

Therefore we can still relate our new narrative to theirs, and in the event of that communication, influence their narratives, reshape ours or even open more perspectives. The very threat of syncretism lies where people are forced from the outside to adopt another view instead of approaching it from their own point of origin.

The final limit we see lies in the question of one's own ability to withstand the permanent need to reshape and re-evaluate one's own worldviews again and again while still preserving something like an identity.

Therefore, the task of rootedness in one's own tradition or narrative is of the greatest importance. This rootedness will then develop into a basic foundation for a transformative praxis of our own lives and the world around us. It is this praxis in which the comparison and valuation of religious traditions has its most important place and from which no detachment is possible.

John George HUBER

A Lutheran – Roman Catholic Initiative in the United States Dialogues

Bilateral and multilateral conversations among Christian communions are commonplace. Scanning a recent issue of the *Centro Pro Unione Semi-Annual Bulletin* indicates that there are more than one hundred fifty ecumenical (interchurch and interconfessional) theological dialogues worldwide currently underway. These include representatives of the Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Evangelical-Lutheran, Methodist, Mennonite, Moravian, Eastern Orthodox, Old Catholic, Oriental Orthodox, Pentecostal, Calvinist-Reformed, Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist churches.¹ When the early beginning date of 1965 is noted for the series of nine Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogues in the United States, the historic significance of this ecumenical initiative becomes apparent.²

For the Roman Catholic Church, this new bilateral venture would have been almost unthinkable just three or four years earlier, prior to the convening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962 by Pope JOHN XXIII.³ Ecumenical restrictions had been set by the encyclical *Mortalium Animos*, issued by Pope PIUS XI in 1928.⁴ This encyclical forbade members of the Roman Catholic Church to “take part in the assemblies of non-Catholics”, and also proposed a reunion with this church and the acceptance of papal authority as the prerequisite

1 A *Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues. Fifteenth Supplement. Centro Pro Unione Semi-Annual Bulletin* 2000/57. 10–12.

2 *The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church*. 1965.

3 ABBOTT, *Important Dates of Vatican II*. 741.

4 BELL G. K. (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity: A Selection from the First and Second Series (1920–1930)*. London, 1955. 188–200.

for Christian unity.⁵ As a consequence of this ruling, participation in ecumenical events was ordinarily excluded. Thus, there was no official Roman Catholic representative at the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954.⁶

It was the new spirit of openness towards other Christian denominations, which characterised Pope JOHN XXIII and Vatican II, especially the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), that enabled the previously isolated church of Rome to invite Protestant theologians to attend the Council as delegate-observers.⁷ This turning point in relationships between Roman Catholics and Protestants set the stage for the bilateral dialogues, as well as other ecumenical initiatives. Also of interest is that the beginning date of the first U. S. Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogues in 1965 actually preceded the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council by five months. These “churches of Rome and Augsburg”⁸ lost no time in translating their ecumenical paradigm-shift into a concrete commitment to cooperation and theological study.

The special significance of these bilateral dialogues for the Lutheran participants is also worthy of comment. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which is structurally united as one ecclesial entity,⁹ the Lutheran scholars who served as dialogue partners represented three separate traditions: the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), with headquarters in New York City; the American Lutheran Church (ALC), with headquarters in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS), with headquarters in St Louis, Missouri.

A further illustration of the internal divisions among Lutherans is that, while the LCA and the ALC were members of one of the sponsoring organisations for the dialogues – the U.S. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation – the ecumenically separate Missouri Synod was not a member.¹⁰ Thus, the involvement of participants from all three major Lutheran bodies in the United States at that



5 BELL G. K. (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity: A Selection from the First and Second Series (1920–1930)*. London, 1955. 198–199.

6 VANELDEREN Marlin, *Introducing the World Council of Churches*. Genève, 1992. 109.

7 ABBOTT, *Important Dates of Vatican II*. 741.

8 The *Augsburg Confession* of 1530 is the primary Evangelical-Lutheran statement of faith.

9 ABBOTT, *Important Dates of Vatican II*. 14–101.

10 *The Status of the Nicene Creed*. 33. As of Spring 2001, the LCMS has not joined the Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, or the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Nevertheless, this denomination did participate in all nine U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues, 1965–1995, as indicated in the lists of representatives in dialogue rounds I through IX.

time represents a kind of intra-confessional ecumenism that brought together not only Lutherans who had been separated from Roman Catholics, but also Lutherans who were institutionally separated from each other. The fact that these Lutherans, together with their Roman Catholic counterparts, could come to a measure of agreement on nine dialogue topics further demonstrates the theological significance of this ecumenical initiative.

In order to provide an additional historical backdrop to this study of the U. S. Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogues, here are the nine subjects covered in this series of conversations, which took place from 1965 through 1995. These are the titles and dates of the official reports: *The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church* (1965), *One Baptism for the Remission of Sins* (1966), *The Eucharist as Sacrifice* (1967), *Eucharist and Ministry* (1970), *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church* (1974), *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church* (1978), *Justification by Faith* (1985), *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary* (1992), and *Scripture and Tradition* (1995).¹¹ This list is in chronological order, in contrast with the more elaborate treatment of six of the nine dialogue series or “rounds”, which follows, drawing upon the agenda topics proposed in *Ut Unum Sint*.

In keeping with the ecumenical spirit of the Vatican Council and its Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Pope JOHN PAUL II released a most irenic encyclical, *Ut Unum Sint*: Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father John Paul II on *Commitment to Ecumenism*, on the Festival of the Ascension of the Lord, 25 May 1995. This document provides further evidence of the desire of the Church of Rome to build a bridge between the Vatican and other Christian communions, to come out of its former isolation into conversation and cooperation. The encyclical includes the surprising admission that the “ministry of the Bishop of Rome [...] constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections”.¹²

JOHN PAUL extends an invitation to other ecclesial communities to engage in a “patient and fraternal dialogue [...] leaving useless controversies behind [...] keeping before us only the will of Jesus Christ for His Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea ‘that they may all be one [...] so that the world may believe you have sent me’.”¹³ *Ut Unum Sint* is a response to Faith and Order.

Evidence for this assumption is provided in the encyclical itself, in the pope’s own words:

“With regard to other Christians, the principal documents of the Commission on *Faith and Order* and the statements of numerous bilateral dialogues have already provided Christian Communities with useful tools for discerning what is necessary to the ecumenical movement and to the conversion which it must inspire. These studies are important from two points of view: they demonstrate the remarkable progress already made, and they are a source of hope inasmuch as they represent a sure foundation for further study.”¹⁴

The topics which are emerging for ongoing study and reflection can be regarded as a mutual effort among ecumenically committed Christians to deal constructively with the doctrinal and institutional issues that continue to divide the churches. The research process of this paper will include matching five of the nine Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogue topics with the five “areas in need of fuller study” that are proposed in *Ut Unum Sint*.¹⁵ A sixth topic which appears later in the encyclical, the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome, will also be matched with one of the dialogue topics.

The matched or paralleled sequence is as follows: Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition (9. *Scripture and Tradition*), the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (3. *The Eucharist as Sacrifice*), Ordination as a Sacrament to the threefold ministry (4. *Eucharist and Ministry*), the Magisterium of the Church (6. *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*), the Virgin Mary (8. *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*), and the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome (5. *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*).¹⁶

I. Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition

The full wording of this first study topic listed in *Ut Unum Sint* reads as follows: the “relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the Word of God”. The corresponding Lutheran – Roman Catholic theme of Round 9 is simply *Scripture and Tradition*.¹⁷ It is instructive to look at this dialogue report dated 1995 – the most re-

¹⁴ *Ut Unum Sint*. 17.

¹⁵ We informally refer to these five topics suggested by Pope JOHN PAUL II as the *Vatican Quinquilateral*, in contrast with the *Lambeth Quadrilateral* of the Anglican communion.

¹⁶ The topics are located in *Ut Unum Sint*. 79 and 88–96.

¹⁷ SKILLRUD Harold C. – STAFFORD J. Francis – MARTENSEN Daniel F. (eds.), *Scripture and Tradition: Lutheran – Roman Catholic Dialogue IX*. Minneapolis, 1995.

¹¹ BURGESS Joseph – GROS Jeffrey (eds.), *Building Unity: Ecumenical Dialogues with Roman Catholic Participation*. *Ecumenical Documents IV*. New York, 1989. BURGESS Joseph – GROS Jeffrey (eds.), *Growing Consensus: Church Dialogues in the United States (1962–1991)*. *Ecumenical Documents V*. New York, 1995.

¹² *Ut Unum Sint*. 88.

¹³ *Ut Unum Sint*. 96.

cent in the series of nine – and note that, unlike the listing of three separate Lutheran bodies in the first dialogue report of 1965, the Lutheran participants are now identified either as members of the larger and ecumenically committed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), or the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, which remains more cautious about ecumenical relationships.¹⁸ The beginning and ending dates mentioned here are reminders that these dialogues have met a three-decade test of time.

Why are the agreements documented in this report so significant? The goal stated in the report's introduction offers a clue: "We hope that the way we address this problem can move our churches beyond the historic opposition between a Lutheran insistence on 'Scripture alone' (*sola scriptura*) and the Roman Catholic two-source theory of revelation by Scripture *and* Tradition."¹⁹ According to an Educational Paper prepared by the Lutheran – Roman Catholic Coordinating Committee in 1998, the central issue concerning this topic is that at the time of the Reformation, "there was a conflict between the churches on the roles of Scripture and Tradition. The reformers asserted that adherence to Tradition distorted the preaching of the Gospel."²⁰

A more complete description of the dialogue report, *Scripture and Tradition*, requires at least mention of the four main sub-topics that are included in this document, prior to the conclusion. Following the introduction, there are these chapter headings: The Word of God, Evolution of the Problem, Theological Considerations, and The Living Word in the Community of Faith.²¹ The conclusion notes that the discussions have shown a "large measure of agreement and some remaining differences of doctrine or emphasis", and then itemises these seven "significant points of agreement":

"Holy Scripture has pre-eminent status as the Word of God. [...] Before the Old and New Testaments existed in written form, the Word of God was carried by Tradition. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Scripture gives rise to the oral proclamation of the law and gospel. The pre-eminent status of Scripture does not exclude the function of a teaching office. [...] There are no historically verifiable apostolic traditions that are not attested in some way by Scripture. Not all true doctrine needs to be simply and literally present in the Bible, but may be deduced from it. The teaching of doctrine

18 SKILLRUD Harold C. – STAFFORD J. Francis – MARTENSEN Daniel F. (eds.), *Scripture and Tradition: Lutheran – Roman Catholic Dialogue IX*. Minneapolis, 1995. 62.

19 SKILLRUD Harold C. – STAFFORD J. Francis – MARTENSEN Daniel F. (eds.), *Scripture and Tradition: Lutheran – Roman Catholic Dialogue IX*. Minneapolis, 1995. 21.

20 *The Lutheran–Catholic Quest for Visible Unity: Harvesting Thirty Years of Dialogue*. 1998. 7.

21 *Scripture and Tradition*. 23–47.

in the Church is never above the Word of God, but must serve that Word and be in conformity with it."²² A most concise and positive appraisal of these agreements appeared in a book review newsletter of the Augsburg Publishing House. The reviewer, Arthur W. TURFA, sees a "convergence in thought between the Lutheran principles of *sola Scriptura* [...] and the Roman Catholic understanding of Tradition."²³

Adding to the ecumenical significance of this question is the long list of documents and books on the theme of Scripture and Tradition,²⁴ including the widely quoted text, *Scripture, Tradition and Traditions*, of the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order held at Montreal in 1963.²⁵ Also mentioned as a resource which enabled a "convergence between Roman Catholic and Lutheran understanding" is the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) of the Vatican II documents.²⁶ A final point to demonstrate the emerging commonality of thought on this issue is Pope JOHN PAUL's designation of Sacred Scripture as the "highest authority in matters of faith."²⁷

II. The Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ

The ambitious scope of the second topic on the list advanced by Pope JOHN PAUL II becomes apparent when reading it in its entirety: the "Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, an offering of praise to the Father, the sacrificial memorial and real presence of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying outpouring of the Holy Spirit".²⁸ The Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (WCC) has called the wording of this topic a "vision consistent with the Eucharist section of BEM", that is, the Faith and Order convergence statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* of 1982.²⁹

In order to appreciate the agreements in the corresponding Lu-

22 *Scripture and Tradition*. 49.

23 *Book Newsletter*. Augsburg Publishing House, 1995. 3.

24 *Scripture and Tradition*. 53.

25 RODGER P. C. – VISCHER Lukas (eds.), *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order (Montreal, 1963)*. London, 1964. 50–61.

26 ABBOTT, *Important Dates of Vatican II*. 111–128.

27 *Ut Unum Sint*. 79.

28 *Ut Unum Sint*. 79.

29 Joint Working Group Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, *Seventh Report*. Genève–Rome, 1998. 10. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Genève, 1982.

theran – Roman Catholic Dialogue III Report of 1967, *The Eucharist as Sacrifice*,³⁰ a summary of some historical differences between the two churches is helpful. A report on *The Eucharist* produced by the international Joint Roman Catholic – Lutheran Commission in 1978 explains that the “reality of the Eucharistic presence” is confessed by Roman Catholics in affirming the “transformation of the whole substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ”, a change called “transubstantiation”, while the Evangelical-Lutherans speak of a “presence of Jesus Christ’s body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine – but not of transubstantiation”.³¹ The additional divisive issue in Eucharistic understanding is the emphasis by Roman Catholics that a “true and proper sacrifice is offered” in the holy mass,³² while Evangelical-Lutherans have been “reticent about speaking of the Eucharist as a sacrifice”.³³

Against this backdrop of doctrinal divergence, the convergences recorded in the Dialogue III Report are significant. While indicating remaining differences, this is what the dialogue participants were able to say together about the Eucharist as sacrifice: Evangelical-Lutherans and Roman Catholics alike acknowledge that in the Lord’s Supper Jesus Christ is “present as the Crucified Who died for our sins and Who rose again for our justification, as the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world Who gives Himself to the faithful”. The confessional documents of both traditions agree that the celebration of the Eucharist is the Church’s sacrifice of praise and self-offering or oblation. Each tradition can make the following statement its own: “By him, with him and in him who is our great High Priest and Intercessor we offer to the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our praise, thanksgiving and intercession. With contrite hearts we offer ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, a sacrifice which must be expressed in the whole of our daily lives.”³⁴

Agreements on Jesus Christ’s Eucharistic presence include these quotations from the summary in the joint statement: “We affirm that in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper Jesus Christ, true God and true human, is present wholly and entirely, in his body and blood, under the signs of the bread and wine. [...] Our traditions have spoken of

this presence as ‘sacramental’, ‘supernatural’ and ‘spiritual’. These terms have [...] in common a rejection of a spatial or natural manner of presence, and a rejection of an understanding of the sacrament as only commemorative or figurative. The term ‘sign’, once suspect, is again recognised as a positive term for speaking of Jesus Christ’s presence in the sacrament.”³⁵

A ringing endorsement of these agreements, from a historical perspective, is offered by Harry J. MCSORLEY CSP, who was a professor of ecumenical theology at Saint Paul’s College, Washington D.C.: “The participants were gratefully aware [...] that at no time since the Reformation have representative Evangelical-Lutheran and Roman Catholic Christians been able to speak with such unanimity on the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.”³⁶ In the foreword of the report, an Evangelical-Lutheran, Paul C. EMPIE, and a Roman Catholic bishop, T. Austin MURPHY, who co-chaired the dialogue team, said that the “participants judged the outcome of the dialogue on this particular subject to be especially significant. The fact that it occurred during the 450th anniversary year of the Protestant Reformation may be another sign of a turning point from cleavage toward convergence.”³⁷

III. Ordination as a Sacrament to the Threefold Ministry

The original intention of the U.S. Evangelical-Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogue group was to move their conversations from “Eucharist” to the possibility of “intercommunion”. But this topic was set aside because, as Paul EMPIE and T. Austin MURPHY report, “conversations on this subject quickly revealed that one could not even discuss the matter without considering the key question of a valid ministry in relation to the Eucharist”.³⁸ Thus, Dialogue IV took up the topic *Eucharist and Ministry*. The central issues that have proven to be so challenging in connection with recognising the validity of ministry in another church are identified in an international Evangelical-Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogue on *The Ministry of the Church* in 1981. This report states that the Roman Catholic Church has traditionally assumed that the ministries of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church were “invalid”. The Second Vatican Council “speaks of a *defectus* in the sacrament of orders in the churches stemming from the

30 *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue III: The Eucharist as Sacrifice*. 1967.

31 MEYER Harding – VISCHER Lukas (eds.), *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. Ecumenical Documents II*. New York–Genève, 1982. 204.

32 MEYER Harding – VISCHER Lukas (eds.), *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. Ecumenical Documents II*. New York–Genève, 1982. 205.

33 *Eucharist as Sacrifice*. 186.

34 *Eucharist as Sacrifice*. 188–189.

35 *Eucharist as Sacrifice*. 192–193.

36 *Eucharist as Sacrifice*. 17.

37 *Eucharist as Sacrifice*. 3.

38 *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV: Eucharist and Ministry*. 1970. 3.

Reformation”.³⁹ This defect is due to the Roman Catholic conviction that there is a lack of “fullness” in the ministry of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, and that “standing in the historic succession belongs to the fullness of the episcopal ministry”.⁴⁰ Thus, the complete wording of the corresponding *Ut Unum Sint* topic includes the “threefold ministry of the episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate”.⁴¹

Evangelical-Lutherans, on the other hand, while quite unyielding about matters of faith, are very flexible regarding church order, holding that “any form of polity which serves the proclamation of the Gospel is acceptable”, including the episcopacy, with or without “apostolic succession”.⁴² In fact, the Evangelical-Lutheran confessions indicate a preference for retaining the traditional episcopal order and discipline of the Church, and express regret that no bishop was willing to ordain priests for evangelical congregations.⁴³

When the report of Dialogue IV presents its *Common Observations on Eucharistic Ministry*, the agreements seem sketched out in “broader strokes” than those recorded in Dialogues IX and III discussed above. There is the recognition of an emphasis on “doctrinal succession” in the New Testament and patristic periods; Evangelical-Lutheran practice shows a “conviction concerning the sacramental reality of ordination to the ministry”, which indicates “considerable convergence between the Roman Catholic and Evangelical-Lutheran understanding of ordination”; the “diverse ways in which [...] ministry has been structured and implemented in the Roman Catholic and Evangelical-Lutheran traditions” is acknowledged with this common affirmation that goes beyond mere “observation”: “We are agreed that the basic reality of the apostolic ministry can be preserved amid variations in structure and implementation, in rites of ordination and in theological explanation. [...] We rejoice together at the future prospect of Christian recognition and reconciliation opened by these recommendations.”⁴⁴

Then, in a kind of “comparative ecclesiology” or “comparative methodology” approach that has been employed by the Commission

on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC),⁴⁵ the report includes two separate reflections, first by the Evangelical-Lutheran and then by the Roman Catholic participants. At the end of each reflection, recommendations are made in bold-face type. The Evangelical-Lutherans urge that the participating Evangelical-Lutheran churches “declare formally their judgment that the ordained ministers of the Roman Catholic Church are engaged in a valid ministry of the Gospel [...] and that the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly present in their celebrations of the sacrament of the altar”.⁴⁶

The Roman Catholic reflection indicates a new perspective and a departure from the traditional position, which held that, without ordination by a “bishop who stands in succession to the apostles”, a minister can “make no claim to a valid Eucharistic ministry”.⁴⁷ There is an acknowledgement that “among most Evangelical-Lutherans there is no claim to an episcopate in historic succession to the apostles”, which means that Evangelical-Lutherans perpetuated a “presbyteral rather than an episcopal succession”.⁴⁸

Building on these and other insights, the Roman Catholic participants offer additional affirmations as part of their concluding statement in bold-face type. They acknowledge in the “spirit of the Second Vatican Council that the Evangelical-Lutheran communities with which we have been in dialogue are truly Christian churches, possessing the elements of holiness and truth that mark them as organs of grace and salvation”. Furthermore, they report having found “serious defects in the arguments customarily used against the validity of the Eucharistic ministry of the Evangelical-Lutheran churches”, and add that they “see no persuasive reason to deny the possibility of the Roman Catholic Church recognising the validity of this ministry”. The Roman Catholic dialogue group then appeals to the authorities of their church to “recognise the validity of the Evangelical-Lutheran ministry and, correspondingly, the presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharistic celebrations of the Evangelical-Lutheran churches”.⁴⁹

Speaking on behalf of all the Evangelical-Lutheran and Roman

39 *The Ministry in the Church* (1981). MEYER Harding – VISCHER Lukas (eds.), *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. Ecumenical Documents I*. New York–Genève, 1982. 271.

40 MEYER Harding – VISCHER Lukas (eds.), *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. Ecumenical Documents II*. New York–Genève, 1982. 272.

41 *Ut Unum Sint*. 79.

42 *Eucharist and Ministry*. 19.

43 *Eucharist and Ministry*. 15.

44 *Eucharist and Ministry*. 12–16.

45 FALCONER Alan D. (ed.), *Beyond the Limits of the Familiar Landscape: Faith and Order in Moshi: The 1996 Commission Meeting*. Genève, 1998. 41–43.

46 *Eucharist and Ministry*. 22.

47 *Eucharist and Ministry*. 23.

48 *Eucharist and Ministry*. 23.

49 *Eucharist and Ministry*. 31–33.

Catholic participants, Paul C. EMPIE and T. Austin MURPHY announce in the foreword of the report their anticipation that the dialogues will continue with the “consideration of at least two or three additional theological issues, which have been stumbling-blocks to mutual understanding”. They conclude with this look toward the future: “We hope fervently that these efforts will make at least a modest contribution toward the ultimate outward realisation of the oneness which all Christians have in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰

IV. The Teaching Magisterium of the Church

The complete wording of this fourth topic, also in *Ut Unum Sint* 79, indicates a breadth for which the summary below will prove to be inadequate: the “Magisterium of the Church, entrusted to the Pope and the bishops in communion with him, understood as a responsibility and an authority exercised in the name of Jesus Christ for teaching and safeguarding the faith”. The more concise corresponding topic of U.S. Dialogue Report VI is *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church* (1980).⁵¹

This issue of the Magisterium is connected to the promulgation of papal infallibility during the First Vatican Council in 1870, which stated: the “bishop of Rome, as successor of Saint Peter in the primacy, is divinely protected from error when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when as ‘pastor and doctor of all Christians’ and by virtue of his ‘supreme apostolic authority’, he ‘defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals’ to be held by the ‘universal Church’.”⁵² It was this infallibility which Pope PIUS XII invoked when he defined the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary in 1950,⁵³ a dogma which, until that *ex cathedra* moment, could have been accepted or rejected by the faithful as a pious opinion.

Despite the controversy that surrounds the pope’s authority to speak infallibly, there is an emerging ecumenical appreciation of the need for the churches to “agree on common ways of decision-making and ways of teaching authoritatively”. This is one of the visible “marks” of unity affirmed by the World Council of Churches (WCC)

at its Vancouver Assembly in 1983.⁵⁴ In addition, Willem A. VISSER’T HOOFT, former general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), indicated his own concern about this need, against the backdrop of papal infallibility, which he expressed in a book he authored just prior to his death in 1985, *Teachers and the Teaching Authorities: The Magistri and the Magisterium*.⁵⁵

In light of the confessional and ecumenical interest in this topic, the agreements reached in Round VI of the U.S. Evangelical-Lutheran – Roman Catholic dialogues are significant. After offering *A Fresh Look at Doctrinal Authority in Relation to the Question of Infallibility*, in which the roles of the Gospel and Scripture are highlighted, distinctive Roman Catholic and Evangelical-Lutheran emphases are identified, and then specific convergences are listed. These include the insistence that the “Word of God in the Scriptures is normative” and that the “apostolic Tradition [...] is interpreted within the family of God with the assistance of tradition in the form of creeds, liturgies, dogma, confessions, doctrines, forms of church government and discipline”. Rather than the “infallibility” of the pope, the dialogue participants use the term “indefectibility” of the Church to describe its “perseverance in the truth of the gospel”. Among the means by which “Christ preserves the Church in the truth of the Gospel, there is the ministry of Word and sacrament”. The agreement recognises that the task of “bishops or other leaders” is to “judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel”, and that there may be a “ministry to the universal Church” that “includes responsibility for overseeing both the Church’s proclamation and, where necessary, the reformulation of doctrine in fidelity to the Scriptures”.⁵⁶

A concluding statement maintains that the “ultimate trust of Christians is in Jesus Christ and the Gospel, not in a doctrine of infallibility, whether of Scripture, the Church, or the pope”. Immediately following is a remarkable Evangelical-Lutheran recognition of the “emphasis since the Second Vatican Council on the collegial relationship of the pope and the bishops” and the “intention of new styles of papal leadership by Pope JOHN and Pope PAUL”, plus the acceptance of the doctrine of infallibility as an “expression of confidence that the Spirit of God abides in the Church and guides it in the truth”.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ *Eucharist and Ministry*. 4.

⁵¹ EMPIE Paul C. – MURPHY Austin T. – BURGESS Joseph A. (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*. Minneapolis, 1980.

⁵² EMPIE Paul C. – MURPHY Austin T. – BURGESS Joseph A. (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*. Minneapolis, 1980. 12.

⁵³ EMPIE Paul C. – MURPHY Austin T. – BURGESS Joseph A. (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VI*. Minneapolis, 1980. 12.

⁵⁴ GILL David (ed.), *Gathered for Life: Official Report, Sixth Assembly, World Council of Churches*. Genève, 1983. 45.

⁵⁵ Genève, 2000.

⁵⁶ *Teaching Authority and Infallibility*. 14–26, 31.

⁵⁷ *Teaching Authority and Infallibility*. 36.

Alan FALCONER, a former director of the Commission on Faith and Order, has acknowledged that this commission has also “begun to address the question of authoritative teaching and the teaching authority of the Church”.⁵⁸ FALCONER expressed the hope that VISSER’T HOOFT’s book on *Teachers and Teaching Authorities* may “help the churches [...] to move towards convergence”.

V. The Virgin Mary

A hint of the controversy surrounding the fifth agenda topic proposed in *Ut Unum Sint* lies in the fact that the corresponding Evangelical-Lutheran – Roman Catholic Dialogue VIII Report on *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, required fourteen conferences spread over seventeen years in order to produce fifteen scholarly papers and some statements of agreement.⁵⁹ The priority given to *The One Mediator* in the dialogue title is in contrast with the full wording of the *Ut Unum Sint* topic, the “Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Jesus Christ’s disciples and for all humanity”.⁶⁰

In fairness to the Roman Catholic position, it is significant that the Second Vatican Council documents also affirm: “We have but one Mediator, as we know from the words of the apostle: ‘For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and people, himself human, Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all (1Tim. 2,5–6).’”⁶¹

Additional evidence of the dispute connected with the Virgin Mary is located in Chapter VIII of the Second Vatican Council Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), entitled ‘The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church’. Footnote 256 discloses some internal tensions among the bishops who participated in the Council proceedings:

“This eighth chapter was appended to the Constitution on the Church as a result of a vote in the Council on October 29, 1963, in which the Fathers, by a small majority, decided not to issue a separate document on the Blessed Virgin, as had originally been planned. [...] The entire text represents a skilful and prudent compromise

⁵⁸ VISSER’T HOOFT Willem A., *Teachers and the Teaching Authorities*. IX.

⁵⁹ ANDERSON H. George – STAFFORD J. Francis – BURGESS Joseph A. (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*. Minneapolis, 1992. 13.

⁶⁰ *Ut Unum Sint*. 79.

⁶¹ ABBOTT, *Important Dates of Vatican II*. 90.

between two tendencies in modern Roman Catholic theology, one of which would emphasise Mary’s unique connection with Jesus Christ the Redeemer; the other, her close connection with the Church and all the redeemed.”⁶²

Another indication that this topic was also difficult for the Evangelical-Lutheran – Roman Catholic theologians in Dialogue VIII is the small proportion of two pages devoted to “Church-Uniting Convergences” out of a total of four hundred pages in the report. Although few in quantity, a sample of these agreements is presented in what follows, in order to demonstrate their quality.

The convergences begin with a quotation from the just-preceding Dialogue VII Report, dated 1985, *Justification by Faith*: “We reiterate the basic affirmation that our ‘entire hope of justification and salvation rests on Jesus Christ and the Gospel. [...] We do not place our ultimate trust in anything other than God’s promise and saving work in Jesus Christ.’ (L/RC 7:4, 157).”⁶³ The 1Timothy 2,5 passage is then cited to “assert together that Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator in God’s plan of salvation”.

Rather than Mary, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are singled out for their “intercessory role”. The term *saint* refers to all those “justified by the grace of Jesus Christ” and for “certain individuals among them, marked by holiness, who live the life of faith in devotion toward God and love towards the neighbour in exemplary ways”. The “communion of saints” confessed in the Apostles’ Creed “includes believers both living and dead”.

It is after this more general treatment of saints that specific agreements on Mary are listed. She is described as the one “who bore Jesus Christ” and is in “particular to be honoured, as ‘God-bearer’ (*theotokos*) and as the pure, holy, and ‘most blessed Virgin’ (*laudatissima virgo*)”. The task of intercession is a part of “prayer to God”. While “saints on Earth ask one another to pray to God for each other through Jesus Christ, [...] they are neither commanded nor forbidden to ask departed saints to pray for them”. The cautionary suggestion is made that “devotion to the saints and Mary should not be practiced in ways that detract from the ultimate trust that is to be placed in Jesus Christ alone as Mediator”.

Under a short section on *Next Steps*, the report admits that our “churches are still separated by differing views on matters such as the invocation of saints and the Immaculate Conception and Assumption

⁶² ABBOTT, *Important Dates of Vatican II*. 85.

⁶³ *The One Mediator*. 60–62.

of Mary”. But the Evangelical-Lutheran and Roman Catholic scholars anticipate “greater progress toward fellowship by taking two further steps within the framework of common study and dialogue”. Then it is recommended that Evangelical-Lutheran churches “acknowledge that the Roman Catholic teaching about the saints and Mary as set forth in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (192–201) does not promote idolatrous belief or practice and is not opposed to the gospel”. The Roman Catholic Church is asked to “acknowledge that in a closer but still incomplete fellowship, Evangelical-Lutherans, focusing on Jesus Christ the one Mediator, as set forth in Scripture, would not be obliged to invoke the saints or to affirm the two Marian dogmas (100, 102)”.⁶⁴

With an eye toward the future, dialogue co-chairperson J. Francis STAFFORD and H. George ANDERSON write in the preface: “We now submit this document to the authorities, theologians, pastors, and people of our supporting churches for their reflection and judgment. We await their reaction to our findings and recommendations toward unity.”⁶⁵ Eight years later in 1998, Dialogue Report VIII, dealing with Mary and the saints, was called the “most extended treatment of the subject in formal ecumenical literature”.⁶⁶

VI. The Ministry of Unity of the Bishop of Rome

The sixth topic proposed by Pope JOHN PAUL II in *Ut Unum Sint*, the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome, follows his list of five topics identified above, as if to suggest that the papacy is the culmination of the ecumenical agenda. While only one paragraph is needed to list the first five topics, nine paragraphs are devoted to the papacy, also referred to as the “ministry of the Successor of Peter”, “*servus servorum Dei*”, “the primacy of the Bishop of Rome”, “the Petrine ministry”, and the “first servant of unity”.⁶⁷ JOHN PAUL says that he is in no way renouncing what is essential to the mission of the papacy, but declares that the “primacy [...] is nonetheless open to a new situation”.⁶⁸

In light of this development, former Archbishop John R. QUINN of San Francisco, California, calls the encyclical a “revolutionary docu-

ment” and offers this paraphrase of what the pope is saying: “I realise that the papal primacy is a serious obstacle to our union. Let us talk about it and see what can be done. There are certain basic elements that the papal primacy will always have to have. But beyond that things can change. There can be a new way of papal primacy. I cannot say what that would be. I need your help in trying to discover it.”⁶⁹

This commitment to a re-examination of the role of the papacy points to the contemporary significance of the corresponding Evangelical-Lutheran – Roman Catholic Dialogue Report V of 1974, *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church*.⁷⁰ There were some historical controversies surrounding the papacy at the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation that add weight to the relevance of this fresh approach to these issues. Roman Catholics maintained that the papacy is a matter of divine law (*ius divinum*), while Evangelical-Lutherans insisted that the papacy was “established by human law, [...] and that its claims to divine right are nothing short of blasphemous”.⁷¹ The concept of absolute papal power “was vehemently repudiated by Evangelical-Lutherans and was viewed by them as leading to intolerable ecclesiastical tyranny”. By contrast, the Dialogue V Report notes: “In the course of our discussions, however, we have been able to gain helpful and clarifying insights regarding these points of controversy.”⁷²

The radically polemical view of Martin LUTHER, that the pope was the “Anti-Christ” because of Rome’s insistence that Christians cannot be saved without his power, is widely known. Philip MELANCHTHON also expressed concern about the abuse of papal authority, but was willing to “concede to him that superiority over the bishops which he possesses by human right, making this concession for the sake of peace and general unity”.⁷³ A more recent historical reference that illustrates the official position of the Roman Catholic Church is this quotation from the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*): “For in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme,

69 QUINN John R., *The Reform of the Papacy: The Costly Call to Christian Unity. Ut Unum Sint: Studies on Papal Primacy*. New York, 1999. 34.

70 EMPIE Paul C. – MURPHY T. Austin (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*. Minneapolis, 1974.

71 EMPIE Paul C. – MURPHY T. Austin (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*. Minneapolis, 1974. 13.

72 EMPIE Paul C. – MURPHY T. Austin (eds.), *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*. Minneapolis, 1974. 13.

73 MEYER Harding, *Suprema Auctoritas ideo ab omne Errore Immunis: The Lutheran Approach to Primacy*. In PUGLISI James F. (ed.), *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue*. Collegeville, 1999. 16, 19.

64 BROWN Raymond E. – DONFRIED Karl P. – FITZMEYER Joseph A. – REUMANN John (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament*. Philadelphia – New York – Ramsey – Toronto, 1978.

65 *The One Mediator*. 14.

66 *The Lutheran-Catholic Quest*. 6.

67 *Ut Unum Sint*. 88–96.

68 *Ut Unum Sint*. 95.

and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely.”⁷⁴

One disappointment in reading the report of Dialogue V is that much of the so-called *Common Statement* is more accurately described by the major heading of the section *Differing Attitudes towards Papal Primacy*.⁷⁵ A sample of these for the most part complementary perspectives will be demonstrated after first quoting a few examples of genuine agreement. Speaking in more general terms, the participating theologians were able to make this statement:

“In these sessions, we have once again found common ground. There is a growing awareness among Evangelical-Lutherans of the necessity of a specific ministry to serve the Church’s unity and universal mission, while Roman Catholics increasingly see the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of the papacy within the universal Church. Evangelical-Lutherans and Roman Catholics can now begin to envision possibilities of concord, and to hope for solutions to problems that have previously seemed insoluble. We believe that God is calling our churches to draw closer together, and it is our prayer that this joint statement on papal primacy may make some contribution to that end.”⁷⁶

More specific agreement is recorded under the heading of *Towards the Renewal of Papal Structures*. The *Norms for Renewal* include the principles of *legitimate diversity*, *collegiality*, and *subsidiarity*, that is, allowing “every section of the Church” to exercise its “legitimate freedom”.⁷⁷ As if to “think out loud” together, the Evangelical-Lutherans, and then the Roman Catholics, speculate about what a renewed papacy and Evangelical-Lutheran – Roman Catholic relationships would look like.

The Evangelical-Lutherans propose a “ministry serving the unity of the Church universal”; a primacy which would be “more pastoral than juridical”; “so structured [...] that it clearly serves the Gospel and the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ”; the “possibility of reconciliation, which would recognise the self-government of Evangelical-Lutheran churches within a communion”; “acknowledge the Evangelical-Lutheran churches [...] as sister churches, which are already entitled to some measure of ecclesiastical communion”; “affirm a new attitude towards the papacy ‘for the sake of peace and concord

in the Church’ and [...] for a united witness to Jesus Christ in the world”; a “renewed papacy would in fact foster faithfulness to the Gospel and truly exercise a Petrine function within the Church”.⁷⁸

The reflections of the Roman Catholic participants include the following ideas for consideration. Admitting that the *Common Statement* falls short of total agreement, the Roman Catholic team nevertheless considers it a “major advance in the ecumenical discussion of one of the most sensitive issues that have historically divided the Evangelical-Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches”. In the New Testament study, it is granted that “we have not [...] found a clear and direct affirmation of the papacy itself”. The Second Vatican Council has “called for modifications in the Roman understanding of papal leadership”. “We share the concern of our Evangelical-Lutheran partners in dialogue that safeguards should be provided against violations of Christian rights and freedoms on the part of all ecclesiastical authority, papal included,” but “we cannot foresee any set of circumstances that would make it desirable, even if it were possible, to abolish the papal office”. There is a realisation that Evangelical-Lutherans will “presumably not be in a position to adopt the same relationship to the see of Rome that is currently held by Roman Catholics”. But they suggest that a “distinct canonical status may be worked out by which Evangelical-Lutherans could be in official communion with the church of Rome. Such a restoration of communion, we believe, would be of great benefit to Roman Catholics, and to Evangelical-Lutherans, enabling them both to share in a broader Christian heritage.”⁷⁹

Some of the proposals for a renewed papacy in Dialogue Report V are echoed in certain concepts of the papacy envisioned by Pope JOHN PAUL II in *Ut Unum Sint*. He regards his office as a “ministry of unity” and as not “exercising power over the people [...] as the rulers of the gentiles”, but “leading them towards peaceful pastures”, working together with the “whole body of Bishops, who are also ‘vicars and ambassadors of Jesus Christ’”, desiring the “full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God’s faithfulness, God’s Spirit dwells”. He further describes the papal ministry as a “service of love recognised by all concerned”, a “ministry which presides in truth and love so that the ship – that beautiful symbol which the World Council of Churches (WCC) has chosen as its emblem – will not be buffeted by the storms and will one day reach its haven”.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ ABBOTT, *Important Dates of Vatican II*. 43.

⁷⁵ *Papal Primacy*. 9.

⁷⁶ *Papal Primacy*. 10.

⁷⁷ *Papal Primacy*. 19–20.

⁷⁸ *Papal Primacy*. 21–33.

⁷⁹ *Papal Primacy*. 33–38.

⁸⁰ *Ut Unum Sint*. 88, 94, 95, 97.

In these various agreements, reflections and proposals regarding the papacy – in the dialogue and in the encyclical – there is the disclosure of an ecumenical vision of a united Church in the future. Typical of this vision is the concluding reflection of the Roman Catholic participants in Dialogue V: “In such a wider communion of churches the papacy would be able to serve as a sign and instrument of unity, not simply for Roman Catholics, but for others, who have never ceased to pray and labour for the manifest unity of the whole Church of Jesus Christ”.⁸¹

The writer wishes to offer this brief update on the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogues in the United States. In 2005, a tenth round was completed and published under the title “The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries.” In 2010, an eleventh round, “The Hope of Eternal Life,” is anticipated for completion.

On an international level, “The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity,” was published by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 2006. This text, as well as the U.S. document on “The Church as Koinonia of Salvation,” deal with the challenging ecumenical issues of ecclesiology.

NAGYPÁL Szabolcs

Speaking the Truth in Love: An Ecumenical Framework for Interreligious Dialogue

When drawing an ecumenical framework for interreligious dialogue, we must consider the history of this endeavour both in the circles of the Genève-based World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Rome-based Roman Catholic Church. Some important concepts such as religion, ideology, worldview and spirituality need to be defined as well. The Biblical basis for such a framework is constituted by the appearance of the word dialogue in both the Holy Scripture and in some interesting places which may serve as engines on the interreligious path. All these point towards a changing landscape of interreligious ideas and methods.

I. History of Thoughts on Interreligious Dialogue in the Ecumenical Movement

1. Interreligious Endeavours of the World Council of Churches (WCC)

The first ecumenical meeting to address and deal with the question of interreligious dialogue and encounter was the legendary missionary conference which took place in 1910 in *Edinburgh*.¹ This gathering decided to once and for all split with the previously practiced idea of *comity*, which means the allocation of certain areas for the work of a certain denominational foreign mission, whose consequence was

⁸¹ *Papal Primacy*. 38.

¹ More on the history of interreligious dialogue may be read in the following entry: ARIARAJAH S. Wesley, *Interfaith Dialogue*. In LOSSKY Nicholas – BONINO José Míguez – POBEE John – STRANSKY Tom – WAINWRIGHT Geoffrey – WEBB Pauline (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Genève, 1991. 281–286.