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The Postmodern as Denominational Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a basic theme of Christianity through all times. Whether you regard the 'The Fall of Humanity' in Genesis as a historical fact or more existentially as a continuous human event, it is an expression of humankind separated from God. Basically all theology is an attempt to pinpoint this separation and how humankind can get back to an 'original' relationship with God – how we can be reconciled with God and live in the way God created us.

Originally there was only one Church, one body of Christ, constituted by the Holy Spirit as we read about it in Acts. This has been the ideal of thinking about the Church for many centuries, and it has been the basis for damnation between the churches ever since the Church separated in two, three, and many. This, though, has not changed the fact that all these different limbs of the one body, are each searching for the reconciliation between God and humankind – and this fact can be the bridge of denominational reconciliation between the churches in the post-modern.

SOMETHING IS BROKEN AND NEEDS FIXING

In Genesis, humans are created in the loving image of God. Human lives happily in Eden, close to God. But humankind diverges from the closeness – we push God away and 'The Fall' occurs. We are no longer in that close relationship with God, which was intended in creation. But God still wants to be close to humankind, even though we continually step out of this close relationship.

And thus God incarnated. God became human to be with the creation. Again we pushed God away, we slaughtered God. Still God wants us and wants to be close to us. And this is possible through the Holy Spirit. God is still with us in our lives, in our world – in the creation. Time and time again we renounce God, but God is still here as an actual possibility for humanity.

This is the message of each and every limb of the Church – no matter the denomination. Each denomination finds its claim of existence in preaching God's willingness to be close to humankind and in passing on God's grace. The grace being the possibility of being close to God – the message being the message of God's loving presence in spite of humankind diverging from the closeness to God. This message can be found at the very heart of each and every denomination.

If this message of reconciliation is to be taken seriously, then the different denominations have to reconcile. Reconciliation between God and humanity starts with the reconciliation among humans. Matthew 5, 23-24: "Therefore if you bring

your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

TWO PERIODS AND THE POSTMODERN

Why then, has the Church been divided? And why is there a tendency to ecumenism in the Church? A key to the answer can, in my point of view, be found in the writings of Niklas LUHMANN and in the writings of Lars QVORTRUP. They divide our timeline into three periods: the theocentric, the anthropocentric and the polycentric, in accordance with the centre from which human views the world.

In the *theocentric* period God, or the divine, is the universal transcendental principle. Science is not based on observations from human senses and rationality, but on a divine principle. Human does not strive to be innovative, but to catalyse the divine. As a product of this there can be only one Church, since God is one. The Church as such strives to be the image of God on earth.

In the *anthropocentric* period humankind is the centre of perception and reasoning. The human subject becomes the universal transcendental principle. The world can no longer stand alone. It takes the human subject to perceive reason and categorise the world. There is no cognitive symbiosis between Creator and creation, which humanity can be part of. Humankind has to perceive the world by itself, and thus holds some of God's creative power in the *imago Dei*. Humans create their own world, and strive ultimately towards the ability of controlling their own destiny by controlling the world with reason. In this period, the Church strives to reason with the rest of the world, but mainly each within the walls of their own denomination. Faith is under attack, and the Church consolidates herself.

In the *polycentric* period there is no single centre through which humankind can illuminate everything. There are dozens and dozens of centres. Some illuminating a little area of life or of the world, others striving to illuminate everything, and thus none can claim to hold all the truth, unless humankind chooses to cling to only one centre. Clinging to only one centre of perception does not illuminate the world, but reduces it to this one perspective. There is no universal code through which we can perceive each other and the world. In the polycentric view, the Church holds no claim to the Truth, and thus there is no basis for damnation between denominations. The Church is no longer an expression of God as one, but it is an expression of the different manners, in which God is close to humanity in the world.



This perspective of our time as the polycentric or the postmodern does have flaws. The whole project of dividing time in different time zones is a modern or anthropocentric way of thinking, and if the polycentric or postmodern is taken seriously, then this project will be altered as well. Then the polycentric perspectives in our timeline must step forward, and not the anthropocentric, as is the case in the modern way of dividing time so far.

One could reasonably argue that we are still in the modern and only moving towards the postmodern – but then this whole project seems a bit premature. Nevertheless, I find that the thoughts of LUHMANN illuminate problems that are present right now, and therefore his thoughts are relevant.

THE POLYCENTRIC AS THE BASIS OF RECONCILIATION

The polycentric understanding of our world gives, in my point of view, a very precise picture of our situation. We live in a world, in a creation of endless complexity. It is full of joy and suffering, and out of this we try to grasp an understanding of our lives. But there is no easy way, no end result to look up.

The Church is the meeting point of humanity, where we place our lives in the hands of God. This does not give any answers to the complexity of creation, but it gives community with the rest of the creation. This means that the Church is not one single denomination, but it is all the

denominations of the world joined by the love of God in creation.

This wealth of denominations is needed because we, as humans, are different, come from different places, and live different lives. The wealth of denominations is legalised because no one person can lay claim to the truth of God, which is realised in the polycentric. God does not stabilise human life by illuminating it, but by giving the possibility of a life without absolute knowledge. God is the warranty that life is worth living without us being able to control it.

Thus, the basis of reconciliation in our age, between God and humanity, and then also between denominations, must be these words from Matthew 18, 20: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” But then what is the name of God; how do we know God? The answer lies in 1. John 4, 8: “Who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

The Church praising God is not one single denomination, but the whole creation. Each denomination praises God with the loving tongue given to them by God as part of the creation. Each denomination holds the grace of God in the love of God – and who are we to question the grace of God and God’s will to be close to us?

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W S C F E U R O P E A C T I V I T I E S I N 2 0 0 3

5-9 FEBRUARY 2003

Corporate Social Responsibility
Central European Sub-region (CESR)
Winter Seminar
Spišská Kapitula, Slovakia

13-16 FEBRUARY 2003

Non-violence as Political and Spiritual Force
Nordic Winter Meeting
Trosa, Vagnhäråd, Sweden

20-23 FEBRUARY 2003

Stripping Religion and Culture of ‘Black and White’ Thinking
Unveiling the Impact of Dualistic Thinking on Power Structures
Preparatory Committee Meeting in view of the Theological Conference
Paris, France

7-9 MARCH 2003

Our Witness in Europe
Meeting of the Youth Sub-Group Planning Committee of the XIIth General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (KEK)
Paris, France

4-11 APRIL 2003

Ecumenical Leadership
European Regional Committee (ERC) Meeting
Oslo, Norway

11-18 MAY 2003

Roma and Gadje: the Challenge of Being Different
Solidarity Conference
Brasov, Romania

28 MAY - 1 JUNE 2003

Ecumenical Kirchentag
Berlin, Germany

JUNE 2003

Consultation for Teachers and Course Organisers
Lingua Franca (LF) Meeting

21-28 JUNE 2003

Healing and Reconciliation
Nordic Summer Meeting
Oslo - Trondheim, Norway

25 JUNE - 2 JULY 2003

Jesus Christ Heals and Reconciles. Our Witness in Europe
XIIth General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (KEK)
Trondheim, Norway

JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2003

Lingua Franca Courses
Central and Eastern Europe

7-14 JULY 2003

Central European Culture - Wanted (Dead or Alive)
Central European Sub-region (CESR) Summer Seminar
Bialowieża, Poland

13-20 JULY 2003

Indecent Embodiment
International Theological Camp in cooperation with WSCF
Agape Ecumenical Center, Italy

3-10 AUGUST 2003

Alternatives to Global Propaganda
International Political Camp in cooperation with WSCF

Agape Ecumenical Center, Italy

28 JULY - 3 AUGUST 2003

Coming to Terms with History and Memory in Eastern and Western Europe
International Ecumenical Summer Seminar of ESG in cooperation with WSCF
Waldsiedersdorf, Berlin, Germany

1-4 SEPTEMBER 2003

European Staff Meeting
Praha, Czech Republic

27-28 SEPTEMBER 2003

Repentance and Conversion
European Regional Committee (ERC) Meeting
Åland, Finland

29 SEPTEMBER - 5 OCTOBER 2003

WSCF and the Ecumenical Movement Discovering our Roots and Looking to the Future
European Regional Assembly (ERA)
Åland, Finland

4-10 NOVEMBER 2003

Stripping Religion and Culture of ‘Black and White’ Thinking
Unveiling the Impact of Dualistic Thinking on Power Structures
Theological Conference
Paris, France

NOVEMBER 2003

Empire, Global Community, and Christian Discipleship
Executive Committee (ExCo) Meeting
New York, United States of America