

urging Catholics to commune at a Protestant Eucharist raises a different set of issues. Third, would intercommunion further or hinder steps to a greater unity? Present models of “unity in reconciled diversity” among Protestant churches tend to reduce unity to intercommunion and mutual availability of clergy. Especially in a culture dominated by consumer choice, where there are already pressures to view the multiplicity of churches as yet another consumer option, would intercommunion become a substitute for full communion rather than a step on the way toward full communion?

Of course, I could be misreading the present situation and the future possibilities. Revolutionary change is unpredictable. Not many saw the changes of the Second Vatican Council coming. We should be modest in our readings of the signs of the times and remember certain tasks that remain constant regardless. We are called to theological faithfulness and, as a part of that call, to seek greater Christian unity. That doesn’t change.

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Ecumenism for the Sake of the World³⁴

“Today’s challenges are no longer defined by local or national borders. They are glocal, both global and local. Borders are no longer what they used to be. That should not scare us. Because at the center of Christianity, there is a God crossing the most dramatic border of all: the one between divine and human. Transgression of borders always entails ‘Berührungsangst,’ the

³⁴ An earlier version of the text in this contribution was published as “To Pope Francis,” *Dialog* 54, no. 3 (September 2015) and “Ecumenical Prospects after the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation in Lund,” *Dialog* 56, no. 2 (June 2017). The editors of *Horizons* thank the editors of *Dialog* for permission to reprint these contributions.

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anxiety of touching and being touched by what is different, strange, other. As people of faith, we can live with these anxieties, remaining centered in the Gospel of the incarnated Christ and open, very much open, to the world. And so, united in prayer for God's creation and the church of Jesus Christ, we say with confidence: *Veni Creator Spiritus*, Come Creator Spirit."

This was how I concluded my address to Pope Francis on my first visit to the Vatican two years ago. Indeed, the challenges of global warming, people fleeing from the atrocities of war and terror, and social injustice are large-scale. Our mission as church can never be blind to these and other challenges—that was a clear message from both the pope and myself. It is in this context that I envisioned the Joint Commemoration of the Reformation on October 31, 2016.

Catholics, Lutherans, and ecumenical guests from all over the world gathered in Lund, Sweden—the place where the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was founded in 1947—to commemorate the approaching five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. This Joint Commemoration was unique and groundbreaking in several respects. Just imagine that the Vatican and the LWF jointly issued the invitations to this special ecumenical event! The pope came as one of two inviters, and both the liturgy *From Conflict to Communion* and the following event in Malmö Arena, "Together in Hope," were planned together. The (Lutheran) Church of Sweden in cooperation with the Catholic Church in Sweden had been assigned the responsibility of being local hosts.

I dare to say that the meeting in Lund was historic. The document signed, the words spoken by the pope, by LWF president Bishop Munib Younan, and by LWF general secretary Martin Junge, the testimonies given, the signs of peace shared, and the photos of a hug between the pope and a Lutheran (female) archbishop circulated around the world: something happened! Something new came into being. Yet it will take many people of goodwill to ensure its growth and flourishing in times to come! Significant progress in ecumenism had been made, when the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was signed by Lutherans and Catholics on October 31, 1999. A new landmark in the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue was the publication of the document *From Conflict to Communion* (2013), currently available in thirteen languages. *From Conflict to Communion* is based on what unites us, without ignoring what still separates us when it comes to views of the church, ministry, and the Eucharist. For the first time in five hundred years, Lutherans and Catholics have now agreed on a description of history as well as on common imperatives for the future. This is new, and it is important for our journey toward greater visible unity of the church.

After five hundred years it is perhaps easier than ever before to achieve a balanced view of the Reformation that can commemorate continuity and discord, benefits and oppression, as well as the bright and the dark sides of the reformer Martin Luther himself. Those who are familiar with the caricatures, prejudice, insults, and even hate speech that occurred on both sides—these things are not just an invention of the internet!—will acknowledge that the common narrative about the Reformation and its history as it is worked out in *From Conflict to Communion* is not a small achievement! We are right to acknowledge and to affirm the gifts of the Reformation to the church catholic, and to do so in ecumenical accountability, aware that Reformation has become a global citizen and that it is an ongoing process. Such was the idea behind the Joint Commemoration of Lund and Malmö: not a triumphant celebration of the upcoming Reformation anniversary; instead, in common prayer, Lutherans and Catholics jointly expressed their joy at what they have in common, their penitence because of the damage created by their discord, and their firm intention together to bear witness to the world of the mercy of God, by working for reconciliation, peace, and justice for the entire creation. So there are many good reasons for an anniversary year that includes scope for reflection on what has been and on the direction in which we want development to take—insofar as we can influence the future.

In an article published shortly before the Joint Commemoration, Cardinal Kurt Koch, head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), and Martin Junge, LWF general secretary, stated: “In a world struggling with breakdowns in communication, the increasing recurrence of inflammatory, divisive speeches and growing violence and conflict, Lutherans and Catholics will draw from the depth of their shared faith in the Triune God to state publicly: Jointly, Catholics and Lutherans will move together evermore closer to their common Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”³⁵

When it comes to future ecumenical potential, the five imperatives in *From Conflict to Communion* may very well be of great significance. The first imperative tells us to “always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.”³⁶ This is a thought especially attractive to Lutherans. The insight

³⁵ Kurt Koch and Martin Junge, “Together in Hope: The Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the 500 Years of Reformation,” October 11, 2016, <http://www.lund2016.net/press-releases-english/2016/10/13/together-in-hope-joint-article-by-lwf-general-secretary-junge-and-pcpcu-president-koch>.

³⁶ “Common Prayer,” 141.

that everything is a gift before it becomes a task is an expression of God's grace. The second imperative calls Lutherans and Catholics to "let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith."³⁷ A quite self-explanatory challenge, which, nevertheless, requires some conscious exercise! And third, we must commit ourselves again "to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal."³⁸ This imperative, demanding unity in creed, sacraments, and ministry, may have special bearing for Catholics, since for them visible unity often includes organizational unity under the pope, whereas Lutherans and others tend to define visible unity less in terms of organizational unity and more in terms of concrete visibility: walking together the paths of Jesus Christ. The fourth imperative is a joyful one: "Lutherans and Catholics should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time."³⁹ This is an agenda that allows not only for common words but also for common action. Consequently, the fifth imperative states that "Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world."⁴⁰ This fifth imperative became a focal point for the entire program on October 31, 2016—the liturgy in Lund cathedral as well as the event at Malmö Arena, "Together in Hope." The liturgy, which was carefully crafted for Lund, has already been used in various places throughout the world and will hopefully continue to inspire ecumenical worship in years to come.

In connection with the commemoration, an ecumenical youth camp was held in Lund. Forty young Catholics and forty young Lutherans gathered in order to get to know each other and to work on the five imperatives. As a visitor, I sensed a lot of positive encouragement and empowerment growing out of that meeting. Catholics in Sweden, being a small minority, have often developed special skills in standing up for their faith and answering questions from secular persons who tend to find a lot about Catholicism quite strange—in particular social and ethical teachings taken out of their context. Sharing these skills with their Lutheran friends will benefit the common mission of the church. When it was time for the youth camp's question-and-answer session, one single question came to dominate the discussion, even though the bishops present tried their best to broaden the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

spectrum. The question that was such a burning issue for the young people was, when will we finally be officially allowed to receive communion together?

The answers that were offered were interesting. Maybe it was the character of a youth camp that made us all focus more on pastoral theology than on doctrine. But none of the traditional distinctions was mentioned by the Catholic representatives: not transubstantiation, nothing about eucharistic sacrifice, not even anything about the common Eucharist entailing full recognition of the Roman Catholic pope as the one and only head of the church on earth. Instead, the arguments were centered around the question of whether the Eucharist is the reward for gained unity or whether it is nourishment on the way toward unity. Is the common Eucharist a receipt for unity achieved and therefore possible only after all differences have been canceled out? Or, is the common Eucharist a gift of grace that we have received in order to sustain us while we work out the paths toward full unity?

The Catholic representatives answered along the lines of the first alternative: the Eucharist is a sign of full unity. All we can do now is to pray and work for this unity until the Holy Spirit allows us to celebrate together. The Lutherans, including myself, spoke in favor of exploring the possibility of seeing the Eucharist also as a *viaticum*, nourishment on the way. This perspective reminds me of how God acts according to Genesis 3:21. Adam and Eve have tasted the forbidden fruit, God has questioned them about what happened, and the loss of paradise is the consequence. But right before the gate of paradise closes behind Adam and Eve, who are about to face the perils of life in this world, God gives them a very special sign of tenderness: "And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them" (NRSV). Godself sews clothes of skin and puts them on Adam and Eve so they won't meet the challenges of life outside paradise unprotected. Analogously to this beautiful sign of love, we may ask, wouldn't the God of grace allow for us to partake together of the heavenly eucharistic food that can sustain and strengthen us as we pray and work for unity? In the Eucharist, Jesus Christ gave us the utmost proof of his love, right before the path of suffering and obedience led him to the cross. Might that gift of love be there for us to strengthen us, as we still suffer from lack of unity in other areas?

It seems that Pope Francis has expressed similar thoughts. In November 2015 he visited the Lutheran congregation in Rome. As a gift, he brought the congregation a eucharistic chalice. On that occasion, a Lutheran woman married to a Catholic man asked Pope Francis how she and her husband can receive Holy Communion together rather than separately in their respective churches. In his answer, the pope reminded the woman that we have the same baptism and that the spouses are walking on a joint

path. "When you teach your children who Jesus is, why Jesus came, what Jesus did, you do the same, whether in Lutheran or Catholic terms, but it is the same," he said.⁴¹ Concerning differences in perception of Holy Communion between Lutherans and Catholics the pope said: "I ask myself: 'Is sharing the Lord's Supper the end of a journey or is it the viaticum for walking together?'" He would leave the question to the theologians, he said. Nevertheless, he once more called the Eucharist a viaticum: "'This is my Body, this is my Blood', said the Lord, 'do this in memory of me,' and this is a viaticum which helps us to journey." He summed up with this conclusion: "Life is greater than explanations and interpretations. Always refer to Baptism: 'One faith, one baptism, one Lord,' as Paul tells us, and take the outcome from there.... Speak with the Lord and go forward. I do not dare say more." He did not say quite the same as another great person of faith allegedly did: "Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen."

Even other Catholics have given strong signals in favor of ecumenical openness and fellowship. The former leader of the PCPCU, Cardinal Walter Kasper, wrote in the Catholic weekly *The Tablet* in late 2015: "Since Jesus Christ also works in and through the other Churches ... the complete realization of Catholicity is only possible in ecumenical exchange and reciprocal enrichment. Catholic and ecumenical are therefore not opposites but two sides of the same coin."⁴² He stated: "So ecumenism does not involve the conversion of one Church into another; it involves the conversion of all to Jesus Christ"—which reflects the model proposed by the pope, namely, that of a polyhedron, a multifaceted body in which all parts form a whole; but they participate in the whole in different ways, and it is precisely because they maintain their uniqueness that they contribute to the beauty and attraction of the whole. Antiecumenical and self-satisfied attitudes of the past sometimes resurface in all faith communities. The joint commemoration in Lund, however, was a powerful reminder that there is no better way forward than healing of memories and an ecumenism of friendship and common service to a world that is crying out for hope, for just peace, and for reconciliation.

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⁴¹ "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis," Christuskirche Parish, November 15, 2015, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151115_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html.

⁴² Walter Kasper, "Mercy Is the Medicine to Heal the Wounds of the Church," *The Tablet: The International Catholic News Weekly*, November 12, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/7234/mercy-is-the-medicine-to-heal-the-wounds-of-the-church>.