From Oulu to Järvenpää

The Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox Theological Discussions from 2001 to 2012

Publications of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 11

The Church and Action

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National Church Council
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THE ELEVENTH THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF FINLAND

Introduction

Bilateral dialogue between the two folk churches of Finland, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCF) and the Orthodox Church (OCF), began in 1989 on the initiative of Archbishop John Vikström.[1] Metropolitan Johannes (1923–2010), who was the Orthodox chair of the dialogue in 1989–2001, was also an important figure in the early years. Before this dialogue, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland had already been engaged in theological discussions with the Russian Orthodox Church since 1970.

The national Finnish dialogue takes place in a context where the two churches are living in the same society but according to different ecclesiological traditions, although they have been mutually enriched by a thousand years of coexistence of the Eastern and Western church traditions in Finland. An especially cordial ecumenical relationship has developed between these churches since the Second World War. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is the majority church, with 75% of the population as its members, while the Orthodox Church is a minority church, with its members comprising 1.1% of the population.

The Finnish Orthodox Church has been and still is ecumenically more influential than its size in Finland would indicate. Its obvious strength is that there is only one local Orthodox Church in Finland – in spite of the historical existence of two Russian Orthodox congregations in Helsinki belonging to the Patriarchate of Moscow - and thereby has a special vocation in Finnish society. The situation would be quite different if there were numerous Orthodox immigrant churches with varying ethnic backgrounds. Now numerous ethnic groups are mostly find their way into this one church.

The context of the Finnish Orthodox Church as a minority church in a Western context has contributed to her creative and active international ecumenical input. As the examples of Metropolitan Johannes of Nicea and many others show, the contribution of the Finnish Orthodox Church has also been widely valued. As an autonomous church under the Patriarchate of Constantinople, also located geographically between East and West, it has also faced many challenges. Its re-

1 Further information regarding these dialogues is available in the theological bulletin Reseptio 1/2009 of the Department for International Relations of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and in the papers by Pekka Metso: *Evaluation of the Dialogue between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finlan*d (pp. 188–200) and Kalevi Toiviainen: *The Discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish Orthodox Church*, 1989–2007. The bulletin is available in pdf form on the website: http://sakasti.evl.fi/sakasti.nsf/0/10FE7C6FC73BEDC2C22576F2004102B3/$FILE/Reseptio1_2009.pdf

lationship with the Patriarchate of Moscow, for instance, has not always been an easy one.[2]

The experiences gathered in the Finnish Orthodox-Lutheran encounters were also made use of in the WCC Special Commission on Orthodox Participation.[3] Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki from the Orthodox Church of Finland and Bishop Voitto Huotari from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland took an active part in the work of this commission, and also chaired the Finnish Orthodox-Lutheran dialogues after Metropolitan Johannes and Bishop Kalevi Toiviainen.

The Orthodox Church of Finland is nowadays growing mostly because of immigration. Accordingly, its fashioning as a home church for Orthodox immigrants of every age group has been raised up as a major challenge in its current strategy. On the other hand, it is losing members in the rural areas and a challenge of a quite different kind is to organize parish work in large areas with only a few Orthodox parishioners.

The ecumenical dialogue between these two churches has been characterized by three aims: 1) to deepen mutual knowledge and learn from the other tradition, 2) to eliminate misunderstandings and 3) to support fellowship and unity.

The most important results of the dialogue are to start with in the pastoral sphere, dealing with intermarriage and practical solutions for supporting ecumenical marriages. Secondly, the two churches have also promoted common witness on contemporary issues, and thirdly, the contribution of the dialogues has been theologically inspiring and refreshing. The growing number of Orthodox theologians with a thorough theological education has obviously contributed to this. This compilation of documents from the five dialogue meetings held in 2001, 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2012 aims to make this development visible to our international readers.

Oulu 2001

Interestingly enough, the themes of the discussions in 2001 were *Prerequisites for church unity* and *The Church's diaconal mission in society*. The papers regarding the church unity were presented by two top specialists in this field: Metropolitan Johannes and Executive director, Rev. Dr Risto Cantell.

Metropolitan Johannes distinguished three kinds of unity: 1) structural, 2) functional and 3) spontaneous unity shown in co-operation. The structural di-

2 For a historical analysis of the tensions in the patriarchal orientation of the Finnish Orthodox Church in the 1940's and 1950's, see the doctoral thesis of Juha Riikonen: *Kirkko politiikan syleilyssä – Suomen ortodoksisen arkkipiispakunnan ja Moskovan patriarkaatin välinen kanoninen erimielisyys* 1945–1957 (2007) [in English: Church in the Arms of Politics – The Canonical Disagreement Between the Finnish Orthodox Archbishopric and the Moscow Patriarchate, 1945–1957].

3 See the doctoral thesis of Elina Hellqvist (2011): *The Church and Its Boundaries. A Study of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches*.

mension is important in the Orthodox tradition, although caution is needed to ensure that this dimension does not achieve too dominant a position. Certain things are necessary to the Orthodox understanding of visible unity, however: "…a common understanding of the faith and a common recognition of the priesthood which implies acknowledgement of the principle of apostolic succession with respect to both the laying on of hands and doctrinal traditions... This implies also sacramental unity, for which common recognition of the priesthood is an essential prerequisite."

Thus it can be seen that the Holy Liturgy and the ministry of the bishop in celebrating the Eucharistic liturgy in a local church are at the centre of this kind of understanding of unity, which is consequently an application of the *Lex orandi, lex credendi* principle. Structural unity builds the basis for functional and spontaneous unity, not vice versa. The authority of the decisions of the seven ecumenical councils lends content to this overall picture. According to Johannes, "…the overall body of tradition created by the seven ecumenical councils serves to complement the prerequisites set out above, not only doctrinally but in other respects, too." As a specialist in the canons of the ancient councils, it is understandable that Metropolitan Johannes should refer to their authority.

Referring to the Nicene Creed, Rev. Dr Risto Cantell underlined that unity is an essential part of the Christian faith. He argued from a Lutheran point of view: "Our church does not claim to be the only true church in the world, nor does it regard the possibility of salvation as being limited to those within it, but we wish through the ecumenical movement to work towards the visible unity of the Church of Christ and its achievement in the course of history. This search for unity must be conducted in two directions simultaneously, backwards in time and forwards in time: back to the days of the old, apostolic, undivided church which was one in a concrete, visible sense, and forward towards visible unity in one and the same true faith and the celebration of a single Holy Communion on the strength of that faith, this being the most profound and most visible expression of the unity of the church in the bounds of historical time." Thus Cantell was focusing on the heritage of the undivided church and the vision it brings to ecumenical work directed towards visible unity of the church "in one and the same true faith and the celebration of a single Holy Communion…".

In addition to this, Cantell emphasized that our interpretation of the ecumenical method of reconciled diversity underlines doctrinal unanimity: "Viewed in this way, unity is a constantly intensifying state of communion, the prerequisite for which is increasing unanimity, or convergence, and the principal goal full, or at least highly substantial, unanimity, or consensus (*magnus consensus*, CA I). …This gradually advancing approach has been used with success in the negotiation of the Porvoo Agreement …and by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in arriving at their Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, for example." The outline of the current ecumenical strategy of

the ELCF for the period up to 2015 follows a similar line of thought, as Risto Cantell was one of its main architects. As in the paper of Metropolitan Johannes, a common understanding of faith is underlined. Cantell's approach is more nuanced, however, in his emphasis on "gradually advancing" communion. Johannes underlines the "overall body of tradition" and structural unity as the prerequisites for unity, there being no other stages in rapprochement.

On the topic of *The Church's Diaconal Mission in Society* Fr Heikki Huttunen[4] argued that "Charitable work is not merely an ethical consequence of faith, but is itself a dimension of the mystery of faith. When we are engaged in service, Christ is present both as the model or pattern for that service and in the face of the neighbour whom we encounter through it (Matt. 25:31–35). …The sacramental nature of service to others may be traced back to its origin in Christ, the servant. It has always been clear from the early centuries of the Christian church that service and the Eucharist belong to together. Our Lord's table and the table that we share with others are two sides of the same mystery. The sacrament of the altar leads us on to the sacrament of service to others. In the Eucharist we step into the unity of life that has been restored to us by Christ, a unity in which we are all members of each other and responsible for each other. On the other hand, the 'sacrament of the poor' cannot substitute for the sacrament of the altar as the Social Ethics revivalist movement of the 1960s would have had us believe, but is grounded in the Holy Eucharist and wells up from it."

Huttunen's approach describes the theological basis of the diaconal mission of the church in a way which many churches and Christians, including Lutherans, can share. He also describes, how an ecumenical "exchange of gifts" has taken place in the area of diaconia: "Diaconal work was revived in many of the local Orthodox churches in the course of the 20th century, a trend which may be attributed to both the influence of western models and the Eastern Church's own interest in the patristic teachings and their practical consequences."

In the Lutheran response, Rev. Irja Askola[5] pointed out the ecclesiological and theological relevance of diaconal work "…charitable work is one dimension of the church's work alongside witness and missions, and is in no sense an optional element. Service to others occupies a prominent place in Jesus' teachings and the New Testament epistles provide numerous accounts of how charitable work took on organized forms while retaining both its liturgical and its social dimension. Luther placed a great deal of emphasis on love for one's neighbour as one of the fruits of faith, and this was one of the factors that led to the founding of a system for caring for the poor within the secular society."

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4 Later, in 2006, Fr Heikki Huttunen became the first Orthodox general secretary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council.

5 Irja Askola later became the first woman bishop in Finland, on her appointment as Bishop of Helsinki in 2010.

In addition to this, Askola, as a church sociologist, reflected on the mission of the church as an agent in civil society in general and suggested some areas and working methods for the churches when making their input in today's Finnish and European context: "…the social mission for the church's charitable work can be summarized very well in the challenge existing throughout Europe to act together with and be a part of the forces engaged in constructing a civil society. In view of the threats facing participation and democracy and the increasing inequality between citizens, the church is called on to play its part in opposing these trends. This can be done by offering clearly defined services and creating effective security networks, and also by stimulating a culture of care and by drawing attention to choices that are apt to give rise to social wrongs and injustices."

Joensuu 2007

The themes for discussion in Joensuu in 2007 were spiritual and pastoral in character: *Sanctification and asceticism* and *Violence in the family and in personal relations*. The papers on *Sanctification and ascetism* were given by Matti Poutiainen, Lic.Theol., Dean of Helsinki, and Aino Nenola, M.Theol.

Poutiainen dealt with the topic on the basis of the Bible and the Catechism, the two main sources of Lutheran spirituality. He summarized the biblical background as given in the Old and the New Testaments as follows: "The concept of sanctity is linked in the Bible above all with God himself. …In Luther's catechisms and the catechism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland that is based on them, sanctification does not simply describe one element in the order of salvation but serves as the basic concept that subsumes the whole of the activity of the Holy Spirit. … The continuous work of the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and develops holiness and its fruits. … We human beings cannot rid ourselves entirely of sin during this earthly life, so that we remain 'half pure and holy'. …(Large Catechism: Article III)."

Ecumenical convergence was found in the area of collaboration between God and man – traditionally a difficult topic for Lutherans. Poutiainen explains Luther's theology on this: "Luther casts some light on this collaborative work in his Sermon on Two Kinds of Justification (*Sermo de duplici iustitia*) of 1519 (WA 2, 143–152). The first kind (*iustitia prima*) is external justification that is bestowed upon us (*iustitia aliena, infusa*). …. It is the Christ who is present in our faith who is our first justification. Thus as far as this external justification is concerned we are wholly and perfectly justified (*totus iustus*), even though in ourselves, as the 'old man" we continue to be utterly sinful (*totus peccator*). … The second kind of justification (*iustitia secunda*) is connected with the first and is our own justification that comes about within us (*iustitia propria*). The Christ who is present in our faith is active within us and gives rise directly to justification. As this is happening all the time in those who believe in him, it represents the beginnings

of a justification that we find in ourselves, which is constantly growing but is unable to become perfect (*totus*) during our lifetime because of the residue of sin within us, so that it remains partial (*partim*)." The word of God and the sacraments are the starting point for the ascetic life in the process of sanctification or "second justification". Inspired by the findings of Finnish research into Luther, Poutiainen describes the process of justification and sanctification, and not only the act of justification by faith.

Aino Nenola had Orthodox anthropology as her starting point. A human being is created in the image and likeness of God, and being a Christian implies deification, striving towards holiness: "The starting point for the theology of the ascetic life may be seen in the view of man as a being created to be good. Holiness is an attribute of God and the ontological source and goal of man, who was created in God's image and likeness. This likeness pervades our whole being and confers on us, by contrast with all other created beings, a particular ability to strive towards holiness. … The achievement of holiness is referred to as *theosis*, or deification. Theologians make a distinction between the essence and the energies of God, and deification is human participation in his uncreated energies, in his divine actions, but not confusion with his essence, which is an undefined mystery, the complete distinction of God from all else that exists. …Deification, unification between the divine and the human, does not lead to a merging of essences but to a true union between the Uncreated and the created through his energies." Thus Nenola favours the Palamistic distinction between the "essence" and "energies" of God.

In practice, this striving for "holiness" is what in Orthodox thought is called "the ascetic life". This is not an individualistic effort, but a holistic endeavour which belongs to the communion of the Church. Nenola argued on the basis of a Trinitarian theology that "It is the pursuit of holiness that we refer to as the ascetic life, a joint undertaking involving the body, soul and spirit which is lived out in practice by the members of the Church. Its aim is the achievement of holiness: theosis, deification. Holiness is the experiencing of God as an interpersonal event requiring the participation of a person and a union of persons, for God is a union of persons and deification is participation in that union and emulation of it."

Convergence could be found regarding the process of "second justification" and "deification" or "faith" and "holiness" - as Professor Risto Saarinen takes as the key words in his parallel models of typically Lutheran and Orthodox understandings of salvation and the Christian life.[6] Although the typically Lutheran emphasis on the word and the sacraments as forming a basis for faith, spirituality and the ascetic life implies the church as its context, the context of the Church as a vehicle for participation in the life of the Triune God is typically more explicitly

6 Risto Saarinen (1997): Faith and Holiness. Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994.

present in the Orthodox contribution. This can also be seen in the dominance of the word over the sacraments in some lines of Lutheran thought.

This possible source of tension was noticed to some extent in the discussions, and the balance between the word and the sacraments was emphasized:"…This line of argument has nevertheless led to an over-emphasis on the preaching of sermons at the expense of the sacrament of Holy Communion, although our thinking on this matter has altered in recent times. It was also noted that a trend in the opposite direction has been observed in the Orthodox Church in recent times, with worship of the word regaining the position to which it is entitled.

The delegates also detected common ground in the emphasis on the presence of holiness in everyday life, which can also be a struggle towards faith in its own way. It is impossible to isolate what is spiritual from what is worldly. Asceticism in both traditions is a question of searching for a simple, harmonious way of life, and a parallel can be seen between the Lutheran concept of prayer and meditation on the Catechism at home and the Orthodox custom of praying before an icon at home."

Regarding the theme *Violence in the family and in personal relations* both Rev. Mari Kinnunen and Fr Rauno Pietarinen dealt with religious harassment as a form of violence in personal relations, although violence against women, child abuse, violence inflicted on the elderly, the tradition of patriarchalism and dualism were also touched upon. The challenges for the churches were identified as being openness, a stop to the covering up of acts of violence and a suggestion of local ecumenical training for the detecting of violence in families. The World Council of Churches' "Decade to overcome violence" also functioned as a framework. Even so, the main attention was paid to the topic of psychological religious harassment: "The discussion that followed touched mainly on the churches' teachings with regard to holiness and obedience. …it is time that the churches rid themselves of the tendency to seek justifications for subjugating others. Holiness should not be abominated by turning it into support for psychological harassment. The churches should protect and value both the physical and psychological integrity of the people placed in their pastoral care."

Helsinki 2009

The topics of the discussions in 2009 were *Inter-faith encounters* and *The languages of faith - How does the church relate to modern man?*

According to the address given by Metropolitan Ambrosius, the Orthodox tradition subsumes both a strictly exclusive attitude towards other faiths, especially in the monastic tradition, and also inclusive views, which are frequently grounded in the *Logos spermatikos* doctrine of St. Justin Martyr and the synthesis between Greek culture and the Jewish-Christian church of the early martyrs propounded by the Cappadocian Fathers. The main thinker in the field of the Orthodox theology

of religion resulting from these influences was named as being the missiologist Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Albania. Metropolitan Ambrosius also emphasized the mystical "dialogue of love" approach as a fruitful starting point for inter-faith encounters alongside the doctrinal perspective. There are differences of opinion between and within the churches regarding such matters as the manner in which evidence of Christ's presence and grace can be found in other religions.

Adjunct Professor Jyri Komulainen described recent trends in the academic theology of religions as being markedly ecumenical in character, with denominational boundaries being replaced with boundaries between schools of thought. Within the Lutheran tradition in Finland, the distinction between the law and the gospel on the one hand and Protestant dialectic theology on the other has led to a cautious attitude towards the world's religions. Pluralistic views have nevertheless been put forward that counterbalance the exclusive approach. Komulainen was inclined to seek out a third path lying in between these two extremes and to emphasize the importance of the basis provided by one's own religious tradition as a prerequisite for encounter with others. A common approach for Lutherans and Orthodox could well be sought in the patristic tradition and the notion of Christ as the incarnate *Logos*.

Coming close to the emphasis of Metropolitan Ambrosius on the "dialogue of love" was Komulainen's attainment of a knowledge of God by way of "otherness". If we look upon God as an "other" who poses a challenge for us, this will lead us to ask humbly what we can learn about God by examining the world outside the church. In this way it comes to be *agape*, love, that defines the encounter. Thus our attitude should be "universalistic without being imperialistic". Although it may not be possible to find a satisfactory theory of encounters within the theology of religions, the most important thing in inter-faith encounters is in any case orthopraxis: friendship and living side by side as a basis for dialogue.

The discussion served to strengthen the thesis that the Christian theology of religion or Christian attitudes towards interfaith encounters can on good grounds be ecumenical in character. The two churches have a common or parallel foundation for their theology of religions. The Lutheran theology of the creation places more emphasis on the work of God the Father, while Orthodox theology stresses the concept of sacramental reality based on the universal significance of Jesus Christ, but the difference is not great.

Regarding the theme *The languages of faith - How does the church relate to modern man?* Bishop Voitto Huotari characterized the language of faith as a language that is capable of making holiness present for us. It presupposes speaking in metaphors of things that humans can address only through approximations. The language of faith gains its meaning from its use in church and its communal use in parish life, and therefore it has to be compatible with Biblical tradition. It is especially difficult in the modern individualistic context to mark the common beliefs of the church as something significant. From a human perspective

it is important to approach things through experiences that appeal to modern man. When communicating fundamental spiritual experiences, narrative is of particular significance.

As Poutiainen did in Joensuu 2007, Huotari emphasized – following the line of the Helsinki school of research into Luther – that the Lutheran concept of the Word is a sacramental one. Holy Communion is a form of language of faith that we can both see and taste, while music is an audible form of the word, and images can speak to us in a language that we perceive with our eyes. Huotari connected this approach explicitly with church services, which as a whole are occasions when God speaks to the congregation and the congregation speaks both to God and to the outside world. Liturgical language makes the tradition of the church's faith immediate to us, so that it becomes both familiar and reassuring. On the other hand, there is a danger that people who do not belong to the same religious community will remain outsiders unless the liturgical language is periodically revised and brought closer to the contemporary realities of life. There is also a place for silence in the routines of the church. Actions, too, can be messages, as it is through these that God's love can speak to the weak, the poor and the sinful and make them strong, valuable and good.

In the Orthodox response Pekka Metso, Lic.Theol., pointed out that the Orthodox Church awoke in the course of the 20th century in particular to the realization that a contradiction existed between its tradition of a belief that was perceived as inalterable and the exigencies of the modern world. A meeting of Orthodox patriarchs in Constantinople in October 2008 issued a joint statement defining the mission of the church in modern times which both spoke out to the world at large in the language of faith, ethics and ecology and with a powerful emphasis on unity and also attempted to strengthen unity between the Orthodox churches. This conforms well with the views of Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, who links the fate of the church in the modern world to the process of inculturation. This implies that the church must be capable of ensuring the reception of the gospel by the world at large without compromising on its content. It will also be necessary to express the gospel in language that is comprehensible to contemporary listeners and readers, while the church's doctrinal language should also be existentially inspiring and its liturgical language comprehensive, Eucharist-centred and closely bound in with the Christian faith and the life of the church. This approach came close to the outline of Bishop Huotari in his address.

It was concluded that the churches seem to be striving to achieve a symbiosis between their life of prayer and worship and the living content of their faith (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). This is the church's own language in which it can speak to those who are exhausted by the modern way of life and are seeking their true identity. It is deeds inspired by love that respond most effectively to these people's needs. The meeting expressed noteworthy convergence and a common understanding

regarding these themes, which were seen as being of considerable contemporary relevance for the witness and service of churches in Finland, Europe and globally.

Helsinki 2010

The new Lutheran chairman in the 2010 discussions was Bishop Seppo Häkkinen, successor of Voitto Huotari as Bishop of Mikkeli. The themes were *Interpretation of the Bible in the church's teachings* and *Ecology and moderation in everyday life*.

Rev. Dr Sammeli Juntunen made a thorough analysis of Lutheran hermeneutics and its flaws as indicated in the view which polemically describes to seeing the Bible as "the Word of God" or "Words of God" as either/or alternatives. Juntunen saw that it was possible to regard the Bible as the Word of God and not just human words about him without any narrow theory of verbal inspiration.

Juntunen summed up his proposal for further ecumenical elaboration as follows: "I feel that one of the greatest challenges facing the Lutheran Church is to find ways that are intellectually acceptable nowadays of describing how God speaks to us through the actual text of the Bible, not just in historical reconstructions that 'lie behind the text', nor in 'inner voices' experienced by individual readers, but in the actual text of the Bible itself. …through the theory of speech acts… it would be possible to expand Luther's discoveries with regard to the forms of language in which God speaks, his Law and Gospel. …The speaker in a deeper sense is not the apostle or prophet through whom God performs these speech acts, but rather the actor is God himself. …Observations of this kind do not imply rejection of the human processes by which the Bible came into being nor of the scientific errors contained in it. For all its inaccuracies, the Bible is still the Word of God, given that God was able to convey through it authentic descriptions, promises, consolations and commands with regard to his Son, through whom He had prepared the salvation of the whole of mankind and opened up a channel for communion with Himself.

…One thing, at least, which it seems to me that the Orthodox Church could offer us Lutherans is the convincing way in which it takes it for granted that the Old Testament can be read as one of the church's own documents, containing the advance witness of God and his prophets to the coming of Christ. The Orthodox Church also acknowledges the Bible as the Word of God and his speech to us without falling into the trap of fundamentalism, as it is apparently self-evident for Orthodox Christians that the Bible can be read from the interpretational horizon of the church's dogma and liturgy…".

An Orthodox perspective was brought to the discussion by Fr Dr Mikael Sundkvist. According to him, contemporary Orthodox theology frequently equates the liturgical context with the essence of the church itself, or at least regards it as one of the main ways in which the church manifests itself. Orthodox exegetes additionally promote the view that the Bible is specifically the book of the *church*

and that its significance can be understood only in connection with the church. Going out from this, the Orthodox exegetes' criticisms of modern Biblical interpretation are directed above all at the concepts of the nature of reality that serve as the scholars' initial assumptions. On the other hand, they can see the usefulness of various methods in Bible research and the fruitfulness of the results they have achieved.

An Orthodox framework for biblical studies has been proposed by John McGuckin, for instance, with his *principles of consonance, authority and utility*. McGuckin emphasizes that Orthodox exegesis should not allow itself to stray away from the church's dogma or its liturgical life, for the separation of these three branches has had detrimental consequences in Western theology. Sundkvist is not quite convinced that McGuckin's hermeneutic principles can be successfully used in Bible scholarship, for it seems scarcely conceivable that the historical method could ever be employed as such as a hermeneutic system to serve the purposes of the church. This is because historical knowledge is always in the nature of a reconstruction, and is frequently just one hypothesis out of many. A historical truth as put forward by scholars rarely exists, as it is usually liable to change – whereas the church cannot live on the strength of constantly alternating hypotheses.

When present-day Orthodox exegetes set out in search of a hermeneutics of their own, Sundkvist sees it as essential for them to consider how they stand in relation to the approach represented by the spiritual interpretation introduced by Origen. Views regarding the justifications for the church having hermeneutic starting points of its own will have a direct influence on whether the church can credibly maintain its traditional manner of reading the Bible in the future. Only an intellectually and spiritually credible interpretation of the Bible can protect the church from the internal trivialization that seems always to result from the emphasizing of second-rate historical facts at the expense of the total spiritual picture that they are intended to convey.

The joint communiqué stated that "the Bible is the principle book of the Church and a revelation of the work of salvation enacted by the Triune God – the Word of God. Its significance can be understood in its full depth from the perspective offered by the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as laid down in the Creed. A Christ-centred approach to the Bible as a whole is capable of offering a means of responding to the questions raised by individuals and societies of today in a manner that arises out of the Church's tradition." As a whole, the discussion also reflected the tensions between "liberal" and "conservative" voices to be found in Finnish society and in the churches and the need for bridge-building on the basis of our common Christian faith, so that simplified and polemic images can be overcome and legitimate diversity within unity can be found in a more balanced way. The discussions indicated that a sustainable solution for today's situation regarding ordinary people's interpretations of the Bible can be found only by considering today's questions in dialogue with our ecumenical Christian tradition.

The papers on the theme *Ecology and moderation in everyday life* were given by Professor Antti Raunio and Fr Heikki Huttunen.

According to Raunio, a "moderate way of life" in Luther's thinking implies that each of us should be satisfied with what we and our families need in order to live and perform our expected calling within society. Understanding moderation in this way, it is possible in some cases to subsume a fairly ascetic way of life under this heading. It seems that the Lutheran model of moderation in life could be taken as a combination of the Aristotelian concepts of *sôfrosynê* and *epieikeia*. This could build an ecumenical point of encounter.

The concept of moderation and rational use of personal possessions as recognised at the time of the Reformation began to disappear from general thinking from the 17th century onwards, and it has practically disappeared in our modern consumerist society. On the other hand, the globally life-threatening ecological problems that have come to the fore in recent times have rehabilitated the notion of a moderate way of life. Theologically speaking, the basis for this, according to the climate change programme of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, for instance, is gratitude and rejoicing in the beauty of God's created world as an important part of human existence. This joy should be accompanied by a moderate life-style and ethically justifiable consumer choices. The strength and sense of direction required for ethical choices and actions should arise out of quiet contemplation and prayer. In this way moderation in our actions and attitudes can be understood as one dimension of our spiritual life.

Raunio, who was involved in the preparation of the ELCF climate change programme, points out that, according to the programme's theological background, "…the role of Christians in the created world is based on the creative, redeeming and sanctifying work of God, all of which, in the theological view represented in that document, consists of manifestations of God's magnanimous love. It is on the strength of this belief and everything that arises out of it that our ecologically responsible Christian ways of thinking and living are built up."

Fr Heikki Huttunen pointed out that the Orthodox Churches had actively participated in the WCC programme *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* in the 1980´s and that the Ecumenical Patriarchate had supported an ecological orientation in Orthodox churches. The message had then been intensified and clarified by Patriarch Bartholomew since 1991 in a way which has been echoed and respected among a broad range of Christians. Huttunen gained further inspiration for his presentation from the work of two patristic theologians, the Indian Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios and the Australian Professor John Chryssavgis.

According to Huttunen, the logic of deification requires that the task that humans are called on to perform in the universe should be that of combining spiritual reality with bodily reality, uniting heaven and earth. Our calling is to consciously unite the created world with its Creator, given that he, by his conscious self-sacrifice in Christ, raised the created universe up to God and became

the high priest of the whole of creation. Therefore, "Confession, repentance and a change of heart are Christianity's response to collective ecological sin".

In Orthodox thinking, an ascetic lifestyle is an essential feature of the life of a Christian. The spiritual life calls for growth, for striving towards holiness in everything one does. Asceticism means concentrating on what is essential in order to realise the true nature of material things and to appreciate true beauty and worth. Fasting and simplicity in life can teach us to see how dependent our human society is on plants and animals. A simple lifestyle opens up a perspective from this life to the next. Life is looked on as transparent – or iconic -, so that we may see through the created to the Creator. All things and all people are dependent on each other. This becomes evident in the Eucharistic liturgy, when we partake in the Body of Christ. What is biological by nature can be glorified to become Eucharistic and what is material can be capable of carrying within it that which is immaterial. This opens up a view to a cosmic liturgy, and it is through this that we will begin to find a solution to our ecological crisis.

The discussion showed that it was easy to reach common ground. It was jointly emphasized that the choice of a moderate, ecological way of life is to a profound extent a spiritual one. Our churches and parishes should seriously consider the far-reaching understanding of welfare that stems from prayer, fasting and silence, and it is our duty as churches to encourage society at large to search for modes of action that will promote a balance between individuals, human communities and the whole created world on both a local and a global scale.

Järvenpää 2012

The themes of the discussions held in Järvenpää in 2012, *God, known and unknown* and *The home as the source of a Christian upbringing*, were both profoundly theological and reflected a contemporary practical challenge for both churches. As in the previous negotiations in 2009 and 2010, the focus was on contemporary theological, spiritual and practical challenges facing our churches. The new Orthodox chairman was Metropolitan Panteleimon, following on from Metropolitan Ambrosius.

The theme *God, known and unknown* was dealt with in three papers. This was because it was regarded as important to avail ourselves of the patristic expertise of Rev. Dr Ari Ojell concerning the important Eastern church father Gregory of Nyssa. In his paper Ojell argued that since Gregory of Nyssa was perhaps the leading theologian in the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 and 383, a study of his theology can be fruitful in helping us to explore what we know and what we do not know about God on the grounds of our common confession.

According to Ojell, Gregory's understanding of "theology" reflects the incarnation motif that runs through all his thinking: true theological reflection that concerns the nature of God and the manner of his existence is possible only on

the basis of the incarnation. Growth in the knowledge of God requires that a person should become imbued with "the light of the incarnation", which is the light of the knowledge of God. Gregory appears to believe that a fullness of knowledge with regard to God implies knowing Him fully in accordance with his will, which He makes evident and known to us in the person of Christ, the Son, through whom we learn to know the Father in the Holy Spirit, in effect in the Word. For Gregory of Nyssa the unknown nature of the essence of God does not by any means imply that there is nothing that we can know about him. On the contrary, the unknown character of (the essence of) God who is *known to us* through the categories of self-sacrifice, communion, presence and love associated with his person, means that there is always something new to be discovered about him and growth in knowledge of him is indeed an everlasting process as we follow him in Christ in accordance with his will.

Archimandrite Andreas Larikka explained the logic of the Palamistic approach and the distinction between God's unknown substance and his energies in which He is known to us. Larikka's paper was also a response to Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen's analysis of the current discussion regarding the theology of Gregory Palamas and neo-Palamism in contemporary Orthodox theology.

According to Larikka, the apophatic approach enables Orthodox theology to give expression to God's absolute supremacy while at the same time emphasizing His immediate presence everywhere and at all times, both above us and in our innermost being. The rise of the human intellect towards God may be depicted as a creative process of exclusion that resembles a catharsis of the soul and destroys every trace of the worship of false gods. The inaccessibility of God is not due only to the fallen nature of man, but above all to the ontological gulf between the Creator and that which he has created. It is this gulf that keeps students of theology rapt in humility, for it reveals the bounds of human reason.

Following the analysis of Georges Florovsky, Larikka states that the development of a person's spiritual life wells up from participation in God's freedom. The view of a relationship between God and man developed from the preoccupation of Byzantine theology with Christology and the debates that arose out of this. A creative synthesis of these ideas was put forward by St. Maximus the Confessor, who proposed that man was created in such a way that it would be possible for God to be born as a man.

Following the "Eucharistic" or "iconic" approach of Orthodox theology and understanding ecclesiology on the basis of the Trinitarian communion, Florovsky insists that Christianity is a liturgical faith, and that the Church is above all a community of worship. Florovsky comes to the conclusion that we do not learn to know God by a dialectic method comprising conceptual laws or principles but through charismatic experience within the Church, and that such experience is granted to those who are pure in mind and heart, for their body and soul become

illuminated by the uncreated light of God. Accordingly, he makes a connection between deification and the function of God through his energies.

According to Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen, it is not merely a Lutheran view but an element of classical theology in general that one may acquire knowledge of God both through the exercise of reason and through His revelation of Himself to us, one specific form of revelation in Christ being the knowledge of God that leads to salvation. Patristic theology made use of both natural knowledge of God and the tools provided by philosophy, but was negatively disposed towards the idea of *theosis*, "deification", or identification with God, being based on natural knowledge.

For the Cappadocian Fathers the essence of God will inevitably remain unknown to both philosophical and theological conceptual thinking, because the principle of his divine nature (*ousia*) is inseparable from the hypostases, or persons, of the Trinity. In such a case the essence of God lies only in this perichoresis of the persons, in the form of an interactive penetration. This does not mean, however, that we should reject the idea of deification, and therefore also of salvation, for the Cappadocian Fathers were quick to emphasize the distinction between a knowledge of God and participation in the faith.

The basis of participation with God in faith is union with Christ. Patristic theology put forward two main models for this: one presented by Athanasius and the other by the Cappadocian Fathers. St. Augustine rejected the substance-accident scheme of things – which can be seen in the distinction between God's *ousia* (substance) and energies - and adopted the term essence (*essentia*). This enabled him to say that the attributes of God are not merely accidents but are one with God himself. There were elements of both Eastern and Western Trinitarian theology in the thinking of Luther on this point. Following Georg Kretschmar, Karttunen argues that, respecting the mystery of the Church's faith, both those following Augustine and those following the Cappadocian fathers attempted to express the nucleus of the Trinitarian faith in accordance with the fundamental tenets of Christianity, which also implied that there shouldn't be any perceivable gulf between them. It is an ecumenically noteworthy fact that the Cappadocians' doctrine of *mia ousia treis hypóstaseis* came close to the model of the Trinity developed by Tertullianus, *una substantia, tres personae*, which appears to have sealed the victory for the Nicene Creed.

Both the patristic tradition and that of the Reformation set out from the premise that the doctrine that constitutes theology is communicated to us by the Bible. That doctrine is given by revelation and is not a product of reason, and its value lies in the fact that it conveys the message of the Triune God who is present with us and of his grace as expressed in Jesus Christ. This truth is hidden in the Crucified God and can therefore be attained only through faith, not through abstract reasoning. Referring to Eeva Martikainen´s research on Luther, Karttunen summarizes the reformer's teachings as follows: "…all doctrines are

targeted at the same point: the saving presence of God in the person of Christ." This can well be seen as a converging position with the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Eastern tradition with its Christological and spiritual theological emphasis.

Presentations on the topic *The home as the source of a Christian upbringing* were given by Saara Kinnunen, a family counsellor, and Soili Penttonen, M. Div. As Kinnunen based her presentation on a PP technique, we can only refer to the discussion and communiqué regarding her input. She laid emphasis on the role of the parents as examples when providing a Christian education for their children. It is in the home that the foundation is laid for growing up as a Christian, with support from the local church and the religious instruction given at school. The delegations jointly agreed that "our interpretations of what constitutes a Christian upbringing and the responsibility for providing this are very similar."

Soili Penttonen underlined in her address that the basic principles for the Christian upbringing of children can be found in the Bible, the canons of the Church and the teachings of the Church Fathers. These guidelines actively encourage parents to bring their children into the circle of the Church. Yet even today relatively little has been written in Orthodox circles about educational and family matters, and scarcely anything at all in Finland other than in connection with the teaching of religion in schools. Thus it can be stated that Penttonen's contribution is important and unique from this point of view.

The issue in the church canons is how a family can live the life of the church. The parental duties in this respect are expressed briefly and concisely: they should take care of their children both spiritually and materially and should not neglect this obligation. There is also an equally clear statement of the children's duties with regard to their parents, the most important (duty and virtue) being – with a clear reference to the Ten Commandments – that of showing respect (reverence) for them.

A Christian family is always in communion with the church. The family is an *ecclesioula*, a "church in miniature", as St. John Chrysostom put it. The best teacher for children is the example set by their own parents. Accordingly, the fundamental idea behind an Orthodox upbringing is that theology and religious education cannot be separated from the life of the church. The fundamental purpose behind both is to learn to know God, and not just to acquire objective knowledge about Him. Penttonen's point of departure reflects well the basic Trinitarian and communion orientation in Orthodox theology and praxis. In the holistic Orthodox approach the Christian faith touches upon every aspect of human nature: the whole of human life with all its activities and emotions is religious life. In fact, it is for this reason that religious education is quite an unfamiliar concept in the Orthodox Church, although the matter itself is known and is an important part of the life of the church.

Referring to Alexander Schmemann – an important figure in the liturgical renewal of the Orthodox Church in Finland, as elsewhere – Penttonen argues that religious education only brings out into the open that which took place at Baptism, when the person concerned was re-born of water and the spirit and became a member of the Church. Participation in worship and its explanation make up what we know as growing up into the life of the Church, or liturgical catechesis. All religious education should be based on the Eucharist and should reach fulfilment in it. As the Liturgy is an expression of the Church's faith, life and teachings, it is in itself an educational method: *Lex orandi lex est credenda*.

Yet in practise, as Penttonen states, responsibility for religious education is being shifted to an increasing extent away from the family and onto "professionals", i.e. the schools and church parishes. This is partly due to lack of knowledge and experience. Therefore the importance of the parish as an educator of adults could also be emphasised. After all, the local parish can play a key role in the Christian upbringing of children.

On the basis of this review regarding the bilateral Lutheran-Orthodox theological dialogue in Finland we may conclude that this dialogue has become more intensive and theologically deeper during the last decade, partly because of the increased theological resources, especially on the Orthodox side, and partly because of the growing mutual respect and trust. Where, for instance, the themes in the dialogue between the ELCF and the Russian Orthodox Church have been oriented recently towards anthropology and social ethics, this domestic dialogue has provided an opportunity to elaborate upon deep classical theological questions and to continue the process of self-reflection in an ecumenical context. At its best this can be expected to provide new impulses and to encourage mutual learning and the exchange of ecumenical gifts. We hope that this document will not only provide material for experts on ecumenical theological dialogues, but will benefit and encourage further elaboration on classical and contemporary theological questions. This kind of theological work can benefit witness, service and unity among Christians and, beyond that, open up doors for dialogue with other religions and encourage efforts regarding sustainable development on Earth.

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Oulu 2001

THE SEVENTH THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF FINLAND, 2001

Communiqué

The Seventh Theological Consultations between delegations from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland were held at the Old Vicarage in Oulu on 19th-20th December 2001. The Lutheran delegation was headed by Bishop Voitto Huotari, and the other members were Rev. Irja Askola, Executive Director Re. Dr. Risto Cantell, Executive Secretary for Theology Rev. Dr. Juhani Forsberg and Rev. Canon Heikki Karvasenoja. The head of the Orthodox delegation was Metropolitan Johannes of Nicaea and the other members were Metropolitan Ambrosius, Fr Heikki Huttunen, M.Theol. Pekka Metso and Archimandrite Andreas Larikka. Also present as observers were Fr Marino Trevisini of the Roman Catholic Church in Finland and Olavi Rintala, leader of the Evangelical Free Church of Finland, representing the Finnish Ecumenical Council.

The speakers at the opening session were Bishop Huotari and Metropolitan Johannes. Bishop Huotari discussed the significance of these local dialogues and emphasized four points with regard to them:

1. Local dialogues of this kind are part of a joint learning process. They help us to become more familiar with the other confession, while at the same time deepening our knowledge of the salient features of our own.
2. Local dialogues serve as a sounding board for broader dialogues between the confessions concerned, making use of the preparatory work for these and the reception accorded to them at the local level.
3. Local dialogues can be of pastoral significance, especially in cases of mixed marriages.
4. Local dialogues serve as joint acts of witness.

In his own evaluation of the significance of the dialogues up to that time, Metropolitan Johannes noted that, even though they had not succeeded in taking any theological steps forward of a kind that could have influenced the structures of the two churches, they had been of particular importance as a means of establishing and strengthening links at the local level and the participants had learned

to be more understanding and realistic in their attitudes towards each other. As an Orthodox church operating in a western context, the Orthodox Church of Finland was better equipped than most to understand the traditions of other western forms of Christianity. The significance of the dialogues could nevertheless be substantially increased by disseminating their results more efficiently among members of the two churches.

The consultations began with an act of prayer in Oulu Cathedral, and on the morning of the second day of the discussions participants attended Matins in the Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity.

Prerequisites for Church unity

The first day's discussions, on **Prerequisites for Church unity**, were based on papers presented by Metropolitan Johannes of Nicaea and Executive Director Risto Cantell.

Metropolitan John approached the issue from three perspectives:

1. Structural unity, which implies a single structure for the church in a concrete sense.
2. Functional unity, which implies conformity in terms of the churches' activities within the framework of certain organizational structures and in a spirit of unity, but does not yet lead to theologically based structural changes.
3. Spontaneous unity, or 'co-operation', which leads Christians and the churches to act together at a certain time and in a certain place, especially in connection with major natural disasters, etc.

One essential concept for the Orthodox Church is that of "visible unity", as manifested in the church's doctrines and structures. This also means common recognition of the priesthood and the apostolic succession in the sense of the laying on of hands and the continuity of doctrinal traditions, which are prerequisites for sacramental unity. The joint celebration of the Eucharist and joint participation in it are visible manifestations of unity, everywhere and at all times. Other prerequisites for unity are the canons and doctrinal statements issued by the seven Ecumenical Councils, which support the Church and its members in their beliefs and their lives. Adherence to this tradition is not a matter of commitment to the letter of the law, however, but of faithfulness to certain aims and principles that have been stated once and for all. Local traditions can be very valuable, but there is a difference in principle between these and the authority of the Ecumenical Councils. Other authoritative statements such as letters from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the recommendations contained in them also give voice to prerequisites for unity, chiefly as measures for preparing for or constructing unity.

Examining the prerequisites for unity from a Lutheran perspective, Executive Director Risto Cantell constructed his argument on the commitment laid down in the Lutheran Confessions to the concept of the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" as expressed in the Creed. The aim of the Lutheran Reformation was not to split the Church but to bring about certain necessary reforms in the western Catholic Church. Likewise the Reformation as it took place in Sweden, of which Finland was a part, did not mean a break with the past nor an interruption in the continuity of the Church, in which the apostolic succession in terms of beliefs, doctrine and the priesthood played a central role.

The Second Vatican Council in effect implemented the majority of the demands put forward during the Reformation. Thus the Lutheran Church is both doctrinally and historically an heir of the Church of Rome, and consequently its understanding of its own nature and mission requires a full awareness of this legacy and of Roman Catholic theology.

According to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, unity calls for recognition of the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the correct celebration of the sacraments. Faith lives and grows on the strength of God's word and the sacraments. Predominant among the latter are Baptism and Holy Communion, although the Lutheran Confessions do not restrict the concept to these alone but regard absolution and the ordination of priests as sacraments under certain conditions. Joint participation in Holy Communion is an expression of complete unity, but it should not be used as an instrument for achieving such unity, for the significance of Baptism is fundamental in this respect. The model of unity favoured by the Lutheran churches is that of "reconciled diversity", in which unity requires full unanimity with regard to the central content of the Church's faith and doctrine together with reconciliation with regard to differentiating factors, disagreements and causes of dissention. In this sense unity can also be looked on as a gradually advancing process, a state of convergence, or increasing unanimity. This was the procedure adopted in the Porvoo Agreement and the Common Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, and it differs markedly from the excessively narrow model favoured in the Leuenberg Concord.

A number of common viewpoints emerged from these papers and the ensuing discussions, especially regarding the sacramental nature of the Church, Baptism and the Eucharist. Both sides saw joint communion as the eventual goal and expression of unity rather than as an instrument for attaining it and were of the opinion that joint communion should not act as a foretaste of unity, nor should it be used to compel churches towards unity. In the discussion on the concept of unity it was observed that efforts towards functional unity are useful but not sufficient. Unity also has a structural dimension.

The Church's diaconal mission in society

The speakers introducing the topic for the second day's discussions, on **The Church's diaconal mission in society**, were Fr Heikki Huttunen and Rev. Irja Askola.

Fr Huttunen emphasized that in Orthodox theology service is closely linked to the Eucharist, which through the apostolic succession came to be constitutive of the Church. Charitable work is thus not merely an ethical consequence of faith but is itself a dimension that belongs to the mystery of faith itself. The sacrament of the altar leads directly to the sacrament of love for one's neighbour. The Early Church developed the office of deacon as a means of carrying out its charitable work, an office which later became established as one of the three strands of the priesthood, an office of service alongside that of bishop. In the early centuries both men and women were ordained as deacons, possessing different liturgical roles and different practical duties, in keeping with the differences between the sexes in many aspects of everyday life.

Within the Eastern Church the office of deacon became the lowest level of the priesthood after the overthrow of Constantinople and deacons became liturgical acolytes to bishops and presbyters, while charitable work was mostly entrusted to the monasteries or became a matter of internal responsibility within the parishes.

Charitable work was revived in many local Orthodox churches during the 20th century, and people began to speak of it once more as "liturgy after the liturgy" Among the Orthodox population in Finland at the beginning of that century it was closely connected with the development of home missions and the establishing of a Finnish-speaking identity.

Attempts have been made to view charitable work from the perspective of Eucharistic ecclesiology and Eucharistic-centred thinking in general, maintaining that a way of life that is grounded in the Eucharist will find expression in "micro-charity" within its own community and "macro-charity" on a global scale. Indeed, this "micro-charity" is more typical of the Orthodox way of thinking and living than is "macro-charity", a form of political analysis based on the contemplation of "structurally embedded sin".

Particular challenges for the Church's diaconal work in the modern world are the fragmentation of people's lives, the individualism that places emphasis on human freedom and our hedonistic culture. According to economists, political scientists and ecologists, these trends have led to a situation in which it is impossible to resolve global problems with the aid of macro-charity alone, so that solutions are also needed at the "micro-charity" level. This is not a problem for the Church, however, as it has a model that covers both local and global aspects within its own holy traditions.

Rev. Askola pointed out that charitable work is one dimension of the church's work alongside witness and missions, and is in no sense an optional element. Service to others occupies a prominent place in Jesus' teachings and the New

Testament epistles provide numerous accounts of how charitable work took on organized forms while retaining both its liturgical and its social dimension.

Luther placed a great deal of emphasis on love for one's neighbour as one of the fruits of faith, and this was one of the factors that led to the founding of a system for caring for the poor within the secular society. Luther's concept of the church similarly had a powerful orientation towards service. He regarded the church as "a hospital for incurable people" and the kingdom of Christ as "a constant bearing of one another's burdens".

Christ's identification with the fate of the homeless, the sick and those in prison (Matt. 25) means that an everyday life of service takes on a spiritual dimension. The incontrovertible connection between the service of God and good works is also brought out in the worship of the church and various parts of its services.

The charitable aspect of the church's work also means having the power and responsibility to speak out within society. Social criticism and statements on behalf of mankind and the created world are a part of the good works expected of the church, as these things become especially necessary at times when democracy and participation are threatened and infringements of human dignity are rife.

The task of constructing and protecting civil society opens up new opportunities for the church's charitable work:

- The church's work is fundamentally community work in terms of its methods and goals and is apt to strengthen co-operation.
- The church is devoted to defending the human dignity of those who have been alienated from society in one way or another.
- The church is committed to ensuring that our society is one in which the elderly, the sick and the weak still have a right to exist.
- The church has a wealth of resources for supporting civil society.
- The church is not engaged only in providing local assistance but is capable of assuming global responsibility.
- The church is not neutral in its approach, but will tend in all situations of choice to give preference to the poor.
- Our society and its members need opportunities to do good. The church's good works provide people with a chance to strengthen their own humanity.
- Good works go together with speaking and acting on behalf of justice.
- Society needs good works to remind it that all of its members are valuable to it.

The papers presented and the discussions that followed them gave expression to the traditional differences in approach between the two churches, but they also pointed to many connections and parallel challenges. Both churches recognise the important link between charitable work, the nature of the Church, its worship

and the Eucharist, but for the Orthodox Church the position of deacon is one aspect of the tripartite priesthood, whereas for the Lutheran Church a deacon is a church employee responsible for its diaconal work. Both churches appear to be discussing how aspects of their social responsibility that lie beyond the sphere of charitable work can be covered, and both parties see the fragmentation of society, the excessive emphasis on individualism and cases of alienation as challenges that lead the churches to examine how they can function as forces for consolidation within society and speak and act on behalf of those who are alienated. Both parties were of the opinion that the churches are not in a position to provide detailed instructions or advice on all the problems affecting society but, setting out from their own principles, they should provide support for those responsible and those with the necessary expertise, many of whom are in any case church members, to encourage them in pursuit of their calling.

Continuation of the consultations

It was decided to continue the series of theological consultations with a meeting in two years' time to be hosted by the Orthodox Church of Finland. The theological subject for discussion was to be **Holiness and asceticism** and the ethical topic **Violence in the family and in other close personal relationships**.

Oulu, 20th December 2001

Prerequisites for Church unity

The unity of the faith is a matter of vital importance to the Orthodox Church, and thus it is also a central issue in the Church's ecumenical endeavours in our times. The significance of the unity of the faith similarly emerges very convincingly from the legacy of the seven Synods, or Ecumenical Councils, that took place between the years 325 and 787 and gave rise to a tradition that includes the Nicene Creed and certain other doctrinal formulations together with about 900 canons regulating various aspects of the life of the Church and its members. It can indeed be said that one essential purpose of the synods was to maintain, protect and give expression to the faith that was once and for all entrusted to the Church and to preserve the unity of that faith.

There is frequent talk of unity within the ecumenical movement, but one of the fundamental problems is that the word itself is used and interpreted in many ways within Christendom. The World Council of Churches sees its aim as being to promote "visible unity", as it expresses it in English, but interpretations of that concept and aim can vary astonishingly from one tradition to another. It is possible, in fact, to divide the understandings of unity into three major groups:

1. Structural unity, which implies a single structure for the church in a concrete sense. This is largely the understanding favoured within the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, although it gains a certain amount of support from other instances in spite of standing out markedly from their general thinking.
2. Functional unity, which implies conformity in terms of the churches' activities within the framework of certain organizational structures and in a spirit of unity. The work of the World Council of Churches can be said to represent this way of thinking in practical terms. This functional approach can include some relatively permanent forms of unity that serve to advance the aims of the World Council, although the theological basis for them is not usually very clearly expressed.
3. Unity in terms of spontaneous activity, or 'co-operation'. A large-scale need for help, e.g. on account of a major natural disaster etc., can lead Christians to act together at a certain time and for a defined purpose.

All three of these ways of thinking represent "visible unity" for some groups or individuals, and in this respect they may be characterized as different degrees of unity that have evidently arisen from different theological traditions and different views on the nature of the church. From an Orthodox standpoint, however, any

talk of degrees of unity would seem strange in the light of the canonical tradition: there must either be unity or not. In the context of worldwide ecumenical endeavours, the nature of our activity, and in worldly terms its "efficiency", depends very much on how we understand visible unity, if only because the representatives of functional unity and spontaneous unity will find it much easier to see and experience unity in their own way than the churches who look for structural unity.

For the Orthodox Church, however, the structural aspect is an essential part of visible unity, although it is also necessary to beware of interpreting this too superficially, as a highly formal view of unity can easily become a matter of external form alone. We do believe, however, that there are certain things that in the light of tradition cannot be omitted from visible unity: a common understanding of the faith and a common recognition of the priesthood which implies acknowledgement of the principle of apostolic succession with respect to both the laying on of hands and doctrinal traditions. (The historical continuity of ordinations alone does not correspond to the Orthodox concept of succession.) These principles also imply an extensive degree of sacramental unity, for which common recognition of the priesthood is an essential prerequisite. This unity is preserved and manifested in the sacred traditions, which stand for living continuity and are understood as representing the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The apostolic nature of the Church's witness is profoundly linked to the Holy Liturgy, or in western parlance the Mass. Joint celebration of the Eucharist and joint participation in it give visible expression to the unity of the Church everywhere and at all times. Structural unity then makes it possible to achieve acts that represent functional and spontaneous unity, although the reverse, that functional and spontaneous unity can provide a basis for structural unity, is not the case in the Orthodox view. It should also be mentioned, of course, that the overall body of tradition created by the seven ecumenical councils serves to complement the prerequisites set out above, not only doctrinally but in other respects, too.

It is thus quite clear from an Orthodox point of view what unity is in a visible sense and what the prerequisites for it are, and in this way the goal of the Church's ecumenical endeavours is known and overtly expressed. All that is left to be done is to remain faithful to this goal in everything that we do. If we think of the Christian world as a whole, this means to an ever-increasing extent a striving to ascertain theologically and in practical terms what unity requires of our dispersed Christian communities and divided churches. This may appear to be a clear-cut matter in theory, but in practice the problem arises of the parts of the Christian church acting in accordance with the different ways of understanding unity as mentioned at the beginning, or at least of these attitudes exercising a background influence. When moving in ecumenical circles one gains the impression from time to time that people are, as it were, afraid of visible unity in the structural sense. One illustrative example concerns the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi, where the observation in the preparatory

material that one of the council's duties was to act as a manifestation of visible unity among Christians gave rise to a tentative question as to whether it would be possible to take one further step forward and develop a vision of what this desired unity might be like. This showed that the questioners had no idea of what unity is according to the Church's tradition and were unwilling to see that no new vision is needed because the Church's tradition already contains a clear vision in this respect, the vision of the basis upon which the undivided Church was constructed in its time. Likewise, before the General Assembly in New Delhi there was much talk of a "state of communion" to which the Church was totally committed, and before the Uppsala meeting the talk was of a "catholic communion" which could overcome human barriers. Phrases of this kind show how people are inclined to resort to terminology which is not clear enough to serve its purpose and leaves room for numerous deviant interpretations even though there may be some value in the words themselves. It is in a way quite natural that the lack of a common outlook on the problem should inevitably lead to the use of cautious phraseology. Some people have even criticized the World Council of Churches, at least on some occasions, for emphasizing unity instead of drawing more attention to witness. This again entails a failure to understand that unity is a fundamental property of the Church, so that it should become an inseparable part of the Church's proclamation of the Gospel. What are people really afraid of? What are they trying to defend themselves against? What is the basic reason why they are forever wanting to determine the nature of unity and cannot be satisfied with the view of the undivided Church on the subject? Why do they somehow deny the justification for structural unity, or rather its inevitability? What theological arguments can be put forward for this?

We have referred above to the canonical tradition of the synods. Let us now look at this a little closer. The Seventh Ecumenical Council described the canons as divine acts of witness that should be preserved and maintained in force unaltered. It is held that the Church Fathers taking part in the synod were inspired by the Holy Spirit when they drew up the canons, so that these are looked on as a valuable, good and positive gift to the Church, something for which it should express its joy and thanks. In view of their nature and purpose it would be unjustifiable to look on them as predominantly prohibitions and restrictions – barriers to human freedom of action. Their true purpose is to keep the Church and its spiritual children on the right path and give them the support they need in order to live lives that are in harmony with their faith.

The Orthodox Church throughout the ages has emphasized the value of the canons and has made approval and veneration of them a prerequisite for Church unity, partly for the reason that it is stated in certain connections within the tradition of the synods that procedures or forms of behaviour that go against the canons of the Church should be regarded quite simply as acts of sin. This is a clear demonstration of the intimate connection between faith and life. Even the

"practical canonical regulations" represent the catholic Orthodox legacy of faith that is to be preserved intact as it forms a significant part of the divinely inspired work of the synods on behalf of unity within the Church.

It follows from the line of thought developed above that even in ecumenical dialogues the Orthodox churches are obliged to respect the view that the witness of the synods represents one part of the church's legacy, the acknowledgement and observation of which must belong to the prerequisites for unity. When discussion has arisen over the synodal tradition in ecumenical connections it has become abundantly evident that most of the non-Orthodox partners have failed to understand the significance of this tradition. This is also to be seen in the fact that the historical traditions of the Anglican Church and the Lutheran Church contain instances of these bodies accepting the legacies of a certain number of the ecumenical synods, although it is really a question of being prepared to recognise the doctrinal regulations laid down at the synods concerned rather than the canons as they formulated them. It would be appropriate at this point to look in slightly more detail at how the synods themselves interpreted their own body of tradition.

All seven synods emphasized precisely the same tradition. They use the term "the belief of the fathers" when referring to the Nicene Creed and avow that no synod has added anything to this tradition or taken anything away from it. All the synods after the first stated categorically that they recognised the same belief in this sense as the fathers at Nicaea had done in their time. It is for this reason that the Orthodox Church does not usually speak of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed but simply of the Nicene Creed, in accordance with the view that the slight extensions made to the creed after Nicaea did not really add anything of substance to it but merely clarified the original wording slightly, and that it remained an affirmation of precisely the same faith throughout. It was emphasized at the first Synod of Constantinople that the fathers present were putting forward some definitions that confirmed the faith as formulated at Nicaea and thereby refuted all teachings that were inconsistent with Nicaea. Similar claims were also made by the Synods of Ephesus and Chalcedon and by subsequent ones, and the seventh, and last to date, pursued the same line in all respects. The fact that the synods formulated new regulations regarding the faith thus did not in their eyes imply at any stage that they were departing from the "belief of the fathers", i.e. the faith as stated at Nicaea. When the Church Fathers attending the Seventh Synod reported their deliberations to the "King of the Romans", as the Emperor was known right up to the fall of Byzantium, they stated that in full accord and mutual understanding they were unanimously in agreement with the findings of the six previous synods.

As noted above, even the canons dealing with "practical matters" were based on and reflected the faith, i.e. they were expressions of the close link between faith and life. This means as far as ecumenical discussions go that they possess a certain value of their own alongside the actual doctrinal definitions. This becomes particu-

larly obvious in the opinions expressed at the Council in Trullo, which have been regarded as significant for the authority and weight attached to the canons. This council was particularly important for the formal confirmation it gave to items of tradition originating from earlier councils and partly from different sources. The fathers attending the council explained that the canonical regulations were to be retained "for the healing of souls and the amendment of disorder". According to the Trullo statement this applied to all the regulations that had been declared to be ecumenically binding. Perceiving the spiritual and fundamentally religious significance of the canons, the fathers at Trullo emphasized the value attached to the regulations and teaching included in the legacy of the synods as a whole and rejected any attempts at altering this tradition. This is the canonical material that is regarded as making up the "catholic" religious tradition.

It is maintained in some connections that illegal acts, i.e. those in contravention of the canons, are to be regarded as heretical, which is logical if the canons are seen as applications of the principles of the Christian faith and as such they are considered to mark deviations from the unity represented and fostered by the synods. These deviations are said to constitute "personal thinking", a term also applied to doctrinal heresies. Such personal thinking is apt to lead to discord, and it means departure from the Church's common tradition. Another term used in much the same negative sense is "innovation", which as such serves well to reflect an attitude that emphasizes faithful adherence to tradition.

Respect for the body of tradition established by the synods also presupposes that the things to be preserved and valued shall include the church's hierarchical administrative structure and the status of its bishops in particular, the tripartite structure of the clergy with its associated lower levels of service, the many regulations applying to marriage, the icon tradition and numerous other areas and details covered by the life of the Church. Serious attention has been paid to some of these in ecumenical dialogues, but others have largely remained beyond the scope of such forums. When discussing these matters, however, it should be borne in mind that although the starting point is that nothing entirely new should be added, it is evident that in the light of a certain development that is constantly taking place in the tradition left by the synods of the Early Church, faithfulness to tradition should not be a question of being bound by the letter of the law in a legalistic or mechanistic fashion. The various synods phrased their declarations on the same subjects in slightly different ways even though they did emphasize their adherence to the tradition of earlier synods. It is thus evidently a matter of faithfulness to previously uttered goals or principles rather than to the letter of the law. It should nevertheless be underlined that even in this sense, faithfulness should mean precisely that and not indulge in any adjustment of the content or purpose of the principles involved.

When discussing the prerequisites for unity it is absolutely essential to recognise the difference in principle between the traditions that are universally bind-

ing on the Church and the various local traditions, since the former belong to the scope of theological dialogues and the prerequisites for unity that have to be taken seriously by all parties, while the latter can carry some weight in these connections provided that they are in harmony with the universal body of tradition. Local traditions can sometimes include a distinct admixture of local or national cultural elements, which, without detracting from their significance, have a special character of their own that has to be understood separately from the universal traditions. It appears, in fact, perhaps for understandable reasons, that the distinction between these two types of tradition can sometimes become partially blurred, especially in the case of emigrant churches and at the "grass roots" level. This problem means that it is extremely important that all theological dialogues should be conducted on the basis of a sound level of expertise, from which it follows in turn that ecumenical dialogues are not really something for rank-and-file members of the churches concerned, although it is clear that as their findings apply to each church as a whole, they should be communicated to the members of those churches at large. This in itself is a far more difficult task than most people would think. One might even claim that the more frequently such ecumenical dialogues are conducted by people who possess a deficient and superficial knowledge of the traditions of their own church, the easier it is to arrive at seemingly positive results.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate has made a remarkable contribution to the ecumenical movement in many ways and in numerous connections. In 1920, for instance, it issued an open letter that began with a reference to "All the Churches of Christ", although it is unclear how many instances it was in fact addressed to. Its message, however, was a very practical one. The goal of unity, or the unification of the Church, had not been forgotten, but the letter moved at a lower level. Unity was not its immediate goal, nor even its first one, but rather it emphasized in an encouraging tone that the Patriarchate did not regard the doctrinal differences between the churches as a factor that could prevent them from developing closer contacts and entering into communion with each other. It is important here, of course, to appreciate the distinction between communion and unity. The letter underlines the Partriarchate's view that such a rapprochement would be highly desirable or even essential. It would mark a step forward for all the churches and the whole of Christendom and would be of value in preparing for and promoting the unification that would come to pass at some time in the future through the will of God. The content of the letter reflects a very interesting way of thinking, namely that when speaking of the difficulties lying in the path of closer communion between the churches, it does not refer in the first instance to doctrinal differences but notes that old-established prejudices, practices and demands had given rise to the initial problems that had complicated and endangered attempts at reconciliation. The letter was very largely an attempt to encourage contacts and the forging of connections.

The Patriarchate's letter referred in concrete terms to certain popular tendencies that were liable to exacerbate the situation. One significant problem was perceived to be proselytism, which undermined the creation of an atmosphere of mutual trust among the churches and would have to be eliminated entirely by some means. One can only observe nowadays that it has become quite evident over the decades and also in our time that the definition and interpretation of what constitutes proselytism is by no means a straightforward matter but rather a source of difficulty in itself. The Patriarchate also called on the churches to restore the sense of Christian love between them, with the aim of reaching a situation in which they would no longer regard each other as strangers and aliens but as close relatives, for they are all part of the family of Christ, members of the same body and joint heirs to the Kingdom. The letter then went on to recommend certain more immediate targets which could be achieved by abandoning proselytism and restoring a spirit of mutual love between the churches. This included references to a common church calendar, which would enable all the churches to celebrate their festivals at the same time and widen the exchange of greetings on these occasions to encompass all the churches and not merely the Orthodox churches. There were altogether eleven such recommendations, including ideas such as contacts and exchanges between theological colleges, objective research into the nature of the doctrinal differences and the reasons for their existence and the drawing up of generally accepted rules for mixed marriages, to mention just a few. The Patriarchate hoped that some kind of common association of churches could be founded for working towards communion and thus taking the first preparatory step on the road towards the eventual goal of unity.

The points mentioned above serve to express some of the prerequisites for unity, although they are not so much theoretical or theological matters as practical ways of preparing for and constructing communion between the churches. The Ecumenical Patriarchate's statements had the effect of encouraging a few other Orthodox churches as well as Constantinople itself to take part in an international meeting of churches in Stockholm, the agenda for which to a great extent corresponded to the outline proposed in the Patriarchate's open letter.

In more recent times the Orthodox churches have gradually adjusted their attitudes towards the discussion of doctrinal issues within the ecumenical movement, but even so it can very well be said that it is above all the Orthodox churches that increasingly laid emphasis on the discussion of such questions, i.e. the "Faith and Order" line of thinking, and for this reason have criticized, sometimes vehemently, the social and political lines of argument pursued by the World Council of Churches. This is indeed as it should be in the light of the notion of structural unity that we have been speaking about, which corresponds especially well to the Orthodox understanding of visible unity.

Summarizing the matters discussed above and drawing the main themes together, we may end by emphasizing once again that the basic factor when speaking

of the prerequisites for church unity from an Orthodox viewpoint is the notion of the "faith of the Church Fathers" with all its repercussions, i.e. the apostolic tradition as represented by the ecumenical synods and the faithful preservation of this tradition both doctrinally and in everyday life. Thus the tradition of the synods is as much a way of life according to the true faith as it is a matter of preserving and giving expression to that faith. This serves the goals of unity and peaceful relations both among the Orthodox churches and, from an ecumenical viewpoint, within the whole of Christendom.

The Orthodox Church is as much dedicated to the preservation and observation of the target of unity in the one faith as it is holy, apostolic and catholic, aspects of its character which similarly allude to unity in the one faith. The canonical nature of the Church inherited from the synods, or ecumenical councils, similarly serves the purposes of this tradition and is an inalienably valuable gift that the church possesses. It is not only a passively and mechanically possessed gift, however, but it is also a duty and obligation for all time, and all the more so at a time when the churches of the East and West are, largely on the strength of their common tradition, becoming engaged to an ever increasing extent in a joint act of interpreting and understanding the faith and the overall body of tradition in order to bear witness visibly, positively and constructively to the unity of their faith.

Rev. Dr Risto Cantell

The prerequisites for church unity from the perspective of the Lutheran Church

The Lutheran Church confesses in every one of its services that it believes in "one church". The unity of the church is an essential part of Christian belief: it is something that was given to the church, a gift from the Triune God. Our Lord Jesus Christ founded only one church, which is described in the New Testament as the Body of Christ and the wandering people of God. In the words of the Creed, it is the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church". The church is one by its very nature.

Thus the unity of the church is one of the facts of the Christian faith. It is simply that at this moment in history we are living amidst a tragic state of division within the church. The well-known Swiss reformation theologian Karl Barth is said to have stated emphatically that "Division within the church is an ontological impossibility," and to have added after a short pause, "and we are living in the midst of that ontological impossibility."

The title given for this paper, "The prerequisites for church unity from the perspective of the Lutheran Church" presupposes acceptance of the empirical fact that must be obvious to anyone that the unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is a matter of faith rather than observation in the modern world. At the same time it must be underlined that the Lutheran Church holds fast to the concept maintained in the New Testament and the Creed that the church is one by its very nature.

Furthermore, the Lutheran Church regards itself as belonging to that one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ and as acting as its representative, heir and upholder of its traditions in this country and in the world. Martin Luther described his own relation to the Church of Christ in the following words in his Large Catechism, which forms part of the Confessions of the Lutheran Church:

> *I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated*

> *into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God* (Luther, Large Catechism, explanation to the III Article of the Faith).[1]

Our church does not claim to be the only true church in the world, nor does it regard the possibility of salvation as being limited to those within it, but we wish through the ecumenical movement to work towards the visible unity of the Church of Christ and its achievement in the course of history. This search for unity must be conducted in two directions simultaneously, backwards in time and forwards in time: back to the days of the old, apostolic, undivided church which was one in a concrete, visible sense, and forward towards visible unity in one and the same true faith and the celebration of a single Holy Communion on the strength of that faith, this being the most profound and most visible expression of the unity of the church in the bounds of historical time.

Apostolic times, the Early Church and its history and development, are also normative for the church of today. The ecumenical creeds and synods, or church councils as we say in the west, continue to guide the church to confess the same faith that is grounded in the Word of God as proclaimed in the Bible. The Lutheran Church's link with the tradition of the Early Church is clearly expressed in paragraph 1 of the law governing the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland:

> *The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland confesses a Christian faith that is grounded in the Bible and expressed in the three creeds of the Early Church and the confessions of the Lutheran Church. These confessions are expressed in more detail in the Church Ordinance* (Law governing the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, section 1, §1).

Correspondingly, the first paragraph of the Ordinance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland states the following:

> *The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland confesses a Christian faith that is grounded in the holy word of God and in the prophetic and apostolic books of the Old and New Testaments and is expressed in the three creeds of the Early Church and the confessions of the Lutheran Church as contained in the Book of*

1 I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Ghost by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it. For formerly, before we had attained to this, we were altogether of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. Thus, until the last day, the Holy Ghost abides with the holy congregation or Christendom, by means of which He fetches us to Christ and which He employs to teach and preach to us the Word, whereby He works and promotes sanctification, causing it [this community] daily to grow and become strong in the faith and its fruits which He produces (Luther, Large Catechism, explanation to the III Article of the Faith, 381, 51–53).

> *Concord. The church takes as its ultimate guideline the principle stated in the Lutheran Confessions that all the doctrines of the church are to be examined and evaluated in accordance with the holy word of God* (Church Ordinance, section 1, §1).

The Augsburg Confession (Confessio Augustana, CA), also contained in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, is constructed in much the same way, starting out from the decision of the Council of Nicaea and noting that the teaching of the churches created by the Reformation was "with common consent" in accordance with that decision (CA 1).[2]

The purpose of the Lutheran Reformation was not to create dissent within the church but to bring about what was regarded as an essential reform within the western Catholic Church. The church continued to be recognised as a community of the Holy Spirit, a mother who through the word of God gave birth to all Christians and bore them up throughout their lives (Luther, Large Catechism, 380, 42).[3] Unfortunately Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon were unable to carry out their reformation in the way in which they had originally intended and instead brought about a tragic division in the Western Church. One reason for this was without doubt the unwillingness and inability of the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church at that time to undertake any of the necessary reforms. It was left to the Second Vatican Council to put a large number of the demands originally made during the Reformation into effect, with a delay of some 400 years.

The original programme of reform is rather poignantly described in the following way at the end of the introduction to the Augsburg Confession:

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2 Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And the term "person" they use as the Fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself.

They condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article, as the Manichaeans, who assumed two principles, one Good and the other Evil: also the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and all such. They condemn also the Samosatenes, old and new, who, contending that there is but one Person, sophistically and impiously argue that the Word and the Holy Ghost are not distinct Persons, but that "Word" signifies a spoken word, and "Spirit" signifies motion created in things. (CA 1).

3 Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves. Learn, then, to understand this article most clearly. If you are asked: What do you mean by the words: I believe in the Holy Ghost? You can answer: I believe that the Holy Ghost makes me holy, as His name implies. But whereby does He accomplish this, or what are His method and means to this end? Answer: By the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. For, in the first place, He has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which He reveals and preaches, [and through which] He illumines and enkindles hearts, that they understand, accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it (Luther, Large Catechism, Article III, 380, 39–42).

> *This is about the Sum of our Doctrine, in which, as can be seen, there is nothing that varies from the Scriptures, or from the Church Catholic, or from the Church of Rome as known from its writers* (CA XXI).[4]

In the case of Finland and Sweden, King Gustav Vasa harnessed the Reformation to serve his own political and economic aims, and the basic principles of Lutheranism as a state religious denomination owe their origins to this development, which proved fatal as far as the independence of the church was concerned. The corollary of this, however, was that the Reformation as such took place peacefully as an internal programme of reform carried through by the church's own leaders, Olaus Petri, Laurentius Petri, Mikael Agricola and Paavali Juusten.

The Reformation in Sweden did not mean a break with the past nor an interruption in the continuity of the church's activities. The spiritual legacy from the Middle Ages was preserved as a treasure of the Lutheran Church, among other things in the apostolic succession as it applied to the faith, its teaching and the laying on of hands. In the words of the Swedish reformer Olaus Petri, the office of bishop was without doubt ordained by the Holy Spirit and would remain in the church until the end of the world.

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church's understanding of its own situation is reflected well in the sanctuary of the nation's principal church, Turku Cathedral, where the fresco on the wall to the right of the altar shows our church's first bishop, St. Henrik, baptizing Finnish people in the spring at Kupittaa, while that on the left-hand wall shows the Bishop of Turku, Mikael Agricola, in his robes of office with his mitre and cloak, presenting King Gustav Vasa with the first Finnish translation of the New Testament. These idealized paintings from the Romantic period produced by the court artist R. W. Ekman are not faithful reproductions of the historical events, but they do provide a theologically accurate impression of a church that holds the word of God and the sacrament of Baptism in high esteem and values its own historical continuity of history.

Thus the Lutheran Church is continuing the work begun by the medieval Catholic Church in this country. The word of God and the sacraments serve to construct and maintain the church, which is a community held together by faith

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4 This is about the Sum of our Doctrine, in which, as can be seen, there is nothing that varies from the Scriptures, or from the Church Catholic, or from the Church of Rome as known from its writers. This being the case, they judge harshly who insist that our teachers be regarded as heretics. There is, however, disagreement on certain abuses, which have crept into the Church without rightful authority.

And even in these, if there were some difference, there should be proper lenity on the part of bishops to bear with us by reason of the Confession which we have now reviewed; because even the Canons are not so severe as to demand the same rites everywhere, neither, at any time, have the rites of all churches been the same; although, among us, in large part, the ancient rites are diligently observed. For it is a false and malicious charge that all the ceremonies, all the things instituted of old, are abolished in our churches. But it has been a common complaint that some abuses were connected with the ordinary rites. These, inasmuch as they could not be approved with a good conscience, have been to some extent corrected (CA XXI).

and love. Membership of this church of Christ and participation in the salvation mediated by it are conferred by Holy Baptism, and the centre point of the church's life is provided by the Holy Mass, the Sacrament of the Altar. It is in the Holy Communion instituted by Him that Our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered and died on the Cross and rose again from the dead, is truly present. He gives His body and blood in the form of the bread and wine to all those who participate in the communion. Communion is a sacrament of belonging, for it combines in a single act the association of the faithful with Christ and their association with one another.

The principal aim of the Reformation, therefore, was renewal of the church, but in effect it led to divisions within the church and the formation of a separate Lutheran Church. Thus the division between the Eastern and Western churches that had taken place 500 years earlier, in 1054, was not to remain the only partition, as it was followed in the 16th century by the breaking away of the Lutheran Church and other reformed churches and the formation of the Anglican Church largely as a result of the severing of relations between the King of England and the Pope. This fragmentation then continued in the subsequent centuries.

Thus the historical unity of the church was lost and instead of one church – or more correctly alongside and in place of the eastern and western branches of that church – we have a plurality of confessions and denominations. This dispersal of Christendom runs contrary to the Christian faith and the nature of the church, but this is the situation in which we live at the present time. The modern-day ecumenical movement has arisen out of the need to provide a common witness to the world at large and out of a recognition of the sinfulness of the present divisions. One thing that this movement has already achieved is that it has raised the question of the church and its unity to the level of a crucial issue in inter-church discussions.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland carries in its name a reminder of the tradition it has inherited from Martin Luther. It should be remembered, however, that Luther did not himself want the church that emerged from the Reformation to be called after him.

The purpose of the Reformation was to renew the existing church, not to found a new one, and there was indeed an interesting attempt to demonstrate the link between the Reformation and the Early Church when a group of theologians in Tübingen translated the Augsburg Confession into Greek and sent it to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as a means of initiating correspondence with him.[5] Unfortunately the scheme did not yield the results that the Lutherans

5 **Wort und Mysterium**. Der Briefwechsel über Glauben und Kirche 1573 bis 1581 zwischen den Tübinger Theologen und dem Patriarchen von Konstantinopel. Herausgegeben vom Aussenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland. MCMLVIII. Luther-Verlag. Witten.

would have wished. It is to be hoped that the present Lutheran-Orthodox dialogues will, with God's grace, lead to more permanent results.

Prerequisites for church unity

The question of the prerequisites for church unity is an urgent one for the ecumenical movement. As maintained in the New Testament and the Creeds, Jesus Christ founded only one church, the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Thus the Lutheran Church asserts in the Augsburg Confession that *one holy church is to continue forever* (*una sancta ecclesia perpetuo mansura sit*, CA VII).[6] The one and only true Church of Christ thus continues to exist in spite of the divisions that have occurred in the course of its history and will continue to do so forever. The essential thing as far as the churches of the division are concerned is how they understand their own position and define their relationship to this One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Up to the time of the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church identified itself with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and maintained that there was no salvation outside this church. Thus Roman ecumenical relations consisted of an invitation to all other churches to return to Rome and the shelter of salvation in the Mother Church. At the Second Vatican Council, however, the church issued a public apology to all its brethren who had been living apart from it for its infringements committed against the unity of the church and redefined its relation to salvation within the one true church in a dogmatic constitution entitled *Lumen gentium*. This document asserted that the true Church of Christ was present in the Roman Catholic Church (*subsistit in ecclesia Romana*) but that they were not identical. It also put forward the doctrine that nominal membership of the church (*corpore*) was insufficient to grant salvation without belief in one's heart (*corde*).

In addition to this, the Second Vatican Council put forward in its decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, a new model for unity in which other churches would not be required to return to Rome but all churches should adopt the common mission of restoring visible unity within historical time through penitence and a change of heart.

In order to understand the Lutheran concept of unity it is thus necessary to examine the most recent ecclesiological developments to have taken place within the Roman Catholic Church. The Lutheran Church is historically and doctri-

6 Also they teach that one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to 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 ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. (Eph. 4:5–6) (CA VII).

nally a descendant of Rome, and its understanding of its own constitution and mission calls for a knowledge of Roman Catholic theology and dialogue with the Church of Rome. When the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, representing the Roman Catholic Church, and the Lutheran World Federation stated in their Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in 1999 that they had achieved unanimity on the basic truths of that doctrine and that the 16th-century condemnations of each other's doctrines did not apply to the churches of today, this was regarded as a significant step on the road to unity. The two churches have not yet achieved full doctrinal agreement, nor has unity in the form of joint communion yet come into view, but even so a major mutual step towards visible unity has been taken.

I have already referred above to the teaching of the principal work among the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, the Augsburg Confession, regarding the church and its unity. In the words of Article VII of that confession, the church teaches ("the churches of the Reformation teach") that *one holy Church is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered.* The church and its unity are permanent by nature, and furthermore, as stated later in the same article, *to the true unity of the Church it is enough (*satis est*) to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.* This is an extremely important point for the topic under discussion here.

One prerequisite for unity is doctrinal unanimity, agreement over the teachings of the Gospel. Church unity is basically a question of doctrinal agreement, where the teachings of the Gospel are not restricted to the doctrine of justification but include the whole dogma of Christianity. It is significant that in the structure of the *Confessio Augustana* Article VII on the church and its unity is preceded by articles on (I) God, (II) Original Sin, (III) the Son of God, (IV) Justification, (V) the Ministry and (VI) New Obedience. In addition to the teachings of the Gospel, the prerequisites for unity include unanimity over the administering of the sacraments, and in particular over the celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion, and the proper administering of Holy Communion implies the ministry as instituted by God, the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments – that people should be received into grace for Christ's sake.

Thus the church and its unity and its faith are understood in a sacramental sense in the Lutheran Church. God's word and sacraments stimulate faith and build and maintain the church. The word and the sacraments, and the ministry of the church in the service of these, are constitutive of the church itself. The Lutheran concept of the Christian faith is likewise sacramental. Faith lives and grows on the strength of the word of God and the sacraments. Baptism and Holy Communion are defined as true sacraments in the Lutheran understanding, because they fulfil the two criteria for a sacrament. They were instituted by Christ himself and they incorporate a promise of grace and possess a concrete, physical element, water in

the case of Baptism and bread and wine in the case of Holy Communion. The Lutheran Confessions teach us that when the word of God descends upon such elements they become sacraments, instruments of grace and salvation. The word of God is in itself an instrument of grace, and thus the word and the sacraments are together instruments of God's grace and salvation.

Unity in faith and sacraments

Lutheran tradition leaves the definition of a sacrament open. The sacraments are not limited to Baptism and Holy Communion, as the Defence of the Augsburg Confession also names absolution as a sacrament alongside these (Apologia Art XIII, 4), and also notes that it is possible under some conditions to regard the ordination of priests as a sacrament: *If ordination be understood as applying to the ministry of the Word, we are not unwilling to call ordination a sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises* (Apologia, Art XIII, 11).[7]

For the Lutheran Church the unity of the church is a unity of faith, unanimity in belief and love. It is communion created by the sacraments of the word of God, agreement on the pure proclamation of the Gospel and administering of the sacraments. Joint communion gives full expression to the existence of unity, but it must not be used as an instrument for achieving unity. When speaking of unanimity over the sacraments and their use, particular emphasis should be placed on the importance of Baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism is a sacrament administered once and for all for each individual, as an act of admission to the membership of the church, the body of Christ, whereas Holy Communion reinforces and strengthens a Christian's relation to Christ and to all other Christians.

The Lutheran Church underlines the decisive significance of Baptism for salvation and membership of the church. Baptism is an essential for the achieving of salvation: *It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare* (Luther, Small Catechism, 309, 699). Baptism was instituted by God, and for mankind *it is most solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptized or we cannot be saved* (Large Catechism, 400, 6). It is founded on God's command and His own action. *For to be baptized in the name of God is to be baptized not by*

7 11 If ordination be understood as applying to the ministry of the Word, we are not unwilling to call ordination a sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises, Rom. 1:16: The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. Likewise, Is. 55:11: So shall My Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please.

12 If ordination be understood in this way, neither will we refuse to call the imposition of hands a sacrament. For the Church has the command to appoint ministers, which should be most pleasing to us, because we know that God approves this ministry, and is present in the ministry (Apologia Art XIII, 11).

men, but by God Himself. Therefore, although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God's own work (Large Catechism, 401, 10).

In Baptism a person is installed in a relationship of saving communion with Christ and His church. The whole life of a Christian rests on this baptism, and we should fall back on it and the grace of God given through it every day of our lives. It is thus the basic sacrament for church membership and the unity of the church. Unlike Holy Communion, Baptism is in the Lutheran view essential for salvation. We are saved by virtue of our faith and our baptism. Even on the point of death we can appeal to God's promises and the sacrament of Holy Baptism and say, *Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body* (Large Catechism, 404, 44).[8]

Unity presupposes unanimity regarding the content of the faith, the church's teachings and the celebrating of the sacraments, where the term 'celebrate' means in connection with Holy Communion precisely the consecration of the gifts and not merely their distribution to the congregation. One requirement for the proper celebrating of Holy Communion is in turn the ministry as instituted by God, the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments – that people should be received into grace for Christ's sake (CA V; note that the Latin version of the *Confessio Augustana* uses the term *ministerium*, emphasizing the aspect of service, while the German version has the word *Predigtamt*, with the emphasis on preaching. The content is nevertheless the same).[9] The word of God and the sacraments, together with the ministry instituted by God to serve and nurture His people, are all part of

8 Therefore every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to practise all his life; for he has always enough to do to believe firmly what it promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, the grace of God, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with His gifts. In short, it is so transcendent that if timid nature could realize it, it might well doubt whether it could be true. For consider, if there were somewhere a physician who understood the art of saving men from dying, or, even though they died, of restoring them speedily to life, so that they would thereafter live forever, how the world would pour in money like snow and rain, so that because of the throng of the rich no one could find access! But here in Baptism there is brought free to every one's door such a treasure and medicine as utterly destroys death and preserves all men alive. Thus we must regard Baptism and make it profitable to ourselves, that when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say: 'Nevertheless I am baptized; but if I am baptized, it is promised me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.' For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism, namely, that the body, which can apprehend nothing but the water, is sprinkled, and, in addition, the word is spoken for the soul to apprehend. Now, since both, the water and the Word, are one Baptism, therefore body and soul must be saved and live forever (Large Catechism, 404–405, 41–46).

9 That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works (CA V).

the constitution of the church, essential factors constitutive of its very existence. The prerequisites for the ministry are a true calling (*rite vocatus*) and ordination.[10]

The doctrinal unanimity that is a prerequisite for true unity in the church should not be strict conformity nor absolute identity in matters such as the order of services, liturgical forms or human traditions: *Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says* (Eph. 4:5–6)*: One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, etc.* (CA VII).

Gradually advancing "reconsiled diversity"

The model of unity adopted by the Lutheran churches is that of "reconsiled diversity" (*versöhnte Verschiedenheit*), in which unity would presuppose full unanimity regarding the main content of the church's belief and doctrine and reconciliation of the disagreements caused by distinguishing factors, differences of opinion and divisions.

Viewed in this way, unity is a constantly intensifying state of communion, the prerequisite for which is increasing unanimity, or convergence, and the principal goal full, or at least highly substantial, unanimity, or consensus (*magnus consensus*, CA I). The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has not signed the Leuenberg Concord concluded between the European Lutheran, Reformed and United churches, which provided for full intercommunion between the signatories, since the model of unity presupposed by that agreement implies unanimity on the doctrine of justification. Once this has been achieved it will be possible to implement full communion, even though unanimity may not yet exist on doctrinal matters connected with the ministry, for instance. The Leuenberg Concord forms the theological foundation for the Evangelical Church of Germany at the present time, but the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland understands the notion of unity somewhat differently and accepts that growth and the search for unity are dynamic processes in which it is only possible, or indeed wise, to advance in a gradual or stepwise manner.

This gradually advancing approach has been used with success in the negotiation of the Porvoo Agreement between the Anglican Churches of Great Britain and Ireland and the Lutheran Churches of Scandinavia and the Baltic States, and by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in arriving at their Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, for example. These documents do admittedly differ somewhat in their content and results, but the method by which they were brought about was the same in each case. The Porvoo Agreement provided for close communion between the signatories, which

10 Of Ecclesiastical Order they teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called (CA XIV).

included joint participation in Holy Communion, mutual recognition of holy offices and efforts towards joint witness and service in Europe.

By comparison, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification marked the achievement of unanimity on the basic truths of that doctrine and not on the whole doctrine as such, but a sufficient degree of consensus was reached to allow the parties to state that the mutual condemnations of the other side's teachings uttered in earlier times no longer held good with regard to the present-day churches. This provides an excellent basis for turning to other problems in relations between the churches concerned. Both of these agreements served to bring the churches closer together, and it is obvious that a distinct convergence has taken place. It is also significant that both documents state first of all that agreement has been reached on certain matters and then go on to indicate the remaining difficulties, setting them out as challenges for future negotiations.

Unity in truth and love

The strivings of the divided Christian world towards unity call for the achieving of a proper balance between truth and love that is established at no cost to either. A compromise in the form of relinquishing one's own position is not the way to arrive at communion, as settling for something less than the truth will never yield lasting results. Unity can only emerge through the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The aim should be that *speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ* (Eph. 4:15). On account of this requirement of truthfulness we should always strive for unanimity in beliefs and teachings without bargaining anything away, while at the same time the spirit of love should lead us to agree to discuss things even with those whose opinions are far removed from our own. The church is a community of faith and love, in which an atmosphere of mutual respect, deference and forgiveness should prevail and there should be the maximum possible room for freedom.

Pope John XXIII, who was renowned for his advocacy of church unity in his words and deeds, was fond of quoting the old principle of the church *Unanimity in everything that is essential, freedom in everything that is uncertain, but love in everything (In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus autem caritas)*.

I would like to bring this paper to an end by quoting another outstanding spokesman on behalf of ecumenism. When His Beatitude Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, took part in an ecumenical service in Uppsala Cathedral in August 1993, he presented the Archbishop of the Swedish Church, the Rt. Rev. Gunnar Weman, with a communion chalice and expressed his hope that the day would soon come when their churches would be able to celebrate the Eucharist, the Holy Communion of Our Lord, together. A couple of years later the Patriarch presented a similar chalice to Bishop Matti Sihvonen in Kuopio Cathedral and repeated the same hope.

None of us knows when that day might come, but prayer and hard work to those ends will not be in vain. It is the command of Our Lord Jesus Christ himself and it has his promise behind it. But one thing is clear, it will not come about as a result of our efforts. The real source and prerequisite for it will be the will of the Triune God himself and his call to unity.

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Perspectives on the church's diaconal mission in society

Christ the servant of all

> *The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves* (Luke 22:25–27).

These words of Jesus uttered at the Last Supper, the institution of the Eucharist, are taken in Orthodox theology as thde basis for the church's charitable work. In them Christ refers to himself as a servant, a deacon, having provided a concrete example of this by washing His disciples' feet and creating a parallel between the communion table and the basin of water (John 13:1–15). The Orthodox interpretation emphasizes the Eucharist as the event that constituted the church, so that its celebration every Sunday forms in a physical sense a continuum from the community of the Apostles down to the present day. We may very well ask, however, how well the continuity of the other aspect of that mystery has been kept up: how well have we observed Our Lord's command to act as servants?

Service to our neighbour is a central theme running through the teachings of the whole of the New Testament. The proximity of the Kingdom of Heaven challenges us to mend our ways and perform deeds that are in accordance with the will of God. God gave of himself and came into the world to serve mankind, and likewise we are called to find ourselves in our neighbours, in the service of other people. It is possible for sinful human beings to partake in the salvation of Christ, to follow in His footsteps on the road to the Cross and the Resurrection and to collaborate with Him in doing good works.

Charitable work as a holy mystery

Charitable work is not merely an ethical consequence of faith, but is itself a dimension of the mystery of faith. When we are engaged in service, Christ is present both as the model or pattern for that service and in the face of the neighbour whom we encounter through it (Matt. 25:31–35). Through service we come face to face with Christ and take part in His work – service is salvation. There is no giver or receiver in such good works, no helper and helped, for both are

pervaded by the presence of Christ, and the parable of the Good Samaritan and many of Jesus' other teachings in which He takes as the central figure a woman, a child or someone who is external to the power structures of society or regarded as ethnically or religiously unclean render the whole phenomenon of good works boundless in nature. In the service of our neighbour we encounter the whole of mankind and humanity, so that it allows us to savour the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven, where the alienation, boundaries and enmities engendered by sin no longer exist. There is no division into our own and others in the eyes of God, for they are all His own. It may be said, therefore, that through good works we are able to share in the secret of faith in Christ and in the mystery of the church: in this sense good works, *diakonia*, are a holy mystery, a sacrament.

The sacramental nature of service to others may be traced back to its origin in Christ, the servant. It has always been clear from the early centuries of the Christian church that service and the Eucharist belong to together. Our Lord's table and the table that we share with others are two sides of the same mystery. The sacrament of the altar leads us on to the sacrament of service to others. In the Eucharist we step into the unity of life that has been restored to us by Christ, a unity in which we are all members of each other and responsible for each other. On the other hand, the "sacrament of the poor" cannot substitute for the sacrament of the altar as the Social Ethics revivalist movement of the 1960s would have had us believe, but is grounded in the Holy Eucharist and wells up from it. The Eucharist gives expression to the communion that arises from the Resurrection and is thereby constitutive of the unity of the church, but it also points to the fundamental unity of the whole of mankind and calls us to put this into action through service.

> *Those who have more than enough to eat are not incapable of feeding the hungry. But they are cruel and inhuman. This church feeds 3000 people a day, and in addition feeds and clothes prisoners, those placed in public care, the handicapped, the clergy and many others. If ten rich property owners were to do the same there wouldn't be a single person in dire straits left in the city.*
>
> St. John Chrysostom, translated from the Finnish from the collection *Pyhien Isien opetuksia elämän eri aloilta* (Teachings of the Holy Fathers on various branches of life).

The development of charitable work in the Eastern Church came to an end with the fall of Constantinople, which meant that deaconesses disappeared from the scene entirely and the work of the deacons in caring for the poor was pushed into the background relative to their other duties. The diaconate remained as one step in the priesthood, but the custom of advancing in a hierarchical manner from one level to the next detracted from its special characteristics and made it into simply "the lowest level of clergy" and certain important tasks, including the independent

role of deacons in distributing the communion, were dropped in certain quarters. Apart from their own liturgical duties, the deacons were typically acolytes to the bishop and the principal priest, and in this respect the order that had existed in the Early Church was preserved. Thus deacons became "liturgical decorations in services conducted by bishops", as has been noted in many connections. In the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans the Turkish rulers restricted the life of the church to work amongst its own ethnically defined members, and its charity work became confined to the ghettoes. Meanwhile, the younger churches of Eastern Europe had not had enough time to become familiar with the idea of charitable work during the first millennium. The outcome was that the diaconate lost its prominent position as a mode of service at the heart of the episcopal system but the idea behind it persisted in the monasteries in the form of charitable work and in the rural parishes as a kind of internal spirit of solidarity. There has been practically no theology of charitable deeds since the days of the great Church Fathers.

Diaconal work was revived in many of the local Orthodox churches in the course of the 20th century, a trend which may be attributed to both the influence of western models and the Eastern Church's own interest in the patristic teachings and their practical consequences. The education of deaconesses began in Greece early in that century and came to form the life's work of the best-loved of the modern Greek saints, St. Nectarios of Aegina, while in Russia there were a number of charitable organizations carrying out work of this kind up to the time of the Revolution, many of them closely associated with monasteries or convents. Two latter-day martyrs, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna and Mother Maria Skobtsova of Paris, are regarded as saints on the grounds of their works of charity. The Coptic Church, on the other hand, has revived a form of induction for deaconesses that is open only to nuns and does not entitle them to take on any liturgical duties. Following the collapse of communism a number of brotherhoods and sisterhoods devoted to diaconal work have been founded in Eastern European countries which are now engaged in pioneering work in hospitals and prisons and among street children and drug addicts, etc. There is now much discussion going on among Orthodox theologians concerning a possible revival of the ordination of women as deacons, and thus about the whole nature of diaconal work.

The social work carried out in the Orthodox Church of Finland has been closely linked to the development of home missions and a Finnish-speaking identity from the 1880s onwards. Under the conditions that prevailed following the Second World War efforts were concentrated on providing help for the parishes in which the evacuees were placed and ensuring their survival, and it has only been in the last few decades that resources have permitted attention to be paid to targets located elsewhere. This aspect has occupied an important position in Orthodox missionary work in East Africa since the early 1970s, efforts have been made to react to emergencies in areas closer to home, in Karelia and Estonia,

from the late 1980s onwards, and new initiatives for social and charitable work were set in motion in the 1990s by the recession and the wave of immigration.

Liturgy after the liturgy

Orthodox theology during the 20th century was characterized by a desire to return to the thinking of the Church Fathers and the principles that governed the life of the Early Church. In the academic world this movement is known as the "neo-patristic synthesis". One of its chief areas of interest is ecclesiology, where emphasis has been placed on the importance of the Eucharist as the principal mode of expression for the secret of faith and the mystery of the church. The role of deacons has also been considered from the perspective of what the liturgical functions of the deacon in the Early Church represented, how they differed from current practices and what challenges for reform might arise in this respect. Eucharistic ecclesiology, however, has not succeeded in answering the questions raised by its own deliberations, which have been concerned in particular with the conclusions to be drawn in the field of sacramental spirituality when it comes to matters of missions, ethics and diaconal duties. One indication of an effort to widen the scope of the discussion from a specific focus on the liturgy to a broader way of thinking is the custom that began in the 1970s of referring to a "liturgy after the liturgy".

> *The Liturgy is not a way of escaping from life but rather a continuous transformation of life in the power of the Spirit and according to the pattern set by Jesus Christ. If it is so that we not only hear the message but actually take part in the great event of liberation from our sins and act of communion (Gk.* koinonia*) with Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit, then this personal incorporation in the body of Christ, this glorification of our modest substance as a member of Christ, must be visible and must be made public in everyday life. … As in the Eucharistic act we become a member of Him who came to serve the world and to be sacrificed for it, we should give expression to this membership of ours by means of concrete diaconal activity, living in and for the community in our new nature in Christ, the servant of all.*
> (Anastasios Yannoulatos, quoted in Ion Bria, Martyria-Mission, 1980)

The original liturgical task of a deacon has been seen as a clear reflection of the socio-ethical significance of the Eucharist. The church's call for an encounter and dialogue between man and God takes place through the Eucharist, in which the people bring forth bread and wine as a thank-offering and a symbol of their own lives and receive them back as the body and blood of Christ, a link with God's act of salvation. It is the deacon who carries the gifts to the altar to be blessed, and after the Eucharistic anaphora and the breaking of the bread it is he who

physically distributes the gifts to the people, to their bedsides and to their prison cells where necessary. Another act that takes place at the Liturgy is a redistribution of wealth, in that a collection is taken to provide assistance for those in need. Similarly, only one of the pieces of communion bread is actually used in the sacrament and the majority are distributed to the hungry.

The broadening of the thinking that is centred on the Eucharist to apply to diaconal work is one more expression of the search for synthesis that is typical of eastern theology. The integrity of spirit, soul and body that is man calls for an integrity of belief and way of life. The Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine are looked on as the first-fruits of a new reality and the leaven that glorifies every aspect of human life and activity, in order to create an opportunity for communion, *koinonia*. The result is an alteration in our existential relations to our neighbours, to the structures that prevail in our society and to our place in the world. The aim of the Orthodox way of life is a personal freedom that leads to conscious relations and communion between people, within creation and with God.

The way of life that stems from the Eucharist gains expression in the "micro-charity" that exists within each immediate community and in "macro-charity" on a global scale. The socio-ethical imperatives of the Church Fathers required justice to be put in place immediately, and this "micro-charity" is a more familiar concept to Orthodox thinking than is the "macro-charity" to be found in the political analysis of "structurally embedded sin". The economic and political globalization of our modern world nevertheless also demands that Christian charity should have a universal perspective to it. Globalization also means that the concrete distress and need for assistance of people in other parts of the world can enter the sphere of the "micro-charity" of local communities, although it is true that hunger and deprivation can only be temporarily alleviated unless we are prepared to intervene in the circumstances that bring them about. The ecumenical movement has forced the Orthodox Church to view charitable work not only as an answer to people's immediate needs but also as a means of influencing development on a global scale.

Diaconal work and the integrity of church life

The major challenge for diaconal work is to face up to the fragmentation of people's lives. The current overemphasis on personal freedom has led to a hedonistic culture in which life is understood as a series of exciting experiences. Responsibility for one's own life beyond the immediate goal of "feeling good" and responsibility for others in any active sense are simply not in fashion. The laws governing society and the problem-solving patterns applied in social work are geared towards supporting people as individuals and not as members of the community. It is frequently the case that one cannot speak any longer of family problems, because the families have broken up; they simply don't exist anymore. Individuals do not belong to communities in their nuclear families or extended

families, or in the block or part of the town where they live, but their lives are still influenced in numerous ways by the global nature of economics, politics and ecological disasters. And this is true not only of people who are in dire financial straits but equally much of those who are materially well off. The existence of sin in the form of selfishness, alienation and dispersal is clear to see, and it is the church's task to provide all people with an opportunity for mending their ways and learning how to live a consistent, harmonious life – which implies, of course, that its own life should be an expression of this.

The focus should thus be on renewal of our local parishes and congregations as communities, and this should also be seen in the correct light as a diaconal task for the church. The typical Orthodox reply to the question of reforming diaconal work can be found in the Eucharistic community, the diocese and parish, but it is only in the concrete everyday life of a local community that the principles enshrined in the church's teachings and history can be put into action in the form of anything more than theological contemplations and nostalgia. The parish as a Eucharistic community is the place at the heart of society where the all-enveloping, healing integrity of the Christian faith should gain expression.

The two thousand years of experience that the church has gained and the teachings of the Holy Fathers urge us to seek unity in the church and harmony in the Christian way of life. A Eucharistic view of the church, a strengthening of the diaconate as one rank in the clergy gathered round a bishop, and an understanding of the faith as a challenge to become co-workers with God in our way of life: these should be the fundamentals of Orthodox teaching. Emphasis should be placed on the connections between these things, and the structure of our dioceses and parishes should be reorganized to serve the needs of this orientation. It is in this kind of community thinking that the renewal and reinforcement of diaconal work should lie, and it is through this that the Orthodox Church will find a relevant mission for itself in the life of our modern society.

Under the conditions that prevail at present, however, our dioceses and parishes have become alienated from their members; they have become administrative authorities, as it were, whose purpose has become slightly irrelevant but presumably harks back in a way to the local government system of the agrarian society of the early 20th century and reflects the rhythm of life of the village communities of those days. The role of a minority church in Finland and the European Union in the 21st century should be somewhat different, however, from the perspective of both society and the members of the church. The Orthodox Church of Finland is free of the cultural and political burdens that weigh upon a majority church, but at the same time it enjoys considerable financial and administrative benefits and occupies an acknowledged position in society. This should give it courage to put the principles that arise from Orthodox tradition into practice in a manner that is relevant to its own context and devote its secure financial resources to diaconal work.

Economists, political scientists and ecologists predict that the problems attached to "macro-charity" will force humanity to resort before long to solutions available at the level of "micro-charity" level; in other words, globalization may very well give way to localization. This should not be a problem for the Christian church, as its own holy tradition incorporates a model which covers both the local and the global level. Do we, as Finnish Christians, have the vision and strength to be pioneers within society in this sense?

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The church's diaconal mission in society

The social dimension, the service that the church provides through its diaconal work, is an integral part of its understanding of its own nature. This charitable work is one element in the whole being of the church, alongside missions and sacrifice. Service to others and the pursuit of justice are not options or alternative paths to be followed for Christians, but are built into their faith and its manifestations. The "new man" who is born at baptism is called to act against the power of evil. Thus good works should be visible and manifested in all the churches, in their own activities and in joint activities. In this sense, diaconal work is an important ecumenical instrument to be deployed in the context of practical co-operation. Service and love as attitudes of mind are emphasized in the teachings of Jesus, as are the significance of repentance and righteousness. The first organized forms of charitable work are reported in the New Testament epistles, where they are ascribed both a liturgical and a social function, and in the course of the church's history the monasteries have developed into major sources of charitable work alongside the parishes themselves.

Luther placed heavy emphasis on love for one's neighbour as one of the fruits of faith – a Christian lives for Christ and his fellow man – but he also reminded people of the social injustices which it is necessary to put right. This led gradually to the founding of a social system for caring for the poor. In Luther's eyes the poor should not be dependent on alms, but rather society should be made to take responsibility for all its members, including those who cannot achieve a sufficient degree of welfare for themselves. His whole theology was heavily weighted towards charity, and the "golden rule" of doing to others as you would have others do to you was taken as a standing order for Christians. The church itself was "a hospital for the incurably sick" and the kingdom of God was fundamentally "a constant state of bearing each other's burdens". Luther's views stake out a place for the church in the world of real, ordinary people, in that it inescapably recognises people's sufferings, pain and imperfections both within it and outside it.

Although the church's diaconal work is carried out in the world, in the midst of society and on its margins, "beyond the camp", it is precisely because of this that it also reaches to the very heart of the faith. Christians achieve communion with Christ by encountering those who suffer. To minister to those who are hungry, thirsty, homeless, sick or imprisoned is to come face to face with Christ and to serve Him (Matt. 25). This means that concrete, everyday work in often brutal circumstances can take on a spiritual dimension. It is by serving our fellow men that we serve God. Since God identifies himself with those who suffer and are rejected, the Christian cannot deny, abandon or repel such people.

The inextricable connection between the church's charitable work and its worship is also visible in our church services, in that the suffering of the world is mentioned by name in front of the whole congregation. The intercessions that form part of every service prevent those engaged in praising God from forgetting the realities of the world: the voices of those who suffer are brought to the altar, their existence is acknowledged and reference is made to the Christian's "everyday agenda" that begins once Mass is over. The true presence of Christ in the Holy Communion, His living sacrifice, continues to be effective when the Christians are required to approach other people, and not only other Christians, in the manner in which Christ approached them.

Partial responsibility for care of the poor and others in distress has rested with the church in Finland since the 17th century, but a return to the policy advocated by Luther took place in connection with the creation of local government legislation, and the provisions for care of the poor were removed from the law governing church affairs in 1869. When the Synod of the Lutheran Church reconsidered the position of its charitable work in 1913, the opinion that gained widest support out of the numerous alternatives put forward was that which once again meant the recognition of such work as a part of the church's official activities: "a vicar shall promote the maintenance of continuous charitable work in his parish and see to it that the necessary men and women are employed in the positions of deacon and deaconess for this purpose." After much controversy it was decreed in 1944 that a statutory office of deacon, intended for social work, should exist in every parish in the country. This practice is extremely rare on a world scale, even among the family of Lutheran churches.

For Luther, charitable work in the surrounding society also meant the right and responsibility to speak out on social matters. The church was entitled, and indeed compelled, to require that society should be governed in such a manner that the will of God was fulfilled, and this included the concept of society's responsibility for the care of those who were less able to provide for themselves. Social criticism and speaking out on behalf of humanity and the whole of creation was a part of the church's charitable work. At the level of social policy this work cannot remain silent or impartial; it represents and requires solidarity on the part of the secular power rather than the pursuit of individual profit, and the strengthening of a society in which there are equal chances for all rather than one based on competition. Thus the social mission for the church's charitable work can be summarized very well in the challenge existing throughout Europe to act together with and be a part of the forces engaged in constructing a civil society. In view of the threats facing participation and democracy and the increasing inequality between citizens, the church is called on to play its part in opposing these trends. This can be done by offering clearly defined services and creating effective security networks, and also by stimulating a culture of care and by drawing attention to choices that are apt to give rise to social wrongs and injustices.

In practice the construction and protection of a civil society means the following steps for the church in its diaconal work:

1. This has to be essentially community work in terms of both its methods and its goals, geared to generating collaboration. The church should be prepared to act jointly with all those who are promoting tolerance, participation and equal respect for all people. In a society that is becoming increasingly fragmented and segregated, this principle and mode of action can be of considerable social significance in itself.
2. The church has to engage in continuous direct interaction with those who are not influential members of society, who rarely hit the newspaper headlines and when they do, are branded as problem groups. The church's task is to treat these people as holistic individuals and not just address their problems. It is essential to support their rights as citizens and reinforce their control over their own lives and their opportunities to influence the immediate community in which they live. Through its own activities the church must emphasize within society that no one's value as a person should be dependent on his or her wage packet, age, state of health, place of birth or way of life, for by doing this it will increase the credibility of its prophetic role, that of constantly reminding society and those in power of the responsibilities they have and supporting them in exercising those responsibilities.
3. One aim of this work should be to preserve society as a complete entity, a place in which the elderly, the sick and the weary all have a full right to exist. The way in which it treats its weaker members is a good test of whether a society is internally sound. The church's charitable work should therefore support peace within society by bringing those who are invisible out from the shadows, making a noise together with those who have fallen silent or have been silenced and insisting that people remember the existence of those whom they would much rather forget. Indeed, we will become part of civil society only when we have the time to wait for those who are slower, respect those whom we may not like and associate with those whose way of life we think strange.
4. The church has abundant resources for supporting civil society: knowledge and skills, appropriate attitudes and values, financial capital and personnel. The funds set aside by it for social work are intended for those in need, but there are no other limitations on how they should be spent. Crises there are in plenty, but there should be no hard and fast rules.
5. A certain tension exists between the needs for global equality and assistance at the local level, but these extremes should not be regarded as mutually exclusive. The activities of the universal church know no national boundaries, nor can they condone any nationalistic endeavours. The church's work

always calls for global responsibility and the sense of proportion that this perspective confers. Luther emphasized that in spite of racial, national and religious differences there is a sense of community between human beings that is based on the act of creation and is actualized in the human ability to imagine oneself in someone else's position and thus treat that person properly. The church's social work is not just help for those who belong to our group, nor does it recognise any system of personal patronage.

6. Charitable work of this kind is not impartial, however. In situations where a choice has to be made the option should always be in favour of the poor. Jesus' own actions made this quite clear. The first people to merit his attention were those whom it was "not respectable" to listen to, speak with, take seriously or invite along. His way of working was to treat children as important, to converse with women and to accept people who had become tainted or had been rejected on account of illness, and this constantly places a critical mirror in front of the church's attitudes and good works in our day and age. For Jesus, justice meant restoring the rights of those who had been deprived of such as a consequence of their social position or altered situation. The demand for justice in our charitable work within today's society cannot be anything other than this.
7. Our society and its citizens need the opportunity to do good. People have a natural propensity for reasoning and feeling which steers them along the right path. We have, at least momentarily, a need to belong to a group engaged in accomplishing "good deeds" and reducing unnecessary suffering. The human conscience works. In a society dominated by results, competition and harsh realities, more and more people have a desire, whether secret or acknowledged, to belong somewhere, to participate, to give something of oneself, to sit down at a dining table devoted to hospitality and the celebration of life itself. People who have dropped out of society may have no need for charity, but those who wield power, cut out fine careers for themselves or prosper in the financial markets in our modern world may need the church's charitable work for an entirely new reason, for the sake of their own humanity.
8. The work of developing a civil society and preserving peaceful social conditions, on a global scale as well, calls for the participation of everyone who still believes in justice and is not prepared to abandon that principle on any so-called "rational" grounds, and it is the duty of the church in its social work to remind people of this principle of justice for all and of the rightfulness of it precisely at those times when it would seem on other grounds to be most inconvenient, just as it is also necessary to remind people over and over again that the increasing numbers of drop-outs from society do not constitute a normal phenomenon that we have to learn to live with and that violence, racism and xenophobia are not acceptable

forms of behaviour. Our society deserves the church's diaconal work, as together with the efforts of other providers, it can create a culture and social climate in our midst in which caring about one another, sharing our everyday burdens and dividing the available resources in a just manner are the normal way of acting.

9. Our society also needs the church's social work because we need people who will remind us with their words and deeds that life is not just material goods and that people are not just unwilling pawns in some kind of faceless planning system. This work bears witness, both directly and by its own example, to the fact that life is vulnerable and in many ways unpredictable. The mission of our church social workers should be to demonstrate together with the people concerned that there is no kind of failure that entitles others to deprive them of their basic human rights, strip them of their value as individuals or call for their expulsion from society. Our civil society will develop and peace within it will be strengthened only by society realizing that it needs all its members. The church's work in this field can provide an example of this through its operating culture, the measures it takes and the attitudinal climate that lies behind them. At the same time it can protect the church itself from the illusion that God's presence and favour can be measured in terms of external success. It is this charitable work that will keep the doors of our churches and the agendas of our meetings open.

Joensuu 2007

THE EIGHTH THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF FINLAND, 2007

Communiqué

The Eighth Theological Discussions between delegates from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland were held at the Orthodox Priests' Seminary in Joensuu on 7th–8th February 2007. The delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church was headed by Rt. Rev. Voitto Huotari, Bishop of Mikkeli, and the other members were Rev. Mari Kinnunen, pastor and family counsellor, Rev. Matti Poutiainen, Dean of Helsinki, Rev. Dr Matti Repo, executive secretary for theology at the Church Council's Department for International Relations, and Rev. Dr Pirjo Työrinoja. The delegation from the Orthodox Church was led by Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki and its other members were Dr Teuvo Laitila, lecturer in the Orthodox Priests' Seminary, MTh Aino Nenola, Fr. Rauno Pietarinen and Prof. Dr Petri Piiroinen. Also present as observers were Fr. Rafal Czernia, SCJ, of the Roman Catholic Church, Fr. Madis Palli of the Orthodox Church of Estonia and Olavi Rintala, head of the Evangelical Free Church of Finland, as representative of the Finnish Ecumenical Council.

The delegations assembled for prayers in the Orthodox Seminary's Church of St. John the Theologian and a number of Lutheran hymns were sung around the negotiating table. The two topics selected for discussion were "Sanctification and asceticism" and "Violence in the family and in personal relations".

In his opening address Bishop Voitto Huotari drew attention to four factors which pointed to the importance of these doctrinal discussions. Firstly, local dialogues of this kind constitute a mutual learning process, helping us to get to know the doctrines of the other confession better and to be more fully aware of the distinctive features of our own confession. Secondly, they provide a sounding board for general dialogues between the churches, thirdly, they are of pastoral significance, especially when ministering to families that include members of different churches, although the lack of common access to the communion table is still an open wound, and fourthly, they constitute acts of witness at the local level.

In his reply, Metropolitan Ambrosius made reference to the close relations between the Lutheran and Orthodox churches in Finland, and linked the series

of local dialogues to the international ecumenical cooperation in which both churches have been engaged under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, for example. He emphasized the importance of continuing the dialogue of love within families, within parishes and at the national level, adding that it was also important that it should be a dialogue of truth. Doctrinal discussions are both an intellectual and a spiritual challenge.

Sanctification and asceticism

The topic for the first day of the discussions was "Sanctification and asceticism", based on papers to be presented by Rev. Matti Poutiainen and M.Th. Aino Nenola.

Matti Poutiainen pointed out that the concept of sanctification presented in Martin Luther's Catechisms of 1529 and the catechism used nowadays by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, published in 2000, covers the whole of the activity of the Holy Spirit and describes the process by which God sanctifies sinful human beings by uniting them with Christ. It is then Christ, who is present in their faith, who confers on them righteousness and a new life. The main elements in the Catechism, the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, constitute a condensed statement of Christian beliefs and the Christian way of life. We are unable by ourselves or through our own deeds to resist attacks by the forces of evil or the temptation to doubt or to resort to evil thoughts or actions, and therefore we need to pray and to read the word of God. It is reading of the Catechism, contemplation of its message and discussion and singing of the texts contained in it that form the starting point for our life of prayer.

Poutiainen then went on to outline five distinctive features of Lutheran spirituality on the basis of the Catechism. In the first place, it is God-centred, it is part of the work of sanctification performed by the Holy Spirit among men. Secondly, the point of departure for prayer is the word of God; i.e. we do not find our inspiration from deep within ourselves. Thirdly, the spiritual life has a content that is conveyed within the biblical texts of the Catechism. Fourthly, the spiritual life is a part of the everyday struggle of faith that we take on at baptism. In this we are shielded by the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation contained in the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion. Fifthly, our meditations and prayers should be directed towards living in accordance with God's will in our everyday callings.

M.Th. Aino Nenola reminded us that one central theme in theology is the search for the path of salvation. The doctrine of sanctification sets out from the holiness of God and His creation of man in His own image. The human potential for holiness is a reflection of God's holiness; it is our task to act as "priests for the whole of creation" and prepare it for sanctity. We cannot be sanctified on our own, however, for we need an "other" in order to achieve this, since sanctification

emulates the relation of love that prevails between the persons of the Holy Trinity; it implies participation in the unity that obtains between the persons of God.

The ascetic life of the Christian is fundamentally a form of liturgical activity that is built up around the Eucharist. It is in the Eucharist that the Church sanctifies the world, for it is through the Eucharist that the body of Christ illuminates those souls that will receive Him and God's holiness extends in this way to the whole of creation. On the other hand, people strive towards holiness in the everyday work to which they are called. All forms of work can be holy. The Orthodox Church also has a long monastic tradition of striving towards holiness in which ascetics retreated to the wilderness, but this resulted in the world coming to them, as people are attracted by holiness. Those who give themselves over to a monastic life are entrusted with the particular duty of praying on behalf of others, which is important from the point of view of the people who remain in the world, as it means that those who withdraw into solitude are not separating themselves off from the body of Christ.

In the discussion that followed it was noted that the teachings in Luther's Catechism regarding Holy Communion form the foundation of the true presence of Christ in our lives and that the word of God can also be said to be sacramental in nature. When the word is read and proclaimed, it not only leads us to the sacrament of Holy Communion but it renders Christ present in our lives. This line of argument has nevertheless led to an over-emphasis on the preaching of sermons at the expense of the sacrament of Holy Communion, although our thinking on this matter has altered in recent times. It was also noted that a trend in the opposite direction has been observed in the Orthodox Church in recent times, with worship of the word regaining the position to which it is entitled.

The delegates also detected common ground in the emphasis on the presence of holiness in everyday life, which can also be a struggle towards faith in its own way. It is impossible to isolate what is spiritual from what is worldly. Asceticism in both traditions is a question of searching for a simple, harmonious way of life, and a parallel can be seen between the Lutheran concept of prayer and meditation on the Catechism at home and the Orthodox custom of praying before an icon at home.

Violence in the family and in personal relations

Rev. Mari Kinnunen, who works as a family counsellor, began her discussion of "Violence in the family and in personal relations" by establishing that violence is an abuse of power that may be physical in nature or psychological, religious, sexual, economic or material, i.e. directed at an individual's personal property, and that it may also be taken to include neglect or maltreatment with regard to the needs of children or elderly persons. She also provided a definition of religious violence, as psychological violence which involves a religious dimension, which

can be manifested in the form of scaring tactics, attempts at forcible conversion, accusations, isolation and/or excessive control in order to suppress individuals' general opinions or attitudes to life or their own way of life.

The World Council of Churches has announced a "Decade to Overcome Violence" to cover the years 2000-2010, which the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is implementing in the form of a project entitled "From Violence to Reconciliation". Among other things, this has entailed the coordination of an ecumenical week of non-violence under the slogan "Don't remain silent!" It is necessary for the churches to learn to escape from the culture of silence on these matters, to have the courage to speak out on them and to break down the walls of secrecy that surround violence in the home. If we remain silent we will simply allow the vicious circle of violence to go on, which will make matters worse.

Rev. Kinnunen also asked to what extent the patriarchal family models of biblical times and the acts of violence bound up with them are reflected in the Bible as we read it today, and to what extent the burden of this tradition still dogs our Christian theological thinking and liturgical practices. It is even the case that many church workers live in Christian homes that are dominated by a mistaken ideal that difficulties, including acts of violence in the family, should be concealed. She proposed that the Lutheran and Orthodox churches should collaborate at the local level to arrange "training in perception" to assist their workers in recognising instances of violence in the home in order to combat this phenomenon.

Fr. Rauno Pietarinen maintained that as a spiritual community, the church is particularly prone to occurrences of psychological abuse in the form of harassment at work and religious harassment in the form of pressure exerted during pastoral care. Church workers involved in the latter carry a great deal of responsibility, as parishioners are liable to ask them for direct advice. A father confessor cannot and must not make decisions on the part of people who consult him. The church should keep a close watch on its own practices to make sure that it doesn't support or even permit any kind of psychological or other violence.

The discussion that followed touched mainly on the churches' teachings with regard to holiness and obedience. Many of the saints celebrated in the Orthodox calendar are martyrs, but it would be unfair to consider holiness entirely in terms of martyrdom as it could nurture mistaken ideas of sacrificing one's own life. Similarly, the Lutheran tradition has taught people in the past to behave in accordance with their station in life, but it is time that the churches rid themselves of the tendency to seek justifications for subjugating others. Holiness should not be abominated by turning it into support for psychological harassment. The churches should protect and value both the physical and psychological integrity of the people placed in their pastoral care.

Future discussions

These discussions took place in an atmosphere of frankness, enthusiasm and mutual respect and trust. Both sides learned much that was new and much that united them, and this encouraged the planning of further theological meetings of the same kind. It was therefore decided that the next discussions should be hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in autumn 2008 and should consider the topics of "The relation of Christianity to other religions" and "The languages of the faith – how the churches approach modern man."

Joensuu 8.2.2007

Dean Lic.Th. Matti Poutiainen

Sanctification and asceticism

I shall begin by briefly considering sanctity as a biblical concept and shall then go on to examine it and asceticism in the light of the Catechism, as this forms the basis for our teachings on baptism and, alongside the Bible, is the main source of Lutheran spirituality. At that point I will discuss first sanctification as the work of the Holy Spirit and then asceticism as collaborative work involving both God and man. I will then discuss first the word of God as a point of departure for the practise of asceticism, then asceticism as a struggle against the forces of evil and thirdly everyday life as an arena for asceticism. Finally, I will summarize a few of the principal features of Lutheran spirituality.

1. Sanctity, sanctification and asceticism in the Bible

The concept of sanctity is linked in the Bible above all with God himself. God is referred to in the Old Testament as "the Holy One of Israel" (Is. 1:4) and the source of all holiness: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (the Tersanctus, Is. 6:3), see also the *Trisagion* "O Holy God, holy and mighty, holy immortal, have mercy upon us"). God chose Israel to be "his holy people" (Deut. 7:6, 14:2), a status that implied an obligation to maintain this holiness: "For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). God's holiness is thus something that carries with it both ceremonial and ethical obligations. This sanctification, i.e. consecration to God, applied to the tent of the covenant (Ex. 28:43), the temple (1 Kings 9:3), the altar and the objects placed on it, the sacrifices made before it (Ex. 29:37; 28:38) and the feasts, or holy days (Ex. 35:2). Ceremonial purity was defined in the laws regarding sanctity (Lev. 17–26), and ethical obligations were associated with these ceremonial ones: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully" (Ps. 24:3–4).

The New Testament builds upon this Old Testament concept of sanctity. The *Tersanctus* of Isaiah is repeated in the worship of God in heaven: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Rev. 4:8). Similarly, we repeat in the Lord's Prayer the desire that God himself, "his name", should appear in all holiness: "Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9). God himself is holy, but Jesus Christ is also referred to as the Holy One (Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35). Christ is the model and foundation for the holiness of Christians (1 Peter 1:15). The Holy Spirit fills the Church with his holiness (Acts 2:4; 4:31) and transforms

it into a people sanctified to God. The spirit accomplishes this sanctification in those who believe (Rom. 15:16), who are called to be "holy", or "saints" (Acts 9:17; Rom. 1:1, 7). The word for "asceticism" in Greek, agoon, and its derived verbs *agoonidzomai* and *epagoonidzomai*, mean a struggle, battle, striving, making an effort or taking trouble over something, and are frequently used to describe the religious life and the spiritual struggle that takes place within it (Luke 13:24; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7; Hebr. 12:1; Jude 3).

2. Sanctity and asceticism as terms in the Catechism

The main references to sanctity and asceticism to be found in the Lutheran Confessions appear in Martin Luther's catechisms of 1529. His *Small Catechism* contains the traditional elements of Western Christianity: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a list of the sacraments with brief explanations. In addition, there are instructions for confession, morning and evening prayers and grace to be said before meals and a "table of duties" for use in the home. The *Large Catechism* is a fuller exposition of these same elements but without the prayers and the table of duties. Both have been of considerable importance for the Lutheran Church's teaching and contemplative traditions and constitute its main confessional books alongside the Augsburg Confessions.

Sanctity and asceticism are theological terms that are familiar in Finnish translation to members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland on the basis of the summary of the Christian faith included in the previous edition of the Catechism, published in 1948. This summary was a doctrinal supplement to the Catechism itself that had been approved by the Church Assembly and was used for a long time as the basis for teaching in confirmation classes, so that the terms "sanctity" and "asceticism" have rooted themselves firmly in Lutheran Christianity in this country. Sanctity was understood in this earlier doctrinal supplement as one item in the order of salvation, in a similar manner to religious orthodoxy and Pietism, and was discussed in a brief paragraph of its own following on from themes such as awakening, repentance, faith, righteousness, re-birth and the new life. Correspondingly, a paragraph devoted to asceticism, the good fight of faith and the struggle implied by these was included after the section on prayer and confession, describing the Christian life and the life of the Cross as intended to be lived in the shadow of suffering.

The current version of the Catechism, dating from 1999, no longer contains any doctrinal supplement but follows the disposition of Luther's *Small Catechism* exactly from point to point. This catechism is still of prime importance as a theological basis for the teaching provided in confirmation classes.

3. Sanctification as the work of the Holy Spirit

In Luther's catechisms and the catechism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland that is based on them, sanctification does not simply describe one element in the order of salvation but serves as the basic concept that subsumes the whole of the activity of the Holy Spirit. In the *Small Catechism* Luther explains "Sanctification" in his third article of the faith, that dealing with the work of the Holy Spirit, as follows:

> *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true."*

The topic of sanctification also occupies the whole of the third article of the faith in Luther's *Large Catechism*, where he observes that, "This article I cannot relate better than to Sanctification, that through the same the Holy Ghost, with His office, is declared and depicted, namely, that He makes holy," and "…. the Spirit of God alone is called the Holy Ghost, that is, He who has sanctified and still sanctifies us. For as the Father is called Creator, the Son Redeemer, so the Holy Ghost, from His work, must be called Sanctifier, or the One that makes holy."

Sanctification is thus a relatively broad concept that describes the whole process by which God renders a sinful human being holy, employing as his instruments in this process the Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, in accordance with the third article of the faith. It is the Holy Spirit that brings the individual into contact with the Church and enables that person to partake in Christ's act of salvation through the mediation of the word of God. It is the spirit that implants faith and conducts each one who hears that word into the presence of Christ. In Luther's words, sanctification implies "bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves."

The concept of sanctification as it appears in the Catechism is thus markedly God-centred. It is not something that we do for ourselves, but rather it is the sanctifying work of God's Spirit. But even though sanctification is described pneumatologically, it is inseparable from Christology. The Spirit does not function independently of Christ and his work, for sanctification is precisely "bringing to Christ", or "bringing into communion with Christ".

At this point Luther is moving close to the idea of a belief in the presence of Christ in our lives (*in ipsa fide Christus adest*), which has been pointed out earlier as a point of intersection between the Lutheran doctrine of justification and the

Orthodox concept of deification. A belief in the presence of Christ is at the same time both a token of righteousness before God and the mark of a new life. Thus Luther does not make any distinction between justification and sanctification as some later interpreters of Lutheranism have done. Justification is not simply an imputative belonging to the host of the righteous in the courts of heaven which follows upon the receiving of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying new life and potential for good deeds, but rather Luther's concept of faith includes an emphasis on the presence of Christ which in itself implies righteousness and a new life.

Luther does not describe salvation in his catechisms as an act of justification but of sanctification, although this involves the same work on God's part. The Holy Spirit brings a sinful individual to Christ, and through communion with Christ that person is able to participate in salvation, the forgiveness of sins and a new life in sanctity.

Nevertheless, even though a person may partake in the sanctity of Christ, he or she will still remain a sinner.

> *"For although the grace of God is secured through Christ, and sanctification is wrought by the Holy Ghost through the word of God in the unity of the Christian Church, yet on account of our flesh which we bear about with us we are never without sin"* (Large Catechism).

Expressed in terms of the doctrine of justification, a believer is at once both righteous and sinful (*simul iustus et peccator*). The "new man" that came about through sanctification is entirely righteous (totus iustus) but in himself he is at the same time (*simul*) entirely a sinner (*totus peccator*). It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit is constantly engaged in the work of sanctification: "Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the grace of the Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us" (Large Catechism).

The continuous work of the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and develops holiness and its fruits. Thus sanctification means for Luther the accomplishment of a complete change in us, so that the "old man" gives way to the "new man" a little more day by day: "But what is the old man? It is that which is born in us from Adam, angry, hateful, envious, unchaste, stingy, lazy, haughty, yea, unbelieving, infected with all vices, and having by nature nothing good in it. Now, when we are come into the kingdom of Christ, these things must daily decrease, that the longer we live we become more gentle, more patient, more meek, and ever withdraw more and more from unbelief, avarice, hatred, envy, haughtiness" (Large Catechism: Holy Baptism).

We human beings cannot rid ourselves entirely of sin during this earthly life, so that we remain "half pure and holy". It is only at the moment of death that

the Holy Spirit will "accomplish it altogether in an instant" whereupon we shall become "perfectly pure and holy, fully of godliness and righteousness" (Large Catechism: Article III). This notion of half-holiness corresponds to the partial aspect of Luther's doctrine of justification: a human being is inevitably at the same time partially righteous and partially sinful (*simul partim iustus et partim peccator*).

4. The struggle for sanctity as collaboration between God and man

The asceticism of human life means that Christians constantly have to be examining the sanctification brought about by the Holy Spirit from the viewpoint of their own lives. In the words of Luther's Catechisms, the Christian life is a continuous contest between the "old man" and the "new man" that is grounded in the notion of Holy Baptism:

> *"But the act or ceremony is this, that we are sunk under the water, which passes over us, and afterwards are drawn out again. These two parts, to be sunk under the water and drawn out again, signify the power and operation of Baptism, which is nothing else than putting to death the old Adam, and after that the resurrection of the new man, both of which must take place in us all our lives, so that a truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever to be continued. For this must be practised without ceasing, that we ever keep purging away whatever is of the old Adam, and that that which belongs to the new man come forth" (*Large Catechism: Holy Baptism*).*

In Luther's understanding baptism is not just one event that took place in the past, but it is something that we can make use of throughout our lives. This implies daily repentance and mending of our ways: "It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (Small Catechism).

Even repentance and a new beginning are not in the last resort our own deeds, however, for "if you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it. For therein are given grace, the Spirit, and power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and become strong" (Large catechism: Holy Baptism).

The Holy Spirit gives rise to faith through the medium of baptism and the word, and Christ, who is present in faith, fights against sin in us and helps us to throw off the "old man", which in turn means that we live better lives. It also means that through repentance and prayer the believer is participating in the work of God. In this sense we may speak of the struggle that forms part of human life as collaborative work involving God and man.

Luther casts some light on this collaborative work in his Sermon on Two Kinds of Justification (*Sermo de duplici iustitia*) of 1519 (WA 2, 143–152). The first kind (*iustitia prima*) is external justification that is bestowed upon us (*iustitia aliena, infusa*). It is external because the natural human power of decision vis-à-vis God has been abominated in the Fall. As a consequence God bestows his justification on us through his word and the sacraments, and the Holy Spirit instils a faith in us in which Christ himself is present. It is the Christ who is present in our faith who is our first justification. Thus as far as this external justification is concerned we are wholly and perfectly justified (*totus iustus*), even though in ourselves, as the "old man", we continue to be utterly sinful (*totus peccator*).

The second kind of justification (*iustitia secunda*) is connected with the first and is our own justification that comes about within us (*iustitia propria*). The Christ who is present in our faith is active within us and gives rise directly to justification. As this is happening all the time in those who believe in him, it represents the beginnings of a justification that we find in ourselves, which is constantly growing but is unable to become perfect (*totus*) during our lifetime because of the residue of sin within us, so that it remains partial (*partim*).

The deeds arising from the second kind of justification, according to Luther, include not only love for one's neighbour but also deeds associated with our own relationship to God, such as mortification of the flesh, humility and the fear of God. Luther teaches that this second form of justification is not merely a fruit of the first but that it also complements it or renders it perfect (*perficit*). When the presence of Christ takes effect within us and Christ enters our struggle against the evil powers of the "old man", then this second form of justification, that of the person himself, joins in the campaign through the medium of mortification of the flesh, humility and the fear of God. As Luther puts it, "The second justification is our own righteousness, not that we should have brought it about, but rather on account of the fact that we are able to do so when acting in conjunction with the first, external form of righteousness" (WA 2, 146, 36–37, English rendering based on the Finnish translation cited by Eero Huovinen in his *Elävä dogma*. Helsinki 1987, 57).

The deeds that arise from this second justification are not grounded in our own free will, however, but rather they are achieved under the influence of the first justification, that brought about by Christ's presence within us. Thus they are bound up with Christ's righteousness and his example to us. Our own righteousness is nevertheless growing in the likeness of Christ day by day, or in the words of Luther's sermon on Phil. 2:5-–7, "it takes the form of a slave" (*forma servi*).

Luther's teachings on the two kinds of justification, or righteousness, can help us to understand the description of the "synergy" between the Holy Spirit and the Christian in the "good fight" of faith. The Holy Spirit sows the seed of faith at Holy Baptism, enabling us to partake in Christ and have the first justification bestowed upon us. Baptism is not just a one-off event confined to the past,

however, but instead we return to it in our everyday repentance and determination to live better lives. The "old man" is drowned in the baptismal water daily and the "new man" rises up in his place. Repentance and the determination to make amends, the mortification of the flesh, is a product of that second form of justification, the righteousness of the Christian himself that takes on the very form of Christ, partaking in his Cross and his Resurrection.

5. The word of God and the sacraments as a starting point for the ascetic life

In terms of Luther's explanation of the third article of the faith, the Holy Spirit carries out his work "through the medium of the Gospel". One distinctive feature of Luther's spirituality is the powerful emphasis he places on the significance of the word of God. The Holy Spirit functions specifically through the word, which is external to himself. It is precisely for this reason that reading the Bible and deliberating on it is the starting point for everything that belongs to our life of prayer. When he speaks of the word of God in this connection he has in mind both the Bible and the Catechism, as the latter is "a short summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scriptures" (Large Catechism).

The connection between the Bible and the Catechism must be understood through their content. The Catechism is built up from the biblical texts used by Christians in their worship in church, at home and in their private prayers, and the three main sections of it, dealing with the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, provide a summary of the whole Christian "doctrine and life, wisdom and knowledge" (Large Catechism) that is contained in the Bible. It is also necessary to know the Bible's teachings on Baptism and the sacrament of Holy Communion, as the whole Christian life fits within this sacramental span. This teaching becomes evident above all in the words used by Christ when instituting the sacrament, words that are explained in the Catechism.

The sacraments mark the climax of the external word, for it is in them that the word of God is linked physically to the material elements that are to receive it and gains substance in them. In the case of Baptism the object of our belief is the name and word of God combined with the water, while in the Holy Communion it is the promise attached to the bread and wine, that it is "given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins" (Small Catechism). The biblical nature of the Catechisms does not concern only the external fact that their wording is grounded in the Bible, for above all it is a question of their theological content. The Catechism takes its whole structure from its Trinitarian and Christological point of departure.

Departing from the Medieval tradition, Luther had a fixed order in which he would present his account of the main elements in the Christian faith: first the Ten Commandments, then the Creed and finally the Lord's Prayer. Similarly, he

was accustomed to dividing the Creed into three parts rather than the twelve or fourteen parts recognised earlier. The result is a Trinitarian disposition, in which the Ten Commandments and the first article of the Creed speak of God the Father as the creator, the third article, the Lord's Prayer, the sacraments and the remaining material speak of God and the sanctifier, the Holy Spirit, and between these two comes God the Redeemer, in the person of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the same time the Catechism open up the word of God on a horizon that comprehends both the law and the gospel. The Ten Commandments tell us what God demands of us, and the Creed tells us of what God has given us. In the First Commandment God demands that we should believe in him, which is a precondition for fulfilling all the other commandments, and it is that same belief that he gives us through the medium of the Creed. Meanwhile, the Lord's Prayer forms part of the spiritual life that arises out of belief.

It is through the Trinitarian element that is based on the Creed that the whole nucleus of the Catechism emerges:

> *"Behold, here you have the entire divine essence, will, and work depicted most exquisitely in quite short and yet rich words, … Here in all three articles He has Himself revealed and opened the deepest abyss of his paternal heart and of His pure unutterable love. … God gives Himself entire to us, with all that He has and is able to do, to aid and direct us in keeping the Ten Commandments"* (Large Catechism).

Thus the catechism serves to reveal the content of God's revelation of himself, his pure love in giving himself and all his gifts to mankind in faith. It is precisely this crystallization of the doctrine of righteousness that makes the Catechism into a true summary of the Bible, a "children's Bible" or "layman's Bible".

6. The Christian life as a battle against the forces of evil

The view adopted in Luther's Catechism regarding the spiritual life is that it is a constant battle against the forces of evil, and in the last resort against "the daily and unabated attacks and lurking of the devil, the master of a thousand arts" (Large Catechism), who is active in the world and in the flesh and wicked thoughts of men.

> *"For let me tell you this, even though you know it perfectly and be already master in all things, still you are daily in the dominion of the devil, who ceases neither day nor night to steal unawares upon you, to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts…"* (Large Catechism).

We are unable by ourselves or through our own efforts to oppose this incessant work of the Devil, for we are far too weak to resist him. It is for that reason that we need to read and deliberate over the word of God:

> *"Besides, it is an exceedingly effectual help against the devil, the world, and the flesh and all evil thoughts to be occupied with the Word of God, and to speak of it, and meditate upon it, so that the First Psalm declares those blessed who meditate upon the Law of God day and night. Undoubtedly, you will not start a stronger incense or other fumigation against the devil than by being engaged upon God's commandments and words, and speaking, singing, or thinking of them. For this is indeed the true holy water and holy sign from which he flees, and by which he may be driven away. Now, for this reason alone you ought gladly to read, speak, think and treat of these things, if you had no other profit and fruit from them than that by doing so you can drive away the devil and evil thoughts. For he cannot hear or endure God's Word"* (Large Catechism).

It is precisely on account of this power to drive away the Devil that the reading of the Catechism, deliberations over it and its texts, the discussion of them and the singing of them provide a starting point for the practise of prayer. Luther's spirituality sets out from external practise of the word, for it is out of this that prayer arises, the prayer through which one may receive God's help in the fight against the devil.

The external word is not merely a message or pronouncement from a distant God that is registered by the human reason, but rather the word moves and influences deeply at the level of the emotions and the will all those who read it and ponder over it. In the last resort it is a question of the presence of the Holy Spirit:

> *"The Holy Ghost is present in such reading and repetition and meditation, and bestows ever new and more light and devoutness, so that it is daily relished and appreciated better"* (Large Catechism).

When the Holy Spirit is at work in the human heart through the medium of reading and meditation, the external word becomes internalized. This is evidence that it is not a neutral, empty message:

> *"God's word is not like some other silly prattle, as that about Dietrich of Berne, etc., but as St. Paul says* (Rom. 1:16)*, the power of God"* (Large Catechism).

Luther also mentions the active work of the Holy Spirit when speaking of *akedia,* or spiritual lethargy. Lethargy and boredom cause us to adopt a detached, scornful attitude towards the Catechism. We become lazy and uninterested in prayer and

meditation, with a cold heart and a lack of enthusiasm. The only cure for this is diligent attention to the word of God:

> *"Therefore you must always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears. But where the heart is idle, and the Word does not sound, he breaks in and has done the damage before we are aware. On the other hand, such is the efficacy of the Word, whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, that it is bound never to be without fruit, but always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devoutness, and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts. For these words are not inoperative or dead, but creative, living words"* (Large Catechism).

The potent word of God can purge our hearts of evil thoughts and stimulate a delight in meditation and prayer and an enthusiasm for these things. Those who are bored and satiated are inspired with a thirst for enquiry:

> *"…and then only, as hungry and thirsty ones, will they truly relish that which now they cannot endure, because of great abundance and satiety"* (Large Catechism).

The word of God will so enlighten their hearts that they will be moved "to pray with pleasure and delight" (Large Catechism).

7. Everyday life as an arena for ascetic practises

This warming of the heart need not be restricted to the practise of prayer, however, but may apply to life itself. This becomes clear when considering the commandments, for instance:

> *"For where this is considered and laid to heart that these things are not human trifles, but the commandments of the Divine Majesty, who insists upon them with such earnestness, is angry with, and punishes those who despise them, and, on the other hand, abundantly rewards those who keep them, there will be a spontaneous impulse and a desire gladly to do the will of God"* (Large Catechism).

The same is repeated in the explanation to the first article of the faith in the Creed:

> *"We ought, therefore, daily to practise this article, impress it upon our mind, and to remember it in all that meets our eyes, and in all good that falls to our lot, and wherever we escape from calamity or danger, that it is God who gives and does all these things, that therein we sense and see His Paternal heart*

> *and his transcendent love toward us. Thereby the heart would be warmed and kindled to be thankful, and to employ all such good things to the honour and praise of God"* (Large Catechism).

The proper place for making use of the catechism is not in communication between the book and its reader but in the relationship between those who meditate and practical situations in their everyday lives. It is for this reason that the words of the Catechism are intended to be learned by heart, for they can then be recalled in the midst of daily life. The same idea of keeping the words of the Catechism to hand also arises in connection with the commandments:

> *"It is not in vain that it is commanded in the Old Testament to write the Ten Commandments on all walls and corners, yes, even on the garments, not for the sake of merely having them written in these places and making a show of them, as did the Jews, but that we might have our eyes constantly fixed upon them, and have them always in our memory, and that we might practise them in all our actions and ways, and each one make them his daily exercise in all cases, in every business and transaction, as though they were written in every place wherever he would look, yea, wherever he walks or stands. Thus there would be occasion enough, both at home in our own house and abroad with our neighbours, to practise the Ten Commandments, that no one need run far from them"* (Large Catechism).

Thus spiritual practises are in the end to be directed towards everyday life. Morning and evening prayers and grace before meals clearly reinforce this impression: morning prayers send us on our way to work, evening prayers to rest and grace to the sharing of a communal meal.

This implies, of course, that the Catechisms are not intended to apply to a contemplative life of the kind that would involve withdrawal from the world. In accordance with the first article of the Creed, the acts of listening to the word of God, deliberating on it and praying to him are targeted at everyday life as God created it, with its labour, its joys and its sorrows. This is emphasized in Luther's criticism of monastic life:

> *"Should not the heart, then, leap and melt for joy when going to work and doing what is commanded, saying: Lo, this is better than all holiness of the Carthusians, even though they kill themselves fasting and praying upon their knees without ceasing? For here you have a sure text and a divine testimony that He has enjoined this; but concerning the other He did not command a word. But this is the plight and miserable blindness of the world that no one believes these things"* (Large Catechism).

> *"If this truth, then, could be impressed upon the poor people, a servant-girl would leap and praise and thank God; and with her tidy work for which she receives support and wages she would acquire such a treasure as all that are esteemed the greatest saints have not obtained. Is it not an excellent boast to know and say that, if you perform your daily domestic task, this is better than all the sanctity and ascetic life of monks?"* (Large Catechism).

The aim of spirituality is "to direct our whole life and being according to God's word" (Large Catechism):

> *"At whatever hour, then, God's word is taught, preached, heard, read or meditated upon, there the person, day, and work are sanctified thereby, not because of the external work, but because of the word, which makes saints of us all. Therefore I constantly say that all our life and work must be ordered according to God's word, if it is to be God-pleasing or holy"* (Large Catechism).

8. Distinctive features of Lutheran spirituality

Bearing these observations from Luther's catechisms in mind, we can now trace certain distinctive features of Lutheran spirituality:

1. Lutheran spirituality is God-centred. The spiritual life is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit among men. The background to this assertion lies in the doctrine of justification: God gave himself entirely to sinful men and united them with Christ in faith through the Holy Spirit. Our own faith and efforts in the Christian life arise from this work and gift of the Holy Spirit.
2. The point of departure for prayer is the external word. We do not seek our inspiration to pray from our innermost being, nor from religious experiences. God's word is a living word which warms the heart and gives rise to belief. The activity of the Holy Spirit through the medium of the word illuminates the external word and transforms it into an internalized word.
3. The spiritual life has a distinct content of its own, which is communicated to those who are prayerful through the biblical and ecumenical texts contained in the catechisms, which reveal the Trinitarian and Christological nature of the faith. Constant use of a catechism will ensure that a Christian remains close to the sources of the faith.
4. The daily struggle with the world, the flesh and the Devil against a background of Baptism and the sacrament of Holy Communion is one part of the spiritual life. It is a matter of drowning the Devil-infested "old man" in the baptismal water and seeing the emergence of the "new man" through

the supremacy of Christ. Continual forgiveness of sins through confession and Holy Communion will protect the pilgrim from the stain of sin.

5. Spirituality is targeted at everyday life. Ordinary life and its work are the environments in which God has placed man in his act of Creation. Prayer and meditation should be directed towards a life in those surroundings in accordance with God's will.

Sanctification and asceticism

Sanctification and asceticism – this is a vast topic that reaches to the profoundest theoretical depths and the most vivid practical realities of theology. It is a topic that emphasizes the comprehensiveness of theology as a way of speaking of divine matters and living them out in real life.

On the source of holiness

The starting point for the theology of the ascetic life may be seen in the view of man as a being created to be good. Holiness is an attribute of God and the ontological source and goal of man, who was created in God's image and likeness. This likeness pervades our whole being and confers on us, by contrast with all other created beings, a particular ability to strive towards holiness.

This pursuit and love of holiness is something characteristic of mankind, because it conforms to the image in which we were originally created. It is natural for us to do good, not evil. Mankind and the world were created to be good, and this goodness applies to the whole entity of man: body, soul and spirit. And this possibility of goodness also applies to man as a material being, so that when we speak of an ascetic life we are not concerned with the subjugation or chastisement of the material body or the perfection of its form but with the eventual returning of everything to God, preparation for its encounter with holiness, with God himself. It has been said that Christianity is a materialistic religion, because it places so much emphasis on the material nature of man and believes in its potential for goodness. Its goal is that the world should really live "in Christ".

Eastern Christianity lays stress on the position of man within creation by referring to him as a microcosmos, a miniature world, for all the levels of created being can be found in man. St. Maximus the Confessor pursues this notion of a microcosmos further by referring to man as a "mediator" who not only reflects the whole structure of the universe, the cosmos, but also takes upon himself the task of uniting the divided and multifarious world in an eventual covenant that will not distort the nature of God's creation but bring it to perfection. This is the task that man was given upon his creation, but which was interrupted on account of his fall from grace. This unification has been made possible and complemented only by Jesus Christ, God made Man. Full unification of the created with the uncreated would never have been possible without the incarnation, in which God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this incarnation was to bring the work of creation to its fulfilment, and it is that same fulfilment that we aspire to in the ascetic life. The "rationale" for asceticism thus lies in the

goodness and potential holiness of all that has been created (mankind, material things and time), not estrangement from holiness.

Theosis, deification

The achievement of holiness is referred to as *theosis*, or deification. Theologians make a distinction between the essence and the energies of God, and deification is human participation in his uncreated energies, in his divine actions, but not confusion with his essence, which is an undefined mystery, the complete distinction of God from all else that exists. As St. Gregory Palamas expressed it, since God remains unattainable in his essence, human communion with him is unlimited, eternal and transcendental. Deification, unification between the divine and the human, does not lead to a merging of essences but to a true union between the Uncreated and the created through his energies.

The attainment of holiness is not an individualistic experience, but rather a constantly advancing process taking place between persons. This arises from the fact that God is a union of persons and holiness in human beings is a reflection of the essential bond that exists between the persons of the Holy Trinity, love.

It is the pursuit of holiness that we refer to as the ascetic life, a joint undertaking involving the body, soul and spirit which is lived out in practice by the members of the Church. Its aim is the achievement of holiness: theosis, deification. Holiness is the experiencing of God as a interpersonal event requiring the participation of a person and a union of persons, for God is a union of persons and deification is participation in that union and emulation of it.

The ascetic life

The ascetic life is a matter of a person's recovery from the sickness of sin and return to communion with God. The emphasis is on the active and dynamic aspects of love, on responding to God's call, on a created being who is a reflection of God's love attempting to move closer to God.

The term ascetic life is frequently used as a synonym for the monastic life, and the whole notion of striving towards God is linked with the monastic tradition, as it should indeed be, since we know from the history of the Church that the first ascetics were people who withdrew from the world to live a contemplative life in the wilderness. But such acts of withdrawal proved to be paradoxical, for holiness is attractive, and it was not long before people were coming to the wildness to consult these ascetics. This teaches us at least that people are drawn to holiness and other people's experiences of it. People thirst for holiness, because it is something that is characteristic of them.

In the teachings of the Holy Fathers, e.g. those of St. Simeon the New Theologian, the encountering of God is a conscious, personal mystical experience.

Many of the Church Fathers speak of seeing God, a long, drawn-out process that is the fruit of ascetic devotions and purity of heart. One feature of asceticism in the history of the eastern monasteries is hesychasm, the practise of unceasing prayer, tears and the resulting experience of seeing the divine light and being illuminated by it until, in a state of holiness and entirely absorbed in prayer, the ascetic comes to shine with that same divine light. The person's whole being is sanctified, and for this reason the process leading to the seeing of the light must take place in the whole being. Spiritual guidance is essential in this in order to avoid losing one's way, something that is true of asceticism both in a monastic context and in "ordinary" life.

The monastic tradition of asceticism as a goal and way of life may seem remote from the world in which the majority of people live and its everyday reality, but the same ideals apply to every Christian and we all have the same calling – to live our everyday lives in accordance with our own beliefs and spirituality. The ascetic path, in the world as in a monastery, begins with repentance, an awareness and consciousness of one's own state, and the goal is the same, the fullness of unification with God, in which every human being can shine with the light of Christ in his own life and calling. Wildernesses and monasteries are places for the very few, but all of us have the opportunity to find a wilderness in our own hearts. This idea is quite a challenge: everyone has a wilderness in their heart and their task is to conquer that wilderness and thereby become a partaker in the holiness of God in the world.

The ascetic life of monasteries is also of importance to those who live in the world, however, for it is our monasteries that have the specific duty of offering up prayer. Even hermits living in complete isolation are not separated from the rest of the Body of Christ, because they have devoted their lives to prayer on behalf of others. Prayer is not a simple matter, however, and achieving the art of prayer calls for profound spiritual devotion. One of the requirements for salvation, and one of the marks of holiness, is that one should pray for the world and the whole of mankind.

The Eucharist and the extension of holiness to the whole universe

The Church bears witness to the fact that direct experience of God and communion with him is possible. It may be said that in the context of "everyday life" communion with Christ takes place through the sacraments of the Church, with emphasis on their liturgical reality and especially the pivotal role of the Eucharist, for it is in the latter that we partake in a concrete sense in another reality: it is not merely a spiritual occurrence but something that permeates all levels of reality.

The Eucharist, a sacrifice offered up on behalf of the whole world, is the focal point of the Church's activities, so that no part of the ascetic life, or the life of sanctification, can be conceived of other than in relation to the Eucharist. In

the Orthodox way of thinking sanctification and asceticism are always fundamentally liturgical activities that are built up around the Eucharist. It is in this way, through the Eucharist as a communal experience, that we participate in the holiness of Christ. It is in this way that his body illuminates the souls of all those who are receptive to him.

The sanctification that takes place through the Eucharist extends to the whole of creation, for the whole human being as a complex entity becomes in a mystical way united with Christ and with other people. And at the same time as it affects individuals at all levels, transforming and glorifying them and uniting them with each other, it also unites and glorifies the whole world, since it is offered up on behalf of the whole world. In the Eucharist, therefore, the members of the Church, as people and as representatives of the world, are able to partake in the reality of the Kingdom of God.

This way of thinking can easily convey the impression of an unrealistic overspirituality, but it is possible to look at it on a highly concrete level. If we believe that the whole world and the whole universe are called to sanctification, what does that mean in practical terms? This is a particularly topical question to consider at the present moment, given the recognition of human-induced climatic warming as an inescapable fact. Mankind has the possibility and spiritual capacity to perceive holiness in the world. Salvation is a necessity not merely on account of the Fall, but in order that the reality of creation should gain fulfilment in Christ. In this sense Christianity is a religion that truly seeks to "put the world to rights", a religion that recognises the immense value of the created world.

It is also important to distinguish the call to sanctification in the various callings that people have. This is the Church's message to people: that all work can be holy work. People aim at holiness and strive towards it in the conditions under which they live and work. Only a few actually work in the Church, and very few indeed are called to lead a monastic life, and so it is important to remember that, although we may speak in sophisticated theological terms of theosis and Trinitarian participation, it is in the last resort a question of the everyday callings of individual people. This does not make one's calling an everyday matter, but rather it makes every day life potentially a holy matter.

Human beings are entities composed of body and spirit, not distinct elements. Material things have a potential for holiness, simply because everything is by its initial nature good. We are not concerned here with aspirations towards a property that is new and foreign to our essential nature but rather towards a return to our true nature and its fulfilment. Our whole humanity, body and spirit, and the whole of the universe, is at home in the holiness of God.

Rev. Mari Kinnunen

Violence in the family and in personal relations

I will begin this paper by briefly defining what I mean by violence in the family and in personal relations and describing the various aspects of violence in the family. I will then go on to consider the possibilities that the churches have for combating this phenomenon, outlining a few potential joint ecumenical projects in this field, and finally, in the second half of the paper, I will bring forward certain theological viewpoints on the matter.

Violence is an abuse of power

Close personal relations always involve the mutual exercise of power. We can show respect for others, value them and approve of them, or we can scorn them, ignore them or reject them. "Violence in personal relations" would indeed be a convenient umbrella term for all negative manifestations of such power, but this has not yet become established usage. Instead we tend to speak separately of violence in the family, violence between couples, child abuse and violence or abuse directed at the elderly. At the same time the violence or harassment can be physical in nature, psychological, religious, sexual, economic, or material, i.e. directed at an individual's personal property, and may include not only violent acts but also neglect or maltreatment. Likewise, the victim of the violence can be anybody at all and the perpetrator can be the spouse or ex-spouse of that victim, a person going out with the victim, a child, another family member or relative, or a friend, acquaintance or workmate, for instance. For the present purposes, however, I will concentrate on violence in the family and its various forms and leave such matters as violence in the workplace on one side. Violence in the family and in close personal relations can be found in all social classes and in all cultures, and thus it can also involve members of the church, even members of church committees and church employees.

Violence in the family is a crime for which the perpetrator is responsible

With certain exceptions made for the police and armed forces, our social order defines resorting to violence as a crime, and physical violence used in the home is always a crime that comes under the jurisdiction of the public prosecutor and can easily involve other crimes as well, such as malicious damage, violation of domiciliary peace, deprivation of liberty, illegal assumption of the custody of a child, use of unlawful threats or rape, and the responsibility in such cases always lies with the perpetrator of the violence, as this is an unlawful assault which no

one has deserved or justified having received. In many cases this violence is also repeated or protracted and tends to become worse in time, and it may carry with it a great deal of shame, concealment and secrecy.

The most common form is violence towards women

Violence in the family is very common in Finland, accounting for almost 21% of the emergency calls to the police from private homes in 2006, and as many as 17 women on average died per year in 2000–2004 as a result of violence between couples who were married or cohabiting. It has also been estimated that at least 17% of Finnish children have had to witness violence in their home.

The majority of violence in the family is wrought by men on women, so that according to the Statistics Finland report *Usko, toivo, hakkaus* (Faith, hope and brutality) published in 1997, a fifth of all Finnish women living in a relationship with a man had experienced violence or the threat of violence from their current partner. A following-up to that research carried out in 2005 and published in December 2006, indicated that the situation had remained much the same.

The outcome of this violence for the individual is a feeling of shame and guilt, while other frequently reported emotions are violation, subjugation and humiliation, and also anger and rage. A psychological reaction in the form of shock is liable to set in at once or within a few days, while long-term violence can lead to a reaction of the kind known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can progress in turn to depression and even suicide. It is also obvious that the use of violence will distort the family dynamics and envelop the family in an atmosphere of fear and secrecy.

Religious harassment

As we are gathered here as representatives of the churches to discuss questions of violence, it is reasonable to put forward a separate definition of religious harassment: that it is psychological harassment that has a religious dimension, taking the form of scaring tactics, attempts at forcible conversion, pressure to experience guilt, isolation and/or excessive control in order to suppress individuals' opinions or their attitudes towards life or their own way of life. This religious harassment can also occur within families. Parents may prevent their children from pursuing a natural course of religious development by imposing too strict a religious education, thus detracting from their ability to fall back on religion as a source of strength for living their lives, but harassment may also take place between adults within a family, usually in connection with the exercise of authority or power. It is important for all religious educators, teachers and providers of pastoral care to be aware of the dangers of resorting to religious harassment.

Child abuse

Child abuse is an area that has remained a surprisingly tightly guarded secret and has been studied very little. The corporal punishment of children has been a crime in Finland since 1984, but as we will remember from last autumn's news broadcasts, there is still a great deal of work to be done in shaping people's opinions in this sphere, as a third of the adult population were in favour of smacking children and a high proportion of the people guilty of this are women.

Most of us were probably brought up on a well-meaning mixture of punishment and embarrassment, so that we may well regard the "threats, bribes and extortion" method of upbringing as right and proper. But if we are to take the rights of children seriously we are obliged to re-think this policy on various grounds, including theological ones. Children are fragile creatures in this sense, as it is only as they grow up that they learn to value and protect themselves and to understand their own human dignity and equality with respect to others. Theologically, of course, children are already images of God; they are not in the process of growing towards this. It is the duty of adults to understand that children are complete beings that are entitled to equality and human dignity. Adults have a duty to protect children and educate them to protect and value themselves and others; in other words, to grow into adulthood. Educators exercise a vast amount of power and they must attempt to make themselves aware of this fact; otherwise there is a danger that they will abuse this power by resorting to violence.

Sometimes there is a danger of confusing compulsion with violence. Compulsion in the context of bringing up children differs from violence and punishment in that it is not intended to cause the children pain or to punish them. It is a matter of compulsion to prevent children from running out into the road by grabbing them in your arms no matter how they may resist. There will always be instances in which you have to use compulsion with children, but it is important for adults to realize where the borderline between it and violence lies. The protection of life sometimes necessitates acts of compulsion in which the freedom of the individual is restricted, but the purpose of setting limits is not to punish the child, nor to deliberately cause pain or embarrassment. There is no such thing as perfect parenthood, but it is possible for us to achieve sufficiently good parenthood. It merely calls for the courage and honesty to accept our own corrupt nature, admit our faults and learn to break out of the spiral of violence, as the most dangerous thing about it is that it arouses more violence.

Even being a witness to violence can be disastrous for a child. It is very common for couples to maintain in consultations with a family counsellor that their children know nothing of the violence that takes place between them because they are asleep or away from home at the time, but when we ask the children themselves, or hear adults telling of their own childhood, it becomes clear that children usually hear or know a great deal about what is going on. The Federation of Mother-and-Child Homes and Shelters has come to the conclusion in

its own research that 80% of the children living in homes where violence occurs have witnessed that violence and that the experience is almost without exception a traumatic one and warrants treatment.

Violence inflicted on the elderly

One further significant form of violence that can occur in families is that perpetrated on elderly people, by a spouse, a grown-up child, or a friend, acquaintance or nurse. This, too, can be physical, psychological, religious, sexual or economic in nature or directed at appropriation of the person's property, and may also involve maltreatment or neglect.

Possibilities for the churches to combat violence in the family or in personal relations

Stop covering it up!

Perhaps the most important thing that the churches can do to combat violence in the family and in personal relations is to teach people to break free from the culture of silence. Research into these forms of violence has shown that it is essential to have the courage to ask what is going on, to speak out on the subject. Otherwise we will never even begin to break down the great walls of secrecy that surround violence in the family. But without sufficient training in these matters people will not usually venture to ask. It may also be difficult to recognise the signs of violence unless you know what to look for and listen for. And in the last resort, people may lack the courage to ask about such things because they do not know what steps to take if their suspicions prove to be true.

Keeping silent is not without its dangers, however, for it is known that violence is liable to repeat itself and to become progressively worse. Tensions increase within the relationship, assaults take place and are followed by a stage of pleading for forgiveness and granting of forgiveness, but this doesn't really change anything and the spiral continues at a new, heightened level of tension and will frequently accelerate as time goes on. If we remain silent about all this we will simply allow the vicious circle to continue, which will usually make the consequences of the violence worse. As far as the violence itself is concerned, silence will be taken as an expression of support and not by any means of impartiality.

Training and perceptiveness are required for talking about violence

The churches and their parish workers possess a broad interface with people's daily lives through the various activities that go on in the parishes. They meet

up with children, young people and elderly people, and with parents, frequently through the children and young people. The churches' charity work involves contacts with people who are in difficulties, although they do not always manage to speak about the occurrence of violence in the family even after seeking help unless the counsellor brings the matter up. And this is something that calls for training, perceptiveness and the gathering of evidence.

It is possible to learn the best ways of helping in such situations, and there is a large amount of ready-made material available in various branches of society. Following a decision taken at the 1998 General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, a "Decade to Overcome Violence, Churches seeking Reconciliation and Peace" was launched for the period 2000–2010, in connection with which the Lutheran Church of Finland has announced a corresponding project entitled "From Violence to Reconciliation". This has taken as it main focus for the years 2006 and 2007 violence in the family and in other personal relationships and has co-ordinated an ecumenical week of "non-violence", the motto for which, "Don't remain silent!", reminds us that by not speaking out against violence we are in fact supporting a culture that condones it. The campaign is being run by a joint network of people involved in projects designed to oppose and prevent violence, including experts, authorities and representatives of various churches and religious organizations. Similarly, the Lutheran Church's office for family affairs, its individual negotiation centres for family affairs and its committee for work among women have all attempted over the years to break down the wall of silence on this topic, and other confessions must have had projects of their own about which the present author has no knowledge. I am nevertheless of the opinion that we now need a better awareness of broad-based parish work that extends over all confessions.

It is not necessary for the churches and their parish workers and volunteers to reach out everywhere and do everything. Experiences have shown that the work of combating violence in the family can be effective only when the organizations concerned can function in conjunction with the authorities, as it is important for the actual treatment and care to be in the hands of professionals. Cooperation between professionals in different fields should be encouraged in all possible ways within the churches. As was noted in the communiqué issued at the end of the corresponding discussions to these in 2001, "the churches are not in a position to provide detailed instructions or advice on all the problems affecting society but, setting out from their own principles, they should provide support for those responsible and those with the necessary expertise, many of whom are in any case church members."

Local ecumenical training in the detection of violence in the family

The churches and their parishes are nevertheless obliged to be involved in such multi-professional networks, even though very few parishes have been participating in the programme for the prevention of violence in the family and in close personal relations run by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health over the period 2004–2007. Some attention has also been paid recently to the fact that, in spite of the extensive contacts that the churches have with children and young people, remarkably few applications for children to be taken into care, e.g. in cases of violence in the family, are made by church workers. This presumably is at least in part a question of the same reluctance to speak out. In addition to the arranging of training and the acquisition of information, it is important that the churches and their parishes should draw up clear and sufficiently straightforward instructions on how to act in such cases. The answer to the question of what the churches can do regarding violence in the family lies to a great extent in the arranging of training and the motivating of its workers and volunteers to attend such courses. The training itself should consist of means of recognising the phenomenon and its signs, the recognition of trauma states resulting from it, means of raising the matter in discussions with families and of ensuring the safety of persons subjected to such violence, the provisions made in the relevant legislation, measures that can be taken, information on cooperation with other instances and recognition of one's own personal barriers and prejudices in these matters. I believe that training of this kind would be a natural form of ecumenical collaboration to set in motion at the local level. After all, cuts, bruises and psychological traumas are very much the same regardless of one's religious persuasion.

International ecumenical cooperation

The work of international church organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in matters of violence in the family came to the fore especially forcibly in the course of the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in 1988–1998, one consequence of which may be the appearance of this topic on our agenda today. At least at the end of the decade and to some extent during it, the member churches were approached through various letters and appeals in order to increase awareness of these problems both at home and internationally. Both the Orthodox Church of Finland and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland are WCC and CEC members, and one distinct outcome of the work done during the decade was the realization that it was necessary for the churches and for society at large to intervene in instances of violence in the home and of violence inflicted on women. The churches can no longer remain silent on the subject of violence, let alone condone it.

Very many churches took violence in the family as one of their themes when the new "Decade to overcome Violence" began in the year 2000, and this was true in Finland, too, so that a reasonable body of material and information is beginning to gather on the topic. The book *Streams of Grace* published in connection with the 9th General Assembly of the WCC at Porto Alegre in 2006 introduces some of this material, and violence in the home was also one of the official themes of the meeting.

All this emphasizes the fact that we are speaking here of a problem of global magnitude. In the light of the AIDS pandemic in Africa, the churches' teachings with regard to marriage, interpersonal relations, sexuality and the condemnation of violence take on a new, far greater importance. It was pointed out at the 16th International Conference on AIDS in Toronto in 2006 that inequality between men and women and sexist attitudes were among the main reasons for the spread of AIDS, and inequality and warped attitudes are to be seen at the local level, too, especially in the form of a tacit acceptance of violence in the family and the sexual violence that frequently accompanies it. Unfortunately this applies to the teachings of the churches as well. We as churches have both a local and a global responsibility in this matter, and opposition to violence in the family and in personal relationships must be a part of the churches' ecumenical activities both at home and internationally.

A national, ecumenical set of instructions

One of the most recent books produced by a church on the subject of violence in the family is that published by the Anglican Church in Britain entitled "Responding to domestic abuse – Guidelines for those with pastoral responsibilities". This provides background information, theological and sociological viewpoints and clear practical guidance, and it should be said at once that a set of up-to-date informative instructions of this kind would be exceptionally welcome in Finland as well, especially if accompanied by practical training and an opportunity to study the available material. And it would be a wonderful thing if such a book could be produced on an ecumenical basis. Perhaps our theological discussions could provide the necessary initiative for this.

The theological frame of reference

When I appealed earlier for a better awareness of broad-based parish work that extends over all confessions I was naturally thinking of pastoral and diaconal work, but not exclusively of that. We should also try to be more perceptive in what we proclaim, in our theological teaching.

What do we teach in our churches with regard to violence in the home? What is the theological frame of reference that we adopt when speaking of these

things? What sort of question is violence in the home for us as representatives of the churches? I believe that I have succeeded in what I have said so far in demonstrating that violence of this kind is not a marginal phenomenon and that innumerable people suffer as a consequence of it. Thus it cannot be a marginal phenomenon as far as the life of our churches is concerned. But does it belong to the hard core of our church life and teaching or somewhere on the outer rim, as a less important part of it? Are we prepared to see the agony of those who suffer because of it and to give them our support and speak out on behalf of them? Do we really wish to condemn violence in the home? And do we find a basis for doing so in the Bible? What do we as present-day churches that have grown up on ancient traditions teach about equality?

I must admit that this has proved the most challenging part of my paper, a subject that might well one day be the topic of a whole doctoral thesis. But as we can't wait for that, I intend to put forward some views that arise out of my own Lutheran and ecumenical frame of reference and wait expectantly for dialogue with the Orthodox participants.

Putting an end to the theological silence

The first and greatest challenge lies in the fact that we do not teach, preach or write anything about violence in the family or in personal relations. We maintain a stolid silence in our Sunday services, in our Bible-reading circles, in our sermons, in our writings and even in our confirmation classes, although the latter would appear to be the most natural of all places to take the issue up. I myself realized at Porto Alegre, when I was following a South African Bible Study class on rape that I had never tried to preach or hold a Bible class on the theme of violence in the home. The South Africans had taken their starting-point from the account of the rape of David's daughter Tamar in the second book of Samuel and succeeded on the basis of that difficult passage not only in speaking openly about rape but also in bringing the figure of Tamar before our eyes as an encouraging example. She was indeed raped, but she didn't try to conceal the matter but showed with her words and her grief that she had been wronged, and finally achieved some measure of recompense. The motto "Don't remain silent" is a fitting one for those responsible for the churches' teaching as well. Opposition to violence in the family should not be in any way difficult within a Christian frame of reference. The golden rule of general humane behaviour together with Christ's command to "love thy neighbour" and the Ten Commandments, particularly the Fifth Commandment, will provide a firm basis for condemning the use of violence in close human relationships. Luther's commentary on the Fifth Commandment runs as follows: "We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbour in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need." This interpretation unambiguously precludes any use of violence.

In the Lutheran understanding both the punishment of evil and the defence of human life are matters for the authorities. There have to be sanctions that apply to violence in the home, and it is important from the point of view of achieving justice that violence is not concealed. It is also evident and understandable that violence should infringe the victim's human dignity, and in doing that it is also offending the dignity of someone created in the image of God.

A challenge!

In my opinion the theological challenge lies not so much in condemning violence as in the exposing of ways of thinking that condone violence, or even justify it, and the elimination of these from our theological teachings and their replacement with points of theological emphasis that clearly bear witness to the wrongful nature of violence.

Interpretations of the Bible and of the patriarchalism of biblical times

The teachings of the Lutheran Church always set out from the Bible. We emphasize its authority and encourage Christians to read God's message in it in their own mother tongue. But the truth is that where violence in the home is concerned there are many difficult passages in the Bible, exhortations to punish or beat people, to commit rape and all kinds of barbarous acts, in addition to which the God of the Old Testament is a god of threats and revenge. And we should not forget, of course, that the very core of the Gospel, the death of Christ for our redemption, is clothed in a framework of cruelty and violence. What can we teach responsibly on the basis of this violence that appears in the Bible?

The Bible is God's revelation of himself set in a historical framework, against a background of the sociocultural setting of its own day and age. There are many matters, such as slavery, polygamy or the prohibition on plaiting one's hair, for instance, on which we can all agree that the words of the Bible do not apply literally to the present day. Sociocultural changes can be perceived within the accounts given in the Bible, and it is obvious that this trend will have continued. Biblical events, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, are described as taking place in a male-centred, hierarchically structured society, whereas the ideal social order for our times is equality and equal rights for all people, referred to as democracy. The long, tortuous process of development from that patriarchal society to our modern democracy has taken hundreds of years to accomplish, and has not yet been fully completed. The Christian proclamation of the equality of all mankind before God is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and St. Paul, and has been one of the principal background factors in the development of our western society. In this sense the roots of our notion of equality, both between men and women and in relation to children, can indeed be found in the Bible,

but there are many texts that require the patriarchal element to be stripped away. We who are living in a different age and a different sociocultural setting need to adapt the guidelines given in the Bible to our own times. But the Bible would not be the sacred book for all Christians if its texts did not live a life of their own as instruments of God's message.

Speaking of God

The Bible, its world and its language have influenced everything that there is in our Christian teaching. Thus something of the sociocultural background of biblical times has inevitably trickled through into what we say about God, into our theology. We speak of God as our heavenly Father, as the Lord, the Creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to mention just the most frequently used epithets. We should nevertheless beware of creating an exclusively masculine or otherwise culturally bound image of God. I would also point out in this connection that I am not talking here of the "inclusive use of language" that has been greatly to the fore in the Ecumenical Movement, at least not in the strictest sense, as I have no desire to remove the masculine expressions from the Church's tradition. I simply wish to emphasize that we should beware of narrowing down Him who in the last resort is not ours to define. We who have been created can never exhaustively define our Creator. God will simply reply to us, "I am what I am". By oversimplifying God we will build up barriers to the Gospel and run the risk of unwittingly providing support for violence in the family, for example. The Bible and the traditions of the Church furnish us with numerous alternatives if we are only prepared to accept them. God is also referred to in the Bible as a Light, a Rock and a Refuge, for instance, and I have learned within the Ecumenical Movement to value the Holy Trinity not only as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit but as the Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Strength. Another subject that could be dwelt upon in greater depth is the influence that our upbringing and psychological development has on the ways in which we address God at different times.

Patriarchalism in the Church's traditions

Our own traditions all require a certain amount of re-thinking on account of the fact that we are living in a post-patriarchal world. We have moved, or at least are moving, away from the male-dominated, hierarchically structured society of earlier times, and we have to take care that the vast body wisdom enshrined in our traditions that has protected and continues to protect the purity of the Gospel can maintain its influence among present-day Christians as well and does not remain a prisoner of the outdated socioculture in which it arose.

Martin Luther introduced a perspective into the development of Lutheran dogma that helped to increase equality in his day, in that he placed especial value

on marriage and the different but equally important roles of the husband and wife in it. Luther regarded God as having set up "three hierarchies against the devil": the home, where the catechism is taught, the church, where the Gospel is proclaimed and the Eucharist distributed, and the secular administration, through which people are protected by the law. But Luther was a product of the patriarchalism of his times, and it was this that led him to emphasize the presence of a hierarchical structure in marriage just as much as in civil society. His aim was to free people from the misguided exercise of spiritual power, from violence and an ecclesiastical hierarchy that retained the right to constrain consciences and employ coercive measures. Equality was not yet part of his world, although with hindsight we can perceive the seeds of equality in his thinking, notions taken from the words of Jesus Christ and St. Paul.

Some scholars are of the opinion that Luther's aims, good and honourable as they were, led in practice to a restriction of the role of women and a strengthening of patriarchalism. Marriage, for instance, became an automatic choice for everyone, so that women – and indeed men, too – lost the alternative way that had previously be open to them through the closure of the convents and monasteries. But then Luther, as a man of his own day and age, presumably could not have conceived of any other world than the male-dominated, hierarchical one, so that he can hardly be accused of strengthening patriarchalism. It is thus our duty as Lutherans of today to try to discover the intentions behind Luther's thinking and adapt our traditions in that light to the demands of our present-day society that is built up on the notions of equality and democracy. We must have the courage to study the teachings of our own traditions from the viewpoint of equality and mutual respect.

Dualism

One very ancient way of thinking has at its core the perception of reality in dualist terms, as a two-way opposition, even to the extent of placing more value on one of the alternatives than on the other. There are many well-established oppositions of this kind: man-woman, reason-emotion, mind-body or man-nature, etc. In each of these examples the first-mentioned is taken as primary and is regarded as capable of exercising control over the second. One consequence of this approach is that people are taught to scorn such things as corporality, particularly a women's body or feelings. There are many traces of such teaching still to be seen even today, and attitudes of this kind have a direct bearing on our view of violence.

Pauliina Kainulainen, a doctor of theology from this city of Joensuu, has appealed in her research and writings for a return to "wisdom theology", noting that many men and women nowadays feel that Christian theology and liturgy are alien to them. The traditional images of God do not connect with their experiences of life or open up any significant viewpoints on it. They see God in a

different way. The early sources of Christianity and the many forms of wisdom theology would in her opinion provide a rich pallet of symbols that would be well worth deploying, but our tradition has always been burdened with a patriarchalist tendency to emphasize the experiences of men. Kainulainen would like to restore the balance between the experiences of men and women, and predicts that the reward for this will take the form of interpretations of the Christian faith that are able to express human perceptions of life in words and open the way to a spirituality that is able to comprehend whole entities. I believe that this could lead to new emphases within theology that could demonstrate quite clearly the evil nature of violence.

A mistaken demand for forgiveness

The atonement and forgiveness made available to us through Christ is the foundation of our Christian faith, and the churches teach that we as individuals have the opportunity to forgive our neighbours and build up new contacts with them, but even in a church context people who resort to violence cannot ask their victims to forgive and forget until they are themselves ready to accept responsibility for their actions and genuinely set out to mend their ways. A verbal plea for forgiveness accompanied by propitiatory gifts following soon after the offence cannot be regarded as signs of a permanent change of heart but are simply acts that form part of the never-ending cycle of violence. It is important to realize that violence in the family or in close personal relations cannot be dismissed with a superficial act of forgiveness. A mistaken demand for forgiveness from the perpetrator may simply shift the responsibility for the event onto the victim! It is evident, for instance, that if the cause of a divorce is violence the person responsible for the break-up of the marriage is not the victim of that violence but the perpetrator of it.

Idealism in the concept of a marriage or family

It is quite common for our Christian teachings to lead us into the trap of idealistic virtue. The life of a Christian entails a struggle against evil and on behalf of good, but this struggle frequently seems to descend into a moralism that simply watches over Christians' sexual behaviour. We live our lives as Christians and, especially as church workers, frequently in the presence of the glossy, idealistic image of a "Christian home". Life in the shadow of a mistaken image can easily lead to the concealment of difficulties, however, including violence in the home. The churches have their opportunities for teaching what makes a good marriage, however, in the discussions with couples prior to the marriage service or the baptism of their children. It is my opinion that a good Christian concept of marriage should set out from the fact that it is a relationship between two people who are equals before the law and in human terms and that both have a right to security,

dignity and respect. The man is not the head of the family, nor is he head over the woman, but rather God's plan as expressed in the Creation is to be fulfilled by both respecting the existence and experiences of the other. I once heard a very apt practical demonstration of the Christian family model from some Christians from the Philippines: it is a custom in Philippine families for the man's washing to be hung on a higher washing line than his wife's, to show the hierarchy that prevails in the family, but the local Christians have taken to hanging the washing lines at the same height as a sign that in a Christian household the husband and wife are equal.

Sinful and righteous

This escape from mistaken idealism can be helped on its way by the Lutheran principle that a Christian is simultaneously both sinful and righteous. The Old Adam and Old Eve are just as truly present in us as the "new man" in Christ. It is important to be honest when confronting our own evil. We all have dark shadows of our own and it is essential for us to examine them. Similarly, we can only try to suppress our own aggressions once we have admitted that they exist. We should attempt as far as possible to recognise and accept all our feelings, for it is only through this awareness that we can make a distinction between feelings and actions.

The example of Jesus Christ

The theological starting point for the ideas put forward in the new publication issued by the Anglican Church referred to above is stated briefly as "Belief in God as love expressed in relationships", implying both our relationship with God and our relationships with other people. The life of Jesus Christ is emphasized as an example and as a model for our relationships with our fellow human beings. It is also pointed out that His sufferings and death and those of the martyrs of the Church at the hands of those who practised violence had their purpose and were undertaken voluntarily. These are conditions which are never met in the case of violence within the family. In other words, the model set by Christ as the "suffering servant" can never be used as a precedent for insisting that someone should put up with acts of violence, although this has sometimes been done in a church context.

The Holy Trinity

At the present moment, however, I am perhaps inclined to be more deeply influenced by the model of the Holy Trinity: the oneness that prevails between the persons of God, as the stream of love that flows between them describes to

me the goal that Christians have in their relations with themselves, with other people and with nature. The problem with this theological perspective is that of giving linguistic expression to it, of transforming it into words. The Trinity is in itself an experience that doesn't easily yield to language; it is easier to encounter it and contemplate it without words. It is the "healing stream", something that is beyond words, that is experiential: an experience of grace, of gaining approval, of being acceptable.

I would like to end this presentation with a prayer from South Africa which is one of those chosen for this year's Ecumenical Week of Prayer:

> *O God, our Refuge and our Redeemer, listen to those who have no voice,*
> *open their mouths to speak*
> *and grant that they may at last experience justice and wholeness, joy and peace.*
> *Open our ears to hear the cries of those who suffer.*
> *Open our mouths to speak on their behalf,*
> *and open our hearts so that we may strive to give others the strength to speak.*
> *Amen.*

Fr Rauno Pietarinen

Violence in the family and in personal relations

Case study

Maria, daughter of an Armenian immigrant family married a professional soldier in her adopted country and moved to live with him in another town. They had four children, two of whom died young. Her husband's brother and his wife lived nearby and had a lot to do with them. Maria was active in the local church, attended its services and took part in its activities in other ways. She looked on all people as equals and gave money to charity.

Her husband's brother and his wife noticed the way she spent money; she was, after all, still a foreigner. Eventually they accused her of disposing illegally of her husband's property and, quite without reason, of unfaithfulness. Maria found herself a prisoner in her own home. One day her husband became angry over an incident in which the others had purposely misinterpreted his wife's words and he attacked her. She injured herself while trying to escape from the house and died two days later. Maria died in an alien country at less than 30 years of age on 16th February in the year 906.

How's the family?

Not very well, I'm afraid. There are divorces, cases of alcoholism, children being taken into care, child abuse and other forms of physical violence and psychological harassment, in addition to which the whole concept of the family has been obscured in a post-modernist fashion. The problems seem to accumulate in certain families, but even so, remarkably many people are affected. And it is not only a question of children and their parents, but also of old people and the handicapped, whose problems have scarcely been spoken of earlier in the manner in which they are spoken of today.

In support of his claim that severe depression will inevitably increase in the future, the American researcher Robert Sapolsky points initially at the lack of social support structures, and then he draws attention to the children: when we adults watch TV news broadcasts about ethnic cleansings, school shootings and the immorality of US presidents our children are sitting beside us all the time. Sapolsky maintains, in fact, that depression is increasing far faster among young people and young adults than in other sectors of the population, which again

points to serious problems in the future. No child is capable of stomaching such information on the evil at work in the world. The least they need is a harmonious childhood in which goodness forms the main content!

Similarly, Sapolsky does not envisage that the number of divorces will decrease. Freedom of movement and the increase in anonymity will also mean rootlessness: few of us will live their whole lives in a small town and surrounded by friends and relatives (see Sapolsky, Robert M.: *Will We Still Be Sad Fifty Years from Now*?, in Brockman, J. (ed.). *The Next Fifty Years*, London, 2003).

Such a view of the future does not bode well. Families are not happy, the numbers of different problems are already bewildering and severe depression is on the increase. The churches are aware that families have too little time together, too little money and too little help with looking after their children, and too little in the way of the skills and knowledge required for bringing up their children, making food and cleaning the house. There is a vast feeling of insufficiency among them, and if they do not have much to do with others who are in a similar predicament – preferably around the sand pit rather than in the pub – they will receive very little peer support. In many cases they are living at the limits of their endurance. There is no practical help to be had, and not even anyone to listen to them, anyone who could put their position into perspective in relation to that of other families, as it can often help to know that there are others in similar straits. The official social support network can also seem impossible to negotiate if you don't know how to go about it. Things that are to be taken care of communally frequently end up by not being taken care of at all.

Conditions can also change radically in the event of a divorce, for a single parent is left carrying two people's burdens, and this is often made worse by recriminations, revenge and problems regarding custody of the children.

Physical violence

International comparisons have shown that we in Finland suffer from about the same amount of violent behaviour as is to be found elsewhere. It is only that our violence is more violent and its consequences are more serious. Homicides are more common than in any other Western European country, for instance. The Finnish government has set itself the target of halving the number of violent deaths, and special attention is to be paid this year to reducing violence directed at children and young people.

The publicity given to the sexual abuse of children has increased people's willingness to report such offences, and that is all to the good. It means, too, that although the number of cases may not necessarily rise, improved collaboration between the various authorities should mean that more cases are brought to the courts than earlier.

Neither of our state churches would seem to have a consistent policy as regards checking on the criminal records of persons applying for positions of priest or cantor. At least in our church, every priest and cantor will be working with small groups of children and young people to some extent and sometimes also with individuals on a personal basis. It would also be useful for parishes to receive some instructions as to how to prevent situations in which children might be subjected to sexual abuse. Clubs and camps which are partly run by volunteers and short-term paid staff are especially risky from this point of view. Instructions are also needed as to how to take action if an instance of abuse is revealed or suspected. This would at least help to avoid the matter being hushed up under a veil of ignorance. A matter that has been spoken about openly is easier to approach boldly and to resolve.

Psychological harassment

Harassment at work is one form of distorted personal relationship that will always rebound upon the victim's family. It is something that should lead us to take a good look in the mirror. The Church, as a spiritual body, is especially vulnerable to harassment at work, and the matter should be taken up when training new employees. The training of pastors for the Lutheran Church includes teaching in leadership and management, and the topic can also be taken up in the course of the church's own pastoral training, but the teaching in Orthodox theology at the University of Joensuu does not include any such training.

I can only speak for my own church, of course, and have to admit that harassment at work is something that no one has yet known how to deal with. Up to the end of last year the situation was made worse by the existing legislation, as the laws that were in force then failed to define who was the superior who was responsible for intervening in the actions of a parish priest on such grounds. We need to be able to examine our situation carefully and show caution in such matters, so that we will no longer be on the receiving end of humiliating practises directed at us from abroad.

Victims of psychological harassment can also be vulnerable to many other problems. Their social contacts are likely to suffer and their mental health may be at risk, and in no time at all this distress may threaten their families as well. Their children may develop psychological symptoms simply because their moods tend to reflect those of their parents in good and bad. It is quite obvious that people who suffer harassment or bullying at work will find their motivation for their work diminishing, and this will detract from the efficiency of the whole working community.

Badly managed problems at a church workplace can easily be exacerbated further and become clothed in an artificial spirituality in which corners are cut by simply demanding an apology, as if this will make the problem disappear. Those

in positions of authority should be sensitive enough to see the whole problem and avoid excessive simplification.

One of the most difficult forms of psychological harassment to deal with is pressure exerted in the course of pastoral work, either through confessions or in other conversations. A priest's responsibility with regard to pastoral work is enormous, but he cannot make decisions for other people, although the temptation is frequently present, as people often come to him in the hope of a ready-made solution. It must always be the confessant who makes the decisions and takes responsibility for them. The priest acting as confessor or otherwise in a pastoral capacity can only suggest appropriate guidelines.

Similarly, a situation should not be allowed to arise in which a person suffers anxiety on account of having gone against a specific instruction from his father confessor. People cannot be commanded to change their ways. The situation may be still more complicated where immigrants are concerned, as many such people continue to have a father confessor in their own country and may receive instructions that are literally "from another world".

One example of this is the custom whereby women cover their heads in church. This is a Russian custom and is unknown in Greece and elsewhere in the west, except among Russian émigrés. Here in Finland this custom is observed at the Monastery of Valamo and, although there are no theological grounds for it, it is tending to spread into our parishes. In our complex modern world there are some people who purposely look out for external rules of this kind, but as something that applies only to one sex, it is apt to give rise to other attempts at artificial discrimination and still more bizarre regulations.

What lies behind these problems?

The single most prominent factor lying behind the cases of violence in our society is alcohol, and the reduction in the tax on alcoholic drinks in 2004 has only made matters worse. Last summer we were the most inebriated nation in Europe. The majority of homicides are committed under the influence of drink and the same is true of many instances of violence within the family. Although the Church is not primarily a temperance organization, we cannot brush over the alcohol question; too many people have to suffer if we do.

Alienation is a complex phenomenon. There can be many reasons for it and it can be a downhill path that begins without anyone noticing, as an outsider usually comes to see only one aspect of another person's life. There are generally very few people who can appreciate the whole scale of another's activities. A similar problem besets those who in the midst of a highly fragmented life realise that they can no longer control their life as a whole. Is it not precisely the Church that ought to be able to offer a means of drawing the strands together and even helping people to do this?

Attitudes are extremely important in this connection. By suitably closing its eyes to the problem, society can permit large-scale cases of bullying at school, or turn dissenters or even journalists, for instance, into fair game for anyone to hunt without fear of retribution. Even in cases of bullying at school a teacher or headmaster can act correctly in formal terms but wrongly in moral terms by failing to make it clear that bullying is utterly unacceptable. There are a number of examples from various parts of the world of how misconduct that has occurred within a church has led first of all to the exerting of pressure on would-be "informers" and then to their dismissal. There has been talk of soiling one's own nest, of preserving the holiness of the Church or of arousing the wrath of God in order to cover up significant economic or moral misdemeanours. In this respect the Web has proved a useful tool. When things that have been swept under the carpet time and again appear there for tens of thousands of people to read, no one can click them away to avoid responsibility – other than by restricting the use of the Web, of course.

> *Don't be afraid of your enemy; he can only kill you. Don't be afraid of your friend; he can only betray you. But be afraid of the general public which, by remaining silent, can allow both of these to get away with it.*

Group ostracism can take place discretely so that it can scarcely be detected from the outside – just like the work of a skilled torturer. Covert accusations, insinuations, avoidance, scornful glances, averting the eyes – all these things can take place anywhere, even in churches, especially where money or power is at stake. Sometimes when one surveys the way the world works one cannot but conclude that the Church has taken the production of martyrs into its own hands. Things may be legally absolutely above board but morally despicable. The gospels shed a great deal of light on this matter.

The Church can scarcely afford to stretch its own conscience too far, because if it did there would be no instance left in the world that was sufficiently healthy to perceive whole human beings, whole families and whole sorrows, and no instance that would be able to strive for the truth by preaching altruistic love. But the health of the Church is not something that can be taken for granted. Although it is a body of fundamentally sinful individuals who are able to participate in the communion of saints through the Eucharist, there should nevertheless be a genuine *striving* for truth and purity.

We may think of the divine love as always freely given and self-sacrificing, where this spirit of self-sacrifice implies an attribute of the Church and not as such a demand placed on its members. People who have been harassed and ostracized in various ways can find peace only when someone sacrifices himself for them. This unselfish love is the model put forward by Christ, which makes it possible for the downtrodden mind to cast itself completely on another person who can

draw upon Christ for his strength. This is the case with the saints, whose whole lives lived in the company of God allowed them to provide support for others. The epithets such as "the joy of all who sorrow" and "the unexpected help" applied to the Virgin Mary testify to her function in doing this, for she has continued in the role that she adopted in the wedding at Cana and is ready to intercede with her Son on behalf of the needs of men and to exhort us to do everything that Christ asks of us. The Virgin Mary's role, especially in interceding for women, should not be underestimated. It is good to remember that when she appealed to Christ she was appealing to her own son. It is a different thing if a women appeals to her father, for instance.

What can the churches do?

To continue the case study quoted at the beginning of this paper,

> *Four months after Maria's death a miracle occurred at her tomb. The local bishop did not believe that a woman who had lived and died in a married state could perform miracles, which were, for him, reserved for pure men, holy monks and martyrs. Nevertheless, when her husband decided a short time later to move her body into a chapel he had built for her and the clergy tried to block the operation, they were unsuccessful. Further miracles followed and there was considerable local veneration of her that continued up until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, although she was never included in the general calendar of saints* (see *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English* Translation, Dumbarton Oaks Electronic Texts, www.doaks.org).

Violence in the family was no different in Byzantine times from what it is today, although the objection raised by the Church to canonization is a strange feature since, in addition to undermining the value of women and their lives of devotion, it confers tacit approval on the use of violence against them.

Orthodox believers would do well to bear in mind the injustice that the calendar of saints does to women, and especially women who are married and have a family. Incidentally, the same would appear to be true of family men, and even priests with a family, for whom it is also very difficult to gain a place in the calendar. St. John of Kronstadt succeeded in this, but he lived in a virgin marriage, which is not only odd in a spiritual sense but also casts a slur on the significance of marriage.

I am well aware that the majority of saints never reach the calendar, and that the selection of saints that appear in liturgical texts or are the subjects of icons proclaims from week to week a distorted view of sanctity and the life of the Church. In the same way the family has been left on one side in our spiritual literature.

If we are to regard the family as the basic social unit within our parishes, at least we Orthodox should pay far more attention to it.

It is necessary all the time to make adjustments to the life and attitude of the Church, and at the moment there is a distinct need for fresh attention to be drawn to violence in the family and in other close relationships, and at the same time to the theologically and spiritually problematic attitudes and practices that lie behind this. Every step we take towards a theologically more balanced state in the life of the Church will lead us to new needs for revision. In addition to personal repentance, this naturally calls for collective repentance and a concerted attempt at making amends.

Proposals

Finally a few practical suggestions:

- Peer groups for victims of and parties to violence within the family are an important contribution that parishes can make and could well be organized on an ecumenical basis.
- We could pay more attention in our teaching and proclamation of the Gospel to mutual understanding between people and to the problems arising from the gender-based exercise of power. Every distortion of the equality principle that appears in our teachings detracts from the Church's credibility.
- Our churches could draw up common guidelines for the prevention of sexual crimes perpetrated on children and young people.
- Our churches could voice a joint demand for a raising of the tax on alcoholic drinks.

Attention should be paid to the following in the training of our employees:

- the noting of warning signs and the prevention of family acts of violence in advance,
- ways of working that permit early intervention in family problems,
- the fundamentals of leadership, group dynamics and organization theories,
- attitudinal development and the protection of victims, and
- collaboration with other instances such as social and health workers and citizens' organizations.

Helsinki 2009

THE NINTH THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF FINLAND, 2009

Communiqué

The Ninth Theological Discussions between delegates from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland were held at the Orthodox Cultural Centre Sofia in Helsinki on 15th-16th January 2009. The delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church was headed by Rt. Rev. Voitto Huotari, Bishop of Mikkeli, and the other members were Rev. Matti Poutiainen, Dean of Helsinki, M.Th. Hannele Karppinen, researcher Taru Kolehmainen, Docent Jyri Komulainen of the University of Helsinki and Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen, executive secretary for theology at the Church Council's Department for International Relations. The delegation from the Orthodox Church was led by Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki and its other members were Fr Rauno Pietarinen, Professor René Góthóni, Archimandrite Andreas Larikka, M.A. Riina Nguyen and Lic. Th. Pekka Metso. Also present as observers were Fr Dr Antoine Levy, OP of the Roman Catholic Church, and Rev. Olavi Rintala, head of the Evangelical Free Church of Finland, representing the Finnish Ecumenical Council. The two topics selected for discussion were "Inter-faith encounters" and "The languages of faith - How does the church relate to modern man?"

In his opening address Bishop Voitto Huotari observed that there exist many points of contact between the Lutheran and Orthodox churches, and that it was precisely for this reason that the doctrinal discussions that had been going on for the last 20 years were important. Viewed in general terms, he traced three main points of departure for these discussions. Firstly, they drew their inspiration from Jesus' words to his disciples that they should "all be one". Secondly, the two churches are working in a common context, carrying out their Christian witness within the same society, and it is to be hoped that these discussions will advance that witness. And thirdly, the discussions can be of pastoral value, especially in the case of mixed marriages, where families contain members of different churches. In addition, he mentioned the international significance of the good relations prevailing between the Lutheran and Orthodox churches in Finland. The Finns have a mission to make their experiences of working together available to others, and this they have succeeded in doing.

In his reply, Metropolitan Ambrosius described the discussions as characteristically taking place in a spirit of mutual trust and frankness, and he, too, related this local form of dialogue to the international ecumenical cooperation taking place between the churches under the auspices of the World Council of Churches and its Special Commission. He characterized the discussions as a process of growth and learning, a dialogue of truth and love. As state churches, the two parties have a nationwide obligation in the field of missions and witness, and the themes to be discussed in the meeting lay at the very heart of this obligation. Metropolitan Ambrosius emphasized the importance of practising the dialogue of love within the family, within the churches and at the national level – without, of course, forgetting the dialogue of truth. Doctrinal discussions are a challenge both intellectually and spiritually.

Inter-faith encounters

The topic for the first day of the discussions was "Inter-faith encounters", based on papers to be presented by Metropolitan Ambrosius and Docent Jyri Komulainen.

Metropolitan Ambrosius regarded encounters between the world's religions as one of the major cultural issues of our global era. On the one hand, fundamentalism has been on the increase and hostile images have proliferated, but at the same time the modern world challenges us to work together in various areas of society, the economy and culture. Even Finnish society is becoming more multicultural. There has been an increase in dialogue between religions, and it is coming to be acknowledged that the real danger facing religions nowadays comes not from other religions but from everyday materialism.

Within the Orthodox tradition one finds both a strictly exclusive attitude towards other faiths, as is especially prevalent in the monastic tradition, and also prominent inclusive views of many kinds, which are frequently grounded in the *Logos spermatikos* doctrine of St. Justin Martyr and the synthesis between Greek culture and the Jewish-Christian church of the early martyrs propounded by the Cappadocian Fathers. The main outlines of the Orthodox theology of inter-faith encounters resulting from these influences have been summed up by the missiologist Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Albania. Metropolitan Ambrosius also emphasized the mystical "dialogue of love" approach as a fruitful starting point for inter-faith encounters alongside the doctrinal perspective. One issue which he pointed out as leading to differences of opinion between and within the churches was the manner in which evidence of Christ's presence and grace could be found in other religions.

Docent Jyri Komulainen described recent trends in the academic theology of religions as being markedly ecumenical in character, with denominational boundaries being replaced with boundaries between schools of thought. The statements issued by the churches on this subject have nevertheless been more firmly anchored

in tradition than have the ideas of individual theologians. Within the Lutheran tradition in Finland it has been the distinction between the law and the gospel on the one hand and Protestant dialectic theology on the other that have led to a cautious attitude towards the world's religions. But even so, pluralistic views have been put forward that counterbalance the exclusive approach. Komulainen was inclined to seek out a third path lying in between these two extremes and to emphasize the importance of the basis provided by one's own religious tradition as a prerequisite for encounter with others. A common approach could well be sought in the patristic tradition and the notion of Christ as the incarnate *Logos*.

One central theme in his argument was the attainment of a knowledge of God by way of "otherness". Just as St. Paul ended his consideration of his relationship to the Jewish tradition by appealing to the unfathomable wisdom of God, the key to inter-faith encounters would appear to lie in understanding "the other". If we look upon God as an "other" who poses a challenge for us, this will lead us to ask humbly what we can learn about God by examining the world outside the church. In this way it comes to be *agape*, love, that defines the encounter, as this is descriptive of an attitude that is universalistic without being imperialistic. Although it may not be possible to find a satisfactory theory of encounters within the theology of religions, *agape* gives us a model to follow in practise. The most important thing in inter-faith encounters is in any case orthopraxis: friendship and living side by side as the basis of dialogue.

In the discussion that followed it was noted that the two churches have a common or parallel foundation for their theology of religions. The Lutheran theology of the creation places more emphasis on the work of God the Father, while Orthodox theology stresses the concept of sacramental reality based on the universal significance of Jesus Christ, but the difference is not great.

It was agreed that one basis for encounter could be a belief in the work of creation performed by a triune God and an affirmation that the Word (*Logos*), for the sake of whom and through whom everything was made, became incarnate in Jesus Christ. On this basis it becomes possible for the church to interpret other religions in a favourable light: beams of truth and holiness can be seen radiating from them because Christ himself is their sun. Love calls us to approach other religions meekly and openly, in a spirit of friendship and bilateral learning. Finland can be expected to gain more immigrants in the coming years, and the churches should seize on the opportunity to bring up religious issues in discussions within society, in order to fulfil Christ's command to go out into all the world, setting out from the beliefs that we have in common.

The languages of faith - How does the church relate to modern man?

Bishop Voitto Huotari opened the discussion with his paper on "The language of faith", in which he defined this language on the one hand as a language for

communication between people on matters connected with their faith and on the other hand as a means of communication between God and mankind. He then went on to examine the nature and present-day context of the language of faith and the Lutheran approach to it in terms of words, worship, prayer, actions and communion.

Bishop Huotari characterized the language of faith as a language that is capable of making holiness present for us. It is not simply a matter of communicating by means of logic and everyday concepts but of speaking in metaphors of things that humans can address only through approximations. The language of faith gains its meaning from its use in church and its communal use in parish life, and therefore it has to be compatible with Biblical tradition. It is especially difficult in the modern individualistic context to mark the common beliefs of the church as something significant. It is the Holy Spirit that sows the seeds of faith, but from a human perspective it is important to approach matters through experiences that appeal to modern man. People are inclined to listen to language that communicates something of the speaker's own experiences. When it is a question of the mystery of fundamental spiritual experiences, narrative – the basic linguistic form of the Bible – is of particular significance.

The Lutheran concept of the Word is a sacramental one: when we proclaim God's word, He is carrying out creative work through that word. Similarly, Holy Communion is a form of language of faith that we can both see and taste, while music is an audible form of the word and images can speak to us in a language that we perceive with our eyes. Our church services as a whole are occasions when God speaks to the congregation and the congregation speaks both to God and to the outside world. Liturgical language makes the tradition of the church's faith immediate to us, so that it becomes both familiar and reassuring. On the other hand, there is a danger that people who do not belong to the same religious community will remain outsiders unless the liturgical language is periodically revised and brought closer to the contemporary realities of life. There is also a place for silence in the routines of the church, however, as prayer takes place in silence, for that is where God resides. Actions, too, can be messages, as it is through these that God's love can speak to the weak, the poor and the sinful and make them strong, valuable and good. We have communion with each other in Christ and the language of that communion is our witness and symbol of hope in the world.

The paper "The languages of faith - How does the church relate to modern man?" given by Lic. Th. Pekka Metso set out from four perspectives on the Christian life, namely life in the world, life as an alien, faith grounded in the work of God and Christian morality, in conjunction with all of which the Orthodox Church awoke in the course of the 20th century in particular to the realization that a contradiction existed between its tradition of a belief that was perceived as inalterable and the exigencies of the modern world.

A meeting of Orthodox patriarchs in Constantinople in October 2008 issued a joint statement defining the mission of the church in modern times which both spoke out to the world at large in the language of faith, ethics and ecology and with a powerful emphasis on unity and also attempted to strengthen unity between the Orthodox churches. In this way the church may be seen to be striving towards a role as a responsible global actor that has a distinct message to convey to the world and will lend a sensitive ear to what the world requires of it. This conforms well with the views of Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, who links the fate of the church in the modern world to the process of inculturation, i.e. the creation of communication linkages. This implies that the church must be capable of ensuring the reception of the gospel by the world at large without compromising on its content. It will also be necessary to express the gospel in language that is comprehensible to contemporary listeners and readers, while the church's doctrinal language should also be existentially inspiring and its liturgical language comprehensive, Eucharist-centred and closely bound in with the Christian faith and the life of the church.

Metso emphasized that the fundamental truths regarding God, mankind and the relationship between them should remain central to the church's message, as these form the basis of its activities. Similarly, the limits set by the truth cannot be exceeded in matters of doctrine or ethics, nor should one forget the need for a spirit of love and humility in everything.

It was agreed jointly that the churches are striving to achieve a symbiosis between their life of prayer and worship and the living content of their faith (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). This is the church's own language in which it can speak to those who are exhausted by the modern way of life and are seeking their true identity. It is deeds inspired by love that respond most effectively to these people's needs.

In conclusion, the participants were grateful for the steps towards mutual understanding that our churches here in Finland have been able to take. The present discussions took place in a spirit of mutual respect and trust and in a general atmosphere of frankness and enthusiasm. Something new was learned on both sides, and also something that united us and prompted us to continue along the same path. We are also well aware that Our Lord's will in this respect still needs to be fulfilled more completely both between our two churches and amongst Christians throughout the world.

Continuation of the discussions

It was decided that the series of discussions should be continued and that the next meeting should be arranged by the Orthodox Church in autumn 2010. The topics agreed on were "Interpretation of the Bible in the church's teachings" and "Ecology and moderation in everyday life".

Helsinki, 16th January 2009

Metropolitan Ambrosius

Inter-faith encounters – a challenge for our time

Encounter and dialogue between religions is one of the major cultural issues of our time. In our turbulent global world the various religions are increasingly often finding themselves living side by side, and over the last three decades or so religious fundamentalism has raised its head to the extent that hostile attitudes have developed between some religions, and often within them, too.

The situation has been analysed by Professor Samuel Huntington in his interesting and highly provocative study "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order" (1996), in which he predicts that future world-scale conflicts will be clashes between cultures in which divisive religious factors will play a pivotal role. We may well agree with him if we look, for example, at the events that have taken place in the Balkans during the last couple of decades, for it is clear that various religions and churches have been exploited in a tragic manner for the purposes of power politics and that they have sometimes even set out enthusiastically of their own accord in the service of nationalistic interests.

But there is also good reason to examine the situation from a different perspective. Global interaction offers us an opportunity for achieving encounters in various fields of social, economic and cultural activity – indeed it challenges us to do so. Although Finland has been one of the last outposts of a monolithic European culture, we are now increasingly coming into contact with representatives of other religions and outlooks on the world within our own context, in our workplaces, in our leisure-time activities and among our own friends and relatives.

At the same time, the World Council of Churches is engaging in a Programme of Inter-religious Dialogue and Co-operation, providing an active ethical forum for the world's religions that in effect has a history going back over 100 years. Islamic scholars are seeking contacts with thinkers representing the Christian tradition, and many moderate Muslim leaders in the Middle East are pursuing similar ends.

In a recent discussion that I had with Metropolitan Georges Khodr of Mount Lebanon he expressed the opinion that Islam does not present any notable threat to the Orthodox Church. On the contrary, they have a common enemy: everyday materialism. This is quite a significant statement, coming as it does from a representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch, an Arab Christian church that has suffered from Islamic reactions to incursions ranging from the Western Christian crusades through the colonialism of the 19th and 20th centuries to the more recent Protestant missionary boom. Contrary to popular opinion, the really surprising thing is that there has not been a much more violent outbreak of Islamic fundamentalism or criticism of the Western way of life than that experienced recently as the Arabs search for their own culture, religious roots and identity.

Al Qaida and other political groups with a fundamentalist religious background are for the most part terrorist organizations with only a narrow following in Islamic societies, and the more recent estimates suggest that they may even be on the decline.

Logos spermatikos and the entire *Logos*

I have reached an age at which I may be allowed a short digression into my own life history. As a small boy I was an enthusiastic attender at Sunday school, and I remember the teacher explaining the terrible fate of pagan children in Africa. They lived in constant fear of evil eyes gazing at them from the branches of trees and they had no hope of salvation. Intuitively, I could not accept this, but as a ten-year-old boy I had to believe it when once the teacher had said it and had backed it up by referring to the Bible.

Twenty-five years later, at the Monastery of New Valamo, I was going through the writings of the early spiritual fathers when I came across an astonishing claim made by St. Gregory the Theologian (d. 390) that Plato and Aristotle, who lived centuries before Christ, had seen a glimpse of the Holy Spirit. The Cappadocian Fathers of the late 4th century had constructed an ingenious synthesis of the finest traditions of the Jewish-Christian martyr church and the greatest insights achieved by the Hellenistic culture, their *Logos spermatikos*, which was grounded in the philosophy of the Stoics and of St. Justin Martyr (d. 150). St. Justin had deliberated at length over how the pagan philosophers and poets could have understood so many theological truths correctly even though they had no knowledge of the revelations of the Christian faith, and concluded that it was "because the seeds of the Word of God are sown in the whole human race". The difference lay in the fact that the pagans had access to only "some of the seeds of the Word" while the ordinances of the Christian faith were based on "knowledge and contemplation of the entire *Logos*, Christ". In Justin's words, "Christ is the *Logos* in which the whole of mankind is called to share. Those who have lived in accordance with the *Logos* (meaning, mind and reason) are Christians".

The time of narrow Christian denominationalism

With the development of state churches and the "bureaucratization" of the church the spiritual openness required to see the work of God as in some way present in other faiths and in all forms of searching for the truth became obscured by the time of the Early Middle Ages, even though there were still some Christian and Islamic philosophers who attempted to maintain a dialogue. Questions of power and being in the right had a painful habit of becoming bound up together, and there was a tendency to thrust other religions, and even views that deviated from the official line, firmly to one side or to condemn them to destruction in the face

of a narrow Christian denominationalism. One does not have to go far to find examples of this, for the centralism of the Byzantine era was enough to result in rejection of the "oriental" Orthodox churches.

Similar attitudes were to be found in the other Christian churches, e.g. in relation to Islam and even Judaism, in spite of the fact that these three together represented monotheistic religions of the Middle East that worshipped the same One God. This is precisely what the authoress Simone Weil was referring to when she spoke of "the three sons of Noah".

On the other hand, it is also important to remember the painful relations that existed between the Christian churches, particular as a consequence of the Crusades and the Reformation, and there has been no dearth of hostility since those times. Particularly notable is the fact that at the Council of Florence in 1438–39, as described so vividly by the Finnish author Mika Waltari in his novel *Nuori Johannes*, the Orthodox representatives were moved to comment on the failure of the negotiations regarding reunion of the churches in the vein of "Rather the turbans of the Turks than the tiaras of Rome".

Orthodox exclusivism and inclusivism

In principle there are several models on which relations with other faiths may be interpreted in the Orthodox view. Those instances that adopt a strict exclusive stance are mainly to be found in monastic circles, e.g. the American Seraphim Rose and certain representatives of monasteries on Mount Athos and in Russia. These maintain that the Christian message of salvation and Christ's unique act of redemption do not in any sense apply to other faiths. Their "Orthodox" fundamentalism is to be seen in the notion that salvation and the truth are to be found only through the sacramental communion of the Orthodox Church. One of the core issues in this respect is observance of the Julian Calendar.

As a contrast to this, one may quote the words of the American Fr. John Garvey that, although one requirement for attaining the Kingdom of God is the act of redemption performed by the Father in Jesus Christ, we can scarcely uphold the opinion of those who believe that every person must consciously accept the salvation offered by Christ or go to hell.

The inclusive viewpoint in its various forms is well represented in the works of Orthodox theologians such as Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, Metropolitan Georges Khodr, Professor Peter Bouteneff and the above-mentioned John Garvey. All of them base their argument on the writings of St. Justin Martyr and the Cappadocians. Bouteneff, for instance, reminds us that the Orthodox Christianity of the Middle East has a long history of encounter with other religions, sometimes in a pluralistic context, but frequently in a syncretistic one. This interaction has entailed a process of learning on both sides, and although Orthodox theologians reject the notion of relativism, they have come to accept that there may be some

degree of truth in other beliefs. "Although Orthodox Christianity does claim to teach the fullness of truth, it does not claim to have a monopoly over that truth," Bouteneff adds.

According to the Metropolitan of Mount Lebanon, western theology lays too much emphasis on the "history of salvation" that reaches its climax in Jesus Christ. In his opinion the economy of the incarnation cannot be reduced to its historical manifestation alone, but rather it demonstrates the fact that we are partakers in the life of God himself. The concept of economy is a mystery, a mystery that alludes to the freedom of God. In his care for us and his gift of salvation, God is not limited to one situation or concrete event. As an instrument of salvation, the church is obliged to proclaim to all religions the mystic presence of God in the world until such time as the secret is finally and perfectly revealed.

The main line of approach of the Orthodox Church to the question of encounters with other religions is that expressed by the Orthodox missiologist Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of the Albanian Church. The following account is based largely on his ideas.

1. Orthodox Christianity respects the religious experiences of others in a spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding. As St. Gregory the Theologian put it, all people have in one way or another, albeit only by intuition, some knowledge of God, some yearning and desire to find Him. Man has not entirely lost his nature as the image of God as a consequence of the Fall from Grace, for God speaks to us and we can feel his presence.
2. Regardless of who believes and who does not believe, for Christians there is only one God: "The God who made the world and everything in it" (Acts 17:24), "One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:6). People have different experiences of God and observations concerning Him, but there are no other gods. Religious experiences reflect both an ardent human striving towards the ultimate truth and a reflection of the radiance of God's glory in the world. In the words of the Anaphora in the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great, the Holy Spirit is "the quickening power, the fountain of holiness that enableth every creature having reason and having understanding to serve Thee and pour forth an unceasing hymn of glory, for all are Thy servants".
3. God's incarnation in Jesus Christ potentially concerns the whole of mankind, for as "the new Adam", He was a representative of the entire human race. For Christians, He is "the true light which enlightens everyone" (John 1:9). His figure, which radiates the fullness of God's glory, casts light – albeit to a limited extent – on the religious experiences of others, such as Muslims, as well. As St. Gregory of Nyssa maintains, all yearnings after beauty are manifestations of our striving to see God. This yearning draws us upwards; it can never be entirely satisfied, but it gains in strength

as the soul climbs higher, "from glory to glory". Mention should also be made in this connection of another of the Church Fathers, St. Maximus the Confessor, who spoke forcefully of the restoration of the world, i.e. the salvation of mankind and the whole world through Christ. He emphasized that the resurrection on the Last Day would be universal but the gift of salvation and the grace of God would come to those who had yearned for it (cf. apocatastasis).

4. Orthodoxy does not attempt to describe, define or delimit the sphere of influence of the Holy Spirit very precisely. Most Orthodox services of intercession begin with a prayer to the Holy Spirit "which art in all places and fillest all things" and goes on to mention that the Spirit abides in us and saves our souls. It is thus clear that the work of the Holy Spirit exceeds all human thought and imagination, and that it cannot be enclosed in any theological system, description or prediction. Everything that promotes mutual good and harmony between people is the work of the Spirit, for "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal. 5:22–23). Wherever these are to be found, we will see the work of the Holy Spirit. John Garvey writes of the empathy of the Buddhists, the genuine charity of the Muslims and the heartfelt devotion of the Hindus to Krishna. They will be saved, because all of these activities of the soul and the heart carry seeds of the Word (*Logos*), and that Word is Christ.
5. The starting point for all interaction and dialogue between people should be the obligation to show universal love that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). In the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus overrode every racial or religious interpretation of who is our neighbour and appealed to us to be a "neighbour" to everyone regardless of race, creed, language or particular moral qualities. Thus no human being will ever cease to be fundamentally a child of God, since we are all created in His image.

Towards "dialogue of love"

The pluralistic approach to encounters between religions is gaining ground in the post-modern spiritual context that prevails in our global world. In fact it is not a long step from the inclusive interpretation of inter-faith encounters to the idea that the spirit of Christ may well be quite genuinely manifested elsewhere in different forms. It is nevertheless the case in practise that the demands of different religions with respect to the truth are frequently conflicting and mutually

opposed. It is not easy to find common criteria for evaluating and comparing the various manifestations of divinity.

There is no need in this respect, however, to aim at one all-pervading definition or doctrine of the truth, but instead we can find a way forward through listening to and learning from one another and sharing ideas and experiences. Hans Küng challenged Christianity to contribute to this on a world scale so that its critical participation could help to clarify the moral, spiritual, ascetic and aesthetic values espoused by other religions.

Perhaps the most creative, most interesting and most problematic perspective on inter-faith encounters is provided by the theory of *acceptance*. This sets out from the notion that the mystery of God and the fullness of His presence cannot be exhaustively described in any human language. The various religions have radically different sets of experiences and symbol systems available for coping with this mystery, but who can say to what extent they are acceptable, or even possible, means of encountering and experiencing oneself, one's neighbour or the whole cosmos?

When nowadays we encounter Buddhist holy men and women or Hindu yogis and swamis on the slopes of the Himalayas or read the biographies of lamas and gurus, we, as Christians, cannot avoid facing up to these post-modern perspectives on the interaction between religions, regardless of our own starting points in this respect.

When, setting out from our own starting point, we succeed in developing an understanding of another religion in the context of a mutual encounter followed by interaction, this will usually end up by being a "dialogue of love", an encounter with holiness and an opportunity for meditation and prayer in the presence of a new reality, perhaps through a monastic or mystical tradition. It was not without reason that St. John of Sinai (d. 649) observed that "Spiritual purity and the ladder of light are the beginnings of theology."

In addition to a purely doctrinal perspective, the Christian churches are also able to approach these matters from the angle of mystical experience, which renders people of the Spirit capable of understanding each other, including each other's thoughts and spirituality. They are also able to respect the different paths that can be taken towards spiritual growth.

The presence of Christ in other religions?

At the turn of the millennium, futurologists were fairly unanimous in predicting a new rise in religious fervour as one of the coming megatrends, and we can see this emerging all around us. Our own hearts, too, may be stirred by questions of the purpose of life and the future of the human race. Growth as a person and efforts to glimpse above and beyond the realities of everyday life are integral parts of all human culture, but in the end it depends on us alone as to what value we

set on holiness, the spirit and spiritual growth within our lives, what content we give to these things and where we look for them.

On the other hand, in spite of this trend, representatives of the old ecclesiastical institutions may well find these times disturbing and threatening. As the futurologist John Naisbitt observed in his *Megatrends* in the 1980s, "religions are in, the churches are out". By this he meant that although interest in religious matters was on the rise, it was not being channelled to any appreciable extent towards the traditional churches.

From the point of view of our own European culture, deliberations over spiritual truths tend naturally to concentrate in the last resort on the issue of the uniqueness and significance of Christ's role in the salvation of mankind. I have no doubt that this will continue to be the crucial question in the future when we consider how we are to encounter other faiths. Opinions may differ more widely than at present, however, not necessarily between denominations but rather within individual churches, as to how the presence and grace of Christ may be found within other religions, in a secret or a visible way, and in an anonymous or a universal way?

Dialogue of love and truth

Finally, I was able to be present in 1986 at the first joint day of prayer for world peace to be attended by representatives of different religions throughout the world, which was hosted by Pope John Paul II at Assisi in Italy. It was an occasion on which representatives of Islam, the religions of Asia and the religions of many aboriginal peoples prayed together with those of various Christian churches on behalf of peace in the world. It was a moving occasion spiritually, and also an exotic one. But when we returned home a few days later a considerable polemic arose in public places. The Catholics and other Christians were accused of syncretism, the confusion of religions, and the Vatican, which masters the complexities of diplomacy and politics better than the rest of us, was at pains to explain that we had not been praying "together" but "in each other's presence". At any rate, this encounter between representatives of different religions was not felt to have violated the traditions of any particular participant with regard to the value assigned to the truth. Still less was it an exercise in eclecticism, which aims at picking out the best features from all the alternatives available.

The majority of those present certainly felt that the occasion was a positive one. As Christians, we, at least, were able to pray together for peace, because we understood that working for peace is a duty for every religious person. But at the same time we were able to at least feel that God was in some form present in the search for truth taking place in other religions. Thus there was nothing unreal or absurd about our mutual encounter in the pursuit of peace. On the contrary,

there was a spark of hope in the atmosphere there, amid the many setbacks and upheavals of the modern world.

But in spite of everything, my own religious belief seemed like something unique there in the piazza of the Franciscan monastery in Assisi. I felt that Christ himself was present in this common yearning for reconciliation, peace and love on the part of the whole human race. It must be remembered, however, that we were not there to consider doctrinal questions, hard facts or matters of values or ethics, although these, too, can provide certain common denominators for people of different faiths. In the end, any encounter between religions is likely to be a matter of both things simultaneously, a dialogue of love and a dialogue of truth.

Adjunct professor Jyri Komulainen

Inter-faith encounters as a universal challenge

Encounters between religions constitute one of the principal challenges of our day and age, for even politicians and political commentators have awoken to the global reality that, contrary to what had been expected in the light of extensive predictions of advancing secularization, religious traditions continue to be one of the major influences in society. The former prime minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair, declared in December 2008, for example, that multi-faith dialogue "will in time be seen as a defining question, and perhaps the leading question of the 21st century."[1]

The importance of inter-religious dialogue was realised within the churches decades ago, and it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that nowhere have dialogue and the possibilities for sustaining it been discussed so abundantly as in the international ecumenical movement. What theological model would serve best to meet the needs of encounter between religions? There is no simple answer to this question, let alone a universally acceptable one.

Recent theological discussions on this topic nevertheless provide a good example of the markedly ecumenical character of academic theology in modern times, for instead of the traditional denominational boundaries we now have divisions between academic schools of thought.[2] The denominational backgrounds of individual theologians are naturally of interest as sources of influence, but they are not decisive when it comes to the reception accorded to their ideas.

By contrast, official statements of opinion issued by churches or other Christian communities reflect the tradition from which they originate far more clearly, although an ecumenical awareness is far more prominent in statements concerned with inter-religious dialogue than in ones dealing with doctrinal matters: in other words, although we Christians are divided on matters of doctrine, the challenge of other religions is common to us all. Thus, when Christians deliberate over the relation of the divine salvation revealed to us in Jesus Christ to paths of salvation existing outside Christianity, the most fruitful approach is to set out from the traditions that unite the Christian churches. And in this respect a frank and open ecumenical attitude can enable us to make full use of the theological scholarship taking place in all the denominations.

The first landmark in the history of the churches' dialogue with other religions may be said to have been the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago

1 http://www.eni.ch/featured/article.php?id=2557

2 For an example of a pluralistic collection of papers by authors of different denominations and religions, see *The Myth of Religious Superiority* (2005).

in 1893, instigated by a private organization. Within the wide range of religions participating in it, the great diversity of Christian denominations was particularly prominent, with Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and the various forms of Protestantism well represented. In spite of its historical significance, however, this parliament did not lead to the creation of any permanent organization for this purpose, although it did promote the founding of certain societies dedicated to inter-faith dialogue.[3] By contrast, the centenary Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993 proved to be the first in a new series of such meetings.[4]

The current inter-faith dialogues being conducted by the churches are of more recent origins and date back to the 1960s and 1970s, when the idea of the need for such dialogues arose more or less simultaneously within the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.[5]

The opening up of the Roman Catholic Church to inter-faith dialogue occurred in the wake of its involvement in the ecumenical movement, but the initial steps taken by this, the largest Christian church in the world, at the Vatican II Council in 1962–1965 have proved to be of far-reaching importance for ecumenical Christianity. Thus it is impossible to ignore either the official teachings of the Catholic Magisterium or the role of individual theologians working in this field when speaking of inter-faith theology.

The point of departure for the now prodigious volume of inter-faith Catholic theology may be found in the documents of the Vatican II Council which emphasized God's desire to bring about universal salvation and the role of the church in His plan of salvation.[6] It gave rise to a great deal of lively discussion, in which a certain element of church politics could also be perceived, and the subsequent popes also left their mark on the history of this inter-faith dialogue. In particular, Pope John Paul II took radical steps towards encounters with people of other faiths by visiting mosques and inviting religious leaders to join him in prayer for world peace at Assisi. Pope Benedict XVI has continued in his predecessor's footsteps, even though his initial attitude towards inter-faith dialogue was a more critical one.

On the other hand, the Vatican has clearly attempted to restrain any excessively far-reaching theological speculations. The document *Dominus Iesus* published in the year 2000 was aimed precisely at laying down authoritative guidelines for

3 See Saarinen 1993: 540. The most significant repercussion of Chicago 1893 would nevertheless appear to have been the commencement of neo-Hindu missions to the West, see Komulainen 2006: 102–135.

4 See http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/ . Meetings were arranged in Capetown, South Africa, in 1999 and Barcelona, Spain, in 2004, and the next one will be in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.

5 See, for example, Lønning 2002:49–59.

6 When a Lutheran or Orthodox theologian, for example, reads the Vatican II documents he naturally has to do so through an application of his own ecclesiology.

inter-faith dialogue[7] and reminding the Catholic Church of its central role in the economy of salvation: "If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation."[8]

The official inter-faith theology of the Catholic Church is distinctly inclusive, as it maintains that God's work in the salvation of mankind extends beyond the Christian Church and makes it possible for non-Christians to be saved. Ecclesiologically, however, this theological concept is based on the traditional notion of the Church of Christ being that church whose head is the Bishop of Rome.[9]

The initiation of the World Council of Churches' dialogue programme was a complicated process. The debates held at the assembly in Nairobi in 1975 reflected, among other things, the varying interests of the local churches in this matter, but agreement was reached at Chiang Mai in 1977, since when inter-faith dialogues have formed an established part of the council's activities. The allegedly liberal policies of the World Council of Churches in this respect have continued to cause internal friction, however, and anxiety over the danger of religious syncretism has been recognised as one factor in the intentions of the Orthodox Churches to withdraw from the council in the 1990s.[10]

Other inter-church organizations have subsequently issued statements related to the dialogue between religions. The parties to the Porvoo Agreement, for example, published a document of their own in 2003 providing guidelines for inter-faith encounters. Nevertheless, although such dialogues have become an established part of the lives of many ecumenical actors, critical views have been expressed as well. Varying opinions exist as to the relation between dialogue and missions, and the Pentecostal charismatic churches that have grown exceptionally rapidly in the global south are frequently negatively disposed towards inter-faith dialogues.

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7 The composite volume *Sic et Non* (2002) contains in addition to this document numerous papers by churchmen and scholars commenting on it. The document aroused great interest in ecumenical circles as well, on account of its doctrinal guidelines, maintaining, among other things, the status of the apostolic succession of bishops as a criterion for its judgements and affirming the true doctrine of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Consequently it refers to the Protestant churches as "ecclesiastical communities" that are not "churches" at all in the true sense.

8 *Dominus Iesus*, §22 (italics from the original).

9 In their fairly recent introduction to Catholic inter-faith theology and the activities of the Catholic Church in the field of inter-faith dialogue, Fitzgerald & Borelli (2006) briefly summarize the teachings of the Catholic Church with regard to other religions as follows: "The Holy Spirit is at work everywhere where genuine prayer takes place, even outside the Christian Church. It is therefore possible to recognise in the texts used in other religions elements by which innumerable people have been nurtured spiritually over the centuries and have been able to live their lives in communion with God. By following their own conscience and acting in accordance with the good to be found in their own religious traditions, non-Christians may in this way be able to respond to God's call and achieve salvation."

10 See Huotari (2003).

Tracing the initial Lutheran standpoint

Before I begin to consider in more detail what kind of theology we need in our changing Finnish society, I would like to say a brief word about the theological tenets of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland with regard to other religions, as my own ideas have inevitably arisen out of this tradition.

To begin with, it must be said that Finnish Lutherans do not have the same theological guidelines to fall back on as do Catholic Christians, for instance, who can always refer to the teachings laid down by the Magisterium. The bishops of the Lutheran Church in Finland have had little to say on such matters, and scarcely any teaching that could be regarded as official has been forthcoming on questions of inter-faith dialogue.[11]

Both the law governing the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Church Ordinance begin with a statement that the beliefs of the Lutheran Church are grounded in the Bible, the three creeds of the ancient church and the books of the Lutheran Confessions. It is a fact, however, that these key documents do not contain any ready-made answers to the current challenges posed by encounters between the world's religions. Although the Bible contains many references to religions that were influential in the world of that time, no consistent theological statements regarding other religions are to be found in it. We are therefore obliged to attempt to interpret and apply the multifarious threads of information that are available in it.[12]

The confessions of the Early Church say nothing about encounters with other religions – unless we recognise as such the emphatic statement in the Creed of St. Athanasius to the effect that a firm and undefiled faith in the common Christian doctrine as laid out in that document is essential for everlasting salvation.

Similarly the Confessions of the Lutheran Church shed little light on this subject, although there are references to the pagan ways of ancient times in connection with arguments against forms of worship devised by man. The Defence of the Augsburg Confession, for instance, alludes to the sacrifices offered up by pagans (IV, 206), as these demonstrate that "a godless opinion concerning works has always existed in the world". Similarly, it is claimed (IV, 288) that the existence of a great variety of rites proves that reason suggests that God should be pleased with different rituals of worship. The Defence of the Augsburg Confession in fact likens many of the characteristics of medieval Catholicism to pagan rituals.

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11 The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland is naturally a member of many ecumenical organizations which have made pronouncements on this subject, but these are not as such binding on Finnish Lutherans. The weight attached to the documents of the World Council of Churches, for example, depends on the reception that they gain; i.e. the decisive thing is how convincing their content is and the formal status that is accorded to them. Editor´s note: The Bishops' Conference of ELCF approved september 10 2013 guidelines *Towards the Sacred: Interreligious Encounter in the Ministry to the Church* (http://www.evl.fi/kirkkokasikirja/TOWARDS_THE_SACRED.pdf)

12 Recent surveys of the biblical material available have been published by McDermott (2007) and O'Collins (2008), for instance.

In his commentary on the First Commandment in his Large Catechism, Martin Luther notes that "the heathen really make their self-invented notions and dreams of God an idol." As they do not place their trust in the one true God, their faith is in Luther's words "false and wrong".

The references to other religions contained in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church are for the most part negative in character, as is evident from the above examples, and the general scarcity of such references may be explained by the historical context of these documents. The world-view that lay behind the Reformation was still a medieval one, so that the authors' knowledge of paganism was restricted to that of Classical times, with the Jews and Muslims also included among those who denied Christ. The new world opened up by the Crusades was only just beginning to impinge on the consciousness of Western Christendom, and the question of the relation between salvation brought about in Christ and the forms of salvation offered by other religions was not a relevant one for the theologians of the Reformation.

Thus Finnish Lutherans will not find any ready-made toolbox for coping with inter-faith encounters in the doctrinal legacy of their own church. In fact, if anything, they are likely to inherit a measure of caution regarding the role of the world's other religions rather than acceptance.

In the first place, Lutheran theology places more emphasis on the fundamental sinfulness of man than does Catholic theology, for instance, and a sharp distinction between the Law and the Gospel has left its mark on Lutheran anthropology. It is held that man can attain true knowledge about God, even though there is a risk that such knowledge will be falsified by his original sin. Human knowledge cannot, however, aspire to a gospel that can be decisive for salvation, so that all religions remain at the level of imperfect human strivings towards God.

Nevertheless, the Lutheran tradition does open the doors to a dialogue that concentrates on common challenges in the social sphere. Thus the Lutheran Church has been more favourably disposed than many others to the notion that non-Christians are capable of organizing public affairs in a just manner on the strength of their reasoning alone.

Secondly, Finnish Lutheran theologians and churchmen throughout the last century were greatly influenced by the dialectic theology that prevailed in the Protestant world, a theology that took a critical view of religions that were felt to be demonstrations of man's self-justification. The second edition of Karl Barth's *Der Römerbrief*, published in 1922, emphasized the role of Christ in marking a point of crisis in all human thought and from this standpoint launched an attack on the liberal theology of the times, which maintained that the difference between Christianity and the other religions was only a matter of degree.

The work of formulating a "theology of religions" on the basis of dialectic theology fell to the Dutch missionary theologian Hendrik Kraemer, who admittedly adopted a more moderate stance than his teacher. Kraemer is remembered for

his influential work *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, which he wrote for the missionary conference in Tambaram in 1938. Kraemer's thinking is highly complex, and trains of thought are to be found in his works that strike one as especially topical nowadays, in the early years of the third millennium.
Kraemer has been widely read in Finnish as well, as the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission published a translation of a short work by him under the title *Miksi juuri kristinusko?* (Why Christianity?) in 1965. It is very probable that the critical attitude towards other religions present in Kraemer's theology will have done much to strengthen the already cautious views held in Finnish Lutheran circles with regard to the theological significance of other world religions. Although the "Christ vs. other faiths" way of thinking propounded in our confirmation classes only roughly resembles Kraemer's theology of religions, there are many similarities in their basic structures.
The two points mentioned above, the distinction between the Law and the Gospel and the influence of dialectic theology, have led to a situation in which the Lutheran Church of Finland at the grass-roots level has traditionally had doubts regarding other faiths.[13] The idea still prevails in our revival movements in particular that the religions of the world simply represent the Law of God, although this exclusive tradition has begun to be accompanied in recent times by more open, pluralistic ideas that emphasize relativity in matters of religion. In the light of current ecumenical discussions, I personally would favour an alternative in which the ship of the church were to steer a middle course between the Scylla of exclusivism and the Charybdis of pluralism. A purely negative attitude towards the world's religions does not do justice either to the multiplicity of the witness put forward in the Bible or to the empirical facts of today, but the pluralistic view which maintains that all religions teach basically the same things and offer parallel roads to salvation is equally problematic as far as a Christian identity is concerned. It is necessary to construct an inclusive theology that is based on the core content of the Christian faith and is able from this starting point to open itself out to encounters with others. Ingredients for such a model are to be found in the most recent international discussions on this theme – and certainly also in the Lutheran tradition if we are prepared to interpret it in the context of our day and age.

Towards an ecumenical theology of encounter

The theology of religions is a rapidly expanding discipline in academic circles, and it would seem that every theologian in recent years who has wanted to be

13 This can be tested in practise in the following way, for instance. First read through the document *Dominus Iesus*, which is considered to be conservative, and then consider what might be the reactions if an ordinary Lutheran pastor in Finland were to say the same things in a homily or sermon in his own parish.

taken seriously has made some sort of pronouncement on the subject. There has been much discussion, for example, on what attitude Christians should take towards encounters with people of other faiths and what role other world religions might play in God's plan of salvation. Another topic that has been of interest is the relation between religion and violence, while particularly heated discussions have taken place over the pluralistic view of other religions which maintains that Christians should renounce their own faith's absolute requirements as one condition for genuine dialogue.

One outcome of the many stages in the discussion is that it has been demonstrated incontrovertibly that compromising on one's own theology cannot be a prerequisite for encounters between religions.[14] On the contrary, it is in the nature of a religion that it should put forward claims about reality that can be understood as absolute truths. Thus a genuine inter-faith dialogue can take place only when different traditions with their own ways of analysing reality come face to face. Inter-faith encounters cannot be regulated by any metatheory, which is in fact what the pluralistic theology of religions in the end proves to be.

The only possible frame of reference is one in which each party sets out from the tradition that it represents and the varying interpretations of that tradition. As a Christian, I can set bounds on an encounter only in accordance with the Christian tradition in which I am anchored; I cannot dictate how Jews, Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists might approach such an encounter. I can admittedly use my own advance knowledge to try to draw attention to the resources that in my view are contained in their religious traditions, and it is in fact precisely interactive comments and questions of this kind that go to make up an authentic dialogue.

Attitudes have changed enormously in recent decades, as may be seen from the rise of the ecumenical movement referred to above, and this broadening of our theology of religions owes much to the patristic theology of the Early Church, which began to be studied with renewed enthusiasm in the West in the course of the 20th century. One important discovery as far as the theology of religions was concerned was the notion held by the early Church Fathers of Christ as the *Logos* incarnate. The concept of *logos* is difficult to translate into our modern languages, as it can mean not only "word", but also "reason" and "principle". Thus Church Fathers such as St. Justin Martyr and St. Clement of Alexandria concluded that the *Logos* that had become man in Christ had associated himself with the reality in which we live ever since the Creation. Thus the elements of truth and holiness that are to be found in the world's religions all reflect the same divine reality that became flesh in Jesus Christ. This allows the church to place a favourable

14 For more details on this discussion, see Komulainen 2006:203–235.

interpretation on the world's religions: they all radiate the light, because Christ himself is their sun.[15]

There are still some less desirable things to be found in the world's religions, however. One only needs to think of the Hindu caste system or the human sacrifices or temple prostitution to be found in many religions. These things mean that encounter is by no means a straightforward matter for Christians. Although the secret hand of God may be seen in them, they also carry distortions brought about by the Fall from Grace, as, of course, does all human activity. Even great theologians of the Early Church such as Origen and St. Augustine used a biblical metaphor to demonstrate the ambiguity of this situation: just as the Israelites fleeing from Egypt took the Egyptians' gold with them (Ex. 3:21–22, 12:35–36), so the Christians can free elements of heathen culture for use in the service of the gospel.

A theology tailored to specific religions

When we set out to analyse the challenges posed by encounters between religions from a theological point of view we are obliged to take account of the abundance of separate issues involved, for in some cases it is a matter of a religion that the other party has acquired in childhood. Thus a Somali immigrant, for example, has a culture that is Islamic through and through. On other occasions, however, one may be dealing with a Finnish person who in the course of his life has left the Lutheran Church (or some other Christian denomination) behind him and adopted some other faith. This is the case with the Finnish-born *bhakta* who belong to the Krishna movement. It is even possible for people to remain members of the Christian church but in practise adopt the precepts that govern their lives from some other religious tradition. Thus is the case, for instance, with ordinary members of the Lutheran Church who practise Buddhist meditation daily but come to church only rarely.

It is obvious that from a theological point of view each of the cases I have quoted above is different, and if we want to seek further nuances, we should remember that in the first case it makes a difference what religious tradition an immigrant has grown up in: Islam is quite a different matter theologically from Hinduism or Buddhism, for instance.

Islam is a religion that grew up under the historical influence of Christianity. Consequently, familiar biblical figures, from Adam to Jesus, are to be found on the pages of the Koran, although the details and the significance of these figures may differ. Likewise, Islam incorporates a distinct opinion regarding Christian-

15 See, for example, Dupuis 1997:53–77.

ity: that Jesus was one of the most important prophets but his message became distorted in the later course of history.

Put in simple terms, a Christian has to evaluate Islam according to much the same criteria as he does the Mormon Church that arose in America in the 19th century. Both are religions that in a sense build on the Christian tradition but add fundamentally new elements to it. Both carry a message which fills out that of the Christian faith in a manner that would not be possible within the framework of traditional Christian theology.

It is important to note, of course, that from a Muslim's point of view Islam was the original faith and the whole chronology is reversed: Islam has been the true faith from the time of the Creation, as witnessed by the existence of monotheists (*hanif*) throughout history, and the Christian doctrine of the trinity is a later aberration that is seen to contravene the absolute requirement for one God (*tauhid*). This is a good example of how encounters can be clashes between conflicting interpretations: Christians adopt the opposite order for looking at Islam from that in which Muslims look at Christianity.

An excellent example of a religion of a different kind would be Hinduism, the core concepts of which are immensely ancient. The books of the Veda, for instance, were written long before the birth of Christ, and although many changes and attempted reforms have taken place within Hinduism, it belongs in its classic form to quite a different category from Islam in that it represents the traditional religious mentality of the human race, a mentality that arises out of the act of Creation itself.

One interesting category referred to in the Bible which may help the Christian to interpret the religious observance of a devout Hindu is that of a "pagan saint". This term has been used in theological discussions to refer to persons described in the Bible in exemplary terms in spite of being adherents of another faith. These have traditionally been taken to include Melchizedek, King of Salem, who is described as "a priest of God Most High" (Gen. 14:18) and who pronounced a blessing on Abraham. This relationship is rendered especially interesting by the fact that God had specifically called Abraham to serve him just prior to this. Thus Melchizedek can be interpreted in the light of the biblical text as representing a broader form of knowledge of God that could be traced back to the covenant made between God and Noah after the Flood (Gen. 9). The French theologian Jean Daniélou has summed up the significance of Melchizedek as follows: "Melchizedek is a cosmic high priest who gathers to himself all the riches that have been offered up in faith since the world began up to the time of Abraham and certifies that they are acceptable to God."[16]

16 Quoted by Dupuis 1997:36.

Another example of a "pagan saint" is Cyrus, King of Persia, who freed the Israelites from exile in Babylon. He is referred to in the Book of Isaiah (44:28–45:1) as a "shepherd" whom "the Lord has anointed king". We know, however, from historical sources that Cyrus reinstated the god Marduk in Babylon and revived many other religious cults. On the other hand, in the words of the Book of Ezra (1:1–4), Cyrus announced his promise to build a temple of the Lord for the Israelites in the name of "the God who is in Jerusalem".[17]

However, rather than dwelling on historical and exegetic problems associated with individual persons, it is more essential to note that the Bible recognises the category of "pagan saints" as such.[18] A biblical figure may be "acceptable unto God" even though he does not in human terms belong to God's chosen people – regardless of whether this means the Old Testament tribe of Israel or the Church of Christ as it takes shape on the pages of the New Testament. It is recounted in the gospels, too, that Jesus held up as example to the people of Israel heathens such as Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:27) and the Roman centurion (Luke 7:9). Similarly the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:37) culminates in a member of this mixed nation denigrated by the Israelites being raised up as an example to others on account of the love that he showed in his actions.[19]

It is possible to regard the "pagan saints" who appear on the pages of the Bible as representing some form of cosmic religious belief derived from the covenant that God made with Noah after the Flood (Gen. 9), for many theologians regard that covenant as still holding good even though God made a separate covenant with Abraham and subsequently became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Thus the various "pre-Christian" religions could be regarded as reflections of divine action that took place in the framework of a covenant agreed upon in the dim and distant early days of human existence.[20]

If religions that pre-date Christianity can be interpreted in the framework of the covenant made with Noah, what of the religions that arose after Christianity? Can Islam be treated as a cosmic religious belief, given that it recognises Jesus Christ but assigns him a quite different significance? Or would it be better to associate Islam with the covenant made with Abraham? This solution has been favoured by some theologians in an attempt to respect Muslims' understanding

17 See Greenstein 2005.

18 For details, see Dupuis 1997:31–37.

19 McDermott 2007:38–41.

20 Even if one should approve of such a theological construct, there are problems that remain unresolved. It is not at all certain, for example, that the Hindus, the Buddhists or the Shintoists of Japan would want to be placed in this category. The Christians could pursue this interpretation in their own frame of reference, but encounters with people of these persuasions would still be fraught with conflicts and tensions. It is true, of course, that tensions exist in the opposite direction, too, for many Hindus and Buddhists classify Christianity as a lower form of religious belief than their own, one that at best can simply be of assistance in the process of illumination of the human mind and soul. It is essential in inter-faith dialogues to tolerate these crucial differences in interpretation.

of their own faith, in which Abraham occupies a position of some importance. There are many open questions, but one thing is clear: that Christians must respect the beliefs of a Muslim just as the biblical writers respected men of God such as Melchizedek and Cyrus.

The whole question of assessing Islamic beliefs from a Christian perspective is an extremely difficult one, especially as Islam itself assigns quite different degrees of significance to those elements that the two faiths have in common and quite explicitly rejects crucial Christian doctrines such as that of the Holy Trinity and that of the two natures of Jesus Christ as truly God and truly man. On the other hand, there are many Christian interpretations of Islamic beliefs: according to some, Islam is a permanent part of God's covenant with Abraham through the person of Ishmael (Gen. 17:15–27), while others maintain that Islam is simply a heresy.

The relation of Christianity to Judaism is quite a separate matter, although similar points of disagreement exist as in the case of Islam. The Jews likewise regard the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as a serious departure from the principle of One God. On the other hand, Judaism is the original faith of Abraham, the significance of which is under constant discussion throughout the New Testament. What stance should the new belief in Christ adopt towards the covenant made by God with Abraham, which culminated in the law received by Moses from God on Mount Sinai? It was a mystery for St. Paul, at least, why Christ's own people did not welcome Him as the Messiah since all the promises recorded in their holy writings were fulfilled in Christ.

A knowledge of God through otherness

The solution reached by St. Paul regarding the relationship between Judaism and the new Christian faith provides an essential model for our deliberations on the relation of Christianity to other religions, to the extent that the British Jesuit Michael Barnes uses it as a basis for re-thinking the whole set of questions to be addressed within the theology of religions.[21] St. Paul engages in a painful struggle with his Jewish legacy in the course of his Epistle to the Romans and is unable to find any consistent, balanced and symmetrical theological construct that will serve as a solution to the problem. Instead, he ends up by appealing to the hidden depths of God's wisdom (Rom. 11:33), on the grounds of which he trusts that everything will eventually be resolved. God's ways remain unfathomable from the limited human perspective.

Thus the theology of encounters between religions cannot in Barnes' opinion be resolved through the concept of "religion", but rather the key word is the "other". The theology of religions is a question of what significance Christians

21 See Barnes 2002.

are prepared to give to "otherness". In a sense, God himself can be regarded as a fundamental case of otherness, and as such a challenge to us at the limits of our fragmented knowledge. The Christian Church has to ask itself what is the theological significance of the otherness that it encounters, and what Christians can learn about God by examining the world outside the church. The church is called upon not only to proclaim the word of God but also to listen critically but with an open mind to the testimony of those of other faiths regarding God, for God may well have hidden some new perspective on Himself within that testimony. In order to explain what this might mean in concrete terms, I would like to recount, although without analysing them in any detail, a couple of experiences of my own that have proved to be of *theological* significance for me.

I remember once sitting in the rear part of an ancient mosque in Cairo at the time of sunset prayers. In spite of the number of people praying there, the vast mosque seemed relatively empty, but an intense atmosphere still prevailed. The two or three rows of men were praying devotedly to the One and Only God. Apart from a few familiar phrases, I could not understand what they were reciting in Arabic, but I did realise that I had a lot to learn from their faith: they truly believed that worshipping God was an essential human task. For me, these Muslim men who were bowing down to the ground in an exotic mosque and uttering their prayers in Arabic represented otherness, but in spite of this, or perhaps precisely for this reason, their faith opened up a quite new perspective on holiness.

I have experienced rather similar tremors in my spine on my travels in India, as an outsider observing the passionate feelings of Hindu pilgrims expressed in resounding cries and dense clouds of incense in the semi-darkness of their temples. I remember gazing at the steps leading up the slope of a high hill in Tirupati, southern India, and watching pilgrims making their way up to look at the powerful image of Sri Venkateswara. After their arduous climb the same pilgrims would queue for hours in the iron cages surrounding the temple to even catch a brief glimpse of the figure mounted on the altar in the "holy of holies".

I remember, too, my feelings in a temple in Mathura at dusk, when Hindus from the nearby villages were pouring into the area of the huge temple that marked the birthplace of Krishna. The atmosphere was intense in one of the smaller shrines, too, as the people began spontaneously to greet Krishna by singing "Jai Jagdish Hare", an ancient Hindu hymn of praise to Vishnu as ruler of the world.[22] The people were dancing before an image of their god, and one man had even dressed up as a woman to imitate Radha, the foremost lover of Krishna, who is a paragon for all worshippers on account of her passionate devotion to him.

Although I have learned many new things through contacts with other religions and have become convinced of the ardour with which people may pursue

22 While studying theology in India in 1997 on a scholarship from the World Council of Churches I frequently sang a Christianized version of this hymn in Christian church services.

their beliefs, I have at the same time become aware of a profound difference. I was also able to see in that temple of Krishna in Mathura how a yearning after the transcendental can easily descend into narrowness of mind and violence. The area around the temple is one of the most volatile places in India, as there are Hindu extremists who would happily destroy the mosque that stands next to it. In their view the mosque symbolizes a faith that is foreign to India and which has penetrated into the subcontinent through acts of violence in the course of history. Krishna's birthplace, with its barbed wire and heavily armed guards reminded me of Bethlehem, which similarly needs substantial military protection in order to receive its pilgrims. There is nothing new under the sun.

In the light of my own experiences I would regard the treating of the theology of religions as a question of otherness as a wise approach and a way of escaping from one intellectual blind alley, although admittedly the new vision that it opens up is equally challenging. Endless parallel analyses of religions can be made and all manner of similarities and differences can be discovered. The Christian faith can be adapted to an Arab, Indian, Chinese or Africa culture and a great deal of "Egyptian gold" can be dug up which can be imbued with new meaning in the service of the Christian gospel. All this can be useful and can support the claim made by St. Paul at the Areopagus when referring to an altar in Athens dedicated to an unknown God, that God "is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27–28). More important than constructing comparative models for the similarities and differences between religions is that we should constantly be asking ourselves over and over again what the God in whom the church basically believes is really like.

The multigenerational tradition enshrined in the Bible reminds us that Christians believe in a God whose actions are full of surprises. As seen in the history of the Israelites, God is always ready to challenge the concepts put about concerning Him. His basic characteristic, however, is freedom, as befits his reply to Moses' question concerning His name: "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:14).

Their period of exile in Egypt led the Israelites to recognise that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the God of all the peoples. Thus, just as they found that their concept of God had been rendered absolute in this sense, so they also found that those who were alien to them were revealed in a new way as being their brothers and sisters, as they were created by the same God. This understanding of the greatness of God can break down the barriers between peoples and overcome the human propensity for regarding holiness as an exclusive property of their own group.[23]

Paradoxically, recognition of God's greatness opens up new avenues in two opposing directions. On the one hand, often severe polemic is aroused in the Bible

23 See Neuhaus 1999.

by gods that are represented in the form of images, or idols (see, for example, Is. 41:29; Jer.10:11–16). The True God is something quite different from the products of the human religious imagination, which are all too often raised up as justifications for oppression within societies or inspirations for various nationalistic projects. The biblical interpretation of faith inescapably includes criticism of all false gods in whose form attempts may be made to transform what is finite into something infinite and what is human into something divine. The need for prophetic criticism of this kind has become particularly acute in the wake of the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century, now that we can appreciate the full implications of the state terrorism that can ensue when a nation or leader is raised up on a par with the gods.

Alongside this criticism there is another theme detectable in the Bible that could be looked on as a universalist one. A passage which has attracted the attention of many theologians is that in the Book of Malachi where the Lord of Hosts says, "from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations" (Mal. 1:11). Many have seen in this passage recognition of a cosmic religious faith through which all nations will come to worship the One True God. Another passage pointing in the same direction is St. Paul's statement at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–31) that the Athenians have unknowingly been worshipping the same God who has now made Himself known in a new way through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Theologians are still arguing, however, about how far any conclusions based on such references can be taken. Some maintain that the world's religious traditions have retained their importance in the eyes of those who believed in them even after the time of Jesus Christ, while others held that such traditions were doomed to die and rise again as forms of Christianity, although not identical to (western) Christianity.[24]

Even though no unambiguous answer may be found to the question of the importance of other faiths from the point of view of Christianity, Christians should nevertheless be prepared to take the risk of confronting the challenge of "otherness" in their own lives. The intellectual and theological problem may remain unsolved, but the ethical code is clear enough. Encounters should be governed by the greatest of all Christian principles: the divine love, *agape*.

Hospitality as a theological virtue

There is no need to go any more deeply into the many theological dimensions of the word "love" in this connection, but suffice it to say that the many ways of

24 I am quoting here an idea put forward by Raimo Panikkar during his early period, see Panikkar 1964.

expressing the notion in Greek have given rise to substantial philosophical and theological discussions on the subject over the ages.[25] It is the word *agape* that is used consistently in the New Testament, however, rather than *eros*, which was favoured by the philosophers of Classical times, and this has been interpreted as implying an emphasis on the distinction between the divine love and human love. *Agape* is more valuable even than knowledge, for as a property of God Himself it is eternal (1 Cor. 13:8–13; I John 4:8).

Agape also proves acceptable as a tool for considering matters related to inter-faith encounters, as it allows conceptualization of an attitude that strives towards the universal but is not imperialistic. This is possible because the concept is grounded in the same internal life of the Trinity that gave birth to the world. Alongside His own existence, God has allowed room for the physical world, which He loves while at the same time respecting its separate integrity. God's love does not force itself on us but is grounded in voluntariness and the giving of something of one's own.[26] Thus a dialogue between religions requires a commitment to encountering otherness without governing it or forcing it into one's own sphere – respect for the other as another, while at the same time striving towards genuine communion.

In spite of the fact that we are unable to formulate a satisfactory theory for encounters with those of other faiths, the concept of *agape* gives us a model to follow in practise. Indeed, it is only through practises defined by *agape* that we can gain access to a theory of encounters, because thoughts and deeds are in the last resort closely linked together. Faced with the challenge of inter-faith encounters, we should direct attention first to the correctness of our actions (*orthopraxis*) rather than attempting to construct some kind of theological model prior to the event (*orthodoxia*).

It is important in encounters between religions to bear in mind the list of virtues typical of *agape* as set out by St. Paul (1 Cor. 13:4–7), as it is obvious that such experiences call for quite exceptional gifts of loving patience, and for a confidence as sure as St. Paul's that, in spite of his intellectual confusion "all Israel will be saved" in the end (Rom. 11:26). This attitude is especially necessary when confronting brothers and sisters who have of their own free will abandoned the Christian faith for some other religion. The new religious movements pose a still more painful challenge to the church than do established religions that may be brought to our country by immigrants, but we are still obliged to extend our love to those who, within their own lives, have turned their backs on that which we find dearest and to which we are most closely attached.

This attitude of love was conveyed in an exemplary manner by Pierre Claverie, the Algerian-French Roman Catholic Bishop of Oran who worked under the most

25 For a presentation and further development of the most recent ideas on the subject, see Saarinen 2007:28–31.

26 See, for example, Pannenberg 1998:182–196.

difficult of conditions in Algeria and was eventually murdered by Islamic militants in 1996.[27] Claverie attempted to act as an "apostle of friendship" in his own Islamic environment. He was critical of the various theological conferences and communiqués that attempted to define relations between Islam and Christianity by means of various slogans such as "the Children of Abraham" or "the People of the Book", and he also maintained that simple talk of one and the same God was merely a way of brushing aside all the major spiritual and theological differences that existed between Christianity and Islam.

Instead of dwelling upon conceptual solutions, Claverie preferred to emphasize the badly scarred history of Christian-Muslim relations. The only conceivable attitude to adopt in the presence of such a historical burden was in his opinion to follow the example of Jesus Christ, who did not attempt to reconcile conflicting ways of thinking but simply concentrated on loving everybody. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is a painful process that can only begin at the grass-roots level, amongst people who are living side by side. Theological discussions can only follow a long time afterwards. One illustrative anecdote concerns an occasion on which a Muslim visitor begged to leave because it was time for prayer. Claverie insisted that he should say his prayers in the bishop's residence. He did not take part in the prayers himself, but he emphasized that it was an honour that his friend should do this. Religious differences should not prevent people from living side by side and establishing friendships.

The examples I have quoted above come from far-away places well beyond the boundaries of Finland, and it is indeed the case that our Finnish society has relatively little experience of inter-faith encounters. We should therefore listen to and examine experiences of encounters between Christianity and other religions taking place elsewhere. The ecumenical Christian world consists of innumerable local churches and parishes which adhere to various Christian traditions, and it is often hard to find sufficient common ground and a workable procedure even to allow ecumenical discussions between these Christian bodies. How much more difficult it must be to confront people who live in a radically different world. At the same time, however, we are all united by a common humanity, which Christians perceive as something especially pleasing to God, which means that outsiders should be made welcome. Friendship and living side by side form a good foundation for dialogue even though the parties may not have anything in common in terms of their outlook on the world. Friendship does not call for a joint communiqué; it is enough to live side by side, listen to each other and engage in interactive dialogue.

The church has a calling to speak to people about a God who makes Himself known in situations of oppression and marginalization, a concept that is famil-

27 See Allen 2007.

iar enough to Lutherans, as the theology of the Cross lay at the heart of Martin Luther's teachings. Thus our awareness of the paradoxical ways in which God acts obliges us to direct our gaze towards the margins, for it is there that we can expect to encounter Christ himself – even though we may not recognise him as such (Matt. 25:37–40).

Voitto Huotari
Bishop of Mikkeli

The language of faith

People express themselves through the medium of language, communicating with each other and receiving messages from each other. In this sense the language of faith is the language used by people to communicate matters concerned with their beliefs, although it is not simply a means of expressing ideas but it is equally well a tool for formulating those ideas. And more than that, it is also an instrument for communication between God and man. I will begin this paper by looking at the nature of the language of faith and describing the present-day context in which the expression and communication of faith takes place. I will then consider the languages of words, church services, prayers, activities and communion in the church from a Lutheran point of view.

Possibilities and limitations of the language of faith

Just as it is with the language of faith that we give expression to our relationship with God, so it is this language that carries the divine messages from eternity into human lives. Language can be used to express realities, but it can also be used to create realities, and at the heart of the language of faith lies the power to make holiness present for us here and now. An experience of holiness is an encounter with the after-life while we are still in the present life, and it is through language that what is timeless and eternal becomes something that we can experience and receive. Spiritual experiences are by nature mysteries, however, and it is difficult in terms of language to discover and capture that which is in essence divine. "As it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' – these things God has revealed to us through the spirit" (1 Cor. 2:9–10).

Since the language of faith does not concern itself only with the external, objective world and the claims that it makes cannot always be verified through everyday observations and deductions, it is sometimes claimed that this language is not meaningful speech but simply vocalizations of people's feelings about life. Western Christianity has been struggling with this claim for a couple of centuries now. Efforts have been made to subject the language of faith to conditions laid down by scientific paradigms, and in this way to transform it into speech that meets the everyday conditions required for comprehensibility, but this has merely meant that the crucial essence of the faith has been missed and many vital aspects of it have gone unexpressed. The transmission of a message by means governed

by rational logic and everyday language does not suffice for the language of faith, for what is infinite cannot be captured by something that is finite.

One consequence of the lack of direct means of expression is that the language of faith is obliged to use many words according to subsidiary or secondary meanings or connotations rather than in their principal meanings, e.g. in speaking of "a father's love" or "pureness of heart". The concepts of this language are in a sense metaphorical, as they are attempting to capture something that cannot be reached by human powers of observation or understood in human terms. Every verbal expression referring to an object of faith is in the nature of an approximation.

It is essential to represent faith in terms of metaphors, symbols and narratives, for it is only these that can render its immense dimensions and depths accessible and open up a new, powerful and profound vision of the destiny and eternity of the human race. These are still able to function in the world of attitudes and emotions and to draw an attitudinal map of the human mind with the directions in which it should travel. They are in close communion with people's deepest desires, their hopes and fears, their passions and their emotions.

All attempts to justify a religious faith by comparing it with the results of a scientific enquiry are tantamount to dressing it up in a straightjacket of objectivity and will inevitably lead to it being misunderstood. A faith has both a cognitive and an emotional dimension, both an objective and a subjective side to it. The purpose of language in this area is to open up a dimension of a different kind, to function in a "language game" world of its own (Ludwig Wittgenstein).

The language of faith needs no further foundation than that provided for it by its own existence and use as such. Faith is an unshakable trust in something that is not in the last resort grounded in rational arguments, which means that its language occupies a very special logical role relative to the language used for empirical or historical facts. Its role lies in giving expression to convictions that direct and regulate every aspect of a person's life.

The comprehensibility of any language is dependent on context, the situations in which it is used, where contextuality also includes the fact that one essential for the language of faith is a community that observes that faith. It is in church that the language of faith gains its semantic content, and its community use is realized within the life of a parish or congregation. Within such language communities, however, and even more so outside them, there is a danger for users of the language of faith that they may assume that their language is independent of context, or that their own context is universally applicable.

Within the Lutheran Church great value is placed on the comprehensibility of the language of faith and we are prepared to struggle to achieve this, but although we struggle on the one hand on behalf of its conceptuality and impact, we are at the same time obliged to look for expressions to suit situations in which the mind and its deepest desires are crying out for support for feelings rather than reason. Thus its effect does not have to take place only on the level of information or

logic. Although the modes of argumentation that apply to matters of religion differ in nature from those used in other spheres of life, they do not imply an escape from statements of fact nor do they entitle one by any means to speak carelessly. Comprehensibility in the language of faith, as in other forms of language, requires simplicity and concreteness. On the other hand, the language of faith does have certain competence criteria of its own, in particular that it should be compatible with Biblical tradition and that it should have an impact on the listener that is consistent with the aims of its message.

Speech and its context

Human beings have never been surrounded by such an abundance and variety of messages and sources of information as they are at present. The volume of these stimuli is inspiring, of course, but it is also superficial, divisive and exhausting. In order to live in such a context we need to strive in a conscious manner to make choices that will lead to an internally satisfactory world-view and concept of human life.

The age-old human yearning for significance and holiness has not disappeared, but it has altered in form. Nowadays we Finns are inclined to concern ourselves with the purpose of life. There is a definite interest in intellectual and spiritual matters that is a part of the discovery of one's own identity. But the possession of personal opinions and experiences needs to be offset by information and experiences of what lies above the human level, an unalterable truth that is greater than man himself. People yearn for experiences that transcend everyday life; they yearn for an intimation of holiness. A world-view that is simply a mosaic without any overall character is unsatisfactory, and although freedom and individuality have created a paradise for modern man, they have also imprisoned him. We are tired of being the measure of our own success and have a concrete need to approach something that is external to us.

At the same time, the spiritual quest in which people indulge has become more individualized. Life is seen as a series of individual choices, or a development project moving towards ever more intensive individual experiences. The fundamental value to be aimed at is the human being who is able to fulfil himself, meet his own needs, achieve his own dreams, cope with his own agonies and recover from his own ills. Thus even people who are interested in intellectual and spiritual matters often find it difficult to recognise the role of the church, or of the community in general, in their own faith. The language of faith is nevertheless fundamentally a community language, a language that gains its experiential content that contributes to a firm faith and a good life from the church. This is a major challenge for spiritual communication, to render the beliefs of the church significant and relevant to modern-day man. It is challenging above all because

it is a matter of swimming against the tide and seeking prominence in a highly disparate linguistic environment.

A belief in God arises and gains in strength through the influence of the Holy Spirit, which goes about its work when and where it wishes, independently of man. "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

When we wish to communicate messages of a religious kind to another person it is important to take into account that person's situation and needs as they are at that time, and as we attempt to do this we are particularly apt to listen to words about God, especially if that person is in a situation in life in which he or she is seeking answers to fundamental questions that have been raised by earlier personal experiences and has a need for such words. People nowadays need to hear about God, for God is able to help them apply their faith to the events of their own everyday lives, as it is more characteristic than ever for people to approach various matters and adopt them as their own on the basis of prior experiences. The Lutheran Church has traditionally been fairly restrained and phlegmatic when it comes to providing "experiences", but fresh, new forms of activity are currently being developed in order to improve this situation.

Particular attention is likely to be paid to speech in which the speaker is able to back up his words with references to his own experiences, and thus it is important to speak in the language of experience that is available to the church. In the Bible, and especially in the Psalter and the Gospels, we meet up with various kinds of people who are coming face to face with God, and common experiences can be an important bridge between them and us.

A fundamental religious experience is frequently described as a mystery that has two interconnected aspects: it is at once both frightening and alluring (*mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*, Rudolf Otto). The uniqueness of such an experience undoubtedly holds a certain attraction for people nowadays, and in this sense the use of narratives and metaphors is especially important in our times. We live in a world of narratives, whereas conceptuality and abstractness do not impress themselves on the listener, nor do they inspire consideration or application of their message.

Narratives are part of the basic language of the Bible. The original form in which the gospel was proclaimed was a recollected narrative, and it is reassuring to see that narrative has regained its privileged position in the Lutheran tradition, since it is an antidote to conceptuality, which often has only an external impact on the listener. Narratives are more illustrative and correspond better to the way in which people of today conceive of things, and they can also be experiential and dramatic. Often it is that which is most personal that is also most widely shared amongst people, and a narrative is sufficiently open-ended as far as the listeners

are concerned that it leaves them to draw conclusions with respect to their own lives and to consider and work on possible applications.

Words

The concept of "word" in our faith as expressed in the Bible implies a reference to the most essential acts performed by God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. … And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1–3, 14). When speaking of God as he was before the world began, before the creation, his nature is described as that of the Word. It is through the power of the Word that everything came into being, and Jesus Christ is the Word made Flesh.

Human speech and words can be deployed in the service of God in the context of the spiritual life, to the extent that the Lutheran Church is often described as the "Church of the Word". Following the path mapped out for us by Martin Luther, we have adopted a sacramental interpretation of the Word as the message that we preach, for we refer to it as an instrument of God's grace in the manner of the sacraments. God's word is not just the plain text of the Bible, however, but the living voice of the gospels (*viva vox evangelii*). The word takes on this form when it is proclaimed and taught to those who will listen to it. Thus the word is an instrument of God's creative work among us, for as the word is preached, God is creating something new within us: he is fighting against Satan, freeing our consciences from the bonds of sin and showing us the way to a firm faith and a good life. One consequence of the sacramental interpretation of the word is that Lutheran tradition does not necessarily require a church service to include Holy Communion, but rather a "service of the word" can be regarded as equally important and effective.

It is also through words that the church conveys its teachings, attempting to explain the divine truth in terms of the language of human thought. The teachings of the church are intended to provide people with "food for thought", as information on the object of one's belief can lend content to spiritual experiences. The Lutheran Church places great value on Christian teaching, and wishes to distribute information on the doctrines, beliefs and life of the church in order to lead people to the mystery of faith itself, while still acknowledging that the last step calls for something more than thought.

Although the Lutheran tradition has centred very much on the word, attention has also been paid to the conveying and reception of messages through several of the senses, i.e. it is possible to "speak" the language of faith in a manner that can be appreciated by various of the senses: it can be heard, seen or felt, for instance,

and in Holy Communion it can be tasted as well: "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Ps. 34:8).

Music in particular has grown in importance, as it can touch upon the innermost feelings aroused by life, whether sorrow, joy, gratitude, yearning, anxiety or whatever, and express those feelings more deeply than can be done in words. In its attempts to express holiness verbally, language has traditionally resorted to more lyrical devices such as rhythm or repetition, or else it has reached out to music or other forms of art as means of expression. Music can indeed bring intimations of the world of the divine that are more profound than those expressed in mere words. All music is a part of God's gift to us in creation, but it speaks the language of faith most clearly when it has taken on spiritual meanings within a religious community, i.e. the language of music becomes a language of faith by virtue of the meaning assigned to it in the life of a religious community. Music as a language of faith cannot be entirely independent of the words associated with it, nor can the words be entirely independent of the meanings created for them.

Images perceived by the eye can also speak the language of faith, and their importance is also on the increase within the Lutheran tradition, although for the present there are still many opportunities for richer forms of visual expression that have not been adequately explored within our tradition. But again, images require semantic content to be assigned to them by a religious community before we can look on them as manifestations of the language of faith. Where it was necessary in the early days of the Reformation to teach people to read written words, it is still necessary nowadays to teach people to "read" works of art.

Liturgy

Lutheran church services may be understood as occasions both for God to speak to the congregation gathered in church and for the people to speak to God, in addition to which the actual preaching of the word is a form of communication between the pastors and the congregation, an act of speaking *about* God. If we add to these the missionary aspect of a church service, we can consider, too, that there is communication with the outside world, including those who are not living in communion with God. For these reasons Lutheran services do not give the impression of being so powerfully oriented towards prayer as is the Orthodox Liturgy, for instance, although they may still be understood fundamentally as an act of prayer, for all liturgy is in essence a matter of prayer.

The purpose of liturgical language is to render the tradition associated with the church's beliefs actual to the worshippers, and thus it must be expected to be traditional and familiar to a certain extent. But it should also be simple and clear as well as concise and accurate. Liturgical language is expected to be somewhat archaic in tone, even at the cost of being unfathomable in places, a property that does not seem to worry people greatly, certainly not those who attend services

regularly. In fact, the inner circle of regular attenders scarcely seems to require any reform of the liturgical language.

The verbal aspects of liturgical language rely very heavily on repetition, which in turn contributes to familiarity and a sense of security, and an important role is also played by texts spoken or sung together. One special feature, however, is its experiential dimension, which is allied to its function of creating and reinforcing a sense of communion among the members of the congregation. In this respect it has been described as a ritual form of speech, the expressions contained in which consist very largely of words from alien or archaic forms of language. These may seem devoid of meaning to those who do not belong to the community concerned, but for those who do belong, it is precisely this language and its repeated turns of phrase that create an air of familiarity, togetherness and participation.

On the other hand, there are some Lutherans who maintain that reform is essential so that people who are seldom involved in church life and those of future generations will be able to understand the church's message. In accordance with Protestant tradition, the language used by the church is seen as linking it with the realities of people's lives and as conveying a message by this means.

Efforts have been made in the course of revising our use of language to replace archaic expressions with new ones that come closer to the standard language, but such expressions have not always struck people as suitable for liturgical use. In particular, new expressions may be thought to fall short experientially, to be lacking in the colour and tones that the earlier expressions had taken on because of the spiritual experiences associated with them.

Prayer

Prayer is described in the Lutheran tradition as a human act of speaking with God which subsumes the expression of petitions, thanks and praise to God and events of God speaking to those who pray. The starting point for prayer is the opening up of the heart to God, both verbally and non-verbally. Sequences of prayer in our church services frequently begin with the words "O Lord, open my lips", in which the people praying both establish contact with their own selves and invite the real source of prayer, God's Holy Spirit, to be at work within them. It is a recognition that prayer is the work of the Spirit of God.

Praise, thanksgiving and intercessions possess a rich diversity of verbal forms of expression in the traditions of the church, while the Protestant tradition also attaches value to the free outpouring of the innermost feelings of the heart to God in one's own words. On the other hand, one often hears of people nowadays who are entirely struck dumb in the face of God and are incapable of formulating their prayers verbally at all. It is both for this reason and also to broaden the act of prayer so that it is not confined to being a self-centred, unidirectional recital

of one's own needs to God that we need to make very much more diversified use of the church's common tradition in matters of prayer. This would mean, among other things, a greater awareness that we are part of a church at prayer and that we can fall back on this fact when we are lost for words in our own prayers and we feel that we lack the strength, the will or even the desire to pray.

The closer we reach out to the eternal source of our faith, the more difficult it is to find the words we need and the more symbolic our language of prayer becomes. Prayer takes place in silence, which is where God is to be found. When we are surrounded by an abundance of words, noise, hubbub and unrest there is a distinct lack of silence, and it is this need that the church is expected to cater for. The cultivation of silence that has been returned to the church's agenda harks back to the teachings of classical Christianity and at the same time stems from people's experiences of modern life.

The silent spirituality movement, which cultivates silence and activities such as retreats, sets out specifically to guide people towards valuing quietness, meditations on the Bible and silent prayer. Prayer is by far the dominant aspect, however, an act in which the human spirit directs itself towards God in the hope that the Holy Spirit will exert its influence and imbue it with new life. In such exercises the use of words can lead to a state of prayer and meditation without words, or else language may be used sparingly, by reading texts slowly and meditating over them. This is a critical approach, a culture which is diametrically opposed to the modern-day flood of communication.

The silent spirituality movement has also raised the issues of the concept of man and the image of God, in the sense that these should be examined particularly through the experience of individuals engaged in prayer. In this context the language of faith is humble speech on the topics of human yearning and the unfathomable nature of God. Since that which is holy about God, the mystery of God, is difficult to express in words, it is to be sought for more in music and restrained rituals, where the accent is on listening in silence to symbols that stimulate the senses in a wide variety of ways.

Activities

God speaks to mankind and the whole of creation through His actions; in other words communication with us is one of His functions. When He created the world through the power of His word it was an act of love, and His redemption of the world through Jesus Christ was also, in terms of His language, a message of love for mankind and the whole of creation. In the same way the sending of the Holy Spirit contained a message from God: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (Acts 2:4). This event implies, too, that messages from God are to be heard

in the speech of men: when such speech is produced through obedience to God it becomes the language of faith.

Human beings who have opened their soul to listen to God speaking to them expect to hear answers to questions concerning their own lives, but God does not simply provide answers; he also asks questions. The first question from God to reach a human ear was His call in the Garden of Eden "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9), to which He expected Adam to answer indicating his location, condition and relation to his Creator. It is not long, however, before we are told of the Lord God calling out to Cain "Where is your brother Abel?" (Gen. 4:9). These are two of the fundamental questions that God has been asking us humans throughout the ages: our relation to Him and our relation to those around us. Thus God's deeds are His communication with us, both when He asks something and when He answers. The tribulations that He allows to befall us are invitations to interaction, and our reply in each case should be to respond with words and deeds and thereby to seek out a path that represents God's will and brings good into our lives.

God's love for us leads Him to work constantly on our behalf and create new things in the world: "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is still working, and I also am working'" (John 5:17). Likewise, all those who believe in God are called upon to express their belief through the language of deeds, by showing love for others. As Jesus put it, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). In other words, we can speak to God by showing love for our fellow human beings. Christian love "… does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful, it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13: 4–7).

Nowadays our fellow human beings are frequently no more than instruments from whom we hope to gain profit. Our modern society generates individuals who are tired, lonely, depressed and devoid of hope. Our world is in need of love. But we must remember, of course, that there are two kinds of love. Human love tends to be directed at what is already beautiful and good, whereas God's love is directed at what is weak, poor and sinful, in order to give it dignity, goodness and strength.

We traditionally speak in Lutheran theology of a spiritual domain and a worldly domain, both of which are ruled over by God. In this scheme Christians practise their faith according to their own calling, in the family, in their work and in society as a whole. Martin Luther instructs us to see a spiritual value in our everyday work, for it is part of our service rendered to God. As co-workers with God we are able to participate in His work of creation in the world.

Communion

"I ask … that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). In this passage Jesus is speaking the language of being and not just that of doing. His prayer is that our existence should be a common existence, that we should be "as one", on the model of the existential unity of the Father and the Son. In the same way Jesus expected his followers to be "as one". This is not a voluntary matter as far as we are concerned, for it is the will of Our Lord.

This poses a severe challenge for the churches and for Christians in general. We are called upon to use the languages of speech, prayer, experience and action more efficiently together, both within the various churches and between them, as proof of our sincere desire to forsake competition and aggression and replace these with co-operation and mutual love.

We are already one in God. When we turn to God in prayer in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and each in our own church and of our own accord place our lives in His hands, then we are in communion in Him. The crucial question concerns the existence and manifestation of this communion in relations between us Christians. This will not be achieved by looking at each other, but above all by focusing our gaze on the Triune God. It is by doing this that we will also be able to find unity of existence between us.

Our Saviour prayed that we should express ourselves and our faith in the language of unity, the language of communion, so that the world would believe. As it is, our speaking of God remains indistinct because of our own divisions. The world of today needs and expects believers to bear common witness to their faith. It is the language of communion that they will be able to hear. That will be our witness and a sign of hope for the world.

We Lutherans are grateful for the steps towards communion that we have been able to take together with the Orthodox people of Finland and the Orthodox Church as a whole, and for the explorations and discoveries related to this communion that we have been able to carry out together in a propitious ecumenical spirit. At the same time, however, we are well aware that Our Lord expects far more comprehensive efforts in that direction both from us and from Christians throughout the world.

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The languages of faith. How does the church relate to modern man?

Introduction: Citizens of two worlds

> *For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. … But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. … They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven.*[1]

This is how an unknown Christian in the late 2nd century described the life of the Christians and their attitudes towards the world at large in a letter to Diognetus. The Christians were externally just like any other people and their participation in the society of the time was governed by the same cultural conventions, but they differed from others inwardly to such an extent that they could be said to live "as foreigners" in this world. St. John expresses this in his gospel by stating that the disciples were "in the world" but not "of the world" (John 17:11, 16, 18).

Christians are by definition "citizens of two worlds" and the church's relation to the world has from the outset been based on the tension existing between the earthly and the celestial. Being a Christian means on the one hand participation in the life of the world as a citizen, a family member, a representative of a certain profession, etc., and on the other hand an identity defined by a feeling of being an alien, of living not for these times but for eternity.

This alienation is derived from the Christian faith itself, in that its teachings regarding God and the world add a timeless perspective to one's attitude to life. The belief of Christians is defined in the Epistle to Diognetus as follows:

1 Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, 5: 1–9. Quoted from the Roberts-Donaldson translation.

… God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts. … But after He revealed and laid open, through His beloved Son, the things which had been prepared from the beginning, He conferred every blessing all at once upon us, so that we should both share in His benefits, and see and be active [in His service]. Who of us would ever have expected these things? [2]

These are the words which the writer of the epistle has chosen to express the inner conviction provided by faith with regard to the possibility of returning to living communion with God as proclaimed through His Son, Jesus Christ, and of partaking in the reality of a salvation which offers new life to the whole of humanity. It is this that forms the core of the church's message.

Thus three perspectives on being a Christian have emerged from this discussion so far: living in the world, living as an alien, and possessing a faith that is grounded in the work of God amongst us. Indeed, a fourth perspective can also be added to these if we consider the nature of the morality that arises from the view of the world opened up by the Christian faith, as referred to in the Epistle to Diognetus as the Christians' "wonderful and confessedly striking" way of life. It is on the strength of these factors that the church has functioned and spoken to people throughout its history – and is still doing so today.

The challenge of a changing world and the failure of the church in its task

As is well known, the Orthodox Church's understanding of its own role is built up on its scared tradition, which encompasses both the content of its beliefs and also their manifold forms of expression. During the last century, however, the church became aware of the challenges arising as this assumedly eternal and unchangeable traditional faith and its manifestations came into contact with the modern world. In the spirit of the Epistle to Diognetus, one might say that the Christian way of life has "come under pressure from modernity". In order to be truly a living reality in this day and age, the church is being called upon to put forward interpretations of its faith that arise out of the experiences of people of our times.[3]

The present state of the world involves features and phenomena that are not only challenging from a Christian point of view but are distinctly disturbing. I shall not set out now to enumerate these in any more detail, however, nor to

2 Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus, 7: 1, 8:11.

3 Alfeyev, Hilarion. Uskon mysteeri. Johdatus ortodoksiseen dogmaattiseen teologiaan. Kuopio 2002, 12 (In English: The Mystery of Faith. Introduction to the Teaching and Spirituality of the Orthodox Church. London, 2002).

consider the attitude of resigned horror that lamentably rarely leads to inspirations that open up new directions for thought or action. Instead, I will restrict myself to a brief reference to the observations of the German social philosopher of Jewish extraction Hannah Arendt which, although put forward half a century ago, are still relevant today.[4] In her opinion the Christian theory with its emphasis on peace and an orientation outwards from the world lost its position during the modern age, when the natural sciences were gaining ground. People's concept of the world altered and the truth lying behind Christian thinking came to be questioned. Arendt points out that developments have led (although not entirely on account of a reliance on non-Christian experiences) to a situation in which the politics of our modern society are driven by a mode of economic thinking that is based on production efficiency and the blatant pursuit of maximum profits. Politics is no longer so much a matter of "managing public affairs" as of attending to the economy of the nation and its society. The "common good" is thus not necessarily that which would be in the best interests of the individual. Arendt is disturbed by the fact that the state is dying out in our modern society, which is ruled by an "unseen hand", an utterly impersonal, faceless administration, while alongside this the maximally efficient organization of labour, which is geared only to the achievement of the greatest possible profits, gives rise to a feeling of human uncertainty and downright calamity.

Arendt's principal observation regarding the problem of human existence in the modern world may be summed up in the paradox of freedom: in our efforts to be free we have become prisoners of our own freedom. This is a consequence of our attempts to break free from the fundamentals of our own being, the land and a natural way of life. One of the achievements of gene research, for instance, is that people have broken free of the shackles that bind them to nature, while thanks to the achievements of technology and the physical sciences over the last century, we are now on the verge of breaking free of our status as inhabitants of the planet Earth and becoming universal beings, a further factor that has shaken the foundations of our human existence. It is changes such as these, in Arendt's opinion, that lie behind the nihilism and human desperation that are typical of our times. These phenomena that Arendt describes are of relevance to the church, if only on account of the fact that the church is made up of the same individuals as our society. The winds of change that buffet the structures of society will also buffet the church through the medium of its members.[5]

4 Arendt 2002 (original: The Human Condition. Chicago, 1958).

5 Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki has spoken in numerous connections in recent years of the change that has taken place in Finland from a monolithic culture to a multicultural, diversified society. In this he is not so much expressing horror at the signs of the times as pointing to the possibilities that the situation can open up for the church. See Ambrosius 2001.

Alongside the changes affecting society as a whole, the church is also currently facing questions or accusations that arise out of the reality of its own internal situation. In the words of Metropolitan John Zizioulas of Pergamon, the present-day church is constructed on the failures of the first two millennia of the Christian era. The Orthodox Church, he maintains, has been lame in its missionary efforts, has confused the Gospel with nationalism and has failed in its attempts to respect the special characteristics of different cultures. This has led it to emphasize national features at the cost of catholic ones. Zizioulas speaks of "ethnophyletism", the most distorted practical manifestation of which he consider to be the problem of jurisdictions, which is blatantly at variance with the Orthodox concept of the church.[6] The problems that Zizioulas mentions in relation to the canonical order within the church and the dominant role of national features in the proclamation of the gospel are connected with the nostalgia for "Holy Orthodoxy" experienced by some local churches, as a result of which the yearning for the Kingdom of Heaven is transmuted – entirely or partially and to a greater or lesser extent consciously – into a yearning for a particular period in history when the church was a dominant world power (socially, economically and politically) through its role in an overtly Orthodox state. This predilection for the things of this world, with all its temporal connotations, first made its appearance alongside the eschatologically oriented notion of the church from the fourth century A.D. onwards.

Another of the difficulties to appear in modern times, according to Zizioulas, is the problematic nature of the relevance of the ecumenical movement for Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church is afflicted with a "polemic psychology", which leads it to blame all its ills on the western church without being able to recognize or repent of its own wrongdoings.[7] Zizioulas' ideas can be summed up in the observation that the Orthodox Church has retreated into itself and has devoted itself to protecting not only the essence of the faith but also many locally and temporally restricted trivialities.

Awakenings

In spite of its difficulties, it would be an exaggeration to say that the Orthodox Church has failed to open its doors to the realities of modern times and modern man. In fact, the early years of the third millennium seem to have provided a new psychological stimulus for deliberations aimed at finding solutions to the current challenges facing the church. Of the individual churches, the Orthodox Church of Russia would seem to have reacted to this challenge most forcibly, publishing its own programme of social ethics which explains the principles guiding its at-

6 Zizioulas 1999.

7 Zizioulas 1999.

titudes towards the real world in which it lives and operates in this day and age.[8] Correspondingly, the Orthodox Church of America published guidelines for its pastoral care in matters of family and sexual ethics in 1992.[9] These local churches have, at least to a preliminary extent, explored the areas of life in which the church's message and activities are felt to be of the utmost importance at the present time.

The challenges of the times have also been appreciated by the Orthodox Church worldwide. Last October the leaders of the local churches, meeting in Constantinople, issued a declaration of the church's mission in the modern world,[10] which was directed not just at the Orthodox world but at all people and nations. Although this was primarily intended to be a response to wider discussions going on at the time, some of the points raised in it concerned internal matters within the Orthodox Church itself. On the issue of global responsibility and the potential that this held for the Orthodox Church, the communiqué (§2) had the following to say:

> *The Orthodox Church … can and must promote to the contemporary world the teaching not only regarding the restoration in Christ of the unity of the entire human race, but also regarding the universality of His work of redemption, through which all the divisions of the world are overcome and the common nature of all human beings is affirmed. Nevertheless, the faithful promotion of this message of redemption also presupposes overcoming the internal conflicts of the Orthodox Church through the surrendering of nationalistic, ethnic and ideological extremes of the past. For only in this way will the word of Orthodoxy have a necessary impact on the contemporary world.*

To put it concisely, the primates of the Orthodox churches were speaking to the world in the language of faith, ethics and ecology with a forceful accent on unity. This theme was in the first place a background motive linked to internal relations within Orthodoxy, i.e. the declaration was a commitment to unity amongst the Orthodox themselves, expressing their desire to resolve their canonical conflicts, above all in the Orthodox diaspora areas. The aim was thus to transform their mutually recognised ecclesiological principles into practical Orthodoxy. In order to do this, the heads of the churches met again this year (2009) to discuss the practical measures required, a process which will be integrated into the planning

8 *The Basis of the Social Concept* 2000. This document discusses the relation of the church to the state, the nation and politics, personal and community morality, labour and the economy, bioethics, ecology, the church's relations with the media and the challenges of secularism and globalization.

9 *On Marriage, Family, Sexuality, and the Sanctity of Life* 1992.

10 *Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches* 2008.

of a pan-Orthodox "Holy and Great Council" (§13), a project that had itself been going on for very nearly a hundred years.[11]

The notion of unity as contained in the declaration nevertheless has broader connotations that imply a global state of unity and solidarity in opposition to the "facelessness" of modern politics and economics that detracts from human dignity, as pointed out by Arendt. The primates therefore appealed for a more purposeful deployment of the church's influence with the aim of promoting harmony among the peoples of the world and eliminating economic discrimination (§5, §8). Also well to the fore was the question of religious unity, as the primates reminded people of the importance of both ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue, which they identified as the only true path to relieving the state of religious dispersion and increasing peace and unity in the world (§6, §13). Furthermore, they added an ecological and ethical significance to the theme of global unity by expressing support on the part of the other local churches for the ecotheological work that the Patriarchate of Constantinople had begun in the 1990s, emphasizing the spiritual and ethical foundations for such work rather than simply the general humanitarian interests involved: *"The Christian teaching about the ontological unity between the human race and sacred creation, as expressed by the entire mystery of the redemptive work in Christ, constitutes the foundation for interpretation of man's relationship with God and the world.… [It is] the obligation of the Church to contribute through the spiritual means at her disposal, to the protection of God's creation from the consequences of human greed"* (§6, §13). Alongside ecological questions, however, the urgency attached to moral issues is also reflected in the support expressed by the church leaders for the family and the institution of marriage and in the emphasis they place on bioethical problems (§12).[12]

The Orthodox Church thus wishes to assume the role in the modern world of a responsible global actor that has a clear message to convey and a proper understanding of the world's expectations regarding the formulation of that message. The policies set out by the heads of the churches demonstrate that it is possible to speak of a single Orthodox Church that, in spite of its divisions into independent local churches, is united in its understanding of the church's mission and global aims and in its concept of the outside world. This fundamental unanimity is something that should particularly be underlined. It should also be noted, however, that the expression of unanimity in their declaration does not necessarily mean that the churches will automatically set to at once to adopt new ways of preaching the gospel more effectively or promoting global unity. Why

11 Metropolitan Kallistos Ware had pointed out that it is unrealistic to assume that such pan-Orthodox assemblies could reach any solutions without joint grassroots activities that span the national and jurisdictional boundaries between the churches. He has therefore called for continued contacts and mutual love between the churches as means of promoting internal unity within Orthodoxy itself, see Ware 2000a, 49–50.

12 The declaration also affirms that the church will set up a committee "to study issues of bioethics, on which the world also awaits the position of Orthodoxy" (§13).

not? Perhaps the main reason is that, although the Orthodox Church has good and beautiful theories on many subjects, its practises are bad or at least deficient. In other words, what it believes and what it commits itself to – quite honestly and seriously, for the most part – is not necessarily transformed into action. This should be recognised in all honesty.[13] Even so, the conflict between theory and practise should not mean that a change is impossible. The many radical developments that have taken place in the Orthodox Church in the course of its history, as indeed the whole existence of the church, go to prove that even poorly resourced efforts taking place initially on a small scale by human standards can bring about major permanent changes. The Orthodox Church is well aware of the need for such pressures for change.

Opening up dialogue in "new" languages of faith

For the sake of its vitality, the church needs to face up to the realities of its position in the modern world. As Bishop Ilarion Alfeyev has noted, the Orthodox Church (here he was admittedly speaking exclusively of the Russian Orthodox Church) cannot expect a revival in theological thinking until the church itself is able to engage in rational discussion concerning the main issues that affect its own current state.[14]

Meanwhile, Metropolitan John Zizioulas has anchored the question of the fate of the church in the possibility of *inculturation* in our times. This would presuppose not merely criticism of our post-Enlightenment culture but also the construction of linkages capable of giving rise to creative contacts. Furthermore, inculturation will be possible only when we have become aware of what elements of the life of the church are unassailable gospel truths and what things are transient and liable to change with place and time. Zizioulas is thus implicitly suggesting that the Orthodox Church should revise its understanding of the relationship of local traditions to the one tradition of the apostolic faith. In other words, it is essential to distinguish between what is divine and eternal and what is human and temporal. In his opinion, success in distinguishing the various principles and levels of expression that are internal to Orthodox tradition calls for a high level

13 Andrew Walker (2000: 231) has explained this problem by observing that although the Orthodox Church has preserved the form and theological thinking of the Early Church, its normative principles are not implemented in practise. The tension between Orthodoxy and praxis is also reflected in Patriarch Bartholomew's observations on the danger of blind conservatism that afflicts the Orthodox Church. In his opinion this is capable of leading to a "ghetto of doubt that worships only formalism". To avoid this, the church needs the life-giving freshness of the Holy Spirit, which in concrete terms means turning its back on the false gods of nationalism in favour of a witness that is directed equally at the whole of mankind, freedom from the shackles of cold ritualism in order to promote encounters that truly bring freedom and revival of the dialectic of unity vs. multiplicity once the local churches have been freed of their burden of obligations to the state (Clément 1997: 227–234).

14 Alfeyev 2000; 324.

of theological perception and acquiescence, in order to ensure that the essence of the gospel can be expressed and preserved in various culturally different forms. In the spirit of the Letter to Diognetus, Zizioulas maintains that there is no one particular Christian culture, but rather there are many Christian modes of expression that in spite of their differences are one in Christ. He regards inculturation expressed in this manner as being derived from a pneumatological interpretation of the workings of the Son amongst men: the Holy Spirit inculturates Christ everywhere and at all times, Christ who is the principle of unity that gathers the many modes of expression together in Himself to form the One Truth. The task of the church is to nurture every new inculturation of the natural readiness to accept the gospel of Christ and ensure that the gospel itself is preserved and does not become a "different gospel" at any stage.[15]

It is then possible to extend Zizioulas' ideas by noting that successful inculturation requires not only that we should have a clear concept of the culture-free core message of the faith but also that the church should have at its disposal a language in which it can communicate with people in a meaningful manner. The vast increase in the Orthodox diaspora that took place in the 20th century could in principle have provided a wonderful opportunity for far more fruitful inculturation than heretofore, and it is not too late to achieve this even now, although it does mean that the Orthodox Church will have to seize still more determinedly upon the prophetic opportunity offered by the diaspora. In order to ensure the continuity of the church's existence and enable it to flourish, a gospel will be needed that takes account of the rational needs of modern man without abandoning the deeper mystery of Christianity, its experiential dimension. And evangelization of this kind will call for a language of faith that will be understood by modern man in all cultural contexts – and one which the church itself is capable of speaking.[16] We can very well ask, of course, whether it is possible, or even necessary, to look for new parallel ways of phrasing the conventional expressions of Christianity. It is clear, however, that the Orthodox faith should be spoken of using two main languages: the language of doctrine and the language of experience, where the latter is further divided into liturgical language and practical language.

15 Zizioulas 1999.

16 On the prophetic potential of the diaspora and the self-criticism presupposed by it, see Walker 2000: 222–235; Ware 2000a: 49. Both Ware and Ilarion Alfeyev have emphasized that the Orthodox Church should re-learn the art of speaking about the faith in accordance with its own nature, although this calls for an escape from the ghetto of Orthodox thinking that manifests itself in a failure to communicate and a predominance of foreign-sounding influences within the expressions of faith (Alfeyev 2000: 324; Ware 2000a: 52).

The language of doctrine

It was the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner who pointed out that although those in higher office in the church would for the most part endorse the traditional articles of the faith wholeheartedly and without notable difficulties, the lay members would not be able to acquiesce so painlessly with the ontological principles lying behind these classical formulations. The traditional formulae, to say the least, are difficult for ordinary people of our times to understand. Explanations and interpretations are needed, i.e. a new language of doctrine.[17] Rahner's demand that our Christian faith should be given a new linguistic form is similarly justified in the light of Orthodox theology, as the content of our doctrine – for all its crucial importance and traditional formulations – is not a body of archaeological material but is urgently in need of existential re-interpretation. What is the point, for example, of speaking of a Triune God if we are unable to explain the truth about God in relation to the fragmentation of society brought about by the cult of individualism and to people's desire for communality? What is the point of a concept of the church that emphasizes communion and sharing if we ignore the real problems that face humanity when we talk of the church?

What the church has to say is of significance only when it contains a message. According to Kallistos Ware, Metropolitan of Diokletia, the strength of Orthodox theology in this day and age is that it confronts people who are longing for the core truths of the Christian faith on the basis of a classical account of religious doctrine. The language of its doctrine enables people to participate in sociological and political discussions in a content-rich manner on many levels. Ware focuses on three doctrinal themes that are of obvious relevance to the modern world: the Trinity, the Incarnation and the person of Christ. In his opinion the strengths of the Orthodox faith lie in the sense of community that emanates from the Christian concept of God, the themes of unity and cosmology that are opened up by the notion of the Incarnation and the answer to people's questions regarding the foundations of their own identity that can be extracted from the theology of personhood.[18]

Harking back to St. Gregory the Theologian (d. 389/390), Ware expresses the hope that the church may once again phrase its theology more in the manner of the fishermen than in that of Aristotle.[19] But what is the fishermen's theology, or what could it be? This is not simply a question of being expressed in a simple, understandable form, however important that may in itself be, for at its most profound the distinction in approach between the fishermen of Galilee and Aristotle is first and foremost one of experientiality and participation versus theory and conceptuality. Secondly, this also reminds us that the human reality of an

17 Rahner 1988: 230.

18 Ware 2000a: 52–53, 55.

19 Ware 2000a: 52.

encounter with God should always be clearly in evidence, for it is the presence and work of the historically incarnate Son of God amongst the fishermen that lies at the centre of the Christian faith and not the ontological contemplation of the revelation of the divine reality in this world. In simple terms, the theology of the fishermen is a theology that is aimed at ordinary people.

In fact, preparations for enacting theology in the manner of the fishermen could well mean in practise a return to the early strata of Christian tradition. Instead of choking to death in the confines of the often polemic dogmatic conventions of the Nicene faith, we could take on a voyage of discovery into the world of pre-Nicene thought. What could we learn from this? At least the early patristic way of thinking which was not yet moulded into classical channels could guide us towards conceptually freer ways of expressing the central issues in our faith. The identifying of interfaces with the fundamental truths of our belief and everyday life – and more widely with the reality of human experience – that formed a part of this early religious material might also open up a fresh perspective on theology.

The language of experience: liturgical language

The above distinction between what is theoretical and what is experiential is implicit in the very essence of Orthodoxy. When speaking of what is its very own, the church uses the language of experience, for experience of participation in the salvation brought to us by the incarnate Son of God lies at the centre of the church's life. The content of what the church has to say is, in the words of the Psalmist "things we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us" (Ps. 78:3).

In the life of the Orthodox Church it is worship that is the primary source of verification for the Christian experience. In theological terms this is expressed in a division into *theologia prima*, the language of praise and prayer which is anchored in experience and constitutes a response to this experience, and *theologia secunda*, which sets out to analyse that experience in a more conceptual manner. The nature of the liturgy and the primacy of experientiality culminate in a situation in which what we believe is to be encountered in reality and participated in through the liturgical and sacramental life of the church. If and when the Orthodox Church decides to aim for an existential reformulation of its tradition, this will take place most naturally in the form of a comprehensive liturgical life that is centred around the Eucharist, for it is in that situation that people not only encounter the idea of the existence of a divine reality but participate in the actualization of this reality

here and now. Liturgical language appeals to human beings in an all-pervading manner; it speaks to the mind, to the heart and to the whole body. [20]

From the perspective of the church as a whole, however, the liturgical and Eucharist-centred Orthodox Church is going through some sort of identity crisis. In the words of John Zizioulas, the Orthodox of today do not know what to do with their liturgy.[21] The central role of the liturgy and the meaningfulness of the liturgical language have indeed been recognised in Finland in an exceptional manner for the Orthodox world since the 1970s, and a thoroughgoing liturgical reform has been carried out with the aim of making it easier for people to experience the Liturgy. According to one of the pioneers of this reform, Fr. Veikko Purmonen, the purpose has been "to express and communicate the content of our faith in an unaltered but comprehensible form, so that the message will truly be conveyed to people."[22] The practical outcome of the liturgical renewal in Finland has been a profound recovery in the role of the Eucharist and the Liturgy. The numbers of communicants have risen greatly and the number and variety of celebrations of the liturgy in individual parishes has increased. The experience of the Finnish Orthodox Church has been that it has succeeded in reaching out to people by making participation in the Liturgy easier and more popular.

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20 The concept of the multi-level nature of the liturgical encounter between God and man is aptly manifested in the ten-point list of principles set out by the pan-Orthodox consultation on "Liturgical Renewal and Visible Unity" in 1998. According to the report, worship is simultaneously both theocentric and based on dialogue, the latter principle being an expression of the dynamism of liturgical acts, in which we as human beings are in both a personal and a transformative relationship with God. Worship is not an end in itself but is instrumental by nature, its purpose being to illuminate our minds, purify our hearts and free us of our passions. It is the principal expression of a Christian's faith and defines the identity of both individuals and communities, and its multi-level nature includes both cosmic and eschatological aspects, see Consultation 1998: 388–389.

21 Zizioulas 2000b: 3–4, 14–17. There has been considerable discussion in Greece and Russia, for instance, over the problems of understanding the liturgical language, and many local churches are reconsidering issues such as the frequency of taking communion and the compulsory requirement to attend confession before communion. In Finland the synod of bishops allowed father confessors to permit members of the congregation to take communion without attending confession each time (see *Piispojen paimenkirje* 1970), and this led to a huge increase in communicants, but correspondingly to a sharp decline not only in the number of confessions heard but more especially in the numbers of people availing themselves of this possibility.

22 Purmonen 1971: 10. Other pioneers of liturgical reform in Finland apart from Purmonen have been Archbishop Paul and Rev. Matti Sidoroff. Prominent amongst the sources of their enthusiasm have been the ideas of the American emigré theologian Alexander Schmemann.

The language of experience: practical language

The Christian experience is not in the Orthodox understanding restricted to worship but should run through every aspect of life. Full acceptance of the gospel implies that a true faith and a rightful way of life should be inseparable parts of a Christian's overall existence.[23] The ethical and pastoral regulations of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Church of America, both of which are based on the traditional canonical modes of expression, are good examples of the practical language of the Orthodox Church today. The language of morality – and practical themes of good and bad, right and wrong – can nevertheless be looked on as one of the most difficult means of reaching out to people nowadays, since most of us are not prepared to accept definitions dictated from the outside. The Orthodox Church, when setting out to evaluate features of the modern world in terms of Christian ethics, finds itself – in common with many other Christian denominations – having to contend with opposition from a species of humanity that has freed itself from the "grip of Christianity". Any talk of ethics will sound like moralizing. Why should this be so? One major reason may lie in the interpretation of freedom that lays emphasis on the independence of the individual. In order to be able to speak about a Christian code of praxis, the church will have to find a way of constructing positive links between its own message and the individual's self-understanding. The theology of personhood, as mentioned above, which places emphasis on communication, communality and sharing, can function as one possible link in this sense, since, considered in theological terms, people are fundamentally social creatures whose lives take on a purpose and fullness only through contacts with other people. Thus the idea of freedom is interpreted in Orthodox ethics in relation to both the individual's discovery of his or her own personality or means of self-expression, and to his or her participation in a human community and in the world at large. This implies that there is really no such thing as Orthodox *personal* ethics, but rather an individual's reality is always determined by his or her contacts and sharing with others.

The accusation of moralization may also be grounded in the fact that it is precisely in ethical questions that the church is forced to state aloud that it is faced with issues and situations for which in principle it has no ready-made answers. Regarding matters such as euthanasia, abortion and gene technology, for instance, the church can do little more than use its authority to make public what it believes to be Christian viewpoints.

It should also be noted at this point that the pastoral tradition of the Orthodox Church tends to deal with these "difficult questions" more frequently at the level of people's personal lives than in public statements, a practise that is based on the notion of the uniqueness of each individual's personality and situation

23 See Timiadis 2007: 31–32.

in life. People who are in difficult situations cannot be approached as instances of the application of canon law, but rather the aim should be to meet them face to face, recognise the realities of their lives and find the best possible solutions within the limits laid down by these. In this case, too, the pastoral care provided is grounded in the ethical principles accepted by the church, of course, but these serve in effect as guidelines for the pastoral approach to be adopted in each case individually. Especially challenging nowadays are situations in which the church is asked for an official ruling regarding the status of particular groups among its members, e.g. homosexuals. Fairly justifiably, this pressure for a public statement frequently emanates from representatives of new forms of technological development that threaten to undermine human values, the inviolability of human nature and the sanctity of life. On the other hand, these instances provide interfaces at which dialogue becomes possible, opportunities that have been seized upon fairly eagerly by Orthodox theologians, at least in the United States.[24]

Thus our modern times can offer the Orthodox Church openings for dialogue with the secular world that arise out of the Christian way of life and set out from more positive initial circumstances. In ecological matters and with regard to the problems of a society oriented towards consumption and efficiency, the church can enter quite naturally into discussions on personal values on the basis of its theology of creation and the human image,[25] and themes such as asceticism, fasting, attentiveness, protection of the heart from evil and contemplation of God's work of creation, which serve to promote human welfare and the sustainable development that forms part of the Christian way of life, can be introduced more extensively in the same connection.[26] The institution of monasticism that continues to thrive within the Orthodox Church also provides a true counterbalance to the modern world's ethos of power.

The practical language of experience as reflected in all forms of spiritual life demonstrates that Christians need not necessarily always speak through words. Deeds, attitudes, examples and love are all ways in which the church speaks to its members, enabling it to reach out to a far wider audience than can ever be addressed by any priest or bishop or influenced by any public statement.

Conclusions

In the light of the above, I would like to end by listing certain perspectives that in my opinion represent the culmination of the principles of the Orthodox Church when it comes to encounters with modern man.

24 See, for example, Calivas 2001: 19–50; Breck 1998 and 2003: 19-107; Engelhardt 2000.

25 On Great Lent and the consumer society, see Ware 2000b; on ecology, see Zizioulas 2000a.

26 See Clément 1997: 79–92.

- It is important to proclaim boldly the fundamental truths of our faith, those regarding God, man and the relation between them, as the whole essence of the church and its activities hangs upon these. The church is in the world to go and spread the gospel in the name of God, and even today people are still asking the same questions to which the church throughout the ages has possessed competent answers: who am I, where have I come from and where am I destined to go? It is on account of these "ultimate questions" that the church's message is of lasting significance for human experience. The element of permanence and timelessness that this message contains lends weight to the church's pronouncements in the ears of modern man as he struggles on an unstable existentialist platform. The act of keeping the unshakable truths of the Christian tradition prominently to the fore can open up perspectives that extend from the present into eternity in a manner that can never be achieved when concentrating on the affairs of this life alone.
- The church should restrict itself to the means of expressing and living out these central truths for which it is best equipped and which are most natural to it, although the profound link between doctrine and praxis may also mean that some people who have grown up in church circles have to internalize its traditional forms and modes of expression over again. Full commitment to the church's tradition has always, throughout the ages, meant personal acknowledgement of the authentic expressions of Orthodoxy as the truth in one's own mind, and it still does so today.
- It will be necessary to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the guardian and creator of the church's tradition, in the search for new ways of expressing the gospel of Christ in our times. The church is called on to respond to the world everywhere where the steps that it takes can bring people closer to the fullness of participation in God's love. This challenges the Orthodox Church to accept boldly all the contacts through which it can communicate the core truths of its faith and to avoid simply mummifying an introverted code of beliefs. Ecumenical dialogue may prove to be of great help in achieving this.
- When the church's own members come up against the extremes of what it regards as the incontrovertible truth in the context of dialogue with the secular world, with other Christians or with representatives of other religions they must show obedience to God and adhere firmly to that truth. There are certain boundary markers that God has ordained and which man is not entitled to alter, and these boundaries should be defended in a spirit of peace and humility, without giving rise to unnecessary conflicts.

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Helsinki 2010

THE TENTH THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF FINLAND, 2010

Communiqué

The Tenth Theological Discussions between delegates from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland were held at the Orthodox Cultural Centre Sofia in Helsinki on 25th–26th November 2010. The delegation from the Orthodox Church was led by Metropolitan Ambrosius of Helsinki and its other members were Fr. Heikki Huttunen, general secretary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council, Fr. Dr Mikael Sundkvist, Dr Pekka Metso, Archimandrite Andreas Larikka and M.Th. Jonas Bergenstad, and that from the Evangelical Lutheran Church was headed by Rt. Rev. Seppo Häkkinen, Bishop of Mikkeli, with Rev. Dr Sammeli Juntunen, M.Th. Hannele Karppinen, Dean, Lic. Th. Matti Poutiainen and Professor Dr Antti Raunio and as advisers Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen, executive secretary for theology at the Church Council's Department for International Relations, and Rev. Dr Kaisamari Hintikka. Also present as observers were Fr. Wieslaw Swiech, SCJ, Vicar-General of the Roman Catholic Church in Finland, and Rev. Soile Salorinne of the Finnish Methodist Church, representing the Finnish Ecumenical Council. The two topics selected for discussion were "Interpretation of the Bible in the church's teachings" and "Ecology and moderation in everyday life".

In his opening address Metropolitan Ambrosius reminded participants of the connection between these discussions and the current international Lutheran-Orthodox conversations, from which those at the national level had benefited considerably. Viewed from a Finnish ecumenical perspective, there was, on the one hand, reason for some concern over the critical attitude adopted by the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe following the collapse of socialism, but on the other hand, there was some consolation in the fact that relations were developing in a more positive direction. This could be looked on as placing more emphasis than ever on the excellent ecumenical atmosphere prevailing in Finland.

In his reply, Bishop Seppo Häkkinen underlined the fact that ecumenical relations performed a crucial role in the Lutheran identity, and that the contacts between the two churches reflected the need for both doctrinal and practical cooperation in pursuit of the ecumenical cause. In accordance with the *Charta*

Oecumenica, the national churches should be constantly asking what they could be doing together in order to bear witness in as effective a manner as possible to Christ and to their common beliefs.

Interpretation of the Bible in the church's teachings

The topic for the first day of the discussions was "Interpretation of the Bible in the church's teachings", based on papers presented by Rev. Dr Sammeli Juntunen and Fr. Dr Mikael Sundkvist.

Rev. Dr Sammeli Juntunen gave an account of the principles governing the Lutheran interpretation of the Bible and of the changes that have taken place in these in the course of history. In his opinion, the process has led to a situation nowadays in which there has been a tendency, even in Finland, to depart somewhat from the traditional manner of reading the Bible which acknowledges it as the supreme authority in matters of faith and life. He thus ended up by asking how the written word ordained by God can be reinstated in its original position in the Lutheran tradition and by making certain proposals as to how this may be done without relapsing into a fundamentalism that holds fast to the doctrine of utter infallibility.

Fr. Dr Mikael Sundkvist approached the interpretation of the Bible in the Orthodox Church from the perspective of its liturgical use. Taking the biblical texts chosen for the feasts of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, as examples, he demonstrated the manner in which the Bible is read throughout as a revelation regarding Jesus Christ. Historical-critical exegesis has raised certain new issues and posed some challenges for the church's traditional way of reading the Bible, and Fr. Mikael presented examples of interpretations proposed by modern Orthodox exegetes that remain faithful to tradition and take the church's teachings into account while achieving both intellectual and spiritual credibility.

It was agreed that the Bible is the principle book of the Church and a revelation of the work of salvation enacted by the Triune God – the Word of God. Its significance can be understood in its full depth from the perspective offered by the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as laid down in the Creed. A Christ-centred approach to the Bible as a whole is capable of offering a means of responding to the questions raised by individuals and societies of today in a manner that arises out of the Church's tradition.

Recent discussions in Finland concerning the Bible and its interpretation challenge the churches to clarify the Bible's significance for the Christian faith. This need does not concern only the parties represented at the present meeting, but rather the Christian churches in general should engage in discussions on biblical theology and devote more attention to their teachings regarding the Bible. The Finnish Ecumenical Council could very well play a role in gathering the various churches in Finland together for this purpose.

Ecology and moderation in everyday life

Introductions to this theme were given by Professor Antti Raunio and Fr. Heikki Huttunen, general secretary of the Finnish Ecumenical Council.

Professor Raunio observed that moderation as a virtue occupied a significant position in the European theological and philosophical tradition. The leaders of the Reformation understood by a life of moderation one that contained all that was sufficient for an individual or community to lead a good life. Life in the western countries subsequently alienated itself from that ideal, but it has come to be taken more seriously as an attitude to life in more recent times with the appearance of ecological problems. Moderation implies the adaptation of one's own needs to the resources available to human beings in the created world, and in terms of the Lutheran Church's document on climate change, a moderate way of life motivates us to show gratitude to God for his gifts to us and to show respect for the whole of creation, as it is through created things that our Holy and Loving God gives and maintains the life of this world and the world to come.

Fr. Heikki Huttunen reminded listeners that Orthodox theologians have been actively involved in discussing ecological questions from both theological and ethical perspectives in recent times. The central issues in the tradition of the Eastern Church as far as ecological thinking is concerned are the relation between the Creator and that which he has created and the role assigned by the Creator to man as the guardian of all that has been created. An examination of the current state of the created world should lead us to a state of repentance and a change to a simpler way of life. It is through the Eucharist that the church expresses the communion that exists between God, man and all created things.

It was agreed jointly that the choice of a moderate, ecological way of life is to a profound extent a spiritual one. Our churches and parishes should strive both in their teaching and in the practical deeds that arise out of that teaching to act in a more responsible and prophetic manner, especially in environmental matters. Our churches should seriously consider the far-reaching understanding of welfare that stems from prayer, fasting and silence, and it is our duty as churches to encourage society at large to search for modes of action that will promote a correct balance between individuals, human communities and the whole created world on both a local and a global scale.

In conclusion, the participants were grateful for the new steps towards communion that they had been able to take, and for the things they had learned about each other and about themselves. They also reaffirmed their common commitment, in response to Christ's call, to bear witness to Him and to obey His will faithfully in this world.

Continuation of the discussions

It was decided that the series of discussions should be continued and that the next meeting should be arranged by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in 2012. The topics agreed on were "The home as the source of a Christian upbringing" and "The God we know and do not know".

Helsinki, 26th November 2010

Rev. Dr Sammeli Juntunen

The traditional Lutheran view of the Bible

Rev. Dr Jari Jolkkonen, secretary of the Bishops' Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, expressed something highly essential with regard to our church's traditional view of the Bible in the following comment on discussions held with the Roman Catholic Church:

> *The Holy Scripture as the written word of God has fundamental authority in the life of the Church. It is the highest norm and rule (norma normans) of doctrine, praxis and administration of the Church, as is stated in the Epitome: "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testament are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged."*
> *However, nobody is allowed to interpret the word of God "according to his or her own private thoughts" (Uppsala 1593). The Holy Scripture must be interpreted in the context of the Church and according to the creeds of the ancient Church and the testimonies of the post-Apostolic fathers, as is stated in the preface of FC…* [1]

The passage in question in the Formula of Concord runs as follows:

> *And because directly after the times of the apostles, and even while they were still living, false teachers and heretics arose, and symbols, i.e., brief, succinct confessions, were composed against them in the early Church, which were regarded as the unanimous, universal Christian faith and confession of the orthodox and true Church, namely, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, we pledge ourselves to them, and hereby reject all heresies and dogmas which, contrary to them, have been introduced into the Church of God.*

At the same time the well-known slogan of Lutheranism, *sola scriptura*, implies that the Bible is clear in its meaning (*claritas scripturae*) and is able to interpret itself (*scriptura sui ipsius interpretens*), without external explicators. Luther expressed this as follows:

> *Tell me if you can, on what criteria the conflict is to be resolved if the statements given by the Fathers are found to be at variance with one another. The solution must be based on the Bible, which would be impossible unless we were to afford*

1 Jari Jolkkonen, Jesus Christ as the Word of God, Reseptio 3/2004, p. 44.

> *to the Bible that precedence in all matters which is customarily assigned to the Fathers; that is, that we should accept that the Bible in itself is the clearest, most certain, most understandable, self-interpreting testing ground for all the claims made by all men, as is written in Psalm 119 … Here the Spirit teaches us quite clearly that light and understanding are to be found only in the Word of God, as if by the opening of a door. This is the first principle to follow in order to attain that light and understanding.* (Luther WA 7, 97:19–35)

In spite of this, the Lutheran Church takes it for granted that the Bible should be read in the light of the Confessions. When read in this way it becomes the authoritative Word of God. But why does the Lutheran Church regard the Bible as the authoritative Word of God?

A whole complex of justifications exist for this which have never been officially stated anywhere. As I see it, they comprise at least the following:

1. God became man in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true and ontologically most profound form of divine revelation. It is for this reason that Christ is referred to as the Word of God, and he is also the same Word by which the world was created and through whom it was redeemed.
2. We, as Christians, have no direct information about this Word, however, and therefore we need the written word of God, the Bible, the fundamental value of which lies in the fact that it provides a true witness to the Word of God, Jesus Christ. It is on this account that we regard it as the highest authority on matters of faith and doctrine.
3. Even so, the Bible is not ontologically on the same level as Christ, the Word of God, for the Bible is a book, something that has been created, whereas the Word of God is the creator of everything. Our salvation is not in the last resort a matter of internalizing a message written in a book, a doctrine or a set of commandments, but rather a form of communion with Christ, the Word of God, that is brought about by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is nevertheless exceedingly important for us, as without it our faith would be in grave danger of becoming a figment of our own individual imagination or that of the church itself and not communion with the God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and redeemed the world. There has to be an authority by which the true doctrine of salvation can be distinguished from heresies and inconsequentialities.

As I understand it, however, the Lutheran Church does accept, at least in principle, that a belief may arise and be maintained without the Bible. If a church's sacraments, hymns, prayers, liturgy etc. are based on the central elements of the faith as laid down in the Bible, a congregation or even an individual person

can live a Christian life as if the Bible did not exist or they were unable to read it. Baptism, Holy Communion, parish membership, the Mass and the church's hymns would carry people forwards. This was undoubtedly the case in ancient times and probably still is in some revivalist movements.[2]

Why the Bible?

Why, then, is it specifically the Bible that provides the true witness to Jesus Christ? Again numerous justifications can be found within Lutheranism:

1. The Bible in its entirety[3] is a work inspired by the Spirit of God. Here the resolution of the Uppsala Meeting as recorded in the Confessions is phrased as follows:

   > *It should be taught, believed and recognised in our parishes that the Bible has arisen under the influence of the Holy Spirit and contains in perfect form everything that belongs to the Christian doctrine of an Almighty God and our blessedness and of good deeds and virtues. The Bible is the true foundation and pillar of Christian doctrine and a guiding principle for the evaluation, resolution and prevention of all religious disagreements* (Uppsala 1593).

2. The Bible "promotes Christ" (*Christum treiben / agere*). In other words, Jesus Christ and the salvation and justification brought about by him is the theme running through the whole of the Bible. Although the whole Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, this *Christum treiben* principle can help us perceive that there are some points and ideas in it that are more, or less, significant than others. It also helps us to interpret the Bible as a whole in such a way that its theme can be found. It was on these grounds that Luther valued some books of the Bible more highly than others and was sometimes inclined to play down the relevance of the Epistle of St. James or the Epistle to the Hebrews.

   > *The true touchstone for assessing all the books is whether they "promote Christ" or not … What does not teach about Christ is not apostolic, even*

2 Some Lutheran brothers and sisters have perhaps heard the obviously exaggerated anecdote of the elderly Pietist pastor who, when he heard someone reading from the Bible, an entirely unknown book for him, asked, "Is that the book of the easy-believing Hedbergists?".

3 One might, perhaps with good reason, place a question mark after this phrase "in its entirety". I personally would maintain that Luther could well have said that the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God in its entirety, even though not every point made in it is of equal value to us.

though it may come from St. Peter or St. Paul. And conversely, what does teach about Christ is apostolic, even if it may come from the mouth of Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod (Luther, WA DB 7, 384:25–32).

3. The *Christum treiben* principle did not mean for traditional Lutheranism simply the effects that preaching about Christ had on those who believed (comfort, a sense of grace, faith), but rather that the believer had communion *with Christ himself*. This helps us to understand why the teachings of the Early Church with regard to the two natures of Christ and their combination in one person were so essential to the traditional Lutheran manner of interpreting the Bible. It was important to speak of Christ just as he was in this person.[4]

   Thus Christum treiben does not simply stand for the proclamation or experience of forgiveness, but it includes that on which the forgiveness is based: the person and deeds of Jesus Christ. Luther and genuine Lutheranism would not have tolerated any experience of forgiveness that had been brought about by some other Christ than he who was born of the Virgin Mary, perfect God and perfect man, "known in two natures, without being commingled, without being changed, without being taken apart, without being segregated."
4. Similarly, *Christum treiben* did not mean in traditional Lutheranism that only those parts of the Bible in which the righteousness preached by Christ was particularly powerfully articulated were God's word inspired by the Spirit, for Luther also regarded passages such as that in Genesis describing how Abram and Sarai moved from Haran to the Promised Land with all their servants, cattle and possessions as a significant utterance on the part of the Holy Spirit. For him it showed how God knows that a move of that kind is hard on people, so that he promises to provide help and sustenance amid the stress that it entails. Thus in Luther's opinion, God gives us instructions, advice, commands and consolation through his Word, touching upon a wide variety of situations in human life. This should not be understood as suggesting that the Bible is a universal textbook for all areas of life and branches of knowledge, but it does not presuppose, either, that God's Word is restricted explicitly to the doctrine of justification. For Luther, the Word of God as contained in the Bible was also a statement of sexual ethics.[5]

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4 It would be useful at this point to refer to the Catalogue of Testimonies at the end of the Formula of Concord. This contains 17 pages of the teachings of the Ecumenical Councils and the Church Fathers with regard to the one person of Christ and the status of his human nature in connection with this.

5 See Sammeli Juntunen, Sex. In: Olli-Pekka Vainio (ed.), *Engaging Luther. A (New) Theological Assessment.* Cascade Books, Eugene, Oregon, 2009, pp. 186–209.

The Psalms, too, simply taken as words, were the Word of God, so that Luther believed that their use in private prayers was a greater source of strength than praying in one's own words. It is thus possible to suggest that the claim made by Miikka Ruokanen in his study of Luther's view of the Bible, that the only inspired part of it for him was its "Christological content" was a mistaken one.[6]

5. The Bible was written by the prophets and by Christ's apostles and their disciples.
6. The essential theme of the Bible is the history of the salvation of the world. The Old Testament is concerned with the promise of the coming of the Messiah into the world, although he is spoken about only covertly and there is much in the Old Testament that was superseded when Christ appeared on earth and God's true scheme for salvation was revealed and came into force. In spite of these reservations, however, the Old Testament is of lasting value to the Church, as it foretells the coming of Christ. Also, the fates of the patriarchs and the tribe of Israel and its individual members can serve as metaphors for the experiences of the church and individual Christians in their belief in Christ.

   Luther was wary of excessive allegorization, but he did not reject allegories entirely. The allegorical and typological readings of the Old Testament nevertheless went out of fashion in 17th-century Lutheranism, at least among university theologians. The reason for this was undoubtedly the fact that interpretations tended to wander away from the literary level and to concentrate more and more on the use of critical methods to identify actual historical events. At that point the idea of Old Testament typologies, allegories or predictions of Christ no longer worked and gradually came to be rejected among academically educated Lutherans.[7]

   I have heard that it may nowadays be regarded as an error in the Faculty of Theology at Helsinki University to take Isaiah 53 as a reference to Jesus' sufferings, but all the same our church presumably still officially believes and teaches that the Old Testament foretells the coming of Christ. One indication of this is the fact that the lessons from the Old Testament for our Sunday services are chosen wherever possible to provide support for the New Testament lesson prescribed for the corresponding day.
7. God *speaks to us* through the Bible. The Lutheran Church has traditionally been of the opinion that this speech can be usefully divided into the *Law* and the *Gospel*.

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6 See Juntunen 2004, Mitä on *sola scriptur*a –periaate tänään? In: M. Hytönen, (ed.) *Raamattu ja kirkon usko tänään*, Synodaalikirja 2004, pp. 33–34.

7 See Juntunen 2010, pp. 214–218.

The *Law* consists of God's demands placed upon us through his will. It is by this means that he protects us from destroying our own lives and those of others and shows us our sinfulness and our guilt before him and before our neighbours, so that we are inclined to seek pardon. The law is not simply a matter for the Bible and the "general revelation" contained in it, for God has written it into the conscience of every person on the strength of his act of creation, so that we can in principle "feel" it with our reason. But as our conscience can become distorted for cultural or other reasons, we also need the statement of God's law that exists in the Bible.

A law may be such that it maintains a state of "social" or "external" righteousness, by promoting peace, by preventing the created nature of man from been eroded by external bad habits or prohibitions, or by praising socially desirable customs. It is possible for human beings to observe this part of God's law in the context of their own free will.

Alternatively, God's Holy Spirit can take his law (but admittedly also the law revealed at the creation) into use and preach it to men so that their sense of guilt before God becomes an acute one. Then the only source of assistance is the second aspect of God's communication with us through the Bible, the Gospel, the promised coming of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. The message conveyed by the Bible is not something that we can believe in independently and of our own free will, but rather it calls for the influence of the Holy Spirit, through whose strength we venture to believe in Christ's promises of grace; we become participators in Christ and his righteousness through faith. Our sins are forgiven and through the influence of our belief in the presence of Christ and his Spirit we begin to love God and our neighbour and willingly act according to God's law, albeit imperfectly on account of the residue of sin in our lives.

Lutheranism has thus emphasized two forms of language, the Law and the Gospel (the demand for love and the promise of grace), as the most significant aspects of God's speaking to us. To my mind this does not imply, however, that the other forms of *illocution* (description, assertion, poetry, threats, consolation, exhortation) cannot be part of the Word of God as well. Such interpretations have been put forward, but they do not strike me as being very convincingly Lutheran. For Luther and Melanchthon it was the distinction between the law and the gospel that was the useful doctrinal point that they frequently alluded to, although it was not decisive in determining whether or not any particular point in the Bible was the Word of God.

Internal differences within Lutheranism

Later the distinction between the Law and the Gospel and the precepts that were derived from it came to occupy a far more prominent position in some branches of Lutheranism than was warranted and were sometimes used directly to determine whether a certain passage or idea in the Bible was authoritatively the Word of God. Thus some Lutherans believe, for instance, that only the "doctrinal" part of the Gospel, and preferably only the absolving and liberating aspects of the doctrine of justification, should be regarded as possessing divine authority, and that that which represents the "Law" (obligations, morality, social ethics etc.) should not be regarded as normative in a biblical context, as these aspects applied to "life" and not to "doctrine" and should be evaluated in terms of "common sense" or "politics", which are to be regarded as autonomous and quite separate from theology.

Luther, at least, did not think along those lines. He believed that the ethics of marriage, for instance, should be derived from the Bible. In fact, he did not consider marriage especially convincing as an institution in the light of common sense alone, but insisted that it should be grounded in the Word of God.

The division into the Law and the Gospel sometimes becomes distorted in modern Lutheranism in the sense that the idea of a publically stated doctrine that is normative for the church (*fides quae*) is equated with law. This would constitute just the kind of obligation that Christ came to free us from by means of his Gospel. Thus the Bible should be interpreted as containing no other binding requirement than that people should not be encumbered with any teaching that the faith has an unequivocally statable content. "The power that we call God" is present when the deeper questions of life are discussed among Christians in a manner that presupposes that the opinions of all the participants are equally important.[8]

Thus there are huge differences within the Lutheran Church as to the way in which God speaks to us through the Bible. Traditional Lutheran doctrine placed emphasis on the Bible as a set of affirmations about God, so that it is the task of theology to build these up into a system in which new affirmations can be derived from them in order to construct a comprehensive view of God, the world and mankind. On the other hand, the traditional approach also stressed the nature of theology as a pragmatic discipline with a therapeutic function with respect to the human soul. Its purpose is to create out of the truths expressed in the Bible a doctrinal system for use in the church through which sinful people can be helped to believe, can be induced to persevere in that belief and can gain eternal life. In this sense, the Bible is a body of material serving the needs of a spiritual form of medical science through which the individual can be led to acquire and maintain a proper relationship with God, a state of righteousness.

8 As phrased in an advertisement for the campaign "Faith, Hope and Love" launched by the Lutheran Parishes of Helsinki.

Thanks to Kant and Schleiermacher and under the influence of Pietism and the Enlightenment, it was, to express it rather bluntly, the latter view that prevailed, but victory was gained in such a way that the earlier Lutheran view on the interpretation of the Bible became distorted. It was the human individual's innermost being and the sense of reverence that resided there that became the seat of a genuine religious belief. For Kant, religion was a question of "schemes for evaluating values", providing a transcendental basis for an ethical code, and Schleiermacher similarly regarded religion as an internal matter for the human personality, although he differed from Kant in regarding the "seat" of religion as being self-assertion (*Selbstbewusstsein*), which was even more fundamental to the personality than ethics. It was in religious terms an "utter sense of dependence" (*schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*) on the Absolute Being that was the source of all existence.

The outcome of this was that very many aspects of the biblical message to which the Catholic Church, Luther and the early Lutherans attached unreserved value came to be reinterpreted in accordance with the Kantian/Schleiermacherian scheme and were rendered superfluous. This was the case, for instance, with the notions of the incarnation of Christ, his two natures expressed in one person, the doctrine of the Trinity, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the water used for baptism and that of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the post-Enlightenment model these things became matters of "mistaken metaphysics" which failed to understand that true religion should not speak about "schemes for evaluating existence", i.e. facts about God, the world and mankind. Instead, it should be speaking about "schemes for evaluating values", which enabled a genuine religious and ethical sensibility to be internalized correctly. This had apparently been the real intention of both Jesus Christ and Luther and thus constituted the correct meaning of the Bible, provided, of course, that it was understood correctly, stripped of all its Papist metaphysical dogmas and "sacramental mystique".

The traditional Lutheran line of thought was not vanquished, however, but lived on and gave rise to a situation in which the Lutheran Church's current interpretation of the Bible is in effect a power struggle between resuscitated (or just about surviving) traditional doctrine and resuscitated (or just about surviving) Enlightenment theology.

The break with the church's dogma and creeds as exegetic horizons

As explained above, the horizon from which the Lutheran Church as represented by Martin Luther and the Books of the Confessions interpreted the Bible consisted of that church's principal points of dogma, its creeds and the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. *Sola scriptura* did not abolish these or affect their use.

It was evidently during the 17th century that the situation began to alter. Lutheranism had from its early days had to cope with "fanatics" and the ways of interpreting the Bible in the light of inner revelations and emotions inspired by the Spirit. In order to do this it had allied itself with the discipline of theology as practised in the universities, the aim of which was to search by objective means for rules that would hold good for all interpretations of texts. Thus the creeds were replaced as exegetic authorities by the university professors of this subject. Then, as academic studies took on an increasingly secular character under the influence of the Enlightenment, the principles on which the Bible was interpreted began to drift still further away from those that had prevailed when it was read in the light of the creeds.

This is to be seen most blatantly nowadays in the attitude which our church has adopted towards interpreting the gospels, the horizon for which is by no means automatically the faith that the church affirms with one voice at every Mass: *I believe in one Lord … who was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary…* . Instead, the horizon may very well be one modern exegetic approach which maintains that the statements in the gospels according to St. Matthew and St. Luke that Jesus Christ was "conceived of the Holy Spirit" should be questioned in some way in order to represent the absolute truth and be credible. This approach is to be found quite commonly in our church, and at the highest possible levels.[9]

The individual as an exegetic authority

We can read about the degeneration of the common horizon for interpreting the Bible within our Lutheran Church in the latest Synodal Book, in which Outi Lehtipuu writes about the tension that exists between creed-based interpretation and academic research. In her opinion this is not a problem but "gives rise to a creative situation which can inspire people to see new things in otherwise familiar texts and in their own beliefs."[10]

This may well be true, but as I read Lehtipuu's paper I can't help thinking that given the situation that our church is in at present, this tension could engender such a flood of pluralism that we would no longer be able to proclaim Jesus Christ convincingly to the modern world. A church that has accepted such a degree of pluralism in its interpretations will have to struggle constantly and argue within

9 Juntunen 2010, pp. 261–267. This has been the state of affairs for almost 10 years, but as I understand it, no official instance has ever addressed the matter. It is perhaps for this reason that greater confusion and annoyance has been expressed in recent years. So far this, too, has been dismissed by branding people in various ways: "the committed biblical zone", "the boycott of bishops", or "a blunter use of language". Perhaps it would now be time to start discussing whether our Evangelical Lutheran Church has in practise any particular tradition or horizon with respect to which it interprets the Bible. Is it the creeds and the dogma of the church, or is it the exegetics practised in the universities? Or is each individual entitled to his own view? Who is going to tell us which of these it is?

10 O.Lehtipuu. In: M.Hytönen (ed.) *Minä uskon? Jumala-usko 2010-luvulla*. Synodaalikirja 2010, p. 61.

itself over precisely the question which Lehtipuu asks in one of her sub-headings, "Our Jesus, your Jesus – whose Jesus?"

This comes out most clearly in the following passage from her paper:

> *But in reality the Bible says nothing. Its texts do not include interpretations; it is people who interpret the texts and give them their meanings. One should not try to evade moral or political responsibilities by hiding behind "the clear words in the Bible", because there is no such thing. The responsibility lies with the interpreter* (Lehtipuu, p. 74).

In her opinion, what is canonized in the Bible is "the multiplicity of its voices", and she looks on this as an ecumenical opportunity:

> *The communion of Christians arises out of the parallel existence of various traditions and the acceptance that there are many equally justifiable ways of living out one's Christian faith. This canonized plurality opens up opportunities for genuine encounters with other religions and other people who believe in different things or in different ways from us. This is essential in the modern world, where Christianity has long since had to abandon its hegemonic position. It also reminds us that the various interpretations and differences in emphasis – both my own and other people's – are fundamentally subjective matters. This relational view of the situation can offer an antidote to the "passion for being in the right" that so often afflicts us. This does not mean that we should abandon our own concept of what is the truth, but that we should make room for respecting other people and their strivings towards the truth. The days of authority, especially unjustified authority, are well and truly over* (Lehtipuu, p. 69).

Is it not the case, however, that communion between Christians arises precisely from the fact that the differences between traditions have not been accepted? It is only the very fundamental aspects of our belief that are common to all: "one faith, one baptism, one Lord". If different interpretations are fundamentally subjective, how do we find the boundaries within which plurality is to be accepted? Why should the days of authority be over? Is it no longer possible for the written word of God to serve for an academically trained Lutheran pastor as an authority that takes precedence over his subjective interpretation, an authority according to which "all teachings and teachers are to be tried and tested"?[11]

11 We Lutheran pastors have undertaken in our vows on entering the priesthood "to remain purely and faithfully true to the Holy Word of God as proclaimed by the prophetic and apostolic books of the Old and New Testaments and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church that are based on them. Why, then, does the Synodal Book instruct us that "the days of authority are over" and that all interpretations are fundamentally subjective?

Contempt for the biblical canon

Apart from the rejection of the interpretational horizon provided by the creeds, there are other reasons for the vast pluralism that prevails in our Evangelical Lutheran Church's interpretation of the Bible. One of these is the fact that modern Protestant exegetics does not in general approve of the biblical canon as an instrument governing the interpretation of individual texts, preferring to regard it as a late political addition employed by the 4th and 5th-century bishops to prevent undesirable Early Christian texts and the groups of Christians responsible for producing them from threatening their hegemonic position.[12]

It is also claimed that the use of the biblical canon as an instrument for the interpretation of the Bible has the effect of harmonizing and smoothing over the biblical texts and their "original messages". This is thought by some to suppress many forms of belief that otherwise would be quite permissible in the light of the early texts themselves.

This has been the case with at least the following points of doctrine:

1. *Christ's virgin birth*. It would be wrong to regard this as normative for the Christian faith, as St. Paul, St. Mark and St. John did not recognise it. The early Christians could just as well have believed, in the adoptionist sense, that Jesus was an ordinary man who was elevated to the status of God's Son at his baptism (or at his resurrection). The same should be permissible in the Lutheran Church today if it wishes to be a "community of the truth".[13]
2. *Christ's death as a sacrifice for the sins of the world*. Since no mention is made of the redeeming function of Christ's blood, sufferings or death in St. Luke's gospel or the Acts of the Apostles (or in St. John's gospel according to some sources), other than in the account of the Last Supper, it cannot be a normative article of faith nowadays, either.
3. *Christ's natures as perfect man and perfect God*. The gospels provide many descriptions of Jesus in which his divinity and his humanity are mingled together in quite different proportions. Thus it would be wrong to accept one particular Christology on the part of modern Lutherans if we are to follow the sola scriptura principle.
4. *Christ's resurrection in the body*. As St. Paul does not mention Jesus' empty tomb, his resurrection in the body should not be taken as a normative Christian doctrine. It is enough to believe in the appearances of the risen Christ, or to accept that "his cause or narrative lived on".

12 For a differing opinion, see T. Veijola, Kaanonin synty ja teologinen merkitys. In: M.Hytönen (ed.) *Raamattu ja kirkon usko tänään*, Synodikirja 2004, pp. 53–71.

13 See, for example, Terho Pursiainen's *Sermon for St. Mary's Day* (available on the Internet).

If the biblical canon is employed as the basis for a church's interpretation of the Bible, the above claims will be impossible to defend. The compilation of the New Testament and its approval alongside the Old Testament as Holy Scripture implied legitimation of a certain canonical polyphony, but it did not by any means imply that Christians could select just one aspect of the Christology of the New Testament and reject the others (as the notion of heresy would suggest). The fact that St. Mark does not mention the divine aspect of Christ's birth, his pre-existence, does not mean that the present-day church should be allowed to teach adoptionist Christology. St. Mark's gospel looks at Jesus from one valuable perspective, but the inclusion in the canon of the gospels according to St. Matthew, St. Luke and St. John, the epistles of St. Paul and the books of the Old Testament allows the information given by St. Mark to be filled out both with their Christologies and with the wealth of material on the expectation of the Messiah to be found in the Old Testament.

Why is the biblical canon so often treated with contempt in modern exegetics? Fundamentally, the reason lies in the methodological assumption prevailing in academic circles that God cannot be acceptable as a historical factor influencing the course of events, whereas the Jewish and Christian thinking with regard to the canon presupposes that God, through his inspiration, has caused both the history of the salvation of man and the Bible to evolve according to his wishes. Thus the whole canon is permeated by his intentions, his will and his guidance, from the earliest biblical texts to the latest ones. In other words, it is through the Bible as a whole that he has provided an authentic testimony to his Son. This assumption is built into the concept of the salvation of mankind as presented in the Bible itself.

Such an assumption would, of course, be impossible in the academic discipline we know as history, and consequently the attitude adopted in historical-critical, or "rational", exegetics is that it would be a misrepresentation of the individual biblical texts to read them in the overall literary context created by the canon. The writer of the gospel according to St. Mark surely could not have imagined that his work would one day be published in the same volume with St. John's gospel or the book of Genesis. Each has its own historical context in which it is to be interpreted. The academic world does not allow us to assume that it was God's will and intention that the books that ended up in the biblical canon should have been combined in such a way. To have invented such a connection between them – in the interpretation that I am criticizing here – is an exercise of religious power that does an injustice to both the writers of the books of the Bible and the original messages that these books were intended to convey.

A second reason for the contempt shown for the biblical canon is that its boundaries are not entirely clear. The Catholic and Orthodox churches accept the divine origins of the Septuagint and thus include the apocryphal books of the Old Testament as part of the Word of God, while the Protestants follow the

Masoretic Jewish tradition with regard to the Old Testament and exclude the books of the Apocrypha. Some theologians within our church believe that this distinction renders the whole canon so indeterminate that it no longer has any theological validity.

The traditional, and official, Lutheran line is naturally that this is not so. The Bible is an entity ordained by God, and thus it can be interpreted as a canonical whole, on the *scriptura sui ipsius interpretens* principle.

Excessive reliance on historical reconstruction for the significance of the Bible

The immense pluralism attached to the interpretation of the Bible in the Evangelical Lutheran Church may also be attributed to the fact that rational exegetics has located the meaning of the Bible very firmly in the historical reconstruction that it has attempted to create in order to "back up" the biblical texts by employing these as historical sources. According to Hans Frei in his work on *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (1974), this tendency first arose in the 17th century.

In my book *Kirkon raamattuteologiasta ja sen puutteesta* (Kirjapaja 2010) I attempted an extensive analysis of Prof. Emer. Heikki Räisänen's programme of research in order to demonstrate that the paradigm he adopted practically ignored one major way of understanding the significance of the Bible: that in which its significance also lies in its "textual world", the plot set out in its text, how the text "opens the world up to be lived in by us".

I quote from this book (pp. 57–58):

> *To explain this, we could take an example from Finnish literature. Väinö Linna's novel* The Unknown Soldier *is based on historical events that took place during the latter part of the Second World War, the phase known to the Finns as the Continuation War, and on Linna's personal experiences of this in a machine gun company. Many of the characters in the novel, such as Rokka and Lammio, are modelled on real-life people. Nevertheless, the significance of* The Unknown Soldier *does not lie in the historical events to which it refers from time to time but in its plot, what happens to the characters in the story, how their personalities and relations with each other develop and what impressions of the world, the war and Finnish men the narrative conveys. Any attempt to concentrate on the military history lying behind the content of the book would yield a very narrow understanding of it. The identity of Rokka, for instance, is not what historical investigations might succeed in revealing with regard to the real person lying behind that character but what the story tells us about him. Correspondingly, the identities of figures appearing in the Bible are dependent not upon what historians may discover about them, but rather how they are depicted in the course of the biblical narrative.*

> *The disadvantage with the above example, of course, is that the Bible does not belong to the same literary genre as* The Unknown Soldier*, as the latter, in spite of its realism and historical connections, is a work of fiction. The purpose of using this example is in any case not to claim that the Bible is fiction but to point out that all realistic narratives – including both the Bible and* The Unknown Soldier *– are of a significance that exceeds any historical reconstruction that can be created on the basis of them.*
>
> *Anthony Thistleton illustrates this by means of three metaphors: the significance may lie a)* behind the text*, in the factual history that it describes (or the lack of such), b)* within the text*, in the literary world projected by the text, the way in which it describes reality and "opens it up" to the reader, or c)* in front of the text*, in the effect that it attempts to exercise on the reader. Each of the texts contained in the Bible lays different degrees of emphasis on these dimensions of significance, but in none of them does it become fully equal to historical reconstruction.*

Thus the attaching of significance to historical reconstruction is by no means entirely wrong, but it would be wrong to give the impression that this was the only significance of the Bible, its true significance or the significance on which all interpretations should be based. If too much significance is assigned to historical reconstruction, one consequence may be that excessive emphasis comes to be placed on its inherent pluralism. This is because the element of consistency that it acquires on account of its literary context will disappear when its texts are no longer allowed to relate to each other through this literary context.

This would mean, for instance, that Isaiah 53 could no longer be taken as alluding to Jesus' death (and could no longer be used in connection with the histories of his passion when rehearsing the preaching of sermons), and that a meaning for the concept of *dikaiosynee* in St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians could no longer be sought even in his Epistle to the Romans, let alone in St. Matthew's gospel or the Book of Genesis. Similarly, since the genuine message of the New Testament in this view lies in the reconstructed faith of the early Christians, the essential thing would not be what St. Luke wrote about the birth of Christ but a hypothetical reconstruction of the development of the Christology of the Early Christian Church, which would undoubtedly, maintain that early Christianity was adoptionist in character and that St. Luke made up his account of Christ's childhood a couple of decades later. The thesis would be that the actual text is a later, falsified composition that has been artificially welded together from the various genuine but differing forms of belief that historical-critical exegetists have been able to discover as a result of what they believe to have been honest, unbiased scientific work that is untrammelled by the influence of the church, its politically motivated canons and its metaphysical creeds.

The church's study of the Bible certainly has a need for rational exegetics and the attempts within that discipline to discern the historical situations in which the texts arose, but historical reconstruction should not be the primary instrument of interpretation for the church. The biblical canon and the literary or narrative methods of assigning significance that it provides are also necessary. The book I refer to above represents a fairly extensive attempt at rehabilitating these methods (see pp. 184–251).

If we forget that God speaks to us through the Bible

The traditional Lutheran view of the Bible definitely includes the idea that God is speaking to us through it. This is also in evidence in the Mass, when the reader of a lesson will conclude with the words, "This is the Word of God". No other readings will end in this way.

The idea of the Bible as the Word of God, or God speaking to us, is not fashionable within Lutheranism today, however. It is frequently equated with "fundamentalism". One example may be found in an editorial by Seppo Simola, information officer for the Lutheran Parishes of Helsinki, in the newspaper *Kirkko ja kaupunki* (Church and City), in which he outlines two contrasting attitudes towards the Bible. One, "the opinion of the committed biblical zone", maintains that the Bible is an expression of "the pure Word of God", and the other understands it as "expressions by human beings of what they have understood by God and our relation to him, conditioned in each case by the history of their own times." We are left in no doubt as to which of these opinions he and his newspaper favour.[14]

Why is it so difficult for present-day Lutheranism to accept the Bible as the Word of God, or God speaking to us? One reason is undoubtedly that some branches of the church would equate this with the view that the Bible should be understood as being true in a literal sense and infallible: God is omniscient and therefore he cannot err in what he says. As the exegetists have indisputably dem-

14 Seppo Simola, *Kirkko ja kaupunki,* 22.3.2010:"Many people will have wondered in connection with the election how the issue of homosexual couples can be so important for the church that it can prove decisive for the electing of an archbishop. It is indeed not so important, but behind this question lies an essential difference in the interpretation of our faith and our relations to the Bible and the church's doctrines.

To simplify once again, there are two distinct viewpoints within the church. On one side we have those who hold fast to the 'unadulterated Word of God' as expressed in the Bible and the unaltered faith and doctrines of the church, and on the other we have people who see the Bible and the church's doctrines as expressions by human beings of what they have understood by God and our relation to him, conditioned in each case by the history of their own times. Broadly speaking, the election was a battle between these two viewpoints, and it was the latter that won by a small margin.

There will be no such contest in the case of the forthcoming election of a Bishop of Helsinki, however, as of all the dioceses in Finland, Helsinki is the least closely attached to the 'committed biblical zone', so that its representatives have no chance whatsoever of being elected. All the candidates represent the second of the two viewpoints, each with a slightly different emphasis."

onstrated, the Bible does contain historical and scientific errors and inaccuracies, and consequently the notion of the Bible as the Word and speech of God has been shown to be naïve – that is the argument.

In this situation modern Lutheranism has adopted the same solution as Protestantism in general. It has chosen to treat the nature of the Bible as a revelation as something belonging to the past (*Offenbarung als Geschichte*, W. Pannenberg): God has accomplished powerful acts of salvation way back in history, both with regard to the fate of the Israelites and in the death and resurrection of his Son, and the significance of the Bible lies in the fact that in its writings people are bearing witness to the message conveyed by these revelations.

In this model, too, the Bible is related to God and his message, but it is not such a direct or immediate relationship as in the traditional Lutheran model, in which the Bible is the Word and speech of God and not just people's testimony to his deeds. In the traditional model God himself is speaking to us in the Bible and calling upon us to obey his law, in spite of the fact that that law was written down by human beings. In its texts God himself is speaking to those who are troubled and encouraging them to trust in the promises that he has made. It is precisely for this reason that we can begin the reading of the Bible in the Mass with the words, "Let us listen to the word of God. As the Apostle Paul writes, …". If the church were to commit itself to the biblical theology advocated by Simola we would have to say, "Let us hear what people have understood regarding God. As the Apostle Paul writes, …".

A return to the Bible as God speaking to us

I feel that one of the greatest challenges facing the Lutheran Church is to find ways that are intellectually acceptable nowadays of describing how God speaks to us through the actual text of the Bible, not just in historical reconstructions that "lie behind the text", nor in "inner voices" experienced by individual readers, but in the actual text of the Bible itself. The most acceptable approach would seem to be through the theory of speech acts, by which it would be possible to expand Luther's discoveries with regard to the forms of language in which God speaks, his Law and Gospel. Luther understood that God is doing something when he speaks to us in the Bible: he is either demanding something (in the Law) or promising something (in the Gospel). The speaker in a deeper sense is not the apostle or prophet through whom God performs these speech acts, but rather the actor is God himself. It is precisely for this reason that the Law and the Gospel have such a powerful impact, as described by Mikael Agricola in his celebrated words, "It is the law that troubles the soul, and Christ who brings comfort."

It would be possible by means of the modern theory of speech acts to find something of crucial importance in Luther's concept of the Bible and at the same time move forward from Luther and discover that God performs many other

speech acts in the Bible, his Word, in addition to demands and promises: he threatens, comforts, describes and provides models, e.g. of prayers. Observations of this kind do not imply rejection of the human processes by which the Bible came into being nor of the scientific errors contained in it. For all its inaccuracies, the Bible is still the Word of God, given that God was able to convey through it authentic descriptions, promises, consolations and commands with regard to his Son, through whom He had prepared the salvation of the whole of mankind and opened up a channel for communion with Himself.[15]

Assistance from other churches' traditions

It is obvious that present-day Lutheranism cannot alone create a biblical theology of the kind outlined above. It will be essential to enlist the help of other churches and the traditions that they have developed. Work has already taken place within the Catholic Church on the concepts of double intentionality and *sensus plenor*, with the idea that, in addition to the individual texts of the Bible and the aims of the people who wrote them in certain specific historical contexts and the meanings that they assigned to them, it should be possible to reveal something of the intention that God had in guiding the process of writing. The individual texts within the biblical canon interact in terms of their meanings, and it is in this way that a "fuller understanding" (*sensus plenor*) can arise, one that is "fuller" in the sense that the original author may not necessarily have intended it at the time. The intention came from God, who was active in the background throughout the evolution of the whole canon, and whose desire it was to bear witness to his Son and the salvation that he was to bring to the world. The Catholic Church is also correct in the emphasis it places on the fact that such an interpretation needs to be backed up with a notion of the community of the faithful and the influence of the way in which that community reads the scriptures.

Within the reformed churches it is particularly Kevin Vanhoozer and Nicholas Wolterstorf who have developed speech act theory in a direction in which it could be of enormous benefit to Lutherans and could help them to understand their own tradition as well. As mentioned above, speech act theory can help us to open up Luther's notion of God's demands and promises as expressed in the Bible, i.e. the Law and the Gospel, in a way that would be especially fruitful for modern man.

One thing, at least, which it seems to me that the Orthodox Church could offer us Lutherans is the convincing way in which it takes it for granted that the Old Testament can be read as one of the church's own documents, containing the advance witness of God and his prophets to the coming of Christ. The Orthodox

15 On the application of speech act theory to the church's theology of the Bible, see Juntunen 2010, pp. 118–183.

Church also acknowledges the Bible as the Word of God and his speech to us without falling into the trap of fundamentalism, as it is apparently self-evident for Orthodox Christians that the Bible can be read from the interpretational horizon of the church's dogma and liturgy, in the light of the functioning of the Holy Spirit in the church and not in that of the professors of exegetics.

It would in my view be possible by appealing to other traditions for assistance to take certain steps towards the traditional manner of reading the Bible in which it is truly the supreme authority for our beliefs and our lives; and to do this without resorting to the kind of fundamentalism that holds fast to the tenet of absolute infallibility or implies that such an authority poses a threat to us. It is only in this way that it will be possible to preserve genuine unity, a communion of faith, within the church.

Fr Dr Mikael Sundkvist

Interpretation of the Bible in the teachings of the church

The Orthodox Church makes every effort to underline the importance of its liturgical life, and the same is true nowadays of this church's biblical scholars.[1] Placed in a liturgical context, a passage from the Bible becomes the living Word; it tells the people gathered in the church about their own history, their own beliefs and their own ultimate goals. This is perhaps most obvious of all within the Orthodox tradition in the service of vespers for Great Saturday, in which the people rejoice on account of the release of the tribe of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Having first heard the reading of a lengthy passage from the Book of Exodus describing the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea on dry land, the choir and reader join in singing antiphonally the song of thanksgiving offered up by Moses and the Israelites in recognition of their deliverance (Ex. 15:2–19). They sing it just as if it were their own song of thanksgiving; in other words, the history of the tribe of Israel as conveyed in the Bible becomes a reality, part of their own history, and in addition serves as a foretaste of the miracle that they are about to celebrate, for Christ's death and resurrection signify at the same time their death and resurrection.

Our modern Orthodox theology frequently equates the liturgical context with the essence of the church itself, or at least regards it as one of the main ways in which the church manifests itself.[2] Since modern Orthodox exegetes additionally promote the view that the Bible is specifically the book of the *church* and that its significance can be understood only in connection with the church, it would seem logical to set out on our deliberations with regard to the interpretation of the Bible in the church's teachings from this notion of its role as the liturgical nucleus of the church. A certain use made of the Bible in a liturgical context constitutes its interpretation.

For this reason I intend below to consider one example of the use of the Bible in the liturgical life of the church, namely the passages read on the feast-days of the Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos* (Mother of God). These provide a good opportunity for considering how the church interprets the Bible in its teachings, in this case its teachings with regard to Mary, and the example inevitably opens up new questions, such as that of the hermeneutic approach employed and the

1 See, for example, Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, *The New Testament: An Orthodox Perspective. Volume One: Scripture, Tradition, Hermeneutics*, (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1997) pp. 62–63.

2 Good examples of this are the 20th-century works of Nikolai Afanasiev (1893–1966) and John Zizioulas (1931–).

way in which this is related to modern historical Bible exegesis. I am assuming, therefore, that a concrete example will help us to observe the presence of various exegetic issues in the teachings of the Orthodox Church, and I intend in this paper to mention a few of these.

Mary the Mother of God as conveyed in the worship of the church

There are six passages from the Bible to be read at each of the feasts of the Mother of God: three at Vespers on the eve of the feast, one at Matins and two at the Liturgy. Since these vary somewhat from one feast to another, I shall consider those appointed for the Feast of the Dormition on 15th August.

To begin at the end, with the Liturgy, the text prescribed for the Epistle is Phil. 2:5–11 and the Gospel is a combination of two passages from St Luke's Gospel, starting out from the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42) and continuing with the incident in which "a woman in the crowd" praised the womb that bore Jesus (Luke 11:27–28). The first part of this gospel reading does not actually speak of Mary the mother of Jesus at all, but Jesus' remark that "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" (v. 42) fits in very well with his comment about his mother in the second part, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" Combined in this way, the two passages from St. Luke's Gospel help the listener to think of Jesus' mother as someone who heard and received the Word of God in a unique manner and thereby, similarly, "chose the better part".

This example illustrates the freedom that the church gives itself to construct texts out of passages from different places in the Bible, in this case guided by consideration of the role of Jesus' mother in God's plan for the salvation of mankind. The same may be said of the Epistle, where verses 6 and 7, at the beginning of the hymn, are especially suitable for the church's celebration of Jesus' mother as an instrument and necessary precondition for the incarnation: "… though he [Jesus Christ] was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

The reading appointed for Matins contains the account of the meeting of Mary with Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–49, 56), in which Elizabeth's greeting "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" together with the hymn of thanksgiving that Mary utters both reflect in a vivid manner the wondrous task that Mary took on as an instrument of God's salvation.

The readings at Vespers are from the Old Testament, a fact that draws our attention to the important hermeneutic issue of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. The first reading is the account of Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen. 28:10–17). The church perceives in this dream an image of Mary

as a ladder stretching from the earth to heaven by which the angels ascend and descend. In actual fact the situation is a theophany, as the passage goes on, "And *the Lord* stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.'" This is followed by the promise of land and of a blessing which will come to all the peoples on earth. The same reaction that Jacob had with respect to that place, Bethel (God's abode), the church extends to the Mother of God, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Mary's role as the place in which God resides is also hinted at in the second reading, from the book of the Prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 43:27–44:4). The vision of the rebuilt temple at Jerusalem that the prophet sees while in exile in the land of the Chaldeans is transformed in the context of the church's feast-day into an image of Mary as the temple of God, filled with his glory, the gate of which was to remain shut. Thus the words "It [the gate] shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it; for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; therefore it shall remain shut" are taken to refer to the church's belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary, a dogma which the 16th-century Reformationists did not, to my knowledge, see fit to re-evaluate.

The last of the Old Testament readings prescribed for Vespers is from the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 9:1–11), describing how Wisdom has built a house and prepared a meal there and is inviting people to come and eat. The foods laid out on the table symbolize the treasures of wisdom. In the church's interpretation Mary is that house, making it possible for Wisdom, Jesus Christ, to hold a feast for his guests.

These three Old Testament readings convey a classical, theologically balanced view of Mary the mother of Jesus. The ladder, the temple and the house are all essential for God to manifest himself to the world, but they have no separate existence apart from that manifestation. The Lord himself appears on the ladder, in the temple and in the house to reveal his plan to bring blessing on all peoples. His glory is revealed through the temple, and in the form of Wisdom he is accessible to everyone.

Taken together, these readings from the Bible succeed in communicating the nucleus of the church's teachings about the Virgin Mary: she is the one who received the Word of God, the one in whom the Word "took the form of a slave" and became man; she is the gate of heaven, the awesome place where God resides, the temple of the Lord; she is the house built by the Wisdom of God in whose shelter "those without sense" – as the text of the Book of Proverbs aptly phrases it – can grow in wisdom.

In these cases the Old Testament is being read from the perspective of the revelation received through Christ, a reading that is quite feasible even if we choose not to believe that Jacob, Ezekiel and "Solomon" were consciously awaiting the incarnation of God who was to be born of a virgin. The readings assigned for

Vespers are a practical illustration of the hermeneutic principle that Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon, expressed in the following manner in the 2nd century:

> *Every prophecy is enigmatic and ambiguous for human minds before it is fulfilled. But when the time has arrived and the prediction has come true, then prophecies find their clear and unambiguous interpretation. This is the reason that the law resembles a fable when it is read by Jews at the present time; for they do not have the explanation of it all, namely, the coming of the Son of God as man.*[3]

The coming of the Son of God as man furnished interpreters with a key by which to read the Old Testament, a hermeneutic approach that, as is well known, was taken for granted by the Early Church, although applied in variable ways in different parts of the church of those times. The readings at Vespers for the Feast of the Dormition, for instance, could scarcely have been acceptable to those who supported the Antiochian tradition, which harboured more reservations with regard to allegorical interpretations than did the theologians based in Alexandria. On the other hand, the readings do conform – although not especially clearly – to the *typos-alêtheia* pattern favoured in Antioch, in which the Old Testament narrative corresponds in basic outline to that occurring in the New Testament. The same pattern is also detectable in the way the church has distributed these readings among the various services marking the feast, so that the *typoi* are assigned to the eve, to be read in the half-light of dusk, while the *alêtheia* basks in the clarity of the morning light.

The use of biblical texts in connection with the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God thus provides us with a good example of the interpretation of the Bible in the teachings of the Orthodox Church, and alongside this an example of its teaching about how to interpret the Bible correctly.

Present-day Orthodox exegetes' criticism of the historical method they have embraced

The Orthodox exegetes of today have staunchly defended the traditional hermeneutics as represented by the use made of Bible readings at the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. One good example of this is the statement made by the Boston-based exegete Theodore Stylianopoulos in a paper on the interpretation of the Bible, "Scripture finds its centre in the mystery of the eternal Christ, veiled

3 Irenaeus, *Haer*. 4.26.1; in K. Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*. (Sources of Christian Thought; Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1984) pp. 44.

in the Old Testament and revealed in the New."[4] This is virtually a reiteration of the words of the 2nd century St. Irenaeus cited above, the implication being that the mystery of Christ can open up the Old Testament to us. Stylianopoulos also considers the role of the church:

> *The Church itself, the ongoing living community of God's people, far from being a mere historical appendage, is the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, constitutive of revelation. As such, the Church forms the very ground from which scripture and tradition emerge and together, in turn, make up a coherent source of revelation.*[5]

The Bible is the book of the church, Theodore Stylianopoulos reminds us, and it cannot be understood without reference to the tradition of the church. Stylianopoulos, a professor at the Greek-American Holy Cross Seminary, is not a relic from the past; he is not without experience of other attitudes towards the Bible. Versed in university theological studies, he gained his doctorate at Harvard with a thesis entitled *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law* (1975), supervised by the renowned New Testament exegete Krister Stendahl (1921–2008). Like most university-based Orthodox theologians, Stylianopoulos accepts the historical approach to the study of the Bible and has no problem in conceding that the Bible also has a human side to it, which can be studied by human means. The Eastern Church's notion of a *synergy* that prevails between God and the beings that he has created to be free also applies to the source of his revelation, and the patristic legacy that is so important to all Orthodox theologians is cited as a good example of the way in which a thinker who is faithful to the mind of the church need not be afraid of making use of the variety of philological and philosophical methods on offer in his own times. Thus Orthodox scholars quite openly accept both the spiritual interpretation of the Bible that is traditional for their church and the current historically critical "rational" approach to the Bible.

On the other hand, a great deal of criticism has been levelled at the historical study of the Bible,[6] or more precisely, not at the historical method as such but at the presuppositions that have directed the scholars' work, in particular the assumptions that the genuine original message of the Bible has become obscured in the church's tradition and that scholars in isolation, employing objective methods

4 Theodore G. Stylianopoulos, "Scripture and tradition in the Church", in: Mary B. Cunningham & Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 21–34 (21).

5 Ibid.

6 See John Anthony McGuckin, "Recent Biblical Hermeneutics in a Patristic Perspective: The Tradition of Orthodoxy", in: Theodore G. Stylianopoulos (ed.), *Sacred Text and Interpretation: Perspectives in Orthodox Biblical Studies. Papers in Honour of Professor Savas Agourides*, (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006), pp 293–324; Stylianopoulos, *New Testament*, pp. 123–145.

and guided by their own reasoning, can extract the truth regarding the real significance of the various bodies of material contained in it. This may be looked on as a secularized form of the *sola scriptura* principle. Another weakness that is often quoted is the flood of information generated by the historical method, which brings out a wealth of historical and literary details without any theological synthesis, i.e. without attempting to identify the theological point that they were originally intended to demonstrate. This means that the Bible becomes a museum collection instead of the living Word.

Furthermore, Orthodox scholars claim that the spiritual nature of the Bible is often annulled in the name of objectivity, leading to lifeless, depressing propositions. Thus one repeatedly comes up against scholars' cynicism and repulsion for the topic that they are working on. As Stylianopoulos puts it, "Behind such attitudes lie a scholar's own unresolved issues of religious faith, various forms of an inferiority complex in the face of the prevailing intellectualism, even a kind of self-hatred for being in a field the expert neither loves nor truly believes is of any value to anyone."[7]

A more serious criticism, however, concerns the philosophical world-views adopted as starting-points by such scholars, which specifically exclude a world in which the supernatural is possible and ignore the concept of revelation entirely, or – moving slightly in a post-modern direction – which cannot conceive that readers should recognise existing meanings but assume that they must create the meanings themselves, or in which the notion of a normative approach to reading or interpretation is looked on as little more than a hegemonic struggle between texts and social systems.

It is clear from the above that Orthodox exegetes' criticisms of modern Biblical interpretation are directed above all at the concepts of the nature of reality that serve as the scholars' initial assumptions, for they are then apt to mention in the same breath the usefulness of various methods and the fruitfulness of the results they have achieved. When examining the ideas put forward by Orthodox researchers one cannot help recalling the simple historical fact that the Orthodox culture originates from outside present-day Europe and was relatively unaffected by the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment. I am inclined to believe that this still applies to modern Orthodox thinkers, although it is undoubtedly the case that the Orthodox culture has enjoyed much creative interaction with the Western cultural heritage, of which the Russian culture, both intellectual and spiritual, of the period of about 100 years from the mid-19th century onwards is one of the finest examples.

7 Stylianopoulos, *New Testament*, p. 142.

But in spite of this, Orthodoxy is fundamentally something rather different, and therefore the criticism directed by its exegetes at their Western colleagues may at times seem unfair. They do not identify themselves sufficiently with the intellectual climate in which theology is practised as a university discipline in the Western cultural sphere, and they do not feel the same inner compulsion to observe post-Enlightenment patterns of thought. Indeed, it may be that they no longer need to in these post-modern times.

Conversely, of course, if Orthodoxy really does represent a different intellectual culture, should it not be allowed to set its own philosophical framework in which to evaluate and adopt the results of biblical exegetics? Actually, examples of such evaluation criteria have been put forward which demonstrate quite clearly that Orthodox exegetes are unwilling to engage in historically oriented critical interpretation of the Bible in the manner in which it is practised elsewhere.

As one example of an attempt to create an Orthodox framework for biblical studies I would like to quote the three principles that make up the model proposed by John McGuckin, Professor of Byzantine Christian Studies at Columbia University.[8] These do not apply directly to critical biblical studies as such but form the hermeneutical points of departure for evaluating the results of such studies.

The *principle of consonance* implies that scholars should attempt to place themselves on the same wavelength as the writer of each text in the Bible and to internalize the same divine Spirit that inspired that writer. They should also identify with the mind of the Church and filter the results of the research methods they use in order to conform to that framework.

The *principle of authority* is a point on which Orthodox exegesis according to McGuckin's model is openly at variance with the independent academic discipline of Biblical exegesis. As McGuckin points out, Orthodox scholars can speak out clearly as supporters of apostolic authority in matters of interpreting the Bible at the expense of autonomous academic interpretations, bearing in mind that this apostolic authority is not a straightjacket but rather a lens through which the modern-day scholar can participate in the continuity of the church's tradition. McGuckin mentions Irenaeus in this connection, since he appealed to the apostolic tradition as a criterion for discerning truth. In his metaphor of a mosaic depicting a king, Irenaeus recounted how the Gnostics came up with a picture of a dog rather than the image of Jesus Christ although they clearly used the original elements to do so. McGuckin implicitly compares this example with the hermeneutic alternatives on offer today, suggesting that modern interpretations of the Bible recognise the original elements but fail to achieve an overall picture.

Finally, the *principle of utility* is a criterion that demands that Biblical exegesis should not remain a dead letter but should be spiritually constructive and

8 McGuckin, "Biblical Hermeneutics", pp. 309–319.

relevant to the church's kerygma. Since the latter is clearly a question of dogma, then exegesis should be a question of dogma, too. McGuckin emphasizes that Orthodox exegesis should not allow itself to stray away from the church's dogma or its liturgical life, for the separation of these three branches has had detrimental consequences in Western theology.

Although McGuckin assures us of the usefulness of various methods of actual research, the question inevitably arises of how his hermeneutic criteria would function in practise when interpreting the Bible, and at what level they would function. It is easy to imagine that many questions would remain unasked, as their value would not meet the criteria given. The example may not be the best possible, but I am reminded of the case during my student days of one Orthodox student who planned to study the significance of the dreams reported in the Bible by a method borrowed from modern cultural anthropology. How would an approach of that kind fit in with predetermined church criteria such as those presented by McGuckin?

The real value of these rather cursory hermeneutic principles can only be assessed in a practical context. What kinds of research do they lead to? On what topics? Are the methods acceptable to non-Orthodox colleagues and capable of being examined by them? Or do Orthodox theologians inevitably have their own way of arriving at the truth? And to go still further, is it even possible to make a distinction between the working methods themselves and the processes by which their results are evaluated?

The challenge of the "historical Mary"

Bearing these questions in mind, we can now return to the theme of the Virgin Mary that we considered earlier, not to examine her role in the liturgical life of the church this time, but rather to "place her on the operating table", i.e. to examine her status from a historical and critical viewpoint. What "new information" about the mother of Jesus Christ has been gained by virtue of modern Biblical exegesis? It is reasonable to ask this in my opinion, as it provides us with an opportunity for assessing the relationship between the church's interpretation of the Bible in this respect, as described at the beginning of this paper, and the historically-based academic interpretation. We may also ask ourselves whether the historical Mary the mother of Jesus would be an object of interest for Orthodox exegetes. Presumably the theme would have better chances of success than the study of dreams that the above-mentioned Orthodox student of theology failed to complete.

Coincidentally, however, modern research regarding the Virgin Mary does tell us something about the significance of dreams as well.[9] Mary's betrothed, Joseph, is reported in the first two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel as having had a number of dreams, in which the Angel of the Lord announced concerning Mary that "the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20), in which the young family were advised to flee to Egypt, and finally, in which they were assured that it was safe to return to the land of Israel.

The birth narrative in St. Luke's Gospel, on the other hand, makes no reference to dreams, and in fact very little is said about Joseph, St. Luke's attention being focused quite specifically on Mary. It is she, and not Joseph, who is told by the angel of the miraculous conception of a child, and the rest of the narrative is similarly presented from her perspective.

Any reader can see that the birth narratives in the gospels differ markedly, and modern scholars do not attempt to harmonize these accounts to form one consistent story but prefer to conclude that the evangelists created their own individual narrative frameworks for the events concerned. Thus they attribute St. Matthew's account to the fact that the name Joseph inspired the evangelist to frame his narrative of Jesus's birth on the basis of the well-known Old Testament story of the Joseph who was sold into Egypt, was a dreamer of dreams and was adept at interpreting other people's dreams. Just as his descendant, Moses, escaped death at the hands of the pharaoh, so the child Jesus escaped from the wrath of Herod, i.e. it is claimed that the tale of Herod's slaughter of the male children of Bethlehem was fashioned on the basis of the pharaoh's corresponding deed.

It is likewise claimed that St. Luke's account of the conception and birth of Jesus – and also of the conception and birth of St. John the Baptist – follow fairly closely similar narratives in the Old Testament. The conclusion, therefore, is that St. Luke made use of these models when creating his narrative, from which it follows that none of these events was necessarily a historical fact.

All is not lost, however, as the otherwise obviously independent narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke contain certain elements in common: Mary and Joseph, a virgin conception announced beforehand by an angel, and birth in Bethlehem. These elements remain impervious to the instruments of exegesis, and therefore they cannot be proved to be unhistorical, either.

What attitude do Orthodox exegetes adopt towards the "new information" regarding Mary? I have not actually seen any feedback from them, but my own guess is that it is not difficult for them to accept these conclusions. It is easy enough, after all, for Orthodox scholars to recognise in the narratives fashioned

9 See in particular Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, Joseph A. Fitzmyer & John Reumann (eds.), *Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*, (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1978).

by St. Matthew and St. Luke on the basis of Old Testament models the same human aspect of the Bible which they will have accepted at the outset in any case.

More problematical, perhaps, is the scholars' conclusion that the person of Mary is treated inconsistently in the New Testament. St. Paul gives no indication whatsoever that he was aware of Jesus' virgin birth, and nor does St. John, for that matter, although his Gospel represents perhaps the most elevated and most profound form of Christology to be seen in the New Testament canon. It may be that it never crossed St. John's mind that the Eternal Word should have been born to a virgin; at least he does not argue from that standpoint. Although an exegesis should not lay too much emphasis on *ex silencio* reasoning, such claims do provide food for thought.

Neither does St. Mark, on whose gospel both St. Matthew and St. Luke are usually thought to have based theirs, say anything about the virgin birth. In fact it is thought that he took a somewhat negative view of the Virgin Mary. Scholars have pointed out that where parallel passages are to be found in the synoptic gospels, St. Matthew and St. Luke appear to shape their versions to show greater reverence for the Virgin. Similarly in St. John's Gospel Mary is to be found among the disciples and is said to have been entrusted as a mother to "the beloved disciple", John, by the crucified Christ as she stood at the foot of the cross. Should we conclude, therefore, that the Orthodox Church may continue to celebrate the feast-days of the Virgin Mary as heretofore, provided it chooses the most suitable description of her from among the alternatives available in the Gospels?

A case like this would also presuppose, however, that the traditional answer were to be accepted for the crucial question existing in Orthodox theology in this respect, namely who was Jesus's father? Although a Jesus who had been conceived and born in the conventional manner would suffice for many present-day Christians, this would scarcely do for Orthodox Christians. What do the scholars have to say on this matter?

In this case the scholars have very little to say. They generally assume that there was an earlier tradition that lay behind the information on the virgin birth given by St. Matthew and St, Luke, but nothing can be said for certain about where this could have come from. The theory that it came from Jesus' family seems difficult to defend, for in that case, why was it that only a few people knew about it? Likewise, considerable reservations have been expressed regarding the suggestion that the tradition may have originated in heathen myths of intercourse between a god and a human being, especially since such a borrowing would have been atypical of a devotional text with its roots in Judaism. Nor can one find any material in the Old Testament that could have given rise to such an *a posteriori* explanation of Jesus' conception. The words of Isaiah 7:14 "a virgin/young woman is with child and shall bear a son" were not interpreted in this way in the Jewish tradition, which means that St. Matthew chose the passage to support information that he had received from some other source. It is in fact

slightly ironic that the opinion that nothing of this kind is mentioned in the Old Testament prophesies is looked upon by modern exegetes as strengthening the genuineness of the alleged virgin birth, in the sense that there was nothing that could have forced the evangelists to interpret Jesus's birth in this way, whereas in the Early Church the existence of prophecies in the Old Testament was the most telling weapon for use in theological controversies.

The only historically feasible source for such a tradition mentioned in the studies with which I am acquainted is the original information that Mary, to whom Joseph was betrothed, proved to be pregnant before consummation of their marriage. There are then two possibilities: either she had been unfaithful to him or else something miraculous had happened. Thus the scholars come to the conclusion that there is no evidence for excluding a virgin birth if one wishes to believe in such a thing.

In the end we are called on to decide whether we trust in the authenticity of the church's tradition or not. To my mind this example demonstrates very well the inadequacy of reliance on historical research. When something cannot be followed up by historical means, it is then – at the latest – that the question of the credibility of "tradition" arises. And this, of course, brings with it the question of the trustworthiness of the medium that has conveyed that tradition, the church. This seems, therefore, to be a question of whether we trust in the evangelists Matthew and Luke to have interpreted the events in a reliable manner that we cannot arrive at by historically-based critical interpretation of the texts, and of what significance is to be given to the fact that the church approved and adopted their interpretation. Is the church – a product of the Holy Spirit – in possession of the truth with regard to these matters that have evaded the watchful eye of history?

Should the Orthodox Church have its own method of tracing the "historical Mary"?

We can now move on to relate the search for the historical Mary to independent Orthodox interpretative strategies as suggested by some Orthodox scholars. If the topic as a whole had proved acceptable, would John McGuckin's three principles of consonance, authority and utility have been able to affect its treatment? Would exegetes imbued with the Holy Spirit and functioning under the auspices of the church – i.e. working according to the principle of consonance – have evaluated any stage in the process differently? Would they have closed their eyes to the negative attitude of St. Mark, or would they have invoked the principle of authority and passed over voices in the New Testament material that departed from the accepted authority? These questions are perhaps phrased too simply, but they reflect my genuine suspicions that independent Orthodox exegetic principles do not work out very well when implemented in concrete historical research. Let us consider another example.

Mary's reply to the angel at the Annunciation has called for some explanation on the part of exegetes from early times onwards: "Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'" (Luke 1:34). This question of hers was explained in the 4th century as implying that she intended to remain a virgin for the whole of her life. Otherwise one would presume that a Galilean girl who was engaged to be married would know about giving birth to children. The angel had not at that stage in the narrative told her that the child would be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that Mary's question could not mean anything other than the amazement of a committed virgin or the ignorance of a young girl.

Modern exegetes, on the other hand, maintain that this was the correct response for Mary to make at this point in the encounter, that the genre itself demands it. The same type of response is found in most of the Old Testament passages where an angel appears and tells of the forthcoming birth of a man who has been chosen by God. Literary convention required that the interlocutor should make a counter-claim. This was true, for instance, of Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, in the same chapter of St. Luke's gospel, who replied by asking the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years" (Luke 1:18). The response was quite in order.

It is easy to accept this explanation suggested by modern research. Some of the Church Fathers, however, including St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Ambrose of Milan, have seen in Mary's reply a proof that she intended to remain a virgin for ever, *aeiparthénos*, *semper virgo*. This is a dogma that we Orthodox repeat in every one of our church services.

If we were now to follow two of McGuckin's principles, those of consonance and authority, would we not be forced to conclude that the unanimous voice and authority of the church supports an interpretation that is less probable than that put forward by independent modern scholars? It is, of course, quite possible to speak of Mary's perpetual virginity, but scarcely without taking account of the church's later overall interpretation of the tradition.

Origen, who was one of the early theologians who accepted the notion of Mary as remaining a virgin, considered that this was mentioned only in the Protevangelium of St. James and in the Gospel according to St. Peter, both of which are external to the canon of the New Testament,[10] but not in the New Testament itself. Thus he defended the concept in a different way, without referring to the Bible, namely by maintaining that the concept of Mary as remaining a virgin represented a suitable and healthy way of thinking of her in view of the fact that the Holy Spirit had come upon her and the power of the Most High had overshadowed her.

10 Brown et al., *Mary*, pp. 274–275.

This example of Mary's reply to the angel demonstrates that it is difficult to implement independent Orthodox exegetic principles in practise. One alternative for Orthodox scholars could be to accept that they are asking different questions about the Bible and that these inevitably elicit different answers. These scholars are nevertheless nowadays a part of the ever-extending uniform Western cultural sphere – so is it possible in this context to leave historical questions unasked? If it is not possible, is it possible to proceed in actual historical inquiry in a different manner from that exemplified by the issue of the "historical Mary"? I personally do not think so.

The deficient nature of historical knowledge

It is scarcely conceivable that the historical method could ever be employed as such as a hermeneutic system to serve the purpose of the church. This is because historical knowledge is always in the nature of a reconstruction, and is frequently just one hypothesis out of many. A historical truth as put forward by scholars rarely exists, as it is usually liable to change – whereas the church cannot live on the strength of constantly alternating hypotheses.

The study of religious realities is a somewhat ambivalent undertaking. As long as the assignment remains on the level of describing human concepts or actions it appears possible, but it becomes more problematical when the object of study is, at least indirectly, a reality that is by nature inaccessible. The situation becomes especially difficult for those investigating the origins of Christianity, because it is an article of the faith that that which is by nature inaccessible became man, became visible. But did it become accessible to scientific research? The multiple waves of scholarship that have surrounded the person of Jesus demonstrate that there is no clear answer. And the issue of the "historical Mary" falls into the same category: it is impossible to find entirely watertight historical evidence for resolving the decisive questions.

Historians can only study things that belong to conventional human reality; a historically reconstructed Jesus might be erroneously taken for the real Jesus, as has happened on many occasions.[11] Thus the historical method is not without challenges for a mind seeking faith. Although scholars may be aware that their reconstructed images do not represent the whole truth, how can they go beyond the pictures they have created and reach a level of synthesis which would enable them to identify with a congregation engaged in celebrating the mystery of the Dormition of the Mother of God, for instance?

These suspicions lead me to be less optimistic than my sources Stylianopoulos and McGuckin with regard to the supposed ease of using the historical method

11 Cf. Dieter Mitternacht & Anders Runesson (eds.), *Jesus och de första kristna,* Verbum, Stockholm, p. 154.

to construct an overall exegetic platform in accordance with the mind of the church. The human mind that is seeking a synthesis – or perhaps we should say contemplation – would seem to be incompatible with a history that is open to multiple interpretations, and the creation of such a synthesis in a historiographic context frequently takes place at the expense of credibility. Nevertheless, McGuckin appears to be putting his principles forward on the assumption that they will be used in the research process, i.e. at the level of scholars evaluating their discoveries rather than that of a synod of bishops exercising the principle of authority.

Orthodox exegetes, who accept in principle that God spoke to the world through his Son, need therefore to set out more clearly their views on the relationship between historical and other knowledge. In this respect it might be useful to begin with Origen, who observes in his *De principiis*:

> *Now the cause … of the false opinions, and of the impious statements or ignorant assertions about God, appears to be nothing else than the not understanding the Scripture according to its spiritual meaning, but the interpretation of it agreeably to the mere letter. And therefore, to those who believe that the sacred books are not the compositions of men, but that they were composed by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, agreeably to the will of the Father of all things through Jesus Christ, and that they have come down to us, we must point out the ways (of interpreting them) which appear (correct) to us, who cling to the standard of the heavenly Church of Jesus Christ according to the succession of the apostles.*[12]

Origen's exegesis is full of insight, but suffers from an excess of allegories, although these can in some cases lead to revealing interpretations. One good thing about him was that he clearly understood the need for a conscious ecclesiastical hermeneutics that met the demands of the learned practises of his day – being perhaps the first Christian scholar to do so. In the above quotation he speaks of the correct concept of God, and in the previous section he had presented the Gnostics' concept of God, pointing to the literal manner in which they read the Old Testament. But it is a principle that Origen maintains throughout his interpretations that anyone who becomes entrapped in that way is no longer able to perceive the divine message that lies behind the words.

As is well known, Origen was also interested in the literal level and used all the devices afforded by his own culture to study it. He did not reject meanings determined at this level, provided they were to some extent consonant with those existing at the spiritual level, but the focus was on the latter, and I am inclined to see the likes of Stylianopoulos and McGuckin nowadays as being of that same

12 Origen *Princ*. 4.2.2.1–9. H.Görgemanns & H. Karpp, *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976.); ET of Philip Schaff, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers IV* via *Christian Classics Etheral Library*, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.vi.v.v.ii.html.

opinion. Like Origen, they emphasize the presence of the Holy Spirit and personal spiritual cleansing as conditions for a scholar's proper understanding of the Bible, and like him, they are opposed to study at the level of dead letters and to the generation of fragmentary items of information, and are correspondingly convinced that the "mind of the church" provides the key to understanding the Bible.

But is this not simply a return to the "pre-critical" stage in the history of human thought? In spite of the extensive awakening of hermeneutic discussion in the last century, information gained by historical methods is still regarded in many circles as the only true knowledge.[13] The term "pre-critical" is indeed justified in a sense, as historical knowledge came to represent something new in a post-Enlightenment context, something that cannot be found among the writers of the late Classical period. The concept nevertheless has its darker side as well, in that there is a tendency to assume, slightly arrogantly, that the early thinkers' way of searching for truth in texts was in itself at fault – for this truth can only be found by the historical method.

The example of Origen, however, clearly demonstrates the opposite. He was well aware of the alternative ways of tracing the fundamental truth in things, and he recognised the literal, or "historical" level of meaning, but he saw this as being insufficient. This level is inadequate for any scholar who in principle recognises that the Bible bears witness to the real event of the incarnation, the incarnation of a reality that the human mind is incapable of encountering in any other way – the act of *God* becoming man. For Origen this meant that God can be appreciated in the Bible through the Word who became its words, i.e. through the medium of Christ, who himself serves as the key to the process of interpretation.

It is for this reason that Origen – and with him the whole of the Early Church – sought the message of the Bible through a spiritual process of interpretation. The Word of God had become flesh – the Word uttered by God was being conveyed in texts written by human hands. It was on this account that it was in general worthwhile to study the Bible, the reading of which was directed towards *the knowledge of God*.[14] The literal level of the text itself served as a means of attaining this goal.

When present-day Orthodox exegetes set out in search of a hermeneutics of their own, it is essential for them to consider how they stand relative to the approach represented by Origen. In what sense can it still be relevant if used alongside the historical-critical method? And how can the spiritual interpretative

13 Cf. the critical comments of Nikolai Berdyayev in his *The Meaning of History* (*Smysl istorii*, Berlin, 1923): "... historical criticism had become absolutely powerless to explain the mystery of the religious phenomenon … There seems to be no grasp or vision of the essentials. Some fundamental mystery which had formed an inalienable part of tradition now disappears leaving only the husk of history … it is only when the knowing subject has not broken away from the inner life that he can feel himself to be in communion with it" (trans. by George Reavey; Cleveland and New York: Meridian, 1962).

14 Cf. John Breck, "Orthodox Principles of Biblical Interpretation", *SVTQ* 40 (1996), p. 77–93 (86).

level be implemented in a concrete sense in the study process? Perhaps we should look for answers to these questions not only in hermeneutic criteria but above all in Orthodox biblical research, a discipline that is in many respects still in its infancy. Only practical applications will show what the church's traditional teaching with regard to interpreting the Bible really means in the work of modern-day Orthodox exegetes.

I have spoken much more here about the hermeneutic challenges facing the Orthodox Church than about how the interpretation of the Bible that the church represents is to be seen in concrete form in its teachings. The fact of the matter would seem to be, however, that the views put forward by present-day Orthodox exegetes regarding the justifications for the church having hermeneutic starting points of its own will have a direct influence on whether the church can credibly maintain its traditional manner of reading the Bible in the future. Otherwise it will be celebrating the Dormition of the Mother of God, and its other feasts, without any proper interface with the reality in which the remainder of our culture lives, the deeper level of which is being sought elsewhere in that culture by means of critical human reflection.

Thus the care shown by modern Orthodox exegetes for the spiritual approach to reading the Bible is closely bound up with the credibility and success of the church. Only an intellectually and spiritually credible interpretation of the Bible can protect the church from the internal trivialization that seems always to result from the emphasizing of second-rate historical facts at the expense of the total spiritual picture that they are intended to convey.

Prof. Antti Raunio

Moderation and an ecological way of life - the Lutheran viewpoint

1. On the history of the concept of moderation

Moderation in all things has played a prominent role in moral instruction, the upbringing of children and the formation of a sense of justice and equality in Europe at least from the days of Aristotle onwards. His notion of moderation set out from two basic concepts, *sôfrosynê* and *epieikeia*, the former referring to the virtue of moderation that resides in the irrational part of the human soul and represents a kind of mid-point between excessively strong and excessively weak desires for experiences of pleasure. Where it was generally thought that people are too desirous of the pleasures of life, i.e. they are unrestrained, those who practise moderation were deemed to lie midway along this continuum, failing to take pleasure in those things that the unrestrained enjoy most and in general refusing to derive enjoyment from things that one should not enjoy or to be mixed up in them in any way. Such people similarly do not suffer from the absence of sources of enjoyment, and either do not yearn after them or desire them only to an appropriate extent. This was taken to apply to forms of enjoyment that were good for one's health or physical condition, and other things provided they were not detrimental to one's health, ignoble or over-expensive. Aristotle believed that the part of a moderate person's soul that governed his or her desires should be in harmony with the reason. If one's desires are powerful and expansive they will overcome one's powers of discretion. The desires should therefore be properly proportioned; they should be limited in number and they should not run contrary to one's reason. Part of the upbringing of children consists of teaching them to control their desires.[1] Thus moderation in the European concept of man has been associated above all with the education and development of individuals towards a virtuous, rationally acting and restrained nature.

The second sense in which moderation is understood is connected with legal practises and has no direct bearing on the restraining of human desires,[2] but it is nevertheless important as far as the history of European thought is concerned. In this sense the concepts of justice and moderation belong very closely together. Aristotle explains this by saying that these are not two entirely different things, as

1 Aristoteles, Nikomakhoksen etiikka (Aristotle, Nikomachean Ethics) Helsinki 2008, pp. 58–62.

2 Simo Knuuttila, Nikomakhoksen etiikka. Selitykset (Nikomachean Ethics, Explanations) Helsinki 2008, pp. 229, 239.

moderation is also just and fair. The difference lies in the fact that where justice implies correctness in law, moderation implies a form of human correctness which rectifies applications of the law. This is attributable to the fact that every law is general in its application, but it is impossible to lay down in general terms what is right in any one individual case. The basic functional nature of moderation is therefore to correct the law in as far as gaps appear in its general applicability. Aristotle concludes his treatment of this subject with a brief description of a person who is moderate by nature. In other words, this form of moderation is also a human virtue, that of choosing and carrying out deeds that are moderate in character, without insisting on your rights at any price but in fact being satisfied with less even though the law may be on your side.[3]

There are other ideals, however, that have also exercised a great deal of influence in the European cultural sphere. If moderation is the search for a "middle road" between two extremes of action, then asceticism may be regarded as the ideal of being content with as little as possible. Ascetics attempt to control their fancies and desires so that their thoughts will dwell on the affairs of this world as little as possible and will concentrate on a goal that exists in the world to come. Elements of both moderation and asceticism have for a long time existed within Christian teachings, with perhaps the latter being regarded as the better way of life.

2. The concept of moderation in the Lutheran Reformation

In the teachings belonging to the Lutheran Reformation the situation is rather different. Asceticism in the traditional sense was cast aside, but an emphasis on moderation became a crucial tenet of the movement. Many of Luther's writings set out from Aristotle's notion of *sôfrosynê*, which allows for joy and celebration and for the enjoyment of food and drink but draws the line at indulgence and drunkenness. In Luther's terms, there is no point in overloading one's conscience.

The Reformation also linked moderation to the notion of a way of life that was appropriate for each estate within society. This did not mean that all Christians should live the same kind of life, because, for various reasons, people have different needs. The everyday needs of a prince are not the same as those of an artisan, or those of a soldier as those of a peasant farmer.[4] It is precisely in this that the concept of moderation comes into its own. The essential thing is to relate the available good, that is food, shelter and the other requirements of life, to the needs of the individual on the one hand and the resources at the community's disposal on the other. A moderate way of life thus implies that each of us should be satisfied with what we and our families need in order to live and perform our

3 Aristotleles 2008, pp. 103–104.

4 Jorma Laulaja, Kultaisen säännön etiikka (Ethics of the Golden Rule), Helsinki 1981, pp. 133–144.

expected task within society, i.e. discharge our calling. Understanding moderation in this way it is possible in some cases to subsume a fairly ascetic way of life under this heading. As I understand it, this means that the Lutheran model of moderation in life could be taken as a combination of *sôfrosynê* and *epieikeia*, rejecting the desire to have or aim at too many good things in this world but taking individual situations and circumstances into account when making use of and distributing the common good.

The points of departure for the Lutheran concept of a moderate way of life are contained in the Great Catechism, in the explanation to the fourth request expressed in the Lord's Prayer. This maintains that the request "give us this day our daily bread" covers everything that we need for our life on this earth, in the first place food, clothing and other necessities of the body, and secondly family relationships, neighbours, social life and administration, and suitable and peaceable work and collaboration with those around us under all conditions. All this God, as our Father and Creator, will give us, as stated in the first paragraph of the explanation. If the course of life in our immediate circle or in society at large is disturbed so that these do not function as they should, then our basic needs will cease to be met adequately and it will prove impossible to maintain life in the long term.

The catechism approved by the Lutheran Church of Finland in 1999 overtly links the fourth request in the Lord's Prayer with the question of moderation, pointing out that the prayer guides us towards a moderate way of life that takes the needs of others into account. This implies that all people should have enough to live on and that the whole of creation should be in a healthy state. God in his goodness obliges us all to share what we have and to trust that even in times of deprivation he will take care of us and of the whole of his created universe.[5]

The philosophy of the Lutheran Reformation does not regard wealth as such as a barrier to moderation in life, provided that we understand that all the good things that we have received and continue to receive are gifts from God. The crucial issue is how we use these gifts. Moderation in their use was seen as requiring that we should use our wealth to meet our own needs only to the extent that is actually essential.[6] The intention was that only that which people need for living and for performing the duties expected of them by the community should be regarded as their own, and that everything that was left over should belong not to them but to those who do not have sufficient to meet their basic needs in life.[7]

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5 Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon Katekismus (Cathecism of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland), 1999, p. 70.

6 Laulaja 1981, p. 136.

7 Kalevi Tanskanen, Luther ja keskiajan talousetiikka (Luther and Medieval Economical Ethics) 1990, p. 172.

The church's Catechism addresses this issue mainly in connection with the commandment "You shall not steal", where it notes with respect to the above notion of moderation in life that the goodness created by God is intended for everyone and that love obliges us to ensure that all people have the wherewithal to live. The seeking of one's own advantage at the expense of the poor is stealing from those whose living conditions are the most difficult of all. Therefore we – thinking in this context of the Finns in particular, although the same applies to people in all prosperous countries – should be prepared to compromise on our own personal wealth and on that of the whole nation. Likewise the Catechism maintains that pollution of the environment and disturbance of the balance of nature are acts of stealing from future generations.[8]

3. The gradual abandonment of moderation in western thought and the western way of life

It is easy, of course, to see that the concept of moderation and rational use of personal possessions as recognised at the time of the Reformation has practically disappeared. It was not long after the Reformation, during the 17th century, that the thesis was put forward that human beings had a right of ownership over their own bodies and their own work and were entitled to sell these on the labour market for the highest price available. This had perhaps been done earlier to some extent, but it was the declaration of this principle in words and its incorporation as part of the theory of social philosophy that brought opportunities and endeavours to accumulate wealth through one's own work out into the open.[9] Another important step was the recognition that the wages paid for work were to be regarded in their entirety as the worker's own property, over which no one else had any rights. If some people wished to become rich and live sumptuous lives in a material sense, giving no thought to moderation,[10] they were free to do so. Gradually, however, this philosophy was developed still further until moderation became irrelevant, particularly in the lives of those who could sell their labour for the highest prices of all, and since these people would be held up as examples and models of the successful management of one's life, the implication was that moderation should no longer form part of anyone's set of values. One should be hungry, always wanting more.

8 Suomen evankelis-luterilaisen kirkon katekismus, p. 22.

9 This took place particularly through the social philosophy of John Locke (1632–1704); see, for example, Dunn, John Locke 1984, pp. 39–41.

10 Locke regarded wealth obtained by a worker from nature through his own efforts as his own property, but he did not approve of the wastage or pollution of natural resources.

4. The revival of moderation with the emergence of ecological problems

There was thus a time when moderation in life had fallen distinctly out of favour in the western world and little was ever said about it, certain not in a positive vein. Our gradual realization that the state of nature and the environment was deteriorating and the complex network that provided us with the necessary conditions for human life was gradually being destroyed has nevertheless brought the issue back onto the agenda. A close relationship has been established between moderation and an ecological way of life in modern times, and we have been led to reconsider what moderation means and how it should be understood and put into practise from the perspective of the Christian faith and way of life. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland was looking for answers to these questions in its recent climate change document *Kiitollisuus, kunnioitus, kohtuus* (Gratitude, Respect, Moderation).

In terms of this programme, moderation in our way of life is an attempt to make proper use of the gifts we receive from God. This may mean, for instance, leading simpler lives and concentrating on what is most essential, which may well imply giving up something good in return for something better, perhaps more time, more space, peace or the opportunity to share what we have with others who are in need. As the document points out, this understanding of the Christian faith sets out in direct opposition to the exaggerated culture of consumption, which can only harm both mankind and the whole created world. The life of a Christian is therefore looked on as a process of striving towards a good, responsible way of living. This does not mean a joyless life, of course, as rejoicing in the beauty of God's created world is an important part of human existence. On the other hand, the joy that this brings should be accompanied by a moderate life-style and ethically justifiable consumer choices. The strength and sense of direction required for ethical choices and actions should arise out of quiet contemplation and prayer.[11] In this way moderation in our actions and attitudes can be understood as one dimension of our spiritual life.

5. Theological foundations for moderation

Even a brief description of moderation in life requires an underlying set of theological principles. The central idea is that of making proper use of God's gifts to us. What do we mean by this in Lutheran theology?

As the climate change document points out, Christian action on behalf of a healthy environment calls for a re-evaluation of our ways of thinking and living that can be brought about only through the participation in the love of the

11 *Kiitollisuus, kunnioitus, kohtuus*, Suomen evankelisluterilaisen kirkon ilmasto-ohjelma (Gratitude, Respect, Moderation. The Climate Program of the Church of Finland), Kirkkohallitus 2008, p. 39.

triune God that is afforded us by faith. God's love is by nature a generous love, a love expressed in giving, as is realized in the three persons of the Trinity: "the Father gives us all of his creation, Christ all of his work and the Holy Spirit all of his gifts."[12] When we speak of the proper use of God's gifts as the aim of moderation in the life of a Christian we are referring to all of these and not just the gifts of creation.

Our Lutheran theology has still more to say about God's love for us: that he did not merely give us gifts, but he also gave us himself in the form of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In love he allows mankind to partake of himself, of this love expressed in giving. It is through this partaking in God that we can achieve the re-evaluation of our thinking and way of life that is required for preserving the health of the environment.

5.1. Creation as a gift from God

In the creation God gave us himself in the form of life and everything that was necessary for the maintaining and protection of life, and it follows from this gift that he is present in everything that has been created. The whole universe is his work of giving and therefore speaks to us of his goodness and love. Lutherans understand that God is present in the world he has created in two ways: first, he is present everywhere, maintaining this world by giving it life, for all created life is dependent on God, and secondly, he is present in our faith, bringing us salvation through his word and sacraments. The implication is that he is not present everywhere in this latter capacity, but only in places where he has promised salvation.

Lutherans have traditionally been somewhat guarded when speaking of the sanctity of the created universe, in order to avoid setting Creation up as a false god and showing it the wrong kind of reverence. The document on climate change concludes, however, that in a certain specific sense one can think of the created world as sacred, not because of any nature (rather quality or characteristic) or position that created beings have, but on the grounds that it is a place where God resides. Thus the idea of the holiness of the created world does not arise from any identification of nature with God, which would be a form of pantheism, for although we believe that God is present in everything he has created, he is at the same time above, beneath and outside it, so that it would be better to say that the whole of creation is and lives "in God". At any rate, the whole of creation reflects the holiness of its Creator, from which it follows that mankind should respect nature and accept it as God's gift to us. Every created thing and being in which God is present is at the same time a gift in which he is giving himself to us. Nothing that has been created exists for its own ends but for those of others.

12 Lutherin Iso katekismus, p. 145.

The purpose of created things and beings is thus to promote the life and health of other such things and beings, and the human race is a part of this order of mutual love among God's creations, an order that represents the fulfilment of God's generous love that is manifest in giving.

We human beings are not intended to pursue only our own personal advantage but to take care of and serve other created beings. This is communicated to us by a law written into our hearts at our creation that urges us to do to others as we would have others do to us. In this sense the whole of creation forms a "system of love expressed in giving", in which every created being exists for the sake of others, based on the dual notions that God is constantly making use of the reality that he has created, as, in accordance with his nature, he is present in it in his capacity as a good giver, and that everything good that we receive from nature, such as food and warmth, comes in the last resort from God.[13]

In the words of the Bible, man has been given power over nature, but has not been given permission to destroy or abuse it, where abuse implies any human action that prevents nature from accomplishing its task of maintaining and protecting life. This is what is at stake when parts of nature, e.g. rain forests or watercourses, are destroyed, for they are then gradually rendered incapable of fulfilling their task of maintaining life. Proper use of nature, on the other hand, is that which supports and strengthens the fulfilment of this task, implying that we should proportion our own life and needs in accordance with the available natural resources. Proper use in this sense calls for moderation, so that no person, no group of people, nor the human race as a whole, is tempted to grab too many of nature's gifts to the exclusion of others.

Luther's interpretation of the control over nature that was originally given by God to man implied that man was capable of finding out about nature and the forces operating in it and of appreciating the needs of created beings and acting in accordance with them.[14] This kind of control is grounded in a knowledge of the objects in nature and a desire to act in their best interests. There is very little left, however, of this control over nature, for man is apt to close his ears and his understanding to the commandment of love written in his heart which urges him to love both his fellow men and all other created beings. The study of the whole created world and the collection of information on its needs and functions is in any case a slow and onerous process, and learning to use that information for the good of nature and the whole of creation may well be a still more difficult and challenging task, for it calls for a deep respect for nature and an understanding

13 For a more detailed analysis of Luther's thought on the "system of love expressed in giving" see Antti Raunio, Summe des christlichen Lebens. Die Goldene Regel als Gesetz der Liebe in in der Theologie Martin Luthers. Wiesbaden 2001.

14 Martti Luther, Ensimmäisen Mooseksen kirjan selitys 1–7 (Martin Luther, Explanation of the First Book of Moses) Hämeenlinna 2004, pp. 68, 70–71.

of man's position and duties within a whole system in which all created things are reliant on each other.

5.2. The gift of salvation

The Evangelical Lutheran Church's ecological programme published in response to climate change perceives the whole complex of environmental problems as stemming from the reality of the human fall from grace. Sin can nowadays also take the form of ecological sin, in which the life of the earth is prevented from flourishing as it should and suffering is inflicted on mankind as well. In such a situation it is essential for humans to acknowledge their wrongdoings, repent and redeem their faults, and to trust in the message of pardon. The realization of this pardon is something that should fill mankind with gratitude and provide new strength for facing up to the changes in life that are required in order to move towards an attitude of respect for nature and all created things.

The nucleus of the Christian faith lies in the incarnation of the Son of God: God became man in Jesus Christ, identifying himself with a human soul and body. In the Christian tradition this mystery is taken as an indication of the immense value placed upon the corporal and material reality of the human species, and is reflected in the ability of material things to convey holy powers in the sacraments, for in Holy Baptism and Holy Communion the Word of God, Jesus Christ, is present in the water, bread and wine.

God gives himself to us in a very special way in saving us from the evil and death that beset our human form. This, again, happens in two ways: first the Word of God became a true human being, lived, suffered and died for all mankind and finally vanquished death, and secondly, salvation implies that Christ comes to be present in faith in every individual's heart and personally makes us a gift of himself and his work of salvation. To receive this salvation we are required to recognise the reality of sin and reach out for the gift of grace which God offers us.

In the view accepted in the climate change document, salvation should be understood as applying to the whole of mankind and indeed the whole of creation. In this respect the Lutheran Reformation is at one with the Bible and the Early Church: as St. Paul puts it, "the creation waits with eager longing for its redemption" (Rom. 8:19–23). One manifestation of man's fall from grace is that we desire to set ourselves up in the role of God and in doing so set out in pursuit of our own good and view reality in terms of our own advantage. This has the effect of restricting the scope of life for other created beings and detracting from their ability to fulfil the functions assigned to them. Thus the whole of creation suffers on account of man's fall and is in need of redemption and salvation.

In this way the climate change document combines Christ's work of salvation with the bearing of responsibility for the future of the Earth. It is on the strength of this work of salvation that Christians find in the midst of all the threats a sense

of hope that will enable them to face the challenge presented by the state of our Earth. Having come to participate in God's grace, the flame of grateful love for His commandments is ignited within them, together with a true desire to observe those commandments. This is a permanent change of life that is set in motion by the grace and love bestowed on us in Christ. It is this that gives us the power to obey the exhortation written in our hearts at the creation: do to others as you would have others do to you.

The crucial message communicated to us by Jesus Christ was and is that the kingdom of God is at hand, a kingdom that marks the fullness of love, justice, peace and joy. The essential thing is that it was the incarnate Son of God who proclaimed the kingdom, giving it a divine dimension and a human one simultaneously, so that they belong together inseparably. This message of the kingdom of God is good news particularly for those who are poor and oppressed. As became evident from Jesus' life and teachings, this is a question of spiritual and earthly things at the same time, of both material and spiritual deprivation and both religious and political or other forms of social oppression. The created world, too, has fallen into a state of poverty and oppression, and this has indeed occurred in a certain sense in our European and Western world-view and industrial culture. For a long time nature was looked on as a mechanical system that operated according to certain immutable laws – and to some extent it is still regarded in this way nowadays.[15] As such it cannot be of any great theological or spiritual interest, but rather remains as an area of reality to be overcome by the human spirit and its beliefs. Thus it is often claimed that a cultured, intellectual person should avoid descending to the level of nature.[16] Such opinions have admittedly become less prominent in recent decades and our world-view has partly altered, but the notion of a sharp distinction between the inevitability of natural laws and the freedom of the human spirit still exists to a great extent in the background to our modern-day problems.

Thus sharing in the Kingdom of God and the salvation granted to us affects our lives in this world in a variety of ways, one of which is the capacity to heal relations among people and between people and other created beings. In our efforts to achieve justice and love in the world of today we should remember, however, that climate change is already having a profound effect on the lives of the poorest sectors of the world's population. Environmental problems are bound up with issues of global equality in that poverty inevitably drives people to exploit their natural resources in an unsustainable manner, while at the same time climate change and other environmental problems are making the problem of poverty

15 On the mechanistic-deterministic world-view, see Tarja Kallio-Tamminen, Kvanttilainen todellisuus (Quantum Reality) Helsinki 2006, pp. 62–93.

16 On the distinction between nature and spirit or nature and person in 19th and 20th-century theology, see Risto Saarinen, Gottes Wirken auf uns, Wiesbaden 1989.

even worse. Thus the struggle to combat climate change should include efforts to implement more egalitarian economic systems and improve living conditions on a global scale.

Their participation in the gifts granted us through the love of God inevitably directs Christians towards relieving and abolishing the threats facing those who are poor, preventing the destruction of the natural environment and promoting its wellbeing. In terms of the Lutheran Church's climate change programme, our Christian love for our neighbours should manifest itself in efforts to eliminate the factors that cause and maintain poverty, in a desire to share what we have and in a willingness to be satisfied with a moderate level of consumption. Moderation in our way of life and the resulting choices that we have to make thus have a global dimension to them.

Based on its climate change programme, the Lutheran Church has come to regard striving towards a moderate, ecological way of life not only as an ethical attitude but also as a part of the spiritual life of the Christian Church, a life that is grounded in silent contemplation and prayer. The prospect of climate change and other environmental hazards brings care for the poor and preservation of the natural environment, i.e. the atmosphere, waters, forests and animals, to the fore as elements of the spiritual life. In this context theological principles become bound up with the adoption of new ways of living: the details of our practical lives cannot be separated from the content of our beliefs.

5.3. The gifts of the Holy Spirit and moderation in life

The triune God also gives himself to us in the form of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who helps us to recognise and take possession of the gifts that He bestows on us as our Creator and Saviour in order to provide for our livelihood and salvation and to make proper use of them. This we can do if we first confess that these are gifts from God and are prepared to use them to attend to the material, intellectual and spiritual needs of the beings that He has created.

The Church believes that it has been created by God in the form of the Holy Spirit and that He continues to maintain it, which in essence means for us unity with Christ and with all other Christians. The Holy Spirit himself is the Love that binds all the members of the body of Christ together, just as nature is created by God to be a community in which all the members exist for the sake of each other and to give good things to each other. The factor that unites the essence of the Church with the essence of the created world is thus the generous love of God. It is through created beings that God passes on the gift of life to others that He has created and thereby maintains that life. In the Church his gift is salvation and eternal life, granted to us through the medium of the reality that He has created, his Word, water, bread and wine, and communion with the other Christians living around us.

The acceptance and use of God's gifts that takes place through the Holy Spirit means that the Church as a community and each individual Christian will use them to promote both the life of this world and that of the world to come. With the help of the Spirit, Christians are able to obey the law written in their hearts at the creation, placing themselves in the position of others and asking what they would wish for in the same situation. Thought of in this way, there is no conflict or juxtaposition between attention to the needs of the created world and a longing for eternal life, for both are forms of identification with the "order" prescribed by the life-giving love of God.

The presence of the Holy Spirit sanctifies everything that he touches, so that he is able to fashion windows into God's world out of finite things. He can open human eyes to see the goodness of the Creator in everything that has been created and the figure of Christ in all those who are poor or oppressed. The Spirit is present in a very special sense in the sacraments, but at the same time he is for the whole of creation just as essential as the air we breathe.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church states in its climate change programme that the role of Christians in the created world is based on the creative, redeeming and sanctifying work of God, all of which, in the theological view represented in that document, consists of manifestations of God's magnanimous love. It is on the strength of this belief and everything that arises out of it that our ecologically responsible Christian ways of thinking and living are built up.

The principle of moderation is essential to the definition of a responsible way of life, as moderation stands for the avoidance of unnecessary consumption which wastes resources and the readiness to adapt one's own way of life to the resources available to the community and to the whole of creation. In other words, we are obliged to ask at every turn how we can increase and support the resources that we possess in common rather than reducing and debilitating them. If we are prepared to ask this question it will lead us to a knowledge of the state of our environment and of the ways in which all things are interrelated.

Although moderation in life is a matter of recognising and confessing the damage that we do through our own actions, we should not be prompted to adopt this attitude out of a sense of guilt or a bad conscience. The motivation for moderation in life should be gratitude to God for His gifts and respect for everything that He has created, for it is precisely in this way that our holy and loving God grants us and maintains for us the gift of life in this world and the world to come.

Protopresbyter Heikki Huttunen
Orthodox Church of Finland

Moderation and an ecological way of life

The ecological state of our planet has been an object of particular interest for Orthodox theologians in recent decades. The Orthodox Church took an active part in instigating the World Council of Churches' *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC)* programme in the 1980s and in shaping its theological content. At the same time the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople was instrumental in placing these matters on the agenda for the Orthodox churches, a message that has been intensified and clarified by Patriarch Bartholomew during his patriarchal tenure from 1991 onwards.[1] In accordance with the tradition of the Eastern Church, the themes that have come to the fore are the relation between the Creator and the created universe and the role laid down by the Creator for human beings as guardians and cultivators of the natural environment. Human inequality and the ever-increasing problem of poverty are looked on as part of the same overall theme as the exploitation of the earth's crust and its plants and animals. An honest appraisal of the current state of the earth can only lead to remorse and a change in life style, the ideal model for which is to be found in fasting, asceticism and the simple life as practised in the monastic tradition.

I shall make reference in this paper primarily to the work of two patristic theologians, the Indian Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios and the Australian Professor John Chryssavgis. The former was head of the Division of Ecumenical Action in the World Council of Churches in the 1960s and was already writing at that time about the attitudes of the Church Fathers to the natural environment and about the ecological disaster facing the world and the human race, while the latter has studied ecological issues from liturgical and ethical perspectives and is nowadays an advisor on these matters to the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America and to the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

1 Chryssavgis (2010, p. 216) points out that Patriarch Bartholomew was the first notable churchman to extend the traditional concept of sin as concerned with the sphere of one's personal life and life within society to apply to environmental damage as well. In 1995 he wrote: *To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin. For human beings to cause species to become extinct and destroy the biological diversity of God's creation… to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing climate change… to strip the earth of its natural forests, or destroy its wetlands; … to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – all of these are sins.*

The Uncreated and the created

The central issues in the theology of the 4th-century Cappadocian Fathers were the differences and connections between the essence of God and God's actions, a context in which they laid emphasis on the fundamental distinction between the Creator and that which God has created. In God's essence, God is unknown, but in God's actions, or energies, God reaches out beyond that essence. In God's act of creation God gives existence to something outside himself, to an Other. This creation of an Other is an act of God's will. God's reaching out beyond Godself is a manifestation of love, the name of God, and of God's nature as the source of all life. In the words of the Cappadocian Fathers, God is love because he gives existence and life to that which is outside Godself.

Thus everything that exists is the love of God in tangible form. St. Basil the Great expresses this by saying that the heavens and the earth, time and eternity are all of the same origin, *syngenoi*,[2] while for St. John of Damascus the whole world is a living icon of the face of God.[3] Animals, plants and all beings and material things are connected with their Creator in their origins and nature, and thus everything that exists is by definition good and sacred.

God is in essence unattainable, utterly different from that which He has created. God's essential qualities are unchangeableness and unity. It is only in God that there is peace and rest, beyond time and place. All life, on the other hand, is on the move. The attributes of created things are distance, difference, diversity and change.

The movements that mark the existence of the elements, the heavenly bodies, stones, plants, animals and human beings constitute a hymn to the Creator. Paulos Mar Gregorios speaks of four levels of reality, of which life in all its forms and at all levels is one – since the vibrations brought about by energy take the shape of elements and their compounds, which then grow into organic life with a consciousness of itself and its surroundings – and everything is enfolded in the cosmic level.[4]

The created world is in motion, motion that began with creation, and is directed towards its goal of unity with the Creator. In this sense the Creator and the created are intended to become one in wholeness. The created world exists as a product of the Creator's love, and lives by virtue of His wisdom, will and word. The created world is the dimension in which the Creator reveals himself, and thus it is change, a state created in time and place, that makes communion possible between the Creator and the created.[5]

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2 St. Basil the Great in his account of the creation, or *Hexaemeron.*

3 As quoted by Chryssavgis 2010, p. 222.

4 Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The four levels of reality as we perceive it*, 1995, pp. 17–20.

5 On St. Gregory of Nyssa's concept of *diastema*, see Paulos Mar Gregorios 1980, pp.67–99 and 168–176.

Just as the universe would be incomplete without the Creator who maintains and guides it, so the created world is of essential importance to its Creator, because it is the expression and physical dimension of the Creator's love. It is through consciousness of its dependence on the Creator that creation finds its purpose and the strength, blessedness and peace that maintains life. The eventual purpose of all life and the very existence of the created universe is communion with God, to become God's body, a place for God's presence.

Nature as a philosophical and theological concept

The current debate over the role and responsibility of humanity within the created universe has been marked by an understanding of nature as something distinct from the human being. The view of the created world as a non-spiritual domain, something to be owned by humans and to serve as an object of their actions, has been presented as an aberration for which the Judaeo-Christian tradition is responsible. It has served as the starting point for the modern Western concept of the right of humans to exploit all other created beings.[6] There are no grounds for such a claim to be found in either the Bible or the teachings of the Church.[7]

There is no word or concept to be found in the Old Testament that refers to "nature", i.e. that describes the created world as something separate from humankind. In fact, the account of the creation treats the human being as one of the created beings that is endowed with a specific purpose with regard to the others (Gen. 1: 26–29). The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, which is the normative textual version for the Eastern Church, uses the word *physis* to refer to the fundamental nature of humanity and the foundation of life as conferred by God (e.g. IV Macc. 5: 5–8). The meaning remains the same in the New Testament. Thus the word *physis* in the sense of non-human created world is not to be found there, either (cf., for instance, James 3:7, 2 Peter 1:4, Gal. 2:15, 1 Cor. 11:14).

The concept of *physis* was used in Stoic philosophy to denote the soul of the world, while for Aristotle it was a synonym for God and an alternative concept to

6 This assertion was first made by Lynn White in her paper *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* in the journal *Science*, vol. 155, 10 March, 1967, pp. 1203–1207.

7 In common with other theologians and church historians, Paulos Mar Gregorios (1980, pp. 14–15) sees Christianity as having adopted two extreme attitudes towards the created universe, both of which can be regarded as theologically untenable. There are features of Christian asceticism that tend to scorn material life, the background to which Mar Gregorios perceives in Hellenistic neo-Platonism or Stoicism, or else in non-Semitic Zoroastrian or Buddhist influences from the east. A still more significant error, however, is the theology that is used to justify the power of humans over the natural environment, which Mar Gregorios attributes to Calvinist thinking, although this can only be held partly responsible.

divinity.[8] This may be regarded as a forerunner of the deistic concept of nature, since Mar Gregorios concludes that nature as an impersonal concept in contrast to humankind is a necessary construct in any way of thinking that does not presuppose a God who has created the world and maintains it.[9]

The Church Fathers used the concept of *ktisis*, "that which is created", or *ta panta*, "everything, the whole of creation", to refer to the created world, whereas for them the word *physis* came to denote the fundamental and essential features of each being. God is the true existence, as expressed in his name as he communicated it to Moses: "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:14).

Ecological sin

No process of "desacralization" of the natural environment can be found in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, quite simply because it does not recognise the concept of nature as something either lower than the human being, or for that matter something higher, i.e. "divine". Nature is always the created real world in its totality. It is true, however, that the influence of Aristotle can be seen in the Western Christian tradition, which frequently alludes to a God-humans-nature trichotomy, in which plants and animals are classed as "nature", on a lower level than the human being. One essential element in this scheme, too, is that God is the source and upholder of all existence.

Paulos Mar Gregorios is quick to emphasize that "nature" as an entirely separate concept from humankind does not belong to the Christian world-view in either its Eastern or its Western form, and that the accusation of the desacralization of the created world should rather be levelled at the Western secular way of thinking that denies the existence of God.[10]

The idea of a dimension of nature that is ranked below the human being emerged in connection with a post-Renaissance secular, anthropocentric view of the world. It is connected with the notion that natural phenomena are governed by the principle of inevitability and do not have a freedom or person of their own, and therefore are devoid of value and do not deserve respect. Natural phenomena represent a lower form of life than humans and serve as objects of human action and be regarded as the possessions of human beings. This view of nature is apt to play a particularly dominant role in societies that have lost sight of the fact that everything proceeds from God and everything is dependent on God.

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8 Mar Gregorios (1980, pp. 21, 56) sees a connection between Hellenistic philosophy and Hindu thought and speaks of an Indo-Hellenic concept of nature *contra* a Semitic one, that which is expressed in the Bible. This is related to the fact that biblical teaching makes a distinction between the Creator and the created, while in the Indo-Hellenic way of thinking there is a continuum between the two.

9 Mar Gregorios 1980, p. 23.

10 Mar Gregorios (1980, p. 31) quotes Malebranche on the concept of nature: *It is par excellence an anti-Christian idea accepted by imprudent theologians.*

It is this estrangement from nature that leads us to sin against it. The current eco-catastrophe is of human making: we are no longer guardians and cultivators, as referred to in the account of the creation, but we have become exploiters and expropriators. We are not fulfilling our calling as the Creator's image and co-worker. Rather, we are in the service of corruption and death, companions of evil. One might say that humankind is guilty of "terricide", because human civilization grows and develops through aggression and attack on other created beings, taking over living space from it.[11]

Sharing is a principle that lies at the heart of the whole existence of the created world, according to the Church Fathers. The human race, plants and animals are all equally dependent on God's energies, God's action, in order to remain in existence and grow closer to Him. Thus the principle of sharing and interaction governs our lives as created beings in relation to each other.[12] Sin is an infringement of this principle of sharing and communion through violence and wrongdoing, and the consequence of sin is death, ultimate estrangement and fragmentation. The consequences of human sin affect the whole of creation, which *waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God* (Rom. 8:19–23).

The task that humans are called on to perform in the universe is that of combining spiritual reality with bodily reality, uniting heaven and earth.[13] This we have not succeeded in doing; on the contrary, we have allowed ourselves and our environment to become so fragmented by sin that the outcome is the predominance of death.

Communion and sharing as principles for life

God called humankind to share in the Resurrection and new life when Jesus Christ came to share in human death. This new humanity is called upon in Christ to become a mediator and bridge between the Creator and the created world. It is in Christ that the divine and the human, the creator and the created, the world to come and this world, the spiritual and the technological are brought together. By virtue of the path opened up by the Resurrection of Christ, the human race and the whole universe come to partake in God. As creations, however, they

11 Mar Gregorios was already using the expression "terricide" in the 1970s. See, for example, Paulos Mar Gregorios 1980, pp. 26–27.

12 As propounded by St. Maximus the Confessor, for example.

13 In the words of St. Maximus the Confessor, the mortal nature of the created world becomes evident in its divisiveness in five dimensions: uncreated-created, spiritual-material, heaven-earth, inhabited earth-paradise and man-woman. The human race was created to repair these divisions, beginning with that between man and woman. This will lead to a union of the reunited natural world with God, and thereby to the eternal co-existence of nature and man, with both taking on absolute significance.

remain within the created dimension, with personalities of their own, in essence different and separate from God.[14]

The human being is an entity made up of body and soul, and as such is the blossom of God's creation. It is in the human body that material substance comes to partake in God's revelation whenever a human being receives this revelation through the holy mysteries of God's word and the church. It is the material substance of the human body that provides the basis for our spiritual lives, and in this sense it is the foundation for our sharing in the life given to us by God. It is our calling to consciously unite the created world with its Creator, given that God in Christ, by His conscious self-sacrifice, raised the created universe up to God and became the high priest of the whole of creation. In the view of Mar Gregorios, it is in and through the human being that matter will find the reconciliation offered by God, but this will take place in a time beyond history, in the eternity that the Cross and Resurrection of Christ have opened up for us. History, the present time, is an opportunity for change of heart, for opening up to salvation, "the spring of the Holy Spirit".[15]

A change of heart

In order to seize upon the opportunity offered to us by the Resurrection of Christ we need to adopt a new attitude and a new way of looking at the world. This is what is meant here by a change of heart, repentance. St. Gregory of Nyssa looks on this change of heart as an essential dimension in the Christian way of life, taking it to mean a new ordering of life's values that is not "of this world". One needs to learn to see the Creator in and through all created things, and to take from that the orientation for one's choices in life.[16]

Confession, repentance and a change of heart are Christianity's response to collective ecological sin. This decision to mend one's ways must take place at the level of both the individual and the community. It starts with recognition of past faults, i.e. an examination of the extent to which one's lifestyle conforms to the ways of this world. This in turn calls for a perspective which encompasses everything that can be affected by the subject's own selfishness and indifference. It should not be simply a show of legalistic righteousness, but truly a change of direction in habits and outlook on the world. It is a matter of adjusting the way

14 The notion of life as a comprehensive entity and of salvation as the restoration of life are central to Mar Gregorios' interpretation of the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. See Paulos Mar Gregorios 1980, pp 63–65.

15 Paulos Mar Gregorios 1980, pp. 65–77.

16 In his principal work of mystical theology, *The Life of Moses*, the Cappadocian Father St. Gregory of Nyssa, describes the Christian's path in terms of three stages: baptism, repentance and the Eucharist.

in which we see ourselves and our place in the created world. If we cannot manage this we will merely be treating the symptoms.[17]

An ascetic lifestyle is not only something experienced by hermits in the wilderness; in the theological thinking of the Eastern Orthodox Church it is also an essential feature of the life of every Christian. The spiritual life calls for growth, for striving towards holiness in everything one does. Asceticism means concentrating on what is essential in order to realise the true nature of material things and to appreciate their true beauty and worth. An ascetic will reject unnecessary external luxuries and enjoyments in order to discover the sounds of silence and the colours of natural light. Fasting and simplicity in life can teach us to value food that is available from nature and point out how dependent our human society is on plants and animals. A simple lifestyle is one in which a person gives up something that is good for the sake of finding something that is still better. It opens up a perspective from this life to the next. Life is seen as transparent, so that we may see through the created to the Creator.[18]

The Eucharist

The Liturgy of the Eucharist is a commemoration of the internal communion that prevails between God, humans and all of creation. In the course of the Liturgy we pray that God will renew the whole of the cosmos, not just ourselves or those present at the Liturgy. It is a feast of communion, the dance of life. When we can accept that all things and all people are dependent on each other, when we discover the cosmic liturgy, then we will begin to find a solution to our ecological crisis.[19]

The Church Fathers believed that what is biological by nature can be glorified to become Eucharistic and what is material can be capable of carrying within it that which is immaterial. It is through bread and wine that members of the church enter into communion with the body of Christ and with each other, and the Church's prayer is that this take place through the Holy Spirit descending on the Eucharistic gifts and on the whole congregation. It is also a prayer for the whole world, that the Holy Spirit come and sanctify the totality of human life and the whole of creation with the Divine presence. This holiness will glorify the depraved and suffering world and transform it into the land of the living, a place in which God is present, so that it will continue to grow and become purified in accordance with its original purpose. Then the human race will be able to offer up thanks on behalf of all created things for the creation and for the care shown

17 Chryssavgis (2010) likens environmental measures that "merely treat the symptoms" to the practice of indulgences in the Latin church of the Middle Ages, which failed to correspond to the severity of the sin or to elicit any change in behaviour.

18 Schmemann 1969.

19 Chryssavgis 2010, p. 218, quoting St. Maximus the Confessor.

by God for God's fallen world. God, who is in essence unknown, has manifested Godself to those that God has created, and the created world has become the dimension of the incarnation of God in Christ.

> *The word by which the Eucharist was instituted, "this is my body", designates the living body, the whole Christ conferring on every communicant a quickening consanguinity and concorporeality. In the same way, "the Word was made flesh" means that God has assumed human nature in its entirety and, in it, the whole cosmos. And the "resurrection of the flesh" in the Creed confesses the reconstitution of the whole human being, soul and body; and thus "all flesh shall see the salvation of God", all flesh meaning the pleroma of nature.*[20]

The Eucharist is a foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven, and it tells us that the whole of material creation can attain this along with humans. The miracles performed by Christ whereby he shared in human suffering and death, His Resurrection in the flesh and His Ascension into heaven are assurances that the purpose and aim of all life lies in the glory of God.

> *With humility of our soul we entreat You, Lord, and we fall down before you: at your command deliver the Earth on which we dwell from every harm and from harsh ruin, and speedily avert from it and abolish by your will destructive emanations and pour out the fresh dew of life-sustaining air. Fence about the whole enclosure of the environment, Master and Saviour, with Your mighty power, granting to all pardon and salvation and divine mercy.*[21]

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20 Evdokimov 1965, p. 7.

21 A hymn from the Office of Vespers for the Day of Prayer for Creation designated by the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1989. See Alexander Belopopsky and Dimitri Oikonomou (eds.), *Orthodoxy and Ecology*. Syndesmos. Bialystok, Poland, Appendix 1, p. 15.

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Järvenpää 2012

THE ELEVENTH THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF FINLAND AND THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF FINLAND

Communiqué

The Eleventh Theological Discussions between delegates from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland were hosted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Järvenpää on 22nd-23rd November 2012. The delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church was led by Rt. Rev. Dr Seppo Häkkinen, Bishop of Mikkeli, with Rev. Dr Sammeli Juntunen, Rev. Dr Elina Hellqvist, Rev. Canon Th.Lic. Petri Karttunen and family counsellor Saara Kinnunen and as advisors Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen, executive secretary for theology at the Church Council's Department for International Relations, and Rev. Dr Ari Ojell, while that from the Orthodox Church was headed by Metropolitan Panteleimon of Oulu, and had as its other members Archimandrite Andreas Larikka, parish priest of Kajaani, Fr. Dr Mikael Sundkvist, Dr Pekka Metso, M.Div. Soili Penttonen and Jukka Mäntymäki, secretary of the Metropolitan of Oulu. The two topics selected for discussion were *God, known and unknown* and *The home as the source of a Christian upbringing.*

In his opening address Bishop Häkkinen reminded participants of the main principles contained in the document *Ekumenian hyvät tavat* drawn up 10 years earlier by the Finnish Ecumenical Council on the basis of the *Charta Oecumenica*. Firstly, he emphasized the fact that "Ecumenical cooperation is grounded in a common belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as our God and Saviour in accordance with the Bible. Thus we aim to fulfil our common calling to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Secondly, he attached importance to mutual respect, which should be reflected in an atmosphere of trust and frankness, and thirdly, he stressed that "Ecumenical relations mean that we should aim at understanding each other and reaching the broadest possible unanimity in our beliefs and our lives".

In his reply, Metropolitan Panteleimon observed that these doctrinal discussions had become a natural part of relations between the two churches, and that it would indeed be odd if this were not the case. Mutual ecumenical encounters were among the practical realities of everyday life, and the role of these theological discussions was to support such practises. It was necessary to be active in

order not to lose momentum in inter-church relations. The ecumenical contacts that arose during the post-war era had done a great deal of good for these relations, creating an atmosphere of frankness, straightforwardness, mutual respect and working together.

God, known and unknown

The discussions on this topic were based on papers presented by Rev. Dr Ari Ojell, Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen and Archimandrite Andreas Larikka.

Rev. Dr Ojell focused on St. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the Cappadocian Fathers and a major actor in the formulation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and his interpretation of theology as the speech by which God expresses Himself to us through his Word. God is in essence unknown, but we can learn to know Him fully, in accordance with His will, through the love that He shows for us in Jesus Christ, who is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets. It is possible for us, in the Holy Spirit, to come to know the Father "face to face" by following His Son, Jesus Christ. This revelation of God is communicated to us through the life and beliefs of the church, i.e. through participation in Christ, who by virtue of his incarnation belongs to us all. For Gregory of Nyssa the unknown nature of God means that there is always something new to be discovered as we follow Christ in love, in accordance with God's will.

Rev. Dr Tomi Karttunen approached the same theme by demonstrating that the roots of Lutheran theology lay in the common legacy of the undivided church, e.g. in the theology of the church father St. Athanasius, one of the defenders of the Nicene Creed, who, in common with the Cappadocian Fathers, looked upon Christ the Logos as a bridge-builder between God and mankind. The tenets of our theology are set out in the Bible, which serves as the "cutting edge" of the church's tradition, as it were, and these tenets always speak to us of God as a "God for us", not as an abstraction. The God who has revealed Himself to us is attainable in the word and sacraments of the church. As far as their understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is concerned, the theology of Martin Luther and the Lutheran Church may be regarded as containing elements from both the western and eastern theological traditions.

Archimandrite Andreas Larikka examined God as a mystery and the process of coming to know Him thorough through natural sources and through the incarnation. Apophatic theology can lead to an experiential knowledge of the living God, and thus the thinking of St. Gregory Palamas and the tradition of a life of prayer that lay behind that thinking not only incorporate the mystery of God but also describe His presence in human experiences of faith. God reveals Himself in his persons and in his actions (Gk. *energeia*). The church's understanding of the faith is often expressed in terms of paradoxes, since God cannot be fitted into

rational patterns or assertions. His presence is real, however, and in that sense it is possible for us to know God.

It was agreed that our churches are employing different concepts in their attempts to understand the fundamental truths of the Christian faith together and in the context of their own traditions. The meanings of the terms they use are not easily comprehensible for those who espouse the other tradition. The common faith is nevertheless far more than the views of individual theologians, and the central issue in matters of a knowledge of God and speaking of God is experience of the living God who revealed Himself to us by being born a man in Jesus Christ. It is this revelation that constitutes the foundation of the church's message and worship.

We are living in an age of searching for meanings and deliberating over ideological viewpoints, but the outcome of this is frequently a feeling of uncertainty. Our churches maintain that it is possible to speak about God, to learn to know Him and to find in Him an answer to our spiritual quest. The foundation for the activities of our churches in this day and age must be the message of a God who is present and in whom we can trust when things otherwise get out of hand and we feel that we have failed in our lives.

The home as the source of a Christian upbringing

Introductions to this topic were given by Soili Penttonen, M.Div., and Saara Kinnunen, a family counsellor.

In Soili Penttonen's view, principles for an Orthodox perspective on bringing up and educating children can be found in the Bible, the canons of the church and the teachings of the Church Fathers. The central concept in this perspective is that of the family as an *ecclesioula*, a miniature church. It is the principal place for socialization into communion with the church, and the ideal should be for the family to live in close contact with the life and worship of the local parish. The most important goal of the children's education should then be the strengthening of their relationship with God and the achievement of salvation as human beings. Participation in the worship of the church and Christian teaching, together with the home life of the family, its contacts with the parish community and day-to-day interaction within society as a whole, should form a consistent entity creating the necessary environment for overall human growth and the development of a sound personality.

Saara Kinnunen laid emphasis on the role of the parents as examples when providing a Christian education for their children. Those things that are of greatest importance for the parents will come to be important for the children, too. It is in the home that the foundation is laid for growing up as a Christian, with support from the local church and the religious instruction given at school. The principal forms that a Christian upbringing in the home should take are evening

prayers, reading of the Bible and going to church as a family. Particular attention should be paid to the period around ten years of age during which the child is moving over from a concrete understanding of the world to conceptual, abstract patterns of thought, and it is important to ensure that children have their own links to the local church and its activities by that time, so that the church will take on personal significance for them. Many parishes have made a particular effort to strengthen their contacts with families who have children, and this has had the effect of increasing the numbers of such families who attend church or take part in other parish activities.

It was agreed that our interpretations of what constitutes a Christian upbringing and the responsibility for providing this are very similar. The notion of the family as a "little church" serves well to sum up attitudes on both sides, as it starts out from the home and then broadens its horizons to include the worship of the church and eventually all aspects of life. The aim should be to provide support for parents in the task of bringing up their children, while not forgetting the roles of grandparents and godparents. Natural contacts with the church and natural links between the generations can ensure a wider supportive network for the family in its task of providing the children with a Christian education.

The changes that have taken place within our modern society have increased the importance of providing support for families. The instruction given at day care centres and the religious education given at schools continue to be major identity-moulding factors for children and young people, and the support received in this way can provide them with a firm foundation for growth and for encountering people of other persuasions in increasingly multicultural contexts.

Both churches were anxious about how children's rights to embrace a religion will be ensured in this country in the future, and wish to emphasize that the foundation created by religious education in day care and instruction in their own religion at schools is essential for balanced personal development, the promotion of respect for others and the preservation of peace within civil society.

In conclusion, the participants were grateful for the new steps towards communion that they had been able to take, and for the things they had learned about each other and about themselves. They also reaffirmed their common commitment, in response to Christ's call, to bear witness to Him and to obey His will faithfully in this world.

Continuation of the discussions

It was decided that the series of discussions should be continued and that the next meeting should be arranged by the Orthodox Church of Finland in 2014. The provisional topic proposed was "The concept of a folk church as a theological and practical issue".

Järvenpää, 23rd November 2012

Seppo Häkkinen
Bishop of Mikkeli

Opening address at the Eleventh Theological Discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Orthodox Church of Finland, Järvenpää, 22nd–23rd November, 2012

It was exactly ten years ago this autumn that the Finnish Ecumenical Council approved the document *Ekumenian hyvät tavat* (Good Ecumenical Practises), a set of recommendations that draw attention to ecumenical topics that are particularly relevant within the boundaries of Finland. Lying behind the document was the *Charta Oecumenica*, drawn up jointly by the Conference of European Churches and the Roman Catholic Council of European Episcopal Conferences in 2001, which in turn was an attempt at constructing an "ecumenical map of Europe", although this as such was obviously insufficient for finding one's way amongst the national ecumenical endeavours taking place in various parts of the continent. It was partly on account of this deficiency that *Ekumenian hyvät tavat* was approved in the capacity of a "national ecumenical road map". It was the intention of the Finnish Ecumenical Council that the document should serve to promote joint ecumenical activities at the local and national levels and that it should make it clear what the country's churches and Christian communities were committing themselves to when entering into ecumenical collaboration.

It would be good for us to recall the principles put forward in *Ekumenian hyvät tavat* as we begin this eleventh round of discussions between the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Orthodox Church in Finland. I shall therefore pick out a few important points that are emphasized in the document.

All ecumenical work sets out from the notion of a common faith: "Ecumenical cooperation is grounded in a common belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as our God and Saviour in accordance with the Bible. Thus we aim to fulfil our common calling to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Ecumenical cooperation also requires mutual respect. The communion between us is built up upon trust and frankness. As the document states, "We are convinced that Jesus' prayers on behalf of unity in His church are more powerful that the disparity that exists among Christians." As the eventual aim of the ecumenical movement is unity within the Church of Christ, we should start out from those things that unite us, although we naturally cannot close our eyes to the factors that divide us. The ecumenical relations between us also mean that we should aim at understanding each other and reaching the broadest possible unanimity in our beliefs and our lives. Dialogue can also help us to appreciate

our own traditions better. We should remember, however, that we are all equal partners in this work, and that, as the document puts it, "in the case of difficult issues we must try through prayer and frank discussion to understand each other's views and interpretations of the Word of God."

These principles will serve as a good point of departure for the work that we are about to undertake here, and it is important to remind ourselves of them, for our churches have accepted them in their time and have undertaken to observe them.

It has been customary in these discussions to take one dogmatic issue and one aspect of social ethics that arises out of practical everyday life in a Finnish context for consideration at each meeting, since the relation between our two churches means that both doctrinal and practical ecumenical cooperation is called for. The themes selected for this meeting, *God, known and unknown* and *The home as the source of a Christian upbringing* are both highly relevant in their own fields at the present time.

We live in a society that is searching for meanings, in which people are interested in questions appertaining to their view of the world. This merely reflects the longing in their hearts, a secret longing for something that is beyond this world but can be communicated to them through this world. What are people really longing for? For the Ancient Greeks it was the "Unknown God", about whom they could learn nothing. In the New Testament this God desired to make Himself known in the person of Jesus Christ. In the light of this search for meaning the theme of *God, known and unknown* is of great current importance.

It is well recognised that the home is central to the emergence of Christian beliefs and the transfer of Christian traditions from one generation to the next. Nothing can replace the spiritual foundation and Christian upbringing that comes from one's own home. The recently published four-yearly report *Haastettu kirkko* (Community, Participation and Faith) draws attention to the rapidity with which the numbers of baptisms and the numbers of homes providing a Christian upbringing have declined in the past few years. This is extremely disturbing. These are some of the most urgent and most important problems that our churches have to grapple with in the coming years – and I venture to say that they affect both of our churches. *The home as the source of a Christian upbringing* is not only a highly topical theme at the present moment but it will also be of extreme importance for the future of our churches.

On behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland I wish you warmly welcome to this eleventh round of theological discussions. I pray that God will bless all that is said here and that we may be guided in our deliberations by His Holy Spirit. It is only in this way that we will be able to implement the aim laid down in the document *Ekumenian hyvät tavat* "to fulfil our common calling to the glory of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

Rev. Dr Ari Ojell

God, known and unknown – the confessed God

The "Father of the Fathers", Gregory of Nyssa, and the theology of confession

The church father Gregory of Nyssa[1] provides us with an especially interesting introduction to the theme of "God, known and unknown", for two reasons. In the first place, he was one of the bishops attending the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381 who was involved in drawing up the Ecumenical Creed of the "One Holy and Catholic Church", but at the same time he was not simply "one of many", as we have a number of reasons for supposing that he was the meeting's leading theological figure, given that his brother, Basil the Great, had died just prior to the council and their mutual friend Gregory of Nazianzus withdrew from the council after having acted as its chairman for a short while. The "Star of Nyssa" – as Basil described his brother – reached his zenith at the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 and 383 and shone brightly throughout the decade, earning him the title of *ho pater pateron*, "Father of the Fathers", undoubtedly on account of his role at that council and as an official guarantor of the Nicene faith.[2] Also indicative of his status in the latter respect was his authorship of a catechetic guide for priests[3] to help them in teaching, explaining and defending Christian beliefs in their dealings with both Jewish and Greek converts, challengers and opponents. From the perspective of the history of the Christian doctrinal tradition and the entire trinitarian confession it is extremely fruitful to begin to examine in the light of Gregory's thinking

1 This paper is based on the author's doctoral thesis *One Word, One Body, One voice – Studies in Apophatic Theology and Christocentric Anthropology in Gregory of Nyssa* (Helsinki 2007), and his subsequent research into the hermeneutic biblical roots of the Judeo-Christian apophatic theological tradition. Gregory of Nyssa has been one of the most intensively studied among the Church Fathers during the period since World War II, and numerous new critical editions of his writings have been produced by the Brill publishing house from 1952 onwards in the series *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* (GNO I-X, ed. Wernerus Jaeger).

2 The Emperor Theodosius appointed certain persons chosen by the bishops attending the Ecumenical Council of 381 from among their own number as regional "guarantors" of the faith, communion with whom was to be taken as a sign of orthodoxy (*Codex Theodosianus* 16..1.3.). In most cases the choice was linked to their administrative position in the church's hierarchy, and in this respect it is remarkable that the bishop of the insignificant little town of Nyssa should have been named as a guarantor alongside his own metropolitan, Helladius of Caesarea.

3 His *Oratio catechetica magna* (GNO III/4; PG 45, pp.9-105) underlines still further Gregory of Nyssa's role as a "Father of the Fathers" whose influence stretched across local and regional boundaries. There was a definite need for a general statement of the Orthodox Christian faith in the church of the period immediately following the Council of Constantinople, and it was no coincidence that Gregory of Nyssa came to compile this work and instruct the priests in their catechetic and apologetic duties.

precisely what we know and what we do *not* know about God *on the grounds of our common confession*. Gregory is an especially interesting figure among the Fathers of the Undivided Church because he delved more deeply than any of his contemporaries into the topic of the unknown nature of God, a fact which raised his theological wisdom to a new plane in a way that lent a fresh richness to both Christian teachings and Christian spirituality and bound the two together in a consistent manner. As is well known, Gregory of Nyssa was one of the most significant of the Church Fathers who laid emphasis on apophatic Christianity, insisting on the unknown nature of God, alongside the Jewish "godfather" of this approach to theology, Philo of Alexandria, an Egyptian contemporary of Jesus Christ and the apostles, and the 6th-century Syrian author who wrote under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite. The historical context in which Gregory of Nyssa was writing was one that laid weight on doctrinal and polemic dimensions, and it is important to note that the defenders of the Nicene Creed constructed their Trinitarian arguments precisely on the tenet of the unknown and unnamed substance of God, whereas their main opponents, the neo-Arian supporters of Eunomius, maintained that it was possible to know the essence of God and to apply to it the name "unbegotten" (*agennêtos*). For the followers of Eunomius, only the Father was "truly God", while his only-begotten Son was not of the same substance with the Father but was "a god" only in relation to other beings that had been created in accordance with the will of the Father.[4]

The terms "known" and "unknown" therefore go hand in hand in an interesting manner in the thinking of Gregory of Nyssa, which indeed is no great wonder for a Church Father who was a proponent of the *theology of confession*. We are not often aware, perhaps, when we recite the Nicene Creed – affirm in accordance with this ecumenical statement our belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – of what we do *not* say, what we confess *by dint of our silence*, what we do not know about God: that his substance is beyond our understanding. The doctrinal summary of the Nicene faith as expressed by the Cappadocian Fathers, "*one substance – three persons*" is a balanced way of expressing the known and unknown elements in our experience of God and of binding them to the source and foundation of our faith: Jesus Christ and our baptism in accordance with the instructions left by him with his disciples. Like the other Cappadocian defenders of the Nicene faith, Gregory of Nyssa remains consistent with the *lex orandi – lex credendi* principle in teaching that Christians should believe as they have been baptised – and that their praise should be in harmony with their belief. He regards baptism "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" as expressing the faith that Our Lord handed down to his disciples with the intention that they should preach it to all

4 Gregory wrote three books entitled "Against Eunomius" and a long "Refutation of Eunomius' confession" (CE I-III and Ref. Eun. GNO I-II), which together proved decisive in ensuring victory for the defenders of the Nicene Creed ín their polemics with Eunomius and his supporters.

nations.[5] Since God is one in substance, Our Lord saw fit that we should consider only *one name* for that substance which is inconceivable and inexpressible – at the same time as we believe in three persons that can be named individually according to the relations existing between them. God's uncreated nature or substance, which we are able to observe equally in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, exceeds all names and all concepts that we can formulate in our minds. In passing on the faith and its mystery to his disciples, Our Lord spoke of a name, but did not go on to say what that name was, because it is a name that is above all names. This is the theology of confession that is bound to Our Lord's command and the baptism instituted by him: the Ecumenical Creed gives expression to the mystery of that baptism in accordance with the instructions and faith that Our Lord passed on to the disciples, and it is for this reason that we confess one substance in three persons but do not seek to name or define the one substance that is common to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through and in accordance with the ecumenical Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed all Christians thus confess to a God that is at once "known and unknown". But what does this mean for us? If God is in essence unknown, what is the "full knowledge (of God)" that St. Paul is referring to when he claims, "Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12)? I will go on now to consider this theme in the light of Gregory of Nyssa's thinking. In his case a good point of departure is to ask what is really at stake in a Christian sense if we maintain that theology is "speaking about God"?

Theology as speaking about God

Gregory of Nyssa is a textbook example of the Judeo-Christian tradition of the "speaking God", about which H.C. Saffrey quite correctly observes: "[I] n the perspective of Jewish tradition, as well as that of the Gospel, God himself is the first theologian. And in a sense, he should be the only one. [...Bible] contains then the revelation of the God who speaks about himself. The Olympian gods never acted like this."[6]

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5 Gregory states that the content of the faith should be derived *ek tês prôtês paradôseôs,* "from the primary tradition" of the faith, meaning the form of baptism instigated by Him and the teachings associated with it. See Gregory's letter 24, *To the heretic Heracleianus* (GNO VIII/2, pp.75–79) and *Ref. Eun.* (GNO II, pp.312–313), which begins with a statement of the *lex orandi – lex credendi* principle as a justification for the Nicene faith.

6 H.D.Saffrey, Theology as Science (3rd-6th centuries), in *Studia Patristica* XXIX (1997), p. 322. See also W. Jaeger, *The Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius* (Leiden 1965, pp.72–73), where he claims that Gregory was involved in creating a new philosophical and rationalized form of Christianity called "theology"; in other words, he was engaged in "a risky project for intellectualizing the supra-intellectual", leading to the emergence of theology. Such claims strike me as highly deceptive as far as Gregory's intentions with regard to his concept of "theology" were concerned.

Long before Gregory was ready to even consider the possibility of calling anyone from outside the Bible a "theologian", he would undoubtedly have said that although all the holy people mentioned in the Bible truly proclaimed its theology with the highest conceivable level of authority – and were thus in a sense "theologians" relative to us – even they could not really have been regarded as theologians. It would have been as if each of these many individuals had been able to lend authority to the theology that he proclaimed.[7] Instead, all of them being human actors involved in the same process of proclaiming theological truths, they should be identified, as is done in the Bible itself, as "servants of the Word".[8] Gregory believed that through theology God was speaking his own Word, and that a servant's input in the *oikonomia* of God's speech was to give that invisible Word a perceptible "body" of human words and deeds, i.e. a form that was amenable to the human senses. Gregory's understanding of "theology" reflects the incarnation motif that runs through all his thinking: true "theological" reflection that concerns the nature of God and the manner of his existence is possible only when God himself takes the initiative and approaches human beings. Growth in the knowledge of God (*theognôsia*) requires that a person should become imbued with "the light of the incarnation", which is the light of the knowledge of God.

In keeping with his line of thought, Gregory does not introduce us to Moses as an "archetypal theologian"[9] but as an example of the perfect servant of God, whom God even referred to as his friend.[10] Gregory describes how Moses was illuminated by the light of the incarnation (the burning bush), how he was able to hear a voice from heaven, and how he followed God's voice up the mountain and himself became the instrument that gently played the music of the Spirit. Having been instructed by the Word in a dense cloud "where God was" (Ex. 20:21), he acted as God's spokesman before the Israelites. Thus as often as he climbed the mountain of God he also came down from there in order to convey God's speech (*theologia*) and divine information (*theognôsia*), everything that he had received from God "above", to the whole nation gathered in the valley "below", for the common benefit of everyone. The people at the foot of the mountain "listened

7 One revealing feature is that in all his works directed against Eunomius, Gregory does not call anyone a "theologian" except for Eunomius himself, which is of course a polemic device for making him appear arrogant and ridiculous. Cf. my "Service or Mastery? 'Theology' in Gregory of Nyssa's Contra Eunomium II" in Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium II (Eds. L. Karfikova, S. Douglass & J. Zachhuber, Leiden 2004), pp.473–484.

8 Luke 1:2.

9 This would have been a quite natural and traditional form of identification in the Alexandrian tradition from Philo onwards, see Philo's De vita Moysis II, p.115, De praemiis et poensis, p.53, and Quaestiones in Exodum II, p.88, where Moses is termed "a master theologian". Clement follows Philo in this respect, see Stromateis I, 150, pp.4–5. Also on this subject, see Anniwies van den Hoek, Clement of Alexandria and his use of Philo in the Stromateis: an early Christian reshaping of a Jewish model. (Leiden 1988, pp.49–51), and Ronald Williamson, Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo (Cambridge 1989), pp.72–73.

10 *De vita Moysis* (VM) II (Sources Chrétiennes 1bis 2e), pp.314, 317.

to Moses in thanks, taking everything that they heard from that person who was versed in the divine mysteries as utterly reliable".[11] What Gregory presumed that Moses brought down from the mountain each time was Christ in various forms, above all in that of an "earthly temple", a close replica of the "heavenly temple", and in that of the Law, which was an expression of God's will that men were able to proclaim by living their lives in accordance with it. It is highly important to remember that this is the crucial aspect in Gregory's interpretation of Moses' life: although his interpretation in general depicts the journey of the soul towards God, this is not all that he wishes to say or teach. Equally important is the message that not everyone needs to venture "up the mountain" in order to partake in the fullness of God: everything that Moses was able to enjoy up above it was possible for the people of God to partake in down below. This implies nowadays participation in the beliefs and sacramental life of the church, i.e. participation in Christ.

A careful reading of Gregory's work on the life of Moses leaves us in no doubt that, in the first place, he defined "theology" as a "sermon concerning the nature of God"[12] that was authorized by God himself, secondly, his concept of theology was Christocentric, and thirdly, that he regarded the incarnation as inseparable from the theology that he describes as "the sound of a trumpet" echoing down from the mountain. Gregory was referring to theology when he wrote, "The Law and the Prophets re-echo with the divine mystery of the incarnation … the last sounds of which are to be heard in the proclaiming of the Gospel."[13]

What holds good for the holy figures in the Bible is at least no less true for us: we do not have among us any theologians who can lend authority to acts of speaking about God, but at the same time each one of us is required to proclaim theology that communicates information about God in accordance with his will and praise the God who was eventually revealed through Christ and in the Spirit as the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Gregory had realized that even the simple confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord" is a genuine, albeit veiled, *confession of the Trinity* – and therefore theology at its very best. For one thing, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3), and secondly, this confession is to be uttered "to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). In other words, lying behind the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, preceding that confession and inspiring it, is the divine action of the Holy Spirit

11 VM II, p.160. Gregory goes on to observe (VM II p.161) that, as implied in 1 Cor. 12:29, "not everyone is an apostle or a prophet". But although Moses was not a "theologian", he had a very particular part to play in God's economy (*oikonomia tou theou*), see VM II, p.279.

12 *Peri tês theias phuseôs kêrugma*, VM II, p.158.

13 VM II, p.159.

operating through the Son and going back to the Father.[14] This simple confession also represents the highest rank of theology, something that in the last instance "every tongue", as St. Paul put it, "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2:10), implying the whole of creation, "should confess … to the glory of God", given that everything that exists does so in accordance with God's will as expressed in the Son, "so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).[15]

Theology as an expression of God's will and love in Jesus Christ

Lying behind any intellectual speech or discourse (Gk. *logos*) one can perceive the intention of the speaker, what it is that he or she wishes to say. In the case of theology, Gregory maintained, that speaker is God. Contrary to the classical Greek "philosophical" theological tradition, for Gregory the concept of the *will* (*thelêsis*) of God rather than knowledge (*gnôsis*) establishes the concept of theology as communication that concerns the divine nature (*peri fyseôs*). At the same time the concept of will also qualifies the idea of "knowledge about God" (*theognôsia*) and its fullness, or perfection, for it can never mean a knowledge of God's nature in terms of his *essence* (*kata fysin / kata ousian*). Theology as Gregory understood it is in essence and in origin divine action, i.e. *energeia*, which he defines as "one single step or arrangement of good will that is transmitted from the Father via the Son to the Holy Spirit."[16] Theology as God's own activity, performed in accordance with His will and as an expression of that will, serves to make God known in precisely the way and to the extent that is possible, or perhaps one should say that it makes God "fully known" in precisely that way in which He can be fully known, in the words of St. Paul: "face to face … even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

There is in fact nothing in Paul's definition of "fully known" that could lead us directly to the conclusion that a full knowledge of God should be understood as some kind of definitive information regarding His nature or essence. In the light of the 4th-century trinitarian discussions and the vocabulary used in them, it could be said that Paul's language is more "personalistic" than essentialistic: in the end knowledge, simply by being "knowledge", will eventually "come to an end", whereas "love never ends" (1 Cor. 13:8), but it will continue to take place

14 Gregory's *Ad simplicium* (GNO III/1, pp.61–67), in which he discusses specifically *Trinitarian worship*, quite consciously ends up with this confession. For more on this subject, see my "Gregory on the Christocentric Simplicity of the Trinitarian Worship: The Contribution of Gregory of Nyssa's Short Treatise Ad Simplicium Tribunum", *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism* (Eds. Drecoll , V. H. & Berghaus, M., Leiden 2010), pp.170–227.

15 Gk. *ê ho theos ta panta en pasin*.

16 *Ad Abl* (GNO III/1, 44,23–49,1).

between persons (*prosopon pros prosopon*), in that "I" will come to know [God] just as "I" will be known [by God].

This personalistic interpretation may well be just the right way of reading St. Paul's text, as he is clearly committing himself to an archetypal Old Testament image of the discussions between Moses and God "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Ex. 33:11). It should be remembered, that the "face" is an expression of *person* and *presence* in the Old Testament.[17] In any case, Gregory, at least, would appear to believe that a fullness of knowledge with regard to God, knowing Him "face to face", implies knowing Him fully in accordance with his will, which He makes evident and known to us in the person of Christ, the Son, who is "the exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebr. 1:3), through whom we learn to know the Father in the Holy Spirit, in effect in the Word, through which God always speaks to us and expresses His good will towards us. A knowledge of God in and through the person of Christ will in turn lead us to know God as love, for all knowledge is eventually transformed into love, as Gregory points out, alluding to St. Paul's witness to this (1 Cor. 13:8).[18]

Gregory's concept of an "apophatic" theology that emphasizes the unknown nature of God is at the same time astonishingly Christocentric, and this also applies to his mystical theology.[19] As Gregory makes quite clear in his *Life of Moses* and his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, what the soul perceives spiritually or comes "face to face" with in the darkness of its own reason but "in an awareness of the loving presence of God" (*aisthêsis tês parousias*)[20] is *Christ*, whom the soul has followed "in faith, not in knowledge" into a "resplendent darkness" which one can enter only by virtue of faith.[21] But even in that darkness that lies beyond words and reason the soul is still called upon to follow its beloved suitor, Christ, who, as the "voice of God" cries out eternally to his bride, "Follow me!"[22]

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17 The Hebrew word *paniym*, "face", frequently refers to presence or person, its equivalent in the Septuagint being either *prosôpon* or – as in Exodus 33:11 – *enôpion*.

18 *An et Res* (PG 46 96, 37). See also *De mort* (GNO IX, pp. 28–68), where, referring to 1 Thess. 2:4, Gregory states that the human mind is unable to conceive of the divine nature of God but can love the God who transcends all human thought with his whole heart, soul and strength.

19 As noted by Anthony Meredith in *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, New York 2000, pp.77–78), Gregory assigns to the whole theophany of Moses an interpretation that alludes to the incarnation. See also Everett Ferguson, Images of the Incarnation in Gregory of Nyssa's Vita Moysis, in *Jesus Christ in Gregory of Nyssa's Theology*, Athens 2005, pp.285–306.

20 *Cant. XI* (GNO 322,4–324,12).

21 Like Moses, Abraham, the early epitome of faith, undertook a journey into the divine unknown on the strength of faith rather than knowledge. CE II GNO I, pp.252–253. Gregory believed that it was a waste of time to try to comprehend the unknown God through rational endeavours, as he can be discovered "only through faith" (*to dia monës tës pisteôs heuriskomenon*). CE III/8 GNO 243.

22 Gregory regards the Old Testament Song of Solomon as a description of precisely this blessed state of the soul in which, "smitten by love" and yearning eternally for its beloved, it hears its suitor calling out to it. He claimed that Moses learned about the nature of this blessed state of the soul when he was allowed to see God from behind. It was a call to continue to follow God, the same call, in effect, that was heard initially by the fishermen. *VM* II, pp.219–236.

It is this following, *akolouthia*,[23] that constitutes the theological method proposed by Gregory for achieving a knowledge of God.[24] Considered more precisely, it is a matter of following the Word,[25] and it is very important to note that this is in no way connected with the apophatic technique and method, the *via negationis*, adopted from neo-Platonism by the Pseudo-Dionysius and later linked with the Christian apophatic tradition. Instead of urging his readers to deny or negate anything that had previously been accepted with regard to God, Gregory maintained that it was essential to reach out and move forward, in the manner of St. Paul, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13). This teaching, which has come to be known as *epektasis*[26], is associated with Gregory's view of the unknown nature of the essence of God for a particular reason, which is not simply the inadequacy of the human mind for comprehending God but rather the fact that God's essence is infinite (*apeiron*)[27] and therefore cannot be circumscribed or dealt with cognitively. But this also entails the consequence that growth in the knowledge of God will also be infinite in character, stretching into the eternity that is to follow the resurrection of the dead, when God is "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

For Gregory of Nyssa the unknown nature of the essence of God does not by any means imply that there is nothing that we can know about him. On the contrary, the unknown character of (the essence of) God who is *known to us* through the categories of self-sacrifice, communion, presence and love associated with his person, means that there is always something new to be discovered about him and growth in knowledge of him is indeed an everlasting process as we follow him in Christ in accordance with his will. It is in Christ that we learn to know God, not statically but dynamically, always as a form of active communion in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a divinely inspired life in which we are able as human beings to participate in the Holy Spirit through Christ in accordance with the will of God. In the light of St. Paul's witness (Phil. 2:9) Gregory concludes that it is the will of the Father that the name Jesus, reflecting the truly human nature adopted by his only-begotten Son, the Christ – who is truly God – should be raised in glory above all other names as the "one name" of the Triune God.[28] Finally, given that God is all in all and rules over all, the re-born humanity that

23 All four evangelists use the Greek words *akolouthei moi* in their report of Jesus calling his disciples.

24 On *akolouthia* as a distinct method developed by Gregory in his writings, see Jean Daniélou, *L'etre et le temps chez Grégoire de Nysse* (Leiden 1970), pp.18–50, and Hubertus Drobner, "Gregory of Nyssa as Philosopher", *Dionysius*, Vol XVIII. New Series (Halifax 2000), pp.69–103.

25 Paulos Mar Gregorios, in his *Cosmic Man – The Divine Presence* (New York 1988), aptly entitles his section on Gregory's method "*Akolouthia* – following the Logos".

26 The classical work on this topic, and a major stimulus for the modern boom in research into Gregory of Nyssa, is Jean Dánielou's *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique* (Paris 1944).

27 This theme is discussed in another, later indisputable classic of the literature on Gregory of Nyssa, Ekkehard Mühlenberg's *Die Unendlicheit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa* (Göttingen 1966).

28 CE III/4 GNO, p.188.

was redeemed in Christ will proclaim Christ in all its members and render the love of God visible in the whole of creation, which will acknowledge, praise and bow down to its One Lord in the name of Jesus, to the glory of the Triune God. God will gain a human face within his created world, our faces, and we will also see the love of Christ in each others' faces, so that we can know the God who loves all men "even as we have been fully known".

Archimandrite Andreas Larikka

God, known and unknown

God as a mystery

No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known (ekeinos eksêgêsato) (John 1:18). This is a common starting point for all Christians. God is "something quite different"; he is invisible, unfathomable, way above all things, beyond words and above all understanding. On the other hand, he is quite uniquely close to us, for he permeates everything. He is personally present and expresses himself to us in the manner of a person. A relationship of love exists between us and this God who is above all things. This has become a reality in a very special way through Christ's incarnation, life, death and resurrection.

Although Orthodox theology is to a great extent *symbolic* in nature, symbols alone are inadequate to describe the sublimity or "otherness" of God. When we wish to speak of this *mysterium tremendum* we need both negative assertions as well as affirmative ones, so that we can express what he is not rather than what he is. This approach is known as apophatic theology. Whatever we say about God will be insufficient to describe the living truth. If we say that he exists, we immediately have to qualify this by adding that he does not exist in the same way as other things exist but that "being in existence" carries a unique meaning in this case.[1]

The source of theology

The Orthodox Church has a vivid way of describing the appearance of the gift of theology from above: it is taught from above and the saints are those who are receptive to it. The first example of this was the Gospel according to St. John. In the Church's hermeneutic tradition, theology is said to have begun at the point in the Last Supper at which the apostle John laid his head on Christ's breast. It is from this event that the gift of theology arose and derived its strength as a life-giving source and stream.

In the Orthodox view the whole idea of theology can be revealed by studying the writings of the Church Fathers. The continuity of tradition has acted over the centuries to give the Church its conscience. The emphasis is thus on tradition and a continuity that is based on personal experience under the guidance of

1 Ware 1979, pp.16–17.

the Holy Spirit. This understanding naturally requires that the Church should be *dynamic* and *charismatic* in nature, for under the inspiration of the Spirit of God the living body that is the Church will never remain static, as no more than a structural institution. Led by this conviction, the Orthodox Church maintains an awareness of, and boldly bears witness to, the living continuity of its theology from the time of the apostles to the 4th-century Cappadocian Fathers and from then onwards to St. Maximus the Confessor (580–662), St. Simeon the New Theologian (949–1022) and St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359).[2]

Apophatic theology

The essence of theology lies in silence, for in the last resort man can do nothing more than remain silent. It is for this reason that the icon of St. John the Theologian pictures him with his fingers to his lips as if bearing witness to the secret significance concealed in silence. One corollary of this is that the apophatic path of negative argument does not lead us to a void but to fulfilment. Our "denials" are in reality overstatements. The apophatic approach allows us to achieve that which is beyond all positive and negative assertions, beyond all language and beyond all human thought. It helps us to attain an immediate *experience* of the living God.[3]

The apophatic approach enables Orthodox theology to give expression to God's absolute supremacy while at the same time emphasizing His immediate presence everywhere and at all times, for He is at once within us and all around us, both above us and in our innermost being. The rise of the human intellect towards God may be depicted as a creative process of exclusion that resembles a catharsis of the soul and destroys every trace of the worship of false gods. The inaccessibility of God is not due only to the fallen nature of man, but above all to the ontological gulf between the Creator and that which he has created. It is this gulf that keeps students of theology rapt in humility, for it reveals the bounds of human reason.[4]

The neo-patristic synthesis

The "neo-patristic synthesis" was a trend that came to occupy a prominent position in Orthodox theology during the 20th century. Georges Florovsky (1903–1979) maintained that it was impossible to construct an Orthodox theological system on the basis of academic learning and philosophical contemplation alone, and he found confirmation in the works of the Greek fathers for a principle of freedom,

2 Bartholomew 2008, pp. 38–40.

3 Ware 1979, p.17.

4 Bartholomew 2008, pp. 52.

not only in history and cosmology but also in all attempts at understanding and interpreting truth and reality.[5]

For Florovsky the Christian faith meant a revolution in thinking, a radical change in human values and concepts and a new attitude towards history. Christianity is an eschatological religion and thereby an essentially historical one,[6] and he criticized Karl Barth (1886–1968) for his denial of the historical and even the human nature of the Church. He claimed that Barth's opinions reflected the breakdown in the view of the Church that took place during the Reformation, a blindness towards history.[7]

In Florovsky's interpretation, the development of a person's spiritual life wells up from participation in God's freedom. The view of a relationship between God and man developed from the preoccupation of Byzantine theology with Christology and the debates that arose out of this. A creative synthesis of these ideas was put forward by St. Maximus the Confessor, who proposed that man was created in such a way that it would be possible for God to be born as a man.

Human freedom destroys itself if it turns its back on God, for we cease to be human in the true, original sense if we are separated from God. Florovsky insists that Christianity is a liturgical faith, and that the Church is above all a community of worship.[8]

In his synthetic interpretation, Florovsky comes to the conclusion that we do not learn to know God by a dialectic method comprising conceptual laws or principles but through charismatic experience within the Church, and that such experience is granted to those who are pure in mind and heart, for their body and soul become illuminated by the uncreated light of God.[9]

On knowledge and lack of knowledge of the essence of God

The discussion as to how the theories of Palamism and neo-Palamism were related to the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers made a crucial contribution to the issue of the relationship between God's transcendence and immanence.[10] The well-known 14th-century controversy between St. Gregory Palamas and the monk Barlaam is a useful way of approaching this issue. It is an undeniable fact that although Palamas is regarded as an authority by the Eastern Church – his relics are available for veneration in the cathedral at Thessaloniki and he is remembered by Orthodox people throughout the world on one of the Sundays

5 Hakkarainen 2010, p.135.
6 Florovsky 1974, pp.58–60.
7 Hakkarainen 2010, p.136.
8 Hakkarainen 2010, p.137.
9 Hakkarainen 2010, p.150.
10 Karttunen 2012, p.8.

in Great Lent – he is regarded with considerable suspicion in the west. Both Palamas and Barlaam spoke of "knowing God" in the context of the notion of a contemplative "vision" espoused by the monastic tradition. The issue between them appears to have revolved around knowledge of God's existence or deeds. Barlaam, too, was of the opinion that salvation was anchored in the revelation of Christ. The Hesychast controversy was concerned with the third level in Evagrius' system, that of "unmediated communion".[11]

God unknown

St. John the Evangelist knew that no one had ever seen God, and the philosophers of the pre-Christian era also subscribed to the transcendence of their "God", while Barlaam demonstrated that the Pseudo-Dionysius had observed precisely the apocataphism of the pre-Christian philosophers. Should we follow the lead given by that writer who is identified by many with Dionysius the disciple of St. Paul (Acts 17:34)? St. Gregory Palamas also approved of Dionysius' apocataphatic method, but adjusted it to the extent that the intermediary role of the celestial hierarchy was replaced by the fact of being "in Christ". In this sense Palamas was liberating the eastern theology from Hellenistic Platonism.[12]

Where does the unknown nature of God come from?

The traditional answer to this question attributed it either to the finite nature of man or to the essence of God, which always exceeds human understanding. Those who chose the first alternative either believe that it is possible for man to overcome his finite nature, which implies a mystical union with God, or do not, in which case they must content themselves with a God who remains unapproachable.

The Pseudo-Dionysius evidently believed that it was possible to interpret the unknown nature of God in both ways. The view that God is unknown because of the finite nature of man belonged to the Platonic interpretation, and Barlaam concurred with this. This was also true of Akindynos and Gregoras, but as they simultaneously approved the Hesychasts' vision of the divine light (at least in Akindynos' case), they were able to claim that man is capable of partaking in the essence of God even though they denied the existence of God's energies. All of these set out from an essentialist philosophy that was close to the thinking of St. Thomas Aquinas but was not directly inherited from him. It was rather a matter of building on a common foundation.[13]

11 Ware 1977, p.52.

12 Meyendorff 1974, pp.132–133.

13 Meyendorff 1974, pp.203–204.

God known – (A) natural knowledge

What is the role of natural knowledge (theology) in knowing God?

Barlaam could see that natural theology was the main path leading to a knowledge of God, although he accepted at the same time that this knowledge was imperfect on account of human limitations. Thus the philosophers of ancient times could still point the way to mystical acquaintance with God. For Barlaam the course of the salvation of mankind – the fall of mankind into sin and restoration in Jesus Christ – did not have any decisive relevance to the question of the possibilities for knowing God.[14]

Natural theology implies that it is possible to gain a knowledge of God indirectly, by examining the created world, either by drawing analogies between it and its Creator or by apocataphatic comparison, by concluding that God *cannot* be the same as that which he has created. Barlaam also understood the celestial hierarchy of the Pseudo-Dionysius in a corresponding manner, noting that the powers that Dionysius mentioned were part of the created world and that God himself remained a mystery. Again, Gregoras and Akindynos concurred in this.[15] For Palamas, however, this hierarchy was something that could not be accepted as such if one wished to disprove Barlaam's system, as we will see below.

Palamas, too, accepted the role of natural theology, but with limited applications. In his opinion the apophatic approach to God by examining creation is restricted to comparisons and intellectual deliberations about God. This means making a distinction between God and the imaginations of the human mind regarding Him – which is where its value lies – but this is not a way to achieve a true knowledge of God, to see God. In Palamas' view, the apophatic phase simply precedes that of seeing God, i.e. truly knowing him, and is not yet a part of it. Assimilation to God takes place through His grace and lies beyond the cataphatic-apocataphatic distinction.[16] Unlike Barlaam, Palamas believed that the non-Christian philosophers were mistaken in their attitude towards a knowledge of God,[17] and thus their value in pointing the way towards such a knowledge was inadequate.

14 Meyendorff 1974, p.127.

15 Meyendorff 1974, p.205.

16 Meyendorff 1974, p.206–207.

17 Meyendorff 1974, pp.128–129.

God known – (B) the intellectual consequence of the incarnation

As seen above, Barlaam regarded indirect knowledge as the only possible knowledge of God. If so, what was the significance of God's act of salvation in Jesus Christ?

Barlaam does not appear to have left any room in his system with regard to a knowledge of God for the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ – as this act did not decisively alter the conditions for a knowledge of God.[18] The miracles that occurred in connection with Christ's incarnation – such as the light surrounding Mount Tabor – certainly represented a knowledge of God, but only in a symbolic form. Barlaam – and also Gregoras and Akindynos – interpreted the liturgical life of the Church as providing opportunities for the human mind to elevate itself towards God.[19]

Palamas reacted to Barlaam's manner of presenting the knowledge of God as indirect as the only possible alternative, since the latter had denied the possibility of supernatural knowledge. If this were so, Christianity would have contributed nothing to man's ability to know God, since Barlaam's view effectively denies the reality of the incarnation. Palamas, on the other hand, maintained that it was precisely because of the incarnation that one could no longer say that God was beyond our knowledge.[20]

How, in Palamas' view, did the incarnation affect man's knowledge of God?

Meyendorff maintains that Palamas intentionally emphasized the significance of the incarnation for man's ability to know God. We enter the new reality brought about by the incarnation through the medium of the Church's sacraments, in which the soul, having died and become isolated from any knowledge of God in the Fall from Grace, is restored to communion with Him.[21] The curse of Adam is passed on to mankind through the natural act of conception, but Christ, who was born of a virgin, represents a new "human species" in which others may share through Baptism.[22] Baptism, which is one of Palamas' favourite themes in his homilies, allows each of us personally to partake in the human state that has been made divine in Christ. The Eucharist is also of the utmost importance in this.[23]

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18 Meyendorff 1974, p.127.

19 Meyendorff 1974, pp.187–188; 1983, p.12.

20 Meyendorff 1974, pp.157, 186.

21 Meyendorff 1974, p.123.

22 Meyendorff 1974, p.126.

23 Meyendorff 1974, pp.154-155.

The same sacramental realism lies behind Palamas' view of Hesychasm.[24] When Christ has taken his place in a person as a consequence of the sacramental mysteries, that person is filled with the light of Mount Tabor (which Origen and St. Gregory of Nyssa regarded as a sanctifying gift of grace).[25] This is the light of Christ, and the grace that is bestowed is the life divine, not a created grace, but something that is uncreated.[26]

Palamas places this new divine being above the angelic hierarchy of the Pseudo-Dionysius, i.e. closer to God, for the reality of the incarnation implies direct communion with God.[27] The light of Mount Tabor is identical to the light of the Kingdom of God, which in turn is a sign of the change in the possibilities for man to come to know God that is contingent upon the incarnation.[28]

Was it impossible to know God in the days of the Old Covenant?

The revelations of God that took place in the days of the Old Covenant were exceptional events that foretold the times when all "developed" Christians would be able to experience the same.[29] Palamas also stresses that if no such thing as superhuman knowledge of God had been given to those who were baptized, then unbaptized heathens, whether good or bad, would be in the same situation as baptized people.[30]

What kind of knowledge?

Information about God

Both Barlaam and St. Gregory Palamas recognised the competence of natural theology, but Palamas emphasized that the knowledge of God that it produced, although accessible to all people, was not sufficient for salvation. By contrast, the mystical knowledge of God that conferred salvation was given as an act of grace.[31] This led him to distinguish between "theology", information about God, and "theory", direct knowledge of God, encounter with Him, experience of Him.[32]

24 Meyendorff 1974, p.149.
25 Meyendorff 1974, pp.151, 153.
26 Meyendorff 1974, pp.164, 167.
27 Meyendorff 1974, pp.189–191.
28 Meyendorff 1974, p.194.
29 Meyendorff 1974, pp.192–193, 195.
30 Meyendorff 1974, p.162.
31 Meyendorff 1974, pp.119–120, 127.
32 Meyendorff 1974, pp.168, 207–208.

Direct knowledge of God

Palamas emphasized the supernatural aspect of knowing God, regarding the most appropriate term for this as being the word "faith" as used in the Bible.[33] True information about God cannot be obtained by means of the human intellect, or *nous*, as, like the body, this is something created, but through the human spirit aroused by the Holy Spirit so that it is essentially fused with the latter. Thus a true knowledge of God is a supernatural state brought about by the Holy Spirit, so that in effect, the object of this knowledge is synonymous with the means by which its attainment becomes possible.[34] This knowledge is nevertheless brought about by the Spirit of God inducing a state of *theoria* in both the *nous* and the body, and it was this that enabled the apostles to see God's uncreated light: the Spirit (momentarily) re-created their sensory eyes and they saw the Light of God in that Spirit.[35]

Any human being who comes to know God in this manner is in effect partaking of the life of God himself, which he can then communicate to others during his lifetime and also through his earthly relics after death.[36]

A God who is in essence unknown but known in his living attributes

Can a human being re-created by the Spirit see God himself?

The realism of Palamas' theology with regard to the human capacity to see and experience God himself leads us inevitably to the additional question of whether we are still dealing with an unknown God or whether it is in some simplified manner possible to know Him. St. John the Evangelist leaves this question open (John 1:18): *No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known* (*ekeinos eksêgêsato – "explained him"*). Does God the Father remain unknown even though the Son has "explained him"?

Barlaam answered this question in the affirmative and Akindynos in the negative, but since the latter regarded the Heychasts' experience of God as genuine he evidently found himself supporting the view that a human being can partake in God's essence. Barlaam maintained that Palamas met up with the same problem, that he found himself drifting either into Messalianism (the view that man can see the essence of God) or into ditheism – the assertion that what man sees is another, lower level of divinity.[37]

33 Meyendorff 1974, p.171.
34 Meyendorff 1974, p.172.
35 Meyendorff 1974, p.173–174.
36 Meyendorff 1974, p.175.
37 Meyendorff 1974, pp.54–55.

Palamas countered Barlaam by developing further the traditional distinction between the essence (*ousia*) of God and his energies or actions (*energeiai*; note also that St. Paul uses *energeia* in the singular: Eph. 1:19; 3:7; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:29; 2:12, where it is commonly rendered in English as "power"), explaining that He can be recognised only through His desire to approach mankind, which is an example of what *energeia* means in practise, an event of God descending upon us. This is what the mention of the Son in John 1:18 refers to. Our experience of God "approaching" us is the only way in which we can "know God", i.e. we know Him through what he does on our behalf, through his energies.[38]

Would it not be easier to hold on to the old interpretation: God is known through his Son and his Spirit (ekonomia)?

In terms of the old tradition it was possible to regard the Son and the Spirit as uncreated energies of God, for these clearly appeared in his *ekonomia*. Akindynos was of this opinion, but Palamas was reluctant to take this course as, given that the 4th-century Ecumenical Councils had declared the Son and the Spirit to be of the same essence as the Father, the suggestion that they were energies deployed by God for the good of the world could easily lead to subordinationism.[39] Nevertheless he frequently expressed himself in a more traditional manner when speaking of the experience of salvation: God can be recognised because "Jesus dwells in us" and the divine light is the Spirit.[40]

But Akindynos' solution was no more than an apparent one, for although it is possible to know God through His energies, the Son and the Spirit, one still has to ask "what" it was that one could know in Christ (or in the Holy Spirit). Christ remains unknown, transcendental, to us as far as his hypostasis is concerned, for if we as humans were to know Him in his hypostasis – which is of the same essence as the Father – we would be merged with God and would share His divinity. The hypostasis of the second person of the Trinity is nevertheless the same as the hypostasis of the incarnate Son, so that the life and reality of God himself can be perceived in Christ's human nature even though it is inseparable from the nature of God (as they are not intermingled, etc., see the Chalcedon definition).[41]

Thus God remains both known and unknown even in Christ, and the same distinction between Created and Uncreated will persist in the world to come. Ware reminds us that we should make a distinction between the hypostasis of the Spirit and the gifts of grace that He bestows, i.e. His energies.[42] In other words, if we

38 Meyendorff 1974, pp.209–211.

39 Meyendorff 1974, p.220.

40 Meyendorff 1974, pp.210, 157.

41 Meyendorff 1974, pp.180–184.

42 Ware 1975, pp.133–134.

once accept that a human being may truly experience God in Christ, the question that arises from this will presumably compel us to make some sort of distinction between the essence of God and his energies, as God is also experienced through his energies in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The synod of 1351 that gave its approval to Palamas' theology stated that it had developed upon the ruling of the 6th Ecumenical Council – in practise the theology of St. Maximus the Confessor – regarding the two wills of Christ: there can be no nature without energy.[43]

The Scholastic fathers would appear to have encountered difficulties (in the 16th and 17th centuries) with regard to one characteristic that was emphasized by the Eastern Fathers in particular, namely that God will remain unknown even in the world to come. The Scholastics attempted to rescue the orthodoxy of the Greek fathers by means of the old Scholastic distinction between "knowledge" and "understanding", maintaining that the *ousia* of God could be seen and known but never understood. This would imply that the problem in relation to western theology did not begin with Palamas but, as Lossky demonstrates, the western Scholastics had the same problem with regard to the earlier Greek fathers.[44]

Also central to Palamism was the starting point for the eastern Trinitarian theology, which is the hypostases and not the essence (of God). God did not say "I am the essence" (*ousia*), but "I am what I am" (*ho ôn*). "He who is" does not derive from the essence, but rather the essence derives from "He who is". It is on account of this that God can appear to men in a real way (in his energies) without revealing his essence.[45] Palamas' opponents set out from a philosophical concept of God, as a simple essence, i.e. a God whose problematic energies arise later, but for Palamas God as an essence is an abstraction and the wrong point of departure.

Do we have two Gods?

Is God divided in two after all?

Palamism was accused even in St. Gregory's lifetime of being a form of ditheism, and this was not only an accusation arising in the west, as Nicholas Cabasilas, for example, feared that Palamas' system might imply ditheism.[46] For Palamas it

43 Meyendorff 1974, pp.211–212.

44 Lossky 1997, pp.9-20; see also Ware 1977, pp.50–51. From the Renaissance onwards western theology has employed only *ratio* and not *intellectus* (Gk. *dianoia* vs. *nous*), and this has made the whole topic more difficult to handle, as *nous* (spiritual understanding) represents a level at which the contradictions entailed in *ratio* can be ironed out.

45 Meyendorff 1974, pp.213–214. Ware (1977, pp.50–51) is of the same opinion as far as 20th-century critics are concerned: God has been transformed by *ratio* into a "simplified" God, whereupon it is no longer necessary to concede that all oppositions are resolved in Him, since He exceeds everything that we know about communion and diversity.

46 Meyendorff 1974, pp.78, 82–83.

was imperative to make a distinction (*diastolê*) between the essence of God and His energies but not a division (*merismos*), although he never claimed to be able to explain the matter exhaustively.[47] Nikephoros Gregoras regarded God as being in essence single and absolute, which Meyendorff considered a philosophical (Scholastic?) concept,[48] maintaining that the term *theos/theotês* should not be used of His energies but only of His essence.[49] Palamism thus denies that God could be a *synthetos*. Ware draws a comparison with the soul and its capabilities and sees a similar difference as between an *ousia* and its *energeia*.[50]

The second meeting of the synod of 1351 discussed the ditheism issue in terms of the following questions and answers:

a–b) Should one make a distinction between an essence and its energies?
Yes, one should, and both should be regarded as uncreated.
c) Does it not follow from this that God is "made up of parts" (syntheton)?
No, as it is not a question of two realities at the level of being, but rather both belong to the one, living God.
d) Should one use the term theotês of the energies? *Yes, this is what the Fathers did.*
e) Does the essence of God exceed His energies?
Yes, that is how the Fathers expressed it.
f) If participation in God is real, then do we participate in God's essence?
The Fathers clearly denied the possibility of participating in the essence of God, while at the same time accepting that the true life of God has appeared.[51]

Palamas rejects the neo-Platonic idea of emanations arising from God as an explanation for His energy.[52] There cannot be two divinities, as the energies do not have hypostases of their own but rather the three hypostases of God have one shared energy, since they are of the same essence. Thus God manifests himself as a concrete Person and in concrete actions.[53] The three persons always act "as one" as far as their energies are concerned.[54]

The energies are not something between God and man but are God himself (in action), nor are they just a part of God but God in his entirety, for other-

47 Meyendorff 1974, p.225.
48 Meyendorff 1974, p.109.
49 Meyendorff 1974, p.96.
50 Ware 1975, p.135.
51 Meyendorff 1974, p.98.
52 Meyendorff 1974, p.130.
53 Meyendorff 1974, pp.215–216.
54 Ware 1975, p.130.

wise God would be divided into parts when approaching us.[55] Many people in the west feel that the energies must be something else rather than God himself, and that the *energeia-ousia* distinction means that a genuine knowledge of God is impossible. Palamas approached God from three perspectives, however: His essence, His energy and the Trinity of His hypostases. His essence represents His transcendence, the Trinity His personal nature and His energies God as men may encounter Him.[56]

It has been claimed that the *energeia-ousia* distinction holds good on the epistemological level (known to us with our limited understanding) but not on the metaphysical one (God himself), whereas the synod of 1351 confirmed that the distinction is an objective and not a subjective one, i.e. it is not attributable to our perspective. Ware, on the other hand, totally denies any precise metaphysical knowledge and insists that we can only speak of God on the epistemological level, in the form in which he manifests himself to us, and that His *ousia* remains concealed from us. Nevertheless, we can reach correct conclusions about God himself on the basis of such manifestations; in other words he is known to us and yet unknown. Otherwise we would not be able to reach any Trinitarian conclusions, either, for our belief in the Triune God has arisen on the epistemological level: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – that is how He appeared to us in terms of His *ekonomia*.[57]

There is also a danger that we may try to apply the precise logic of the Scholastics to the expressions of the Palamists without asking first whether these two systems are compatible or what the relation between the epistemological and metaphysical levels might be. If the two do not correspond, the epistemology will be devoid of any real value.[58] What we say about God may be contradictory, but in such a way that He remains real and genuine. Our message is based on the *ekonomia* of His revelation of himself to us, e.g. in the Holy Trinity, the incarnation, or the Eucharistic gifts – instances in which the Church has always turned its back on logically sound explanations and committed itself to paradoxes, albeit

55 Ware 1975, p.135.

56 Meyendorff 1975, pp.220–221.

57 Ware 1975, pp.134–135.

58 Ware 1977, pp.59–60. The modern, living tradition of the Church bears witness to the same fact in the following way, for instance:"The soul feels apprehensive at approaching the subject of the Light which visits man who craves to behold the Face of the Eternal. Its nature is mysterious – in what terms can it be described? Incomprehensible, invisible, yet it may sometimes be seen by the physical eye. Quiet and gentle, it draws heart and mind to itself, until the earth is forgotten, one's spirit caught up in another sphere. It can happen in broad daylight as in the blackness of night. It is a soft Light, yet more powerful than all around. In a strange fashion it embraces from without. This holy light, coming in strength, brings humble love, banishes all doubt and fear… Death flees from this Light, and the prayer, 'O holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal' in marvellous fashion is conjoined with it. Our spirit exults: this Light is God – God Almighty and at the same time indescribably gentle. Oh, how discreet its approach! It will heal the heart broken by despair. The soul bruised with sin, it will inspire with the hope of victory" (Sophrony 1988, pp.166–167).

rational ones in their own way. The experiences concerned are genuine and clear, but indescribable in words, so that use has to be made of analogies and images.

Epilogue

The task of preparing this presentation fell upon the parish priest of the Church of the Transfiguration of Christ in Kajaani, and perhaps I will be permitted to conclude with a general summary of this theme that was put forward by Fr. Dimitri Tarvasaho, former lecturer at the Finnish priests' seminary, on the occasion of the consecration of that church on 14th November 1959, the 600th anniversary of the death of St. Gregory Palamas.[59]

Tarvasaho notes that all mystics are convinced that they have *seen* God, but they are equally convinced that they have failed to reach the true essence of God. He has remained incomprehensible, unattainable and immeasurably sublime. At the same time, all those who have been interested in obtaining a logical analysis of this situation have found the teachings of the mystics of the Eastern Church conflicting and alien to their way of thinking.

Those who set out to interpret the mysticism of the Eastern Church are not interested in analysis but in describing what they have experienced and gathering those experiences together without trying to analyse them. The eastern thinker will recount *the living reality just as he experienced it*. The richness and diversity of life, especially the spiritual life, cannot be subjected to the strict formulae of rational logic. The key lies in God's sublime perfection, which is always way above our human understanding and conceptual powers. It is the duty of all of us to remain constantly at prayer.

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59 Tarvasaho 1959, p.279.

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God, known and unknown – A Lutheran and ecumenical viewpoint

God the Father – the giver of all good things

Martin Luther states in his commentary to the First Commandment in the Large Catechism: "

> *A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the [whole] heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust be right, then is your god also true; and, on the other hand, if your trust be false and wrong, then you have not the true God; for these two belong together, faith and God. That now, I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god." He goes on to identify the most common false god, or idol, as being Mammon.*

It should be noted that Luther is here positing a connection between a personal Christian faith and the content of the issue of God, even though it is only in the later parts of his Catechism that he goes on to talk more extensively about Trinitarian Christian faith. Faith is both trust felt in the heart (*fides qua*) and the object and content of that trust (*fides quae*), the Triune God who has revealed his love for us and his desire to save us specifically through his Son, Jesus Christ. A distinction is sometimes made not only between trust (*fiducia*) and conscious faith (*notitia*) but also between these and acceptance of a personal relationship of faith with this holy, Triune being who has revealed himself to us (*assentia*). It is customary in modern ecclesiastical theology, in a Lutheran context as elsewhere, to emphasize in general terms that faith is fundamentally a matter of trust in and a personal relationship with a personal God who approaches us through his Word and the sacraments and with whom we may communicate through prayer.

On idols and the significance of a common knowledge of God

The Christian faith thus opens up a saving relationship with God through his revelation of himself, on which the Holy Scriptures and the Church's apostolic and catholic understanding of its faith are based and through which God's message

of love, his truth and his grace are conveyed to us. The question of a god is not alien to non-Christians, however. As Luther also notes in his Large Catechism:

> *"No people has ever been so reprobate as not to institute and observe some divine worship; everyone has set up as his special god whatever he looked to for blessings, help, and comfort. … Every one made that his god to which his heart was inclined, so that even in the mind of the heathen to have a god means to trust and believe. But their error is this, that their trust is false and wrong; for it is not placed in the only God, besides whom there is truly no God in heaven or upon earth. Therefore the heathen really make their self-invented notions and dreams of God an idol, and put their trust in that which is altogether nothing. Thus it is with all idolatry. … (It arises) in the heart, which stands gaping at something else, and seeks help and consolation… (It) neither cares for God, nor looks to Him for so much good as to believe that He is willing to help, neither believes that whatever good it experiences comes from God. … If you have a heart that can expect of Him nothing but what is good, especially in want and distress, and that, moreover, renounces and forsakes everything that is not God, then you have the only true God."*

In modern theology the Reformed theologian Karl Barth, for instance, came to radical conclusions in his early works that, to quote Luther, "*The heathen really make their self-invented notions and dreams of God an idol".* In Barth's early thinking "religion" is a worshipping of idols, a hubristic attempt by men to reach out to God from their own standpoint, which is doomed to failure because of the impassable gulf that separates mankind and the whole of the fallen created world from God's reality. The word of God came into the world without any preparatory measures, like a streak of lightning "directly from above" (*senkrecht von oben*). Religion is thus one aspect of self-righteousness, whereas "faith", as a source of salvation, is Christ's revelation of himself. Barth's point of departure led him to be highly suspicious of "natural" theology and knowledge of God. One of the influences behind this was the transcendental philosophy of Kant, which maintained that we cannot know anything about "things as such" (*Ding-an-sich*) but only about what they mean "for us" (*Ding-für-uns*).

The second element lying behind this stance was the Reformed conviction that the finite cannot comprehend the infinite (*finitum non est capax infiniti*). One corollary of this is the Reformed doctrine of the Eucharist, which implies that Christ is present in the Eucharistic gifts either "in spirit" or only symbolically, whereas Lutheranism and Luther's theology underline the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the Word and in the sacraments in general and thereby union with Christ in faith (*unio Christi*). Luther did not, however, have such a radical attitude as Barth, the structure of whose revelation theology expresses the modern philosophical distinction between person and nature, or as those influenced

by him. Luther is known to have emphasized the theology of the creation, the incarnation of Christ and the works of the Spirit performed through external, material intermediaries. He is thus inclined to place a certain value, both in his overall theological views and on the basis of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, for instance, on natural morality, i.e. the ability of God to speak to us through our conscience and through nature: *Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they [who suppress the truth] are without excuse* (Rom. 1:20), and *When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, … they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts* (Rom. 2:14–15). The demand placed upon us by the love of God is indivisible, even though the law alone does not give us the strength to love. It is only the Gospel that can set us free to love with the love of Christ through the influence of Christ that is present in our faith.

In the same way the content of the "Golden Rule", "Do to others what you would have them do to you", and the principle of loving one's neighbour which it represented, were generally accepted within patristic theology and it was understood that justice and righteousness within human societies would be upheld if this were followed. Many of the Church Fathers were nevertheless of the opinion that this golden rule was not followed in everyday practise, and they also maintained that although the rule did not specifically refer to one's relationship to God, neither the rule itself nor the requirement of Christian love that it stood for could be implemented without such a relationship.[1] Thus this point of departure in itself is sufficient to require a distinction to be made between a natural knowledge of God and the revelation of God given to us in Jesus Christ and the participation in a proper relationship with God and consequent salvation that such a revelation bestows on us.

For Luther the notion of a natural knowledge of God belongs in the same category as the impossibility of fulfilling a natural moral law. Natural human beings who are seeking their own identity are bound up in themselves and their sense of love is distorted. Therefore, in order to fulfil the law, they have to know what point of law is at stake and how it has arisen. Luther accepted that we could be aware of the essence and properties of God on the grounds that his gifts and guidance are visible in nature (cf. Rom. 1:20). It can be seen that he gives us good things and guides us into doing good. Our Creator is righteous, wise, eternal, almighty and good. But merely contemplation of this, i.e. knowledge, speculative or abstract, does not ensure participation, nor does it make the thinker righteous, wise, immortal or good. When people seek good things for themselves from God, they are acting wrongly, self-centredly. They are misusing the knowledge of God

1 Raunio 1993, p.64.

that is in their hearts, using it narrowly, in an egocentric manner. Even a striving after piety could in Luther's opinion be misused and become a self-righteous seeking of rewards.[2]

What is needed is faith and the Christ who is present in faith as an effective source of righteousness, a gift from God, on the basis of which a transformation takes place in us who are sinful so that through faith we, too, can look on the word of God as a source of righteousness and God can regard us as righteous on account of Christ, i.e. we can experience justification and salvation. God changes us human beings through his Word and the sacraments so that we can become like the Word (Christ) and possess the form (*forma*) of the Word of God. The presence of this form in humans is a reality: we come to partake in the properties associated with God such as truth and righteousness. According to Luther, we humans should be allowed through the Word to share the attributes of God in order to be able to obey the Golden Rule and live for others in accordance with the purpose of our creation and love God above all other things.[3] On the other hand, this righteousness is no more than an incipient property and is able to transform us entirely only in the fullness of time, in heaven. In its fundamental sense, as a vehicle for salvation, the righteousness of man is always the righteousness of Christ, a righteousness that is external and alien to us.

This distinction between a "natural" and a "specific" knowledge of God does not, however, mean that both natural morality and a natural knowledge of God and yearning for him couldn't be employed in the service of pedagogical understanding and the conveying of the Church's message in connection with its missions, or when collaborating on issues of social ethics or communicating a set of values based on a Christian outlook on life to non-Christians and people with a lower level of religious literacy. On the contrary, it may be conjectured that in spite of everything, "natural morality" can function as a bridge leading to discussions of moral issues and linking the Church with the community at large. This may be possible even though this natural morality, understood in a theological sense, may not be the same thing as general public opinion. Man's natural longing for sanctity can be made use of for contextualizing the Christian message (cf. the apostle Paul's speech to the Areopagites, Acts 17:22–34).

Knowledge and ignorance of the essence of God - Christ the *Logos* as a bridge-builder

It is not merely a Lutheran view but an element of classical theology in general that one may acquire knowledge of God both through the exercise of reason and

2 Raunio 1993, pp.161–162; Martikainen 1999, p.86; see also Juntunen 1996, p.407.

3 Raunio 1993, pp.171–172.

through his revelation of himself to us, one specific form of revelation being the knowledge of God that leads to salvation. It has not been customary, however, to cast aspersions on natural information about God, as is reflected in the use made of classical Greek philosophical analysis regarding existence and the essence of that which exists in order to specify the Christian concept of God. In fact the choice of philosophy in this connection has also been reflected in theological distinctions. Thus St. Augustine's theology of the Trinity, with its Platonic and Neo-Platonic influences, differs from that of St. Thomas Aquinas, which makes use of Aristotelian philosophy. St. Augustine maintains that natural human reason can comprehend something of the nature (*Natur*) of God and even of the Trinity, especially within the structure of the soul, since in Platonic terms existent individuals acquire their nature directly from God. Meanwhile the Scholastic view, which is more Aristotelian in orientation, emphasizes the relative independence of the essence (*forma*) of the soul with respect to its initial cause, since everything that exists has its *causa formalis*. It is on account of such a distinction that, in this way of thinking, it is impossible to distinguish God from created beings other than through the "analogy of being" (*analogia entis*). The concept of God is both complex and at the same time pure and simple (*unus et simplex*), the latter implying that it cannot be subjected to conceptual analysis. The modern relational concept of God differs from both of these models, however.[4]

Patristic theology made use of both natural knowledge of God and the tools provided by philosophy, but was negatively disposed towards the idea of *theosis*, "deification", or identification with God, being based on natural knowledge. *Theosis* as a patristic concept implies that humans can strive towards God and attain identification with him in a manner that accords them salvation. This "participation", however, is both a theological concept and a Platonic philosophical concept that emphasizes natural participation in a divine being, and it is important to make a distinction between the two. Thus our Christian theology of the Creation not only emphasizes that God created the cosmos out of a chaotic, eternally existent mass of initial material but also cuts off the direct bridge between the Creator and his created universe by emphasizing that God created the world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). In our lives, and most especially in the matter of our salvation, we human beings are dependent on the *Logos*, the Word (Jesus Christ), through whom everything was created. We have no initial image in our souls that might enable us to go back to our origins and attain communion with God and participation in his eternal life.[5]

This theosis is possible only through Christ, the Word incarnate. The church father St. Athanasius, the "Pillar of the Faith", as he is often called, who was one

4 Martikainen 1999, pp.95–96.

5 Martikainen 1999, pp.96–97.

of the main architects of the classical Christian dogma, emphasized that Christ the *Logos* bridged the ontological gap between the Creator and that which he has created. It was he who uttered the well-known saying, *The Word became flesh so that we might become divine*.[6] The crucial notion here is the term "of one substance" (*homoousios*) as used in the Nicene Creed. The Son is "of one substance with the Father", and thus participation in Christ implies participation in the nature of God. "The Word of God became man so that we should have an opportunity for deification (*theosis*), and he appeared to us in the body so that we should gain some intimation of the unseen Father."[7] Thus Athanasius emphasizes the ontological bridge with God that we have in Christ Jesus, our intimate relationship with Christ and the nature of man as a passive object and recipient of the salvation brought about by Christ. In this model salvation through deification is thus entirely the work of Jesus Christ,[8] a notion that quite clearly calls to mind the "Christ alone" thinking of Martin Luther.

A second patristic concept of oneness in addition to that of St. Athanasius can be found in the thinking of St. Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Fathers, which later formed the basis for hesychastic theology and the notions of the unknown nature of the essence of God and God's presence in his energies. For the Cappadocian Fathers the essence of God will inevitably remain unknown to both philosophical and theological conceptual thinking because the principle of his divine nature (*ousia*) is inseparable from the hypostases, or persons, of the Trinity. In such a case the essence of God lies only in this perichoresis of the persons, in the form of an interactive penetration. This does not mean, however, that we should reject the idea of deification, and therefore also of salvation, for the Cappadocian Fathers were quick to emphasize the distinction between a knowledge of God and participation in the faith. In accordance with his apophatic theology, St. Gregory of Nyssa maintained that the essence of God cannot be subjected to conceptual analysis and, in common with Philo of Alexandria, emphasized the uncreated nature of the substance of God. St. Gregory also emphasized the role of Christ the *Logos* in bridging the ontogenic gulf and the act of accepting love in Christ as a means of achieving a knowledge of God. Fundamentally, it is God who finds man. On the other hand, a certain synergy has been perceived especially in Gregory's earlier works – in contrast to those of Athanasius – in the sense that when a human being comes to realise that he cannot find God by himself, God in his love rushes to meet him halfway.[9]

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6 Martikainen 1999, p.97, where she refers to this saying: Athanasios, De Incarnatione 54 B: PG.25, p.191.

7 Martikainen 1999, p.98, referring to: Athanasios, *Contra gentes* 30–34; PG 25, pp.59–70.

8 Martikinen 1999, p.98. In this connection see Luther's definition of man as a non-person (*Nichts*) before God, as discussed by Juntunen 1996, pp.405–409.

9 Martikainen 1999, pp.99–101.

Eeva Martikainen has drawn attention to the fact that Finnish research into Luther and his writings has, starting out from classical theology, laid emphasis on the notion of the uniting of man with God in faith on the basis of Christology and doctrine of the Trinity rather than of a philosophically argued ontology. At the centre of this is the incarnation of Christ as an act of bridge-building. Martikainen then analyses Finnish research into Luther as being connected with the concept of "union" (*unio*) derived from the Athanasian-patristic tradition, in spite of certain differences, and notes that this tradition understands "union" as reaching the essence of God and his attributes. Finally she concludes, "When we say that God is love we are at the same time saying something essential about his nature as well as his properties."[10]

This does not mean, however, that we should perceive any radical distinction between the lines of thought represented by the Cappadocian Fathers and by St. Athanasius. Both stressed the difference between a natural knowledge of God and deification that takes place through faith, and similarly the role of Christ the *Logos* in bridging the ontological gulf between the Creator and the created universe. It is also possible to build a bridge to modern theology and its relationalist way of thinking if we set out from the doctrine of the Trinity and look on the concept of union that is derived from Christ's incarnation as being in general terms both a relational and an ontological way of understanding the permanence of God's revelation of himself and its individual uniqueness in time and place. Athanasius was one of the major supporters of the Nicene Creed, a defender of the dogma of the Church, but it was the Cappadocian Fathers that carried his tradition forward and ensured that Nicene theology gained victory in the end. If Athanasius, who did not make any distinction between God's essence, or *ousia*, and his person, or *hypostasis*, set out from the oneness of God, the Cappadocians, as stated above, set out from the persons of the Trinity, or *hypostases*, and in the manner of the mid-Platonic philosophers, made a clear distinction between his *ousia* and these *hypostases*.[11]

The great theologian of the West, St. Augustine, rejected the substance-accident scheme of things and adopted the term "essence" (*essentia*). This enabled him to say, like Luther, that the attributes of God are not merely accidents but are one with God himself. God's outward works are indivisible, and the persons of the Trinity act as one.[12] One problem lying behind this, however, was that when the Cappadocian Fathers on the one hand drew attention to the mystery of the Trinity, they had to on the other to emphasize the ontological doctrine of the Trinity relative to the economic doctrine, with the result that the relation between the internal life of the Trinity and the process of the salvation of the created world

10 Martikainen 1999, p.102.

11 Mannermaa 1975, pp.58–59, on the defence of the decisions taken at Nicea.

12 Mannermaa 1975, p.64.

threatened to become obscured.[13] St. Augustine was evidently trying to clarify this point by emphasizing the outward indivisibility of the Trinity,[14] and Luther subscribed to this tradition through his own realistic theology that stressed the presence of God and self-giving love.

In the opinion of one expert on the theology of the Early Church, Georg Kretschmar, one could say that the effort to reconcile the tension between the oneness of God and the three persons of the Trinity, in other words to understand the logic of their simultaneous unity and division did not come easily for either the Cappadocians or St. Augustine. While respecting the mystery of the Church's faith, both attempted to express the nucleus of those beliefs in this matter in accordance with the fundamental tenets of Christianity, which also implied that there shouldn't be any perceivable gulf between them.[15] In Tuomo Mannermaa's view, it was precisely the fact that the Cappadocians' doctrine of *mia ousia treis hypóstaseis* came close to the model of the Trinity developed by Tertullianus, *una substantia, tres personae*, that sealed the victory for the Nicene Creed.[16]

A further complication regarding the correct relationship between the transcendence and immanence of God arises from the discussion of how Palamism and Neo-Palamism are related to the theology of the Cappadocian Fathers. On the one hand it would seem that the Cappadocian Fathers' distinction between *ousia* and the *hypostases* was retained in Palamism and Neo-Palamism, but a possible problem is concealed in the question of how St. Gregory Palamas in particular understood the relations between the *ousia*, *hypostases* and energies of God. Reinhard Flogaus has suggested that what is known as the Palamist controversy arose from the fact that Palamas understood the relations and distinctions between these three concepts in a way that departed from tradition. In Sammeli Juntunen's opinion, Flogaus interprets the distinction between the *ousia* and *energeia* of God that he objects to in Palamas in an ontological manner, whereas the Cappadocians and St. John of Damascus still understood it conceptually or noetically rather than ontologically, i.e. God sacrificed himself in reality and in a way that was open to perception, but at the same time remained transcendental and unknown. Palamas nevertheless emphasized the presence of God in uncreated energies in a manner that resembled the role of a hypostasis, a person of God, in the history of the salvation of man.[17]

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13 Mannermaa 1975, p.61.

14 Cf., however, Zizioulas 2008, p.68: "The Holy Trinity cannot be divided, of course, so where the Father is, there the Son and the Spirit are too."

15 Kretschmar 1994, p.36.

16 Mannermaa 1975.

17 Juntunen 1998, pp.500–502. Kretschmar 1994, p.41, sees in Palamas' concept of *energeia* a parallel with Thomas Aquinas' concept of created grace.

One interesting observation made by both Flogaus and Juntunen is that Palamas used long passages from St. Augustine's *De Trinitate* in his arguments, although without mentioning this source. This heavily disguised tribute to the great western theologian would seem to speak of a certain parallelism in the discussions in question, even though the conceptual tools used were different. Without doubt both have certain restrictions in their theology and both have allowed room for interpretations that run in different directions – perhaps Augustine more especially. It is well-known that St. Augustine's theology and the theology that bears his name can differ quite considerably at some points. This nevertheless serves only to underline the common faith that binds the Church together: the value of the Creeds, the Bible and the dogmas of the undivided Church when giving the faith a common Christian interpretation – in addition, of course, to the worship and prayer of the Church. The opinions of individual theologians have always been to some extent limited in scope.[18]

Flogaus states on the basis of his research that "Palamas' ontological distinction between *ousia* and *energeia*" 1) gives rise to a narrowing of the significance of God's hypostases and the soteriology of the history of the salvation of man, 2) can be justified only on the basis of an anachronistic interpretation of tradition, and 3) incorporates an internally inconsistent interpretation of the concept of *energeia*. From this he concludes that the decision of the local synod of Constantinople in 1351, which in a certain sense wrote the principal ideas put forward by Palamas into the canons of the Church, should not command any great authority.[19]

In spite of a certain one-sidedness, Flogaus' interpretation as put forward by Juntunen would appear to have received support from the ideas of Orthodox theologians such as John D. Zizioulas, Augustine Casiday and Aristotle Papanikolaou. Augustine Casiday notes that Palamas developed the teachings of the Early Church Fathers in an idiosyncratic manner that did not take the whole of tradition into account, but he nevertheless regards Palamas' method of responding to the theological interpretations of religious experiences arising from hesychastic prayer as being typical of Orthodox theologians. It is a matter of dialogue with experiences connected with a new life in Christ. Orthodox theology, in Casiday's

18 Cf. Kretschmar 1994, pp.36–37: "Es ist immer einmal nötig, sich wieder klarzumachen, daß selbst die großen Lehrformeln der Kirche zwar einerseits Bekenntnis, andererseits aber auch Schulformeln sind, die Sprachregelungen sanktionieren. Doch nur diesen Aspekt hervorzukehren, wäre auch höchst ungerecht. Bekenntnis will formuliert sein, und ohne feste Formeln gibt es keine katechetische Tradition. Der spannungsvollen Zusammengehörigkeit von Evangelium, Bekenntnis und Theologie entkommen wir auf keiner Stufe." Zizioulas 2008, p.15, emphasizes, in the Orthodox manner, the importance of the Ecumenical Church Councils: "As individuals, the saints and Fathers are not infallible. …Without any reference to the other charismas and functions of the Church, no individual is infallible. But any individual can express the truth of the Church as it has been infallibly formulated by the councils of the bishops, as long he is faithful to this truth. …Christian doctrine can claim infallibility only if it is faithful to the dogmas decreed by the councils. Many theologians have confused the teaching of the Fathers with the dogmas of the Church."

19 Juntunen 1998, p.505.

opinion, is capable of self-criticism and of speaking out in a creative manner in a new situation. The discussion in that case was concerned not with the substance of God but with communion with him. Doctrines are expressions of a theological life, and although a doctrine may sometimes be closely defined, its purpose is always to help in finding a way to God: *lex orandi, lex credendi*.[20]

In Aristotle Papanikolaou's opinion Zizioulas' theology acts as a corrective to that of Yannaris and Lossky before him, in the sense that he does not presuppose that the logic of deification must inevitably call for recognition of the essence-energy distinction. Like Casiday, Papanikolaou emphasizes that the Orthodox theological discussion on this point does not concern the substance of God as much as the question of how "being in communion with him" can be understood conceptually.[21] Zizioulas' theology displays clear overlaps with Lutheran theology. A comparison is made, for instance, between the communion ecclesiology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Zizioulas' eucharistic ecclesiology.[22] At the same time Bonhoeffer, who emphasizes the dialectic simultaneity between the individual and the community (by analogy with the distinction and connection between *ousia* and *hypostasis*) was profoundly influenced by Luther's *Sermon von dem hochwürdigen Sakrament des heiligen wahren Leichnams Christi und von den Bruderschaften* (1519) in which the reformer paints a vivid picture of the Church as a community.

On the one hand, Luther inherited the way of thinking about the Holy Trinity that prevailed in western Christianity, while on the other hand, there are features in his writings that contain elements from both traditions: eastern and western.[23] It is precisely in his theology that Lutherans are revealed as heirs of both the Western and the Eastern Church. Thus ecumenically and in terms of extracting everything possible from the rich theological traditions of the Christian Church, one should not try to choose one or other of the two Trinitarian traditions. Jouko Martikainen even goes so far as to say that Luther's doctrine of the Trinity is closer to the Cappadocians and St. John of Damascus than it is to the Latin tradition of St. Augustine, maintaining that Luther puts more weight on the independence of the persons of the Trinity than was the case in the Latin tradition and more weight on the oneness of God than did the Cappadocians. Martikainen also regards Luther as departing from both models in the sense that he made a direct connection between the unity of God and the First Commandment and saw this unity as based on the Almighty himself. In addition, he understood

20 Casiday 2008, pp.183–184. See also Papanikolaou 2008, p.242, and Zizioulas 2008, p.1: "Theology starts in the worship of God and in the Church's experience of communion with God. …Theology touches on life, death and our very being, and shows how our personal identity is constituted through relationships, and so through love and freedom."

21 Papanikolaou 2008, pp.241–242.

22 Kavvadas, Nestor, Person und Gemeinschaft bei Dietrich Bonhoeffer und Johannes Zizioulas, in: Von der Communio zur Kommunikativen Theologie, hg. von Barnhard Nitsche, Berlin 2008, pp.137–144.

23 Kretschmar 1994, p.41; Martikainen J. 1994, p.93.

the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas in the context of the omnipotence of God and the radical nature of evil and interpreted God's revelation of Himself quite clearly as belonging to the history of the salvation of man.[24] It could very well be said that as a biblical theologian and one who emphasized the clarity of the message contained in the Bible, Luther anchored his thoughts in the biblical accounts and concepts to a greater extent than many others, even though he did not entirely forsake the use of philosophical or theological concepts.

The ever-present personal God as an object of faith and true doctrine

Thus, although Luther followed Athanasian and patristic lines of thought to a great extent in claiming that we can know the essence and attributes of God through participation in Christ, he did not represent the view that God "as a being" could be subjected to conceptual analysis. Our knowledge of God is based on what God has done "for us" (*für uns*) in Christ. This led Eeva Martikainen, in her explorations of Luther's concept of doctrine, to note that "The God that is the object of this doctrine is always a 'God for us' (*Gott für uns*) and not an absolute God (*Gott an sich*)." What Luther was criticizing in scholastic theology was its abstraction and its confusion of metaphysical and theological precepts, leading to a situation in which God as a topic of theological study was threatened with subordination to metaphysics. Theological doctrine, which is centred on sinful human beings and God's revelation of himself to them, nevertheless always speaks of God, in Luther's interpretation, as a "God for us". This means that he is approachable through faith; the God who has revealed and manifested Himself to man can be encountered in the word and sacraments of the Church.[25]

Since God is concealed from us in the person of his antithesis, the Crucified Christ, we nevertheless require a doctrine that shows the object of our faith to be the ever-present Triune God. We can then accept him as the object of our faith and hold fast to this object so that our faith becomes an effort of will and continues to focus on that object even in the face of adversities. Looked at from this perspective, our doctrine is the Gospel, which in the words of Luther contains both descriptions of Christ and words of comfort to those who believe.[26]

Since Luther emphasized at one and the same time the objective focus of the Church's doctrine (*fides quae*) and the existential and personal dimensions of faith (*fides qua*), his concept of doctrine naturally entails an element of permanence

24 Martikainen 1994, p.93.

25 Martikainen 1999, pp.84–87. Cf. Zizioulas 2008, p.28:"God wants us to know that he exists *for us, for me*: he looks only for that acknowledgement that can take place person to person."

26 Martikainen 1999, pp.86–89.

and the demand that it should be made comprehensible in teaching situations.[27] In a broader sense we can perceive in this the dialectic between continuity and permanence on the one hand and contextualization on the other that is typical of Lutheran theology, or in other words, the simultaneous emphasis on the person and the community.

In this sense a parallel can be made with the neo-patristic insistence that God is a person and not a principle and that theology arises through a personal encounter with God.[28] This is not, however, a matter of the actualist or relationalist thinking typical of what is sometimes referred to as "Protestant personalism", which has been criticized in Finnish research into Luther on the grounds of its neo-Kantian influence, but rather of knowledge acquired through participation and the ensuing deification – although admittedly participation can be understood philosophically and theologically in a variety of ways. On the other hand, Christos Yannaras, for example, makes use of the Palamist distinction between essence and energies to suggest that knowledge of the "essence" of God implies definition whereas the "energies" are personal and existential in form, i.e. he makes a distinction between knowledge of a conceptual nature and knowledge acquired through participation. Yannaras has nevertheless been criticized for reading elements of modern personalist philosophy into the writings of the Church Fathers, although his intention was merely to relate their tradition to the present day in the form of a neo-patristic synthesis.[29] As noted above, the Palamist distinction does

27 Martikainen 1999, p.88. Cf. the neo-patristic claim of Zizioulas 2008, p.25: "We have said that we cannot simply repeat the theology of the Fathers word for word. …If we are to learn from them, so that their theology is allowed to challenge the way we understand ourselves, we have to take the vocabulary and conceptuality of our own age and use them to interpret the Fathers' theology faithfully. …This requires that we relate our own experience to Patristic theology, bringing one into the light of the other. All knowledge that is truly ours must relate in some way to our experience."

28 Cf. the typology put forward by the leader of the *Glaubenskongregation*, Gerhard Ludwig Müller, in his book *Katholische Dogmatik*. He distinguishes the following models for the concept of God's revelation of himself to man, the third of which, in particular, that based on communication theory, would seem to describe fairly well the situation in modern Orthodox theology:

1) The information theory interpretation: the revelation is understood as a set of assertions or truths.
2) The projection theory viewpoint: God is merely a rationally generated regulative idea or a *priori* requirement for statements of belief focused on him, which are as such products of the human intellect.
3) The communication theory approach: the revelation is a subject-subject relationship. Faith is based on a personal encounter with God in his word and his actions. Müller himself is in favour of this model and sees it as consistent with the thinking of the II Vatican Council. Among modern Lutheran theologians, Wolfhart Pannenberg, for example, could certainly be classed as a supporter of such an approach.

29 Louth 2008, p.200.

not occupy the same central role in the thinking of the ecumenically respected Orthodox theologian John D. Zizioulas.[30]

A clear ecumenical point of contact with Lutheran theology and that of Luther himself, and also with Roman Catholic or Anglican theology, for that matter, can be found in the observation of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who is regarded as a forefather of Eucharistic ecclesiology and was frequently quoted in 20th-century ecclesiological discussions, that "Wherever Christ is, there the catholic Church is, too" (Letter to the Smyrnaeans, 8.2.). Eucharistic ecclesiology, or the theory that it is the celebration of the Eucharist that creates the church as a community gathered around its bishop, was developed by a number of theologians beginning with Nikolai Afanasyev and continuing with figures such as John Romanides, John Zizioulas and Alexander Schmemann, among whom the last-mentioned, who derived his ideas from the patristic understanding of the Holy Liturgy, had a considerable influence on Archbishop Paul of Finland.[31] It was also Schmemann who inspired the American Lutheran liturgist Gordon Lathropp and the late Finnish Lutheran liturgist Heikki Kotila.

Starting out from knowledge of an ever-present, personal God and a faith that arises through participation, together with the theory of Eucharistic ecclesiology, it is possible to see much that is constructive in the idea of the Orthodox theologian Georgios Vlantis that more use should be made of the potential to be found in the apophatic theology of the early centuries of Christianity.[32] This would imply a refusal to equate our knowledge of God with the information about him as delimited by a particular church, acknowledgement of the limitations of human language, adoption of a creative understanding of the mystery of our faith, resistance to all exclusive ecclesiological models and the creation of space for the handling of ecclesiological and sacramental theological questions.[33] Understood in this way, apophatic theology is not an arbitrary matter. Its understanding as implying that we know nothing about God or his will is, in its current context, a post-modern interpretation of the apophatic tradition, which need not necessarily be construed so narrowly. It is true that our lack of knowledge about God has

30 See Zizioulas 2008, p.24, where he refers briefly to Palamas but appears to regard the solution put forward by Maximus and Athanasius as more decisive for modern patristic theology, which emphasizes the relation of love between the Father and Son as the foundation for the communion of the Church and for all theological knowledge: "The Son is the mirror of the Father, which is what Athanasius meant by calling the Son the image and truth of God. This is the conception that powered the theology of Maximus the Confessor. A relationship of persons, and therefore of love, reveals the truth, and makes known what could not be known in any other way. God is known through the Logos because the Logos is his Son."

31 Louth 2008, pp.198–199.

32 This is true regardless of the fact that the distinction between apophatic and cataphatic theology has been criticized, especially when the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, which influenced St. Gregory of Palamas and St. Maximus the Confessor, were shown in the early 20th century to have been written under a pseudonym, so that Meyendorff and Schmemann, for instance, were inclined to distance themselves from him (Louth 2008, pp.195–196).

33 Vlantis 2012, pp.239–240.

been emphasized quite strongly in the apophatic approach throughout the ages, but as Zizioulas has pointed out, the key to all talk of the content of the concept of God is to be found in Christ the *Logos*. In the context of the Church's theology and liturgy, the apophatic approach can be construed as a manifestation of silent contemplation in the face of the mystery of the Trinity and awe at a personal encounter with the holiness of God through partaking of the mystical body of Christ in his Word and the sacraments – a matter of knowledge gained above all through participation and not through direct conceptual argumentation. But still, faith as a matter of trust and the content of that faith belong closely together.

Both the patristic tradition and that of the Reformation set out from the premise that the doctrine that constitutes theology is communicated to us by the Bible. Common ground can be found especially if, in accordance with modern ecumenical theology, we set out from the theory of a single source, which can be traced back to the church father St. Irenaeus and was revived by the Second Vatican Council, and the related notion of *sola scriptura numquam sola*, "The Bible alone is never alone", for it is always combined with tradition, e.g. with the ecumenical creeds.[34] It is nevertheless the Bible, at the cutting edge of tradition, that serves as the basis for the explication of theological doctrine. This doctrine is given by revelation and is not a product of reason, and its value lies in the fact that it conveys the message of the Triune God who is present with us and of his grace as expressed in Jesus Christ. Thus, in the words of Luther, theological doctrines are not matters of opinion but "firm statements" – the truths on which our faith is based. They gain their authority from the fact that they are revealed to us by God, and in this respect they are more in the nature of observations that we make with the senses than statements based purely on abstract argument. They refer to the object about which they speak, the Triune God. They are not abstractions, but call for internalization in the human mind. After all, theology for Luther was the doctrine of the sinfulness of man in the eyes of God, so that it is essential for us to recognize our sin, but also to recognize the revelation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.[35]

Luther criticized the Scholastics' teaching that faith does not manifest itself to the believer through its object, i.e. the presence of Christ, but only through another

34 Thus Zizioulas 2008, p.7, for instance, observes that "If we understand that the continuity of the apostolic tradition is the work of the Holy Spirit, there is no problematic relationship between tradition and Scripture, for each serves the other."

35 Martikainen 1999, pp.79–84. Cf. Zizioulas 2008, pp.6–7:"Dogma is the doctrine that, through its councils, the Church confesses as the truth that brings salvation for every human being. This truth brings us into particular relationships with one another, and it brings the Church into a particular relationship with God and with the world. …truth is not a matter of objective, logical proposals, but of personal relationships between God, man and the world. …It is only when we are drawn into the life of God, which is triune, and through it receive our entire existence and identity, that we have real knowledge. Then we may realize that the Church's Trinitarian doctrine of God faithfully articulates the truth of our experience in this communion that is the Church."

of the virtues, love, and he himself maintained that doctrine and statements of doctrine point to the real object of faith, so that this can be internalized. In this sense he was critical of the notion that faith is a matter of taking certain abstract precepts as true if this is divorced from the object of those precepts, Christ as a treasure of the faith and conveyor of the knowledge of God that is essential for salvation. From this perspective it may be said that faith is a belief above all in Christ and in a personal God, not in abstract assertions or systems. Luther nevertheless holds fast to the conviction that the human reason, in the form of the intellect or understanding, can reach its target even in matters of faith, although the natural intellect cannot attain a knowledge of God without doctrine and the light of faith, simply on account of the magnitude of the object of that endeavour. In terms of theology, it is faith that represents that intellect or understanding. Since the treasure of our belief is concealed in its antithesis, the Crucified Christ, it is only through faith that it can be attained. The God who in the incarnation came to us in the midst of our deprivation, godlessness, sin, suffering and evil is attainable for us. Eeva Martikainen summed up Luther's teachings as follows: "…all doctrines are targeted at the same point: the saving presence of God in the person of Christ."[36] Grace has come down to us from above.

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M. Div. Soili Penttonen

The home as the source of a Christian upbringing

The Orthodox Church looks very kindly on children, and the basic principles that it lays down for their upbringing are extremely positive. They can be found, of course, in the Bible, the canons of the Church and the teachings of the Church Fathers, and they not only exhort and require us to bring our children into the circle of the Church but actively encourage us to do so. There is not a vast amount of material on this topic, but it does point very clearly to a positive attitude towards children on the part of the Church.

The classic example among the biblical texts is the well-known passage in the Gospel according to St. Mark (Mark 10: 13–16):

> *People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.'*

It is still the case even today that relatively little has been written in Orthodox circles about educational and family matters, and scarcely anything at all in Finland other than in connection with the teaching of religion in schools and research related to this. I will not attempt to speculate on why this is so; I merely note that this is the situation at present. The most prominent figures in the Orthodox world who have spoken out on educational matters have been Sophie Koulomzin,[1]

1 Sophie Koulomzin (1903–2000) was born in St. Petersburg but escaped to Estonia at the time of the Russian Revolution in 1917 and later first to France and then to the United States, where she studied education at Columbia University, New York, becoming in 1927 the first Orthodox woman to gain a master's degree in education. In 1954 she took up the post of lecturer in religious education at St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary in New York, a position that she held until her retirement in 1973. Her principal work, *Our Church and Our Children*, was published in 1975.

Alexander Schmemann,[2] John Boojamra[3] and Constance J. Tarasar[4] in the United States and Sister Magdalen[5] in England. Each of these authors has examined religious education from a slightly different viewpoint, laying emphasis on different aspects, but what they have in common is a reliance on the church's ancient educational principles and an insistence on the importance of participation in the worship of the church.

Basic educational principles

The canons of the church look on the life of the family, i.e. the relations between parents and their children and the rights and responsibilities of each, in the light of the Christian faith.[6] The issue is how a family can live the life of the church. Parental duties are expressed briefly and concisely: they should take care of their children both spiritually and materially and should not neglect this obligation, but a balance is achieved in this respect by means of an equally clear statement of children's duties with regard to their parents, the most important (duty and virtue) being that of showing respect (reverence) for them.

The fact that the canons take a stand on matters of family life in this way demonstrates that the Christian family is not "master of its own destiny", i.e. an entity that is independent of the church and its congregation, but is always in communion with the church. The family is an *ecclesioula*, a "church in minia-

2 Fr. Alexander Schmemann (1921–1983) was born into a Russian emigré family in Estonia and received his education in France. In 1951 he was invited to take up a professorship in liturgical theology at St. Vladimir's Seminary in New York. He was dean of the seminary from 1962 to 1983 and also held associate professorships at Columbia University and New York University. He was actively involved in the work of the World Council of Churches.

3 John Boojamra (1942–1999) obtained a doctorate from Fordham University, New York, where he later taught Byzantine church history. He was also an associate professor at St. Vladimir's Seminary with responsibility for the teaching of religious education. He served as secretary of the Orthodox Commission for Education and head of education in the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America. His main published work in this field was *Foundations for Christian Education* (1989).

4 Constance J. Tarasar (1938-) gained a doctorate in education at the State University of New York in 1989 with a thesis entitled *A Process Model for the Design of Curriculum for Orthodox Christian Religious Education*. She is now a teacher of religious education at St. Vladimir's Seminary.

5 Sister Magdalen, author of the works *Children in the Church Today: An Orthodox Perspective* (1991) and *Conversations with Children: Communicating Our Faith* (2004), lives at the Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Essex, England.

6 Very little is said in the canons of the church with regard to children and their upbringing. The subject is addressed only in two canons promulgated at the local Synod of Gangra (340 AD):

15. *If anyone shall forsake his own children and shall not nurture them, nor so far as in him lies, rear them in becoming piety, but shall neglect them, under pretence of asceticism, let him be anathema.*

16. *If, under any pretence of piety, any children shall forsake their parents, particularly [if the parents are] believers, and shall withhold becoming reverence from their parents, on the plea that they honour piety more than them, let them be anathema* (Translation: Schaff & Wallace 1900, pp. 98–99).

ture", as St. John Chrysostom put it.[7] But in spite of this designation, the family should in no way be an "enclosed unit", but should be open towards the local church, so that the children learn through their family that they belong to the parish community. Through the medium of the family each member can come to play an increasingly lively part in the parish congregation and the parish can in turn give spiritual strength and light to the family. This implies a state of constant interaction between the family and the church. The principal aim and goal of family life and the education of the children should be identical to that of the church – salvation and the achievement of communion with God. As Christians we are engaged in a constant search for God, as He is the source of all life.

The 4th-century homily of St. John Chrysostom (344–407) on *The right way for parents to bring up their children* is full of pastoral, psychological and educational advice for parents. In his opinion all education that is given within the church should be grounded in the Holy Bible, for this is the principal source of all pastoral activity, and since the family is an *ecclesioula*, its life should also be anchored in the Bible.[8]

It is the task of parents to raise their children to be "citizens of heaven", and St. John Chrysostom likens the act of bringing up children to the work of a sculptor, whose work will not be finished in a day but will take a long time and call for long-term planning and creative enthusiasm. The same is true of parents: every day they need new strength and enthusiasm.

The best teacher for children is the example set by their own parents. St. John Chrysostom urges parents to pray together with their children every morning and evening (preferably in front of their own home altar), as when they see their parents praying they will find it easier to begin doing so themselves. Children should also be introduced at a relatively early stage to the custom of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays and should also be taught liturgical hymns. And the most important thing of all is that they should never be in so much of a hurry that they haven't time to say or sing grace before meals.

Membership of the family is important for children, and St. John Chrysostom points out that it is the father who is responsible for the children's spiritual upbringing. It is only if the father is not a member of the church or is otherwise unable to discharge this duty that the mother should take on this responsibility.[9]

It is also clear that children need guidance. They should learn at a very early age that obedience is an essential and natural part of life and that it is especially important for development in the spiritual life. But obedience should be looked

7 Sister Magdalen (1991, p. 30) uses the term "microchurch". This can be realized in an external form in the home by ensuring that the home is blessed, that it possesses icons, that incense is sometimes used there, that liturgical music can be heard there and that the children are named after saints.

8 Sister Magdalen's *Children in the Church Today* is partly based on this homily of St. John Chrysostom.

9 The old Orthodox tradition in Finland, too, was to baptize the children after their father.

on as an expression of love and not just as a mechanistic fulfilling of instructions. In his opinion rules and discipline are the building blocks that children need; if they break a rule they should be reprimanded at once and then the matter should be forgotten. In this way their parents will be teaching them the nature of forgiving love (cf. the sacrament of repentance).[10]

Religious socialization

In his book *Foundations for Christian Education*, the American educationalist Dr John Boojamra discusses the Orthodox educational tradition at great length, basing his arguments on the views of the Church Fathers but at the same time taking into account the requirements of the modern western way of life. The key concepts for him are learning by participation and experimentation and integration into the church – in other words, religious socialization.[11]

Socialization is a life-long process, as is growth in church membership, but childhood is the most important phase of all. The family acts as the first socializing influence for a child, but it must be remembered that socialization is a two-way process: parents socialize their children, but the children also socialize their parents. In other words, the parents develop psychologically as they grow into their new tasks.[12] Boojamra similarly emphasizes this primacy of the family as a socializing influence on the children. The first world with which children become acquainted, both psychologically and spiritually, is their own family, and their world of values grows amongst the family to such an extent that not even their later experiences of school can alter them entirely.[13]

A Christian family is a part of a religious congregation, and Boojamra also quotes St. John Chrysostom's concept of *ecclesioula* in this connection, in order to emphasize and pay tribute to the crucial educational role played by the family.[14] Children learn to belong to a parish community through the medium of their family, in practise by taking part in its worship, particularly the Liturgy, as often as possible. The Orthodox Church is above all a liturgical church, and its services are central to the whole of parish life. When children take part in its worship along with their families, they realize that they are part of a larger entity, the whole family of the parish, and they develop a sense of belonging. The parish and its congregation become a natural part of their lives. As Boojamra puts it, children who do not attend church worship along with their parents are left

10 Sister Magdalen 1991, p. 33.

11 Socialization refers to the process by which the individual becomes a full member of a community by learning, i.e. internalizing, that community's values, attitudes and norms (Vermasvuori 1987, p. 9).

12 Tamminen 1987, p. 79.

13 Boojamra 1989, pp. 64, 79.

14 See Boojamra 1989, pp. 47, 48, 62.

rootless, with an empty spot in their personality.[15] The children's early education is to a great extent in the hands of their parents: if they do not take part in the worship of the church, their children will not do so, either, nor will they have a chance to form an Orthodox identity.

Like the Holy Fathers, Boojamra emphasizes the role of the example given by the parents in the religious education of their children – whether in the customs pursued in the home or in participation in parish worship. It is important to realize that small children learn through experience and not by being taught. They do not need to know and understand facts and religious truths; it is enough for them to take part. Understanding comes as they grow older. They do not, for example, need to understand the content of prayers; it is enough for them to be in the company of people who are praying. In church services they can make full use of their senses, for even though they can't understand everything, they can see, hear, smell and taste – and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit.[16] They can touch the cross around their neck, they can kiss icons, they can smell the incense, they can taste the communion bread and wine, they can hear the choir singing and they can learn to make the sign of the cross for themselves. This world of experiences is an exceedingly rich one, and we should remember, of course, that it is not exclusively the prerogative of children, as physical experiences of that kind are important for adults, too.[17]

Comprehensive education

The fundamental idea behind an Orthodox upbringing is that theology and religious education cannot be separated from the life of the church. The fundamental purpose behind both is to learn to know God, and not just to acquire objective knowledge about Him.[18] As Sophie Koulomzin puts it, the first duty of the educator of a child is to provide that child with an awareness of the presence of God. She maintains that many Christians are more aware of the practises of the church, of its moral principles or its national traditions than they are of the simple fact that *God is* – that his presence is a reality in our own lives.[19] In practise this presence implies communion with God and in God, communion with other people and communion with the whole of creation. Through the liturgical

15 Boojamra 1989, p. 90.

16 Boojamra 1989, pp. 42–44.

17 I would like to point out here that the Orthodox Liturgy is never celebrated for a particular group of people – not even for children. There is no need for this, as it is seen as a communal act of worship intended to involve everyone.

18 Tarasar 1994, p. 2.

19 Koulomzin 1975, pp. 19–20.

life of the church it is possible for people to learn to know and understand God and to feel His presence.[20]

But God is a Triune God. Therefore, in both theology and religious education, Christians have first to learn to understand Him as God the Holy Trinity,[21] and then to assess what is their personal relationship to Him and to their fellow human beings. Relevant concepts in this respect are those of freedom, love and unity.[22] In God we are *one body*. In fact, there are many manifestations of this unity in our lives: a small family, the community of friends, a nation or the Church. On each of these levels there lies a possibility for religious experience; indeed, membership of a group is an essential part of religious growth. This idea, in turn, brings us back to the liturgical life of the Church, for it is in this that the members of a congregation gather to act *together* as the Church, the Body of Christ.[23]

When speaking of the comprehensiveness of religious education it is important to be aware that the Orthodox Church does not make any distinction between "religious" and "secular" education, even though our multicultural, secularized society might prefer to see the Church as an isolated community that is closed in on herself and has nothing to do with "worldly cares". The Christian faith can never be placed in a separate compartment in a person's life, nor can anyone be a "part-time Christian".

The Christian faith touches upon every aspect of human nature and thus the whole of human life with all its activities and emotions is religious life.[24] In fact, religious education is something of an unknown concept in the Orthodox Church, something borrowed from western terminology. This does not mean, however, that the Church does not educate its members, although it may be said that it doesn't "school" them but rather transforms them[25] so that they think, act, work and develop according to Christ's example. The more willingly people will accept the spiritual food offered by the Church, the more they will mature as people.[26]

Education was always understood in the Early Church as a complex made up of teaching, liturgical experience and spiritual striving towards God. According to Alexander Schmemann it is precisely this comprehensive view of education that we need in the Church today more than anything else. In the early centuries of the Church the close connection between teaching and worship was reflected best in

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20 Tarasar 1994, p. 2.

21 See, for example, Sister Magdalen's account of her conversations with children of different ages about knowing God and the Holy Trinity (Sister Magdalen 2004, pp. 33-36).

22 Tarasar 1994, p. 2.

23 Koulomzin 1975, pp. 23–24.

24 Koulomzin 1975, pp. 29–30.

25 On "transformation", see also Koulomzin 1975, pp. 24–26.

26 Hakkarainen 1996, p. 34.

the teaching received by the catechumens before baptism and the mystagogy[27] of the Easter Week following their baptism. Nowadays it is customary both in theological colleges and in Sunday schools to divide theology into subjects, such as Bible study, dogmatics, liturgy and spiritual education, but as long as this is done we will to Schmemann's mind be distorting the Church's teaching. This division has the effect of allowing the content of the subjects to develop into separate abstractions instead of manifesting the faith in all its vitality, concreteness and fullness.[28]

Liturgical experience – liturgical catechesis

Alexander Schmemann emphasizes that the main purpose of all religious education is to introduce those undergoing that education to the life of the Church. In other words, religious education only brings out into the open that which took place at Baptism, when the person concerned was re-born of water and the spirit and became a member of the Church.[29]

The Christian faith is not a philosophy, an ethical code or a set of rituals; it is a new life in Jesus Christ. And this new life is the Church. It is through the sacraments, and particularly the Holy Eucharist, that the Church becomes what it is, *the Body of Christ*, and the Eucharistic Liturgy requires above all that the faithful should *gather together* to celebrate it, which is precisely the meaning of *ecclesia*, the Church.[30] *Participation* in worship and its *explanation* make up what we know as growing up into the life of the Church, or *liturgical catechesis*:[31] "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34) – first we taste, we take part in and experience the sacrament, and then we see, i.e. it is explained and understood. This, in Schmemann's view is the only correct Orthodox approach to education.[32]

The implementation of this liturgical catechesis nevertheless requires a liturgical reform within the Church, to achieve more active participation by the congregation in its worship and a deeper understanding of that worship. Indeed this will have to apply not only to congregations but also to the clergy, for this is actually a question of a new understanding of the concept of the Church.[33] As long ago as 1970 Schmemann was talking of the Orthodox Church as living in

27 Mystagogy was the introduction to the mysteries, or sacraments, of the Church that was provided exclusively for members. The period of Great Lent prior to Easter was the time when the catechumens learned about the teachings contained in the Bible. Then their Baptism took place at Easter, and throughout Easter Week they would then be introduced to the sacramental life of the Church.

28 Schmemann 1974, p. 152.

29 Schmemann 1983, p. 11.

30 Schmemann 1983, pp. 12–13.

31 The concept was defined by Schmemann and further developed pedagogically by Tarasar.

32 Schmemann 1983, p. 13.

33 Schmemann 1983, pp. 14–15.

the midst of a theological and liturgical crisis, the main cause of which was, in his opinion, the obscuring of the connection between theology and liturgy. On the one hand, theology had ceased to function as an expression of the Church's conscience and self-consciousness, while on the other hand, liturgy, which is the most central activity of the Church, had become alienated from both theology and the life of the Church and its members; liturgy had become enclosed in the church buildings themselves, although the intention was that it should be effective all the time, as a "liturgy after the Liturgy".[34] Similarly, Constance J. Tarasar has drawn attention to the fact that the worship of the church is still frequently looked on as mere ritualism, so that learning is schematic, taking place by rote, and the Christian life is nothing more than a personal show of piety.[35]

The Liturgy is not just a symbol, however, but an *action* through which the Church gives expression to its true being. The Eucharist is the core of the Church's life, around which everything else is built up; it is a sacrament of salvation, unity, love and sanctity that leads those who believe to live as Christians. Consequently, all religious education should be based on the Eucharist and should reach fulfilment in it. As the Liturgy is an expression of the Church's faith, life and teachings, it is in itself an educational method: *Lex orandi lex est credendi* – the rule of prayer is the rule of belief.[36]

Also bound up with the worship of the Church are the issues of the Bible and the Church's Year. It is impossible to understand the Church's worship without a knowledge of the Bible, and conversely, the significance of the Bible emerges in the context of the Church's worship. The language of the Church and its worship is the language of the Bible, not necessarily in a literal sense but in the sense that the structure, symbolism and imagery of the church services and the atmosphere that prevails in them are very closely linked to the Holy Scriptures.[37] In its turn the Church's Year adds a dimension of salvation and a new life to the concept of time. The regular use of the word *today* in the texts for the festivals makes events that took place in the past real for us at this moment in time, introducing an eschatological dimension that provides a foretaste of the coming of the Kingdom of God. This is something that can be experienced only through the worship of the Church. Thus it is not sufficient for children and young people, for example, to learn the dates of the feasts and fasts by heart; their teachers must help them to gain a feeling of the atmosphere of each feast, so that the biblical texts, the liturgical hymns and the ritual details of the services form a living, integral whole for them.[38] Tarasar looks on the cycle of the Church's Year in itself as a kind of

34 Hakkarainen 1996, pp. 32–33.

35 Tarasar 1994, p. 23.

36 Schmemann 1983, pp. 21–22.

37 Schmemann 1983, p. 18.

38 Schmemann 1983, pp. 19–20.

liturgical curriculum, since it is intentionally constructed with a view to conveying the fundamental truths of the faith and supporting people in their growth towards those truths.[39]

Religious education is a conscious, purposeful form of activity which takes place in every aspect of church life: in worship, in formal teaching in schools and in practical everyday living. In order to be effective and efficient and to lead to an understanding of the comprehensive nature of the Christian life that can also be put into practise, it needs to ensure that all three aspects are properly linked together.

Tarasar set out to develop Schmemann's notion of catechesis further in a pedagogical sense. She takes the term *(church) worship* to refer primarily to worship taking place within a church building but to include in addition all contexts in which the main emphasis is on the practising of the faith, e.g. retreats, or prayers in school. In the world of Christian experience acts of worship answer the question *what*. The individual comes face to face with the reality of the presence of God and His kingdom, and it is this encounter that answers the question "what". Although religious education is not the principal aim or purpose of church worship, it is skilfully woven into every liturgical act, whether verbal or non-verbal. Music, poetry, iconography, the use of colours and movement in church, all these things together proclaim the word of God. And it should be remembered, too, that the people in the congregation are not external observers but are absorbed as an integral part of the act of worship.[40]

The term *(school) teaching* is correspondingly taken to denote the classroom situation in which certain things are taught, but it may also refer to less formal learning environments such as parish study groups, camps or clubs. This teaching answers the question *why*: why is the Christian life what it is? Answers may be sought in the books of the Bible, liturgical texts and the doctrines of the Church, employing reasoning, careful examination, analysis, synthesis or guided interpretation of the Bible or the church's tradition. Formal teaching is nevertheless an important part of church life, as together with worship it helps to shape a Christian view of the world that, through praxis, can be transformed into the Christian way of life.[41]

Praxis (in the home and surrounding community) concerns first and foremost the family and church community, or parish, but it can also be extended to all situations in which a person is in some way engaged in religious interaction with another. Praxis entails answers to the question *how*, and serves to bring ethical applications to the fore. At this stage education is more personal, communal and social in character and involves searching for values and constructing attitudes that

39 Tarasar 1994, pp. 24–25.

40 Tarasar 1994, pp. 26–27.

41 Tarasar 1994, p. 28.

will help people in their spiritual growth and development. A father confessor, or an elder in a monastic context, can help an individual in this process of growth.[42]

These aspects of religious education, worship, teaching and praxis, are closely connected one with another. If any one aspect is emphasized to the detriment of the others the focus and nature of the education will immediately alter. On the other hand, the achieving of a balance between them is essential for the overall growth of an individual and the attaining of personal integrity.

Epilogue

Various educational ideals that are worth striving for have been detailed above, but the practical reality of the situation is far less rosy. Although the family is looked upon, at least in theory, as a highly important unit within the parish, parents are in reality frequently alone in facing the task of bringing up their children. Responsibility for religious education is being shifted to an increasing extent away from the family and onto "professionals", i.e. the schools and church parishes. One reason for this may be a lack of knowledge and expertise. In many case the parents themselves have broken off their connection with the Church and no longer take part in its worship, nor have the accompanying religious customs been passed on from one generation to another within the family. Mixed marriages, the dispersion of the minority Orthodox population and the fact that the Church has to compete nowadays with all sorts of other leisure-time activities that are on offer have all affected the situation, as have the changes that have taken place in people's values.

Boojamra also notes that the process of religious education now includes a substantial measure of prejudice of a kind that does not belong to the Orthodox tradition:[43]

- We often think that education and teaching are to be directed only at children and happen only in schools. We also assume that children can learn just about anything (in theory) without any empirical experience.
- We have made the classroom into the only correct and permissible place of education. We no longer attach enough value to membership of the Church and participation in its worship.
- We conceive of learning as something that happens at school and teaching as the prerogative of "qualified teachers". The church community is not regarded as a teacher and the parents in a family even less so.

42 Tarasar 1994, p. 29.

43 Boojamra 1989, pp. 8–9.

- We have come to deny the fact that doctrinal Christianity is in effect a religion for adults.
- Since we have tended to concentrate our attentions on children, we have distorted the nature of the Church by simplifying it to a point where it can no longer be understood. A Christian education has been reduced to a set of facts about the Church, of dates, numbers and simple statements of belief that can be dealt with in a classroom in the course of a 45-minute lesson.

Growing up as a Christian is a life-long process in which no particular age can be regarded as more important than any other, as growth occurs all the time. To achieve balanced growth, however, it is necessary for each of us to be aware of our own educational responsibilities. Boojamra emphasizes the importance of the *family* in the education of its children, but we could just as well underline the role of the *parish* as an educator of adults. We should also remember that in a parish context we are not merely educating children, but we are educating people to be full members of the Church. The Liturgy, which is the focal point of parish life, is above all a *joint* act of participation, thanksgiving and praise.

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