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EDITORIAL

How to give an overview of this *One in Christ* issue with its wide spectrum of topics? Perhaps in pointing out certain convergences. In the context of Pope’s Francis recent visit to the WCC for its 70th anniversary, let us begin with the articles exploring the opportunities to go further in the ecumenical dialogue such as those of Wood, Francis, Temmerman. Wood presents Pope Francis as a force for ecumenical unity with his charismatic approach and his insistence upon the fundamental of the Christian faith. Francis explores the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and shows how it promotes an ecumenical understanding. As to Temmerman, his paper is focused on Eucharistic participation by way of exception where Christians of other traditions are concerned and how this exception in reception would open the way to a more normal application of canonical exception. With Reardon’s report we see that the ecumenical dialogue is a hard job as reflected in the recent dispute within the German Bishops’ Conference about the Proposed Guidelines on Eucharistic Sharing in Interchurch Families.

Haye’s report moves in the same direction when she proposes it is time to examine the lived experience of Interchurch Families and to hear the testimony of the children belonging to them. The interview with Zimmer-Winkel and the report of Dupont-Roc point towards other contexts of ecumenical dialogue in the Holy Land for the first, in Morocco for the second. And it provides us with much food for thought and makes us discover that there are different ways of living ecumenism. The importance of the Holy Land as a Cathedra, a place from which you are taught, seems very interesting and perhaps invites us to deepen Jewish tradition and to consider interreligious dialogue more carefully. In this sense the experiences of J. Monchanin, H. Le Saux and B. Griffiths as related in Trapnell’s contribution are very interesting ones because of their confrontation to another culture and religion, and the opportunity they found there to renew their own spiritual and theological approaches.

Another important part of this issue consists of articles linked with prominent figures of Reformation. Schachl offers a reflexion on how we can take advantage of the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation from the perspective of the present and of the future. She underlines the relevance of Luther’s themes such as the
unconditional welcome of God, the Extra nos or importance of the Other, and the reality of liberation instead of liberty. Gehlin studies the contemporary concept of receptive ecumenism in the light of Söderblom’s ecumenical endeavours and what they have in common in spite of different historical and contextual settings: the emphasis on spirituality and common action for Christian unity. Gioia states that it is best to approach familiar questions by engaging with interlocutors who challenge the most. In fact, Barth’s criticism of monasticism is a very positive one, pointing out that monasticism as action plays an essential role in giving witness to the infallible power of God’s grace.

Noblesse-Rocher provides us with a very accurate study of the translation of the Bible in the vernacular at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a turning point in the history of Christianity, whether the work of Reformers, or of the humanists, or of the Counter-Reformation. Strange gives us an historical account of ecumenism in Oxford from the point of view of a Catholic chaplain and shows us how friendship and common action play an essential role towards Christian unity. It is important to mention the report of Tchilingirian about the historic ordination of a deaconess in the Tehran diocese of the Armenian Church in 2017. It is a very important question on which the Catholic Church is also reflecting. We are looking forward to a further contribution on this subject for a subsequent issue.
POPE FRANCIS AND ECUMENISM

Susan K. Wood*

The author shows how Pope Francis is a force for ecumenical unity with his charismatic approach and his emphasis on the fundamental of the Christian faith: ‘One Lord, one faith...’. In a first part, she presents the major themes pertaining to ecumenism such as dialogue, encounter, reconciled diversity, journey, ecumenism of blood, founding all these aspects on a personal relationship with Christ in prayer. In a second part she recalls spectacular ecumenical gestures of Pope Francis pointing out how he was already involved as Archbishop of Buenos Aires in a dialogue based on friendship, personal encounters and how he favours the role of discernment and personal responsibility in a very Ignatian way.

Although Pope Francis has written little on ecumenism, he has made some spectacular ecumenical gestures. In the first part of this presentation I will present the themes in Pope Francis’ writing that pertain to ecumenism. In the second part, I will describe some of his spectacular ecumenical gestures. While Pope Francis has cultivated relationships with the Orthodox, celebrating an ecumenical service with Orthodox churches in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem in 2014 and meeting with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill in Havana, Cuba on February 12, 2016, since 2017 was the five hundredth centenary of the Reformation, I will focus my attention on his spectacular ecumenical gestures to Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Lutherans.

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The importance of witnessing through gestures is evident in Pope Francis’ response to a young person who asked him during the World Youth Day at Krakow in 2016, ‘What must I say to my friend who does not believe in God? How do I convert him?’ Pope Francis answered: ‘The last thing that you must do is to say something. Take action! Live! Then, seeing your life, our witnessing, the other one will perhaps ask you why you live thus.”

Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), 28 November 2013, only devotes three sections (244-246) to ecumenism, where he emphasizes the importance of common witness for peace in the world, warning that the starting point should not be differences that exist, but the common faith, all the while respecting the ‘hierarchy of truths’ (UR 11) since not all statements and practices of the faith have the same weight. In addition to specific references to ecumenism, a number of recurring themes in his writing directly relate to ecumenical relationships and the unity among Christians, namely dialogue, encounter, journey, the model of unity as ‘reconciled diversity,’ and an ‘ecumenism of blood.’

**Dialogue**

Dialogue is essentially an encounter and conversation, a speaking and a listening, between partners. Pope Francis comments that “To dialogue entails a cordial reception, not a prior condemnation. In order to dialogue, it is necessary to know how to lower the defenses, open the doors of the house, and offer human warmth.” Each partner speaks from his or her context, from his or her perspective of the world. Dialogic speech seeks to communicate that experience and perspective to the other and to receive that same message from the partner so as to be able to enter as much as possible into the experience of the other and so to see the other’s perspective through their eyes. For example, a successful ecumenist engaged in dialogue can articulate the partner’s perspective not only so that the partner recognizes it as her own, but sometimes better than she can articulate it herself. The first aim of dialogue is not to convince the partner of one's own deeply held convictions, but to understand another in a

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deep way. It is above all a spiritual experience in understanding the other, a listening and speaking to one another in love.

Dialogue is a necessary companion to doctrine, for it presents doctrine with a human face. Too often doctrines can appear to be disembodied words or abstract propositions imposed on life situations. Christoph Theobald has coined a phrase, ‘the pastorality of doctrine,’ to describe doctrine as something to be authentically interpreted and faithfully applied within concrete historical, cultural, and pastoral contexts. Dialogue provides the condition for the possibility of such pastorality of doctrine, which, applied by Theobald first to Pope John XXIII’s remarks in Gaudet Mater Ecclesia at the opening of Vatican II, also represents Pope Francis’ papacy.

Pope Francis, in Evangelii Gaudium, develops a theology of dialogue as intrinsic to the task of evangelization and the pursuit of peace. He identifies three areas of dialogue in which the church must engage in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society—including dialogue with cultures and the sciences—and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church (EG 238). Francis identifies dialogue as ‘a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society’ (EG 239). The Church does not engage in this dialogue with ready-made solutions for every particular issue (EG 240), so her approach must be one of humility. In the dialogue with science, the path is one of a synthesis between ‘the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself...’ (EG 242). In ecumenical dialogue, Francis identifies the interlocutors as fellow pilgrims. He says that this means that ‘we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust,’ with our gaze focused on our common quest, the radiant peace of God’s face (EG 244). Similarly, ‘an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with non-Christian religions...’ (EG 250). This dialogue may simply be a

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‘being open to them, sharing their joys and sorrows’ through which we learn to accept others and their different ways of living, thinking, and speaking. Doing this, we join one another in taking up the duty of serving justice and peace. This common ethical commitment brings about a new social situation. Francis says that through mutual listening ‘both partners can be purified and enriched’ and express love for truth. Far from being a form of syncretism, true openness requires that the dialogue partner remain steadfast in conviction and clear in one’s identity while at the same time being open to understanding the convictions of the other party.

The importance of faith-motivated dialogue is highlighted by present culture, which has become increasingly uncivil. The current politics are rife with toxic, demonizing, and demoralizing rhetoric. The Second Vatican Council and Pope Francis remind us of the obligation to respectful conversation with people whose views may differ markedly from our own. Such dialogue is the precondition for ecclesial discernment.

**Encounter**

Dialogue entails an encounter. In his remarks marking the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian unity in 2015, Pope Francis illustrated the theme of encounter with Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well:

> Weary from his journey, Jesus does not hesitate to ask the Samaritan woman for something to drink. His thirst, as we know, is much more than physical: it is also a thirst for encounter, a desire to enter into dialogue with that woman and to invite her to make a journey of interior conversion. Jesus is patient, respectful of the person before him, and gradually reveals himself to her. His example encourages us to seek a serene encounter with others. To understand one another, and to grow in charity and truth, we need to pause, to accept and listen to one another. In this way we already begin to experience unity. Unity grows along the way; it never stands still. Unity happens when we walk together.\(^1\)

He calls, not for ‘subtle theoretical discussion in which each party tries to convince the other of the soundness of their opinions,’ but challenges us ‘to grasp more fully what unites us, namely, our call to share in the mystery of the Father’s love revealed to us by the Son

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\(^1\) Homily, Conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 2015.
through the Holy Spirit.’ He is convinced that by humbly advancing towards the Lord, we also draw nearer to one another.

**Journey**

Pilgrimage or journey is an apt metaphor for dialogue, for dialogue entails a walking with the other. Dialogue represents a word on a common journey, neither the first word nor the last word. It marks a moment between the ‘already’ of our past communal histories and the ‘not yet’ of our future. It images the conversation of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, who recount the wonders that the Lord has worked during a journey that culminates in the shared recognition of the Lord in the breaking of the bread at a common table. In dialogue, we have not yet reached the end of that journey, so as we turn to God for assistance on that journey, the dialogue continues. Pope Francis uses the image with respect to ecumenism. In *Evangelii Gaudium* he says, ‘We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God’s face’ (EG 244). During a service to mark the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2014 he commented:

> We have all been damaged by these divisions. None of us wishes to become a cause of scandal. And so we are all journeying together, fracternally, on the road towards unity, bringing about unity even as we walk; that unity comes from the Holy Spirit and brings us something unique which only the Holy Spirit can do, that is, reconciling our differences. The Lord waits for us all, accompanies us all, and is with us all on this path of unity.¹

**Reconciled Diversity**

Pope Francis picks up on the model of unity proposed by Oscar Cullman (1902-1999) of ‘unity in reconciled diversity’ (EG 234-237). Cullman, friend of Pope Paul VI and observer at Vatican II, summarized this model saying, ‘Every Christian confession has a permanent spiritual gift, a charism, which it should preserve, nurture, purify and deepen, and which should not be given up for the sake of

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John Paul II had introduced the idea of an ecumenical gift exchange in *Ut Unum Sint*, and Francis repeats this in his comment, ‘In ecumenical relations it is important not only to know each other better, but also to recognize what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for us,’ concluding, ‘We must walk united with our differences: there is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus.’

Pope Francis suggests an image of the polyhedron (a polygonal and multi-dimensional body), 'which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness' (EG 236). The aim of actions in such a polyhedron model is to seek ‘to gather....the best of each’ (EG 236).

**Ecumenism of Blood**

Martyrdom for the faith constitutes a bond among Christians, whatever their confession, and thus constitutes an ecumenism of blood. Religious persecution is uniting Christians around the world. Pope Francis has said, ‘When Christians are persecuted and murdered, they are chosen because they are Christians, not because they are Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglican, Catholics or Orthodox. An ecumenism of blood exists.’

**Spectacular Ecumenical Gestures: Outreach to Evangelicals and Pentecostals**

According to a 2011 Pew Forum report, about half of the world’s Christians are Catholic, 12 percent are Orthodox, and 37 percent are ‘Protestants, broadly defined.’ The same study reported that together Evangelicals and Pentecostals total nearly 400 million people. Although dialogue with Protestants largely refers to dialogue with the

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shrinking ‘historical’ churches represented by the World Council of Churches, a Catholic/Pentecostal dialogue has been in existence since 1972 (compared with immediately after Vatican II for the historic Protestant churches). Pope Francis’ ecumenical focus has been on the Evangelical and Pentecostal worlds, which reflects not only the demographics of religious adherence, but also his experience in Latin America. For centuries Latin America was almost homogeneously Catholic, but today the growing number of Evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which often have an antagonistic relationship to Catholicism, represent the primary Christian ‘other.’ Official dialogue with these groups is often difficult, since even though they represent as much as one-third of all Christians, they are highly fragmented, existing as independent churches. Pope Francis tends to foster dialogue with Pentecostals through individuals and small groups in personal encounters rather than through formal commissions.

While still archbishop of Buenos Aires, the then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio developed a close friendship with a number of Protestant leaders through a movement called ‘Renewed Communion of Evangelicals and Catholics in the Spirit.’ There he met Italian Evangelical Pentecostal pastor Giovanni Traettino, founder in the late 1970s of the Chiesa Evangelica della Riconciliazione, with whom he participated in a prayer service in Buenos Aires in 2006 that attracted 7,000 in a venue normally used for boxing matches. On that occasion Cardinal Bergoglio allowed himself to be prayed over by a delegation of Protestant clergy, a gesture that drew fire from both conservative Catholics as well as Protestants.

Since ecumenism is built on relationships and lasts over time, it is not surprising that the now Pope Francis paid a visit to Pastor Traettino in July 2014 in the southern Italian city of Caserta. Those present for his visit to Caserta included not only Italian members of the community, but also evangelical and Pentecostal representatives from Argentina, the U.S., France, Spain, Canada, and India.1 There he delivered a historic apology for Catholic persecution of Pentecostals under fascist rule, saying, ‘I am the Pastor of Catholics: I ask your forgiveness for this!’ There he also commented that the Christian community has been tempted to say, ‘I am the church, you are a sect.’ Francis said that this temptation came from Satan and not from Jesus

1 See the report in Corriere della Sera, 29 July 2014.
who prayed for unity and that the Holy Spirit is responsible for diversity in the church and for unity, so that ‘this way the Church is one in diversity.’ With his influence, the bishops at Aparecida in 2007 avoided the disparaging word ‘sects,’ referring rather to ‘religious groups.’ Giovanii Traettino, referencing the earlier anti-Catholic attitude of evangelicals, urged ‘that one needs to strive more to emphasize what is held in common, rather than defining one’s own identity from an anti-Catholic position.’

It is important to note that even before Caserta, on July 19, the Evangelical Alliance in Italy, claiming to speak for almost all Italian Pentecostals and 85 per cent of the country’s Protestants, had issued a declaration signed by the Federation of Pentecostal Churches, the Assemblies of God in Italy, the Apostolic Church, and the Pentecostal Congregations, calling for resistance to ‘unionist initiatives that are contrary to Scripture.’ It described the Catholic Church as an ‘imperial church’ that does not ‘follow the example of Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served.’ It expressed determination to resist ‘the mounting ecumenical pressure from the Roman Catholic Church to expand its catholicity at the expense of biblical truth.’ Given the continuing theological and ethical differences, it invited all evangelicals to exercise healthy biblical discernment without being guided by concerns for unity that are contrary to scripture, and instead to renew their commitment to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world.

Undeterred by this ecumenical resistance, the Pope encountered Pastor Giovanni Traettino once again in May 2015, where once again a group of Pentecostal pastors prayed for him. In the face of opposition to ecumenical unity, Pope Francis counters, not with theological arguments, but with spectacular gestures and prayer.

A clue to the close connection between Pope Francis’ and Evangelicals and Pentecostals can be found in Pope Francis

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1 Pope Francis, ‘Private Visit of the Holy Father to Caserta for a Meeting with the Evangelical Pastor Giovanni Traettino,’ Address of Pope Francis, 28 July 2014.
2 Martin Bräuer, ‘Pope Francis and Ecumenism,’ The Ecumenical Review 9/1(March 2017) 4-14 at 9.
memorable line in *Evangelii Gaudium* (3) where he addresses all Christians, saying, ‘I invite Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day.’ The hallmark question of an Evangelical Protestant is ‘Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?’ Here both Pope Francis and the evangelical emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis' approach to ecumenism has a distinctly charismatic character as is evident in these comments:

I don’t believe in a definitive ecumenism, much less do I believe in the ecumenism that as its first step gets us to agree on a theological level. I think we must progress in unity, participating together in prayer and in the works of charity. And this I find in the [Charismatic] Renewal. Now and then we get together with a few pastors and stop and pray together for about an hour. This has been made possible thanks to the Charismatic Renewal, both on the evangelical side and on the Catholic side.¹

These encounters with Pentecostals illustrate that Pope Francis practices ecumenism through relationships, personal encounters, and ecumenical gestures. He engages in the spiritual ecumenism of prayer, conversion, and repentance. This is an ecumenism not reserved to the theologians, but one that can be practiced by all Christians.

**Spectacular Ecumenical Gestures: Outreach to Lutherans**

The themes that marked Pope Francis’ commemoration of the Fifth Centenary of the Reformation were profession of our common faith in the Triune God, common prayer and the intimate request for forgiveness for mutual faults, and a shared ecumenical journey.² Two events stand out with respect to Pope Francis' outreach to Lutherans, one meticulously orchestrated, the other spontaneous. The first was Pope Francis' visit to Lund, Sweden, where together with the Revd Dr Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, he participated in a common prayer service and signed a joint statement

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² Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to a Delegation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, 18 December 2014.
on the occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation on October 31, 2016.

In their Joint Statement the two church leaders committed themselves ‘to further growth in communion rooted in Baptism, as we seek to remove the remaining obstacles that hinder us from attaining full unity. Christ desires that we be one, so that the world may believe (cf. John 17:21).” Recognizing the ‘pain of those who share their whole lives, but cannot share God’s redeeming presence at the Eucharistic table,’ they renewed their commitment to theological dialogue to respond to the spiritual thirst and hunger of people to be one in Christ and to heal this wound of division in the Body of Christ. They prayed to God for inspiration, encouragement and strength so that they might stand together in service, upholding human dignity and rights, especially for the poor, working for justice, and rejecting all forms of violence, emphasizing that God summons us to be close to all those who yearn for dignity, justice, peace and reconciliation. They called for an end to the violence and extremism which affect so many countries and communities, and countless sisters and brothers in Christ and urged Lutherans and Catholics to work together to welcome the stranger, to come to the aid of those forced to flee because of war and persecution, and to defend the rights of refugees and those who seek asylum. Finally, realizing that joint service in this world must extend to God’s creation, they prayed for the change of hearts and minds that leads to a loving and responsible way to care for creation.

A more informal and spontaneous spectacular ecumenical gesture occurred during Pope Francis’ visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Rome November 15, 2015. There Anke de Bernadinis, the Lutheran wife of a Roman Catholic, expressed sorrow at ‘not being able to partake together in the Lord’s Supper’ and asked, ‘What more can we do to reach communion on this point?’ Because Pope Francis’ nuanced response has caused quite a stir in the ecumenical world, I cite it at length:

1 Joint Statement on the occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation, Lund, Sweden, 31 October 2016: http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2016/10/31/0783/01757.html#orig
I think the Lord gave us [the answer] when he gave us this command: ‘Do this in memory of me’. And when we share in, remember and emulate the Lord’s Supper, we do the same thing that the Lord Jesus did. . . . I ask myself: ‘Is sharing the Lord’s Supper the end of a journey or is it the viaticum for walking together? I leave the question to the theologians, to those who understand. It is true that in a certain sense sharing is saying that there are no differences between us, that we have the same doctrine . . . but I ask myself: don’t we have the same Baptism? And if we have the same Baptism, we have to walk together. You are a witness to an even profound journey because it is a conjugal journey, truly a family journey, of human love and of shared faith. We have the same Baptism. When you feel you are a sinner—I too feel I am quite a sinner—when your husband feels he is a sinner, you go before the Lord and ask forgiveness; your husband does the same and goes to the priest and requests absolution. They are ways of keeping Baptism alive. When you pray together, that Baptism grows, it becomes strong; when you teach your children who Jesus is, why Jesus came, what Jesus did, you do the same, whether in Lutheran or Catholic terms, but it is the same. The question: and the Supper? There are questions to which only if one is honest with oneself and with the few theological ‘lights’ that I have, one must respond the same, you see. ‘This is my Body, this is my Blood’, said the Lord, ‘do this in memory of me’, and this is a viaticum which helps us to journey. . . respond to your question only with a question: how can I participate with my husband, so that the Lord’s Supper may accompany me on my path? It is a problem to which each person must respond. A pastor friend of mine said to me: ‘We believe that the Lord is present there. He is present. You believe that the Lord is present. So what is the difference?’—‘Well, there are explanations, interpretations…’. Life is greater than explanations and interpretations. Always refer to Baptism: ‘One faith, one baptism, one Lord’, as Paul tells us, and take the outcome from there. I would never dare give permission to do this because I do not have the authority. One Baptism, one Lord, one Faith. Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say more.¹

A number of points are to be noted in these remarks. (1) Pope Francis emphasizes baptism as the foundation of Christian unity. (2) He builds an argument on the scriptural injunction of Jesus’ words: ‘Do this in memory of me.’ The question is how can the churches remain

¹ ‘Responses of the Holy Father to the questions of three members of the Evangelical Lutheran Community of Rome,’ 15 November 2015: https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151115_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html
faithful to this command if they do not share the Eucharist. (3) The Church has always taught that the Eucharist is both a sign of unity and a means to unity, but it has generally insisted that unity much be achieved before the Eucharist is shared. Pope Francis, however, picks up on the theme of viaticum, that is, Eucharist that is food for a journey since ‘viaticum’ means ‘walking together.’ Viaticum is the Eucharist given to a dying person as food for the journey back to God. Here Pope Francis uses it as food for the journey to Christian unity. He applies it to the journey of the ecumenical couple, but we might ask whether it also can apply to the ecumenical journey of the churches on the way to unity. (4) He does not supply an answer to the woman from his pastoral authority as pope, but invites her to prayerful discernment. In fact, he says he doesn’t have the authority to give an answer. Nor does he give permission for the woman to receive communion with her husband. In his appeal to personal, prayerful discernment he is very Ignatian. He does not deny the theological explanations, doctrines, and interpretations, but in effect he says that life is greater than these. (5) In the end, he refers back to baptism and the Ephesians text, ‘One faith, one baptism, one Lord,’ and says the woman’s response must be based on that.

Thus Pope Francis does not supply easy answers to this pastoral dilemma. Instead, he lifts up elements of traditional Eucharistic doctrine that need to balance the elements of the doctrine that control current church teaching on Eucharistic sharing. For instance while the Eucharist cannot be shared ordinarily with those who do not believe substantially as we do, since it is also the cause of unity, we neglect the documents which say that, in cases of need, sharing is not just ‘tolerated’ or ‘allowed, but ‘commended.’ He believes that the Eucharist, although the fullness of sacramental life, ‘is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak’ (EG 47). He does not intrude upon the woman’s conscience or relationship to the Lord, but places the responsibility for her decision squarely on her shoulders even though he gives her some principles on which to base her decision.

Since the woman is Lutheran and her husband Catholic, the norms for Eucharistic sharing in the 1993 Vatican Ecumenical Directory would apply, although Pope Francis did not reference that. Baptized

\[1\] UR 8.
members of other churches and ecclesial communities are permitted to partake in Catholic communion if 1) they manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament, 2) ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, 3) they unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial community, and 4) be properly disposed.¹

In his encounter with the Lutheran woman Pope Francis identified some theological themes inviting further reflection by theologians: the importance of the Dominical command, the identification of the Eucharist as viaticum, and the relationship between a common baptism and potential Eucharistic sharing. He underscored the roles of conscience, discernment, and personal responsibility. What the world witnessed in this spontaneous exchange was theological reflection in action. Somehow all these elements superseded raw authority, yet in the end there was recognition that there is theological reflection yet to be done by the church, for there was no clear answer given.

**Why Francis is a Force for Ecumenical Unity**

Aana Marie Vigen wrote a ‘A Lutheran’s love letter to Pope Francis, published in *America Magazine* on September 19, 2017.² In it she gives four reasons why she is convinced that Pope Francis is the pope that Luther was looking for 500 years ago:

1. He helps us to see Christ in our neighbor. She cites Pope Francis exclamation, ‘How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor!’ and the spectacular gestures that gave witness to that desire: his first pastoral trip as pope outside of Rome to migrants fleeing poverty and violence, his washing the feet of Muslims, of women, and of prisoners at a Holy Thursday service, his installing bathrooms and showers at the Vatican for those living on the streets of Rome, and his lunch with people living in a homeless

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shelter after his historic 2015 address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress.

2. He helps us to see God in creation through his papal name of Francis chosen in emulation of St Francis of Assisi, lover of the earth and all of its creatures. His first encyclical, *Laudato Si*, challenges all of us to confront not only harsh planetary realities, but also our complicity in contributing to them through our selfishness, complacency, and willful ignorance.

3. He combines humility with audacity through his life style by choosing to live in a simple papal apartment instead of the apostolic palace, by his willingness to apologize, by his understanding that ‘every person is always both beloved and broken, capable of expressing grace and healing and yet always in need of healing and forgiveness,’ and by his use of his prominent position to focus our attention on issues we often wish to avoid such as obscene inequality, chronic hunger, human rights abuses, and the ravages of war.

4. He inspires creative hope and action.

This witness, which at first blush, seems unrelated to ecumenism reflects the authenticity that is the basis of human relationships which lie at the heart of ecumenical encounters.

Dialogue, encounter, and journey are ecumenical themes in Francis’ writing, but he lives them in concrete relationships: his Pentecostal friend, the Lutheran World Federation at the centenary commemoration, and chance meetings in Lutheran churches. Ultimately, ecumenism is about reconciled relationships. Pope Francis models a reconciled church through his example.
ECUMENISM, RECEPTION AND IDENTITY IN THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS PROCESS: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Anne Francis *

The initiation process for newcomers into the Catholic Church, The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), could be perceived as denominational in focus. This article explores how the act of reception in the RCIA’s welcome of baptised Christians promotes ecumenical understanding and Church unity. This reflection will focus on the experience of ministering in the context of Christian initiation in the Roman Catholic tradition; the Rite itself and theologies of relation and receptivity.

In his recent address to the World Council of Churches on the theme of a ‘new spring’ in ecumenism, Archbishop Justin Welby said this:

As a bishop conducting confirmations I regularly confirm those who have been adult members of non-episcopal churches, and receive into the Communion of the Church of England adults who have been confirmed in the Catholic or Orthodox churches. My friend and colleague the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster does exactly the same thing the other way round. And as we receive people we receive their traditions, their stories and their spirituality, and this affects and improves our own.¹

This assertion-by-experience that the ecclesial and sacramental rites of one church serve to receive the spirituality and traditions of one church serve to receive the spirituality and traditions of


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another is a simple description of the reality experienced across the churches, but may seem controversial when viewed in terms of Church identity and boundaries.

How does the experience of receiving new members in the churches relate to these ecumenical aspirations and church identity? Are there theological foundations for Archbishop Welby’s view that the reception of people from other church traditions ‘affects and improves our own’? In this piece I will explore how the Rite of Reception in the Roman Catholic initiation process enhances ecumenical understanding and church unity. I will do this by reflection on pastoral experience and by considering the rite itself in dialogue with theologies of relation and reception.

**Lucy**

A Roman Catholic parish in Ireland formed a group to accompany someone who had expressed an interest in becoming a Catholic. Lucy had belonged to an evangelical church in the US and now wanted to join the local faith community. She started to attend meetings with the group which began with a time of reflection on the Sunday readings. After a few weeks a member of the group rang me to say that their candidate knew the Bible inside out and was enthusiastically teaching them about the readings. They felt at a loss not only because they did not have the biblical knowledge that she had, but also because they felt that they should be ‘giving’ and she should be ‘receiving.’

The group persisted. They discovered grace at work among them as they all journeyed together, receiving the gift of their candidate and also, gradually, sharing with her the riches of their tradition. Friendship deepened. The story of their earlier consternation was told in fun. All members grew in faith and discipleship. She became part of the community, attending church with her Catholic husband. The presence of the group in the parish acted as a leaven and provided encouragement to others to grow in faith. Other faith initiatives followed. The parish community prayed for Lucy with love and pride. It was an occasion of joy when she was eventually received into membership of the Catholic Church.

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1 Stories in this article are true but names and some other details have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved.
The rite by which Lucy was welcomed was the Rite of Reception of Baptised Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church, known as the Rite of Reception. This rite is part of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), the liturgical expression of the process by which adults are welcomed as new members of the Roman Catholic Church.¹

The RCIA accommodates two paths for adults. The primary path is for those who have never been baptised and for whom their journey into the Catholic Church is a journey into Christian faith. The secondary path is for those adults who have already been baptised as members of other Christian churches and who now wish to become Catholics.² In the past these people were called ‘converts’ and are now known as ‘candidates.’ It is the reception of these already-Christian new Catholics which is the subject of this piece.

A Part of the Story of the RCIA in Cork and Ross

When I moved to Ireland and the Diocese of Cork and Ross in 1996 I soon realised that the RCIA, introduced by the Church in 1972, had not yet been established. Adults who wished to become Catholics were welcomed and taught by clergy, sisters or other individuals, often teachers, and the process, while rich in spirituality and kindness was usually private and based on a model of instruction. ‘Converts’ would learn and appropriate the teaching of the Church over a period of preparation and were then received at a quiet ceremony with one or two family members or close friends. The purpose of this process was primarily growth in belief and conviction. The public, ecclesial and liturgical model of the RCIA with its model of accompaniment, apprenticeship and belonging was unknown. I soon became involved in resourcing adult faith formation and liturgy and when I was appointed formally to this role in 2003 I found myself one spring day in the privileged position of purchasing the Diocese’s first ever Book of the Elect.³

¹ The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1988).
² This does not apply to Christians of Orthodox backgrounds or members of churches in communion with the Catholic Church as no rite of reception is required.
³ This is the book into which those ‘elected’ and proceeding toward Baptism write their names. See the Rite of Election, RCIA (118). My ministry in the
The subsequent years saw the establishment of the RCIA process in the diocese, and the training of RCIA companion groups in many of its parishes. These RCIA ministers were invited into this ministry not because they had teaching experience, though some did, but because of their commitment to Christian discipleship, their spirituality and their warm and welcoming natures. They most often felt inadequate in that they did not ‘know all the answers’ but were willing to serve and welcome those who wished to join the Church.

In one rural parish the parish priest had contacted several people who had initially not accepted the invitation. They felt daunted about taking on a task which involved knowledge of their faith tradition. Some days later one of them rang me and said that she had ‘phoned around the others’ and they had changed their minds. Speaking of the candidate, a baptised Christian, she said ‘he’s one of our own now. We’ll have to look after him.’ This sense of love and welcome characterised the people involved in this ministry.

RCIA companion groups would come for a short training course and begin to meet with their candidates locally in the parish. Because of the small numbers and limited resources these groups journeyed with those who had never been baptised and those who approached the Church as Christians in the same group, which often hosted members of several nationalities. They shared scripture, discussion, Church teaching and prayer together. This was the context and means of catechesis. Many of the Catholic members of these groups had had little formal faith formation since their schooldays and these discussions were enlightening for all the members and they grew in friendship and discipleship together. Here those entering the Church met and observed the faith and life of diverse Catholics, and while they learned and appropriated Church traditions and teaching, they more importantly entered into a fellowship of equals in which they experienced the love and communion of God. One person who was received into the Church in this way summarised her experience by saying, ‘I felt loved every minute.’

Diocese of Cork and Ross (1997-2014) included the establishment and leadership of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) process.
Participants, candidates, clergy and other parish leaders moved from an understanding that candidates were leaving their old beliefs and traditions behind, to the understanding that God had been present throughout the lives of these individuals and was now leading them, not to leave everything behind, but to step into a new community, and integrate the Catholic tradition with all that God had already revealed in their lives. Catholic RCIA ministers frequently commented that they had received so much more than they had given in the course of their ministry. They emphasised the conversion and transformation which had taken place in their own lives as a reflection of the process experienced by their candidates.

**Context**

An additional dimension to the RCIA story in County Cork was the religious demography and history of the area. Ireland’s history of colonialism and sectarianism had affected relationships between Catholics and Christians of other denominations. Only a few years previously it would have been forbidden for a Catholic to attend a Protestant neighbour’s wedding or funeral, and Catholics and Protestants would have shopped in the businesses run by members of their own denominations. While Protestants and Catholics in most circumstances were good neighbours and friends, there was also division between the communities and a too-recent history of violence which was not fully reconciled. It was unusual to see someone move from the Catholic to a Protestant church and vice versa.

The RCIA only became really active in County Cork when immigration became more common. Those who came into the Catholic Church having been baptised in other Christian traditions were, for the main part, young adults who were marrying Irish Catholic partners. Time and again I met people at their first approach who had met and come to know the family of their partner and felt that they had ‘something’. If they were coming to live in Ireland they often felt that they would like to be part of the Christian community as a family, and were happy to ‘move over’ into the Catholic Church. There were some fears that they would have to take on beliefs or customs with which they were uneasy, but the process with the companion groups reassured them and they themselves were seen as bringing gifts from their own traditions.
Revelation in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults Process

In relation to the sharing of Christian teaching in the RCIA groups, practitioner and theologian Thomas Morris discusses the element of revelation in the catechesis of the RCIA process:

Doctrine, is in its best sense, an articulation of the community of faith. It is the Church expressing its experience of God reconciling and saving us in and through Jesus the Christ. Doctrine, as an expression of revelation is dynamic. It flows from the faith of the community ... doctrine flows from the experience of God in our midst.¹

The RCIA groups’ sharing of faith and their expression of their experience of God’s presence and action in their lives, not only conveys the doctrine of the Church but becomes a locus of dynamic revelation for members and for the Church.

The General Directory for Catechesis says of the context of the RCIA process:

The catechumen who has discovered the Gospel and desires to know it better realises that it lives in the hearts of believers. Catechesis is nothing more than presenting the Gospel as the Christian community has received it, understands it, celebrates it, lives it and communicates it in many ways.²

It asserts:

Catechesis ... is always called to assume an ‘ecumenical dimension’ everywhere.³

In this scheme the ‘flow’ of revelation expressed within faith communities may also move between faith communities when sister and brother Christians are received graciously. The conduits of this are those whose faith journey, in response to the Holy Spirit, moves them to migrate between churches. A particular demeanour of ongoing conversion is required by those making this journey. Those who approach another tradition necessarily make themselves vulnerable. They move from their position of ‘belonger’ and natural

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² General Directory for Catechesis (Dublin: Veritas, 1998), 105. Here the word ‘catechumen’ refers to those candidates who have not yet been baptised.
³ General Directory for Catechesis, 97.
heir within their denomination to that of stranger or visitor in another. Rita Ferrone writes,

a just appreciation of the gifts of Catholicism and a true willingness to share from the storehouse of one’s spiritual history demand a chastened self-awareness, humility, patience and all the spiritual gifts that come from God.¹

This prophetic role within the revelation process challenges the receiving community to understand the stranger as heir. This happens gradually and unselfconsciously in RCIA companion groups and is celebrated in the Rite. The newcomer’s vulnerability and disposition toward growth is reciprocated in the instruction to the RCIA which acknowledges the need for the ongoing conversion of RCIA ministers:

By joining the catechumens in reflecting on the value of the paschal mystery and by renewing their own conversion, the faithful provide an example that will help the catechumens to obey the Holy Spirit more generously (4).²

At the Rite of the Call to Continuing Conversion of Candidates, celebrated alongside the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent, sponsors who are recommending candidates for full membership of the Church are asked the following questions:

Have they come to a deeper appreciation of their baptism, in which they were joined to Christ and his Church?
Have they reflected on the tradition of the Church which is their heritage and joined their brothers and sisters in prayer?
Have they advanced in a life of love and service of others? (556)

In this text both baptism and tradition are seen as belonging to the whole Christian Church. Candidates’ Christian past and their future as Roman Catholics are seen in continuity and not rupture. The relationship presented here between candidates and the welcoming community is that of sisters and brothers reflecting together on Baptism and the shared heritage of the Church.

² Although the word used here is ‘catechumen,’ it can be taken in this case that the demeanour of the ministers would be the same for candidates who have come from Christian backgrounds.
The Rite of Reception

How a community welcomes newcomers speaks aloud of who we think we are and what characteristics define us as a community. In his work on the RCIA Thomas Morris asserts:

Initiation rituals help define the fundamental identity of a community.¹

In John 10: 9-10 Jesus says:

I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture ... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.²

The threshold and entrance of the Christian Church is Christ himself. Those who approach Christ will find life. There is provision in Christ of freedom to come and go. The defining characteristic of the Christian community is the person of Christ. The fundamental rite of entry into the Christian Church therefore is baptism. Here we enter into Christ and the paschal mystery, becoming a new creation.

The Rite of Reception in comparison is a minor and subsidiary rite, indeed Turner says of its origin that it was ‘intended to downplay the ceremony in order to affirm the baptism already received.’³ It exists only in relation to and continuity with baptism but it also reveals something of our identity as a church community. The identity in this case is characterised by qualities of unity, not only with Christ, but with one another in the churches.

The RCIA provides the Rite of Reception of Baptised Christians into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church.⁴ This normally takes place during Mass, includes the sacrament of Confirmation where this is appropriate, and culminates in the reception of the Eucharist. In describing the Rite of Reception the instruction goes to length to stress that no convergence should be made between the Christian candidate and the person who is preparing for baptism (catechumen).

Anything that would equate candidates for reception with those who are catechumens is to be absolutely avoided (391).

¹ Morris, The RCIA: Transforming the Church, 30.
² Biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV translation.
⁴ RCIA (473).
The instruction emphasises the baptism of the candidate, saying that this person is already ‘justified by faith and incorporated into Christ’ (419). No unnecessary obstacle is to be placed in the way of welcoming the baptised sister or brother into full communion:

The rite is so arranged that no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity (375).

Regarding the celebration of the rite the instruction states that

Any appearance of triumphalism should be carefully avoided ... Both the ecumenical implications and the bond between the candidate and the parish community should be considered (475:2)

... with respect for ecumenical values and be guided by attentiveness both to local conditions and to personal and family preferences. (420)

Every effort is made to ensure that the candidate is welcomed into the Church as a brother or sister in Christ. This accords appropriate respect both to the individual and to the ecclesial community which has formed him or her. In the intercessory prayers this sentiment is made even more explicit with prayers for members of all Christian denominations, for Christian unity and a particular prayer for the church(es) which formed the new Catholic:

For all who believe in Christ and for the Communities to which they belong, that they may come to perfect unity.

For the Church (Communion) in which N. was baptised and received his/her formation as a Christian, that it may always grow in knowledge of Christ and proclaim him more effectively (496).

This rite, which is the culmination and expression of a whole process, has a stated aim of ‘communion and unity.’ This does not reflect hard borders between the churches, nor defences at the threshold against threat or contamination, but a familial welcome; a relationship of love and respect, rooted in shared baptism and shared identity in Christ. There is an acknowledgement that the newcomer enters with a history which has enriched and sanctified their discipleship and which they bring into communion by their presence.

The reception of the new Catholic with prayerful reverence for their church of origin indicates a reception also of their spiritual tradition and heritage. The reception of the candidate from another Christian tradition makes the receiving church even more what it is intended to be in Christ. Like the mustard seed of Matthew’s gospel (13: 31-32), the
Rite of Reception is a tiny seed which becomes a tree where the birds of the air can nest.

**Theologies of Relation and Reception**

This process coheres with theologies of the Trinity. Here the very nature of God is conceived as the mutual endowment of personhood in love. The divine persons cannot be who they are without the otherness and diversity within the godhead. This divine loving exchange characterises the God of Christianity. Referring to theologies of *perichoresis* or *circumincessio* Cunningham summarises the Trinitarian relation as:

> dynamic interrelationship with one another, giving to and receiving from one another what they most properly are.\(^2\)

What is the welcome offered within this exchange in the Trinity? What is the nature of reception? There is a true dynamism in exchange but it is not a welcome which demands the loss of any part of the One who comes. It is not a reception which diminishes the One received. This exchange is necessary for God to become who God is. This is the nature of Christian communion which is made available by the Holy Spirit. In the economy of the Spirit it is impossible to conceive of a theology which is not relational and which does not indicate, for churches, active, hospitable mutuality with God and others.

This doctrinal view is central to ecumenical dialogue and is present in many of its documents and discussions. Kasper presents Trinitarian theology as the key to the nature of church unity citing ARCIC’s *Life in Christ* among others:

> The mystery of divine life cannot be captured by thought and language but in speaking of God in Trinity in Unity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

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we are affirming that the Being of God is a unity of self-communicating and interdependent relationships.\(^1\)

The report of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches states:

it is the Holy Spirit who draws the church to model its life on the relationship of the Trinity and draws the people of God into the communion of the Holy Trinity.\(^2\)

This understanding of a dynamic God-in-communion in the context of a Christ who prays ‘that all may be one,’ (John 17: 21) reveals the mutual reception of baptised believers between faith communities as a sign of the Church’s health and flourishing.

**Reception**

In the Rite of Baptism the candidate is invited to ‘receive the light of Christ.’ The essential part of our initiation and belonging is that the believer receives Christ. The epistle to the Colossians (2: 6-7) exhorts:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith.

In the same text, also in the context of baptism, the author writes ‘you have come to fullness in him’ (2: 10).

After the events of Pentecost, when Peter is asked by the crowd what they should do, he responds that they should first be baptised and then ‘you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2: 38). In Confirmation, not despite, but as a consequence of our baptism, believers are invited to ‘receive the Holy Spirit.’ This does not infer that the Holy Spirit has been hitherto absent or latent, but is a call to an active receptivity as a spiritual virtue, itself endowed by the Spirit. Discussing receptivity, baptism and the Holy Spirit, Clark Pinnock uses the term ‘actualise,’ and reflects,

The term is not the issue. Whatever we call it, it is important that the full package of baptismal blessing be quickened in us, however it may do so.\(^3\)

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The Church is the Church of the Trinity and led by the Spirit. Our conversion and ecclesial belonging are essentially receptive. It is therefore inevitable that the Church is characterised by the exchange of diverse gifts and by receptivity, not only within denominations, but in the wider expression of Christ’s body. This is experienced in the hearts of believers and in the friendship and faith-sharing of the RCIA groups.

In his work on receptive ecumenism, also developed in the Archbishop’s lecture, Paul Murray writes:

Receptive ecumenism is concerned to place at the forefront of the Christian ecumenical agenda the self-critical question, ‘what in any given situation, can one’s own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?’

He observes that while Christ’s church subsists in the Catholic Church, it may find the marks of Christ’s church better lived in the churches of other traditions:

it may properly appreciate and receive from the aspects of catholicity present in other traditions, which as Cardinal Kasper has recognised, may be being lived there more adequately, in part, than in Roman Catholicism.

He uses the term ‘conversion,’ in this regard, saying it is not a matter of becoming less Catholic, but of becoming more Catholic precisely by becoming more appropriately Anglican, more appropriately Lutheran, more appropriately Methodist, more appropriately Orthodox etc.

The Rite of Reception, in its quiet way, expresses this liturgically and spiritually by receiving the flesh and bones and living history of these traditions. In fact, in this regard it goes further because it receives people without the niceties of ‘appropriately’ and takes the particular version of the tradition embodied by candidates. It co-exists with ecumenical dialogue as an expression of both division and unity.

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2 Citing The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium 8.
4 Ibid. 21.
Within an understanding of receptivity this indicates a theology of hospitality which reflects the generosity of the people of the parish who said ‘he’s one of our own now.’ This hospitality responds to the vulnerable approach of people rather than ideas or proposals only. While it is appropriate to consider whether one might accept or become convinced by theological concepts, the communal reception of newcomers brings the exigency of the pastoral encounter.

In the story of Abraham and Sarah at Mamre (Genesis 18) the couple welcome and provide lavish hospitality for three strangers. In this way the story of the people of Israel begins. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews remembers this (Heb. 13: 2):

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

It is not so much that Christians might find themselves playing host to angels but that by their hospitality they receive God’s presence. As Christian communities the practice of welcome and hospitality is central to our life and holiness and this is why the RCIA is a central pillar of Catholic parish practice. A theology of reception becomes both pastoral and risky when it involves admitting actual people. Anyone involved in RCIA ministry will tell you that they have never met anyone who has presented exactly as the book describes. People are complicated. They come with mitigating circumstances, special considerations, pastoral needs and mixed blessings. And they come with gifts of all sorts. Their arrival always brings transformation for communities.

The pastoral and receptive ecumenism of the RCIA is not a conversation between theologians but the meeting of embodied and lived discipleship in which Christian denomination plays a greater or lesser part. Newcomers rarely bring an advanced knowledge of their denominational theology and welcome are not often confident in what is really Catholic and what isn’t. The parish community, Christ’s agent of reception, is getting on with living Christian life without necessarily being able to explain it. The point is not a theoretical exchange but a holy hospitality where welcome and love are prioritised and an apprenticeship of faith and tradition can follow. Abraham brought meat, Sarah made bread and God’s plan was fulfilled.

Maggie Poggi Johnson reflects on Christian hospitality with reference to the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18:
What this story hints at, and what the parable of the sheep and goats makes explicit, is that every encounter with a stranger is an encounter with God. And here, suddenly, all bets are off and the delicate art of balance and welcome is irrelevant. The first and final encounter in our human experience is with the one who has entered our human experience of vulnerability ...

In Pope John Paul’s encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, he proposes a ‘spiritual ecumenism,’ founded on true conversion and a ‘theocentric vision.’ This is founded on grace and holiness and is relevant to receiving church communities.

When we speak of a common heritage, we must acknowledge as part of it not only the institutions, rites, means of salvation and the traditions which all the communities have preserved and by which they have been shaped, but first and foremost this reality of holiness ....

Where there is a sincere desire to follow Christ, the Spirit is often able to pour out his grace in extraordinary ways. The experience of ecumenism has enabled us to understand this better. If, in the interior spiritual space described above, Communities are able truly to ‘be converted’ to the quest for full and visible communion, God will do for them what he did for their Saints. He will overcome the obstacles inherited from the past and will lead Communities along his paths to where he wills: to the visible koinonia which is both praise of his glory and service of his plan of salvation. (84)

**Conclusion**

The words of Justin Welby at the World Council of Churches prefaced his key message of an ‘ecumenism of action,’ and the experience of mutual reception of members among the churches is at its core. To acknowledge that the reception of Christians baptised in other churches ‘affect and improve’ our own traditions is to recognise the action of the Holy Spirit in bringing about ecclesial unity. This contribution to unity is not effected by Church leaders and theologians, but by searchers, pilgrims and those in search of belonging. These worker bees pollinate and cross pollinate, bringing life and diversity and endow the Church with its true identity in the image of the Trinity.

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Eucharist: An Opportunity for Familial Reception?

Ray Temmerman*

Much has been written about Eucharistic participation by way of exception where Christians of other traditions are concerned. This paper identifies and illuminates a familial exception which pre-exists the exceptions spoken of in the Code of Canon Law and the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, and which calls for the application of those exceptions. It further argues that a recognition of this exception could open the way to a more normal application of the canonical exceptions, in the process making Eucharist an opportunity for familial reception.

In the Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church, Canon 844 §1 specifies the administration of the sacraments to Catholics alone. It then immediately goes on to allow for exceptions.¹ Can. 844 §2 allows Catholics, when there is no availability of Eucharist within their own Church, to receive from non-Catholic ministers in whose Churches the sacraments are valid.²

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² Code, Canon 844 §2. Whenever necessity requires it or true spiritual advantage suggests it, and provided that danger of error or of indifferentism is avoided, the Christian faithful for whom it is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister are permitted to receive the sacraments of penance, Eucharist,
Two corollaries to this part of the canon should be noted. First, in order to receive the Eucharist in this situation, it must be appropriate, from the Catholic perspective, to be received by those ministers and their Churches. Second, given that some of those Churches are not welcoming of people who are not their members, it must be equally appropriate for Catholics to, in the words of Susan K. Wood, ‘risk the real pain, the profound embarrassment, the wrenching experience of exclusion’ that may result from engagement with such ministers and their Churches.

Canon 844 §3 allows for Catholic ministers to administer the sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick licitly to members of Eastern Churches which do not have full communion with the Catholic Church if they seek such on their own accord and are properly disposed. One might presume that this applies only when ministers of their own Eastern Churches are not available, however it doesn’t actually say that. It appears sufficient that such Christians be properly disposed, and seek participation (i.e. this is something they actively do of their own volition) in the sacraments within the Catholic Church.

Finally, there is the question of reception of people of other Christian traditions within the Catholic Church. Can. 844 §4. states ‘If the danger of death is present or if, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or conference of bishops, some other grave necessity urges it, Catholic ministers administer these same sacraments licitly also to other Christians not having full communion with the Catholic Church, who cannot approach a minister of their own community and who seek such on their own accord, provided that they manifest Catholic faith in respect to these sacraments and are properly disposed.’

The conditions are clearly outlined, and are expanded on in the Directory on Ecumenism.

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The DAPNE and Exceptions

The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (DAPNE) states that where the Eucharist, penance, and the anointing of the sick are concerned, ‘in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities.’

Exceptions, as you know, are not situations in which the law can be broken, but rather situations in which the law does not apply, something outside of, or beyond, the norm. The norm involved here is that the sacraments are for those in full communion with the worshipping community. The exception, if granted, would be to extend sacramental participation to a person not in full communion with the worshipping community.

Some dioceses and episcopal conferences have published their own directories on Eucharistic sharing, with some giving lists of events to serve as examples of where an exception may be granted. Where such exceptions have been granted, they have been welcomed and celebrated. What has been the experience of the faithful regarding the granting of exceptions?

While not able to speak for all, I can provide some indication from the perspective of interchurch families, couples bound together as brothers and sisters of Christ through baptism, and made one in marriage. Living in their marriages ‘the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity’, they ‘can lead to the formation of a practical laboratory of unity’. As such, they are on the frontlines of this issue, impacted Sunday by Sunday, most often (though not exclusively)

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3 Address of Benedict XVI, Warsaw, Poland, (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006).
within the Catholic Church. They find themselves, as per Derrida, lodged within the traditional conceptuality, where are found the fissures and wounds of the tradition, ‘challenging the very order of it in order to move to a new time, an unexpected thing and different place.’ Their experience indicates several responses.

- In practice, such lists have often been taken as exclusionary, i.e. if the event is not listed, no exception is deemed possible.
- It is presumed that a minister of the person’s tradition is always available, even in cases where the couple, that one made so by marriage, is worshipping together. It would appear the spouses must make a choice: either 1) they uphold the unity of their marriage, and refrain as one from receiving the sacrament in recognition of the divisions between their churches, or 2) they deny the unity of their marriage in order to receive individually the sacrament of unity in their respective traditions—and in that denial perhaps render themselves improperly disposed.
- There is a presumption that the person of another tradition does not have a Catholic faith in the Eucharist.
- The issue of disposition is seldom broached.

I offer these observations, not by way of criticism, but to indicate that there is a real need to delve more deeply into our understandings of exceptions. I invite you to explore with me a context, theological, ecclesiological and anthropological, whose exceptionality calls for the exceptions possible in canon law.

In Baptism, we are made by adoption what Christ is by origin, raised from our natural human condition to the dignity of sons and daughters of God.2 We become members of Christ, and are ‘incorporated in the Church’.3 We are formed into God’s people. This is the case for all who are baptized, provided the minister of baptism has ‘the intention of doing what the Church does’,4 and that the

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4 Decree for the Armenians (Council of Florence, 1439); and also Decree on the Sacraments (Council of Trent, 1547), Canon 11, cited in Richard P. McBrien, Catholicism (Oak Grove MN: Winston Press, 1980), hereinafter referred to as ‘Catholicism’.
baptism is conducted with water and the trinitarian formula. This is tremendously and wondrously inclusive.

Against this sense of inclusion, there is a history of speaking, at least in English, of brothers and sisters in Christ, who enjoy membership in Christ’s Body, the Church, albeit through other Christian traditions, as being ‘separated brethren’. This term has led many to see those brothers and sisters as somehow ‘other’, not really ‘one of us’. Therefore, it’s worth looking at its origins.

*Orientalium Dignitas* (1894), while addressed to the Eastern Churches, spoke of *fratres dissidentes*, or dissident brothers. They are our brothers, but we don’t get along. *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (1964), also speaking of relations with the Eastern Churches, spoke of *fratres seiunctos*, a term translated into English as *separated brethren*. That same term is taken up in *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), where once again it is translated into English as *separated brethren*.

It’s important, however, to look at the understanding of the Latin term. According to G.H. Tavard, one of the drafters of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Cardinal Baggio, a noted Latin scholar, requested that the term *seiuncti* be used instead of *separati*. *Separati*, he argued, ‘would imply that there are and can be no relationships between the two sides; *seiuncti*, on the contrary, would assert that something has been cut between them, yet that separation is not complete and need not be definitive.’ Tavard suggests a more appropriate terminology would be to speak of *estranged* brothers rather than *separated*. The

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1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), #1271. Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: ‘For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church. Baptism therefore constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn.’


nuance does not come through well, if at all, in the English translation, yet the difference in nuance is important.

Rather than seeing Christians of other traditions as being somehow separated from the body, needing to be reattached to have life, we can rightly see them as still connected, still part of the same body of which we, as individuals, also form part. Even though the bodily tissue is damaged and in need of healing, the body is still one. There is still in some way a flow of nutrients, of neurological signals, between the parts. Unity still exists, is still real, though in a manner which is less than perfect.

That lack of perfection, however, lies not at the level of being truly brothers and sisters, but at the level of estrangement between true brothers and sisters.

What would happen if we began referring to Christians of other traditions as brothers and sisters from whom we are estranged? Would we perhaps begin more clearly and easily to recognize them as still part of the same body of which we are also part, still connected, even though the body may be damaged, the connections tenuous and in need of repair? Would we see that estrangement requires two to be involved, i.e. that we have as important a role to play in lessening the estrangement between us as does the person from whom we are estranged?

**Dinner in the household of God.**

To slightly modify a phrase by Susan K. Wood, *even though all people are born into the human community, and thereby experience union with one another within this common reality, our incorporation into that community takes place only within a particular concrete household.*¹ It is normal and normative that we humans eat and drink in our own household, where we are familiar with the family’s recipes and rituals. While, in more affluent societies, it is now more common to ‘go out’ to eat, trying different restaurants, with their varied ambiances, recipes and flavours, the norm is still to eat in one’s own home. To eat

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¹ Wood, p. 30. Her original phrase is ‘Even though all Christians baptized with the water bath in the name of the Trinity are incorporated into the death and resurrection of Jesus, and thereby experience union with one another within this common baptism, our incorporation into Christ and the Church takes place only within a particular concrete ecclesial community.’
in another's home, even that of a brother or sister, is exceptional. And to do so in the home of a sibling from whom one is estranged, is exceptional indeed. This, I suggest, is an appropriate context for the Directory's use of the term ‘exception’.

To go into the home of a family member from whom one is estranged, there to eat and drink with that member, where access to one's own recipes and rituals is unavailable, is an activity full of risk, and therefore rightly an exception. One does not know if one will be received in welcome (even if the receivers are equally fearful), or rejected, turned away. Nor is one familiar with the rituals, the behaviours considered appropriate. One believes only, with that sibling, that there is real food here, and real drink, and that eating and drinking together can help to heal the estrangement, restore the family unity.

It may be that such eating and drinking takes place around a baptism, a wedding, a funeral, events which hold a certain commonality, and hence reduce the risk. But I would argue that the events themselves are not the exception. Rather, they reveal the primary exception which, I would also argue, is the act of going outside one's own home, to the home of a family member from whom one is estranged, with all the risk that entails, there to eat and drink together with the intent\(^1\) of building family unity, reducing the estrangement.

For an estranged sibling to receive in a ‘non-home’ Church or ecclesial community involves two acts of reception. The one we are most familiar with, the one spoken of in canon law, is that of the

\(^1\) An example, by way of clarification of what I mean by \textit{intent} might be in order. When my wife and I invite a sibling and his/her spouse to our home for a meal, we do so in the simple joy of getting together. We serve as hosts, they as guests; we have a good time together, after which they return to their home. Our guests are, indeed, my sibling and his/her spouse, but they could be anyone. There is, moreover, no intent to strengthen family bonds, though that may well be an unintended outcome. On the other hand, when I and my siblings, each of us with our spouses, gather every third month for a sibling dinner, we do so with the specific intent of nurturing and enhancing family bonds. We meet in the home of one or other of the siblings, and share a meal together, a meal prepared from the offerings of each. At the end of our time, we each return to our own homes, to continue our journey of life. But in the process, we have strengthened our family bonds, built the capacity to work through differences, made our family more ‘one’.
estranged sibling receiving the Eucharist. But there is a second, namely that of the Church or ecclesial community receiving that sibling.

The presence of an estranged sibling in the community’s central act of worship constitutes a call to that community to receive that estranged sibling. How will the community respond? With a presumption that the sibling rejects the community’s self-understanding, its guidelines for table etiquette? Or with a presumption that, even if the specifics of that etiquette are unknown by the sibling (as can often be the case), the sibling is seeking to reduce the estrangement, restore the body? Will the body of Christ be recognized as present only in the sacred elements, or also in the person of the estranged sibling (1Cor. 11:29)? The selected presumption, conscious or subconscious, will largely dictate the community’s response, for rejection or reception.

If we take the words of the canon, and obey them, I suggest we will find it very difficult to receive anyone from outside our Church or ecclesial community without extreme vetting, based on a presumption that such people fall short of our required table etiquette. If, on the other hand, we take those same words and apply them within the context of an exceptional act, I suggest we will find ourselves far more able to receive the gift of God present in the form of the estranged sibling.

Returning to canon 844 §4, I also ask: is the very desire to reduce estrangement between brothers and sisters, a response (even if unwitting, i.e. it never specifically enters a person’s mind that this is what is being done) to Christ’s call that all be one, not itself of sufficient gravity to warrant administration of the Eucharist to Christians not fully in communion with us, provided all the remaining criteria are met?¹

¹ Note that the wording of the canon presents challenges. One might think that the criteria of §4 (cannot approach a minister of their own community, etc.) serve as the deciding factor in determining whether or not an exception can be granted to share the Eucharist. While the criteria may offer guidance in determining levels of ecclesiality, the fact is that people of other traditions seldom get far enough to have their case tested against the criteria. In the vast majority of cases, the question of exception is determined on the basis of serious necessity, itself determined according to criteria of imprecise determination, and almost invariably unknown by the person(s) impacted by the determination. There would seem to be no way of knowing what level the bar is which one must leap over before reaching and being tested against the specified criteria. The appended flow chart shows that more clearly.
Let us not forget that ‘the res et sacramentum of Baptism ... is membership in the Church,’¹ and that ‘the res et sacramentum of the Eucharist is not just the risen body of the Lord, but the whole Christ, the Church.’² This must surely include those brothers and sisters who have come to our home, the home of siblings from whom they are estranged, there to eat and drink with those siblings.

I return, then, to the original question encapsulated in the title of this paper: can we find it in ourselves to receive an estranged member of the family who risks joining us for a meal, with our presuming, not that this family member is an abuser of family ties, merely out to see how the relatives live, but one like us, a pilgrim on the way to the unity for which Christ prayed? In such a situation, can the Eucharist, rather than a sign of delineation and separation, be viaticum, food for the journey for all who receive?

If so, then the Eucharist can indeed become an opportunity for familial reception.

¹ Catholicism, p. 740.
² Catholicism, p. 739, citing Matthias Scheeban’s *The Mysteries of Christianity*. 
CATHOLIC CONTEMPLATIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIA IN THE LIFE AND THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT OF JULES MONCHANIN SAM, HENRI LE SAUX OSB, AND Bede Griffiths OSB CAM

Judson B. Trapnell*

This paper seeks to shed light on the encounter between three Catholic theological thinkers who sought to engage with the religious tradition of India in the twentieth century. Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) and Henri Le Saux (1910-1973) were French religious and Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) an English monk. Both Monchanin and Griffiths understood the significance of the monastic framework for the Indian Church; Le Saux, more a mystic, found his role in the singularity of the ascetic tradition of Hinduism. These three provoked a creative encounter between Catholic Christianity and India which continues to engage the theological imagination and underline the significance of commitment in dialogue between the religions.

In the history of Christian encounters with India several key events could be claimed as definitive, beginning with the legendary arrival of the apostle Thomas in Kodungallur (Cranganore), South India in 52 CE and his later martyrdom. Even if St Thomas was not the first disciple of Jesus Christ to reach India, we know that missionaries from Syria arrived by the fourth century and established churches among Hindu communities on the Malabar coast. Here began what has been touted

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as an exemplary period of interreligious coexistence, explained in part by the Christians’ participation in the caste structure and commerce of the area.

The beginning of the sixteenth century also constitutes a definitive period in the history of Christian engagement with India, shaped by the arrival of Europeans with both commercial and religious motivations. A pattern of coexistence between Christians and Hindus was quickly replaced by one of conflict, grounded not only in cultural myths but religious convictions as well. The decades following Vasco da Gama’s arrival on the Malabar coast in 1498 are notorious for the violent persecution of Muslims, the negative stereotyping of Hindus, and the zealous confrontation of the existing Syrian Christianity by the Portuguese—all in the name of the Catholic faith.

The early encounters of India by European Catholics wore a less violent face, creating a quite different model for Hindu-Christian relations that would also endure, though with much less influence, into the twentieth century. That face was worn most visibly by the Italian Jesuit Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656). Unlike his fellow Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506-1552) whose harsh criticisms of Indians and their religions are perhaps as legendary as his prolific efforts to baptize the ‘heathen,’ de Nobili immersed himself in the traditions of the priestly caste, the Brahmins, believing that this approach would facilitate the reception of the Gospel from the top down. De Nobili, through his learning of Sanskrit, his adoption of the lifestyle of the sannyasin, or of renunciation, and his serious effort to understand a non-Christian religion from its own sources, set an example of engagement that would directly inspire the three Europeans discussed in this chapter.¹

To identify Jules Monchanin’s arrival in Bombay in 1939 as a further defining event in the history of Christian encounters with India requires qualification. Like de Nobili, Monchanin did not enter a world in which his own tradition was absent. Christianity had been a part of the Indian religious landscape, however miniscule, for at least sixteen hundred years, increasing in influence after the overthrow of Muslim rule in the mid-eighteenth century by the British. Specifically, a modern Indian Christianity was already in formation through the

efforts of Indian Christians such as Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Narayan Vaman Tilak, and A.J. Appasamy. Other Indians, like Mohandas Gandhi and Keshub Chunder Sen, while never formally embracing Christianity, clearly influenced its modern Indian form as well.

One may justify a claim for the importance of the work of Monchanin, Le Saux, and Griffiths by taking into account two forces of change that meet in them: first, in distinct ways, each represents questions within the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Second Vatican Council regarding its relation to other religions that each sought to resolve through following a vocation to India. As importantly, each of them maintained connections to theologians in Europe for whom the experiments of these three pioneers provided revealing data about not only the future of missions but also the direction of theology that indirectly informed Vatican II.

Simultaneously with the movements of change within the Catholic Church, forces were at work in India that impacted any European Christian there. The so-called Hindu Renaissance had begun in the nineteenth century, a movement that as a whole both drew from and rejected European influence. As a result, the Hinduism that

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1 Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) directly influenced the theological and liturgical explorations of Monchanin, Le Saux, and Griffiths. It was Upadhyay who drew a connection between the Trinity and the Hindu imaging of the divine as sat-chit-ananda (or saccidananda), who extolled Vedanta philosophy for its potential role in expressing an Indian Christian theology, who nevertheless upheld Christ as the fulfillment of Vedanta, and who founded a monastery in the model of the Hindu ashram in 1900, though this experiment was short-lived due to ecclesiastical opposition. See B. Animananda, The Blade: The Life and Work of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (Calcutta: Roy & Son, 1945); and Julius Lipner, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

2 For a strongly negative evaluation of de Nobili's and Upadhyay's motives and missionary efforts from a contemporary Hindu, see Sita Ram Goel, Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1994), especially chapters 3 and 4.

2 The possible influence of the three on the Council is most apparent in Monchanin. See Donald Nicholl, ‘Other Religions (Nostra Aetate),’ in Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After, ed. by Adrian Hastings (London: SPCK, 1991), p. 126.
Monchanin, Le Saux, and Griffiths would encounter was one that contained two currents: a liberal, inclusive vision of other religions (e.g. S. Radhakrishnan), and a politicized, exclusive criticism of them (e.g. the Arya Samaj and its offshoot, the RSS). In the decades from Independence (1947) to the present, strife between the two has increased, affecting the climate within which all three figures conducted their interreligious explorations.¹

If one may productively image Monchanin, Le Saux, and Griffiths as Catholics attempting to construct bridges between Christianity and Hinduism, one must somehow represent the fact that the two worlds they were trying to connect were both in the throes of creative change. As we shall see, it was the calling of each figure to seek the contemplative depths of both traditions beneath the turbulent surfaces in order to discern a living connection between them and express it in fresh theological terms. In this paper we shall examine 1) the approach to this vocation taken by each figure, 2) some of the theological directions prompted by their experiences in India, and 3) the legacies that each left behind for future theologians. If one dares to assert that they together represent a defining moment in the history of Christian encounters with India, one must acknowledge at the outset that their common intention was to pass on their contemplative vocation and theology for Indian Christians to develop more fully.

Jules Monchanin S.M. (1895-1957): the Challenge of ‘Rethinking’ Theology

In the spring of 1939, just prior to his long-awaited departure from France for India, Jules Monchanin, priest of the Church of Lyon, met for a final time with his friend, Henri de Lubac SJ. Monchanin’s record of the visit articulates a principle for theological reform given to him by de Lubac that would guide not only his mission in India but Le Saux’s and Griffiths’s as well:

[T]o rethink everything in the light of theology and to rethink theology through mysticism, freeing it from everything incidental and regaining, through spirituality alone, everything essential .... He believes that it is in coming into contact with India that I will be able to rework theology much better than by going into theological problems in themselves.  

This quotation raises significant questions for our examination of Monchanin’s approach to theology. First, what is involved in ‘rethinking’? Second, what view of theology is assumed by the advice to ‘rethink everything in the light of theology’ and by what must be the prior task of rethinking theology ‘through mysticism’? Finally, in what ways would transplanting the theologian to a foreign culture that is shaped primarily by a non-Christian religion facilitate this process of rethinking?

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Theological Method

In French as in English, the verb repenser or ‘rethink’ suggests either the simple act of thinking again in familiar ways about something, or the more challenging tasks of re-viewing and re-formulating, that is, allowing unanticipated structures of conception to emerge from relatively unprocessed experiences and then expressing them in words. Monchanin was intellectually and religiously formed in a time and place in which these more difficult tasks seemed possible and urgent. Nevertheless, throughout his life he would have been mindful of the Oath against Modernism (which he had to take as a priest) and of the later papal encyclical against the so-called ‘new theology’ (Humani Generis, 1950) that was so personally devastating for de Lubac as well as for himself. Rethinking demands that one risk not only the comfort of familiar frameworks of meaning but also the approval of one’s faith community. Unlike de Lubac, Monchanin would not live to see the opening to significant reconceptualization represented by the Second Vatican Council.

Creative insight and fresh articulation are not easily achieved without some catalyst to deconstruct one’s existing thought structures and languages. De Lubac’s advice to Monchanin just before his emigration suggests two such stimuli. The first is mysticism, which was already central to Monchanin’s approach to theology. On the one hand, Monchanin exhibited an intellectual gift for Indology and philosophical analysis, including comparative studies, e.g. Eckhart and Shankara. On the other, Monchanin was himself a contemplative whose prayer moved him beyond mere theorizing about theological

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1 For six articles about Monchanin’s life and work in France, and about the theological situation there between the two world wars, see Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) as Seen from East and West, vol. 1, pp. 5-71. No doubt, he was familiar with de Lubac’s own efforts at rethinking, especially the latter’s seminal Catholicisme (1938). This book by de Lubac also influenced Griffiths. See Bede Griffiths, ‘Catholicism To-day,’ Pax 40 (1950): pp. 11-16.


matters. The relationship between these two urges is effectively described in the following:

What I wish for is the Absolute (I mean a participation in the Absolute) in truth and Its truth, even if no intellectual construct is linked to it—although I find it difficult to breathe in too pure an atmosphere where ideas cannot be crystallized. The God of mysticism is beyond all feeling, all hope, in the burning solitude where he reflects himself and unifies himself.¹

Monchanin’s proclivity for thought and ideas thus conditions his passion for the Absolute or for a God beyond all thought and feeling. A method is also suggested here that resonates with de Lubac’s ‘rethinking’: dare to experience the ‘God of mysticism,’ yet also allow ideas to crystallize out of that experience.

De Lubac’s parting advice to Monchanin suggests a second stimulus in addition to mysticism for the process of rethinking: immersion in a non-Christian culture. Monchanin had felt a call to India from an early age, one to which he eventually committed himself in 1932 in response to a serious illness, joining the Société des auxiliaires des missions (SAM).² When he did finally leave France and arrive in India in 1939, Monchanin experienced this transplanting as a cross, a mental and spiritual stripping, an opening to God’s Spirit.³ It was this ascesis through immersion in the unfamiliar, and the mystical openness it engendered, that would clear the mental ground for fresh conceptualization during the next eighteen years, a project he would describe as follows: ‘India must be rethought in terms of Christianity, and Christianity in terms of India, as was done previously in Greece.’⁴

During his first ten years in India, as had been his experience in France, he was frequently moved by his bishop from one post to the next, serving in small villages where he adapted himself to their Tamil language and customs and to the poorest of conditions shared by

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² Weber, pp. 15-16. The Société had been founded in Belgium in 1926 by Frs Boland and Lebbe for the purpose of assigning priests to autochthonous bishops, first in China and later in India.
³ Ibid. p. 31.
⁴ Ibid. p. 95.
In Hindu, Muslim, and Christian alike. During this decade of pastoral ministry, private study, and solitary prayer, an idea developed to found a Christian contemplative community in which the mystical depths essential to the project of rethinking theology could be experienced in a way that was both thoroughly Christian and fully Indian.¹ In 1948 Monchanin was joined by another French priest, Henri Le Saux OSB, who shared this vision. Together they founded in 1950 a contemplative community at Shantivanam near the sacred Kavery River and the village of Kulithalai where Monchanin had served as pastor.² The double name they gave to the new community, Saccidananda Ashram and Hermitage of the Most Holy Trinity, signified the interreligious and Trinitarian commitments they shared.³ For the next seven years, the solitude and the unfulfilled potential of this community would serve as the crucible out of which Monchanin’s mature theologizing would arise.

**Theological Directions**

In what directions did the method of rethinking stimulated by both his mysticism and his immersion in India take Monchanin by 1957? Especially significant for consideration here are his writings on apophatic and Trinitarian mysticism, and on the relation of Christianity to the other religions—two areas that correspond to the two stimuli for rethinking suggested by de Lubac, the first representing an intra-religious and intra-personal process, the second an inter-religious and inter-personal one. The creative interaction of

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¹ Ibid. p. 72; and Jacquin, p. 139.
² Symbolizing their adaptation of Christian monastic life to the indigenous spirituality, Monchanin and Le Saux assumed traditional Indian names, respectively Parama Arubi Ananda (‘Bliss of the Supreme Formless One’) and Abhishikteshvarananda (‘Bliss of the Anointed One, the Lord’), later shortened to Abhishiktananda—a name by which he is often known.
³ Saccidananda is a traditional Sanskrit appellation for the Absolute or Brahman: Being (sat), Awareness (cit), and Bliss (ananda). The resonances of this name with the Christian Trinity appealed to both founders. For discussions of the parallels, see Jules Monchanin and Henri Le Saux, *Ermites du Saccidananda: un essai d’intégration chrétienne de la tradition monastique de l’Inde*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Casterman, 1957), p. 176; and Abhishiktananda, *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience*, rev. ed. (Delhi: ISPCK, 1984), especially Part Three (pp. 161-202), and Appendix 1 (pp. 203-214).
both processes directed the theological explorations of all three figures we are discussing.

In one of his final lectures, ‘The Quest of the Absolute’ (1956), Monchanin distinguishes two types of Christian mysticism, the analogical and the apophatic. While the former begins with the creature and by discerning traces of its creator rises to a knowledge of God, the latter ascends by means of negating the creature and all that is not God. Nevertheless, Monchanin also concurs with Dionysius that the positive or analogical way and the negative or apophatic way are completed by a third mystical approach and theological perspective:

The third degree, called supereminent, asserts once again what the previous degree [the negative] has denied, but not in the same way.... [T]his supereminent theology is, above all, a deeper immersion into the abyss of nescience; the more the mystic contemplates God and experiences him—*patiens divina*—the more does he measure an unplumbed depth of the ‘supra-divine Deity.’

Here is at once an affirmation of the positive contribution of theological discourse and a reminder that such discourse must always be grounded in an ever-deepening experience of not-knowing before the divine mystery—a conclusion with important implications for Le Saux and Griffiths as well.

Monchanin completes his discussion of apophatism in ‘The Quest of the Absolute’ with a reflection on the Trinity, an effective illustration of how the ascent above images or *via negativa* culminates in a more profound reappropriation of Trinity as constitutive of mystery. The philosophical and theological implications of this connection are profound for Monchanin: to be is to be-in-relationship. Christian mysticism, then, can be defined ‘in its essence’ as ‘the sharing of God’s life; that is, the sharing of the trinitarian relationship,’ thus fulfilling the apophatic path and correcting an imbalance he identifies in Hindu philosophy:

Christian mysticism is trinitarian or it is nothing. Hindu thought, so deeply focused on the Oneness of the One, on the *kevalin* in his *kevalatva,* cannot be sublimated into trinitarian thought without a

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1 Weber, p. 130.
2 See also Monchanin’s ‘Apophaticism and Apavada,’ as discussed by Ysabel de Andia, ‘Jules Monchanin, Apophatic Mysticism, and India,’ in *Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) as Seen from East and West*, vol. 1, pp. 89-93.
crucifying dark night of the soul. It has to undergo a noetic metamorphosis, a passion of the spirit.¹

Similarly, in lectures given during his post-war visit to Europe, he criticized Hinduism’s tendency to conceive of and experience the goal of oneness with the divine as a unity that abolishes the knower or lover, rather than as a communion between the human and the divine in which some duality remains.² Such prognoses of what Indian philosophy needs to receive from Christianity suggest an inclusivist theology of religions, one in which Christianity is understood as fulfilling the aspirations of non-Christian traditions in which the Spirit has nonetheless been present—a position that would have been at the cutting edge of Catholicism in the mid-1950s. Monchanin, however, did not articulate a definitive or systematic theology of religions. His lifelong search for synthesis remained open-ended, intentionally unfulfilled, reinforced by his philosophical assumptions and his experience in India.³ He concludes ‘The Quest of the Absolute’ as follows:

Meanwhile, our task is to keep all doors open, to wait with patience and theological hope for the hour of the advent of India into the Church, in order to realize the fullness of the Church and the fullness of India. In this age-long vigil, let us remember that very often amor

¹ Weber, p. 132. The two Sanskrit terms are derivatives of Kaivalya which means the final state of the soul once freed from all earthly attachments according to Vedanta and the Yogasutras.
² Ysabel de Andia cites three lectures from this period in which such critiques of Hinduism are found: ‘L’Inde et la contemplation, Gitagovinda,’ and ‘L’Hindouisme,’ both in Mystique de l’Inde, mystère chrétien, ed. by Suzanne Siauve (Paris: Fayard, 1974); and ‘Un itinéraire et un dessein missionnaire,’ in Théologie et spiritualité missionnaires, ed. by Edouard Duperray and Jacques Gadille (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984).
³ Reserve about creating a theoretical synthesis, nevertheless, did not weaken his sense of mission to ‘Christianize’ India through a clear intellectual strategy that shows how he adapted de Lubac’s parting advice: 1) rethink Christianity by returning to its biblical origins prior to any European shaping; 2) isolate the heart of the other civilization by returning to the period of awakening at its origin; and 3) once the purity of both Christianity and the non-Western civilization have been identified, graft the former onto the latter (Weber, pp. 123-25).
Love can enter where the intellect must stand at the door.

Theological Legacy

In a 1939 letter to his mother written from the ship that carried him to his new home, Monchanin evoked a comparison that others would echo in describing his legacy: 'I must be buried in this land of India—somewhat like Father de Foucauld in the land of the Sahara—to be sanctified and to make it fertile.' Monchanin longed for as fruitful a death as de Foucauld’s, understanding that he would see little growth from the seed he planted and that the transformation of India he foresaw would take generations. In part due to the radical nature of its ideal for its time and in part to the increasing conflicts between Monchanin and Le Saux over the years, the ashram at Shantivanam attracted no lasting vocations. Bede Griffiths, the English Benedictine who received responsibility for the ashram from Le Saux in 1968, did see the seed germinate with the arrival of Indian monks and identified Monchanin as the origin of this growth: 'He gave his life for the ashram without seeing any immediate hope for the future, but it is from his sacrifice that the ashram has continued to live.'

In addition to leaving behind him an ashram as a laboratory for rethinking an Indian Christian theology grounded in contemplation, Monchanin also passed along to Le Saux, Griffiths, and others, specific directions for theological investigation that these others would develop. In particular, Monchanin emphasized the importance of the doctrine of creation as free gift that he believed was needed to correct a serious flaw in Hinduism, as well as the value of a Christian reinterpretation of advaita in the light of the Trinity in order to portray God as love more adequately. Monchanin also recognized the vital role that India with its spiritual traditions could play in teaching Europe and the Church the importance of the inner life—a recognition that would be echoed strongly in Le Saux and Griffiths, in

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1 Weber, p. 132.
2 Weber, p. 27. See also p. 49. 'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies....' (John 12: 24).
3 Quoted without reference on the back cover of Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) as Seen from East and West, vol. 1. See also Griffiths’s Preface to Weber (p. 3).
5 Jacquin, p. 138.
the contemporary contemplative renewal in the Catholic Church, and in the general receptivity of the West to Eastern forms of meditation from the 1960s to the present. Finally, with his attempts to ‘rethink Christianity in terms of India’ by first ‘disassociating it by thought from the conceptual modalities in which it was incorporated into Mediterranean civilizations,’ Monchanin anticipated the challenges of inculturation with which his successors, especially after Vatican II, would have to grapple.¹

As the eldest and theologically most conservative of the three figures we are examining in this chapter, Monchanin may appear less of a pioneer in interreligious understanding. One must recall, however, that for his time his very presence in India as a priest with the poor under the guidance of an autochthonous bishop and in particular his vision of a contemplative ashram as a center for dialogue were radical. Prior to Vatican II, more adventurous ‘rethinking’ was both difficult and dangerous; he illustrates both the obstacles to, and the promise of, serious Western Christian engagement with a non-Christian tradition that will shape the efforts of Le Saux and Griffiths.

Henri Le Saux (Abhishiktananda) (1910-1973): The Mystical Plunge beyond Thought²

Not long after his arrival in India, Monchanin wrote of his dream of discovering a Hindu guru, a dream whose fulfillment was ‘essential if I am to know India otherwise than through books ... Otherwise I shall never reach the centre—the intuition from which everything radiates.’ Over a decade later and only a month after he and Le Saux began their ashram experiment, Monchanin concluded that fulfilling this dream was ‘impossible.’³ When the two priests had visited Sri Ramana Maharshi in 1948, Monchanin had described this Hindu teacher as follows: ‘A truly human being, there is not an atom of Christianity in that serene and beautiful spirit. Such examples indicate better than anything else the gulf which I perceive ever more clearly between the

¹ Weber, p. 123.
² Le Saux’s writings are primarily published in Delhi, India (under Abhishiktananda) by the International Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (ISPCK). A complete bibliography of these as well as studies of Le Saux (articles and book-length) are found in James Stuart, Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through His Letters (Delhi: ISPCK, 1989).
³ Quoted in Stuart, p. 98.
summits of Christianity and of Hinduism." The visit thus confirmed for Monchanin the difficulty in building a bridge, even a contemplative one, between the two traditions.

Le Saux’s response to Ramana Maharishi was significantly different. He had read the writings of this teacher before leaving France and, although he was initially unimpressed, the presence of the Maharshi, and with him ‘the very soul of India,’ eventually penetrated Le Saux deeply: ‘It was a call which pierced through everything, rent it in pieces and opened a mighty abyss.’ In the following days, he dreamed frequently of the Maharshi and became aware of a mental conflict that would continue for most of the rest of his life:

My dreams included attempts—always in vain—to incorporate in my previous mental structures without shattering them, these powerful new experiences which my contact with the Maharshi had brought to birth; new as they were, their hold on me was already too strong for it ever to be possible for me to disown them.²

Le Saux’s self-analysis here reveals his experience of de Lubac’s project of ‘rethinking’: existing ‘mental structures’ are shaken by ‘powerful new experiences’—experiences that cannot be ‘disowned,’ presumably through either reasoned explanation or appeal to orthodoxy. At work here as well are the two stimuli of mystical awakening and interreligious encounter implied by de Lubac. In contrast, however, to Monchanin’s interpretation of his friend’s advice, Le Saux’s ‘rethinking’ springs from an unusual willingness to open through non-Christian sources to a level of experience ‘which pierced through everything,’ i.e. all thought and image, revealing ‘a mighty abyss.’³

In this detail of difference between the two French sannyasins regarding their openness to learning to plunge beyond thought from Hindu gurus one may discern a contrast in their engagement with India that would have important consequences for their respective theological methods and explorations.

1 Quoted in Stuart, pp. 32-33; see also p. 98.
3 Monchanin strongly disapproved of Le Saux’s spending three weeks in retreat with another Hindu guru, Sri Gnanananda, in 1956. See Stuart, pp. 98-100. For Le Saux’s account of this retreat, see his Guru and Disciple: An Encounter with Sri Gnanananda, a Contemporary Spiritual Master, trans. by Heather Sandeman (Delhi: ISPCK, 1990).
Theological Method

For weeks at a time during the early 1950s Le Saux immersed himself in the silence of non-discursive meditation in the caves of Arunachala near Ramana Maharshi’s ashram, consciously following the models of the early Christian desert fathers and of the Hindu sannyasins. Inspired by these retreats, Le Saux composed a series of essays that he gathered into a volume entitled Guhantara: au sein du fond.¹ These writings, he would say later, ‘had poured forth even before I had become aware of them’ and are ‘the direct expression of the first overwhelming experiences.’² Their message was inherently apophatic, arising from the discovery that the God that Christians and Hindus alike worship under various traditional forms is One beyond those forms. Yet that message was also inherently Upanishadic, conveying his realization that this One is also one’s Self. To uncover a similar depth within Christianity the Church must respond to the ‘grace of interiority’ offered to it through India.³ While this message and the experience from which it sprang would remain central to Le Saux’s theological writings for the rest of his life, he would refine its expression in relation to Christian doctrine, especially the Trinity. Important here, however, is what we learn of his theological method which received significant reshaping in these experiences in the caves of Arunachala. From this point on, Le Saux was unremittingly mindful of the principle that the thought processes of theology must be founded upon experience of nonduality beyond thought, an experience that relativizes all formulations yet also empowers all formulations with the power to draw the hearer of them to his or her

¹ Guhantara (Sanskrit) means ‘the dweller in the cave,’ and is a pseudonym for the author, while the French subtitle may be translated, ‘at the heart of the depth’ (Stuart, pp. 76, 78, 364). Only portions of this text have been published so far, primarily in Abhishiktananda, Initiation à la spiritualité des Upanishads: ‘Vers l’autre rive,’ ed. M-M. Davy (Sisteron: Présence, 1979), and idem, Intériorité et Révélation: Essais théologiques, ed. M-M. Davy (Sisteron: Présence, 1982). See bibliographic details in Stuart.
² Stuart, pp. 76, 223.
³ Abhishiktananda, ‘La Grace de L’Inde,’ in Initiation à la Spiritualité des Upanishads, p. 41.
source.¹ In contrast to Monchanin, Le Saux also concluded that through such a plunge beyond thought into silence, beyond the inherited structures of theology into an unstructured state, one could bridge the gulf between Hinduism and Christianity.²

It was precisely here that Monchanin felt increasingly uncomfortable with Le Saux’s method and conclusions: ‘I feel a growing horror for all those muddled modes of thinking in which this beyond thought proves to be short of thought, in which everything is drowned.’³ As though in response, Le Saux diagnosed his colleague’s inability to grasp the true significance of these essays as symptomatic of an attachment to Western conditioning: ‘I think he is too “Greek” to go to the depths.’⁴

Not surprisingly, Le Saux’s skeptical attitude toward the method and content of traditional theology was encouraged by the Church censors’ rejection of Guhantara and by his increasing conflicts with Monchanin who came to represent a rigidity of thinking that he was trying to purge in himself.⁵ This strong ambivalence toward theology and theologians would continue, even as he later in life attempted to integrate the explosive message of Guhantara into the minds of the

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² For Monchanin’s skeptical assessment, see Weber, p. 132. For Le Saux’s different conclusion, see his *Intériorité et révélation*, p. 119. On the ‘gulf’ between the traditions, see also Stuart, pp. 56, 58. The limits of Monchanin’s approach to dialogue, in contrast to Le Saux, are analyzed by Michael Amaladoss SJ in his ‘The Theological and Missionary Project of Monchanin in Today’s Indian Theological Context,’ in *Jules Monchanin (1895-1957) as Seen from East and West*, vol. 2, p. 122.

³ Quoted in Jacquin, p. 143. For Monchanin’s Preface to Guhantara, see Monchanin, *Mystique de l’Inde, Mystère chrétien*, pp. 271-73; quoted in full in de Andia, pp. 82-84. See also Weber, p. 119.

⁴ Quoted in Stuart, p. 81.

⁵ For the censors’ comments and Le Saux’s reactions to them, see Stuart, pp. 82-84, 104. On Le Saux’s own abiding caution in plunging into the advaitic experience, note diary entry (23 March 1953) in Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948-1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom H. Le Saux)*, ed. by Raimon Panikkar, trans. by David Fleming and James Stuart (Delhi: ISPCK, p. 67). For a particularly revealing criticism of theologians, see *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart*, p. 142.
Indian and Western churches through a more patient concern for his audience.

Theological Directions

Monchanin’s death in 1957 left responsibility for Saccidananda Ashram fully in Le Saux’s somewhat reluctant hands. It would not be until 1968, however, that Le Saux would relinquish this responsibility to fellow Benedictine, Bede Griffiths, and move permanently to a hermitage in the north near Uttarkashi. During this middle period of Le Saux’s sojourn in India, he became increasingly involved in the tasks of articulating an Indian theology and of composing an Indian liturgy. While maintaining his contemplative focus, he organized and participated in several meetings, primarily among Christians, in which the potential dialogue between Christian and Hindu spiritualities was explored.¹ In 1968, in preparation for the All-India Seminar of the Catholic Church in Bangalore, he composed a book-length memorandum in which he reflected upon the renewal of the church through liturgical reform, openness to Hindu sources, and contemplation.² His most notable theological work dates from this period as well, published in 1965 as *Sagesse hindoue mystique chrétienne: du Vedanta à la Trinité*.³ This work was an ambitious attempt to synthesize his early experiences of nonduality into a coherent Trinitarian spirituality and thus represents a more accessible kind of bridge-making between Hinduism and Christianity than *Guhantara*.⁴

Le Saux’s apophatic emphasis in the early chapters of *Sagesse*, heightened by his appeal to the Hindu experience of nonduality,

³ Paris: Centurion.
⁴ For a comparison of these two works, see Stuart, p. 192. For Le Saux’s anticipation of this task of integrating Hindu and Christian understandings of the divine mystery into a ‘Christian advaita’ as early as 1954, see Stuart, p. 79. For a detailed and insightful analysis of *Sagesse* in the context of Le Saux’s developing thought, see Edward Theodore Ulrich, ‘Swami Abhishiktananda’s Interreligious Hermeneutics of the Upanishads’ (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 2001), ch. 6.
forces the question more powerfully than one finds in Monchanin of how to reconcile apophatic theology and the efficacy of Christian symbols. Is the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, an aid to contemplation that is functionally equivalent to the Vedantic image of saccidananda and that one must finally transcend in opening directly to the divine mystery? The exigencies of analysis and the assumptions of Christian theology guide Le Saux to articulate the relationship between the Vedantic and Trinitarian experiences within a hierarchical and sequential framework. He thus presents the Vedantic experience of Self-realization in which one’s sense of self is lost in an awakening to Brahman as an essential stage in one’s union with the divine mystery. This experience constitutes a thorough purification of concepts, images, and all that reinforces duality between oneself and God, and represents the culmination of and justification for the apophatic way.

However, Le Saux affirms, relying upon similar theological sources as Monchanin, that the apophatic stage is completed by the important recovery of the Trinity as a mystery that underlies the theological doctrine but cannot be reduced to it, a mystery revealed in Jesus’ relation to the Father. That relation does not constitute a simple monism but rather a communion in which the partners are paradoxically conceived as one-in-relation.

Vedanta obliges us to recognize in man a level of consciousness deeper than that of reflective thought, more basic than man’s awakening to himself through sense-perception or mental activity. Christ’s experience compels us to admit the existence in man of something even deeper still ... Only he who proceeds from the Father at the fount of Being itself could tell us that Being is not a monad, but communion.¹

Le Saux’s strategy for reconciling Vedantic and Trinitarian experiences discloses a theological framework similar to Monchanin’s: the ‘theology of fulfillment’ which assumes ‘the convergence upon the historical Christ and the Church, of all the religious and spiritual experiences of mankind.’² Like Monchanin, however, Le Saux balances the fulfillment framework with an affirmation of the fact that

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¹ Abhishiktananda, Saccidananda, pp. 82-83, 84.
² Ibid. p. xv.
Christianity will learn much from the encounter with India. Nevertheless, one must take seriously Le Saux’s reminder about the provisional nature of this and any theological work as an exercise in ‘rethinking.’ He was, even at his most explicitly theological, consciously using words to point toward silence.

**Theological Legacy**

If *Sagesse* represents a resolution of the creative tension between Vedantic and Trinitarian experiences that characterizes *Guhantara*, Le Saux would soon move beyond that resolution into fresh and pregnant disequilibrium, even as he was revising *Sagesse* in an English translation. Symptomatic of this internal change was a growing dissatisfaction with the ‘fulfillment theology’ as a framework for relating Hinduism and Christianity. The solution, he was coming to realize, was not a new theological framework but a stance at a different level, an openness outside all frameworks. Already in 1970 he had written in a letter that *Sagesse* failed to solve the problem of how to bring together the depths of Christian and Hindu mysticisms:

> The best course is still, I think, to hold on even under extreme tension to these two forms of a unique ‘faith’ until the dawn appears. For advaita and theology are on two different levels. The lofty assurance of the advaitin philosophers is as empty as that of the theologians.

As his enthusiasm about the project of revising *Sagesse* steadily lessened, his skepticism about theology as a response to the divine mystery heightened. He judged his book flawed by the same limitations of thought that he had criticized in Monchanin. These conclusions reflect a fuller mental kenosis, a more thoroughly apophatic realization than seemed to inform *Sagesse*, an emptying that the events of his final years can in part explain, especially his permanent move to his hermitage in the north in 1968, his deepening meditation upon the Upanishads with disciple Marc Chaduc, and his heart attack in 1973.

In the year before his death, Le Saux wrote:

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1. Ibid. pp. 223-24.
3. Ibid. p. 268.
No wish to be a theologian. The only thing I try to do is turn souls inward, where every question is moot—to the primordial silence of the Father, or to the consuming silence of the Spirit, where the Verbum dawns, and whither it leads.¹

In spite of such caveats, Le Saux has strongly influenced theologians and other Christian authors who knew him or who have been drawn to his writings, including Sagesse.² Yet few of these authors would point to specific theological conclusions as his primary legacy. Instead they are inclined to identify his importance for Christian theology in his ability to live the tensions created by a life in dialogue and to speak from experience with unusual integrity.³ In contrast to Monchanin, Le Saux remained convinced to the end of his life that the key to de Lubac’s project of rethinking as well as to building any kind of bridge between the mystical depths of Hinduism and Christianity was the mystical plunge beyond thought. In a letter written several weeks before his death, he asserts, ‘So long as we have not accepted the loss of all concepts, all myths—of Christ, of the Church—nothing can be done! Everything has to spring up anew from the depths ...’⁴

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² Such a list would include Jacques Dupuis SJ, Raimon Panikkar, Michael Amalados SJ, Murray Rogers, Sr. Sara Grant RCSJ, Sr. Vandana RCSJ, George Gispert-Sauch SJ, Klaus Klostermaier, Bettina Baeumer, James Stuart, and, as we shall see, Bede Griffiths.
⁴ Stuart, p. 358.
Bede Griffiths osb cam (1906-1993): Toward the Integration of Mysticism and Theology

In a 1976 article, Bede Griffiths praised Le Saux’s recently published English translation of *Sagesse* as ‘without doubt the deepest study which has yet been made of the basic problem, the relation between advaita and the Trinity.’ Yet, Griffiths, like some of Le Saux’s other colleagues, appears to have been surprised when the French *sannyasin’s* spiritual diary (first published in French in 1986) and his letters (the basis for James Stuart’s 1989 biography) revealed how disillusioned he was with this book by the end of his life. At issue for Griffiths was not Le Saux’s abandonment of the ‘fulfillment theology’ as a framework for comparing Hindu and Christian spiritualities, for Griffiths had himself let go of this theology of religions by the early 1970s. Instead, Griffiths objected to Le Saux’s renewed attraction to a dichotomized view of absolute reality and relative creation, and thus of *advaita* and theology—a view reflected in the heightened skepticism toward language expressed in the letters and diary entries of Le Saux’s final years.

In his 1991 lectures at the John Main Seminar, Griffiths expressed his critical evaluation of Le Saux in this way:

Toward the end of his life, I get the impression the world had become too much an illusion for him. He was just leaving it behind and centering on the one reality alone. And I think that’s not the fullness. I think in each tradition you have to go beyond the dualities and open up to the one beyond, and then you have to reintegrate the whole of humanity and the human experience into that unitive vision.

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4 Bede Griffiths, ‘Plenary Discussions,’ side 3, tape recordings of *Christian Meditation: The Evolving Tradition* (Chevy Chase, Maryland: John Main Institute, 1991). These lectures and discussions have been edited and
One may dispute whether Griffiths is portraying Le Saux accurately here, but these statements are significant in capturing the key principles of Griffiths's own approach to theology and nonduality. In particular, Griffiths consistently affirmed throughout his life the need to integrate a radical openness to the divine mystery ‘beyond’ with a consistent valuing of the creation and the individual self. He articulated this need for integration in terms of various polarities: East and West, immanence and transcendence, feminine and masculine, intuitive and rational. It was this instinct for reconciling opposing values that also guided his approach to the relationship between mysticism and theology that we have been examining in Monchanin’s and Le Saux’s responses to the charge given them by de Lubac.

**Theological Method**

Griffiths moved to India from England in his mature years (age 48) when he was already to a large degree formed intellectually, theologically, and spiritually. Like Le Saux, he had spent two decades as a Benedictine monk and priest; like Monchanin, Griffiths was a public figure, although he had published considerably more, including numerous articles and an autobiography, *The Golden String* (1954). One of the central themes of these early writings, contemplation, connects the three figures, in large part explaining their mutual attraction to India. Griffiths agreed with his two predecessors that both Christianity and the West will benefit from an encounter with

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Hinduism and the East where contemplation and non-rational means of knowing in general have been more consistently valued. The ‘marriage of East and West’ that Griffiths first articulated in 1953 and that became the title of his 1982 sequel to The Golden String would also aid the East by encouraging its rational capacities.¹ Thus in his dialogue with Hinduism, Griffiths instinctively preserved a careful balance of rational and non-rational means, ever vigilant to integrate theology and mysticism, words and silence.

In his article, ‘The Mystical Dimension of Theology’ (1977), Griffiths argues that the vital interrelation between Christian theological discourse and mystical realization has been neglected by the modern church.

[T]he most urgent need in the Church to-day is to recover her mystical tradition, not merely in the sense of encouraging contemplative prayer and contemplative life, but rather in the sense of learning to see religion itself as a way of mystical experience. We have to show that Christianity is not merely a way to know about God but a way to know God, that is to experience the reality of God in one’s life.²

An important effect of the modern divorce of the scriptural, liturgical, and doctrinal aspects of Christianity from the mystical has been to sap theology of its transforming power and to reduce it to formulae intractably identified with one cultural context:

Christian mystical experience is ... the experience of God in the Spirit through Christ, but the terms in which Christ is understood are subject to continuous change. The function of theology is to reflect on the terms in which the mystery of faith is expressed in the Scriptures and in the history of the Church and the world and so to renew the experience of the mystery of faith. Thus theology derives from a mystical experience and seeks continually to renew it by means of the words and images and thoughts through which that experience is expressed.³

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As in Monchanin’s project of ‘rethinking Christianity in terms of India,’ Griffiths advocated a reconnection to Jesus’ experience of God, which for him is inherently mystical, and the rebuilding of theology from that experience expressed in terms meaningful to an Indian context. The Church’s recovery of its mystical tradition and subsequent renewal of theology is, for Griffiths, one important fruit of its encounter with India where the mystical element of religion remains more prominent.

It is appropriate, then, that Griffiths concludes his 1977 article on the integration of mysticism and theology by reflecting upon de Lubac’s advice to Monchanin ‘to rethink everything in terms of theology and to rethink theology in terms of mysticism.’ By opening himself more fully to Indian mystical sources than Monchanin, Griffiths could discern the common contemplative source beyond thought and image from which Hinduism and Christianity then diverge in scripture, ritual, and doctrine. By clinging to a principle of integration more tenaciously in his intra- as well as inter-religious exploration than Le Saux, Griffiths could articulate a theological bridge not only between Hinduism and Christianity but between the worldviews of East and West. If rethinking theology in an Indian context in the twentieth century depended upon de Lubac’s two stimuli of mysticism and interreligious encounter, Griffiths’s method clearly built upon the breaking up of the existing ground of theological structures by his predecessors using these same two means.

**Theological Directions**

The guiding principle of Griffiths’s integration of apophatic and Trinitarian theologies was his theory of religious symbol. Drawing upon Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, and Karl Rahner, Griffiths defined

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the religious symbol as the expression of the divine mystery in human consciousness, a communication further explicated in ritual and doctrine. ¹ Far from being a simple artifact or sign, the religious symbol mediates communion between the divine Spirit and the human spirit, between mystical realization of the non-dual reality and theological reflection within the world of language, or between what Le Saux described as the separate levels of advaita and theology. Thus, for facilitating theological renewal, Griffiths believed the role of India is providential due to its fuller sense of the power of symbols as representations of the divine mystery.²

As an important qualification to his theory of symbols, Griffiths upholds the apophatic principle of Dionysius’s ‘radical criticism of language’:

Dionysius says about the language we use to speak of God, that all words we use about God are symbols in which divine reality is present but is beyond the grasp of the mind .... Here we are at the heart of mystical theology. God cannot be known directly. He is only known through signs and symbols by which the divine mystery makes itself known.³

In this apophatic principle Griffiths finds a powerful link to those Hindu philosophers like Shankara who have emphasized the


Upanishadic teaching that ultimately what we can most truly say about the Absolute (Brahman) is neti neti, ‘not this, not this.’ But the above quote makes an additional point, one that received less emphasis by Le Saux, especially in the later correspondence and diary entries of which Griffiths was critical: the symbols through which one may come to know God are also themselves means through which the divine mystery expresses and communicates itself. For Griffiths, the most important such symbol in the Christian revelation is the Trinity. Building on the stages of spiritual ascent espoused by Dionysius, Griffiths states that the apophatic way beyond symbols is not final but is completed by ‘the way of transcendence’ in which symbols such as Father, Son, and Word regain their power but in a sense that is ‘beyond human comprehension.’

Griffiths finds a similar spiritual dynamic in Ruysbroeck’s Trinitarian mysticism. Through contemplation, one leaves the created world of multiplicity in order to return to the one divine source, only to discover that within that unity all multiplicity is present in interrelationship, modelled upon the unity in relationship of love that is the Trinity. ‘This is the climax of Christian mysticism, as of all mysticism, where there is a return to the original unity of being beyond all distinctions and yet embracing all distinctions.’ The model of a differentiated unity, symbolized in the fullest sense by the Trinity, is the key to Griffiths’s ‘Christian advaita,’ a model that he could not find as clearly presented in Hindu teachings on nonduality.

As for Monchanin and Le Saux, Griffiths’s way of resolving the tensions between advaita and Trinity is reflected in his theology of religions. Just as the Trinity symbolizes the inner dynamics of the divine mystery, so it reveals a principle of differentiated unity that characterizes all relationships in creation, including potentially those between the religions whose revelations may thus be understood as complementary. In place of the ‘fulfillment theory’ that he, like Le Saux, had earlier advocated, he articulated the following theology of religions in 1973:

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The divine Mystery, the eternal Truth, has been revealing itself to all men from the beginning of history. Every people has received some insight into this divine mystery—which is the mystery of human existence—and every religion, from the most primitive to the most advanced, has its own unique insight into the one Truth. These insights, insofar as they reflect the one Reality, are in principle complementary. Each has its own defects both of faith and practice, and each has to learn from others, so they may grow together to that unity in Truth which is the goal of human existence.

Nevertheless, Griffiths also discovered that in putting such a vision into language, he could not avoid setting it within a Christ-centered theological framework—both because this is the limitation of language and because this is the limitation of the human heart devoted to a particular symbol.

**Theological Legacy**

At his ashram in January 1990 Griffiths suffered a stroke that, like Le Saux’s heart attack in July 1973, was accompanied by a profound spiritual awakening. In describing ‘the greatest grace I’ve ever had in my life’ he focuses on a shift in mental function, similar to his account of what happens during meditation:

> I had died to the ego, I think. The ego-mind and also maybe the discriminative mind that separates and divides, all seemed to have gone. Everything was flowing into everything else, and I had a sense of unity behind it all.

Several days later, Griffiths felt a call to ‘surrender to the Mother.’ His prayerful response evoked ‘a psychological breakthrough to the feminine’: ‘An overwhelming experience of love came over me. It was like waves of love.’ Both events, he believed, awakened the feminine, intuitive side that had been repressed so long both within himself and his culture of origin, bringing a new balance with his dominant rational side. Gradually, as his normal consciousness returned, rational activity resumed but without overshadowing the simultaneous intuitive awareness of nonduality.

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In his transformed mental state Griffiths experienced the basis for a more profound rethinking. Yet one does not discern significant developments in his theology as a result of the stroke. What one can see is a heightening of prophetic charism due to a more total transparency to the Spirit and a more vital grounding of theory in experience. Griffiths continued to pursue his project of the preceding decade of identifying a principle of nonduality as differentiated unity within not only Christianity and the other major religions but Western science as well.\(^1\) By broadening the scope of his synthesis in this way, Griffiths clearly aspired to fulfill de Lubac’s intuition ‘to rethink everything in the light of theology’ to a degree not possible for his two predecessors. To address this same project of exploring the principle of nonduality in a crosscultural context, Griffiths’s final work was an anthology of scriptures from the major religions.\(^2\)

One may certainly take issue with such synthetic projects; Griffiths himself did not claim to have based them on exhaustive research. Instead, he would have argued that they represent theology rethought ‘in terms of mysticism,’ for it is at the mystical level, he claimed, that the various religions converge, a convergence that his own experience, both contemplative and interreligious, confirmed. It is in the breadth and depth of such conclusions that his unique legacy lies, a legacy, however, that bears continuity with and dependence upon the contributions of Monchanin and Le Saux.

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\(^1\) For a particularly effective treatment of the topic of nonduality, see Bede Griffiths, ‘Transcending Dualism: An Eastern Approach to the Semitic Religions,’ ed. by Wayne Teasdale, *Cistercian Studies* 20/2 (1985): pp. 73-87. In the area of Western science, Griffiths relies in particular upon the ‘new scientists’ in the fields of psychology (especially Ken Wilber), biology (especially Rupert Sheldrake), and physics (especially Fritjof Capra and David Bohm)—all with inspiration from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Conclusion

To examine Monchanin, Le Saux, and Griffiths together in one essay invites diachronic analysis as well as theological comparison in terms of method, substance, and legacy.¹

In his response to de Lubac's charge to 'rethink' theology on the basis of mystical and interreligious experience, Griffiths employed a method that was more daring than Monchanin's, yet more cautious than Le Saux's. In contrast to Monchanin and like Le Saux, Griffiths allowed his dialogue with Hinduism to be more than intellectual by incorporating symbols from Hindu ritual more centrally in the liturgy, terms from Hindu scriptures more constitutively in his theology, and practices from Hindu spirituality more thoroughly in his daily meditation. Like Monchanin and in contrast to Le Saux, however, Griffiths did not immerse himself in the experience of nonduality without concern for losing his religious and intellectual bearings. In the same 1991 seminar cited above, Griffiths concludes that Le Saux may have plunged too carelessly into the advaitic experience.² As is apparent from their methodological criticisms of one another, the three represent a range of options for balancing the radical and conservative exigencies that are both required for any project of theological reform to remain intelligible to the community of faith. Nevertheless, their friend and colleague in Hindu-Christian dialogue, Raimon Panikkar, has praised all three as 'trespassers' who were 'prosecuted' both by Christians who doubted their orthodoxy and Hindus who questioned their sincerity.³

Monchanin, Le Saux, and Griffiths also shared a deep interest in the relationship between the apophatic (advaitic) and Trinitarian approaches to theology. This similarity is partially explained by their common focus on the nondualist philosophy of Shankara and his interpreters who were their primary partners in dialogue, rather than

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³ Raimon Panikkar, Remarks at a Memorial Service for Bede Griffiths, tape recording, September 1993, Chicago, Illinois.
the more numerous devotees of various Hindu gods. As contemplatives, they felt affinity with those in India who affirmed that God is a mystery beyond all thoughts, images, and forms (*nirguna Brahman*) more than with those who worshipped God in or through a particular form (*saguna Brahman*). Their *inter*religious dialogue, then, with Hindu *advaita* and its presentation of the formless God stimulated their *intra*religious dialogue on the relation of the formless God of contemplation and the Trinitarian God of doctrine. Generally, they came to a common conclusion: the dialogue with Hinduism disclosed by similarity the significance of the apophatic way in both traditions and by contrast the essentially Trinitarian nature of Christianity. Reflecting the tension between their theological commitments and their *intra-* and *inter-*religious experience, there lingers in each not a small measure of mystical humility in comparing *advaita* and the Trinity.

Nevertheless, as a result both of their differing methods and of the different stages of the Church’s development in which they lived, they arrived at different conclusions regarding a theology of religions. Monchanin concluded that no bridge, even a contemplative one, could be constructed over the abyss between the summits of Christianity and Hinduism. To reconcile this antinomy in a pre-Vatican II worldview, he assumed an inclusive theology of religions in which all human religious aspirations, including the Hindu, would find fulfillment in Christ and the Church—though not without significant contributions from India to that fullness. Le Saux experienced a bridge between the summits in his awakening to nonduality, then attempted to express that connection within a theological framework similar to that of Vatican II, but finally despaired of all such attempts due to the limitations inherent in language. In the end he let go of all comparative frameworks for resolving the tension between *advaita* and Trinity as well as for understanding the relationship between the religions. Griffiths was aided by an explicit theory of religious symbol that salvages the power of images like the Trinity to make present the divine mystery to which they point, and by a post-Vatican II openness to the spiritual riches of other traditions of symbols. As a result, he was able both to envision and to articulate a convergence between the various religions at their mystical summits (or depths) in a way that was true to his instinct for
integration but was perhaps not possible for Monchanin or Le Saux for historical as much as theological reasons.

Their legacies are most constructively conceived as sequential and cumulative, suggesting that their own efforts were inherently incomplete. Each recognized that their contemplative vocation and theology would only bear fruit if thoroughly transplanted to Indian soil, a process that would change that vocation and theology in ways they could neither anticipate nor control. They, therefore, each measured their success by the degree to which they could pass on their legacy to Indian monks. Only Griffiths would live to see this fulfillment, but the achievement belongs to the Spirit that moved through each of them.

Their common legacy extends beyond the Indian Church to the broader Christian community’s understanding of the theological task. The challenge of rethinking theology in the light of mystical experience and interreligious dialogue is not something to be feared, as difficult as it may be. Nor is the additional task of rethinking everything in the light of theology to be avoided in the face of an increasingly secularized world. Monchanin, Le Saux, and Griffiths each demonstrate that through the inevitable sacrifices involved in such rethinking a transforming grace is present.
WHY DO WE STILL TALK ABOUT LUTHER THE REFORMER?

Katharina Schachl*

Translated by John McAreavey

The anniversary of Luther's 95 theses is an opportunity to assess the relevance of their reforming principles for today's Churches, and society. Thus: an unconditional ‘yes’ to God, against a multitude of other claims in society (and Churches?); the importance of the other/Other in a society (and Churches?) which accords the individual so much importance that it loses all reference to anything beyond itself; and the liberation sought by the Reformer as against a sacrosanct individual liberty divorced from any other attachment. Revisiting Luther's propositions also allows us to consider how they constructed—sometimes paradoxically, producing effects contrary to their initial vision—the society in which we live.

The year 2017 has been marked by many celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. The challenge of this date for the Protestant Churches was not to fall into the trap of self-celebration or of a commemoration focused on the past. In France, where Protestant Churches are a minority, the temptation to have a ‘glorious commemoration’ was less than in those countries where Protestant Churches have an important role and which is noticed in the media and in society.

How should we take advantage of this date more as an occasion for reflection and from the perspective of the present and the future?

It is interesting to focus on the gesture of Luther rather than on the wider historical account of his action of nailing 95 theses, especially in light of the fact that historians question the historicity of the act of posting the theses on the door of the church at Wittenberg. The

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posting of the theses is both a protest and a call to dialogue. The United Protestant Church sees itself as a Church of witnesses. Therefore each believer must be able to recognise himself in Luther’s gesture, in the light of their own convictions and with an openness to dialogue with others who do not share those convictions. One could summarise the question before Protestant believers in 2017 (and which continues): why refer to the reformer Martin Luther and more widely to the inheritance of the Reformation today? To put it another way: in what way is the message of the Reformation seen as relevant today when the ecclesial and social context has fundamentally changed? How could Reformation ideas challenge or perhaps inspire our way of living and believing in the twenty-first century?

**An unconditional welcome**

The protest of the Reformation was raised against the practice of indulgences. It is against this practice that Luther formulated the 95 theses. The practice of indulgences expressed a concern, even a fear, on the part of the believer of being turned down by God at the last judgement. Will salvation, a welcome by God be accorded the believer or not? Will the works carried out by him during his lifetime be sufficient for him to receive grace and pardon from God? Luther himself is caught up in this torment. His exclamation, ‘how can I find a gracious God?’ translates it well. His decision to live in a monastery, the privations he inflicts on himself, his study of the Scriptures make him aware of the gap that separates him from God. Nothing allows him to find peace. Finally, it is in an experience that could be called ‘biblical-mystical’, which Luther will receive as a revelation, the certitude of a God who justifies the sinner instead of judging him (in the sense of condemning). ² How could this spiritual and existential

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¹ Wie kriege ich einen gnädigen Gott?
² ‘I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: “The justice of God is revealed in it.” I hated that word, “justice of God,” which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, as they call it, i.e., that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust. But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn’t be sure that God was appeased by
experience of a sixteenth century monk touch the life of a believer today, or more globally the Church and society? We no longer live in a context where people fear a final judgement and the ‘fires of hell’. The subject of ‘salvation’ does not preoccupy our contemporaries and the ‘Law of God’ is no longer felt as profoundly significant in our daily decisions.

And yet, in a society which demands performance, mobility and success and where failure and fragility are taboo (whether loss of employment, sickness or old age), the individual is subject to continual judgement and is subject to tests every day in order to ‘be someone’, to participate. The pain of exclusion and the loss of identity are real. Some young people measure their value from the number of ‘friends’ on their social media sites. Certainly it is not God who judges them, but their standing among others counts and acts as a pitiless judge. There is no right to make mistakes. Some, rather than lose face, would lie to their immediate family and go through the motions of leaving for work every morning before, finally, months later admitting that they lost their jobs. Some have taken their own lives in order to escape definitively the contempt of others.

To escape from this infernal circle (hell has finally returned), the question that is posed is about ‘grace’. Not the grace of compassion

my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. [...] This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant. I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: “The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: ‘The just person lives by faith.’” I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: “The just person lives by faith.” All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light.’ Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Works (1545) translated by Bro Andrew Thornton OSB from the ‘Vorrede zu Band I der Opera Latina der Wittenberger Ausgabe, 1545’ in vol. 4 of Luthers Werke in Auswahl, ed. Otto Clemen, 6th ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 196), pp. 421-428:
http://www.bluffton.edu/courses/humanities/2/ml-1545.htm)
when faced with such situations, but the experience and affirmation of a possible place of welcome ‘for nothing’ and where no argument is needed: a place of radical acceptance. It is the experience of Luther and many others revisited today: the human being cannot really accept his human destiny with all its highs and lows in life unless he can count on a place of welcome, which does not judge, that is, which does not link his identity to either success or failure.

In the words of the Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, the human being is called to ‘accept being accepted even though he is unacceptable’. As long as the identity of the human being depends on what he does, achieves or produces, that person is threatened by nothingness. This assurance comes from the fact that this fundamental acceptance—which does not come from an existing condition or autosuggestion—comes from outside of ourselves.

**Extra nos or the importance of the Other**

Another facet of the discovery of the reformer Martin Luther touches on the inaccessibility of the place that declares me ‘justified’: it is *extra nos* (literally, ‘outside of us’). What does this mean? One can summarise it simply by saying: responsibility for what is essential (salvation) has been taken from the human being and entrusted to God. Instead of the human being thinking he had to ‘make his salvation’, God offers it to him. How extraordinarily pretentious of the human being to think for a second that he is capable of ‘making his salvation’. No, it does not depend on human capacity, Luther reminds us. We cannot even collaborate in this process. The anthropological pessimism of Luther finds expression on the basis of personal experience. The human being is perhaps capable of lots of good things in life and society; he is not however capable of assuring divine salvation. Salvation, the unconditional acceptance, is entirely the gift of another. Not a kind of reward but a real gift from beyond himself, a gift that does not rely or depend on anything interior to the human being, but uniquely on the mercy of God: *extra nos*. The pastoral and existential consequence is immediate: if justification arises solely from God (*extra nos*), if the unconditional acceptance of the sinner is the decision of an Other, it is impossible for me to interfere with it, to collaborate with it in any way at all. It escapes me in a way; I have no

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control over it; it is simply that I have received it. Salvation, my salvation is therefore no longer my affair! When Jacques Ellul was asked whether the question of his salvation preoccupied him, he said, ‘That, not at all’. The extra nos is entirely in accord with the fact that it is no longer my affair! The individual thus assured and covered by the action of an Other is no longer measured by his actions in view of a salvation that has to be won. This individual encouragement reflects on the wider community: instead of being the object of good actions needed to assure salvation, he becomes the subject. Two subjects meet: in the absence of pity or condescension, new relationships are woven.

Today, in a Western society marked by individualism, an attitude of waiting for everything (or certainly the essential) from an Other raises questions. Even the increasing demand for spirituality often leads to a demand to ‘draw from oneself the necessary strength’ or to ‘discover in oneself the divine spark’. The human being in this context does not appear to be dependent on another/an Other but as one who is at the centre of everything, dependent solely on himself. One understands why anxiety and anguish are two omnipresent symptoms of a humanity which must rely on its own strength to ‘sort things out’ and which is becoming more and more conscious of its fragility. The extra nos could be a significant remedy …

**Liberation rather than liberty**

When the reformer, in his Treatise on Christian Freedom,¹ writes about liberty, he does so from the experience of liberation. ‘Every human being is born free and equal in dignity and rights’, the first article of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states.² Liberty is cited as a fundamental given, which is essential and certainly indispensable, even constitutive of the human being from birth. Like many other Christian authors, Luther does not share this conviction: if liberty is central for him, it is not on the basis of a fundamental given, neither inherited nor from nature. The human sciences today would probably join him on this point. In fact, experience shows that the human being is not free, and that he is not born free. He is born with a historical inheritance, carrying multiple hopes, in a precise and

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¹ [On The Freedom of a Christian](https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/luther-freedomchristian.asp)
² *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, article 1, 1949.
limiting familial, cultural context, carrying the weight of what went before, good and bad ... Liberty is not at the origin of life and yet it is indispensable for it. If there is liberty, for Luther this is liberation. Since the human being is unable to liberate himself by his own resources, there must be the intervention of an Other (we pick up here again the idea of extra nos).

Liberation comes from the order of lived experience, as Luther the reformer saw at the moment of his discovery of a God who justifies the sinner. This was revealed to him, not by hard work or the careful reading of the Letter to the Romans, but by God who took ‘pity’ on him.

Luther relates his experience to the Canticle of Canticles.\(^1\) Rereading the text, he meditates on the question, ‘But how does God free us?’ Everything works out in relation to Christ.

The verse, ‘My beloved is mine and I am his’\(^2\) and the metaphor of the love between husband and wife allows him to grasp how the human being can be freed by Christ. Luther writes: ‘Faith unites the soul to Christ as a wife is united to her husband. By this mystery ... Christ and the soul become one flesh. ... It is He [Christ] who, as a spouse by faith takes on his share of sins, death and hell. What do I say? He makes them completely his own, as if they were really his and he had sinned. It is no longer possible that one’s sins (those of the soul) bring it condemnation, for they rest on Christ and are subsumed in him. As for the soul, it possesses in Christ the justice that it can regard as its own and which, faced with its sins, can face down death and hell, saying ‘If I have sinned, my Christ has not; it is in him that I believe, all that is in him is mine and what is mine belongs to him, according to the Canticle of Canticles. Christ henceforth carries the narrowness and anguish that are signs of slavery. Liberation is only possible by virtue of that union which Christ offers the believer. Faith, trust reposed in another, is fundamental to this union. It allows the ‘joyful exchange’ between Christ and the believer. This close relationship with Christ which permits the believer to live in liberty confronts everything that can threaten the life of the human being, present and future.

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\(^1\) On The Freedom of a Christian
(https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/luther-freedomchristian.asp)

\(^2\) Canticles 2: 16.
The consequence of this experience is double and is expressed in a paradoxical way. Luther writes: ‘The Christian is the freest person; master of everything, he is subject to no one. The Christian is in all things the most servile of slaves; he is subject to all’. This freedom is the result of a fundamental liberation; God declares just one who is not and makes him leave a system of reward/punishment that constitutes a subject that is totally free: no morality applies; all exhortation (‘you have to do this or that to achieve this or that) is done. However the free subject becomes by his very freedom a literally responsible being: he must answer for himself before himself. He has to review the criteria that underlie his actions. If there is no pressure to obtain the love of God (to ‘gain my salvation’), I am free to act. I can act for the other in a disinterested way: it no longer serves to foster my salvation; I can look to what he really needs and help him in a responsible manner. Christian liberty is a freedom to be responsible for the other.

The rediscovery of responsible freedom, the result of an unmerited liberation, which turns towards the other in a disinterested way makes believers reconsider all forms of attachment, particularly in the Church and in the family. On the basis of experience and a pessimistic anthropology, Luther will question human capacity to bind itself by means of a pact, a vow or a covenant. For Luther personally, monastic vows are the subject of his criticism. The question is put as follows: can the human being freed by God renounce this freedom invoking God as the one who asks it of him? Or again: does the human being in a perpetual vow in a given place or community not claim a power which he does not have? Or more fundamentally, can God wish that the human being bind himself in these ways? One of the criteria that will affect how these questions are answered is the following: the covenant that God offers the human being produces life and happiness, is offered to all human beings. However it must be said that pacts by which the human being binds himself to others or to a particular person often bring about death rather than life. This is why Luther (and other reformers after him) will, initially, authorise the breaking of vows. However monastic vows only concern a small percentage of the population. At a later stage, this critique of vows will be applied to the marriage covenant. Under the influence of reformers, divorce becomes thinkable and possible (the man can ask for it and, something unheard of, the woman) if marriage is no longer
a source of life and happiness for the couple. It is better to find another spouse with whom life reflecting the covenant with God is possible than to remain in a life without prospects.

This fundamental reconsideration of the capacity of the human being to create a bond and also to break it poses a question to society where the question of commitment, particularly that of the couple but not only this, is more and more problematic. Today, the idea of maintaining a commitment which is no longer life-giving has become incomprehensible. To break this commitment has become commonplace and is reflected in daily experience, regardless of spiritual or religious context. Disengagement becomes fundamental to social norms. For Luther and the other reformers, breaking a bond is not an end in itself. The covenant remains the aim and objective. If the human being has freedom to break a covenant, it is with a view to re-committing to another covenant which reflects more the covenant offered by God.

**Why do we still refer to the reformer Martin Luther?**

Some of Luther’s propositions, brought to the extreme, redound against themselves and need to be re-evaluated in their original context; for example, the freedom of the individual championed against communal and institutional constraints ends with people being lonely and lost. Other propositions remain unverified. I think particularly of the unconditional acceptance by God, God’s acceptance of the unacceptable, which the Churches, also on the Protestant side, have so much difficulty in proclaiming and putting into practice. It is as if the human being had to remain permanently tied up in a system—whether religious or social—that is fundamentally based on merit and punishment. Is there not a fear of letting go and giving full scope to God, confident that it is an Other who will take care of things? A sort of lack of faith ...?
UNITY, ACTION, AND SPIRITUALITY. Prospects and Challenges at the Intersection Between Contemporary Receptive Ecumenism and Nathan Söderblom’s Ecumenical Vision

Sara Gehlin*

The contemporary development of the ecumenical concept of ‘Receptive Ecumenism’ takes place a century after the Swedish Lutheran archbishop Nathan Söderblom’s ecumenical endeavours in the early modern ecumenical movement. What prospects and challenges for contemporary and future ecumenism occur at the intersection of these two strands of ecumenical engagement? The article discusses this question from a point of departure that they have in common, in spite of different historical and contextual settings: the emphasis on spirituality and common action in the search for Christian unity.

A Polyphonous Wholeness

A century has passed since the Swedish Lutheran archbishop Nathan Söderblom developed his ecumenical vision in the early days of the modern ecumenical movement. Today his arguments are still thought-provoking regarding ecumenical engagement for healing relations in the churches and society, an engagement which has endured from his to our time. Nathan Söderblom formulated his ecumenical vision in a time that in many ways was different than ours. Yet, his wrestling with the question of how to overcome church-related and societal division, mistrust, and hostility clearly connects his time with ours. Söderblom approached this question from a theological horizon by discussing the meaning and implications of

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Christian unity. As he elaborated an understanding of Christian unity, the aspects of action and spirituality played an indispensable part. Unity, action, and spirituality were interconnected in Söderblom’s ecumenical engagement. Today, this interconnection is once again brought to the fore as the newly emergent ecumenical current receptive ecumenism takes root and develops in church communities around the world. Discussing Christian unity and its meaning, one of its protagonists sketches out the following image:

> The wholeness, the full communion, of full catholicity thus understood is like ... a polyphonal choir singing in harmony—in which each ...distinct voice, is needed for the whole.¹

The words could have been Nathan Söderblom’s and they could well have stemmed from the years around 1914, when fervent preparations for summoning an international ecumenical council were embarked upon. However, the words stem from year 2014. They were formulated by theologian Paul D. Murray of the Centre for Catholic Studies in Durham on the eve of the Third International Receptive Ecumenism Conference.² 100 years have passed, but some visions persist. The vision of the Christian communion as a wholeness in which each voice is heard and respected has subsisted throughout the past century of ecumenical endeavour. The idea of a polyphonal wholeness reflects the goal of the ecumenical movement, the goal of Christian unity. However, unity is a concept not wholly accepted in contemporary times, not even within the ecumenical movement. Unity can easily be mistaken for uniformity. How Christian unity can re-sound the distinct voices of the polyphonal choir of world Christianity is a question that never ceases to concern, puzzle, interest, and fascinate ecumenical theologians.

Nathan Söderblom was one of them. Christian unity was a central issue in his theological thinking. With his varied and colourful approaches to this issue, he causes his readers to react with fascination and interest, as well as puzzlement and, at times, concern. Known as a founder of the ecumenical Life and Work movement, his

² The conference took place at Fairfield University, Connecticut, 9-12 June 2014 on the theme Receptive Ecumenism in International Perspective: Contextual Ecclesial Learning.
character is frequently described against the background of its slogan: ‘Doctrine divides, service unites’. This slogan may give the impression of Söderblom as an ecumenical theologian whose perspective on Christian unity narrowly focused on service in common action. On the contrary, a whole range of thoughts shaped Söderblom’s understanding of Christian unity. As indicated above, the following investigation will attend to different aspects of his ecumenical endeavors, not only to common action but also to spirituality. A century beyond the time of Söderblom it is relevant to reflect upon what prospects and challenges emerge when these aspects of his ecumenical engagement are studied at the intersection with the contemporary concept of receptive ecumenism. How action and spirituality can play a role in the formation of Christian unity is a question that engaged ecumenical pioneers a century ago. The work of Söderblom provides a lucid example of the struggle with this question in the early modern ecumenical movement. The same question is raised afresh today within receptive ecumenism. It provides the starting point for subsequent exploration of the challenges and future prospects that Söderblom’s endeavors bring to light.

**Receptive Ecumenism—A Way of Spirituality**

In the Roman Catholic Church receptive ecumenism has been developing for more than a decade. Beyond Roman Catholic circles, however, receptive ecumenism largely remains an unexplored ecumenical path. With its roots in spiritual ecumenism, receptive ecumenism emerges as a way of spirituality. When considering the role of spirituality in the formation of Christian unity, receptive ecumenism brings up perspectives of contemporary relevance. Simultaneously, it inspires inquiry into core features of Nathan Söderblom’s ecumenical vision.

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Receptive ecumenism calls for reflection on the way attitudes are formed in ecumenical encounters. It involves making a shift from prioritising the question, ‘What do the others need to learn from us and understand better about our tradition?’ to asking instead, ‘What is it that we need to learn and receive with integrity from others?’ In other words, receptive ecumenism means that learning takes precedence over teaching in ecumenical encounters. It involves an attitude of self-critical receptive learning from the other. The principle of receptive ecumenism might stand out for its simplicity. Yet, it poses a challenge to the believer, to take the initiative of engaging in self-critical receptive learning without insisting on a corresponding initiative from the other. It can be noted that the purposes which receptive ecumenism seeks to promote and articulate have been constant features of ecumenical thought and practice. In this sense, receptive ecumenism is a new name for old ways of thinking. Still, by naming formally a certain way of thinking and by drawing it to explicit attention, it is hoped that its strategic potential can be released.²

Theologian Antonia Pizzey elucidates the way receptive ecumenism forms a part of spiritual ecumenism, where the exchange of gifts is a central feature. Receptive ecumenism focuses on one half of the exchange: to receive and learn from the other. It aims at interior conversion for the healing and reform of each tradition. This is a key point within the receptive ecumenical approach, Pizzey notes. Focus rests not on the church ad extra but on the church ad intra. In view of John Paul II’s call for ecumenical commitment to be based upon the conversion of hearts, she points out that ecumenism entails spiritual, affective, and virtuous aspects that have not always been emphasized, but which are evoked throughout receptive ecumenism.³

According to Murray, receptive ecumenism includes a reparative dimension. It involves the humble recognition of wounds that exist in one’s own tradition, but also attentiveness to such ways of proceeding within other traditions which can assist the healing of these wounds.

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He emphasises that too much ecumenical engagement is a matter of ‘getting the best china tea service out’. Ecumenical encounters far too often involve trying to show oneself formally in the best possible light, instead of allowing a more ‘warts-and-all’ understanding to come into view. Thus, receptive ecumenism aims at an ‘ecumenism of the wounded hands’, which means to be prepared to uncover one’s imperfections and recognise one’s need to be ministered to from others’ gifts and grace.¹ Pizzey underscores that such an approach, which involves displaying the weaknesses of one’s church rather than its strengths and asking the other for help, undoubtedly implies a radical humility and trust in the other. Receptivity to other traditions, promoted in receptive ecumenism, entails an understanding of Christian unity as the work of the Spirit.²

Considering the question of how spirituality may affect the formation of Christian unity, receptive ecumenism maps out ways in which interior conversion, humility, self-critical learning, hope, and trust in the other guide the ecumenical journey. What is Nathan Söderblom’s answer to the same question?

**Spirituality—At the Centre of Nathan Söderblom’s Ecumenical Vision**

Spirituality was essential to Nathan Söderblom’s understanding of Christian unity. Yet, in comparison to the contemporary development of receptive ecumenism, a different set of issues triggered Söderblom’s thinking on spirituality and Christian unity. The structures of church institution and organisation, which evoked his resistance, belonged to this set of issues. Söderblom insisted that, at its best, Christian life revealed itself beyond every church institution.³ Söderblom thus developed his reasoning on Christian spirituality beyond the practical concerns of institution and organisation.

The spiritual nature of the church was a theme that Söderblom frequently returned to in his writings, in various ways. He illustrated this spiritual nature in terms of devotedness, personality, sincerity, 

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mystery, originality, and the internal essence of the church.\textsuperscript{1} Söderblom stressed that the very basis of Christian unity could be found in the essential element of Christianity, the personal choice to follow Christ.\textsuperscript{2} Christian unity was the unity of all believers in Christ and his Spirit. Hence, unity was primarily spiritual.\textsuperscript{3} Söderblom explained that our eyes can make us see the multiplicity of confessions, church communions, constitutions, and orders of divine service. Our faith, however, can help us discern also what is invisible. He stressed that through our faith we are enabled to discern the unity of the church and understand the sense of our belonging to Christianity. This, Söderblom emphasised, means to envision the assembly of different people from different church communions who eventually will stand together at the shore of eternity. Söderblom envisioned Christian unity in terms of God’s temple, which reaches from the earth through the heavens. God’s temple, he maintained, is built of all sincere souls in all different church communions. Loving and praying, all sincere souls in all Christian congregations are living stones in God’s house, the true church of Christ. Suspicious of church institutions, he contended that no organization would ever be equivalent to the church of Christ.\textsuperscript{4}

According to Söderblom, the life of the church was largely characterized by the impersonal, by form and institution. He admitted that, to a certain degree, it needs to be in that way. Still, he expressed his confidence in the capability of the church to provide space and protection for personal life. For Söderblom, only the personal had an eternal value. Following Luther, he maintained that personal communion with God developed independently of apparatus, organisation, and legislation. He asserted that when Christ’s Spirit


blows through the Christian community, the temporary and subordinate position of ecclesial institutions will become evident.\(^1\) Söderblom’s reasoning on spirituality and Christian unity presents several contrasts: the institutional and the personal, the exterior and the interior, the body and the soul of the church. Reflecting on the way Nathan Söderblom sketched out these contrasts, theologian Gustav Aulén maintains that it was Söderblom’s spiritual understanding of the church that supported his standing as an ecumenical church father.\(^2\)

Nevertheless, Söderblom’s understanding of spirituality and Christian unity evoked reactions which ranged from great support to deep distrust. The distrust was due, to a large degree, to the way Söderblom subordinated the issues of structure, form, and institution. Could church unity be legitimate without being grounded in church institutions and doctrines? The critique that was levelled against Söderblom from Roman Catholic representatives largely revolved around this question. Söderblom’s conception of Christian unity was criticised with regard to its lack of dogmatic foundation. It was described as an intellectual idea, based on a relativist conception of truth. Söderblom, in return, described the Roman Catholic Church as a church that paid immense attention to external factors such as institution and doctrine. What also provoked Söderblom was the understanding of Christian unity which still prevailed in the Roman Catholic Church at that time: the return of all Christians to Roman Catholicism. Due to this understanding, Söderblom labelled the Roman Catholic Church as a sect. Roman Catholic voices, on the other hand, labelled Söderblom’s ecumenical vision as a modern heresy. With such a background, it is not surprising that Söderblom’s invitation to the *Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work* in Stockholm 1925 was rejected when it reached the Roman Catholic authorities. There was indeed openness to cooperation on ethical issues. But the fundamental differences in understanding Christian unity were seen as an insurmountable obstacle against coming together on the basis of faith.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Söderblom, *Svenska kyrkans kropp och själ*, p. 93.


\(^3\) Sara Gehlin, ‘Nathan Söderblom, freden och ekumeniken. En analys av Nathan Söderbloms definition av begreppen *fred* och *ekumenik*, med
Today, the invitation to take new and transforming steps in ecumenical engagement comes from representatives of the Roman Catholic Church: the invitation to walk the way of receptive ecumenism. What obstacles does this way aim to surmount? A century after the time of Nathan Söderblom, the obstacles are partially of a different kind. Can the ecumenical vision of Söderblom still support the discernment of the prospects and challenges for contemporary and future ecumenical work? Some of the obstacles that provoked the thought of Nathan Söderblom have been long since left behind, among them the Roman Catholic model of ‘return’.

**For the Active Service of a Broken World**

Söderblom’s reluctance to give emphasis to church structure is not widely echoed within receptive ecumenism. Here, spirituality does not appear in contrast to institution or doctrine. As a way of spirituality, receptive ecumenism does not move beyond, but operates within, the frameworks of institutional and doctrinal structures. It aims at setting free the potential of spiritual ecumenism for a renewal of precisely the institutional, theological, and structural dimensions of the church. The conversion of hearts is considered the pulse of this movement, with potential to transform the church in all its dimensions.¹

Accordingly, it can be seen that receptive ecumenism, intersecting with Nathan Söderblom’s ecumenical vision, does not mirror the contrasts which framed Söderblom’s understanding of spirituality and its impact on Christian unity. Instead, receptive ecumenism brings out the integrative capacity of spirituality. Moreover, receptive ecumenism brings the ecumenical vision of Nathan Söderblom into conjunction with a reality which for many years has appeared an almost insurmountable obstacle to ecumenical progress. This is the ‘ecumenical winter’, which in the last decades has tended to cause

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deep disillusionment among those committed to ecumenical engagement.¹

Addressing the issue of the ecumenical winter, Murray raises the questions: What in this situation are we to make of the call to organic structural unity? Is reconciled diversity without structural unity the most that can be hoped for and worked towards in this context? Murray stresses that reconciled diversity without structural unity can never be a sufficient equivalent to the intended unity of the church. He underscores that the ecumenical aspiration for forms of theological, practical, and structural unity will, by necessity, be a long haul, but for that reason is not to be given up. The point, he maintains, is to ask what it means to live now while oriented towards such a goal. This means to consider what is our ethic of life in relation to this vision.² Whereas Murray contradicts the reasoning of Söderblom with regard to structural unity, he still argues in line with central ideas of Söderblom’s ecumenical vision. Also for Söderblom, the vision of Christian unity was a question about one’s ethic of life. According to him, Christian unity was a vehicle for societal change and for the active service of a world that, due to the war, was marked by political and humanitarian crisis.³

Correspondingly, Murray hints at receptive ecumenism’s potential for service of a world in conflict and crisis. This potential can be found in the approach to the other, in an attitude of receptive learning. Murray emphasises that receptive ecumenism, by entailing the exploration of what each tradition can learn from the other, aims at enriching rather than compromising the integrity of each and everyone involved. Learning from the other’s particular gifts must not imply the diminution of one’s confessional integrity, but instead its intensification, complexification, and further realization. In taking the particularity of traditions seriously, receptive ecumenism brings up the challenge of how not to collapse into closed and relativistic tribalism, but to acknowledge the pluralised reality of this world and negotiate this appropriately. In consequence, the effects of receptive

³ Gehlin, 'Nathan Söderblom, freden och ekumeniken', pp. 80-81.
ecumenism may reach beyond the realm of inter-church relationships. According to Murray, receptive ecumenical learning within and between the separated Christian traditions goes to the heart of the call to witness to the possibility of living reconciled difference for mutual flourishing in a world of conflict and crisis.¹

**Stages of Unity on the Ecumenical Journey**

Söderblom developed his ecumenical thinking in view of the world’s apparent need for such a vision. Also for him, there was a clear connection between the two motives of protecting confessional particularity and being a sign for the reconciliation of the world. The affinity of these two motives was brought to the fore by Söderblom when he described the meaning of ecumenism at the first stage of his ecumenical programme.² The programme had its basis in Söderblom’s rendering of the concept called ‘evangelical catholicity’.³ This programme has sometimes been suspected of having a hidden agenda, promoting quite the opposite of the protection of confessional particularity, namely a Lutheran universality.⁴ For Söderblom, however, evangelical catholicity was a way of religious liberty. He was convinced that evangelical catholicity had the potential to form an ecumenical space in which all confessions were embraced, along with their differences. According to him, the Lutheran confession, by means of its openness to differences in doctrine and organisation, paved the way for the creation of Christian unity beyond these differences. For Söderblom, evangelical catholicity was a principle that protected against confessional uniformity. When he described the first stage of his ecumenical programme, he emphasised that the deepening of knowledge of other traditions was strongly connected with the faithful deepening of knowledge of one’s own tradition. No tradition was to set the norm for the other. The first stage of the programme, which Söderblom called the ‘federative stage’, also entailed social responsibility. It involved unity in common action for

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the service of a world in crisis.\textsuperscript{1} Hence, it can be noted that leading ideas of Söderblom’s programme were reflected in the endeavours of the Life and Work movement.

If common action and the protection of particularity were two motives that characterised the first stage of Söderblom’s ecumenical programme, what did its next stage imply? There was only one more stage in Söderblom’s ecumenical programme. This stage, which he called the ‘organic stage’, was envisioned for the future.\textsuperscript{2} Federative ecumenism was a matter of urgency for Söderblom. The situation in the world called for the churches’ common action. As a consequence, unity in common action was promoted by Söderblom as the first stage of the ecumenical journey.\textsuperscript{3} The unity that he envisioned at the second and future stage was, on the other hand, a unity created only for the sake of unity itself. This unity was the synthesis of the dialectic dialogue that emerges from mutual exchange between traditions, a dialogue in which the churches’ gifts were purified. Unity at the second stage entailed a condition in which the churches’ various gifts were added to each other and, together, made visible the spiritual richness of Christianity.\textsuperscript{4} The organic stage of ecumenism mediates the sense of future vision. In Nathan Söderblom’s ecumenical programme, the federative stage prepared for the eventual realization of this vision. When exploring new ways for the future of ecumenism, receptive ecumenism today marks out a path through an ecumenical terrain that, in part, looks different. On the way, an array of ecumenical stages is brought to light.

Receptive ecumenism visualises three, not two, phases of ecumenism. All of them are practicable in present time. Receptive ecumenism is the third phase, embodying a new approach to come to grips with the thorny issues of lasting, substantive differences between churches that engage in ecumenical interaction. This means the development of an ecumenical strategy which aims at long-term mutual challenge and growth by bringing traditions into encounter with each other, precisely in their differences and by calling attention

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\item[\textsuperscript{1}] Gehlin, ‘Nathan Söderblom, freden och ekumeniken’ pp. 74-9.
\item[\textsuperscript{2}] Brodd, \textit{Evangelisk katolicitet}, pp. 105-6, 118-9.
\item[\textsuperscript{4}] Brodd, \textit{Evangelisk katolicitet}, pp. 105-110, 118-9.
\end{itemize}
to what needs to be learnt from the other. Life and Work ecumenism is the first phase and is described as the ecumenism of life without which nothing else is possible. Nevertheless, it is stressed that it alone will never be sufficient to solve the ecumenical problem of how to transform hostility and mistrust into recognition and collaboration. The middle and second phase is the ecumenism of the Faith and Order movement. It is described in terms of an ecumenism of truth and dialogue, which concentrates on formal doctrinal and ecclesiological causes of division. It entails focusing on the question of how these divisions might be overcome and healed or, at least, might come to be understood as legitimate differences.¹

Ecumenical Endeavours Bespeaking a Responsibility

By means of this multi-phased depiction, receptive ecumenism elucidates the comprehensiveness of the ecumenical field. In light of this comprehensiveness, Söderblom’s heavy emphasis on federative ecumenism may appear lopsided. Therefore, his integrative approach to the ecumenical field of his time might be surprising. In the late 1920s he advocated the overall integration of the different organisations that operated in the international ecumenical arena. This included both the Life and Work and the Faith and Order movements. Söderblom maintained that life, work, faith and order ultimately are expressions of an already existing spiritual unity. He furthermore emphasised that each of them requires the other for its complete fruition. However, such an integrative approach had not always guided Söderblom’s agenda. In the early 1920s, Söderblom still drew sharp lines between the Life and Work movement and other ecumenical movements.²

The contrasts between the Life and Work and the Faith and Order movements, which are often explicated in ecumenical circles, might lead to conclude that Söderblom distanced himself from the Faith and Order movement. This was not the case. Even though Söderblom was hesitant regarding certain endeavours of the Faith and Order movement, he was a faithful companion of the movement and an active contributor to its development and assemblies.³ Söderblom agreed with the goal of the movement, a unity in faith and order. An

² Sundkler, Nathan Söderblom, pp. 413-8.
³ Sundkler, Nathan Söderblom, pp. 267-73, 404-6.
'organic unity' was advocated also within the Faith and Order movement. Söderblom’s hesitations concerned the methods of the movement for achieving this kind of unity. For him, unity could not be shaped within the framework of a ready form, an idea which he connected with the Faith and Order movement. He claimed that doctrine could never constitute a means for reaching organic unity. From his point of view, unity was to emerge and grow in a non-systematic way out of federative cooperation.\(^1\) Moreover, the critical situation in the surrounding world strengthened his hesitations about the approach of the Faith and Order movement. Söderblom contended that this was not the time for long-term theological deliberations. For the sake of the healing of the broken world, Christian unity was to be created immediately through common action.\(^2\)

Söderblom’s argumentation brings to light the restrictions of adopting a purely doctrinal approach to Christian unity. The same conclusion is drawn within receptive ecumenism. Yet, where Söderblom points to the merits of Life and Work ecumenism, receptive ecumenism elucidates the restrictions within this ecumenical approach too. In a time of ecumenical winter, Life and Work ecumenism is not considered sufficient to alone solve the ecumenical problems of mistrust and hostility. Receptive ecumenism corresponds with the way Söderblom on the one hand acknowledges the relevance of theological deliberation in ecumenical life and on the other hand remains doubtful about the extent of its role for the realisation of Christian unity. Within receptive ecumenism, however, these doubts emerge on different grounds.

Pizzey points out that receptive ecumenism does not primarily concern doctrinal matters, but aims at sorting out difficulties within traditions on the basis of the lived experience within each tradition. Therefore, receptive ecumenism is somewhat in tension with methodologies that are based on forms of theological ecumenism which aim to resolve differences between traditions.\(^3\) Murray elucidates how receptive ecumenical work involves moving away from

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\(^3\) Pizzey, ‘On the Maturation of Receptive Ecumenism’, p. 112.
the refined articulation of theorised and doctrinally-driven accounts towards also asking for the lived experience of decision-making in each tradition, and for the real difficulties and tensions to be found there. Receptive ecumenism, Pizzey observes, is not simply intended for highly theorised endeavours abstracted from the ordinary life of the traditions concerned. It is explicitly designed for practical use. Murray stresses that receptive ecumenism bespeaks a task, a responsibility. It is a spirit-driven movement of the heart, mind and will that is of immediate relevance for all in the churches and not only those with specific formal responsibilities, since it has implications at every level of ecclesial life, whether at the structural, theological, local, or personal. According to Murray, it is a total ethic that is as simple and yet as pervasive as the gospel that it represents. Therefore, he underscores, the way of receptive ecumenism holds a promise of life within it and to follow this way is worth our greatest effort.

**Enduring Visions**

When the ecumenical vision of Nathan Söderblom intersects with contemporary receptive ecumenism, new prospects and challenges come into view. Emerging a century apart, the two ecumenical approaches have crystallised against different historical backgrounds. Still, both approaches are rooted in ecumenical spirituality as well as in the ambition to actively contribute to the healing of a conflicted world. Whereas Nathan Söderblom developed his ecumenical engagement in relation to the challenges of the early modern ecumenical movement, receptive ecumenism today develops in aspiration for finding new ways to make ecumenical initiatives not run out of steam. However, ecumenism at this side of the century does not only imply facing the challenge of ecumenical disillusion, but also facing the prospects of a movement which has taken root and grows at the local level of church life. Ecumenism seeks to provide a space for the people of the church in its full scope. This engenders a need for new ways, alongside the older ones, for carrying out the ecumenical task. Receptive ecumenism aims to respond to this need.

The receptive ecumenical response, while evolving from a newly emergent ecumenical current, motivates further inquiry into the

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3 Murray, ‘Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning’, p. 16.
perspective of learning in ecumenical endeavours. It gives rise to questions, which concern the meaning of integrity in ecumenical learning, as well as the relation between learning and teaching in ecumenical processes. It also evokes questions about the actual premises for learning in relations that are characterized by an asymmetry of power. The development of receptive ecumenism brings new issues to the ecumenical field of research and exploration.

The receptive ecumenical response, moreover, brings spirituality to the centre of the ecumenical agenda. Through its emphasis on the spiritual nature of the ecumenical encounter, it brings to the fore the impact of personal humility, interior conversion, self-critical learning, hope, and trust in the other for the healing of broken relationships, a healing which in the best case also has effect beyond the sphere of inter-church relations. In a time when religions, including Christianity, manifest attitudes that not only align with, but also are quite opposite to, self-critical learning, humility, hope, and trust in the other, receptive ecumenism communicates a significant message. The significance of this message might be compared to the urgency that Söderblom ascribed to the ecumenical vision of his time. 100 years have passed, but some visions persist. How to approach the other in hope and humility in the midst of the polyphonal choir of world Christianity is a question which elucidates both challenges and prospects for ecumenism today, and which motivates renewed consideration of the words of Söderblom:

God’s orchestra is not unison. Every people, every church is to be an instrument, when they all tune in there will be music.¹

WORD OF GOD AND MONASTICISM IN KARL BARTH

Luigi Gioia *

Far from being a dismissal, Barth’s critical remarks on monasticism betray admiration for the latter’s ‘strange persistence’ in Christianity. As an action corresponding to the direction of the Word of God, Barth rejects any wedge between monastic vocation and the call addressed to all Christians. In dependence from his doctrine of the secularity of the Word of God, Barth also argues that the lives, liturgies, reading of Scripture (lectio divina), community life, ministry and witness of monks and nuns never lose a level of imperviousness to God’s grace. Such imperviousness however helps monasticism to experience a deeper solidarity with anyone exposed to the non-evidence of God in the world.

The most rewarding method of approaching familiar questions is engaging with the interlocutors that challenge us the most. With regards to the relation of monastic tradition with the Word of God nobody seems more apt to play this role than the great Reformed theologian Karl Barth (+1968). His fourteen-volume Church Dogmatics (1932-1967) consists in a tightly-woven reformulation of all the main tenets of Christian doctrine as the unfolding of the dynamism of the Word of God, that is of the act through which God reveals himself to us. No aspect of Christian life is left undisturbed in the course of

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1 This article is based on a paper given at the ‘Parables of Communion—Journeying Together’ conference held in October 2016 at Rostrevor Monastery to mark fifty years of this journal’s publication. It has been published in The American Benedictine Review, 68/4 (2017): 418-32, for whose agreement to republish we are grateful.

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Barth’s uncompromising and sustained questioning. He freely, acutely, probingly—and often fiercely—confronts all Christian denominations, including and maybe especially the very Reformed tradition to which he belonged and in which he ministered as a pastor. He is not tender with many aspects of Catholicism too, but this has not prevented a wide and deep reception of his thought in Catholic theology, spearheaded by the seminal works of theologians of the calibre of Hans Urs von Balthasar¹ and Hans Kung,² and memorably acknowledged during his visit to Rome after the II Vatican Council on 22–29 September 1967, where he was received by pope Paul VI.³

Benedictine monasticism too has not shied away from Barth’s probing questioning. Indeed, such questioning was positively prompted at a strategic juncture of the history of the Benedictine order, when the latter undertook the task of rethinking its charism in the wake of the aggiornamento to which the whole Church had been summoned by the II Vatican council. A commission led by the abbot of Montserrat, Gabriel Brasó, sent a letter to Karl Barth on February 15, 1966, asking him ‘to offer short responses to three questions: 1) what do you think of the nature of the monastic life (not the religious life generally, but specifically monastic life)?; 2) what do you believe that the church expects today from the monks?; and 3) where has, in your opinion, the aggiornamento of monasticism come into existence, which direction should it follow and by which basic rules is it spread?’⁴ Only ten days later, Barth replied to this request with a little-known letter⁵ which provides us with a sound and lucid theological frame for our topic.

⁵ The letter can be found in the volume *Visioni attuali sulla vita monastica*, Abadía de Montserrat, Barcelona 1966, 43f. (From now on Visioni).
For him, the charism of monastic life lies in its exemplary role with regards to the life of the Church. Monasticism does not exist for its own sake, but it is a ministry whereby monks and nuns try to be brothers and sisters to each other in a special way and thus become brothers and sisters of all Christians and of all people. Their life is meaningful insofar as it gives witness to God ‘in the world, towards the world, and for the world’. However, there are some crucial conditions on which monastic life ‘stands or falls’ addressed in the final paragraph of the letter, where Barth confronts what he considers to be the most serious threat to the ministry, to the exemplary role and to the witness of monastic life. The aggiornamento, that is the ‘renewal’, is something to which a Council can invite, but that can effectively be summoned and steered only by the Word of God. In fact, renewal is not an episodic aspect of the life of the Church and of monasticism in particular, but it belongs to their existence and define their essence:

Their particular monastic existence stands and falls by the fact that their Lord, who is always faithful to himself and to this extent also to them, wills them, establishes them and orders them anew at every moment and in every situation, and that their existence, for its part, is always open, willing and ready to live anew by his free mercy and to be newly obedient only to his free command.¹

Anyone even only remotely acquainted with Barth’s thought instantly detects here the key tenets of his ecclesiology and more generally of his understanding of Christian life as an event incessantly triggered by the living, active and effective Word of God, that is God in the act of speaking to us².

The traits of the monastic charism outlined in this short letter had received a more extensive treatment in a section of the Church Dogmatics, vol. IV.2, written eleven years before, in 1955,³ specifically devoted to this question in the context of the life of the reconciled person. Barth’s theological reading of monastic tradition in the light of the Word of God in this text can be summarized around the three key ideas highlighted in his letter to the Benedictine abbots, that is (1)

¹ Visioni, 44.
ministry, (2) exemplary character and (3) monastic life as event or, as he says here, as action.

Monastic life can be seen as Christian only insofar as (1) it strives to embody the ministerial aspect and the solidarity with all Christians and with all humanity essential to Christian life. Then (2) Barth acknowledges the exemplary role fulfilled by monasticism in the course of history as a 'highly responsible and effective protest and opposition to the world and not least to a worldly church' which had lost her eschatological impetus and become more and more secularized. A form of life is indeed Christian only if it is in the world, towards the world, and for the world, but precisely this commitment involves acceptance of a conflict and retreat as the reclaiming of a freedom for God and for one’s fellows. The fruitfulness of this attitude has been testified by the many influential movements of reform born within the monastic environment.

Just as in the letter written to the abbots however, in this text too, the ministry and the exemplary role of monasticism (3) should rely not on institutional settings but on a conscious and constant dependence on God’s action, that is on a renewed and actual hearing of the Word of God. This point relates to some features of monastic tradition that Barth sees as threats to its ministry in the Church and in the world.

First of all, in relation to the world, it would be naïve to think that physical withdrawal alone can make monks and nuns free. ‘One thing is sure—says Barth—that even in his hut or cave the hermit will never be free from the most dangerous representative of the world, i.e. himself.’ For the monk or nun, for the monastic community just as for the Church as a whole, the greatest threat is not the world without, but the world within, which Barth describes elsewhere under the headings of secularization, self-glorification, and sacralisation. From

1 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/ 2*, Ed. G. W. Bromiley. Trans. Harold Knight. T & T Clark, London 1958, 14. (From now on Barth, CD IV/2).
2 Barth, CD IV/2, 13.
3 Barth, CD IV/2, 15.
4 Barth, CD IV/2, 16.
5 Barth, CD IV/2, 14.
6 Barth, CD IV/2, 16.
7 Barth, CD IV/2, 14.
8 Barth, CD IV/2, 12.
an evangelical viewpoint, *secularisation* is the process whereby the salt loses its savour' and the Church uncritically adopts what seems to be the most urgent and sacred need in its own particular environment.\(^2\) *Self-glorification* then has been the scourge precisely of the forms and reforms of monasticism most wide-spread, successful and therefore influential. It leads to self-assertion and to a developed consciousness of oneself\(^3\) and to communities which start trying to be important and powerful within the world instead of serving the world.\(^4\) Finally, the greatest of these threats, as far as monasticism is concerned, has probably always been that which Barth labels *sacralisation*, that is the ‘transmutation of the lordship of Jesus Christ into the vanity of a Christianity enamoured only of itself and its traditions, confessions and institutions’\(^5\).

That the Church in general and monastic communities in particular should be exposed to these threats is the unavoidable downside of their call to be in the world, towards the world, and for the world,\(^6\) it is ‘integral to what the Church is on earth, to what its commission is’.\(^7\) In the course of history, these threats have caused the decline of countless communities and have often seriously obscured their witness. If, however, these threats have not been able to prevail, it is thanks to what Barth calls a ‘strange persistence’\(^8\) of the ability of Word of God to uphold a Christian community. This upholding is something that the Word achieves of itself.\(^9\) The Word of God ‘has always been heard in its one, original and authentic form where Scripture has again made itself to be heard and created hearers for itself’\(^10\). This has happened because Jesus in his Holy Spirit remains within his community, conducting his case.\(^11\)

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\(^1\) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, Ed. G. W. Bromiley. Trans. Harold Knight. T & T Clark, London 1956, 668. (From now on Barth, CD IV/1).

\(^2\) Barth, CD IV/1, 667.

\(^3\) Barth, CD IV/1, 668.

\(^4\) Barth, CD IV/1, 669.

\(^5\) Barth, CD IV/1, 670.

\(^6\) Visioni, 43.

\(^7\) Barth, CD IV/1, 670.

\(^8\) Barth, CD IV/1, 673.

\(^9\) Barth, CD IV/1, 674.

\(^10\) Barth, CD IV/1, 674.

\(^11\) Barth, CD IV/1, 675.
Another of Barth’s critical remarks is that despite the potential positive aspects of the monastic dealings with sex, property and speech, institutional vows tended to become the expression of a ‘mechanical sealing off’ of these spheres, as if this could be enough to neutralize the latter’s disrupting potential in Christian life. Similarly, with regard to the idea that obeying to people (the spiritual father, the abbot, the staretz etc…) is obeying to God, he warns against the danger of institutionalizing these gifts and thus potentially conflating human and divine action. Finally, much more earnestly Barth evokes one of the main criticisms the Protestant tradition has always levelled against monasticism, aimed at that which he calls ‘optimism’:

It is a pity that the final sentence in Benedict [’s Rule] is as follows: *Facientibus haec regna patebunt superna*. This cannot be admitted for a moment. The statement must be resolutely reformulated. It is not because and as they do this that the *regna superna* will open up to them. It is because and as the *regna superna* are opened up to them in the death of Jesus Christ that they will do this in the power of his resurrection.

However, far from preluding a dismissal of monastic ministry and charism, these critical observations are meant to emphasise the secret of the extraordinary fruitfulness of monasticism in Christianity, of its ‘strange persistence’. This secret matches the subject of this paper, namely the role played by the Word of God in monastic tradition.

It is true that Pelagianism and even more so its offspring usually gathered under the loose label of ‘semi-Pelagianism’ originated and thrived in monastic circles—Pelagius (+418) himself is thought to have been a monk and traces of semi-pelagianism can be detected in Cassian’s writings, which decisively shaped Western monastic spirituality (+435). It is also true that the practical nature of Benedict’s rule (+537) can unwittingly fall into the slippery slope of transactional language. Barth however does not believe that these blunders compromise the overall value of monastic tradition and dismisses the ubiquitous misperception of early Protestant anti-monastic apologetics on this point when he states:

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1 Barth, CD IV/2, 15.
2 Barth, CD IV/2, 17.
3 Barth, CD IV/2, 14.
4 Barth, CD IV/2, 18.
5 Barth, CD IV/1, 673.
‘This sequence [from works to reward] ... was certainly suppressed in the history of monasticism, and even denied and contested in its forms. ... [Thus] we have always to learn from monasticism that it derives from faith and that necessarily in faith it has to do with discipleship, sanctification, concretion, brotherhood and love. Those who recognize what has been revealed for the world and for them in the resurrection of Jesus Christ will do this in the power of his resurrection’.

Then, in the following sentence, for three times monasticism is revealingly called an action:

We should [not] suppress or neglect this action. ... We see clearly that this action, put in the right context, must not on any account be suppressed or neglected, but given its proper place. ... This action deserve[s] our serious consideration in detail.

In Barth’s thought, no greater theological value and potential can be attributed to an aspect of Christian life than calling it an action (or an event). In the sentence just quoted, this move is meant to explain how, despite its potential shortcomings, monastic tradition has managed to preserve its authenticity and hence its fruitfulness for the life of the Church, that is,

its desire and aim [to be] a concrete individual and collective sanctification, a teleological concretion of the Christian status, a practical and regulated brotherhood, and all this in the service of concrete and total love.

Now, the only way for Christian life to preserve this living character, to remain an action, an event, something constantly happening anew, a constant renewal (or aggiornamento), is its openness to the Word of God.

Here, it is vital to be aware of the distinction Barth assumes between the Word of God and Scripture. A little analogy with our human interactions might help us to grasp this distinction. Speech is inherently relational. A word makes sense only insofar as it establishes, sanctions, expresses, clarifies a relation. What gives weight to a human word is the person speaking it and the extent to which through this word I have access to this person. Thus, if a friend writes a letter to me, this writing brings me joy because the love

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1 Barth, CD IV/2, 18. Our Italic.
2 Barth, CD IV/2, 18.
3 Barth, CD IV/2, 18.
expressed in it is that of a person I care for and who cares for me. If a total stranger was to read to same letter, he might understand its content and appreciate its style, but that would not bring him any joy because the letter is not addressed to him, it does not refer to an actual relationship for him. Thus Scripture becomes alive only as it is received as word, as the Word addressed to us. The written words (Scripture) speak to me only if and as God himself speaks to me when I read or hear them (Word of God). Properly speaking, therefore, the Word of God is the event (or the action) whereby some human limited and fallible words become the medium or the occasion through which God addresses me, reveals himself to me, reconciles me to himself and establishes me in fellowship with all those who have been reached by this same address.

This linear analogy, however, does not take into account the fact that God is invisible, not only because we have not seen him, but because we cannot see him. When God reveals himself to us therefore, we have somehow to be enabled to hear sounds our ears are unfit to perceive. Another analogy might illustrate this point. A woman scientist who had been studying elephants for decades at one point decided to listen to the elephants’ sounds with the help an ultrasonic device and for the first time she realized that she had never heard their real language before. She found out, for instance, that ultrasounds enable elephants to hear each other even several miles away. We can say that the ‘device’, so to speak, that allows us to hear the ultrasound of divine revelation is none other than the Trinity.¹ I can hear the Father only if the Son reveals him to me. I can hear the Son’s revelation of the Father only as the Holy Spirit enables me to perceive it. The act of hearing is possible only if I am introduced into the life of the Trinity and only if the listening to the Word becomes conversion. I can welcome the Father’s revelation only as I let myself to be reconciled with him by Christ through the Holy Spirit.²

This means that the Word of God is God as he speaks to me (Dei loquentis persona) and that this never becomes something I can take for granted, a message I have heard once for all or that I can encapsulate in propositions valid once for all. Word means communication based on communion: the communication happens

¹ Barth, CD I/1, 119.
² Barth, CD I/1, 119.
only insofar and as long as the relationship is there. It is an unceasing action, a repeated event:

This third form of the Word of God [the Word of God as event] needs to be stressed because Bible and proclamation are not the Word of God but must constantly become the Word of God: the Bible by attesting (being a witness, pointing away from itself) revelation; proclamation by repeating the Bible as witness to revelation.¹

In this context, the theological significance of Barth’s description of monasticism-as-action becomes clearer. Monastic life is a ministry to God, preserves its exemplary role, can generate communities gathered and sustained by God’s call only insofar as it remains an action, an event. Talking about monasticism as ‘state of perfection’, as order, can lead to forget that it owes its origin and its existence solely and incessantly to the event of revelation and of reconciliation. A monastic tradition too reliant on forms, customs, rules and practices can become a hindrance to monasticism-as-action. Drawing inspiration from one of Barth’s most eloquent images, we can compare monasticism-as-action to those giant billboards overlooking Times Square in New York: unless electricity passes through them, they remains indistinguishable from the darkness of the night.²

Another essential feature of this monasticism-as-action and of its dependence on the Word of God is that the event of revelation not only gives life to a Christian person, to the Church and therefore to a monastic community—it also gives them a distinctive form and a characteristic organizing dynamic. This is what Barth calls ‘direction’. The forms monasticism-as-action has taken throughout history have been shaped by the ‘direction’ and the ‘consistent orientation’ Christ’s resurrection conveys to human existence.³ They are an expression of what has been called the ‘self-organizing power of the Gospel’.⁴

Barth attributes the historical and theological predominance of the right sequence between faith and works in monastic tradition

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¹ Barth, CD I/1, 117.
² Barth, CD IV/1, 619. Cf. also ‘The Christian simply is a reflector such as we have on our roads with no intrinsic power of illumination’ (614).
³ Barth, CD IV/2, 15.
precisely to the acknowledgement of the resurrection as ‘direction’. ¹
When we bathe into a river, we feel the might of its current and if we do not resist to it, we are effortlessly carried downstream. Barth describes Resurrection as a stream and its direction is the shape it gives to monastic life as ‘discipleship, sanctification, concretion, brotherhood and love’.² These are the forms monasticism cannot but take if the Word of God truly becomes event, action in its midst:

‘The Resurrection, in the Holy Spirit, is a direction which becomes the principle of sanctification, effects the upbuilding of the community, in the eventuation of Christian love.’³

Of course, the exemplary or ‘representational’ role of this monasticism-as-action is provisional,⁴ fragmentary, incomplete, insecure and questionable.⁵ Although provisional, however, it is genuine and even invincible because, just as the Church, a monastic community is not only ‘activated’, so to speak, by God’s words, but is also ‘continually fitted’, or ‘equipped’ for this action by it,⁶ according to a passage from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians Barth often quotes in this context: ‘The gifts God gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.’⁷

We should visualize this being fitted, or equipped, or built up as the movement of a whirlwind which not only goes somewhere but also gathers everything in its course. The direction conveyed by the resurrection not only draws us towards the Father, it also fits us as mutual brothers and sisters. Again here Barth quotes Ephesians: ‘In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord’.⁸ This upbuilding consists in mutual adaptation,

¹ Barth, CD IV/2, 18.
² Barth, CD IV/2, 18.
³ Barth, CD IV/1, 614.
⁴ Barth, CD IV/1, 620.
⁵ Barth, CD IV/1, 621.
⁶ Barth, CD IV/1, 623.
⁷ Cf. Eph 4, 11ff.
⁸ Eph 2.21.
reciprocal dependence and support, which is *agape*.\(^1\) Within the community, this upbuilding takes the form of reciprocal edification, shared consolation, as we find in 1 Corinthians: ‘those who prophesy speak to other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation’.\(^2\) The Church is the event of this upbuilding as a community.\(^3\) This direction translates into a distinctive Christian ethos: everything Christians do is to be judged by whether it serves this integration, this edification, this upbuilding.\(^4\)

In this description of what allows monasticism to be an action corresponding to the direction of the Word of God, Barth takes issue with any interpretation that drives a wedge between monastic vocation and the call addressed to all Christians. It was understandable, he says, that in the course of history ‘distinctions had to be drawn between the vigilant and active on the one side [i.e. monks and nuns] and the sleepy and indolent on the other’. These descriptions, however, ‘ought not to have been interpreted as distinctions between perfect and imperfect, or gradations of calling’.\(^5\) This trend had such an influence in the history of the Church that until recent times very few would have applied the term ‘vocation’ to those who come to faith and ask to be baptized. This term was reserved to the call to embrace any form of ordained or charismatic ministry in the Church.

For Barth this is not just a philological nicety, but betrays a deeper theological misunderstanding that endangers the integrity of both Christian life and monastic ministry. He starts by observing that the main name the New Testament uses to refer to the believer is not ‘Christian’ but *kletos*, ‘called’.\(^6\) The use of the words *qahal* (‘convocation’) in the Old Testament and of *ekklesia* (from *enkaleo*, ‘to call out of’) in the New Testament to designate the community of believers conveys exactly the same idea: the assembly comes to existence only because it is summoned and gathered by the call of the Word of God. The structural relation to the Word of God in Christian

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\(^{1}\) Barth, CD IV/1, 636.
\(^{2}\) 1 Cor 14 3.
\(^{3}\) Barth, CD IV/1, 641.
\(^{4}\) Barth, CD IV/1, 637.
\(^{5}\) Barth, CD IV/2, 15.
\(^{6}\) Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/1*, Ed. G. W. Bromiley. Trans. Harold Knight. T & T Clark, London 1957, 525. (From now on Barth, CD IV/3.2).
life means that ‘vocation’ or ‘call’ is what makes us Christians. This core truth of our faith lost most of its power in the context of institutional Christianity where infant baptism and sociological constraints obscured the fact that nobody is a Christian unless he actually, constantly, personally and consciously answers to God’s calling—not only initially, but every day.

Reclaiming this biblical understanding of call or ‘vocation’ chimes with Barth’s theology of the Word of God as the living presence of Christ as prophet in the midst of his Church and with the corresponding ministry of witnessing entrusted to all Christians.

Whiffs of 19th century individualism are sometimes still in the air in monastic circles. There can be monks who are models of monastic discipline, spend long hours in prayer and zealously fulfil the tasks entrusted to them while disliking interactions and living at the edge of the community. This attitude embodies a distinctive stream of spirituality promoted by romantic ascetical pamphlets based on an individualistic and voluntarist understanding of redemption. These writings describe monastic calling as a flight from the world to pursue one’s own salvation and are permeated by a shocking anthropological pessimism (‘As often as I have been among men, I have returned less a man’). ¹ Most monastic hagiography, especially since the Counter-Reformation, adopts this soteriological model and favours the implausible image of a monk spending his time kneeling in a cave and looking at a crucifix, with a skull as his only furniture.

In his dealings with unsatisfactory versions of Christian vocation, Barth addresses this form of soteriological individualism a part of his criticism of the pro me so familiar to Protestant homiletic and spirituality. Christian vocation is not first of all a call to be saved and ‘to enjoy the benefits of salvation’. ² We might think that nothing is ‘more relevant than that which in supreme and ultimate matters concerns me’, ³ and that a Christian should ‘be supremely interested in the goal of vocation from the standpoint of its personal or ‘existential’ relevance to himself’. ⁴ Too much, however, in this approach ‘would

² Barth, CD IV/3.2, 561ss.
³ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 563.
⁴ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 566.
depend upon my strong or feeble assurance of salvation’. ¹ This ‘would sanction and cultivate an egocentricity which is only too human for all its sanctity’. ² And anyway, Barth adds, even from the historical point of view, spiritual movements which stressed the pro me were not at all quiet! ‘They could not refrain from talking about these things’³ and indeed ‘gave real impulse to evangelical mission’.⁴

A healthy theological answer to these individualistic approaches to Christian vocation is that the ‘goal of vocation is to be in Christ, and Christ cannot simply be the means to something else’.⁵ The Gospels start with Jesus’ call to his disciples to follow him. This call expresses the essence of vocation, of salvation, of the Church and of the life to come: to become Christians is to be with Christ; eternal life will consist in being with Christ, at least in Paul’s most concise description of it: ‘and so we will be with the Lord for ever’.⁶ ‘That Christ should live in the Christian is the goal of his vocation’⁷ and ‘the principle which controls Christian existence consists in the community of action with him’.⁸

The use of the word ‘action’ in this last sentence echoes the description of monasticism-as-action which is guiding our reflection. Being with Christ ‘activates’ us to fellowship with each other. However, Barth also makes clear that ‘fellowship of life finds realisation as a differentiated fellowship of action’.⁹ The fact that there is no gradation of calling in Christianity does not mean that there is no differentiation with regards to action and therefore that there are no specific ways of answering this same call, one of which is the monastic ministry. The call however is the same for all because there is no higher or more perfect or more effective call than the one the living Word addresses to all people.

Precisely because to be called is to be in Christ and because Christ’s identity cannot be separated from his mission, monastic vocation too

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¹ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 565.
² Barth, CD IV/3.2, 567.
³ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 568.
⁴ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 569.
⁵ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 595.
⁶ 1Th 4.17.
⁷ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 594.
⁸ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 597.
⁹ Barth, CD IV/3.2, 598.
is essentially to be given a task. Barth observes that all biblical accounts of vocations have one thing in common: ‘that to be called means to be given a task’\(^1\) and ‘the essence of their vocation is that God makes them his witnesses’.\(^2\) Christian existence is first of all determined by ‘a commission, a function to be exercised between God and other people, between God and the world’.\(^3\)

Ultimately, therefore, Christian vocation has to do with the fact that Christ is the Word of God and that to be with him is to echo this Word by the direction it impresses on one’s life, both individually and as a community. One of Barth’s way of conveying the same idea is stating that ‘Christ calls the Christians so that we may speak of their cooperation in his prophetic work. This then, the divine Word, is the telos and meaning of their service’.\(^4\)

The essence of a reconfiguring of monastic vocation as the action summoned, shaped and sustained by the Word of God, or by Christ as Prophet (another way of saying the same thing), is therefore that it has to give witness to God’s action of revelation and reconciliation. ‘In the New Testament Christ himself is the witness. But the self-witness of Jesus not only calls the Christian to be his witness but appoints and makes him such’.\(^5\) Christians, monks, nuns can only do this as human beings and therefore within the limits represented by their sinful existence and its possibilities. The ministry of monastic life is indeed exemplary for the Church, but just like any other form of witness to Christ, it ‘cannot be more or other than a human indication and attestation of the Word of God—if Christ did not bear witness to himself, of what avail would be even the best witness with which the Christian can serve him?’\(^6\)

This point leads us to a final aspect of monastic calling, ministry and witness in relation to the Word of God we should not overlook. Monks and nuns are supposed to be believers who take their Christian vocation seriously; the call is indeed the same for all Christians; yet monasticism really brings a difference to this call through what Barth calls ‘a teleological concrection of the Christian status’, by which he

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1 Barth, CD IV/3.2, 573.
2 Barth, CD IV/3.2, 575.
3 Barth, CD IV/3.2, 592.
4 Barth, CD IV/3.2, 607.
5 Barth, CD IV/3.2, 614.
6 Barth, CD IV/3.2, 609.
means ‘a practical and regulated brotherhood ... in the service of concrete and total love’.¹ One aspect of this total love, of this solidarity is that it reaches out not only to other Christians, but to all people, irrespective of their religion on non-religion, and therefore to non-believers too. With regards to this last category -non-believers-monasticism-as-action, that is a monasticism that truly keeps listening to the Word of God, paradoxically leads to an even greater solidarity with people who struggle with the non-evidence of God.

The most intriguing feature of Barth’s approach to revelation is precisely the fact that God does not cease to be invisible, unknowable in his revelation. If revelation and the Church exist only as events, if monasticism can be truthful only as action, it is because our unbelief, our sloth, our resistance to God constantly need to be overcome by God’s grace. A plane flies not because it is dispensed from the law of gravity, but only thanks to its powerful engines and only as long as it is propelled by them. If this thrust stops, the plane immediately crashes. If monasticism ceases to be ‘action’, it ceases to be Christian.

With relation to this aspect, monasticism is helped by what Barth calls the secularity of the Word of God. He explains that we do not have the Word of God otherwise than in the mystery of its secularity, i.e. of a double indirectness.² It reaches us under the form of a creaturely reality³ which also is a fallen reality, that is a reality which contradicts God. Scripture, preaching, Christian witness, the ministry and the exemplary role of monastic communities are not so much that through which God reveals himself, but that in spite of which God miraculously manages to make himself known.⁴ This inevitable opacity of all created realities, even those God uses to reveal himself, is what Karl Barth calls the ‘secularity’ of the Word of God. God has chosen to reveal himself through a medium that contradicts him. This secularity is not accidental or provisional, but an inalienable attribute of the Word of God.⁵ This explains why revelation is an event, an action. The opacity, the resistance of created and fallen realities to revelation is never overcome once for all. Only the active presence of

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¹ Barth, CD IV/2, 18.
² Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics I/1, Ed. G. W. Bromiley. Trans. Harold Knight. T & T Clark, London 1936, 165. (From now on Barth, CD I/1).
³ Barth, CD I/1, 166.
⁴ Barth, CD I/1, 166.
⁵ Barth, CD I/1, 168.
the Risen Christ who keeps speaking his word and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts enable us to receive it. Secularity is overcome as result of an act, that is never once for all. To ignore or try to evade this secularity, says Barth, is to evade Christ who in his Incarnation has entered in this secularity.

A key corollary of the secularity of the Word of God for monks and nuns, therefore, is that their lives, their liturgies, their reading of Scripture (their lectio divina), their community life, their ministry and their witness never lose a level of imperviousness to God’s grace and of ambiguity. Their faith remains a constant challenge for them as for any other Christian. ‘A Christian does not see more than a non-Christian, but he trusts [Christ] and follows him in darkness’. This explains the suspicion Barth (and most of the Protestant tradition) feels against some forms of mysticism. In his understanding, ‘mysticism regards the secularity of Bible and of Christ as mere symbols which become dispensable once their content has been revealed; faith, on the contrary, immediately returns to the Bible and Christ in their secularity’ and keeps relying on God’s faithfulness alone.

Far from impairing the ministry of monasticism-as-action, this awareness enhances the exemplary role of monasticism. Whoever has lived in a monastery as a monk or a nun long enough, or as a lay people has benefited from the proximity to the life of a monastic community, knows that the infallible hallmark of a spirituality authentically shaped by an effective listening of the Word of God is the key Benedictine value of humility.

Thus, for example, a superficial reader of chapter four of Benedict’s rule, What are the instruments of good works, could be led to think that monastic life is all about systematic focussing on good practices. It is striking however that this list of 72 exhortations should end with a recommendation that prevents any possible temptation of self-reliance or any illusion that Christian life and witness might consist in becoming models of perfection. The last of these exhortations is

1 Barth, CD I/1, 171.
2 Barth, CD I/1, 168.
3 Barth, CD I/1, 170.
4 Barth, CD I/1, 178.
‘Never despair of God’s mercy’,¹ which means that monasticism-as-action never loses sight of the uncertainty and ambiguity of human endeavours and of the constant opacity of any form of human witness. Therefore, the exemplary role of monasticism, the essential feature of Christian life monasticism-as-action gives witness to, is the infallible power of God’s grace and mercy in the midst of an ever-increasing awareness of human opposition to it. It is precisely this tension, this paradox that explains, for Barth, the fruitfulness of monasticism and its extraordinary resilience in spite of all its shortcomings. This is how monasticism contributes to the life of the Church: ‘More that this human witness is not demanded of [it]. But the service of this human witness’² is necessary in a Church and in a world that more than ever needs to learn the power of relying on God’s mercy alone.

¹ RB 4.
² Barth, CD IV/3.2, 609.
REFLECTIONS ON VERNACULAR TRANSLATIONS OF THE
BIBLE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Annie Noblesse-Rocher

Translated by John Bolger

The author traces the vicissitudes of vernacular translations of the Bible in the early sixteen hundreds. Their initial encouragement, by the Councils of Vienne and Lateran V, as a tool for converting the infidel, was quickly overshadowed by the accusation that they promoted heresy. The proponents of lay access to the Bible (e.g. the Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants) and those condemning it (e.g. Petrus Sutor) are considered. Vernacular translations, from any source, and whatever the motivation (pastoral or humanist) were banned in Paris (1535); yet Johann Eck published his German translation (1537), to counteract the evangelicals' versions.

The opening decennia of the sixteenth century are marked by various positions adopted in respect of the study of biblical languages and of vernacular translations. Humanists, evangelical reformers, but also, in reaction, certain theologians of the traditional Church, called for these translations into the vernacular, often, though not exclusively, based on the study of Greek and Hebrew. The first attempts often included programmatic prefaces, which are of particular interest here: they promote, depending on the particular case, a missionary intention and reading for lay people, the formation of ordinary clergy or the wish to

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counter evangelical advances. Adversaries such as Martin Luther and Johann Eck both translated the Bible into German: the first from 1523 on, from the original languages; and the second in 1537, from the Vulgate. These translations were rapidly and roundly condemned by the theological faculties of Louvain and Paris, notwithstanding the Councils of Vienne and Lateran V, and such monuments as the Grant Bible, which, at the instigation of King Charles VIII had already recommended that ordinary folk should read the Bible in the vernacular. Around 1505 there appeared an edition of the Bible historiale with a preface recommending that the Bible should be read by all the faithful. This Bible historiale, produced on the orders of Charles VIII, which Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples mentions in the preface to his translation of the Acts of the Apostles, is intended for the use of the intermediate class of lettered laity, of minor clerics and hermits, and enjoyed considerable success:

Poor sinners, blind to doing good, living in this world with worldly hearts and apt to evil doing, consider that God does not wish the death of sinners, but that they convert. [...] And since laziness is the enemy of the soul, and all leisured people, to pass the time, need to read some beautiful story or some book of divine knowledge, you can read this present book which is the holy bible, the which has been translated from Latin to French, adding nothing to the purity of its truth, as contained in the Latin Bible. Nothing has been left out, except for those things which cannot be translated, and the translation has been made, not for clerics, but for lay people and ordinary religious and hermits who are not lettered as they should be; also for other good people who live by the law of Jesus Christ; the which by means of this book may nourish their souls with divine histories and instruct simple and ignorant people.¹

But how could these ‘unlettered’ read this Bible historiée? If they cannot read, they may hear it, as indicated in the prologue to the 1521 edition of La Bible en francoys (1498), and shun the evils of romantic literature:

Those who cannot see or read it, because they have not been taught how to read in their youth, they must listen to it, and so banish

laziness from their minds, and take divine sustenance to strengthen their bodies and souls in good virtues. It is better that you should occupy yourself with divine scripture than with romances recounting loves and battles, which are full of lies.¹

That these vernacular translations could see the light of day, was because they had been encouraged by the pontifical institution itself at the Councils of Vienne (1311-1312) and Lateran V (1512), though with a very specific purpose which seemed no longer to concern the translators of the *bibles historiales* of the beginning of the sixteenth century, namely, the conversion of the infidel.

**Studying languages with a view to converting the infidel: councils of Vienne and Lateran V**

The institutional basis of the sixteenth century reflection lay in the decisions that the Council of Vienne, meeting from 16 October 1311 to 6 May 1312 and presided over by Clement V, had promulgated in an *Inter sollicitudines* decree which dealt with the study of languages. ‘With constant thought to how we can bring back to the path of truth those going astray’,² preaching was an essential tool in the missionary enterprise, for the pope earnestly desired that ‘holy Church be amply supplied with Catholics well versed in the languages used by the infidel.’ In this way non-Christians could be instructed in Catholic doctrine, thereby ‘gathering them for their salvation into the body of the faithful by the teaching of the Christian faith and by receiving baptism.’³ To this end, the pope ordered the setting up of schools for the teaching of Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic. Two experts in each language would practise in these schools, in the Roman curia and in the centres of study in Paris, Oxford, Bologna and Salamanca.⁴ These instructors ‘will faithfully translate into Latin works published in these

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⁴ Ibid.
languages, and will teach these languages to others’,¹ that is, to missionary preachers.

The Fifth Lateran Council, which opened on 3 May 1512 on the initiative of Pope Julius II, in large part took up this recommendation of the Council of Vienne, but forged a new link between vernacular translation and suspicion of heresy. The aim was to pursue the work of reform, especially in the area of forming preacher clerics. The bull *Inter sollicitudines* interests us especially: it was promulgated by Leo X on 4 May 1515 and concerns printing. The Pope recognises its importance: created by the grace of God, printing ‘has brought many benefits to men and women since, at small expense, it is possible to possess a great number of books’ with a view to instructing the infidel.² But in the mind of Leo X printing also has a deleterious effect, and he denounces ‘books—some translated into Latin from Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean as well as some issued directly in Latin or a vernacular language—containing errors opposed to the faith as well as pernicious views contrary to the Christian religion.’³ An initial link is established between translating biblical works from original languages (Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic) into the vernacular, and heresy: audacious printers have sold to the public works in Latin translated from Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Aramaic, but also works written directly in Latin or in vernacular languages. Such works contain ‘pernicious views contrary to the Christian religion’,⁴ leading readers into the greatest errors concerning faith, but also in morals. Censorship is imposed. From now on, works must be examined by the pontifical vicar or the master of the sacred palace, by the bishop, by ‘the inquisitor of heresy’⁵ and must be approved by a formula from their own hand, under pain of excommunication. After the enthusiasm of the first few years, printing now finds itself accused of encouraging the dissemination of vernacular translations of liturgical and biblical texts, seen as a serious risk in view of the supposed

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¹ Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid. p. 426.
doctrinal ignorance of the laity.\textsuperscript{1} In a letter of 17 March 1479 to the University of Cologne, Sixtus IV had already given this institution the privilege of penalising printers, sellers and readers of suspect publications. On 17 November 1487, Innocent VIII published the constitution \textit{Inter multiplices}, the first papal document to set out the Church’s position. Thus, the conciliar constitution \textit{Inter sollicitudines} of 4 May 1515 already had a long history.\textsuperscript{2}

\textbf{The humanist initiative}

These accusations were a slap in the face for early humanist initiatives. Thus Juan Luis Vivès, in his \textit{De disciplinis} of 1531,\textsuperscript{3} denounced confounding the knowledge of ancient languages with heresy.\textsuperscript{4} A sophisticated knowledge of Latin, according to him, by no means implied a propensity to heresy. For him, Martin Luther proved the point: this bad Latinist, and a latecomer to Greek, was nonetheless an inveterate heretic.\textsuperscript{5} The knowledge of ancient languages, any more than their ignorance, was no decisive indication of heresy. The \textit{annus mirabilis} in this matter was surely 1516 which saw the publication of a new edition of the Greek text of the New Testament by Erasmus, the \textit{Novum Instrumentum}, accompanied by a new Latin translation with programmatic prefaces.\textsuperscript{6} The first preface, the \textit{Paraclesis}, provides the motto of this human initiative, not only for biblical languages, but also for translation which would allow everyone, and in particular the \textit{idiotae}, access to the holy text: ‘I would wish that all women would

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid. p. 84.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid. pp. 97-9. ‘Nec satis illis fuit ignorasse et ab eorum cogitatione arcuisse alios pro uirili parte sua, etiam infamarunt teterrimi crimini, ne quis uellet proprius accedere metu contagii. Aiunt linguas errorum esse quodam uelut seminarium. [...] Quid ergo, si intelligas linguas, non potes esse haereticus? eris, si loquare? ceu uero in semione sita sit haeresis, et non in intelligentia! An ideo fonserit culpandus, si liquidior fluat et purior?’
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid. p. 97. On Luther and his mediocre knowledge of languages according to Vivès, see p.99: ‘Nam graece nihil penitus [Lutherus] nouerat, quum ad scribendum accessit: latine parum admodum.’
read the Gospel, that they read the epistles of Paul; and that these
texts were translated into all the languages of men, so that they be
read and known not only by the Scots and the Irish, but also by Turks
and Saracens ..." It is not impossible that this initiative in favour of a
generous diffusion of the biblical text, however innovative, would be
at home in the early promotion of missionary translation by the
Council of Vienne, but it’s main concern was for the access of idiotae
to the Gospel: ‘Ah! If only the peasant at his plough could sing a
Gospel passage, if the weaver at his loom would modulate some
verses, if the traveller would ease his tedious journey with such
stories!’ It was in this Erasmian spirit that the humanists of the Cercle
de Meaux undertook the dissemination of Scripture, this time for
practical reasons.

**Translating to prepare the people for the Sunday sermon**

Following his pastoral experience in the diocese of Meaux, and
especially after Bishop Briçonnet’s pastoral visit of 1519, Jacques
Lefèvre d’Étaples devoted himself to his biblical works. It was with
Erasmian enthusiasm that he introduced his translation of the
gospels, distributed freely in the diocese, with his preface of 8 June
1523. The reason he translated the Bible into French was

so that everyone who knows the Gallic language, but no Latin, may be
better disposed to receive this present grace ... here you have in the
common language ... the Gospels according to the Latin which is
commonly read ... so that ordinary members of the body of Jesus
Christ, having the same in their own language, may be equally certain
of the truth of the gospel, as those who know Latin.

For the humanists of the Cercle de Meaux, a knowledge of the biblical
languages also had a spiritual dimension. Thus, Guillaume Briçonnet
recommended to Marguerite d’Angoulême the writings of Jacques
Lefèvre d’Étaples, of François Vatable and of Gérard Roussel as matter
for both study and meditation, so that the study of languages might
lead to a piety informed by the best sources. The study of Hebrew and
Greek, through the works of the three humanists, was prescribed as a

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2 Ibid.
3 See G. Bedouelle, op. cit., p. 64.
way of shedding light on the Scripture, obfuscated in the shadows of bad translations, namely of the Septuagint and Vulgate.¹

However this appropriation of Scripture through knowing the languages did not, in the mind of Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples, imply interpretation. It was rather an exegetical method consisting in juxtaposing Scripture texts so as to clarify the more obscure by the more obvious, and of evaluating a text according to its author and recipient, its context and raison d’être:

Saul, that chosen vessel, in several passages, especially in the second epistle to Timothy, wonderfully praises the divine scriptures: because their author is God, all-wise and all-good; and because for everything human they are suitable and useful for obtaining eternal happiness, especially because they refute and confound all error, and render their true hearers perfect, instructed, and ready for every good work. For they are more excellent and true, more suitable and decent, for those who practise what they read, than all other scriptures composed by the mind of man: all the more since God is stronger than men, and the son God is wiser than the sons of men, and the spirit of God is better than the spirit of man, and that pure truth overcomes lies. And if some passages are found to be difficult (as also St Peter says about the epistles of saint Paul) for any authority and on the face of it appear contradictory, nonetheless the careless person should not lose heart in reading them, or think up for himself some gloss or explanation not proceeding from scripture (however plausible it may seem); but it is necessary that obscure passages should be clarified by others which are similar, and more evident. And to do this, and to have the best grounding in understanding the scriptures, it is most useful to first consider speaking [the languages], since every language has its own way of speaking. Secondly it is necessary to consider what has just been said in relation to what follows, and to carefully consider of whom, or to whom, they are addressed, in what time, and for what reason.²

² Lefèvre d’Étaples, La Saincte Bible en francoys translatee selon la pure et entiere traduction de J. Lefèvre chacuns brief argument avec plusieures figures... (Antwerp: Martin Lempereur, 1530), prologue, p.1.
The well-known *Epistles and Gospels for the 52 Sundays of the year*¹ are representative of Lefèvre’s objective, of providing for clergy with little formation the precise and simple meaning of gospel text along with a translation into the vernacular based on the Vulgate. If he stays faithful to the translation of Jerome it is to avoid perturbing the clergy in their attachment to their breviaries. It is in this perspective that he produces a French translation of the Gallic text, the liturgical version of the psalter, published in Paris by Simon de Colines in 1523. This is how he presents his work: ‘And in this way the ordinary clergy in considering and reading each verse will understand more easily what they are reading in Latin.’²

**Translating with a view to Reformation**

Amongst evangelical Reformers a consensus was reached on the absolute necessity of learning the biblical languages for pastors and laity alike, for a personal knowledge of Scripture, allowing for no exception it seems, whether in the ranks of the Reformer authorities or among dissidents. There were however debates about the validity of rabbinical interpretations for the new exegesis, a rift opening on this point between the Rhenish school and that of Wittenberg.³ But this need not concern us here. It was Martin Luther’s programmatic texts aiming to canonise biblical languages, as in his *September Testament* (1522) and the *Sendbrief von Dolmetschen* (1520), which were generally authoritative for reformers.⁴ While not all had mastered Hebrew or Greek, the reformers of the first two generations brooked no exception to the norm of studying biblical languages, and of translation into the vernacular. The time had come to give the faithful the personal nourishment they needed. Thus one witnessed new kinds

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of works destined for the faithful or poorly trained clergy, or ordinary preachers, as well as the flourishing of public institutions for Bible studies, which bore fruit precisely in vernacular biblical translation.

The institution of the Carolinum Zürich, or Prophezey, as a model for a new kind of biblical culture which spread as far as London, gave institutional form to a wider public in the three languages (Latin, Greek and Hebrew) and led to the Zürich Bible (1531). These translations inspired new literary genres such as Veit Dietrich’s *Summariem über die ganzen Bibel* (1545) in the Lutheran world, German résumés of the books of the Bible for the use of pastors of limited learning and of the laity. In the Kingdom of France a similar genre appeared, intended for pastors, but as collections of extracts from commentaries on the Bible, namely, Augustin Marlorat’s florilegia of commentaries. These simplified pedagogical initiatives are often borrowed from learned exegetical works from the Rhineland, as in the case of the *Familière Declaration* (1553), a French translation of Martin Bucer’s voluminous Latin commentary on the psalms, which left out all the signs of Greek and Hebrew erudition, present in the original Latin.

Amongst the dissidents one finds the same concern for providing the faithful with the Gospel text—in their own language—as in the introduction to Schappeler’s *Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants*:

Peace to the Christian reader and the grace of God through Christ:

There are many evil writings put forth of late which take occasion, on account of the assembling of the peasants, to cast scorn upon the gospel, saying “Is this the fruit of the new teaching, that no one should obey but that all should everywhere rise in revolt, and rush together to reform, or perhaps destroy altogether, the authorities, both ecclesiastic and lay?” [...] In the first place, the gospel is not the cause of revolt and disorder, since it is the message of Christ, the promised Messiah; the

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1 *Die ganze Bibel der ursprünglichen Ebraischen und griechischen waarheit ...,* (Zürich: Christoffel Froschauer, 1531).
4 See the unpublished thesis of René Gerber: ‘*Lis avec application les articles et puis tu jugeras. La réception des XII Articles dans les Flugschriften de 1525*’, defended 6 September 2012, supervised by M. Arnold, Faculty of Protestant Theology, University of Strasbourg, p. 79.
word of life, teaching only love, peace, patience, and concord. Thus all who believe in Christ should learn to be loving, peaceful, long-suffering, and harmonious. [...] It is clear that the peasants demand that this gospel be taught them as a guide in life, and they ought not to be called disobedient or disorderly.¹

**Reaction of the conservatives: interdictions pronounced by the Faculty of Theology and the Parliament of Paris**

In the summer of 1523 the Paris Faculty of Theology, at the instigation of Noël Beda, opened a debate about the possibility of new Latin versions of the Bible based on Hebrew and Greek, and also of new translations into the vernacular. Moderate voices having been stifled, on 22 August the decision was made: new versions of the Bible in Latin from Greek or Hebrew—Erasmus and Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples were mentioned specifically—were forbidden, along with translations into the vulgar tongue.² Francis I having taken Erasmus under his protection, and Lefèvre being admitted to court through the mediation of the King’s sister, the Faculty of theology did not formalise its condemnation by a *determinatio*.

However, at the beginning of June, 1525 the Paris faculty of theology examined Lefèvre’s *Commentarii initiatorii in quatuor evangelia* and, following the same trend, the Paris Parliament, as the only competent executive, ordered the seizure of all copies at the house of Simon de Colines.³ Indeed, condemnations against the *Cercle de Meaux* had been issued as early as 1523; on 26 November Martial Mazurier and Pierre Caroli were condemned for having preached in churches of the diocese. On 2 December a *determinatio* condemned forty-one propositions which the two preachers had advanced in their sermons, one being an exhortation to priests and laity that they should study the Bible, the other that the laity should meet together to discuss

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¹ Translation from *German History in Documents and Images*, © German Historical Institute.


problematic biblical passages. But there was no specific condemnation of the Bible in the vernacular:

Proposition 1: that all Christians, and especially the clergy, are incited to study holy Scripture for all other doctrines are human and unfruitful. Censured. In its first part this proposition comes from the errors of the Poor of Lyon, in its second part it is reckless and corresponds to the preaching of the heretics. Proposition 2: that it is permissible for ordinary people to meet on feast days to discuss biblical problems. Censured. Proposition 3: that it is permissible for the faithful to discuss the Catholic faith and to comment on sacred Scripture. Censured, for these two propositions are reckless and come from the practices of the Waldensians and the Hussites.¹

By evoking the Cathars, Waldensians, Hussites and heterodox Beguines in their condemnations, the theologians of Paris were making a clear link between reading in the vernacular and the medieval heresies, resurrected in Lutheran circles. On 5 February 1526 the Parliament promulgated a judgement which was proclaimed at all crossroads to the sound of trumpets and which put an end to the regime of tolerance:

— all preaching of the teaching of Luther or all other condemned teaching is banned;
— French translations of the Old and New Testaments, and the Epistles and Gospels for the 52 Sundays of the year of Lefèvre d’Étaples must be lodged at Parliament’s registry, or that of senechals, bailiffs or provosts;
— it is prohibited for printers to print these books and offer them for sale, under any manner whatsoever;
— it is prohibited to translate from Latin into French.²

At the same time the Paris Parliament issued a number of interdictions concerning Readers at the Royal College, founded by Francis I for the study of the three languages. Noël Beda, administrator of the faculty of theology, ordered the seizure of a number of the Royal College’s posters announcing courses in biblical languages. For its part, parliament commanded the Readers to cease

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their explications of sacred texts, following an investigation made by the theological faculty on 10 January 1534. The lecturers were straying too far from the Vulgate text. On 14 January 1533, ‘this day after dining there came to court the sirs Pierre Danes, François Vatable, Paul Paradis and Agathie Guidacier, the King’s lecturers at the University of Paris, following the order of the same court, on the same day.’ The court ‘made this request to them [...] to forbid them to read or interpret any of the books of Sacred Scripture in the Hebrew or Greek language.’ The person making the denunciation is the administrator of the University of Paris. The denunciation ‘requests that copies of this document be affixed at all the crossroads of this town’. The same prohibition of publicly reading and interpreting Scripture without the Faculty’s permission is applied to all individuals. From 1525, the conservatives armed themselves with a programmatic text of the Carthusian Pierre Couturier (or Sutor), the De tralatione Bibliae.4

Sutor’s treatise against translations into the vernacular

In the preamble to his De tralatione Bibliae et novarum reprobation interpretationum, Sutor tells how he entered the Charterhouse to flee the world but that the works of the ‘theologastri [meaning Erasmus and Lefèvre d’Étaples] quos antichristi praecursores vocant’ obliged him to forsake his solitude and write this treatise against the new vernacular translations.5 The question of translations into the

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 De tralatione Bibliae et Novarum Reprobatione Interpretationum (Paris: Jean Petit, 1525). Born around 1475-80 at Chêmeré-le-Roy in the diocese of Le Mans, Paul Couturier, after a period at the Saint-Barbe college, was made socius of the Sorbonne in 1502 and most probably the college’s librarian and rector in 1504-5. He was doctor in theology in 1510 and parish priest at Saint-Loyer (diocese of Sées). He entered the Vauvert Charterhouse in 1511, which boasted a rich humanist library. From 1514 to 1531 he was prior of four charterhouses—Val-Dieu, Vauvert, Preize and Notre-Dame du Parc (Maine). It was at Preize, near Troyes, that in 1525 he wrote his De tralatione... See J.K. Farge, Biographical Register of Paris Doctors of Theology, 1500-1536 (Toronto: 1980), pp. 119-21; and W. François, ‘Petrus Sutor’, p. 140.
5 Sutor, De tralatione, f° Aiir.
vernacular only comes up in the twenty-second and final chapter.¹ Sutor sets out a threefold aim: to show that these translations deserve to be condemned; to plead that they be forbidden; and to issue a *quaerimonia* in favour of the true teaching of the Church. The humanists had maintained that *idiotae* and women had a right to know the Scriptures, and even that this was indispensable for their salvation.² Not so for Sutor, who identifies among the faithful a class of *idiotae* who have no need of this scriptural sustenance. He bases his argument on Luke 4: 20: *Et cum plicuisset librum, reddidit ministro, et sedit. Et omnium in synagoga oculi errant intendentes in eum.* ‘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.’ Sutor turns this simple Gospel scene into an exemplar. Simple folk read the Bible superficially, according to the letter, and so cannot reach the heart or essence of the text, that is, the spiritual sense. Sutor assimilates *littera* and vernacular translation, as if the polysemy of the text is only carried by the Latin language, and as if in translating into the vernacular the exegetical richness of the text is lost. This vein is picked up a few years later in 1548, with an equally disseminated work by Esprit Rotier, a Dominican of Toulouse, in his *De non vertenda scriptura sacra*, and especially in his *Antidote [...] against the plague of Heresy:*

Many people ask if it is good for illiterate people to read the Old and New Testaments translated into the vernacular, the which question we have discussed at length in the book which we called *De non vertenda Scripture Sacra.*³ For now it is enough to remember that holy Scripture, in whatever language it is translated, always remains profound and difficult to understand: because, beneath the grammatical letter lies the spiritual sense, intended by the Holy Spirit, which is the true literal sense, enclosed and covered as the spirit in the body: and so oftentimes, instead of the heart or essence, such people take the husk and go no further than the body of the grammatical letter. So it is with these burnt heretics.⁴

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¹ Ibid. f° Aiir f° 44.
² Neither Erasmus or Lefèvre made any such claim. See W. François, ‘Petrus Sutor’, pp. 143-4.
³ *De non vertenda Scriptura sacra in vulgarem linguam*, (Toulouse: Jean Dembat and Jean Chazot, 1548).
Translating into the vernacular to counteract the evangelicals

Let us finish this rapid overview with Johann Eck’s vernacular translation of the Bible (1537). After the Augsburg Confession (1530) the challenge of vernacular translations for traditional thinking is to counteract the well-established translations of the bibles of Zurich and of the Lutherans. This is why in 1537 Johann Eck brought out a German translation from the Vulgate nach dem Text in der hayligen kirchen gebraucht, ‘on account of the falsified bibles, [everywhere] used and read’:

It has become important, though not essential, good or salutary, to translate the books of the bible into the vernacular language, but it is also an undertaking that must be recognised as dangerous and harmful. Lay people have taken the Bible into their hands. Saint Jerome already spoke of this in the prefaces to his translations: let everyone take hold of Scripture. But as was said by Jerome, and St Peter and St Paul: ‘the letter kills but the Spirit gives life’ (2 Cor. 3:6). Allowing lay people to read the Bible in the vernacular is concerning; [...] therefore it seems to me to be important to respond to these dangerous undertakings by providing a translation accessible to all but made on the only version of the Bible of holy Church.¹

During the first decennia of the sixteenth century, vernacular translations faced different challenges depending on the motivation of the translators and their confessional and intellectual allegiances. The humanist initiative crowned the first medieval attempts and reasserted the rights of the text as text, breaking with the tradition of illuminated bibles. While the motivations of the likes of Erasmus and Lefèvre d’Étaples were not entirely the same, nonetheless their common goal was to provide uneducated people with the actual text of the Scriptures in a language they could understand, and the clergy with an aid to meditation. With the Bible of Johann Eck’s we come more or less full circle, back to the Fifth Lateran Council: the principle purpose of vernacular translation was once again the combating of heresy.

ECUMENISM AT OXFORD. A VIEW FROM THE UNIVERSITY CATHOLIC CHAPLAINCY

Roderick Strange*

The Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy was established in 1895. At that time and in the following decades, there was little ecumenical activity. From the 1960s, however, ecumenism began to flourish. The Catholic chaplains were invited to preach in College chapels and they in their turn invited College chaplains to preach at the Chaplaincy. There were shared projects as well. Ecumenical initiatives began to develop to a point at which chaplains, whatever their denomination, were at ease with one other. What previously had seemed special became normal. And at the heart of their collaboration was friendship and trust.

Before the Beginning

The Oxford Act of 1854 made it possible for people to matriculate at Oxford and take the BA without signing the Thirty-Nine Articles. There would be further debate and discussion with regard to religious tests, but that provision which allowed Dissenters to attend the University also, of course, opened the way for Catholics as well. Their path, however, was to prove more tortuous. The Roman authorities, increasingly guided by Henry Manning who in 1865 was to become the Archbishop of Westminster, forbade Catholics access to Oxford and it was only in 1895, three years after Cardinal Manning’s death, that Catholics were at last given permission to matriculate and the Catholic Chaplaincy to care for them was established. Nevertheless, in the years immediately following the Oxford Act and before Rome’s initial negative decision, thought was given to Catholic attendance at

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the University and in particular to the way pastoral care could be provided for those who went up.

Twice during the 1860s Bishop William Bernard Ullathorne of Birmingham invited John Henry Newman to found an Oratory there. The idea was a kind of compromise. As it was not practicable to erect a Catholic college, those matriculating would have to become members of one of the existing colleges. The idea was for the Oratory to offer them that pastoral care and support they would need. On the first occasion Newman even bought property in Wellington Square, which he had to sell later when his plans were impeded, and on the second he made it a condition that he would only proceed again provided there were no secret clause that prevented him personally from being in residence. When just such a clause was eventually revealed to him, he withdrew, Ullathorne declaring to him that he had been ‘shamefully misrepresented at Rome’ by his fellow countrymen there. But whatever anxieties there may have been among people in Rome, there had also been some anxiety in Oxford.

In November 1864 Newman wrote to his great friend, Edward Pusey, to inform him about this plan for an Oxford Oratory, but Pusey was not happy. He saw rationalism as the enemy of faith and believed that the truth, as he put it, was ‘making its way against rationalism’. He was buoyant and he added that the disciples of Jowett, the formidable Master of Balliol and a contributor to Essays and Reviews, ‘own that the tide is turned among the clever young men’. Newman’s Oratory, he feared, would change all that. ‘The establishment of a mission of yours,’ he wrote, ‘which must in its own nature be aggressive, even against your will … would necessarily alter this.’ He feared that the presence of the Oratory would make preachers defensive and would stir up anti-Roman controversy once more, distracting them from the struggle against rationalism where at present they appeared to have the advantage. Newman was not persuaded. ‘I assure you,’ he replied, ‘that controversy will not come from me, nor anyone with whom I am associated.’ In the event, in any case, this plan came to nothing.

When it was renewed in 1867, Newman wrote to Pusey again, assuring him once more that, if the plan were to succeed on this occasion, ‘I trust it will be in no hostile spirit to what remains in the place of its old habits, opinions and practices’. And he went on, ‘You, I suppose, would rather a man agreed with me than with the advocates of scepticism and infidelity—and I certainly should prefer a man to be an Anglican than an infidel; therefore I do not see what chance there is of our moving in opposite directions.’ The point here, of course, is not simply to recount even briefly the rather complex attempts by Newman under obedience to set up an Oratory in Oxford which would have been a precursor of a Catholic chaplaincy today, but rather to notice the exchange between Newman and Pusey who had remained devoted friends in spite of Newman’s conversion to Rome. They discussed issues, they disagreed, but their tone was always marked by trust and respect. Indeed, when there was a report in the press in October 1865, following a meeting they had had, that Newman and Pusey had been ‘reconciled’, Pusey was quick to set the record straight. ‘The deep love between us,’ he told the editor of The Guardian, ‘which now dates back for over forty years, has never been in the least overshadowed. His leaving us was one of the deep sorrows of my life; but it involved separation of place, not diminution of affection.’ Roman opposition to Catholics going to Oxford meant there was no formal presence till 1895, but the friendship between Pusey and Newman created an encouraging backcloth for what the future might hold for ecumenism.

The Early Decades

There may not have been a formal presence of Catholics at Oxford until 1895, but there were Catholics nonetheless who matriculated. An Oxford University Catholic Club was formed in 1878 which in 1888 became the Newman Society, but for a long time there was no evidence of any ecumenical activity. It would have been largely unheard of in those days in any case. Moreover, the fact that a number of the early Catholic chaplains had themselves formerly been Anglicans made them sensitive to their situation. They were there to provide pastoral care for the Catholic members of the University; they

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1 Letters and Diaries xxiii, p.29.
had no wish to proselytize or even appear to be doing so. Ronald Knox, once described to me as the most distinguished, but not necessarily the most effective of my predecessors, and who was chaplain from 1926 to 1939, was welcomed back to Trinity, his old college, and almost immediately elected to Common-room rights, but, as Evelyn Waugh observed, ‘Ronald kept clear of non-Catholic undergraduates. It was not his business, he felt, to make converts. The goodwill which the chaplaincy enjoyed in the University would be compromised if he were thought to be poaching the preserves of the Anglican chaplains.’ Those who might be interested in becoming Catholics were sent on to the Jesuits at Campion Hall or the Dominicans at Blackfriars. And even in the fifties there could be tensions. In his history of the Chaplaincy, Walter Drumm remarked of those times, ‘Friendship and co-operation with college chaplains … was unheard of.’ Valentine Elwes was the chaplain then. Drumm continued, ‘The occasional incursions into colleges made by Father Val to recover the lapsed members of his flock were not always viewed kindly by college chaplains.’

However, Elwes’ health was not always strong and from 1954 he had a kind of unofficial assistant in Père Yves Nolet. Nolet was Belgian, a delightful man, whom I was lucky enough to meet later on a number of occasions. Yves had been ordained for a Chinese diocese in 1948. He had wanted to be a missionary there, but when the Communists took over the following year, his path was blocked. He devoted himself to further studies instead, both at the Institut Catholique in Paris and also at Ushaw where he taught. It was while he was teaching at Ushaw that he heard of Elwes’s need for an assistant and offered his help. Walter Drumm says of Père Yves that you could not listen to him ‘without realising that ideas have supreme importance and that their expression must be pursued, discussed and refined so as to serve the cause of truth.’ He encouraged a range of groups for study and discussion, among them was one on ecumenism. And matters in any case were about to change.

3 op.cit., p.99.
Ecumenical Initiatives

From the Catholic viewpoint, the trigger for the change, of course, was the election of Pope John XXIII in October 1958 and his summoning of the Second Vatican Council three months later. The Pope’s joyful, outgoing personality and his intention that the Council should not be concerned to define further doctrines, but be pastoral instead, looking for ways to relate the Gospel to the modern world, created a sense of openness. Those who were not Roman Catholics were also invited to send observers to the Council. This Council was to be Ecumenical not merely in the traditional sense for a gathering of this kind, but because ecumenism was to be at its heart. And in 1959 Michael Hollings was appointed as the new Catholic chaplain at Oxford in succession to Val Elwes. Hollings was deeply in tune with the mood in the Church created by Pope John. Although previous chaplains, and most notably Ronald Knox, had been appreciated and admired in the University, the Chaplaincy itself had remained rather isolated, a somewhat sheltered environment. Michael Hollings made it an open house. The front door was unlocked at 7.00 in the morning and remained unlocked till midnight. And that openness was ecumenical as well.

During Hollings’s eleven years at the chaplaincy from 1959 to 1970 various practices became normal. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was becoming more prominent everywhere and pulpits were regularly exchanged. At the Chaplaincy on the Sunday within that Week one of the College chaplains or a Canon of Christ Church would come and preach at the principal mass. There were also many other occasions when Michael or one of his assistants, initially Richard Incledon, later Crispian Hollis, would be invited to preach at Evensong in one of the Colleges. During my twelve years at the Chaplaincy (1977-1989), I preached at Evensong in more than twenty colleges, some of them on more than one occasion. I was also invited to preach a University sermon. The really significant point was that over time these occasions occurred so regularly that they ceased to be special. It was just what happened and in the best sense came to be taken for granted. This was the style of which I had experience as a graduate priest from 1970 to 1974 and it was the style that I inherited on my return to Oxford in 1977.

As well as words from pulpits, however, there was also action. During the sixties Michael and Eric Kemp who was then the chaplain
at Exeter College, but was later to become the Bishop of Chichester, planned summer Borstal Camps. They were an ecumenical initiative and were valuable and successful. For a week equal numbers of borstal boys and undergraduates went camping in the Yorkshire dales, and then for a further week stayed together in the Borstal in Hull. Those taking part came from all denominations. In Oxford there was also a shared involvement in the Simon Community, volunteering to help. People who have taken part in these ventures have always spoken of them with warm appreciation.

**Further Developments**

A further initiative of Michael’s had been the introduction of College masses. Every term the Catholic members of each particular college would be invited to gather for a celebration of mass. Sometimes the number of those attending would be small, maybe only half a dozen. The mass might then be celebrated in an undergraduate’s room or sometimes in the room of a Catholic don. That was how I first recall such a mass at St Catherine’s, for example. But the situation could change. One year several new undergraduates at St Catherine’s got together to plan the mass and they publicized the occasion extensively. Forty or fifty people came to the mass, and not only Catholics. Other friends came too. We gathered to celebrate the Eucharist and afterwards relaxed over a splendid meal that the students had prepared. For some years the St Catherine’s mass was a termly event people looked forward to. And other colleges tended to follow the same pattern, praying first, but then relaxing together afterwards, at least over a drink, if not a meal.

Increasingly and almost invariably the College chaplains welcomed these occasions. The College chapel would be placed at our disposal and often many of the chaplains would make a point of being present. It was an opportunity for them as well to meet a group of students from their college and in general it was not as though they were meeting them for the first time. Some they would already know well. Many Catholics would be members of their college choir, for example, or would be making themselves useful on other chapel occasions in their college. Old barriers had dropped away.

One obvious contrast between my time as a Catholic chaplain at Oxford and Ronald Knox’s were the number of people with whom I had lengthy conversations because they were interested in being
received into the Roman Catholic Church. Over those twelve years many came to talk and there were probably more than a hundred of them who became Catholics. Instead of being sent on to Dominicans or Jesuits, they talked to me. I have no recollection of this work with students causing tensions with college chaplains. If that is correct, I suspect there were two principal reasons. First, no more than Knox was I proselytizing. I was not actively seeking to win people over. My basic starting-point, when I was approached, was to insist that we were exploring what those who asked to talk really believed. If they liked what they heard about Catholicism, but did not actually believe it, then they should not be received. On the other hand, if they did not like it, but nevertheless were convinced that it was true, then they should be received. Whether people were aware of that approach of mine explicitly, I don’t know, but perhaps they realized it implicitly. And Michael’s, Crispian’s, and Walter’s approach was essentially the same. And the second reason may be, as far as I recall, that those who came to see me, were not coming from a firmly committed standpoint in another Christian tradition, but, even though they may have been baptized, they were usually exploring Christian faith with seriousness for the first time, perhaps because, as a modern linguist who had spent a year abroad in a Catholic culture, they had found what they enjoyed studying was alive in a way they had not previously imagined, or perhaps, as medieval historians, they had discovered their research was still part of a living tradition. So the college chaplains shared in the joy of a new-found faith become alive and real.

I have mentioned college chaplains being ‘almost invariably’ welcoming. In fact I can recall only one occasion when a college chaplain was less helpful. It concerned a wedding. The chaplain took the view that only services of the Established Church were permitted in the College chapel and so it was not possible for a Catholic graduate member of the College, even one who was still in residence, to be married there to his Catholic fiancée. According to the statutes, the chaplain was perhaps technically correct and he opposed any exception being made. His Head of House was shocked and soon afterwards the statutes were emended. The venue for the wedding was rearranged and went ahead most happily at Oriel, my own College. This one instance apart, weddings were also occasions when ecumenical relations flourished.
Students often wished to be married in their College chapels. However, let me mention in passing a small irony. In those days, in order to do so, they needed to obtain a special licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury’s office. As private chapels College chapels were not ordinarily licensed for weddings. The licence, if I recall correctly, cost £70. Catholics, on the other hand, were allowed to go to a Registry Office for a civil wedding first, as they would have done in France, for example, and then proceed to the College chapel for their religious marriage. It does seem ironical that it was simpler and cheaper for Catholics to be married in their College chapels than Anglicans. And I have many happy memories of marriages celebrated in college chapels, sometimes according to the Catholic form and sometimes the Anglican, sometimes I officiated, sometimes I preached.

Besides these liturgical celebrations, there were also other opportunities for ecumenical discussion. At about this time, the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was beginning to produce its various agreed statements, for example, on the eucharist, ministry, and authority. I can recall taking part in various meetings at different times and in different places, sometimes in a chaplain’s room in college with a group of undergraduates, and once a series of meetings at the University Church of St Mary the Virgin. On the last occasion I remember in particular a quiet conversation with Henry Chadwick as we walked downstairs at the end of one meeting and our talking about the importance of trust in ecumenical relations. Henry was emphatic. Later, in February 1989, writing à propos of something else, he commented to me, ‘Times are hard for ecumenism now’, and writing again some years later he referred to the helplessness he had sometimes felt ‘as the flowing ecumenical dialogue began to run into the sand’. It could be easy to become discouraged. Hopes had been high, but sometimes goal-posts were being moved. When that happens, the importance of relationships, firm, trusting friendships, become all the more important.

Friendships
My Oxford ecumenical friendships have been too many to number. John Morgan was the chaplain at Oriel when I arrived in 1970 as a graduate priest and immediately made me warmly welcome. Billy
Watson at St Peter’s was another good friend and used to enjoy telling people that his wife, Jill, and I used to go on holiday together. That was true. But Jill Pickering, as she was, and I were small children at the time on holiday with our families in the Isle of Man. John Shepherd was the chaplain at Christ Church and for a while lived along St Aldate’s. He and his wife, Joy, were then my next-door neighbours. We became good friends. John once invited me to preach during Lent when he had arranged a series of sermons on the seven deadly sins. ‘Lust,’ he was quick to inform me, ‘has already been taken.’ An Australian, he was for many years Dean of the Anglican Cathedral in Perth. In 2016, when I had been asked to deliver some lectures in Western Australia, we were able to meet again. He and Joy invited me to dinner. They are friends whom I value, but whom I have seen too rarely over the years.

One friend in particular, however, deserves mention, Geoffrey Rowell. I think I first met Geoffrey when he was the assistant chaplain at New College and he invited me to one of those conversations I have already mentioned about an ARCIC document. Soon after he became the Chaplain and a fellow of Keble and he was one of the examiners for my doctorate. I remember that he began by asking me a long, complicated question that left me completely bewildered. Thereafter, fortunately for me, matters improved. Then, when I returned to Oxford three years later, he was the first of the chaplains to invite me to preach, not in fact at Evensong, but at the College Corporate Communion and soon afterwards he asked me to teach with him. A paper had been included for theology undergraduates to study in a seminar an individual theologian in more detail, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and others. It was thought preferable for there to be two people to guide the discussions. Geoffrey had taken on the Newman class and invited me to join him. I was happy to do so. For the next eleven years we taught this class together. There was also a number of weddings that we celebrated in Keble Chapel, couples with whom I am still in touch.

After I left Oxford, we met sometimes at Newman Conferences. In 1990 there was a conference at Nanterre. Geoffrey suggested we have dinner together one evening and I at first declined, thinking of the people with whom I was staying. But then I thought better of it because my hosts were close friends whom I could see more often. I arranged to meet him after all. Over dinner I remember him telling
me in particular of an interview he had had with George Carey who was then the Archbishop of Canterbury and his discussing with Carey the ordination of women. He was frustrated because the Archbishop did not seem to have grasped the issue theologically. It was that lack of theological awareness that irked him.

Then from 1998 to 2015, while I was Rector of the Beda College in Rome, a College that prepares older men from the English-speaking world for priestly ordination, we would meet fairly regularly. In 2001 Geoffrey had become the Anglican Bishop for Europe and would be in Rome quite often. I recall in particular one occasion when he had brought a group to the Basilica of St Paul’s outside the Walls which is just across the road from the Beda, and him asking me to speak to them, which I did. We were able to have a drink together afterwards and he remarked then that there would have been those in the group who would have been astonished that he and I had worked so closely together before. His desire for Christian unity ran deep.

In 2012 I was able to take a brief, but, as it happened, abbreviated sabbatical in Oxford from January to February. It should have been till the April but was abbreviated because of Pope Benedict’s resignation and my need therefore to return to Rome. In the few months I was in Oxford, however, Geoffrey invited me to dinner in Keble twice; the second occasion was a special College dinner in January. It was typical of him to think of me.

I had taken that sabbatical to try to make progress on a volume of Newman letters that Oxford University Press had asked me to edit. It was published as *John Henry Newman: a Portrait in Letters*. Geoffrey came to the launch at St Mary’s University, Twickenham, my present post, in October 2015 and was happily able to stay for dinner afterwards. At the end, we said goodbye and planned to meet again. His cancer was in remission; he seemed perfectly well. But there was to be no further meeting, as the cancer returned suddenly and killed him. Geoffrey died on 11 June 2017. We had been friends for 40 years. In messages to me some have spoken of our long friendship and described me as one of his best respected friends and colleagues. I feel humbled to be thought of in those terms. We should not be discouraged. When plans falter, but friendships remain firm, there can always be hope. As Henry Chadwick recognized, trust is essential.
Concluding and Continuing

I am conscious that this article is a curious piece, moving from nineteenth century history through the earlier years of the Oxford Catholic Chaplaincy to something more immediate and personal. Has it just been a ramble? In concluding, let me come back to the main subject.

In February 1989, my final year at the Catholic Chaplaincy, there was a University Mission. These were arranged at regular intervals and over the years had acquired a more ecumenical character. An earlier mission had been led by Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens, the Archbishop of Malines-Bruxelles and a major influence at the Second Vatican Council. Catholic chaplains had often had a role, but on this occasion I was invited to chair the planning committee. Let me make it plain at once that the real work was done most generously by Brian Mountford, the Vicar of the University Church. However, even the fact that the Catholic chaplain should have held that position indicates how far thinking and attitudes and relationships had moved over the years. Then on 15 May 1989, shortly before my time as Catholic chaplain in Oxford came to an end, the college chaplains arranged a dinner for me at Oriel. It was a memorable evening, but also from another point of view simply a gathering of friends. We must not lose hope.
RAINER ZIMMER-WINKEL: AN INTERVIEW

Rainer Zimmer-Winkel MA was born in 1963 in West Germany. He studied Roman Catholic Theology and Political Science in Trier, and is presently working as a publisher and editor at AphorismA Publishing House in Berlin. This is a non-profit-making private limited company, with a particular focus on Jerusalem. Rainer is married, with one daughter, and has been involved in the Middle East since the mid 1980s, especially in the Holy Land which, as a political entity, he usually refers to as Israel-Palestine/Palestine-Israel. William Russell is a member of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) who since 2005 has been serving at St Anne's Basilica in Jerusalem, in which city this interview took place.

WR You are deeply engaged in the religious scene in the Holy Land, and have been for a long time. Could you explain how that involvement first began, and the main stages in its development?

RZ-W Indeed, I have been travelling back and forth to the Middle East, especially to the Holy Land for more than thirty years. It was during my theological studies in Trier that I developed an interest in the places where ‘it all happened’, but I naively thought that one visit there would be quite sufficient to gain the understanding of it that I needed. At the same time, there was also a political side to my interest. I had grown up with a left-of-centre approach to life, and been educated in that way. This included a clear and open opposition to anything that smacked of Fascism which, to put it positively, meant a commitment towards Antifascism. Trying to understand Zionism better, and exploring its consequence after 1945 in the formation of the state of Israel, played an important role in the way I was thinking about this part of the world.

When I did eventually come, in 1987, I was privileged in a way that I was hardly aware of at the time, and did not at first appreciate. I was a member of the youth organisation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Germany at the time. This gave me contacts with Mapam, an Israeli political party which later merged with others to become the party now known as
Meretz. It was through Mapam that I got the opportunity to visit the country in the first place (though, in fact, it was only to that part of it which was internationally recognised as Israel). I was also involved with the German branch of Pax Christi, which was sending out a delegation of its Middle East Committee. I was coming in advance of that delegation, which I would join later, since it was to arrive immediately the Mapam-organised part of my trip had been completed. So I was involved with two very different organisations—you might call them two extremes—during that initial visit.

These four weeks in 1987, prior to the first Intifada, changed my life. I got introduced to the reality of what I would call ‘progressive Israel’, which hardly exists any more. Meretz does struggle on as a political party but it is now greatly reduced in numbers and support. It is no longer seen as having any real chance of participating in government, even as a coalition partner, whereas in 1987 that was still a genuine possibility.

The first two weeks of my 1987 trip included many meetings, with the help of Mapam. These ranged, for example, from a Kibbutz at the Gaza border to a Druze village up in the North. Then, immediately after that, via Pax Christi, I had two further weeks as part of their delegation to peace groups around the country. These peace groups were both religious and non-religious.

This introduction into the area gave me contacts with a wide diversity of people who had very different narratives and approaches. In retrospect, it is clear to me that this was an extraordinary way to gain a first experience of the place. For many years, however, it was something I simply took for granted, as if it had been self-evident. It was only very much later that I fully understood what a ‘grace’ this introduction had been, and how unusual it actually was. What an enrichment it had been not to come to the situation via one side only, as most people do. Instead, my introduction to what may be called ‘Holy-Land-Formation’ had come via both sides—or, to put it better, via different sites.

Once I was back in Europe, in my own German context, this experience eventually led me to articulate a first, basic political stance towards the place I had visited. I developed
within *Pax Christi* a position I have always maintained until today, and never given up. This was a simultaneous commitment to Israel’s right to a secure existence AND to Palestine’s right to national self-determination—and I have always insisted that both realities have to be said in one sentence. We summed it up by coining the phrase ‘Double Solidarity’ (*Doppelte Solidarität*), an inclusive approach that embraced all. It is important to note here that this formula was never intended to hide or gloss over the enormous disparity in power-relations which exists between the two sides, a crucial point which cannot be ignored. This was not at all a popular position to take in the West Germany of the 1980s. And, somehow, once again, it is not a popular position today either. But I remain fully convinced of it, and stick with it while, to my great dismay and disappointment, the German branch of *Pax Christi* has given up on it.

**WR**  
*As well as its political dimension, your commitments are also explicitly ecumenical and inter-religious. We will take these points one by one. First, how would you describe the ecumenical situation in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Holy Land? And what do you see as the most important possibilities for the future of ecumenism both there and, indeed, further afield?*

**RZ-W**  
First of all, I would like to emphasise that my ecumenical and inter-religious commitments and engagement came only via what I like to call the *cathedra* of the Holy Land. Let me explain what I mean. Just as a University Professor has his ‘chair’ (i.e. his *cathedra*) which somehow gives him the ‘authority’ to teach, so too we can describe the Holy Land itself as just such a teacher—one, moreover, from whom we can learn a great deal, and to whom we should pay particular attention. My previous studies, and teachers, had not prepared me for what I would learn from this place. And they certainly had not provided me with the breadth and depth I would require. It was to be a steep learning curve. I found my horizon widening exponentially as I sat at the feet, so to speak, of this unexpected and remarkable ‘teacher’ called ‘the Holy Land’. 
Insofar as ecumenism had played any role at all in my formation prior to my engagement with Israel-Palestine/Palestine-Israel, it was only in regard to gaining some limited understanding of Catholic-Protestant relations, and pretty much restricted to the German context. As for the inter-religious dimension, that hardly existed for me before that trip, which completely altered my main focus. It was my encounter with the Holy Land which put it on my horizon for the first time.

When I eventually did finish my studies back home in Germany, it was with a Master’s thesis on the secret encounters between Israelis and Palestinians from the period after the Camp David accord until the beginning of the first Intifada. This was an important step in the right direction. However, my teachers at the University insisted on looking at reality through a purely theoretical approach. They were not much interested in paying attention to actual human beings, and to the ways in which real people deal with the challenges on the ground as they go about the daily business of getting on with their lives.

One unfortunate effect of this was that I came away from my studies with hardly any understanding of Islam. And I have to admit that even today I am still far from a real understanding of it, although I do try to make up for the gaps in my knowledge as best I can. On the ecumenical front, in regard to Christian traditions other than my own, however, one very important thing I did acquire was a new and lasting interest in Orthodox spirituality, especially in regard to the reality of icons. My understanding of what was for me this ‘new’ world of Orthodoxy was still very limited, but the initial spark had been given and it would keep growing from then on.

As you can see, there were many gaps in my understanding of the ‘Holy Land’ reality I was already beginning to deal with, but perhaps the biggest one was this: I had no clue whatsoever about the huge colonial and imperialist heritage which we white people from the North carry with us when we come into this area of the world. Far too easily, and far too frequently, we slip into thinking of it as ‘our’ Orient. I still had
a lot to learn, even about myself, as I was continually confronted with my own and other people’s complicity in this collective past.

Maybe one of the things I have learned a bit, over time, in terms of inter-Christian relations, is just how many different kinds of ecumenism there are, especially in the Holy Land. There is this ecumenical life of the expatriates, a world by and for itself, and then there is the ecumenical life of the local church. The local Christians know they are Christians, and would not describe themselves in any other way. That is their main identity, and very often denominational belonging does not seem to matter so much to them, unless they are ordained clergy of course. This ‘basic Christian identity’ is surely a good thing, although it does carry with it a tendency to become merely a social identity, rather than an affirmation of personal faith commitment.

There is also this specialised ecumenism of academic discourse, but this is something which has hardly any echo in the Holy Land, as this land is lacking the necessary institutions for that kind of thing. The Church, which is to say the churches, do not show any sign of being able or willing to create an interdenominational ‘university’ here. This is unfortunate, because such an institution could be greatly beneficial in building up the possibilities for an enriched religious socialisation among all the Christians, clerics and people alike.

In the West, it seems very popular at the moment to speak about the decrease of Christianity in the place, or places, where it was founded, especially in Israel-Palestine/Palestine-Israel. But we in the North have to ask ourselves: do we truly understand the context of this ecumenism of life as it exists in the Holy Land? Do we in fact know anything at all about it, as it actually takes place on the ground? Did we ever make any real effort to understand a Christianity which has learned to live for centuries in a predominantly Islamic context, with all the complexities which arise from that? Do we bear in mind that this situation includes pros as well cons, and that these pros need to be emphasised as well, not just the cons? Couldn’t we learn something from this?
Still sticking with the ecumenical aspect, could you explain more about your own personal commitment and contribution in this regard? In the Holy Land, of course, but also elsewhere, more generally, what do you think are the most important challenges for ecumenism today? How would you like to see it develop?

Ecumenism today—that’s a huge question. First and foremost, I personally would not give up on finding a common structure for all of us who are baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This structure, traditionally called Church, needs to be different, however, from our historical models. We need to keep trying new things, and gradually a vision of how we could structure ourselves will emerge.

Let me give you a concrete example of something which might sound a bit strange at first—but just think about it. Why couldn’t the Latin Patriarch—that is, the Latin Rite Roman Catholic Bishop of Jerusalem—become the auxiliary bishop of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem? That would involve massive canonical changes on both sides, of course, but nothing can progress if everybody stays where they are already, without budging an inch. Change is inevitable, and to be welcomed. We need to find new ways to ‘see’, ‘envisage’ and ‘make visible’ a unity which already exists underneath the present structures anyway.

Unity is a gift of prayer, and not a matter of spiritualising everything. The unity we seek has to be tangible and real, not just spiritual or intentional. We do have to pray for unity, but prayer without action is empty—and action without prayer is unsustainable. The Risen Christ is very closely with his disciples during the forty days before the Ascension yet, even in all the glory of his resurrection, he still shows his own vulnerability. He invites Thomas to touch his wounds, right here in this city of Jerusalem—just around the corner from where we are sitting, so to speak. We need to learn once again, in a new way, to combine these two realities: the glory and the suffering. These have to become—in us—the veneration and the compassion. Otherwise, what kind of ecumenism are we actually doing, if its roots are not there?
And what is our contribution to the world going to be? What shall we answer when the Lord comes back tomorrow, and looks around? Will he still find faith?

There is a paradox here that seems to me very important. Yes, we must indeed stay very close to the most vulnerable, remaining with those people at the corners and edges of society whose exploitation often secures other people’s opulence, maybe including our own. This is a common task for all of us who believe actively in a God who became part of the creation, and who seek to follow a poor, abandoned and crucified Saviour. However if, while doing this, we begin as a consequence to lose all sense of the importance of beauty in our lives, we will ultimately be denying the glory of the resurrection. Christ is risen, and the fullness of the creation’s beauty already shines forth in him. This—the beauty of the Risen Christ—has to be acknowledged and celebrated and made manifest. The Church is the earthly mirror of this heavenly reality. We shall serve the poor in comforting their wounds, for sure, but also in representing them at the altar, which is to say before God’s face. This is the place where our communion with the angels, around what tradition calls ‘God’s throne’, becomes real. Being close to the poor does not mean denying the beauty of God’s creation and redemptive work, which we celebrate in the liturgy.

To be true to herself the Church has to make these extraordinary mysteries manifest, showing forth something of their glory. Holy service must be carried out in both these ways. Our service of the poor and our service of the altar belong inseparably together, like two sides of the same coin. Being focused on the poor does not mean neglecting the beauty which is so essential to the celebration of the liturgy. Everything, from the architecture to the vestments, from the music to the incense must convey the meaning of the mysteries being celebrated, giving a glimpse of the heavenly liturgy in which the faithful are participating. The beauty with which the liturgy is imbued is the earthly vessel of the divine Incarnation.

This double-sided coin, in which complete solidarity with the poor is at one with celebrating the Divine Liturgy in its
beauteous fullness, will have to become the ‘common
currency’ of those who believe in Christ. Only then can it be
put to use. This means a currency that functions in a multiply
enriched community, one in which we are all genuinely
oriented towards each other, and where commitment to the
poor and beautiful liturgical celebration are not seen as
cancelling each other out. Instead they will go absolutely
together. That would be my kind of ecumenism—but maybe
it’s not the ‘right answer’ to your question!

WR  Well, you are giving us food for thought, and I don’t suppose
anyone would say it’s the wrong answer... Could you also say a
word about what is happening on the inter-religious level,
particularly in the Holy Land, where you have many contacts
among both Jews and Muslims? What do you see as the role of
the diverse Christian communities in fostering inter-religious
relations in the Holy Land? What has been done so far? And
what more could be done?

RZ-W  I hope it won’t scandalise your readers too much if I say that
authentic inter-religious life in the Holy Land is virtually non-
existent. Even where there is something it tends to be quite
ineffective, especially in terms of changing the situation. I see
two negative tendencies at work here. On the one hand you
have what I call ‘a dialogue out of context’, which remains
‘abstract’, or even ‘purely religious’. This kind of dialogue may
take place but it avoids altogether the realities on the ground,
and does not even attempt to influence them. On the other
hand, even worse in my view, you have what I call ‘a dialogue
of humus-eating’. Everyone is friendly and pleasant towards
each other, but nothing real is ever tackled.

Sadly, the fragmentation caused by the conflict prevents
profound interreligious relations from developing, and they
never quite gain the kind of leverage they could do. People are
blocked from understanding what is needed by the
nationalisms and various forms of polarisation and political
manipulation which dominate the situation. Fear, the
deliberate creation of fear, and all the efforts that are made to
make sure that these feelings of fear continue, are preventing
the ‘doing of justice’ which could and should result from
genuine dialogue among the three main religions.
In principle, all three religions have to be represented for authentic dialogue to take place, which will be effective in the situation. If there are only two, the danger is very real that the dialogue will become these two joining up against the third, which helps no one. Instead of resolving the issues and conflicts which abound this only compounds them.

Don’t get me wrong, what I am saying here is not intended to judge or discourage all the truly good and honest efforts that many people are making at the grass-roots level to change these realities. Look, for example, at what happened this year during the Jewish feast of Pesach with the ‘Freedom Seder’ held in Hebron/al-Khalil. Activists from Israel and abroad, hosted by Palestinians, read a *Haggaddah* with references to the occupation. This was on the 50th anniversary of the first Jewish settlers arriving in the city—could there be a more meaningful way to ‘translate’ what the Exodus story of the liberation from Egypt means today, on the ground, in the Holy Land of Israel-Palestine/Palestine-Israel?

Christianity’s task is to testify to reconciliation. By that, I mean reconciliation across all—absolutely all—borders, walls and separations. The precondition for this, however, is trust, and that means taking people seriously. You will remember how, at the beginning of this interview, I said that a big defect of my education in Germany was that our professors treated the political conflict here in a purely abstract and theoretical way. It is people who matter, but how will they ever trust us if we don’t listen to their stories, their narratives, their suffering? And how will anyone trust us unless we acknowledge our own faults, and show a readiness to change?

As ‘outsider’ Christians from the West, we need to be aware of the huge amount of baggage we carry with us. We need to purify our understanding of ourselves, and of any contribution we might make here. We have to face the fact that we carry with us a lot of truly terrible anti-Jewish feeling and history. What are we going to do about that? We also have within us a huge amount of fear, prejudice and even downright hatred towards Islam—not just historically but even today, and increasingly so. We have to confront that one
too. What use will we be if we don’t face down these demons within us? Are we sufficiently determined to remain open to all? If not, how can we ever become effective agents for a peace that extends to everyone?

Some Western Christians have a strong tendency to identify with one side of the conflict and demonise the other. That is not genuine inter-religious dialogue. It makes matters worse by confirming and deepening the conflict instead of alleviating and overcoming it. Even offering what seems to be just support for ‘national’ aspirations seems to me to be an inadequate response to the situation. By itself it is certainly not enough. There is far more to this particular conflict than simply national aspirations.

There is a terrible irony about Western Christians coming in from the outside with their ‘solutions’ to the situation, as if they know better than those who actually live in it. What gives us any right to feel superior to the local Christians on the ground in that regard? They are ‘the Church’ here, not us. As visitors, we are their guests, not their masters, and should act accordingly. We have to be very careful not to foist onto them our own anti-Jewish and/or anti-Muslim ‘baggage’, which has such a long history in the West. We can easily poison the situation further with these old attitudes, which sometimes have far more power over us than we imagine.

The only way we can be of any use to the local church is if we come with the ‘double commitment’ I mentioned earlier. That is, a commitment which is open to both Jews and Muslims, deliberately standing in solidarity with both, seeing them all as our ‘cousins’ with whom we are journeying together on the way to eternity. The Church is a new thing in Christ, for sure, and different from anything else. But Christians, Muslims and Jews are still on this ‘way’ together. They can, and must learn from each other as they go. Here in Israel-Palestine/Palestine-Israel it is clearer than anywhere else in the world that no other alternative exists. This is the only hope there is for a genuine and lasting peace. The challenge lies in getting these ideas deeply rooted in the ‘Land’ we all call ‘Holy’. The religions have a great
responsibility and role to play here. But so far we have hardly scratched the surface.

WR You are also the founder of a publishing house which has a special focus on Jerusalem. Could you explain how this started, what your house does, the kind of publications it promotes, and how you see it contributing to both ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue in the Holy Land and further afield?

RZ-W AphorismA is indeed a small publishing house, and also an antiquarian bookshop and an agency. We are politically and religiously independent and trying hard to maintain this status. Our marketing slogan is ‘Right and Left of Jerusalem’. We use this phrase to underline that there is much more in common on all sides of Jerusalem than most folk realise. The issue on all sides is far more than just different ‘national’ or ‘nationalist’ ideas. Of course, it cannot be denied that the national aspirations of the peoples living in the Holy Land are part and parcel of the mosaic. But that is just the point: they are only part of it, not by any means the whole of it. These aspirations need to be put in context, and taken together with the many other elements which make up the whole picture. Without these other elements the mosaic is not just incomplete, but full of holes. You might even say ‘severely damaged’, because most of the mosaic is missing. Jerusalem is not one single thing, which exists in some kind of purity or isolation. To the contrary, it is a combination of many different things which are almost infinite in their variety. There are many worlds here, and within each of them there are further ‘worlds within worlds’. This is the reality we try to host and, however inadequately, show forth in AphorismA. The idea is to give a little glimpse of the great diversity which Jerusalem is by publishing Jews, Christians and Muslims alike, as well as people with no religious commitment at all. Our authors include Israelis and Palestinians, Europeans and others. Our means are limited and our economic possibilities are certainly a restraint, but we still hope that the small contribution we make adds one further constructive approach to the overall reality.
We also mentioned your political engagements. At one time you were among the founders of the Willy Brandt Center in Jerusalem and later the regional representative of a programme called Civil Peace Service. Could you tell our readers something about that work, and your experience of it here in the Holy Land? How do you see the relationship between the political and ecumenical aspects in this special place? And also between the political and the inter-religious dimensions in what might be described as the 'capital' of the three great monotheistic religions?

Towards the end of the 1990s I had the privilege of being somehow instrumental in bringing together some young politicians from Israel, Palestine and Germany under an umbrella organisation known as the International Union of Socialist Youth. We managed to create a framework in which these committed young people had the opportunity to sit down and learn together about this contentious area of the world in a constructive and cooperative way, which went beyond national or nationalistic boundaries and assumptions. This helped all of them to end up with a more cohesive and inclusive approach to the whole of humanity inhabiting this piece of earth, the land which lies between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan, in all its diversity. From 2004-2008 I also had the honour of working for the German government programme you mentioned, called Civil Peace Service (Ziviler Friedensdienst). Its objective was to help professionalise non-violent conflict intervention, and it operated in conjunction with non-governmental organisations towards this end. The various debates in the German peace movement formed the background to this cooperative effort. These included a feeling that while we always claimed to have the better theoretical answers, we were usually ignored and not always effective on the ground. So there was a need to do something in order to make all our good theories bear fruit in practice. So the aim of the programme was to train non-violent peace servants. The programme is still running today, and is now active on all continents. The intention was to spread the idea of ‘Do no harm’—but in an effective, not a ‘harmless’ way! It was not a
matter of being naively or idealistically opposed to violence but, rather, committed to actively keeping open the kinds of possibilities in which interventions that would change the situation could occur.

This was not just idealism. We were and are fully aware, that something like a peace industry exists, and that it is sometimes counter-productive. Peace programmes always face the danger of feeding what one has created, including the violent situations which make such programmes necessary. Their real purpose is to make themselves redundant, putting an end to the violent situation so that they are no longer necessary.

One of the very challenging aspects of my work was the difficulty of overcoming the gaps between the various social realities and spheres in which I was involved. ‘With whom I play, I cannot pray, and with whom I pray, I cannot play’—this is a saying of a friend of mine in Jerusalem, a Rabbi who is very active in inter-religious affairs, and it describes this situation very well. How do we get out of our ghettos, out of our closed circle of the ‘usual suspects’, in order to interact with so many others with whom we really could make a difference? How can we create new alliances, new sisterhoods so to speak, which are genuinely future-oriented? This is a challenge for everyone involved in dialogue at any level, whether ecumenical or inter-religious. Even the ‘dialogue circles’ we create, or enter into, can become ‘closed ghettos’ in their own way, if we are not careful.

WR Finally, as a committed and fully engaged layman what advice would you like to give the Church in order to develop fully the notion of lay ministry, that huge potential which seems to go largely untapped?

RZ-W To be honest, I have never been a friend of the term ‘lay’, and I always try to avoid using it. This is only partly because I insist on taking seriously the priesthood of all the baptised. This is a clear biblical teaching which ought to be a matter of course for everyone, but it is very often overlooked and ignored in practice. The service which Stephen was providing as a deacon in the Acts of the Apostles is something which the whole church has to learn anew today, and the message it
conveys should not be ‘clericalised’. We are all here to serve, and that means being present in all the crucial (what a word!) spots of the world. It really does not matter if that presence is through the activities of a priest or a deacon, a monk or a nun, a priestess or a deaconess, or any brother or sister in Christ. Whoever of all the baptised is providing the service, whatever kind of service it is, what matters is that in this being present we learn anew what the different gifts and charisms arising in the Church actually are. That means recognising all of these gifts as blessed, and giving each one of them its rightful place, letting it shine and bear fruit.

The Church—any church at all—is wrongly advised when it seeks only to maintain a structure. We should not waste the blessing of priesthood by seeing it only as a means of governing and administrating a parish, or a diocese, or whatever. There is more to life, and to priesthood, including the priesthood of all the baptised, than simply administering and governing. The Church’s vocation is to listen to all the gifts, so as to use them to the full in service to each other, and useful to all the just causes in the world. There is a need to put the priestly service of the ordained truly ‘into’ this body of Christ, and not over and above it. Only then will it make sense to speak about other ministries. These other ministries will be different both in the tools they use and in their status—be it sacramental or not. But they too come from God and, in that regard, their value is not less, but equal. They too are essential for setting up the signs which show that heaven is already present on earth, and intertwined with our daily realities. Christ is Risen—therefore Change is Possible!

WR  Rainer Zimmer-Winkel, allow me to thank you on behalf of One in Christ for spending time with us and sharing with our readers some of the profound personal insights you have gleaned, over the last thirty years, by sitting at the feet of the ‘cathedra’ of the Holy Land. With ecumenical, inter-religious and political realities all continually intertwining, this has surely been a unique learning experience. The Holy Land holds lessons for all of us, wherever we happen to be.

For those wishing to visit AphorismA (Right and Left from Jerusalem), the website may be found at:aphorisma.e
REPORTS

GERMAN BISHOPS’ PROPOSED GUIDELINES ON EUCHARISTIC SHARING IN INTERCHURCH FAMILIES

Ruth Reardon*

In February 2018 the German Bishops’ Conference approved pastoral guidelines for the admission of non-Catholic partners in interchurch marriages to communion by a large majority. However, seven diocesan bishops wrote to the Vatican expressing their objections to the text and asking for clarification. A meeting took place in Rome on 3 May between representatives of the German Bishops and curial officials; Pope Francis asked the bishops to come to as unanimous a position as possible. After being informed of the discussion he approved a letter to the bishops saying that the questions raised on 3 May needed further study at world level, and the German document was not ready for publication.

At the close of the plenary assembly of the German Bishops’ Conference in February 2018, its President Cardinal Reinhard Marx issued a press release saying that the German Bishops, after intensive discussion, had prepared pastoral guidelines for the admission of non-Catholic partners in interchurch marriages to communion, in individual cases and after careful pastoral discernment with respect to their need, provided those partners affirmed Catholic eucharistic faith. The proposed handout for the guidance of Catholic pastors was approved by a large majority of the German Bishops’ Conference, but was still open to changes in the text.

The full text was not published, but the German bishops seemed to be making a straightforward application of the provisions of the 1993 Vatican Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism. There appeared to be no mention of limiting admission to

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communion to special occasions, as some other guidelines—including *One Bread One Body* (the British and Irish guidelines of 1998)—had done. (For a commentary on these guidelines, see *One in Christ* 35/2, 1999, pp. 109-30.) This proposed application by the German bishops was very welcome to interchurch families; the Interchurch Families International Network had asked the 2015 Synod on the Family to make it clear that admission need not be limited to particular occasions, but because of the nature of marriage and family life the need for admission could be regarded as on-going in some cases (see *One in Christ* 49/1, 2015, pp. 142-60). There remained an ambiguity on this point between ‘exceptional occasions’ and ‘exceptional cases’ (meaning couples). The provisions of the Directory were of course permissive, not prescriptive, and bishops would still have the right to make their own applications, but it would be helpful to interchurch families if it were made clear on the world level that permission for admission in some cases could be on-going (as indeed some bishops have decided).

In an interview with a Lutheran press agency, the vice-president of the Bishops’ Conference, Bishop Franz-Josef Bode of Osnabrück, was reported as saying that the Bishops wanted to recognise and give a pastoral foundation to what was already happening in practice, since in many places Protestant spouses already received communion alongside their Catholic partners. Bishop Bode was present at the 2014 and 2015 Synods on the Family.

**Opposition from within the German Episcopal Conference: a letter to Rome**

However, it was not long before some German Bishops began to express their fundamental opposition to the proposal. In March Cardinal Gerhard Müller, formerly Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, declared that this was a doctrinal rather than a pastoral matter, and bishops’ conferences had no authority to decide doctrinal issues. This seemed strange in view of the fact that episcopal conferences had been urged to make their own applications of the provisions of the 1993 Directory, and many had already done so. Indeed, Catholic ministers had been instructed to decide in individual cases in accordance with the Directory’s norms, if the diocesan bishop or the Bishops’ Conference had not established their own norms (Directory, 130). Cardinal Müller’s view would seem to take no account
of the position taken by the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism (8), which states that there are two main principles involved. First, expressing the unity of the Church generally forbids eucharistic sharing; second, sharing in the means of grace sometimes commends it. There is a norm; there are exceptions. The local bishop is to decide on what should be done in practice, unless the bishops’ conference or the Holy See has decided otherwise. Subsequently the 1983 Code of Canon Law (844) and the pastoral application made in the 1993 Ecumenical Directory have laid down at world level the parameters within which Catholic bishops and episcopal conferences are expected to make their own applications. A number of such applications, both by individual bishops and by conferences of bishops have been published. How then can the German Bishops’ Conference not have the authority to make its own application?

However, following this lead seven German bishops, led by Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne, wrote to the Vatican on 22 March suggesting that the German Bishops’ Conference had overstepped its competence and that its decision was therefore unlawful. They asked for clarification as to whether the question of admission to communion for Protestant spouses in an interchurch marriage could be decided at the level of an episcopal conference, or if a decision at the level of the universal Church is required. The letter was sent to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Archbishop Luis Ladaria, and to the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Kurt Koch, without prior consultation with Cardinal Marx.

The text of this letter was not at first made public (it was later leaked to the press), but Cardinal Marx published his own reply to the arguments it raised on the German Bishops’ Conference website on 4 April. He pointed out that the proposed pastoral handout did not speak of general admission for spouses in interchurch marriages, but said that in individual cases a serious need for eucharistic sharing might arise because of the way a couple shared their married life. He referred to canon 844, and to the fact that guidelines had been established elsewhere by bishops and bishops’ conferences. The bishops had studied the relevant theological and ecumenical documents, and the possibilities offered by canonical regulations, so that they would be in line with the universal Church. Pope Francis had encouraged further steps forward in ecumenism and in pastoral care,
and the bishops wished to create greater clarity for ministers and couples.

**A meeting in Rome**

On 19 April the German bishops announced that Pope Francis had called Cardinal Marx, Cardinal Woelki and Bishop Felix Genn of Münster (known as a good mediator) to Rome to discuss the matter. On 30 April the Vatican press office announced that there would be a meeting on 3 May of a group of German cardinals and bishops with several heads of dicasteries and curial officials at the Vatican. Besides the three already mentioned, the German delegation included Bishop Wiesemann of Speyer, president of the Doctrinal Commission of the German Episcopal Conference, Bishop Vodeholzer of Regensburg, vice-president of the Doctrinal Commission, Bishop Feige of Magdeburg, president of the German Bishops’ Commission for Ecumenism, and Fr Langendörfer SJ, secretary general of the German Episcopal Conference.

Besides Archbishop Ladaria and Cardinal Koch, Mgr Markus Graulich, under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts and Fr Hermann Geissler, office head of the Doctrinal Section of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith were to be present.

The Holy See Press Office issued a release on the evening of 3 May. It explained that the German Episcopal Conference had prepared a pastoral handout entitled ‘Walking with Christ in the footsteps of Unity: Mixed Marriages and Common Participation in the Eucharist’; this had been approved by more than three-quarters of the bishops at the end of the plenary session held 19-22 February 2018. A not insignificant number of pastors, among them seven diocesan bishops, did not feel, for a variety of reasons, that they could give their consent, and wrote to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legal Texts. In accordance with Pope Francis’ wish, an exchange was arranged between some German bishops and curial officials. The names of those present were listed, and it was noted that the meeting took place at the CDF headquarters, and that the language used was German. Mgr Ladaria explained that Pope Francis appreciated the ecumenical commitment of the German bishops, and asked them to seek for a possibly unanimous arrangement in a spirit of ecclesial communion. During the meeting
various points of view were discussed; for example, the relationship of the question to the faith as well as to pastoral care, its relevance for the universal Church, and juridical aspects of the subject. Archbishop Ladaria would inform Pope Francis on the content of the exchange, which took place in a cordial and fraternal atmosphere.

The background

This is not the first time that the German Episcopal Conference has been openly divided on the issue of eucharistic sharing for interchurch families. Following the publication of the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1993, the question of eucharistic sharing in interchurch families became a matter for debate and decision by many episcopal conferences. Many national Ecumenical Commissions worked intensively on the subject. In Germany the Commission issued a statement in early February 1997 (German original in Una Sancta, 1, 1997, and English translation in Interchurch Families, 6/1, 1998).

To summarise: the text drew attention to the two fundamental Catholic principles for eucharistic communion: witness to the unity of the Church and sharing in the means of grace. Families in interchurch marriages may experience serious spiritual need in certain situations. The underlying principles for eucharistic sharing in individual exceptional situations, namely that the eucharist is a sign and source of the unity of the church and at the same time spiritual food, are seen, in the case of interchurch marriages, from a particular theological perspective: according to Catholic belief the valid marriage contract between two baptised partners means the continuing mutual giving of the sacrament of marriage, which is a sign of the unity of Christ with his Church. The Christian family is to be seen as ‘embodiment of the church’ and shares in the ministry of the church. Neither a refusal for all, nor a permission for all partners in interchurch marriages who are not Catholics to share in the eucharist would be appropriate. Since pastorally the establishment of objective criteria for serious spiritual need is extremely difficult, ascertaining such a need can as a rule only be done by the minister concerned. Essentially this must become clear in pastoral discussion. When full sharing in the eucharist is granted to the partner who is not a Catholic, care must be taken that an individual case such as this does not become a general precedent. At present the Roman Catholic
Church is convinced that its responsibility is to grant communion at the Lord’s table to Christians of other denominations only in exceptional cases.

The German Ecumenical Commission had been responding to a report by a joint working group that had been set up by the Bavarian Council of Churches and the Nuremberg Council of Churches; this had asked for a blanket invitation to communion for all partners in interchurch marriages. The Ecumenical Commission had taken care to remain strictly within the terms of the 1993 Directory in stressing that admission to communion could only be allowed in particular cases; not all the German Bishops, however, agreed with the statement, and the question continued to be hotly disputed in Germany. In 2002 the then-President of the German Episcopal Conference, Cardinal Lehmann, issued a press statement at the end of the February plenary assembly; the bishops were preparing to issue a document on ‘Church and Eucharist’, which would include the question of admission for interchurch families:

Mixed marriages have to be seen as a particular life situation for Christians, whose communion in marriage is grounded in baptism and rooted in the sacramental nature of their Christian marriage. There must be further exploration of how far the profound ecclesial character of communion in marriage may justify exceptional admission to the eucharist. This is not so much a matter of unique occasions celebrated in the life of the family, such as First Communion, but more a matter of the constant striving of the couple to live their path of faith together. The pastor who accompanies a couple has a particular role here.

A new situation?

In recent years the ‘profound ecclesial character of communion in marriage’ has been intensively studied at world level in the 2014-15 Synods on the Family and in the Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia (1916). The intention has not been to bring in new legislation related to marriage, but to focus hearts and minds on the need for a pastoral understanding of the situation of married couples in a new way. Pope Francis has stressed the importance of pastoral support for marriage and family life, and the pastoral discernment that is needed by each and every couple in its own particular situation. He showed his understanding of the deep need felt by some interchurch families for eucharistic sharing and his encouragement for them to ‘go forward’ in
his visit to the Lutheran church in Rome in November 2015 (One in Christ, 50/1, 2016, pp. 83-5). He did not appear to wish to make a ruling himself; he wanted to allow the couple to make their own discernment and to follow utheir conscience.

It seemed at first that Pope Francis did not wish to give a ruling in the case of the dispute among the German bishops, he wanted them to work hard to reach a unanimous decision as far as they possibly could. (The precise meaning of his words was disputed.) This is consistent with the approach of the Roman Catholic Church to mixed marriages since the Second Vatican Council. It could never be the same again since the Decree on Ecumenism, the Declaration on Religious Liberty, and the new understanding of marriage that came with Vatican II. The subject of mixed marriages has always been a contentious one, particularly where there are large numbers of divided Christians living side by side, as in Germany and England. It has never become a top priority at world level. The motu proprio of 1970 laid down certain clear boundaries (for example, no promise about the children’s upbringing could be asked of the other Christian partner) but there was a good deal of latitude left for decisions to be made by national episcopal conferences. The national directories that applied the motu proprio to their own territories differed considerably between themselves (see One in Christ 7/2-3, 1971, pp. 210-34, and additional updates in the following numbers). These directories were open to revision; for example, the wording of the promise required from the Catholic partner has been revised twice in England since the first national directory in 1970.

The 1970 motu proprio stated that mixed marriages do not help in promoting Christian unity ‘except in some cases’. It is those exceptional cases already identified in 1970 that are those most likely to be the exceptional cases who experience a deep desire for eucharistic sharing. Many of the couples who ‘share the sacraments of baptism and marriage’ do not, indeed, wish to share the eucharist; like many one-church couples, they are not in church at all. There are other reasons for which mixed couples do not wish to share the eucharist, while some who do experience a deep need and desire have found that they have been able to share communion without causing any problems in their local communities. The number of those interchurch spouses who ask for admission to communion and fulfil the conditions are not as great as has been suggested on both sides of
the debate. But there is certainly a great fear in some quarters that the proposal will be understood as a blanket permission for all those spouses who share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, shortly to be followed by a more general admission for other Christians. This fear makes it very difficult for some to see the issue as a pastoral one of the greatest importance to some interchurch couples and families.

The controversy that was been raised not only inside but outside Germany attracted more attention at world level than the subject received at the 2014-15 Synods on the Family. Following the meeting of 3 May it looked as though a very heavy responsibility rested with the German bishops; what happened to their guidelines would surely have an influence beyond Germany itself. Would the German Bishops be able to come to a unanimous decision? Would they find a way to witness clearly both to the Catholic conviction of the close link between ecclesial and eucharistic unity, and also to the nature of marriage as an on-going, lifelong relationship, not a series of exceptional moments—wedding, baptism, first communion, confirmation, funeral?

**A letter from Rome**

But they were not to be left alone with this responsibility. Pope Francis decided that the questions raised at the 3 May meeting must be studied further at world level. This was made clear in a leaked letter from Archbishop (Cardinal-designate) Ladaria to Cardinal Marx, copied to the other German bishops who had been at the Rome meeting; it was dated 25 May and appeared in the press on 4 June.

Archbishop Ladaria wrote that as agreed on 3 May, he had informed Pope Francis about the discussion; he had spoken twice with the Pope, giving him a summary of the conversation on 11 May, and discussing the question further on 24 June. The points made in his letter had the explicit approval of the pope.

First, he appreciated the ecumenical efforts of the German Episcopal Conference, and their close collaboration with the Evangelical Church of Germany. The shared commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 showed the possibility of common witness and encouraged us to go forward with trust towards ever deeper unity. Second, the discussions of 3 May showed that the text of the guide raises many problems, and Pope Francis concludes that the document is not ready for publication. This is because the issue touches the faith of the Church
and is significant for the universal Church. It also affects ecumenical relations with other Churches. Further, it concerns the interpretation of canon 844, and the dicasteries of the Holy See are to clarify the questions this leaves open, at the level of the universal Church; in particular it appears opportune to leave to the diocesan bishop the judgment on the existence of ‘grave and urgent necessity’. Thirdly, Pope Francis is greatly concerned that the spirit of episcopal collegiality should remain alive in the German Episcopal Conference.

Since the letter appeared there has been a proliferation of commentaries and forecasts, from many different points of view. No doubt there will be many more. A thorough re-thinking of the question at world level may take a long time. There are many apparently conflicting values and concerns to be recognised and held together. It took from 1965 to 1970 to establish at world level the basic parameters of the parental ‘promise’ required when a Roman Catholic married a Christian of another communion, and there are still different applications and attitudes in different regions.

Fifty years on, there has been enormous progress in ecumenical relations, and there has been a renewed understanding of the nature of married life on the part of the Catholic Church, particularly since the Synods on the Family and the appearance of Amoris Laetitia. As Pope St John Paul II said to interchurch families at York in 1982: ‘You live in your marriage the hopes and difficulties of the path to Christian unity’. The ‘exceptional cases’ of those mixed marriages who promote Christian unity referred to in the 1970 motu proprio have become the ‘exceptional cases’ who appealed to the 2014 and 2015 Synods to recognise their on-going need for eucharistic sharing for the sake of their family life. By such sharing they can embody and express more fully the hopes as well as the difficulties of the path to Christian unity. They would like to offer this as a small service to the whole Church.
INTERCHURCH FAMILIES: WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

Doral Hayes*

This paper explores the fears and hopes of interchurch parents for their children in 1968 when mixed marriages were considered a principal ecumenical problem. In 1968 it was tentatively suggested that it might be possible to bring up children within two churches; many saw this as impossible. Yet some interchurch families dared to hope that it might prepare the way for visible unity in Christ. This paper considers the response they received and proposes it is time to examine the lived experience of Interchurch Families and to hear the testimony of Interchurch children asking what relevance this has for the church today.

Fifty years ago in 1968, when a small group of ‘mixed marriage’ couples (where one partner was Roman Catholic and the other from another Christian denomination) first came together at national level in England, they coined the term ‘interchurch marriages’ to distinguish themselves from other kinds of mixed marriages. In 1967 mixed marriages were described by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity Information Service as the ‘primary and crucial ecumenical problem.’ Contrary to this belief, a few people began to suggest that, in the light of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, mixed marriages need not be a problem to the churches, or to ecumenical progress, but rather an opportunity and resource. Concern about the Christian upbringing of the children in such marriages had long been recognised as the central issue. This was described in a ground-breaking

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1 Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity Information Service (1967) 3, 9.
editorial published in the English Catholic ecumenical journal One in Christ as ‘the most difficult of all problems’, since the Roman Catholic Church refused to recognise a marriage between a Catholic and a Christian of another communion unless both partners promised that all children would be baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church. In this paper I will highlight the hopes and fears of interchurch couples for their children as they expressed them fifty years ago, and the responses they received at that time. In addition to hearing the lived experience of interchurch couples, the voices of the now adult interchurch children need to be heard if there is to be constructive reflection on new pastoral approaches.

The Second Vatican Council aroused great expectation among ecumenically minded Catholics, with Ruth Reardon, one founder of AIF describing this as a time ‘when everything seemed possible’. Vatican II brought the Roman Catholic Church officially into the ecumenical movement, spelled out its commitment to respecting religious liberty and developed Catholic teaching on the nature and value of marriage, thus impacting the Roman Catholic view of mixed marriages and leading to a change of policy as expressed the Papal document Matrimonia Mixta in 1970. Following the Council there were discussions between the churches, some explaining their difficulties with the Roman Catholic position, and Catholics explaining why their ecclesiology had led them to a position that was offensive to other Christians.

In some European countries, with encouragement from Rome, the practice on asking both partners to make the traditional promise about the baptism and upbringing of the children began to change, but such changes largely bypassed England.

One in Christ, published in England, tried to spread information about new thinking and practices in other countries, but many people simply did not believe that this was possible. The 1968 editorial made a revolutionary proposal: that the children of mixed marriage families might be brought up within the life of both their parents’ churches, and only when they left home would they have to decide between them.

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Several theologians were asked to comment on the proposal; the responses were mainly cautious, but in general the idea was thought worthy of further consideration. It was already being considered by some ecumenically-minded Catholics that where the other Christian partner in a mixed marriage was devout, and the Catholic a nominal Christian, it might in practice be better for the children to be brought up in the church of the more devout partner. This could at least be tolerated by the Roman Catholic Church, even if not approved. But the Catholic partner would have to acknowledge their sacred duty and promise that he/she would do all they could for the Catholic baptism and upbringing of the children. Nobody considered what to do if the partners had ‘two informed consciences’,1 both firm in their own church allegiance, and equally desirous of sharing their faith with their children. These couples posed the ‘greatest problem’2 and the pastoral response was to tell the couple not to get married.

However, in the post-conciliar climate it began to seem to some mixed couples that a more ecumenical approach might be a real possibility: a shared upbringing that would offer an experience of life in two churches. When the first meeting of mixed marriage couples was convened on a national level in 1968, those who came to it found to their joy that others too shared this perspective. They coined the term ‘interchurch marriages’ for those who wanted their marriages to express an ecumenical commitment to both churches and to one another.

Whatever decision they made about the church-belonging of their children they were committed to both churches. ‘Mixed marriages’ continued to be the official terminology of the Roman Catholic Church for such marriages between Christians, but in 1970 the Bishops of England and Wales estimated that 10 per cent of mixed marriages in their countries could be reasonably called interchurch marriages.

The central difficulty for interchurch families in 1968 was the insistence by the Roman Catholic Church on the promise that all children would be raised as Catholics, which seemed to remove joint parental responsibility. Some made the required promise reluctantly, some refused to make it and married in another church resulting in the Catholic being barred from communion; some had not been required to

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1 Editorial, One in Christ (1968): 131.
2 Ibid.
make the promise due to special circumstances; and some hoped to marry without being obliged to make it and remain in good standing within his/her church. Many faced disapproval from family, priests and ministers; a common reaction from Catholic priests had been: ‘I’ve never met a couple like you before’. They felt like oddities, afraid they wouldn't fit in, and that their children might be treated as oddities too, to be fought over by grandparents and churches. There were however hopes that the Catholic rules would change everywhere so that no longer would both partners have to make the promise. This would open the door for the possibility of a joint parental decision to bring up the children in the church that seemed right for each family, or to consider seriously together the possibility of a fully joint upbringing.

There had been many criticisms of the One in Christ proposal from a theological, canonical and not least, a psychological point of view, so the organisers of the first meeting invited a child psychologist and Catholic sister to comment on the proposal. Would it really mean that the children would feel insecure, not knowing where they belonged, as couples had often been told? Or would the parents be able to help their children to grow into a faith and unity that they were beginning to experience themselves, a unity that their churches were now committed to? The response was amazingly reassuring. What matters to children, concluded Sr Mary John, is the harmony and integrity of their parents. She found the idea of bringing up the children of a mixed marriage in both communions attractive, but was puzzled by one part of the proposal. Why should a child eventually have to choose between them? This question came as a surprise but filled participants with hope for the future. They envisaged their families preparing the way for the unity of the churches. Even if unity did not come before their children made their own decisions, perhaps the churches would be closer together so that they did not have to make a choice.

There were still all kinds of problems to face—how far would the churches be prepared to adapt their disciplines to allow the degree of sacramental sharing for which parents hoped for their children? The publication of Matrimonia Mixta in 1970 showed that rules could change; the experimental legislation on the ‘promise’ of the 1960s was extended to the whole Catholic Church and the Bishops of England and Wales produced their own Directory making it clear that no promise was required of the other Christian parent. This raised hopes for a more flexible pastoral approach, in which the pastors of both partners could
be involved. Already in 1968 the Lambeth Conference in its Report on Renewal in Unity welcomed a move towards joint pastoral care of families both before and after marriage by the clergy of the two churches, but a report from the first mixed marriage meeting in 1968 records a participant commenting, ‘I have not noticed it happening much in England.’ However, Matrimonia Mixta encouraged couples by stating that ‘mixed marriages could help in re-establishing unity among Christians’ and by commending joint pastoral care for mixed marriage families together with ministers of other churches.

The Joint Working Group between the British Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church took up the question of joint pastoral care for interchurch marriages, and its recommendations were published in 1971. This was encouraging although the idea of a dual upbringing was not accepted as a real possibility. But couples were persistent, and by 1994, when Churches Together in Marriage: Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families was produced by the Group for Local Unity of Churches Together in England, there was considerable experience of shared celebrations of baptism. Interchurch children were also beginning to ask for shared celebrations of confirmation. One pastoral guideline for clergy and ministers said: ‘Do everything possible to support interchurch parents who want to share the riches of both traditions with their children and bring them up within the life of two church communities; respect any feeling of double belonging on the part of the children, who should not be required to make an exclusive choice’. Pastoral care for interchurch families remains patchy; in some places good, in others almost non-existent, depending on the understanding and attitudes of local bishops, clergy and ministers. What has always been valuable is the mutual pastoral care that has been exercised by interchurch couples for one another.

The fundamental questions that interchurch couples asked themselves fearfully but also hopefully, were these: Would their children come to a living faith in Jesus Christ? Would the churches allow them to live out and carry forward their relationship with two churches as their parents had hoped and as they themselves might wish

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as they grew older? In the early years they were working with an untried proposal. Now there is half a century of experience of dual upbringing to assess.

In 2017, I had the privilege of connecting with a group of adult children of the Association of Interchurch Families (AIF), when I carried out a small qualitative study which has become the starting point for a larger piece of work investigating the lived experience of interchurch children. In 1968 it was not possible to examine the impact of being raised in an interchurch family, while a small study was carried out by AIF in 1984; but in 2018 a more detailed analysis could be possible as a larger group of interchurch children are available spanning different generations. The changing shape of both church and society in the UK indicates less attachment to denomination and tradition and this work has implications for organisations like AIF as well as for the church more broadly.

It is time to ask how this church upbringing and the pastoral response they and their parents received from the churches has influenced their faith, perception of and sense of belonging to the church. It is time to consider whether they were confused—did they feel like an oddity or a problem?

In conclusion, interchurch parents were and still are concerned about whether their children will come to a living faith and how the churches will support them to carry forward their relationship with two churches, as far as they wish to do so. The pastoral response remains patchy and reflecting on the lived experience of interchurch families highlights the need to listen to the testimony of interchurch children, to hear their unique perspective on the pastoral care of their families. Each interchurch family is unique requiring a pastoral response adapted to its needs. Pope Francis writes ‘Education in the faith has to adapt to each child’,¹ ‘all of us are striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families … Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together’.² Interchurch families are by their nature families of great faith, informed consciences and ecumenical resource. The churches need to hear their voices, reflecting the joy and pain they have experienced across the Church of God.

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² *Amoris Laetitia*, par. 325.
In January 2018 I had the joy of being invited to teach for a week in Rabat (Morocco), in the wonderful ecumenical Institute which is Al Mowafaqa. The name speaks for itself: Al Mowafaqa means ‘agreement’. Inaugurated in 2014 in the presence of Moroccan and foreign personalities from Africa and Europe, this institute of ecumenical theology, co-directed by a Reformed pastor and a female Catholic theologian, presents as a place of formation, reflection and promotion of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. The adventure began in 2012, with the conversion of the facilities of a former centre of documentation, La Source, itself the successor of a social centre run by religious. Supported by DEFAP (Service protestant de mission), and benefitting from agreements with the Institut catholique of Paris and the University of Strasbourg, Al Mowafaqa received its first intake of students in 2014. The Institute provides two kinds of formation: an undergraduate course of theology, and a certificate in cultural and religious dialogue, along with courses in Arabic language and civilisation. It is about providing a formation in Christian theology and Bible studies for religious, priests, pastors and pastoral workers from a wide range of Sub-Saharan Churches, as well as being more broadly a place of culture and dialogue, open to Moroccan society, and beyond that to the whole African continent. African and European professors teach intensive sessions, with Moroccan university personnel covering Islam. All of which indicates a richness of cultural, intellectual and religious encounters.

I had come to provide an intensive session on Pauline literature in third year theology, and in this too short time I found a wealth of discoveries and encounters which I could not have imagined.

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Firstly, the diversity of students, all equally involved in studies which enthuse them and become a place for exchanging points of view, and sometimes for confrontation, all in the mutual respect which comes from a common faith in Jesus Christ. A course on Paul’s letters, with his radical message, will not go uncontested, but requires close attention to the text and its interpretation. Exchanges, sometimes difficult but always fruitful, took place on the question of faith and works, on the precedence of God’s gift and human response, on the availability to all of salvation offered, and on freedom, on ‘predestination’, etc. A smaller group consisted of a Catholic lay woman and two priests, Reformed and predominantly evangelical pastors-to-be (men and women), and one or other Pentecostalist group leader. Some already have a university formation, others are in the process of acquiring it, but all display an admirable commitment and seriousness of purpose. Intensive sessions (28 hours over 5 days plus Saturday afternoon) with small numbers of students (between 10 and 15) make it possible to really get to know each other. One very soon becomes aware of the importance of cultural backgrounds and of each person’s human and religious presuppositions, which leads to greater respect, more careful reflection, and more considered language. Each one, teacher and student alike, feels bound to examine how they understand the biblical text and their own faith, to face up to and accept the lines of difference, which are no longer lines of fracture, but places of dialogue which open the way to a clearer, broader vision, and an opportunity to progress in how one thinks about, and expresses, one’s faith.

The biblical text, of which the students have an exact knowledge, is a privileged place out of which a variety of readings and interpretations emerge—from the necessary, sometimes disconcerting work of ‘establishing’ a text, to grammatical and lexical studies which often reveal where fractures have occurred, and show that other readings remain possible. How to articulate them, without minimising them? Unity is no flabby consensus, but the reality of a respectful, friendly and hospitable dialogue, in which the other becomes an indispensable partner, whose position and presence one interiorises. In this, everyone remains aware that they must safeguard the riches and logic of their own tradition, tied to a particular Christian anchorage, but that this logic can only gain by being open to others.

Within this Muslim world, hospitable yet necessarily reserved, Christians are called to live and to witness together. The Moroccan
situation is particular, in that Christians live there in peace, in a country which has not known religious freedom for its own members. Proselytism is ruled out. All that matters is witness, with a language which is prudent and careful, not censured, but respectful of a context which remains difficult. For me, this stay was a wonderful and inspiring stage on the sometimes fraught path of ecumenical dialogue, of encounter and travelling together towards a living faith, ever richer and more open.

Paul’s letters—a place of Christian debate and exchange. The text of Romans 8: 29-30 marks an amazing crescendo: the momentum of men and women called by God to become conform to the image of his Son who is the ‘first-born among many brothers’. The usual translation is: ‘For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son ... And those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.’ The translation poses a problem: is ‘those whom’ exclusive (those and no others), or is it inclusive (all human beings, without exception)? The choice one makes entails a different understanding of the theme of ‘predestination’, but also of the role of human action in the economy of salvation.

An exclusive reading, which makes some doubt the possibility of salvation for all human beings, leads above all to the requirement that each person should demonstrate, by means of ‘works’, the reality of their conversion and return to God. Some Christians insist on a decision taken by God in advance which would prohibit salvation for ‘those who do not love him’. Instead, could one not read this (advance) pro-ject as God’s primary initiative who, in his Son, reconciled humanity to himself, a reconciliation which Christ achieved for all? The love of God, the self-giving of Jesus the Son, precedes us. But each one is free to welcome him. However, in their concern for personal commitment and militant evangelisation, not a few evangelicals refuse to read in this text a salvation open to all, beyond the frontiers of a voluntarist confession and moral activism. But surely, the apostle’s vision might be broader than that? Taken as a whole, verses 18-30 envisage the salvation of the whole of creation, caught up in the wake of humanity’s God-ward momentum of filiation—an ‘affiliated creation’, as has been said. How then could one possibly countenance any other criterion of salvation, except love: ‘for those who love God’? God still leaves each one free to respond, or not, to his love, to welcome or not the offered salvation. Grace is still costly ... and the mercy of God inexhaustible!


**HISTORIC ORDINATION OF A DEACONESS IN THE TEHRAN DIOCESE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH**

Hratch Tchilingirian*

The Primate of the Diocese of Tehran ordained a young woman as a deaconess in Tehran’s St. Sarkis Mother Church on September 25, 2017. Even though the office of deaconess had existed in Armenian Church convents for centuries, this was a historic first. It is the first time that a lay woman, not a nun, was ordained a ‘parish deacon.’

Twenty-four year old Ani-Kristi Manvelian, an anesthesiologist by profession, was ordained—along with a young man Mayis Mateosian—by Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian, the Primate of the Diocese of Tehran. ‘What I have done is in conformity with the Tradition of the Church and nothing else,’ said Archbishop Sarkissian. This was his personal initiative as a diocesan primate in order, as he explained, ‘to revitalise the participation of women also in our church’s liturgical life,’ adding, ‘do not be surprised, a woman could also become a servant of the Holy Altar.’

Deaconess Ani-Kristi has been involved in the life of the church in Tehran since she was very young. She used to perform the duties of an acolyte during church services, such as reading the psalms and carrying the ceremonial candle.

In explaining the purpose of the ordination, Archbishop Sarkissian said:

> Today, our Church is confronting the imperative of self-examination and self-critique. It is imperative to rejuvenate the participation of the people in the social, educational and service spheres of the Church. It is our deep conviction that the active participation of women in the life of our Church would allow Armenian women to be involved more enthusiastically and vigorously, and would allow them to be connected and engaged. They would provide dedicated and loving service [to the

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people]. The deaconess, no doubt, would also be a spiritual and church-dedicated mother, educator, and why not, a model woman through her example. It is with this deep conviction that we are performing this ordination, with the hope that we are neither the first nor the last to do it.

According to the Primate, parish priests in Tehran are watchful and keen to recruit more women who fit the profile of prospective deaconesses. What is special and novel about Deaconess Ani-Kristi Manvelian’s ordination is that she is a ‘parish’ deacon—that is, she is not a member of a convent or a religious order, like the Kalfayan Sisters in Istanbul or Gayanyants Sisters at Birds Nest in Jibel, Lebanon, who have a few sisters among their ranks and are not ordained deaconesses. Like her male counterparts in the Armenian Church, if and when Deaconess Ani-Kristi marries, she will continue to serve as a deaconess.

Deaconesses have been part of the Christian tradition from the early years of the faith. There are numerous references in the Epistles and early Church writings. In the Armenian Church tradition, the development of the office of female diaconate is divided into four historical periods according to Fr Abel Oghlukian, the author of a study on the subject: (a) 4th-8th centuries in Greater Armenia; (b) 9th-11th centuries in Eastern and Cilician Armenia, where the term ‘deaconess’ is included in the book of ordination; (c) 12th century and on, where there are ‘literary references and rites for the ordination of deaconesses in liturgical texts in Cilicia and eastern Armenia’; and (d) 17th century renewal of female diaconate.¹

The last ordained monastic deaconess in the Armenian Church was Sister Hripsime Sasounian in Istanbul. The late Patriarch Shnork Kalustian of Constantinople ordained Sister Hripsime of Kalfayan Sisters (established in 1866) as a deaconess in 1982, using the canon of ordination used for male deacons. Damascus-born Deaconess Hripsime was 54 years old at the time. She passed away in 2007.²

² For an extensive discussion of deaconesses in the Armenian Church, see Fr Abel Oghlukian’s study in note above and Knarik Meneshian’s article
In North America, Seta Simonian Atamian was the first adult woman ordained as an acolyte, a lower rank, by Archbishop Vatche Hovsepian of the Western Diocese in 1984 at St. Andrew Armenian Church, in Cupertino, California. However, when in 1986 she moved to the East Coast of the United States, she was not allowed by the local diocese to serve on the altar in the Armenian Church.¹

Even as this is a most welcome step by Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian and the Diocese of Tehran (under the jurisdiction of the Catholicosate of Cilicia), the Armenian Apostolic Church has yet to formally restore the office of female diaconate. Today the question is how to revive the female diaconate for the pastoral life of local parishes rather than in monastic settings or convents, which are virtually non-existent as viable institutions.

¹ 'Seta in her own words at the AIWW conference 1996':
AN ENGLISH ARC REPORT, SEEN FROM AN INTERCHURCH FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

Ruth Reardon*

The English Anglican-Roman Catholic Committee (English ARC) works in 5-year periods; the latest was from 2012 to 2017, when the co-chairs were Archbishop Bernard Longley and Bishop Tim Thornton. In January the Committee published a 25-page report entitled Walking Together: Mapping Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations 2018. They give an overview of how Anglicans and Roman Catholics are working together at diocesan and parish levels, and suggest priorities for EARC’s future work.

A response to GTUM 2007

In this English ARC was responding to the 2007 report Growing Together in Unity and Mission produced by the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). Whereas the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was established in 1966 as a theological dialogue, IARCCUM was established in 2001 with the task of exploring how ARCIC’s work on our shared faith could be lived out in joint action and common witness to our fragmented world. Bishop Crispian Hollis enthused interchurch families when he gave the fourth John Coventry Memorial Lecture in 2003 on ‘The Mississauga Initiative and its significance for the path of Roman Catholic and Anglican Unity’, telling the story of the Mississauga meeting of paired Catholic and Anglican bishops from 13 different countries in 2000, and the decision to set up IARCCUM that followed. Shared faith was going to be put into practice! and Mississauga had said good things about the need for joint pastoral concern and care for Anglican-Roman Catholic families. The first IARCCUM report, in 2007, also spoke of this. Lucy Docherty, a member of the English Association of Interchurch Families, used her

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maiden speech at the Church of England Synod in February 2008 to urge the importance of taking *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* seriously, including a plea that Synod members would both remember the pastoral needs of interchurch families and also make use of the contribution they could make to the implementation of some of IARCCUM’s suggestions on deepening relationships between the churches at parish level. Ten years later, English ARC’s ‘Mapping Exercise’ was designed to investigate how, as Anglicans and Catholics, our shared faith is being lived out in *action* both at diocesan and parish levels, and what more we can do.

The information it gathered came largely from Anglican and Catholic diocesan ecumenical officers. It is clear that not all dioceses replied to the questionnaires they received, but we are not told which, nor how many, nor, indeed, what the questions were. In their introduction the co-chairs ‘realise the report represents a snapshot in time and is in no way exhaustive’, but ‘it provides a very helpful picture of what is happening on the ground in terms of partnership between the two churches, as well as highlighting possible areas of work for the future.’ Clearly much effort has gone into this ‘mapping exercise’, and we can be grateful for it.

**Diocesan level**

An overlapping map of the 19 Catholic dioceses and 40 Anglican dioceses shows how in practice the non-correspondence of boundaries makes relationships between bishops very complicated in some areas. However, bishops across two-thirds of the Roman Catholic dioceses meet on a bilateral basis with Anglican bishops. The report points out the great importance of personal meetings, which ‘set the tone’ and encourage relationships at both diocesan and parish level. But bishops also meet one another in the multilateral context of wider church leaders meetings (Churches Together), often at county level; Catholic bishops of 87% of dioceses meet Anglican bishops in this context. The report has taken account of that relationship also. So, for example, joint schools and pilgrimages are more likely to be bilateral activities, while chaplaincies and joint social and community action are more likely to be multilateral activities which include Catholic and Anglican participation. A 4-page section giving concrete examples of joint activity at diocesan level—sometimes identified by place and sometimes not—brings the report to life.
Parish level
The second part of English ARC’s questionnaire concerned ecumenical relations between, and activities of, the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church at parish level. Here the results show that it is only in sharing church buildings that more is done on a bilateral than a multilateral level; so far as covenant partnerships, joint social action, joint non-eucharistic worship, joint study groups and joint pilgrimages are concerned, bilateral activity is considerably less. However, the one area in which the results are fairly close is interesting: it is the one headed ‘Other—e.g. joint baptism and confirmation, support for interchurch families’ (bilateral 19%, multilateral 26%) (pp. 13, 14). And in the section giving concrete examples of joint activity at parish level we read:

Although not the most frequently mentioned, support for interchurch families was mentioned in a significant number of returns. One included the suggestion that this may be a good time for English ARC to give the issues of intercommunion within interchurch families some consideration ‘given that the Roman Catholic Church is now deliberating on actions that might be taken to support together the family, referred to in its Catechism as the domestic church’ (p.16).

Conclusions and recommendations
The conclusion of the Report underlines the importance of strong relationships between bishops, both bilateral and in the multilateral (Churches Together) context. This is not always easy, but ways can be found:

There is one example [the place is not identified] where all the bishops of a large Roman Catholic diocese meet with all the bishops of the Anglican dioceses which fall within its area.

A further factor will be the strength of the County Churches Together framework, which may facilitate multilateral church leaders’ meetings and other joint action, but not all areas have such a strong ecumenical framework, which often depends on sufficient funding being available.

Boundary mismatch and lack of time and finance can be overcome if the will is there. English ARC’s 3-page summary of its Report says:

Fundamentally, in a bishop’s demanding ministry, it comes down to prioritising. We hope that this report gives encouragement to bishops to see their relationship with their Anglican or Roman Catholic colleagues as fruitful and a blessing to others.
A final section of the Report asks Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops to reflect together on how they could increasingly support and encourage concrete areas of joint faith in action, under the headings proposed by IARCCUM’s *Growing Together in Unity and Mission* in 2007. Under the first heading, ‘Visible expressions of our shared faith’, in first place comes ‘Support for interchurch families’, with a reminder that IARCCUM had highlighted interchurch family groups as highly significant: ‘the Association of Interchurch Families figures prominently here.’

There follow 5 items for ‘Suggested further action’. The very first in the list is:

A. Encourage greater support in dioceses for interchurch families, especially by ensuring that all canonical provisions and pastoral opportunities are reflected in parish life.\(^1\)

There follows a brief paragraph on ‘Joint baptism and confirmation preparation’, which reports:

There was one example of joint confirmation preparation, using Roman Catholic material and a number of mentions of Anglicans and Roman Catholic clergy assisting in baptisms, funerals and weddings of each other’s churches. The IARCCUM Report (2007) flagged up the potential for such joint pastoral support and catechesis, but the fact that it has not been explored very much suggests caution or reticence at both parish and diocesan level.

The joint pastoral care given by Catholic and Anglican clergy at baptisms, funerals and weddings presumably refers mainly to interchurch families, and we know that where this has happened it has often been a great encouragement for such families. English ARC clearly believes that there is much potential for increasing such joint

\(^1\) ‘Canonical provisions’ presumably includes not only the 1983 Code of Canon Law, but also its pastoral application in the 1993 Ecumenical Directory and the 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, together with a review of the provisions of *One Bread One Body*, the 1998 teaching document on the Eucharist and establishment of norms on sacramental sharing of the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland. ‘Pastoral opportunities’ presumably includes also an application to interchurch marriages of the pastoral approach to supporting married couples and families that Pope Francis has given us in the 2016 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of Love, *Amoris Laetitia*.
pastoral support, and it is to be hoped that the ‘caution or reticence at both parish and diocesan level’ that it notes will melt away in the light of *Amoris Laetitia*’s plea for pastors to listen and respond to the experience of couples and families themselves.

The ‘Annual Report on the Church of England’s Ecumenical Relations 2017’ (from the Council for Christian Unity of the General Synod, and Lambeth Palace) contains the statement that ‘the conclusions of the “Mapping Exercise” ... will be taken into account in defining the priorities and key areas of work for the next phase of English ARC’.

**What next?**

Mississauga (2000) said that interchurch families can be ‘signs of unity and hope’; a pressing concern is to provide joint pastoral care for them. Sometimes they experience great pain, particularly in the area of eucharistic life. It asked the new IARCCUM to examine all possibilities, within current canon law, to deal generously and pastorally with interchurch marriages involving Anglicans and Roman Catholics. In the first IARCCUM Report (2007) the specific reference to eucharistic life was—sadly from our perspective—omitted, but the need to develop programmes of joint pastoral care (including marriage preparation) was highlighted, as was finding ways to minister to the concerns of interchurch families.

Mississauga and IARCCUM were international initiatives, involving the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church at world level. How can English ARC take forward this work of supporting interchurch families ‘generously and pastorally’ at national level, now that it is firmly on the agenda as a priority?

Interchurch families involving Anglicans and Roman Catholics find themselves in the closest of bilateral relationships, living together in their one domestic church. In the past interchurch spouses have been included as members of English ARC, in both the Anglican and Catholic teams. Might it be helpful if this happened again now, both so that they could speak directly of their deeply felt need for true pastoral understanding, and of their hope that their experience of lived family life together may in some small way contribute to the growing together of our churches in unity and mission? Or might their input be sought if English ARC decided to set up a group to look specifically at the way in which pastoral care for interchurch families
might be offered together jointly by both churches? There are clergy and ministers in both churches who have experienced the value of this, and it could be useful to tap into their experience.

Both the Church of England and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales have said that they want to support marriage. If they are to support their own members who have married one another, then they will need to mobilise the resources of those people in both churches who are charged with the task of supporting marriages, as well as, and together with, those who serve on groups promoting unity. Will English ARC be able to facilitate the coming together of such groups in order to make a reality of joint pastoral care?

The ‘mapping exercise’ of English ARC has underlined how important it is for the bishops of both churches to come together in face-to-face meetings at diocesan level. The bishops also meet together from time to time at national level. Let us hope that English ARC is able to ensure that, when Catholic and Anglican bishops come together, their joint responsibility for Anglican/Catholic interchurch families is on their agendas, as one of their shared concerns.
BOOK REVIEWS


Among the publications marking the fifth centenary of the Reformation, this book stands out for the extent and depth of its treatment of historical and theological themes. Great credit is due to the editors for, first, coping with the logistical and other challenges of bringing together a decidedly international body of Lutheran and Catholic specialists for a conference at Maynooth Pontifical University in 2015, and then for having the indexed proceedings published in time for the centenary. It is a book full of insights for those who have felt the need to go beyond the recent popular surge in acclaim for Luther as well as the traditional antipathies towards him. In consequence, it consists of presentations by specialists and is not an easy read. Basic knowledge of Luther’s life and his theology is assumed. His life and doings are only incidentally mentioned and a limited number of his vast output of publications cited or referred to in the course of the essays. It does help that the citations give the location of these works in the Weimar Ausgabe and in the American publication, Luther’s Works. All of this brings to mind a dilemma neatly summed up by a recent biographer, Scott Hendrix: ‘We cannot tell the story of his life separately from that of the early Reformation, but neither can we allow the Reformation to overwhelm the person’.

The title and subtitle raise the question of how appropriate are these essays for the project of remembering the Reformation. The essays of Part Three are in fact focused on the sub-title: Luther and Catholic Theology, while the other three Parts contextualise the Reformation in history, Augustinian and scholastic theology and present-day theological and pastoral concerns, with the fourth Part focusing on ‘What Can Catholics Learn from Luther?’ Somewhat surprisingly, there are no contributions from scholars of the Lutheran liturgical tradition, even though contemporaries such as Lathrop and Senn have contributed much to liturgical renewal in collaboration with Catholic liturgists.
Pieter de Witte’s fascinating article on how Rahner and Von Balthasar viewed Luther’s famous principle *simul justus et peccator* deals with the reservations both of these authors had in its regard, but asserts also that both felt that ‘behind this seemingly heterodox phrase there was an authentic experience of faith that was worth being taken into account, even if (it) is difficult to express in Roman Catholic terms’ (145). It makes one wonder whether in Luther’s vast oeuvre either theologian had come across a sermon on Eph. 3: 14-21 of 1525 in which he states that the Christian is ‘utterly deified’, clearly indicating his belief in an ontological status. This important aspect of his anthropology, as de Witte says, was first brought to notice by the Helsinki scholar, Tuomo Mannermaa, in his *Christ in Faith*, first published in German in 1989 shortly after both Rahner and Von Balthasar had died—and publicised by Braaten and Jenson in 1998, as a footnote to the essay indicates (148). In fact, the late Robert Jenson returned to Luther’s doctrine of *theosis* in a 2003 article, emphasising its importance for contemporary theology. In the same vein, De Witte’s stated aim is to draw attention to the topic of ecumenical learning in Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue.

This is also the concern of James Corkery’s study of ‘Luther and the Theology of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI’, which begins by referring to Ratzinger’s interview of 1983, ‘Luther and the Unity of the Churches’. Corkery notes the affinities between these ‘fellow Germans’ arising from their shared appreciation of personal encounter with the living God, something of great importance in face of a secularised culture. Differences of nuance are noted, for example, Ratzinger’s principle of a ‘communio-centred Christian faith’ compared with Luther’s individualist emphasis (128). Also, the two differ in their understanding of the relationship between love and faith, Ratzinger granting love a role, though a weak, ‘Augustinian’ one rather than the medieval *fides formata caritate*, while Luther places love among works with no place in justification. In the end, Ratzinger’s difficulty with Luther is in relation to the role of the church, which for the latter ‘can neither assume the guarantee of certainty for one’s personal salvation nor decide in a definitively binding manner about the content of faith’ (135).

The polarity seen here makes one return to another essay, Phillip Cary’s ‘Luther and the Legacy of Augustine’, in which the author points to a significant factor in the development of Luther’s mature thought on justification. Rather than arising simply from his reading of Romans—something, one might say, that always needed further explanation—
Cary suggests that the role of medieval sacramental theology, ‘made it possible for Luther to conceive of an external word that gives what it signifies’ (51). The reference is to Luther’s reliance on the words of absolution, an example of the sacramental word that comes in the church’s liturgy. As is well known, his understanding of the external word—the word of forgiveness—informed Luther’s approach to the Eucharist, but it has to be said that even with this externalising of the justifying process, its liturgical context, it still differs from Ratzinger’s ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’ (138) which stems from his idea of apostolic succession. This is an example of how interplay between the diverse articles in this volume gives much food for thought.

Other articles suggest that a subtle approach is needed to the standard theses on the historical context of the Reformation (Heinz Schilling and Peter Marshall) and to, for example, Luther’s attitude towards women, though in the end the traditional view seems to be upheld by Charlotte Methuen. Worthy of particular note in Gesa Thiessen’s comprehensive account of ‘Luther and the Role of Images’—which incidentally provides the front cover illustration—is that after Luther’s death his followers used imagery for didactic more than polemical purposes. Not that the latter ceased completely, as the attack on the Zwinglians and Calvinists by orthodox Lutherans shows, and was powerfully depicted in a book from the latter half of the sixteenth century. An image entitled ‘Calvinist Wolves of Discord’ shows two wolves devouring a sheep named ‘Concordia’, a reference to a failed attempt at reconciliation between the two groups.

The book has a Foreword by Margot Käßmann, the special envoy of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the Reformation Jubilee. Apart from a crude reference to the Catholic Church having ‘said farewell to the practice of selling indulgences for money’ (xiii), the text is rather bland. The Epilogue, by the Anglican church historian, David Bagchi, is more interesting. He defends the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (236) and has some perceptive comments on the stages Luther went through to become the Reformation theologian who could, if he were here now, play a leading role in the debate between ‘Martin Luther and Catholic Theology’.

There is much enlightening material in this volume; it is a thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding read.

Fintan Lyons, Glenstal Abbey, Ireland

The title of this volume indicates quite clearly its scope and purpose: the editors wish to draw attention to Luther’s early writings as evidence of his Catholic faith and spirituality. To this end, writings have been chosen from the period up to 1530, and the anti-papal tracts, especially the later ones, are left out of account. The Foreword by the Director of the Johann Möhler Institute for Ecumenism, Professor Wolfgang Thönissen, draws attention to the appreciative comments of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI concerning Luther’s spiritual and pastoral motivation, as examples of Catholic scholarship’s re-assessment of the Reformer, which had been pioneered by Joseph Lortz in the mid-twentieth century. Thönissen states that the ‘writings contained in this volume expressly verify the hypothesis that Martin Luther remained Catholic’. He recognises, however, that here ‘Catholic’ may be understood in various ways: ‘a reformed Catholic, a confessing Catholic, or even Catholic Reformer’ (vii). The editors, two Lutheran theologians, state their conviction that ‘Luther was a Catholic and had no intention to form a new church or have one named after him’ (ix). Luther, of course, famously made such a declaration, and ecumenical studies recognise that this was his settled conviction.

This allows the editors to choose several of his early writings which make clear that his theology and spirituality in the chosen period (even after his excommunication in 1521) were in accord with traditional Catholic teaching. The writings include his much praised Commentary on the Magnificat, writings on Penance, Baptism and the Eucharist, his Sermon at Coburg Castle and the hitherto apparently untranslated Sermon on Preparing to Die. The editors’ introduction to each of these writings is a valuable part of the book, especially the account of his doctrine of the Eucharist, with its ecumenical potential.

The Coburg sermon was given in 1530 while Melanchthon and others went on to Augsburg, because, being under the ban of the Empire, Luther could not venture beyond the boundary of Saxony and the protection of the Elector. It is the latest of the texts
reproduced and is included, the editors say (10), to ‘demonstrate his mature understanding of the role of the saints’ and that ‘his devotion to the saints (had) developed into his understanding of the communion of saints’. The fact, however, that the sermon was given at the end of his ‘early’ period raises the question of whether he had by then moved on in relation to his sense of being Catholic. After an account of St Christopher’s trials when crossing a river carrying the Christ child, the sermon describes the waves that came over ‘everyone who wanted to be an Evangelical’. ‘(T)he waves came, the pope, bishops, princes and the rabble set themselves in opposition’ (69).

Including this sermon appears not to be helpful towards ‘verifying the hypothesis’ of the editors because by 1530, Luther had long been convinced that the papacy, as such, was the Antichrist, that the papal church was in thrall to the devil. His idea of Catholic identity involved not only rejection of the papacy but also of the necessity for any visible headship of the church. When that conviction settled in his mind is uncertain, as he was not consistent in his declarations, but by 1541 he was claiming (in a pamphlet against Duke Heinrich of Braunschweig) that the reform movement to which he belonged had remained faithful ‘to the true ancient church’ while the opposition, the papal church, had apostatised from it. If he was Catholic, the papal Church wasn’t.

The attempt, then, to vindicate Luther’s Catholicity on the basis of his early writings seems to be a case of special pleading. It is hardly the best way to promote the project of ecumenical rapprochement with the present-day Catholic Church. Luther’s early writings are well known and appreciated but a more fruitful approach may well be to turn to his fundamental theological, as distinct from ecclesiological, principles. His theology of grace, which formed the basis for the Agreement on Justification, was quoted with approval by Pope Francis at Lund in October 2016. By its eschatological thrust it could enrich considerably the contemporary quest for a truly ecumenical theology.

Fintan Lyons, Glenstal Abbey, Ireland


Last year’s commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, both in its preparatory stages and over the course of the year itself, inevitably precipitated a host of new publications on Luther; each of these, in turn, have attempted to cast some new light on this iconic figure or, at least, have sought to understand some old elements of his story in a new way. This review takes two of these publications and assesses their contribution to the ongoing scholarly enterprise of remembering the Reformation, beginning with the longer work of Fintan Lyons and concluding with Walter Kasper’s shorter work, even though this does not reflect the sequence in which they appeared. My reason for doing so will become apparent later.

At the outset of the work Lyons explains that, ‘after providing a basic biography of Luther’, the volume’s aim was to ‘record my perception of what Luther's challenge to the church in his day essentially was, to show his relevance to the efforts of the Catholic Church to continue in the path of renewal undertaken at the Second Vatican Council, and, finally, to show how his theology can today address a secular world which has Christian, including Reformation, roots’ (p. 10). As it turns out, however, at least to the mind of this reviewer, Lyons greatly undersells himself in his reference to a ‘basic biography of Luther’ (my emphasis); on the other hand, and especially given his impressive background in ecumenical dialogue, the sections of the book which deal explicitly with Luther’s ‘challenge’ (to the sixteenth-century church and, more recently, to Christianity in our own day) are much briefer than they might have been; which is, perhaps, a missed opportunity. In concrete terms, out of fourteen chapters, twelve are gathered under the heading ‘Part One: A Basic Biography of Luther’, while the remaining two chapters form Part Two, entitled ‘Luther’s Challenge’ (chapter thirteen deals with Luther’s challenge to the church of his own day and chapter fourteen to the church and society of today). Given the book’s subtitle, this structure appears a little uneven.

And so, to Part One of the work. Lyons admits at the start of the book that he has relied on existing scholarly sources for Luther’s
biography, while seeking to make his own contribution to his area of special interest—the study of Luther’s relevance to contemporary issues. But this admission should not take away from Lyons’s deft handling of Luther’s life and times. What we find here is an extremely useful and eminently readable synthesis of historical scholarship on Luther, encompassing both well-established portraits such as that of Roland Bainton and more recent studies, including Lyndal Roper’s magisterial biography. Lyons writes very well and proves himself to be an equally reliable and convivial guide to the early-sixteenth-century world in which Luther was formed. What is particularly appealing about Lyons in this regard is his confidence in dealing with the theological questions which consumed Luther in a manner that communicates well without needlessly dumbing down the complexities behind them (see, for instance, his discussion of the *via moderna* and *via antiqua* respectively on pp. 76-7, his discussion of the origin of *conscientia* in Luther, something which Roper doesn’t discuss, on p. 104; and his handling of the charge that Luther’s theology was *merely* forensic on p. 192, and his explanation of Luther’s theology of the mass, found on pp. 129-31). What is refreshing here is Lyons’s sure-footed ability to interpolate his own discussion of Luther’s Eucharistic theology with what proves to be a helpful insight on Eucharistic faith from a Swedish Lutheran bishop, Yngve Brilioth, in 1926.

Apart from his facility in presenting theological ideas in an easily accessible manner, Lyons also has an eye for the kind of detail that readers interested in Luther will relish. In referencing Luther’s burning of the papal bull in 1520, for instance, Lyons tells us that ‘the place chosen was where the hospital rags were burned’ (p. 94). Some readers may also be surprised to learn that Luther’s ‘protector’, Elector Frederick (Friedrich) the Wise, shortly before he died, ‘could not recall ever having met Luther and probably never did because of the social structures of the time’ (p. 38). He also has a knack for choosing quotations that get to the heart of the matter. In his discussion of the debate between Erasmus and Luther on the question of free will, Lyons quotes Luther as praising Erasmus ‘that unlike all the rest you alone have attacked the real issue … and have not wearied me with irrelevancies about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences and such like trifles … with which almost everyone hitherto has gone hunting for me without success’ (p. 143). I can imagine this quotation being usefully
employed by university lecturers setting exam papers, followed by the word ‘Discuss’.

When Lyons comes to the question of Luther’s challenge to the church and society of today, he admits from the outset that the Catholic Church has changed in important ways since the sixteenth century. He draws attention to the changed nature of the papacy, especially since the loss of the papal states, capturing the transition in a lovely throw-away line which reminds us that ‘Pius IX who built a cigarette factory in Rome to give employment was a temporal ruler as well as being Peter’s successor’ (p. 204). He sees a prophetic element in Luther’s call for what we might term ‘devolution of power’ and the reassertion of the importance of the local church. He notes that Vatican II ‘gave a fuller account of the priesthood of all believers than one can find in The Book of Concord’ (p. 205) and recognises the considerable ecumenical convergence that has emerged in discussion of the Eucharist which tends to focus more on the celebration of the paschal mystery rather than debating issues relating to the ‘real presence’ (p. 207). Ultimately, Lyons states, ‘seeing what is best in another Christian tradition is at the heart of the ecumenical movement’ (p. 217).

For what it promised (and no doubt could certainly have delivered), Part Two of Lyons’s work disappoints. I am not sure why the volume took the shape it did in the end; had the two parts of the work been more evenly set out, it would arguably have made a much greater contribution to existing scholarship. That said, Lyons’s synthesis of biographical scholarship on Luther, in addition to his confident handling of the theological controversies of the early Reformation, make this a volume that all who are interested in the figure of Martin Luther will want to have on their shelves.

In a sense what I had hoped Lyons would do in Part Two of his work is what Walter Kasper does, at least in part, in his much slimmer volume of seven short chapters entitled Martin Luther: an Ecumenical Perspective, published a few months earlier than Lyons’s volume.

Kasper uses the prologue to his work to mention briefly how perceptions of Luther have shifted over time. Catholics, who once branded Luther the heretic who split western Christendom, have come to recognise his genuine religious concerns to such an extent that, for many, he has almost become a doctor communis (a common
church father). Kasper recognises, too, that many of the questions debated by Luther have become foreign to both ordinary Catholics and Protestants today. Luther, then, has become a stranger.

Chapter 1 examines the historical context of Luther’s life and identifies the period as a time of decay and new beginnings. It rightly emphasises that a movement for reform within the Catholic Church was already in existence, exemplified by the work of figures such as Archbishop Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros and also the devotio moderna movement. Luther, then, could conceivably be characterised as a reform Catholic. In Chapter 2, Kasper argues that behind the 95 theses stood a genuine Catholic concern; in themselves ‘they remained within the parameters of what was then tenable in theology and are a document of reform but not of the Reformation’ (p. 10). Kasper sees Luther as part of a long line of Catholic reformers and echoes Erwin Iserloh in stating that he ‘vanquished a Catholicism that was not really Catholic and consequently rediscovered something that was primordially Catholic’. Indeed, a little later in the work, he baldly states: ‘The entire history of the Middle Ages is a history of reforms’ (p. 23).

In Chapter 3, Kasper admits that Rome and the bishops of the time ‘instead of being penitent and responding with the necessary reforms ... answered with polemic and condemnation’. In that regard ‘Rome bears its fill of complicity in the fact that a church-dividing Reformation developed out of the reform of the church’ (p. 13). Strong words; but not necessarily new ones, as the reference to Pope Adrian VI reminds us. But Kasper doesn’t let Luther off the hook either. His apocalyptic outlook and views on the eschatological battle with the Antichrist (the papacy) was decidedly unhelpful and a dangerous position to adopt, for one cannot dialogue with the Antichrist. Chapter 4 examines the claim that Luther fathered modernity. While there is much that is right about this view, Kasper reminds us that Luther’s idea of conscience, for instance, was far removed from this idea in our own day.

Kasper’s last three chapters deal with more modern ecumenical developments: the acknowledgment that what unites us is far more than what divides us and, where we are still divided, we continue to learn from one another (p. 28). On continuing contested questions, his observation that ‘we are in agreement that we want unity, but we are not in agreement about what constitutes unity’ is particularly
insightful (p. 29). Sometimes not only an ecumenical vision is missing, but also an ecumenical will. And, meanwhile, a fast-growing secular ecumenism, which has no respect for theological hair-splitting, aims to eject Christianity from the public square. More worryingly, still, we are increasingly witnessing an ecumene of blood, which, likewise, doesn't discriminate between denominations (p. 30).

Kasper adverts to Pope Francis initiating a new phase of the reception of the Second Vatican Council, one which takes up the notion of reconciled diversity and a receptive ecumenism which emphasises learning from each other. No longer is it simply a question of ecumenical unity being understood as concentric circles around a Roman centre point (p. 34). In his final chapter, Kasper suggests that the contribution Luther can make to the furtherance of ecumenism is precisely in his original preaching of the gospel of grace and the mercy of God and a call to conversion (p. 39). Taking its cue from a quotation of Luther concerning the planting of an apple tree, the work ends in a decidedly positive key, gaining encouragement from the idea that we are no longer on the path to division, as we were in 1517, but, instead, on the path to unity. This short work closes with a quite beautiful image: if we are patient, Kasper writes, we will not be disappointed, for ‘we will rub our eyes and gratefully be amazed at what God’s spirit has brought about, perhaps quite differently from what we have imagined’ (p. 40).

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