

CENTRO PRO UNIONE

A publication about the activities of the Centro Pro Unione

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Centro Pro Unione

A Ministry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement



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Centro Pro Unione Bulletin

A semi-annual publication about the activities of the Centro Pro Unione

The Centro Pro Unione in Rome, founded and directed by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, - www.atonementfriars.org - is an ecumenical research and action center.

Its purpose is to give space for dialogue, to be a place for study, research and formation in ecumenism: theological, pastoral, social and spiritual.

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Letter from the Director

This issue is interesting since all of the lectures are by women from various ecclesial traditions, namely Orthodox and Lutheran. In addition the speakers come from varied different backgrounds. Professor Dimitra Koukoura is engaged in the preparation of Orthodox priests by teaching patristics and homiletics as well as communication theories. Professor Gail Ramshaw is a college professor teaching students about religion. In addition she is a liturgist and composer of liturgical texts in her own Evangelical Lutheran Church. She is also well known for her lectionary commentaries to aid preachers in the preparation of the Sunday homily.



In our continued celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, Dr. Koukoura takes a look at what the Council taught on ecumenism from the perspective of an Orthodox woman theologian. Particular attention is paid to the method and the verification of Council's approach from an Orthodox vision.

Dr. Ramshaw gave three lectures during the Spring. The scope of these was to introduce our public to one Lutheran church's approach to worship by looking at the rites of the Lutheran liturgy, the readings and lectionary, and finally at the celebration of the Easter Triduum as the heart of the *Christian liturgical* year. Our goal was to show that there was a great deal of convergence both in form and content of the worship life of our churches. These lectures took place during an exciting time in Rome, namely the resignation of one pope and the election of another.

Dr. Teresa Francesca Rossi also conducted a series of lectures entitled: *Conosciamo I fratelli*. The series included a video interview and history of each of the ecclesial traditions followed by a lecture by the pastor of various communities: Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Pentecostal and Catholic. It is our hope to publish these in our series: *Corso breve di ecumenismo*.

Our Fall series will continue with our celebration of the Second Vatican Council. Prof Alberto Melloni of the Bologna Institute of Religious Sciences will speak on *Il diario del Concilio: Quaderni, lettere, filmati di un evento* namely on the importance of the letters, journals and diaries of the bishops and experts present at the Council for the interpretation of the Council's texts. Cardinal Walter Kasper will take a look to the future in light of the Council's teaching on ecclesiology and the search for the unity of Christians. Lastly Fr, William Henn, OFM Cap will round out the year with a lecture: *Capturing the Reality in its Entirety' (Ut Unum sint 38) Toward a Common Vision of the Church (Faith and Order Commission Text 2013)* which will look at the ecclesiological project of the Faith and Order commission approved at the General Assembly of the WCC whose theme is: *God of Life, Lead us to Justice and Peace* held in Busan, S. Korea.

Lastly, the Week of Prayer Material is available from www.prounione.it and www.geii.org

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James F. Puglisi, SA
Director Centro Pro Unione

Vatican II through the Eyes of an Orthodox Woman Theologian A Communicative Approach

Dimitra Koukoura - Professor of Homiletics, Department of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Conference given at the Centro Pro Unione, Thursday, 28 February 2013



▶ Prof. Dimitra Koukoura

Introduction

Firstly, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my dear friend Dr. Giacomo Puglisi, director of the *Pro Unione Center*, for this honourable invitation. I would also like to express my sincere joy, because I was given the opportunity to share with you my personal experiences and thoughts on the fruits of the momentous Second Vatican Synod, whose 50th anniversary is celebrated this year.

This commemoration coincides with two other anniversaries of important events that took place during the first millennium, 1700 years since the decree of Milan and 1150 since the mission of my compatriots Thessalonians Saint Cyril and Methodius from Constantinople to Great Moravia, the current Czech Republic.

In particular this day is important because of the voluntary resignation of the Holy Father Benedict XVI from his position as the bishop of Rome, which, being his personal choice, can be interpreted as a sign of his love for the Church.

* * *

Without any doubt, decisions of the Great Synod¹ had concerned mainly the majority of Roman Catholic Church's members all over the world. These members had seen their church proceed to its convocation especially for pastoral reasons. There were many problems in the post-industrial societies of the North, just as well as the combat for justice and national independence in the South. These problems and issues were certainly demanding a solution².

The opening of the Vatican II to the other Christian denominations,³ and the special reference towards the Orthodox Church gave hope for a renewal of inter-Christian relations. A shared goal was to give a common witness to the Gospel in the rapidly changing technocratic world

1 4 *Constitutiones* and 12 *Decreta* which were published (*promulgatio*) from December 4, 1963 (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) to November 18, 1965 (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*).

2 For the sociological and political preconditions of the Synod and its concern about the answers to pastoral problems see Arch. S. HARKIANAKIS (acting Archbishop of Australia), *Αρχιμ. Στυλιανού Χαρκιανάκη, (νυν Αρχιεπισκόπου Αυστραλίας), Το περί Εκκλησίας Σύνταγμα της Β' Βατικάνειας Συνόδου, Διατριβή επί Υφηγεσία* (Θεσσαλονίκη: 1969) 27-33 (= *The Constitution referring to the Church of Vatican II*, Habilitation Thesis, Thessalonika). See *Unitatis redintegratio*, Decree on Ecumenism, 19: "In the great upheaval which began in the West toward the end of the Middle Ages, and in later times too, Churches and ecclesial Communities came to be separated from the Apostolic See of Rome. Yet they have retained a particularly close affinity with the Catholic Church as a result of the long centuries in which all Christendom lived together in ecclesiastical communion".

3 "For this reason the Holy Council urges all, but especially those who intend to devote themselves to the restoration of full communion hoped for between the Churches of the East and the Catholic Church, to give due consideration to this special feature of the origin and growth of the Eastern Churches, and to the character of the relations which obtained between them and the Roman See before separation. They must take full account of all these factors and, where this is done, it will greatly contribute to the dialogue that is looked for" (*UR* 14).

of the sixties, and to show a willingness to reconciliation among, and unity of all Christian churches⁴.

More particularly, the friendship Pope John XXIII offered to Constantinople, and the strenuous efforts of an established joint committee⁵, resulted in a brotherly kiss between Pope Paul VI and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Athenagoras on 5 January 1964 at the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. It was also marked by the rescinding of the excommunications of 1054, on the eve of the Synod's end, on 7 December 1965, both in Rome

differences have intensified the conflict, that lead to the schism and they were identified with it⁶

Its rescinding in 1965 didn't imply a rescinding of church schism, but it channeled rays of light that can melt the ice.

One year after the beginning of Vatican II (11 October 1962), the second Panorthodox Conference took place at the island of Rhodes (26/9-1/10/1963). Representatives from all Orthodox Churches discussed the position they would take towards the Roman invitation to participate at Vatican II, and towards the proposal to renew contacts in a spirit of peace and love.

The inauguration of a bilateral theological dialogue on equal terms (*ex aequo*) after the end of Vatican II was the most important decision of the Conference. The proposal expressed the spirit of the well known Patriarchal encyclical of 1920 "to all the churches of Christ on earth"⁷, which after the end of the catastrophic First World War was calling for a cooperation despite confessional differences aiming for a common effort for the desired unity. Besides, after the end of the most lethal Second World War, at the same spirit of this encyclical was the participation of Orthodox Churches in ecumenical movement.

What was defined as the aim of a bilateral dialogue was the unity of Christians according to the will of Jesus that "they all may be one" (John 17:21). Its methodology was in conformity to the tradition of the One Undivided



and in Constantinople.

The excommunications of the 11th Century concerned two specific church leaders (Pope St. Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Kerularius) who played an active role during these turbulent periods of history. None of the churches excommunicated the other, but after maintained channels of communication between them. However, the excommunications as well as various theological

4 The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided.(1) Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature (UR 1).

5 I. WILLEBRANDS, M. MACCARRONE, A. RAES, A. STICKLER, C.J. DUMONT, P. DUPREY, Metropolitan of Elioupolis and Thyra Melito, Metropolitan of Myra Chrysostomos, Chief Secretary Gabriele, Deacon Evangelos, Pr Anastasiadis.

6 Ι. ΚΑΡΜΙΠΗ, "Ορθοδοξία και Ρωμαιοκαθολικισμός ΙΙΙ, η Δ΄ Φάση της Βατικανείου Συνόδου", *Εκκλησία* (1966) 136 [= "Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism III, the 4th Phase of Vatican II"].

7 <http://goo.gl/OMP8Qf> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

Church of the first millennium: *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*⁸.

We underline again that the serious engagement of the Vatican II with the ecumenical movement, where the approach of Orthodox forms a part of, was invigorated by the Pope John XXIII's, and his successor Paul VI's, strong insistence. It was also invigorated by systematic collaboration, and by the efforts of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, founded in 1960, and later, in 1989, elevated into the *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* (PCPCU)⁹.

The following text will focus on my personal experience of this Council's activities. One is related to the *Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration*¹⁰ and

8 I. ΚΑΡΜΙΠΗ, *Ορθοδοξία και Ρωμαιοκαθολικισμός, Ι, Η Β' Βατικάνειος Σύνοδος και η έναντι αυτής και των ενωτικών τάσεων της θέσεως της Ορθοδόξου Καθολικής Εκκλησίας*, (Αθήναι, 1964) 9-10 (= *Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicity I. The Second Vatican Synod and the Positions of the Orthodox Catholic Church on it and its Unifying Trends*). The dogmas of the seven Ecumenical Synods are considered to be indispensable, the theologoumena or the less important liturgical and administrative differences, however, as ambivalent. Likewise the principle of Patriarch Fotios: «έν ος ούκ ἔστιν πίστις τό ἀθετούμενον, οὐδέ κοινο? τε καί καθολικο? ψηφίσματος ἔκπτωσις, ἄλλων παρ' ἄλλοις ἔθ?ν τε καί νομίμων φυλαττομένων, οὔτε τούς φύλακας ἀδίκε?ν οὔτε τούς μή παραδεξαμένους παρανομε?ν, ὀρθ?ς ἄν τις κρίνειν εἰδώ? διορίσαιτο».

9 The origin of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is closely linked with the Second Vatican Council. It was Pope John XXIII's desire that the involvement of the Catholic Church in the contemporary ecumenical movement be one of the Council's chief concerns. Thus, on 5 June 1960, he established a "Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity" as one of the preparatory commissions for the Council, and appointed Cardinal Augustin Bea as its first President. This was the first time that the Holy See had set up an office to deal uniquely with ecumenical affairs. In the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* (28 June 1988), Pope John Paul II changed the Secretariat into the *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity* (PCPCU); this new designation took effect as of 1st March 1989.

10 *The Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration* Founded in 1963, the Committee seeks to promote, between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine tradition and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, exchanges of students, who wish to follow theological studies or other ecclesiastical disciplines at Catholic or Orthodox institutions. An international Committee for the awarding of scholarships, which depends on the Committee, meets every year in March: <http://goo.gl/lUdtqP> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

the other to the participation of Roman Catholic Church representatives, particularly women, at the Commission on "Faith and Order"¹¹, as well as at other different encounters of the WCC.

Visions perceived by inspired leaders need firstly the youth, who will adopt them and put them into practice. This can be achieved through education, enhancement of cultural goods and by sincere fellowship. In the framework of this perspective the Secretariat for Cultural Cooperation started to grant scholarships to young Orthodox for studies at Roman Catholic universities in Western Europe so that they might know better the new "face" of Roman Catholic Church. This happened as of the end of the sixties, in a time in which the mobility of today's students (for example in the framework of European network Erasmus) was still unimaginable. At this time possibilities for studying abroad were only open to a few scholars from international foundations and a few youngsters from wealthy families. However the WCC had initiated a similar cultural program in early fifties.

The scholarship program at the first decades was accepted by the Orthodox, with reactions ranging from enthusiasm to deep mistrust and even fear. Young students were happy having the chance to study abroad. Those bishops that accepted openly the decisions of the second Panorthodox Conference for having relations of peace and reconstruction of harmonious relations with the Roman Catholic Church encouraged their future collaborators to study abroad. Nevertheless, diverse ecclesiastic or monastic circles, with great influence, not infrequently commented that: "they give scholarships to our youth in order to make them theirs". Others were giving advice to young people: "Be careful where you are going as not to loose your faith".

How can all these reactions be explained?

Obviously these negative, sometimes even hostile positions taken had their roots in the behavior of Rome against Christians in the East during some painful phases of their history. I shall briefly remind you of the destructions of crusaders (11th-13th c.), the indifference of the Christian West towards the total subjection of the Orthodox East by the Ottomans (15th c.) and also the unfair attitude of

11 At the same time, the Pontifical Council also aims to develop dialogue and collaboration with the other Churches and World Communions. Since its creation, it has also established a cordial cooperation with the World Council of Churches (WCC), whose headquarters are in Geneva. From 1968, twelve Catholic theologians have been members of the "Faith and Order" Commission, the theological department of the WCC: <http://goo.gl/lUdtqP> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

Propaganda Fidei through the action of the missionaries among the enslaved Orthodox intending by all means to convert them to the Roman Catholic faith.

It is about several devastating events that took place from the beginning until the end of the second Christian millennium, events that did not fade away from collective memory. The reason is that they had spread disappointment and bitterness to Greek, Arabic, and Slavic speaking people persecuted by Islam for their Christian faith. This behavior from the West was adequately considered to be one of the reasons for the calamities of the Orthodox people and created a climate of deep mistrust against the Western Church and Pope.

Obviously, the historical bitterness and anger can't favor the sober thought and understanding for the contemporary Church of Rome. The coherence of its Head in those circles goes with the past; whereas for example the development of theological thought or even administrative and pastoral changes that were lead by its multicultural dimension all over the world are ignored.

The intense critique that was heard 50 years ago and still is heard today from diverse Orthodox towards both Synods, the Vatican II and the Panorthodox II of Rhodes is summed up below: dialogue can't exist, if there are differences. Among them, besides the primacy and infallibility¹² of Pope, the validation by Vatican II of Greek Catholic Churches¹³ is underlined. This action defined at many Orthodox circles the certainty for the dishonesty of intentions of Vatican II for honest approach. For this reason they considered it with enough suspiciousness for its action of Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration.

In the long suffering history of the Ottoman and Latin domination of the island regions of the Ionian and Aegean Sea, Crete and the shores of Asia Minor and

12 Detailed orthodox commentary concerning the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, some years after the promulgatio of the "Constitution" in the year 1964, see Archbishop S. XARKIANAKIS, as mentioned above, pp.79-259.

13 "This sacred ecumenical Council, therefore, in its care for the Eastern Churches which bear living witness to this Tradition, in order that they may flourish and with new apostolic vigor execute the task entrusted to them, has determined to lay down a number of principles, in addition to those which refer to the universal Church; all else is remitted to the care of the Eastern synods and of the Holy See," *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite §1. In the course of the bilateral dialogue the issue of uniatism found a compromise solution: an agreement stating that uniatism does not consist of a form of unity between two churches, in the year 1993 at the Theological School of Balamand, Lebanon, where it was widely accepted by the Orthodox: <http://goo.gl/Mml61T> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

Middle East from 13th to 20th century, the chapter "*Action of Western Missionaries*"¹⁴ as well as "*Studies of Greek children at the Greek College of Saint Athanasius of Rome*"¹⁵ withdraw bitter memories.

The educational role of Secretariat had relevant external efforts with the Church of Rome the 16th century and that's why a lot of people believed that the same history is repeated. The College of Greeks of Saint Athanasius (1576) had been founded with decisions made by one also great Synod of Trent (1545-1563) and was addressing to young Greek Orthodox with the following clear aim: to educate clergy in Greek and Latin (*summa cum diligentia*) in order to serve the idea of United Church, with preaching and spiritual guidance of the enslaved Orthodox. Necessary precondition for the graduation and the diploma was confession of faith towards Roman Catholic Church, as it was defined by Pope Pious IV (1559-1565) with the seal of 13 November 1564¹⁶

Certainly, research of sources reveals that the main goal of the College to make its Orthodox alumni to confess the Catholic faith didn't always succeed. Undoubtedly most of them after their graduation worked really on bringing Orthodox to the Catholic faith, as clergy at occupied regions or as scholars, lay or clergy in Italy. Some have lost their chance for high education for not denying the faith of their fathers and others took their diploma with public confession, which although didn't continue.

Without any doubt, the 16 century of Synod of Trent is not the same with 20 century Synod of Vatican II. Neither young Greek students were not living under horrific conditions nor were uneducated. Moreover, the institutional goals of the Secretariat were clear: consolidation of friendship and collaboration for the promotion of dialogue of love and peace. It was not about subordination to the Catholic tradition.

14 See A. ΒΑΚΑΛΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ, *Ιστορία του Νέου Ελληνισμού*, Γ' τόμ (Θεσσαλονίκη: 1968) (= *History of Modern Hellenism*. Vol. III).

15 Ζ. ΤΣΙΡΠΑΝΛΗ, *Το Ελληνικό Κολλέγιο της Ρώμης και οι μαθητές του 1576-1700*, (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πατριαρχικόν Ίδρυμα Πατερικών Μελετών, 1980) (= *The Greek College of Rome and its Students, 1576-1700*).

16 The confession of faith was necessary for everyone who held teaching responsibilities, and it included the following: the Symbol of Faith with the addition of *Filioque*, the explicit acceptance of the tradition of the Church, the Bible, the 7 Sacraments, the decisions of Trent on original sin, the remission of sins, transubstantiation, the Purgatory, the worship of icons, the indulgences and forgiveness, (*indulgentia*), the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church and the primacy of Pope. See for relevant source note 15 above *The Greek College of Rome...*, *op. cit.*, 93.

Moreover from the beginning of the twentieth century the relays of “*evangelism*” that glides towards proselytism had already passed to more dynamic communities that until today are spread with inconceivable pace all over the Global South¹⁷. The Center of gravity of Christianity from Europe and North America has already shifted to the South and the percentage of Christians between North and South had brought extraordinary changes at the Christian Atlas¹⁸. Within this reality, the open wound from the schism of West and East at the North Hemisphere, after a millennium it should have followed a real healing treatment.

It is true that time acts most of times as the best doctor and heals deep wounds from the past. However, in many cases it is proved insufficient, when sadness and wondering keep them alive in memory: the Muslim conquerors grabbed violently the children of Orthodox, for changing them their faith and use them against their families. How was it possible also for Christians from West to vindicate their children¹⁹?

In this case the doctor who will heal the wound is the one who created it. This has really achieved it the Secretariat for the Cultural Collaboration.

The experiences from people gained scholarships consist the most accurate and convincing evaluation of the educational project. During the period of the half century, the people who accepted this beneficence consists a long



list of clergy high in authority from all the Eastern Orthodox and Ancient Oriental Orthodox Churches. Among them His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and lots of scholar teachers are included.

On May 1976, when I had completed the first year of my postgraduate studies at Sorbonne and the Catholic Institute of Paris, I received a short letter from the Secretariat of that time because of the good news that I received a scholarship for my studies. Signature: Fr Pierre Duprey. Some months later I have met him,

an authoritative, educated and approachable clergyman who told me very kindly: “*I am glad that you have a classic and theological background and you are engaged with the language that Church Fathers used in their texts. I was impressed by your research plan, for the linguistic understanding of liturgical texts from the contemporary Greek -speaking and for this reason I recommended positively for your scholarship. When I had been studying in Athens, I had the same question with you*”.

The Secretariat had awarded a scholarship to a woman for a research program that was interdisciplinary. There was no involvement in the choice of my studies, the methodology of my research, the place of accommodation and certainly no

trace of proselytism. Only consistent monthly payment of scholarship for four years from the young at this time clergyman fr Nikolaos Wyrwoll.

One could say that the few woman awarded with scholarships might have not been included in a possible plan of “conversion”. However nor the huge amount of young students who were carrying studies of high level at well known Universities of Roman Catholic Church or at state universities in Italy, France, Belgium, Germany and Ireland never were a goal of confessional approach. Not even in the Colleges or the Foyers that they were staying.

On May 2010 the Department of Theology of Aristotle University of Thessalonika organized a symposium in memory of the three years of the dormition of Bishop Pierre Duprey. Among the hundreds that were invited, fifty have succeeded to be present for expressing their gratitude and respect for their warm friend of Orthodox Pierre Duprey of blessed memory. They have also described their experiences from their studies, their professors and the people responsible for the Colleges or Foyers, the understanding they had shown for their

17 Cf. *LG*, and “moreover, Catholics engaged in missionary work in the same territories as other Christians ought to know, particularly in these times, the problems and the benefits in their apostolate which derive from the ecumenical movement” *UR*, 10.

18 H. van BEEK, ed., *Revisioning Christian Unity. The Global Christian Unity* (Oxford: 2009), vii-ix. See also D.L. ROBERT, Boston University School of Theology, Witness and Unity in 21st Century World Christianity, Global Christian Forum Manado Meeting, Indonesia Meeting, 4-7 October, 2011: <http://goo.gl/2cfBS7> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

19 “Nessun'altra cosa e più atta a mutar il governo di una famiglia o città, che con l' educazione contraria a quello” Opinion on the functioning of the Greek College of Rome, P. SAPRI, *Opere*, t. 6 (Helmstat: 1765)146, and TSIRPANLI, *The Greek College...*, 4.

adaptation, the encouragement for their tiredness, the joy for the progress in the field of studies and their following career.

The Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Unity with its educational program adopted an effective healing treatment. It didn't base on oblivion but on the healing of memory.

As far as the Orthodox circles are concerned that are still not convinced about the honest intentions and are afraid that the young people may lose their faith, the answer from the same scholars is breathtaking: not only we don't lose our faith but we realize ours and we fortify it, because we meet people that have devoted their whole life on studies, editions, commentaries and translations of patristic and liturgical texts and often ask to know how they are experienced by the people of God and their spiritual leaders.

Unquestionably, the people awarded scholarships were young in majority clergy or candidates to be clergy, obviously for serving with their knowledge later on the Inter church relations and the theological dialogue.

Hereby from what is concluded, the women awarded with scholarships were few. However, mainly at the first decades before the fall of totalitarian regimes at Eastern and South East Europe, when consequently the number of clergy grant holders was broader, some portions from the budget of Secretariat were leaving for young women students. But even this small number of women added some color to the ordinary black and white picture.

Of course and the selection of women was not irrelevant with the general spirit of the Synod. Obviously it was going hand in hand with the recognition of the role of laity in the life of Roman Catholic Church²⁰, including women in a cultural context with increasing feminist

pressures. The requests "pray, pay, obey" which confined in the past the participation of women in the community and the three K's: "die Küche, die Kirche, die Kinder" that defined their roles in the society in the twentieth century did not have significant impact.

The contribution of women at the decisions of Vatican II took place at the stage of the preparatory period. The Permanent Committee for International Congress of the Lay Apostolate had been nominated by the Pope Pius XXIII that included prominent women from the Catholic Action who in collaboration with the World Union of Catholic Women's Association have been elaborating at long term relevant issues and have contributed on the formation of decisions of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

At plenary sessions of Vatican II, as it is highlighted²¹ there was not any woman speaker, only in September of 1965 fifteen nuns and lay women as auditors, who became twenty three until the end²². Nearly twenty more women are being added to the audience experts in bioethics, worldwide famine and peace movements.

After the end of the Synod the Roman Catholic Church had shown that she had recognised multiple talents of women and created for them a place for the Mission of the Church, for the multiplication of their talents with diverse important roles.

It is enough to compare the number of students and professors at Catholic Universities before the Synod with the today's reality: in the past women needed special allowance for entering libraries, whereas today, most of them teach²³.

Unitatis Redintegratio, Decree on ecumenism, beyond other things encouraged the participation of the

20 See the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, "3. The laity derives the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. They are consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10) not only that they may offer spiritual sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may witness to Christ throughout the world. The sacraments, however, especially the most holy Eucharist, communicate and nourish that charity which is the soul of the entire apostolate. (...) On all Christians therefore is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world.(...) 9. The laity carries out their manifold apostolate both in the Church and in the world. In both areas there are various opportunities for apostolic activity".

21 Dr Donna Orsuto, director of the Lay Center at Foyer Unitas in Rome, Professor at the Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Italy. <http://goo.gl/LhHFRN> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

22 A.VALERIO, *Madri del Concilio. Ventitré donne al Vaticano II* (Roma: Carocci, 2012) ii.

23 Orsuto did note that «the wheels are slowly grinding in the direction of an expanded role, even in Rome. Once upon a time, she noted, women needed special permission just to use the library at a pontifical university such as the Gregorian; today, she and other women are valued members of the faculty» <http://goo.gl/LhHFRN> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

Roman Catholic Church at the ecumenical movement²⁴. In 1965 the Joint Working Group set up with equal number of member of WCC and Roman Catholic Church, for discussing issues of common interest and promoting collaboration on a permanent basis.

Henceforth Vatican proceeded as a full member at the theological Commission on "Faith and Order" as well as at "Mission and Unity" with a counseling capacity. Also it supports the ecumenical institute of Bossey and works in common in the group of interfaith dialogue and of collaboration²⁵.

In 1981 the Commission on Faith and Order of WCC organised a historical Conference at Sheffield in England, which elaborated the answers of questionnaires that the Committee had sent to the member churches of WCC before three years. The content of questions concerned was about generally the position of woman within the Eucharist community, the modern Hermeneutics of Holy Scripture and the interpretation of the tradition for the possibility of ordination of women and the redistribution of authority and power not only to men but also to women²⁶.

The issue of women's ordination had already been discussed at WCC from the first Assembly of 1948, whereas in 1975 at Nairobi in the fifth Assembly, there were already several ordained women from some protestant churches²⁷. This was a dominant issue at all theological discussion and as it goes challenged all their members to give their own answers. From the extended catalogue of Sheffield that had been set towards the Orthodox interlocutors we can summarize the following:

Which is the place of woman in the life of your church?

Why at the Orthodox delegations women are not included?

Why women's ordination is excluded?

The Orthodox representatives at the beginning were surprised from the pressing questions of their

24 "Today, in many parts of the world, under the inspiring grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires. The Sacred Council exhorts all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism" UR, 4.

25 <http://goo.gl/CcPrG3> (URL Retrieved: March 20, 2015)

26 *The Community of Men and Women in the Church, The Sheffield Report, Sheffield 1981* (Geneva: WCC, 1983).

27 Metr. G. LYMOURIS, "Woman in Dialogue within the Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement in the 20th Century. A Historical Survey," *KANON* (2001) 1-24.

interlocutors and the insisting argumentation of feminist women for the reconsideration of history "through the eyes of women" and were answering spontaneously: "in our Church men and women have the same faith and perception of their salvation". The interlocutors then were asking: "if this really happens, why this is not applied at the life of the church? And why they don't participate to the dialogue, in order to explain us their position?" The one side was answering for the essential and the other side for its application in our times.

In the rumble of questions about the place of woman in the Orthodox Church and issue of ordination, in 1974 an Inter Orthodox Conference was convened at Chambésy, where only clergy and lay men participated. Regarding their fuller participation in the life of church, it was recognized that women can offer their talents with many ways such as the charity and catechism work. As for the ordination issue, it was stated that the Orthodox Church hasn't discussed it yet.

The inter-Orthodox discussions for women issues continued the following year with their participation, sponsored by WCC. These were culminated with the historical inter Orthodox conference of Rhodes that Ecumenical Patriarchate convened the autumn of 1988, with the topic: "The role of woman in the Orthodox Church and issues related to her ordination".

The interest of all members of the Conference, one third of them being women, an unprecedented percentage, turned directly to the better participation of laity in the life of church, meaning the automatic upgrade and broadening the role of women in multiple activities at parishes and dioceses. The possibilities and roles described analytically reflect as much as possible except the populous Diaspora at North West Hemisphere and the Orthodox world at Russia and South East Europe before the fall of totalitarian regimes and the Middle East during the bloodiest civil war in Lebanon. There is a long reference at the importance of monastic women communities and an encouragement for the institutional renewal of deaconess.

The ordination of women had not been an issue of vivid discussion, because it was not an innate problem of church communities. In contrary, the voices for broadening the participation of laity in the life of church were loud.

The obligatory percentage men-women at all initiatives of WCC, as requested from its regulations, in accordance with similar decisions of U.N, pushed several Orthodox to nominate women delegates at tasks of WCC, under different capacities.

In the environment of WCC, "the Orthodox women theologians" consisted a "rare and intriguing species", which was treated with respect, interest and readiness to be offered every moral support needed in case she declared

pressed, as she could not be ordained and acquire with this way a leading role in her church.

In a Hall of the University campus in Harare, 1998, in a special meeting for women who participated at the 8th Assembly of WCC, for two hours I was explaining the Orthodox tradition, the equal perspective of salvation for men and women, the influence of cultural environment in her roles in the church, which need to be adapted at a time. The ordination of women was subsumed in the diversity of charismas. In the end I have heard a lot of comments. I was surprised from one: It was the first time hearing about Orthodox. I didn't understand a lot. At least though I found out that Orthodox woman even though they are not ordained, they are not oppressed. It was an African woman that after the suppression that lived her country because of colonization finally she found recognition in her community, which helped her to study and gave her a leading position through the ordination.

The Orthodox witness in WCC is a difficult exercise of communication which is facilitated by affability, honesty and spontaneity of representatives of member churches of Council, but it becomes difficult due to the mutual ignorance of traditions.

In the curricula of our Theological Faculties the courses of Church History are linked with huge volumes of syllabus, long lasting study and frequently with stomach neurosis of students in order to succeed in the exams. In those endless pages there is a part that concerns Roman Catholic Church and Reformation and its main streams. However quite few people know the details of today's development of "*ecclesia semper reformanda*" and even fewer can understand its fracturing and transformation to "*ecclesia fragmentata*".

The same happens with the split Protestant world, which is represented in WCC, with the vision of Unity that has little knowledge of the unceasing Church History from the Apostles until today. The spirit of now and here (*hinc et nunc*), limits them in their case and in their present. Another surprise that I came through was a question by a woman theologian professor at a seminar in Australia: which were the indigenous people in Greece before Christianity came? She was of the aborigines from which Christianity was identified with Captain Hook. I answered her that I am from Thessalonika that might have heard from St. Paul's letters.

This shows a kind of loneliness among baptized people in the name of Triune God, who pray and know by heart lots of passages of Scripture, who fight with passion for peace, justice, environment and the poor. Without although the veneration of Holy Mother of God and the holy men and women, without the ceaseless experience of the Gospel through two millennia, the Divine Service

of Worship that brings heavens to earth and ascends the Eucharistic community to heavens in order to chant the Sanctus hymn with the cherubim and seraphim.

In the middle of '80s "*the ecumenical journey*" in WCC terms and of recent ecumenical initiative of Global Christian Forum started for the grant holder at the Catholic Committee for Cultural Collaboration. The first time in various meetings of Commission of WCC there was a need an Orthodox woman's voice to be heard. Within this unfamiliar context, Roman Catholic clergy, lay women and sisters was more familiar and near to me.

It is known that the Commission on Faith and Order is the theological let us say reflection center of WCC, with serious contribution to the case of BEM or of Mutual Understanding and Common Vision of Church that is because of prominent Protestants, Anglicans, Orthodox and Roman Catholic theologians, clergy and laity.

After the 9th Assembly of WCC at Porto Alegre the year 2006, the Ecumenical Patriarchate honored me by delegating me as representative of Faith and Order Plenary and Standing Commission. During the period of 7 years until the next General Assembly to be held in October 2013 in Busan South Korea, the Committee has been occupied with ecclesiology, patristic hermeneutics and anthropology issues. I make reference to among the thirty members of the Committee my fine and dear friend representatives of PCPCU, Fr. Frans Bouwen (Missionary of Africa), Fr William Henn (OFM Cap) and Dr Myrijam Wijlens, Professor of Canon Law at Erfurt Catholic University. With Dr Myrijam Wijlens we have worked together at a sub-committee on the research issue: "*Moral discernment. Moral issues dividing the churches*".

It concerns current issues that are particularly difficult. The answers of different church traditions are stated but not always acceptable from all. The effort within this framework is to be at least understandable. In this point the Magisterium and restrictions of Canon Law when are explained by a contemporary woman professor, then the strictness and authority loses its antique character and becomes a contemporary and fresh voice.

At the beginning of the II Vatican Synod, Pope John XXIII offered a hand of friendship to Patriarch Athenagoras. The official rapprochement of the churches started from this point on. In November 2006 on the porch of Patriarchate of Constantinople with a spontaneous move Patriarch Bartholomew took the hand of Pope Benedict XVI, clasped his hand and raised both their hands united up to the sky. This well known gesture illustrates rapprochement and prayer for beseeching continuous friendship and God's enlightenment so that "*His will be done*".

How I Worship Back Home The Rites of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Conference given at the Centro Pro Unione, Thursday, 7 March 2013



I greet you today on St. Perpetua's Day. I join her in proudly proclaiming that "I am a Christian," although I hope to avoid joining her in the arena because of it.

May I bring you greetings also from the Lutheran church in the United States. I will be giving three addresses here on Thursdays, and while my next two lectures will deal especially with my life's work – the

I will speak first of Martin Luther, then of the Lutheran immigrants to North America, then of the contemporary American situation, and lastly of my beloved worship resource, the 2006 Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW).

Martin Luther

Since I know myself to be a daughter of Luther, I am interested in what he taught about worship, and I

package that they have not even fully opened.

Luther sought ways to involve the laity more fully in communal worship, for example, by offering the cup to all communicants. As myself a layperson, I have always considered worship from the point of view of the nave, and I must rely on those who are ordained to involve all the baptized in the worship practices that they lead. Although I am now currently employed by our national church's publishing house to provide extensive weekly homily helps, I do not ever preach, and I am perpetually curious as to what lay people make of the biblical texts that they hear proclaimed.

Luther, like the Jesuit Matteo Ricci ministering in China shortly afterward, realized that to involve lay Christians in a meaningful way, the liturgy must be in the vernacular. Every few decades, the Lutherans in the United States undertake to re-edit their liturgical texts, to ensure that the speech on Sunday morning be both as profound and as accessible as possible. Since language is continuously changing, so must the vernacular texts of worship change. Beginning as a university student, I have dedicated much of my life to attending to vernacular worship language.

Luther knew that his German people loved to sing. Continuing this emphasis of the Reformation, Lutherans give considerable attention to church music, and in my case, to the words of the perhaps five hymns we sing each week. It is often the case that the texts of the carefully chosen hymns proclaim the meaning of the Sunday readings and the spirit of the



▶ Gail Ramshaw

study of the metaphors in liturgical language – I thought it would be useful to begin our time together by telling you about the Sunday liturgy as I experience it each week as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Postmodernism expects of us honesty and clarity about our personal point of view, and being a Lutheran in the United States has formed much of my thought, indeed, also my heart, about things liturgical.

discover that I have inherited many, although not all, of his concerns as my own. To begin the list, we must realize how much he treasured the historic Western mass. He felt no need, as did many later Protestants, to create new forms for Sunday worship. And I agree with him. It has been my experience that those who design new orders of worship are usually sadly ignorant of the wealth of what they are discarding, and so they throw away a

liturgical season better than did the sermon, or at least in interestingly alternate ways.

Luther began his scholarly career by lecturing on the psalms. Most Lutherans in the United States use the Revised Common Lectionary, which is the most recent Protestant adaptation of the current Roman lectionary, and it is usual for Lutheran parishes each Sunday to chant the whole appointed psalm, perhaps the choir the odd verses and the congregation the even verses. This weekly immersion in the psalter has enlivened our liturgical language by vastly enriching its store of metaphors. It may be that lay-focused religion is especially prone to literalist interpretation. However, there is no more thorough corrective to biblical literalism than praying the psalms.

Luther's love of metaphor and his skill at preaching biblical images were one impetus behind his condemnation of the medieval literalization of the biblical metaphor of sacrifice. Christians can speak of sacrifice only by altering its definition, away from its primary meaning of humans killing an animal to please their deity. It seems to me that, as the twenty-first century shows itself increasingly prone to literalization in the world's religious languages, we are called more and more to resist the literalizing of biblical images. For example, Jesus did not rise up into the sky on Ascension Day to sit next to God on a throne: so then we need to attend carefully to what Ascension Day means. I rant against much contemporary literalizing because it renders Christianity ignorant of both God and the earth God has made.

Yet we smile to encounter Luther, after rejecting the medieval doctrine of transubstantiation, suggesting that clergy keep the elevation, because the people valued it. Ah, we wonder: did Luther include himself, when he cited "the people"? When do we maintain liturgical practices that we judge to be in some way problematic, because the people like them? When do we add new things, because the people like them? How do we know what the people like? Which people?

Luther was concerned that the meaning of liturgical actions be clearly Christological, that everything in worship, as he said, "show forth Christ." If we want to enjoy, as my high-school English teacher said, "the wide truths of life," there are better places for that than the eucharistic assembly on Sunday morning. For Luther, the center is always Christ: which biblical readings are most clearly about God's grace? Which hymns express most deeply the communal faith in Christ's death and resurrection? What ought the assembly prayer be, in light of Christ? And so when I craft my weekly homily helps, I think of Luther, and ask: how might each reading, the psalm, an appropriate hymn, an appropriate choice of art, bring us deeper into the mystery of Christ? And how can I show people God's mercy in Christ that is hidden, as in the bread and cup, in all the texts of the liturgy?

Yet Luther considered many issues to be adiaphora. That is, far from explicit orders to govern the details of liturgy, as came later in some Protestantism, Luther rejected church law as a useful technique for achieving profound worship. So in current worship practices in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, there is considerable width in the range of advice given concerning liturgical practices, and I myself must stifle my peevishness when decisions about small liturgical issues do not reflect my preferences.

Although this list of Luther's liturgical advice might suggest that in every way I follow his patterns, in one essential area I have absolutely rejected Luther as model. Because he saw in the medieval canon a literalization of the metaphor of sacrifice, and because he knew less about the development of the Eucharistic prayer than do first-year seminarians in our time, he advised evangelical clergy to omit the full text of a Thanksgiving at Table. I, on the other hand, wrote my first Eucharistic prayer as part of a university honors project in 1967, and over the decades I have written many Eucharistic prayers, over a dozen of which have been included in the worship resources of several different Protestant denominations. I hope that, would Luther experience these prayers, he would commend my work of resurrecting biblical language in the people's praise of God. I am now finding ways to include more congregational responses during the course of the prayer, and so perhaps Luther would be pleased also with that.

Immigrant Lutherans

Martin Luther is famous for having remarked that he would rather drink blood with the pope than wine with the Swiss. From Luther on, Lutherans have danced somewhere along a continuum between Roman Catholics and the later Protestants, in some ways leaning toward Rome and in other ways partnering with Geneva, and each set of Lutherans did so differently than did the Lutherans of another area of Europe. For example, the upper class Lutherans of Sweden retained most of their rich Roman liturgical heritage; yet the much poorer Norwegians, repelled by the opulence of Swedish liturgy, preferred to worship in the simplicity of their sparse dwellings. The Lutherans who immigrated to North America brought with them this range of liturgical attitudes that reflected their home situation, most of which had relatively little meaning, beyond a comforting nostalgia, in the new American situation which they established. Sometimes the American situation forced considerable liturgical emendations. My favorite example of this deals with the German Lutherans from Saxony who in 1838 took ship to relocate in St. Louis, Missouri. In one of their ships, the *Amalia*, they stowed their valued ecclesiastical vestments, expensive communion vessels, and a complete

set of instruments and several organs to accompany hymn singing. Well, the ship sank, and with its loss went the liturgical traditions of those particular Lutherans. Europeans must also recall that nowhere in North America did Lutherans have any regional political power to require anything of their membership, and if people didn't like the patterns of one Lutheran parish, there was soon another congregation across town, or another Protestant denomination altogether, eager for their participation.

Contemporary American Lutheran diversity

The two largest Lutheran church bodies in the United States – the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to which I belong, and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, in which I was raised – do not agree about things liturgical. Some of the even smaller Lutheran church bodies resemble the Missouri Synod in being increasingly characterized by literalism in their biblical hermeneutic and American evangelical Protestantism in their worship practices. Some of these groups arose as protest movements over one specific issue, and their common response for example to homosexual clergy, constitutes their unity, rather than any liturgical markers. So it is that given both Martin Luther's position that much of worship ought not be mandated by officialdom and the American zeitgeist of the adoration of freedom, Lutherans in the United States worship with different service orders, varying musical styles, and distinctive theological emphases. Of some of this diversity, I know a good deal; some of this diversity I respect, and some of it breaks my heart. There are, for example, Lutherans who have lost the power of biblical metaphor, some whose sacramental understanding leads them to drink only wine with the Swiss – indeed, grape juice with the Methodists. Thus it is that you might encounter practicing American Lutherans whose weekly experience of liturgy is quite different from mine. Even within the ELCA, diversity is a denominational marker, and churches utilizing precisely the same worship resources enact their liturgy in distinctive ways.

The ELW: Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Let me now report to you what I know best, the recently published worship materials of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ELCA.

In 1987, several small Lutheran church bodies, which had been historically Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and German in background, merged into a single organization. As you can guess from what I have already said, these national church bodies nurtured somewhat different patterns and preferences in worship, and so the newly merged church undertook a five-year effort to develop on a churchwide statement of principles for worship. Committees of liturgical scholars, clergy, church musicians, historians, and lay worshipers collaborated to

articulate those principles that would characterize the worship of ELCA congregations. Wisely, the committees were constituted with persons who disagreed with one another on the topic at hand, for it was there in the very formulation of principles that such differences of theology and piety needed to be addressed. After considerable churchwide discussion and emendation, the document "The Use of the Means of Grace" was adopted at the national church convention in 1997. Then, working from this text, in 2002, four separate consultations, one on language, one on music, one on preaching, and one on worship space, released the full "Principles for Worship" which meant to guide the ELCA in developing new worship resources for the twenty-first century. Then came a set of eight volumes of provisional worship materials under the general title "Renewing Worship," which congregations were urged to use and to comment upon. Finally, in 2006, was published the primary worship resource titled *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, usually referred to as the ELW. Since then, additional volumes of occasional services and explanatory instruction have appeared. Once again, it is important for members of other communions to keep in mind that ELCA bishops have no authority to mandate specific worship practices, and the new worship resource book is not canonically mandated in the denomination. All reform must be achieved by persuasion.

First, the order for Holy Communion. Although for various historical reasons most American Lutherans fifty years ago celebrated Holy Communion perhaps monthly – in my home congregation it was four times a year – the ELW makes clear that the standard Sunday service is a Eucharist. Ten different musical settings of the same worship ordo are included in the ELW: when Lutherans ask "what liturgy did you use," they mean, "which musical setting." Here already are two fundamental features of the book: weekly Eucharist according to the historic ordo of gathering, word, meal, and sending, and options for how to en flesh the ordo. The ELW includes also ten different Eucharistic prayers – Thanksgiving at the Table, we call them – some historic and most newly crafted, several of them marked with a wealth of biblical images to assist our prayer and praise.

Printed in the ELW is a list of the biblical citations according to the Revised Common Lectionary, which is an ecumenical adaptation of the Roman lectionary. Most ELCA Lutheran churches use this lectionary, proclaiming the three readings, chanting the psalm, and selecting hymns that complement the texts of the day. In an appendix to the ELW is a daily lectionary, in which the readings from Thursday through Saturday prepare you for the Sunday readings, and those from Monday through Wednesday help you reflect more on those Sunday readings.

A second primary characteristic of the ELW is an emphasis on baptismal renewal. We concur with many

scholars that the church of the twenty-first century will resemble that of the fourth century more closely than that of the nineteenth, which was marked by homogeneous communities of Christian practice. Now, as in the early centuries of the church, baptism is less a familial birth ritual, and more the life marker of members of the body of Christ. Thus the ELW includes a symbolically enriched rite of baptism, a ritual to welcome baptismal candidates to the baptismal process, and various rituals of baptismal remembrance. On the model of Thanksgivings at the Table, several full Thanksgivings at the Font are included in the ELW. The assembly participates in the baptismal rite by reciting the creed and welcoming the newly baptized. Lent is understood as the time of baptismal renewal, and new Lenten hymns are provided that focus on baptism, rather than on the passion of Christ.

The ELCA is slowly proceeding along in what I call the hundred-year plan – we are at about year 50! – to recognize Easter as the center of Christian life and to make the Triduum the center of the Christian year. (The ELW, by the way, uses English rather than Latin, and so I might suddenly be referring to The Three Days.) Over the last centuries, most Lutherans borrowed from Roman Catholics the Lenten devotion of *Tenebrae* and from Protestants Good Friday's three-hour preaching event. Some of us are valiantly working away to lure Lutherans away from these services of the word back to the rediscovered Triduum. For when Holy Week gets separated from Easter, there is always the danger that Good Friday becomes no more than a personal guilt trip and Easter only a springtime flower show. In the Three Days, the assembly does not only hear what happened to Christ, but also the assembly enacts its meaning. On Maundy Thursday, we accompany Jesus at the meal by washing each other's feet and sharing at the table. On Good Friday, we accompany Jesus at the cross by praying for everything and everyone. On Pascha, we celebrate the risen Christ by lighting the light of Christ, seeing divine light in the darkness of the world, proclaiming the biblical stories of salvation with solemnity, and sometimes even with delight, baptizing and renewing our own baptismal grace, and celebrating the first Eucharist of Easter. These rites are included in the ELW: they are the rites not only of clergy, but of all the people.

The ELW inserts Lutherans into an ever-widening ecumenical assembly of the faithful. For the common texts such as the Lord's Prayer and the creed, the ELW prints the translations developed in 1988 by the English Language Liturgical Consultation on the texts we share in common. The Revised Common Lectionary has been judged the most important ecumenical achievement of the twentieth century. The ELW includes much global music, and musicians are encouraged to provide appropriate accompaniment for this diverse music. At least the first

stanza of eighteen different languages are included among the hymns.

Let me mention several more characteristics of the ELW. The ELW includes the full text of the 150 psalms, simply pointed for chanting, in an inclusive language translation. The collects reflect the rediscovery of biblical imagery, and many different biblical images of God have been added to the classic format. God is radiance and fountain, rock and redeemer, merciful master, creator, defender. I can read you a longer list if you interested. Although Lutherans have no canonized saints, the calendar of commemorations encourages Lutherans to honor the faithful departed. Since in American English nouns such as "men" and "brothers" no longer are used to denote humankind, the ELW is marked by inclusive language. The anti-Semitism in Good Friday's Bidding Prayer has been replaced with a positive petition for God's care for the Jews. Two new sections of hymns provide texts of lament and about care for the earth. The Sunday intercessions stipulate that always one petition address issues of the created earth itself. In providing a collect for each set of lectionary readings, the ELW includes some adaptations of the writings of the saints, so that, for example, on the Sunday of "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," the collect is "You are great, O God, and greatly to be praised. You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." At least some worshipers will recognize this masterful prayer as coming from Augustine.

In summary, the ELW hopes to gather the assembly around Christ in word and sacrament each Sunday; to strengthen the baptismal identity of God's people; to deepen the way to keep Holy Week and Easter for the entire assembly; and to enrich our worship with ecumenical offerings. I cannot pretend to you that these noble goals are regularly achieved by the nearly 10,000 congregations of the ELCA, but I can report to you that some assemblies are traveling together on the journey towards deeper biblical immersion and fuller congregational participation as they gather for the Three Days, each Sunday's eucharist, and communal celebrations of baptism. I trust that some of what I have said reminds you of what you have sometime studied, but I hope that much of it was news, and perhaps even a welcome report about how some Christians are worshiping on Sunday morning.

So what will this coming Sunday be, at my home parish? There will be one service of Holy Communion, observing the fourth Sunday of Lent. The fabrics in the sanctuary will be purple. Our organist retired last month, and so one of the musicians in the congregation will be playing. But our assembly sings with gusto, so the music will be OK. Everyone will face the font for an opening full rite of confession and absolution, in which the Trinity

is described in expansive language. We are in year C of the lectionary, and the readings will be Joshua 5: 9-12, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, those two proclaimed by a lay lector, and the prodigal son, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32, proclaimed by the lay assisting minister. The Psalm will be 32, chanted between the choir and the assembly. We will sing the Kyrie, but not the Gloria in Lent, and later both the Sanctus and the Agnus Dei. I hope the sermon will be worthy: it is not easy to preach on well-known texts, since the preacher is tempted in such cases to be clever, and usually clever interpretations are no gift to the Scripture. If the sermon is seriously inadequate, I will tune it out and memorize part of Psalm 32. I have memorized many psalms. The intercessions will include petitions for the church, the earth, the nations, the local community, all in need, and the desires of our hearts. March 10 being in our calendar the day to thank God for the lives of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, and March 12 the day of Gregory the Great, these commemorations will I hope find mention or resonance in the intercessions. We

will take a collection of money, brought forward with the bread and wine. The eucharistic prayer will be one especially appropriate for Lent. Through the course of the service, we will sing five or six hymns, composed in various centuries. Most likely, one hymn will be "Our Father, We Have Wandered," a text explicitly based on the prodigal son, composed in the twentieth century by Kevin Nichols, a Roman Catholic priest. Probably we will also sing "Amazing Grace," by the ex-slaver John Newton, and one of the Taize chants while we walk up to the altar for communion. The dismissal will probably be one appropriate for Lent: "Go in peace; remember the poor." My suggestion to the pastor, that we project onto the wall Rembrandt's depiction of the prodigal son, will not have been acted upon. Ah, well.



Prof. Teresa Rossi, associate director of the Centro Pro Unione and Gail Ramshaw, speaker of the conference

Hearing the Images The Lectionary and the Tree of Life

Gail Ramshaw - Professor of Religion, LaSalle University, Philadelphia, USA

Conference given at the Centro Pro Unione, Thursday, 14 March 2013



Good afternoon. Welcome to an afternoon about “hearing the images” of the lectionary’s readings. I will first speak about the human habit of seeing things that are not there; secondly about how Christian texts that are filled with metaphors that exemplify this human creativity; and thirdly about where my favorite image – the Tree of Life – is giving hidden meaning to the lectionary readings.

Seeing what is not there

The human eye sees what is here, what is physically before us. And because our eyes can see, we do not walk into walls, and we recognize a dear friend walking toward us on the sidewalk. It is good to be able to see with one’s eyes. But I suggest to you that the most monumental seeing of which our human species is capable is sight not with the eye, but with the mind. Eyes see what is here, but the human mind sees what is not here. No matter what is or is not before my face, I can see, in my mind, what we call an image, something not-here that is beautiful or dreadful, distant or fantastic. That image may be so strange, or even dangerous, once it is let out into the world, that the community locks such seers up, calling them crazy. For when that which is seen but is not-here is shared with others, it becomes more here than not-here.

Conversely, when such an imagining is judged helpful for human community, those humans who now together see what is not-here are bonded together in that seeing, and they are glad to be joined in seeing both what is here and what is not-here. The world is now layered, with more meanings than it had before, and we laud these visionaries and praise their seeings.

One result of the human mind’s ability to see what is not-here is art. People with talent to externalize their internal sight share it, not only

by describing the not-here, but by crafting it in two or three dimensions. So an early human, seeing several bumps on the stone walls of a cave, saw also what was not there: the figure of a bison. And the artist drew that not-here onto the bumps on the cave wall, and now the bison was here, for everyone to see. And visiting the caves of Spain and France, we can still see it, the not-here become here. What it meant to be human, that is, what human minds could see, fills our history books and museums and vacation travels.

We can define religion as a communal sharing of what is not here. With our eyes we can see one another, life and death, sufferings and joys, but for over 50,000 years humans have seen what is not-here: gods, angels, demons, souls, values, an entire other existence. What is means to be a Hindu or a Jew or a Christian is to join with countless others like yourself to affirm a certain set of the not-here that is behind, beyond, within, what is here. Religious folk claim that the not-here is in some ways more significant than the here. The not-here gives to the here any profound meaning that it might have.

Along with the cave paintings, the paintings on the walls of Christian churches exemplify this human delight in what is not here. At San Clemente here in Rome, we now have



before our eyes what was in the minds of several different centuries of Christian worshipers. My favorite is on the main floor, where the exuberant image of the Tree of Life is the not-here that stands behind and within the enacted rituals of the medieval worship. Thus liturgical theologians must discuss and debate whether a certain wall-painting is one that provides the best interface with the rituals taking place in the room. Those sixteenth-century Calvinist clergy who white-washed their sanctuaries gave radical answers to this question, for they judged it better for worshipers to see only a black-garbed preacher than to gaze at images of the lives of the saints. Currently, the white-wash is being removed from those walls, and once again the liturgical theologians ought to inquire whether such-and-such images are not only historically fascinating, but also liturgically worthy as the not-here that provides the context and gives the meaning to the here. You will not be surprised that although I understand that churches need cleaning, that junk accumulates, that Aunt Suzie's favorite statue really must be thrown out, I do not concur with any Christian denomination, whether Calvinist or renewed Roman Catholic, that in the name of contemporary aesthetic enacts the worship of the church in a room with bare walls and maybe one crucifix. Not even the caveman did this. We need to see and to share with each other what is not-here.

Speaking what is not here

But humans not only cover their walls with images: they share these images verbally. In the twentieth century, some phenomenologists suggested that what is truly essentially human, even more than wall paintings, is metaphor. The toddler who played for an hour in the water looks at her hands, and calls out with dismay, "Raisin fingers!" Humans speak what is not-here, and so create it to be here. What is not here becomes a force in the human community, perhaps a positive force, perhaps a negative one. Humans are always describing A in terms of B, and the listener thinks, ah, A is not B; well, perhaps in a way A is like B; goodness, A is more like B than I ever would have thought; indeed, I will never think about A in the same old way again; thank you, poet. The metaphor has created a new A, a sort of A prime.

One of the indispensable vehicles that religion has as it conveys its valued not-here is its texts. Primary theology, we call it: words so laden with the images of the meanings of life and death that we write the image-laden words down and repeat them over the centuries and urge the faithful to memorize them and reprint scholarly editions and write dissertations about them. We are trying to say the unspeakable, and so we need to call upon a vision of the not-here to bring the unspeakable into focus in our midst. How to say A? Let's try Q or X.

All our treasured Christian documents are filled with metaphors. Read once again, for example, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Assisting the readers in their understanding of the content of the document, the text includes many images that assume communal recognition: the temple of the church, the pilgrims who journey, we who are thirsty, the church that is mother, the church that is bride. Outsiders may remonstrate that our buildings are not temples, we are not pilgrims, I am not thirsty, the church is not mother or bride. And in the text of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy there is more: sheepfold, adoption, light, chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, redeemed people around the throne. All this metaphor is not-here. The significance of these metaphors, beloved by the insiders, is more or less unavailable to the outsider or the newcomer. And so religions must teach the metaphors: we are a temple. What's a temple? How are we a temple, since we, in fact, are not a temple?

What images did the writers employ, how did they say what is not-here, so that we can come to believe the not-here as the meaning of the here? As a small child, I wondered at the translation in our church's hymnal of Psalm 22:21, in which we asked God to save us from the horn of the unicorn. But, literate kid that I was, I knew that the horn of the wondrous unicorn fulfilled your wishes, and so was something to be sought, not avoided. Current translations of Psalm 22 clarify the metaphor: it's the horn of the wild bull from which we beg for God's protection. And I remember that in junior high school, I was in a state youth choir that sang the Bach harmonization of "Wachet Auf": what, I asked my mother, was the "nuptial hall"? Repeatedly at worship I find myself wondering how much sense, if any, do many worshipers make of the myriad metaphors in our liturgical texts. Yet while some liturgists suggest that all these unfamiliar metaphors be dumped, I argue fiercely that we not strip our Christian imagination of its wealth, but rather we share its glistening gems with all the worshipers.

Even though a worthy or totally unworthy painting on our sanctuary wall has seared itself into the consciousness of faithful worshipers, never able to be erased even decades after the building has been destroyed, we have no good system for canonizing wall images and statues in our sanctuaries. Yet for metaphor, we do: Christians have canonized the words of the Bible. The words are so powerful in bringing the not-here into our assemblies that it is as if the very Creator of the universe spoke them into existence. In these words the community finds the highest truths, the deepest values, the most profound expressions of the not-here that are our baptismal beliefs. The religious tradition represented by the millennium of written texts that are our sacred Scriptures remembers previous images as if they are the

foundation of a house, and later authors build upon that foundation rooms full of furniture and rugs and curtains. Thus it is that reading the New Testament requires that we begin our journey in the basement, and walking through the mansion look carefully into each room, tracing the growth in height and depth of the initial images.

So we confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Does this sound like a simple credo? “Jesus,” the second Joshua, leading us into the promised land; “Christ,” the ancient Israelite king become a Jewish hope for freedom from oppression; Hebrew turned into Greek, *mochiach* become *christos*; and “Lord” imagines not only an honored sir, but also the unspeakable name of God, *afire* in the burning bush. We Christians do not say a thing without recourse to a tradition of images. Yet Christians often must turn upside down any archetypal religious imagery if it can apply well to our Savior. Biblical images carry in them a history of devotion translated through several languages. Daughter of Martin Luther although I am, I do have some sympathy for the medieval idea that the Bible ought to be kept away from those who are unlearned, for the word is so easy to misunderstand, so difficult to fathom.

Images in the lectionary readings

Now to the lectionary readings. Are there any persons here in the room whose church does not espouse a lectionary? To construct a lectionary is judgment upon judgment, whether it is done by decades of committees or the lonely preacher. First, these texts are so valued that we term them sacred Scripture and probe their countless metaphors for the truths within. Second, the sacred Scriptures are so lengthy, and as Augustine said, “of mountainous difficulty and enveloped in mysteries,” that selections must be made. Shall we read aloud on a Sunday the regulations for when a building that has leprosy is to be dismantled? no: the narrative of Jesus healing a leper? yes. The current three-year lectionary proclaims more of the Bible than did any previous lectionary, omitting the proposal of Ulrich Zwingli to read through the entire Scriptures week by week, chapter by chapter, since as you can well imagine, this proposal died of impossibility somewhere in the middle of Leviticus.

Despite the differences between our several churches, there is in common the expectation that the preacher is to expound on the texts that were proclaimed in the meeting. Dismissing the sad truth that much preaching does not do this, there are still several legitimate and faithful ways that the biblical texts can be approached. Preachers may focus on the historical background of the three texts, the movement through the Gospel of the year, the interrelationships between the three readings, the denominational tradition for usage, the dance between the original meaning of the words and the different contemporary connotations, the implications for personal

morality and social justice. Judging from the over 5000 sermons I have heard and the hundreds more I have read, I find it hard to list as one of the legitimate techniques the currently popular “My Story, Your Story” approach. But there is also the way of Ambrose, an exploration into the metaphors of the Scriptures, and this is what I have spent my life thinking about.

This past week the Revised Common Lectionary and the Roman lectionary appointed identical readings. First we can consider Joshua 5:9-12. Joshua is the same name as Jesus. He led the people into the promised land, and so does Christ. So, metaphorically, standing with Joshua is standing with Jesus Christ. The reading mentions Egypt, a place of slavery, now gone, and so is the slavery to sin that we hope during Lent to abandon. The reading reports that the Israelites kept the Passover, and we Christians keep the coming Easter as our Passover, our celebration of entrance into life. The manna, which ceased in Palestine, is now on the walls of many churches, the bread raining down from heaven, often in the shape of medieval communion hosts, for God continues the gift of daily bread for which we pray. Images: Joshua, Egypt, the Passover, manna. One short reading, at least four images, pictures of the not-here brought into the assembly for our growth in faith and our delight in mercy.

The Tree of Life

What has been of greatest interest to me over the last three decades has been the ubiquitous archetypal image of the Tree of Life. Let me give you first a quick run-down of some of the uses that world religions have made of this image: In Hinduism, Krishna appears in a kadamba tree, and at first only the cattle recognize his divinity. (Sound familiar?) In Buddhism, the Buddha sits under the Bodhi tree and finally receives enlightenment. In Shinto, the sacred kami appear on earth in the branches of a sakaki tree. In Islam, the paisley pattern on the prayer rug represents the tree in God’s garden, since prayer brings the believer already into paradise. Medieval Jews drew the emanations of God as a tree rooted in heaven and filling the earth. The Norse legends imagine the Yggdrasil as the mammoth tree that held the layers of the universe together. Many of the Native American tribes give a tree a primary role in their sacred stories, and the Lakota have revived their annual summer solstice ritual in which everyone dances around the sacred tree as a sign of the renewal of their communal life. And those of us who set up and light a tree in our homes at Christmas, what is this but the ancient evergreen that during the dead of winter symbolizes the hope that the light of the sun will return to bring green once again to our northern lands?

I see that Tree of Life in our three-year lectionaries in several places. Recalling that in Deuteronomy God is said to curse anyone who is executed by being hanged

on a tree (Deut. 21:22-23), Paul writes in Galatians that Jesus was hanged on a tree. Perhaps it is this layering of images by Paul that began the Christian practice of depicting the cross as if it were a tree. The Roman Empire executed vast numbers of people, not on a tree, but on a pole permanently affixed deep in the ground. Calling the cross a tree puts life into the pole, and this mis-naming, this not-here, continued in the New Testament, where Luke proclaims the cross as a tree in Acts 5:30, Acts 10:39, and Acts 13:29, two of which are included in the texts of the Revised Common Lectionary, although not, alas, in the Roman lectionary.

A primary example of the way images grow in the communal imagination is encountered on Advent 2, year A. Israel was typical of monarchies in the ancient Near East in describing the king, not matter how wretched and unjust he actually was, as if he were the cosmic Tree of Life. His vitality signified, and in fact ensured, the vibrancy of the kingdom. His engendering dozens of sons primed the pump of his nation-state. His power held up the sky. During Advent Christians hear again from Isaiah 11 of this Tree of Life that will grow forth from the loins of the dead Jesse so that the great King David will live again in his mighty offspring. But because we know that metaphors are always more, even other, than first perceived, the lectionary sets the poem about the tree of Jesse next to the preaching of John the Baptist, who speaks of the trees that are fruitful and those that are not. So what have we here? First the prehistoric legend of a Tree of Life holding up the sky, then the rise of male monarchies, then the metaphor of the king as the embodiment of this cosmic tree, then the Israelite hope for such a mighty king, then the reign of the Roman Emperor, then the prophet John remembered by the evangelists, who affix the image of the tree onto each individual, every one of us, like an ancient monarch, who can be useful to the community or a waste of good ground. Shall we list all the Jesse Trees that are in the churches in Rome? And now children in churches all around the world construct Jesse Trees to hang in their sanctuaries during Advent.

Because many preachers are unaware of how these images are both employed and altered in Christian imagery, another use of the Tree of Life is often missed. In Mark 4 is the well-known parable of the mustard seed growing into a mighty plant with birds of the air making nest in its branches. So perhaps you heard what I call "The Wide Truths of Life" sermon in which text is used to prove that the little seed of our faith grows into a mighty tree. Of course, the mustard plant does not grow into a mighty tree, and Jesus' hearers would have understood this parable for the joke that it was. (This is not the only place in the lectionary where our piety keeps us from laughing: think of Eldad and Medad, or Jonah 1, or Daniel 3.) To make clearer the meaning of the mustard plant,

the lectionary sets Mark 4:26-34 next to Ezekiel 17, one of the Old Testament uses of the ancient Near Eastern metaphor of the king as the cosmic tree with birds nesting in its branches. But, promises the prophet Ezekiel, the faithful will be surprised, for the high tree will be made low, and the low tree high. Mary will sing her Magnificat as Christians call the cross on Golgotha a mighty tree with birds nesting in its branches. By the way, check out Ambrose on this text. Christ is the mustard seed, who when buried in the ground grows in the tree that gives life to the world.

When I planned to speak on this topic, I knew without checking the selections of readings in the Revised Common Lectionary, and I am sorry to report to those of you who are Roman Catholics that my lectionary includes many more hints of the Tree of Life than does the Roman Lectionary. For example, on Easter 6 C, our reading from Revelation has more verses and so includes the description of the Tree of Life, with twelve fruits and leaves that heal the nations. The Revised Common Lectionary includes Paul's reference in Galatians 5 to the fruits of the Spirit, an image that many Christian artists have superimposed upon the archetypal Tree of Life. But also Roman Catholic assemblies sing Psalm 1 and Psalm 92, in which the church applies the image of the tree to all of us. Because of the tree of the cross, we can grow into fruitful trees, thriving alongside the baptismal waters. Next Thursday I will talk about the many images that we hear and the many that we enact in the liturgies of the Triduum, and that will give me more occasion to trace the Tree of Life in Christian worship.

In conclusion, then, we can say that humans have eyes in their imagination, and that what is seen that is not-here can be such as to give to what is here its primary significance. This is true in many arenas of human life, one of which is the scripture readings at the Sunday liturgy. We are called not only to see those images ourselves, as if our baptismal formation has given us a set of eyeglasses that see more than what is present. We in this room are among those Christians who are called to point out those images to others. We can lead classes, conduct image retreats, e-mail explanatory blurbs to parishioners on the Thursday before the Sunday assembly, reproduce helpful images in the service folder, project them onto the walls of our naves, choose hymns that amplify the images in the readings, meditate on them in private devotion, what else? Recently I received from the Lutherans in Denmark a set of what resembles playing cards, and on each card is a biblical image of God, with picture and citation, and I am excited to use this image-pack in some educational setting. Because images have depth, because they layer meaning onto meaning, images have the ability to gather us all into the reading, those who get only one layer, those who get four or five; and next year, after our own joys and

sorrows, we ourselves will be able to descend, or shall we say ascend, to yet another layer that the image offers.

Let me conclude by introducing you to one of my favorite children's books, Seymour Leichman's *The Boy Who Could Sing Pictures*. The medieval boy Ben discovered that when he sang, the pictures in his words came into life. Seeing the crowds of poor and wretched peasants, aware of their deep sadness, a sadness "like a snake in the chimney smoke," Ben sang to them. "It was like no song they had heard before. His voice was high, sweet and clear. He sang about the farmer and he sang about the land and he sang about the doves and he sang about the river and the rainbow. And he sang about the sun and the spring and pilgrims on the road. He knew he would sing forever against the sadness. The miracle did not happen all at once. It happened first when he sang about the doves. And they appeared. And the people saw them. Then the rainbow. And the people saw it. He saw it too, and more. He looked into their faces, into their eyes, and the sadness was gone." (p. 24-25)

But then the wicked king demands a performance. And Ben sees the opulence and the cruelty of the court, and he does sing. "He sang a tear. And it turned blood red. And out of the blood-red tear he sang soldiers dead in the lilies, and it was not beautiful. He sang farmers without food. And carpenters without wood. He sang children on the frozen ground. He sang of the hard winter ahead of them. The great sadness that he sang away in the village,

he sang back again to the great hall. And they saw it. They saw it all and were much disturbed." (p. 38)

And so the evil king orders Ben's execution. And all the people gather, to hear his last song. " 'It will be the last time I will ever sing for them,' he thought. 'I must make it good.' And it was. He sang colors they had never seen, in a land they had never seen. He even sang a giraffe, and that, not even he had ever seen. He sang sugar cane from another country, melons and cherries and all summer fruit in the winter snow, still fresh and good. He sang a man singing another man singing another man, and babies born in times to come. And oxen and warm fire and the sea gulls along the shore. And on and on he sang the Promised Land. The weary, he sang rested. The hungry, he sang full. The cold, he sang warm. And the great sadness, he sang all away. And then he sang no more." (pp. 45-46) And the king frees him and promises to begin a reign of justice. "Then, they all sat down together and had a simply marvelous breakfast in the meadow." (p. 46)

I like to think of Ben's first song as the lectionary's readings, good news offered to those who know great sadness. His song before the wicked king is the intercessions, when we tell one another the truth about a world that needs God. And his final song is a magnificent Thanksgiving at the Table, with the Sanctus sung by saints and angels.

Multiply the Images

The Readings and the Actions of the Triduum

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Conference given at the Centro Pro Unione, Thursday, 21 March 2013



Good afternoon. Welcome to the third of three discussions with me, the second and third being about the images that fill up the pages of the Bible, and thus also the words of our lectionary readings and the meaning of our actions. Two weeks ago, I reported to you how as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America I worship at home, and last week I described what is for all Christians the metaphoric nature of Scriptural texts. Today, the day on which in 1556 Thomas Cranmer, a genius at liturgical language, was martyred by Queen Mary of England, I will

conservatism that the old Holy Week liturgical rites are just fine, thank you very much. So I have written booklets, published articles, delivered lectures, and even served on a team that at summer seminars conducted all these rites, to teach in every way we can what these liturgies mean and how to conduct them. All this work has prepared me to talk with you today.

A number of denominations are urging their members to restore the Three Days. I know best the Lutheran rites, and will be speaking today out of my

Lutheran tradition, but I am acquainted also with the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and United Church of Christ materials, and I hope my comments will illumine the Three Days for you all, no matter which your denomination. When for twenty-two years I taught religion to undergraduates at a Roman Catholic university in Philadelphia, I discovered how little my students knew about the Triduum. For example, I routinely heard from students said that the Saturday night Easter Mass was meant for only adult catechumens and their

family and friends, and my students were glad not to attend, since they said that the Mass was too long. So I suggest that all our churches, even if these services are being enacted, need to engage in intense instruction and creative mystagogy about these extraordinary events in the annual life of the church.

The Christian reliance on images

I spoke last week about the metaphoric nature of the Scripture. Our lectionary readings and the psalms we sing are filled with images, some from the distant past, most of them layered on top or attached to the side of yet other images. The images carry the much of the Christian message. In our time, as we are newly aware of the power

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focus on the images found within both the texts and the actions of the Triduum.

Let me first note that, as those of you who were present two weeks ago know, Lutherans in the United States are not required by their bishops or because of their institutional membership to use any specific liturgical forms or texts. Thus those of us Lutherans who are urging a restoration and renewal of the Triduum – we use English and call it the Three Days – have had to engage in a considerable amount of encouragement and catechesis concerning these services. A parish cannot be ordered to host these services: instead, we teachers must convince the parish leaders and members that these services are worth doing, despite the work involved, despite a lingering

of images – “a picture is worth a thousand words” – this aspect of biblical language ought to be welcome. Let me now walk us through the Three Days, to dig out all the images therein, and to find ourselves enlarged and enriched by the multiplicity of the words and actions, their being in us and our being in them. I will proceed day by day, through both the readings and the actions.

The primary image of the Three Days is that three is one, one is three. The meaning of each narrative event that we observe – the last supper and foot-washing, Christ’s passion and death, and his resurrection – can be too easily distorted unless the three days are understood as one. The death of Christ can be only another tragic example of human violence unless it leads to the resurrection, and the resurrection can be only a spring flower show and choir concert unless it responds to the passion and death of Christ. A Nazarene scholar named Carmen Renee Berry wrote an engaging book that describes the differences in Christian denominations titled *The Unofficial Guide to Choosing a Church*, and one of her categories is the Trinity affinity: that is, which member of the Trinity is the one that each denomination most attends to. So we can say the same about the Three Days. Depending on one’s tradition and piety, the forgiveness seen in the last supper, or the suffering of Christ on human behalf, or the joy of new life at Easter might be the central annual event, the denominational marker. The Three Days calls us all to focus on all three, to hold the meaning of each in relation to the other two, so that the paschal mystery can begin to be expressed in the profundity it deserves.

The images in Maundy Thursday’s readings and actions

We Lutherans call the day Maundy, but I know some others use the simple title Holy. “Maundy” carries the image of Jesus on his knees washing feet and his command for us to love another. “Holy” is not as many contemporary speakers would guess, something about being sinless, but rather it brings to us the image of the whole, made whole by being filled with God. The word “Holy” conveys the hope that as we enter that holiness, we too share in the whole-ness of the day.

The first lectionary reading is Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14, the preparation of the Passover lamb. The image is of the people enslaved to the old regime and of their appeal to God for new life. The old life, like the lamb, is killed; this death leads to the beginning of new life. We kill and eat the old, so that it nourishes the new. I encountered a university student who thought that Jesus’ occupation was shepherding, because he heard so much about lambs. Thus even such a repeated image as “lamb” needs our attention. Forget the usual interpretation that lambs are stupid: for ancient Israel, sheep are God’s gift, providing food and clothing for the people and serving as a worthy

offering back to God. Like the ancient Israelites, we eat the life of God at the table of communion.

The second reading is 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Paul is here correcting the meal practices of the Corinthian assembly. The meal, Paul writes, must be permeated with the imagery of the crucifixion. Does everyone in the assembly know what the image of “the covenant” is?

The gospel reading is John 13:1-15, the foot-washing. Writing in the late first or early second century, the author of the Gospel of John is layering and layering more. We speak of the bread as the body of Christ, and next to this John places the very feet of our neighbors. Their feet are also the body of Christ in our midst, and we are invited to cherish that body in the foot-washing. Thus all year long, the phrase “body of Christ” can bring to mind Jesus of Nazareth, the bread on the table, and water over the feet of our neighbors.

The unique action of the evening is the foot-washing. Many of us lay Christians, especially in the northern hemisphere, have been formed to think of church as a place to sit quietly and listen; don’t even wriggle around in that pew. And so renewed liturgies that ask us to walk around, or kneel, or shake hands, or raise our arms, or wash someone’s feet, have found naves and naves filled with resisters. Currently in Lutheran churches, we encourage anyone interested in participating in the foot-washing to come forward, first have her feet washed, and then get down on her knees to wash the feet of the next worshiper in line. I find this a better way to enact the foot-washing than dressing up some kids in bathrobes and watching them play-act Jesus and the disciples, and as a lay Christian, I do not advocate solely the ordained taking the role of Christ. All the baptized are now those disciples, and the foot-washing is an enacted image, the picture of Jesus washing feet is not only in our minds, or on a reproduction on the service folder, or projected onto the wall of the nave, but also in our very bodies. We not only hear about Jesus washing feet: we are now the church, we are those filled with the Spirit of Christ, and so now we wash one another’s feet. We not only hear the image, but we also enact the image.

A final action of the evening is the stripping of the space – the altar, and as well the remainder of the chancel and the nave. During the chanting of a psalm – our worship materials now suggest Psalm 88, since we will join in Psalm 22 on Good Friday – everything that adds use, meaning and beauty to our worship rituals is stripped away. As the final verse of Psalm 88 says it, “darkness is my only companion.”

The images in Good Friday’s readings and actions

The liturgy on the day that is called in English “Good” Friday is one in which various images of the suffering and dying Christ are laid side by side, each to inform and illumine the others. The image in the first

reading is Isaiah 51:13—53:12. Here the lamb that is slaughtered is superimposed onto Jesus on the cross. We respond with the images in Psalm 22, in which we liken Christ to the abandoned loner, to the one who suffers.

Filled with the image of the lamb, we turn to the second reading, Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9. Here Christ is not the lamb, but the high priest who does the killing of the lamb. This technique of turning images upside-down is common in the Scriptures. The high priest, who alone could mediate between God and the people, is now in our midst as Christ.

For the gospel reading, once again on the Three Days the church relies on the Gospel of John, whose imagery always flies higher than that of the synoptics. In John 18:1—19:42, Christ is the I AM, before whom the 600 Roman soldiers bow down; there is no kiss of Judas, for Christ willingly goes forward to die; Christ debates with Pilate, arranges the care of his mother, gives over his spirit, and is buried with one hundred pounds of spices in a garden. Consider this last image: victims of crucifixion were left on their execution poles as a terrifying reminder to the populace that Rome would punish offenders, and finally their bodies were thrown into a lime pit. Yet John writes that Jesus was buried as if he were a king, and that in a garden. Don't confuse first-century Rome with nineteenth-century Victorian England: in the Roman Empire, dead bodies were not buried in gardens. Rather, the garden is a Johannine image of the life that will spring forth from the dead body of Jesus, the place where the seed who is Christ will blossom into life for us all.

One of the actions of the Good Friday rite is that we pray for everyone in the whole world. I am particularly pleased with the editing of the Bidding Prayer in our worship book, in which the petitions for the Jews and for the people in other world religions are worded not as would have medieval Christians, but as would contemporary believers.

For the Jews: Long-ago, you gave your promise to Abraham and your teaching to Moses. Hear our prayers that those people who called and elected as your own may receive the fulfillment of the covenant's promises. For persons in other world religions: Gather into your embrace all those who call out to you under different names. Bring an end to inter-religious strife, and make us more faithful witnesses of the love made known to us in your Son.

Also the current editing of the Reproaches, inspired by the work of the Methodist liturgist Don Saliers, makes clear that Christ is speaking to "O my people, O my church." Christ is not scolding the Jews, but is calling us to faithfulness. The final stanza is based on the words of

the Son of Man on Judgment Day in Matthew 25: "I was hungry, and you gave me no food, sick and in prison and you did not visit me, and you have prepared a cross for your Savior." It may be a good idea to offer study of this complex litany sometime during Lent.

Yet another image is acknowledged as we revere the cross. The actual item that we honor may be perhaps the parish's processional cross, perhaps a crucifix, perhaps embedded with a fake splinter of the True Cross, perhaps a rough-hewn wood cross that the youth group constructed at a retreat last weekend. And yet we act as if this cross is the one on which hung the salvation of the world. It's an image.

I do not know which story I like better, that of Helena, Egeria, or Radegund. Perhaps you know them all. Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, led an archaeological dig of Palestine in the fourth century and found what she believed to be the True Cross. Splinters of that True Cross have, like the bread of the eucharist, multiplied to bring faith to countless Christians through the ages. Egeria traveled from western France to attend the Holy Week services in and around Jerusalem in perhaps the early fifth century. I like best her account that when the True Cross was displayed before the people for their veneration, it was flanked by guards, since previously someone had taken a bite out of the cross so as to take home the best souvenir possible. The Germanic princess and later Queen Radegund, unable to negotiate a divorce from her bishop because he feared reprisal from her husband, who was king in France, left the throne, veiled herself, established a convent in Poitiers renowned for its learning, and sent for Fortunatus to become the convent's poet. Each year on Good Friday we still sing his "Vexilla Regis," in which the cross is lauded as the Tree of Life. In later centuries, the human imagination, seeing what is not-here, spun out the entire tale of the Tree of Life from its origins in the Garden of Eden until it eventually became the wood of the cross. One place in which the entire legend was depicted was the mid-fifteenth-century Book of Hours of Catherine of Cleves. Images never keep to their small beginnings, but grow up and down and out. Perhaps that is why images are unsettling to some theologians, to the John Calvins who are still around.

The images in the Paschal Vigil's readings and actions

The readings of the Easter Vigil offer us many images of what the resurrection is. Does your assembly choose a meager four? a respectable seven? the best nine? the full twelve? In the first reading of Genesis 1:1—2:2, God is creator, and we are in the world newly created by the resurrection of Christ. In Genesis 7-9, God is re-creating the world, and we are safely in the ark of the church, receiving peace from the dove of the Spirit. In Genesis 22:1-18, God rescues us from death, and we are

Isaac, free from sacrifice, and Christ is the ram killed in our stead. I am drawn to this troubling story, because one thing that it seems to be saying is that God will save us from religion. In Exodus 14:15—15:1, God is the liberator of the oppressed, the one who changes human history, and we are those saved by walking through the sea. And since we, the baptized, are now the emissaries of God, we are now those who lead the oppressed to freedom, and there we dance together the joy of the resurrection. In Isaiah 54:5-14, God is our husband, and we are living in a city with jewel-encrusted gates. In Isaiah 55:1-11, God is the host, serving up a banquet of free food. In Proverbs 8 or Baruch 3:9-15, 32—4:4, God is Woman Wisdom, calling us, gathering us into the good life, serving up a meal and instructing us in the way of truth. In Ezeiel 36:16-17a, 18-28, God is the physician, giving us a new heart. In Ezeiel 37:1-14, God is the breath of life, assembling the dry bones and resuscitating our deadness into a living being. In Zephaniah 3:14-20, God is our home. We live in God, as if God is a city. In Jonah 1:1-17, God casts Christ into the sea of the grave, but brings him out to proclaim life to us. And we in baptism are cast into the sea of Christ's death, and are brought out of the waters to preach God's judgment and mercy to the world. Granting that already the Gospel of Matthew likens the resurrection to the story of Jonah, I am very glad that our current Lutheran rite appoints this reading for the Vigil. In Isaiah 61:1-4, 9-11, God is giving us new clothing. And Lutherans love the final Old Testament selection, Daniel 3:1-29, when to the sound of the "horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble," Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can finally bring a smile onto the faces of even the most restrained worshipers. And with a grin at this wonderfully fantastic story comes the renewed confidence that when we are in the fire, Christ will be with us.

In Romans 6:3-11, we hear that we have already died. There we are, lying in our own coffin. But then comes the Gospel. We Lutherans keep John throughout the Three Days, proclaiming the synoptic account on Easter Day. And so there we are with Mary of Magdala, reaching out to touch Christ: but soon at the table of the Lord, we will be granted what she was not, for we will indeed take the body of Christ into our hands. So: how many images is that?

As well, we enact several images. We mark the candle, not with some supposed date of the death and

resurrection of Jesus, but with this year's date: 2013 – because today is the resurrection. It's not that today is the celebration or the remembrance of the resurrection. No, today is the resurrection. And we each carry a candle, reminding ourselves of the candle given us at baptism. I love the legend of Patrick on Hill of Slane, breaking the law that allowed only the tribal chief to light the springtime fire. No, Patrick would light the fire of the resurrection, and so we still do. Those fire pits designed for use in suburban patios are one safe way to set out a good-sized blaze.

After the reading of the Exodus, I hope some people rise to dance to the Song of Miriam and Moses. Whether with a fine solo performance by a talented dancer or a conga line by dozens of worshipers, we are now those who, as our prayer after the reading of Exodus says it, "together dance on the safe side of the sea."

I have dealt with only the appointed texts and actions. There will be more, for there will be hymns and choir pieces, art on the walls and art on the service leaflet.



I hope that your assemblies chose vibrant hymns, so that everyone can sing yet more images of the faith. In my context there will be at least four hymns each evening, and thus we will put our mouths around images from the Hebrew Bible, from the centuries of Christian piety, and from contemporary poets. In Brian Wren's new hymn for Maundy Thursday is the line, "We strain to glimpse your mercy seat and find you kneeling at our feet." The hymn "There in God's Garden," a Hungarian text rendered into English in the twentieth century, enriches Good Friday with lines such as "This is my ending, this my resurrection. Into your hands, Lord, I commit my spirit. This have I searched for; now I can possess it. This ground is holy." This hymn

sets us next to Moses, at the burning bush of the cross. At the Vigil we sing Martin Luther's "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," with its line "Christ alone, our holy meal, the hungry soul will feed and heal; faith lives upon no other!" And we sing Hallelujah as we eat the image itself.

I know that it is now Lent, and that we don't say or sing the A-word during Lent. (When my older daughter was very young, in responding to the pastor's question on the Sunday before Ash Wednesday about what Lent was, she said, "In Lent you can't say Alleluia, and you can't eat chocolate. But you can *say* chocolate." She is now a pastor.) But at least we can look together at this new Easter hymn by Herbert Brokering, "Alleluia! Jesus is Risen." Its images include light, the Lamb, heaven, the Emmaus story, the vine and branches, the fruit of the tree, cherubim singing, clothing, the city of God, golden Jerusalem, the river of life, and God the I AM. Singing the hymn is like opening a treasure chest filled with images of grace.

It is good that we get to traverse these images, heard and enacted, yet again next year, and the year after that. It will take us a lifetime to fit each one into

our consciousness so we can live by their power. One way to understand the Three Days is to see that the normal number of images that are regularly called up amongst us during a Sunday assembly are vastly multiplied. We hear one image after another, and then for a break now and then, we get up and enact the image. Many biblical passages call us to serve one another, but on the Three Days, we kneel before a neighbor and wash his feet. Many Sunday readings evoke the image of light, but at the Vigil we each hold our candle. The images pour out of our minds, into our hands, into our entire bodies, and from my body to yours.

I have always liked the proposal made by Hélène Cixous. It is wrong, she writes, to say that I am who I am. None of us is so isolated, so insular. Rather, she writes, I am who I are. That plural-ness for Christians is made up of all these images, heard and enacted, as each of us moves more and more to be the communal body of Christ that we are.

Thank you for your attention. May you keep a good Three Days.





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