

# RESEPTIO $\frac{2}{11}$

KIRKON ULKOASIAIN OSASTON TEOLOGISTEN ASIAIN TIEDOTUSLEHTI



**The Same Church in all Directions – Lutheran Identity and Ecumenism**

*To the honor of Archbishop emeritus John Vikström*

*on his 80th birthday October 1st 2011*

# RESEPTIO 2/2011

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# Foreword

Mt Reverend Dr John Vikström, Archbishop of Turku and Finland, has played a significant role in the ecumenical movement in Finland, in the Nordic Countries and in international ecumenical organizations. During his time in the leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland first as Bishop of the Swedish speaking diocese of Borgå (Porvoo, 1970-1982) and later as Archbishop of Turku and Finland (1982-1998) our Church was an active and highly influential member church in the Conference of European Churches (CEC), Finnish Ecumenical Council (FEC), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Nordic Ecumenical Council (NEC) and World Council of Churches (WCC).

At the same time the direct mutual relations to other churches and ecclesial communions increased greatly. Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland was also actively involved in bilateral

dialogues both in Finland and abroad. Archbishop Vikström was a respected ecumenical theologian and Church leader both in east and west as well as in north and south.

John Vikström is celebrating 1.10.2011 his 80 years anniversary. In order to commemorate his close coworkers will publish in English a collection of his important ecumenical articles, lectures and sermons. They have been held in different contexts and situations during the past years, but nevertheless they are still actual and relevant also in the present challenging and changing ecumenical situation.

I am honored to be asked to write this short foreword in this volume “The Same Church in all Directions – Lutheran Identity and Ecumenism” and to express my warm gratitude to my honored and highly esteemed predecessor on the seat of St. Henry.

*Kari Mäkinen*  
*Archbishop of Turku and Finland*

# I INTRODUCTION

## John Vikström's Ecumenical Outlook

Rev. Dr. Risto Cantell

During John Vikström's tenure as the archbishop of Turku and Finland from 1982 to 1998, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland strengthened her ties with other churches and ecumenical organizations. Vikström is known in Canterbury, Geneva, Constantinople, Moscow and Rome as an ecumenical leader whose thoughtful opinions have been eagerly sought. What has Vikström's ecumenical attitude been? This article explores the questions of what Vikström attempted to achieve, and what direction the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland took during his sixteen-year archiepiscopacy.

During the eighth general meeting of the World Council of Churches (WCC) held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998, the former Secretary General of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), Jean Fischer, and the leader of the delegation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Bishop of Mikkeli, Voitto Huotari, found themselves in the same line queuing for coffee. While waiting for their coffee, the gentlemen discussed the ecumenical input of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

Fischer said that the Evangelical Lutheran

Church of Finland was the best and most active member church in the Conference of European Churches. Upon hearing this, Huotari hailed a passing Finn and said, "Come hear this. I'm sure you will find this interesting and pleasing." Fischer replied, "He already knows it, as the archbishop's former secretary. John Vikström has often called himself a man of the CEC."

### European Man of the Church

What exactly did Jean Fischer mean when he called Archbishop Vikström a man of the Conference of European Churches, and that the church in Finland is the best member of the CEC? How can Vikström be appropriated as an attribute of a single ecumenical organization?

Fischer did not elaborate on his claim during the coffee break in Harare, but several facts supporting his interpretation can readily be found. Archbishop Vikström was one of the three chairs of the CEC General Assembly held in Prague in 1992, and he performed this difficult task with honor.

At the Assembly, held in the midst of political and ecclesiastical upheaval,

Vikström had to use all his skill and energy to guide the disordered meeting to a sensible and democratic conclusion. Together with the Orthodox Father George Tsetsis and the Dutch Reformed Mrs. Ploni Robbers-van Berkel, he directed discussions with skill and determination.

Vikström's friendly but firm grip also kept the voluble Orthodox clergy in line. The chairman and Chrysostomos, the Metropolitan of Peristerion, occasionally exchanged terse words about how the meeting was being run and how the decisions were being made. However, their friendship and mutual respect were able to withstand even the more heated moments of the meeting.

When the CEC and the Catholic Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) convened the second European Ecumenical Assembly in Graz in 1997, Vikström was the guest of honor. He was entrusted with delivering the blessing at the CEC opening service after the Assembly.

At the Assembly in Graz, the CEC passed a measure to integrate the CEC and the European Ecumenical Church and Society Commission (EECS), a process which began in early 1999. Archbishop Vikström, along with the Church Council for International Relations, was firmly in favor of the integration of these two organizations. He has often spoken out in favor of the cooperation between various ecumenical groups.

These are some of the reasons that might have led Jean Fischer to describe the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland under John Vikström's direction as the most active church in the CEC. His views were likely also influenced by the fact that, over the last few years, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has increased her financial backing of the CEC and acted in other ways to support the day-to-day functioning of the CEC.

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many church leaders in Europe questioned whether the CEC, which had worked on behalf of the détente and to promote cooperation between the churches of the East and the West, had any relevance in the new Europe. John Vikström was keen to point out that continued action for the unity of Europe and the European churches was still necessary.

Vikström's and the Finnish Church's attitude was proved correct. The CEC's time is not yet over. Its missions and challenges have changed and continue to change, but it is still needed. A unified Europe and unity between the churches on our continent is by no means a given. Jean Fischer was correct in saying that John Vikström is an important European cleric.

## **Supporter of the World Council of Churches**

Archbishop Vikström's ecumenical

activity is not limited just to Europe and the management of European ecumenical affairs. Vikström could equally be called a man of the World Council of Churches. When he was a docent at the Åbo Academy, John Vikström was a member of the Finnish delegation to the fourth assembly of the WCC held in Uppsala in 1968. His key emphases on ecumenism and his long-lasting friendships date from that period.

At the WCC assembly held in Vancouver in 1983, the newly installed Archbishop John Vikström was one of the main presenters and leader of his church's delegation. In Vancouver he was also elected to the Central Committee of the WCC. He held this position until the following, seventh, assembly held in Canberra, Australia, in 1991. Vikström was also the vice-chairman of the WCC's third program unit, and was actively involved in planning the restructuring of the WCC. At the same time, back home he was serving as the chairman of the Finnish Ecumenical Council, and, as archbishop, was responsible for fostering the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's burgeoning ecumenical connections.

In the World Council of Churches, Vikström rapidly attained a key position of influence. He had good connections with representatives of most churches. Vikström's expertise and diplomatic skills were also employed in many different assemblies and meetings. At the headquarters in Geneva, they would have

liked to make greater use of his ecumenical abilities, but his duties as archbishop set clear limits on his involvement in practice. The WCC's Uruguayan General Secretary, Rev. Dr. Emilio Castro (Methodist), the Bulgarian Deputy General Secretary Prof. Dr. Todor Sabev (Orthodox) and the German chairman of the Central Committee, Bishop Heinz Joachim Held (Lutheran/EKD) supported Vikström in many key ecumenical issues.

In the WCC, Vikström emphasized two things in particular: the importance of discussing issues of doctrine (the task of the Faith and Order Commission), and the necessity of clarifying matters relating to social ethics. He wanted to develop the World Council of Churches specifically as a body for Christian cooperation that paid close attention to the voices of its member churches.

### **A Lutheran Church Leader**

Unlike his predecessors, Archbishops *Mikko Juva* and *Martti Simojoki*, John Vikström did not serve as president or vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), nor was he a member of the LWF executive committee. Nevertheless, he has done a great deal of work for the Lutheran World Federation and has built connections between different Lutheran churches.

Vikström led his church's delegation at the LWF Assembly in Budapest in 1984. He was also present at the meeting of

Lutheran church leaders in Geneva in 1994, and at the meeting of European Lutheran church leaders in Liebfrauenberg in 1992 and Budapest in 1996. At these and other Lutheran events, John Vikström has clearly raised the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's Lutheran and ecumenical profile.

At the conference of European Lutheran church leaders in 1996, Vikström delivered a presentation about the foundations of Christian social ethics that related to the themes of the second European Ecumenical Assembly held in Graz. The presentation generated discussion and feedback even outside the Lutheran churches. The director of one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (and later Interim General Secretary of the CEC), the theologian and Romanian Orthodox Father, Professor Viorel Ionita, considered it the best presentation on social ethics he had ever read.

Vikström is highly respected amongst the Lutheran churches of the world. His international renown may be even greater than his fame in Finland. His approach to ecumenism, which combines a strong Lutheran identity with ecumenical openness towards all, has inspired admiration and respect in many Lutheran sister churches in Eastern Europe, Germany and the U.S.A.

He has received honorary doctorates from the Budapest Theological Academy in

Hungary, as well as from Suomi College (now Finlandia University) in Hancock, Michigan, in the United States.

Archbishop Vikström received an honorary doctorate of theology also from the Leningrad Theological Academy. This extremely rare accolade from the Russian Orthodox Church demonstrates how well-respected the archbishop is amongst the Orthodox.

During his student days at the University of Helsinki, John Vikström was a keen student of Lutheran theology. He was especially stimulated by the work of the Swedish theologians Gustav Aulen, Ragnar Bring, Anders Nygren and Gustav Wingren as well as the Danish theologian Regin Prenter. Later, the seminars jointly led by professors Lauri Haikola and Gotthard Nygren gave him a thorough grounding in Lutheran social ethics, and introduced him to the theology of Professor Herbert Olsson. This stage of his studies was excellent training for his future academic career and episcopacy. Later, as lecturer in systematic theology and then as assistant professor of ethics and philosophy of religion at the Swedish-speaking University of Turku (Åbo Academy), he was able to make extensive use of his past studies.

As Bishop of Porvoo, and even before, John Vikström had a reputation as an expert in social ethics and was often consulted. He served for several years



as chairman of the Church Social Work committee and was a member of many committees dealing with issues regarding church order, social ethics and theology. Even though John Vikström did not specifically study Luther, he kept up with the Finnish and international scholarship on Luther. As part of the dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Russian Orthodox Church, he became acquainted with Tuomo Mannermaa and his project on Luther at the University of Helsinki. Like his predecessor, Archbishop Martti Simojoki, Vikström supported the scholarship of Mannermaa and his students, and was quick to appreciate its implications for Lutheran theology and the Church's ecumenical efforts.

An important influence on John Vikström's pastoral outlook and preaching was Rev. Dr. Geert Sentzke, vicar of the German Congregation in Helsinki, with whom Vikström lodged for three years when he was a student in Helsinki.

### **Building connections with the Reformed Churches**

As a Lutheran theologian, John Vikström has always wanted to foster good relations with the Reformed churches and their theologians. He chaired in the working group that prepared the Finnish Church's statement regarding the *Leuenberg Concord* (1973), which fosters fellowship between the reformatory churches (i.e., Lutheran, Reformed and United

churches). The signatories agreed on a close communion based on a common understanding of justification, known as the Leuenberg Communion. Other members of the working group included Professor Frederic Cleve and Professor Tuomo Mannermaa. The general synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland accepted the working group's recommendation and in 1976 declined to sign the Agreement, but ELCF participated actively in the consultations and theological projects organized by the Leuenberg Communion.

Both as bishop and archbishop, John Vikström was committed to seeing that the council's decision to be involved in the theological work surrounding the Leuenberg Communion was implemented. Our church has regularly sent observers to the Leuenberg general assemblies and representatives to its theological working groups. The Finnish church has also acted as host to many of these working groups. The same cooperation has continued since the Communion was renamed the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in 2003.

In addition to the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, the most important channels for interaction with the Reformed churches have been the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. When he was serving on the Central Committee of the WCC, John Vikström became friends with the Rev. Dr. Paul A. Crow, president

of the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). A delegation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland led by the archbishop visited the headquarters of the Disciples of Christ in Indianapolis and became acquainted with their activities and vibrant ecumenical networks. The archbishop later sent his secretary to attend the synod of this very ecumenically oriented and interesting church. A delegation of the Disciples of Christ, led by the Rev. Dr. Crow, visited Finland in 1998. During the visit the delegation experienced many aspects of the life of our church and participated in the Finnish preparatory seminar for the WCC General Assembly in Harare.

During his trips to Rome, Archbishop Vikström has often visited the old Waldensian church (Chiesa Valdese) and its theological faculty. The renowned Waldensian theologian, Professor Paolo Ricca, greatly appreciates that the archbishop of a large, majority, Lutheran church has taken pains to foster good relations with minority Protestant churches in his own country and around the world. John Vikström has become familiar with Reformed and other Protestant churches through the Conference of European Churches and other similar organizations. The Swiss Reformed theologian Jean Fischer who served as Secretary General of the CEC was close friends with John Vikström, and they worked well together. Fischer was known to consult John Vikström about important issues

before making a final decision. They maintained a close correspondence well into retirement. Both being ecumenical theologians, they considered it important to promote connections in all directions from the basis of one's own theological identity. They both had very close ties to the largest member church in the CEC, the Russian Orthodox Church and its leader, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Alexey II.

### **Respected by the Orthodox**

John Vikström's connections with the Orthodox Church are worthy of a chapter of their own. Archbishop Johannes (Johannes Wilho Rinne, 1923-2010, Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland 1989-2001, after his retirement he was granted the title of Metropolitan of Nicaea and Exarch of Bithynia by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) and John Vikström were colleagues and friends since their days at the Åbo Academy in the 1960's. This friendship lasted through the years despite theological variances. The archbishops' attitudes towards female priesthood and some societal issues may have differed, but friendship and a sense of humor bound them together.

Both the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I, and the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexey II, have visited Vikström in Turku. Vikström in turn has visited both Constantinople and Moscow. Close ties have been maintained with the Russian

Orthodox Church over the years.

The archbishop of the Lutheran Church has led the delegation of the Church of Finland in all doctrinal discussions with the Russian Orthodox Church. The eleventh series of discussions, the last of John Vikström's archiepiscopacy, took place in Lappeenranta in October 1998. The Finnish delegation was headed by Archbishop Vikström and the Russian delegation by Vladimir, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga. Dialogue with the Orthodox Church in Finland began in 1989, at Archbishop Vikström's initiative.

Through this dialogue and other contact, good relations have been built up with the Russian Orthodox Church, which have in turn benefited the Lutheran churches in Russia, such as the Ingrian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Russia and other states (ELCROS). At the beginning of the 1990's the only group the Russian Orthodox Church were engaged in doctrinal dialogue with were the Finns.

In 1998, Vikström was the first Finnish Lutheran archbishop to make an official visit to Constantinople. It is a good illustration of the ecumenical situation in Finland at the time that the archbishops of both national churches took part. Patriarch Bartholomew received his guests – Vikström and Archbishop Johannes – graciously and reaffirmed the Ecumenical Patriarchate's commitment to ecumenical ties and close links with Finland.

## Relationship with Rome

During John Vikström's time, the relationship of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland with Rome improved noticeably. A cool distance was replaced by a warm and close relationship tempered by mutual respect. Contrary to critics' fears, Vikström did not drag the Lutheran Church back to Mother Church in Rome.

He consistently rejected "the return to Rome" as an ecumenical model. He has pointed out to Roman Catholic theologians, that, after the Second Vatican Council, a return to Rome is no longer even what is on offer. The discussion now is about a restoration of unity (*Unitatis redintegratio*). It is a challenge issued to all churches and requires penitence, improvement and reform from everyone.

Archbishop Vikström met with Pope John Paul II on several occasions. Of these, two in particular are worth mentioning. When Pope John Paul II visited the Nordic Countries in the summer of 1989, the archbishop kindly and courteously received him in Turku Cathedral and the bishop's residence. Vikström emphasized the importance of the Bishops of both Turku and Rome praying together for the unity of the Church and world peace.

On a return visit to Rome in October 1991, Archbishops John Vikström and Bertil Werkström of the Church of Sweden were the first leaders of other churches to officiate at Vespers together with the Pope

at the main altar of St. Peter's in Rome. This happened in conjunction with the feast celebrating the 600 years anniversary of the canonization of Saint Birgitta. In his sermon at St. Peter's, Archbishop Vikström echoed Birgitta's prayer, "Lord, show me the way and make me ready to follow it." Earlier, in 1985, Pope John Paul II had told Archbishop Johannes, Archbishop Vikström, and the Catholic Bishop of Helsinki, Paul Verschuren, that he hoped that "you in the North might find the way to the reunion of the Church".

In Uppsala in 1993, the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, suggested that the Lutheran churches of Sweden and Finland together with the Catholic dioceses of Helsinki and Stockholm should work with the Pontifical Council to explore possibilities for closer unity between these churches.

In his response, Archbishop Vikström expressed support for the cardinal's suggestion, but said that the churches of Sweden and Finland represented all of Lutheran Christendom and this necessitated investigating the true ecumenical potential between the churches. Later, in discussions among the Lutheran churches of the Nordic Countries it was agreed to open up regional dialogue with the Catholic Church in the North. The venture did not advance beyond a mutual agreement of general good faith.

*The Joint Declaration of the Doctrine*

*of Justification* compiled by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church received the support of Archbishop Vikström and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. I doubt that any other Lutheran church has discussed the issue of justification as long and as thoroughly as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Most of the credit for this is due to the archbishop and other bishops, who were unanimously agreed in their support of the Joint Declaration.

### **A Leading Nordic Cleric**

In the Nordic Countries, John Vikström attained a position unlike that of anyone else. For a long time he was one of the undisputed spiritual leaders of the Nordic churches who was entrusted with the most difficult responsibilities, and whose word was heeded. For example, the Nordic Ecumenical Council based in Uppsala employed Vikström as their keynote speaker in their major seminars.

The respect and authority awarded to John Vikström did not derive solely from his position as archbishop. It is based more on his personal qualities, his modest nature, his relentless honesty and theological dependability. The recent archbishops of Sweden have often noted with envy that the Church of Finland, which previously was like a little brother or sister to the Church of Sweden, has outgrown it and has matured into an independent ecumenical authority.

The Archbishop of Uppsala, K.G. Hammar, presented Archbishop John Vikström with the Medal of St. Erik on the eve of Epiphany as a mark of honor of the Swedish Church. In this way, the Church of Sweden wished to express its gratitude to the Archbishop of Finland, who has been a great spokesman for Lutheranism of all the Nordic Countries.

## **Bishop of Porvoo**

Before becoming archbishop, John Vikström spent twelve years as bishop of the Swedish-speaking diocese of Porvoo. During his time in Porvoo, he matured from being pastor of his own see to a skilled spokesperson for the whole church on the international ecumenical arena.

As archbishop he became the Bishop of Porvoo in a different sense, when the Lutheran churches of the Nordic and Baltic States, and the Anglican Churches of Britain and Ireland signed the 1996 *Porvoo Declaration*, which forged a close ecclesiastical fellowship between the Anglicans and Lutherans of Northern Europe. John Vikström signed the declaration on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in the cathedrals of Nidaros and Tallinn, and in Westminster Abbey in London.

Vikström was granted the privilege of delivering the sermon at the celebratory mass held in England's national sanctuary, Westminster Abbey. The sermon was both theologically weighty and funny.

Rarely has the whole congregation of Westminster Abbey – including the Queen of England – laughed out loud during, and because of, a sermon held there.

At the first meeting of the church leaders of the Porvoo Communion, held in Turku in the winter of 1998, Vikström naturally acted as host. He led the meeting with skill and gentleness – as was his habit in domestic episcopal conferences and church councils.

When Vikström suddenly had to undergo surgery for cancer during the Porvoo convention, prayers were said on his behalf not only in Finland but also amongst all the countries of the Porvoo Communion, and in the ecumenical world at large. From every corner of Christendom letters flooded to Turku, and the flowers and well-wishes clearly showed just how venerated and respected an ecumenical leader John Vikström is.

## **Overtures towards the Free Churches**

In the portrait of John Vikström's ecumenical accomplishments, his connections with the Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches have been highlighted. While accurate, this is only part of the whole picture, part of his ecumenical efforts. In reality, Archbishop Vikström's ecumenical policy is much broader and more multi-faceted. As chairman for many years of the Finnish Ecumenical Council, as well as through

his office as a Lutheran archbishop, he has forged strong and active relationships with all of the churches and Christian communities operating in Finland.

During his archiepiscopacy, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has been involved in doctrinal dialogues and formed permanent councils with the Evangelical Free Church of Finland and the Finnish Pentecostals. This was followed with dialogues with the Baptist and Methodist churches in Finland. An agreement between the Lutheran church and the Methodists was signed in 2010.

The archbishop has regularly maintained contact with both the Free Church Council of Finland and its Swedish language counterpart. In these discussions both parties have gotten down to brass tacks regarding both difficult theological issues as well as practical problems. The archbishop has also given his full support to efforts to develop the laws in Finland concerning freedom of religion to further protect the rights of all groups.

### **Maintaining connections and building bridges**

In the Evangelical Lutheran church, the archbishop is not the superior of the other bishops, although many people think this is the case. He is, as the old saying goes, “*primus inter pares*”, first among equals. Every bishop is the chief pastor of the priests and congregations in his own diocese. The archbishop, however, has

a special position regarding ecumenical affairs. He decides, with the Church’s Department for International Relations, how the Church is to be represented on an ecumenical and inter-church level.

During John Vikström’s tenure, the ecumenical ties of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland have grown, expanded, and diversified. I doubt there is another church in all Christendom that has so widespread and positive interactions with other churches that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland enjoys. The spectrum of ties extends from the Roman-Catholic and Orthodox Churches to the Pentecostals and Free Churches.

In all his interactions, Vikström has highlighted the particular identity of the Lutheran church and the importance of ecumenical openness to that identity. Only by being faithful to its own heritage can a church genuinely interact with other churches and Christian communities. In his duties as archbishop, Vikström has always considered himself Saint Henry’s heir and successor.

The historical continuity of the church and executing the heritage of the Reformation has, in practical terms, led to reforms in the church that are in keeping with changing times. The church exists partly anchored to one time, but also steaming full speed towards the future. In honor of John Vikström’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1991, the Festschrift “*Purjeena Perinne*” (“Tradition as a Sail”) was published, a title that aptly

reflects his activities and policies.

Already when serving as bishop of Porvoo, John Vikström began to pursue an ecumenical policy that as archbishop of Turku and Finland he was able to commit to implementing. The church's continued commitment to this policy was affirmed in the ecumenical strategy approved by the Department of International Relations, "Our Church: A community in search of unity. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's ecumenical strategy until 2015", and in the leaflet published in 2010 entitled "Lutheran and Ecumenical: The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and its ties with other churches". Both of these statements have been well received

both in our own church and in churches and ecumenical organizations around the world.

*This is an updated version of the article "John Vikström's Ecumenical Outlook" which originally appeared in Finnish in the magazine Kanava in March 1999. The author, Rev. Dr. Risto Cantell served as director of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland's Department for International Relations from 1994 to 2010. He is a docent of ecumenical theology at the University of Helsinki, and served as Archbishop Vikström's secretary from 1984 to 1992.*

# Where are We Standing, Where are We Going?

*An Attempt at an Ecumenical Position and Setting a course for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland*

*A Lecture in Nordic WCC/CEC meeting in Järvenpää, on January 13-15, 1995*

For every Church taking part in the ecumenical movement, it is important, both for oneself and for others, to clarify one's position and one's stated goals. Below, I will make an attempt to explain where the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland can be placed on the ecumenical map and what course it should set for the years to come.

### 1. Where do we stand?

I will make the stated position decision using city names, which will represent Churches and denominations or historically and theologically important decisions.

#### 1.1 Uppsala

The Lutheran Churches of Sweden and Finland were for a long time joined as a single Church. In 1593 this Church made a particularly important ecumenical course correction, which we have celebrated, also together, quite recently in Uppsala. At the meeting in Uppsala in 1593, Sweden and Finland defined the joint church's

position in regards to Rome as well as Geneva, i.e. the Calvinist branch of the Reformation. The decision made at that point in history has significance for us today, as we are to state the ecumenical position of our Churches. This involves referring to a number of very old cities, not only Jerusalem and Rome, but also Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), i.e. cities where the undivided Church made important position decisions. We believe that our Churches were born long before Martin Luther and Gustav Vasa.

Consequently, there was both a fundamental and a historical motivation for the clearly defined ecumenical character of the 400-year jubilee held about a year ago. The jubilee service also included the preachings of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew as well as Cardinal Cassidy, leader of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican. The Patriarch delivered a chalice to Archbishop Weman, with the clearly stated desire of someday having the Churches celebrate the Lords Holy



Communion together.

The day prior to this, Cardinal Cassidy had proposed a more exhaustive dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Churches which had convened as one in Uppsala 400 years earlier. Last November, I was down in Rome together with Archbishop Gunnar Weman and accepted the Cardinals proposition. Together with the management of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity we decided to start preparing a regional Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in Sweden and Finland, with the support of Vatican and a great openness in the relationship with our Lutheran sister churches.

## ***1.2 Rome***

On the ecumenical map, Rome occupies a central place and is the symbol of the largest Christian Church. It is the place where the first Christians gave a convincing account of their faith and their devotion. It was to the Christians of this city that Paul sent the letter, in which he preaches on the righteousness that comes from faith with a particular gravitas and clarity. We Lutherans are both historically and theologically the heirs of Rome. Our Protestantism is a protest *for* the Christian legacy, which has been bestowed by Rome and *against* what has been perceived as a distortion of this legacy. It was never the intention of Luther to found a new Church.

Thus, for both historical and theological

reasons, Rome is a natural and important interlocutor. However, as we have emphasized at different times, both in Rome and at the jubilee in Uppsala, we do not have any designs to return to Rome, but rather to restore the unity of the Church with Rome.

We are working toward establishing an objective and realistic relationship with the largest denomination in Christendom and its representatives. To us, the Pope is primarily the Bishop of Rome, as I implied to him during our joint mass in Turku Cathedral. The claims of the Pope's primacy and infallibility are difficult theological questions, where our viewpoint differs from that of Rome.

In the Nordic countries, the experiences from cooperation with the Roman-Catholic bishops, with joint deliberations among other things, have been very positive. During more than a quarter of a century here in Finland, we have had the pleasure of witnessing the way in which the Catholic Bishop in Helsinki has strived toward achieving ecumenical openness in his Diocese, within the Ecumenical Council in Finland, and as chairman of the Nordic Catholic Bishops' Conference.

## ***1.3 Porvoo, Canterbury, London***

As the former Bishop of Porvoo, I have a certain amount of pride mixed with the joy over the ecumenical strides made that have been symbolized by the name Porvoo over the years and the well-known gables of its

cathedral. I refer, of course, to the agreement and declaration to establish a long-term community between the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches on the one hand and the Anglican churches in Great Britain on the other. This document received its finishing touches in Järvenpää, but was named after Porvoo, which is the cathedral where the delegates held a joint mass.

The Church of England is traditionally close to us for both historical and theological reasons. The first bishop of our church and the national saint of Finland, Saint Henry, was born an Englishman. He arrived as a missionary bishop from Uppsala in order to consolidate the position of the Western Church in our land. However, this English contact over 800 years ago had an unfortunate ending. Bishop Henry died a martyr on Köyliö Lake one winter day in the year 1155.

Henry became our national saint and today we appreciate the Anglican church for its rich liturgical heritage, its spirituality and its ecumenical openness. During his most recent official visit, the Archbishop of Canterbury received a much friendlier reception than what Bishop Henry received in his day.

#### ***1.4.1. Constantinople, Kuopio, Joensuu***

The Orthodox Church in Finland is our country's second national church, and, as an autonomous local Church, is

subject to the ecumenical patriarchy in Constantinople. Through the centuries, the Eastern and Western Christian traditions have lived side by side in this country. The first meeting of the two was not particularly peaceful, but we have learnt to respect and appreciate one another. We have, of course, also had an impact on and learned from each other.

The city of Kuopio is the centre of the Orthodox church of Finland. Kuopio serves the seat of the Archbishop and is the site of the Church Council and the Orthodox Church Museum, one of the cultural sites in our country. To us, Kuopio is an important ecumenical point of orientation, also since Archbishop Johannes, whose title is the Archbishop of Karjala and All of Finland, has served as chairman of the Ecumenical Council in Finland, and is also in other things a considerable ecumenical gain.

The city of Joensuu also occupies a place on our ecumenical map, as, besides serving as a venue for Orthodox priest and cantor education, it is also home to one of the first attempts at an establishing an ecumenical theological faculty.

A doctrinal dialogue was initiated between our Church and the Orthodox Church of Finland in 1989. Besides specifically theological questions, the dialogue involves such practical issues as the day-to-day co-existence of these two churches in our country. In this context it is also important to mention that the two Orthodox monasteries New Valamo and Lintula have become

important sites for prayer and tranquility also for the Lutheran Christians.

### ***1.4.2 Moscow, St Petersburg, Kiev***

After a few tentative contacts in the 1960s, regular theological dialogues between our Church and the Russian Orthodox Church were begun in 1970. These dialogues have produced important results, especially regarding the relationship between becoming righteous and deification (*theosis*), which, according to our shared views, expresses the original Christian teachings about salvation. The next dialogue, which takes place every three years, will be held this coming autumn in Kiev. The topics of discussion will be the mission of the church, nationalism and peace work.

A regular exchange of scholarship holders and mutual visits forms part of our contacts and interactions. In September of last year the Patriarch Alexey II with delegation was an official guest at the two national churches in our country. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the Moscow patriarchy has a permanent representation and two small congregations of their own (Pokrova and Nikolsky) in Helsinki. The bishop of these congregations is the Metropolitan Kirill, the leader of the foreign department at the Patriarchy in Moscow.

The good relations to the Russian Orthodox church have also, at least indirectly been invaluable when it has come to rebuilding the Lutheran Church within the area of the

former Soviet Union. During the difficult years of the Cold War the help and support of the Russian Orthodox Church was of invaluable importance for the Ingrian Lutherans.

During later years, some mission projects led and inspired from the West have caused irritation within the Russian Orthodox Church. This has also occasioned certain talks with the administration of the Russian Church, where the relationship of our Church to the actions in question have been clarified. During the doctrinal dialogues three years ago, the two delegations jointly declared that no church can have sole rights to any region. At the same time, both delegations disassociated themselves from any form of proselytism.

### ***1.5 Wittenberg, Hannover***

That Wittenberg should be mentioned in conjunction with this position decision is a given. The Reformer of Finland, Mikael Agricola, had studied in Wittenberg and his special significance was that he consciously strived to unify the central tenets of the reformation with the legacy of faith of the old church and the historical continuity of the church.

Thus, like in Sweden, the Reformation did not cause a radical break with the past in Finland. It was really a question of reformation in the actual sense of the word.

Historically, German Lutheranism

is important to us, even though we sometimes have difficulty understanding certain aspects of both the German theology and German Church politics. For example, it is apparent that we place more stress on the continuity with what existed prior to the Reformation, while in Germany, as well as in the rest of Central Europe, there is a higher degree of defining one's identity and self-awareness of the differences. However, we naturally have a close relationship with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD). We have a cooperation agreement with the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), which, among other things, concerns the pastoral care of Finnish people in Germany and Germans in Finland. The agreement also encompasses regular consultations between our two Churches.

### ***1.6 Zurich, Geneva, Leuenberg***

Our Church has historically assumed a guarded approach to the Central European reformist interpretation of Christianity. The battles of doctrine and the arrangements made during the time of reformation have left their marks. However this hasn't hindered a significant influence from the reformist camp during certain periods and among certain groups within our church.

Over the past decades, we have had considerable difficulties in identifying with the general Protestant attitude, which involves basically critical attitude towards old Church doctrines and

traditions. Since we perceive our Church not only as Evangelical Lutheran, but also as Evangelical Catholic, both Zwinglian Zürich and Calvinist Geneva raise theological problems for us.

As with other Nordic national churches, our Church has declined to sign the so-called *Leuenberg Agreement* between Lutherans and Reformists and we are not likely to do so, since the reasons for not signing the Agreement have been specifically theological. The plan for a European Evangelical synod has not been able to raise any significant interest within our church. We have not, however wanted to pursue any kind of isolationist doctrine. This is why we have taken active part in the theological work within the scope of the Luenberg community and also sent observers to the Evangelical gatherings in Basel and Budapest, which have been called by those who work hard for a European Evangelical synod. In this matter as well, we have followed the same course as our counterpart in Sweden.

Of course, the names of Zürich and Geneva signify a close kinship for us, which is why it has been only natural that we have had years of discourse with the independent Church of Finland and that we have created frameworks for guaranteeing permanent contacts between our Churches in the future. It is also apropos to mention corresponding discourses with the Pentecostal movement, even if it is not as easy to find an appropriate city to symbolize that relationship.

If this presentation were to be about our churches relation to other churches in general, the list of city names would of course be very long, which would necessitate bringing up a large world map. However, as this is a question of an ecumenical position decision, a few markers on a smaller map is sufficient.

## **2. Where are we going?**

### ***2.1 On the road to unity***

In ecumenical terms, we often speak of the importance of becoming the one you are. That doesn't necessarily mean turning inwards and that the direction and movement becomes introverted. It does, however, mean that one examines where they belong, that one looks outwards and draws the consequences of the belonging that one discovers.

I have talked earlier about our affinity with the Swedish Church founded on a both inner and outer unity over several hundred years. This is apparent without further comment. It is, of course, also important for each Church to become what it is in this regard. This constitutes one of the answers to the question: *Where are we going?*

But in order to become who we are, we probably need to look further afield than Sweden. Here, I am thinking of Nordic Lutheranism, which is a remarkably homogeneous whole, historically as

well as theologically, despite all the differences therein. Also in this case, it is vital for us to become who we are.

I expand my thinking to include the worldwide fellowship of the Lutheran Church, the nature of which has been the subject of much attention and discussion in recent years. We have increasingly begun to use the word *communion* in this regard. After a certain amount of skepticism here in Finland, we are also becoming more and more convinced of the correctness in this development. It means that the family of the Lutheran Church is moving in the right direction. As we continue following that road, we are becoming more and more as we already are, i.e. a part of the oneness and community of the Church, which agrees on the question of "the teachings of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments" (Aug. VII).

The Lutheran world organization is partly an expression of, and partly a tool for this communion, which fundamentally and primarily is a spiritual entity, a creation of the Holy Spirit through the words of God and the sacrament.

But do we become who we are, if we are content with the oneness and community within the family of the Lutheran Church? Of course not. We feel that there is an important ecumenical dimension to the Lutheran identity as well as an ecumenical resource. In order to become who we are, we must become ecumenical in a very deep sense.

So where are we going? These days we are headed in the direction of Canterbury, as I've established earlier. This is something we do by realizing ourselves, not by denying ourselves. To break free and make a break with the past are two distinctly different things. It is truly possible to break free without breaking with what has been. But can we break free and follow Canterbury's lead without simultaneously preparing to take similar serious and purposeful steps in the directions of Zürich and Geneva, the Reformist Church family? Certainly it is possible, but we are becoming more and more convinced that we cannot remain standing where we are in relationship to the Reformists and related denominations and churches. This is where we are hoping that the Porvoo Document and the corresponding Meissen Document will be able to offer a new opening and new possibility. A movement in this direction would have important ecumenical consequences at home as well as throughout the Nordic countries.

The move towards Canterbury was shortened and accelerated by the fact that we were met halfway from Canterbury. The move towards Zürich and Geneva can surely be shortened in the same way. So, how does it look in the direction of Rome, Constantinople and Moscow? One thing is certain: A lot more patience is required in this regard. It is also of particular importance to clarify how one can break free without breaking with the past. If this isn't possible, nobody will be able to move,

which means that not very much will be accomplished.

That it is truly possible to break free of old positions without actually breaking with one's past is something that I think I can see an example of in the joint Lutheran and Roman Catholic document about becoming righteous, which is one of the more exciting ecumenical accomplishments these years. This is truly an example of moving without denying oneself.

## *2.2. How are we going?*

In addition to the questions "Where do we stand?" and "Where are we going?" I would like to end by adding a third question: "How are we going?" On the road to becoming who one is, we need help. That purpose is why the confessional and ecumenical organizations exist, so also the confessional ones.

In a Lutheran context, we like to emphasize that the Lutheran World Organization is partly an expression of and partly a tool for the communion of the Lutheran Churches. Separated from this communion, this organization has no function and no right to exist. The same is more or less valid for all other organizations for cooperation between the Churches, whether they are global (e.g. WCC), regional (e.g. CEC and NER) or national. For all its incompleteness, they are fundamentally an expression of and tool for an entity that has been given as a gift and a duty. Their function is to

aid us in becoming who we are.

How will the ecumenical organizations be able to handle this task during the years to come? It won't be easy. In many places there is a need for a radical innovation in thinking, in the same way that is necessary for all large organizations in the modern world. We know that people today feel an increasing estrangement from large, well-meaning organizations. This is something that both political parties, unions, churches and congregations experience.

In such circumstances large organizations need to start from the beginning based on people's needs, not the needs of the organization. They need to assume the same humble attitude as Jesus when encountering the blind Bartholomew: "What would you like me to do for you?"

This, as well, should be the number one question for the ecumenical organizations when dealing with their member churches. Because these are the actual subjects of the ecumenical movement. These are the ones that need to realize themselves, that is, to become what they are.

When our churches take part in the work of the ecumenical organizations and their meetings, we say that we contribute to the ecumenical movement. But isn't this the exact opposite? It is the churches that

are called to be subjects in the ecumenical movement, not these organizations. Consequently, it is these organizations that need to contribute to the ecumenical movement.

But how do our churches fulfill the calling and task of being the subject of the ecumenical movement? Bartholomew answered Jesus' question clearly and without hesitation. How are we doing? Do we know what our needs are when our joint organizations ask us what we want them to do for us? Or is it up to them to try and define the needs of the member churches by themselves? If that is the case, we as member churches have a very real need to shape up.

The question about the relationship between ecumenical organizations and the member churches is certainly not a new one. However, it is my opinion that, in a situation where all large organizations need to review their identity, their attitudes and their work regarding their members, this question should be given special attention and a sense of urgency. It is important to know where we as churches are going on the ecumenical map, but it is also important to receive support, comfort and guidance on that journey. That is why we need each other and our ecumenical organizations.

# Lutheran Christian Identity in an Increasingly International World

*Presentation at the Congress of the Christian Folk High Schools in Eurajoki, on January 19, 1996*

No place expresses a Christian's denominational identity as clearly as the communion table. Members of different confessional groups may have a similar outlook in their devotions and Christian activities, and work together in many ways, but, on the way to the communion table at the very latest, their paths diverge.

In Turku Cathedral, Finnish Lutheran Christians can confirm their identity before they have made it very far towards the main altar. If they look around – which should of course not be done conspicuously at that point – they can make several important observations regarding their own identity. When they ascend the steps to the chancel they will see on the right the portrait of Ansgar, the Apostle of the North, and on the left they will see Luther. Standing in the chancel waiting their turn, they can look up to the right and see Bishop Henry baptizing the Maid of Finland at the Kupittaa Spring. Opposite, on the left, they can see Mikael Agricola presenting Gustav Vasa with the first Finnish translation of the New Testament.

Every individual's identity is based on the answers to questions such as “Who am I?” “Where do I come from and where am I

going?” “Where do I belong?” “Why am I me and not somebody else?” We know how important it is for us to have a clear identity. It allows us to have inner security, the ability to orientate ourselves, to make plans and decisions and engage in creative and fruitful interaction with other people. When the Swedish National Agency for Education concluded that Swedish youth, when encountering immigrants, did not have a clear idea of their own identity and what they stood for, the situation called for an increase in the teaching of Christianity in schools. Only persons secure in their own identity are able to face another person openly and without fear. This applies equally to the relationship between churches and between Christians.

Thus, a clear denominational identity is one of the basic prerequisites of the ecumenical movement. Superficially, it might appear that denominational allegiance is one of the greatest obstacles to rapprochement. This is how adherents of what is known as Christian interdenominationalism see it, and they take steps towards a joint spiritual union, brushing aside issues of denominational identity. This shortcut to Christian unity might achieve some quick, but hardly lasting, results. The same rule applies to



this situation as to any human interaction: without a clear sense of self no clear or lasting connection can be built.

Identity creates a profile, it makes a distinction. But identity can also bring people together. After all, Christians have a shared identity regardless of denomination that separates them from other religions, secularism, and the world at large. The Lutheran identity contains elements that link us to other churches. After all, we have shared origins, shared Scripture and so forth. Luther himself was not seeking to distill a separate Lutheran identity, but was looking for things that were shared from the beginning. He did not write his catechisms for a segregated group of Lutherans, but for the whole Church; he in fact forbade his followers from calling themselves Lutherans. And the principal aim of the Augsburg Confessions was to demonstrate how the congregations of the reformed movement were believing and teaching what the church had believed and taught since the beginning. This self-awareness and endeavor form the basis of what can be called Lutheran identity. Ansgar's and Henry's portraits are not on display in the chancel by accident.

Did Luther become a reformer simply by repeating what had been said before? Yes and no. The Reformation was intended to reform the Church from within. It was intended to reform the Church, but also to reform society, family life and working life. Luther, however, is not regarded as a reformer simply because he taught that

people are saved by grace alone. This was also the teaching of the Church he hoped to reform. Nor is he regarded as a reformer for teaching that the Bible is the Word of God. This was also the teaching of the Church at that time. The deciding factor was not that he taught that the Bible is the only guide for faith and doctrine. This was also what John Hus and other dissidents taught. Finding the Bible was not what made Luther a reformer, it was what he found *in* the Bible: a dynamic, liberating, and vivifying gospel. The initial force was simultaneously old and new. It had always been present in the Church, but often concealed and bound up. Now it burst forth like a churning, irrepressible, springtime river.

Lutheran identity always has something to do in one way or another with this river. The justification of the sinner through faith is the focal point that everything concentrates on, and is, for this reason, the special stress test of the Church. From this it is apparent, whether the church will stand or if it is collapsing.

But if one must find the one thing that gives the so-called Lutheran identity its structure, one must go beyond the doctrine of justification. The acclaimed Lutheran theologian Wilhelm Maurer has stated that the doctrine of justification is the fruit of the doctrine of the Trinity and the Christology of the old Church. Behind it is the concept of God, the concept of what God is like and how He operates. When comparing the doctrinal principles of

Luther and Calvin, their social ethics and their way of bringing about reformation, it is possible to demonstrate how the differences between the two are based ultimately on different ideas about God Himself.

When trying to define Lutheran identity based on the concept of God, it is possible to see how Luther's vision differs not only with regard to Calvin's theology, but also to the deistic heritage of the Enlightenment still in effect today. Luther's vision also differs from the Lutheranism that tried to preserve his heritage without entirely succeeding.

The concept of God that Luther encountered in the Bible has two features that seem to influence almost every point of his theology. These are dynamism on the one hand, and closeness and presence on the other. The God Luther encountered is not an exalted being reclining in lofty seclusion, but an active, speaking, fighting, suffering God in our midst. God's dynamism can appear paradoxical or conflicting. The fact that He is hidden is not because He is far away, but because despite being in our midst He acts in ways that are often surprising and incomprehensible to us.

This so-called theology of the cross is one of the central elements of Lutheran identity, and it is a perpetual challenge to the deism inherited from the Enlightenment that is constantly influencing our culture and each of us. The

Biblical starting point and paradigm is the story of Moses, who in the mountains of Sinai beholds God, but only from behind. God, whom we can only see from behind, is different from what we expect Him to be. He is the God of the cross, which is madness to the world. He appears different from what He actually is. He is hidden in His opposite. He has hidden His power in weakness, His wisdom in madness, His love in hate, His honor in the shame and curse of the cross.

God's reality is therefore *para doxa*, contrary to that which appears reasonable or sensible. God is thus a hidden God, concealed from human reason and experience.

How does one find this hidden God? The person who tries to find Him with reason and good deeds – and therefore tries, in a way, to control Him – will not be able to see to the other side of the cross. To him the cross will always be an impermeable lunacy, an impermeable obstacle.

The God hidden behind suffering and the cross can only be found by someone who is suffering. The God concealed in the darkness can only be found by someone in the same darkness. According to Luther, faith, as well as doubt, is the darkness in which Christ dwells.

Intrinsic to this is Luther's concept of the relationship between seeing and hearing – a relationship which, as far as I understand, has critically impacted the

central position occupied by the word in the culture of this country. Luther states that whatever man sees and experiences causes him anxiety, be it a question of the state of the world, the church, or his own soul. Relying on what one can hear and experience leads a person into the sort of darkness from where there is no visible exit. One is left in this darkness and hopelessness unless one hears the word of God, which not only encourages but also creates something new. If one is distressed by what one sees and experiences, then what one hears will provide release from anxiety and encouragement. Seeing amortizes, hearing gives new life. God's word is the creative word.

In this way, hearing relativizes what people hear and experience – not, however, meaning that what one sees and experiences turns out to be just a delusion, but that from behind it or under it another reality, concealed from the eyes and experience, is revealed. The paradoxality of the theology of the cross does not mean denying perceptible or experiencable reality. The bleeding, suffering God crying out on the cross is reality, but it reveals God's brilliance and power. God's wrath is the most serious reality, but it reveals God's love and mercy. Humanity's sinfulness and godlessness is also a harsh reality, but based on the word and promise of the gospel, people can believe that beneath this brutality lies another reality of grace and righteousness.

This is the frame of reference for

observing and interpreting reality that the theology of the cross with all its paradoxes has provided for our people and our culture. Now we can ask how effective and appropriate this frame of reference – this paradigm – has been. To what degree has it helped people come to terms with the harsh and brutal reality that they have had to experience in the different phases and crises of their lives?

Firstly, the observation can be made that the paradigm has forced people to accept a received reality. Reality is every bit as insane, merciless and godless as it appears when examined by reason. But the frame of reference provided by the theology of the cross also contains a significant protest against what man sees and experiences. It is a protest against the absolute demands of reason, a protest in the name of faith and hope, a protest on behalf of the invisible reality, on behalf of an open future. We humans have a future and hope because the deeper reality and truth is *paradoxa*, contrary to all it appears to be. The cross, the cross of God and humanity, is not illusory but real, and from underneath and behind it a wider reality is revealed. For this reason the godless have God, and the hopeless have hope. Juhani Rekola wrote: "a frivolous faith assures us that God exists. An anxious faith must concede that, despite everything, God exists."

The theology of the cross is one of the key ingredients of Lutheran identity. The hidden God in the middle of our reality. Belief in the real presence of

God is more broadly one of the most important elements in Lutheran identity and spirituality. Unfortunately, Lutheran identity often gets lost on this point. This has been especially influenced by the legacy of the Enlightenment, which has removed God from our reality and limited God's activity to what He has done in the distant past. This deism has penetrated deep into our culture and, unfortunately, also into our sense of our Christianity. The consequences have been disastrous both for Christianity and for Lutheran identity.

In places where belief in the God who is present and operates in the here and now is lacking, all that remains is a legalistic, intellectualistic and moralistic Christianity, an anemic and dry system, in which God's law is static, the gospel is a story of events that took place two thousand years ago, the justification of man is a juridical procedure, the Bible only contains supernatural information about God, man and the world, the Church is an organization of people who dabble in Christianity, the divine service is an event with Christian music and public speaking, the sermon is talk about God and Christianity, the baptism is an induction to membership and a naming event, and the Eucharist is a memorial service. Awareness of the ever-present God, who acts and addresses, judges and binds, liberates and encourages, is lacking. One of the central elements of Lutheran identity is lacking.

God's presence and actions in the here and

now are crucial to Lutheran spirituality, but also to Lutheran ethics. Luther makes very startling statements about the commandments in the Bible. According to him, they merely confirm what God is at every moment commanding through the needs of those closest to us. Lutheran ethics are not derived from timeless ideals, principles or values that should be executed, but from the circumstances of our neighbors, to which we should respond according to the Golden Rule. In this sense, Lutheran ethics are essentially social ethics.

In a unifying Europe, Lutheran ethics has its own clear profile. It is clearly distinct from, for example, liberal individualism, according to which the purpose of morals is to promote the happiness and well-being of the individual. Lutheran ethics is also distinct from Catholic moral philosophy, characterized by the concept of humans striving to achieve some prescribed model of the good life. The starting point for both of these solutions is the individual. They are about "refining" the individual according to the ideal of the good life. Self-actualization is conceived of differently, but that is what is at the heart of these two cases. They are both predicated on the idea that society as a whole will benefit if individuals strive to achieve the ideal of the good life. This is also the theoretical basis of the so-called subsidiarity principle.

In Lutheran ethics, by contrast, the main focus is on the other person, on

the individual's neighbor. The primary concern is the neighbor's benefit, not the shaping of an ethical subject. The starting point is therefore communal. The community assumes responsibility for its members and does not leave them to the mercy of the charity of individuals. This is the theoretical basis for the Nordic welfare state. The phenomenon of the Nordic welfare state is in accordance with Lutheran ethics. It is no coincidence that in Europe people speak of "the Nordic model". One might equally well speak of the "Lutheran model".

Lutheran ethics also differs in its basic principles from Reformation ethics. I mentioned above, in the last instance it is a matter of the differences between Luther and Calvin regarding the concept of God and His actions. In this context I will merely observe that the Reformed churches have a tendency towards puritanism and theocracy for both the individual and society. One variation on this is the idea, inspired by Karl Barth, of "die Königsherrschaft Christi" as a social-ethical concept. These days we have considerable difficulty coming to a consensus with the Reformed churches regarding the principles of social ethics, because they, for the reasons outlined above, strive to derive the fundamentals of social ethics from the gospel and justification. As Lutherans we wish to emphasize God's work as creator and caretaker as the foundation for social ethics. It is a matter of God's presence in the reality He has created. Keeping this in mind, it

is easier for us to find points of commonality with the social ethics of the Catholic Church than with the Reformed Church.

To conclude, I shall return to Turku Cathedral. I mentioned above that a person's identity includes awareness of where he or she belongs. Where do we belong as Lutheran Christians? What is our relationship to other Christians? We have already discussed this, but the reference in my title to the internationalizing world necessitates a few more words on our ecumenical relationships.

In Turku Cathedral, under the watchful gaze of Ansgar and Luther, Henry and Agricola, I have over the years greeted the pope of Rome, the patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria and Moscow, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the representatives of our diverse Lutheran sister churches as well as representatives of churches in our own country.

On such occasions I have rejoiced in the great ecumenical capital that Lutheranism possesses. This capital of course includes the copy of the New Testament presented by Agricola to Gustav Vasa, and the baptism performed by Saint Henry at Kupittaa. But it also includes the connection mentioned above to the legacy of faith from the old Church, which was self-evident to the leaders of the Reformation. This conscious preservation of the continuity of the Church is an important resource in our dealings with members of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican Churches, and it

reminds us of our shared roots. As heirs of the Reformation we have another resource regarding the renewal of the Church. We notice it when we strive to strengthen our ties with the so-called Protestant Churches.

The relationship between continuity and renewal has therefore always been a significant and challenging problem. It is also part of our Lutheran identity.

The distance members of different churches must traverse to a shared communion table is currently longer than the central aisle at Turku Cathedral. However, we can now rejoice that, in the Nordic Countries and the British Isles, Lutherans and Anglicans can cover the distance together.

# The Ecumenical Policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

*A Speech to the Bishops' Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, on February 13, 1996*

I am often asked, both as archbishop and as chairman of the Council for International Relations of our church, what is the ecumenical program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The question has sometimes included the suspicion or the hope that our program involves a return to Rome, or to Constantinople, or to Geneva or to some other such place.

I have answered the question by saying that our ecumenical program is not a return to anywhere, but a restoration of unity. Then I think that the task of ecumenical work is not only to lead separated churches into unity, but also to express the unity that already exists between them.

From the point of view of our church's ecumenical relations, it is significant that although the expression "the restoration of unity" comes from the Second Vatican Council, it is suitable to describe our program.

What kind of unity then do the ecumenical relations and contacts of our church represent? What has been our ecumenical policy in the current Lutheran–Roman Catholic debate on justification, in the *Porvoo Declaration*, in Lutheran–Orthodox discussions, in our contacts

with the Finnish Evangelical Free Church and the Pentecostal movement, or in participating in the work of the Lutheran World Federation, the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches?

## **Our relations with the Roman Catholic Church**

Of the ecumenical relations our church is involved in, the primary one is the relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, to which we belonged for centuries, on whose legacy we have been able to build, and against whom our church has historically engaged in polemics. There is, however, very little polemical material to be found in the writings of our reformer, Mikael Agricola. In the recently published textbook of Finnish church history by Professors Simo Heininen and Markku Heikkilä the authors have the following to say about him:

Agricola noted how Luther opposed the papacy, the veneration of saints, the doctrine of purgatory, requiem masses, monasteries, celibacy, fasts and finally the catholic mass. He paid attention not only to Dr. Martin Luther's criticism but also to his positive message,

above all the teaching of the absolute authority of the Bible and man's salvation through faith alone. In any case Agricola preferred to listen to Luther's constructive preaching rather than to his furious criticism of the old church. This was natural: in Finland the church was not corrupt, and the new was built upon the basis of the old."<sup>1</sup>

Our church has desired to continue Mikael Agricola's line with its emphasis on continuity, as after a break of centuries we have made contact with a different kind of Roman Catholic Church than the one we meet in, for instance, Paavali Juusten's *Chronicle of the Bishops of Finland* or Zachris Topelius' *Tales of a Barber-Surgeon*, which used to be compulsory reading in Finnish schools.

The Roman Catholic Church has shown a different face to the Finnish people with, for example, Pope John Paul II's visit to Finland in 1989. After his visit the Pope has in several connections related how in Finland and Sweden he encountered Lutheran churches which cherish contact with their catholic legacy in a special way. In 1993 Cardinal Edward Cassidy proposed that the Lutheran churches of Sweden and Finland and the Roman Catholic dioceses begin regional dialogue on the subject of the episcopate. Now in the Nordic countries we are discussing the broadening of dialogue to include all of

the Nordic Lutheran churches and Roman Catholic dioceses.

I am pleased that our church's Council for International Relations can give a positive and constructive critique of the draft of a Common Statement on the subject of the doctrine of justification, negotiated by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church's Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. From our church Eero Huovinen, Bishop of Helsinki, took part in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic working group which met in June 1995 to work on this document further.

In spite of the tight schedule I hope that in 1997 at the general assembly of the Lutheran World Federation the Lutheran churches will declare that we have achieved a sufficient degree of agreement with the Roman Catholic church on the doctrine of justification for the mutual public recognition of the immoderateness of the theological anathemas of the sixteenth century. There are, still differences in the understanding of the doctrine of justification, to be sure, but after agreement is reached on basic truths it is easier to deal with these differences together.

I hope that for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland the debate on the subject of justification will mean as it has

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<sup>1</sup> Suomen kirkkohistoria ('The Church History of Finland'). Helsinki 1996. p. 66.



already meant not only the broadening of ecumenical perspectives but also that we might use the excellent opportunity afforded to us here to make a variegated study of the Reformation principle, which was, and is, considered to be so central that with it the whole Church either stands or falls. In Germany, for example, theologians have been amazed that for the past year the central theme of Finnish clergy meetings, and parishes' councils too, has been the justification of sinners.

The fact that the Lutheran churches around the world are seriously considering their relations with the Roman Catholic Church and the doctrine of justification is the consequence of the development of a closer communion among the Lutheran churches themselves. It was the ELCA (the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) which felt that it had achieved such a degree of agreement in its own Lutheran–Roman Catholic discussions that it deemed it necessary to invite the other Lutheran churches to evaluate the results of the discussions. This one church did not think that it could continue alone any longer, so it invited its sister churches along.

If sufficient unanimity is achieved on the doctrine of justification between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches, and if the anathemas are declared to be immoderate, a significant step will have been taken in interchurch relations. Afterwards we can aim at more complete unanimity on the doctrine of

justification and come to grips with other doctrinal points that separate us, such as the Papacy, the status of Mary in the Church and the ordained ministry.

## **Lutheran–Anglican relations**

It is a question of much fartherreaching interchurch agreement when to date (1996) ten Lutheran and Anglican churches have accepted the *Porvoo Declaration*, which means not only rapprochement between the churches but laying the foundation of ecclesiastical communion between the churches of the Nordic countries, the Baltic States and the British Isles. According to the document, the churches recognise each other as true churches, recognise each other's members as true Christians, accept each other's preaching and sacraments and also promise to treat each other's church members as their own. I shall repeat what I have said previously about what the *Porvoo Declaration*, perhaps at its simplest, means in practice. An Anglican who lives in Finland said to me that when he next has to go to hospital and a Lutheran hospital chaplain comes into his room he can say, "Here comes my priest too."

The Anglican and Lutheran churches have never condemned each other, so there is no need to rescind anathemas. Instead many ecclesiojuridical and practical problems remain to be solved, so that the *Porvoo Common Statement* can really serve the members of the signatory churches.

The signatory churches to the *Porvoo Declaration*, “share a common understanding of God’s justifying grace, i.e. that we are accounted righteous and are made righteous before God only by grace through faith because of the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and not on account of our works or merits... Both our traditions affirm that justification leads and must lead to ‘good works’; authentic faith issues in love.”<sup>2</sup>

On the first and second Sundays in September 1996 we shall be festively celebrating the signing of the *Porvoo Declaration* with attendant church services in Trondheim and Tallinn. The climax to these celebrations is to be a joint church service in Westminster Abbey in London on November 28<sup>th</sup>.

The acceptance of the *Porvoo Declaration* has subsequently raised the question of our relations with the so-called Leuenberg Church Community, comprising several Reformed, Lutheran and Unified churches of Europe, which is based on altar and pulpit fellowship agreed upon in 1973. For theological reasons the Nordic Lutheran churches have not signed the charter of the community. Since 1973 the German Evangelical Church, to which belong Reformed, Lutheran and Unified churches, has negotiated the so-called *Meissen Agreement* with the Church of England. It is conceivable that the Reformed,

Lutheran, Unified and Anglican churches of Europe will continue to develop the direction of their church relations by producing a document, the origin and content of which will be more influenced by the *Porvoo Declaration* and the *Meissen Agreement* than by Leuenberg. Last March we presented a proposal to this effect to the German Evangelical Church.

### **Lutheran–Orthodox discussions**

In Finland Lutheranism and Orthodoxy live side by side. The influence of Orthodox Christianity has been greater than one might deduce from its membership of 50,000. Since the end of the 1980s our interchurch relations have gone beyond practical co-operation to the level of joint discussions of doctrine. At the meeting of the folk churches the main questions addressed were the ministry of these churches within the same nation and among the same people. In March the subjects of the fifth round of discussions were “Work, Unemployment and Human Dignity” and “The Priesthood of All Believers”.

Significant encouragement for the improvement of Lutheran–Orthodox relations was given to our church on May 1995 when His Holiness Bartholomeus, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, visited Kuopio Lutheran Cathedral and made the

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<sup>2</sup> The Porvoo Common Statement 32 c.

strongly symbolic gesture of presenting the Eucharistic chalice to Bishop Matti Sihvonen, expressing the hope that the day would come when our churches could celebrate the Eucharist together. It was a beautiful reminder of the true goal of the movement for unity.

Since 1970 our church has regularly engaged in doctrinal discussions with the Russian Orthodox Church. In these discussions, apart from increasing our knowledge of the Orthodox faith, there has been a growing realisation of the ecumenical significance of Luther's theology. In these discussions the doctrine of justification has shown itself to have an ecumenically fruitful perspective, when in Järvenpää in 1974, in Kiev in 1977 and in Turku in 1980 it was possible to affirm that justification in Lutheran theology and deification in Orthodox theology express the same thing in different ways.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church has especially appreciated the fact that in spite of its many internal difficulties the Russian Orthodox Church was prepared to continue this tenth round of discussions last Fall in Kiev. Our church is to host the next round of discussions in 1998.

The dispute between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople over the Estonian Orthodox Church has not been a hindrance to the relations of our church with either the Finnish Orthodox Church

or the Russian Orthodox Church.

### **Lutheran—Free Church contacts**

The doctrinal discussions of our church have also included doctrinal discussions with the Finnish Evangelical Free Church and the Finnish Pentecostal Movement in the 1980s, as a result of which relations have improved and mutual understanding has increased. In 1992 at Vesala in Jyväskylä the so-called "tripartite talks" took place between our church, the Free Church and the Pentecostal Movement. The experiences that a minority church and the Pentecostal assemblies have had of the outworking of religious freedom in Finland were examined from many angles. These churches will receive all our support, so that religious liberty as a positive basic right will be realised as fully as possible in our country.

With the Finnish Free Church we have long had a joint consultation committee. Last January the Council for International Relations of our church also nominated our representative to the joint consultation committee of the Pentecostal Movement and the Lutheran Church. It is illustrative of the ecumenical program of our church that this decision was taken at the same meeting where we issued a statement on the Lutheran—Roman Catholic document on justification.

### **Bilateral and multilateral ecumenism provides mutual support**

In expounding the ecumenical program of our church I have so far concentrated on interchurch or interdenominational bilateral contacts. Experience shows that bilateral and multilateral ecumenism provides mutual support. As an example of this I might mention only the doctrinal discussions between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church's Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, which have lasted for over a quarter of a century, or the work of the Lutheran-Orthodox theological commission.

Our church is an active founding member of several ecumenical and international associations of churches. We have just chosen our representative to the general assemblies of the Lutheran World Federation and the Conference of European Churches in 1997 and to the general assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1998.

Bilateral and multilateral contacts have also provided mutual support in the many co-operation, development and assistance programs of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. They have offered those from different churches the opportunity not only of working together but also of learning from one another. We constantly need a healthy reminder of how the majority of people in the world see the global situation.

For us the Lutheran World Federation

is a major forum and instrument of interchurch co-operation, but at the same time also a communion of churches in which the churches have mutual altar and pulpit fellowship. When speaking of the visions for the future of the World Council of Churches we wish to stress the primary need that the World Council of Churches remain a movement for church unity and that visible church unity remain the goal of the whole ecumenical movement.

Many of the lines of development described here are taken up in Finland by the Finnish Ecumenical Council, the Finnish churches' co-operative body, which will be 80 years old in 1997. This council is unique in all of the Christian world in that the Roman Catholic Church in Finland has been a full member since 1967, and that in a country with over an 85% Lutheran majority the present chairperson of the ecumenical council is the Orthodox archbishop and the general secretary a Baptist pastor.

## **The unity and continuity of the Church**

It is not possible to define the ecumenical policy of our church without reference to the Augsburg Confession, according to which, "our churches ... teach that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. For the true unity of the church it is enough

to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.” (Augsburg Confession VII)

The Lutheran Church confesses the unity and continuity of the Church. Our duty is to seek and promote the unity of the Church in the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. What is sufficient for the unity of the Church is, according to our confession, also essential for unity among believers. Unity is not uniformity but a rich diversity in the same faith, doctrine and life. The Lutheran model of ecumenism has been described as “reconciled diversity”, in which differences have lost their separating nature. “...It is not essential that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere.” (Augsburg Confession VII)

As a Lutheran church we are heirs of Luther and the Reformation. We cherish contacts with sister churches, other churches and Christian denominations and ecumenical organisations. We wish to hold fast to the authority of the Bible, and its central content the justification of sinners. All the doctrinal articles of Christianity are related to justification. In other words, what is taught about justification also affects the interpretation of other articles of faith.

### **The same church in all directions**

The basic aim of the ecumenical activity

of our church is that it should be one and the same church in all directions. It is a matter of Lutheran identity. In the same way as the individual must be honest and consistent with who he is and where he comes from, the Church and Christian denomination must also aim to preserve its own identity and integrity. In practice this has proved to be possible. It is possible to be the same Lutheran Christian and representative of the Lutheran Church in discussion with the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Free Churches and the Pentecostal movement.

Lutheran identity involves, first of all, deep humility, and secondly, a strong awareness of who we are and where we come from. Since as of this year 450 years have passed since Doctor Martin Luther died in his birthplace of Eisleben, I wish to point out these two aspects as they appear at the very end of his life: humility and strong identity, awareness of who he was and where he belonged. The last words he was heard to utter were taken from a Latin prayer he knew from his time in the monastery: “In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, redimisti me, Deus veritatis!” Into your hands, Father, I commend my spirit, you have redeemed me, O God of truth! As one’s moment of departure approaches things become simplified. Then it becomes apparent who we are and where we belong.

After Luther’s death his final written note was found, the last sentence of which

“We are beggars indeed” has often been quoted. This sentence is part of a more extensive writing, which runs as follows:

Vergil’s poetic works cannot be understood unless one has oneself been a shepherd or farmer for at least five years. Nor can Cicero’s letters be understood except by one who has for decades worked in public administration. Let no one then imagine that he has sufficiently tasted and appropriated the Word of God, even if he has guided

the Church for a hundred years with all the prophets. Vergil’s epic Aeneid is admirable. But for us a greater miracle and mystery is the heroic death of God, the Great Tale, which has the following points: 1. John the Baptist, 2. Christ and his work, 3. The Apostles into all the world, and 4. Christ and his Church. Do not therefore interfere in this heroic Aeneid tale of God but bow in humble admiration and contemplate the traces it has left in world history! Compared to this we are beggars indeed.

# The Lutheran Church and Ecumenism

*A Lecture at the International Study Meeting “Saint Bridget and the Holy Year” in Rome, on November 12-13, 1999*

When St. Bridget came to Rome 650 years ago in order to celebrate the holy year, she came from the northern periphery of the Church at that time. In recent years increasing emphasis has been laid in our part of the world on the northern dimension of political, economic and cultural cooperation. Seen from a historical perspective this is nothing new. When Bridget appeared as a messenger of Christ before the Pope and the princes of the day in Europe, it was a reminder even then that both the political and the ecclesiastical life in this part of the world also had a northern dimension.

Bridget's person and her life's work were the clearest and the most obvious manifestation of the northern dimension at the time. Even today St. Bridget is still a symbol that the Nordic countries constitute an integral part of the rest of Europe. It is therefore with joy and satisfaction that we in the north have received the news that Bridget has been proclaimed one of the patron saints of Europe.

Both the agenda and the list of participants for this international study meeting are, in their way, an expression of the northern dimension I just mentioned. I hope, too, that what I have to say will also stress this dimension. The title of

my paper is “The Lutheran Church and Ecumenism” and I shall approach it from a Nordic, in particular a Finnish and Swedish, perspective. When St. Bridget lived Finland formed part of the Swedish kingdom and continued to do so until 1809. Until that year we also had a common church, which means that even today we still view things from a common perspective.

When we were received in audience by Pope John Paul II in connection with the St. Bridget anniversary in 1991, he said to us “Perhaps you in the Nordic countries will find an ecumenical way forward.” This instruction and encouragement we have not forgotten. Some weeks ago we met at a joint Lutheran and Roman Catholic conference to discuss our mutual relations in the Nordic countries, and then we reminded each other once more of this papal exhortation.

The ecumenical scene has changed in many ways during the past few decades even in the Nordic countries. Far into this century the ecumenical position has been strongly marked by the overwhelming dominance of the Lutheran national churches. With the exception of Sweden the Protestant free churches have constituted relatively small minorities

and the Roman Catholic and Orthodox contributions have been marginal. Only in Finland has the Orthodox church been more strongly represented.

The immigration that has taken place in recent decades has contributed markedly to creating a new situation also from an ecumenical viewpoint. The membership of the Roman Catholic dioceses has increased considerably and especially Sweden has seen a large inflow of Christians belonging to different Orthodox churches.

The need for ecumenical cooperation has consequently grown in the Nordic countries. But ecumenical activity in northern Europe has also increased in the last few years quite independently of the wave of the immigration. Our involvement in the World Council of Churches, the Conference of European Churches and the denominational world unions together with our participation in bilateral and multilateral discussions at the world level have naturally meant a particularly valuable ecumenical exchange for us. The national Christian councils in our countries have increased their contacts and cooperation between churches in the north. A number of bilateral discussions at the national level have worked in the same direction. In Finland we like to point especially to the fruitful dialogues that we have had with the Russian Orthodox Church since 1970 and which have also left their stamp on the Orthodox-Lutheran dialogue at the global level.

When we speak of the northern dimension, we are of course talking geographically. In our Nordic geography the Baltic Sea occupies a key position. In recent years we have begun to ask ourselves increasingly what responsibilities and what opportunities are afforded by the fact that all the main denominations of Christianity in our part of the world are represented along the shores of this sea. We have already experienced certain concrete examples of how this sea can also function as a uniting factor on the ecclesiastical level. Similar cooperation has come about between the churches, especially the Lutheran and Orthodox, that are linked by the Barents Sea far away in the north.

One of the most important ecumenical events in the Nordic countries in recent history was the Pope's visit in 1989. This historic event was of great significance for relations between the Lutheran Nordic countries and the Roman Catholic Church. There were many who were impressed by the spiritual nature of the visit. We met a praying pope.

Among other major ecumenical events there was also the signing of *The Porvoo Declaration*, which created a very close fellowship between the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches on the one hand and the Anglican churches in Britain and Ireland on the other. These churches note, for example, that they share the same apostolic belief, that they regard each other as churches belonging to the



one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, that they recognise each other's ordinations and that they are ready to regard each other's baptised members as their own members.

The creation of the Porvoo Communion has been looked upon as one of the most important concrete ecumenical achievements of this century. It has already been seen that it can inspire similar steps in other countries and parts of the world. Corresponding agreements include *The Meissen Agreement* between the evangelical churches in Germany and the Church of England and *The Concordat of Agreement* between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The most recent great ecumenical event that has made its impact on our national churches in the Nordic countries is, of course, the signing of *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* on 31 October this year in Augsburg. We believe and hope that this historical event will prove to be of decisive importance on the road to greater fellowship between the Roman Catholic church and the Lutheran churches throughout the world.

### **Lutheran identity and ecumenism**

Wider and deeper ecumenical contacts mean not only closer familiarity with other churches and denominations. The meeting with others also means a meeting

with oneself and therefore constitutes an incitement to greater self-knowledge at the same time. As in all human intercourse so also in the ecclesiastical field we have the rule that only the party with a clear identity can meet the other party with openness and confidence.

The increased ecumenical activity that we have seen in recent decades has consequently led to a situation where the question of Lutheran identity has acquired a new urgency within the Lutheran community worldwide, now frequently referred to as *The Lutheran Communion*. Our Nordic churches are no exception to this. The question of identity has taken on extra weight from the fact that during these years we have at the same time been confronted by Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Anglicanism and Reformed Christianity. The contact with the Reformed churches has taken place in connection with *The Leuenberg Concord*, the agreement between the Lutheran, Reformed, United churches and some pre-Reformation Protestant churches in Europe. Our national churches in the Nordic countries have admittedly not signed this concord but we have taken an active part in the theological work that such an agreement requires.

The identity of an individual or a group always contains elements that indicate relations to others. This is true of every church and denomination. The question, then, is: What is the fundamental attitude to other churches that is contained in

the Lutheran identity? In what direction are we going when we in the Lutheran church try to be true to ourselves? Does a strengthening of our own identity mean only a way inwards, away from others? Or does the way inwards lead in the final analysis outwards, towards other Christians and other churches? Is it so – as some critics claim – that ecumenical involvement leads to a weakening and dilution of what is genuinely Lutheran? Or is it the other way round, that the preservation and strengthening of our Lutheran identity imply an ecumenical basis? A corresponding attitude with corresponding alternatives prevails in other churches, too.

Is there an ecumenical dimension to our Lutheran identity? If so, what are the elements of Lutheran identity that have special ecumenical relevance?

### **“A confessional movement within Christ’s universal Church”**

The entrance to the nave of Turku Cathedral – Finland’s national shrine, the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which we celebrate in year 2000 – is bordered by two murals. To the right is a painting of Ansgar, the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen, who has been called the “apostle of the North” because of his missionary work in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. To the left, opposite Ansgar, is Martin Luther.

In the nave there are another couple of paintings that also reveal the heritage from

Reformation and pre-Reformation times in a similar fashion. On the right is a picture of Bishop Henry, Finland’s missionary bishop and patron saint, baptising people at the fountain of Kupittaa in Turku. On the left is Mikael Agricola, the reformer of Finland, handing the first Finnish translation of the New Testament to King Gustav Vasa.

These mural paintings illustrate the ecumenical attitude of the Lutheran reformation. Luther, as we know, had no plans to found a new church; he even forbade his followers to call themselves Lutherans. His only intention was to bring about a renewal of the church to which he belonged and to which he wanted to belong, with a conscious link to the apostolic heritage of the early Church that this church administered and lived by.

This fundamental view and desire dominates the whole of the Augsburg Confession, *Confessio Augustana*, which became the main expression of the self-understanding both of the Lutheran Reformation and of the Lutheran churches. One of the principal motives for this confession, which was presented to the Emperor in 1530, was to show that what was taught and preached was in agreement with the original common belief of the Christian Church.

In *Confessio Augustana* it says that “one holy Church is to continue for ever” (Art. VII). The idea that there could at the same time exist any other church was quite

alien. The same article refers to St. Paul's words in his letter to the Ephesians: "one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all..." (Eph. 4: 5-6).

In conformity with this fundamental view *Confessio Augustana* takes as its *point de départ* the Nicene Creed, in particular its teaching about the Trinity, where it is a question of what God has done and still does for us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The endeavour to relate to the heritage of the early Church is demonstrated not least by the fact that the reformers consciously hold fast to the principal creeds of the early Church, the Apostolic, the Nicene and the Athanasian.

The American theologian and bishop William Lazareth has, in my opinion, given a telling description of the self-understanding and identity that revealed here; he has characterized Lutheranism as "a confession movement within Christ's universal Church". Emphasizing the confessional aspect is not seen as a hindrance to ecumenical contacts and endeavours. On the contrary, we Lutherans believe that ecumenical endeavours must always take the confession of the church seriously. This leads to an emphasis on the role and importance of the doctrinal dialogues in the ecumenical movement. In line with this the Lutheran churches have always given special support to the work done within the framework of Faith and Order in the World Council of Churches.

## **The Lutheran view of the Church and the unity of the Church**

The self-evident effort to relate to the apostolic heritage of the early Church, is then one element in Lutheran self-understanding that holds special ecumenical relevance. A further element in Lutheran identity that is of ecumenical significance is the view of the Church and the unity of the Church and consequently of the prerequisites and constraints for ecumenical endeavours. This element is closely associated with the first one.

In Lutheranism the Church is understood primarily in terms of the Gospel and the sacraments. These are the truly constituent elements of the Church. The ministry in itself is constituent as servant and administrator of the Gospel and the sacraments.

According to *Confessio Augustana* the Church is "the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments administered rightly" (Art. VII). This brief definition gives the concept of the Church both stability and openness. The Church is limited to the community within which the Gospel is preached in accordance with the biblical message and where the sacraments are administered in agreement with their biblical institution.

On the other hand, the Church is not restricted to any one particular institution. In his theological last will and testament

in the book *Vom Abendmahl Christi*, Luther says that Christianity is not found just under the Pope but also among Turks, Persians, Tartars and throughout the world. This gathering of all Christians everywhere in the world constitutes the only bride of Christ, Christ's spiritual body, of which he is the head.

This is not just a question of an invisible fellowship. Christ's Church worldwide is visible since its members could not believe it they were not objects of the visible Church's activity, namely the preaching of the Gospel and the sacraments. This visibility takes on an especially strong emphasis in the Greek version of the creeds – both the Apostolic and the Nicene – where the church is referred to as *koinoonia toon hagioon*. Here we can detect an allusion to God's word and the sacraments.

According to this view of the Church there is only one holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Its unity is given, not created by human effort. It is one in Christ.

The conditions for the visible unity of the Church are an inevitable consequence of this solid and open view of the Church. In the words of Confessio Augustana “for the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or seremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike” (Art. VII).

This concept of the Church and its unity provide the aims and guiding principles for ecumenical dialogue and for ecumenic endeavours in general. Above all, it is a question of first trying to find this, the one Church of Christ, that extends all over the whole world. It is matter of ascertaining where the outward prerequisites for the existence and life of this Church are to be found. Here interest is directed naturally towards the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

Then we must go on to draw the consequences of what we have found, i.e. to put into practice through our actions the unity of what we have discovered. This occurs through a common form of worship and prayer, through common service in the world and by seeking structures that express, make visible and support the communion.

Of course, these ecumenical efforts also consist of going further together and seeking a deeper and richer understanding of the Gospel. From a Lutheran viewpoint this means, for example, critically examining the other conditions for full communion that may be set in connection with or in addition to the Gospel and the sacraments.

Those churches that take part in the ecumenical dialogue lay claim each and individually to representing the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ. When we Lutherans observe this in itself obvious fact, we attach special attention to

whether a church makes this claim in an exclusive way or not. A church that claims to represent Christ's Church can see itself either as the one true Church or as a part of it.

In the first case considerable difficulties ensue for the ecumenical efforts. In the second case, on the other hand, the churches can meet as equal partners and together study whether they can regard each other as parts of Christ's Church. *The Leuenberg, Meissen and Porvoo Agreements* all clearly state that this is the case. In the Meissen and Porvoo declarations the wording is identical: "We acknowledge one another's churches as being churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God."

A particular problem in the context is the doctrinal condemnations that the churches have made of each other's teachings in the course of history. As long as these condemnations continue to stand, a church cannot regard another as fully participant in Christ's Church. Consequently, it has been necessary to focus special attention on these Condemnations. The discussions held on Germany between Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed theologians in the years 1981-1985 are a supreme example of this. These discussions resulted in the report "*Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*", which came to be

an important preliminary for the *Joint Declaration on Justification*.

This view of the Church, its unity and the conditions for concrete efforts towards unity make it possible to pursue an ecumenical dialogue on different levels with different aims. We can, for example, be satisfied just to hold discussions aimed at getting to know and understanding each other and so strengthening our fellowship without trying to bring about any binding agreements. Our dialogue with the Russian Orthodox church is just such an example of this. However, we can go further, deepening the dialogue and aiming at unity in a certain question of belief or teaching, as was the case with the *Joint Declaration on Justification*, in the hope of establishing a greater outward and visible unity between the churches in question. We can also, as with the *Porvoo Declaration*, go even farther and set our immediate sights on a very close communion between churches overall.

## **Continuity and renewal**

I have pointed out that the Lutheran identity encompasses two elements that are particularly relevant to ecumenism. One is the link with the early Church and its heritage of faith. The other is the view of the Church's very essence and what is necessary for the unity of the Church.

Using the distinction between what is necessary and what is not necessary for the unity of the Church as a basis,

the Lutheran church has developed an ecumenical model that is described as “unity in reconciled diversity”. At the general assemblies of the Lutheran World Federation in Dar-es-Salaam in 1978 and in Budapest 1984 this model of unity was given special approval.

In her thesis *Ad veram unitatem* (1994), which contains an analysis of the first two stages in the dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic church in the period 1967-84, Dr Pirjo Työrinoja has demonstrated that the Lutheran ecumenical strategy has in fact been based on the two elements of Lutheran identity that I have already mentioned. Pirjo Työrinoja notes that both in these discussions and in Lutheran identity the key question is that of the relationship between *continuity* and *renewal*. We are here confronted with the question that is of importance for every organization and body, and one which has pursued the Christian Church from its earliest beginning.

According to Työrinoja the reformatory principle *ecclesia semper reformanda* is incorporated in Art. VII of the Confessio Augustana, containing as it does the distinction between what is necessary and what is not necessary for the unity of the Church. However, the element of continuity in Lutheran identity is, in her assessment, an important factor for change. Without this dynamic factor the ecumenical model *unity in reconciled diversity* can only legitimise

and consequently conserve existing differences in a way that puts a brake on the necessary renewal and realisation of the visible unity of the Church.

Stressing not only the legitimate diversity but also the continuity will undoubtedly strengthen the Lutheran churches’ character of *communio*. In this way the mutual fellowship between the Lutheran churches is reinforced, and at the same time their possibilities of increased joint and unified action in the ecumenical field strengthened. The significance of this became abundantly apparent in the work leading up to the *Declaration on Justification*.

## **The concept of salvation**

The question of the continuity of the Church is concentrated, above all, to the question of being saved. The church’s principal vocation is to proclaim, mediate and put into practice the salvation that God has bestowed upon mankind and our world through Jesus Christ. On this there exists no disagreement. The questions of what this salvation consists of, how it is to be mediated and received, on the other hand, has created disunity among Christians and in the worst cases led to mutual condemnations of the other’s teaching.

Since salvation is of the essence both for the individual and for the Church, it is understandable that both disunity and unity on this matter have far-reaching

consequences. We have bitter recollections of this from the time of the Reformation since the conflict actually concerned salvation in the sense of human person's justification before God. The question of salvation also created great tension between the different branches of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation movement. The Lutherans, for example, took the view that Calvinism regarded Christ, the Eucharist and predestination in a way that made human person's justification uncertain and limited.

The question of human person's justification as an expression of salvation has consequently become one of the key questions in the ecumenical dialogue. Most of the other matters in this dialogue have proved to be more or less directly related to this main question. As long as this question remained unresolved, it was difficult to go on but now that we can discern a solution in this respect, it opens up very exiting perspectives for the future.

For the Lutheran churches the question of justification is particularly important for ecumenism since justification occupies such an exceptionally key position in Lutheran identity. The teaching on justification is, in Lutheran eyes, the clause, the article of faith, on which the church stands or falls, *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. This view is clearly expressed in Confessio Augustana in that what is stated there about justification is seen as an immediate consequence

of the teaching about the Trinity and Christology.

In the light of this it is understandable that we Lutherans are pleased about the way in which the question of justification has been on the agenda in the theological discussions between the different churches in recent decades. When I look at this question from the perspective of my own church, I note that it has attracted attention in all the major dialogues that our church has been involved in recent time.

In the dialogue with the Russian Orthodox church this question took pride of place in the discussions held in Kiev in 1977. Here the two ways in which salvation is open to interpretation were set face to face. Behind the theme "*Salvation as justification and deification*" lay the fact that we Lutherans interpret salvation in the first place as justification while the Orthodox interpret it as deification.

On this point we Lutherans have experienced an ecumenical problem. The strong emphasis on justification as righteousness imputed – what is termed forensic justification – has created problems in most directions, both to Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism and for Protestant Christians who strongly emphasise the link between justification and sanctification. When we Lutherans have wanted to stress that human person is saved by faith alone, *sola fide*, and not by reason of his own achievements, other churches have got the impression that we

have lost the organic connection between justification and the new life.

This problem has admittedly been one of our own doing, through a one-sided forensic interpretation of the original Lutheran concept; the reason for this one-sidedness lies primarily in the post-Reformation development of the teaching on justification. But often it has been a question of innate prejudice on the part of those with whom we have been engaged in discussion.

In the course of the discussions in Kiev mentioned earlier we took an important step forwards along the ecumenical path. Professor Tuomo Mannermaa proved in his lecture how a sharp distinction between declaring someone righteous and actually making him righteous does not accord with Luther's intentions. Luther often spoke of a real union between Christ and the believer. Christ is present in the faithful with all his gifts and consequently mediates to the believer divine life where there is no sin, no death and no damnation. Christ's work and Christ's person must not therefore be separated. Christ himself is present, not only in his gifts – *in ipsa fide Christus adest*, as Luther himself put it.

In Kiev justification and deification thus appeared as two legitimate ways of expressing the fact of salvation – as a “reconciled diversity”, in other words. Consequently, the representatives of our two churches were able to say: “According to the understanding of the Church

justification is pardon and remission of sins received by the Christian through Baptism (1. Cor. 6:11) in a living active faith ‘which worketh by love’ (Gal. 5:6), i.e. saving faith united with repentance, he takes a new road leading to deification...”

The same problems surrounding the relationship between forensic and effective justification have been given prominence in the *Joint Declaration on Justification*. In the declaration it is said that a consensus between Lutherans and Catholics has been reached on the basic truths of the teaching of justification and that the remaining differences on the form of language, theological formulations and emphases can be permitted. Here, too, then, we have a reconciled diversity.

From the Lutheran viewpoint it is naturally of key importance that it is clearly stated that human person is entirely dependent on God's saving grace for his salvation. Alone he is quite unable to turn to God and earn his justification. Human person cannot win eternal salvation by his own efforts (*Joint Declaration on Justification*, 19).

The other important point in this declaration is the bridging of the old controversy between the concept of justification as the forgiveness of sins and as effective justification. These are now seen as two aspects of God's gracious actions that are inseparable: “When persons come by faith to share in Christ, God no longer imputes to them their sin



and through the Holy Spirit effects in them active love. These two aspects of God's gracious action are not to be separated, for persons are by faith united with Christ, who in his person is our righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30): both the forgiveness of sin and the saving presence of God himself" (*Joint Declaration*, 22).

The third important part of the declaration, which from the Lutheran standpoint has particular ecumenical relevance, is the role accorded to the teaching about justification in other parts of Christian belief. It says here that this teaching is "more than just one part of Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other. It is an indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practices of our churches to Christ" (*Joint Declaration*, 18).

In relation both to the Reformed (*Leuenberg Concord*) and to the Anglicans (the *Porvoo* and *Meissen Declarations* and the *Concordat of Agreement* in the USA) the question of justification has been given a solution with similar emphasis on the forensic and the effective aspect.

## The way forward

Against the background of the controversies and condemnations of the Reformation we can thus note that at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century and second millennium we have been able to take steps that, it

would seem, will prove to be of decisive significance for the realisation of the unity of the Church. Now we must go forward by undertaking a serious and thorough reception of what we have agreed on and by confronting the questions that still remain unresolved. What is said in the conclusion to the *Joint Declaration on Justification* has enormous ecumenical import and relevance:

"Our consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself. In this respect, there are still questions of varying importance, which need further clarification. These include, among other topics, the relationship between the Word of God and church doctrine, as well as ecclesiology, authority in the church, ministry, the sacraments, and the relation between justification and social ethics. We are convinced that the consensus we have reached offers a solid basis for this clarification... We give thanks to the Lord for this decisive step forward on the way to overcoming the division of the Church. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us further toward that visible unity which is Christ's will."

On this common journey forward we may join together in St Bridget's prayer: "Lord, show me the way and make me ready to follow it. It is dangerous to delay yet perilous to go forward."

# Reconciliation as a Gift of God

*A Speech given to the Church Leaders' Conference of LWF European Member Churches in Budapest, on December 9, 1996*

## **The importance and current relevance of the theme**

Seldom have our churches worked with such theologically pivotal themes as those which have engaged us in recent years and continue to do so. We are in the middle of a process which aims at a joint declaration concerning justification with the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, we are preparing ourselves for the joint assembly of the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences, which will be held in Graz, Austria, and which will focus on the theme "Reconciliation - Gift of God and Source of New Life."

We Lutherans have often complained that in ecumenical conferences, and in the ecumenical movement in general, the pivotal dogmatic questions have too often been displaced by socio-ethical themes. Now we almost feel as if we have been given, at one time, more than we ever dared to ask or expect. This is an occasion on which we, as European church leaders, have the opportunity to reflect on the question of reconciliation as a gift of God. Theologically, this simultaneous occurrence of the themes of reconciliation and justification turns out to be more than just a mere coincidence.

Certainly, the inclusion of the theme of reconciliation in the agenda of this Budapest conference is no coincidence either, since the Graz Assembly is intended to be a very important ecumenical step on our continent. It is to be called the "Second European Ecumenical Assembly." We have, therefore, the obligation to take the central theological questions of Graz into account in our present conference, this duty being at the same time an excellent opportunity for us to participate in this important ecumenical process of our continent. We do hope that Lutheran churches can make an important contribution to the preparations of the Graz Assembly and to the work done in the conference itself, and we also hope that all this will be a useful learning process for us. Participation in the ecumenical movement is a continuous process of giving and receiving.

## **The theme of reconciliation in the preparation of the Graz Assembly**

How is the Graz Assembly going to deal with the great and pivotal issue of reconciliation? The first draft of the working document has been sent to the churches and various Christian organisations and groups for their evaluations and comments. The deadline

for responses, with possible proposed changes, is the end of January 1997. In this regard, the timing of our present conference is ideal! The question asked by the Planning Committee, “Have we correctly perceived the most important issues and perspectives under the concept of reconciliation,” can serve as a relevant and useful starting point also for us, here and now. Thus, we accept the invitation given by the Graz Planning Committee.

The context of the Graz Assembly is the surprising and confusing situation of Europe seven years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and just a few years before the end of second millennium. No matter what direction one looks at, the conclusion is the same: Europe needs reconciliation. The plan is that the Graz Assembly will respond to this challenge through six subthemes:

1. The Search for Visible Unity Between the Churches
2. Dialogue with Other Religions and Cultures
3. Reconciliation as Working for Social Justice, Especially Overcoming Poverty, Social Exclusion and Other Forms of Discrimination
4. Reconciliation Between Nations and Promoting Non-violent Forms of Conflict Resolution
5. Reconciliation as a new Praxis of Ecological Responsibility, Particularly with Regard to Coming Generations
6. Reconciliation as just Sharing with Other Regions of the World

As a basis for discussion concerning these subthemes, a chapter has been drafted on questions of principle and theology, which is intended to be discussed and accepted by the Graz Assembly as the “Message of Graz”. In our present conference, this particular chapter is obviously of special interest to us as we discuss reconciliation as a gift given to us by God.

### **Reconciliation as a biblical concept**

The evaluating of the preparatory material for the Graz Assembly is, in a way, a process of determining its position or location. In order to do this we need two perspectives: an ethical one on the level of praxis, and a dogmatic one on the level of principle. We must ask, on the one hand, whether the churches are where they should be concerning the anxiety and needs of our continent and its people. On the other hand, we must also ask whether the theological starting point of the document is correct with regard to the content of the churches’ responses to these needs. In this presentation, I shall focus on the second of these two questions, because the topic given to me corresponds with the first part of the theme for Graz.

For determining a position, one needs a map. What does the theological map for the Graz Assembly look like with respect to the Assembly’s view of reconciliation? My aim is to remind us of some of the basic lines and patterns of this map, which are already familiar to us all.

The logical background and precondition for the word “reconciliation” is a situation marked by a break-up, i.e. a disagreement and hostility between the partners. In the Bible, this background and need for reconciliation is depicted already in the very first pages of Scripture, where the cosmos created by God breaks up in one sense and harmony is displaced by loud dissonance. This happens between the human being and God, man and woman, and the human being and nature. Brother kills brother and peoples no longer understand each other. Outside of the Garden of Eden, “the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way,” guard the way that leads to the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:24). The wrath of God stands between humanity and the Tree of Life. The human being has become, in a very profound sense, an outsider, and the whole of creation has fallen under the rule of the forces of destruction.

The pivotal position and role of the idea of reconciliation in both the Old and the New Testament should be understood against this background. The Old Testament paves the way for the New Testament’s declaration of reconciliation in three senses in particular:

- 1) Annually, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest made atonement for the sins of the entire people (Lev. 16).
- 2) In the vision which Isaiah saw when he was called to be a prophet, his sins were atoned for by means of a stone which the seraph took from the altar (Isaiah 6).

3) Deutero-Isaiah’s description of the servant of God presents the idea of the vicarious suffering, the taking on of a punishment and the sacrifice which bring about reconciliation: “...he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... upon him was the chastisement that made us whole” (Isaiah 53).

In the New Testament, Christ is depicted above all as the reconciler: “He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). The one who both initiates and brings about reconciliation is God himself: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself” (2 Cor. 5:18). The source of reconciliation and the only foundation for it is the love of God: “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). In the following sentence, Paul articulates the integral interrelatedness of reconciliation, justification and salvation: “Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Rom. 5:9). In the same connection, Paul very explicitly emphasises that reconciliation is a gift given to us.

The reconciliation brought about by God in Christ was a “once-and-for-all” event, and in this sense it is something that has already happened. For human beings, however, this reconciliation is continuously realised through the “ministry of reconciliation”: “We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled

to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Thus, we are encouraged to receive “the message of reconciliation” in faith (2 Cor. 5:19).

However, Christ’s work of reconciliation does not only apply to the relationship between God and the human being; Christ also creates a new fellowship between we human beings by uniting us with himself (Col. 3:3-25, Eph. 2:11-22). It does not matter whether you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, or male or female, “for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Reconciliation with God and people’s reconciliation with one another belong together in such an integral manner that one form of reconciliation cannot exist without the other. In the gospels, this interrelatedness is emphasised in a particularly clear fashion (Matt. 5:23-24, 6:14-15, 18:21-35; Mark 11:25). Reconciliation is at the same time a gift and a calling.

### **Theological interpretations of reconciliation**

It is a well-known fact that Christ’s work of reconciliation has been given different interpretations in the different phases of church history, during which several doctrines of atonement have emerged. In his book *Christus Victor*<sup>1</sup> which has become a classic of systematic theology, the Swedish professor (and later Bishop) Gustaf Aulén classified these doctrines in

a manner which continues to be helpful to all theological map-makers.

Aulén distinguished between three major types of interpretations of reconciliation. In view of our theme, it must be pointed out that the nature of reconciliation as a gift of God is also interpreted differently by these three groups. According to Aulén’s analysis and classification, the first of these groups is called the classic doctrine of atonement; Aulén himself, however, speaks rather of the classic atonement motif. In the theology of the early Church, this was the dominant interpretation of Christ’s work of reconciliation; its typical representatives were, among others, Irenaeus and Athanasius. In agreement with Paul’s words on how Christ has overcome our enemies, Wrath, Sin, Law and Death, and liberated us from their tyranny (Rom. 5-8), Christ’s work of reconciliation was interpreted to be, above all, a victorious battle against the forces of destruction. In a way that is hidden from us, the love of God has, in Christ, overcome even the wrath of God himself, and has thus brought about reconciliation and new communion. Reconciliation is totally is gift of God.

Aulén referred to the second group of atonement doctrines as the Latin or scholastic theory of atonement. This group mainly came into existence and developed within the western branch of the Church, and was, to a large extent,

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<sup>1</sup> Original Swedish title: *Den kristna försoningstanken*, 1930.

based on Tertullian and Cyprian's theology, in which the work of Christ was understood and interpreted through juridical categories. As a result of the influence of such things as the institution of (private) confession, for example, Christ's work of reconciliation began to be increasingly viewed from the perspective of merit and satisfaction (*satisfactio*). This kind of doctrine of atonement reached its culmination in the theology of Anselm of Canterbury. He regarded atonement or reconciliation as a satisfaction which Christ gives, on behalf of human beings, to God, who is also the agent; thus, God is at the same time both reconciler and reconciled.

This Latin theory of atonement separates that which Christ does as God and that which he does as a human being from each other. This means that the early Church's view of reconciliation as a sole act of God is obscured. At the same time, the love of God is also obscured. In other words, this view is very close to the idea that atonement appeases a hostile God who only begins to love the human being actively after this appeasement. According to the biblical view, however, it is precisely the God of love who reacts to sin with wrath.

The juridical nature of the Latin doctrine of atonement, as well as this doctrine's image of God, was severely criticised already in the Middle Ages, and it has been criticised increasingly especially since the era of Enlightenment. Abelard rejected

the juridical approach to atonement and emphasised the exemplary effect of the death of Christ on the faithful: the suffering of Christ reveals to us the love of God, and, in response, kindles in us love for God. Thus, the hostility towards God that exists in the human being changes into trusting love, and reconciliation thus takes place.

A sequel to this subjective doctrine of atonement by Abelard emerged in the modern era, its extent corresponding with the extent to which the main emphasis in theological thinking was shifted to the human being. Both in the theology of the Enlightenment era and in later theology (e.g. Schleiermacher and Ritschl), atonement or reconciliation was mainly regarded as the human being's change of mind. On the side of God himself, no change is needed. He is the permanent love, and love demands no satisfaction. Thus, the "message of reconciliation" is a revelation, which corrects the human being's fallacious concept of God. The negative attitude of the human being towards God had thus been based on a misunderstanding.

Before I try to locate the position of the Graz working document's concept of reconciliation on this map of the three doctrines of atonement, it is certainly appropriate to ask where Luther is located on it. His location co-ordinates can perhaps best be found in his explication of the Second Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, delivered me and freed me of all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with his holy and precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death, in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

Certain pivotal elements of the classic doctrine of atonement can easily be found in this interpretation of Christ's work of redemption and reconciliation. Christ has defeated sin, death and the devil, and has thus redeemed us from their dominion. Luther often classifies God's law and wrath, too, as destructive forces. Indeed, Gustaf Aulén is of the opinion that Luther's view of reconciliation meant a renewal and deepening of the classic atonement motif.

Certain characteristics of the Latin doctrine of atonement also make their presence felt here, especially in the fact that Luther looks at the human being from the viewpoint of sin and guilt. This perspective is not alien to the classic doctrine of atonement either, but in the classic view the captivity and slavery of the human being under the rule of the

destructive demonic forces outweighs the aspect of guilt.

Luther's explanation also contains a subjective element, but in a manner differing from the subjective doctrine of atonement mentioned above. For Luther, the primary aspect is not that of a psychological change based on knowledge-centred revelation, but a change of the human being's entire existence and of its preconditions, owing to the fact that reconciliation, redemption and justification are integrally connected.

Luther's view of reconciliation is theocentric, not anthropocentric. The point at issue is what the God of reconciliation continuously does as the Redeemer and Justifier, and as the one who keeps renewing his creation and making it whole.

### **What will the theological position of the Graz Assembly be?**

Where then will the Graz Assembly be located on the map of theological doctrines of atonement and reconciliation? If one looks for an answer to this question in the first draft of the working document, one becomes quite confused. When one tries to find the co-ordinates of the view of reconciliation that manifests itself in this paper, one feels at first as though they must be entirely off the map. This is not necessarily the fault of the co-ordinates though; the map may also be to blame, in which case a wrong map has been used for determining the location.

Without taking a stance on the question of whether the traditional map of atonement doctrines used above is correct or fallacious, it can nevertheless be said without doubt that the first draft of the working document of the Graz Assembly often speaks of reconciliation in a manner that differs from the way in which we have learned to speak on the basis of the long tradition of the theology of atonement and reconciliation. In the draft, the word “reconciliation” is used as a solution to a problem which is different from that addressed by the traditional doctrines of atonement. The traditional doctrines mainly address the problem of enmity between God and the human being, whereas from the viewpoint of the Graz material the main problem is the hostility between human beings and human communities, between churches, among religions and cultures, between the rich and the poor, among the nations, between the human being and nature, etc.

These are, of course, immensely important questions, and reconciliation is undoubtedly a concept and word that can be used in the search for solutions to ecumenical and socio-ethical conflicts. The problem is how the reconciliation between God and the human being is related to the reconciliation among human beings. Does the former have an intrinsic value in itself, or does it just have an instrumental value in relation to the ecumenical and socio-ethical reconciliation? The greatest theological problem in the preparatory material for

Graz is that the reconciliation brought about by God is practically confined to the horizontal dimension of life alone. The mission and ministry of the reconciler is limited to equipping humans to achieve reconciliation amongst themselves.

One paragraph that is of central theological importance in this working document says that reconciliation as a gift of God means that in Jesus Christ God became a human being and is now present in the creation. “We have faith,” it is said, “that the power of this love, of Christ’s ‘pneuma’ (spirit) lives and works among us. We speak of this good and holy Spirit as the energy of reconciliation, as the power to effect change... And we can be certain that in and with the presence of this Spirit of God, reconciliation becomes an historical possibility. God introduces reconciliation as a concrete possibility into human history.” (paragraph 12)

The document also says that what underlies everything is the mercy of God (paragraphs 14-19), which is revealed to us in the kenosis of the Son, and the energy of which is active among us in the Holy Spirit. This mercy and compassion of God is the source of new life from which reconciliation flows. Traces of this source can be recognised in the relationships among people and among peoples in various parts of the world, and also in the sacraments, which renew life. The basic theological conception described above (if it can be called such)



may possibly remotely echo the classic doctrine of atonement; of the Latin doctrine of atonement, not even an echo is left. What the document's conception has in common with the subjective doctrine of atonement is the emphasis on immanence and on the activity of the human being, as well as a certain tendency to psychologise; the most significant and important of such common characteristics, however, is that no enmity is perceived between God and humanity.

It seems that in the preparatory material for the Graz Assembly we encounter an old theological question which may help us understand what is actually the point at issue here. In the history of the Church and theology, there is a certain long-running tension between the theology of incarnation and the theology of atonement or reconciliation. Where one of these two has occurred with one-sided emphases, it has happened at the expense of the other. It seems that the Graz document is an example of a narrowing and distortion of the concept of reconciliation, resulting from the dominant role of a certain view of incarnation: when God himself is present, one no longer needs to look backwards but

can, inspired by the Spirit of God, set out to establish reconciliation on earth.

Those who put together this first draft of the working document for Graz would have had a wonderful opportunity to draw up an entirely different kind of draft. Namely, one year earlier (in 1995) a small preparatory book appeared which took both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions into consideration in quite a different fashion.<sup>2</sup> In the second section of that document, "Biblical, Theological and Liturgical Impulses", the text is related to biblical material and to material provided by the history of theology in a manner which results in a view of reconciliation that represents the churches well. At the same time, the text also manages to show what it means in practice to carry out the ministry of reconciliation in church and society. It would be desirable for the draft of the working document sent to the churches to be checked and revised along these sort of lines. If this is done, it will be possible to find a theological position in the Graz Assembly which enables us to choose a direction when we set out to carry out the ministry of reconciliation in the world today.

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<sup>2</sup> *Reconciliation, Gift of God and Source of New Life. A Study Guide for the Preparation of the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz, 23-29 June 1997: CEC/CCEE, 1995*

# The Next Steps on the Road Towards Unity in Faith and Love

## *Comments on the Introduction by Cardinal Cassidy in Uppsala, on August 21, 1993*

Your Eminences Archbishop Weman and Cardinal Cassidy

1. The legacy and memory of the Uppsala conference (year 1593) are common to the Lutheran churches of Sweden and Finland. At the time of the Uppsala conference the Lutheran churches of Sweden and Finland were still one and the same church. Even today the churches of Sweden and Finland are exceptionally close to one another due to their common heritage. Political separation more than two hundred years after the Uppsala conference has not erased the centuries of common history and life. A common faith and history make the churches of Sweden and Finland sister churches today. This fact we may sometimes take for granted. It is, however, good for us to remind ourselves of this as we commemorate the Uppsala conference.

2. The purpose of the Uppsala conference was to define the position of Lutheranism in the European ecclesiastical situation at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Today it is important for us to note that in the Nordic countries the Reformation was not understood as a thoroughgoing renewal and change of Christian faith but as a return to the ancient and original faith. As such, four hundred years later

the legacy of the Uppsala conference is of contemporary and ecumenical significance. The tradition of the Uppsala conference is not to lead churches apart from one another, but to study together their common heritage – the tradition of the early, undivided Church.

3. The development of closer relations between our churches in recent years has been significant and gratifying. Realistically, honestly and humbly we may say that the Lutheran churches of Sweden and Finland and the Roman Catholic Church have together taken important steps on the road to unity.

4. It is important to state this, because today there is talk of the “cold spell” in ecumenism, a halt in progress or cooling of relations. However, Pope John Paul II is right when he states that relations between our churches are experiencing an ecumenical spring, and when he issues us with the serious challenge: “Perhaps you in the Nordic countries will find a new ecumenical way ahead.”

5. In his hopeful and promising introduction Your Eminence (Cardinal Cassidy) has pointed to two significant ecumenical events: the pastoral visit to

all the Nordic countries by the Pope in spring 1989 and the historic service of vespers which we – the distinguished predecessor of archbishop Weman, Archbishop Bertil Werkström, Pope John Paul II, and I, Archbishop of Turku and Finland – conducted in the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome on 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1991. I might add two other visible symbolic signs. One is the mass held in the Piazza Farnese on 6<sup>th</sup> October, 1991 with the Pope officiating, during which we exchanged the sign of peace and the Pope blessed us with the consecrated elements in his hands. We were only a short step away from a common celebration of the Eucharist, the Holy Communion of our Lord. The other is the annual mass of St. Henry held in January in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva. There, too, only a short but decisive step separates us from together administering and receiving the sacrament of the altar.

6. When the bishop of Rome said in such a context, as your Eminence quoted in his introduction, “The search for unity does need concrete steps forward...”, he challenges us to step forward boldly towards full visible unity, which is dimly visible before us, already quite close. In your speech, Cardinal Cassidy, there is a concrete suggestion about which I gladly give my opinion. But allow me first to state a couple of important facts which need to be taken into account in evaluating relations between us and as we step forward together.

7. Firstly, I wish to say as clearly as possible that we Lutherans in Finland and Sweden (the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church of Sweden) are part of the Lutheran communion formed by the world Lutheran churches on the basis of common faith, doctrine and confession. In our ecumenical contacts we represent the entire Lutheran communion, also those brothers and sisters whose ecumenical, historical and social situation is very different from that of our Nordic folk churches. Our churches are founder members of the Lutheran World Federation and active member churches within it. We consider the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue to be important and we emphasize the ecumenical significance of confessional world federations. In our view the way to church unity does not bypass tradition and confessions but passes through them.

8. Secondly, I wish to refer to the ecumenical and historical fact that in their tradition, for instance in the functioning and venerated historical episcopate, the Lutheran churches of Sweden and Finland have such ecumenical potential as not all Lutheran churches have to the same degree. We are able and wish to use the ecumenical opportunities we have as a kind of vanguard in the great community of Lutheran churches. The idea that the Roman Catholic Church is exploring the possibility of recognizing us as sister churches is a gratifying one for us.

9. Our view of the doctrinal, liturgical and pastoral status of our churches is not, however, determined by what other churches think of us. We consider ourselves to be representatives of the legacy of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, continuing its work in our country and in the world. We wish to honour the legacy of the Reformation and the demand for renewal of the Church, and it is for this reason that we wish to build up fellowship with other churches possessing the same apostolic faith and witness. We cannot “return to Rome”, nor do we wish to, but “restoring the unity” of the Church of Christ (*unitatis redintegratio*) is a challenge which obligates and inspires us, too.

10. I shall now return to the suggestion made by your Eminence concerning the study of the most urgent and most difficult ecumenical problem, that of the ordained ministry, and the leading role of our churches in this work. In fact, Pope John Paul II also referred to this

problem in his sermon in Turku Cathedral on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1989. The Bishop of Rome prayed together with us and dealt with the subject of being a church and the ordained ministry which serves the church, on the basis of a common faith and baptism. This is an excellent starting point for the study of the whole question of the ordained ministry.

11. The two fields of closer co-operation suggested by the cardinal at the end of his talk have my full support. A deepening of ecumenical spirituality, and co-operation in the area of study, are good moves in the right direction. When we think of the ecumenical road it is good for us to remember the words of St. Bridget: “It is dangerous to delay, yet perilous to go forward.”

12. May Almighty and merciful God grant us his grace and help that together we might grow in the knowledge of grace and truth, and achieve that unanimity in faith and love for which Christ himself prayed and gave his life.

# The Church as a Gift and a Mission

*A Lecture at the Leningrad Theological Academy, on the occasion of receiving an honorary doctorate, on June 14, 1985*

Every person wishes to know who he is, where he is from, and what his mission is in the world and in the society in which he lives. These questions are also questions for the Church. The Church must also always be aware of its identity, and the reasons for its existence.

It is the special mission of theology to answer these kinds of questions. With the aid of theology the Church and the Christian faith analyse and contemplate their own identity and their relationship with the world.

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland have, since 1970, been practising this critical introspection together. Through theological presentations and discussions we have sought to find the shared roots of our faith and have tried to define our mission in today's world. In this way we have learned to understand both one another and ourselves. We have also learned to see and appreciate the meaning of theology to the life and actions of the Church.

During these years we have also participated in the theological work taking place as part of the World Council of Churches. Our churches belong to

those churches that are of the view that, in ecumenical work, great attention must be paid to issues of faith itself. For this reason we particularly wish to support the work of the Faith & Order Commission of the World Council.

From all indications, the coming decade will be a very important phase in the work of the Faith & Order Commission. Among the great and inspiring projects of this decade I would especially like to mention the programme dealing with the Nicene Creed designed to bring our churches closer together, The Apostolic Faith Study.

As we participate in the theological work involved in this project we can make use of what we have already discovered and experienced in our own bilateral negotiations. We will also have the opportunity to delve into issues we have not yet had the chance to discuss together.

Through the Nicene Creed it is also possible to find answers to the questions I posed in the beginning regarding the nature and mission of the Church. After all, according to this creed, the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. What do these terms mean for the Church's self-awareness in these times and global circumstances? I shall briefly mention a few things.

We believe that Christ's Church is one. Despite all the divisions, factions and disagreements we nonetheless firmly believe that the Church, as the body of Christ, is one. Christ Himself is the guarantee and foundation of this unity. In Him, and only in Him, are we one. When He gave Himself to us, He also gave us the unity of the Church. This we believe, and in this belief we live and work.

This means that the unity of the Church is both a gift and a mission. It is both a starting point and a destination. The unity that has been granted must also be achieved.

In conjunction with the doctrinal discussions between our churches we have very concretely experienced and realized the ways in which the unity of the Church is both a gift and a mission. This has become especially clear in the fundamental compatibility of divine service and theological undertakings. How to hear the living word of God and attain communion and unity through common prayer has challenged us in our discussions. On an abstract level, we have attempted to approach the mystery revealed to us in the temple of the Lord.

We believe that the Church is holy. If we were to adhere solely to what we can see, it would be every bit as difficult for us to speak of the holiness of the Church as it is about its unity. But despite all the unholiness, all the impurity, all the sinful selfishness and all the imperfection, we

boldly believe that Christ's Church is holy. It is holy because Christ dwells in it, and because the Holy Spirit performs its sanctifying work there. In the same way that the unity of the Church is a gift, so is its holiness. This gift is likewise also a mission. We must dedicate our lives to the Lord who has saved us and claimed us as His own.

In the doctrinal discussions to be held in Finland in 1986 we plan to focus on the issue of the holiness of the Church. Then we shall consider, for example, the question of what it means for the Church and its members to practice holiness in daily life. The holiness of the Church and its members is a very relevant and concrete issue.

In accordance with the Nicene Creed we believe that the third important dimension of the Church is its catholicity. We read in the Gospel of John that God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son. God loves the world, all of it. His love knows no bounds. Through Christ he brought salvation to the whole world. Through his Church he offers this salvation to the whole world. For this reason the Church is not limited to one people or place. The gift affects the whole world. The mission affects the whole world. All boundaries – national, racial, linguistic, cultural, political – must be transcended. Salvation belongs to all. No one may be forgotten. No one may be discriminated against.

We have come to realize that in

the Orthodox Church and doctrinal interpretation the catholicity of the Church is heavily emphasized. The Orthodox liturgy opens up an almost cosmic perspective.

The catholicity of the Church has another dimension: the entire richness of the Gospel, redemption, and God's love is present in the Church: in every congregation, in every divine service. This gift is at the same time an obligation: the message must be delivered in its fullness. Any one-sidedness of doctrine, proclamation, or teaching is in conflict with the catholicity of the Church. In our ecumenical interactions and work we must help one another to more fully express the great richness of redemption, namely the catholicity of Christ's Church.

The fourth property of the Church according to the Nicene Creed is its apostolicity. The Church is, according to the New Testament, built on the "foundation of the apostles and the prophets". The apostles guarantee the origin and authenticity of the message, especially the message of the resurrection. We must adhere to the words of the apostles and prophets, the Holy Bible. If we do not do this, the church will lose its connection to its roots, its foundations, and will no longer be what it once was. By maintaining its apostolicity, the

Church maintains continuity through the centuries.

This continuity is apparent in the Church's mission, which is ultimately based on the mission of the apostles. By proclaiming the word of God and performing the holy sacraments, the Church's mission builds and enhances the Church, because the resurrected Christ, whom the apostles witnessed, is Himself present where the Gospel is preached purely and the sacraments are performed correctly. In this way, the Church's mission is to be a servant to its apostolicity, continuity and unity.

The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is thus both a gift and a mission. We praise God for the gift that he has given to all creation. Every day we can receive this gift of salvation anew. We can receive the new life that our resurrected Lord who lives within our Church grants to us. Every day we also receive the Church as a challenge that has been given to us. Inspired, led and encouraged by the Holy Spirit we can work together to ensure that the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church are realized even better in the world we now live in. At the same time, we look in hope towards the day when all languages proclaim in the name of God our Father, that Jesus Christ is the Lord.

# The Porvoo Process - the Main Concerns of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

*A Contribution at the Church Leaders' Consultation in Trondheim, on September 2, 1996*

Such things as the signing of the *Porvoo Declaration* and the worship celebration, which followed, were part of the reception and adoption of the Porvoo process in our churches. However, festivities are always followed by a return to normal, and we, too, have returned to our everyday lives. But something has changed: our daily lives are now inspired by what we experienced together in our common feast and celebration. Today we are gathered together again, aware of the fact that we have acknowledged our ecclesiastical communion and signed an agreement, thus committing ourselves to a process of removing obstacles and of paving the way for a fuller ecclesiastical communion. What occupies our minds and hearts today is this question: what is required of us now?

## **1. We should get started without delay**

Last February, the Bishops' Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland issued guidelines according to which the priests of those Anglican churches which have signed the Porvoo Declaration (PD) are allowed to officiate at services of worship and liturgical ceremonies in the Evangelical Lutheran

Church of Finland (ELCF). These guidelines can be regarded as the PD's first application to the life of the ELCF.

However, many of the questions related to the consequences of the PD in the domain of ecclesiastical law still remain unanswered. The Bishops' Conference of the ELCF has interpreted the PD as a statement of goals which is based on discussions of principle; this interpretation suggests that conclusions from commitment to the PD must be drawn separately. The churches of the PD have committed themselves to further action in terms of incorporating the items mentioned in the PD into the body of each church's ecclesiastical regulations. Among such items are, for example, the recognition of one another's ministries, and questions related to church membership. Further, points of contact between ecclesiastical and national law must be clarified in each state and each church individually.

## **2. Towards a common understanding of diaconal ministry**

From the viewpoint of the ELCF, the commitment of the PD churches to seek a common understanding of diaconal ministry is very much an issue of current



relevance. This common commitment places the multi-year committee work of the ELCF on this subject in a larger Lutheran- Anglican context. As regards the functions of diaconal ministry in the service of worship, I believe that the ELCF has much to learn from the Anglican churches. On the other hand, the way in which diaconal work is carried out in the ELCF parishes (which is unique also in view of the Lutheran world as a whole) has aroused interest in the rest of the PD churches. In this respect, too, the PD is a process of mutual learning.

### **3. The churches of the Porvoo Declaration in the service of a wider communion**

For me, one of the special reasons for joy is the fact that the PD churches do not want to form a bloc of their own in Northern Europe. Rather, it is our duty on the basis of the PD to be even more open to the rest of Christendom and seek communion there even more actively than earlier. The PD is a natural joining together of churches which have never pronounced doctrinal condemnations upon one another. Thus, the PD is, also for ourselves, an ecumenical gift which we believe will also serve the wider ecumenical communion.

In Finland, the adoption of the PD has raised questions about the relationship of the ELCF to what is often called the Leuenberg fellowship, which exists among several Reformed, Lutheran

and United churches in Europe. For theological reasons, the Lutheran churches of Finland, Sweden and Iceland have not signed the Leuenberg Concordat. Since this Concordat, the negotiations of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the Church of England have resulted in the Meissen Agreement. It is not unthinkable that in the future the inter-church relationships among the Reformed, Lutheran, United and Anglican churches of Europe might be organised through a declaration which would be affected, in terms of both content and method, by the Meissen and Porvoo agreements, as well as by the experiences gained from the Leuenberg process. In the EKD-ELCF consultation last March, we reminded ourselves and our consultation partner of this option.

### **4. Together in Mission and Ministry**

The Church of England is close to the Finns for both historical and theological reasons. The first bishop of our church, St Henry (Henrik), was English by birth. This missionary bishop, who is still the patron saint of our country, came from Uppsala to Finland in order to establish the Western branch of the Church in our country. He suffered martyrdom in Finland in the January of 1155. In my present office, I am the 53rd incumbent of St Henry's see.

When I think about my predecessors in the office of the Bishop of Turku, I believe that they would also have been very pleased to

sign especially Chapter IV of the Porvoo Common Statement, “Episcopacy in the Service of Apostolicity of the Church”, which integrates the episcopal office into the entire apostolic mission given to the Church. Indeed, the full edition of the Porvoo Common Statement is called “Together in Mission and Ministry”.

In the Porvoo Common Statement we say: “We believe that all members of the Church are called to participate in its apostolic mission...” (PCS 32, i) “We believe that within the community of the Church the ordained ministry exists to serve the ministry of the whole people of God...” (PCS 32, j) “We believe that a ministry of pastoral oversight (episcopate), exercised in personal, collegial and

communal ways, is necessary as witness to and safeguard of the unity and apostolicity of the Church...” (PCS 32, k). Thus, the Porvoo Common Statement and the Porvoo Declaration are also important missionary documents for our churches, and inspire us in our effort to fulfill the Church’s apostolic task, i.e., “in mission and ministry”.

In the ELCF, we regard the PD as a reception of the earlier ecumenical dialogues and processes. On the other hand, however, we think that the signing of the PD and the subsequent worship celebration were the starting gun rather than the finish line on our way towards the visible unity of the Church.

# The Porvoo Common Statement from the Lutheran Point of View and the Statement's Significance for the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue

*A Lecture at the Centro Pro Unione in Rome, on November 18, 1994*

## Introduction

*The Porvoo Common Statement* is an ecumenical document between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches, which aims at a very close fellowship between these churches.<sup>1</sup> For our church, the *Porvoo Common Statement* marks an ecumenical turning point. Never before has our church approved an ecumenical document the significance of which (both in principle and in practice) is as profound as is that of the *Porvoo Common Statement*. Therefore, the Statement will also be of significance as regards the relations of our church to other churches, including the Roman Catholic Church.

## The Background of the Statement

*The Porvoo Common Statement* was drafted at a relatively brisk pace. This was possible because of the several earlier Anglican-Lutheran agreements and other Anglican-Lutheran ecumenical documents, which provided the basis for the construction of the *Porvoo Common Statement*. Among these documents are the *Pullach Report* of Conversations between the Lutheran World Federation and the Lambeth Conference, the *Helsinki Report* of the European Commission on the Anglican-Lutheran Dialogue, the *Cold Ash Report* of the Anglican-Lutheran Joint Working Group, the *Meissen Common*

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<sup>1</sup>The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland signed the Porvoo Declaration in 1996. The churches that have signed the agreement until 2011 are The Evangelical-Lutheran Churches of Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Finland and Denmark and the Anglican churches: Church of England and of Ireland, Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church. Two churches from South Europe also belong to the Porvoo Communion. They are the Lusitanian Church in Portugal and the Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia has not signed the Common Statement, but participated in the talks leading to the Porvoo Common Statement and has an observatory status in Porvoo meetings together with the The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia abroad and the Lutheran Church in Great Britain ([www.porvoochurches.org](http://www.porvoochurches.org)).

*Statement* between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church of Germany, the *Niagara Report* of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcopate, and the document called *Toward Full Communion and Concordat of Agreement* (American Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue).

In addition to these Anglican-Lutheran agreements, the Faith and Order documents *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) and *Confessing the One Faith* have had an impact on the *Porvoo Common Statement*. To some extent, the same can be said of conversations between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Church, as well as of discussions between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

In addition, the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches have had previous agreements with the Church of England. As early as in the last century, the Church of Sweden had advanced furthest in these relations. In 1936, however, also the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland signed an agreement with the Church of England, and on the basis of this agreement these two churches have practised mutual admission to communion and participated reciprocally in episcopal consecrations.

The outcome of the negotiations - that is, the document which was accepted on 13th October 1992 - was named the *Porvoo Common Statement*, because the common celebration of the eucharist in connection with the process of acceptance of the Statement took place in Porvoo

Cathedral, which dates back to the Middle Ages. The *Porvoo Common Statement* had been drafted and completed within an amazingly short period of time; namely, the negotiations only took about three years. From the point of view of theological substance and ecumenical significance, however, the outcome of these negotiations is a document which certainly can compare with the results of many negotiations of longer duration.

### **The ecumenical method of the Porvoo Common Statement**

In recent decades, ecumenical methodology has been a subject of lively debate and study. At the heart of the matter have not been the more or less technical questions of procedure, which, admittedly, are also important in ecumenical dialogue. Rather, what are referred to as 'ecumenical methods' are the various theological approaches which are applied in ecumenical dialogue. The questions related to ecumenical methodology can be made more concrete through the following questions: What are the historical and theological fundamentals of our ecumenical work? What kind of model of unity is our work based on? What are the doctrinal issues we must agree upon? In our communion, what kind of diversity is acceptable? What is the ultimate goal of our efforts, and what is the concrete aim of this particular document? What are the consequences of our agreement?

Nowhere in the *Porvoo Common*

*Statement* is it said explicitly what the ecumenical method (methods) used in the document is (are). However, on the basis of the structure and content of the actual text of the Statement, it is possible to draw some conclusions concerning the ecumenical method used in it.

Firstly, the *Porvoo Common Statement* gives expression to the common understanding concerning the nature and unity of the Church (II A 14). This unity has already begun to make itself visible in the Church. However, it demands fuller visible embodiment in structured form. The unity given to us in Christ is a sign, instrument and foretaste of the Kingdom of God. On this basis, it is said in the document that all existing denominational traditions are provisional (II B 22). These kinds of expressions in the *Porvoo Common Statement* show that on the question of the understanding of the unity of the Church, the churches involved attempt to reach a consensus which is to gain visible form as well. This consensus is about the understanding of the Church and its ministry, which are discussed in chapters II and IV of the Statement. The document represents *koinonia* ecclesiology, the essential content of which is, firstly, the life of the Church in communion with the Holy Trinity, and, secondly, the communion between churches and Christians based on the above-mentioned communion (II A and B).

Secondly, in addition to the consensus

which finds expression in chapters II and IV, the partners' agreement concerning the content of the Christian faith is expressed in chapter III. This chapter gives expression to the actual doctrinal consensus of the partners; this consensus is, in fact, a confession containing the partners' common doctrinal understanding. The central paragraph in chapter III, namely, para. 32, contains sub-paragraphs which express this confessional character through phrases such as "we accept... we believe... we confess". What is presented in these sub-paragraphs is the fundamental, substantial agreement in faith. It is based on the confessional traditions of both partners, on one hand, and on the results of bi- and multilateral ecumenical work, on the other hand (III 29-30).

Thirdly, the *Porvoo Common Statement* repeatedly states that the consensus or agreement which has been reached must not be identified with uniformity. "Visible unity, however, should not be confused with uniformity. 'Unity in Christ does not exist despite and in opposition to diversity, but is given with and in diversity'" (II B 23). According to the Statement, not only the unity of the Church but also its diversity has its roots in the Holy Trinity: "Both the unity and the diversity of the Church are ultimately grounded in the communion of God the Holy Trinity" (II B 23). The maintenance of unity and the sustaining of diversity both belong to the life of the Church (II B 24). "Unity needs a visible outward form which is

able to encompass the element of inner differentiation and spiritual diversity as well as the element of historical change and development” (II B 26).

It is apparent in the light of these and several other phrases referring to diversity that also the model of ‘reconciled diversity’ has been applied in the *Porvoo Common Statement*. This diversity between the two denominations will remain in the sense that the partners are not required to “accept every doctrinal formulation characteristic of our distinctive traditions”; on the other hand, however, the reconciliation of this diversity “does require us to face and overcome the remaining obstacles to still closer communion” (III 33).

Thus, what is involved here is not merely an agreement upon differences; diversity is to be *reconciled*, too. The model of reconciled diversity comes to the fore especially in connection with the question of episcopacy, in relation to which the section on doctrinal consensus mentions a ministry of pastoral oversight (episcopate), exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways (III 32.k). This consensus is explicated more thoroughly, in accordance with the model of reconciled diversity, in chapter IV, which is called “Episcopacy in the service of the apostolicity of the Church”.

The *Porvoo Common Statement* makes use of a kind of “combined method”, which seeks to take seriously both doctrinal consensus and reconciled diversity. Thus, the doctrinal consensus concerned is

expressed in quite a full form - instead of first, briefly, introducing a kind of “basis” or “event”, and then trying to give it later a more encompassing “embodiment” or “expression”. In this sense, the *Porvoo Common Statement* differs from the method used in the *Leuenberg Concordat*.

## **The model of unity in the Porvoo Common Statement**

The model of unity in the *Porvoo Common Statement* finds expression, firstly, in the concept of *visible unity*, which occurs repeatedly in the document (e.g., Foreword, para. 6/p. 2; para. 11/p. 5; II, para. 23/p. 13; para. 27/p. 15; III, para. 29/p. 16; IV, para. 54/p. 28; V, para. 60/p. 32).

*Visible unity* is defined and confined in the document in the following manner:

1) The point of origin of visible unity is the faith that the unity of the Church “belongs by necessity to its [the Church’s] nature” (II, para. 21/p. 13), because “the unity of the Church is grounded in the mysterious relationship of the persons of the Trinity” (ibidem). Therefore, communion between Christians and churches is not a “product of human achievement” but is “already given in Christ as a gift to be received, and ‘like every good gift, unity also comes from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit’” (II, para. 21/p. 13). This formulation of the nature of the unity of the Church, which is a very classic one, is closely linked to the results achieved

in the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission, as indicated by footnotes 5, 6, and 7 in the Statement. According to the *Porvoo Common Statement*, the unity of the Church is *given*, and therefore the document also speaks of the “restoration” and “recovery” of unity. (“... this will be a very significant contribution towards restoring the visible unity of Christ’s Church”; Foreword, para. 11/p. 5; “Churches ... are obliged by their faith to work and to pray for the recovery of their visible unity”; II, para. 27/p. 15)

2) As I have mentioned earlier in a preliminary fashion, visible unity must not be confused with *uniformity*. Unity and diversity do not stand in contradiction to each other, but unity “is given with and in diversity” (II, para. 23/p. 13). Thus, diversity is not the same thing as disunity (cf. II, para. 22/p. 13), which Christians “can never tolerate” (II, para. 27/p. 15). Unlike disunity, diversity “corresponds with the many gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church” (II, para. 23/p. 13-14). Viewed in this light, diversity is not to be regarded as a “mere concession to theological pluralism” (II, para. 23/p.14). Therefore, not only unity but “both the unity and the diversity of the Church are ultimately grounded in the communion of God the Holy Trinity; II, para. 23/p. 14).

3) The *Porvoo Common Statement* distinguishes between the concepts of *visible unity* and *full communion*. In fact, the term ‘full communion’ is not used in the document at all (the only exception

being the quotation of a resolution of the Eighth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Curitiba in 1990; III, para. 31/p. 17). Both visible unity and full communion still lie ahead of us. They are goals towards which both partners believe to be going. Therefore, the following expressions are used in the document: *closer unity* (V, title/p.30), *closer visible unity* (IV, para. 54/p. 28), and *closer communion* (V, para. 60/p. 32). Visible unity is still the *goal* towards which the partners are going. The *Porvoo Common Statement* is an expression of new steps on the way to visible unity (“We are now called to a deepening of fellowship, to new steps on the way to visible unity...”; III, para. 29/p. 16). The consensus expressed in the document concerning the Church and its ministry, especially the laying on of hands and episcopal succession, means that the unity and continuity of the Church is made more visible “at all times and in all places” (IV, para. 53/p. 28). However, as these formulations indicate, even after the approval of the *Porvoo Common Statement* there will still remain - in the churches of both traditions - the kind of diversity which these churches must seek to overcome in the future (Foreword, para. 9/p. 4, referring to the *Porvoo Declaration*).

## The elements of unity

The structure and the content of the *Porvoo Common Statement* reveal what kinds of things are considered as prerequisites for and elements of the

emergence of closer unity. These are 1) a common understanding of the nature and unity of the Church (chapter II), 2) agreement concerning the content of faith (chapter III), and 3) a consensus concerning historical episcopacy and episcopal succession as a servant of the apostolicity of the Church and as a sign of the unity and continuity of the Church (chapter IV).

As for point 1), enough light has already been shed on it in the previous section. As regards the content of faith and episcopacy, however, it still remains to be asked what the significance of these questions, in addition to the model of unity, is within the entirety of the Statement.

Especially from the point of view of my church and its (Lutheran) confession, the content of the Statement's chapter III ("What we agree in faith") is of essential importance. Namely, this section actually gives expression to that which, from the point of view of *faith*, is necessary and sufficient for the unity of the Church (cf. The Augsburg Confession, article VII).

I am not sure whether the twelve sub-paragraphs in paragraph 32 in chapter III can be regarded as a "common Anglican-Lutheran 'Confession of Faith'", as Georges Tsetis, the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in its permanent delegation to the WCC, phrased it in his letter of 29th March 1994 to Eugene Brand, the Assistant General Secretary of the Ecumenical Affairs in

the Lutheran World Federation. What paragraph 32 is about is the "substantial agreement in faith" (III, para. 30/p. 16), which is a summary (concentrating only on that which is most necessary) of the consensus of the both partners on the content of our faith. Neither the Lutheran nor the Anglican side has felt it necessary to say anything more, because these traditions have never condemned each other in matters of the content of faith. This applies particularly to the doctrine of justification, on which there is no separate section in the document. The concept of justification of the sinner by grace alone, for the sake of Christ alone, and by faith alone, which is inalienable to the Lutheran side, is given valid and sufficient expression in chapter III, para. 32 c./p. 18 (which is the sub-paragraph on the gospel) and, in fact, even earlier in chapter II, para. 15-16/p. 10-11.

The partners' agreement concerning faith has been expressed in the following *loci* which involve both doctrine and practice:

- a) The Scriptures as the sufficient source of doctrine.
- b) The question of God's will, commandment and grace. To express this in the language of Lutheran tradition, the issue involved here is the law and the gospel.
- c) The gospel, justification, faith and love.
- d) The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Apostels' Creed; the Trinitarian and the Christological dogma.
- e) Liturgical worship.
- f) The Church.



- g) Baptism, infant baptism and confirmation.
- h) The Lord's Supper (Eucharist). The true presence of the body and blood of Christ. The eucharist and sacrifice. The meaning of the eucharist.
- i) The priesthood of all members of the Church, and their participation in the apostolic mission of the Church.
- j) The ordained ministry. The oneness of the ordained ministry and its threefold character.
- k) The ministry of pastoral oversight (episcopate), its different manifestations, and its function to safeguard the apostolicity of the Church. The episcopal office as a sign of the continuity of the Church.
- l) A common hope in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God, and work for justice, peace and integrity for creation.

Not everything that is included in our common faith is expressed in this presentation of the "substantial agreement in faith". So much of it, however, is articulated here that Lutheran confession challenges us to ask the following question: What else, in fact, is needed for the fulfilment of the *satis est* which the Augsburg Confession demands (CA VII)? From the Lutheran point of view, it is difficult to think, after this, of any remaining *theological* obstacles related to the content of faith which would hinder us from acknowledging that our churches have achieved unity. There may be other reasons, though - liturgical,

historical, cultural, etc. - for which it is not appropriate to attempt to establish a uniform Anglican-Lutheran church, not even after the approval of the *Porvoo Common Statement*. Theologically speaking, however, the *Porvoo Common Statement* means emergence of such communion whose "fullness" is very near.

## **Episcopacy in the service of the apostolicity of the Church**

From the Anglican point of view, the most important obstacle to the rapprochement between the Anglican and the Lutheran churches has been, up till now, certain deficiency in the episcopal office of most Lutheran churches. In accordance with the Lambeth Quadrilateral, the Anglican church has considered historical episcopacy and episcopal succession as being of such importance for the essence of the Church that this question has determined for a great deal the pace at which Anglicans have taken their new ecumenical steps. The *Porvoo Common Statement* brings to this problem a new model of solution.

In its solution to the problem of the ministry of oversight, the Statement does not simply "give way" to the so-called presbyteral ordination and succession. Instead, the Statement sets out to consider the ministry of oversight on the basis of something that is even wider and more fundamental, and belongs to the essence of the Church, namely, *apostolicity*. "The primary manifestation of apostolic

succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the Church as a whole” (IV, 39/p. 23).

However, the manifestation of the apostolicity and continuity of the Church consists of several “threads”. These are “witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each” (IV, 36/p. 23; this is a direct quotation from BEM, Ministry, para. 35). Of these “threads”, the Statement brings to the fore especially the ministry of pastoral oversight (episcopate), which can be exercised “in personal, collegial and communal ways”. According to the Statement, this kind of ministry of oversight is “necessary” as a safeguard of the apostolicity and unity of the Church.

All these three manifestations of oversight are important. It is said in the Statement that nowadays communal oversight, in particular, takes synodical form in most of the churches concerned (IV, 44/p. 25). From the point of view of Lutheran churches, this remark is of special importance. We do not regard the communal oversight that takes place through ecclesiastical councils (in which the majority of the members are representatives of the laity) and through the synod (which guides the church as a

whole) as an alternative to the episcopal office. Rather, these two belong together in the apostolicity of the Church, and complement each other.

Also the personal ministry of oversight, as well as its historical succession and continuity, are discussed in the Statement within the framework of this entirety. To ordain a bishop in historic succession through the laying on of hands is a *sign* of the apostolicity of the Church (IV, 50/p. 27). The fact that some of the churches concerned have not previously used this sign is not an obstacle to the establishment of fellowship. By their approval of the *Porvoo Common Statement*, the churches involved agree together to make use of this sign, which is understood as a means of making the unity and continuity of the Church more visible at all times and in all places (IV, 53/p. 28).

While stressing historical episcopacy and its continuity as a form of the personal ministry of oversight and as a sign of the apostolicity of the Church, the *Porvoo Common Statement* does not, however, raise episcopacy to the same position which belongs to the word and the sacraments, or make it a third “pillar”; such a thing would not be acceptable from the point of view of Lutheran confession. In interpreting episcopacy as a sign which serves the apostolicity of the Church - or even “safeguards” and “ensures” it (III, 32 k./p. 20-21), but does not “guarantee” it as such - the *Porvoo Common Statement* does not give rise to the above-mentioned

problem, which, thus, is not an obstacle to the approval of the Statement.

### **The consequences of the Statement for the churches concerned**

Indeed, the *Porvoo Common Statement* has consequences for the churches which have approved it; chapter V of the Statement, which contains the so-called *Porvoo Declaration*, shows what these consequences are. The Declaration, which is composed of two parts, consists of six “acknowledgements” and ten “commitments”.

In these acknowledgements and commitments, the churches signing the *Porvoo Declaration* acknowledge one another's churches as belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. They acknowledge that preaching and the sacraments are valid in one another's churches, and they also acknowledge one another's ordained ministries as given by God as instruments of his grace (NB: “instruments”, not “means of grace”). Moreover, they acknowledge that one another's ministries of personal, collegial and communal oversight in their different forms are valid, and acknowledge one another's episcopal office as a sign serving the unity and continuity of the Church.

In addition to these acknowledgements, the Declaration of these churches contains ten commitments, the realization of which will, indeed, have many

practical consequences for the life of the churches concerned. What these commitments mean is an almost complete reciprocity in the lives of the members of these churches, and in these churches' ministries. What remains for the churches to carry out after the signing of the *Porvoo Common Statement* is the challenging task of changing their laws and other ecclesiastical regulations, so as to make these correspond with the commitments in the Declaration. However, the true goal of the *Porvoo Declaration* is not be reached until its commitments change the lives of these churches, too.

### **The significance of the Declaration for the Lutheran - Roman Catholic relations**

It is said in the *Porvoo Common Statement* with emphasis that the Statement seeks to be an ecumenically open document. It is not the intention of the Statement to create unity that would be exclusive in regard to these churches' other ecumenical relations. The Statement as a whole has as its conclusion a section called “Wider Ecumenical Commitment” (V, C/p. 32-33). In the light of this section, it is readily apparent that the churches signing the document do not aim at emergence of an Anglican-Lutheran “bloc” which would wish to isolate itself from others. At the same time it is obvious, however, that the *Porvoo Common Statement* and its content must be taken into account in the other ecumenical relations of the churches involved. This also applies to their

relations to the Roman Catholic Church. A natural point of comparison to the *Porvoo Common Statement* is provided by the recently completed outcome of the third stage of the work of the Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission. It has recently been published as a document called *Church and Justification*, which has been sent to the churches concerned for their response. Even though these two documents are different in character, one can still examine their mutual compatibility. However, in this context it is not possible to carry out a detailed comparison of the documents; hence, what follows is merely a brief and general characterization.

1. As for the ecumenical “spirit” of the documents, the *Porvoo Common Statement* and *Church and Justification* are very much of the same kind. Both seek to take substantial theological questions seriously. In these documents, minimization of doctrinal questions is not regarded as a way of creating inter-church fellowship.

2. Ecclesiology occupies a central place in both of these documents. Moreover,

in them both the perspective from which ecclesiology is presented is that of communion ecclesiology.

3. It is only natural that in Lutheran - Roman Catholic relations the doctrine of justification occupies a more central place than is the case in the *Porvoo Common Statement*. Namely, in Lutheran-Anglican relations problems have not emerged in the domain of justification, whereas in Lutheran - Roman Catholic relations this very issue has been perhaps the most important subject of controversy.

4. Both documents also deal with the ministry of the Church. From the Lutheran point of view, this question has constituted an ecumenical problem in Lutherans’ relations to both Anglicans and Roman Catholics. In the *Porvoo Common Statement*, the solution found to the problem of ministry, especially episcopacy, is such that this question will no longer divide these churches. We hope that this consensus might also promote the process in which solutions are sought to the problems related to the ministry of the Church also in Lutheran - Roman Catholic and Anglican - Roman Catholic relations.

# Europe in Our Hearts - The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Integration of Europe

*A Speech at the Ecumenical Association for Church and Society in Brussels, on February 21, 1995*

It is not necessary for us Finns to come to Brussels or Strasbourg to find Europe; we carry Europe with us day and night. We have Europe in our hearts.

How did this happen, how did Europe enter into our hearts? It is a long story. I do not think that this would be the proper occasion for recalling the whole story in detail, but I would nevertheless like to tell you some parts of it. Only against this background is it possible to understand what we Finns and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland expect from the European Union, and what we feel our contribution to the Union might be.

It was the Christian church that brought Europe into our hearts. We did not choose Europe but Europe chose us. Arriving simultaneously from both east and west, the first Christian influence made its presence felt in Finland approximately 1,000 years ago. In the era following the introduction of Christianity, Finland was a field for trials of strength between east and west for several centuries, at times literally a battlefield. This applies both to the churches and to the politic powers.

According to the German-American

theologian and cultural philosopher Paul Tillich, borderland is a particularly fruitful soil for learning. If this is true, we Finns have had a particularly good opportunity to learn lessons that will hopefully benefit the rest of Europe as well. Unfortunately, however, we have also been compelled to face the fact that not only learning but also the waging of wars is characteristic of borderlands. Wars with our eastern neighbour together form a dark period of more than a hundred years in the history of our country, which lies on the borderland between east and west. For this reason, we have learned to appreciate peace particularly deeply. I hope this fact will be manifest in our interaction with the other member countries of the EU in the coming years.

As the ecclesiastical and political result of the west-versus-east competition, to which I just referred, Finland finally joined the Western world. The patron saint of our country is an Englishman who came to our country in the twelfth century as the Bishop of Uppsala (Sweden) and who became later the first bishop of Finland. However, we never quite fell out of the sphere of the Orthodox influence either. There is a small Orthodox church in our

country still today. It reminds us of the fact that we live in one of the important European borderlands.

In the Middle Ages, Europe was planted in our hearts in many different ways. In our churches, whose architecture and wall paintings still reflect the influence of those days, the Mass was celebrated in accordance with the Dominican liturgy. In parishes, schools and the diocesan chapter, there were priests who had studied in the well-known European universities in Bologna, Prague and Paris. As for my predecessors, the incumbents of the see of the Bishop of Turku, two of them were former rectors of the University of Paris. In sum, access to Europe was free, and great use was made of it. The Finnish church buildings dedicated to St. Jacob, which still serve parishes as places of worship, are witnesses to the fact that one of the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, began in Finland.

In some respects, a new Europe was brought into our hearts by the Reformation of the 16th century. However, the Europe of the Middle Ages also remained in our hearts. In Sweden and Finland, ties with the past were not radically cut off by the Reformation. By contrast, the ecclesiastical continuity was retained in a significant way, which also applies to episcopacy. This sense of continuity can still be recognised in the identity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, as well as in the identity of our twin sister, the Church of Sweden. Compared to the

Protestant churches of Central Europe, we emphasise more strongly those things, which link us to the pre-Reformation era. This is the essential element of our attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church still today. Therefore, with regards to such European Protestant projects that seem to be directed against the Roman Catholic Church, our attitude has been critical. One reason for this attitude of ours is certainly the fact that the Catholic church we encounter in Finland and the other Nordic countries is far different from the Catholic church encountered by Protestant minority churches elsewhere in Europe.

In the post-Reformation centuries, we were naturally influenced also by those ideas and ideologies which together gave shape to the Europe of the new era: the Enlightenment, Romanticism, Idealism, and Darwinism; philosophical, religious and political Liberalism; Socialism; and religious revival movements. Hence, the present Europe, which we Finns carry in our hearts, is also a Europe of various philosophical, ideological, political and religious tensions - even though Finland is undoubtedly, in many respects, one of the most homogeneous countries in Europe.

Thus, the Europe in our Finnish hearts is not a separate Europe, but part of the larger context. On the other hand, however, we Finns also know what it means to be isolated. We went through this experience in the winter of 1939-40, when we had to defend our independence and freedom alone. These kinds of

memories probably also had their impact on our EU referendum last autumn. If there ever comes another occasion where our freedom is threatened, we do not want to stand alone. Hence, we regard the Europe in our hearts as a Europe that creates security. At the same time, however, it may be that some people or groups in our country regard Europe as a threat to our cultural independence and originality. Thus, it seems that Europe both safeguards and threatens our political and cultural independence. This is where we stand, and this paradox probably finds its best explanation in the fact that we live in a borderland between east and west - that is, in an area where survival as a nation requires both guarantees for security and the fostering of identity.

Particularly in the years of the cold war, our geographical location meant for us a challenge and opportunity for learning. As a church too, we felt in those years that it was our duty and calling to build bridges to Eastern Europe. Very determinedly, we established and maintained relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, and especially with our Lutheran sister churches in the Baltic states, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania. When the Conference of European Churches (CEC) was founded in 1959 to work for a European fellowship stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains, we entered wholeheartedly. Today as well we want to foster this kind of comprehensive European fellowship and work for it also

within the European Union.

It is against the background outlined above that our attitude towards European integration in general, and towards the European Union in particular, must be analysed in order to be understood. Speaking here especially of how the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland relates to the EU, and to the larger question of European integration, I tell you that this process brings with it at least three challenges to our church. And to a certain extent I believe that all of the churches in the member countries of the Union are faced with these same challenges.

First of all, we are challenged to share the responsibility for the future of Europe. While it must be admitted that none of the churches stood by the cradle of the European Union, and that the Union has never been baptised, this does not mean that the churches are exempt from the responsibility to which I just referred. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that most of the politicians who built and are building the EU are Christians. Churches must support their members and all those who work as builders of Europe. Churches must ask with these people the following questions: What kind of Europe is a good Europe? What task does each of us have in the process of building this good Europe?

Secondly, the European integration also challenges churches to work more efficiently for even closer inter-church fellowship and co-operation, so that they

can witness to their faith, hope and love even more convincingly.

Thirdly, churches have to ask what kind of effect the norms created in the integration process will have on their position and opportunities in their own countries.

In the following, I will mainly concentrate on the first of these three issues. I will also, however, pay attention to the fact that awareness of churches' common responsibility for the future development of Europe also makes the question of their fellowship and co-operation a topical issue. Namely, it is obvious that if churches wish to influence the policies of the European Union in one way or another, they must co-operate as much as possible.

What, then, is the calling of churches in an integrated Europe? What are their special responsibilities? Answers to these questions cannot be found in the documents which deal with the constitution or organisation of the EU. As we know, churches do not have any official status in this organisation. In spite of this situation, however, there can naturally be certain expectations in connection with churches. For example, Jacques Delors, the former President of the European Commission, urged churches to have the "soul" of Europe as their special concern. Recently, I read a book in which two

Spanish philosophers, Rafael Argullol and Eugenio Trias, discuss the "exhausted Western countries".<sup>1</sup> They speak of a civilisation which, in their opinion, has somehow lost its faith in its own great ideals. These two philosophers say that though European Liberalism began in the spirit of liberty, equality and fraternity, at present the discussion only concerns liberty, and that only in the sense of freedom of trade. Moreover, they say, this discussion is conducted without faith in the future and without true enthusiasm - in other words, it is conducted in the spirit of general apathy, in an atmosphere where faith in progress has come to an end, where nihilism nullifies ideals and emotions, and where people nervously confine their activities to protecting their own position and security.

If these Spanish philosophers are right, we truly have reason to ask if Europe is on the verge of losing its self-confidence. If this is the case, the situation is really quite serious, because history teaches us that when self-confidence wavers, creativity and innovations also come to an end. As we know, Jesus was of the opinion that a human being can gain the whole world but still lose his or her soul. Faith in the excellence and superiority of the free market economy is not a sufficient basis for the spiritual health, self-confidence and future optimism of any culture.

What then is this soul of Europe which

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<sup>1</sup> *El cansancio Occidente*, 1993.



the churches are supposed to make their special concern? Every human being, as well as every company and organisation, needs signposts to indicate the right direction - the direction in which the future lies. Without these signposts one just wanders about, and confusion and the lack of enthusiasm begin to take over. This is why business and management consultants say that in order to overcome a crisis, a company has to re-discover its original business idea and its function, and to focus on them again. In other words, one must re-discover oneself.

Thus, when we speak of the European soul, the actual point at issue is Europe's fundamental set of the values. It is good to bear in mind that usually our continent has understood and defined itself as a cultural concept rather than as a geographical term - that is, as a community of certain values rather than as a geographically bounded region. However, when it comes to values, Europe is not a homogeneous community. On the contrary, a combination of common values and pluralism are characteristic of the European "soul" and its inner life. Naturally that which is common to all of us has to do with our common roots. Europe is a community of values of reason (Athens), justice (Rome) and mercy (Jerusalem). Therefore, Europe is marked by its particularly deep appreciation of science and technology, its appreciation of individuality, its strong self-criticism, its emphasis on justice as the basis for peace, and its awareness of

the duty to take care of the smallest and the weakest in particular.

Thus, a certain set of common values is important for Europe. However, another element just as important as this is the acceptance of the pluralism of values which Europe's ethnic, regional and language variety carries with it. Within the cultural legacy of Europe, Judaism and Islam have their own place too, and they have much to offer. In Finland the Jewish and Islamic minorities have enriched our culture and social life already for many generations. We should bear in mind that Europe's worst violations of internal peace have taken place and her most atrocious deeds have been done when pluralism and diversity have been suppressed in the name of a single value. Therefore, we can be certain in these days as well that the internal integrity and peace of Europe depends on the success of our efforts to fit together a respect for certain common values on one hand, and an approval of pluralism on the other. From every minority's point of view this question is crucial.

Against this background it is easy to understand why the Treaty on the European Union (Maastricht Treaty) names certain values which are to be realised in all the member countries of the EU. Among these values are freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental rights, and solidarity between peoples, which also involves respecting the history, culture and traditions of each

people. Subsidiarity as a moral value and guiding principle is an integral part of this entirety, because it obliges the member countries to take diversity into account.

This kind of effort to establish a set of fundamental values, which can guide the European integration process, seems to be in line with the original vision for the integration. One part of this entirety is the logical and causal connection of values and peace. This causality, in turn, reveals the legacy expressed, e.g., in the message delivered by the prophet Isaiah: "If only you had heeded my commandments, your peace would have been like a river..." (48:18). In this verse, and in the Bible in general, peace is a very comprehensive concept which actually encompasses the well-being of the whole of creation, including nature. Furthermore, this peace is "like a river," i.e. it is a living process which gives life as well; a living process of renewal. The concept of this kind of peace can be regarded as the intrinsic value of each country and continent, the value which is also served by political peace.

The European churches spoke out on this very emphatically in Basel in 1989. The assembly in question has been referred to as the most important ecumenical meeting held in our continent so far. This assembly, which was arranged by the Conference of European Churches (CEC)

and the Council of European [Catholic] Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), was part of the world-wide process on the theme of "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" (JPIC). It was stated in this assembly that these values are suitable signposts to point the way for the contemporary development of Europe as well. A similar assembly is being planned for June of 1997. The theme of the conference of 1997 will be Reconciliation - a most topical theme, as we know.

Noble and high values are like a raised flag. Flags are needed, flags that stream in the wind and inspire people, flags that show people which way to go and strengthen their identity. But mere flags are not enough. The ideals and values that are manifested up in the air by the flags must be realised and materialised by people here below. This also applies to European values. The old values of justice, reason and mercy must find their manifestation and materialisation in the Europe of today and tomorrow. A significant attempt of this kind is the memorandum "Responsibility for the Social Dimension of Europe"<sup>2</sup> which the Evangelical Church in Germany published even before the Maastricht treaty. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, we can, to a great extent, accept the outlines and proposals presented in this memorandum, in which the demand for solidarity is also extended to our relations

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<sup>2</sup> Verantwortung für ein soziales Europa: EKD, Die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland.

to future generations, nature and the so-called third world.

I said at the beginning of this presentation that it is not necessary for us to come to Brussels or Strasbourg to find Europe. Europe is much closer to us, because we carry it in our hearts. In a like manner, I want to state that the most important part of the work done for Europe by churches does not take place in the conference rooms and corridors of Brussels. Undoubtedly it is still important that the presence of churches can be felt here. We ourselves are here to search for the best ways for our church to be in touch, here “on the spot,” with the important bodies and staff members of the Union, and with those Finns and representatives of other churches who work and are active here. We also wish to discover how our church, on the basis of its own fundamental values, can best support the work that is being done here. However, the most important work for Europe takes place at home, and this applies to every church.

When churches proclaim the Word of God, administer the holy sacraments,

and teach and live out the values we have discussed here, they foster the soul of Europe, on which the vitality and future of our continent crucially depend. The secularisation of Europe is an indisputable fact, but it is just as indisputable that in the midst of all this pluralism we still have certain fundamental values of pivotal importance. We should become aware of and recognise the universally binding nature of these values again, in order to strengthen Europe’s identity and internal sense of community on the basis of these values. Accordingly, we must also identify and recognise the unity that prevails amidst the ecclesiastical pluralism of Europe. We work for this unity, thus serving both the ecclesiastical fellowship and the European fellowship as a whole. All over Europe, this unity and fellowship is under serious threat whenever churches are taken advantage of in pursuit of national, political or financial interests. This is something we must reject. To be truly churches is the best way for churches to serve the goals of peace that are present in the original vision of the quest for European integration.

# Mission and Kingdom of God – Redemption and Kingdom of Peace as Object of Faith and Ethical Task<sup>1</sup>

## *A Contribution to the Current Interchurch Dialogue*

Since 1970, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland have held a series of joint theological consultations. A continuous theme of these, in addition to central dogmatic matters, has been the question of the theological basis of the Churches' work for peace. At the fourth consultation, held in Kiev in 1977, this topic was dealt with under the title "Redemption and kingdom of peace as object of faith and ethical task". What follows is the address I gave on that occasion as a contribution from the Finnish and Lutheran side. In conclusion, I shall indicate its relevance for our subject of "Mission and Kingdom of God".

### **I. The peace of God's kingdom and political peace**

The title under which the relation of the churches to the ever topical question of peace is to be dealt in this year's theological consultation, bears a heavy charge of theological explosive, but it should also be likely to promote fruitful and enlightening comparison between the theological traditions of our churches.

The theological explosive in the title is chiefly concentrated in the word "rauha", peace, because it can signify two distinct concepts, or perhaps even two pairs of concepts. Firstly one can distinguish between peace in the sense of a psychological condition of particular individuals, and peace as a political and social condition in collectivities and States. Secondly, a distinction can be drawn between peace as a condition brought about by God through redemption in Jesus Christ, and the peace which is produced by various human measures on the plane of the creation, whether in individuals or in societies. In the first case peace is an eschatological term concerning salvation history, and "rauhan valtakunta", kingdom of peace, is identical with kingdom of God or kingdom of Christ. In the latter case, peace is a concept belonging to this world and kingdom of peace is an expression for earthly conditions.

Against this background we can ask what is meant by "kingdom of peace" in our title. Is it the kingdom of God as an eschatological reality of salvation history,

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<sup>1</sup> From Lutheran contributions to the *Missio Dei*, LWF 1984, p. 55-63.

or an earthly kingdom of peace as the goal of social and political endeavors? At all events one thing is sure; the kingdom referred to in the Bible must be susceptible of being both an object of faith and an ethical task.

The problem can be made clear by two questions.

If the kingdom of peace of our title is identical with the kingdom of God as an eschatological reality, it is easy to think of it as an object of faith, but in what sense can it be an ethical task? Can the kingdom of God be called forth by human activity?

Again, if the kingdom of peace in our title refers to an earthly realm of peace, it is easy to see it as an ethical task, but in what sense is it an object of faith?

The title contains a word which helps us to answer these questions – the word “redemption” with which the kingdom of peace is linked. We can infer that what is primarily in question is the reality which we usually call kingdom of God or kingdom of Christ. Now since our intention is to discuss the contribution of the Churches to peace under this title, the word “*rauha*”, peace, must also be intended to mean earthly peace, so that “*rauhan valtakunta*”, the kingdom of peace, tends to become also a concept of social ethics. So we are concerned here with a social ethics in which the kingdom of God represents the central and dominating idea.

I have deliberately considered our title closely as a way of approach to the theological problem which it hints at in a really masterly fashion. It is obvious that the title is meant to bring out the close connection between the peace of God’s kingdom and the peace striven for by work for peace. The question is then, how this connection is to be brought out and emphasized without uncritically confusing two realities which ought in principle to be kept apart. Uncritical confusion of that kind leads among other things to redemption’s losing its exclusive and eschatological character and tending to become almost exclusively a worldly reality. That tendency was clearly noticeable at the missionary conference in Bangkok in 1973. In their reports on the Consultation in Järvenpää in 1974, the delegations from our churches, as is of course well known, expressed their joint criticism that the “true dimension” of redemption had not been fully stressed at the conference (V:16).

The central theological task must therefore be to determine what actually constitutes the connection between the peace of the kingdom of God and political peace. How is this connection to be defined without uncritical confusion, so that redemption can retain its specific character while work for peace, and political peace, may also retain their specific features? The conception of the kingdom of peace as an object of faith and an ethical task, depends decisively on the kind of answer given to this question.

## **What was said at earlier consultations?**

It may be asked whether we are not dealing with a problem here to which no sufficient attention was devoted in our previous consultations. Were the peace of the kingdom of God and political peace spoken about in such a way that the danger of uncritical confusion could be avoided? A few quotations from consultation reports may suggest an answer:

“Peace with God is the presupposition for Christians’ endeavors for peace in the world” (Turku/Abo 1970).

“Christians cannot evade their responsibility for peace by claiming that God’s peace only concerns individual human beings or that the perfect state of peace can only be realized at the end of time” (Turku/Abo 1970).

“In bearing witness to their Lord as the prince of peace, Christians should not forget intercessory prayer for peace and for the victims of violence” (Zagorsk 1971).

“The holy gospel itself is a spur to us to work for peace. Christ is our peace, and by proclaiming this, the Church works for peace in the true sense of the word” (Järvenpää 1974).

Each of these statements contains both the salvation history and the political concept of peace. The stress is laid throughout on

the interconnection of these two realities. The connection is that the eschatological peace of salvation history has more or less direct consequences for political peace. It is not possible to determine to what extent the emphasis laid on the connection between the two realities has also led to confusion between them. At all events, eschatological and political peace are coordinated in a very matter-of-fact way, so that no genuine protection is offered against an interpretation which makes it possible to equate these two kinds of peace. The danger of such interpretations is obvious, as the history both of the Churches and of theology in the last hundred years shows.

We now briefly refer to this, and then elucidate the question of the difference and the connection of political and eschatological peace, and consequently the question of the kingdom of peace as an object of faith and ethical task, from a Lutheran point of view.

## **A connection which leads to confusion**

Protestant theology in the present century presents some phenomena which are typical examples of more or less far-reaching identification of the peace of the kingdom of God with political peace, of salvation history with world history. These are theological conceptions in which the idea of the kingdom of God is predominant as the guiding principle of social ethics.

Here above all we can name the so-called “cultural Protestantism” with its roots in the liberal theology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this theological and ecclesiastical current, the kingdom of God was a central idea. That kingdom was thought of as an ethical reality within the world itself, a realm of morally accomplished personalities. To work for that kingdom was regarded as a joint task of Church and State. Consequently, the kingdom of God and the political realm had a tendency to coincide. Salvation history and world history converged more and more to form a single stream, and the salvation history aspect tended to sink into the background. This was connected with the fact that no great weight was attributed either to the eschatological or the sacramental character of Christianity. The Trinitarian aspect was correspondingly unstressed.

The same class of phenomena includes religious socialism, which in the first decades of the present century became an important ecclesiastical and social phenomenon in Europe, and its American counterpart, the “social gospel”. In this modernized edition of the Puritan kingdom of God idea, Christianity is interpreted in collectivist categories. Sin and redemption are thought of collectively. As sin can also be observed in structures of society, redemption is held to apply to these structures too. Society, too, must be redeemed. That is to happen by means of an historical process in the course of which the kingdom of God is realized and in which even technological social

advances are interpreted as an approach to the kingdom of God. The peace of the kingdom of God and political peace, accordingly flow together.

To a large extent that is over and done with. But clear lines of communication run from those theological and ecclesiastical phenomena down to the present time. They are to be found above all in the ecumenical movement and its social thought. The dominant, almost solely dominant, conception of social ethics within the ecumenical movement of recent decades, the idea of the kingly rule of Christ elaborated by Karl Barth, exhibits remarkable kinship at several points with the above-mentioned currents. There is the same tendency to make the kingdom of God a structural factor in the social and political field, so that salvation history peace and political peace tend to become identical.

This tendency was particularly strong in the “post-Barthian” stage of the ecumenical movement and social ethics. I am thinking here of the “conversation to the world” which marked some endeavors in the ecumenical movement in the 1960s. In this connection a specifically Christian ethics was rejected, and by reference to the hidden presence of Christ in the world, simply being in the world was elevated into a specifically Christian task. It was a Christian’s business, it was alleged, to find Christ’s footsteps out in the world outside the established Church, and to follow them: in secularization, in

technological and social development, in the liberation of the people. The most remarkable thing about this was that the self-same idea which had been put forward by Barth as warranty for a specifically Christian ethics, was now used as an argument to blur the boundary between the specifically Christian and the universally human – namely the idea of Christ's kingly rule. Christ's rule extends to the whole world, Christ is active in the whole world, consequently all that is Christian is worldly or secular, and the secular is Christian! Thus Christ's redemption indeed encounters us in social development. The logic cannot be faulted. The mistake lies in the assumption, where among other things belief in creation, and with it the Trinitarian aspect, has been lost sight of.

Closer analysis of these phenomena reveals certain common features which appear to be worthy of note in this connection. Perhaps the most important of these is the concept of development which is applied both to the events of salvation history and to those of world history. The events are conceived as a continuous realization of certain ideas, principles and programmes. This idea of development towards the realization of the kingdom of God, has in some cases a counterpart in the conception of man's redemption, which also is regarded as onward development. The idea of human cooperation in the realization of the kingdom of God, often has a counterpart in the idea of man's cooperation in his own salvation. That is

mostly based on so one-sided an emphasis on the ethical element in Christianity that other factors are disregarded. It is only natural, not to say self-evident, that the evolutionist attitude to the kingdom of God and to redemption, is linked with an optimistic view of man.

It is time to ask whether some common element lies behind these tendencies and features, some factor which of inherent necessity operates in the same direction within different phenomena and is the cause why the peace of the kingdom of God, and political peace, tend to coincide more or less completely. If one considers these phenomena from a Lutheran point of view, such a factor is not difficult to find. It proves to be a constant tendency to monism in the attitude to the relation between law and gospel.

The propensity to let gospel and law join together into a single reality, may have various causes. In cultural Protestantism it is the philosophical, and more precisely the idealist element which operates in this direction. Elsewhere it can be a Biblicism which regards the Bible more as a law book than as God's judging and forgiving Word to man. In ecumenical social ethics, it is the Barthian image of Church and State, Church and society as concentric circles with Jesus Christ and his redemptive action as their common centre. It has already been pointed out that this clearly Christological starting-point can lead in practice to the loss of what is specifically Christian. In many cases



it would probably be possible to find the ultimate reason in the actual idea of God, namely, a static notion of God, leading to the history of salvation and world history being viewed as a continuous realization of definite and unshakable divine principles, plans and decisions. Then it is not just a matter of interconnection between the peace of the kingdom of God and political peace; interconnection becomes intermingling and ultimately complete identity of the two realities. Then it is relatively clear how the kingdom of peace can be an ethical task, but extremely obscure in what sense that kingdom could be an object of faith. It is connected with the fact that redemption itself is in immediate danger of losing its specific character as an eschatological reality.

## **II. The peace of the kingdom of God and political peace from a Lutheran point of view**

The idea of the kingdom of peace as an object of faith and ethical task, depends, as we have noted, on how that kingdom is defined, and for that, the view taken of the relation between the peace of the kingdom of God and political peace is of the greatest importance. What does the interconnection of the two consist in? What is their relation and what is the connection between work for the freedom of the kingdom of God and political peace work?

We have already suggested that the

answers to these questions might depend on the underlying idea of God. At all events this is so as regards the Lutheran tradition. Here the connection with the idea of God is evident. That is no accident, for after all, the heritage of the ancient Church with its Trinitarian doctrine and Christology is of fundamental importance for Lutheran interpretation of Christianity. The question is how on the basis of the Lutheran understanding of Christianity, the kingdom of God is viewed as an object of faith and an ethical task, and how the relation between that kingdom and work for peace on earth is regarded. The view taken of the kingdom of God is clear from the commentary on the petition "Thy Kingdom come" in the Large Catechism:

Now, what is God's kingdom? Answer: Nothing else than that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, into the world, that He might redeem us and free us from the power of the devil and bring us to Himself to reign over us as a King of righteousness, of life and of salvation, and to protect us from death, sin and an evil conscience. Wherefore God also gave us His Holy Spirit, to teach us this through His holy Word, and through his power to enlighten and strengthen our faith.

It is clear from this quotation that the kingdom of God is closely linked with the redemption. It is designated as kingdom of Christ and defined by words such as righteousness, life and happiness. Kingdom of God is an antithesis to sin, death and evil conscience. Somewhat

later, it is said that this kingdom comes to us in two ways, “either temporarily through the Word and faith, or eternally through the revelation”. Further, it is said that this kingdom “has taken its beginning here”, “daily increases and is finally consummated in eternal life”.

That the kingdom of God in the Lutheran view is closely connected with personal redemption, also follows from the fact that under the name of Christ’s kingdom it is identified with the Church. Consequently it is also an object of faith in the same sense as the Church. Like the Church, God’s kingdom too can sometimes be hidden under the cross. Faith in the hidden character of the kingdom of God and of the Church, has its counterpart in faith in God’s hiddenness, which plays a central role in the Lutheran conception of God’s mode of action in the world of sin as well as in Lutheran theology generally (*theologia crucis*).

In what relation, then, does this kingdom of God or of Christ stand to ethics. In what sense can this kingdom be an ethical task in Lutheran eyes? From one point of view the kingdom of God is not the goal but the presupposition of Christians’ action. The kingdom of God is spontaneous and overflowing love, which finds expression in the activity of Christians out in the world, or more precisely in their individual vocations at home and at work. In this sense there is a spontaneous outflow of justice, peace and joy, originating in the kingdom of God,

into society, with its effects on social life. Thus God’s kingdom is a precondition of the action of Christians.

On this point, great unanimity between the Lutheran and the Orthodox view appears to prevail. In the addresses on the question of peace at our earlier consultations, it was repeatedly stressed by Orthodox speakers that the peace produced by the gospel in turn creates peace in human relations. In Zagorsk in 1971 it was said in so many words that the kingdom of God is a precondition of Christian’s work for peace (Osipov).

God’s kingdom is not merely a precondition of Christians’ ethical action. It can likewise be a goal, in the sense that the life and work of Christians always stands and should stand at the service of this kingdom. In the Apologia of the Confession of Augsburg, it is said that the actions of Christians, though defiled by sin, nevertheless, because of faith, are “holy and divine and an expression of Christ’s life of sacrifice”, “because through them he reveals his kingdom for the world”. By the deeds of Christians, therefore, God’s kingdom is revealed to the world. “Through these works, Christ triumphs over the devil”, it is also stated in this confessional document.

What is the relation, then, between this work for the kingdom of God and the work for peace and justice which is carried out in society by Christians and non-Christians? Or, to repeat the earlier

question, what is the relation of the peace of God's kingdom to political peace? Is work for peace which is not a spontaneous expression of the peace of God's kingdom but involves deliberate efforts for peace and justice, often employing power as a means, only a supplement, made under the pressure of necessity, to the "work for peace" of God's kingdom, or has it a value and motivation of its own independently of the kingdom of God?

On this point I shall refer to the address of Bishop Filaret (Turku/Abo 1970), which strongly emphasized the necessity of external measures for peace. He said among other things: "One would be making a great mistake, however, if one were to assert that a mere appeal to man's moral and spiritual rebirth is enough to save the world from the horrors and destructions of war. Life demonstrates, and the history of mankind confirms, that preaching which contains spiritual education for each individual, does not always find an echo in all hearts. What is required here is not only efforts directed to the inward transformation of man, but also such external endeavors as may possibly include a change in prevailing social conditions." The question is now whether these external endeavors, which are not *per se* a spontaneous expression of interior peace in man, have only a practical motivation, or whether a motivation of principle, deriving from theological standpoints, can be attributed to them.

These questions about the relation

between work for the kingdom of God and endeavors for peace and justice, between the peace of God's kingdom and political peace, are answered on the Lutheran side on the basis of the Trinitarian doctrine of the ancient Church. We believe that God is active in the world in which we live, both as creator and conserver and as redeemer. The present kingdom of God is an expression for the uninterrupted operation of God as redeemer. In this capacity he is active through the gospel and in Word and sacrament. As creator, God operates through his law, by which he maintains and promotes life on our earth.

The Lutheran idea of calling is of a kind to throw more light on this relation. This concept of vocation is an expression of the faith presented in the first and second chapters of the Letter to the Romans that God's law is inscribed in the creation in such a way that it can in principle be known by every human being. The law of God, which is an expression for God the creator's will, has for its purpose the conservation and further development of life in a world in which God constantly continues his work as creator. By the law, man is summoned to be God's collaborator in this work. Man meets with this law in the various callings which he has at home and in society and by which, fundamentally, he can serve his fellowman. For God's law, of course, always concerns love and service, care for the neighbor and the life of the neighbor, in big and small things. And, we have said, all men are confronted with this law

in the tasks which they have to fulfill both in their private life and in society. We find the content of the law in principle in our Bible, and its concrete content in the various needs of our fellow-men and of human society. Among these needs is that of peace and justice.

Work for political peace is therefore an ethical task which is incumbent on all men on the grounds that they are created by God and incorporated into his creation. We have here an ethics of law as distinct from the ethics of the gospel or of grace, which holds good in the kingdom of God but is nevertheless fulfilled by carrying out the same tasks at home and in society to which we are called by God through the law. The connection between the two is caused by God, who is active in this world in two ways, as creator by means of his law and as redeemer by his gospel. This link between the ethics of the gospel and the ethics of the law is matched by the connection between the peace of God's kingdom and political peace. It is a connection which has its ultimate ground in God who is constantly active maintaining and remaking his creation.

### **III. What relevance do these ideas have to the "Mission and Kingdom of God" problem?**

1. In Lutheran view, "kingdom of God" is an expression for the redemption gospel. The salvation of God's kingdom ultimately applies to the whole creation.

2. Mission means taking this redemption out to all men, who are still in the power of sin, death and Satan. The mission is an instrument of the saving gospel and at the same time an instrument of redemption through God's kingdom for the whole world.

3. Mission and kingdom of God are therefore closely connected in the Lutheran view. On this point there is no conflict with the mission theology which found expression at the 1980 Melbourne Conference under the heading "Your kingdom come". Mission is prayer and work with the purpose that God's kingdom may spread more widely and reach more and more human beings.

4. The decisive tension between Lutheran missiology and the theology of the Melbourne Conference lies in the more precise characterization of the kingdom of God which the mission is to serve. That characterization will in turn determine the view taken of missionary goals and methods.

5. A theological basic conception which is not able to do justice to the first article of faith and the idea of creation, leads with inherent necessity to a secular, this-worldly concept of the kingdom of God. This in turn leads to a concept of mission with a markedly social ethical aspect.

6. Where justice is done to the idea of creation, there is no need for the gospel to enter as substitute for law, but it can

be God's liberating work which wills the liberation of the whole creation. The kingdom of God can then be a reality which is produced by God himself through Word and sacrament, and the

mission can be seen as an instrument of this eschatological activity, which also includes loving service and the bearing of witness in the midst of the suffering and distress of the fallen creation.

# Life – a Gift of God

*A Contribution at the 6th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, 24 July – 10 August 1983*

## **“In him we live, and move”**

In a discussion about the existence of God in Finland’s largest daily newspaper recently there was a contribution from the paper’s political cartoonist. Done in the cartoonist’s own style, the cartoon showed the smiling bearded face of God the Father peering from behind a mountain. His arm stretched round the mountain and in his hand sat a number of serious-faced gentlemen engrossed in discussion. The cartoon needed no caption. Anyone opening the newspaper on that morning was fully aware that the topic of the gentlemen’s animated discussion was the existence of God.

St Paul the Apostle would have been able to supply a suitable caption to the cartoon had one been needed. He could have taken a few words from his sermon to the Athenians on Areopagus, “In him we live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)

The Old Testament story about Jacob provides ample evidence that man can fight against God without realising who he is fighting against. The same story also shows that man can even be blessed by God without knowing who he is being blessed by. (Gen. 32:24–29)

As Christians we live in the happy assurance that it is God who has created this world and who sustains its matter and life regardless of what opinions we may hold of him, regardless of our beliefs and our doubts. This means that it is not just we human beings but everything on this earth that is related to God just by the mere fact of existence. The whole of our existence, the whole of our reality has, in a manner of speaking, a personal character – not in the sense that reality is identical with God but in the sense that all reality and therefore all life, everywhere and at all times, is related to a personal power which calls everything in existence. The innermost essence of this power is love and the name of this love is Jesus Christ. Christ is the expression of God’s love for this world – “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son ...” (John 3:16) Through Christ (Col. 1:16), through the Word (John 1:3) all things are made. Above the whole of God’s creation we may therefore write the words, “GOD SO LOVED”. Above the stars, we may write the words “God so loved”, above every flower, every human being, every tree, and every meadow we can imagine that the words “God so loved” are written – perhaps rather “God so loves”, for God is always present as the creator and the force that sustains his creation. Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without God’s

knowing and willing it (Matt. 10:29). Therefore “Cast all your cares upon him, for you are his charge” (1 Peter 5:7). This is what we believe and we acknowledge that the very essence of all creation is faith, trust, love. God is continually moving towards us and we may meet him openly and in trust.

In God’s good and unspoiled creation this love and this goodness lead to closer interaction and intercommunication, to greater fellowship, both between human persons and between human person and nature. This we can read in the first pages of the Bible. God places man in the Garden of Eden to tend it and watch over it (Gen. 2:15). Man and nature are united in each other’s service – the land is tended and cared for and man, in turn, experiences the joy of creating, tending and watching over the land. In the same way man and woman, human being, come together and meet each other. This is the true reality that the God of love creates, sustains and continually renews through the Holy Spirit (Psalm 104:30).

### **Praise the Lord, the Creator**

The vision of God the Trinity’s creative work is a vision of exuberant and abundant happiness and love. Every attempt to portray this in words therefore tends to be transformed into expressions of gratitude and praise. Consequently, the account of God’s creation in Holy Scripture is couched in the form of praise. The creation as recounted in the first pages of the Bible

is more a hymn of praise of the Creator than an account of the Creator’s work and the psalmist never ceases to sing the praises of God for his wonderful works:

O praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord out of heaven;

praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all his angels;

praise him, all his host.

Praise him, sun and moon;

praise him, all you shining stars;

praise him, heaven of heavens,

and you waters above the heavens.

Let them all praise the name of the

Lord,

for he spoke the word and they were

created;

he established them for ever and ever

by an ordinance which shall never

pass away.

Praise the Lord from the earth,

you water-spouts and ocean depths;

fire and hail, snow and ice,

gales of wind obeying his voice;

all mountains and hills;

all fruit-trees and all cedars;

wild beasts and cattle,

creeping things and winged bird birds;

kings and all earthly rulers,

princes and judges over the whole

earth;

Young men and maidens,

old men and young together.

Let all praise the name of the Lord

for his name is high above all others,

and his majesty above earth and

heaven.

(Psalm 148)

## **The voices of evil**

What has become of this song of praise in this world in which we live today? Praise of God's glory is today mingled with many other voices and noises – the thunder of tanks and bomb – explosions, screams from torture chambers and prison camps, the heart-rending weeping of starving children, the voices of those intent on destroying their lives with drugs and cursing the day they were born, the clatter of machines mercilessly exploiting the natural resources of this planet.

Why has it turned out this way? Why has praise of God been drowned by the voices of selfishness, hate, evil and violence? The Bible tells us how the first human beings opposed God, how they fled from the face of God and were driven out of Paradise (Gen. 3). Outside the very gates of Paradise the first fratricide takes place and there is heard the scornful question of selfishness and lack of concern, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9) At the very gates of Paradise man uses his technical know-how not to the glory of God but to further his own selfish interests; "Come, let us build ourselves a tower with its top in the heavens, and make a name for ourselves." (Gen. 11:4)

The consequences of this tower raised in the name of vanity and selfishness are that the builders are divided among themselves and can no longer understand each other (Gen. 11). So man comes to realize that the tree of knowledge is a tree of both good and evil.

This old story from the Bible still has something to tell us about ourselves and our world even today. They show how the good that God created is no longer what it was intended to be. Instead of being united we are divided; instead of giving life human person takes it. Man thinks more of himself than of his brother, he is more interested in his own glory than God's, man is moving away – from God, from his brother, from himself, from a proper relationship to nature.

## **The occupied life**

Why then this senseless self-destruction? Because this world has been occupied by a foreign power that is opposed to God and wishes to destroy what God has created – "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). The good that God has created is continually threatened by this foreign destructive power, sorely threatened. This explains why the good in this world can very often only be achieved through a struggle with the evil. In such cases it is in fact the Creator himself who takes up the struggle by creating new life and by protecting life with his message of love, justice and truth.

Since our Creator continues to play an active role in this world beset by evil, we can still rejoice over much that is good and beautiful. We can take pleasure in man's creative ability, not only in the fields of science, technology and the arts but also in simple activities in the home and at our place of work. We may occasionally



catch glorious glimpses of the Paradise that we have lost – in love and tenderness, in loyalty and friendship, in solidarity and brotherhood, in happy games and lively parties.

Life in this world is a mixture of freedom and compulsion, of kindness and cruelty, of pleasure and strife, of truth and lies, of justice and injustice, of constructiveness and destruction. Between these there is waged an incessant struggle, which at bottom is a struggle between God and those who oppose him, between “the all-merciful Father” (2 Cor. 1:3) and “the father of lies” (John 8:44). This struggle concerns us all. It goes on both within and without us. We experience it through the tension between God’s commandments, which call upon us to work in the service of life, and the temptation to be the servant of destruction. This is something which concerns us simply because we are human beings and part of God’s creation. Regardless of our beliefs we are involved in the struggle between good and evil. Regardless of our beliefs we can stand side by side in the struggle for life against death, for truth, for justice, and for a better world in every sense of the word. This is possible not least because there are obvious parallels between the moral principles of different religions. In these parallels we, as Christians, see proof that God as the creator is related to all life and therefore to every human being. When the apostle Paul pronounced those words upon Areopagus in Athens – “In him we live, and move, and have our being” -, he

immediately pointed out that this was in fact nothing new to the Greeks. Their own poets had said earlier, “We are also his offspring.” (Acts 17:28)

## **The Prince of Life**

The awareness that there exists a God is therefore nothing new in this world, nor is the awareness of higher ethical ideals that can serve in the defence of and furtherance of life. This is common knowledge essential for the whole humanity, created and kept alive by the universal Creator. But Paul did not go to Areopagus just to tell the Greeks what they already knew. He had something new to relate, a revolutionary piece of news for them. It was because of this news that he had travelled so far and it was this news which formed the basis of the young church.

This revolutionary and fundamental news was that the lawful king has come to this, our occupied world. Naturally he has come in disguise, which explains why not everyone recognises him, but he is here and now as the leader of a growing resistance movement. Signs of his presence may be detected from time to time, signs that indicate the new power which is still hidden but which will one day come forth when the forces of the occupying power are finally broken.

We who have gathered at this assembly here in Vancouver are members of this resistance movement. Our life as Christians “lies hidden with Christ in

God” (Col. 3:3). At times we may find it hard to recognise both ourselves and others as Christians – and sometimes we may have difficulty in recognising our disguised king, Jesus Christ. But we wish to give each other support, to be more closely united in order to fight for our Lord and his kingdom, inspired with the hope that this kingdom will indeed come.

When we fight for Christ’s kingdom, we do so in the knowledge that we are no foreign conquerors of this world. When Christ came on to this earth to be among men, he came to “his own” (John 1:11). It is his own human race and his own creation which shall be freed (Rom. 8:19-23). This is why Paul in his sermon also includes a reference to the creation and to

the fellowship that exists among all men on this earth as a result (Acts 17:22-31). To convert to Christ is to be united with him “by whom all things were made” (Nicene Creed, Col. 1:16) – with him who is the rightful ruler of heaven and earth, “the prince of life” (Matt. 28:18; Acts 3:15).

The prince of life frees and renews the life of occupied creation. Therefore we follow him, therefore we praise him when we praise and pray to God, the Holy Trinity:

“Of him, through him, and to him, are all things:  
to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”  
(Rom. 11:36)

# Contemporary Challenges to the Christian Church as I See Them

*A Lecture given in Christ Church Cathedral in Indianapolis, on July 31, 1996*

The theme I have been given is a broad and demanding one; it is in fact an absolutely overwhelming task. The contemporary challenges to the Christian Church are immensely different in different parts of the world. Fortunately, the title contains the words “as I see them.” I may thus choose to address the subject from a personal angle, that of a Finnish and European bishop and theologian. It is your task to evaluate the extent to which the challenges I have perceived are also challenges to the Christian Church on this side of the Atlantic.

I begin with the premise that the Christian Church is a community of faith, hope and love. I shall accordingly divide my presentation into three parts. I shall be speaking of the challenges that our *faith*, our *hope* and our *love* encounter today as I see them.

## **I. Contemporary Challenges to Christian Faith**

The Church of today needs to encourage people to believe in the Triune God in a culture which is characterised by pluralism and individualism. With such a diversity of views, values and religions to compete with, Christian faith is no

longer a selfevident element of culture as it was in past centuries in many countries, particularly in Europe. Christian faith is encountering serious challenges from very many quarters. Every Christian who is able to relate openly to, and think critically about, his or her environment has to admit that critical reflection constantly directs itself towards his or her faith as well, often bringing doubt.

Besides pluralism, accentuated individualism is part of the environment in which Christian faith lives today. In the background there is a significant ideological and psychological change, which has at times been called “the silent revolution”. This refers to the shift which has taken place in recent decades away from valuing material security towards an emphasis on postmodern freedom. This shift has given rise to the sort of person which tries to make decisions on individual and personal basis in as many different areas of life as possible. He or she wants to work, eat, dress and spend leisure time in entirely individual and personal ways. The same quest for individuality is also apparent in matters of ethical values, life philosophy and faith. In everything he or she wants to get away from mass produced, standardised

products and decisions. He or she wants to have tailor-made options, and a tailor-made god to match. What we are facing is a privatisation of every area of life.

The contemporary man thus has an emphatic need to believe in his own way, independent of all institutions. Such a privatised faith may include many diverse elements. The ecological movement of our time typically awakens an interest in pantheism. Many have read the writings of “ecosophists”, the New Age movement and radical feminists which speak of Mother Earth, goddesses or a new planetary awareness, under the name *Gaia*. In yoga and alternative therapies one hears of spiritual world energy. For others the only divinity, the divine flame or spark, is to be found in themselves. Such beliefs are, surprisingly, often connected with some variation of the doctrine of reincarnation. And then there are those who seek life force and energy not in God but in Satan, the prince of darkness.

Alongside pluralism, individualism and various religious and occult phenomena there is also, of course, the continuing challenge posed to Christian faith today by the legacy of the Enlightenment. This legacy has admittedly been subjected to growing criticism, but the idealisation of irrationality associated with that critique is not an obvious ally of and support for the Christian faith. The challenge of scientific thinking must be met as it is, in all its criticalness.

How is the Christian Church to respond to

such challenges to its faith? In attempting to answer this question I must make a further distinction between theology and practice.

As for the theological aspect, one must be aware of the existence of two temptations. The environment of our faith created by critical thought and pluralism is characterised by constant insecurity and uncertainty. This can be a very oppressive environment for faith. Thus it is very understandable that the Christian seeks more stable and secure living conditions for his faith. He or she may attempt to resolve the situation by rejecting oppressive voices and observations by closing his or her eyes to the surrounding reality. The consequence of this is the attitude and shade of opinion commonly referred to with the word “fundamentalism.” One can argue over the exact meaning of this word, but it is in any case a form of reaction which cuts off living and open interaction with the surrounding world. This is replaced by a closed, rigid religious system which offers its adherents certainty and security. As such it poses a great temptation to all those for whom the conflict and uncertainty brought on by the existence of different views and ideologies becomes a burden too heavy to bear.

The other temptation is to solve the problem with the wrong kind of adjustment: assimilation and syncretism. One can be gullible and uncritical, and glean apparently good elements from

here and there, linking them in varying degrees to one's Christian faith. In this way too a certain stability and security can be reached in the midst of religious and ideological conflicts and tensions. The procedure is reminiscent of situations where one tries to get rid of intrusive peddlers by purchasing something from the selection of wares offered by each one.

Such answers to the challenges of pluralism and individualism are attractive and understandable in a sense, but they are not the proper responses for the Christian Church. Challenges must neither be fled from, nor silenced or softened. Challenges are to be faced up to as what they are. The Church must meet them while remaining faithful to itself, to its own essence. In what I say about this, I shall concentrate on two things: the nature of faith, on the one hand, and its content, on the other.

As for the nature of faith, one must remember that genuine Christianity has from the very beginning been a faith that has met with persecution and questioning, and thus it is a militant faith. It arose as a movement of protest which from the very first met with rejection, and early on with persecution as well. It spread in an empire where there was a great variety of religious movements and philosophical trends. The environment in which the new faith grew was at least as pluralistic as our contemporary society and culture.

The particular nature of Christian faith is also due to the fact that it is faith in a

hidden God, the God of the cross. This faith is madness to the world and human reason. Martin Luther in particular has taught us how the God of the Bible, whom Moses could only see from behind, is concealed in his antithesis. The hidden God has concealed his power in weakness, his wisdom in madness, his love in hate, his glory in the curse and shame of the cross.

God's remaining hidden from human reason and experience might easily lead us to despair. But on the other hand there is the message that God is different from what He seems on the basis of our reason and experience, which is a very encouraging and liberating message. Amidst sin, death, darkness, hopelessness, fatigue and fear we can believe that the hidden God of the cross is close to us, forgiving, saving, comforting and giving strength. This is how He has revealed Himself to us. He is different from what He appears to be.

I am of the opinion that this theology of the cross is particularly necessary and valuable for the Christian Church at the present time. Amidst critical issues, senseless evil and suffering, and competing worldviews and religions the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob may occasionally seem very weak. At times like this it is good to remember that this impression is nothing new. We believe in a God whom man can see only from behind. Our God is the vulnerable, suffering and lonely God of the cross. Faith in such a

God is tenacious. It may waver and bend but it will not break.

Besides the theology of the cross the contemporary Church also needs a better defined theology of creation. As ecological issues become more highlighted, man's relation to nature has come to the fore in a way that has never been seen before. At least in Finland, and in many other European countries, it has been observed that the "Greens" have usually been especially critical of the Church and Christianity. On the other hand, those who are ecologically oriented tend to be very open to religious movements which seem to have a stronger emphasis on the harmonious relationship between man and nature than is found in Christianity.

It is clear that we must not formulate theology on the basis of PR tactics, to say nothing of opportunistic marketing strategies, but it is just as clear that we need to be self critical and ask ourselves whether the theology of the first article of faith has not been neglected in recent decades. I really think that it has been. The JPIC process (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) of the World Council of Churches has indeed exercised a positive influence on theological rethinking, but there still remains much to be done in this area of theology.

The present situation has revealed even more clearly yet another theological omission. At least in Finland, and in other European countries, in the new religious

situation we have had to recognise that our theology of interfaith dialogue is extremely undeveloped. Preachers, church teachers and church members, in particular young members, all need theological help in encountering other religions. In this context we may note that there are many links between a theology of creation and a theology of interfaith dialogue. The Apostle Paul recognised this in his speech on the Areopagus in Athens.

I have stated that we need to make efforts to respond theologically to the contemporary challenges to Christian faith. But the answer to pluralism and individualism also has its practical side. In this context I should like to mention one particular issue. This concerns the relationship between the individual and the community. A particularly critical attitude towards institutions and towards large organisations in general is connected with the individualism of our age. This is what the wellknown sociologist Jürgen Habermas means when he speaks of the tension and even antithesis between man and the "world of systems" as one of the typical features of our time.

This tension and antithesis has been experienced by all large institutions and organisations, at home in Finland and in Europe in general, including the churches. How should one respond to such a serious challenge? When faced with this question one needs to take into account the fact that in rejecting old large organisations the contemporary man is in fact seeking

a stronger sense of fellowship and community.

The new religious movements, various alternative movements and certain new forms of civic society have shown that people get involved and join in where their needs are met in a genuine and relevant way, and where they can experience that the community exists for them and not they for the community.

In this situation we in our church have begun to speak of the Church growing from the bottom up, and we have attempted to act accordingly by reforming the church's liturgy, diaconia etc.. The special symbol and paradigm we have adopted for these efforts is the story of the blind beggar Bartimaeus, whom Jesus asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51) We thus endeavour to begin with people's situations and needs, and not with the needs of the local church organisation. Just like other organisations, we have for too long tried to grow from the top down. Now we are aiming to return to the original and natural direction of growth, and we believe that at the same time we are finding the new communal dimension which the person who values individuality longs for and needs.

## **II Contemporary challenges to Christian hope**

A little while ago I read a book containing

a dialogue between two Spanish philosophers concerning the contemporary moral climate, particularly in Europe, entitled "The Exhausted West".<sup>1</sup> Together these two discuss how one of our continent's two competing economic, ideological and political systems has collapsed, while the other one, which dates back to the French Revolution and which has been supported by the ideas of the Enlightenment, has lost its faith in its great ideals. European liberalism was born out of the inspiration of the values and slogans of "liberty, fraternity and equality." Now all that is left of these is the talk of liberty in the sense of free markets, and that without real enthusiasm or faith in the future. Since the brave and enthusiastic idea of progress has run out of steam, since ideals and emotions have been nullified by nihilism, and since people are now fearfully limiting themselves to defending what privileges and benefits, position and security they have, general apathy reigns.

Perhaps these Spanish philosophers use too dark of colours in painting their picture, but I fear that their observations and evaluations are by and large correct. True, similar observations have been made before. When Lesslie Newbigin, a leading figure in mission and the ecumenical movement this century, returned to England and Europe in 1974 after forty years in India, he described his chief impression with the words, "the

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<sup>1</sup> Rafael Argullol & Eugenio Trias, *El cansancio de Occidente*.

disappearance of hope.” In his opinion he encountered a Western culture which had lost its selfconfidence in the face of the ecological and other problems it had created in its attempts to build a brave new world with the aid of science and technology.<sup>2</sup>

In Finland our worldfamous philosopher, Professor Georg Henrik von Wright, has for several years now articulated severe and profound criticism of society and culture. He draws attention to the direction in which the legacy of the Enlightenment is now leading our entire civilisation. In his remarkable book *Science and Human Reason*, von Wright sees the trends of our contemporary way of life in a very pessimistic light. The total extinction of the human race on our planet appears to be a serious possibility when one takes into account the direction in which technology and its adverse effects are developing. According to von Wright, it is ultimately a question of a *crisis of reason*. One particularly fatal development has been that of the field of reason becoming limited to a banal “technological reason,” relating merely to means and resources; excluding questions of values and goals from the scope of reason. Reason is used primarily to control and manipulate nature, without its being able to lead to the development of what we might consider to be a reasonable lifestyle. Using Max Weber’s terminology then, one can thus state that *goalrationality* has in an

alarming way displaced *valuerationality*. Human person and the whole of society are thus losing their ability to steer their own course today. One indication of the crisis of reason is, according to von Wright, the popularity enjoyed by different antirationalistic protests, superstitions, esoteric teachings and eastern religions.

Von Wright says that, for his part, he places his hope “if I have any such thing” in the kind of protest which comes from within; in the powers which he considers to be the most powerful motive of the leading contemporary trend: man’s rational tendencies. He thinks it possible that new scientific categories are developing, and along with them a new world view which brings us to value the search for scientific truth because it gives us power to control our natural living conditions. In my opinion, we can agree with von Wright that the solution to the crisis of reason is to be sought in reason itself. There is no alternative to reason. In the life of both the individual and society we need both goal rationality and valuerationality.

But at the same time we need to be aware that the perhaps most profound crisis of our civilisation is a kind of *crisis of motivation*, as the Spanish philosophers I referred to above maintain. People can no longer believe in the rightness of old goals. The selfconfidence of our civilisation is wavering. Faith in development is wavering. Amidst the explosive growth

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<sup>2</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984*.



of knowledge feelings of purposelessness, irresolution and inactivity are gaining ground.

This is a challenge to our Christian hope. The exhortation of the First Letter of Peter is now very relevant and upto date: “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). The infant Christian faith was once the herald of hope in a culture showing signs of fatigue. It was, of course, a hope anchored beyond visible reality, but it also gave meaning to this life.

What is the basis of such hope? Faith in God as Creator of heaven and earth tells us that this world and life in this world have a purpose. Faith that we are created in the image of God and are God’s coworkers tells us that we may rejoice and give thanks for our personal gifts, and that we may trust in the judgement of reason when we seek the way forward for our world under threat of catastrophe. According to the biblical faith in creation, we are put here to “till and keep” (Gen. 2:15) this earth, not to ruthlessly dominate it. Faith that the law of God is the law of life tells us that we may take the risk of building our lives to a greater extent on ethical considerations. We know that in the world there is a deep chasm of evil, suffering, purposelessness and hopelessness, and that this chasm threatens to swallow up each one of us. But we can believe that when we cry to the Lord out of the deep, these cries are heard. On the brink of the

chasm stands the cross of atonement, suffering love, which reminds us that the future exists in spite of everything. Our God and our future have a human face.

On this our hope is based. I firmly believe that the present intellectual and spiritual state of our civilisation challenges the Christian Church to keep standing tall on the ancient foundations of our hope. When the Church is true to itself, it is at the same time a community of hope.

### **III Contemporary challenges to Christian love**

The challenges to Christian love are still more bound to time and space than are those to faith and hope. The external challenges to Christian love are as changeable as life itself. In fact it is the ever changing needs and distress of one’s neighbours which ultimately determine what the command of love implies in concrete terms in individual cases.

Some general challenges are, however, identifiable. On the basis of revelation the Christian Church begins with the premise that the real nature and background of evil in the world is the breaking up of wholeness, disintegration. The Greek name for the adversary of God, the devil, *Diabolos*, literally means “the one who throws apart,” the disrupter. On the first pages of the Bible we can see what he brings about. There the original perfection of creation is broken, first between man and God, then between spouses, between

brothers, between man and nature, and between different nations.

Thus the integrity of creation, the integrity of humankind and the integrity of different communities are constantly considerations for, concerns of and challenges to the Christian Church. This is also the reason why the JPIC process which I mentioned earlier has necessarily been a global project for all the churches involved. Here we have a common problem, a common responsibility and a common task; in other words, a common challenge.

In Europe this problem of break-up and disruption faces us in particular in terms of the alienation of more and more different groups within society, especially the unemployed, foreigners and untrained young people. While engaged in discussions with leaders of a European Union research unit a little while ago, I noted that they regard this phenomenon of alienation as the most serious threat to the stability of our continent in the age we are living in.

In the Nordic countries we meet this problem of disintegration particularly in reference to the welfare state system whether to dismantle it or save it. In recent decades the Nordic welfare state has been able to put into effect some of the main values of our Christianhumanistic tradition. The weak have been cared for in a spirit of love, solidarity and human dignity. Society has remained intact. No one has been left outside. In accordance with the Lutheran social ethic an attempt

has been made to view social reality from the viewpoint of the weakest in society and to act accordingly.

Today we have come to realise that this beautiful creation of the Christianhumanist tradition - Nordic liberalism, together with the labour movement - has become more expensive that we can afford. At the same time the common ideology of neoliberalism and pure market economy is eroding its base and its support structures. The result seems to be the division of society, the alienation of those in the weakest position economically and socially, thus at least a partial return to the situation we had prior to the establishment of the welfare state based on the concept of solidarity.

This unfortunate development brings with it a great challenge to our Nordic churches. Responding to this challenge involves, on the one hand, participating in the debate on the future of the welfare state, and on the other hand, helping in a concrete way those people who suffer most in a situation of growing competition.

Such examples show how the integrity of humankind is threatened in different ways both globally and locally. Our faith tells us that the Church of Christ is called to be a community where the inner healing of humankind is anticipated on the basis of the atoning work of Christ. Here is a challenge to our faith, hope and love. It is a challenge which is leading us towards a deeper and wider realisation of the unity of the Church of Christ.

### III SERMONS ON SPECIAL ECUMENICAL OCCASIONS

## Life and Peace

*A Sermon at the "Life and Peace" peace conference in Uppsala,  
Final Worship Service in the Uppsala Cathedral, on April 23, 1983*

In recent years peace has become the central topic of discussion in our world. It is discussed at conferences and seminars, at demonstrations and mass meetings, in the chambers of the UN and in our kindergartens, in churches and schools, in songs and prayers.

We too have been talking about peace. For three days. It has been necessary to do so. We have felt that it was our duty to do so in our capacity as leaders of churches in different parts of our divided world.

We have spoken. Now as we prepare to separate, we should still ourselves in order to hear Another speak. We still ourselves so that the Lord Himself can speak to us. He shall have the last word. His word will send us back home. His word will send us back into the world from which we have come. Through the prophet Isaiah He says:

"I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had heeded my commandments, your peace would have been like a river..."

(Isaiah 48:17-18)

I am the Lord your God.

I am the Lord of heaven and earth.

The world, this divided, suffering world, which longs for peace and mercy, is my world, says the Lord.

I have created this world, I love this world, I have suffered for this world, I want to take care of this world.

I want my will to be done on earth as in heaven, so that love and justice will prevail.

I want life to flourish on the earth.

I want life and peace on the earth.

So speaks the God whom we find in the Holy Scripture and whose presence we sense both beyond Milky Way and in a little flower and in our consciences all over the world.

When he sends us into the world today, he does not send us as the representatives of some alien ideology. He who came unto "his own" (John 1:11) in Jesus Christ sends us into his own world – not as foreign robbers but as ambassadors of His love.

He sends us because He loves. He sends us because He suffers – if we dare to express it thus. If that is, love suffers with those

who suffer, God suffers with our world and humankind today. If love shares all with the beloved, God today shares our fear and anxiety, our disappointment, our hope and our dreams. God's love is a suffering and struggling love. This is shown us by the message of Good Friday and Easter.

But God's love is not sentimentality. God's love is not the care of a guardian, either. It does not remove from us our own responsibility. God's love lets us see and feel the results of our actions. It allows us to feel the possibilities of freedom and the risks of freedom. The Lord also speaks about this through the prophet: "If you heeded my commandments, your peace would be like a river..."

Here the Lord God is speaking about the nature of peace and its preconditions. He tells us what peace is and how peace is created.

What do we mean by the word peace? We often suppose that peace is the same as outward orderliness – outward peace and quiet. But are peace and outward orderliness really the same thing? After a struggle the victor hopes that order will reign on the field of battle. But is this peace? On the job a hard foreman can maintain order through discipline. But is this really peace? In the home a domineering father can spread chilling silence around himself. Can we call this silence peace? In a country the hand of power can press heavily on those who wish for change and who dream of a future of justice and freedom. Outward

order exists. But is this peace?

Is peace the same as nothing happening? The God who speaks through the prophet tells us: "Your peace would be like a river." True peace is not like a stagnant mud puddle. It is not a frozen lake. Peace is a river which builds up in the spring and gives life to the cold, dry earth. Peace is life. Peace is justice and freedom.

How can we achieve the peace that is like a river? In order to obtain the peace brought by outward order, all that is required is power. That peace can be created with the help of weapons, torture chambers and barbed wire fences; that peace can be maintained through the treat of reprisals and through fear. The peace of force and violence and fear.

But force and violence can never achieve the peace, which is like a river. Winter does not create rivers.

How can we create and maintain the peace, which is like a river, the peace which is life and not death. The Lord answers through the prophet: If you heeded my commandments, your peace would be like a river.

"If you heeded my commandments..." Never before in our world have we been able to see so clearly as now where we are headed unless we heed the Lord's commandments. We can see that this way ends in catastrophe and destruction. Death is the outcome when we do not follow the

Lord's commands, the commands of love and justice, truth, honesty, solidarity and freedom. We do not need simply a new international economic order. We also need a new international moral order if we wish to avoid catastrophe, if we wish to protect life on this planet.

But we need more than morals. The Lord's commandments do not apply only to moral questions. The Lord's commands also deal with more important matters than morals: they deal with the conditions for morals – trust and faith.

I am the Lord your God. So reads the first and the most important commandment, which contains all the other commandments. But this is not simply a demand. It is an offer, God's great offer to humanity and each individual – the Gospel.

I am the Lord your God. You can trust in me!

Where do we place our trust in today's world? Where do we seek our basic security, our salvation, our hope in the future. We know where we have looked in past decades. We believed that science would create a happier world. We believed that technology would lead us towards a brighter future. We trusted in "development". We must not deny the importance of these things, but we must also see what happened when these our servants became our masters, even our gods. We turned them into gods, into idols, which could not help, idols which have betrayed us and left us in the grasp of

helplessness and fear. Where then can we find comfort and salvation, security in the face of the future? In what should we trust? Can we trust in anything besides power, our own power, the power of our friends, the power of our allies, the power which has its clearest manifestation in nuclear-armed missiles on launching pads, in submarines and in aircraft? Is this all that remains when humanity has grown tired of its idols? Is this all that remains for us to trust in: destructive force, the power to destroy life on the globe? Is this the only peace we can count on: the peace which depends on the threat of destruction – life and death?

No, this is not all. We believe that there is an alternative. For this reason we have assembled in Uppsala. For this reason we are returning to our own countries and our churches. We believe that there is an alternative because we hear the voice of Him who says: "I am the Lord your God. You can have faith that my promises and my commandments are valid. For my sake you can dare to trust in one another more than in weapons. You can dare to have faith that my commandments lead to life and peace."

As you now travel back to your church and your land, you may feel small before the enormous task which awaits you there. The Lord speaks to you today through the prophet: "I am the Lord your God." Your God.

"All power in heaven and on earth is given to me. Go therefore.."

Go therefore!

# "I am the vine..."

## *A Speech at an Ecumenical Service in Conjunction with the Visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II in Turku, on July 5, 1989*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus says: "I am the vine, you are the branches: He who abides in me, and I in Him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

This is a historic moment in the old Cathedral of Turku. For the first time, the Bishop of Rome joins the congregation, which praises and worships Almighty God in this shrine. I have the joy and honour to wish Your Holiness heartily welcome to our service. I likewise welcome the members of your retinue and the representatives and members of various churches that have come here.

This is a holy moment. This cathedral of ours, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint Henry (Henrik), has not been suddenly transformed into a place of church diplomacy. It is now, as it has been for centuries, a place of the special presence of God, a holy place. We are gathered in the face of God. Here, together, we can ask God to grant mercy to our world, to Christianity, and to each and everyone of us. Together we can thank and praise God for His goodness, His work of creation, His care and His gift of salvation

in Jesus Christ. Together we can ask God's guidance and blessing for our peoples and churches. Together we can trust that the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, is in our midst as he has promised. This is a holy moment.

We are gathered today as members and representatives of different churches. Before God and the world, we must openly and honestly acknowledge that we are not only different, but also disagree on certain matters. But we also know that what unites us is much more and much stronger than what divides us. As the people of God, we have been called to wander towards that promised land, where the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ "that they all may be one" will one day be granted.

We have set off enjoined and encouraged by the word of God. The idea of the unity of the Church of Christ, of a profound fellowship of all Christians, is not a concept and goal of any church-policy strategy, but rather an original and central part of our Christian faith. It belongs to the Gospel itself, to the good news of Jesus Christ. Jesus says: "I am the vine, you are the branches."

The unity of the Church of Christ is broad,

which gives us cause for joy. But it is also a gift that imposes an obligation for us. As the branches, we must remain on the vine, growing more and more firmly attached to it. Every renewal of the church, every real reformation, is therefore progress towards more and more perfect realization of the unity the church. It is a drawing closer to Christ.

When, as churches, we seek renewal, we must set ourselves in motion. That is why we are here now. This service of worship is a station, this cathedral one rendezvous point on our common journey. The people of God, who follow different roads and paths as they wander, carry with them something that they have received from their common apostolic heritage - we have gifts in common, but also what we have received from the cultural and social terrain that we have travelled. In our Lutheran Church, for example, there are things that stem from the environment in which we have lived and through which we have travelled. But we know that we also bear with us a certain gift, which we believe we have received as an inheritance of faith from the ancient church and which is very precious to us. This treasure, which has been preserved and cherished with special love and care among our people, is the message of the justification of sinners by Christ through faith.

We in Finland have felt the importance and value of this treasure down through the centuries, especially in difficult times. We have found that it endures. It has enabled

us to live. It has given us the courage to die. This treasure, the treasure of the Gospel, has furnished safety, consolation and salvation in this country. It has been our people's greatest resource.

Thanks to doctrinal consultations in recent years, we have seen anew that this treasure of the Gospel is not a peculiarity that divides and isolates us from others, but rather part of the common heritage of the Church of Christ. That is why we boldly carry this treasure with us on our journey towards ever more perfect fulfillment of the unity of the Church. We do not presuppose that accomplishing the unity of the church would necessarily require the amalgamation of existing historical churches. But we do need agreement in teaching the Gospel and performing the sacraments. That being the case, certain diversity may be a better guarantee and servant of fellowship than an endeavour to achieve outward uniformity in matters that are not of decisive importance from the point of view of salvation. Holy Spirit can use our diversity and make us living branches on the vine, which is Jesus Christ.

As churches, we have a common starting point, our mutual heritage of faith based on the Bible. We also share tasks and challenges. The first task that we share is, of course, to take the Gospel to the whole world. In that, the reality of secularization in old Christian countries and encountering other religions - here in Europe as elsewhere - requires ever greater shared efforts on our part.

In future years we shall encounter other shared challenges as well. One such challenge stems from the endeavours now being made to accomplish integration in Europe. Topical European questions do not apply only to the economy and politics. A question that must also be asked is: What will the moral, intellectual and spiritual future of Europe be like? What is required of us if Europe is not to lose her soul? When speaking of Europe, we Finnish churches wish to remember and remind that the border of Europe does not run along the eastern frontiers of Finland and several other Western European countries. In accordance with that view, fellowship with the churches of Eastern Europe has assumed an important place in our ecumenical work.

As churches, we are pleased that broadening and deepening interdependence between different countries is creating a constantly strengthening foundation for lasting peace in Europe. But as churches we have also emphasized that peace is much more than merely the absence of overt violence. Peace is not simply that nothing is happening. Peace has a positive content: the attainment of justice, respect for human rights, mutual trust. As a Biblical

concept, peace also includes the well-being of nature, and we must now ask how we can accomplish peace between nature and its worst enemy, human being. This new fateful question confronting humanity is a challenge - the churches as well. It gives us joy that we have been also to set out together to respond to this global challenge - participating in a process that has been given the name of "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation".

I have said that what unites us is more than divided us. We are united by Christ, the true vine. We are united by the Holy Gospel. We are united by shared tasks and shared challenges. We are also united by shared views and dreams:

Together, we look towards that day when swords will be forged into ploughs and spears into pruning-hooks, when "righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalms 84:10). And we are inspired by the vision in the Book of Revelations to John of a group clothed in white raiment, who, assembled from all peoples, stand before the throne of the Lord exalting Him and praying: "Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever! Amen." (Rev. 7:12)



# Through the Valley of Grace

*A Speech given as Part of an Ecumenical Worship Service in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, on October 5, 1991*

The ecumenical journey taken by our churches passes through an ever changing landscape. It is a journey over hills and through valleys. From the hills we have wide, inspiring vistas, but down in the valleys the view is considerably less spectacular. From there we can usually only see a small portion of the road ahead. Sometimes the way is so obscured that it requires some effort to find it even.

At this service we have for a short time been up on a hill and enjoyed a truly impressive view. In giving thanks together to God for what he has given our churches and our countries through St. Bridget, we have been able to look back over a period of 600 years. In praying together for the unity of the church, we have been able to direct our eyes forwards to the promised land of Christian unity.

In a little while we shall descend from this height and go down into the valley. There we shall continue our journey towards the promised land. In the course of our journey we shall often have cause to repeat the prayer that St. Bridget has given us: "Lord, show me the way." But it is not enough just to see that way. We also need obedience if we are to advance along the road to unity. Therefore we must be ready to accept the continuation to Bridget's

prayer: "and make me ready to follow it." Ecumenical work often involves risks. Our joint experience shows that our attempts to achieve unity sometimes serve instead to strengthen the forces of opposition. Sometimes the keenest protagonists of the ecumenical movement constitute a risk. It is obvious that the ecumenical movement needs men and women who with ardent enthusiasm work for the unity of Christ's church. Our problem is not that we have too many such men and women but rather that we have too few - that apathy and caution are greater than enthusiasm. Nonetheless, on occasions over enthusiasm can undermine the credibility of ecumenism within our churches.

In other words, it seems to be dangerous to advance. Is it safer then to stop, to cease treading the path towards fellowship and unity? No, absolutely not! The alternatives are not the security of waiting versus the insecurity of advancing; the safety of delaying versus the risks of striking out and going on.

As St. Bridget says to the Lord in her prayer, "It is dangerous to delay, yet perilous to go forward." In the course of our ecumenical journey we are faced not with the choice between safety and

danger. It is not only risky to advance, to go on; it is also dangerous to delay and loiter on the road to Christian unity. To hesitate and wait on this road can create as much unease and conflict as to hasten impatiently onwards. The greatest danger here, of course, is the danger that disobedience brings with it. Let us therefore listen together to St. Bridget when she says to our Lord: "It is dangerous to delay."

The valley that we must pass through on the way to the promised land of Christian unity seems to be a valley filled with dangers - a perilous valley. But in that valley there is something else. To put it in the words of the psalmist: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4). He knew that there were not just frightening shadows in the valley. God himself is also there.

The Bridgettine monastery in Finland was founded in a valley north of the bishop's see in Turku (Åbo). The valley was given the name *Vallis Gratiae*, the valley of grace. In the rich and valuable spiritual heritage passed down to us in Finland from St. Bridget we are given a reminder that our life in this world is a life and a journey in *Vallis Gratiae*, the valley of grace. It is this greeting that I wish to bring from Finland to this ecumenical service.

The valley through which we shall continue on our ecumenical journey to the promised land of Christian unity is

not then a valley of perils; it is above all a valley of grace. What does this mean for our ecumenical strivings? The joint Commission on the Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches has in its report, *Ways to Community* (1980), given an answer to this question. It says, "Christian Unity is a blessing of the Triune God, a work which he accomplishes, by means he chooses, in ways he determines."

In the valley of grace the unity of the church is an expression of God's gracious love for his world and his church. God himself has created from our world a valley of grace. Here on this earth, through Jesus Christ, he has broken down the walls that separate us, and united us instead with him and with each other (Eph. 2:12-22).

Our joint ecumenical journey is a continuing acceptance of this gift of salvation and unity, a common thanksgiving and praise to him who is the fount and perfection of unity.

In the valley of grace God takes particular care of the least and the weakest. That is how God is. That is what God's love is like. This means that we have a special obligation to include the small minority churches in our ecumenical fellowship and to treat them in the same way as we do the larger churches.

The valley of grace is then a valley of love. At the same time it is a valley of truth, a valley of divine truth. He who, according

to the Scriptures, is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) does not demand unity and fellowship of us at the expense of truth. Therefore we must continue our discussions on basic questions of faith, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide us to the whole truth (John 16:13).

In the light of God’s truth we can see the way in the valley of grace more clearly. But in that same light we also see how incomplete our lives and our path are. Therefore together we cry out, “Lord, have mercy on us,” and look towards the cross, which is our judgement and our salvation.

The cross of reconciliation has been raised in our valley of grace so that it is not just a valley of the shadow of death but also a valley from which the source of life springs. Our Lord, Jesus Christ, whom we follow, is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

The wander through the valley of grace means that, unlike Moses, we do not have to be content just to see the promised land. For the valley of grace leads on into the promised land and we are not forced to stop at the border of that promised land. God did not allow Moses to enter the promised land but he will not hinder us from doing so. On the contrary, we may believe that the Father will gladly fulfil the Son’s prayer that “all may be one” (John 17:21). So we have the possibility of entering the promised land and enjoying its blessings at the same table.

We thank the Lord for the brief moment of rest that we have spent together on this height and continue our journey through the valley of grace, for “it is dangerous to delay.”

# The Fourth Basket

*A Sermon given at the Worship Service in the Lutheran Cathedral on the Occasion of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Meeting in Helsinki, on March 29, 1992*

We have just heard John the Evangelist's account of the multitude that needed bread, the bread of that time (John 6:1-15). The question of bread has also been central in the process concerning security and cooperation in Europe to which Helsinki has given its name.

In saying this, I use the word bread in the same meaning as Martin Luther does in his Small Catechism. In it he asks: "What is daily bread?" and answers by listing a number of things that people need to live: food, drink, clothing, footwear, devout and faithful leaders, good government, faithful neighbours and "other things like that".

The list contains many things that are important also to the peoples of Europe, for example good government, peace, good friends, faithful neighbours. It is precisely in this that one finds the daily bread that the people and peoples of our continent now need. At the CSCE meeting in Helsinki in 1975, the leaves that were then to hand were placed in three baskets. The first basket was filled with security issues, the second was for economic matters, science, technology and environmental protection, and the third contained everything to do with human

rights, cultural interaction and exchanges of information.

Much enthusiasm and many expectations centered around those three baskets here in Helsinki back in those days. However, a question that was being asked at the same time was: "will they be enough?" It seemed that there were more problems and needs in Europe than resources. How far would the bread in the three baskets go?

There was a similar situation and a comparable problem on a hillside near the Sea of Galilee. There, too, needs seemed to exceed resources. One young boy had five barley loaves and two fish in his basket, whilst all around were thousands of hungry men, women and children. "But they will certainly not be enough for all these people?" asked Andrew, Jesus' disciple. The others certainly had to concede that his assessment was realistic and his concern justified. Jesus' other helpers were likewise at a loss to know what to do, but Jesus was not. "Make the people sit down," he commanded. It is easy to imagine what kinds of questions Jesus' helpers had to answer as they walked around and told people to sit down for a meal.

When the people had sat down on the summary grass, Jesus stood up. As the host for the meal, he took the loaves and fishes and said grace, asking the blessing of the Heavenly Father on those gifts. Then he began distributing them, breaking bread.

What actually happened in tangible terms we do not know. What we do know is that there was a young boy, possibly a slave, who was willing to share with others what he had brought with him. We also understand that Jesus' blessing set in motion a distribution, a process in which bread was passed along to neighbours who needed it, where resources that had been hidden seem to have been found. We also know that the people felt they had experienced a great miracle.

There is no explanation for a miracle. If there was, it would not be a miracle any longer. The only answer to the people's astonishment and questions was that Jesus of Nazareth who was in their midst.

We can, of course, ask whether it might be that the closeness of Jesus opened up other baskets besides that of the young boy. Could it be that the baskets opened up because hearts were opening in the presence of Jesus? What we do know in any case is that after the meal there were empty baskets, at least twelve of them, available for use to gather up the pieces left over.

Today, this familiar old story has been told

to us as Holy Gospel, as good and joyful message. When we return in our thoughts from that hillside to the present moment, we can note that also in today's Europe needs seem to exceed visible resources in many places. In the same way as Jesus' disciple, we too must ask how "this will be enough for all these people".

Of course, we have been able to notice how the contents of the three baskets of the European security and cooperation process have increased and multiplied. In this connection, I am thinking in particular of the loaves that have been in the human rights and exchange of information basket. In recent years, those millions of people who have hungered for freedom have found much bread in that basket.

But hunger can never be finally satisfied. It returns time and time again. The requirements of freedom and self-determination are permanent ones for individuals and people; so is the need for security, not to speak of the needs associated with material livelihood. And those needs are very real in Europe today.

Thus there is hunger. There are also baskets. But will the loaves be enough? The sufficiency of the loaves seems to depend on factors similar to those on the shore of the Sea of Galilee nearly 2,000 years ago. Distributing resources in a manner that ensures that also the needs of weak groups and regions are met requires solidarity. There is likewise a need for solidarity with the Third World and the

whole of creation. But solidarity does not grow from selfish hearts. Solidarity presupposes an opening of hearts of the kind that obviously took place around Jesus by the waters of the Sea of Galilee.

This means that reshaping economic and political structures will not be sufficient in itself to revitalise Europe. Our continent also needs profound spiritual and moral renewal. Thus in the present decade Europe needs, in addition to three baskets

that we already have, a fourth - the basket of five barley loaves and two fishes, open hearts and internal renewal.

That is why we pray: Come, Holy Spirit, you living factor and renew us. You, who opened the baskets on the hillside, open also our heart! Come, Holy Spirit, and renew Europe and the churches of Europe! Come, Holy Spirit, and renew the whole world, the whole of Creation - Your Creation.

# In the Service of Reconciliation and Hope

*A Sermon given in Westminster Abbey in London on the occasion of the signing the Porvoo Declaration, on November 28, 1996*

A narrow door leads up to the pulpit in the Cathedral of Porvoo. Above the door there are two quotations from the Bible, one on the outside and the other on the inside. As bishop of Porvoo in the 70's I often had cause to remember these quotations. Now I wish to share them with you.

When the minister or bishop climbs up to the pulpit, he is faced with the apostle Paul's words to the Christians of Corinth, We preach Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:23).

The Lord has not made life easy for his preachers either in Porvoo or in London or, indeed, anywhere else. A market survey among people today might well reveal that when we mount the stairs to our pulpits, we should speak above all of signs and miracles, of supernatural things and fantastic experiences, of profound thoughts and great wisdom. This is the sort of thing people want to hear. But we are exhorted to preach Christ crucified, a bleeding, weeping, doubting son of God, a God tortured and wounded to death.

To preach Christ crucified is to preach a vulnerable God. A God who remains distant and far away is well protected from all attacks. A God who is close to us, on the other hand, is defenceless and vulnerable.

An impersonal God, an impersonal vital force, an impersonal highest principle is protected by anonymity. But a God who reveals his innermost thoughts, his will, his heart, exposes himself to criticism and doubt.

God's church is just as vulnerable, just as defenceless in the face of critical observations and doubts. Where is your God among starving children, raped nuns and sick missionaries? Isn't your God able to protect even his most loyal followers? And why do you have lightning conductors on your church roofs? Don't you believe in God's care and protection when you're praying inside?

On the cover of the *Porvoo Common Statement* there is, as we know, a picture of the cathedral in Porvoo. At the top can be seen a cross with a crown of thorns in the middle. I can tell you something that most people don't know: there is a lightning conductor concealed in the cross - a symbol of doubt together with the symbol of faith.

This is rather embarrassing. Should we perhaps ask the present bishop of Porvoo to have this humiliating piece of technical equipment removed from the cross on Porvoo cathedral so that our communion

would have a purer and more noble symbol? But before we do that, shouldn't we reflect for a minute? With its lightning conductor isn't the cross on Porvoo perhaps a better rather than poorer symbol of our faith and fellowship?

We believe in a God who is close to us, a God who enters into our broken and incomplete reality, not just in very human Bible texts and in the simple bread and wine of Holy Communion but also in our suffering and loneliness, in our sorrow and pain, in the darkness of our doubts and fears. We believe in a God who is open to our questions and doubts, a God hidden behind weakness and foolishness.

But the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength, writes the apostle (1 Cor. 1:25). When we believe in a vulnerable God on the cross, we have nothing to lose, nothing to fear any more. There is no longer anything to separate us from God. No darkness, no doubt, no sin, no death that can separate us from God and his love (Rom. 8: 38-39). For he is already here, in the middle of all this. God is here, with us and for us.

Why this presence of God? It is a question of the unfathomable mystery of reconciliation. Surely he took up our infirmities, says the prophet, and carried our sorrows ... the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:4-5). He is the Redeemer who is here among us, creating

peace, healing that which is broken. As churches we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5). Therefore we must preach Christ crucified - not only in Porvoo but in every church.

When the bishop or minister leaves the pulpit in Porvoo cathedral, he sees above the door other words from the same letter: the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk of word but of power (1 Cor. 4:20).

God's kingdom is not a matter of words, of pompous speeches and declarations, not even the *Porvoo Declaration*. God's kingdom is a question of power, the strength of God that is powerful in its weakness. God's kingdom is the life that God's Holy Spirit inspires and tends in his church when the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments administered.

God's kingdom is the power of the Spirit which creates unity amidst all schisms, which gives hope and new courage in the midst of doubt and despair, the Spirit that lets the flower of life thrive on the harsh soil of selfishness, that creates new life and a new future in the valley of the shadow of death, reconciliation with both God and human person.

Our churches live and have their being in a part of world that longs for reconciliation and hope. Once it was the war - both hot and cold - that gave rise to rifts and differences. Now it is nationalism that sunders peoples, and economic ideologies and policies that divide our peoples into



winners and losers. At the same time as the process of outward integration advances, our part of the world is threatened with collapse from within. Marginalisation and alienation of more and larger sections of the population is a catastrophic trend in our countries today. In this very serious situation we are in crying need of visions that will bring us together, and concrete expressions of a fundamental fellowship.

The *Porvoo Declaration* aims at a deeper realisation of the unity that has already been bestowed upon us both as people and as Christians. It is also a promise of the perfect unity that we will one day celebrate before the throne of God. Therefore we can with thanksgiving and joy place our increased and deeper communion at the service of reconciliation and hope.



Archbishops Martti Simojoki and John Vikström, two prominent Lutheran ecumenical leaders.

Archbishop emeritus Dr. John Vikström (1931) is one of the most influential Lutheran and ecumenical church leaders. As Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (1982-98) he promoted ecumenism in many ways. Starting from the roots of the Lutheran reformation the primary ecumenical dialogue partner was the Roman Catholic Church. In this direction he paved the way for many noteworthy contributions. Archbishop Vikström promoted significantly the Lutheran Anglican Porvoo process and good relations with the Lutheran sister churches. In Finland he initiated the ecumenical dialogue with the Orthodox Church of Finland in 1989 and led many delegations in the bilateral dialogue with the Russian Orthodox Church. During his time our Church had an official dialogue with the Evangelical Free Church (1983-84) and the Pentecostal Awakening (1987-89), and also the dialogue with the Finnish Baptists began in 1997. As a deep Christian thinker Vikström had the opportunity to give papers in large ecumenical meetings like in Vancouver (1983). According to him, renewal belongs together with the heritage of faith of the early Church. Archbishop Vikström formulated: "Stressing not only the legitimate diversity but also the continuity will undoubtedly strengthen the Lutheran churches' character of *communio*." In this way it is possible to be the same church in all directions.