

Lutheran Ecumenism.

.....

In the course of my ecumenical engagement, I have been particularly privileged to receive support, encouragement and inspiration from Roman Catholics and Lutherans. My contact with the former reaches back into my undergraduate years, co-terminous with Vatican II. I have already written about these briefly in this journal¹.

My contacts with Lutherans have been much more recent but very warm, a new delight in the later stage of my ecumenical career. There are few Lutherans in England, so contact with them depended on chance circumstances. I had been aware since the late eighties of the increased links between English Anglicans and both German and Scandinavian and Baltic Lutherans. In 1994, I met the late Fr. Fred Jelly OP, a veteran of US dialogues with Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans, at a conference at which he enthused on the subject of Catholic-Lutheran dialogue as particularly demanding and challenging, yet also extremely fruitful, a point I have since verified in my reading of many excellent texts from their partnership. I decided it was high time that I ceased to rely on a purely bookish knowledge of Lutheranism, primarily derived from English texts, some of them from a previous generation and certainly not fully up to date, and sought live contact with some Lutherans. Accordingly, I signed up for a week's conference due to take place at the Lutheran Ecumenical Centre in Strasbourg in July 1997.

That conference, involving continental and American Lutherans as well as students from other traditions, gave me a much deeper sense of the sheer global variety of present day Lutheranism. It was thus a good introduction to a tradition of major significance within the past and current Ecumenical Movement. A friendship with Tom Bruch, the American born Lutheran pastor who was for many years secretary of the Lutheran Council of Great Britain, gave me a valued mentor in matters Lutheran from the time when he joined the Theology and Unity Group of Churches Together in England, of which I was then secretary. Other friendships and contacts followed for which I am extremely grateful. I have recently joined the Anglican-Lutheran Society and look forward to new contacts and insights from its members.

The purpose of this article is to pay a tribute to the Lutheran witness to the faith, in particular to the currently extremely valuable activity of the Lutheran World Federation churches in the Ecumenical Movement. Many of these churches have sought dialogue with partners of other traditions with a view to closer relationships and, ultimately, full communion accords. The initial partners were Catholics, Anglican and Reformed, but soon dialogue also took place with Methodists. Dialogue commenced with the Orthodox, but the high point of achievement came with the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of*

¹ *Ecumenical Trends*, 'Vatican II-a Methodist Reaction', April 2013, pp. 1-7.

Justification, officially accepted by both the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. No agreement on mutual recognition and communion has yet been possible with Catholics or Orthodox, though energetic dialogue continues. Meanwhile, important dialogues have taken place with Mennonites, where an early history of estrangement and persecution by Lutherans needed to be laid to rest in mutual reconciliation. Dialogues are also in place with Baptists and Pentecostals.

In 2010, the Lutheran Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg published an extremely valuable summary of the dialogues up to that point². Strangely, no mention of the one Lutheran-Methodist international dialogue of 1977-81, *The Church, Community of Salvation*, was made, recommending mutual recognition and communion³. However, as a Methodist, I am prepared to forgive them that! The dialogue with world Methodism did lead to agreements on communion in Germany, Norway, Sweden and the USA, the last mentioned being made in 2008.

Insofar as any two communions can be said to have made major global progress towards mutual reception and communion, that applies to Anglicans and Lutherans, who have established full communion across North America and much of northern Europe, to which must be added the agreement between the Church of England and the EKD on mutual Eucharistic hospitality and several other emerging relationships, most notably in Africa and Australia⁴.

My tribute of thanksgiving to the Lutheran World Federation and its ecumenical leaders, researchers and activists, will take the form of what I hope is an irenic and appreciative commentary on the recent *Three Sets of Theses concerning Lutheran Identity*, being the product of the Lutheran Research Team in Strasbourg, now available on their website. At the end, I will also mention an important work by a Brazilian Lutheran scholar, Vitor Westhelle, exploring aspects of Luther's teaching as a resource for dealing with the social problems of a globalising world⁵.

The Statement consists of an Introduction, followed by the three sets of theses concerning Lutheran identity. The three are respectively devoted to basic theological convictions, to Lutheran churches and the unity of the Church, and to ecumenical challenges of today. Two key concerns underwrite the whole document. The first is to represent the fundamental convictions of the Lutheran Reformation in a way that addresses the very different contexts

² *Lutherans in Dialogue*. The dialogue with the Mennonites, referred to above, is discussed, pp. 55-62.

³ Gros, Meyer and Rusch (eds) *Growth in Agreement II* (1999), pp. 200-218.

⁴ Full communion was established between the Anglican churches of the British Isles and seven Baltic and Scandinavian Lutheran churches in 1994, since when the Latvian Church in exile, the Lutheran Church in Great Britain and the two very small Iberian Anglican churches have joined. In 2001, the Episcopal Church in USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America entered into full communion, their accord being followed by a very similar agreement in Canada. The Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the EKD was made in 1988, but does not permit full inter-changeability of ministry

⁵ *Transfiguring Luther. The Planetary Promise of Luther's Theology* (2017).

of 2017, marked as they are by a rapidity of global social change that could never have been imagined by the reformers of the sixteenth century. The second is to take full account of the lessons that have been learnt both by Lutherans and other participating communions from the Ecumenical Movement, in particular from the method of resolving differences dialogically on the basis of what the Statement calls *differentiating* consensus, the latter term being now preferred to the original *differentiated consensus* as used in 1999 in the Joint Declaration on Justification. The change is motivated by a very real desire to accept the authenticity of differing ways of stating the same fundamental truth as they have been developed within previously separated communions which can now accept their consonant authenticity. The statement is made that 'The Catholic Church rightly reminds Lutheran theology that the Christian message of salvation is also expressed in the Bible by means of concepts other than those of justification.'⁶

The Statement has been issued on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, the churches of which represent about 90% of Lutherans across the world. It should, however, be noted that there is a significant minority of more conservatively minded Lutherans who co-operate not through the LWF, but through the International Lutheran Council. The biggest partner church in the latter is the well-known Missouri Synod church. It is not a signatory to the Joint Declaration nor to the other agreements made by individual LWF churches with other communions. However, it may be about to involve itself more deeply in its own ecumenical conversations and I understand from my friend, George Semiec, a minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England, that a dialogue between the ILC and the Vatican is now being planned.

It is also important to understand how the present concord amongst the LWF churches differs from the very real divisions that emerged amongst Lutherans in the sixteenth century, often summed up in the contrast between Luther himself and Melancthon. Luther was not prepared to accept the compromises, as he saw them, that Melancthon proposed in his conversations with the Reformed on the real presence in the eucharist and in his later discussions at Regensburg with Cardinal Contarini (where more conservative Catholics also helped to torpedo the talks). In the late sixteenth century, there was a clear division between the gnesio-Lutherans and more emollient ones over relations with the Reformed, some of the gnesio-Lutherans being more anti-Reformed than they were anti-Catholic⁷. As far as the ecumenically engaged LWF churches are concerned, these sharp divisions have gone, though it would still be true that some Lutherans feel a greater closeness to the more

⁶ *Statement*, para 9.

⁷ A very good summary of these divisions is given in MacCulloch, D. *The Reformation: Europe's House Divided* (2003), pp. 347-353. He stresses that in this period some Lutherans restored the elevation of the host to underlie their theological differences from other Protestants over the eucharist.

'catholic' churches of Rome, Canterbury and the Orthodox and others to the Reformed and other Protestant churches⁸.

The thesis on basic theological convictions.

Unsurprisingly, this begins with a stress on grace alone, the grace of God revealed in his self-emptying in Christ⁹. This is immediately linked with an emphasis on God's coming to us 'in the finite, material and corporeal gifts of this world', a stress that is a powerful witness against 'all spiritualising tendencies in piety and theology, and against all forms of prosperity gospel that are commonly preached today'¹⁰. In these strong statements, we hear the authentic voice of the founder of the tradition, Luther himself, now applied to continuing and new distortions in Christian life. The Church is reminded of its low estate and its call to care for the very least.

A continuing concern for reliance on grace alone is recorded in the assertion that, while Lutherans share the search for a juster world, they must also remind a world in which human beings increasingly exult on their ability to act as 'creators of themselves', that they also witness both against any re-entry of legalistic bargaining into Christian life and any attempt to reduce Christian faith to social activism, however admirable¹¹. That is a witness particularly needed in those churches with a strong liberal Protestant heritage, British Methodism perhaps in particular. However, the whole concept of human beings as co-creators with God needs further exploration, particularly in dialogue with the Orthodox tradition and its stress on the potential of the image of God in human kind¹². There is a proper sense in which human beings are called to be co-creators provided always that they remember that this is in the context of the invitation of Him who is both Creator with the Father yet also our Incarnate brother. 'There is one Lord Jesus Christ through whom all things are and we with Him'¹³.

Next the question of law and gospel is addressed with a necessary balance being adduced. 'If only the law were proclaimed, the result would be pride or despair. If only the gospel, it

⁸ Thus, the Swedish and Finnish churches have not entered into the Community of Protestant Churches, which embraces almost all European reformed and Methodists as well as many Lutheran churches, but they have entered the Porvoo Communion with Anglicans in the British Isles and the Church of Sweden is also trying to develop relations with the Old Catholics.

⁹ *Statement*, para 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, para 8.

¹¹ *Statement*, para 24 is particularly interesting 'There is a tendency...to make a person's or the church's degree of Christianity contingent on specific ethical requirements...this danger of a new legalism should be critiqued.

¹² The conclusions of the recent Anglican Orthodox report, *In the Image and Likeness of God. A Hope-Filled Anthropology* (2016), on this would be helpful for any Lutheran-Orthodox conversation.

¹³ 1 Cor 8:6.

would necessarily become cheap grace'. The balance sought in the twentieth century by Bonhoeffer is affirmed¹⁴.

The primacy of Word and sacraments in the creation and ongoing life and mission of the Church is reinforced, alongside an affirmation of the motherhood of the Church as stemming from this. Agreement on the fundamental role of word and sacraments as means of grace is seen as basic to church unity, though it is accompanied by an assertion that God also acts through other means¹⁵. The ministry conferred through ordination is also divinely instituted and a need for episcopate at regional level is accepted, though without any particular form being prescribed for it¹⁶. Lutherans accept, however, that others may pose relevant questions on the exact form that such ministry should take.

The traditional Lutheran emphasis on the priesthood of all believers is linked with a stress on the apostolic obligation of the whole Christian community. All Christians have the privilege of access to God in prayer and the right to intercede for others but also a share in the apostolic commission to bear witness to the gospel in word and life¹⁷.

The goodness of creation and the importance of secular responsibility are strongly asserted. 'In confessing the creative bounty of God, the Lutheran reformers were insisting on the autonomy of the created world and inviting people to a joyful participation in earthly life'¹⁸. The traditional Lutheran doctrine of secular work as also a vocation is reaffirmed, but with a particular stress on the need for service in the world in which Christians seek its overall good and not their own personal good. A carefully nuanced statement argues that the outcome of such engagement should not be seen as a realisation of the Kingdom of God; however such acts are undertaken in the hope that God will at the end save the fallen creation and bring to perfection what has begun below¹⁹. There follows a discussion of Luther's teaching on the three estates in which all Christians are necessarily involved, church, family and social life, accompanied by the famous distinction between the role of the Lutheran in private relationships, in which behaviour should be based on the Beatitudes, and in public roles where the person acts in accordance with the regulating and even, on occasion, punitive role of the State, ordained by God as a defence against anarchy and chaos²⁰.

Finally, there is consideration of the traditional Lutheran stress on *sola scriptura*. It balances recognition of the key role of Scripture as witness to revelation with the problems of interpretation made particularly acute by the many forms of biblical interpretation at play in the Christians world, both traditional and historical critical. Lutherans agree on the

¹⁴ *Statement*, para 20.

¹⁵ *ibid*, para 30.

¹⁶ *ibid*, paras 28,34. See also the important LWF statement of 2007, *Episcopal Ministry in the service of the Church*.

¹⁷ *ibid*, para 32.

¹⁸ *ibid*, para 42.

¹⁹ *ibid*, para 47.

²⁰ *ibid*, paras 49-51.

importance of the Church as a living interpretative community, but this stress raises questions of how interpretation within one communion interacts with that in others²¹. Lutherans might do well to look at the contemporary Catholic stress on the *sensus fidelium*, particularly in terms of its transmission across the ages²².

The theses on Lutheran Churches and the Unity of the Church.

This section looks both at the growing internal communion of the Lutheran churches and at their concern for the unity of the whole oikoumene. Central to its account is a description of the growing global Lutheran unity particularly since the emergence of the Lutheran World Federation in 1947, almost simultaneously with the foundation of the World Council of Churches. The interconnection, for Lutherans, of the two is stressed. The LWF was founded to promote increasing fellowship and mutual understanding amongst the global range of Lutheran churches²³.

The original Lutheran churches of the sixteenth century in central and northern Europe had been mainly state churches, established under the authority of those princes who had supported the Reformation. From the late seventeenth century, members of many of these churches had begun to emigrate to North America, taking their faith with them and resulting in churches variously constituted but not 'established' in the traditional sense. From the eighteenth century some Lutherans established overseas missions in non-Christian countries, resulting in a considerable Lutheran presence in some parts of Africa, in India and in Ethiopia. Inevitably, these churches developed under very different local influences and began to develop their own particular styles and emphases²⁴.

The establishment of the LWF was designed to help such churches understand each other within the common framework of maintaining the key Lutheran emphases as stressed in the first thesis of the Statement. It was also designed to help Lutherans understand and participate in the wider Ecumenical Movement. To this end, the LWF set up in 1963 its Research Institute in Strasbourg, the primary aim of which was to encourage and indeed monitor dialogue between Lutherans and other Christian confessions. It has been outstandingly successful in this. Perhaps the only other communion with as strong and effective a department for ecumenism is the Roman Catholic Church with its Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. The Strasbourg Centre has run many ecumenical seminars and conferences designed to help clergy and people alike understand ecumenical dialogues and developments. In 2010, it produced an excellent guide to the

²¹ Ibid, paras 54-59. Note the significant statement at the beginning that the differentiation, but not separation of gospel and Scripture is important.

²² See e.g. my article in ET relating to the most recent statement of the International Theological Commission of the Roman Catholic Church on *sensus fidei* in the life of the Church ET Feb 2105, pp 6-15.

²³ *Statement*, paras 75-7, 80-81.

²⁴ Gritsch, Eric W. *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism* (1958, updated 1994) gives a good overview.

dialogues, *Lutherans in Ecumenical Dialogue*, containing both accounts of the overall principles involved and short accounts of the dialogues with particular partners.

The LWF has also produced important major theological studies, such as *The Church as Communion* (1997), outlining a Lutheran understanding of communion across the ages and a variety of geographical contexts. In the second half of the last century, Lutherans eagerly appropriated the developing oikoumene wide understanding of the Church as communion, viewing it through the lens of their particular Lutheran self-understanding. A prolonged debate within the LWF led to a proposal for redefining itself as a communion in 1990²⁵. At the core of this second thesis of the Statement is an assertion that the entire oikoumene is a communion of churches²⁶.

It was at the LWF conference in 1977 that the concept of unity in reconciled diversity was developed as a way of helping to ensure that unity was not understood as absolute uniformity but did allow for the continuation of contrasting, but potentially mutually enriching, theological insights and spiritual practices for mutual benefit²⁷. The concept has since proved controversial, some critiquing it as unity on easy terms without real entry into a dying to denominationalism and rising to a new common life in Christ²⁸. It does, however, seem to relate well not just to the original Lutheran insistence on adaphora and legitimate variation in church practices where they did not affect the common necessary core of faith and practice, but also to the acceptance of varying but equally valid and mutually enriching traditions within other communions. Thus, for example, modern Roman Catholic thought accepts the equal status of the Latin and eastern traditions and even speaks of the Church as needing to breathe with both lungs²⁹. The Statement implicitly accepts one of the possible perils of such unity when it insists that unity on such a basis must provide for continuing exchange between the partners in such a way that future disagreements can be solved without further schisms³⁰. In short, I would add that such unity needs to be legitimate, reconciled and mutually beneficial³¹.

Considerable attention is given to dialogue and to its being both irenic and rigorous, irenic in terms of a willingness on the part of Lutherans and partners to explore alternative ways of expressing the same core of truth but rigorous in ensuring agreement on the basics. Lutherans have certainly been effective in pursuing these twin aims in national and international dialogues: I have already mentioned Fr. Fred Jelly's testimony to that fact. The

²⁵ Ibid, para 80.

²⁶ Ibid, paras 82-3.

²⁷ Ibid, paras 88-90.

²⁸ As for example did the late Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, a key figure in the foundation of the Church of South India. I have looked at some of the arguments for and against reconciled diversity in my article 'Unity in reconciled diversity: Cop-out or rainbow Church?' in *Theology* (2010), pp 411-420.

²⁹ As shown in the appropriate sections of the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II and the Decree on the Eastern churches. Pope John Paul II issued his apostolic letter *Orientalis Lumen* in 1995 to reinforce the point.

³⁰ Statement paras 108-9, underlining need for reception at all levels.

³¹ As in my article referred to above in ref.27.

importance of reception of the dialogues at every level is also stressed, with the important rider being added that such reception involves more than simple assent, it also calls for a new quality of life, proper communication and education.

The varying nature of the international dialogues is briefly discussed. If I may re-categorise a little what it said, there are effectively three sets of dialogues in terms of their present and past status³².

First, there are the two dialogues with the ancient major churches of East and West, each of which claims that it alone has preserved fully the Apostolic Tradition in teaching and order. Both of these have cleared much ground, the dialogue with the Roman Catholics especially, which also started much earlier than the Orthodox dialogue. The former dialogue has been as it were the jewel in the crown, leading to one of the few statements to be fully adopted by both partners to an international dialogue, the famous *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. However, neither dialogue has yet got to the stage attained in three others which recommended pulpit and altar fellowship, the reason being that, in both cases, professedly so in the first, there is no agreement on what structures are necessary for full mutual churchly communion. For Lutherans, agreement on the key article of justification and on the gospel sacraments suffices, for Catholics it lacks agreement on an episcopate in necessary communion with the Bishop of Rome³³.

Next come the dialogues with Anglicans, Methodists and Reformed which have either recommended pulpit and altar fellowships to the member churches of both communions, or, at least, as is the case with the Anglicans, have cleared the ground for regional agreements on full communion. Here the problems in achieving communion have been fewer because none of these three communions claims to be the sole church that is *fully* church, though Anglicans have required some agreement on the nature and practice of episcopal succession, steps which have been achieved in North America and northern Europe³⁴. The individual member churches of the LWF retain the right to make their own decisions on agreements relating to partial or full communion. The ELCA has intercommunion agreements with the Episcopal Church and the United Methodists, with two churches in the reformed tradition and with the Moravians. The Church of Norway has pulpit and altar fellowship agreements through two regional communions, the Porvoo Communion and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe as well as a local agreement with United Methodists. Together, they yield fruitful relationships with Anglicans, Reformed and Methodists.

³² Ibid, paras 99-105.

³³ A point made strongly by the Catholics in the joint study document, *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2006)

³⁴ Through the 1999 agreement of ELCA and The Episcopal Church in USA and through the Waterloo agreement (2001) of The Anglican Church of Canada and the Lutheran Church of Canada.

Finally, there are newer dialogues with Baptists and Pentecostals, neither are yet at the stage where pulpit and altar fellowship might be established³⁵. The dialogue with Pentecostals contrasts the Lutheran emphasis on the *pure* gospel of justifying grace with the Pentecostal one on the *full* gospel, including their understanding of the range of charismatic gifts³⁶. Hopefully, this might lead ultimately to a particularly interesting differentiating consensus, celebrating the contrasting complementarity of the two traditions within the total catholicity of the Great Tradition.

A point little mentioned in these theses is the distinguished contribution rendered by many national dialogues in which Lutherans are involved. One can particularly point to the immensely detailed ongoing work of the US Lutheran-Catholic dialogue which has a good claim to be considered the most productive of all the national bilateral dialogues. The key regional dialogue, embracing eleven churches, seven Lutheran and four Anglican was the north European dialogue leading to the creation of the Porvoo Communion³⁷.

Two key points in this section to note are the insistence on visible unity as corresponding to the incarnation of the one Christ and the excellent definition of catholicity in para 119.

‘Catholicity is realised in this exchange of gifts. Catholicity is a unity which compels and a unity in legitimate diversity. Catholicity is being church together beyond all confessional, ethnic, linguistic and national barriers. Only the awareness of catholicity and its realisation in the churches gives ecumenical efforts their true sense’.

Finally, we note the traditional Lutheran insistence that agreement on the proclamation of the Word and right administration of the sacraments is sufficient for communion. However, it is coupled with an understanding of the importance on structures of ministry, so important, of course, in both Anglican and Catholic thinking. Traditionally, Lutherans have considered the exact form of the ministry of the Word and sacraments as variable (as indeed it remains *within* the LWF). There remains some tension between those Lutherans perfectly happy with the historic episcopate and those, such as the *Word Alone* Movement in the US, wary of it—a tension that requires further internal Lutheran work.

Ecumenical challenges today.

These are the subject of the third set of theses, the term being used at least as much in terms of global challenges common to all churches as in terms of challenges to Lutherans per se.

³⁵ *Statement*, para 102.

³⁶ *Lutherans in Dialogue*, op cit, pp. 63-9.

³⁷ *Together in Mission and Ministry. The Porvoo Common Statement with Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe*, (1993). Osterlin, L. *Churches of Northern Europe in Profile*, (1995), surveys these churches historically in the context of their relations with Anglicans.

The first issue addressed is that of context for each particular Lutheran church and its inculturation. Inculturation is accepted as part of the same 'essence of faith as the Incarnation' and it is asserted that 'God creates and maintains His Church in the most diverse places and cultures'³⁸. Nevertheless, not all aspects of any particular culture are necessarily compatible with the gospel, also globalisation means that there can be overlapping cultures within the same national context³⁹.

Following on from this, there is stress on the need for common fundamental theological work on both the understanding of Scripture and the doctrine of justification. The complexity of biblical interpretation, granted both the variety of contexts and of modern exegetical methods is accepted, but a need is also affirmed to recover the three key principles of Luther in bible study, prayer, meditation and struggle to understand⁴⁰. One may add that all communions struggle with the need to encourage systematic bible study amongst the faithful, Catholics to consolidate its developing importance since Vatican II and Protestants to encourage its revival amongst many congregations which have lost the habit once so central for Protestants.

The central teaching on justification needs to be maintained stoutly within the countervailing context of the modern secular legalism of evaluating people simply by their work and achievements⁴¹. The Gospel can still save people from what the thesis calls 'mandatory self-realisation' and let them flourish instead in the new identity that God offers⁴².

The challenge of newer styles of Christian church to the traditional denominations is stressed, the rise of the Pentecostals, the non-denominational churches and (especially in USA) the mega churches. It is important not to overlook their appeal, which may well be legitimate on the Pauline principle of 'being all things to all people', but it is equally important to ask how far they may be driven by market paradigms, thus being less than faithful to the gospel. The importance of maintaining and communicating distinctively Lutheran gifts is stressed⁴³.

The questions of potentially church dividing ethical disputes and relationships with other religions are also mentioned⁴⁴. For the Lutherans, the key question is whether such ethical disagreements affect the core of the faith as they have received it or whether they are simply the result of differences in social context: it is admitted that distinguishing between the two is not always easy⁴⁵. Finally, there is the commendation of inter-religious dialogue

³⁸ *Statement*, para 124.

³⁹ *Ibid*, paras 129,132.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, paras 138-141,142.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, paras 145-8

⁴² *Ibid*, para 149.

⁴³ *Ibid*, paras 154-160.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, paras 161-166.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, para 163.

as important for mutual tolerance and understanding. For Lutherans, there is always a balance to be maintained between their affirmation of *Christus solus* (Christ alone) and an acceptance of the universally salvific will of Christ⁴⁶. Inter-religious dialogue is always to be distinguished from ecumenical dialogue with its sure basis in the lordship of Christ, a point that is, of course, also strongly stressed by Catholics and others⁴⁷.

Conclusion.

My appreciation of Lutheranism is not confined to the excellent summaries in the Statement, or even to my Lutheran friends, grateful as I am to them, but also relates to a particular appreciation of what I would call the Lutheran balance. At the Reformation Lutherans were insistent that a radical refocusing of doctrine was needed so as to prioritise the free grace of God in Christ⁴⁸; however, in terms of church practice and devotion, they were not as anxious as the Reformed and radicals to throw out everything which did not in their eyes have a fully biblical basis. They maintained considerable amounts of the traditional liturgy and associated practices. They did not despise art as potentially idolatrous and indeed sometimes scandalised visiting Puritans and Reformed by their continuing use of statues and art. It is always worth remembering that Bach was a Lutheran.

The concept of *adiaphora*, or things indifferent, has much in common with the developing Anglicanism of Richard Hooker in England. In varying ways, Lutherans can relate to aspects of Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism and the more Protestant free church tradition. Catholic, Anglican and free church scholars, such as James Atkinson, Yves Congar, Philip Watson and Gordon Rupp have all played a role in the rediscovery and re-reception of Luther. More recently, the Finnish Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue and the work of American scholars like Braaten and Jenson, have stimulated a recovery of Luther as a theologian of holiness⁴⁹. The wide Lutheran outreach in dialogue and relationships has been extremely valuable to the rest of us. There are important aspects of Lutheran life and theological thought with which Catholics, Anglicans and free church Protestants can identify as well as aspects of Lutheranism from which they can most certainly learn.

We may look forward to increasing insights into contemporary problems from the Lutheran churches of Latin America, Asia and Africa. I recently received for review a book by a Brazilian Lutheran, Vitor Westhelle, *Transfiguring Luther: The Planetary Promise of Luther's Theology*. In it, he seeks to explore the breadth of Luther's teaching in the context of his own country and others facing similar problems. He places great stress on Luther as a theologian of experience, who engaged not simply with the search for a gracious God but

⁴⁶ Ibid, para 171.

⁴⁷ Ibid, para 170.

⁴⁸ In the report, *The Apostolicity of the Church-Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (2006), this point is particularly stressed. The Lutherans concerned spoke of the Reformation as reconfiguring the central aspects of the apostolic faith so as to bring them into clearer prominence. *Apostolicity*, p. 142.

⁴⁹ Braaten, C.E. and Jenson, R.W. (eds) *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (1998).

also with the whole context of his own society. The author mines Luther for insights, but in no way treats him fundamentalistically; indeed, he points up some contradictions in Luther's thought. He places emphasis on the third mode of Christ's presence as referred to in the classical texts, that is to his presence in the whole of creation and particularly in the poor, as distinct from His historical presence and His sacramental presence⁵⁰. He places particular stress on the Lutheran doctrine of creation, arguing that nature is not innately fallen, albeit cursed by human sin⁵¹. He argues that God 'created space for human beings' and picks up Marx's description of Luther as the first German economist, describing a primitive system of organic human relationships with each other and nature, later distorted by sin and exploitative relationships⁵². He notes some similarities between the grassroots support for Luther's following in Germany and the later Latin American base communities⁵³.

The book is not an easy read and I confess I cannot review it with the ability of one who is both more familiar with liberation theology and with Luther. However, I can see it as a valuable pointer towards the coming of greater creative theological output in the newer Lutheran churches that are developing outside of the original European and slightly later Lutheran heartlands. Such ventures will enrich the life of the Lutheran Communion and the rest of the oikoumene.

Finally, I will pay a brief tribute to the extremely thorough document of the most recent dialogue between the US Catholic Bishops Conference and ELCA, *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Sacraments*. It registers 32 agreed statements on the three intertwined topics, adding a commentary on each and drawing on both the previous stages of the international dialogue as well as on three national dialogues, German, American and Swedish-Finnish, each of which have their own distinctive flavour within the Lutheran pleroma. It concludes with an examination of remaining areas of difference, still to be resolved. The impetus for such work came from a suggestion by Cardinal Koch that it was timely to create a new genus of ecumenical document, specifically dedicated to harvesting previous agreements and registering partial progress over remaining problems⁵⁴. Particularly valuable for other dialogues between Catholics and Anglicans/Protestants are the assurance that the famous phrase *defectus* used in connection with the ordained ministries of the latter does not imply that they are not being used effectively in the work of salvation. In particular Pope Benedict is quoted as saying that the conciliar remarks on *defectus* 'should in no way deny the saving presence of the Lord in the Lutheran Lord's

⁵⁰ Westhelle, pp. 246-7, 275, cites Luther 'the world is full of God. In every alley, at your door, you find Christ: stare not at the heavens'.

⁵¹ Luther stressed that it was on the first Sabbath, after the completion of creation, that sin first occurred.

⁵² Ibid, p.299.

⁵³ Ibid, pp.227-231.

⁵⁴ As observed by Susan Wood in her brief commentary on the agreement, downloaded on 30 May 2017 alongside the main document.

Supper⁵⁵. It is, however, admitted that neither church is yet agreed on what intermediate sacramental steps might be taken towards fuller reconciliation⁵⁶.

This irenic and finely tuned and nuanced document should prove a great spur to even greater Catholic-Lutheran rapprochement. It was issued in the context of a belief that 'Lutherans and Roman Catholics must let themselves be transformed continuously by the mutual witness of faith' and of the need to meet 'the holy impatience of the faithful' for further progress, requiring not just theological honesty but also 'urgency and love'⁵⁷.

A message for all of us, who can be enriched by every dialogue and not just by those in which our own tradition is involved. I end, as I began, by recording my thanks for the inspiration received from both Lutherans and Catholics.

David Carter.

⁵⁵ *Declaration*, p. 91.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.13.