacraments, in prayer and action – is a call to life with God in beatitude. The journey of the Christian is a journey into the heart of the Trinity, into the perfect love which is the beginning and end of holiness. These reflections on holy living by pilgrims on ‘the way’ lead to a consideration of the ‘saints above’ and the final goal of holy living.

#### *Saint Josephine Bakhita*

Josephine Bakhita (a name which means ‘fortunate’) was canonised in 2000 and is recognised as a saint because of her holiness and the way in which she overcame unspeakable sufferings, discovered human freedom, and came to trust and profess faith in her Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Born in the region of Darfur in southern Sudan in 1869, Bakhita was kidnapped as a young girl and sold into slavery in the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum. Her owners treated her cruelly and she bore the physical scars of this suffering for the remainder of her life. Eventually she was bought by the Italian consul Callisto Legnani, who treated her well and showed her respect through small gestures of kindness. When Legnani had to return to Italy for political reasons, Bakhita obtained permission to travel with his family and so began the passage towards freedom. After spending some time with another family, she was entrusted to the Canossian Sisters in Venice. There she came to know about the God she had acknowledged since childhood: 'I remembered how, as a child, when I contemplated the sun, the moon, the stars, and all the beautiful things of nature, I was wondering, "who is the master of it all?" And I felt a keen desire to see Him, know Him, and pay Him homage'.<sup>23</sup>

In 1890, she received baptism and was given the name Josephine. Six years later she entered the convent and spent the rest of her life in prayer, simple work, and welcoming people with kindness and warm hospitality. In spite of sickness and pain, she trusted and prayed 'as the Master desires'. She died in 1947. Catholics recognise her as a Patron for those who are the victims of human trafficking and ask her intercession for freedom and dignity for those who are abused in this way.

*The Reverend Dr Donald Oliver Soper*  
*Baron Soper of Kingsway*

Donald Soper made his mark in the world as a prophet of the soapbox. He preached in the open air weekly, on Wednesdays and Sundays, at Tower Hill and Speakers' Corner in London – a ministry that he continued from 1926 until three weeks before his death in 1998 at the age of 95. He always managed to link profound Christian piety, holiness, and evangelical witness with concern for social justice and service to the poor. He led the West London Mission and its social work ministry for forty-two years.

Donald took the Sermon on the Mount not as a beautiful but impossible piece of idealism, but as a practical programme for living. His faith led him to a ministry which was always spiritually rooted, but to which social and political action was integral. He coined the phrase 'fellowship of controversy', which well describes the way he lived his Christian faith. Donald defended pacifism in an age of war and conflict. Though an outstanding broadcaster, he was banned from the BBC during the Second World War because he refused to soften his pacifist convictions. He was regularly knocked off the wall at Tower Hill because of his views.

As well as being President of the Methodist Conference of Great Britain in 1953, the highest office of that denomination, Soper founded or was active within organisations that reflected the convictions that sprang from his faith. He co-founded the Christian Socialist Movement in 1960, was for a time Chairman of the homelessness charity Shelter, President of the League against Cruel Sports, President of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, and President of the Methodist Peace Fellowship. In 1981, the World Methodist Council presented him with the World Methodist Peace Award.

---

23. Maria Luisa Dagnino, *Bakhita Tells Her Story* (Rome: Casa Generalizia, Canossiane Figlie della Carità, 1993), p. 61.

Despite all this, Donald Soper was content to be known as ‘one of Mr Wesley’s travelling preachers’.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### God’s Holy People: The Saints Above

137. This chapter explores the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life, and to the final consummation of all things in Christ at the end of time. It focuses on the saints in heaven – the ‘saints above’. The culture of contemporary scientific thought makes it difficult for many people to understand the Christian mysteries concerning what follows death. The subject matter of this chapter, therefore, must be approached with humble Christian faith and due reticence, recognising that words, concepts, and images are inadequate to express the mystery of God’s love and life beyond the grave. In the presence of mystery, it is better to say less rather than to attempt to speculate.

138. The richness of God’s revelation in the scriptures provides the foundation for Christian teaching about the resurrection and eternal life. This truth is known both from Jesus’ teaching – ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live’ (*Jn* 11.25) – and the witnesses to the resurrection. St Paul teaches that if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then faith is futile (*1 Cor* 15.20-21). Christians trust that ‘what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is’ (*1 Jn* 3.2). The Christian hope is that ‘we will be with the Lord for ever’ (*1 Thess* 4.17).

139. As friends and followers of Christ, Christians journey together as pilgrims towards the promise of eternal life and fellowship with the saints ‘standing before the throne’ (*Rev* 7.9). Jesus commands his disciples to love God and one another in relationships that begin in this life, but extend beyond death when knowledge and love will be perfected. ‘For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known’ (*1 Cor* 13.12).

140. There are many questions relating to ‘the last things’ which Christians explore because ‘faith seeks understanding’. The Gospels contain many references to the final judgement (cf. *Matt* 25.31-46) and speak of Christ’s return in glory (cf. *Mk* 13.26). In Luke’s Gospel (23.43), Jesus says to the penitent thief on the cross, ‘Today you will be with me in paradise’. This promise raises the question about what happens between a person’s death, and the final judgement and general resurrection. Is there an intermediate state? What does it mean to speak of ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (*Rev* 21.1) when ‘Christ is all and in all’ (*Col* 3.11) and God’s kingdom is fulfilled? What is the relationship between the saints below and the saints above?

141. Catholics and Methodists profess together the ecumenical creeds that affirm the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. This common profession expresses a shared Christian hope, and yet there are differences in theological understanding between our communions, some of which stem from Reformation controversies. Moreover, what a Christian community believes is articulated in the context of particular local cultures, so that a common belief in the resurrection and life after death may yet be expressed in a diversity of liturgical and cultural forms.

### Communion with the Saints Above

142. All the baptized, living and dead, make up the communion of saints. However, Methodists and Catholics recognize within this communion the exemplary presence of divine grace in specific persons whose words and holy living – even to the shedding of their blood for Jesus – testify to the transforming action of the Spirit. This ‘cloud of witnesses’ transcends ecclesiastical divisions (Singapore §66). The saints above, who have passed into the fullness of the mystery of God’s grace, are forever part of the community. Their witness and example from the past continue to be cherished; the saints above are held as instances of Christ’s closest love and as signs of the eventual fulfilment of all God’s promises (Singapore §75). Holy living among the saints below can be inspired by contemplating and meditating upon the witness of these exemplary figures.

143. The communion between the saints below and the saints above is like that of a family, where bonds of love continue to exist between the living and the departed. The dead are still remembered as family members in prayer and on special days as well as at particular places. There is a sense of solidarity with the saints above as faithful Christians who have lived the Gospel and become holy during their lives.

Come let us join our friends above  
that have obtained the prize,  
and on the eagle wings of love  
to joy celestial rise;  
Let all the saints terrestrial sing  
with those to glory gone,  
for all the servants of our King  
in earth and heaven are one.<sup>24</sup>

### Death and the Hope of Resurrection

144. Death brings people to the uttermost limits of human experience, imposing a finality immersed in mystery. Human life is a life unto death. It is precisely in the face of death that the proclamation of the Gospel bursts forth: Jesus Christ has conquered sin and death and offers the promise of salvation, resurrection, and eternal life to all who believe in him (*Jn* 3.16-17). Through Baptism, the faithful share in the death and resurrection of Christ and become his adopted children to ‘walk in newness of life’ (*Rom* 6.3-8) as members of his body, God’s holy people. The assurance of Christ’s triumph over evil and sin inspires the pilgrimage of the Christian who desires to see God face to face and whose life anticipates the final resurrection. Physical death completes the dying with Christ that begins at Baptism and anticipates the fulfilment of the promise of resurrection. Whilst grief and loss naturally surround the end of life, Christians attribute a positive meaning to death: ‘For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain’ (*Phil* 1.21).

145. The rituals of dying are followed by rituals of death. Methodists and Catholics hold in common: prayer with the bereaved, often in the presence of the deceased; a wake or vigil; a funeral, memorial service or Mass; and burial or else cremation followed by the reverent disposal of the ashes. In these rites, the Christian community offers

---

24. Version as first published in *Funeral Hymns* (London: Strahan, 1759), no. 1.

consolation to those who mourn and proclaims its hope of resurrection by reading the scriptures and singing Christian hymns, and by entrusting the deceased to the mercy of God.

146. Christian teaching holds in tension the continuity of personal identity from this world to the next, and the discontinuity between life on earth and in heaven. St Paul expresses the conviction that not even death can separate a person from the love of Jesus Christ (*Rom* 8.38-39). This hope holds for all people. Christian belief affirms that God's creative power will reunite body and soul at the general resurrection after the pattern of Jesus Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 15.49-53).

147. Catholics and Methodists together believe that God wills the salvation of all people, whilst also believing that salvation is attained exclusively through Jesus Christ (*Acts* 4.12). Hope for those who do not come to an explicit saving faith in Jesus Christ rests in a just and merciful God. Catholic teaching affirms that '[t]hose also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience' (LG §16). Methodists have not found it necessary to articulate authoritative teaching concerning the possible salvation of those who do not come to an explicit saving faith in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the Wesleyan theological tradition maintains that there is a basic knowledge of God available to those who have not heard the Gospel of Christ. Such knowledge is itself the result of universal prevenient grace, which is grounded in the atoning work of Christ. When humans respond to God's call to holiness, according to the enlightening knowledge that they have received by grace and through the power of the Holy Spirit, then there are grounds for hoping that this will lead to a saving relationship with God, which is always and necessarily through Jesus Christ.

148. Both Methodists and Catholics affirm their trust in the mercy of God regarding infants and others who die without receiving the sacrament of Baptism, believing that they, too, share in the promise of eternal life. Nevertheless, Catholics and Methodists are encouraged to baptize premature babies and others in danger of death. In cases of emergency, any person may baptize another using water in conjunction with the trinitarian formula. In response to pastoral need, Catholics and Methodists provide funeral rites for stillborn babies, who are commended to God's mercy (cf. UMBW, p. 171; MWB, p. 492). Pastorally, it is often important to offer parents a liturgical rite that enables them to voice their grief for the loss of their stillborn child and to show respect for the child's human dignity. More recently, liturgical rites have also been developed for women and parents who have suffered miscarriages. In tragic circumstances such as these, liturgical rites and pastoral care for the bereaved help acknowledge the reality of death and loss whilst assisting the process of grieving.

### **God's Judgement**

149. The Apostles' Creed affirms that Christ 'will come again to judge the living and the dead'. Though some Christians find this idea of divine judgement unpalatable and prefer to focus exclusively on God's mercy, the fullness of the Gospel challenges believers to hold mercy and justice together. On the Day of Judgement, a person will stand before the holiness of God and the full story of his or her life will be laid bare (*Matt* 12.35-37). The consequences of holy living and the failures of sin will be revealed before the Lord, who commanded his followers to love God and neighbour (*Mk* 12.30-

31), to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and to visit the sick and those in prison (*Matt* 25.31-46). At the same time, God bestows upon each person the gift of freedom so that there is always the possibility of accepting or rejecting God's gracious gift of salvation and the call to holiness.

150. Methodists and Catholics believe that God's particular judgement at the point of death determines a person's final destiny. Although some Methodist Holiness traditions teach and expect perfection in this life, both our traditions accept that many will fail to attain the unqualified holiness required before a person can see God face to face (*Heb* 12.14). When a person dies not having attained such perfection, Methodists and Catholics agree that this will be conferred in the transition to eternal life (JCS, p. 90). The nature of this transition is debated.

151. God's mercy is limitless, but neither Catholics nor Methodists believe in universalism (that all will be saved irrespective of their free will), accepting that a person may choose to sever his or her relationship with God. Catholics and Methodist traditions allow for a range of interpretations concerning what happens at the judgement, and both acknowledge the possibility of everlasting damnation. Likewise, both traditions have described hell in terms of the vivid scriptural image of everlasting fire. However, contemporary accounts of heaven and hell focus on the relationship with God. Like any relationship, a person's relationship with God after Baptism may mature and deepen or else diminish and wither. Hell can then be understood as the death of a relationship with God and thus total alienation from God. Both Catholics and Methodists consider it appropriate to hope that no one will be eternally damned.

152. A significant difference between Methodists and Catholics relates to the question of how unqualified holiness is conferred upon those who have died without having attained it. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory envisages a process of purification following death, in which intermediate state the deceased person is purged of sins and made perfect in holiness through the cleansing effect of God's grace. However, the Reformers rejected this teaching as merely speculative and liable to misuse. Following the lead of John Wesley, who similarly rejected the doctrine of purgatory as interpreted by the Reformers, Methodists have been circumspect in their teaching about this transition. Some Methodists understand perfection to be a gift from God bestowed instantaneously at death whilst others consider growth in holiness to continue in an intermediate state beyond death. Interestingly, Wesley appears to have held this latter view and writes of souls held in Abraham's bosom 'continually ripening for heaven' and states further: 'it is certain, human spirits swiftly increase in knowledge, in holiness, and in happiness, conversing with all the wise and holy souls that lived in all ages and nations from the beginning of the world'.<sup>25</sup>

153. In recent times, Catholic teaching has further refined the doctrine of purgatory. Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 encyclical *The Hope that Saves (Spe salvi)* offers possibilities for developing an ecumenical understanding of purification after death. The encyclical describes the purification of the soul in terms of the dramatic encounter with Christ, before whom all falsehood melts away. There is pain in this encounter, as the sickness of our lives becomes evident to us, but 'it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally

---

25. John Wesley's sermon 'On Faith', §6, WJW 4:191-92.

ourselves and thus totally of God' (*Spe salvi* §47). Seeking to overcome the theological controversy that arose when purgatory was conceived in terms of space and time, the encyclical states that 'we cannot calculate the "duration" of this transforming burning in terms of the chronological measurements of this world. [...] it is heart's time, it is the time of "passage" to communion with God in the Body of Christ' (*Spe salvi* §47). Catholics offer this encyclical to Methodists as a possible way of describing a process of purification and perfection following death. The shared understanding of Catholics and Methodists that the transition from earthly to heavenly life depends on the gracious action of God provides a christological foundation for further dialogue concerning purification after death and the doctrine of purgatory.

### **Prayer for the Departed**

154. Just as Christians pray for one another here on earth, Catholics continue to pray for those still being purified, and particularly their loved ones. That 'all the ties of affection which knit us as one throughout our lives do not unravel with death' encourages Catholics to believe that a spiritual exchange of prayer and its effects is possible between all members of the body of Christ.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, a precedent for this practice can be found in a prayer in the deuterocanonical scriptures for those who have died (*2 Maccabees* 12.44-45; cf. *1 Cor* 3.15). Intercessory prayers are an act of trust in God's merciful power to save through the redeeming work of Christ. Similarly, acts of charity, prayer, the celebration of the Mass for the intention of a loved one, or good works such as almsgiving through God's grace can assist those who have died. Catholics pray for the faithful departed that their sins may be forgiven and that they may be welcomed into heaven: 'Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace.'

155. In rejecting the doctrine of purgatory, the sixteenth-century Reformers similarly rejected the practice of prayer for the departed. The twentieth century, however, witnessed a growing interest in prayer for the departed in response to pastoral needs created by a huge number of distant deaths caused by warfare. As a result, there are indications that Methodists may increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed. Some Methodist liturgical rites acknowledge the place of the faithful departed within the communion of saints. In Eucharistic liturgies, the Sanctus in the prayer of thanksgiving refers to the saints above joining with the saints below in the worship of God. Methodist funeral liturgies sometimes refer to the communion of saints, especially at the commendation of the dead ('Into the glorious company of the saints in light'; UMBW, p. 150). Specific prayers for the departed are often inspired by texts in the Catholic Requiem Mass; for example, 'we pray for those who we love but see no longer' (MWB p. 458) and 'we praise you for the great company of all those who have finished their course in faith and now rest from their labor [...]. Let perpetual light shine upon them' (UMBW, p. 143).

---

26. Cf. *Order of Christian Funerals*, Invitation to Prayer from the Vigil for the Deceased, and CCC §§1475-6.

## The Saints joined in Love and Praise

156. Methodists and Catholics honour the saints above as witnesses to holiness and exemplars of holy living. Some, such as the apostles and martyrs of the early Church, are publicly named and honoured as saints by all Christians. The saints in heaven praise God, while the saints on earth join in their praise through prayer, song and worship, especially in the Eucharist. The saints above encourage the saints below as they continue on their earthly pilgrimage: ‘The saints on earth remain on pilgrimage, journeying towards and praying for an ever fuller expression of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. The saints in heaven are their unseen friends, divided temporarily by death, but united in faith, love, thanksgiving and praise’ (CLP §2.4.13).

157. For Catholics, the saints in heaven are also intercessors because of the bonds of love that exist between all the members of the Church and Christ. The intercession of the saints is a daily occurrence as the saints are mentioned in liturgical prayers. In the words of the Preface of the Mass for the Saints, ‘By their way of life you offer us an example, by communion with them you give us companionship, by their intercession, sure support, so that, encouraged by so great a cloud of witnesses, we may run as victors in the race before us and win with them the imperishable crown of glory’ (RM). As well as soliciting the prayers of those around them, earthly pilgrims can ask their friends in heaven to intercede for them. This strong sense of mutual friendship and support builds up the communion of the Church through reciprocal prayer. All such prayer relies upon the merits gained by the death and resurrection of Christ, the one mediator, which are applied for the benefit of individuals and the community. In Catholic imagination, the earthly and heavenly choirs worship God in unison and pray for one another as friends in Christ.

158. Methodists acknowledge the mysterious solidarity of the saints above and the saints below, which stems from the indissoluble bonds of love and communion that unite them in the body of Christ. At the same time, Methodists have been reluctant to explore in detail the possible implications of that solidarity and mutual encouragement between the saints below and the saints above. They have generally been resistant to the invocation of saints lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised. Article 14 in John Wesley’s abridgement of the Thirty–nine Articles of the Church of England denounces the invocation of saints (among other Catholic practices) as ‘a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of scripture, but repugnant to the Word of God’. On the other hand, Wesley suggests elsewhere that the spirits of the faithful departed may minister alongside the angels to the living: ‘may we not probably suppose that the spirits of the just, though generally lodged in paradise, yet may sometimes, in conjunction with the holy angels, minister to the heirs of salvation?’ He then adds, ‘how much will that add to the happiness of those spirits which are already discharged from the body, that they are permitted to minister to those whom they have left behind!’<sup>27</sup> This suggests that God may commission the departed saints to minister to the living, though the living may not petition the saints for their specific intervention. Further convergence will depend on whether and how Methodists develop the liturgical and practical implications of the solidarity between the saints above and the saints below.

---

27. John Wesley’s sermon ‘On Faith’, §12, WJW 4:197.

159. In this regard, the naming of saints days demonstrates the importance of the saints in Catholic and in certain Methodist liturgical calendars. Some Methodists have found the observance of saints' days and prayerful reflection on the lives of the saints to be helpful as signs of the love of God and the fruits of the Spirit, which inspire growth in holiness.

### **Mary: Life and Sign of Grace and Holiness**

160. Chapter Three considered Mary, the Mother of the Lord, as a woman of prayer (*Acts* 1.14) who finds favour with God (*Lk* 1.30), is the servant of the Lord (*Lk* 1.38), and whose holiness always points towards Christ. Here the dogma of the Assumption of Mary is briefly examined in relation to grace and holiness, recognising that Methodists, in company with others, have reservations about its scriptural foundations.

161. Catholics believe that Mary, at the end of her bodily life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. The feast of the 'falling asleep' of Mary dates from the end of the sixth century. In the East, the feast was known as the 'dormition', which implied her death but did not exclude her being taken into heaven. In the West, the term used was 'assumption', which emphasized her being taken into heaven, but did not exclude the possibility of her dying. This belief is reflected in the theology of the early Church, though the dogma of the Assumption was not formally defined until 1950.

162. It is important to recognise that the 'dogma does not adopt a particular position about how Mary's life ended, nor does it use the language of death or resurrection, but rather focuses on the action of God in her'.<sup>28</sup> At the heart of the dogma is the conviction that at the end of her life Mary would be embraced and brought into the immediate presence of the God who took flesh in her womb. Prepared by grace for her unique role in salvation history, her path to holiness was lived in the intimacy of being Mother to the incarnate Word. Mary already shares fully in the hope of the resurrection, which is the hope of all. Her assumption into heaven is the completion of her redemption, being raised up by Christ and totally dependent on him. Catholics understand Mary to be all holy, *panagia*, thoroughly sanctified and perfected by the gift of the Holy Spirit who overshadows her and fills her life. In this, Mary is an anticipatory sign of what Christians are to become as individuals, but above all as the Holy Church of God. She is a sign and icon of the universal call to holiness (cf. MML §26).

163. Methodists similarly affirm the unique role of Mary in salvation history, as recorded in the scriptures – notably her grace-filled response to God's invitation to carry the incarnate Word in her womb, and her exemplary discipleship in which she urges others also to heed the call to holiness (*Jn* 2.5). Although they find no scriptural foundation for the Catholic dogma of the Assumption, Methodists can affirm its core intention to bear witness to God's saving work in Christ and the final consummation of holy living. By grace, Mary was made perfect in love and holiness through her close relationship with her son. From a Methodist perspective, Mary's life is readily seen to manifest Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Thus, her 'falling asleep' anticipates

---

28. ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, §58.

and testifies to the glorious future of all God's children made possible through the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

164. Where Catholics and Methodists continue to differ, however, concerns the way in which they respectively understand the spiritual and pastoral implications that Mary's unique place within the communion of saints holds for the saints below. In invoking the prayers of the departed saints, Catholics regard the intercession of Mary as particularly effective because of her exalted status within the communion of saints through being 'Mother of God'. Methodists, on the other hand, find no reason to seek the intercession of Mary (or any other departed saint), for all are equally dependent upon Christ for their redemption. Methodists would ask Catholics whether an appeal to the intercession of Mary does not show a lack of confidence in Jesus Christ who lives forever to intercede for us (*Heb* 7.25; cf. *Rom* 8.34). Moreover, appealing to the intercession of Mary encourages an excessive devotion that detracts from the worship due to God alone, despite the theoretical distinctions present in Catholic doctrine. Catholics would ask Methodists whether being faithful to the witness of scripture does not lead to the recognition of Mary's exalted status in the new creation: 'my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant' (*Lk* 1.48). Moreover, scripture itself points to an appropriate devotion to Mary: 'Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed' (*Lk* 1.48). Continuing joint reflection on these questions will lead to greater mutual understanding and, hopefully, to greater convergence between Catholics and Methodists about Mary, the Mother of the Lord, as a sign of grace and holiness.

### **Awaiting the Lord's Return**

165. Christian hope in the resurrection looks to the time when 'death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away' and all things will be made new (*Rev* 21.4-5). The scriptures speak of the end of salvation history in vivid imagery, prominent among which is the idea of 'a new heaven and a new earth' (*Rev* 21.1). In this heavenly state, all the saints will finally come to experience eternal life in the fullest and most immediate communion of love with God, joyfully participating in the 'messianic banquet' (*Is* 25.6; *Matt* 22; *Lk* 14.15; *Rev* 7.16). Whereas 'now we see in a mirror, dimly, then we will see [God] face to face' (*1 Cor* 13.12). Catholics and Methodists believe heaven to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme happiness and bliss.

166. The article of the Apostles' Creed 'I believe in the resurrection of the body' – literally, the resurrection of the flesh – means not only will our immortal soul live on after death, but the 'mortal body' will also experience resurrection. Scriptural images speak of a transformation in which Christ 'will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body' (*Phil* 3.21) and of a 'spiritual body' in which perishable bodies put on imperishability (*1 Cor* 15.44, 49-55). Since Christ assumed all that is human, all that is human will be redeemed. Catholics and Methodists share this common hope and a responsibility to keep the promise of eternal life alive in the hearts of believers and to evangelise the world.

167. United in worship and prayer with the saints above, the saints below await the return of the Lord, as dramatically portrayed in the scriptures (*1 Thess* 4.16-17; *Rev* 21.2), which will bring salvation history to its close. The mission and ministry of the Church will finally be fulfilled when all things are restored in Christ through the power

of the Holy Spirit (*Eph* 1.10). Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses among the saints above, the saints below run with perseverance the race that is set before them, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of their faith (*Heb* 12.1-2). ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!’ (*Rev* 22.20).

### *Heleny Guariba*

Heleny Guariba is one of the ‘disappeared’ from the time of the military dictatorship and the so-called *anos de ferro* (‘iron years’) in Brazil (1964–1985). She was persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and, it seems, executed by the National Intelligence Service. Despite all the suffering she underwent, Heleny remained faithful to her Lord and Saviour and to her understanding of God’s kingdom of justice and peace.

A Methodist, Heleny was a leader of her church youth movement and was dedicated to religious education particularly through her contributions to the magazine *Cruz de Malta*. These pedagogical writings always emphasised ecumenism, social issues, and the courage Christians required to witness in contemporary Brazil. On the strength of these articles, Heleny was dismissed from her job with the church as the regime’s grip tightened.

However, Heleny’s resistance continued. She was part of an underground network that provided safe passage for those under suspicion and in danger of arrest. One person she helped was Frei Beto, a Dominican friar and theologian. A year after his escape, the pair met again, this time in prison. Frei Beto wrote of her, ‘Even in prison your joy was contagious. I recall the scene of the last time we met: it was your birthday, and your children brought a cake with candles and a small present. When you untied the pink silk ribbon and unwrapped the paper, you saw the present and started to find it hilarious: how paradoxical after all the torture you had undergone. You started showing everybody and kissed your children who laughed with you [...] soon after, you were released from prison. Even under torture nothing was proven against you! In July 1971, the news circulated about your disappearance. The only thing that is known is that you were taken by the national security service and died under torture. I heard that your body was thrown into the sea. I don’t know, I can’t accept it. The only thing that I know is that now Iemanjá (Queen of the seas) has for me a joyful face.’<sup>29</sup>

### *Christian de Chergé*

Christian de Chergé (1937–1996) was born in France, but spent part of his childhood in Algeria. He returned there for a time as a seminarian, and during that time, a Muslim friend saved his life during a military skirmish; the next day the friend was murdered for protecting Christian. Years later, Christian wrote, ‘in the blood of this friend, I came to know that my call to follow Christ would have to be lived out, sooner or later, in the very country in which I received the token of the greatest love of all.’<sup>30</sup>

Eventually, Christian became a Trappist monk and, in time, prior of Notre Dame de l’Atlas Monastery, located in Tibhirine, Algeria. He and his community lived their monastic observance with dedication and in peace, having built strong relations

---

29. Frei Beto, *O Batismo de Sangue*, 6th ed. (1983), pp. 51-52.

30. Christian Salenson, *Christian de Chergé: A Theology of Hope*, trans. Nada Conic (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 2012), p. 24.

with their Muslim neighbours. Christian occasionally gathered to pray with one of those neighbours, Mohammed, without losing sight of the significant differences between Muslims and Christians. They referred to their prayer as ‘digging a well together’. One day Christian asked Mohammed: ‘at the bottom of our well, what will we find? Muslim water or Christian water?’ Mohammed replied: ‘You know very well that at the bottom of that well, what we’ll find is God’s water.’<sup>31</sup>

In 1993, unrest broke out between rebel forces and the Algerian government. All foreigners were warned to leave the country. The small community of monks decided to stay, eschewing government protection, in solidarity with their Muslim neighbours.

On 27 March 1996, seven of the monks were kidnapped by rebels belonging to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). Weeks later, they were found dead, and Christian was among them.

Two years before the kidnapping, and aware of the danger his community was in, Christian sent a letter to his family in France to be opened in the event of his death. The letter concludes with this prayer for his would-be executioner:

And also you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what you were doing: Yes, I want this thank you and this goodbye to be an ‘A-Dieu’ for you, too, because in God’s face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both. Amen! Inch’Allah!<sup>32</sup>

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Growing in Holiness Together: Openings for Common Witness, Devotion and Service

#### How Far have Catholics and Methodists travelled on their Shared Pilgrim Journey?

168. In the introduction to this report (§5), it was noted that ‘the call to holiness is a call to unity in the Church’, and that ‘holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves pursuit of the other’. The relationship between holiness and unity speaks directly to why our two world communions have entered into dialogue in the first place, and why the present topic has been addressed. Like Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus and then back to Jerusalem, Catholics and Methodists are communities of disciples who have encountered the risen Lord and been transformed by the encounter. We are travelling on the same road, seeking faithfully to follow the same Lord, desiring to be led by the same Spirit, and yearning to find our identity as children of the same Father. The triune God who calls us to holiness also calls us to unity.

169. It is now fifty years since the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church entered into dialogue, and that dialogue has been tremendously fruitful. In the ten rounds of this dialogue, commission members have repeatedly reached more convergences than were anticipated. The consensus between Catholics and Methodists concerning the trinitarian and christological foundations of faith, and

---

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

convergence on many other aspects, is a tangible sign that the Holy Spirit has been fruitfully at work in our churches, and in our dialogue and efforts at reconciliation. When we consider all that the Spirit of God has achieved through fifty years of dialogue and growing relations, there is much cause for rejoicing.

170. The Commission's experience in the current round of dialogue has been deeply encouraging. Mindful that the call to holiness is a universal and corporate summons, we have set out to address the ways our communities understand and seek holiness, naming common ground and addressing differences. We have found common ground in our understanding of the human person, created by and for God; in our understanding of divine grace at work, enabling, justifying, and sanctifying stumbling human beings, and creating sons and daughters of God capable of witnessing to and sharing in God's saving work for the world; in the ways in which human beings are called to live holy lives in the Church and in the world; and in a shared hope for life with God after death. We have reflected upon continuing differences, and that conversation has led us to a deeper understanding of each other. When we have encountered differences which keep us from being in full communion, we have not experienced them as dead ends, but as areas where further work is necessary, and where the Spirit of God will need to show us a way forward in God's time.

171. In the work of dialogue, the identification of common ground and exploration of divergences bring different tasks to our respective communions as dialogue partners on the road to the full visible unity of the Church. What are our next steps? Where is the Holy Spirit leading us next? At the end of the very first round of Catholic–Methodist dialogue, the Denver report (1971) spoke of its goal in terms of the 'education of our Churches at lay, ministerial and local levels, for the overcoming of prejudices and misunderstandings' (§121); closer communication and 'the stimulating of good relations, of dialogue and cooperation at national and local level' (§122); and of spiritual renewal, spiritual sharing (§129) and joint witness to Christian values (§131). In 1986, the Nairobi report identified a more comprehensive goal: 'full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life' (§20). That goal has been reiterated in subsequent reports and remains the objective of Catholic–Methodist dialogue.

172. Methodists and Catholics have come to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and our churches as being in a relationship of real but incomplete or imperfect communion. For those engaged in dialogue over these past fifty years, that sense of a real communion, which binds us in God's love, has become increasingly strong and tangible.

173. The Commission is mindful that our dialogue reports are not well known among Catholics and Methodists, and that the consensus and convergences these texts have registered have not had the transformative effect on our relations for which we had hoped. Convergence statements such as these hold rich potential but, in the end, they are only documents until the insights and understandings they carry are received. This leaves us with both a sense of urgency and an abiding hope that our and other efforts at reconciliation between divided Christians will contribute to fruitful engagement in our churches.

174. The members of the Commission come from eleven different countries, and we have also met on four different continents in the current round of dialogue. This has provided frequent reminders that relations between Methodists and Catholics differ greatly in different parts of the world. In some regions, relations are cordial; in others,

they are marked by suspicion. In some places, it is commonplace for Catholics and Methodists, often joined by Christians of other communities, to work together for justice or in charitable outreach; in other areas, the prospect of cooperation seems difficult and problematic. In some countries, gathering together for prayer and giving common witness to Christian faith happens frequently and with ease, whereas in other countries, such gatherings are rare. There are historical, social, and ecclesiastical reasons that help to explain the state of Catholic–Methodist relations in different parts of the world. But it is also the Commission’s conviction, out of the experience of dialogue and encounter with each other, that those relations could be strengthened in every part of the world; that none embodies a full realization of what is possible; and that God wills that Catholics and Methodists learn to walk more closely together.

175. In 1952, shortly after the World Council of Churches was formed, the Lund Principle was formulated, inviting churches to ask themselves ‘whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately’. Methodists have turned to the Lund Principle in numerous ecumenical engagements over the past decades. A Catholic version of the Lund Principle is articulated in the 1993 Ecumenical Directory, which notes that the contribution that Christians can make in responding to the world’s needs ‘will be more effective when they make it together, and when they are seen to be united in making it. Hence they will want to do everything together that is allowed by their faith’ (§162). Unfortunately, the history of ecumenism suggests that it is not easy to change the way churches do things, and that there is a resistance to engage deeply in shared witness and mission; churches tend to choose to do things separately except where extraordinary circumstances move them to act together.

176. In approaching this final chapter, readers are invited to ponder the relationship between holiness and unity, and to make a connection between the pursuit of holiness and the taking of steps towards reconciliation between our two communions based on our shared understanding of what binds us together. Each area where there is consensus in our understanding of the faith can translate into aspects of common witness, joint prayer, and a deeper sharing in the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church. Each convergence can be a stimulus for common study and ongoing dialogue. Each step towards a greater communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life is a valuable step.

177. At the opening of the Methodist Ecumenical Office in Rome on 6 April 2016, Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, commented on the relationship between various steps moving Catholics and Methodists towards reconciliation: ‘We say that a principal duty of ecumenism is to join together in common witness and mission. But how can we engage in common witness unless we know we are inspired by a common love, flowing from the Trinity? And how can we locate that common love unless we pray together and speak with each other? Finally, as two worldwide communions, how can we hope to find one another in common prayer before the Lord and in holy conversation unless we create places to encounter each other and draw our structures, our mission, indeed our ecclesial lives into a closer relationship with each other?’

178. Ecumenical relations are not moved forward by compromise or negotiation. Rather, they are moved forward when encounter with the other leads to a recognition that our brothers and sisters in Christ of another Christian community hold much in

common with us; that each of our communities is enriched when open to receiving gifts from the other; and when that which we hold in common is given lived expression in our churches through common prayer, ecumenical friendship, joint mission, and common witness. To engage in this work of reconciliation is an intrinsic part of the path to holiness willed by the all-holy God. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who is leading us on this journey, it is the Risen Lord who is accompanying us as we walk together.

179. In this final chapter, the Commission offers a summary, in the form of creedal statements based on previous chapters, of what Catholics and Methodists are able to say together. Where divergences have been registered, these will also be noted. Then we will raise a series of questions in terms of what might be able to flow from both common statements and divergences, mindful that these questions need to be answered not principally on the level of the universal Church, but in each country, region and congregation or parish where Methodists and Catholics live side by side. It is our hope that these creedal summaries and questions might be studied in congregations and schools, in families and among groups of clergy, in areas where Methodist–Catholic relations are strong, and in areas where they are minimal. It is our hope that these resources are approached with an eye to the profound relationship between the search for unity and the pursuit of holiness. All references in the section below are to paragraphs in this document, except where otherwise noted.

### **Revisiting Chapter One: The Human Person**

180. Methodists and Catholics have come to recognize that in very significant ways they hold a common understanding of the human person. Together, we believe that:

- human beings are a mystery to themselves, a mystery that is to be lived in relationship with God, with others, and with creation (14, cf. 17-22);
- humans are created by and for God (16), in the image of God (15), to be addressed by God and to hear and receive God’s word (17);
- he origin and destiny of the human person are connected to the identity of God (16); we are created with a desire that can only be fulfilled by communion with God (14);
- our relationship with God is the one absolute dimension from which every other dimension takes its point of reference (20);
- in our social nature we reflect the triune God in whose image we are created (19); as social beings, we are created for relationship with family, community, and society; life in community, which calls forth interpersonal self-giving, is integral to holy living (18-19);
- in the encounter with the other as person, humans find themselves before an image that has not been fashioned by human hands (19); we thus have an obligation to respect and care for the other, and our identity and fulfilment is intrinsically linked to others;
- human beings are created by God in such a way that they need the world that surrounds them for their own subsistence; furthermore, the world is filled with God’s grace, and it is part of the human vocation to care for and nurture creation (20-22);
- human beings were made to live in harmony with God, creation, and neighbour (20), and doing so carries both gifts and responsibilities which are an essential part of holy living;

- human beings are a mysterious unity, constituted of body and soul (23-24); being embodied, humans are finite and mortal; being ensouled, we transcend the world and are called to immortality (23-24);
- the human body was created good, is essential to personal identity, and is called to final transformation in the resurrection, but is currently weak, fallen, and in need of transformation (24-25);
- human beings have been created with freedom, making us capable of love, communion, and the shaping of our identity by the choices we make; like all aspects of human existence, our freedom is finite and limited (26);
- holiness requires human beings to recognize and respect the limits of our creaturely existence, and in our failure to do so, we have fallen; in our sin, we have become estranged from God, from others, and from the created world (27-29); all of history is shaped both by sin and by God's grace;
- while sin can disfigure or deform God's image in the human being, it cannot destroy that image (30);
- God does not want anyone to be lost; in God's great mercy, God does not abandon his fallen creatures but continues to overcome human estrangement by acting in our history and calling us into relationship (31-33).

181. Catholics and Methodists agree that the full mystery of the human person is revealed in Jesus Christ:

- just as the human being bears the image of the first Adam, so too are we made to bear the image of Jesus Christ, in the sharing of his risen body; the created image (*imago Dei*) marred by sin is made a new creation in the image of Christ (*imago Christi*) by the power of the Holy Spirit (34);
- the Christian vocation to holiness is to be conformed to Christ and clothed with his image (34);
- all has been created through Christ, and all is directed towards him; Christ is the one who gives the image of God in the human its true and definitive form; he is the full measure of human being, and the final goal of human existence (8, 36, 39);
- the plan of God, revealed initially in the gift of creation, is confirmed and re-created in the mysteries of the incarnation and redemption (15);
- salvation is above all liberation from sin and reconciliation to God in Christ (36);
- holy living begins with the recognition of many gifts received; it consists in living into one's baptismal identity in the ordinary tasks of daily affairs; in so doing, Christians contribute to the transformation of the world, the re-creation of the universe (37, 41);
- in Christ, human freedom attains its goal, receptivity to the Father and openness towards all people in an attitude of service, mercy and love (40);
- the glory of God is the human person fully alive, and the life of the human person is the vision of God; being conformed to Christ in holiness does not diminish the human, but humanizes us (42).

182. Questions for local or regional discussion:

How might Catholics and Methodists support each other in living the Christian vocation to holiness by being more deeply conformed to Christ? How might we learn from each other as we strive to live into our baptismal identity?

Mindful of our common understanding that human beings are created by and for God, to be addressed by God and to hear and receive God's word, what are some ways that we could creatively gather in prayer or come together to study the word of God?

What are some ways in your region where human dignity is challenged or threatened? What are some of the key ethical questions being grappled with in your society? Given that in significant ways Methodists and Catholics hold a common understanding of the human person, what can you do together in defence of the dignity and integrity of the human person?

In light of our shared recognition that it is part of the human vocation to care for and nurture creation, and that we are called to live in harmony with the natural world, how might we pool our energies at the service of the environment and the safeguarding of the earth and its creatures?

We proclaim together that God does not want anyone to be lost and does not abandon us. How might we work together to overcome human estrangement by serving the marginalised and those in greatest need in our midst?

How might you structure a local or regional dialogue between Methodists and Catholics? Would a sharing of ways in which our respective communities understand and seek holiness be a good first topic for that discussion?

## **Revisiting Chapter Two: The Grace of God**

183. Catholics and Methodists share a common understanding of God's grace. Together, we believe:

- grace is God's work of re-creating humankind, overcoming humankind's estrangement from God as a result of sin and leading us to salvation (45);
- grace is the saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ, in his incarnation, and in the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection; in the mystery of salvation, the grace of Jesus Christ transforms human nature and its condition, giving us a new way of living in the world, reconciled to God and to one another, patterned after his way of holy living (43, 46-47);
- the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is 'the Spirit of grace' (Heb 10.29), was bestowed upon the early Church at Pentecost, and continues to be present and active in the Church throughout the ages; the Spirit seeks us out in our sinfulness, and makes the grace of Christ present in our lives; the gifts of the Holy Spirit are always a gift of grace in our lives (49-52, cf. 14);
- the grace that enables, the grace that justifies, and the grace that sanctifies are intertwined aspects of God's saving love and call to holiness (68);
- enabling or 'prevenient' grace, universally offered to human beings, is at work even before individuals come to faith, preparing people to receive and respond to salvation offered us through Jesus Christ. It is through God's initiative that we are saved, and we are saved solely as a result of God's mercy. Since human beings are never without enabling grace, there can be no radical separation of 'nature' and 'grace' (53-54);
- enabling grace, which precedes and facilitates the human response to God's initiative in salvation, does not remove the need for a free human response, but we are not saved by our response. Catholics and Methodists refer to this first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit in terms of repentance or conversion (53, 55-56);

- by grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit’; the grace of faith which justifies is never merited, but ‘renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works’ (59, citing JDDJ §15);
- while not contributing to justification, good works of mercy and piety in the Christian life are its inevitable consequence and an obligation of holy living (61, 79);
- justification is not an isolated event in the Christian life but one aspect of a process of sanctification or being made holy through a deepening relationship with Christ in his body, the Church’ (64, citing Honolulu §13). Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift or disposition such that the Christian grows in the image of Christ and is drawn more deeply into life with the triune God (64-65);
- by God’s grace, all in the Church are called to holiness, and that holiness is both personal and communal (68-70; cf. 94);
- sanctifying grace leads to perfect love, as Christians grow in grace and devote themselves to the love of God and neighbour; because there is no limit to the power of God’s grace, Catholics and Methodists affirm that perfection in love is possible before death (73-77);
- the experience of grace and holiness is always oriented towards the strengthening of the Church and bringing all things into the new creation in Christ; as God’s chosen agent and instrument of the call to holiness, the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of the world; elements of grace and holiness exist beyond the visible Church, but are always directed towards incorporation into Christ (71-72, cf. 10);
- being sure of God’s grace – what Hebrews 11.1 calls ‘the assurance of things hoped for’ – stems from the trustworthiness of God’s promises and is confirmed by the interior work of the Holy Spirit (89; cf. Honolulu §24). Catholics and Methodists ‘confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God’ (88, citing JDDJ §34); this is not understood as the certainty of one’s personal salvation, but as the reliability of a relationship which is founded in God’s love (92).

184. Methodists and Catholics have not yet reached full agreement regarding God’s grace. Regarding the possibility of reaching a state of perfect love in this life, Methodists are much more hopeful than Catholics (77). The text returns to this subject in Chapter 4 when it treats the subject of purgatory. The area where continuing disagreement is most evident concerns good works and merit (80-86). Catholics and Methodists jointly affirm that individuals can freely cooperate with the work of grace in such a way that they are fully responsible for their actions; but ‘justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace’ (80, citing JDDJ §38). Where Catholics and Methodists differ concerns the possibility that the merit arising from the good works of Christians might aid the sanctification of others. For Catholics, the bonds of love between Christians make possible a ‘wonderful exchange’ whereby ‘the holiness of one profits others’ (83, citing CCC §1475). Methodists are uncomfortable with any idea that might undermine the sufficiency of Christ’s saving death and that risks creating a mechanistic and transactional view of such works (84). Further reflection on the implications of the bonds of love within the communion of saints is invited (86).

185. Questions for local or regional discussion:

Catholics and Methodists share a common understanding of grace as the saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ and as God's work of recreating humankind, giving us a new way of living in the world. In your culture and region, what makes it difficult to believe in God's grace, and what can we do together to give common witness to what God is doing for us in Christ and in the Holy Spirit?

How does our common understanding of God's grace help us to regard each other as brothers and sisters in Christ and to see our churches as being in a relationship of real but imperfect communion? How does it move us towards the goal of full communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life?

Catholics and Methodists confess together that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God, and on the work of God's enabling, justifying, and sanctifying grace in our lives. Mindful of Jesus' desire that his disciples be one, how might our shared understanding of God's grace and faithfulness translate into common worship?

The *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ), signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (1999) and affirmed by the World Methodist Council (2006), brought reconciliation on a major controversy of the Reformation. What are appropriate contexts in your region for studying the JDDJ and the pastoral implications of this agreement?

Methodists and Catholics agree that the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of the world. What are major areas of injustice in your region, and where is reconciliation needed in your society? How can we act together as artisans of reconciliation and agents of justice?

Acknowledging that elements of grace and holiness exist beyond the visible Church as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, are there ways in which Catholics and Methodists, working with other Christian communities, can strengthen relations and enter into dialogue with adherents of other religious traditions?

### **Revisiting Chapter Three: The Saints Below**

186. Methodists and Catholics agree that the Christian life of holiness involves walking with the risen Christ. Faith, conversion of life, and membership in the Church are essential (93-94). Together, we believe that:

- individual believers are joined in a family of disciples, so that belonging to Christ means also belonging to the Church which is his body'; we are called to be holy together, as the Church (94, citing Nairobi §11);
- the Church's structures must effectively serve both the holiness of its members and the mission of the Church' (95, citing Seoul §101);
- the risen Christ summons his disciples from fear and doubt to faith and joy, so as to send them out as witnesses to the world; the Church is holy in that it communicates assuredly the blessings and graces of Christ's paschal mystery (100-101);
- the Church equips the people of God for God's mission in and for the world; mission and service are characteristic of the call to holiness (100);
- the holiness of the Church is that of a people on the pilgrim way; it is marked by the sins of its members and is a place of human brokenness; it is a forgiven people called to forgive and embody God's loving plan for a broken world; holiness is not primarily about success in being good, but rather about being open in all the brokenness and giftedness of our lives to God's transforming grace (96, 101, 111);

- Christian communities are called to be ‘households’ of grace and holiness; the Church is sacramental in character; as sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom of God, it is grace-filled and instrumental in conferring grace (100, 102-103);
- the economy of salvation is sacramental in nature; liturgies and worship practices, and especially the sacraments and preaching, are public ecclesial ways of nurturing holy living in the world (105);
- baptism is a lifelong sacramental gracing of the Christian’s journey, immersing us in the paschal mystery and consecrating us for the holy work of God’s mission (106);
- ongoing participation at the Eucharist renews the faithful for mission and holy living, transforming disciples more and more into the likeness Christ; in the breaking of the bread, Christ is truly present, and those who receive him are sent out into the world to bear new witness to him (107);
- the two principal rites of vocation for adults – marriage and orders – give grace to the individual or couple, so that the wider community might grow in grace; there is no hierarchy to the various states of Christian life, and all can be avenues to, and expressions of, holiness; community life and emerging forms of consecrated life continue to be discovered and lived with integrity as Christians prayerfully discern how God is calling them to respond to the Gospel and the needs of the world (109-110);
- the Church is called to be a community close to those in need, and close particularly to those whose sin, weakness, and marginalisation leaves them in need of deep compassion, accompaniment, and the binding of wounds (111);
- rituals of self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation are intended to be staple practices of a pilgrim people (113);
- caring for the sick is an intrinsic part of holy living; and sickness itself can be transformed by grace into a particular form of holy living and service (114);
- the reading and study of the scriptures, in personal as well as communal settings, is a privileged means of grace for nurturing growth in holiness; reading and studying the scriptures together (ecumenically) is a source of grace (116-117);
- the pursuit of holiness is enhanced by basic dispositions and habits which shape the affections; these virtues or ‘holy tempers’ orient the whole person to what is good and so shape one’s actions and decisions (118-119);
- the Christian life of holiness is characterised by the joyful proclamation of the risen Christ, and by giving an account of the hope that is within us; witness to the Gospel requires a profound engagement with the complexity of the world and the cultures in which we live (120);
- we witness not only through our words, but above all by holy living, characterised by both personal faithfulness and active engagement with the world in service to God’s reign; holy living is expressed socially in the pursuit of justice and in acts of mercy, embodying the compassion and love of God for the world (120-121);
- holiness is fostered through private and family prayers; the singing of Christian songs and hymns; pilgrimages to holy sites and shrines; quiet days and spiritual retreats; fasting and almsgiving (122);
- holy dying is part of holy living; the saints below witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying; the passing from this life through death is a profoundly human place of grace even in suffering and loss; by aiding and honouring the dying and those close to them, and in presenting a vision of the end of life as a place of

love, patience, care, and hope, Catholics and Methodists can challenge some secular approaches to the end of life and to death itself (132-135).

187. There are also differences in holy living that reflect underlying theological disagreements between Methodists and Catholics that often have their origin in Reformation disputes. In particular, there are differences regarding the number of sacraments, though Methodists do see a sacramental character in what Catholics identify as the seven sacraments (107-114). Here are other areas of divergence regarding holy living:

- Catholics emphasise that the Church, as an eschatologically present reality in the world, is without sin, even though its individual members may be sinful. Methodists speak of the holiness of the Church, but see the correlation between the visible and the invisible Church in less theologically precise terms than Catholics, and are uncomfortable with language that suggests the Church is without sin (97-99);
- While Methodists and Catholics jointly recognise Mary's unique role as Jesus' Mother and God-bearer, and see her as a holy exemplar, disciple, and advocate for the poor, Methodists have significant questions about Marian devotions in the Roman Catholic Church, including praying the rosary and pilgrimages to sites of Marian apparitions, and would ask whether the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ is in danger of being obscured (127);
- The Catholic practice of the veneration of relics causes concern for Methodists about the attendant risk of idolatry. Catholics and Methodists agree that popular devotion to holy relics must always be properly discerned so that it does not detract from the worship of God alone (130-131);
- Other Catholic devotional practices involving the saints, adoration of the Eucharist, the use and veneration of images, and the blessing of inanimate objects, evoke Methodist discomfort and concern that the Gospel may be in danger of being obscured by superstition (123).

188. Questions for local or regional discussion:

Methodists and Catholics agree that belonging to Christ means belonging to the Church, and that we are called to be holy together. Through recent rounds of dialogue, we have made great strides towards a common understanding of the Church. Yet our dialogue texts have hardly begun to fulfil their potential for transforming our relations; nor can documents alone build and strengthen our relations. Identify some contexts in your region where Catholics and Methodists can encounter each other, forging ecumenical friendships, and discerning ways to grow together in communion and mission.

How can we more visibly acknowledge our recognition of each other's baptisms and our common understanding that Baptism is a lifelong sacramental gracing of the Christian's journey, immersing us in the paschal mystery and summoning us to a share in Christ's mission? Given that further dialogue is needed before Methodists and Catholics can share fully in each other's Eucharistic celebrations despite much common ground regarding the Lord's Supper, what are ways in which we can pray and give thanks to God together?

What might Methodists and Catholics learn from each other about fostering and encouraging all forms of Christian vocation, including married and single life,

ministry and consecrated life? Are there new forms of community life, including those with an ecumenical character, forming among Christian communities in your region?

Where Catholics and Methodists live side by side, they face the common challenge of witnessing to the Gospel by engaging with the complexity of the world and the cultures in which they live. In what ways might we work together in giving an account of the hope that is within us (*1 Pet 3:15*)?

In many parts of the world, euthanasia and assisted suicide are allowed or their legality is being publicly debated. Catholics and Methodists jointly witness to holy dying as a constitutive part of holy living, and see the end of life as a time of grace even in the midst of suffering and loss. Are there ways in which you can work together in your region to uphold the dignity of human life, protect the freedom of conscience of healthcare workers, and build up our social structures to care well and compassionately for the dying?

As this chapter details, we hold some devotional practices in common, and differ on others. Encourage conversations between neighbouring Methodist and Catholic congregations about devotional practices, making sure to share about both common and different ways of seeking holiness. Encourage participants to listen respectfully to each other with the possibility of gaining new insights, but also being able to ask each other difficult questions from which we might learn.

#### **Revisiting Chapter Four: The Saints Above**

189. Methodists and Catholics alike acknowledge that words, concepts, and images are inadequate to express the mystery of God's love and life beyond the grave (137), but the richness of God's revelation in the scriptures allows us to profess together:

- Jesus Christ's conquering of sin and death and his promise of eternal life provide a wellspring of hope for human beings, who encounter death as the uttermost limit of human experience (144);
- resurrection hope leads us to look to the time when 'death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more,' and all things will be made new; heaven is the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme happiness and bliss (165, citing Rev 21.4-5); our Christian hope is that 'we will be with the Lord for ever' (138, citing 1 Thess 4.17). Catholics and Methodists share this common hope and a responsibility to keep the promise of eternal life alive in the hearts of believers and to evangelise the world (166);
- the ecumenical creeds that affirm the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting (141);
- we are called to love God and one another in relationships that begin in this life but extend beyond death when knowledge and love will be perfected (139). The communion between the saints below and the saints above is like that of a family, where bonds of love continue to exist between the living and the departed (143);
- within the communion of saints, we recognize the exemplary presence of divine grace in specific persons whose words and holy living – even to the shedding of their blood for Jesus – testify to the transforming action of the Spirit; their witness can inspire the saints below (142); some, such as the apostles and martyrs of the early Church, are publically named and honoured as saints; the saints above are unseen friends to the saints below, encouraging them as they continue on their earthly pilgrimage (156);
- God wills the salvation of all people; we also believe that salvation is attained exclusively through Jesus Christ. Hope for those who do not come to an explicit

saving faith in Jesus Christ rests in a just and merciful God (147). We can entrust to the mercy of God infants and others who die without receiving the sacrament of Baptism, believing that they, too, share in the promise of eternal life (148);

- God’s creative power will re-unite body and soul at the general resurrection after the pattern of Jesus Christ (146); since Christ assumed all that is human, all that is human will be redeemed (166);
- Christ ‘will come again to judge the living and the dead’; on the Day of Judgement, each person will stand before the holiness of God and the full story of his or her life will be laid bare (149). God’s mercy is limitless; a part of the mercy is the gift of human freedom, including the freedom to accept or reject God’s gracious gift of salvation and the call to holiness (149, 151); while human beings can choose to sever their relationship with God, Catholics and Methodists consider it appropriate to hope that no one will be eternally damned (151);
- we await the return of the Lord; his coming will bring salvation history to its close; the mission and ministry of the Church will finally be fulfilled when all things are restored in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (167).

190. Flowing from this common profession, Catholics and Methodists also hold certain practices in common:

- rituals for the dying and the deceased which offer consolation to those who mourn and proclaim our resurrection hope, including prayer with the bereaved, often in the presence of the deceased; reading the scriptures, singing Christian hymns, and entrusting the deceased to the mercy of God; a wake or vigil; a funeral, memorial service or Mass; and burial or else cremation followed by the reverent disposal of the ashes (145).

191. Methodists and Catholics have not yet reached full agreement on the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life, nor on the relationship between the saints below and the saints above. Principal divergences include:

- the doctrine of purgatory. When a person dies still unprepared to see the face of God, the Catholic doctrine of purgatory envisages a process of purification following death, in which intermediate state the deceased person is purged of sins and made perfect in holiness through the cleansing effect of God’s grace. Reformers rejected the doctrine of purgatory, and Methodists have been circumspect in their teaching about this transition. Methodists and Catholics are in agreement that God’s particular judgement at the point of death determines a person’s final destiny, and that the transition from earthly to heavenly life depends on the gracious action of God; this provides a foundation for further dialogue (150-153);
- prayer for the departed. Catholics, believing that a spiritual exchange of prayer and its effects is possible between all members of the body of Christ, continue to pray for those still being purified after death and in so doing ask for the intercession of the saints in heaven. While there are indications that Methodists may increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed, it remains a subject for further conversation (154-155);
- intercession of the saints. Closely related to the previous point, Catholics also view the saints above as intercessors for themselves and those still living, ever mindful that Jesus is the one mediator between God and humanity. Methodists acknowledge the mysterious solidarity of the saints above and the saints below, but have generally

- been resistant to the invocation of saints lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised (157-158);
- the Catholic dogma of the Assumption of Mary and the intercession of Mary. Catholics believe that Mary, at the end of her bodily life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. Methodists can affirm the dogma's core intention to bear witness to God's saving work in Christ and the final consummation of holy living, but find no scriptural foundation for the dogma (160-163). Catholics and Methodists continue to differ concerning the way in which they respectively understand the spiritual and pastoral implications that Mary's unique place within the communion of saints holds for the saints below. It would be fruitful for Methodists and Catholics to continue to ask each other questions with regard to Mary as a sign of grace and holiness (164-165).

192. Questions for local or regional discussion:

Christian hope is ultimately grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus; his conquering of sin and rising from the bonds of death is the good news at the heart of our witness. How can Methodists and Catholics join with other Christians in proclaiming the new life – and promise of eternal life – given us in Christ?

Catholics and Methodists agree that bonds of love exist between the living and the departed, and that there is a real communion between the saints below and the saints above, as the latter inspire and encourage us on our earthly pilgrimage. We are not in full agreement about prayer for the departed, intercession of the saints, and the role of Mary in the lives of believers. Consider ways in which Catholics and Methodists can share stories and reflections on the relationship between the saints above and the saints below. Also consider ways in which we might gather together to pray for those who have gone before us.

Methodists and Catholics both hold that God wills the salvation of all people, and that all salvation is in Christ, leaving Christians with a summons to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Likewise, we both believe and hope that God, ever rich in mercy, can offer salvation to the unbaptized and to non-believers. Do Catholics and Methodists engage together in inter-religious dialogue in your region, and if not, what might enable them to do so?

Methodists and Catholics readily acknowledge that words, concepts, and images cannot adequately grasp or communicate the mystery of God's love and life beyond the grave. Whatever our way of picturing this, we both believe that we will stand before the judgement seat of God, and rely utterly on God's great mercy. Invite pastors to share how they hold together God's mercy and God's justice in their teaching and preaching.

The doctrine of purgatory has been a point of strong disagreement between Catholics and Protestants since the time of the Reformation, but there are signs that our differences are not as great as they once were in this regard. When you enter into dialogue about purgatory and the transition from death to eternal life, try not to allow differences to lead the conversation into a dead end, but rather see them as the subject of further dialogue and be ready carry forth the conversation.

In all of these questions and reflections, return often to the relationship between holiness and unity, and encourage the people of our two communions to make connections between the pursuit of holiness and the taking of practical steps towards reconciliation between us.

## EPHESIANS 1.1-10 (NRSV)

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

In this opening section of the Epistle to the Ephesians, St Paul reflects on the themes of grace and holiness in relation to the broad sweep of salvation history. By grace, God has made it possible for humankind to attain salvation. From the foundation of the world, God elected a people, in Christ, to be 'holy and blameless before him in love', a state only made possible by redemption through the atoning death of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

The redemption achieved by Christ is the source of abundant blessings. In response, God deserves to be blessed because he has so richly blessed us 'in the heavenly places'. The blessing of the age to come has been bestowed on Christ, who reigns at God's right hand. United with Christ, his elect people already participate in this hoped for blessing.

To say that election in Christ took place before the foundation of the world is to emphasise that it was not on account of historical contingency or human merit but solely by God's sovereign grace. The reference here is to collective rather than individual election: God eternally chose a people in Christ (that is, the Church), to be holy and blameless before him at the final judgment and so enter into the full blessings of the age to come.

Election is described in familial terms as God's adoption of sons and daughters, through Jesus Christ. Borrowing from Graeco-Roman law, where adoption conferred the status of heir upon those who were not so by birth, St Paul employs this same idea to describe the privileged new relationship that those in Christ now enjoy with God. Under God's free elective will, those in Christ are adopted into God's family to enjoy intimate fellowship as children and heirs.

Redemption in Christ is made possible through God's grace, which is 'glorious' and 'freely bestowed'. These terms suggest both abundance and extravagance, though words are inadequate to describe the inexhaustible riches of God's grace, which not only makes redemption possible, but also supplies the spiritual insight and wisdom necessary to sustain and deepen holy living.

The 'mystery' of God's elective and salvific will was revealed in the life and ministry, death, and resurrection-glorification of Jesus Christ. St Paul affirms that God's election is not limited in scope. For it is God's intention in the fullness of time 'to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth'.

## APPENDIX

### Resources for Prayer and Meditation Prayers of Self-Offering

#### Prayer of St Anselm

Lord Jesus Christ; Let me seek you by desiring you,  
and let me desire you by seeking you;  
let me find you by loving you,  
and love you in finding you.  
I confess, Lord, with thanksgiving,  
that you have made me in your image,  
so that I can remember you, think of you, and love you.  
But that image is so worn and blotted out by faults,  
and darkened by the smoke of sin,  
that it cannot do that for which it was made,  
unless you renew and refashion it.  
Lord, I am not trying to make my way to your height,  
for my understanding is in no way equal to that,  
but I do desire to understand a little of your truth  
which my heart already believes and loves.  
I do not seek to understand so that I can believe,  
but I believe so that I may understand;  
and what is more,  
I believe that unless I do believe, I shall not understand.

#### Wesleyan Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.<sup>33</sup>

#### Suscipe of St Ignatius Loyola

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace; that is enough for me.

---

33. MWB, p. 290.

### **A Hymn of Charles Wesley**

Thou to whom all hearts are known,  
Attend the cry of mine,  
Hear in me thy Spirit's groan  
For purity divine:  
Languishing for my remove,  
I wait thine image to retrieve;  
Fill me, Jesus, with thy love,  
And to Thyself receive.  
Destitute of holiness,  
I am not like my Lord,  
Am not ready to possess  
The saints' immense reward;  
No; my God I cannot see,  
Unless, before I hence depart,  
Though implant thyself in me  
And make me pure in heart.  
Partner of thy nature then,  
And in thine image found,  
Saviour, call me up to reign  
With life immortal crown'd;  
With thy glorious presence blest  
In speechless ecstasies to gaze,  
Folded in thy arms to rest,  
And breathe eternal praise.<sup>34</sup>

### **Prayers of Gratitude that we have been Saved and Prayers of Desire to Imitate Christ**

#### **A Prayer of Susannah Wesley**

I thank Thee, O God, for the abundant reason that I have to adore, to praise, to magnify Thy goodness and love in sending Thy Son into the world to die for sinners. What reason have I to praise and adore and love that Saviour who suffered so much to redeem me! What sentiments of gratitude should I conceive for such boundless charity to souls! Help me gladly and cheerfully to take up my cross for Him who suffered death upon the Cross for me. Enable me to praise and adore the blessed Spirit, who sanctifies and illumines the mind; who cooperates with the means of grace; who condescends to visit and assist and refresh my soul by His power influences. Glory be to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, joint Authors of my salvation! Amen.<sup>35</sup>

---

34. Cited from ST Kimbrough, Jr. and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds., *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Kingswood, 1992), pp. 367-68.

35. W. L. Dougherty, ed., *The Prayers of Susannah Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1956), p. 37.

### **A Prayer of Carlo Maria Martini, SJ**

We praise and thank you glorious Lord Jesus Christ, for being present among us and in us. In us you praise the Father with the voice of the Spirit, whom you have given us. Lord may this voice of the spirit be roused in us as we listen to the words of Scripture in a manner that is worthy and fitting, appropriate to the meaning of the text and in harmony with what is revealed to us. Make us ready to recognise how we can correspond to the teaching and example proposed to us, for you are God, living and reigning for ever and ever. Amen.

### **A Prayer of Mary Ward**

O Parent of parents, and Friend of all friends, without entreaty you took me into your care and by degrees led me from all else that at length I might see and settle my love in You.

What had I ever done to please You? Or what was there in me wherewith to serve You? Much less could I ever deserve to be chosen by You. O happy begun freedom, the beginning of all my good, and more worth to me than the whole world besides.

Had I never hindered Your will and working in me, what degrees of grace should I now have. Yet where as yet am I?

My Jesus, forgive me, remembering what You have done for me and whither You have brought me, and for this excess of goodness and love let me no more hinder Your will in me.

### **A Hymn of Charles Wesley**

How happy every child of grace  
Who knows his sins forgiven!  
This earth, he cries, is not my place,  
I seek my place in heaven:  
A country far from mortal sight;  
Yet, O! By faith I see  
The land of rest, the saints' delight,  
The heaven prepar'd for me.

A stranger in the world below,  
I calmly sojourn here,  
Nor can its happiness or woe  
Provoke my hope or fear:  
Its evils in a moment end,  
Its joys as soon are past;  
But, O! The bliss to which I tend  
Eternally shall last.

To that Jerusalem above  
With singing I repair,  
While in the flesh, my hope and love,  
My heart and soul are there:  
There my exalted Saviour stands,  
My merciful high-priest,

And still extends his wounded hands  
To take me to his breast.<sup>36</sup>

### Prayers for the Saints Below

#### Traditional Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the same Spirit we may be truly always truly wise and ever enjoy His consolation; through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

#### John Henry Newman's Prayer - Our place in the Household of God

God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work.

I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments.

Therefore, I will trust Him, whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

#### A Prayer from the *Didache* for Christian Unity

We give you thanks, our Father,

For the life and knowledge you have made known through your son and servant Jesus  
Glory to you world without end.

As this broken bread, once scattered over the mountains was gathered together and made one,

So may your church be built up from the ends of the earth,

And gathered into your kingdom,

To you be glory and power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

#### A Hymn of Charles Wesley

Christ, from whom all blessings flow,

Perfecting the saints below,

Hear us, who thy nature share,

Who thy mystic body are:

Join us, in one spirit join,

Let us still receive of thine,

---

36. Charles Wesley, *Funeral Hymns* (London: Strahan, 1759), no. 2, ss 1-3.

Still for more on thee we call,  
Thee, who fillest all in all.

Closer knit to thee our head,  
Nourish us, O Christ, and feed,  
Let us daily growth receive,  
More and more in Jesus live:  
Jesu! We thy members are,  
Cherish us with kindest care,  
Of thy flesh, and of thy bone:  
Love, forever love thine own.

Move, and actuate, and guide,  
Diverse gifts to each divide;  
Plac'd according to thy will,  
Let us all our work fulfil,  
Never from our office move,  
Needful to the others prove,  
Use the grace on each bestow'd,  
Temper'd by the art of God.

Sweetly now we all agree,  
Touch'd with softest sympathy,  
Kindly for each other care:  
Every member feels its share:  
Wounded by the grief of one,  
All the suffering members groan;  
Honour'd if one member is  
All partake the common bliss.

Many are we now, and one,  
We who Jesus have put on:  
There is neither bond nor free,  
Male nor female, Lord, in thee.  
Love, like death, hath all destroy'd,  
Render'd all distinctions void:  
Names, and sects, and parties fall;  
Thou, O Christ, art ALL in ALL!<sup>37</sup>

### **Prayers concerning the Saints Above**

#### **Prayer of St Ambrose in the face of death**

Carry me, Christ, on your Cross, which is salvation for the wanderer, rest for the wearied, and in which alone is life for those who die.

---

37. 'The Communion of Saints, Part IV', John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1740).

### **Prayer for the Dying (*Proficiscere*)**

Go forth upon your journey, Christian soul,  
in the name of God the Father who created you;  
in the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for you;  
in the name of the Holy Spirit who strengthens you;  
in communion with the blessed saints,  
with angels and archangels and with all the heavenly host.  
May you rest in peace  
and may the City of God be your eternal dwelling. Amen.<sup>38</sup>

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving for the Faithful Departed**

Eternal Father, God of the living and not of the dead: we thank and praise you for the faithful of all generations who served you in godliness and love and are now with you in glory. We thank you for those who have enriched the world with truth and beauty, for the wise and good of every land and age. Teach us to follow them as they followed Christ; that at the last we may receive with them the prize of eternal life; through Jesus the Christ, our Lord.<sup>39</sup>

### **A Hymn of Charles Wesley**

Happy the souls to Jesus join'd,  
And sav'd by grace alone,  
Walking in all thy ways we find  
Our heaven on earth begun.

The church triumphant in thy love  
Their mighty joys we know,  
They sing the Lamb in hymns above,  
And we in hymns below.

Thee in thy glorious realm they praise,  
And bow before thy throne,  
We in the kingdom of thy grace,  
The kingdoms are but one.

The holy to the holiest leads,  
From hence our spirits rise,  
And he that in thy statutes treads  
Shall meet thee in the skies.<sup>40</sup>

---

38. MWB, p. 431.

39. *Uniting in Worship 2* (Sydney: Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, 2000), p. 304.

40. John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (Bristol: Farley, 1745), no. 96.

## Prayers for Mission

### A Prayer for the Earth from Pope Francis's *Laudate Si'*

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe  
and in the smallest of your creatures.  
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  
Pour out upon us the power of your love,  
that we may protect life and beauty.  
Fill us with peace, that we may live  
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  
O God of the poor,  
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,  
so precious in your eyes.  
Bring healing to our lives,  
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.  
Touch the hearts  
of those who look only for gain  
at the expense of the poor and the earth.  
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BDUMC	<i>The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church</i> . Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012.
BDUMC/ART	Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church (1808), §104, pp. 63-70.
BDUMC/CON	Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church (1963), §104, pp. 70-75.
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church: Second edition. 1997.
CLP	The Methodist Church in Britain. <i>Called to Love and Praise</i> . 1999.
CPM	The Methodist Church in Britain. A Catechism for the Use of the People called Methodists, Rev. ed. 2000.
ENNT	John Wesley. Explanatory Notes on the New Testament.
GUG	Grace Upon Grace: The Mission Statement of the United Methodist Church. Nashville, Tenn.: Graded Press, 1990.
HEFG	Heaven and Earth are Full of Your Glory: A United Methodist and Roman Catholic Statement on the Eucharist and Ecology. 2012.
JCS	English Roman Catholic–Methodist Committee. 'Justification – A Consensus Statement'. 1991; in <i>One in Christ</i> 28 (1992): 87-91.
JDDJ	Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. <i>Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification</i> . 1999.

LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), 1964.
MAJDDJ	The World Methodist Council Statement of Association with the <i>Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification</i> . 2006.
MML	British Methodist/Roman Catholic Committee. <i>Mary, Mother of the Lord: Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness. Towards a Shared Understanding</i> . London: CTS Publications and Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1995.
MSB	<i>The Methodist Service Book</i> . London: Methodist Publishing House, 1975.
MWB	<i>The Methodist Worship Book</i> . Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999.
PL	Migne, Patrologia Latina
RM	<i>Roman Missal</i> (3rd edition, 2002).
RVM	Rosarium Virginis Mariae (2002).
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> (Constitution on the Liturgy, 1963).
UMBW	<i>The United Methodist Book of Worship</i> . Nashville, Tenn.: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992.
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i> (Decree on Ecumenism), 1964.
WJW	<i>The Works of John Wesley</i> , various volumes and editors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1983; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-).
Brighton	Speaking the Truth in Love: Teaching Authority among Catholics and Methodists, 2001.
Denver	The Denver Report, 1971.
Dublin	The Dublin Report, 1976.
Durban	Encountering Christ the Savior: Church and Sacraments, 2011.
Honolulu	The Honolulu Report, 1981.
Nairobi	Towards a Statement on the Church, 1986.
Rio	The Word of Life: A Statement on Revelation and Faith, 1996.
Seoul	The Grace Given You in Christ: Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church, 2006.
Singapore	The Apostolic Tradition, 1991.

English translations of Roman Catholic documents may be found at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

#### Note on Scripture Quotations

All scriptural quotations are from the New Revised Standard (Anglicised) Version.

## COMMENTARY ON “THE CALL TO HOLINESS: FROM GLORY TO GLORY”

*John A. Radano*

This report of the tenth phase of international Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue is beautifully and logically arranged. It begins with a passage from Scripture and ends with another, the two of which, taken together, help show the broad perspective of the theme, namely, that God calls both individuals and the community to holiness. At the beginning, before the Introduction *Luke* 19: 1-10, the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus is presented as “a story of divine grace and the call to holiness” for an individual. Zacchaeus “has been drawn into a saving relationship with Jesus” (first para).<sup>1</sup> The story shows “the drama of divine grace at work and its powerful salvific effect” on an individual (second para). At the end of the report, Ephesians 1:1-10 is cited. Here St Paul “reflects on the themes of grace and holiness in relation to the broad sweep of salvation history. By grace, God has made it possible for humankind to attain salvation. From the foundation of the world, God elected a people, in Christ, to be ‘holy and blameless before him in love’ “(first para). Election in Christ here is collective rather than individual: “God eternally chose a people in Christ (that is, the Church), to be holy and blameless before him at the final judgment and so enter into the full blessings of the age to come” (third para).

### **Theme and Focus**

The theme of holiness has, of course, deep roots in the life of both communities. For Catholics this idea echoes the teaching of Vatican II concerning “The Universal Call to holiness in the Church” (*LG*, Chpt.5). For Methodists, it is consistent with the historical mission of Methodism “to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (n.2). In treating holiness, this dialogue comes back to an issue which has long been one of its key concerns. The report of the second phase of this dialogue could already say in 1976 that “It has been recognized from the beginning of our dialogue that among the ‘more solid grounds for affinity’ between our two traditions the first was ‘the central place held in most traditions by the ideal of personal sanctification, growth in holiness through daily life in Christ.’”<sup>2</sup>

As to focus, *The Call to Holiness*, considers how Catholics and Methodists understand the nature and effect of divine grace upon the human person and the implications for the Christian life. In so doing, “it investigates grace and holiness not simply as theological concepts, but in relation to their central place in the Christian life. For the God of grace calls people to holy living in a relationship of communion or fellowship (*koïnonia*) with the Holy Trinity and with one another” (n.4).

An engaging characteristic of this presentation, and found throughout, is that of the Church on pilgrimage. “The life of holiness for the Christian is fundamentally a

---

1. The paragraphs of the brief commentaries on both scripture passages are not numbered.

2. Dublin Report, 1976, n. 26. Also, “Methodists and Catholics repeatedly discover a notable rapport when they speak of spirituality, the life of the Spirit” (Honolulu Report, 1981, n. 7.

“A key point of agreement between Methodists and Roman Catholics is the need for graced, free and active participation in God’s saving work” (Brighton Report, 2001, n.53.)

walking with the risen Christ” (n.93). “The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage, and so has the quality of both a present reality through the presence of the risen Jesus, who walks with us, and of a promise of holiness towards which disciples travel, step by step” (n.96). “The idea of the pilgrim journey lies at the heart of all aspects of the Church and Christian life” (n.100). In discussing Holy Dying in Chapter Three, the text says: “Holy living comes to its natural conclusion in death as the end of the pilgrim journey on earth” (n.132). Discussion of “The Saints Above” in Chapter Four, begins with “As friends and followers of Christ, Christians journey together as pilgrims towards the promise of eternal life and fellowship with the saints ‘standing before the throne’ (Rev. 7.9)” (n.139).

### Structure of the report

Among the theological foundations of this report, three are “particularly noteworthy.” First is the trinitarian mission in salvation history as recorded in scripture and tradition. Second is the Methodist Statement of Association (2006) with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (MAJDDJ2006/1999).<sup>3</sup> Third, the common participation of Christians in the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The first and third build on previous work of this dialogue (n.6), and are areas in which there is much fundamental agreement among Christians. The second, MAJDDJ, involves the Methodist reception of a major ecumenical achievement of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, illustrating that this Methodist-Catholic bilateral dialogue has been positively influenced by another bilateral, the Lutheran-Catholic bilateral, and supports the latter’s achievement, making it its own.

The report is divided into three sections, comprising five chapters. The first section, including Chapters One and Two, “outlines a shared Christian anthropology and understanding of the nature and effect of divine grace and holiness in relation to the human person” (n.7). Chapter One, “The Mystery of being Human,” articulates a Christian anthropology as the theological basis for the chapters that follow. It considers the creation of the human being in the image and likeness of God, the effects of the fall on humankind and creation, the longing for reconciliation, and the person of Jesus Christ as the full measure of human being (n.8). Chapter Two, “God’s Work of Re-creating Humankind,” describes the saving work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in mediating divine grace, presented in three aspects: the “grace that enables,” the “grace that justifies,” and the “grace that sanctifies.” (n.9).

The second section, comprising chapters three and four, draws upon the shared understanding of grace and holiness to investigate particular elements of holy living in the communion of saints (n.7). It explains that “just as Christian anthropology leads to soteriology, consideration of the saving work of Christ is inseparable from ecclesiology, since the experience of grace and holiness is always oriented towards the formation of relationships in the church and the transformation of the world.” The communion of saints includes those below, and those above. Chapter Three, “God’s

---

3. The 1999 Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (=JDDJ). The Methodist Statement of Association (2006) with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (=MAJDDJ).

Holy People: the Saints Below,” considers the personal and ecclesial effect of grace and what it means to be called by God to holy living in the church and in the world. “The chapter describes the pilgrim Church itself as a household of grace. Holy living is described in relation to the sacraments, witnessing to the Gospel, devotional practices, and service in the world” (n.10). Since the living and the departed “are joined together in love and praise within the household of grace,” Chapter Four, “God’s Holy People: The Saints Above,” considers the eschatological effect of grace, and what this means for a communion among the saints which transcends death. This chapter explores related topics such as death and the hope of resurrection, judgement, purification and growth in grace beyond death, prayer for departed saints, the intercession of departed saints and Mary, the Lord’s return, images of final salvation, and the fulfillment of God’s design and purpose for humankind in a new heaven and a new earth (n.11).

The third section includes chapter five, which offers a summary of the report’s convergences and divergences, and asks how the fruits of dialogue might have a transformative effect in Methodist and Catholic communities (n.7). Chapter Five, “Growing in Holiness Together: Openings for common Witness, Devotion and Service,” reflects upon the close relationship between holiness and unity. “The work of reconciliation between our world communions is itself a Spirit-led response to the summons of holiness” (n.12).

### **The call to holiness and the quest for unity**

An important characteristic of this text is that it clearly relates holiness to Christian unity. At the start it affirms that “The call to holiness is also a call to unity in the church, the body of Christ. Jesus prayed for his disciples to be sanctified in the truth that they might all be one (*Jn* 17.17, 21). Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other”(n.5).

Chapter Five continues the reflection on holiness and unity, saying that “the relationship between holiness and unity speaks directly to why our two world communions have entered into dialogue in the first place, and why the present topic has been addressed.” Like Cleopas and his companion on the road to Emmaus encountering Christ, Methodists and Catholics together “are traveling on the same road, seeking faithfully to follow the same Lord, desiring to be led by the same Spirit, and yearning to find our identity as children of the same father. The triune God who calls us to holiness also calls us to unity” (n.168).

Reflection on this theme gives the opportunity to indicate some of the successful results of the dialogue in seeking unity. In ten rounds of dialogue we “have repeatedly reached more convergences than were anticipated. The consensus between Catholics and Methodists concerning the Trinitarian and Christological foundations of faith, and convergence on many other aspects...” is a cause for rejoicing (n.169). In the current round we “have found common ground in our understanding of the human person, created by and for God; in our understanding of divine grace at work, enabling, justifying, and sanctifying stumbling human beings, and creating sons and daughters of God capable of witnessing to and sharing in God’s saving work for the world; in the ways in which human beings are called to live holy lives in the Church and in the world, and in a shared hope for life with God after death” (n.170).

But they admit, as well, that there are also continuing differences which keep them from being in full communion, and where further work is necessary (n.170). While the goal of this dialogue remains full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life (n.171), the dialogue has brought Methodists and Catholics to a stage of seeing their churches “in a relationship of real but incomplete or imperfect communion” (n.172). But, besides the continuing differences which need to be resolved, there are obstacles which this dialogue, like other dialogues, has towards moving towards full communion, such as the following. The reports are not well known among Methodists and Catholics, and therefore consensus and convergence registered by these dialogue texts have not had the transformative effect on our relations for which they had hoped. The insights achieved by dialogue need to be received in order to foster that effect (n.173). Furthermore, the relations between Methodists and Catholics differ greatly in different parts of the world. In some places they are cordial, in others, marked by suspicion. The Commission, however, out of the experience of dialogue and encounter with one another, is convinced that those relations could be strengthened in every part of the world (n.174). Also, when churches have acted separately for so long, there is resistance to getting them to act together in shared witness and mission (n.175). Despite these obstacles, “readers are invited to ponder the relationship between holiness and unity, and to make a connection between the pursuit of holiness and the taking of steps toward reconciliation between our two communions based on our shared understanding of what binds us together” (n.176). “To engage in this work of reconciliation is an intrinsic part of the path to holiness willed by the all holy God. Indeed it is the holy Spirit who is leading us on this journey, it is the Risen Lord who is accompanying us as we walk together” (n.178).

### **Overview of the Report**

While this report presents many agreements and convergences, the report shows also divergences, differences and open questions.

Chapter One, “The Mystery of Being Human: Created by God and Re-created in Christ for being in communion with God”, articulates an agreed Christian Anthropology. Humanity is created in the image of God and for relationship with God, with others, and with creation. Human beings, constituted with body and soul, were also constituted with the freedom to accept communion with God or not. The failure of freedom resulted in the “original fault freely committed by the first parents of the human species” (n.27). “As a result of that first sin, the world is marred by sin” (n.28). There is estrangement from God, and the reality of sin which divine revelation discloses, resonates with human experience.

Nonetheless, God did not abandon human beings after the fall, and God’s love for fallen creatures is made concrete in salvation history. The incarnation of the eternal Word and the sending of the Holy Spirit overcome the human estrangement from God, creation, and self, suffered in the fall. Christ, the New Adam, fully reveals the mystery of the human being. “Together, the mystery of creation and the mystery of redemption are the proper foundation for a true understanding of humanity” (n.35). Being re-created in the image of Christ has an eschatological orientation. The drama of human existence unfolds in history between the creation and its final consummation. “The full meaning of humanity’s present existential situation can be found only in Christ who gives the image of God in the human its true and definitive form” (39). “In

Christ, human existence receives a new and deeper meaning: the whole creation is restored” (41).

This chapter is presented as a shared account of humankind created in the image of God. At no point does it signal significant differences between Methodists and Catholics.

Chapter Two, “God’s Work of Re-creating Humankind,” is considered in light of the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. A brief summary is first given of the grace of God in the person and work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, followed by an exploration of the nature and effect of divine grace in its personal and corporate aspects. It concludes by investigating two issues which have been contentious between Catholics and Protestants: the merit accruing from good works of mercy and piety, and whether it is appropriate to speak of an ‘assurance of salvation.’

Commenting first on “the Grace of God in Jesus Christ” the report states that Catholics and Methodists describe grace in similar terms, as a favour, a free gift of God’s help so that we can respond to his call to become children of God. “God’s grace is not an abstract idea but is saving love revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ...” (n.46). The work of Christ “leads to the fulfilment of God’s purpose for the whole created order and not just for humankind” (n.48). Scripture shows, too, how the Holy Spirit is constantly present and active in the person and work of Jesus Christ (n.49) and is present and active in the Church throughout the ages (n.51). “The Holy Spirit is ‘the spirit of grace’ (*Heb* 10:29), who makes the grace of Christ present and active, drawing people into a deepening relationship or fellowship with God and with one another” (n.51). The diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit are always a gift of grace in one form or another, meant for the common good of the Church. While it is not the purpose of this report to develop a common ecclesiology, given what is said about the Holy Spirit in ns.49-51, the report could have easily added a sentence at the end of those numbers saying that the Church is indeed the Body of Christ (n.64) and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Grace is described according to three characteristics: grace which enables, grace which justifies, and grace which sanctifies. As to grace that enables, Catholics and Methodists ‘Confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation’ (*JDDJ*, 19). Enabling grace means that it is only by God’s grace that human beings have the capacity to respond to salvation offered us through Jesus Christ (n.54). At the same time, it does not remove the need for a free human response to God’s initiative in salvation. “Catholics and Methodists reject the idea of universal salvation where this is interpreted as meaning that all will be saved whether or not they freely consent” (n.55).

Discussion of the grace that justifies helps recall that one of the major controversies of the Reformation concerned the doctrine of justification. The Lutheran-Catholic (1999) Methodist (2006) *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* which resolved this conflict is the basis for this treatment, and is cited several times. It cites the heart of the *JDDJ* (15): “By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works” (n.59). The grace of justification re-creates the human person, though not necessarily in a permanent state of being. While it always remains possible for the justified to depart

from grace, even then, the grace of God makes it possible to repent afresh and receive the grace that justifies (n.63).

The grace that sanctifies involves a process of sanctification, or being made holy through a deepening relationship with Christ in his body, the Church (n.64). Sanctifying grace is not only interior to the human soul, but also involves a commitment to holy living in every sphere of human life. Citing *JDDJ* 37, Catholics and Methodists confess together that good works of mercy and piety are the fruit of justification and an obligation of Holy living. As such they belong to God's victory over sin and death. Holy living itself leads to growth in sanctifying grace (n.65).

These three features of grace are aspects of God's saving love and call to holiness (n.68). As God's chosen agent and instrument of the call to holiness, the Church on earth is essentially missionary, oriented towards the transformation of all things into the new creation in Christ (n.72). Christians are called to perfection in love and holiness. While absolute perfection belongs to God alone, Catholics and Methodists agree together that 'sanctification is a process that leads to perfect love' (Honolulu 18) as Christians grow in grace and devote themselves to the love of God and neighbor. They have different approaches in speaking about Christian perfection, but basic agreement. In light of what is said in ns.73-77, the first phrase in n.75 ("although Catholic theology generally does not refer to Christian perfection or entire sanctification as such") could have been left out to avoid misunderstanding.

A point of difference is introduced here. While both can say that being brought into a final state of perfection in love and holiness is the work of grace, they have traditionally differed on the way this final state of perfection has been attained. For Catholics it is by a post-death experience of purification traditionally called purgatory. While Methodists take seriously those passages in scripture that suggest a process of purification from the effects of sin, they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of purgatory as it was understood and rejected by the Reformers (n.77). This difference will be taken up further in Chapter Four.

This leads to another area which has been controversial between Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation, namely, the question of good works and merit. But *JDDJ* (15) has brought reconciliation on this point. Good works of mercy and piety in the Christian life do not contribute to justification but are its fruit. But a continuing difference between Catholics and Methodists "concerns the possibility that the merit arising from the good works of Christians might aid the sanctification of others." Both explain their positions on this. The Catholic explanation includes a discussion of indulgences (n.83). Some convergence is registered since, in a certain sense, "Methodists accept that good works of piety may benefit particular individuals" (n.85), and also since "some Methodists would further accept that the prayers of departed saints and the prayers of the saints on earth may also be mutually beneficial, albeit in ways that cannot be identified precisely in terms of their salvific effect" (n.86). Moreover, further theological reflection on the implications of the bonds of love within the communion of saints "may lead to greater convergence between Catholics and Methodists concerning the possibility of an 'exchange' whereby the holiness of one benefits others" (n.86).

Chapter Two ends by discussing the "Assurance of Faith and Salvation." Again referring to the *JDDJ* (34), the report finds that the different ways that they have of speaking about an "assurance of salvation" are differences of emphasis "and does

not constitute a substantial disagreement between Catholics and Methodists in understanding the nature of Christian assurance” (n.90). In order to avoid misunderstanding, the first sentence in n.91 “For Catholics, to have faith is to trust in God,” might be expanded slightly to say, “For Catholics, one very significant aspect of having faith in God, is trusting in him.”

Having dealt, first, with creation, and then with redemption, the report turns then to holiness and the Church, with Chapter Three, “God’s Holy People: The Saints Below.” Exploring first, the Church as “a Holy People,” it describes the church on pilgrimage. “The holiness of the Church is that of a people on the road, on pilgrimage, and so has the quality of both a present reality through the presence of the risen Christ, who walks with us, and of a promise of holiness towards which disciples travel, step by step” (n.96). Immediately, the question of sin is raised. “The Church on its pilgrim way is still possessed of the sins and failings of its members, yet unmistakably oriented towards its future fulfilment in God” (n.96). The idea of the pilgrim journey lies at the heart of all aspects of the Church and Christian life (n.100)

This eschatological orientation of ecclesial life is the context in which some historically divisive issues are taken up, such as whether the church itself is sinful. Catholics emphasize “that the Church as an eschatologically present reality in the world is without sin, even though its individual members may be sinful” (n.97). Methodists affirm the holiness of the church, but “emphasize that ecclesial structures can themselves be affected by sin. The Methodist reluctance to claim that the Church is sinless reflects a sensitivity to the risks in such a proposition, which can lead to a failure to repent and reform when sin occurs in the church. Holiness can never simply be reduced to a possession or an unquestioned characteristic of the Church, but must always be understood as God’s action and free gift” (n.98). While these contrasting emphases are not mutually exclusive, they have implications for the way Methodists and Catholics respectively speak of the Church, its institutional forms and limitations of authoritative discernment. The implications are significant and underlie many persisting differences and divisions among Christians, especially the relationship between the Church ‘visible’ (its historical, institutional reality) and ‘invisible’ (its spiritual reality in Christ) (n.99).

It is important that Methodists and Catholics can say together that the Church is a means of grace, “a sacramental and missionary means of grace for the world” (n.104). This statement is followed by sections which explore the ecclesial practices of the church which nurture the holy living and mission of God’s pilgrim people. These include celebration of sacraments, shared thinking around practices of social justice, ethics, personal and public devotions, approaches to dying and death as the end of the Christian’s pilgrimage on earth (n.104).

The Church is described as the household of grace (ns.101, 105-115). “In the Church, Christians meet Christ in ways consistent with our human existence as embodied and social beings.” In this light the report discusses “The Household of Grace: Holy Living and the Sacraments” (ns.105-115). The economy of salvation is sacramental in nature; God uses particular sensory experiences (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) in order to mediate grace assuredly... Liturgies and worship practices, and especially the sacraments and preaching, are public ecclesial ways of nurturing holy living in the world. The discussion of sacraments that follows shows the importance of sacraments for holiness. There are many agreements, e.g. regarding baptism, many

convergences but also differences of belief, between Methodists and Catholics especially regarding the Lord's supper/Eucharist, how we understand the sacraments of initiation, the number of sacraments. One difference which should be mentioned here concerns the relationship of the Eucharist to sacramental ordination, especially in light of the fact that Catholics and Methodists differ in their understanding of the number of sacraments.

Besides sacraments there are many other practices of holiness in the world which are constituent of holy living including the reading and study of scripture (ns.116-118), traditions of witness to the Gospel through active engagement with the world in service with God's reign (n.121), which are deeply rooted in the practice of prayer (122).

Here again, between Methodists and Catholics there are areas of unease and difference, areas for continuing dialogue (n.123). Methodists are concerned with a number of devotional practices in Catholic life because of which, in their view, the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ is in danger of being obscured, or the gospel is in danger of being compromised by superstition (n.123). One should say that when strong words such as superstition are used, it would be helpful if specific examples were given to clarify Methodist concerns. As serious as these concerns are, and as strong as the language is, as the report shows, new insights in both communities can foster convergences (ns.127-129). This is true also when concerns about Marian devotions, and about purgatory are expressed. Regarding Mary, both Catholics and Methodists together recognize, on the basis of Scripture, the unique role of Mary as Jesus' Mother and God-bearer (*Theotokos*). Catholics, different from Methodists, have a significant tradition of devotions relating to the Mother of our Lord. "For Catholics, authentic Marian devotion draws the Christian into a closer relationship with God's incarnation and humanity in Jesus through the mystery of Mary's motherhood by the power of the Spirit" (n.128). The Catholic practice of the veneration of relics is based on a long and meaningful tradition, but it causes concern for many Methodists (ns.130-131).

In n.130, while Catholic practice of the veneration of relics "causes concerns for many Methodists", what follows in 130-131 is an adequate Catholic explanation of this practice, and a mutual challenge of each to the other on this matter. Later, In ns.152-153, regarding Purgatory, while it is noted that the reformers rejected this teaching as merely speculative, as did John Wesley, Methodists "have been circumspect in their teaching" about the transition that takes place, and have differences regarding it. However, in 153, Catholics suggest that Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *The Hope That Saves* offers possibilities for developing an ecumenical understanding of purification after death.

Chapter Three ends with a brief consideration of "Holy Dying", the end of the pilgrim journey on earth. "Catholics and Methodists believe that holy dying is part of holy living, and that the people of God witness to the Gospel in the manner of their dying." (n.132)

Chapter Four, "God's Holy People: the Saints Above", focusing on the saints in heaven, explores the transition of the Christian from death to eternal life, and to the final consummation of all things in Christ at the end of time (n.138). This discussion, too, is offered as another component of the pilgrimage, the walking with Christ, in which Christians participate (n.139). Since the Gospels contain references to the final

judgement, one question which is raised concerns what happens between a person's death, and the final judgement and general resurrection. "Is there an intermediate state?" Catholics and Methodists profess together the ecumenical creeds which affirm the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. "And yet there are differences in theological understanding between our communions, some of which stem from Reformation controversies." (n.141).

In this chapter Methodists and Catholics affirm much together. They start by affirming that all the baptized, living and dead, make up the communion of saints (n.142). An important ecumenical observation is made, that among those who have died are some, both Methodists and Catholics, who gave their lives for Christ, showing that "This cloud of witnesses" transcends ecclesiastical divisions (n.142). Both traditions attribute a positive meaning to death, since physical death completes the dying with Christ that begins at baptism and anticipates the fulfillment of the promise of resurrection (n.144). Methodists and Catholics believe that God's particular judgement at the point of death determines a person's final destiny. (n.150).

A significant difference between Methodists and Catholics relates to the question of "an intermediate state." How is unqualified holiness conferred upon those who have died without having attained it. The difference focuses on the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, an intermediate state in which the deceased person is purged of sin and made perfect in holiness through the cleansing effect of God's grace. Like the Reformers, Wesley rejected the doctrine as merely speculative and liable to misuse (n.152). As already mentioned, Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical, *The Hope that Saves*, refined Catholic teaching on the doctrine of Purgatory, and provides a basis for further discussion on this matter (n.153).

Another difference, related to this, concerns "Prayer for the Departed." Catholics continue to pray for those still being purified (n.154), but in rejecting purgatory, the Reformers also rejected this practice, as have Methodists. But today a number of liturgical developments among Methodists, indicate that they may increasingly be open to the practice of prayer for the departed (n.155). Still another difference concerns the intercession of saints. For Catholics, the saints are intercessors because of the bonds of love that exist between all the members of the church and Christ (n.157). Methodists have been generally resistant to the invocation of saints lest the absolute uniqueness of Christ as sole mediator be compromised (n.158).

In regard to reflection on Mary, there are convergences in that Methodists and Catholics affirm the unique role of Mary in salvation history as recorded in scripture, notably her grace-filled response to God's invitation to carry the incarnate Word in her womb, and her exemplary discipleship, urging others also to heed the call to holiness (*Jn* 2.5) (n.163). However Methodists and other Protestants have reservations about the scriptural foundations of the dogma of the Assumption (n.160). On the other hand, Methodists can affirm the core intention of that dogma "to bear witness to God's saving work in Christ and the final consummation of holy living. By grace, Mary was made perfect in love and holiness through her close relationship with her son. From a Methodist perspective, Mary's life is readily seen to manifest Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Thus her 'falling asleep' anticipates and testifies to the glorious future of all God's children made possible through the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (n.163). Catholics and Methodists differ, however, "regarding what the spiritual and pastoral implications of Mary's unique place within

the communion of saints holds for the saints below.” Catholics regard the intercession of Mary as particularly effective because she is ‘Mother of God.’ Methodists find no reason to seek the intercession of Mary (or any other departed saint), for all are equally dependent upon Christ for their redemption. Further discussion may lead to greater convergence on these matters (n.164).

Finally, united with the saints above, the saints below await the return of the Lord as dramatically portrayed in the scriptures, which will bring salvation history to its close. The mission and the ministry of the Church will finally be fulfilled when all things are restored in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (n.167). Catholics and Methodists “believe heaven to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme happiness and bliss” (n.165). Both believe that the immortal soul will live on after death and the ‘mortal body’ will also experience resurrection.” Since Christ assumed all that is human, all that is human will be redeemed” (n.166).

Chapter Five summarizes Catholic and Methodist agreements found in previous chapters, in the form of “creedal statements,” noting also divergences which have been registered. It is hoped that this will assist discussion of these results in parishes and congregations.

Important is the affirmation, which is correct, made in n.186, summarizing especially ns. 109-110, that “the two principle rites of vocation for adults – marriage and orders – give grace to the individual or couple, so that the wider community might grow in grace”. This is followed by the statement “that there is no hierarchy to the various states of Christian life, and all can be avenues to, and expressions of holiness.” But from a Catholic perspective, more must be said on this matter to prevent misunderstanding. Thus, as reflected in n.110, Catholic teaching shows that “from the very beginning of the church there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes... Christ himself has invited certain persons to follow him in this way of life, of which he remains the model...” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]* (1618). “Virginity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven is an unfolding of baptismal grace, a powerful sign of the supremacy of the bond with Christ and of the ardent expectation of his return, a sign which also recalls that marriage is a reality of this present age which is passing away” (*CCC 1619*). “Esteem of virginity for the sake of the kingdom and the Christian understanding of marriage are inseparable, and they reinforce each other.” (*CCC 1620*). According to *Lumen gentium* 42, the holiness of the Church is also “fostered in a special way” by the observance of the “manifold counsels proposed in the gospel by our Lord to his disciples. Outstanding among them is that precious gift of divine grace which the Father gives to some men... so that by virginity, or celibacy, they can more easily devote their entire lives to God alone with undivided heart. This total continence embraced on behalf of the kingdom of heaven has always been held in particular honor by the church...”

Finally, it can be noted here, as well, that the goal of this dialogue is stated as full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life. (ns.171, 176, 185). This is a good formulation, perhaps the best formulation of the goal of this dialogue that these two communions can express *together at this time*. At the same time, in an earlier statement of this international dialogue, the 1986 report *Towards a Statement on the Church*, the Roman Catholics clearly expressed their Church’s teaching that the Bishops, as successors of

the Apostles, foster the unity of the People of God. “In collegial communion with fellow bishops and with the Bishop of Rome, they cement and express the bond of the universal fellowship” (n.32). Since this is a position with which Methodists apparently do not agree, one might ask in which way this Catholic teaching is accounted for in the formulation of the goal of this dialogue.

### **Ecumenical Reception**

As mentioned above, the lack of reception of insights of dialogue reports into the life of the churches is one obstacle preventing the churches in dialogue from moving closer to unity. *The Call to Holiness* contributes to ecumenical reception in two ways. First, by various means, the report itself provides assistance to the reception of its findings into the local churches. Second, in making its theological arguments for its subject matter, it receives again, and utilizes, one of the milestones of the ecumenical movement, the official Lutheran and Catholic (1999) and Methodist (2006) *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, which resolved one of the major theological problems of the Reformation.

First, *local reception and the pastoral aspect of this report*. This report provides in a number of ways pastoral aides to reception of its major concerns. First, after theological elaboration on the subject matter, four of the five chapters conclude by giving a brief account of the life of two persons, one Catholic and one Methodist, who have been recognized by the respective communion as living an extraordinary life of holiness. This remarkable feature of the report helps the reader to see holiness in very tangible terms, encouraging the reader to explore his or her capabilities of deepening the quest for holiness. Second, Chapter Five in its second part, does two things which foster discussion of the theological content of the report. One is that it offers a summary, in the form of “creedal statements”, based on each of the previous chapters, of what Methodists and Catholics can say together, also noting divergences or differences when these have been registered. The other is that these “creedal statements” are followed by a series of questions for discussion on each chapter in regional or local settings where Methodists and Catholics live side by side. Third, the report provides a very helpful Appendix: “Resources for Prayer and Meditation.” These could be used for common ecumenical prayer between Methodists and Catholics during their discussions, or at other times. It provides prayers from both Methodist and Catholic sources, under categories also relating to the themes found in the report. These categories include: (1) Prayers of Self-Offering; (2) Prayers of Gratitude that we have been Saved and Prayers of Desire to Imitate Christ; (3) Prayers for the Saints Below; (4) Prayers concerning the Saints Above; (5) Prayers for Mission. The Appendix reminds us that while ecumenical dialogue is important for discovering agreements on the dimensions of holiness and all that it involves as Christians move on pilgrimage toward unity, prayer which promotes holiness, and prayer for unity, is even more fundamental. If made use of, these resources would be helpful for the reception of the report.

Second, this text receives and utilizes the historic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. The *JDDJ* stated that “a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics (n.40), thus helping resolve the clashes over this doctrine of justification which were at the heart of Luther’s protest against the Church in the sixteenth century. In 2006, the World Methodist Council officially associated with the *JDDJ*, joining Lutherans and Catholics in accepting this

ecumenical achievement. While *The Call to Holiness* builds on and receives previous Methodist-Catholic international reports, it also builds on and continues to receive the *JDDJ*. It does this in several ways.

In its introduction, *The Call to Holiness* mentions three theological foundations for this report which are particularly noteworthy, one of them being the Methodist Statement of Association with the *Joint Declaration (MAJDDJ)* (n.6). In addressing the subject of grace in Chapter Two, the *MAJDDJ* “is an important source of basic agreement between Catholics and Methodists (and Lutherans) concerning theological questions which have divided Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation” (n.44).

As Chapter Two continues, its treatment of “The Grace that Enables”, starts by citing *JDDJ* 19: “Catholics and Methodists ‘confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation.’” But it is especially under the second heading (the grace that justifies) and third heading (the grace that sanctifies) that specific *JDDJ* wording is used a number of times to articulate aspects of Methodist and Catholic theological agreement.<sup>4</sup>

Under “The Grace that Justifies,” in n.59 the heart of the *JDDJ* is cited to remind the reader that, while historically there was conflict between Catholics and Protestants concerning justification, today Methodists and Catholics can together confess ‘By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works’ (*JDDJ*, 15). They also cite the *Joint Declaration* in saying together that “even faith is not a human achievement since ‘faith is itself God’s gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers’ (*JDDJ*, 16).” In n.60, the *JDDJ* is cited to show the biblical basis for saying that justification means “liberation from the dominating power of sin and death,” that it “unites a sinner with Christ and with his death and resurrection,” and that it means “being accepted into a relationship of communion (*kooinonia*) with God already now, but then fully in God’s coming Kingdom” (*JDDJ*, n.11). In n.61, *JDDJ* 25 is cited in speaking of the relation between faith and good works, namely that good works do not contribute to justification, but they are its inevitable consequence. Faith in the saving action of God in Christ is always and necessarily active in love and thus results in good works of mercy and piety. The point is then made by citing *JDDJ* 25 that ‘whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification or merits it.’

Still in Chapter Two, in two numbers under “The Grace that Sanctifies” the *JDDJ* is cited twice as support. First to support the important point in n.65, that “Sanctifying grace is not only interior to the human soul, but also involves a commitment to holy living in every sphere of human life (cf. *Rom* 12.1)”, it cites *JDDJ* 37 after saying that “Catholics and Methodists confess together that good works of mercy and piety are the fruit of justification and an obligation of holy living.” Then, their assertion, in n. 66, that “Holy living itself leads to growth in sanctifying grace” is supported by *JDDJ* 38. In discussion on “The Grace that Sanctifies” references are

---

4. It is used in three different numbers under “The Grace that Justifies” (in n.59 (twice), n.60 and n.61), and in two numbers under “The Grace that Sanctifies” (n.65 and n.66). *MAJDDJ* is referred to twice under “The Grace that Sanctifies” (n.66 and n.67).

made to MAJDDJ, once in n.66, once in n.67. The *JDDJ* is cited to support themes also in other sections of the report.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, in this report, the achievements of this dialogue on holiness are well presented, and the important contributions to reception of dialogue results are well illustrated.

## Conclusion

*The Call to Holiness* makes an important ecumenical contribution in several ways. First by showing the many agreements/convergences Catholics and Methodists share on the matters discussed, it underlines again, and deepens, the real though imperfect communion which they share. The clear explanations of differences help the reader to see where dialogue is still necessary, and the differences are often accompanied with suggestions illustrating the direction which dialogue can take in order to deepen that communion.

Second, the report shows clearly the two areas which every dialogue now should take into account, namely, the continuation of dialogue itself to clarify and resolve issues over which Christians are divided, and second, the various possibilities of reception of dialogue results. Third, it illustrates that among issues over which Christians divided, common views on issues related to holiness and the spiritual life are also important. Fourth, this dialogue's way of linking holiness to unity is a significant contribution to the ecumenical movement.

On various occasions, Pope John Paul II spoke of ecumenism as a pastoral priority of his ministry, and of the Church. Ecumenical achievements such as reconciliation of Christians on important matters such as justification (the *JDDJ*), or the milestone Faith and Order text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, are, of course, vital for ecumenical progress. What they have achieved is also pastoral because they enable divided Christians to recognize one another more easily as brothers and sisters in Christ. Exploring the topic of holiness enabled Methodists and Catholics to explore, together, life in Christ. In a sense this dialogue itself plunged them into the pastoral life itself. It enabled them to explore that at which Christians always aim when preaching the gospel, administering sacraments, doing catechetical work. That is, to promote and deepen holiness among Christians and others who will hear. It is to promote the holiness, the closeness to God which we gain because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This indeed is a pastoral priority.

With this report the international Methodist- Catholic dialogue has taken another step towards healing the division between their communions. One must congratulate that dialogue for this important contribution, and pray that its consistent work of healing the divisions between us will continue and be successful as well.

*Monsignor John A. Radano is currently an adjunct professor in the School of Theology of Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, U.S.A.*

---

5. In Chapter two, under "Good Works and merit," para 79 cites *JDDJ* 15, and para 80 cites *JDDJ* 38, and under "The Assurance of Faith and Salvation," para 88 refers to *JDDJ* 34, para 91 refers to *JDDJ* 36, and para 92 refers to *MAJDDJ* n. 4.6.

## JUSTIFICATION AND SACRAMENTALITY: THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS AN AGENT FOR JUSTICE

*Report of the Fourth Phase of Catholic-Reformed International Dialogue\**

### INTRODUCTION

1. “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice” constituted the theme of the fourth phase of the international Catholic-Reformed dialogue, which was held under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) between 2011 and 2015. In these meetings, representatives of the Catholic Church and the Reformed churches came to explore various dimensions of this theme. At Rome, Italy, in 2011, “Justification: Reformed and Catholic (Historically and Currently)” introduced the discussions. “Justification and Sacramentality” with emphasis on the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper provided the agenda for the meeting at Decatur, Georgia (USA), in 2012. In 2013 at South Bend, Indiana (USA), the topic “Justification and Sanctification” in the context of the teaching authority of the church continued the conversations. At the fourth meeting at Coatbridge, Scotland, in 2014, the dialogue team explored the relationship between justification and justice, discussed preliminary drafts of the first chapter, and proposed the outline for the entire text. At Ghent, Belgium, in 2015, after several short papers on particular points that had been identified as needing further consideration, the initial drafts for the entire report were carefully revised, tasks were assigned and a plan was agreed for the final revision and completion of the report.

2. This most recent phase resumes a dialogue that originated in informal discussions between members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Catholic Church during the Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. Both communions were convinced that in the context of the new situation created by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) the time was auspicious to move forward with official conversations at the international level. The theme chosen for their first meeting was “The Presence of Christ in Church and World” (1970-1977), which addressed the topics of Christology, ecclesiology, the Eucharist, and ministry. The second phase of the dialogue, “Towards a Common Understanding of the Church,” (1984-1990), sought to extend the

---

\* Following the request of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, in this report the title “Catholic Church” refers to that community that is also known as the Roman Catholic Church, while the word “catholic” in small case refers to the whole church as included in the creed.

conversation on ecclesiology, focusing especially on the relation between the gospel and church in its ministerial and instrumental roles. These roles were seen to consist in the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. The former has assumed central importance for the Reformed churches and determined their understanding of the church as “creature of the Word” (*creatura verbi*). The category of sacrament has been decisive for the Catholic understanding of the church, defined here as “sacrament of grace” (*sacramentum gratiae*). The signal achievement of this phase was the mutual recognition that these two conceptions of the church are complementary: Word and sacrament are necessary for any adequate conception of the church. In the third phase, “The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God” (1998-2005), the two communions sought to shed further light on ecclesiology and Christian witness through an extended biblical investigation into the kingdom of God. At least two reasons – methodological and thematic – lay behind this choice. First, the ecumenical movement had already by this time begun to ask about the aims of dialogue: how does the struggle to overcome Christian divisions in faith and order relate to the struggle to overcome what divides societies, nations, cultures and religions in today’s world?<sup>1</sup> Since the kingdom of God, the universal reign of peace which is the destiny of the whole creation, embraces in a mysterious way all cultures, societies, nations, and religions, the theme was considered responsive to this concern. Second, the theme proved appealing in light of its biblical and patristic roots, its relative neglect by both sides of the Reformation divide, and its helpfulness in addressing the hopes of contemporary Christians for a greater measure of peace, justice and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17) in a turbulent world.<sup>2</sup>

3. How then does the theme “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as Agent for Justice” continue and build on what has preceded? To answer this question, it is necessary to note developments in the first decade of this century, especially since the end of the third phase of our dialogue in 2005. These developments in large part influenced the choice of this theme.

4. On 31 October, 1999 the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* was signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Augsburg, Germany. As the outcome of thirty years of bilateral dialogue on a doctrine regarded as one of the most important disputes of the Reformation era, the consensus statement was then and is still regarded now as a significant milestone on the ecumenical journey which Catholics and Lutherans have traveled together. But this historic event has had ecumenical repercussions for other churches that did not participate in the process culminating in *JDDJ*. For this reason, its signatories invited the World Methodist Council (WMC) and WARC, together with observers from the Commission on Faith and Order of the WCC, to a theological consultation in Columbus, Ohio (USA), in 2001. The purpose of the invitation was twofold: (1) to submit *JDDJ* to these churches for theological evaluation; and (2) to determine ways to involve them in ongoing discussion with the ultimate aim of inviting them to associate with *JDDJ*. For their part, the delegates of the WMC received the

---

1. *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*, 7, [http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e\\_r-rc\\_2-menu.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_r-rc_2-menu.html) (accessed 11 November 2015).

2. *Ibid.*, 17.

content of *JDDJ*; the WMC associated itself with *JDDJ* at its world conference in July 2006 at Seoul, Republic of Korea.

5. The WARC took a somewhat different approach in responding to *JDDJ*. Because of their historical commitment to the doctrine of justification and to its implications for individual and social life, the Reformed were invited to participate in a quadrilateral study commission, in which their perspective was expected to contribute to a wider ecumenical understanding of justification. This commission was not constituted at the time. Non-official responses to *JDDJ*, however, include three Reformed presentations given at Columbus.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the European Area Committee of WARC appointed a Theological Subcommittee following the Columbus consultation to address the doctrine of justification from the Reformed perspective, with particular attention to the relation between justification and justice. These reports were later compiled in a volume published in 2009.<sup>4</sup> No official action on *JDDJ*, however, was taken by WARC.

6. The following year witnessed a significant event in the history of the worldwide Reformed family of churches: in 2010 WARC and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) organized a Uniting General Council (UGC) in Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA), to merge the two bodies into the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). This new fellowship of Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches was the outcome of a process that began for WARC in Accra, Ghana in 2004 and for REC in Utrecht, the Netherlands in 2005.

7. This event provided an opportunity to the new WCRC to learn the mind of its member churches about a number of issues affecting them. To give concrete responses to these issues each of the delegates was appointed to a thematic section, including one on “Christian unity and ecumenical engagement.” Here the delegates urged that future ecumenical encounters should emphasize the implications of theological positions for action on behalf of justice in the world. Having the proposed theme of the upcoming phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue on justification before them, the delegates observed that there is a necessary relationship between justice and justification. In Jesus Christ the “setting right” which is accomplished in God’s work of justification calls and commits the justified to the work of justice in the wider world. For the Reformed churches today, “justification” and “justice” are integral to each other. Therefore, the latter cannot fall outside a doctrinal consensus on justification in any agreed statement. Even *JDDJ* itself speaks of the need to clarify further issues of doctrine, not least the relation between justification and social ethics.<sup>5</sup> In this spirit there was some willingness on the part of the delegates to investigate what it may mean for the Reformed to associate with *JDDJ*. A new statement on justification could serve as a theological foundation of the Reformed churches’ commitment to justice. In addition, attaching such a statement to *JDDJ* in the act of associating with it would be symbolically

---

3. See Páraic Réamonn, “Introduction,” *Reformed World* 52 no. 1 (2002), 1-4.

4. Michael Weinrich and John P. Burgess, eds., *What is Justification about? Reformed Contributions to an Ecumenical Theme*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2009.

5. *JDDJ*, 43. For the complete text, see [http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/1-rc/doc/i\\_1-rc\\_just.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/1-rc/doc/i_1-rc_just.html) (accessed 20 February 2016).

significant in view of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017 of the beginning of the Reformation.

8. Since the signing of the *JDDJ* in 1999, several significant events have occurred also in the Catholic Church related to the theme of this phase of the dialogue. First of all, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 gave special attention to ecumenical relations and, in his post-Jubilee apostolic exhortation *Novo millennio ineunte* (2001), Pope John Paul II expressed hope for a renewed ecumenical commitment in the post-Jubilee pilgrimage. Second, the first decade of the new millennium provided many occasions for further reflection on the *JDDJ* both within the Catholic Church and with various other Christian communities, as mentioned above. Third, that decade was also marked by synods of Catholic bishops devoted to the Eucharist (2005) and to the Word of God (2008), both of which resulted in important theological literature and official teaching on Word and sacrament. Fourth, the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI (2005-2013), included not only many ecumenical meetings and initiatives but also three encyclical letters (*Deus caritas est* (2005), *Spe salvi* (2007), and *Caritas in veritate* (2009), which provided substantial biblical and theological material relevant to the themes chosen for the present phase of our dialogue. For example, the attention given by the last of these to Catholic social teaching and to the theological foundation of a just society paralleled the concerns of the third phase of the dialogue and one of the more important emphases of Reformed churches in recent years. Moreover, the special Pauline Year (June 2008-June 2009) provided numerous opportunities for reflection on the writings of Saint Paul, particularly Pope Benedict's cycle of catecheses on Paul's doctrine of justification.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the interventions of Pope Francis confirmed some of the themes mentioned here.

9. Thus, various developments in both communions opened the way for beginning a new, fourth phase of bilateral dialogue between us. The theme of justification by faith naturally presented itself as an obvious and preferred topic in light of the various unfinished conversations between us in relation to the *JDDJ* during the first decade of the new century, as reported above. Furthermore, the convergence claimed and deepened by our two preceding phases of dialogue concerning the complementarity of Word and sacrament offered the intriguing prospect of exploring

---

6. During the "Year of Faith" called by Pope Benedict to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Francis' first encyclical, *Lumen fidei* (2013), not only supplemented Pope Benedict's letters on charity and hope but also resonated well with the theme of justification by faith. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), Francis called for a renewed proclamation of the gospel in the context of the many social challenges facing today's world, devoting the entire fourth chapter of this document to "The Social Dimension of Evangelisation" (176-258). He writes that "All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world," a task in which the Catholic Church unites "its own commitment to that made in the social field by other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, whether at the level of doctrinal reflection or at the practical level" (183). [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost-exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html#The\\_Church%E2%80%99s\\_teaching\\_on\\_social\\_questions](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost-exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#The_Church%E2%80%99s_teaching_on_social_questions) (accessed 20 February 2016). For full text of *Lumen fidei*, see [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130629\\_encyclica-lumen-fidei.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_encyclica-lumen-fidei.html)

how these two essential dimensions of ecclesial life might relate to justification by faith and sanctification. The fact that both Reformed and Catholic believers see an indissoluble link between justification and sanctification, both of which are intimately related to Word and sacrament, promised to open new levels of convergence between us. Finally, the keen interest by both of our communions in the role of the church as an agent for justice led to the tantalizing intuition that justification and Christian action on behalf of justice in the world must be intimately connected to each other. These considerations prompted the choice to explore the connections between justification and sanctification and the ministry of Word and sacrament with a view to clarifying the role of Christians and the church as a whole as agents for justice in the world.

10. The foregoing reflections on these developments explain the decision to dedicate this fourth phase of dialogue to an exploration of the theme: “Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice.” Accordingly, the structure of the following report consists of the following chapters: I. “Justification and Sanctification”; II. “Justification and Sanctification through the Church’s Ministry of Word and Sacrament”; and III. “Justification, Sanctification and Christian Action on Behalf of Justice in the World.”

## CHAPTER ONE JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

11. Central to the disputes at the time of the Reformation was the understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. The centrality of this doctrine was reaffirmed in the *JDDJ*, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church on 31 October 1999. Several member churches of WARC offered varying and even critical reviews of the document. The newly formed WCRC later concurred with its insistence on the importance of the doctrine of justification by faith. An earlier phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue registered agreement between us about the Trinitarian and Christological foundations of justification and sanctification, which we determined to be a helpful starting point for our own reflections:

Before all humankind, sisters and brothers, we announce the death of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 11:26) and proclaim his resurrection from the dead (cf. Rom. 10:9; Acts 2:32; 3:15). In the mystery of his death and resurrection we confess the event which saves humanity, that is, it liberates it from the distress in which it is imprisoned by sin and establishes it in communion with God. . . . In his life and in his death Jesus is revealed as the Son par excellence of God, the one alone who knows the Father and whom the Father alone knows (cf. Matt. 11:27), who can address himself to God saying “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). . . . Finally, the work of Jesus, the Son, reveals to us the role of the Spirit who is common to him and to the Father: it reveals to us that God is triune. By the life, death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit becomes the common gift of the Father and the Son to humanity.<sup>7</sup>

---

7. *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 60, 73-75, [http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e\\_r-rc\\_2-menu.html](http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_r-rc_2-menu.html) (accessed 20 February 2016).

12. Subsequent paragraphs of the same report<sup>8</sup> present material pertinent to justification and sanctification. From Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind, comes the grace by which we are justified through faith and thereby brought into communion with God in the one Holy Spirit. That dialogue team further confessed that the acceptance in faith of justification is itself a gift of grace. “To rely for this salvation on anything other than faith would be to [detract] from the fullness of salvation accomplished and offered in Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

13. This faith through which we receive our justification, our “pardon, our liberation, our life with God,”<sup>10</sup> is a “living and life-giving faith,”<sup>11</sup> that is, it is a faith that “receives grace freely” and “bears testimony actively” as it works itself out in love (cf. Gal. 5:6). Justification can thus be seen to issue in good works. “Justified by the free gift of faith, [we] can henceforth live according to righteousness”<sup>12</sup> and “committed to gratitude and service, we bear fruits worthy of the grace” we have received. In this connection, this previous phase of the dialogue stated that “justification by faith brings with it the gift of sanctification, which can grow continually as it creates life, justice and liberty.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, Jesus Christ is not only the one Mediator but also the “unique way” by which we may lead lives pleasing to God.

#### **A. Justification and Sanctification: Reformed Perspective**

14. The Reformed tradition developed its understanding of justification initially in the 16th century, in agreement with Martin Luther’s emphasis that Christ alone is our righteousness, which we receive by faith alone and not through any works of our own. John Calvin even called justification “the main hinge on which religion turns.”<sup>14</sup> In addition, in the work of Calvin and such confessional documents as the *Belgic Confession* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), and the *Westminster Confession* (1647) there is evident a deep concern for sanctification, that process of growth in holiness which Reformed see as a vital, but distinct aspect of Christian life. From the 16th century to the present, this “double grace” of justification and sanctification has characterized the Reformed understanding of salvation, and the two should be considered as distinct but never as separate from one another. Recent confessional documents have continued this dual emphasis, but have tended not to use those specific terms, preferring instead language such as “deliverance” and “service.”<sup>15</sup>

15. Jesus Christ is the basis and content of our justification. The starting point for the Reformed understanding of justification is that Christ himself is our righteousness (cf. *1 Cor* 1:30). For the Reformed tradition, the righteousness of Christ that we receive

---

8. *Ibid.*, 77-79.

9. *Ibid.*, 77.

10. *Ibid.*, 78.

11. *Ibid.*, 77.

12. *Ibid.*, 79.

13. *Ibid.*, 79.

14. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1960, 3.11.1, 726.

15. *The Theological Declaration of Barmen*, 2 and *The Confession of 1967* (Presbyterian Church (USA), Section C, resp. For these and all subsequent references to the Reformed confessional documents that appear in this report, cf. *Book of Confessions*, Louisville, KY, Geneva Press, 1996.

is grounded in his perfect obedience, which is defined as both active and passive. By his active obedience he perfectly fulfilled the law through his life of love toward God and human beings, especially those in dire need. This is precisely the life for which God created us, yet because we fail to live it in greater or lesser degrees we stand condemned as sinners before God's just judgment. But for this very reason, Christ's obedience is also passive. By his passive obedience Christ consented to bear, in his passion and death on the cross, the just penalty of the law against sin in order that we might be pardoned.

16. Christ was delivered over to death for our sins, but raised to life for our justification (*Rom* 4:25). In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are at once judged and condemned for our sins and accepted in grace, placed in a new life before God and with God. On the basis of what Christ has done and undergone for us and in our place, God is merciful with respect to our sins and does not impute them to us, but rather imputes to us the righteousness of Christ (cf. *2 Cor* 5:19).<sup>16</sup> In this event consists the mystery of the "wonderful exchange" (*commercium admirabile*). On the cross Christ has taken our sin and death to himself (cf. *Rom* 8:3, 4), and in rising again from the dead he gives us his righteousness and life.

17. Christ's righteousness and life are given to us whole and entire by faith, which unites us with Christ and makes us members of his body the church. They are given to the believer once and for all, in and with baptism, and then ever anew day by day. To believe in Jesus Christ is to receive him as he has given himself to us. According to John Calvin, Christ has given himself not only to deliver us from sin and death and restore us to favor with God, but also to regenerate us by his Spirit, so that we may live a new life of love and righteousness.<sup>17</sup> In virtue of our union with Christ through faith we therefore have received a twofold benefit (*duplex gratia*), namely, justification and sanctification.

18. Like justification, sanctification is entirely a gift of grace received by faith. The sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is reflected in a faith that is living, because it "apprehends Christ who is alive and makes alive and shows that it is alive by living works."<sup>18</sup> It is impossible for true faith to be unfruitful, because it is a faith that works itself out in love (cf. *Gal* 5:6) and engenders a desire to do those works that God has commanded in his word.<sup>19</sup> Thus the new life of faith is characterized by a "complete joy in God through Christ and a strong desire to live according to the will of God in all good works."<sup>20</sup>

19. This is not to suggest that our walk in obedience is anything more than a small beginning in this new life of faith.<sup>21</sup> Though sanctification is given to us whole and entire, we never succeed completely in overcoming all sin here and now. There remains a continual struggle between the flesh, which desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit, which desires what is contrary to the flesh (cf. *Gal* 5:17). Therefore, the new life of faith consists not only in works of love and justice, but also in lifelong

---

16. Second Helvetic Confession, 15.

17. Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.3.1., 592-93.

18. Second Helvetic Confession, 15.

19. Belgic Confession, 24.

20. Heidelberg Catechism, 90.

21. *Ibid.*, 114.

repentance. Though the power of sin is broken, we have still to pray for forgiveness for the sins that we daily commit as those who are both righteous and sinful (*simul iustus et peccator*). We have constantly to die (*mortificatio*) to sin in order that we may live (*vivificatio*) to God in the power of the risen Christ (cf. *Rom* 6:11). “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (*2 Cor* 5:14-15).

20. God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified, and they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification.<sup>22</sup> Since the gifts and call of God are irrevocable (cf. *Rom* 11:29), the gift of faith includes the assurance of salvation; faith without assurance is deficient. Nevertheless, our assurance does not come from anything in ourselves, much less from our good works; rather, it is based on Christ and the promises of God. Our perseverance is based on the promise of God to be faithful to us in Christ to the end. “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (*Phil* 1:6). For this reason we are confident as we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us according to his good pleasure (cf. *Phil* 2:12-13).

## **B. Justification and Sanctification: Catholic Perspective**

21. A presentation of the Catholic doctrine of justification and sanctification requires a consideration of the teachings of the Council of Trent (1547), the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the *JDDJ* (1999). Catholics believe that doctrine undergoes development and deepening in the course of history in a way that is both faithful to Scripture and tradition, on the one hand, and responsive to the needs of new contexts and questions, on the other. While the teaching of the Council of Trent is the first official, normative Catholic presentation of the doctrine of justification, Vatican II provided a solid Christological, anthropological and ecclesiological basis for this teaching and the *JDDJ*, as its official explanation within the context of the ecumenical dialogue, is an authoritative interpretation of it.

22. Critically responding to the Reformers, the Council of Trent assumed the Pauline category of “justification,” but previously that same salvific event was also described in terms of new life, re-creation in Christ, sanctification. The essential content of the decree affirms that justification depends entirely on the grace of God that we receive through Jesus Christ, in continuity with the teaching of the first millennium against the errors of Pelagius. Self-justification is excluded from the outset, and salvation is said to be offered to the whole world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: “But even though ‘Christ died for all’ (cf. *2 Cor* 5:15), still not all receive the benefit of his death, but only those to whom the merit of his Passion is imparted.”<sup>23</sup> The merit of Christ effects “the transition from the state in which one is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and adoption as [children] of God (cf. *Rom* 8:15)

---

22. Cf. Westminster Confession 11, 5.

23. *Decree on Justification*, 3 (1523). For this and all subsequent references to sources of Catholic doctrine, see Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum, editio XLIII*. ET Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, eds., Peter Hünermann, Robert Fastiggi and Anne Englund Nash, 43<sup>rd</sup> edition, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2012.

through the second Adam Jesus Christ our Saviour.”<sup>24</sup> In adults, the beginning of justification is attributed to God’s prevenient grace through Jesus Christ. By turning away from sins, adults assent to and cooperate with God’s grace and so prepare for the sacrament of baptism, which bestows the gift of justification.<sup>25</sup>

23. Trent uses the language of causality to describe justification in a way that gives emphasis to the priority of the divine action.<sup>26</sup> The aim of justification (its “final cause”) is the “glory of God and of Christ, and life everlasting.” The agent (“efficient cause”) “is the merciful God who gratuitously washes and sanctifies (cf. *1 Cor* 6:11), sealing and anointing with the promised Holy Spirit. . . .” The meritorious cause “is the most beloved only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ who, ‘while we were enemies’ (*Rom* 5:10), ‘out of great love with which he loved us’ (*Eph* 4:2) merited for us justification by his most holy Passion on the wood of the Cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father.” Baptism plays an instrumental role; for this reason it is considered the “sacrament of faith,” since without faith “no one has ever been justified.” Finally, the formal cause of justification is “the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which he makes us just.”

24. Justification remains a free gift of grace, since “nothing that precedes justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification.”<sup>27</sup> During the course of life, one can “increase in the very justice . . . received through the grace of Christ,”<sup>28</sup> seeking to live a godly life (cf. *Tit* 2:12), obeying the commandments (cf. *1 Jn* 5:3) and performing good works (*2 Pet* 1:10). Nevertheless, one must not be presumptuous about salvation but rather ask for the grace of perseverance.<sup>29</sup> Finally, God rewards those who “abound in good works” (cf. *1 Cor* 15:58; *Heb* 6:10; 10:22; *2 Tim* 4:7), which are never independent of Christ. As the life of the vine flows into the branches (cf. *Jn* 15:5), so the power of Christ “always precedes, accompanies, and follows [our] good works, which, without it, could in no way be pleasing to God and meritorious.”<sup>30</sup> Sanctifying grace is lost by mortal sin, even though faith might not be lost. This grace can be restored to the repentant sinner through the sacrament of penance instituted by Christ for this very purpose.

25. The affirmations of the Second Vatican Council that Christ is the “focal point and goal” of human life and that in him alone is revealed the mystery of human dignity, community, and action address to some extent the Christological concerns expressed in the Reformation slogan *solus Christus*. The Church likewise believes that the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of human history is to be found in its Lord and Master. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history

---

24. *Ibid.*, 4 (1524).

25. *Ibid.*, chapters 5 and 6. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* interprets the meaning of this “cooperation” in the following way: “Justification establishes cooperation between God’s grace and man’s freedom. On man’s part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.” Liguori, MO, Liguori Publications, 1994, 1993.

26. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from *Decree on Justification*, 7 (1528-31).

27. *Ibid.*, 8 (1532).

28. *Ibid.*, 10 (1535).

29. *Ibid.*, 12-13 (1540-41).

30. *Ibid.*, 16 (1545).

and civilization, the center of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations.<sup>31</sup> In addition, faith is understood as a commitment of one's entire self to God in response to God's self-revelation. God reveals himself, not just some truth or knowledge about himself. Faith is then the willing response to this self-revelation.

“The obedience of faith’ (*Rom* 16:26; cf. 1:5; 2 *Cor* 10:5-6) is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,”<sup>32</sup> and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving “joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it.”<sup>33</sup> To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation, the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts.<sup>34</sup>

The church is the people of God, the community of believers who have responded to God's self-revelation in faith under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> These teachings of Vatican II represent a deepening of Trent's vision of faith, relating it to the Christological, anthropological, and ecclesiological doctrines of the Catholic Church. Faith is no longer considered merely as the first step in the process of justification that leads to the reception of baptism.

26. The principal elements of an authentic interpretation of justification, as officially embraced by the Catholic Church in the *JDDJ*, include the following affirmations: “sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ” and “whatever in the justified precedes or follows the free gift of faith is neither the basis of justification nor merits it.”<sup>36</sup> Renewal of life “necessarily follows from justification”; without such renewal “faith does not exist.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, when claiming that the renewal of the person takes place through the reception of grace, Catholics do not thereby deny that God's gift of grace in justification remains independent of human cooperation.”<sup>38</sup> Human participation in preparing for the reception of justification is itself “an effect of grace” and “not an action arising from innate human abilities.”<sup>39</sup> While not using the language of “assurance of salvation” (perhaps because of Trent's

---

31. Cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, 10 and 45 (4310, 4345); see also 22, 32 and 38 (4322, 4332, and 4338).

32. Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, 3 (3008).

33. Synod of Orange II, can. 7 (377); Vatican Council I, Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, 3 (3010).

34. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation *Dei verbum*, 5 (4205). See also the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church *Verbum domini* (September 30, 2010) of Pope Benedict XVI, especially on the God who speaks (6-16), our response in faith to the God who speaks (22-25) and all of Part Two on the Word of God in the church, *Verbum in ecclesia* (50-89). [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html) (accessed 20 February, 2016).

35. Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 9 (4122-24).

36. *JDDJ*, 25.

37. *Ibid.*, 26.

38. *Ibid.*, 24.

39. *Ibid.*, 20.

caution against rash presumption), still Catholics affirm that, in spite of human weakness, a believer cannot “at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy.”<sup>40</sup>

### C. Consensus and Convergence

27. Regardless of the differences which appear in the previous two sections, our exploration of this theme, together with the common confession from the second phase of our dialogue, allows us to claim full agreement with the consensus formulated in *JDDJ*:

In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to do good works.”<sup>41</sup>

28. We also affirm together that the doctrines of justification and sanctification must be seen within the whole scope of Christian revelation. Scripture and its faithful interpretation in the course of the life of the church confess the saving activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in bringing about the redemption of human beings from sin and death and their sanctification by means of this same divine economy. We firmly agree that there are a plurality of images and metaphors used both in Scripture and our respective traditions to describe this saving activity and that justification cannot be separated from many other ways of speaking about salvation, including redemption, reconciliation, regeneration, forgiveness, new creation, and kingdom of God, among others. Nevertheless, we agree that the doctrine of justification is of particular significance in expressing the very heart of the gospel.

29. We also affirm together that justification and sanctification are free gifts received by faith, not earned by us.

30. We also affirm together that justification is inseparable from sanctification, which involves the transformation of the sinner and the commitment to live a life of righteousness and love, a life characterized by obedience to the commandments and to the teachings of Jesus. The council fathers at Trent taught that Christians must strive to live in charity. They emphasized this calling to counter what they perceived to be a teaching that rendered unnecessary the pursuit of a life of holiness because of the assurance that salvation is based on faith alone. Calvin’s teaching of the double grace of justification and sanctification that we receive in virtue of our union with Christ shows that the position rejected by Trent is not applicable to him. Since justification and sanctification are so intimately united for the Reformed, they cannot be said to have denied the need for the pursuit of holiness that Trent was so concerned to defend.

---

40. *Ibid.*, 36.

41. *Ibid.*, 15.

#### D. Points Needing Further Clarification

31. Our dialogue has acknowledged that there are different conceptions at work in our thinking about justification which, however, appear to be compatible with our agreement with the fundamental statement of the *JDDJ*. We are agreed that we are justified only in virtue of the passion and resurrection of Christ for the glory of God, the honor of Christ, and eternal life. The major remaining divergence seems to be that for the Catholic justification refers to a process while for the Reformed it indicates a status. Trent and classical Catholic teaching speak of an “increase” or “growth” in justification.<sup>42</sup> For the Reformed, justification refers to the new standing we have before and with God, in union with Christ by grace through faith, as pardoned and reconciled sinners. This standing is whole and complete and so cannot admit of a “more” or a “less.” Reformed, however, do speak of increase and growth in sanctification.

32. Trent maintains that one can lose the grace of justification after serious sin. Nevertheless, Catholics affirm that one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God’s mercy and Christ’s merit.<sup>43</sup> The Reformed insist that one cannot lose the gift of justification. The assurance of salvation is rooted in the calling and gifts of God, which are irrevocable. The Reformed affirm that assurance of salvation rests not in themselves but in the promises of God who is faithful. Still, in the Reformed tradition there have been some who have raised the question of this absolute assurance of salvation over against serious sin committed by the justified believer.<sup>44</sup>

33. Trent finds the concept of “merit” helpful for understanding what the New Testament affirms about God’s promise to reward good works, even using the concept with respect to eternal life. The Reformed tradition, concerned to safeguard a proper understanding of salvation by grace alone, has preferred to apply the concept to Jesus Christ. Thus, we are justified not on the basis of our works and merits (*propter opera et merita nostra*) but on the basis of Christ’s merit (*propter meritum Christi*). The Reformed do not deny that God rewards good works (cf. *Matt* 5:12; 10:42 *et passim*), but they do not ascribe the reward to the person who receives it; it is ascribed rather to the “goodness, generosity and truthfulness of God who promises and gives it.”<sup>45</sup> As St. Augustine wrote: “God crowns in us the gifts of His own mercy.”<sup>46</sup> Above all, for the Reformed

---

42. *Decree on the Sacraments, Foreword* (1600). While Trent speaks of an “increase” in justification, the more common Catholic way of expressing progress in discipleship is in terms of growth in grace. All followers of Christ “must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through love. . . . But if charity is to grow and fructify in the soul like a good seed, each of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and carry out his will with deeds, with the help of his grace. . . .” *Lumen gentium*, 41, 42 (4166).

43. *JDDJ* 36.

44. See G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Sin*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971; James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. John Wain, New York, Penguin Books, 1983.

45. Second Helvetic Confession, 16.

46. Augustine, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Tractatus 3, 10: “*coronat autem in nobis Deus dona misericordiae suae*” cited in “Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana 24,” Roma 1968, 56; cf. Second Helvetic Confession, 16.

eternal life is not seen as a reward dependent on good works, but as a free gift given in justification by grace through faith alone.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION THROUGH THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

34. The previous chapter pointed out agreement between the Reformed and Catholics that justification and sanctification cannot be separated. The present chapter seeks to integrate that agreement with an important achievement claimed by two earlier phases of dialogue between our communities. They had stated that a typical way of contrasting our respective visions of the Church as “creation of the Word” (*creatura verbi*) for the Reformed and as “sacrament of grace” (*sacramentum gratiae*) for Catholics was insufficient, because this does justice neither to the Christian understanding of the Word of God nor to that of sacrament, which always comprises both performative gesture and accompanying word. In 1990, the final report of our second phase of dialogue noted:

The two conceptions, “the creation of the Word” and “sacrament of grace,” can in fact be seen as expressing the same instrumental reality under different aspects, as complementary to each other or as two sides of the same coin. They can also become the poles of a creative tension between our churches.<sup>47</sup>

Subsequently, the final report of the third phase, issued in 2007, stated:

We can now affirm, in light of our investigation both of the kingdom and of the patristic literature, not only that these visions are mutually informative and complementary but also that neither is fully adequate without the other. A “sacramental” church that does not give proper place to the Word of God would be essentially incomplete; a church that is truly a creation of the Word will celebrate that Word liturgically and sacramentally. If our churches differ according to these two visions, perhaps it is less because either church is convinced that the church is only *creatura verbi* or only *sacramentum gratiae* and more because each tradition has emphasized one aspect to the point of de-emphasizing or neglecting the other. In such a case, arriving at full communion will amount to a process in which each community recovers the full scope of God’s provision for the life of the church.<sup>48</sup>

How do justification and sanctification relate to the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments within the ongoing life of the Christian community? Because the specific theme of this fourth phase of dialogue between our communities concerns the relation of justification to the “sacramentality” of the church and to the church’s action on behalf of justice, the present chapter will concentrate on the relation of justification and sanctification to Word and sacrament, while the final chapter will consider the relation of justification and sanctification to action on behalf of justice.

---

47. Towards a Common Understanding of the Church, 113.

48. The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God, 193.

35. Our experience has confirmed what a recent ecumenical report pointed out about one result of the long division of Christian communities from one another:

Dialogue demonstrates that the partners speak different languages and understand the meanings of words differently; they make different distinctions and think in different thought forms. However, what appears to be an opposition in expression is not always an opposition in substance. In order to determine the exact relationship between respective articles of doctrine, texts must be interpreted in the light of the historical context in which they arose. That allows one to see where a difference or opposition truly exists and where it does not.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps this is especially important to remember when discussing the relation of justification to Word and sacrament or when asking whether the church as a whole may be considered in some sense to be “sacramental.” John Calvin and many other leaders of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation had no hesitation in speaking about the necessity of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper within the life of the church. Yet they placed more emphasis upon Christ as the ground and content of justification and sanctification and upon the Holy Spirit’s use of the proclamation of the Word to impart saving faith than upon the role of the sacraments or that of the church as a whole. For the Reformed, however, the church is the ordinary setting where the proclamation of Christ’s gospel of salvation takes place. For their part, Catholics have tended to emphasize the close union between Christ and the church in such a way as to see Christ’s saving activity through the Church’s proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments; nevertheless, for them Christ remains the unique foundation and author of justification and sanctification. Both views can call upon Scripture for support – that there is salvation in no one else but Christ (cf. *Acts* 4:12 and *1 Cor* 3:11) and that Christ is intimately united through the Spirit with his body, the Church (cf. *Eph* 1: 22-23; 4:15-16). But the customary language, thought and exegetical patterns of both churches emphasize these truths in different ways. As a result, the language of “sacraments” and of “sacramentality” sounds different to Reformed believers than it does to Catholic believers.

36. Can one delve underneath such language to ask whether there is a real difference in substance between our communities? Both profess that the actions of the church in proclaiming the Word and in celebrating the sacraments are not on the same level as the saving activity of Christ but are dependent on his gift of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. The heart of the question seems to concern whether – and, if so, how – one may speak of a certain “instrumentality” or “cooperation” on the part of the church. An important consensus on this point has already been reached in Catholic-Protestant dialogue in France: “The divergence . . . does not pertain to the fact of the instrumentality of the Church in the transmission of salvation, but to the nature of this instrumentality: is the Church sanctified in such a manner so that she can herself become a sanctifying subject?”<sup>50</sup> A further question is whether priority in such a role

---

49. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, *From Conflict to Communion*, 33. For full text see <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf>

50. Comité mixte catholique-protestant en France, *Consensus acuménique et différence fondamentale*, Paris, 1987, § 11 [our translation]: “La divergence . . . ne concerne pas le fait de l’instrumentalité

should be given to the proclamation of the Word, to the celebration of sacraments, or to neither, both being equally necessary. The Appendix to the *JDDJ*, a document which has served as one of our sources in the present dialogue, includes the words: “The working of God’s grace does not exclude human action: God effects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore, we are called to strive (cf. *Phil* 2:12 ff.). As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>51</sup> As long as the recognition of the Holy Spirit’s agency is assured, many Reformed Christians are able to agree with Lutherans and Catholics in that statement.

### A. Justification and Sanctification in the Church of Word and Sacrament

37. We note that the second phase of the Catholic-Reformed dialogue registered agreement about how justification – and, in light of our first chapter, we would add sanctification – relates to Word and sacrament.

Justification by grace through faith is given us in the Church. This is not to say that the Church exercises a mediation complementary to that of Christ, or that it is clothed with a power independent of the gift of grace. The Church is at once the place, the instrument, and the minister chosen by God to make heard Christ’s word and to celebrate the sacraments in God’s name throughout the centuries. When the Church faithfully preaches the word of salvation and celebrates the sacraments, obeying the command of the Lord and invoking the power of the Spirit, it is sure of being heard, for it carries out in its ministry the action of Christ himself.<sup>52</sup>

38. The New Testament suggests that justification and sanctification, on the one hand, and the proclamation and celebration of Word and sacrament, on the other, are intimately related within that profound mystery of salvation in Christ. Some passages highlight the importance of the Word as a means by which Christ bestows the gift of saving faith. Such faith, according to Paul, comes from hearing the Word: “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (*Rom* 10:14). This leads Paul to conclude: “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (*Rom* 10:17). This faith is the means of our justification: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom* 5:1). Other passages speak of rites such as baptism and the Eucharist as means of the saving action of Christ in the Spirit. “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

---

de l’Eglise dans la transmission du salut, mais la nature de cette instrumentalité: l’Eglise est-elle sanctifiée de manière à devenir elle-même sujet sanctifiant?”

51. *Joint Declaration*, Annex 2C, quoting “The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration,” II. 64f. in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2000, 566.

52. *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 86.

This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (*Tit* 3:4-7). John’s Gospel includes passages which seem to point to the saving effect both of baptism – “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit’” (*Jn* 3:5) – and of the Eucharist – ‘Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day’ (*Jn* 6:53-54). In the account of the day of Pentecost and in the summary of ecclesial life which immediately follows, we read: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (*Acts* 2:37-38, 41-42). The importance of the audible word and the visible rite for the life of the church reflects the essentially incarnational nature of the mystery of salvation in Christ.

39. A contemporary ecumenical presentation of salvation history, which seeks to clarify the notion of sacrament, can at the same time illustrate the importance of the Word. One such attempt was offered in a summary of the responses to the convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC.

In the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has communicated effectively the mystery of his saving love to the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ continues his saving action of God by being present and active in our midst. For this purpose God continues to act through human persons, through their words, signs and actions, together with elements of creation. Thus God communicates to the faithful, and through their witness to the world, his saving promise and grace. Those who hear and receive in faith and trust this gracious action of God are thereby liberated from their captivity to sin and transformed in their lives. Those who receive this gift, respond to it in thanksgiving and praise, and are brought into a *koinonia* with the Holy Trinity and with each other and are sent to proclaim the gospel to the whole world. Through this sacramental action, communicated through words, signs and actions, this community, the church, is called, equipped and sent, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit to witness to God’s reconciling and recreating love in a sinful and broken world. And so all who in faith long for fullness of life in Christ may experience the first-fruits of God’s kingdom – present and yet to be fully accomplished in new-heaven and earth.<sup>53</sup>

---

53. *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1990, 143-144. Henceforth the convergence statement *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* will be referred to as BEM.

This description expresses how God makes use of words, signs and actions in the economy of salvation. Since our current phase of dialogue focused in a special way upon sacramentality, the following section will consider one of the sacraments that we both celebrate: Baptism. The subsequent section will address sacraments in general. Because the dialogue considered Eucharist mainly in connection with justice, this report will treat it in chapter three. Nevertheless, there are some general aspects that pertain to both sacraments.

### a) Justification, Baptism and Incorporation into the Church

40. Both Catholics and Reformed acknowledge “one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” and so recognize the importance of the celebration of baptism.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, on the acknowledgment that the appropriate formula and practice are being used, there is now a long established practice of mutual recognition of baptism between the Catholic and Reformed churches.<sup>55</sup> This expression of the faith of the ancient church is in harmony with Paul’s interpretation of baptism as a “participation in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ”.<sup>56</sup> Even though they explain differently the relation between the unique justifying act of Christ and the ecclesial sacramental action by which this new life is signified, Catholics and Reformed alike can confess together, with the words of the *JDDJ*, “that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life”<sup>57</sup>; and that “in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person.”<sup>58</sup> This is the reason why it is so

---

54. A fine multi-lateral exposition of the meaning and importance of Baptism can be found in: Confessing the One Faith. An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381), A Faith and Order Study Document no. 153, New Revised Edition, Geneva, WCC Publications 1991, 90-96.

55. Recent Catholic-Reformed national dialogues in the United States and Scotland have brought to light similar concerns for both traditions in terms of the pastoral demands for those requesting baptism for their children, while not even in the widest sense being active members of the church, as well as the urgent need for contextually appropriate baptismal education. For the United States dialogue report, entitled *These Living Waters*, see <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/reformed/upload/These-Living-Waters.pdf> [accessed September 11, 2015]. The Scottish text is entitled *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed*, which can be obtained at [http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/3115/Baptism\\_document.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/3115/Baptism_document.pdf) [accessed September 11, 2015].

56. Cf. *Rom* 6: 3-11; *Col* 2:12; *BEM* 2. *BEM* also recalls other biblical expressions for baptism: a washing away of sin (*1 Cor* 6: 11); a new birth (*Jn* 3: 5); an enlightenment by Christ (*Eph* 5: 14); a re-clothing in Christ (*Gal* 3: 27); a renewal by the Spirit (*Tit* 3:5); the experience of salvation from the flood (*1 Pet* 3:20-21); an exodus from bondage (*1 Cor* 10: 1-2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex, race or social status are transcended (*Gal* 3: 27-28; *1 Cor* 12: 13).

57. *JDDJ*, 25.

58. *JDDJ*, 28. Here it is important to note that the Reformed would not say that it is in the strict sense the Holy Spirit who justifies. For the Reformed God the Father justifies the sinner in virtue of the redemption accomplished by the Son (see, e.g., *Rom* 8:31-32), a redemption that includes justification and sanctification. But since these gifts do not benefit us unless the Spirit unites us with Christ so that he and these gifts become ours, it is not inaccurate to say that the Holy Spirit plays a role in our justification.

important to explore the relations between justification, sanctification, the celebration of baptism and its significance for the justified person. It is worthy of note that the baptismal liturgies as practiced both in the Catholic Church and the Reformed churches do not reflect the language of justification. Here it might be of interest to pursue further some of the theological reflection expressed in the national Catholic-Reformed dialogue that took place in the United States, which focused its attention on the relationship between baptism and grace rather than that of baptism and justification.<sup>59</sup>

41. Given the emphasis in the Reformed tradition not only upon *sola scriptura* but also *tota scriptura*,<sup>60</sup> it is not surprising that its theology of baptism has sought to interpret the meaning of this sacrament in the context of the covenant witnessed to in the Old and New Testaments. Baptism is the sign of the covenant (*signum foederis Dei*), grounded in God's promise to Abraham, which is confirmed to him and his descendants in the rite of circumcision. Baptism stands in analogy to circumcision, signifying inclusion in this one covenant and a share in its blessings.<sup>61</sup> Baptism is the sacrament that makes salvation personal: "holy baptism reminds and assures us that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross benefits us personally."<sup>62</sup> The administration of baptism symbolizes that our sins are washed away. But it is not the water of baptism that effects this reality: "Only Jesus Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins."<sup>63</sup> Baptism means not only the washing away of sins but also a rebirth: "God saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" (*Tit* 3:5). On the relation between sign and the reality signified in the administration of baptism, there is a difference of opinion within the Reformed tradition; generally, however, it is held that grace is given by the Holy Spirit who acts in the Spirit's own time. Only those who believe in Christ will benefit from baptism. That is why children are baptized after the parents have professed their faith and adults are baptized only after a similar personal profession. Nevertheless, baptism is not reducible to the personal, but includes also a strong communal dimension, since those who are baptized are incorporated into the body of Christ, made visible through their assembling together as his church.<sup>64</sup> "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (*1 Cor* 12:13). Finally, baptism has moral consequences: "To be washed with Christ's Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed and sanctified us to be members of Christ so that more and more we become dead to sin and live holy and blameless lives."<sup>65</sup>

42. According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, baptism is the sacrament of faith that plunges us into the paschal mystery;<sup>66</sup> without faith no one is ever justified.

---

59. See Section 5, 70-73 of *These Living Waters*, available at the website indicated in note 48 above.

60. Paragraphs 24-25 of the report of the first phase of the Catholic-Reformed international dialogue *The Presence of Christ in Church and World* registers some important convergences between us on the relation between Scripture and Tradition. Such a convergence is one of the fruits of many bilateral dialogues; see W. Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits*, London/New York, Continuum, 2009, 102, 197-198.

61. Heidelberg Catechism, 74.

62. *Ibid.*, 69.

63. *Ibid.*, 72.

64. *Ibid.*, 74.

65. *Ibid.*, 70.

66. Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* 6 (4006).

The celebration of baptism, as a profession of faith, is not only a personal confession of the faith of the believer but also a confession of the faith of the church as the community of believers.<sup>67</sup> This is especially evident in the baptism of an infant, which also expresses the Catholic understanding that the celebration itself of the sacrament, and not the subjective state of the recipient or the celebrant, is determinative of validity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that “our Lord tied the forgiveness of sins to faith and Baptism” (citing *Mk* 16: 15-16), adding that “Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification.”<sup>68</sup> Catholics believe that baptism is “necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament” and “the means that assures entry into eternal beatitude.”<sup>69</sup> The effects of baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. In baptism one becomes a new creature, an adopted child of God, a “participant of the divine nature” (*2 Pet* 1:4), a member of Christ, co-heir with him and temple of the Holy Spirit.

43. Thus, the whole of Christian life has its roots in baptism. Finally, baptism makes one a member of the body of Christ, incorporating one into the church. From the baptismal font is born the one people of God of the new covenant, which transcends all natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes. By means of baptism, Christians become living stones to be “built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood” (*1 Pet* 2:5), participating in the priesthood of Christ and in his prophetic and royal mission. Baptism precedes the apostolic and missionary activity of the people of God. “Incorporated in the Church through Baptism, the faithful are destined by the baptismal character for the worship of the Christian religion; reborn as children of God they must confess before men and women the faith which they have received from God through the Church.”<sup>70</sup> As Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism states, baptism “establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it.”<sup>71</sup>

## **b) The Relation between Justification and Sanctification and the Understanding of Sacraments in General**

44. There has been considerable agreement among Christian churches about baptism, even though practices such as re-baptism are evidence that some communities have not recognized this rite of initiation as practiced in other communities. The specific sacrament of baptism was chosen for consideration in the foregoing section because it most clearly offers an opportunity for exploring the particular relation between justification and sacraments, which is the central theme of the present chapter.

---

67. *Lumen gentium* 7 (4112).

68. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 977.

69. *Ibid.*, 1257. The catechism goes on to speak of “baptism of blood” regarding those who are martyred for the faith (1258) and “baptism of desire” regarding catechumens who die before having the opportunity to receive the sacrament (1259). The sacrament of baptism is treated in paragraphs 1213-1284 of the catechism. Much of what is written here about baptism is taken, often quite literally, from paragraphs 1265-1271.

70. *Lumen gentium* 11 (4127).

71. *Unitatis redintegratio* 22; cf. also 3 (4188).

In the following paragraphs, the Reformed and Catholic reflections concerning the relation between justification, sanctification and baptism will now be considered in relation to sacraments in general. A first section will present material suggestive of possible convergences between us regarding the relation of justification and sanctification to the sacraments. A second section will identify several differences, which call for further exploration and dialogue.

### **c) Areas of Converging Understanding Concerning the Sacraments**

45. The Reformed tradition, insisting on God's sovereign grace and the freedom of the Spirit, is careful about language or thought patterns that would deny or compromise them. God is not bound by the sacraments. Nevertheless, God instituted the sacraments to seal and confirm the promise of the gospel proclaimed in the Word, "making it more evident to us and in a sense ratifying it."<sup>72</sup> The *Geneva Catechism* affirms that the sacrament is the "outward attestation of the grace of God, which, by a visible sign, represents spiritual things to imprint the promises of God more firmly in our hearts, to make us surer of them."<sup>73</sup> By giving us signs tangible to the senses God condescends to us in order to accommodate our human weakness, that is, our corporeality. Sacraments, just as the proclamation of the Word, are indeed means of grace, but the Reformed reject the view that grace is somehow "contained" in the elements used in their celebration. The *Westminster Confession* insists that "the grace which is exhibited in or by the sacraments, rightly used, is not conferred by any power in them."<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, the connection between the sacramental sign and the thing signified is so close that the Reformed do not hesitate to refer to a "sacramental union" (*unio sacramentalis*). According to the Westminster Confession, "there is in every sacrament a spiritual relation or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other."<sup>75</sup> In this perspective, it is not inappropriate to say that the waters of baptism wash away sins and grant a participation in Christ; or that the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper nourishes Christians with the body and blood of Christ, uniting them more and more with his glorified body as well as with members of his body the church. It has always to be borne in mind, however, that it is the Holy Spirit that communicates Christ and his benefits to those who receive them by faith. The Holy Spirit is the sole cause of the efficacy of the sacraments. This is not to deny the fact that they remain sacraments even if they are received by the unbelieving. Together with the Word, the sacraments are objective means of grace appointed by God and used by the Holy Spirit to grant us a participation in Christ and to confirm our faith in his promises. Because these are the principal activities of the worship of God's people, the Reformed emphasize the indispensability of the church. Following the famous phrase of St. Cyprian that one cannot have God as one's father if one does not have the church as one's mother, Calvin prized the image of the church as a mother, who conceives and nourishes each of her children.<sup>76</sup>

---

72. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.14.3., 1278.

73. Calvin, *Geneva Catechism*, 310.

74. Westminster Confession of Faith, 27.3

75. *Ibid.*, 27.2

76. See *Institutes* IV.1.1.4

46. Catholics would concur in substance with many of these Reformed perspectives on Word and sacrament. They too affirm the uniqueness of the salvific activity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the sovereignty of God, the centrality of union with Christ and the importance of the proclamation of the Word. However, their emphasis upon the close unity between Christ and the church leads them naturally to stress the notion of efficacy in their sacramental language and practice in a way that is quite different from that of the Reformed. After offering its teaching on justification and prior to treating each sacrament individually, the Council of Trent promulgated a decree on the sacraments in general (*sacramenta in generale*), explaining how they relate to justification: “For all true justification either begins through the sacraments, or, once begun, increases through them, or when lost is regained through them.”<sup>77</sup> The teaching that justification begins, increases, and can be regained reflects the Catholic understanding of the close relation between justification and sanctifying grace, which connotes as well the inseparability, in Catholic thinking, of justification and sanctification.

47. The sacraments are prepared for by the Word of God and by the faith which assents to this Word. Therefore, they are called sacraments of faith. According to Vatican II, “Sacraments not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called ‘sacraments of faith.’”<sup>78</sup> This presupposes a close relatedness of Word and sacrament: “The people of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God. . . . The preaching of the Word is required for the sacramental ministry itself, since the sacraments are sacraments of faith, drawing their origin and nourishment from the Word.”<sup>79</sup>

48. In addition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has outlined the Christological foundation of the sacraments.<sup>80</sup> They are founded in the mysteries of Christ’s life, and are effective, not on the basis of their own “power” but thanks to that power that comes forth from the body of Christ, through the action of the Holy Spirit at work in the church. The Spirit manifests and communicates to human beings, especially in the Eucharist, the mystery of communion with the God who is love. Their purpose is to sanctify human beings, to build up the body of Christ, and to glorify God. In this context the language of sacramental efficacy needs to be carefully understood; in fact, the sacraments “are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work. It is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son’s Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit.”<sup>81</sup> Sacramental grace is that grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament, by which the Spirit heals and transforms the recipients, making them “become participants of the divine nature” (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). Clearly the celebration of the sacraments entails the reception of the Word in faith and of that sanctifying grace which is the very heart of justification and sanctification.

---

77. Council of Trent, *Decree on the Sacraments*, Foreword (1600).

78. Sacrosanctum concilium, 59.

79. Vatican Council II, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum ordinis* 4.

80. Much of the material in this paragraph is taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1115-1123.

81. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1127.

#### d) Areas Calling for Further Dialogue

49. Many Reformed believers concur with much of the above. What differences then remain between our churches regarding the individual rites known as sacraments? One area concerns the question of the efficacy of the sacraments. The fact that it is Christ himself who baptizes and celebrates the Lord's Supper/Eucharist (and Catholics would add – who presides at the other sacraments as well) has led Catholics to emphasize forcefully the efficacy of the sacraments, as suggested by the expression that they are effective *ex opere operato*, that is, “by the very fact of the action's being performed,” not depending upon the subjective state of those conferring or receiving them.<sup>82</sup> While Catholics would also affirm that a sacrament does not bear fruit in the life of a person who does not receive it in faith, nevertheless, the meaning of the expression *ex opere operato* has been misinterpreted as suggesting an efficacy that is mechanical or automatic and insufficiently respectful of the agency of the Holy Spirit through the celebration of the sacraments. Calvin noted that “We must not suppose that there is some latent virtue inherent in the sacraments by which they, in themselves, confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon us ... since the only office divinely assigned to them is to attest and ratify the benevolence of the Lord towards us; and they avail no farther than accompanied by the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts, and make us capable of receiving this testimony in which various distinguished graces are clearly manifested. ... God, therefore, truly performs whatever he promises by figures and by signs; nor are the signs without effect, for they prove that he is their true and faithful author.”<sup>83</sup> From what has been said above, what is being criticized here is not the view that the Catholic Church actually holds. It would seem that both positions seek to affirm both the primacy of divine agency in the sacraments and that they are effective signs. Still they seem to differ in nuance, emphasis and the language used to express these convictions.

50. Another area of disagreement concerns the identification of those rites which are properly designated as “sacraments.”<sup>84</sup> Our differences here depend in part on different notions of what a sacrament is and upon different understandings of their “institution.” Calvin identifies baptism and the Lord's Supper as the two sacraments instituted by Christ, adding that he would have no objection to calling the laying on of hands a sacrament but for the fact that it is not meant for the use of the whole church.<sup>85</sup> Later, however, he devotes an entire chapter to argue against the “five sacraments falsely so called.”<sup>86</sup> While the Council of Trent, for its part, teaches that

---

82. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1128: “This is the meaning of the Church's affirmation that the sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: ‘by the very fact of the action's being performed’), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that ‘the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God’ (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* III, 68, 8). From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them.”

83. *Institutes* IV, 14, 17.

84. Cf. *The Presence of Christ in the Church and in the World* (1977), 98; *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* (1990), 140.

85. *Institutes* IV, 14, 20, see also IV, 14,22; 18,20.

86. *Institutes* IV, 19.

Christ instituted seven sacraments, it immediately rejects the notion that they are all of equal importance.<sup>87</sup> Such qualitative differentiation makes it possible for Catholics to maintain the traditional view which has always recognized the prominent significance of baptism and Eucharist as *sacramenta maiora* or *principalia*, in contrast to the other five sacraments.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, it is true that the Reformed celebrate a number of those rites which Catholics call “sacraments,” such as confirmation, reconciliation, marriage and ordination, without designating them with that term. In some contexts, these rites are known as “ordinances of God.”<sup>89</sup> In some ecumenical dialogues, criteria have been proposed in order to overcome the historical divergences.<sup>90</sup>

## **B. The “Sacramentality” of the Church in Relation to Christ’s Salvific Activity in Justification and Sanctification**

51. The following section will explore the possibility of applying what has been said so far concerning the sacraments to the wider topic of the nature and mission of the church as a whole. This will build upon the agreements of our earlier phases of dialogue concerning the church as a community of Word and sacrament and will hopefully serve as a good transition to our third and final chapter on the church as an agent for justice in the world.

52. During the twentieth century, some Catholic theologians began to develop the theological notion of “sacrament” as a way of interpreting the salvific activity of Christ and the Spirit in and through the Church as sign and instrument.<sup>91</sup> The divine economy of salvation takes place within the conditions in which human beings live, through audible words and visible signs. Already creation reflects and speaks of its divine author. With the incarnation and paschal mystery of the Son of God, redemption brings to fulfillment God’s saving design for creation. This echoes a principle dear to medieval scholastic theologians, that is, that grace perfects nature, now reinterpreted more broadly. If a sacrament may be considered to be a visible encounter with grace in

---

87. Council of Trent, *Decree on Sacraments*, (1601 and 1603).

88. Cf. Related with this idea is Thomas Aquinas’ expression “*potissima sacramenta*” (*Summa theologiae* III, q. 62, a. 5; cf. also *Summa contra gentiles*, IV, 72). See also Y. Congar, “The idea of ‘major’ or ‘principal sacraments,’” *Concilium* 4 (1968), no. 1, 1, 12-17.

89. The *Second Helvetic Confession* for instance reads under chapter 19 entitled ‘Of the Sacraments of the Church of Christ: “There are some who count seven Sacraments of the new people. Of these we acknowledge that repentance, the ordination of ministers (not indeed the papal but the apostolic ordination), and matrimony are profitable ordinances of God, but not Sacraments.”’

90. Some ecumenical dialogues involving the Reformed and Catholics have suggested that a promising approach to addressing disagreement about the number of sacraments may be found in distinguishing between a broader and a narrower usage of the term “sacrament” (cf. Lehmann, K. and Pannenberg, W., Hrsg., *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*, Band I: *Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt in Zeitalter der Reformation und heute*, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985, 77-88, I. 1.2) or between two “sacraments” and five “sacramental (ecclesial) acts” (cf. Groupe des Dombes, *The Holy Spirit, the Church and the Sacraments* (1979), 32).

91. This development was anticipated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838) and Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888). Yves Congar and Karl Rahner, both of whom played influential roles at the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, acknowledged an intellectual debt especially to the former.

history, then, always depending upon Christ and recognizing that he continues to work in history through the Holy Spirit, it becomes possible to speak analogously of the sacramentality of the church as a whole, not only in celebrating particular sacramental rites, but also in proclaiming the Word of God and in the witness of Christian life. This is what was meant when Vatican II opened its Constitution on the Church by claiming that the church “is in Christ like (*veluti*) a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”<sup>92</sup> Our dialogue has seen such a designation of the church as a welcome change from the largely institutional self-understanding which dominated Catholic ecclesiology in the centuries following the Reformation. The conviction that the church, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to bring healing to a world wounded by sin resonates to some degree with a Reformed emphasis on the witness which the Christian community, as the prophetic people of God, is called to give in history.<sup>93</sup>

53. Through justification and through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, the church, as the body of Christ, is emboldened to continue Christ’s offices of prophet, priest, and king in keeping with its unique calling to be a sign and sacrament of the kingdom of God. According to the *Heidelberg Catechism*, Jesus is called the Christ because he was ordained by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher, our only high priest and our eternal king.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, every Christian by faith shares in this anointing and in this threefold office.<sup>95</sup> The value of this triple office was acknowledged by Vatican II when it described not only individual members of the ordained clergy<sup>96</sup> and the laity,<sup>97</sup> but the entire people of God as a prophetic, priestly and kingly people.<sup>98</sup> This suggests the possibility of an important convergence between us regarding the nature of the church. Those who are justified by grace through faith and sanctified by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament are invested with the prophetic office of proclaiming the gospel message of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God in speech and action. They offer their lives as a living sacrifice of praise (cf. *Rom* 12:1) and dedicate themselves to action for justice and peace in accordance with the demands of the kingdom. Justification grounds the lifelong process of sanctification in which the prophetic, priestly and kingly people of God commit themselves to share in the offices of Christ by acting as he did. During our dialogue, we on occasion referred to sanctification as the “middle term” between justification and justice, which finds expression in social action and the promotion of human dignity. This was a brief, useful way for the dialogue to express the interconnectedness of justification, sanctification and social action.

---

92. *Lumen gentium* 1 (4101).

93. See e.g. K. Barth, *The Humanity of God*, Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1996: “The Church is the special race of men, the congregation, or to use Calvin’s expression, the *compagnie*, which has been constituted, appointed and called to be His witness in the world by a knowledge of the gracious God manifest in Jesus Christ, as knowledge which is rather miserable, but which is invincible because the Holy Spirit has the making of it.”

94. *Heidelberg Catechism*, 31.

95. *Ibid.*, 32.

96. *Lumen gentium*, 25-28 (4149-53).

97. *Ibid.*, 34-36 (4160-62).

98. *Ibid.*, 10-13 (4125-32).

54. Seeing the Church as a prophetic, priestly, and kingly people on the basis of Word and sacrament also provides a framework for understanding the relation between prophetic voices and authority within the life of the community. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires believers to deepen their understanding of the good news of Jesus Christ and to discern ways of applying the gospel to the needs of time and place according to the signs of the times.<sup>99</sup> It is the same Holy Spirit who is invoked to assist those charged with roles of authority and leadership within the community. Our dialogue did not touch on the significantly different ecclesial structures and understandings of authority, accountability, and discernment in our two traditions. It would be mutually enriching to take up such themes in future phases. Only some very general comments can be offered here. In the Catholic Church there has been a tendency to locate the role of authority, leadership, and discernment within individual offices, although since Vatican II conciliar structures have been fostered at various levels of the life of the Church inviting the participation of all according to their specific vocation within the people of God.<sup>100</sup> The Reformed tradition invests authority in conciliar processes, which are found at local, regional, and national levels and which interact with each other. Within these conciliar processes the decision making authority on all matters of the church is vested not only in ordained members of the clergy but, on a level of parity, also in elders, deacons, and their equivalents. In particular situations such decision-making authority can be vested in all members of a congregation.

### CHAPTER THREE JUSTIFICATION AND CHRISTIAN ACTION ON BEHALF OF JUSTICE IN THE WORLD

55. Our first chapter explored our agreement that justification and sanctification are indissolubly linked in Reformed and Catholic thought. The second chapter related justification and sanctification to the ministry of Word and sacrament, giving an opportunity, first, to explore points of convergence and difference between us regarding these essential dimensions of the life of the Christian community and, second, to consider

---

99. *Lumen gentium* teaches that “discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life” 12 (4125).

100. Such participation includes all of all of the baptized, including those who, in Catholic parlance, are called the laity. As *Lumen gentium* states: “But by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others. It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer” 31 (4157).

the service of the church as a whole in God's saving action in history. This final chapter will explore how the acceptance of God's pardon in justification and the ongoing sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, impel Christians to commit themselves to participate in the kingdom of God already inaugurated by Christ Jesus.

56. The very similarity between the words "justification" and "justice" in almost all languages invites Christians to reflect upon whether and how the realities they express are related. The New Testament makes use of the very same word – *dikaiosynē* – to express both the quality of upright behavior and the state of being freed from sin through the mercy of God.<sup>101</sup> That both of these meanings are conveyed with the same word reflects the fact that they are profoundly related. The one who is justified by faith is called to act in a righteous way. As a consequence, the doctrine of justification cannot be seen in the abstract, divorced from the reality of injustice, oppression, and violence in today's world. The report of phase three of the dialogue between WARC and the Catholic Church noted that "Jesus, the Word made flesh, proclaimed that the kingdom is at hand and the community of disciples is that group of human beings which, under the influence of grace, has responded in faith. . . . This response of saving faith impels them, for their part, to proclaim the Word of salvation and commissions them to witness to the kingdom values that Jesus taught."<sup>102</sup> The tragic abundance of economic injustice, oppression, racism, sexism and abuse of the environment is all too evident in our world today; these evils are present even within the Christian community. In the face of this, there have been repeated calls in both of our communities for commitment to work for change. The church is nourished to work on behalf of justice, peace and the protection of creation through the ongoing encounter with Christ in the Spirit through Word and sacrament. As the previous phase of our bilateral conversations noted:

The transformation of the world occurs in part through efforts to create a more just and peaceful society. But Christians also believe that this transformation is realized now, in an anticipatory way, in that communion between God and human beings which takes place in the church, especially through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and other sacraments or rites. As sacrament of the kingdom, the church is and must be both creation of the Word and sacrament of grace.<sup>103</sup>

---

101. The noun *dikaiosynē* can be translated either as "justice" or as "righteousness." In the New Testament it can express simply the quality of upright behavior, as in the verse "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (*Matt* 5:20). A central theme of Pauline theology, however, is to employ this word in his reflection about the relation between faith and the works of the law: "But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." (*Rom* 3:21-22). For its part, the noun justification, in today's vernacular languages, refers either to God's activity of reconciling sinners to himself or to the experience of being reconciled to God. Paul uses this verb (*dikaiōō*) to express God's gracious saving action in Christ: "Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rom* 5:1).

102. The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God, 190.

103. *Ibid.*, 191.

Justice is a complex reality, having various meanings depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed. But we found the greatest convergence about it by starting with the revelation of the loving and graceful God, who expresses justice-seeking action in all facets of the lives of human beings and of creation.

57. God makes and declares human beings just not only to be saved individually within the community of the church, but also so that they can participate in God's work of healing and transforming their unjust world. In this sense, one can talk of the ethics of justification. This is beautifully expressed in the parable of the separation of the sheep and the goats, where Jesus states that at the last judgment he will say "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." (cf. *Matt* 25:31-46). The God of the Bible is a God of righteous mercy<sup>104</sup> who takes human misery to heart, entering into it and overcoming it from within. God establishes justice for the innocent who are threatened, the poor, the alienated and the oppressed. God stands unconditionally and passionately on their side: "he has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" (*Lk* 1:52). God's concern for us in our distress cannot be taken seriously without assuming responsibility for all those who are poor and wretched.<sup>105</sup> The believer is summoned to accompany and defend those who suffer wrong. Conformity to Christ means attending to the needs of those excluded by society. The poor, the marginalized and the victimized, together with the whole groaning creation, require the special attention of the Christian<sup>106</sup>

#### A. Justification, Sanctification and Action on behalf of Justice

58. For the Reformed, justification is always accompanied by sanctification; they are two inseparable aspects of the saving activity of Christ granted to believers in virtue of their union with Christ that as a result they may live in holiness. The Second Vatican Council entitled an entire chapter of its Constitution on the Church the "universal call to holiness," proposing that the church is holy "because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as 'alone holy,' loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her (cf. *Eph* 5:25-26); he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God. Therefore all in the Church . . . are called to holiness, according to the apostle's saying: 'For this is the will of God, your sanctification' (*1 Th* 4:3; cf. *Eph* 1:4)."<sup>107</sup> True sanctification always manifests itself in the fruits of the Spirit, outstanding among which is love. Thus the Council affirms that "the first and most necessary gift is charity, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor because of him."<sup>108</sup> Such love for God and for neighbor will impel the Christian to seek to rectify situations in which human beings suffer under conditions of oppression, injustice or the destruction of the environment on which we all depend. In this perspective, justification and sanctification of necessity call for and lead naturally to action on behalf of justice. One national dialogue between our two communions affirms:

---

104. Cf. the Hebrew word *tzedakah*, the primary meaning of which is "righteousness."

105. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 386-387.

106. See Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 197-201; *Laudato si*, 17-19.

107. *Lumen gentium*, 39.

108. *Ibid.*, 42.

The people of God are called in every age to proclaim righteousness, to struggle against injustice, and to care for one another, for the structures of civilization, and for creation. In our age, “human rights” is a particular way of speaking of the ethical demands of righteousness and justice under God’s rule. At their deepest point, all human rights are grounded in nothing else than God’s righteousness, which we know through Jesus Christ. It is under the grace of God’s righteousness that humans speak of a universal and reliable moral law that is known by revelation and reason. It is engraved on the human heart in such a way that no one and no group is excused from recognizing the claim that other humans must be treated with justice, and that societies must be arranged on the basis of freedom and equity. ... <sup>109</sup>

The statement reinforces the Christian mandate to do justice by pointing out that it is engraved on every human heart, a claim that accords with the Catholic understanding of natural law. Though the Reformed have varying perspectives on the concept of natural law, they do affirm that God’s law given at creation is consistent with God’s law revealed to Moses and embodied in Jesus Christ. As those renewed by the Holy Spirit and thereby empowered to obey this law more completely, Christians have a special interest in pursuing justice.

## **B. The Word of God and Commitment to Justice**

59. The Word of God – incarnate, written, and proclaimed – founds the Christian pursuit of justice. The incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, embodies God’s justice most fully, as we see in his proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” (*Lk* 4:18-21, quoting *Is* 61:1-2).

60. The righteousness proclaimed and embodied by Jesus presupposes the Old Testament tradition that testifies to God’s justice. God is the just judge (*Pss* 7:10; 11:7; *Jer* 11:20) who rules and orders all things with righteousness (*Dt* 32:4; *Pss* 119:137; *Is* 5:16). God’s righteousness lasts forever (*Pss* 119:142) and brings about the deliverance of the people Israel, in fulfillment of the promise (*Pss* 103:6; *Is* 42:6-7; 45:13,24-25 and, in general, *Is* 40-66). Justice is also a human moral virtue which designates the observance of God’s commandments so that one does justice or acts with righteousness (*Gen* 18:19; *Pss* 106:3; 119:40,106; *Prov* 21:3; *Is* 56:1; 58:2). In the Old Testament, God’s good gifts of heaven and earth, seas and dry land, vegetation and animals, and God’s promise of land to Israel, beckon us to seek not only just human relations, but also the care and protection of God’s whole creation.

61. While one dimension of biblical justice is captured in the “golden rule” (“Do to others as you would have them do to you,” (*Lk* 6:31), the New Testament encourages

---

109. “The Statement on Human Rights” from Reformed-Roman Catholic USA consultation on “Ethics and the Search for Christian Unity,” (1980), available at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/reformed/upload/Ethics-and-the-Search-for-Christian-Unity.pdf> (accessed 18 February, 2015).

an even more radical form of righteousness, following the very example of Jesus: “Live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (*Eph* 5:2). In this way, scripture asks not simply that people act fairly and consistently, treating others as they hope that they might themselves be treated, but to treat others as they themselves have already been treated. Christ delivered us at great cost from the peril of eternal death. We have been spared from a condemnation that would otherwise have been ours. From now on there is nothing for us but to live a life of gratitude. The standard of behavior is set not by our wishes to be treated fairly but by Jesus’ saving act of radical, self-sacrificing love.

62. We hear and respond to God’s Word most frequently in and through the church’s proclamation of the good news of God’s righteous action in Christ, which is: “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed” (*Rom* 3:23-25). Christ’s death for us on the cross is for the sake of our salvation as well as an indication of the depth of his suffering love on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized.

63. Proclamation of this gospel has obvious implications for the social commitment of Jesus’ followers. Faith engendered by hearing the Word heals the person wounded by sin and moves him or her toward justice both within and beyond the bounds of the church. As Pope Francis noted in his exhortation on the joy of the gospel:

Reading the Scriptures also makes it clear that the Gospel is not merely about our personal relationship with God. Nor should our loving response to God be seen simply as an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need, a kind of “charity à la carte” or a series of acts aimed solely at easing our conscience. The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world.<sup>110</sup>

And as the *Belhar Confession*, of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa, states:

We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ; that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells.<sup>111</sup>

Both these statements underline our shared conviction that the church is directed beyond itself toward the world, to which it is called to bear witness about the good news of God’s reign of love and justice.

---

110. *Evangelii gaudium*, 180.

111. *The Confession of Belhar* (September 1986), 3. The confession was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In 1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA). For full text see [http://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/belhar.pdf)

### C. Sacraments and Commitment to Justice

64. Sacraments, as expressions of faith, both clarify the meaning of justice and call believers to commit themselves to pursuing its realization in the world. An essential aspect of the believer's response of gratitude for what God has done in his or her life is to live a life worthy of the call to sanctification and holiness. The sanctification of believers by the Holy Spirit impels them to promote that justice which scripture relates with the kingdom of God. "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (*Rom* 14:17). Baptismal liturgies in our churches tend to emphasize biblical themes related to salvation in Christ, especially those of participation in the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and birth in Christ to become a new creation. Dying and rising with Christ, sharing his life through life-giving grace, becoming an adopted child of God – these fundamental dimensions of baptism impel Christians to be conformed to Christ, whose mission and identity are so devoted to the relief of human misery. An essential characteristic of baptismal life in the pattern of the Trinity is that it is oriented to mission. The Father sent the Son to give the Spirit. Jesus' baptism inaugurated his mission. Anointed with the Spirit at his baptism, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and then returned to Galilee proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God (cf. *Mk* 1:9-15; *Lk* 3:21-4:14). Similarly, the Christian, conformed to Christ in baptism and anointed by the Spirit, is sent to serve the coming of the kingdom of God, to participate in Christ's mission while manifesting the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit and thus to transform the world. In the end, the establishment of the kingdom is the work of God:

Certainly we cannot "build" the Kingdom of God by our own efforts—what we build will always be the kingdom of man [sic] with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope. And we cannot – to use the classical expression – "merit" Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something "merited," but always a gift.<sup>112</sup>

### D. The Eucharist and Justice in the World

65. It is with regret that we must acknowledge that, even though we agree on the implications of the Eucharist for justice, our two communions still cannot celebrate the Eucharist together. The reasons for this situation have not yet been addressed by dialogue between our churches at the international level, though we hope that this will be taken up in the future.<sup>113</sup> With this in mind we are nevertheless able to say together the following.

66. The Eucharist by its very nature leads to sharing and caring for the poor and disadvantaged. One of the earliest accounts of the Eucharist – *1 Cor* 11:17-34 – is a

---

112. *Spe salvi*, 35.

113. The 7th round of Reformed-Catholic dialogue in the United States (2003-2010) did spend significant time exploring convergences and divergences in Eucharistic theology and practice. This work helps to illuminate the continuing limits of our Eucharistic sharing, as well as suggesting areas for future dialogue. See the dialogue's final report *This Bread of Life*, esp. section 3c "Presence of Christ" and section 3d "Offering and Sacrifice", as well as section 4 "Pastoral Implications". [http://www.pcusa.org/site\\_media/media/uploads/worship/pdfs/this-bread-of-life.pdf](http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/worship/pdfs/this-bread-of-life.pdf)

good point of departure for considering its social significance. Paul writes to admonish the Corinthians to correct certain abuses, such as disparities in food and drink, with some persons having more than enough while others had very little. The community was torn apart by conspicuous consumption at the expense of the poor and needy. Its celebration of the Lord's Supper stood in contradiction to that communion which is the very meaning of the Eucharist. In John's Gospel, Jesus' miracle of multiplying the loaves and his discourse on the bread of life make explicit reference to the feeding of the Israelites with manna – bread from heaven – during their journey through the desert to the promised land (cf. *Jn* 6, 31-33 and *Ex* 16). This feeding of the people during their exodus from Egypt was a miraculous experience of solidarity and sharing, in which those who gathered much had nothing left over and those who gathered little had no shortage (*Ex* 16, 18). The Eucharist, like the manna in the desert, is food for people on the march toward the true promised land, revealed by Jesus to be the kingdom of God. The Eucharist is essentially a shared meal which scholarship has shown to be deeply associated with the paschal celebration; it is one of the culminating moments of the ministry of Jesus, who often shared meals with his followers and with publicans and sinners and who encouraged his disciples to invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind who were unable to repay one's generosity (*Lk* 14:13-14). Furthermore, the Eucharist is the expression of the self-giving, sacrificial love of Christ, who says "this is my body given for you" (*Lk* 22:19; *1 Cor* 11:24), "this is my blood poured out for you" (*Mt* 26:28; *Mk* 14:24; *Lk* 22:19), verses which reflect the suffering servant hymn of *Is* 53:4-6. The celebration of the self-sacrificing love of Christ in the Eucharist invites those who participate to do as he has done, offering their own action on behalf of those in need. In this way, one can see that a deep meaning of the Eucharist is charity. Charity is at the very heart of the social commitment of the Church:

Charity is love received and given. It is "grace" (*charis*). Its source is the wellspring of the Father's love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (cf. *Jn* 13: 1) and "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (*Rom* 5: 5). As the objects of God's love, men and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God's charity and to weave networks of charity. This dynamic of charity received and given is what gives rise to the Church's social teaching, which is *caritas in veritate in re sociali*: the proclamation of the truth of Christ's love in society.<sup>114</sup>

67. The connection between the Eucharist and love was also nicely underlined by some of the earliest Christian writers. According to the *Didache*, the Eucharist was expected to express the overcoming of every cultural division, especially those rooted in enmity, while at the same time committing all who partook of it to sharing with the poor.<sup>115</sup> Concerning Christian worship in the second century, Justin Martyr wrote:

And on the day named after the sun, all, whether they live in the city or countryside, are gathered together in unity.... Those who are prosperous and who desire to do so, give what they wish, according to each one's own choice, and the collection is deposited with the presider. He aids orphans and widows,

---

114. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 5.

115. Cf. Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Eucharist and Offering*, Pueblo: New York 1986, 15.

those who are in want through disease or through another cause, those who are in prison, and foreigners who are sojourning here. In short, the presider is a guardian to all who are in need.<sup>116</sup>

Several decades later, Tertullian speaks of the Eucharist in contexts where it appears associated with the practice of the works of love that the Christian community practiced, especially for the weak and persecuted.<sup>117</sup> Perhaps even more important is the actual practice of some of the various churches about which we have some information.

68. From this one can see that the church, in various contexts, drawing much good from cultures as well as challenging what is contrary to the gospel, is called to be a transforming community that cares for the poor, the needy, and the humiliated. It needs to reflect Jesus' words at the last supper: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn* 13:35). The Eucharist points to and embodies real reconciliation. The third phase of dialogue between our communities pondered the role of the Church during the situation of apartheid in South Africa, where a provoking stimulus to reflection on the system of separation of the races began precisely because of the refusal on the part of some to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that included all believers.<sup>118</sup> The Eucharist impels the Christian community to overcome such division. The Eucharist points out, in a most eminent way, what it means to be a Christian. Its celebration necessarily implies a certain way of life. Regarding justice, the Eucharist recalls and manifests that, in Christ, the righteousness of God has been revealed, as a gift and human response. In the offering of his body and the shedding of his blood, a new order has been definitively established. Each celebration of the Eucharist introduces us into the dynamic of justification, reconciliation and re-creation of humankind. But the witness character of the sacramental symbols does not end with human re-creation. Immersed in the waters of baptism and transformed by sharing the manna of Christ, fruit of the earth, and work of human hands, we are also thereby called to be responsible stewards of the environment. Our sharing of a meal must also be extended to the responsibility to safeguard that the earth be habitable for all. In the face of so many structures and mechanisms of injustice and exclusion, the Eucharist should be a true sign of the coming kingdom of God.

### **E. Authority and Action on Behalf of Justice**

69. It is the church as the whole people of God that is called to advance and promote those things that lead towards the establishing of a more just world. In order to avoid that such advancement and promotion be conditioned by any cultural, social or political context alone, this requires continuous processes of discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. At the same time it involves the openness to be challenged to live the Christian witness as appropriate to different contexts.

---

116. *First Apology*, 67, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers I: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. 9 vols., 1885; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1996, 186. Hereafter referred to as *ANF*.

117. Cf. especially *Ad uxorem*, II,4: CSEL 70, 117 and II,8: CSEL 70, 124. ET in *ANF* 4, 46-48.

118. See *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* (2007), 82-101.

70. In the church there are different ministries and areas of service, both those that hold formal authority and those that manifest themselves prophetically/charismatically from time to time. Care must be taken not to create any false dichotomies between institutional and prophetic/charismatic authority nor between clerical and non-clerical voices. The collaboration between prophetic voices within the Church and the voices of those in roles of formal institutional authority needs to find expression within the formal structures of the church as well as beyond those structures.

71. Experience shows that such collaboration produced by the Spirit can be preceded by tension and conflict. Dialogue and discernment through humble, prayerful listening to one another under the guidance of the Holy Spirit provides the church with good cause for hope that the level of agreement needed for carrying out its mission as the prophetic, priestly and kingly people, can be reached, without prejudice to the legitimate variety of insights and proposals that emerge within the community.

72. Formal authority and leadership within the church are ordered very differently in our respective traditions. The dialogue team did reflect on some matters relating to this difference but not sufficiently so to report on it. It would therefore be useful to take up an exploration of the structures and ordering of our churches together with their respective decision-making processes at a future point. In particular, the better understanding of the location of formal authority and leadership within the respective ecclesial structures might prove itself to be ecumenically fruitful.<sup>119</sup>

#### **F. Building on our Previous Phase: Church as “Sacrament” of the Kingdom**

73. The kingdom of God was at the heart of the ministry and activity of Jesus. In The Lord’s Prayer, Reformed and Catholic Christians pray together, “Thy kingdom come.” We acknowledge that Jesus and the kingdom are one. There is no kingdom without Jesus, and no Jesus without the kingdom. When we pray for God’s kingdom to come, we are praying for the coming of Jesus at the same time. As this divine kingdom comes to us in the person and work of Jesus, we would note that it has three tenses. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God’s kingdom has come once and for all. In the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments, this kingdom enters into our midst here and now. At the end of history, when Jesus will be revealed in glory, this kingdom will reach its fulfillment in universal thanks and praise for the mercy and justice of God.

74. Phase three of our dialogue explored in depth the meaning of this kingdom as revealed both in scripture and in subsequent tradition. Here we affirm together that reception of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist calls Christians to a firm commitment to serve the cause of the justice of the kingdom of God in today’s world. Baptism anoints the Christian community to become the priestly, prophetic and kingly people of God. The Lord’s Supper forms us into a just, reconciled, and loving communion and strengthens the bonds of communion between and among the members of the body of Christ, thereby impelling them to become agents of justice,

---

119. See paragraphs 142-144 of the report of the second phase of our dialogue *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church* and especially chapters 2 and 3 of the report of the third phase of our dialogue, *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God* on case studies of common action on behalf of justice and on structures and processes of discernment.

reconciliation, and love within the church and the world. Our earlier phase has spoken of the church as a kind of sacrament of the kingdom of God.<sup>120</sup> In its focus on the implications of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist for the justice of this kingdom, our current phase has sought to deepen and extend reflection on this image of the church. Together we affirm the hope, expressed in our earlier dialogue, that our articulation of the church's ministerial and instrumental role, in total dependence on the Spirit of Christ and directed toward God's kingdom, can make a contribution to Christian unity that reaches beyond our own communities. The ecumenical movement as a whole may be understood as participation in the movement of the Holy Spirit, who calls and inspires us to seek the kingdom of God together, and to commit ourselves to one another. If churches find new ways to give shape to this mutual support and accountability, then we pray that the result will be greater visibility for the church as sign and instrument of God's kingdom.<sup>121</sup>

In this light, we recognize that the relation of eschatology and justice could serve as an important topic for the future of ecumenical exploration.

### **G. Inseparability of Doctrinal and Practical Ecumenism**

75. There has been a classic conflict among ecumenically minded Christians between those who insist that the path toward unity requires a focus upon doctrinal questions which have been at the root of historic divisions, such as justification by faith, sanctification, and sacraments, and those who insist that such issues are less important today and that the focus of work for unity should be directed toward collaboration between the churches for the betterment of society. This is the tension, which can be expressed as that between doctrinal ecumenism and social ecumenism and was represented by the distinct efforts of the ecumenical movements of "Faith and Order" and "Life and Work." Our work in this dialogue has hopefully shown that theological agreement about the Holy Spirit's saving activity of justification and sanctification by grace through faith. Sanctification by the Holy Spirit through Word and sacrament is precisely what impels believers and the Christian community as a whole to action on behalf of justice in the world. These classic doctrinal themes provide a broad theological basis for the action of the Christian community on behalf of justice, peace, and the protection of creation. The specific issues addressed in the Church's social action also need to be grounded in a solid theological reflection. Commitment to and work for social justice in our world finds an important and irreplaceable foundation in agreement about the theological doctrines of justification and sanctification, which are generated in believers by the Holy Spirit through the Church's ministry of Word and sacrament.

### **GENERAL CONCLUSION**

76. Approaching the Reformation anniversary year of 2017, we have taken up the theme of justification by faith, which was so important in the debates and eventual divisions between Christians five hundred years ago. Our aim was to consider this topic

---

120. Cf. *The Church as a Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God*, 190-193.

121. *Ibid.*, 197.

within several fresh perspectives that have perhaps not been sufficiently explored by us or by other ecumenical participants up until now. The three chapters of our report consider the relation of justification, respectively, to sanctification, to Word and sacrament and to action on behalf of justice in the world.

77. We discovered a very substantial agreement that justification and sanctification cannot be separated. This means that justification will make possible and lead to the fruits of virtuous action. The justified believer enters into a journey toward that holiness to which he or she is called by the Lord and enabled by the grace of the Holy Spirit. As a result, the teaching that human beings are saved by grace through faith and not through works, which St. Paul proposed within the precise conditions he faced when gentiles entered into the Christian community, does not serve as a reason for division between us regarding the meaning of salvation by faith and the importance of good works. There seem to remain some differences between us in that the Reformed, for their part, see justification as complete and irrevocable, based on their confidence of the faithfulness of God to his covenant, while Catholics, for their part, closely associate justification with sanctifying grace, which they understand as lost when a believer falls into grave sin. Future dialogue toward greater doctrinal agreement and full communion between us should take up the themes of divine election and the possibility of falling into and of overcoming serious sin.

78. We discovered a very substantial agreement that justification and sanctification are brought about by the Holy Spirit by means of Word and sacrament. This allowed us to bring our theme of justification and sanctification into contact with an important advance registered by two earlier phases of dialogue, that is, our agreement that the Church is constituted by both the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. Through Word and sacrament the Holy Spirit confers the grace of faith, which is at the heart of both justification and sanctification. A contribution that our convergence here can make to the overall ecumenical movement is to nuance the conviction that human beings are saved “by faith alone.”<sup>122</sup> This expression should not obscure the fact that the Spirit makes use of means, such as audible spoken words and visible enacted rites, to impart the righteousness that comes by grace through faith. Significant differences remain between us regarding how we understand the salvific efficacy of Word and sacrament and regarding the number of the sacraments. Furthermore, the charismatic interplay between the prophetic voice of the whole community of the Church and the formally located voice of authority within the Church needs to reflect the nature of the community as a prophetic, priestly and kingly people, anointed as such by the Spirit received in baptism and nourished in the Eucharist. We have not taken up the question of what precise ministerial offices and structures are called for by Word and sacrament. These could serve as themes for future dialogue.

79. Finally, we discovered full agreement that the theological doctrine and reality of justification by faith and sanctification impels the Christian community to act on behalf of justice. The imperative for justice flows necessarily from justification and

---

122. It would seem that the words “faith alone” appear in the New Testament only in James 2:4, which claims that one is not saved by faith alone, without works. The emphasis on saving faith by the Pauline tradition finds a good expression in Ephesians 2:8 (“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”).

from the call of the whole Church to holiness. We especially considered how the celebration of the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper points to the need for the community to reach out to those in need. Here we noted that justice is closely allied to charity and mercy, both in the Scriptures and in the voices of the tradition. Differences remain on where each community locates formal authority. The process and structures of decision-making remain to be more fully explored, though this theme has already received some important initial treatment in the report of phase three of dialogue between our communities, *The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom*. Fortunately our present report has shown that there need be no tension between dialogue about traditionally divisive theological issues, such as the nature of justification, and collaboration in the work of justice. To our delight, we discovered that it is precisely theological agreement that can provide a basis for collaboration in promoting justice, peace and the protection of creation.

80. As we conclude this fourth phase of dialogue between the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Catholic Church, we members of the bilateral international commission unanimously encourage our two communities to continue on the path of dialogue. Each of the three previous paragraphs spotlights some issues which this phase of dialogue has shown to be in need of further discussion. Other issues to which this report invites us to give greater attention are the Eucharist, ordained ministry, and the exercise of authority. We believe that a most promising theme for dialogue which could lead to the uncovering of greater ecclesiological convergence between us could be a focus upon the nature of the Church as a prophetic, priestly and royal/shepherd people of God, a theme which is explicitly proposed both by Calvin and by the Reformed tradition as well as by the Second Vatican Council. Should a new bilateral commission be nominated, perhaps its first consideration might be to discern, in light of the foregoing paragraphs, what particular concern seems to call most urgently for discussion within our respective churches.

81. We also would suggest several concrete steps that can enhance the reception of the present report.

- The report ought to be made available to the various ecumenical offices throughout our communities at regional, national, and local levels; the internet could be used for inexpensive and expedited communication to promote growth toward greater unity between our churches.
- Some collaboration in preparing catechesis on justification and sanctification, about which we share a significant consensus, could be developed.
- Efforts can be made at regional and local levels to agree to develop and make use of common certificates of baptism, noting that our churches fully recognize baptism when administered according to the mandate of Jesus in Matthew 28:19.
- Discussions about Reformed association with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* can be continued and, if possible, lead to such an association, which would be important not only for our two churches but for the wider ecumenical community as a whole.
- Especially in light of Chapter Three of the present report, new initiatives for promoting justice, peace, and the protection of the environment can be fostered between our communities at various geographic levels.

## COMMENTARY ON JUSTIFICATION AND SACRAMENTALITY: THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS AN AGENT FOR JUSTICE

*A Catholic Reflection on the Report of the International Conversation between the Catholic Church  
and the World Communion of Reformed Churches 2011-2015*

Robert F. Christian, OP  
November 2017

1. The purpose of this commentary is threefold: (1) to highlight the ecumenical value of the agreement reached in *Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice* (hereafter, JS); (2) to indicate areas that need further study; and (3) to note particular or potential difficulties for a Catholic understanding, and reception, of the document.

2. The first area requires some initial general observations about the genesis of JS, the type of document it is intended to be, and the achievement it represents.

3. The second and third areas overlap, since some difficulties for a Catholic understanding of salient points in the document may require further study, which could help clarify or even solve them, whereas some other topics might be judged as obstacles to reception because they appear to be incompatible with already received Catholic doctrine.

4. Inevitably, the second and third purposes of this commentary require more description and explanation than does the area of the ecumenical value of the agreement as such. Therefore, this commentary will necessarily devote more space to these areas than to the first area. But it should be clear from the beginning that the relatively greater length of this commentary devoted to the second and third purposes is not an indication of an overall negative judgment concerning the worth of the document. It bears noting that the positive stress that comes with listing areas of agreement and the value of such agreements is, in fact, a foundation for assessing how what is held in common can, in the future, lead to even greater agreement. From the Catholic perspective, many—though not all—criticisms regard matters of omission, not of positive error. It is perhaps easier to imagine what more should be said rather than correcting what has *been* said. Like many agreed or convergence statements, all parties give thanks for what is held in common, and from that point, work to give a full presentation of areas of divergence and areas for future exploration.

5. Another preliminary remark concerns hermeneutics. Care must be taken to understand sympathetically what is said in the document. From time to time it may be useful to suggest expressions that, it is hoped, convey the meaning intended by the authors, or by particular traditions, in a way that can be grasped by all without ambiguity. When using terms hallowed by particular use in different traditions, e.g., *simul iustus et peccator* or *instrumental causality*, it will be necessary to explain how the traditions that use such expressions want them to be understood. This is important in order to avoid having different traditions use the same expressions in different, conflicting ways, leading to the paradox of the common use of an expression fostering confusion rather than clarity. The reverse is also true. Not every apparent opposition is an opposition in reality. This is recalled in §35 which cites the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, *From Conflict to Communion*:

[W]hat appears to be an opposition in expression is not always an opposition in substance. In order to determine the exact relationship between respective

articles of doctrine, texts must be interpreted in the light of the historical context in which they arose. That allows one to see where a difference or opposition truly exists and where it does not.

Since the 1990s, solid ecumenical practice has made explicit the fact that sometimes, terminology that was once polemical can now be seen instead to communicate the same truth, albeit with distinct nuances.<sup>1</sup>

6. With regard to the two expressions cited above—*simul iustus et peccator* and *instrumental causality*—it behooves the partners in dialogue to consider carefully, with regard to the first, how to understand *simul*: if it means “at one and the same time,” it is necessary to understand well how grace works in a person, and how sin affects a baptized person. Likewise, it would be imprudent to presume that it means “over time,” rather than “at any time.” JDDJ paragraph 29 points out this difficulty.

7. Paragraph 19 of JS presents the notion of *simul iustus et peccator* in such a way that the notion of “lifelong repentance” might fruitfully be placed “in dialogue” with the Catholic notion of ongoing conversion (the *mortificatio* described as a constant dying to sin) mindful, however of a key difference: Catholics hold that it is at least possible that some—while always struggling against sin—can overcome sin here and now with the help of God’s grace.

8. Paragraph 20 states that “God continues to forgive the sins of those who are justified, and they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification.” It is desirable that this notion be explicitly linked to—or divorced from—the praying for forgiveness mentioned in paragraph 19. This would make it clear whether praying for forgiveness is “merely” an effect of justification or is in some way instrumental in maintaining one’s justification. The tenor of the paragraph (“they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification”) suggests that praying for forgiveness is something the baptized Christian ought to *want* to do, but need not. Given the Catholic teaching that those cannot be saved who, “if they are aware that the Catholic Church was founded by God through Jesus Christ as a necessity for salvation refuse to enter it or to remain in it” (*Lumen gentium* 14), or who, though fully incorporated into the Church, do not persevere in charity (*ibid.*), the adverb *never* (they can never fall ultimately from the state of justification) is a challenge to further study. Indeed, *Lumen gentium* adds that if the sons and daughters of the Church “fail to respond to [Christ’s] grace in thought, word and deed, not only will they not be saved, they will be judged more severely (*nedum salventur*,

---

1. For an example of this method of treating expressions that once were taken as dividing, but now assist reciprocal appreciation of a commonly held truth, see the Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East signed by Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV on 11 November 1994, which reads in part: “Christ therefore is not an ‘ordinary man’ whom God adopted in order to reside in him and inspire him, as in the righteous ones and the prophets. But the same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity. The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is the reason why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as ‘the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour’. In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as ‘the Mother of God’ and also as ‘the Mother of Christ.’ We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety.”

*severius indicabuntur*.” Paragraph 20 states that, from the Reformed perspective, “the gift of faith includes the assurance of salvation” which “does not come from anything in ourselves [but] is based on Christ and the promises of God. Our perseverance is based on the promise of God to be faithful to us in Christ to the end.” Clearly, the meaning of *simul* is crucial for further progress on this point.

9. *Instrumental causality* is treated below in paragraphs 33 to 35.

10. This commentary will be divided into two main sections. The first describes the ecumenical value of the agreement reached in JS. The second treats of difficulties that require further study in common or which pose a challenge to Catholic reception of the document.

## I. The ecumenical value of the agreement reached in JS

### *Method*

11. The ecumenical value of JS lies in its demonstration that a dialogue can be fruitful and worthwhile even while some important matters remain to be resolved. It is not the case that dialogue comes to a halt when issues that continue to divide communities remain unsolved. Rather, acknowledgement is made of the problematic issues that have not yet been successfully tackled, and the dialogue continues.

12. This is evident right from the beginning. The title, *Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice*, is not to be understood as promising that all the issues connected with justification and sacramentality are mutually agreed on, and that *therefore*, the dialogue can talk from a basis of commonly acknowledged unity in those matters about the Christian community as an agent for justice. Rather, the report indicates that there is sufficient agreement about justification and sacramentality to move the dialogue away from what might be termed further systematic considerations towards consequences deriving from what is already commonly held in the area of social morality or ethics. The last part of the JS explicitly links the notion of the Church as agent for justice to the notions of justification, sanctification, and sacramentality, while yet acknowledging that work remains in those fields.

13. At a time in the history of the ecumenical movement when some disagreements seem to present insuperable barriers to the achievement of full, visible unity, it is important to see, as JS shows its readership, that progress towards unity can still be made even when obstacles remain. Such progress is a sign that the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:21) and for which our churches and communities labor may be achieved not merely by approaches that represent logic corollaries deriving from some agreed positions, but also by other means known to the Spirit.

### *Widespread consideration of neuralgic issues*

14. During the three phases of Catholic-Reformed dialogue which preceded the phase represented by the current Report, some major ecumenical achievements occurred, one of which features prominently in JS, namely, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ) signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity on 31 October 1999. The JDDJ, while not bringing about a perfect union between Catholic and Lutheran perspectives in the area of justification, did nevertheless demonstrate an attractive theological agility according to which both Catholics and Lutherans could assert the priority of grace and the importance—as a *consequence* of grace (although the issue of the relation of grace to

one's will was not completely elucidated)—of a life of good works. The JDDJ succeeded in attracting the attention of other communities. In 2006 the World Methodist Council associated itself with the JDDJ. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), while not studying the JDDJ officially, did receive reports from some members and from its European Area Committee. Presciently for this fourth phase, these reports devoted special attention to the relationship between justification and justice.

15. In 2010, the WARC itself was merged, as the result of a Uniting General Council, with the Reformed Ecumenical Council. The resulting fellowship, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), comprises Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, United and Uniting churches. Inevitably, the fact of being together entailed studying together what they are and how they intend to live. With regard to what they are, a common understanding of baptism is crucial,<sup>2</sup> and with regard to how the baptized live, it was logical to study how the planting of the Kingdom of heaven implies fostering justice in this world (see JS §7). As the Report says, “For the Reformed churches today, ‘justification’ and ‘justice’ are integral to each other” (§7).

16. Finally, the impetus deriving from a common understanding of the Church as *creatura Verbi* and *sacramentum gratiae*—terms that do not stand in opposition to each other, but are like two sides of the same coin—led to a sympathetic appreciation of the magisterium of the last three Bishops of Rome with regard to this report’s focus on the Church as an agent of justice.

17. How each of these neuralgic issues has been treated demonstrates the importance of trust and of a receptive, open consideration of the steps that follow from what many are saying together. If the theological virtue of hope can be described as the virtue by which the goal we know through faith (unity in Christ) is worked toward through choices that bring us closer to that goal, then the communities in dialogue about justification, the Christian’s identity (in particular, the Christian’s share in the *tria munera Christi* thanks to baptism), the sacramentality of the Christian community, and the transformation of the world into a more just place modeled on the Kingdom, are evidence of hope. In these regards the JS makes a significant contribution to today’s ecumenical climate.

#### *Other important areas of agreement*

18. JS notes that “God is not bound by the sacraments” (§45). As shall be mentioned below, this statement should be understood as denoting that God does, in a real way, bind himself to the sacraments even while not being limited to producing the

---

2. This was dramatically acknowledged at Magdeburg Cathedral in April, 2007, site of a baptismal font in use since before the East-West split of 1054, when representatives of the Catholic Church, the Orthodox, Ethiopian and Armenian Churches, and the Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist communities signed an agreement recognizing one another’s baptisms. In this remarkable statement, the signatories affirm their belief that despite different understandings of Church, they hold a common view of baptism, and every baptism is “unique and unrepeatable.” The statement continues, “We confess with the Lima document: ‘Our one baptism into Christ is a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship’ (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, B6).”

effects of sacraments also outside of sacramental celebrations. Properly understood, this statement usefully diminishes any temptation to consider a sacramental rite a sort of *deus ex machina*.

19. Regarding baptism, JS notes “that the baptismal liturgies as practiced both in the Catholic Church and in the Reformed churches do not reflect the language of justification” (§40), and it suggests that it might be fruitful in the future to focus instead on the relationship between baptism and grace. This is an important statement on at least two counts. First, it implies that for those involved in the dialogue, liturgy is a *locus theologicus*, and liturgies with common elements in both traditions are seen as witnessing to truth. Secondly, it builds on the relationship of justification to grace as found in JDDJ, and this witnesses to the effect of a careful consideration of a significant document in the ecumenical area.

20. A further area of agreement concerns the share of the baptized in the *munera* of Christ (§53). Paragraph 80, in fact, speaks of this as “a most promising theme for dialogue which could lead to the uncovering of greater ecclesiological convergence between us [namely] a focus upon the nature of the Church as a prophetic, priestly, and royal/shepherd people of God, a theme which is explicitly proposed both by Calvin and by the Reformed tradition as well as by the Second Vatican Council.” Presumably, future dialogue would need to deal with the question of whether sharing in the *tria munera Christi* is ontological (§43, for example, is not clear on this point).

## II. Difficulties requiring further study or which could impede Catholic reception of JS

### *The theological virtues*

21. Although JS, in paragraph 19, quotes Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians (“[Christ] died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them”) which describes hope as a theological virtue, the lack of any explicit reference to hope in this section and elsewhere suggests that an investigation into the relationship among the three theological virtues, and an explanation of their relationship to baptism, which would necessarily differ somewhat depending on whether the subject of Baptism is an infant or an older person able to choose the sacrament for himself.

22. Such an investigation could shed light on how JS intends one to understand the statement that according to the Reformed tradition, “Christ’s righteousness and life are given to us whole and entire by faith, which unites us with Christ and makes us members of his body the church. They are given to the believer once and for all, in and with baptism, and then ever anew day by day” (§17).

23. In Catholic thought, baptism confers a disposition to the theological virtues when it is conferred on infants, and it strengthens those virtues, which may already be present in the subject of baptism, in the case of older candidates. This disposition is not lost, since, Catholics hold, the sacrament imparts a character which is indelible on the soul of the baptized. Should the Christian turn away from virtue, he or she will lose grace (see §23), but the receptivity to a life of faith, an orientation to eschatological happiness (hope), and charity, remains as Christ’s pledge of fidelity to those who are his own. Thus, for the Catholic, one is *either* “*iustus*” or “*peccator*”, but even as sinner, one has a relationship with the Lord who is ever faithful to his promises.

24. The debate over the relation of works to faith, as indeed, the consideration in JS of the relationship between justification and works of justice, would be enriched by an investigation into the nature of the theological virtues as gifts of God, the relationship between those gifts and the sacrament of baptism, and a clearer description of the eschatological orientation of each of the virtues which, in turn, sheds light on the purpose of each virtue in this life. This is especially germane given the link JS makes between charity and agency for justice.

#### *Justification and sanctification*

25. JS affirms full agreement with JDDJ's statements that "Justification [...] means that Christ himself is our righteousness in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father" (§27), and that "justification is inseparable from sanctification, which involves the transformation of the sinner and the commitment to live a life of righteousness and love, a life characterized by obedience to the commandments and to the teachings of Jesus" (§30).

26. JS notes that the foundation of this statement is the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ (§27), but the link between the Son's assumption of human nature as the instrument of the redemption of human beings, and the instrumentality of the Church (and her sacraments) today needs to be expressed in greater depth. *Lumen gentium* 8 speaks of the analogy according to which "just as the assumed nature serves the divine Word as a living instrument of salvation inseparably joined with him, in a similar way the social structure of the Church serves the Spirit of Christ who vivifies the Church towards the growth of the body." An explicit reference to this text would be welcome, because this makes it clear why and how justification is a gift, and it indicates that the modality of receiving that gift is, at least ordinarily, through the visible instrumentality of the People of God. Paragraph 36 presents the problematic clearly. It asks if the Church can be a sanctifying subject, and if so, whether that is because of the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of sacraments, or to both.

27. Likewise, the notion of instrumentality makes it easier to describe not only one's own sanctification, but also how one who is a part of the "agency" of justice in the Church is a vital part of the instrumentality that the Church enjoys, or, to put it differently, how one participates in the *tria munera Christi* by sharing in the priesthood of Christ.

28. Paragraph 31 states that "for the Catholic justification refers to a process while for the Reformed it indicates a status." If justification is inseparable from sanctification, then there is still indeed a significant division between Catholics and Reformed communities on this point. Both communities believe in the fidelity of God to his promises. Their divergences lie in the area of sin and grace. Furthermore, one could mention that an area of future exploration should be that of the divine will, or Providence. To say that God wants all to be saved, but that not all will be saved, is to introduce the difficult area of the antecedent and consequent will of the Triune God. While this is not an easy topic, it is a useful one so that the notion of God's promises not be taken too mechanically, and the notion of human free choice not be reduced—in effect—to a single act of the will. Paragraph 36 speaks of God's willing the sanctification of humans and of the cooperation of human beings with God's will, but much could be gained by explaining God's will and the sometimes episodic cooperation of human beings more thoroughly.

29. Finally, an investigation of this theme would require a sensitive explanation of the assertion, “without faith no one is ever justified.” There are many theories about the salvation of unbelievers, but from the Catholic perspective, the dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* can have two basic meanings. First, those who *culpably* do not join or stay in the Church (that is, those who know that Christ founded the Church as the needed sacrament of salvation) cannot be saved. Second, the Church as the needed sacrament of salvation is in some way instrumentally used by Christ for the salvation of all who are saved (see *Lumen gentium* 14 and *Dominus Iesus* 16).

30. Paragraph 32 mentions that “in the Reformed tradition there have been some who have raised the question about this absolute assurance of salvation over against serious sin committed by the justified believer.” However, JS does not attempt to evaluate the authority of such statements. In the future, it will be imperative to compare and contrast the notions of magisterial authority with the voices of diverse theologians. Like the Reformed acceptance of liturgical tradition as a useful theological source, it is to be hoped that an evaluation of the nature and authority of theological tradition could lead to future breakthroughs.

#### *Grace and the sacraments*

31. The sacrament most thoroughly treated in JS is baptism, and one problem that is not satisfactorily presented concerns the notion that sacraments “contain” grace, or that the sacraments, as instruments of Christ, confer grace. The Catholic Church prefers to speak of sacraments containing grace in order to avoid saying that sacraments are merely occasions of grace—rites that dispose the recipient to be open to the workings of the Spirit “who acts in the Spirit’s own time” (§41). The notion that sacraments contain or confer grace denotes a certainty: when the sacrament is properly celebrated by the correct minister in the correct way, for properly disposed recipients, the effect that Christ wills to be communicated by the sacrament is actually communicated. The sacraments are thus certain, or definite, encounters with the Savior whose saving graces flow from his Passion.

32. Since saving effects are, logically, effects willed by the Savior, and since the Savior redeemed the human race through his death on the Cross, the only way to hold that sacraments contain grace is to explain that they contain grace in a “transitive” way: they are like instruments which are inert unless wielded by someone with a vision of how to use them and a skill in actually using them. When so wielded, they render effective the will of the one using them. Thus understood, sacraments only confer grace when they are used by Christ’s body, the Church, for the purpose of conferring grace. That is why the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms *both* that the sacraments confer grace, and that when a sacrament is celebrated, it is Christ who is celebrating it.<sup>3</sup>

33. Paragraph 45 states that sacraments “are indeed means of grace, but the Reformed reject the view that grace is somehow “contained” in the elements used in their celebration.” Further exploration of the notion of transitory or transitional containing (which is always to be distinguished from the theology of an ongoing, Real

---

3. See, for example, CCC 1127: “Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are *efficacious* because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies.”

Presence, in the Eucharistic species) might make it possible to advance beyond these words, also found in paragraph 45: “[I]t is not inappropriate to say that the waters of baptism wash away sins [...] or that the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper nourishes Christians with the body and blood of Christ [...].” This is premised on the notion of “a spiritual relation or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified.” If an exploration of the question of grace *in* the sacraments focused on how to understand the sacraments as instituted by Christ to give supernatural effects that exceed the natural effects of which the signs and gestures are capable, it might be possible to reconcile these views which are already close.

34. The Catholic notion that the sacraments are objective means of grace is important when considering how those who fall into serious sin can “regain” justification (see §46). The existence, in Catholic sacramental theory, of the “medicinal” sacraments of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, which can be repeated, and of the desirability of receiving the Eucharist frequently, underlines the importance of linking the notion of grace being contained in sacraments with (a) God’s ongoing invitation to sinners to convert and to grow in holiness, and (b) the desire humans have for certitude that a sacrament actually does what it signifies.

35. The conclusion of paragraph 49, devoted to the question of the *ex opere operato* efficacy of the sacraments, shows that the participants who composed JS are sensitive and hopeful about future developments in this area: “[W]hat is being criticized here is not the view that the Catholic Church actually holds. It would seem that both positions seek to affirm the primacy of divine agency in the sacraments and that they are effective signs. Still they seem to differ in nuance, emphasis and the language used to express these convictions.”

#### *The number of the sacraments*

36. While it is true that the Council of Trent did not explain how to understand what institution by Christ looked like for each of the seven sacraments, it did teach in a binding fashion that Christ instituted seven and only seven sacraments., no more and no fewer. Trent’s teaching refuted the positions that Christ gave the Church the authority to institute sacraments or that the Church presumed on her own that she had such authority, and likewise, Trent was at pains to teach what had already been the common teaching of the Church in both East and West from the time of Peter Lombard (d. 1160). Since the Catholic Church holds that Christ instituted each sacrament, she judges that each of the sacraments is a gift to be welcomed gratefully. There are many theories about how the Church discerned the connection between the will of Christ and certain sacraments, and many theories distinguish between the relative importance of, say, the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist on the one hand, and the medicinal sacraments on the other which restore impaired communion. Nevertheless, no sacrament can be called, in Catholic thinking, an “ordinance” of God in the sense of being simply a wholesome thing to do.

37. Division on this issue is difficult to overcome, because there are different theological methods employed by Catholics and by the Reformed. Thus, in the future, a common investigation, with reference to the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution *Dei Verbum*, of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, would be a useful starting point.

38. Already, as noted above in paragraph 19, the Reformed use of liturgy as a theological source gives evidence of an openness to a more developed notion of Tradition that might help overcome the methodological differences undergirding our opposing positions in this regard.

39. In turn, such a development could lead to a deeper appreciation of the Church as a sacrament (§52).

#### *The sacrament of the Eucharist*

40. JS acknowledges that it is not in a position to speak at length about the Eucharist because the issues that divide Catholics from the Reformed concerning common celebration of the Eucharist have yet to be taken up by the dialogue. As a result, there is some imprecision in paragraphs 66 and following. However, this is not due to any misplaced irenicism, and the statement that “a deep meaning of the Eucharist is charity” is one that is certainly central not only to the concern of JS that the Church be an agent of justice, but also to the notion of communion with God Who is Love which is strengthened by holy communion. It is to be hoped that in the future, the notion of the Eucharist as the sacrament of Christ’s sacrifice can be fully explored.

### **III. Conclusion**

41. JS is a document that merits careful attention because it is the fruit of dialogue participants who have seriously considered the fruits of other dialogues (most notably the JDDJ), the scope and limitations of their theological methodologies, and the attempts made by voices in one another’s traditions to move towards agreement on issues that undergird a consideration of the Church as an agent for justice.

42. JS shows that in neuralgic areas of investigation, it is possible to lay aside some issues that cannot yet be resolved and still make progress. In leaving certain issues to the future, JS notes what the issues are from the Catholic and the Reformed perspectives, and it often offers an opinion as to whether a particular topic is a matter of serious theological dispute or, instead, a matter of expression that could, with sufficient clarification, lead to agreement.

43. Given that JS acknowledges areas of continued disagreement, and given that it acknowledges a significant discrepancy between Catholic and Reformed understandings of the sacramental economy, the fact that JS is able to describe sufficient unity to be able to speak of the Christian community as an agent for justice is remarkable. This is due above all to hopeful signs of a convergence in theological methodology. The Report can be accepted as a significant milestone along the journey toward full, visible communion.

---

This note constitutes part of the official Catholic Response to the text of the *Justification and Sacramentality: The Christian Community as an Agent for Justice*, and has been prepared by common agreement between the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

With regard to the section entitled “Areas of Converging Understanding” (in particular, paragraph 48) of Chapter Two, the following Catholic teaching should also be considered: “*God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments*” (n. 1257 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

## JOINT COMMITTEE FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ASSYRIAN CHURCH OF THE EAST

### COMMON STATEMENT ON 'SACRAMENTAL LIFE'

#### INTRODUCTION

On 11 November, 1994, His Holiness Pope John Paul II and His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos–Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East signed a Common Christological Declaration. This historic document was the result and the conclusion of a first phase of unofficial dialogues (1984–1994) between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. *“Whatever our Christological divergences have been, we experience ourselves united today in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace”*: with these words, an age–old doctrinal controversy concerning the Christological implications and consequences of the Council of Ephesus was concluded and new horizons of theological dialogue and pastoral collaboration were opened up.

The Christological Declaration continues: “Living by this faith and these sacraments, it follows as a consequence that the particular Catholic churches and the particular Assyrian churches can recognize each other as sister Churches. To be full and entire, communion presupposes the unanimity concerning the content of the faith, the sacraments and the constitution of the Church. Since this unanimity for which we aim has not yet been attained, we cannot unfortunately celebrate together the Eucharist which is the sign of the ecclesial communion already fully restored.” The Joint Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East consequently programmed two further phases in its activity: one on sacramental theology and a following one on the constitution of the Church. The phase on sacramental theology was carried on between 1994 and 2004 and concluded with the document at hand. Our third stage of dialogue, which will begin subsequent to this present ‘Common Statement,’ shall be concerned with the constitution of the Church. It is the sincere hope of the Joint Committee thus to hasten the day that both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East will be able to celebrate together the Eucharist, as a sign of fully restored ecclesial communion.

The present statement, elaborated by the Joint Committee for theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, deals with sacramental life. As the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East have different ways of distinguishing and listing the sacraments, this document is structured according to a classification that applies to both of their traditions. All liturgical rites

considered as sacramental celebrations in either both traditions or in only one of them, are treated in five following subdivisions: 1. Holy Orders and the Sign of the Cross; 2. Holy Baptism and Chrismation; 3. Holy Qurbana or Holy Eucharist, Holy Leaven and the Consecration of the Altar; 4. Christian Life (Christian Marriage, Religious Life); 5. Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and Funeral. The main purpose of this classification is to clarify how both sacramental traditions are one in their diversity; in different forms and rites, indeed, they both intend to celebrate the one and same mystery of salvation.

## I. SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

Sacramental life is a life of participation in the mystery of God's salvific work through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. This mystery is made present in the liturgy of the Church, which is called a celebration of 'Razeh' in the Syriac tradition, or 'Mysteries' in the Greek tradition or 'Sacraments' in the Latin tradition. Through the celebration of these mysteries, in grateful response to God's initiative, the Church enables the faithful to share in God's life and to concretely reflect that gift in their daily lives, through their communion with God and with one another.

As effective signs, sacraments convey the divine reality that they represent. Through their celebration, the Church in reality participates in the fruits of Christ's Paschal Mystery and in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Sacramental celebrations are thus more than a mere remembrance or an image of that divine reality; they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify. They actually introduce the faithful into God's work of salvation, through and in the Church. For believers, consequently, sacraments are ordinary means of salvation.

The Holy Spirit is the principal cause of this real effectiveness. He is at work through all the words and deeds of the assembled community. He associates to his transforming power the ordained ministers, for the accomplishment of their mission. He sanctifies the material element in every sacrament (such as bread, wine, water, oil, the imposition of hands, etc.) and operates through them. He unites the entire community to the life and mission of Christ. The Epiclesis therefore pertains to the very heart of every sacramental celebration.

All sacraments are celebrated in joyful hope of the coming of God's Kingdom; they are celebrated "*until He comes*" and "*that God may be all in all*" (cf. *1 Cor* 11:26; 15:28).<sup>1</sup> Sacramental celebrations therefore stand in the eschatological tension between the 'already given' and the 'not yet fulfilled' dimension of God's Kingdom. They confer here and now an actual participation in the final reality of God's Kingdom, a Kingdom, which still awaits fulfilment. They introduce the Church into a life, which still tends towards its achievement: their full participation into the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. *Jn* 3:3–5; *Rom* 6:3–4).

The sacramental celebrations of the Church are not arbitrarily established. They spring from the life of Jesus Christ and the foundational activity of the apostles, through the working of the Holy Spirit. They also decisively touch the crucial stages or moments of human and Christian life. This origin and purpose makes sacramental

---

1. Quotations of Holy Scripture in this document are taken from "The Jerusalem Bible" version.

celebrations among the most sacred and essential actions of the Church. As regards their origin, status and necessity, however, some historical and theological distinctions can be made among sacramental celebrations. This internal difference among the sacraments can be expressed in different ways.<sup>2</sup>

Though essentially one and the same, sacramental life has distinguishing characteristics and features in the liturgical traditions of East and West. These different traditions are the result and the expression of different missionary movements, ecclesial developments and cultural backgrounds. As one and the same mystery is celebrated in these respective traditions, their different characteristics and features can be considered as a remarkable element of complementarity within the Church of Christ. *“You have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us”* (2 Tim 1:14), writes St. Paul to Timothy. The following chapters present and explain that ‘unity in diversity’, which characterises the sacramental traditions of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church has gradually recognised the treasure received from Christ and, as a faithful steward of God’s mysteries, determined its ‘dispensation’. In the Catholic Church, this gradual recognition led to the magisterial discernment that among liturgical celebrations there are seven that, in the strict sense of the term, are sacraments instituted by the Lord.<sup>3</sup> In the Assyrian Church of the East, no similar magisterial discernment was established. During the centuries, however, some authoritative authors employed distinct approaches dealing with the ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’, as celebrated in the Assyrian Church of the East. These approaches are slightly different from one another. Two of the most notable treatises, including a list of seven ‘Razeh’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’, were composed by Metropolitan Mar Abdisho of Nisibis (+ 1318) and Patriarch Mar Timothy II (from 1318 till 1332).<sup>4</sup> Respecting the sacramental traditions of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the

---

2. During the centuries, several distinctions were made in the Catholic tradition between sacraments necessary for ‘the salvation’, ‘the perfection’ or ‘the preparation’ of the faithful, between ‘major’ and ‘minor’ sacraments. In a comparable way, different Church of the East authors composed distinct sacramental lists, reflecting analogous theological considerations.

3. This discernment was formally decreed for the first time at the Council of Lyons II (1274); this determination was subsequently confirmed at the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1547).

4. Patriarch Mar Timothy II, in his treatise «Book of the Seven Causes of the Mysteries (Razeh) of the Church» presented the following list: (1) Priesthood; (2) Baptism; (3) Consecration of Altars; (4) Eucharist; (5) Consecration of Monastic Life; (6) Funerals; (7) Marriage. Metropolitan Mar Abdisho, moreover, in the introduction of his treatise, presents the following list of the ‘Razeh’: (1) Priesthood; (2) Baptism; (3) Oil of Unction; (4) Holy Qurbana; (5) Absolution; (6) Holy Leaven; (7) Sign of the Cross. However, in terms of historic patrimony, it should be noted that in the same treatise on the ‘Razeh’, Mar Abdisho substitutes the chapter on the “Sign of the Cross” with a chapter on “Marriage and Virginity”; he deals with the subject of the “Sign of the Cross” in the following section dedicated to the acts of worship. For circumstantial reasons, Mar Abdisho’s list became more available and consequently recognized and adopted in the Assyrian Church of the East. In fact, during the Patriarchate of Mar Dinkha IV, the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East affirmed in 2001 Abdisho’s list of ‘Razeh’ as the official list for the Assyrian Church of the East.

East, the succeeding chapters deal with all liturgical celebrations considered as ‘Sacraments’ or ‘Razeh’, in at least one or both traditions and with them only.

The liturgical traditions of the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East also practice a number of liturgical signs or rites which bear a resemblance to the sacraments, although they are not considered by both as ‘Sacraments’ or ‘Razeh’ in the strict sense of the term. In the Catholic tradition, these signs are generally called ‘sacramentals’. They signify effects, particularly of a spiritual nature, which are obtained through the intercession of the Church. They always include a prayer, often accompanied by a specific sign, such as the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, or the sprinkling with holy water. Some of these rites are occasional blessings of persons, meals, objects or places. Other blessings have a lasting importance because they consecrate persons to God, or reserve objects and places for liturgical use. By this variety of ritual or liturgical signs, Christians are disposed to receive the chief effect of the sacraments and various occasions in their lives are rendered holy. The following chapters do not deal with ‘sacramentals’ as such. All liturgical celebrations, mentioned herein after, are considered either by the Catholic or by the Assyrian tradition as belonging to the domain of their ‘Sacraments’ or ‘Razeh’.

## II. HOLY ORDERS

Jesus Christ personally called, formed and empowered the twelve apostles; from the very beginning they were his companions, called to assist him in the proclamation of the Good News, by their words and by their deeds (cf. *Mk* 3:13–19). After the Resurrection, the Lord commissioned his disciples to continue his work until the end of the world (cf. *Mk* 16:15–16; *Mt* 28:18–20; *Lk* 24:47; *Jn* 20:21–23; *Acts* 1:8). In turn, the twelve apostles transmitted their apostolic ministry to their successors, by the working of the Holy Spirit. They “*prayed and laid their hands on them*” (*Acts* 6:6; 13:3; cf. *2 Tim* 1:6). The Church continued this apostolic tradition. By a specific consecratory prayer and the imposition of hands, she qualifies her sacred ministers for the fulfilment of their apostolic mission. Both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East believe that ordination is a spiritual charism given to men elected by the Church to celebrate the ‘Mysteries of the Church’ (*Razeh d-Edta*) for the edification of the faithful and the building up of the Body of Christ, but never apart from the Church. Holy orders may not be repeated.

The requirement that all ordained ministers of the Church should stand in the apostolic succession, in virtue of their sacramental ordination, is an expression and a guarantee of continuity between the apostolic origin of the Church and the present qualification of her ministers. Being ordained in the apostolic succession, all ministers of the Church participate in the Pentecost of the Church: the Holy Spirit descending upon the apostles and their successors, after Christ’s Resurrection, for the accomplishment of their world-wide mission, till the end of time.

The sacrament of Holy Orders is exercised in three different degrees, episcopacy, presbyterate and diaconate. As expressed in the liturgical rites, theological teachings and uninterrupted praxis of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, these three degrees pertain to the one sacrament of Holy Orders. Although each of the three degrees is related in a specific way to the one ministry of Christ, all three are conferred by a particular sacramental rite of ‘ordination’. As the

bishop has the fullness of priesthood, he also can confer the presbyterate and the diaconate to others. The essential rite of the sacrament of Holy Orders for all three degrees consists in the bishop's imposition of hands on the head of the ordinand and in the bishop's specific consecratory prayer asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and his gifts proper to the ministry to which the candidate is being ordained.

All sacraments normally have to be administered by an ordained minister, according to his degree of participation in the ministry of Christ.<sup>5</sup> Although reflecting a basic similarity, a few different practices exist between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East concerning the minister of some sacraments, at least in certain occasions. These differences will be indicated below, each of them in their respective context.

Sacramental ministry has to be situated within the context of the Christian community, as a service to the common priesthood of the baptised. The whole community of believers, indeed, is in a special way priestly. Christ, high priest and unique mediator, has made of the Church "a kingdom, priests for his God and Father" (cf. *Rev* 1:6; 5:9–10; *1 Pet* 2:5,9). Lay Christians exercise a baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to his own charism or calling, in Christ's mission as priest, prophet and king. Through their baptism and unction, they fully participate in the mission of the Church, especially in its mission towards the world. Christian parents, as heads of their families, educate their children in the faith, giving them the example of Christian virtues and "offering their lives as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (*Rom* 12:1); this is their spiritual worship. Lay Christians also have the right and the duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and received by all throughout the world. Some lay Christians can also be admitted temporarily or permanently to different forms of non-ordained ministry.<sup>6</sup>

## THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

The Trinitarian formula, as expressed in the 'Sign of the Cross', is a basic element of all sacramental celebrations. Because all sacraments are conferred in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the ordained minister repeatedly makes the 'Sign of the Cross' during all sacred mysteries or sacramental celebrations. By doing so, he expresses that these celebrations are performed in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At the same time he efficaciously administers to the assembled community and the faithful all divine gifts, which take their origin and come upon them from the Holy Cross (cf. *Col* 1:20). From one sacramental celebration to another,

---

5. Both in the Catholic Church and in the Assyrian Church of the East all sacraments are normally administered by an ordained minister. Only regarding the sacrament of Matrimony, two different traditions exist within the Catholic Church (cf. *infra*).

6. In the Assyrian Church of the East, minor orders or ministries are transmitted in a specific liturgical celebration and are received through a rite implying only a ritual blessing, like the ministries of reader and sub-deacon. Similar ministries exist in the Catholic Church: "for the purpose of assisting the work of the common priesthood of the faithful, other particular ministries also exist, not consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders; their functions are determined by the bishops, in accord with liturgical traditions and pastoral needs. Servers, readers, commentators, and members of the choir also exercise a genuine liturgical function" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, London, 1994, n. 1143).

Christians are increasingly endowed with the gifts of salvation, brought about by the life-giving sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The fundamental conviction that every sacramental celebration depends on the salvific death and resurrection of Jesus Christ explains why some authors of the Assyrian Church of the East ranked the 'Sign of the Cross' among the 'Razeh' or 'Sacred Mysteries.'

The 'Sign of the Cross' functions as an explicit symbol of unity among all the sacramental celebrations. For the Assyrian Church of the East, when used in a sacramental manner by the priest in all of the sacred mysteries (*Razeh*), it is part of the consecratory process of each of the sacraments, by which they are 'sealed.' All of them are means by which the Church further associates her members into the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. *Rom* 6:6–11) and into the eternal communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### III. HOLY BAPTISM AND CHRISMATION

Faithfully following the commandment of the Lord before his Ascension into heaven (*Mt* 28:16–20), Saint Peter said on the day of Pentecost: "*You must repent . . . and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (*Acts* 2:38). From the very beginning of her existence, the Church has thus celebrated and administered the sacrament of Holy Baptism.

By their baptism, Christians are brought from the darkness of ignorance and sin into the light of knowledge and holiness (cf. *1 Thess* 5:5; *Eph* 5:8). Baptism is their second birth; if by their first birth they receive the gift of human life, by their second birth from water and the Holy Spirit they receive the gift of divine life and salvation. Baptism is among the ordinary means for salvation, as already affirmed by the Lord himself (cf. *Jn* 3:5).

According to the Scriptures and to the doctrine of the Church, the effect of baptism is manifold. It purifies the neophytes from sin (cf. *Acts* 2:38). It makes them 'adopted sons of God' (*Gal* 4:5–7). It incorporates them into the Body of Christ, which is the Church (cf. *Rom* 8:17; *1 Cor* 6:15; 12:27). It transforms them into temples of the Holy Spirit (cf. *1 Cor* 6:19). It makes them in a special way participants in the priesthood of Christ and in his prophetic and royal mission (cf. *1 Pet* 2:9). It qualifies and leads them into a life of sacrifice, holiness and happiness (cf. *1 Cor* 16:13–16; *2 Cor* 5:15). It makes them participants in the death and Resurrection of Christ (cf. *Rom* 6:3–11) and the divine nature of God (cf. *2 Pet* 1:4).

In accordance with the early Church, when whole 'households' received Baptism,<sup>7</sup> both the Catholic and the Assyrian tradition practice the baptism of adults and the baptism of infants. Children are baptised to bring them into the realm of freedom of the children of God, being freed from the servitude of sin. Every human being is in fact conditioned or affected by sin (cf. *Jn* 1:29; *Rom* 5:12–13), as Mar Timothy II says, "*a person, who is born from a slave, is a slave himself, till he receives liberation*

---

7. Cf. *Acts* 16:15,33; 18:8; *1 Cor* 1:16.

*from his servitude*”.<sup>8</sup> Infant baptism manifests moreover, in a very emphatic way, that all faithful receive their new creation in Christ as a sheer gratuitous gift of salvation.

Since Christian initiation is incorporation into Jesus Christ and reception of the Holy Spirit, baptism with water is completed by the acts of imposition of hands and unction with Holy Oil.<sup>9</sup> The Latin liturgy administers a first post-baptismal unction, which announces a second and usually later postponed anointing with Sacred Chrism, called Confirmation. The Assyrian Church of the East liturgy, in accordance with the Oriental practice, administers a “final signing” with Holy Oil, immediately after the baptismal rite. This “final signing” is considered as a distinct completion of the baptismal rite for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the perfection of Christian life. It covers what the Latin liturgy means by her separate and usually postponed sacrament of Confirmation.<sup>10</sup>

The rite of initiation into Christian life is a journey with several distinct steps or stages, including the catechumenate, profession of faith, baptism with water, anointing with sacred oil and admission to Eucharistic Communion. Although these essential elements are the same in both the sacramental traditions of Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, different liturgical practices and sequences have developed. For adult baptism, both traditions normally administer baptism, chrismation and Holy Communion during one single celebration. For infant baptism, however, liturgical practices differ. In the rite of the Assyrian Church of the East, consistent with the Oriental practice, the initiation of infants begins with baptism, immediately followed during one and the same liturgical celebration by the signing (*shumlaya*) with holy oil and completed by the reception of the Eucharist.<sup>11</sup> In the Latin rite, infant baptism is normally followed by years of catechesis, before being completed later on by confirmation and Eucharist. Infant baptism as practised in both traditions requires parents, godparents and the Christian community to make sure that children are reared in Christian faith and Christian life.

A Christian person can only be configured to Christ and signed with the seal of the Holy Spirit once and forever. Both baptism and anointing therefore confer an indelible spiritual character on the faithful.

---

8. Mar Timothy II, Book on the Seven Causes of the Church Razed, III, 20, The meaning of infant baptism.

9. In the Latin tradition, the consecration of “Sacred Chrism” is reserved to the bishop. In some Oriental traditions this consecration is even reserved to the Patriarch. In the Assyrian Church of the East it is the celebrant who consecrates fresh oil of baptismal anointing during the baptismal liturgy, signing it with the old Holy Oil (also called the ‘Oil of the Horn’), and praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

10. Traditions differ with regard to the ordinary minister of this ‘final unction’ or ‘confirmation’; in the Latin rite the original minister of Confirmation is the bishop; in the rite of the Assyrian Church of the East, consistent with the Oriental practice, the priest who baptizes confers himself the “final anointing” during one and the same liturgical celebration.

11. In most Oriental traditions, infants immediately receive Holy Communion with their baptism and unction, during one and the same ceremony. In the Assyrian Church of the East children receive the Holy Qurbana or Holy Communion after being confirmed at baptism. The priest dips the small finger of his right hand into the chalice containing particles of the Body, and places it in the mouth of the child.

#### IV. HOLY QURBANA OR HOLY EUCHARIST

From the beginning the Church has been faithful to the Lord's command "*Do this in remembrance of me*" (1 Cor 11:23–25). With respect to the very first Christian communities it is written "*they remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers*" (Acts 2:42).<sup>12</sup> More precisely on Sunday, the Day of the Lord, Christians met to celebrate the memorial of His passion and resurrection, to share in his Body and Blood and to grow as living members of His Body, which is the Church. That celebration thus became the centre of the Church's life.<sup>13</sup>

In the Assyrian Church of the East sacramental and Eucharistic theology, the concept of *Mdabranuta*' is of particular importance. According to the Syriac vocabulary, *Mdabranuta*' covers the whole salvific mystery, God's divine economy for the creation and the salvation of humankind. Originating in the eternal plan of God, *Mdabranuta*' finds its 'former dispensation' in the Old Testament, culminating in the Advent of Christ in humanity. Its 'present dispensation' is the New Testament economy, beginning with the Incarnation, culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and being completed by the descent of the Holy Spirit. Its 'future dispensation', which began at Pentecost, still awaits the Second Coming of the Lord, the glorification of the Church and the renewal of creation. The entire *Mdabranuta*' or salvific mystery is commemorated and celebrated throughout the Liturgical Year, in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the Sacraments. Its most clear and comprehensive celebration, however, is effected during Holy Qurbana or the Eucharistic celebration. During the Eucharist, the human condition before the Incarnation is evoked, humanity's need to God's salvific economy is confessed, and forgiveness is prayed for. Gratitude is expressed for the abundance of grace, given through the Old Covenant, through the Incarnation, through the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. An enumeration is made of the many blessings and benefits obtained through the provision of Gods salvific economy. The whole mystery of salvation or *Mdabranuta*' is thus summarised, celebrated and gratefully received in every Eucharistic celebration. Although this comprehensiveness is more evident or extensive in the Syriac Eucharistic tradition, it also is a characteristic feature of all Catholic Eucharistic traditions. In both traditions, the whole mystery of salvation is gratefully commemorated and celebrated in every Eucharistic celebration.

Reflecting their common Eucharistic faith, the same fundamental structure characterises Eucharistic celebrations in the tradition of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East: the gathering of the local community presided by the bishop or the priest, the Liturgy of the Word including readings from both the Old and the New Testament, the intercessions of the faithful, the presentation of the offerings, the anaphora or Eucharistic prayer, the fraction and the communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, followed by prayers of thanksgiving.

The anaphora or Eucharistic prayer leads to the heart and summit of the Eucharistic celebration, which is the receiving of 'the bread of heaven' and 'the cup of

---

12. The Peshitta text reads: "And they remained continually in the doctrine of the apostles, and they participated in prayer and in the breaking of the Eucharist."

13. Cf. Acts 2:42,46; 20:7,11.

salvation'. By the invocation of the Holy Spirit and by the representation of what our Saviour has done and said at the Last Supper,<sup>14</sup> the elements of bread and wine sacramentally become the Body and Blood of our Lord. Both the Epiclesis and the Words of our Saviour are thus necessary elements of the anaphora or Eucharistic Prayer. The real and true presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine, moreover, is part of our common faith and devotion.

While sharing the same Eucharistic faith, different liturgical traditions have developed in both the Catholic Church and in the Assyrian Church of the East for the celebration of Qurbana or Holy Eucharist. These different liturgical backgrounds and traditions are a constitutive element of our respective ecclesial identities, which leads to mutual enrichment. Each of these traditions should therefore be faithfully preserved and organically developed. In this context, a highly respectful consideration is due to the anaphoras traditionally used in our liturgical heritages, especially when they date back to venerable antiquity.

### HOLY LEAVEN

In different ways the early Church practised a partition of Eucharistic bread, combined with a distribution of these particles among the churches or the celebrants of a specific area. Such liturgical practice existed both in the Christian East and in the Christian West. One of these practices, called the 'fermentum', consisted in a distribution of small Eucharistic particles by the bishop to the priests of the surrounding area; each priest had to dip this particle into the cup of his eucharistic celebration, hence the name 'fermentum' or 'leaven'. Similar practices gradually disappeared in the Western Church and in most of the Oriental Churches.

The Assyrian Church of the East, however, faithfully conserved such a liturgical practice, called 'Holy Leaven' or 'Malka'.<sup>15</sup> Every year on Holy Thursday, the local parish priest renews the Holy Leaven by mixing the old Leaven with the new one. This Leaven is subsequently to be used during the year in all the Eucharistic loaves prepared by the priest before the Eucharistic celebration. In the sacramental tradition of the Assyrian Church of the East, this Holy Leaven has an integral and necessary part in the overall process of consecration. Further, the Holy Leaven functions as a visible sign of historical continuity between every Qurbana or Eucharistic celebration and the Last Supper (cf. *Mt* 26:26).

---

14. Among the Anaphoras of the Church of the East, the Anaphora of Addai and Mari occupies a special and venerable position, being recognized as its most ancient Anaphora. The validity of the Eucharist when celebrated with the Anaphora of Addai and Mari was recognised by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on January 17th 2001; Pope John Paul II subsequently approved this decision (cf. *Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Chaldean Church and the Assyrian Church of the East*; and *Ammissione all'Eucaristia in situazioni di necessità pastorale*, in: *L'Osservatore Romano*, Friday 26 October 2001, p. 7–8.

15. In virtue of its venerable origin, theological meaning and liturgical statute, the Holy Leaven was ranked by Mar Abdisho of Nisibis among the 'Razeh' or 'Sacred Mysteries'. The rite of Holy Leaven is still practiced by the Assyrian Church, not by the Chaldean or the Syro–Malabar Church.

## CONSECRATION OF THE ALTAR

Both the tradition of the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East reverently respects the altar around which the community is gathered, on which the Eucharistic gifts are offered and from which the Body and Blood of the Lord are received. A solemn liturgy for the consecration of an altar is provided in both their liturgical rites. This consecration is reserved for the bishop; it is carried out by an invocation of the Holy Spirit and an unction with sacred oil.<sup>16</sup> However, in the Catholic and Assyrian traditions, the consecration of the altar is not considered one of the sacraments.

## V. CHRISTIAN LIFE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

Marriage is vested with special importance and meaning, expressing both the order of creation and the order of salvation, that is God's eternal plan for the creation (cf. *Gen 2*) and the salvation of humankind, culminating in Jesus Christ (cf. *Eph 5:32*). It is a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a lifelong and complete partnership, which of its own nature is ordered to the wellbeing of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children. This intimate communion of life and love has been established by the Creator and endowed by Him with its own proper laws. The model of Christian marriage is the covenant between Christ and his Church, as made clear by the Apostle Paul: "*Husbands should love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy*" (cf. *Eph 5:25–26*). Through the celebration of the Church, the spouses receive the grace that enables them to represent in their conjugal love the fidelity of God to the people of His covenant and of Christ to his Church, and to bear witness to that divine fidelity. Christian marriage thus receives its sacramental character.<sup>17</sup>

The parties to a Christian marriage are a baptised man and woman, not impeded from contracting marriage and who freely express their consent.<sup>18</sup> The

---

16. Due to its ecclesial and liturgical importance, the consecration of the altar was ranked by Patriarch Mar Timothy II among the 'Razeh' or 'Sacred Mysteries'; according to his liturgical order, the consecration of the altar functions at the same time as a consecration of the whole church and the sanctuary where the altar stands. In the actual liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church, following the sacramental list of Mar Abdisho, the consecration of an altar is a liturgical rite, that is not considered as a sacrament. In a similar way, in the Catholic tradition, the consecration of an altar is ranked among the sacramentals.

17. Marriage does not appear on the list of the 'Razeh' composed by Mar Abdisho. His list reflects indeed an earlier stage in the development of the actual list of seven sacraments, preceding some later developments, common to the Greek and Latin tradition. In the tradition of the Assyrian Church of the East, however, the liturgical texts used for the celebration of marriage, as well as the teaching documents explaining its meaning, display the same elements which are considered as constitutive for its sacramental character in the Catholic tradition.

18. Regarding marriages between Christians belonging to different Christian communities or marriages between Christians and non-Christians, we have to refer to the appropriate canonical regulations of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. In the Catholic Church, permission for a marriage between a catholic and a non-Christian can be given by the bishop; in the Assyrian Church of the East, however, no such permission can be given.

Church's minister receives and blesses their consent in the name of the Church.<sup>19</sup> He especially prays the Holy Spirit, the ever-available source of their love and fidelity, to bless and to seal their covenant. The presence of the Church's minister and also of the witnesses visibly expresses the fact that Christian marriage is an ecclesial reality.

The unity of marriage, distinctly recognised by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity that must be accorded to husband and wife in mutual and total affection. The indissolubility of marriage is clear in the Lord's saying: "*They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide*" (Mt 19:6).

As a participation in God's creative love, marriage is ordered to the procreation and upbringing of offspring (cf. *Gen* 1:27–28). In our time and world, often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living and radiant faith. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are by word and example the first heralds of faith for their children. They should encourage their children in the vocation proper to each one of them, fostering with special care any religious vocation. Spouses unable to receive children can likewise have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate fruitfulness of charity and of sacrifice, both between themselves and towards others.

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious life has developed in the tradition of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, since the first centuries, as a special charism and way of Christian witness. Vocation to religious life was considered as a special gift of the Holy Spirit, for the sanctification and enrichment of the Church.<sup>20</sup> Several spiritual or ecclesial themes were related in a specific way to religious life, such as desert life (cf. *Mk* 1:12–13), the radical imitation of Jesus Christ (cf. *Mk* 10:17–31) and the following in example of the first Christian communities (cf. *Acts* 2:42–47).

Different forms of religious life developed in both traditions. In the Catholic Church successive periods of foundation and reform repeatedly contributed to the internal renewal and diversification of religious life. In the Assyrian Church of the East religious life spread at the end of the third or the beginning of the 4th century and prospered for many centuries.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the 14th century, nevertheless, it came to a rapid

---

19. In the Latin Church, it is ordinarily understood that the spouses, as ministers of Christ's grace, mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church. In the Assyrian Church of the East, in accordance with the Oriental tradition, the liturgical rite of marriage must have the presence of the priest, the cup of blessing, and the Cross as 'intermediaries' required for the validity of the rite.

20. The liturgical admission into monastic life was ranked by Patriarch Mar Timothy II among the 'Razeh' or 'Sacred Mysteries'. In the actual liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church of the East, following the list of 'Razeh' or 'Sacred Mysteries' of Mar Abdisho, admission into monastic life is a liturgical rite, that is not considered as a sacrament. In a similar way, in the Catholic tradition, the consecration of virgins and the rite of religious profession are ranked among the sacramentals.

21. In ancient times, the Assyrian Church of the East observed a unique type of 'Proto-monasticism' known as the *Bnay/Bnath Qyama*, or the 'Sons/Daughters of the Covenant.' This ancient form of religious life consisted of men or women living a consecrated life in their homes and among the community of faithful. It pre-dated the formal monasticism instituted by St. Anthony of Egypt, and it is the type observed by St. Ephrem and Aphrahat the Persian Sage.

decline and almost completely disappeared, mainly due to drastic social and political circumstances.<sup>22</sup>

## VI. RECONCILIATION, ANOINTING OF THE SICK AND FUNERAL

### RECONCILIATION

According to Holy Scripture, God's heart is not like the heart of men and He does not like to destroy (cf. *Hos* 11:8–11). He does not want the death of the wicked, but that he may turn from his evil way and may live (cf. *Ezek* 18:23). Jesus is the full representation of God's mercy, as he affirmed himself: "It is not those who are well who need the doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (*Lk* 5:32). He finally gave his life and poured out his blood for the forgiveness of sins (cf. *Mt* 26:28). In communion with his own mission, Christ gave the apostles and their successors power to forgive sins (cf. *Mt* 16:19; *Mt* 18:18; *Jn* 20:22s.). By virtue of this mandate and authorisation sins can be forgiven by the ministry of the Church, even after baptism. This ministry of reconciliation has been entrusted to bishops and priests. They received the authority to absolve by a sacramental act of absolution and reconciliation.

The sacramental administration of reconciliation exists in the liturgical tradition of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Constitutive elements of this reconciliation are repentance, confession, penance, absolution and conversion (cf. *Mt* 3:8). Different practices developed within both liturgical traditions for the administration of reconciliation, giving priority either to the private or to the communal character of reconciliation. The communal confession of sins and the ministerial proclamation of forgiveness during the celebration of Holy Qurbana or Holy Eucharist retains a particular penitential importance in both liturgical traditions; Christian conversion and reconciliation find in fact their source and nourishment in the Eucharist. The practice of personal confession and absolution exists in both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, at least for grave sins. In the Catholic Church, the 'private' practice of penance favoured a regular frequenting of the sacrament of personal confession. Although less customarily or frequently, the Assyrian Church of the East also practices personal confession and sinners at any time can ask for it.<sup>23</sup>

### ANOINTING OF THE SICK

Illness and suffering have always been part of human reality. In the Holy Scriptures illness is associated with human sin and with confidence in God. On the one hand, all sufferings on earth are associated with Adam's sin (cf. *Gen* 3:16–19; *Rom* 5). On the other, it is before God that the faithful lament in their illnesses, and it is from God, the Master of life and death, that they implore healing. Prayer of healing in time of sickness

---

22. In recent years attempts in the Assyrian Church of the East at revival of monastic life have begun in Iraq and in India and the United States.

23. Private confession was increasingly more practised by the Chaldean Church and the Syro-Malabar Church, bringing their liturgies into line with the Latin tradition.

is recommended together with repentance for sin (cf. *Sir* 38:9–11).<sup>24</sup> Jesus Christ gave surprising priority to bringing healing to the sinners and the sick. His compassion and healing of every kind of infirmity became a resplendent sign that the Kingdom of God was at hand (cf. *Mt* 11:1–5). Already during his public ministry, He sent his disciples with a mission to heal the sick (cf. *Lk* 10:9). And after his glorification, He mandated the apostles to continue such a healing ministry: “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptised will be saved... In my name . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, who will recover” (*Mk* 16:15–18; cf. *Js* 5:14–15).

The liturgical traditions of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East tradition make provision for the anointing of the sick. This anointing has to be administered by an ordained minister, namely a bishop or a priest. The efficacy of this anointing is attributed to the healing power of Jesus Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is not only indicated by the corresponding prayers, but also by the fact that the oil has to be blessed by an ordained minister and that the anointing is accompanied by the Sign of the Cross. Those elements are an expression of the sacramental character of this anointing rite.<sup>25</sup>

As the liturgical prayers of both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East indicate,<sup>26</sup> the effect of this anointing is manifold: healing of the body and the soul, sanctification of the Church and fortification of the person. The manifold effects of this healing anointing are noted by the apostle St. James: “And if he is sick, let him call the presbyters of the Church and let them pray over him, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith shall heal the one who is sick, and our Lord will raise him up...” (*Js* 5:14–15).

## FUNERAL

Christian communities pray for their beloved dead. They pray God to forgive their sins, that he may welcome them with mercy and generosity into His Kingdom. They beseech God to receive them with all the righteous at the banquet of the Lamb. They remember them and pray for their eternal rest and joy during Holy Eucharist. They consider these prayers also as a thanksgiving to God and a reminder for the living.<sup>27</sup>

---

24. God’s healing presence is not partial but complete; it tends to restore human life in all dimensions of its being weak and wounded. According to the Holy Scriptures, healing of evil and sin is considered as the most fundamental healing a human person can receive from God (cf. *Mt* 9:1–8; *Mk* 2:1–12; *Lk* 5:17–26).

25. The anointing of the sick does not appear on the list of ‘*Razeh*’ composed by Mar Abdisho (cf. note 5). In the Assyrian tradition, however, the liturgical texts used for the celebration of the anointing of the sick, as well as the teaching documents explaining its meaning, display the same elements which are considered as constitutive for its sacramental character in the Catholic tradition.

26. Cf. this prayer of the Church of the East for the oil of the sick: “O true Healer whose word is full of all well-being, aid, care and healing; O Lord let your grace dwell on this oil and make it to be a helper and healer of all our illnesses, a reliever of our pain, tensions and hardship, a cure for our wounds, a cleanser of our infliction, may we find in it the cure for our illnesses, now and forever. Amen”.

27. In virtue of its liturgical, spiritual and pastoral meaning, the liturgy of funeral was ranked by Patriarch Mar Timothy II among the ‘*Razeh*’ or ‘Sacred Mysteries’. Nevertheless, in the actual

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Sacramental life and theology is multiform in its nature, because it is the quest for understanding the mystery of faith in human categories and celebrating this faith in forms that are characteristic of each culture and nation. In general, the sacramental life and theology of the Catholic Church developed in a Greco–Roman context. As to the Assyrian Church of the East, its sacramental life developed in lands, which never were ruled by the Roman Empire, either by the Western or by the Eastern Empire. It developed in a predominantly Semitic and Syriac theological context, very close to the background of the primitive apostolic communities.

During many centuries, due to massive and sometimes very painful historic situations, the Church of the East could not communicate in a normal way with the rest of Christianity, situated within the Greco–Roman area. Some later developments in sacramental theology and practice, which gradually were adopted in the Greco–Roman area, did not affect the Assyrian Church of the East. Remaining extremely faithful to its proper apostolic origins, however, the Assyrian Church of the East conserved and developed its sacramental patrimony, stemming from the apostolic age. This patrimony represents a unique source and testimony for the whole Church.

A comprehensive approach to sacramental life confirms, indeed, that Christian life in both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East is structured by one sacramental reality. While celebrating sacramental rites according to different liturgical and cultural traditions, in essence, they both share the same sacramental faith and the same sacramental life. Their sacramental rites can therefore be considered as complementary expressions of a unique divine reality, unfolding its wonderful richness in a diversity of ecclesial traditions. The principle of unity in diversity can thus be applied, not only regarding the formulation of doctrine, but also regarding the celebration of sacramental life in both the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

In their Common Christological Declaration of 1994, the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East declared themselves united “*in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace*”. That common heritage of faith was received, maintained, taught, confirmed and clarified by the Holy Spirit in both traditions, especially through their respective sacramental and liturgical heritages. Sacraments being sacraments of faith, the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East are now able to declare themselves also united in celebrating the same faith “*in the Son of God who became man so that we might become children of God by his grace*”, and in dispensing the same salvific mystery, through their respective sacramental and liturgical traditions.

To be full and entire, communion between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East not only presupposes unanimity concerning the content of faith and the celebration of sacraments, but also concerning the constitution of the Church, as written in the *Common Christological Declaration* of 1994. Accordingly, both the *Common Christological Declaration* of 1994 and the present *Common Declaration on*

---

liturgical practice of the Assyrian Church of the East, following the sacramental list of Mar Abdisho, funeral is a liturgical rite, that is not considered as a sacrament.

*Sacramental Life* lay the foundation for the third phase in our theological dialogue, namely, on the constitution of the Church. When brought to a good end, the third phase will have completed the agreement on faith, sacramental life and the constitution of the Church, and the way will be open for the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East “to celebrate together the Eucharist, which is the sign of the ecclesial communion already fully restored.”<sup>28</sup>

24 November, 2017

His Eminence Cardinal Kurt Koch  
*President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*  
CO–CHAIR

His Beatitude Mar Meelis  
*Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon*  
CO–CHAIR

---

28. This present ‘Common Statement on Sacramental Life’ and the common sacramental understanding of our two Churches does not allow for the con–celebration of the sacraments and rites of the Church by their respective clergy.

# WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018

## LETTER OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY TO THE ECUMENICAL COMMISSIONS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES AND OF THE SYNODS OF THE ORIENTAL CATHOLIC CHURCHES

On behalf of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, I am pleased to send you the enclosed resources for the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018. These materials have been prepared by an international committee comprising representatives from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, working from material provided by an ecumenical group representing Christians from diverse traditions in the Caribbean.

The biblical theme which provides the focus for the material is, “Your right hand, o Lord, glorious in power”, from the triumphant song of Moses and Miriam (*Exodus* 15:1-21). This scriptural passage has a special resonance for a people whose history has been scarred by colonisation and oppression, but who recognise their freedom as a triumph and a gift of the God of steadfast love. A song, *The Right Hand of God*, written by the Caribbean Conference of Churches and an anthem of the ecumenical movement in the region, is used throughout the materials.

The Worship Service gives particular prominence to the Word of God in Holy Scripture. The Caribbean Christians recognise the great irony that this Word which they received from the hands of the same people who cruelly oppressed them, became a Word of hope, liberation and salvation. Christians across the region recognise the shared experience of God entering their history to free their hands from bondage, putting an end to their enslavement. Like the Israelites of the Exodus, they have a song of victory and freedom to sing and it is a song which unites them. The chains of enslavement have been replaced by the bond of communion established by the shared experience of God’s gift of salvation.

In their reflections for the eight days of the Octave of Prayer the Caribbean Christians chose to focus on contemporary issues, such as debt, addiction, human trafficking and violence, which threaten to again enslave a people that has been set free. Their faith in the salvation God has already won for them, gives them hope and strength in the face of these challenges.

The materials include an introduction to the theme, an ecumenical worship service, a selection of readings, reflections and prayers for the eight days of the Octave of Prayer, and an account of the ecumenical context in the Caribbean. The resources

can be drawn upon in many ways, and are intended for use not only during the Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity, but throughout the year 2018. The materials are also available online, and in translation, at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index\\_weeks-prayer.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index_weeks-prayer.htm).

The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity requests that you bring these resources to the attention of those responsible for coordinating Prayer for Christian Unity events. We strongly encourage the regional or local adaptation of the material, so that it may effectively address the local social and cultural context. It is also hoped that the material will be adapted and made available to young people, youth groups and associations. This process will provide a further valuable opportunity for collaboration between Christians at the local level.

With every good wish, and in appreciation of your efforts for the cause of Christian Unity, I remain

+ Brian Farrell  
*Secretary*

## IMPORTANT

This is the **international** version of the text of the Week of Prayer 2018

Kindly contact your local Bishops' Conference or Synod of your Church to obtain an adaptation of this text for your local context

*Resources for*  
**THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY**  
*and throughout the year 2018*

Your right hand, O Lord,  
glorious in power

*(Ex 15:6)*

*Jointly prepared and published by*  
The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity  
The Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches

*Scripture quotations: The scripture quotations contained herein are from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, 1995, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used with permission. All rights reserved.*

## TO THOSE ORGANIZING THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

### THE SEARCH FOR UNITY: THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is 18-25 January. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Paul Wattson to cover the days between the feasts of St Peter and St Paul, and therefore have a symbolic significance. In the southern hemisphere where January is a vacation time churches often find other days to celebrate the week of prayer, for example around Pentecost (suggested by the Faith and Order movement in 1926), which is also a symbolic date for the unity of the Church.

Mindful of the need for flexibility, we invite you to use this material throughout the whole year to express the degree of communion which the churches have already reached, and to pray together for that full unity which is Christ's will.

### ADAPTING THE TEXT

This material is offered with the understanding that, whenever possible, it will be adapted for use in local situations. Account should be taken of local liturgical and devotional practice, and of the whole social and cultural context. Such adaptation should ideally take place ecumenically. In some places ecumenical structures are already set up for adapting the material; in other places, we hope that the need to adapt it will be a stimulus to creating such structures.

### USING THE WEEK OF PRAYER MATERIAL

- For churches and Christian communities which observe the week of prayer together through a single common service, an order for an ecumenical worship service is provided.
- Churches and Christian communities may also incorporate material from the week of prayer into their own services. Prayers from the ecumenical worship service, the "eight days", and the selection of additional prayers can be used as appropriate in their own setting.
- Communities which observe the week of prayer in their worship for each day during the week may draw material for these services from the "eight days".
- Those wishing to undertake bible studies on the week of prayer theme can use as a basis the biblical texts and reflections given in the eight days. Each day the discussions can lead to a closing period of intercessory prayer.
- Those who wish to pray privately may find the material helpful for focusing their prayer intentions. They can be mindful that they are in communion with others praying all around the world for the greater visible unity of Christ's Church.

## BIBLICAL TEXT FOR 2018

*Exodus 15:1-21*

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

“I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name.

Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power — your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries; you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble. At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ You blew with your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendour, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them.

In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. The peoples heard, they trembled; pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; trembling seized the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O Lord, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by. You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established. The Lord will reign for ever and ever”.

When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea”.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME FOR THE YEAR 2018

*Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power  
(Ex 15:6)*

### THE CARIBBEAN REGION

Bearing the name of one of the groups of its indigenous peoples – the Kalinago people, formerly called the Caribs – the contemporary Caribbean region is a complex reality. The region's vast geographical spread includes both island and mainland territories containing a rich and diverse tapestry of ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions. It is also a complex political reality with a variety of governmental and constitutional arrangements, ranging from colonial dependencies (British, Dutch, French, and American) to republican nation states.

The contemporary Caribbean is deeply marked by the dehumanizing project of colonial exploitation. In the aggressive pursuit of mercantile gains, the colonisers codified brutal systems which traded human beings, and their forced labour. Initially, these practices enslaved and decimated and in some cases exterminated the region's indigenous peoples. This was followed by the enslavement of Africans and the "indentureship" of people from India and China.

At each stage, the systems of the colonisers attempted to strip subjugated peoples of their inalienable rights: their identity, their human dignity, their freedom and their self-determination. The enslavement of Africans was not simply a case of transporting labourers from one location to another. In an affront to God-given human dignity, it commodified the human person, making one human being the property of another. With the understanding of the enslaved as property went other practices that further sought to dehumanize the African. Included among these was the denial of the right to cultural and religious practices and to marriage and family life.

Very regrettably, during five hundred years of colonialism and enslavement, Christian missionary activity in the region, with the exception of a few outstanding examples, was closely tied to this dehumanizing system and in many ways rationalized it and reinforced it. Whereas those who brought the Bible to this region used the scriptures to justify their subjugation of a people in bondage, in the hands of the enslaved, it became an inspiration, an assurance that God was on their side, and that God would lead them into freedom.

### THE THEME FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018

Today Caribbean Christians of many different traditions see the hand of God active in the ending of enslavement. It is a uniting experience of the saving action of God which brings freedom. For this reason the choice of the song of Moses and Miriam (Ex 15:1-21), as the motif of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018 was considered a most appropriate one. It is a song of triumph over oppression. This theme has been taken up in a hymn, *The Right Hand of God*, written in a workshop of the Caribbean Conference of Churches in August 1981, which has become an "anthem" of the ecumenical movement in the region, translated into a number of different languages.

Like the Israelites, the people of the Caribbean have a song of victory and freedom to sing and it is a song which unites them. However, contemporary challenges again threaten to enslave and again threaten the dignity of the human person created in

the image and likeness of God. While human dignity is inalienable it is often obscured by both personal sin and social structures of sin. In our fallen world societal relationships too often lack the justice and compassion that honour human dignity. Poverty, violence, injustice, addiction to drugs and pornography, and the pain, grief and anguish which follow, are experiences that distort human dignity.

Many of the contemporary challenges are themselves the legacy of a colonial past and slave trade. The wounded collective psyche is manifested today in social problems related to low self-esteem, gang and domestic violence, and damaged familial relationships. Although a legacy of the past, these issues are also exacerbated by the contemporary reality that many would characterize as neo-colonialism. Under existing circumstances it seems almost impossible for many of the nations of this region to pull themselves out of poverty and debt. Moreover, in many places there is a residual legislative framework that continues to be discriminatory.

The right hand of God that brought the people out of slavery, gave continued hope and courage to the Israelites, as it continues to bring hope to the Christians of the Caribbean. They are not victims of circumstance. In witnessing to this common hope the churches are working together to minister to all peoples of the region, but particularly the most vulnerable and neglected. In the words of the hymn, “the right hand of God is planting in our land, planting seeds of freedom, hope and love”.

#### BIBLICAL - PASTORAL REFLECTION ON THE TEXT (EX 15:1-21)

The Book of Exodus takes us through three periods: the Israelites’ life in Egypt (1:1-15:21); Israel’s journey through the wilderness (15:22-18:27); and the Sinai experience (19-40). The passage chosen, the ‘Song at the Sea’ led by Moses and Miriam, details the events leading up to the redemption of the people of God from enslavement. It closes the first period.

#### “THIS IS MY GOD, AND I WILL PRAISE HIM” (15:2)

Verses 1-3 of chapter 15 emphasize the praise of God: “The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him” (15:2). In the song, led by Moses and Miriam, the Israelites sing the praises of the God who has freed them. They realize that the plan and purpose of God to set the people free cannot be thwarted or frustrated. No forces not even Pharaoh’s chariots, army and trained military power could frustrate the will of God for his people to be free (15:4-5). In this joyful cry of praise, Christians from many different traditions recognize that God is the Saviour of us all, we delight that he has kept his promises, and continues to bring his salvation to us through the Holy Spirit. In the salvation that he brings we recognize that he is our God and we are all his people.

#### “YOUR RIGHT HAND, O LORD, GLORIOUS IN POWER” (15:6)

The liberation and salvation of God’s people comes through the power of God. The right hand of God can be understood both as God’s sure victory over his adversaries, and as his unfailing protection of his own people. In spite of the determination of Pharaoh, God heard the cry of his people and will not let the people perish because God is the God of life. By his control of wind and sea God shows his will to preserve life and to destroy violence (*Ex* 15:10). The purpose of this redemption was to constitute the Israelites as a people of praise recognizing God’s steadfast love.

The liberation brought hope and a promise for the people. Hope because a new day had dawned when the people could freely worship their God and realize their potential. It was also a promise: their God would accompany them throughout their journey and no force could destroy God's purpose for them.

#### DOES GOD USE VIOLENCE TO COUNTERACT VIOLENCE?

Some Church Fathers interpreted the narrative as a metaphor for the spiritual life. Augustine, for example, identified the enemy which is cast into the sea not as the Egyptians, but as sin.

“All our past sins, you see, which have been pressing on us, as it were from behind, he has drowned and obliterated in baptism. These dark things of ours were being ridden by unclean spirits as their mounts, and like horsemen they were riding them wherever they liked. That's why the apostle calls them ‘rulers of this darkness’. We have been rid of all this through baptism, as through the Red Sea, so called because sanctified by the blood of the crucified Lord...” (Sermon 223E).

Augustine saw the story as encouraging the Christian to hope and to persevere, rather than despair, at the pursuit of the enemy. For Augustine baptism was the key constitutive event in establishing the true identity of each person as a member of the Body of Christ. He draws a parallel between Israel's liberating passage through the Red Sea and that of the Christian people in baptism. Both liberating journeys bring a worshipping assembly into being. As such Israel could freely praise the saving hand of God in the victory song of Miriam and Moses. Their redemption constituted the enslaved Israelites as members of the one people of God, united with one song of praise to sing.

#### UNITY

Exodus 15 allows us to see how the road to unity must often pass through a communal experience of suffering. The Israelites' liberation from enslavement is the foundational event in the constitution of this people. For Christians this process climaxes with the incarnation and Paschal mystery. Although liberation/salvation is an initiative taken by God, God engages human agencies in the realization of his purpose and plan for the redemption of his people. Christians, through baptism, share in God's ministry of reconciliation, but our own divisions hamper our witness and mission to a world in need of God's healing.

#### **THE PREPARATION OF THE MATERIAL FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018**

The Churches of the Caribbean were chosen to draft the material for the 2018 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Under the leadership of His Grace Kenneth Richards, Catholic Archbishop of Kingston and Bishop with ecumenical responsibilities for the Antilles Episcopal Conference, together with Mr Gerard Granado, General Secretary of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), an ecumenical team of women and men were invited to draft the material.

Gratitude is extended in particular to the leaders of CCC, to the Antilles Episcopal Conference, and to those who contributed to these resources:

- Most Reverend Kenneth D. Richards - Coordinator of the Drafting Team on behalf of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC), Chairman of the AEC Ecumenism Commission, Archbishop of Kingston (Roman Catholic) [Jamaica]
- Mr Gerard A.J. Granado, M.Th. (Edinburgh) - General Secretary, Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), Convener of Drafting Team (Roman Catholic) [Trinidad and Tobago]
- Professor Luis N. Rivera-Pagan – Prof. Emeritus of Ecumenics, Princeton Theological Seminary, N.Y. (Baptist) [Puerto Rico]
- Reverend Kirkley Sands, Ph.D. – Chaplain, Codrington Theological College, (Anglican) Church in the Province of the West Indies [Bahamas]
- Reverend Patmore Henry – Secretary, Connexional Conference, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) [Antigua]
- Oluwakemi Linda Banks, Ph.D. - A President of CCC & Clinical Psychologist (Anglican) [Anguilla]
- Ms Nicole Poyer – Leader, Taizé (Ecumenical) Group, Trinidad and Tobago and Matriculating Masters student in Theology (Roman Catholic) [Trinidad and Tobago]
- Right Reverend Glenna Spencer – Bishop, Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas (MCCA) & former member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) [Guyana]
- Right Reverend Kingsley Lewis, Ph.D. – Bishop, Moravian Church (East West Indies Province), and President Emeritus of the CCC [Antigua]
- Reverend Elvis Elahie, M.Th. (Edinburgh) – Moderator Emeritus, Presbyterian Church in Trinidad and Tobago (PCTT) and Principal Emeritus of St. Andrew's (Presbyterian) Theological College [Trinidad and Tobago]
- Reverend Marjorie Lewis, Ph.D. – President Emeritus, United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) (The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands) [Jamaica]
- Reverend George Mulrain, Ph.D. – Connexional President Emeritus, Connexional Conference, Methodist Church in the Caribbean & the Americas (MCCA) [Trinidad & Tobago]

The local drafting team presented the texts, prayers and reflections they had chosen or prepared to an international team sponsored jointly by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). At this meeting, held at Emmaus House in Nassau, Bahamas, 3-7 September 2016, the draft text was edited and finalised. The international team had the opportunity to visit the Pompey Museum of Slavery and Emancipation at Vendue House, a visit which helped the editorial team honour the struggles for freedom of the Bahamian and wider Caribbean people.

The international team would like to thank Archbishop Patrick Pinder and the Archdiocese of Nassau for their generosity in hosting us at the Emmaus Centre and to the staff who work there and made our stay so comfortable. We also wish to express our gratitude for the support of local ecumenical Church leaders, Reverend Dr Ranford Patterson, President of the Bahamas Christian Council, and the Right Reverend Laish Boyd, Diocesan Bishop, Anglican Diocese of The Bahamas and the Turks and Caicos Island, who joined the group to share their knowledge and experience of the local church.

## ECUMENICAL WORSHIP SERVICE

### INTRODUCTION

The Bible and three sets of chains are integral to the celebration of this Worship Service. The Caribbean writing group suggests that these symbols are prominently placed in the worship space.

The Bible is especially important in the experience of the Caribbean Churches. Historically, indigenous and enslaved peoples experienced atrocities perpetrated by colonizers who, at the same time, brought Christianity. Yet, in the hands of the oppressed peoples of the region, the Bible became a primary source of consolation and liberation. This dynamic of reversal makes the Bible a particularly potent symbol in itself. Therefore, in this service, it is important that a visually significant Bible be placed in the midst of the gathered assembly and that the readings be proclaimed from this same Bible rather than from other books or booklets.

Chains are a very potent symbol of enslavement, dehumanization and racism. They are also a symbol of the power of sin which separates us from God and from each other. The Caribbean writing group encourages the use of real iron chains during the Prayers of Reconciliation in this Worship Service. If iron chains are not feasible, alternative visually strong chains should be used. During the Worship Service, the iron chains of enslavement are replaced by a human chain expressing bonds of communion and united action against modern slavery and all kinds of individual and institutionalised dehumanisation. Inviting the entire assembly to participate in this gesture is an integral part of the worship.

For the song after the proclamation of the Word, the Caribbean writing group suggests the hymn *The Right Hand of God*. Reflecting the song of Miriam and Moses in praise of the liberating action of God in the Book of Exodus, it is associated with the ecumenical movement in the Caribbean, as the Churches work together to overcome the social challenges facing the people of the region.

### ORDER OF THE SERVICE

*Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power  
(Ex 15:6)*

- L** Leader
- C** Congregation
- R** Reader

### GATHERING

#### **Song**

*During the singing of the song, those leading the celebration enter. They should be led by an assistant carrying the Bible. The Bible is placed in a place of honour in the centre of the worship space. The Scripture readings during the service should be proclaimed from this Bible.*

## WORDS OF WELCOME

**L** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**C** **And also with you.**

**L** Dear friends in Christ, as we gather for this service of prayer for unity, we thank God for our Christian heritage, and for his liberating and saving action in human history.

The resources for this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity have been prepared by the churches of the Caribbean. The history of Christianity in that region contains a paradox. On one hand, the Bible was used by colonizers as justification for the subjugation of the original inhabitants of these lands, along with others who were transported from Africa, India and China. Many people suffered extermination, were put in chains and enslaved, and were subjected to unjust labour conditions. On the other hand, the Bible became a source of consolation and liberation for many who suffered at the hands of the colonizers.

Today, the Bible continues to be a source of consolation and liberation, inspiring the Christians of the Caribbean to address the conditions that currently undermine human dignity and quality of life. As the iron chains of enslavement fall from our hands, a new human bond of love and communion emerges in the human family, expressing the unity prayed for by our Christian communities.

## INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*The response to the invocation may be sung.*

**L** With the Christians of the Caribbean, let us call upon the Holy Spirit to set our hearts on fire as we pray for the unity of the Church. Unite your servants in the bond of unity.

**C** **Come, Holy Spirit!**

**L** Teach us to pray.

**C** **Come, Holy Spirit!**

**L** Liberate us from the slavery of sin.

**C** **Come, Holy Spirit!**

**L** Help us in our weakness.

**C** **Come, Holy Spirit!**

**L** Restore us as your children.

**C** **Come, Holy Spirit!**

## Song of praise

### PRAYERS OF RECONCILIATION

**L** We have not received a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Let us call upon the mercy of God, confident in the saving power of God's Right Hand.

*Three members of the assembly come forward, each carrying a chain. After each petition and response, one of the chains is allowed fall to the ground. The Kyrie response may be sung.*

**L** From structures that undermine human dignity and enforce new forms of enslavement, deliver us, O God. *Kyrie eleison.*

**C** **Kyrie eleison.**

**L** From decisions and deeds that impose poverty, marginalisation or discrimination on our brothers and sisters, deliver us, O God. *Kyrie eleison.*

**C** **Kyrie eleison.**

**L** From the fear and suspicion that separate us from each other and place limits on hope and healing, deliver us, O God. *Kyrie eleison.*

**C** **Kyrie eleison.**

**L** The Lord is our strength and our might, and has become our salvation. May God, who has redeemed us, lead into the abode of holiness.

**C** **Amen.**

### PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

**L** Redeem us, O God, from human oppression,

**C** **that we may keep your precepts.**

**L** Make your face shine upon your servants,

**C** **and teach us your statutes.** (cf *Ps* 119:134-135)

### Exodus 15:1-21

**L** Listen and you will be set free.

**C** Thanks be to God.

*It would be preferable for the psalm to be sung.*

**Psalm 118:5-7, 13-24**

**R/ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his steadfast love endures for ever!**

Out of my distress I called on the Lord;  
the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.  
With the Lord on my side I do not fear.  
What can mortals do to me?  
The Lord is on my side to help me;  
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. **R/**

I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,  
but the Lord helped me.  
The Lord is my strength and my might;  
he has become my salvation.  
There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous. **R/**

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly;  
the right hand of the Lord is exalted;  
the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.  
I shall not die, but I shall live,  
and recount the deeds of the Lord. **R/**

Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the Lord.  
This is the gate of the Lord;  
the righteous shall enter through it. **R/**

I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.  
This is the Lord's doing;  
it is marvellous in our eyes.  
This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it. **R/**

**Romans 8:12-27**

**L** Listen and you will be set free.

**C** **Thanks be to God.**

*A suitable Alleluia acclamation may be sung before and after the proclamation of the Gospel.*

Mark 5:21-43

L Listen and you will be set free.

C Thanks be to God.

Homily / Sermon

Song

## The right hand of God

Patrick Prescod

Noel Dexter: Jamaica

1. The right hand of God is writ-ing in our land,  
2. The right hand of God is point-ing in our land,  
3. The right hand of God is strik-ing in our land,  
4. The right hand of God is lift-ing in our land,

6  
writ-ing with pow-er and with love; Our  
point-ing the way we must go; so  
strik-ing out at en-vy, hate and greed; Our  
lift-ing the fal-len one by one; Each

10  
con-flicts and our fears, our tri-umphs and our  
cloud-ed is the way, so eas-i-ly we  
self-ish-ness and lust, our pride and deeds un-  
one is known by name, and res-cued now from

13  
tears are re-cord-ed by the right hand of God.  
stray, but we're guid-ed by the right hand of God.  
just are de-stroyed by the right hand of God.  
shame by the lift-ing of the right hand of God.

© 1981 Caribbean Conference of Churches, P.O. Box 616, Bridgetown, Barbados, W.I. All rights reserved.

## The Apostles Creed

### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**L** With thanks for our liberation from slavery to sin, let us place our needs before the Lord, asking him to shatter the chains that enslave us and to join us instead with bonds of love and communion.

*Each intercession is read by a different reader. As they finish, the readers each join hands or link arms with members of the assembly, thus creating a human chain.*

**R1** God of the Exodus, you led your people through the waters of the Red Sea and redeemed them. Be with us now and free us from all forms of slavery and from everything that obscures human dignity.

**C** Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

**R2** God of abundance, in your goodness you provide for all our needs. Be with us now, help us to rise above selfishness and greed and give us the courage to be agents of justice in the world.

**C** Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

**R3** God of love, you created us in your image and have redeemed us in Christ. Be with us now, empower us to love our neighbour and to welcome the stranger.

**C** Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

**R4** God of peace, you remain faithful to your covenant with us even when we wander from you, and in Christ you have reconciled us to yourself. Be with us now and put a new spirit and a new heart within us that we may reject violence and instead be servants of your peace.

**C** Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

**R5** God of glory, you are all-powerful, yet in Jesus you chose to make your home in a human family, and in the waters of Baptism have adopted us as your children. Be with us now and help us to remain faithful to our family commitments and our communal responsibilities, and to strengthen the bonds of communion with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**C** Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

**R6** God, One in Three Persons, in Christ you have made us one with you and with one another. Be with us now and by the power and consolation of the Holy Spirit, free us from the self-centredness, arrogance and fear that prevent us from striving towards the full visible unity of your Church.

**C** Lay your hands on us, O Lord, that we may live.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

**L** Let us join our hands, bound not by chains but by the love of Christ that has been poured into our hearts, and pray to the Father in the words that Jesus taught us.

*The Lord's Prayer may be sung.*

Our Father.....

*After the Lord's Prayer, still holding hands, the assembly may sing a familiar song that celebrates their unity.*

*After the song, the Sign of Peace may be exchanged.*

## COMMISSIONING

**L** Redeemed by the Right Hand of God, and united in the One Body of Christ, let us go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**C** **The Spirit of the Lord is upon us,  
because the Lord has anointed us  
to bring good news to the poor.  
to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.  
Amen! Alleluia!**

**Song**

## BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS

<b>DAY 1</b>	<b>You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt</b>
Leviticus 19:33-34	You shall love the alien as yourself
Psalms 146	The Lord watches over the strangers
Hebrews 13:1-3	Some have entertained angels without knowing it
Matthew 25:31-46	I was a stranger and you welcomed me

*After becoming the first independent black republic, Haiti extended hospitality to other enslaved peoples in search of freedom. Recent times have brought severe economic hardship to Haitians, many of whom have left home, making perilous journeys in hope of a better life. In many instances they have been met with inhospitality and legal barriers. The Caribbean Council of Churches has been involved in advocacy to challenge those nations that are restricting or stripping Haitians of citizenship rights.*

## REFLECTION

The Israelites' memory of being strangers in the land of Egypt lay behind the Law's instruction that God's people were to welcome the stranger in their midst. The memory of their own exile was expected to prompt empathy and solidarity with contemporary exiles and strangers. Like Israel, our common Christian experience of God's saving action goes together with remembering both alienation and estrangement - in the sense of estrangement from God and from his kingdom. This kind of Christian remembering has ethical implications. God has restored our dignity in Christ, and made us citizens of his kingdom, not because of anything we did to deserve it but by his own free gift in love. We are called to do likewise, freely and motivated by love. Christian love is to love like the Father, that is to recognize dignity and to give dignity, and thereby to help bring healing to the broken human family.

## PRAYER

Eternal God,  
You belong to no culture and land but are Lord of all,  
you call us to welcome the stranger in our midst.  
Help us by your Spirit,  
to live as brothers and sisters,  
welcoming all in your name,  
and living in the justice of your kingdom.  
This we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is planting in our land,  
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;  
in these many-peopled lands,  
let his children all join hands,  
and be one with the right hand of God.*

## DAY 2

### No longer as a slave but a beloved brother

Genesis 1:26-28

God created humankind in God's own image

Psalms 10:1-10

Why, O Lord, do you stand far off?

Philemon

No longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother

Luke 10:25-37

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

*Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which victims are forced or tricked into sex work, child labour and the harvesting of organs for the profit of the exploiters. It is a global, multimillion-dollar industry. It is also a growing problem across the Caribbean. Reformed Churches in*

*the Caribbean have joined with the Council for World Mission and the Caribbean and North American Council for Mission to educate Christian communities to end the scourge of human trafficking.*

## REFLECTION

One of the first things we learn about God in the Hebrew and Christian Bible is that God created humankind in his own image. However, this profound and beautiful truth has often been obscured or denied throughout human history. For instance, in the Roman Empire, the dignity of those enslaved was denied. The Gospel message is entirely different to this. Jesus challenged the social norms that devalued the human dignity of Samaritans, describing the Samaritan as the ‘neighbour’ of the man who had been attacked on the road to Jericho – a neighbour to be loved, according to the Law. And Paul, made bold in Christ, describes the once-enslaved Onesimus as ‘a beloved brother’, transgressing the norms of his society and affirming Onesimus’s humanity.

Christian love must always be a courageous love that dares to cross borders, recognising in others a dignity equal to our own. Like St Paul, Christians must be ‘bold enough in Christ’ to raise a united voice in clearly recognising trafficked persons as their neighbours and their beloved brothers and sisters, and so work together to end modern-day slavery.

## PRAYER

Gracious God,  
draw near to those who are victims of human trafficking,  
assuring them that you see their plight and hear their cry.  
May your Church be united in compassion and courage to work for that day  
when no one will be exploited  
and all will be free to live lives of dignity and peace.  
This we pray in the name of the Triune God  
who can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.  
Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is lifting in our land,  
lifting the fallen one by one;  
each one is known by name,  
and rescued now from shame,  
by the lifting of the right hand of God.*

## **DAY 3                      Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit**

Exodus 3:4-10              God frees those who are in human bondage

Psalms 24:1-6              Lord, we are the people who seek your face

1 Corinthians 6:9-20      Therefore glorify God in your body

Matthew 18:1-7            Woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!

*Many Christian churches in the Caribbean share a concern about the issue of pornography, especially via the internet. Pornography has destructive consequences for human dignity, particularly for children*

*and young people. Like slavery, it commodifies human beings, ensnares those addicted to it and damages wholesome loving relationships.*

## REFLECTION

The book of Exodus demonstrates God's concern for people in human bondage. God's revelation to Moses at the burning bush was a powerful declaration of his will to free his people. God observed their misery, heard their cry and so came to deliver them. God still hears the cry of those who are subject to enslavement today, and wills to deliver them. While sexuality is a gift of God for human relationships and the expression of intimacy, the misuse of this gift through pornography enslaves and devalues both those caught up in producing it and those who consume it. God is not impervious to their plight and Christians are called to be similarly concerned.

St Paul writes that we are called to give glory to God in our own bodies, which means that every part of our lives, including our relationships, can and should be an offering pleasing to God. Christians must work together for the kind of society that upholds human dignity and does not put a stumbling block before any of God's little ones, but, rather, enables them to live in the freedom which is God's will for them.

## PRAYER

By your heavenly grace, O God,  
restore us in mind and body,  
create in us a clean heart and a pure mind  
that we may give glory to your Name.  
May the churches attain unity of purpose  
for the sanctification of your people,  
through Jesus Christ  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is healing in our land,  
healing broken bodies, minds and souls;  
so wondrous is its touch,  
with love that means so much,  
when we're healed  
by the right hand of God.*

## DAY 4                      Hope and Healing

Isaiah 9:2-7a	His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace
Psalms 34:1-14	Seek peace, and pursue it
Revelation 7:13-17	God will wipe away every tear from their eyes
John 14:25-27	Peace I leave with you

*Within the Caribbean, violence is a problem to which the churches are called to respond. There is an alarmingly high rate of murder, much of which stems from domestic abuse, gang warfare and other forms of criminality. There is also a rising rate of self-harm and suicide in some parts of the region.*

## REFLECTION

The kingdom which God promised, the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed and made manifest in his ministry, is a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. What does this Good News mean for those trapped in the darkness of violence? In the prophet's vision, light shone on those who lived in a land of deep darkness. But how can Christians bring the light of Jesus to those living in the darkness of domestic and gang violence? What sense of hope can Christians offer? It is a sad reality that division among Christians is a counter-sign, which hampers the communication of hope.

However, the quest for peace and reconciliation between the different churches and confessions is the opposite of that. When Christians strive for unity in a world of conflict, they offer the world a sign of reconciliation. Christians who refuse to enter a logic of privilege and status, who refuse to demean others and their communities, give witness to the peace of God's kingdom, where the Lamb guides the saints to springs of the water of life. This is a peace the world needs, and one which brings healing and comfort to those afflicted by violence.

## PRAYER

God of all comfort and hope,  
your resurrection defeated the violence of the cross.  
As your people,  
may we be a visible sign  
that the violence of the world will be overcome.  
This we pray in the name of our risen Lord.  
Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is pointing in our land,  
pointing the way we must go;  
so clouded is the way,  
so easily we stray,  
but we're guided by the right hand of God.*

## DAY 5

**Hark, the cry of my poor people from far and wide in the land!**

Deut 1:19-35	The Lord God goes before you and carried you
Psalms 145:9-20	The Lord upholds all who are falling
James 1:9-11	The rich will disappear like a flower in the field
Luke 18:35-43	Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!

*The Caribbean economies have traditionally been based on the production of raw materials for the European market and so have never been self-sustaining. As a consequence, borrowing on the*

*international market became important for development. The requirements of such borrowing impose a reduction of spending on transport, education, health and other public services, which impacts most severely on the poor. The Caribbean Conference of Churches has launched an initiative to address the current debt crisis in the region and through their international networks to come to the aid of the poor.*

## REFLECTION

We can imagine the noise of the crowd as Jesus enters Jericho. Many voices shout down the cry of the blind beggar. He is a distraction and an embarrassment. But through all this tumult Jesus hears the blind man's voice, just as God always hears the cries of the poor in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Lord who upholds the falling not only hears, he responds. Thereby, the beggar's life is radically transformed.

The disunity of Christians can become part of the world's tumult and chaos. Like the arguing voices outside Jericho, our divisions can drown out the cry of the poor. However, when we are united we become more fully Christ's presence in the world, better able to hear, listen and respond. Rather than increasing the volume of discord, we are able to truly listen and so discern the voices that most need to be heard.

## PRAYER

Loving God,  
you lift up the poor and distressed  
and restore their dignity.  
Hear now our cries for the poor of our world,  
restore their hope and lift them up,  
that all your people may be one.  
This we pray in Jesus name.  
Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is lifting in our land,  
lifting the fallen one by one;  
each one is known by name,  
and rescued now from shame,  
by the lifting of the right hand of God.*

## DAY 6

### Let us look to the interests of others

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Isaiah 25:1-9     | Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation                                    |
| Psalms 82         | Maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute                              |
| Philippians 2:1-4 | Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others |
| Luke 12:13-21     | Be on your guard against all kinds of greed                                    |

*Changing international banking regulations continue to have a negative impact on the trade and commerce of the Caribbean and threaten the economic survival of many families. It has become increasingly difficult for Caribbean people working abroad to send money back to their families. The*

*Churches in the Caribbean introduced the Credit Union movement in order for the poor to have access to finance for economic activity.*

## REFLECTION

The witness of the Scriptures is consistent that God always makes a preferential option for the poor: the right hand of God acts for the powerless against the powerful. Similarly, Jesus consistently warns against the dangers of greed. Despite these warnings, however, the sin of greed often infects our Christian communities and introduces a logic of competition: one community competing against the next. We need to remember that insofar as we fail to differentiate ourselves from the world, but conform to its divisive competing spirit, we fail to offer ‘a refuge for the needy in distress, a shelter from the storm’.

For our different churches and confessions, to be rich in the sight of God is not a case of having many members belonging – or donating – to one’s own community. Rather, it is to recognise that as Christians we have countless brothers and sisters right across the world, united across the economic divisions of ‘North’ and ‘South’. Conscious of this fraternity in Christ, Christians can join hands in promoting economic justice for all.

## PRAYER

Almighty God,  
give courage and strength to your church  
to continually proclaim justice and righteousness  
in situations of domination and oppression.  
As we celebrate our unity in Christ,  
may your Holy Spirit help us  
to look to the needs of others.  
Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is striking in our land,  
striking out at envy, hate and greed;  
our selfishness and lust,  
our pride and deeds unjust,  
are destroyed by the right hand of God.*

## DAY 7

### **Building family in household and church**

Exodus 2:1-10	The birth of Moses
Psalms 127	Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain
Hebrews 11: 23-24	Moses was hidden by his parents ... because they saw that the child was beautiful
Matthew 2:13-15	Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt

*In the Caribbean the family continues to be adversely affected by the legacy of enslavement and by new factors such as the migration of parents, financial problems and domestic violence. Facing this reality, the churches of the Caribbean are working to give support to both nuclear and extended families.*

## REFLECTION

Families are of central importance for the protection and nurture of children. The Bible accounts of the infancies of both Moses and Jesus, who were in mortal danger from the moment they were born because of the murderous orders of angry rulers, illustrate how vulnerable children can be to external forces. These stories also show how action can be taken to protect such little ones. Matthew presents us with a model of fatherhood that is in loving fidelity to the Lord's command, especially in turbulent times.

The Scriptures view children as a blessing and as hope for the future. For the Psalmist, they are 'like arrows in the hand of a warrior'. As Christians, we share a common calling to live as supportive family networks, relying on the strength of the Lord for the task of building strong communities in which children are protected and can flourish.

## PRAYER

Gracious God,  
you sent your son to be born in an ordinary family  
with ancestors who were both faithful and sinful.  
We ask your blessing upon all families  
within households and communities.  
We pray especially for the unity of the Christian family  
so that the world may believe.  
In Jesus' name we pray,  
Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is writing in our land,  
writing with power and with love;  
our conflicts and our fears,  
our triumphs and our tears,  
are recorded by the right hand of God.*

## DAY 8

**He will gather the dispersed... from the four corners of the earth**

Isaiah 11:12-	Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not be hostile towards Ephraim
Ps 106:1-14,43-48	Gather us to give thanks to your holy name
Ephesians 2:13-19	He has broken down the dividing wall
John 17:1-12	I have been glorified in them

*The Caribbean churches work together to heal the wounds in the Body of Christ in the region, which are a legacy left by colonization. Reconciliation often demands repentance, reparation and the healing of memories. One example is the acts of apology and reparation between Baptists in Britain and the Caribbean. Like Israel, the Church in its unity is called to be both a sign and an active agent of reconciliation.*

#### REFLECTION

Throughout the biblical narrative of salvation history, an unmistakable motif is the unrelenting determination of the Lord to form a people whom he could call his own. The formation of such a people – united in a sacred covenant with God – is integral to the Lord's plan of salvation and to the glorification and hallowing of God's Name.

The prophets repeatedly remind Israel that the covenant demanded that relationships among its various social groups should be characterized by justice, compassion and mercy. As Jesus prepared to seal the new covenant in his own blood, his earnest prayer to the Father was that those given to him by the Father would be one, just as he and the Father were one. When Christians discover their unity in Jesus they participate in Christ's glorification in the presence of the Father, with the same glory that he had in the Father's presence before the world existed. And so, God's covenanted people must always strive to be a reconciled community - one which itself is an effective sign to all the peoples of the earth of how to live in justice and in peace.

#### PRAYER

Lord,  
we humbly ask that, by your grace,  
the churches throughout the world  
may become instruments of your peace.  
Through their joint action as ambassadors  
and agents of your healing, reconciling love  
among divided peoples,  
may your Name be hallowed and glorified.  
Amen.

*The right hand of God  
is planting in our land,  
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;  
in these many-peopled lands,  
let his children all join hands,  
and be one with the right hand of God.*

## THE ECUMENICAL SITUATION IN THE CARIBBEAN\*

The Caribbean region stretches from the Bahamas in the north to Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana (Cayenne) on the South American mainland, and from Barbados in the east to Belize in Central America in the west. The common identity of the Region is based on geographical considerations as well as on a shared history of colonialism, exploitation and resistance against foreign domination, and on a common cultural awareness.

The presence of some of the churches in the Region – e.g. the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches – coincides with the beginning and early period of the colonial enterprise. Other churches came later as part of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century missionary movement. Even more recently, the evangelical and pentecostal movements have spread throughout the Caribbean. Consequently, evangelical alliances or fellowships can be found in many countries and territories of the Region.

The Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC) grew out of a dynamic precursor of ecumenical activity in the 1960s and was formally established during the socio-cultural and political ferment of the early 1970s. This was the immediate post-colonial period of the Region during which many countries gained their political independence. It was a time when the Region as a whole was enveloped in a movement towards self-determination, development and new forms of self-expression. The joint response and contribution of several churches to this new regional awareness was the formation of an organisation called Christian Action for Development in the Caribbean (CADEC). This organisation is the precursor of the CCC, and would later become one of two major departments of the CCC. The other department was known as the Agency for Renewal of the Churches (ARC).

The founding assembly of the CCC took place in 1973, in Kingston, Jamaica. The preamble of its constitution reads:

We, as Christian people of the Caribbean, because of our common calling in Christ, covenant to join together in a regional fellowship of churches for theological reflection, inspiration, consultation, and cooperative action, to overcome the challenges created by history, language, culture, class and distance. We are therefore deeply committed to promoting peace, the holistic development of our people and affirming social justice and the dignity of all persons. We pledge to journey together in Christ and to share our experiences for the strengthening of the kingdom of God in the world.

The thirty three member churches of the CCC represent a vast diversity of people and cultures, spread over many islands and mainland territories of South and Central America and belonging to four major linguistic groupings – Dutch, English, French and Spanish. Included in this grouping are: Cayenne (French Guiana), Cuba, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique and Puerto Rico. The CCC's member churches share the common conviction that, despite the divisiveness of the long colonial heritage, there is an

---

\* This text is reproduced under the sole authority and responsibility of the ecumenical group in the Caribbean which came together to write the source texts for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018.

authentic, unifying Caribbean identity through which Caribbean people must articulate God's will for them and make their response to it.

As one of six Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs), the CCC is historically unique, being the first instance in the world in which the Roman Catholic Church – formally through its bishops' conference – was a founding member of an REO. The involvement of the Antilles Episcopal Conference (AEC) as a founding member of the CCC was held up as an example in the preparatory document – “Lineamenta” – for the Roman Catholic Church's 1997 Synod of the Americas. In the section of the document entitled “Areas and Ways of Communion,” the document states: “One example of greater possibility for dialogue with other confessions is demonstrated by the work of some bishops of the Caribbean, who contributed to the founding of the only ecumenical organisation present in the region” (Section IV, Art. 42).

Over the forty three years of its existence, the CCC's member churches have together taken many initiatives in the areas of theology, Christian education, integral development, youth and women's concerns, family life, human rights, and communications. Some of the significant achievements of the CCC have been the media channels *Contact and Caribbeat*, the *Caribbean Contact* monthly newspaper and the Christian education series – *Fashion Me a People*.

In 1983, the CCC's mandate was re-formulated to read: “Promoting ecumenism and social change in obedience to Jesus Christ and in solidarity with the poor”. Since then, the Conference has developed a strategic approach and implemented an integrated programmatic response to the many socio-economic issues and social ills impacting the Caribbean. Among these are endemic poverty, a high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection, drug-trafficking and addiction, and uprootedness as persons are displaced for various reasons – including natural disasters, violence and the search of work and a better life.

The policy of the CCC is a deeper ecclesial engagement with, and mutual accompaniment of the member churches, through their existing agencies and institutions, and right down to the local congregations. The major programme initiatives are:

- Priority Regional Initiatives (HIV/AIDS, drugs, violence, family, food, uprooted people)
- Sustainable Socio-economic Development (poverty reduction, project funding, disaster preparedness)
- Advocacy and Communications (public awareness, information, dialogue and exchange)
- International Relations (regional integration, solidarity visits), and cultural affairs.

In addressing some of these issues, the CCC works very closely with major regional intergovernmental organisations, chief among these being the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It has also engaged over the years with various departments of the United Nations (UN) and European and North American governments.

In addition to the above initiatives, the CCC established a Regional Forum of National Councils of Churches (NCCs), as a space for greater networking and mutual accompaniment of these councils in the region. This was in recognition of the critical

role played by NCCs in several parts of the Region, some NCCs – e.g. the Cuban and Jamaican NCCs - pre-dating the CCC by decades. The Forum was first convened in 2001 under the theme: “*Sing a New Song*”. It met annually thereafter until 2008. Like some other initiatives, the Regional Forum had to be curtailed because of significantly reduced funding to the organisation.

In recent times, a greater emphasis on the *theological* basis of Ecumenism is being pursued by the CCC’s Secretariat in conversation with member churches. This is in an effort to strengthen the fundamental issue of “*koinonia*” which, it is felt, has been somewhat obscured by an over-emphasis on “*diakonia*.” In this regard, a measure has been taken to ensure, not only that discussions on these and other “faith and order” issues take place, but also to ensure that there is a “*space of hospitality*” where members of various dominations – theologians, clergy and others – can encounter one another in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and edification. With these objectives in mind, the *Caribbean Regional Centre for Ecumenical Encounter & Dialogue* was launched in December 2014. The creation of this Centre is a collaborative venture between the CCC and the monks of the century-old Benedictine Monastery of *Our Lady of Exile* – popularly known as Mount St. Benedict’ – in Trinidad. (Given its historical pastoral ministry to people of many different religious persuasions, the Monastery was seen as a natural setting and choice for such an initiative).

There has also been a new engagement by the CCC with other ecumenical expressions and configurations – e.g. the Taizé movement and the Caribbean ‘chapter’ of the Global Christian Forum (GCF). The latter is an important means of outreach and dialogue with Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. The CCC has actually acted as convener / facilitator of the Caribbean GCF.

Apart from the CCC, there are other institutional expressions of ecumenism in the Caribbean. One such outstanding manifestation is The United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI), located in Jamaica. As an institution, the UTCWI is a collaborative venture of various Protestant denominations. Interestingly, the UTCWI is located next to the Roman Catholic Theological College (and former seminary) of St. Michael’s. The lecturers and students of both institutions have enjoyed a very amicable and mutually edifying relationship over the several years of the institutions’ existence.

On a wider Regional level, there is also the Caribbean Association Theological Schools (CATS). This organisation brings together in a collaborative manner the three major theological colleges of the Anglophone Caribbean – UTCWI; Codrington (Anglican) College, (Barbados); and the two Roman Catholic Colleges: St. John Vianney and the Uganda Martyrs, (Trinidad) , and St. Michael’s (Jamaica).

In terms of Protestant ecumenical theological colleges in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, there is the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico and the Evangelical Seminary of Matanzas, Cuba. Both institutions are collaborative ventures of various Protestant denominations. The latter is currently headed by the Rev. Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, a former President of the CCC and a former staff member of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

No consideration of the ecumenical situation in the Caribbean would be complete without noting that the Caribbean made a tremendous gift to the wider ecumenical movement in the person of the Rev. Dr. Philip Alford Potter – the celebrated third General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Dr

Potter, now of sacred memory, was a Methodist minister and a native of the Commonwealth of Dominica. During his tenure as the General Secretary of the WCC (1972 – 1984), Rev. Potter fought the immoral apartheid regime of South Africa. It was also during his tenure of office that Pope John-Paul II – in response to an invitation of the WCC – made his historic visit to the headquarters of the WCC in Geneva, Switzerland. This was a major milestone in ecumenical relations between the Vatican and the WCC. It is estimated that there are currently thirteen member churches of the WCC in the Caribbean, representing 1.4 million Christians. Following in Rev. Potter’s footsteps, other Caribbean ecumenists continue to make significant contributions in the wider international ecumenical arena. Among these is the Rev. Neville Callam of Jamaica. Rev. Callam, the incumbent General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), was for many years a highly respected member of the WCC’s “Faith and Order Commission.”

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY  
THEMES 1968-2018

*Materials jointly prepared by the WCC Faith and Order Commission  
and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity were first used in 1968*

- 1968 To the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:14)
- 1969 Called to freedom (Galatians 5:13)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1970 We are fellow workers for God (1 Corinthians 3:9)  
(Preparatory meeting held at the Monastery of Niederaltaich, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1971 ... and the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:13)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Bari, Italy)
- 1972 I give you a new commandment (John 13:34)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1973 Lord, teach us to pray (Luke 11:1)  
(Preparatory meeting held at the Abbey of Montserrat, Spain)
- 1974 That every tongue confess: Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:1-13)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1975 God’s purpose: all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10)  
(Material from an Australian group – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1976 We shall be like him (1 John 3:2) or, Called to become what we are

- (Material from Caribbean Conference of Churches - Preparatory meeting held in Rome, Italy)
- 1977 Enduring together in hope (Romans 5:1-5)  
(Material from Lebanon, in the midst of a civil war – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1978 No longer strangers (Ephesians 2:13-22)  
(Material from an ecumenical team in Manchester, England)
- 1979 Serve one another to the glory of God (1 Peter 4:7-11)  
(Material from Argentina – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1980 Your kingdom come (Matthew 6:10)  
(Material from an ecumenical group in Berlin, German Democratic Republic – Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)
- 1981 One Spirit - many gifts - one body (1 Corinthians 12:3b-13)  
(Material from Graymoor Fathers, USA – Preparatory meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland)
- 1982 May all find their home in you, O Lord (Psalm 84)  
(Material from Kenya – Preparatory meeting held in Milan, Italy)
- 1983 Jesus Christ - the life of the world (1 John 1:1-4)  
(Material from an ecumenical group in Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Céligny, Bossey, Switzerland)
- 1984 Called to be one through the cross of our Lord (1 Corinthians 2:2 and Colossians 1:20)  
(Preparatory meeting held in Venice, Italy)
- 1985 From death to life with Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7)  
(Material from Jamaica – Preparatory meeting held in Grandchamp, Switzerland)
- 1986 You shall be my witnesses (Acts 1:6-8)  
(Material from Yugoslavia, Slovenia – Preparatory meeting held in Yugoslavia)
- 1987 United in Christ - a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:4a)  
(Material from England – Preparatory meeting held in Taizé, France)
- 1988 The love of God casts out fear (1 John 4:18)  
(Material from Italy – Preparatory meeting held in Pinerolo, Italy)
- 1989 Building community: one body in Christ (Romans 12:5-6a)  
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Whaley Bridge, England)

- 1990 That they all may be one...That the world may believe (John 17)  
(Material from Spain – Preparatory meeting held in Madrid, Spain)
- 1991 Praise the Lord, all you nations! (Psalm 117 and Romans 15:5-13)  
(Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Rotenburg an der Fulda, Federal Republic of Germany)
- 1992 I am with you always... Go, therefore (Matthew 28:16-20)  
(Material from Belgium – Preparatory meeting held in Bruges, Belgium)
- 1993 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit for Christian unity (Galatians 5:22-23)  
(Material from Zaire – Preparatory meeting held near Zurich, Switzerland)
- 1994 The household of God: called to be one in heart and mind (Acts 4:23-37)  
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Dublin, Republic of Ireland)
- 1995 Koinonia: communion in God and with one another (John 15:1-17)  
(Material from Faith and Order – Preparatory meeting held in Bristol, England)
- 1996 Behold, I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3:14-22)  
(Material from Portugal – Preparatory meeting held in Lisbon, Portugal)
- 1997 We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20)  
(Material from Nordic Ecumenical Council – Preparatory meeting held in Stockholm, Sweden)
- 1998 The Spirit helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:14-27)  
(Material from France – Preparatory meeting held in Paris, France)
- 1999 He will dwell with them as their God, they will be his peoples (Revelation 21:1-7)  
(Material from Malaysia – Preparatory meeting held in the Monastery of Bose, Italy)
- 2000 Blessed be God who has blessed us in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14)  
(Material from the Middle East Council of Churches – Preparatory meeting held at La Verna, Italy)
- 2001 I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life (John 14:1-6)  
(Material from Romania – Preparatory meeting held at Vulcan, Romania)
- 2002 For with you is the fountain of life (Psalm 36:5-9)  
(Material from CEEC and CEC – Preparatory meeting held near Augsburg, Germany)

- 2003 We have this treasure in clay jars (2 Corinthians 4:4-18)  
(Material from churches in Argentina – Preparatory meeting held at Los Rubios, Spain)
- 2004 My peace I give to you (John 14:23-31; John 14:27)  
(Material from Aleppo, Syria – Preparatory meeting held in Palermo, Sicily)
- 2005 Christ, the one foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:1-23)  
(Material from Slovakia – Preparatory meeting held in Piešťany, Slovakia)
- 2006 Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them  
(Matthew 18:18-20)  
(Material from Ireland – Preparatory meeting held in Prosperous, Co. Kildare, Ireland)
- 2007 He even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak (Mark 7:31-37)  
(Material from South Africa – Preparatory meeting held in Faverges, France)
- 2008 Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:12a, 13b-18)  
(Material from USA – Preparatory meeting held in Graymoor, Garrison, USA)
- 2009 That they may become one in your hand (Ezekiel 37:15-28)  
(Material from Korea – Preparatory meeting held in Marseilles, France)
- 2010 You are witnesses of these things (Luke 24:48)  
(Material from Scotland – Preparatory meeting held in Glasgow, Scotland)
- 2011 One in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42)  
(Material from Jerusalem – Preparatory meeting held in Saydnaya, Syria)
- 2012 We will all be changed by the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ  
(cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-58)  
(Material from Poland – Preparatory meeting held in Warsaw, Poland)
- 2013 What does God require of us? (cf. Micah 6:6-8)  
(Material from India – Preparatory meeting held in Bangalore, India)
- 2014 Has Christ been divided? (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)  
(Material from Canada – Preparatory meeting held in Montréal, Canada)
- 2015 Jesus said to her: Give me to drink (John 4: 7)  
(Material from Brazil – Preparatory meeting held in São Paulo, Brazil)
- 2016 Called to proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord (cf. 1 Peter 2:9)  
(Material from Latvia – Preparatory meeting held in Rīga, Latvia)

- 2017 Reconciliation - The love of Christ compels us (2 Cor 5:14-20)  
(Material from Germany – Preparatory meeting held in Wittenberg, Germany)
- 2018 Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power (Ex 15:6)  
(Material from the Caribbean – Preparatory meeting held in Nassau, Bahamas)

#### KEY DATES IN THE HISTORY OF THE WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

- c. 1740 In Scotland a Pentecostal movement arose, with North American links, whose revivalist message included prayers for and with all churches.
- 1820 The Rev. James Haldane Stewart publishes “Hints for the General Union of Christians for the Outpouring of the Spirit”.
- 1840 The Rev. Ignatius Spencer, a convert to Roman Catholicism, suggests a “Union of Prayer for Unity”.
- 1867 The First Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops emphasizes prayer for unity in the Preamble to its Resolutions.
- 1894 Pope Leo XIII encourages the practice of a Prayer Octave for Unity in the context of Pentecost.
- 1908 First observance of the “Church Unity Octave” initiated by the Rev. Paul Wattson.
- 1926 The Faith and Order movement begins publishing “Suggestions for an Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity”.
- 1935 Abbé Paul Couturier of France advocates the “Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” on the inclusive basis of prayer for “the unity Christ wills by the means he wills”.
- 1958 Unité Chrétienne (Lyons, France) and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches begin co-operative preparation of materials for the Week of Prayer.
- 1964 In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I prayed together Jesus’ prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17).
- 1964 The Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II emphasizes that prayer is the soul of the ecumenical movement and encourages observance of the Week of Prayer.
- 1966 The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity [now known as the Pontifical

- Council for Promoting Christian Unity] begin official joint preparation of the Week of Prayer material.
- 1968 First official use of Week of Prayer material prepared jointly by Faith and Order and the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.
- 1975 First use of Week of Prayer material based on a draft text prepared by a local ecumenical group. An Australian group was the first to take up this plan in preparing the 1975 initial draft.
- 1988 Week of Prayer materials were used in the inaugural worship for The Christian Federation of Malaysia, which links the major Christian groupings in that country.
- 1994 International group preparing text for 1996 included representatives from YMCA and YWCA.
- 2004 Agreement reached that resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity be jointly published and produced in the same format by Faith and Order (WCC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Catholic Church).
- 2008 Commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. (Its predecessor, the Church Unity Octave, was first observed in 1908).

# MISC

## ***In Memoriam Cardinal William H. Keeler (1931–2017)***

*Cardinal William Henry Keeler, Archbishop Emeritus of Baltimore, died on Thursday, March 23, 2017, at the age of 86. Very much committed to ecumenical dialogue and its importance, as well as to religious relations with the Judaism, Cardinal Keeler was for many years a member of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Born in San Antonio, USA, on March 4, 1931, he was ordained priest on July 17, 1955. In 1983 he was appointed Bishop of Harrisburg by Pope John Paul II, who also designated him Archbishop of Baltimore in 1989, a ministry which he fulfilled until his retirement in 2007. From 1992 till 1995, he served as President of the Episcopal Conference of the United States of America, guiding it with conviction in the same way as his remarkable and courageous predecessors, Cardinals Bernardin and O'Connor, with a particular attention to deepening the dialogue with representatives of the North American and International Jewish community. Below is the telegram of condolences sent by Pope Francis to William Edward Lori, who succeeded him at the Archdiocese of Baltimore.*

Deeply saddened to learn of the death of Cardinal William H. Keeler, I offer heartfelt condolences to you and to the clergy, religious and lay faithful of the Archdiocese. With gratitude for Cardinal Keeler's years of devoted episcopal ministry in the local Churches of Harrisburg and Baltimore, his years of leadership within the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and his long-standing commitment to ecumenical and interreligious understanding, I join you in commending the soul of this wise and gentle pastor to the merciful love of God our heavenly Father. To all who mourn the late Cardinal in the sure hope of the Resurrection, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of consolation and peace in the Lord.

Franciscus PP.

ORE, 31 March 2017

## ***In Memoriam Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor (1932-2017)***

*On Friday afternoon, 1 September, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor died at the age of 85. He was the Archbishop emeritus of Westminster and the Catholic Primate emeritus of England and Wales. Upon hearing of Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor's death, Pope Francis sent the following telegram to Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the current Archbishop of Westminster.*

Deeply saddened to learn of the death of Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop Emeritus of Westminster, I hasten to offer my heartfelt condolences to you and to the clergy and faithful of the Archdiocese. Recalling with immense gratitude the late Cardinal's distinguished service to the Church in England and Wales, his unwavering devotion to the preaching of the Gospel and the care of the poor, and his far-sighted commitment to the advancement of ecumenical and interreligious understanding, I willingly join you in commending his noble soul to the infinite mercies of God our heavenly Father. To all who mourn his passing in the sure hope of the Resurrection I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of consolation and strength in the Lord.

Franciscus PP.



EDITOR

Reverend Father Hyacinthe Destivelle, OP

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity  
VA – 00120 Vatican City  
[office@christianunity.va](mailto:office@christianunity.va)

The material in this *Information Service* is not copyright, but the Pontifical Council would appreciate a copy of any publication which includes extensive quotation from it.

Copies of all issues of *Information Service* (from 1967–present) are available on  
<http://w2.vatican.va/>  
and  
<http://www.christianunity.va/>

TIPOGRAFIA VATICANA







