

One in Faith, Sacramental Life and Piety

I wish to begin with a word of gratitude for the World Council and Atonement Friars and Sisters placing before us, again, in this year's Week of Prayer and National Workshop theme: the goal of full communion as attested in Scripture: “

I first understood how the dialogue of truth could lead us gradually, to reconciliation in a Conciliar Fellowship; that would not exclude my church with its truth claims, burdensome papacy, and Eucharistic horizon; by reading Robert Welsh's popular account of the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches, only 7 years after Catholics had joined Faith and Order in 1975!...we have been richly blessed in the years since then.

There may be calls for a diversionary new paradigm, a profile ecumenism, or a misunderstood reconciled diversity – which is often interpreted as unreconciled complacency!¹ Even in some of the ecumenical proposals we see a complacency that does not want to face the hard truth questions that divide Christians. Yet, most of our members have not yet been converted to this vision articulated in the Acts of the Apostles and spelled out in our years of dialogue among the churches.

Yes, you have a challenging task before you, but we are grateful for this moment of prayer and recommitment!

The luncheon talk is an assignment to give us encouragement and challenge, and I will do so on 3 notes: 1) How to prepare for the commemoration of 2017, 2) How to take serious account of popular religion, and 3) How to provide ecumenical mentoring for the 21st century.

I 2017

In 2017 we will remember 500 years since Luther's 95 theses and the All Saints sermon of 1517. How does this year become an impetus for the unity of our Western churches?

1) We express our appreciation to Mark Hanson and the LWF for its celebration of repentance and reconciliation with the Mennonite communities. 16th century persecutions and 5 centuries of alienation of begun to be healed by a service between the LWF and MWC members in Stuttgart last spring. The icon of Lutheran & Mennonite leaders, foot washing pail and servant towel in hand, is the image I use to begin my Reformation course, with the YouTube of the mutual anointing.² By these interpretive symbols I challenge my students to see our 16th century burdens as subjected to the healing anointings of Christ's grace and our ecumenical scholarship.³ I hope when the churches – in your local places, or in Augsburg, Rome, Canterbury, Geneva, Johannesburg, Pittsburg and around the globe – plan commemorations, this repentance and reconciliation can be our model.⁴

2) In the next five years this Workshop and other ecumenical venues need to prepare our leadership for this 2017 occasion, to harvest our decades of journey together, and contribute to the reception of the deepened relationships of the last 50+ years:

- We can invite keynote speakers like Jared Wicks, Kenneth G. Appold, Eamon Duffy or Geoffrey Wainwright, to instruct us on how best to reconstruct the fascinating 16th c story, so that it comes alive, again, in new and reconciling ways. For our people we need to get beyond “The doctrinal archaeologists, busily unearthing layer after layer of controversy about the sacraments or shifts in the understanding of grace, [that] have left most folk, even in the Church, far behind.”⁵
- We need catechetical and preaching seminars, in this Workshop and elsewhere, so that the *Joint Declaration*; this Lutheran gesture to the Mennonites, those of the Reformed, and the Jubilee Catholic apologies before it; and the myriad of dialogue results; may become resources for a common story and life in our congregations.
- Like the LWF initiative, all of our results need to “bear fruit in the teaching of the Lutheran [and other] Confessions [and the councils of Trent and Vatican I,] in the seminaries and other educational activities...”⁶ of our churches.
- We need a text narrative on the 16th c for seminaries, undergraduates and congregations written with the help of these agreements on Reformation era issues, as proposed by the Reformed Catholic and Faith and Order dialogues.⁷

I have the good fortune to teach a seminary course “Is the Reformation Over?” stealing Wainwright & Noll’s title.⁸ It is a joy to use the *Joint Declaration* as the lens through which to read Trent and the continental confessions, and to see our common legacy of 16th c renewal, suffering and struggle. Teaching the indulgence controversy in light of the new text *Hope for Eternal Life*;⁹ the Swiss Reformation and Marburg Colloquy (1529) with the *Formula of Agreement* and BEM; the English Reformation using *The Gift of Authority*; the Anabaptist contribution through these new Catholic¹⁰ and Lutheran texts. I hope to help my Protestant students realize that the reformations of Las Casas, Theresa and Ignatius may be as seminal for our reconciling future as those of Menno, Calvin, Luther and Carmner.¹¹

Of course, we know the difficulties of this task, as one historian of the period reminds us:

Despite their endeavours to break free, even modern historians remain to some extent the prisoners of their educational, social, and ecclesiastical environments. While rejoicing in the new wave of ecumenism, we do not believe ourselves capable of the superhuman detachment from the opposed confessional ideals. ...Yet at no stage can we afford to relax our steady determination to see both sides and assimilate ‘new’ evidence however much it may conflict with our former judgements and prejudices. Such vigilance remains, for us and for every other historian of the Reformation, a heart-searching struggle which produces many losers and no outright winners.¹²

We can only hope that our scientific historians, with their moment of possibility in this commemoration, will be as driven by a hermeneutics of reconciliation as earlier historians were by confessional loyalty. We need to make the results ecumenical interpretive resources a “common heritage.”¹³ The serious historian is aware that “Religious interests can raise genuine historical questions which might not otherwise be investigated, and even unhistorical questions need not be antihistorical.”¹⁴

3) In addition to the commemorative and educational components, we also need spiritual disciplines for rebuilding the memory of this normative, yet tragic moment in our heritage. Certainly we have already begun, for example, to see pilgrimages, from Wittenberg to Rome on foot; to Rome, Trent, Augsburg, Wittenberg, the Wartburg, by less arduous means. We need to find ways of entering into this spiritual pilgrimage toward full communion, to be given by the free grace of God, through concrete signs, spiritual disciplines and the contribution of rereceiving our common story in reconciling ways.

At times such as ours, on the cusp of a new millennium, the historian in us, looking back at the Other in the past, merges with the seer in us, peering into the shape of the future.¹⁵

As Archbishop Romero reminds us:

History will not perish; God sustains it. That is why I say that in the measure that the historical projects attempt to reflect the eternal project that is God’s, in that measure they are reflecting the Reign of God, and this is the work of the Church....God desires to have the people making a new history.¹⁶

II Popular Religion in our Ecumenical Journey

We know the role of spirituality among our ecumenical disciplines. Reconciliation is as much a matter of the heart as of the head, hand and institution. We pray with one another, for one another and for the healing of those fissures that divide the Christian churches and the whole human family. We work to see the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity celebrated in all of our congregations, schools and other centers of Christian ministry. The sharing of devotional literature, retreat centers, and spiritual resources is one of the great boons of the ecumenical movement!

1) We also need to see the results of the ecumenical dialogues as a gift to the abundant spiritual life of our people. The common affirmation of the paschal mystery in the *Joint Declaration* and the different emphases in Methodist, Lutheran and Catholic piety, within the theologically agreed themes of grace, works, law, faith and confidence in God’s mercy; are all resources for broadening and deepening a spiritual life we can now share in Christ.

In the 25+ years of work on BEM, I have always proposed it as a retreat theme, for listening to our spiritualities of ministry, communion and common baptism; as we experience them on the pilgrimage toward a common table and common structures of service. *The Nature and Mission of the Church* text of the World Council is very explicit in the hope that it “can contribute to a spiritual encounter between different communities in which as trust grows it becomes possible to face the theological issues together.”¹⁷

2) However, we also need to take seriously the differences in piety, the sacred prejudices that are as deeply entrenched as any theological or institutional obstacles to reconciliation. We know that “the reforming process was not fundamentally about ideas in the mind or structures in church and state but indicate much more elemental changes in spiritual direction.”¹⁸

My Protestant students are more interested in themes of infallibility, indulgences and transubstantiation; than most of my Catholics, because their rejection (as misunderstood by them, as by my Catholic students!), their rejection is so integral to their identity.

The irony is that when many of my Missionary Baptist students understand transubstantiation in its historical context, they say that it is exactly what they teach their congregations about the Lord’s Supper – at least they think so! My Church of Christ colleague chose papal infallibility for his dissertation because of concerns with 19th c biblical infallibility issues in the piety of his own tradition.¹⁹

When in *Oh so* ecumenical Berkeley, they let me teach one course of my own selection: *Popular Religion*. I used the ecumenical dimension of the issue, with 3 church traditions, 5 themes, and the help of 4 colleagues! It was great fun, opening up others’ pieties, as church dividing and potentially church uniting dynamics.

Among the themes and documents we used was an earlier draft of the new Lutheran Catholic *Hope for Eternal Life*: contributing to reconciling Purgation, Purgatory, Prayers for the Dead, and Indulgences; themes of both historic and contemporary spiritual interest. However, paralleling this set of church dividing eschatological pieties, we also looked into Pentecostal millennial Christian Zionism and African American liberationist readings of history; ending with YouTubes of the Left Behind series and MLK, jr’s “I have been to the mountain top” final speech at Mason Temple in Memphis.

3) As ecumenical leaders we call our people into a spiritual life that keeps Christ’s prayer for unity central to conversion. We help our people understand and appreciate the piety of others, even when they do not share it. We call for a dialogue that will heal spiritualities, as well as intellectual/doctrinal and institutional/ecclesiological divisions. And finally, we help build a common ecumenical spirituality that cultivates the zeal for the unity of Christians in service to the healing of a broken world.

We need to help our people form an ecumenical piety that resonates with the majestic prayer of the *Negro National Anthem*:

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,

Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;

Thou who has by thy might, led us into the light.

Keep us ever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee.

Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee;

Shadowed beneath thy hand, May we forever stand,

True to our God, True to our native land!

III Ecumenical Mentorship for the 21st Century

Finally, I would like to thank the Workshop for providing this assignment. In choosing the theme of mentorship for ecumenical leadership, I have been blessed to reflect on over the 50 years of my ministry, and those of you who have mentored me in the service to the unity of the church.

I will suggest to you that our major task as ecumenical officers is mentoring up a new generation of ecumenical leaders, for a new set of challenges beyond any that God's providence has yet to provide for us. Let me suggest three among the many dimensions of the mentoring task before us: 1) invitation, 2) accountability & communication, and 3) mutuality.

1) The most important thing we can do in passing on the torch of ecumenical zeal to the next generation is invitation. Indeed, the Episcopalians who invited me to state convention, the Presbyterian who invited me to Memphis Presbytery meeting, the Adventist college that invited me to speak on authority, the Methodist who asked me to teach Vatican II; all showed both a hospitality and a challenge at a very pedestrian, local level that helped me to see how bridges could be built, and how I had to become competent and critical in my own tradition.

The invitations of Robert Welsh and Bill Rusch to write for *Midstream* and *Dialogue*, showed me that I could modestly follow their footsteps in interpreting the ecumenical movement to our people. Thomas Stransky and Robert Welsh showed me the texts that helped build bridges in the early ethics debates on human sexuality; and it was Stransky who lured me into editing the ecumenical documents after my whining about our needs for a decade, and Joe Burgess who invited me to learn how to do it.

You can invite folks onto ecumenical commissions, into ecumenical & denominational meetings, denominational worship services, and out to ecumenical lunches; that can change their lives – and yours - and the lives of our churches together. Identify, invite and support the new generation of colleagues, to build new ecumenical relations and bring our heritage into ever new contexts of ministry. Give books, send websites, share church actions and their interpretations, entice new voices to learn and contribute to our marvelous ministry of reconciliation.

2) Colleagues hold us accountable and challenge us to be good communicators. Again, Robert Welsh tutored me how to navigate the ecumenical complexities of the conciliar movement, national and world; and how to make ecumenical and church leaders perform better than their own resources would permit; on behalf of the unity, common witness and effectiveness of the churches.

We often speak of the “egomenical” movement:

Not all who have positions of ecumenical leadership have the charisms/gifts of relational, intellectual or organizational ministry, commensurate with the Holy Spirit's calling or the needs of the Church. Colleagues need to supplement our gifts, provide the corrective to improve our inadequate behavior, and we need to find ways of making things work, even with people we would not chose to work with, were they not given to us by God and the churches.

We need to find colleagues who can communicate to us honestly 1) about what is going on in their churches, 2) what are the terms of debate, 3) how we can get beyond the press in interpreting them, and learn 4) how to provide the most supportive behaviors on the part of our church. I was often asked during the recent difficulties in Boston, how best to support an old ecumenical colleague, without taking sides in internal church debates and public legal action.

I could have not gotten through the recent convention of the Society for Pentecostal Studies meeting in Memphis, featuring the heritage of the African American Church of God in Christ and challenging the ecumenical horizon of the Pentecostal community; without COGIC insider mentors on both sides of the running ecclesial battles there.²⁰

I am very grateful for Anglican colleagues who were interested in the real, behind the scenes 40+ year developments in last fall's Vatican pastoral outreach, and to Episcopal colleagues willing to come into my Catholic class to talk about Anglican piety & authority, and 30 year of experience with this very set of discussions with Catholics.

3) We are colleagues in this ecumenical task, mentoring each other on how best to interpret a) ourselves, b) our partners, and c) the ecumenical stage we are at, and the future for which we hope, at every step of the way. We know who our friends and mentors are, and they are not always the colleagues with whom we work most routinely or with whom we have had the longest relationship.

In ecumenical ministry there is a necessary tension between our loyalties, in Christ, to our own church, to our ecumenical partner and to the ecumenical agencies, councils and instruments which serve the churches [I have a longer treatment on layers of loyalties, which will not be presented here]. These loyalties are complicated by our expertise, our experiences and our commitments to particular issues and groups.

Finally, as we move forward toward the commemoration of a half millennium of alienation, we are called to engage all of our people, mentora new generation of leadership, and create a spiritual sensitivity and a new set of spiritual disciplines that will serve the future to which the Holy Spirit is calling us in faith, sacramental life and witness to a violent and hurting world.

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¹ Here is a definition from the 1985 *Facing Unity* of the Lutheran Catholic dialogue: “What is really at stake is that a theologically based agreement ... should work through divergences to the point where they lose their church divisive character. At the same time it should both clarify and make certain that remaining differences are based on a fundamental consensus in understanding the apostolic faith and therefore are legitimate.” # 47 http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/l-rc/doc/e_l-rc_facing.html. For a more precise use see also, for example: The united church viewed as a “conciliar fellowship of all churches in reconciled diversity with a Petrine ministry serving this fellowship.” Bilateral Working Group of the German National Bishops’ Conference and the Church Leadership of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, *Communio Sanctorum: The Church as the Communion of Saints*, Collegetown: Liturgical Press, 2004, # 190. See Walter Kasper, “Charting the road of the ecumenical movement,” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20080117_kasper-ecumenismo_en.html, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20041121_kasper-ecumenismo_en.html, *Information Service*, 109 (2002) 11-20 at 14. For the new president of the PCUP, Cardinal Kurt Koch’s concerns, see <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/15558>, <http://scecclesia.com/?p=4614>.

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYMK14ATxNU>.

³ *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*, Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, <http://www.mwc-cmm.org/en15/files/OEA-Lutheran-Mennonites-web-EN.pdf>.

⁴ See, for example, <http://www.asia-lutheran.org/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=496>

⁵ See Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 1. Elisabeth Gleason notes in *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome and Reform*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: “Contarini can be a wonderful partner in dialogue with modern interlocutors who care about questions of political and religious order, of liberty and authority. His thought still invites them to meditate on unresolved issues and on thinkable alternatives to the course of events in church and state, then and now.” 301

⁶ <http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/index.php/council-reconciliation-mennonites.html>

⁷ “Toward a Reconciliation of Memories,” http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/r-rc/doc/e_r-rc_2-1.html. Timothy J. Wengert and Charles W. Brockwell, jr., eds., *Telling the Churches’ Stories: Ecumenical Perspectives on Writing Christian History*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995. For a fascinating suggestion for rereading the 16th/19th c developments see Michael Root, “Vatican I and the Development of Doctrine: A Lutheran Perspective,” in James Puglisi, ed., *How Can the Petrine Ministry Be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, 139-40.

⁸ *Is The Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*. By Mark Noll, Carolyn Nystrom. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Is the Reformation Over?* (Pere Marquette Theology Lecture), Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2000. See Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in*

Ecumenical Dialogue, New York: Continuum, 2009; Daniel Mulhall, Jeffrey Gros, eds., The Ecumenical Christian Dialogues and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, New York: Paulist Press, 2006.

⁹ http://www.usccb.org/seia/The_Hope_of_Eternal_Life.pdf

¹⁰ http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/mn-rc/doc/e_mn-rc_fr2003.html

¹¹ Jeffrey Gros, “Building a Common Heritage: Teaching the Reformation in an Ecumenical Perspective,” *Ecumenical Trends*, May, 2006, 35:5, 11-15.

¹² A.G.Dickens, J.M.Tonkin, and K.Powell, The Reformation in Historical Thought, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985, 4. Even conservative evangelical Protestants are seeing the need for ecumenical honesty: James Payton, Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings, Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010. For a similar survey of Catholic views of Luther see Gregory Sobolewski, Martin Luther: Roman Catholic Prophet, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001.

¹³ In Pope John Paul’s monumental encyclical of 1995, *Ut Unum Sint*. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html #s 2, 81.

¹⁴ Dickens, 221, “...the demands of sober evidence, just balance, and sensitivity to pluralist rather than simplistic ideological explanations must remain constant and unremitting... We need to explain without gross simplifying and generalize without amputating the stubborn fact to fit them into procrustean beds. Ours is a rigorous yet earthy discipline, and on its power to imbue the social science with these same though attributes the future of a subject like the Reformation will in part depend.” 320, “So long as people look back on the Western tradition, they will be compelled to study both the movement and its historiography with purposes and methods far transcending those of the historical textbook.” 323. See also Margaret O’Gara, “‘Seeing in a New Light’”: From Remembering to Reforming in Ecumenical Dialogue,” *Jurist*, 71 (2011) 59 – 76.

¹⁵ Matheson, The Imaginative World, 139.

¹⁶ Scott Wright, Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints, Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2009, 128 - 9.

¹⁷ # 8 http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/FO2005_198_en.pdf

¹⁸ Matheson, The Imaginative World, 6.

¹⁹ Mark E. Powell, Papal Infallibility: A Protestant Evaluation of an Ecumenical Issue, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

²⁰ <http://www.sps-usa.org/meetings/home.htm>