

# *Touchstone*

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## THE BLESSING AND CHALLENGE OF ECUMENISM

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## **EDITORIAL**

### **Gone Fishing: A Response to the Comprehensive Review Task Group**

This number of *Touchstone* is focussed on ecumenism, both in general and in the United Church of Canada in particular. It is a pleasure to welcome articles as varied as the cutting-edge reflection of Bishop Donald Bolen on “receptive ecumenism” and the imaginative “pulp fiction” of Sandra Beardsall. Among the gems is Betsy Anderson’s profile on Gordon Domm, whose remarkable ministry foreshadowed the vision of “Mending the World.” All the content is stimulating on a topic that sometimes draws yawns. My own call in this editorial is to respond to a radical proposal for the alteration of United Church polity that certainly has ecumenical implications.

The Comprehensive Review Task Group has provided the Church with a provocative report in “Fishing on the Other Side.” It challenges us to leave behind a great deal of what we might have thought integral to its being. Believing that “God is doing a new thing,” it presents a bold and imaginative model to free congregations for becoming “vibrant communities of faith.” Perhaps such freedom from more bureaucratic forms of being church is just what we need. Springtime is in the air! Shall we try it? Perhaps we should first consider whether the proposed model and the argument for it actually might lead us away from the very goals they aim to serve.

#### **An Over-correction?**

It is a classic and understandable move to over-correct when one is embroiled in an unhappy situation. For instance, a minister who is viewed as flamboyant and even reckless by a congregation may be replaced by one who is utterly buttoned-up and authoritarian. Might “Fishing,” with its radical proposals, be such an over-correction? We have a governance structure that is arguably over-regulated with the supervisory responsibilities of “courts,” bureaucratic rules and endless forms. Will we now replace it with a structure that is under-regulated,

with little or no provision for the oversight and support of congregations?

Many congregations already function with little need of guidance from presbytery or conference; they are among the healthiest of our communities of faith. Most of them participate in the life of the wider church through representation at presbytery and conference, and so learn about sister congregations, even playing a role in caring for their ministries. There are some congregations, however, that seem isolationist, distancing themselves from mandates of mutual support and accountability through lack of participation in our courts. A governance structure without some form of oversight and support obviously will give full permission to all congregations to disown responsibility for the well-being of other congregations. The most vulnerable congregations, those on the cusp of viability, will have to sink or swim on their own. *Sauve qui peut!* Voluntary gatherings in the “connectional space” are unlikely to provide much help to at-risk congregations in what may be viewed as a form of social Darwinism.

### **Congregationalism**

“Fishing” is in fact proposing that the United Church of Canada become congregationalist in most of its polity, though even congregationalist churches like the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A. have official regional associations and stated officers. With regard to missing regional judicatories, one wonders if the notion of “connectional space” is presented so as to suggest continuity with our Methodist heritage. But it is a pale reflection of the Methodist connexionalism in which church members were primarily loyal to “the connexion” (Methodism) and only secondarily to circuit and congregation. One wonders also about the ecumenical impact of dismantling conference and presbytery bodies. The United Church would no longer be able to argue that the function of episcopacy (or oversight) is carried in our church by the presbytery. This loss would be ecumenically limiting, if not wounding. Moreover, all of our past conviction about the nature of the United Church has been that we are not a congregationalist church, but connexional and conciliar. Have we ceased believing that the episcopal function of oversight (of

congregations) is integral to our understanding of what it means to be church? Do we really wish to promote so individualistic a system as that of a radical congregationalism?

### **Identity**

Neither personal nor institutional identity is formed on the basis of present experience and future hopes alone. The past always has considerable impact on both present realities and future possibilities whether we are aware of them or not. The fact that the history of our church plays so little role in the articulation of the “Fishing” proposals is a telling weakness. This apparent indifference to our history compounds the misunderstanding of how identities are formed. For instance, there is considerable irony in the fact that the task group asserts the importance of a strong denominational identity and at the same time proposes that we dismantle the governance structure that has been a major factor in nurturing United Church identity.

“Fishing” describes our United Church identity as being that of “an open, welcoming, and justice-seeking church” (p. 1). These adjectives really are more like the attributes, or qualities, of living out our identity rather than factors actually describing our identity. For example, Pope Francis currently is exemplifying such attributes, but it is clear that they do not define his identity or that of his church. The identity of a church is a complex phenomenon, to be sure, but a church is first of all “identified” by its teaching (doctrine), its organization (polity), its history and perhaps its current cultural context. The United Church sets the first two of these in its constitution, the Basis of Union. Would not an account of our identity begin by speaking about our faith in the self-giving love of God in Jesus Christ, our desire to be governed by representatives in church councils and our history as a distinctively Canadian church? Might we even dare to speak of ourselves as trinitarian, since all our faith statements assert this?

Later (p. 3), our denominational identity is described as “centred around faith, hospitality, justice, an open theology and interculturalism.” Again, one notes that, except for “faith,” these words seem to reflect *how* the church carries its identity rather than actually

articulating *what* it is. Later in the first paragraph on p. 3 we do hear about “living out God’s unconditional love as exemplified, proclaimed, and inspired by Jesus Christ.” But this is said in reference to supporting “spiritual journeys” and is not taken up as an identity-conferring mark of faith. The attributes of openness, of being justice-seeking, of being intercultural, etc., are important characteristics to which all churches should aspire. But if convictions about *how* one lives the faith is all we have to say about who we are as a Christian church, then will not the criticisms of those who accuse us of having little or no theology seem to be justified? Not basing our identity on the official teaching and governance set out in our constitution also makes it slam-dunk easy to substitute a congregationalist polity for an existing conciliar polity.

### **Structure or Leadership?**

Near the end of the time that I was serving on General Council staff (1995-2001) restructuring was proposed. The rhetoric of the day was that the then existing divisions were functioning as “silos” and that only with greater integration could we serve the Church’s mandate effectively. The wheels were set in motion for change and resources of money and personnel allocated to the project. A colleague made an observation that might well be made today: “The problem isn’t the structure; it’s the leadership.” What was needed then in the General Council Office wasn’t a re-organization but greater vision and greater will to work together across administrative boundaries.

Any structure can become bureaucratically captive, from the General Council Office to the life of a congregation. Perhaps what is needed is not another venture in wholesale restructuring (with its attendant expense), but the overturning of the bureaucratic mindset and a deeper recovery of servant leadership. In terms of overturning the bureaucratic mindset, the publication of the 2013 Manual seems a good step in the right direction.

It has been observed that as churches experience the loss of vital conviction about the centralities of faith they tend to focus ever greater attention on their institutional structures. While the “Fishing” proposals seem to promise the releasing of God’s people from bureaucratic

captivity to the free service of mission, they actually might be in disturbing continuity with the notion that we can address what ails us through re-structuring. Moreover they might plunge us into years of sorting out the changes—and paying for them.

### **Options for More Modest Restructuring**

If we suffer today from too few able and willing people in our courts and on our committees, as well as from diminishing financial resources, there are options for more modest change that need to be considered, change that will not threaten to swamp the boat. Toronto Conference, for example, has instituted such a change, reducing the number of its presbyteries from nine to four, and clarifying the mandates of presbytery and conference so that duplication between them is ended. Members of Conference staff have been deployed to the presbyteries while still being supervised by the executive secretary. As well, forms of policy governance have been instituted that seem to be working very well in the Conference executive and moderately well in the presbyteries. The restructuring of Toronto Conference has not been without challenges, but it is change that the Conference has been able to undertake without significant dislocation or exorbitant cost.

One aspect of the personnel shortage in our presbyteries, particularly urban ones, is that many ministers simply do not attend. Conferences have seen fit to make training in racial justice and in the prevention of abuse mandatory for ministers who wish to remain in “good standing.” Might conferences and presbyteries address the problem of non-participation at judicatory meetings in the same way? This also would put pressure on agenda and planning committees to deliver more imaginative and effective meetings!

### **College of Ministers and the Association of Ministers**

The challenge of both supporting and disciplining ministers is not a problem to be solved but a polarity to be managed. It will be with us for a long time to come. One way of managing the polarity would be to address it structurally by creating the College and Association proposed by “Fishing.” However, the existence of two such bodies might well lead

to a type of management–union negotiation and confrontation, or leave congregations vulnerable to association assertiveness. The church is always in danger of secularizing itself, and the importation of these models from the surrounding culture would lead to increasing litigious entanglement, multiplying time demands on those involved.

It is too early to tell, but the model of assigning all official ministry and personnel responsibility to conference staff, thus giving presbyteries the freedom to be supportive of ministers, may succeed in managing the disciplinary/support polarity well. In contrast, the concept of a College and an Association seems to add layers of bureaucracy and increasing the potential for adversarial relationships.

Perhaps the best idea in “Fishing” is direct election from congregations to a large General Council. Deeper and more positive “ownership” of the United Church by its local “franchises” would be a heartening result.

### **Theological Foundations?**

While “Fishing” presents the text of “A New Creed” and invokes various faith concepts, one looks in vain for any biblical or theological foundations for its proposed new structure. What is there in the Bible or in the theological heritage of the United Church that justifies a congregationalist polity or a management-union system for ordering relations with ministers? What rationale is offered for the abandonment of an oversight function in the church, or for the substitution of “connectional space” for “a strong connexional tie”? Where is there serious engagement with Jesus Christ, whom we are commissioned to proclaim as “crucified and risen, our judge and our hope,” and to whom we have referred for decades as “the only head of the church”? There is no theological foundation provided that can bear the weight of the radical departures proposed in “Fishing.” Serious theological engagement is missing in action in this document.

*Peter Wyatt*



# RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM: OPEN POSSIBILITIES FOR CHRISTIAN RENEWAL

by Donald Bolen

Georges Tavad once wrote that each church would do well to look to the history of its dialogue partners during the centuries of separation, “to ask if it should not learn from the other . . . a memory that it has itself missed.”<sup>1</sup> I have always liked the quote and the notion of learning a memory belonging to others, a memory of what God has been doing in their midst. In his book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope John Paul II suggests something very similar when, in pondering why the Holy Spirit had permitted so many divisions among Christ’s disciples through the centuries, he asks: “Could it not be that these divisions have been a path continually leading the Church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ’s Gospel and in the redemption accomplished by Christ? Perhaps all this wealth would not have come to light otherwise.”<sup>2</sup>

The implied notion that there are memories to be learned, insights of the Gospel to be retrieved, and “Christian treasures of great value”<sup>3</sup> to be found in other churches is an underlying assumption at the heart of a new initiative called “Receptive Ecumenism.” Paul Murray, who coined the phrase, is a lay Roman Catholic theologian teaching at the University of Durham in the north of England. He has coordinated three international colloquia, edited a major volume, and initiated a local pilot project to test and refine the governing principles and practice of what he hopes will be an initiative to encourage the revitalizing of Christian churches through ecumenical learning.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Tavad, “The Final Report: Witness to Tradition,” *One in Christ*, 32 (1996): 122.

<sup>2</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Random House, 1994), 153.

<sup>3</sup> Addressing the observers at the end of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul spoke of having come into contact “with Christian treasures of great value” in the Christian communities they represented.

<sup>4</sup> The first colloquium, held in conjunction with the University of Durham granting Cardinal Kasper an honorary doctorate, was in January 2006. The colloquium led to the publication of *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, ed. Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford

Murray knows well the landscape of ecumenical initiatives, including those of the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, and other Christian Communion over the past five decades. His initiative builds on the work of dialogue and on efforts towards common prayer, joint witness, and mission. But receptive ecumenism challenges churches to move also in a different direction—through an attitudinal shift in the way they approach other Christian churches. It invites a turn from what the dialogue partner can learn *from us* to what we can learn *from them*. It takes values that have always been quietly essential to good ecumenical work—self-critical hospitality, humble learning and ongoing conversion—and makes them into “the explicit required strategy and core task of contemporary ecumenism.”<sup>5</sup> Murray notes that he could say of receptive ecumenism what William James said of pragmatism in his 1907 volume on the subject—it is “A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking.”<sup>6</sup>

It is useful to begin with Murray’s diagnosis of the current ecumenical landscape. On the one hand, he argues that the “once widely held hope for structural unification in the short-medium term is, in general, now widely recognised as unrealistic.”<sup>7</sup> He also takes as a given the ecumenical fatigue and energy drain that characterizes the current context; the sense that our dialogues have reached an impasse as they have sought to address the issues at the heart of our divisions. And he laments the gap between all that the dialogues have produced and the “rather slim” amount of “actual effective ecclesial learning that has taken place at more than a notional or theoretical level.”<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, he strongly affirms the need for our churches to

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University Press, 2008), hereafter RE&CCL. A second colloquium was held near Durham in January 2009, and a second volume with Oxford University Press is in the planning stage.

<sup>5</sup> Paul D. Murray, “Reform and Renewal: Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Conversion.” Lecture given at an ecumenical clergy workshop, Mayfair United Church, Saskatoon, SK, 7 November 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning—Establishing the Agenda,” in RE&CCL, 12.

<sup>7</sup> Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for Our Needs,” *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008): 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. See also “Reform and Renewal.”

remain committed to the goal of full visible unity as Christ's will for the church. Receptive ecumenism "firmly resists relinquishing . . . (the) aspiration for full visible structural and sacramental unity and the correlative commitment to walking the way of ecclesial conversion that this requires."<sup>9</sup> While full unity may be an eschatological reality, "it would be poor eschatology that led us to conclude that it is, therefore, a reality that is of no relevance to the contingencies of present existence." Giving up on that goal is akin to "giving up on the aspiration for economic justice which will likewise always be elusive in this order."<sup>10</sup>

Given this assessment of the current ecumenical situation and an unbending commitment to the goal of full visible unity, Murray raises pragmatic questions: What does it mean "to live now, oriented upon such goals? . . . What is the appropriate ethic for life between the times in relation to this calling?"<sup>11</sup> He insists that the Christian God does not lead us into a corner and prod us with a stick, but asks, where *is* God leading us, opening a space for us to grow ecumenically in the present moment?<sup>12</sup>

Locating the ecumenical task within the context of larger challenges confronting Western society, he suggests that the key question of our age is "whether we can live difference for mutual flourishing rather than mutually assured destruction."<sup>13</sup> The notion of "living difference well" suggests, however, not only a secular challenge but also an ecclesiological one, grounded in the nature of a Trinitarian God. The churches "are called in their very living and working together . . . to be a living witness to difference well-lived in the conviction that difference well-lived goes to the very heart of the Trinitarian being of God."<sup>14</sup>

The way in which Christians and Christian communities seek to address their differences through engaging in respectful and rigorous

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> "Establishing the Agenda," 11-12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; cf. "Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning," 32.

<sup>12</sup> "Reform and Renewal."

<sup>13</sup> "Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning," 31; cf. 32.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

dialogue, turning together to the Scriptures, tradition and their separate histories, is a witness the world needs to hear. But Murray's focus in this initiative is not on dialogue so much as on learning from the differences in other Christian traditions: "receptive ecumenical learning within and between the separated Christian traditions goes to the very heart of the evangelical call to witness to the possibility of living reconciled difference for mutual flourishing in a world of blood-soaked conflict."<sup>15</sup>

Receptive Ecumenism is in the first instance not a project but an ethic, one which draws part of its inspiration from the "turn to the other" espoused by Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. In a context of division, it invites churches to move away from competition with the other and towards "the need to attend to and to act upon their specific responsibilities revealed in the face of the other."<sup>16</sup> This implies more than simply tolerating the other, or coming to recognize the other's approach as complementary and of value, but rather, delving into the "deep implications of the other's differing perspective" for one's ecclesial life, opening a space for the possibility of genuine learning.<sup>17</sup> "The basic principle is that considerable further ecumenical progress is indeed possible but only if each of the traditions, both singly and jointly, make a clear, programmatic shift from prioritising the question, 'What do our various others first need to learn from us?' to asking instead, 'What do we need to learn and what can we learn—or receive—with integrity from our others?'"<sup>18</sup>

The invitation to churches here is for each tradition to take "responsibility for its own potential learning from others" and to be "willing to facilitate the learning of others as requested but without either requiring how this should be done, or even making others' learning a precondition to attending to one's own."<sup>19</sup> This move away from the logic of "we'll learn from you if you learn from us" calls forth a real maturity from our churches. Murray notes that our hidden

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<sup>15</sup> "Establishing the Agenda," 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> "Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning," 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> "Establishing the Agenda," 15; cf. 12, 17.

assumption in ecumenical relations has been that “life would be a lot easier if only they were a bit more like us.” Instead, he is suggesting that “what we need to do is to spin the telescope around 180 degrees, and approach the other, not thinking, ‘how can we get them to see my beauty’, but saying, ‘what’s their beauty that speaks into my life?’” He speaks of embracing a “unilateral willingness to walk the path of ecclesial conversion,” not solely or principally to build up ecumenical relations, but “for the sake of the greater flourishing of one’s own tradition.”<sup>20</sup>

Murray notes that such an ethic can be embraced at every level of ecclesial life. It is “as simple yet all pervasive as the Gospel it represents,” with a starting point that “befits the character of Christian life, the way of hope-filled conversion.”<sup>21</sup> And it invites changing our view of the place of ecumenism in church life. He summarizes well an attitude we have often encountered, and perhaps expressed, in relation to ecumenism: “Yeah, okay, I accept that it’s a very good thing, but I have this very long list of things that I’ve got to do, with an ever-shrinking congregation, with an ever-shrinking number of presbyters and ministers.” In this mindset, ecumenism represents one more task in a ministerial or parish workload that is already overwhelming. Murray counters it by suggesting that ecumenical learning is precisely what can help us address our challenges. It may well be the principal way in which the Holy Spirit is resourcing us, by learning from how other Christian traditions face the same difficulties confronting us. We do so “not by picking up another’s tradition and plunking it into our own, but like music, transposing it so it can be sung in a way that is recognizably Anglican or recognizably Methodist or authentically Catholic.”<sup>22</sup>

American Jesuit Thomas Reese, who delivered an address at the first Receptive Ecumenism conference in 2006, observed that, while in the past, many saw reform within the Roman Catholic Church as essential to ecumenical progress, “today the reverse is also true:

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<sup>20</sup> “Reform and Renewal.”

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 12.

<sup>22</sup> “Reform and Renewal.”

ecumenism is an essential path to church reform.”<sup>23</sup> Murray notes that for some time now we have been learning from each other liturgically, but receptive ecumenism invites us to engage in learning also concerning the organizational realities of our churches, how we make decisions, how we communicate the gospel message and carry out the mission given us by the Lord.

Murray envisages how receptive ecumenical learning could lead each tradition to be “fruitfully re-imagined in the light of its own ecumenical others.”<sup>24</sup> It offers “a long-term learning opportunity in which the churches might progress towards their calling and destiny in the only way possible—by slow and difficult growth in maturity.”<sup>25</sup> Such growth cannot be programmed or anticipated. It is likely to come in an ad hoc way, yet one that enriches Christian communities over time on all levels of our ecclesial lives.<sup>26</sup> From this perspective, the ecumenical scene can be understood “not simply as a problem-strewn field but as one of open possibilities, across which the only path is one of long, slow learning into greater life and maturity—this is not a second-best accommodation compared with a supposedly alternative faster route but the only route possible, the golden highway.”<sup>27</sup>

There is an intrinsic humility built into the notion of ecumenical learning. Murray suggests that often in our relations with other Christian churches, we foster an ecumenism of the “best china tea set,” where we put on display our strengths, our achievements, what we do well. Receptive ecumenism calls instead for “an ecumenism of the wounded hands.” “Our traditions are limited as well as life giving, wounded as well as grace-bearing. We need to show rather than to hide our wounds and to ask our others to minister to us.”<sup>28</sup> This approach has long been lauded on a personal level, but Murray notes that “the openness to

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas J. Reese, “Organizational Factors Inhibiting Receptive Catholic Learning,” in *RE&CCL*, 354.

<sup>24</sup> “Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning,” 32.

<sup>25</sup> “Establishing the Agenda,” 15.

<sup>26</sup> “Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning,” 33.

<sup>27</sup> “Reform and Renewal.”

<sup>28</sup> Paul D. Murray, “Healing gifts for wounded hands.” Unpublished lecture given at St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan, 8 November 2013.

growth, change, examination of conscience and continual grace-filled conversion that lies at the heart of Christian life pertains as much to the ecclesial as to the personal.”<sup>29</sup> Not only as individuals, but as churches, we do well to foster a keen attentiveness to the work of the Holy Spirit in the other, and a self-critical eye to oneself, with the aim of being converted ever more deeply.

This conversion is not ultimately about sacrifice, but about enrichment. Murray notes that all effective receptive ecumenical learning is not only a matter of the head but also of the heart; a matter of being attracted by, even falling in love with, the grace-filled beauty in another tradition and being impelled to move towards it, even when such a move has its cost.<sup>30</sup> In ecumenical circles, it is almost creedal to say that the more we are converted to Christ, the closer we move to one another. In Paul Murray’s formulation, the suggestion is that, through our ecumenical encounters and efforts, we also have the potential to come closer to Christ. Receptive learning “will move us closer to finding ourselves in the other, the other in ourselves, and each in Christ.”<sup>31</sup>

Murray suggests that such learning would make each Christian community more authentically itself. It would not be a matter of making the Catholic Church less Catholic but “more fully, more richly Catholic and, hence, more fully, more richly the church of Christ; more clearly the ‘sacrament of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind.’”<sup>32</sup> Receptive Ecumenism “is about the intensification, complexification, and further realization of identity, not its diminishment and loss.”<sup>33</sup> The challenge is for each tradition to become more fully itself, more fully the church of Jesus Christ, by learning from the richness of other traditions. This will require receptivity and openness, but not a compromising of one’s ecclesial identity. Murray is confident that such ecumenical learning could strengthen the identity and richness

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> “Establishing the Agenda,” 15; cf. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 16; cf. “Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning,” 33, 39.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 18, citing *Lumen Gentium* (The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1964), §1.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 17.

of each family of churches. It could strengthen the relationships among churches, “because we will each be on a journey of conversion that is going to take us places that are unimaginable, by fulfilling that which is possible and achievable and by opening other doors that are not yet seen.”<sup>34</sup> And, of great importance, it could strengthen our witness to the world, by living authentically the call to conversion and the richness of the Gospel we proclaim.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Paul Murray is a Roman Catholic theologian, and his receptive ecumenism initiative is deeply and carefully rooted in Catholic ecclesiology and ecumenical principles. In his 1995 papal encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*, Pope John Paul II had noted that ecumenical dialogue involves not only an exchange of ideas but also an “exchange of gifts” (§28). He added that ecumenical encounter “works to awaken a reciprocal fraternal assistance, whereby Communities strive to give in mutual exchange what each one needs in order to grow towards definitive fullness in accordance with God’s plan (cf. Eph 4:11-13).”<sup>36</sup> Pope John Paul was building on the ecumenical principles set forth in the Second Vatican Council. In sum, wherever elements of the church have been more effectively emphasized in other Christian Communities, wherever the fruits of the Holy Spirit have been received in ways that differ, but are complementary to their reception in the Catholic Church, wherever a fuller appreciation of any aspect of revelation is found, one can speak of gifts which could be received by the Catholic Church, gifts with the potential to lead its faithful to “a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “Reform and Renewal.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> UUS §87. For a summary of the Roman Catholic ecclesiological foundations of an exchange of gifts and receptive ecumenism, see my articles: “Exchange of Gifts: A Roman Catholic Ecclesiological Perspective” in *Celebrate!* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 8-9; “Discovering God’s Gifts in the Other” in *Celebrate!* 51, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 6-7; and “Receptive Ecumenism and Recent Initiatives in the Catholic Church’s Dialogues with the Anglican Communion and the World Methodist Council,” in *RE&CCL*, 271-284.

<sup>37</sup> The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, §4.



From a Roman Catholic perspective, ecumenical learning, whether reciprocal (an exchange of gifts) or not, fundamentally concerns how gifts of the Spirit objectively come alive in the dialogue partner, how the transformative grace of God has come to expression in the other. Pope John Paul II spoke of a “vast new field” that has opened up ecumenically, pertaining to the life in Christ that is in evidence in other Christians (*UUS* §48). In one of the most beautiful sentences in *Ut Unum Sint*, he notes that ecumenical relations over the past decades have “enabled us to discover what God is bringing about in the members of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities” (§48).

The receptive ecumenism model also seems to be consistent with Pope Francis’ approach to ecumenical relations. In his few short months as pope, he has frequently called for a culture of dialogue and encounter, and in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he stresses the importance of trusting our fellow Christian pilgrims (§244). Paul Murray will no doubt be rejoicing in what follows: “If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us” (§246).

Of course Catholic ecumenical principles rival Catholic social teachings as the Catholic Church’s best kept secret, not only from our ecumenical partners, but within the life of the Catholic Church itself. But there is a correlation between the robust ecclesiological claims that characterize Roman Catholicism and the openness and receptivity to learning that its official teaching and successive popes have proclaimed. The fleshing out of those foundational principles both on the universal and local levels will continue to occupy Catholic theologians and ecumenists, and their ecumenical dialogue partners, in the coming years. Whether Paul Murray’s receptive ecumenism model could also serve The United Church of Canada, or other Christian communities, is something for each to discern. At the very least, it could be the subject of a good conversation.

## THE CASE OF THE MISSING ECUMENICAL SPIRIT

### *Pulp Fiction for Delicate Sensibilities*

by Sandra Beardsall

#### **A New Client**

It was supposed to be spring, but wasn't. The snow was greyish, the wind cold, and my case file thin. Not surprising, though. When people are consumed with cursing the weather, they don't have the energy to track down debtors and philanderers. Or more to the point, they don't have the will to pay me to do it. Which is why I probably reacted a little too eagerly when my capable assistant, Pat, whisked open my office door to admit a potential client.

An older woman, small, dressed neatly but not flashily, with sensible shoes and handbag. She sort of tiptoed into the room, bird-like. I sized her up, as I always do; tried to guess her problem: she suspects someone is after her money, perhaps, trying to steal her legacy? At the same time, of course, I was rising from my desk, grinning like a fool, gesturing her to a chair, and saying, "Welcome! Please come in! Do sit down!" Honestly, did I have to sound so desperate for work?

Pat, ever smooth in social settings, made the introduction before bowing out. "This is Ms. U.C.C. She says that's what people call her: U.C.C."

The woman relaxed a little and her face crinkled into a nervous smile as she perched on the edge of the proffered chair. "I know it's odd, but they've been calling me that for years."

"No problem at all," I replied, still beaming, but thinking, "Yep, that is odd. 'U.C.C.' as in 'Uck?' And who are 'they,' anyway?" I have learned to keep such thoughts to myself, however. Pat has taught me to approach clients a little more graciously. I said, "So how can I help you, Ms. U.C.C.?"

"Well, it is rather embarrassing. But I seem to have lost something."

"Oh, please don't feel badly. That is exactly why we are here—to help you find it. But what is it?"

Ms. U.C.C. hesitated, self-conscious. "I believe I have lost my

ecumenical spirit.”

“Ecumenical spirit,” I repeated evenly, proud of my calm demeanour. Thanks to Pat I know not to flinch, not to raise an eyebrow when clients describe their problems, no matter how wacky they sound. “Can you say a little more about this ‘ecumenical spirit’?” Again, my voice held no irony; my potential client didn’t hear me put quotation marks around her quaint phrase.

“I was so full of it—the spirit, I mean—when I was young.” U.C.C.’s voice grew stronger; her face glowed. “It was my whole purpose.” Suddenly this petite woman became an orator, arm raised in a theatrical gesture: ““Why should we, who bear allegiance to one Kingdom, and are animated by one purpose, hoist different banners which exhibit our separateness rather than our unity?””

She beamed. “One of my forebears said that: Samuel Dwight Chown—in 1912.<sup>1</sup> He was a Methodist, and they were naturally given to enthusiasm, but my Presbyterian ancestors said it too. I can still quote the manifesto of Principal William Caven of Knox College, Toronto: ‘The ideal of the unity of believers, while chiefly spiritual in its nature, can be fully represented only in *an undivided state of the visible Church* in which . . .’ Are you listening? This is the important part!”

“Yes, of course.” Pat has schooled me in paying attention—or rather, appearing to pay attention—to the client at all times.

““ . . . in which perfect fellowship shall be maintained throughout the entire body of Christ; and it is the duty of the church, and of all its members, continually to aspire towards, and to labour for, *the completeness of this manifested union.*”<sup>2</sup>

“Isn’t that *something*?” Ms. U.C.C. flushed with pride. “That is what I was made for: “manifested union.” That was me in my glory days.”

I was half-listening to the purple prose, because I was trying to

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon of S.D. Chown, reprinted in Edward Richard Schwarz, “Samuel Dwight Chown: An Architect of Canadian Church Union” (Boston University Graduate School, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1961), 219-221.

<sup>2</sup> William Caven, quoted in George C. Pidgeon, *The United Church of Canada: The Story of the Union* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1950), 21.

make sense of the thing. Founded? What did she mean by that? And if this Chown character was making declarations in 1912, how did Ms. U.C.C. come into the picture? So, despite Pat's coaching, I lost it a little.

"Ms. U.C.C.," I enunciated too crisply to hide my irritation. "Can you say more about this 'being founded' thing? What exactly is your role in this 'manifested union'?"

"Of course, silly me. You seemed so understanding; I forgot that I would need to fill in a few details about myself." She blushed. "The thing is, I am a church."

"A church." I recovered my neutral tone.

"Yes. A fairly large church, actually. Two million people affiliate with me—not that they all show up every Sunday," U.C.C. chuckled. "So I was founded, as a grand ecumenical experiment: an organic union of three national denominations, in 1925. I was their love child. But as I told you at the outset, I am here because I appear to have lost my ecumenical spirit. Or . . ." she leaned in conspiratorially, "or someone has *stolen* it!"

You don't make it in my line of work if your brain makes slow connections. So my synapses were firing fast. Most likely possibility: this woman suffers delusions. Pat keeps a list of medical personnel; we could gently usher Ms. U.C.C. in the direction of a mental health professional. But—and this is where the old brain really went to work—there was something vaguely familiar about this scenario. Why? Where? Up bubbled a memory, an image. From the dog's breakfast that was my university arts degree, I recalled a religious studies course—"Early Christianity," or something like that. We studied a weird second century text where someone—a shepherd?—has visions, and one of the key figures he meets in these visions is an old woman who turns out to be "the church."<sup>3</sup> Good Lord!—pardon the expression—was I hallucinating too?

Ms. U.C.C. appeared to be very real, though, as she peered at me expectantly. And hadn't Pat let her in? I could see Pat's head through the frosted glass of the door. Then a prickly feeling washed over me. This

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<sup>3</sup> See *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.4.2.

was my fate. I needed to follow this through as though it were normal. *Of all the P.I. offices in all of Canada, she had to walk into mine*—that sort of thing. And strangely, as soon as I gave into it, I calmed down. I had a client. I had a job to do.

### **A Complication**

I took up my coil-bound notepad and pencil—I like to keep it simple when gathering information; people will tell you more that way—and settled into my usual patter. “So, Ms. U.C.C., you once had quite a tremendous ecumenical spirit, but it has, in your opinion, gone missing. It may be misplaced. It may have been stolen. When do you last recall having or seeing this ecumenical spirit? Or, to put it another way, when did you *stop* being ecumenical?”

“Oh dear,” U.C.C. sank back, deflated. “I have not explained myself well. You see, I have not stopped *acting* ecumenically at all. I am as busy as I ever was—maybe busier.<sup>4</sup> You should see me at the World Council of Churches! And I muck around in all sorts of global ecumenical organizations—I sometimes wonder what they would do without good old U.C.C.! I send ecumenical accompaniers all over. I cooperate in climate change work and global ecumenical aid groups. I am a fierce supporter of the Canadian Council of Churches (C.C.C.) and of KAIROS, the ecumenical justice organization. Why, the General Secretary of the C.C.C. is a United Church minister! And two national bilateral dialogue groups: Roman Catholic-United Church and Anglican-United Church are discussing all sorts of important issues. Then there are the interfaith initiatives. Oh, and did you know that almost all my candidates for the order of ministry study in ecumenical settings?”

I didn’t.

“And my goodness,” U.C.C. was animated again. “We mustn’t forget the local ecumenical shared ministry congregations. There are over one hundred in Canada, and I participate in over sixty of them, mostly with Anglicans and Lutherans, but also Presbyterians and

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<sup>4</sup> Ms. U.C.C.’s information in this section comes largely from the report of the Theology and Inter-Church Interfaith Committee to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Council, August, 2012, accessed at [http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/reports\\_41-78.pdf](http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/reports_41-78.pdf).

Catholics and Disciples of Christ and Mennonites.<sup>5</sup> Why, the Pinawa Christian Fellowship in Manitoba—four denominations in one congregation—just marked its fiftieth anniversary! Now, that was a nice celebration.”<sup>6</sup> She got a dreamy look in her eyes, but caught herself and snapped back into focus.

“You know, if you added it up, there must be hundreds of United Church people who work locally to globally in ecumenical and interfaith groups. I got a little anxious when the Theology and Faith Committee merged with the Inter-Church Interfaith Committee in 2009—would they lose the impetus? But they seem to be doing fine. And here they are now in discussions for a Full Communion Agreement with the United Church of Christ in the U.S.A.” That chuckle again: “People are always getting us confused with each other—which U.C.C. is which, and so forth. So why not get together?”

“Get together?” I asked, lamely. My fingers were cramped from scribbling U.C.C.’s monologue, and I was getting irritated. Ms. U.C.C. seemed to have lost her marbles, not her ecumenism. Why was she wasting my time?

“Oh, these full communion agreements are lovely. They usually involve mutual recognition of ministries and membership—so people can go back and forth serving and worshiping in each other’s churches without a lot of bureaucratic hoopla. And then they also agree to work in common mission.<sup>7</sup> It really knits you together, you know? Quite something.”

Quite something, indeed. And I had had quite enough. “Ms. U.C.C.,” I hissed, throwing Pat’s years of training aside, “you are making no sense at all. You claim to have lost an item, and then you go on and on about how you are employing the very thing you have ‘lost.’ I’m afraid there is no way I . . .”

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<sup>5</sup> For Ecumenical Shared Ministry information, see the Prairie Centre for Ecumenism ESM Directory at <http://pcecumenism.ca/esm>.

<sup>6</sup> *Called Together: 50 years of the Pinawa Christian Fellowship, 1963-2013* (Pinawa, MB: 2013).

<sup>7</sup> “Discussion of Full Communion with United Church of Christ,” posted February 10, 2014. Accessed at <http://www.unitedchurch.ca/communications/news/general/140210>.

“But . . . oh dear . . . oh my,” U.C.C. interrupted. She was not angry, just flustered. “That is the odd thing, see. I have not lost my ecumenical *work*. It’s my ecumenical *spirit* I am worried about. That sense that ecumenism is not *only* about doing useful work together. Of course the work is important. But there is something much deeper at stake. It is about this yearning for unity, this sense that our witness is flawed, that we as Christians are not complete, without each other. In the words of one ecumenist, “We cannot say we love Jesus and not care for the hurt and division in his body.”<sup>8</sup> Or as another one said recently: “A vision of cooperating when expedient will not generate the passion needed to sustain this movement.”<sup>9</sup> It is that *passion* for unity that I believe I may have lost.”

“But how do you know? If there are two million people out there claiming your name, hundreds in ecumenical groups and congregations, surely some of them still have the ecumenical ‘spirit’.”

“Yes, I know they do! But it doesn’t seem to be a collective priority. Take, for example, the “Fishing on the Other Side” document. It offers suggestions for restructuring—well, me! The authors say that they heard throughout the constituency a “strong denominational identity,”<sup>10</sup> but there is nothing in that text about a strong *ecumenical* identity. We look to other denominations for ideas, for “fixes,” but not for unity. Please, trust me! I sense something is amiss.”

“Okay,” I sighed. Drat, this would be hard. But I ushered Ms. U.C.C. out the door, with my usual promise to keep her informed. So it was official: I was about to apply my investigative skills to helping a typological client track down a missing “spirit.” I decided that if anyone asked me, “How’s business?” I would simply reply, “Fine.”

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<sup>8</sup> Fr. Bernard de Margerie, speaking at Week of Prayer for Christian Unity service, McClure United Church, Saskatoon, SK, January 2009 (audio recording). Accessed at [http://ecumenism.net/2009/08/bernard\\_de\\_margerie\\_a\\_life\\_in\\_ecumenism.htm](http://ecumenism.net/2009/08/bernard_de_margerie_a_life_in_ecumenism.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Kinnamon, “New Contours of Ecumenism: Challenges to the Next Generation,” *The Ecumenical Review* 66, No. 1 (January, 2014): 20.

<sup>10</sup> “Fishing on the Other Side: Seeking the Wisdom of Presbyteries, Districts, the Consistoire, and the Synod,” Report of the Comprehensive Review Task Group, February 6, 2014.

### The (Usual) Suspects

So who, or what, had made off with Ms. U.C.C.'s ecumenical spirit? I will not bore you with the tedious details of my investigation. But never have I created a roster of possible suspects odder than the one I wrote up for this strange client:

- *The Continuing Presbyterians* – The 1925 union was indeed reported as “glorious,” as Ms. U.C.C. suggested. But when close to thirty per cent of the Presbyterians failed to join, it took some wind from the sails of this new union. Did that quench a bit of the spirit of unity? Did it suggest that alongside the grand rhetoric of visible unity lurked a more prosaic narrative of corporate merger? And did that plant early seeds of ecumenical doubt?
- *The Anglican Bishops ca.1975* – I could not believe how excited Ms. U.C.C. had been about the proposed organic union with the Anglican Church of Canada and the Christian Church: Disciples of Christ in the 1960s and early 1970s. When the House of Bishops decided, in February 1975, not to ratify the *Plan of Union*, the failure was devastating to those who had worked and prayed for union. Compounding the misery, a subsequent task force that sought to secure a “mutual recognition of ministries” between Anglican and United Church clergy also failed at the hands of the Anglican House of Bishops in 1983, as did a similar attempt at mutual recognition between the United Church and the Disciples of Christ in 1985. The United Church did not scale back its ecumenical work, but these experiences did pose a conundrum for its motto, “United and Uniting.” Uniting with whom?<sup>11</sup> And did it also eat away at Ms. U.C.C.'s ecumenical vision?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The U.C.C. united with the Evangelical United Brethren in 1969. This small denomination had united with the Methodists in the U.S.A. at the same time. The U.C.C. welcomed the union gladly and did not have to sacrifice much to do so.

<sup>12</sup> See “Drawing from the Same Well: The St. Brigid Report: The Report of the Anglican-United Church Dialogue (2003-2009),” 42, 48.



- *1988 Ecumenical Partners* – The United Church *Observer* calls it “the decision that changed everything.”<sup>13</sup> When the denomination made its 1988 declaration that sexual orientation, in and of itself, was not a barrier to membership, and that all members were eligible for consideration for the order of ministry, the U.C.C.’s ecumenical partners responded initially with gentle notes of encouragement and prayer. Yet there developed an unspoken sense that the United Church had crossed a line, and some of these partners began to distance themselves not only from the decision, but from the denomination. Shared ministry congregations were particularly vulnerable; one Anglican bishop—who was supportive of ecumenical congregations—reported to a shared ministry congregation: “There is a ‘nervousness’ right now with regard to our official relationships in shared ministries.”<sup>14</sup>

Around this time, the United Church Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee surveyed church members and partners and produced its new approach to ecumenism, “Mending the World.” The church’s ecumenical priority would be shared service to the world, rather than the quest for that “undivided visible church” of its birthing vision. It is certainly possible that the two are linked—that this subtle sense of being rebuffed, of having to “go it alone” with its important theological decision, robbed Ms. U.C.C. of her ecumenical optimism.

- *The “Empire” Critique* – By the 1990s, the United Church had become aware of its complicity with colonizing, hegemonic ideologies, especially with regard to Canada’s First Nations. The attendant soul-searching led to suspicion about all of the church’s history of grand narratives. Could it trust any of its institutional

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<sup>13</sup> *The United Church Observer*, July/August 2013, cover.

<sup>14</sup> Alberta Provincial Archives, Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Athabaska Fonds, Acc. #91:80, Box 1, Item 10. Gary Woolsey, Letter to Andy Hoskins, U.C.C. minister at Manning-Deadwood Shared Ministry, Oct. 31, 1988.

aspirations? In the same era, mistrust of public institutions took root in popular culture, and participation in voluntary organizations of all kinds has fallen precipitously.<sup>15</sup> Did this critique lead Ms. U.C.C. to wonder if the search for unity was actually an imperialist wolf in scriptural clothing?

- *The “Winter” Theorists* – Sometime in the past two decades, someone suggested that the churches were living in an “ecumenical winter.” The image stuck. It does not matter how many agreements, actions and documents the movement produces; the notion that formal ecumenism has entered a cold, barren time persists. Ecumenists try to combat it,<sup>16</sup> but it clearly is a useful term for dismissing the challenging work of confronting division and diffidence. Could purveyors of this “big chill” theory have stolen Ms. U.C.C.’s ecumenical spirit?

So there they were—a pretty sketchy, elusive bunch, I knew: all circumstantial evidence and no hope of conviction. I braced for my encounter with my odd client.

### **Closing the File/Opening the Door**

Ms. U.C.C. took it amazingly well. She sat calmly in my office, nodding a bit as she scanned my report. When she was done, she gazed at me placidly. “There is not much there I did not already know.”

My heart sank. “But,” she went on, “you have summarized it for me. I have little doubt that every one of these so-called suspects have contributed to my malaise. That is not the point, though, is it?”

I had thought that was exactly the point.

“No, the point is that I may have confused ecumenical *spirit* with ecumenical *success*. I assumed I knew how the ecumenical story would

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<sup>15</sup> See Philip Schwadel, “Age, Period and Cohort Effects on Social Capital,” *Social Forces* 91:1 (2012), 233-252; Robert D. Putman, “Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America,” *Political Science and Politics* 28 (1995), 664-83.

<sup>16</sup> The term proliferates in ecumenical literature. As recently as October 2013, two articles in *The Ecumenical Review* (65:3) feature “ecumenical winter” in their title.

and should unfold for me. But the story took its own turns, as you have reminded me. Some of them were quite bitter, but I have learned from those hard things, too.

“That clever Pope Francis says that the church must ‘accept the unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations.’”<sup>17</sup> “Unruly freedom”: isn’t that lovely? I’ve always wanted to be just a *little* unruly!”

I couldn’t quite picture it, but I smiled along with her.

“So,” said Ms. U.C.C., “I can be self-righteousness and depressed about the ecumenical project, or I can throw myself into it: into an encounter with the word’s unruly freedom, into the uncertainty and the hope, into the confidence that Jesus has not abandoned his church, and that he will love us into true unity.

“I think I’ll start with those hundreds of United Church folk who still pour their hearts into the ecumenical life: encourage them to keep at it! Well, thank you for your time, but I have work to do. Send the bill to 3250 Bloor Street West—*someone* will pay it!”

Ms. U.C.C. sailed out of my office and waved farewell to Pat. I opened the outer door for her as she bounced off. Strangely, as I looked out on the winter lawn, I saw a mauve crocus peeping through the snow.

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<sup>17</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), § 22.

# **“WE INTEND TO MOVE TOGETHER”: THE TENTH ASSEMBLY OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**

**by Bruce Myers**

When the World Council of Churches (WCC) gathered for its inaugural assembly in 1948, the 147 churches that came together in Amsterdam concluded that landmark meeting by articulating a firm commitment: “We intend to stay together.”<sup>1</sup> Sixty-five years later, in the Republic of Korea’s second city of Busan, representatives of 345 member churches issued a nuanced version of that original affirmation as they ended the WCC’s tenth assembly: “We intend to move together.”<sup>2</sup>

The differences in the message, venue, and size of those two assemblies are indicative of the change the World Council of Churches and worldwide ecumenism have experienced in the nearly seven decades since the WCC’s foundation. The Busan assembly, held from October 30 to November 8, 2013, can provide a snapshot of the current state of this “privileged instrument of the ecumenical movement.”<sup>3</sup>

## **“God of life, lead us to justice and peace”**

The tenth assembly’s theme, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace,” was both a prayer and an indicator of the current emphasis of the WCC’s life and work. While some other past assemblies have put the accent on conciliarity, unity as *koinonia*, or eucharistic fellowship, the theme at Busan suggested a subtle shift away from a more traditional faith and order agenda in favour of one emphasizing the churches’ prophetic role around issues of justice and peace.

Such an emphasis was particularly germane to the context of where

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<sup>1</sup> “Message, WCC Assembly, Amsterdam, 1948,” in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, eds. Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 21.

<sup>2</sup> “Message of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC,” World Council of Churches, last modified 8 November 2013, accessed 30 April 2014, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/message-of-the-wcc-10th-assembly>.

<sup>3</sup> Lukas Vischer, “A Privileged Instrument of the Ecumenical Movement?” *Ecumenical Review* 43, no. 1 (January 1991): 90.

the assembly gathered. In meeting on the divided Korean peninsula, the WCC sought to both witness and support the local churches' ongoing efforts toward the reunification of North Korea and South Korea. Many of the 800 delegates to the assembly were able to see the division firsthand through a visit to the Demilitarized Zone, and hear directly from Korean Christians about the human and economic costs of the 60-year-old severance. In turn, the WCC sought to offer its own witness to reconciliation by gathering its fellowship of divided churches in search of visible unity in the midst of a divided land in search of visible unity.

The choice of meeting place was also a tacit recognition of the shifting demographics of global Christianity. Busan marked the first time a WCC assembly was convened in southeast Asia, a region of the world where Christianity continues to enjoy rapid growth. South Korea's churches are especially robust, and the human and financial resources they were able to marshal as the assembly's hosts—as well as the exceedingly generous hospitality they offered their ecumenical guests—served as a further indicator of Christianity's centre of gravity moving in a southward direction.

The Busan assembly's emphasis on justice and peace was perhaps most evident in the 11 statements, resolutions, and minutes it approved by consensus on pressing issues ranging from climate change to the human rights of stateless people. Three of the statements approved are of particular significance to the Canadian context. A minute on climate justice calls upon WCC member churches “to insist that governments look beyond national interests in order to be responsible towards the creation and our common future,” and specifically rejects the Keystone XL pipeline project.<sup>4</sup> A sweeping statement on the rights of religious minorities includes Canada in list of countries where “discrimination and intolerance against religious groups . . . are evident in discourses and regulations introduced by governments that question or ban religious dress, symbols, and traditions.”<sup>5</sup> It is a specific reference to the

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<sup>4</sup> “Minute on Climate Justice,” World Council of Churches, last modified 8 November 2013, accessed 30 April 2014, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/minute-on-climate-justice>.

<sup>5</sup> “Statement on the Politicization of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities,” World

introduction of legislation by the Quebec government that would have prohibited public-sector employees from wearing religious symbols at their workplace. The statement asks WCC member churches to oppose such regulations and to defend the rights of all religious minorities. In a similar way, another resolution urges the churches to “respect indigenous people’s spiritualities and support the aspirations of indigenous communities for self-determination around the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Another way in which indigenous issues were highlighted at the assembly was by the election of Bishop Mark MacDonald, the Anglican Church of Canada’s national indigenous bishop, as the WCC’s North American regional president. He is the second Canadian to serve in this role (Lois Wilson of the United Church of Canada was North American president between 1983 and 1991), and the first aboriginal person. Regional presidents function as ambassadors for the World Council of Churches in their respective parts of the world, promoting and interpreting the council’s work to the member churches. They in turn voice the concerns of the WCC’s member churches in the region to the council’s leadership. Bishop MacDonald has indicated he also intends to use the position to hold the concerns of indigenous peoples from every part of the world before the WCC.

From an outside perspective, some of the statements on current issues passed by the assembly might seem obscure or purely rhetorical. However, all of the resolutions considered came at the behest of the churches in the regions affected. The ability to point to an official statement issued by a credible international body like the World Council of Churches can provide Christians—especially those struggling in minority situations—with a tangible expression of solidarity in the face of injustice. This is particularly the case for churches in the Middle East, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Armenia, and Cuba,

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Council of Churches, last modified 8 November 2013, accessed 30 April 2014, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/politicisation-of-religion-and-rights-of-religious-minorities>.

<sup>6</sup> “Minute on Indigenous Peoples,” World Council of Churches, last modified 8 November 2013, accessed 30 April 2014, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/minute-on-indigenous-peoples>.

all of whom had issues pressing to their specific contexts addressed by the assembly.

### **The WCC's "primary purpose"**

Notwithstanding the prominent place afforded ecumenical approaches to justice and peace at the assembly, theological ecumenism found a place at Busan also. The "Unity Statement," a document approved by the assembly offering an assessment of the WCC's place on the current ecumenical landscape, reaffirms that the Council's "primary purpose" is "to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe."<sup>7</sup> This official reiteration of the ecumenical movement's long-standing objective of full visible unity is significant at a time when many voices suggest some lesser goal would better reflect what kind of reconciliation can be realistically achieved among the divided churches.

The Busan assembly received the fruits of the latest efforts of ecumenical theological dialogue to make more visible the real if imperfect communion among the WCC's member churches. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, a convergence text on ecclesiology, is the product of 20 years of work by dozens of theologians working collaboratively through the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order. The document stands in the tradition of the groundbreaking convergence text of a generation before, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)*, and is in a sense its logical successor. *BEM* revealed an almost startling level of agreement among the divided churches, especially on questions dealing with baptism and eucharist. However, the text—and the dozens of responses to it provided by the churches—also demonstrated there was rather less consensus on the manner in which the church's ministries ought to be ordered.

It is in this sense that *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*

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<sup>7</sup> "Unity Statement," World Council of Churches, last modified 8 November 2013, accessed 30 April 2014, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/unity-statement>.

picks up where *BEM* left off, understanding that theological agreement on the nature of the church is an essential aspect of the mutual ecclesial recognition that “full visible unity” implies. As with *BEM*, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* has been offered to the churches for reception. Among the questions to which they are invited to respond are: “To what extent does this text reflect the ecclesiological understanding of your church?” and (more provocatively), “What adaptations or renewal in the life of your church does this statement challenge your church to work for?”<sup>8</sup>

There has always been a dynamic interplay between the WCC’s dual emphases on theological ecumenism and peace-and-justice ecumenism, and this was in evidence at Busan. The two streams of the ecumenical movement that first came together to form the World Council of Churches were Faith and Order, with its emphasis on unity through dialogue, and Life and Work, which claimed that “doctrine divides but service unites.” The WCC itself has acknowledged that efforts to integrate these two visions of the ecumenical movement have “been challenged by a continuing tension and sometimes antagonism between those who advocate the primacy of the social dimension of ecumenism and those who advocate the primacy of spiritual or ecclesial ecumenism.”<sup>9</sup>

At its best, however, that tension is of a healthy kind. The common faith that provides the grounds for the churches’ common witness for peace and justice are revealed in the theological dialogues of the past several decades. At the same time, the theological dialogues must always be complemented by incarnational expressions of local, spiritual ecumenism. The unity of his followers for which Christ prayed was not for unity’s sake, or some kind of end until itself, but rather for the sake of the world which he came to save.

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<sup>8</sup> “Introduction,” *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 3.

<sup>9</sup> “Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC,” last modified 14 February 2006, accessed 30 April 2014, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/common-understanding-and-vision-of-the-wcc-cuv>.



### **A “praying assembly”**

Common prayer has long been acknowledged—but is still too often overlooked—as an essential aspect of ecumenism. The members of the divided churches may not yet all be able to gather around one eucharistic table, but there are many other forms of prayer in which Christians of different traditions can join together as they journey toward that goal. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an annual reminder of this truth. Ecumenical prayer has always been an essential component of WCC gatherings, and Busan continued in this tradition of being a “praying assembly.”<sup>10</sup>

Crafting prayers, music, and worship services that reflect and respect a multiplicity of Christian traditions, languages, and cultures demands equal measures of creativity and sensitivity. These qualities were reflected in the services of morning and evening prayer that enveloped most days of the assembly’s business. Morning services blended sacred words, music, and symbols from a variety of church traditions that together reflected the day’s appointed theme, which would also form the basis for the small-group Bible studies that immediately followed morning prayers, as well as the plenary session. Liturgies at the end of the day were “confessional,” with evening prayers being offered variously according to the Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Pentecostal, and Protestant traditions. Impressive opening and closing services book-ended the assembly as a whole. On the Sunday of the assembly, delegates were the invited guests of local Korean churches.

Among the most striking liturgical moments during that week was a ritual foot washing that had been incorporated into the final morning prayer service of the assembly, during which WCC General Secretary Olav Fykse Tveit, a Norwegian, knelt before a delegate from the global south and washed his feet. In a plenary address to the assembly, Duleep de Chikera, the retired Anglican bishop of Colombo, reflected on the particularly ecumenical significance of foot washing as a ritual act:

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<sup>10</sup> “Assembly Spiritual Life,” *Program Book: WCC 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly, Busan, 2013* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 10.

“There can be no stronger symbolic demonstration of Jesus’ energy for faithful journeying than to touch and refresh one another’s feet; as Jesus did and asked us to do. As an added bonus, the feet washing at the centre will fill the frustrating eucharistic vacuum at our ecumenical gatherings with a fitting alternative till we are ready to break bread together.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Current Challenges for the WCC**

That day on which Christians belonging to separated churches would gather around the same eucharistic bread and cup seems much further away than when the World Council of Churches gathered for its first assembly in 1948. Part of the WCC’s challenge—and that of the ecumenical movement has a whole—is how to understand its vocation in this chastened ecumenical reality:

When the World Council of Churches was founded hopes ran high. Rapprochement, even unity among the churches, was expected in a near future. However, it soon became clear that a long and difficult way lay ahead: the divisions not only ran deeper than had at first been realized, but actually increased as the ecumenical movement expanded. The WCC was not just an instrument for a short “interim” period between separation and unity, but had to prepare for a long-term existence.<sup>12</sup>

In some ways, the WCC’s challenges are simply those with which postmodernism is obliging many institutions to grapple. Among the markers of a more radical postmodernism are a vanishing of great hopes, projects, and commitments, as well as a lack of confidence in institutions.<sup>13</sup> The ecumenical movement is nothing if not a grand, hope-

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<sup>11</sup> Duleep de Chickera, “Theme Plenary Presentation by Bishop Duleep de Chickera,” last modified 31 October 2013, accessed 30 April 2014, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/plenary-presentations/god-of-life-lead-us-to-justice-and-peace>.

<sup>12</sup> Vischer, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Luc Tardif, “Postmodernité,” *Reflets* 12 (Ottawa: Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques, 2001): 232.

filled project that requires the long-term commitment of all of those involved. Because of the nature of the church's organizational structures, the ecumenical movement tends to be driven by institutions, the WCC being preeminent among them.

The shifting demographics of world Christianity are another reality to which the WCC is attempting to respond. The 147 churches that came together to form the WCC 65 years ago were chiefly historical mainline Protestant churches based in Europe and North America. The 1960s saw the incorporation into the fellowship of many Orthodox churches. The Catholic Church, though an active partner in many of the WCC's initiatives, is not a member of the Council.<sup>14</sup> Even with a current membership of close to 350 churches worldwide, the WCC can be said to represent only about one quarter of the world's Christians.

Among those falling outside the scope of the WCC fold are the rapidly growing evangelical, Pentecostal, charismatic, indigenous, and "renewalist" movements, many in the global south. Some of these churches or movements have been suspicious of the ecumenical movement or unable to make the commitments membership in the World Council of Churches would oblige, but are still willing to explore the possibility of some kind of wider Christian fellowship.

In response, the World Council of Churches was instrumental in helping establish the Global Christian Forum (GCF), which has so far convened two global gatherings at which half of the participants come from churches or groups not a part of the WCC. The GCF exists "to create an open space wherein representatives from a broad range of Christian churches and inter-church organizations, which confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as perfect in his divinity and humanity, can gather to foster mutual respect, to explore and address together common challenges."<sup>15</sup> At Busan, the WCC reaffirmed its long-standing goal as "visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship." The goals and visions of these two global ecumenical instruments are

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<sup>14</sup> It is, however, worth noting that the Catholic Church is a full and highly engaged member of the Commission on Faith and Order, the WCC's theological roundtable.

<sup>15</sup> "Guiding Purpose Statement," Global Christian Forum, accessed 30 April 2014, <http://www.globalchristianforum.org/statement.html>.

fundamentally different, but have so far coexisted in a complementary way.

A more mundane—but no less real—challenge confronting the WCC is its financial situation. The WCC’s budget depends in large part on the contributions of its member churches, many of which have had to reduce their commitment to the council because of their own financial difficulties. As a result the WCC has had to progressively curtail its own budget, staff, and programmatic work. At the same time it is exploring more cost-effective ways of structuring its governance and developing the property in Geneva that is home to its headquarters.

In declaring at the Busan assembly that “we intend to move together,” the WCC evoked the image of global ecumenism as a movement: a fellowship of still-divided churches on the way to full communion. As the most institutionalized expression of that movement, the World Council of Churches must discern anew its place on an ecumenical landscape much changed from that which served as the backdrop in Amsterdam in 1948.

At Busan in 2013, the WCC’s member churches challenged their fellowship to “give a compelling programmatic and financial priority to building bridges with those outside the historic ecumenical movement,” to acknowledge that “top-down ‘elite’ ecumenism of institutions is no longer effective,” and to focus more “on how to share the fruits of ecumenical work to the local level.”<sup>16</sup> The WCC’s willingness and ability to respond to these challenges will become evident as its constituent churches move together toward the eleventh assembly.

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<sup>16</sup> “EC 01. Called to Be One: New Ecumenical Landscapes,” *Ecumenical Conversations: Reports, Affirmations and Challenges from the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2014), 7-8.

# CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

by Andrew O'Neill

As denominations of the Christian Church, we share Scripture and a common heritage, and we share many of the same concepts and much of the same language, but how we interpret these varies considerably. Within a longer view of history, this can be seen as both beauty and brokenness. When congregations swell and faith flourishes, it is possible to say that our differences weave a rich tapestry. In times of significant change, especially of diminishment, these same differences can become the source of defensive particularity.

Outside the church, institutional religion is increasingly viewed with either ambivalence or antagonism. Our identity as churches and as Christians is being challenged. Yet, a church defined by cynicism cannot convey a word of hope. It must continue to be defined by the Kingdom work of justice and peace, and communicate this vision through worship and relationship.

What I want to consider here is one theological approach to shaping Christian identity positively, and to relate it to ecumenical dialogue. The way in which I am using the term “identity” is not in a psychological sense (personal spiritual experience) or in a sociological sense (religion as culture). My interest is in the philosophical sense of identity: how we, as individuals and as denominations, make varied and mutable claims to universal, eternal truth.

First, I will briefly consider some emerging models for thinking about Christian identity. Second, I will consider the theology of Paul Tillich, focusing specifically on the “method of correlation” and the “Protestant principle” as they appear in his *Systematic Theology*. Finally, I will suggest some of the possible benefits this approach adds to the already great strides ecumenism has made, in terms of our unfolding Christian identity as members of one Body of Christ.

## Identity and Difference

At the Greenbelt faith festival in Cheltenham, England last summer, I was struck by the polarizing of responses to the question of Christian

identity. At one end of the spectrum were those who advocate setting aside religious identity altogether. For example, Peter Rollins, who is part of the Radical Theology movement, reads the Gospel accounts of Christ's ministry as a critique of religion itself. Drawing on his experience of sectarianism in his native Northern Ireland, Rollins argues that the commitments required for maintaining religious identity fashion faith into idolatry, redirecting it from its mission of engagement with the world, to self-preservation.<sup>1</sup> His concern is for a wider community suffering from division and conflict.

At the other end were those who insist that remaining rooted in religious identity is necessary for authentic dialogue. For example, participants in Scriptural Reasoning, a movement gaining ground in inter-faith dialogue today, discuss a single topic from the perspective of their own scriptural traditions, and have the opportunity to ask questions of one another. The aim is not to find a common denominator, or to "translate" another's perspective into one's own terms. In this approach the integrity of the community is sought not by diminishing or abandoning specific identities, but by honouring them through respectful encounter.

This latter approach to identity and difference resembles Jürgen Habermas's theory of "communicative interaction," in which both theory and practice emerge within the context of communication. Habermas was concerned to take account of how both reason and ethics are conditioned experientially by the interaction of different languages, cultures and religions. In his theory of inter-subjectivity, interaction becomes action as collaborative reasoning becomes a form of problem solving.<sup>2</sup> The integrity of the community, then, depends on both a deep sense of identity and on the capacity for more than one identity to give shape to community.

In ecumenical parlance, this approach is often referred to as

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<sup>1</sup> See Peter Rollins, *The Idolatry of God: Breaking Our Addiction to Certainty and Satisfaction* (New York: Howard Books, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 24. For the connection between Habermas's inter-subjectivity and Tillich's ontology, I am indebted to Canadian theologian James Reimer, especially his article, "Metaphysics and Communication: The Logos-Ontology of Paul Tillich and Habermas' Theory of Communicative Practice," in *Being versus Word in Paul Tillich's Theology?* ed. Gert Hummel (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1999), 194-205.

“hospitality,” an approach that I have witnessed in the Anglican Church – United Church Dialogue which, in its current instantiation, has been meeting since 2003. The first phase of the Dialogue was concerned primarily with articulating what the two denominations have in common. We sought to understand how our polity and language accomplished similar tasks. We looked at ways in which we could understand “the other” in terms of “ourselves.” We celebrated shared ministry.<sup>3</sup>

Eventually, however, we moved to the second, current phase, marked by honesty about our differences, and by honouring and learning from them. We are now at the stage of finding ways to recognize each other’s expressions of order and ministry more formally—a stage that could not have been reached without first having honestly encountered our differences.

There remains, of course, for all ecumenical dialogue, a sense in which hospitality is necessary, but not sufficient. Unlike interfaith dialogue, ecumenical dialogue is premised upon the call of the gospel to visible unity in the Body. Naturally, there is variation in how *unity* is understood.

In the United Church, unity was initially expressed as *union*. Denominations were to be transcended in favour of a new vision. Further union was sought with other denominations, successfully in the case of the Evangelical United Brethren in Disciples 1968, and unsuccessfully in the case of the Anglican Church of Canada and the Christian Church (Disciples) a few years later. Around the same time, however, a global ecumenical convergence led the United Church and many others into rich liturgical reform and missional sharing. Today, it is common for denominations to share prayers, songs and even sacraments. Shared ministries are not universal, but are well established. Many denominations share in global mission projects, and the inter-church coalition, KAIROS.

For some, this is sufficient. The body of Christ is enriched by a diversity of (denominational) expressions of faith; ecumenism is

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<sup>3</sup> The results of this phase of the Dialogue were published in the report, “Drawing from the Same Well: the St. Brigid’s Report,” which can be found online at <http://www.anglican.ca/faith/eir/sbr>.

iterative, but not prescriptive. Bi- and multi-lateral agreements are signs of co-operation and deepening commitment. For others, ecumenism so conceived feels like a compromise of an earlier and much grander vision: division within the Body remains a scandalous “stumbling block” to the children of God. The respectful, measured steps of ecumenical dialogue can feel too small and too slow in the face of deepening spiritual longing and the practical needs of a suffering world.

The two concerns shared by all churches engaged in ecumenism are: how to communicate gospel to the world; and how to articulate the vision of Christian unity without abandoning identity or submerging difference. I believe that the theology of Paul Tillich provides support for these two tasks—by providing a framework for relating divine revelation with the world-historical situation, and by articulating Christianity’s inherent capacity for self-critique and reform.

### **The Dialectical Shape of Christian Identity**

There are two major concepts in Tillich’s theology which help to shape Christian identity. First, the *method of correlation* proposes that “a theological system is supposed to satisfy two needs: the statement of the truth of the Christian message and the interpretation of this truth for each new generation.”<sup>4</sup> Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* uses classical philosophical categories to describe being and existence, and articulates traditional Christian theological concepts in a way that engages the questions, conflicts and ambiguities of human existence.

The structure of the entire system is dialectical; that is, the question and the answer shape each other. This theological approach is not dogmatic, but apologetic. Tillich argues that revelation offers resolution to the problems of human existence not by over-powering reason, but by demonstrating that reason and revelation are fundamentally connected within the divine-human relationship.<sup>5</sup>

In the first volume of the *Systematic Theology*, Tillich describes God not as “a being alongside other beings,” but as the ground of all

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume One* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Tillich, *ST* 1, 61.



being.<sup>6</sup> Within God lie the twin possibilities of “everything” (being-itself) and “nothing” (non-being). This polarity is the basis for both God’s infinity and God’s self-limitation in creation.<sup>7</sup>

The same polarity exists within humanity. We are not God, or being-itself; but, bearing the *imago Dei*, we are also defined by both being and non-being. Within us, being manifests as existence, reason and creativity; non-being manifests as awareness of our finitude and estrangement from God (sin). However, even the “shock of non-being”—our consciousness of the limits of existence and history—points toward our connection as beings with being-itself: the living, creating and relational God.

In the second volume, Tillich describes Jesus the Christ as the New Being, the manifestation of being-itself in human form.<sup>8</sup> This historical event reveals the meaning and direction of human existence, and the *telos* of history: salvation. The New Being bridges the gap between being and non-being, and offers resolution for the estrangement of sin and evil, guilt and despair, which are the marks of our finitude.<sup>9</sup>

In the third and final volume, Tillich outlines how God’s Spiritual Presence continues to speak to the ambiguities of religion, morality and culture.<sup>10</sup> The fulfilment of existence and of history are symbolized in the kingdom of God, which stands in opposition to the demonic kingdoms and power structures of the world; the “what ought to be” in response to “what is.”<sup>11</sup>

Importantly, for this discussion, divine revelation is not an exogenous law imposed upon humanity, nor a supernatural intervention within history. The possibility of transcending our finitude—sin, estrangement, conflict and ambiguity—is a condition of our existence, as beings rooted in the ground of being. The method of correlation

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<sup>6</sup> Tillich, *ST* 1, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Tillich’s ontological description of God is closely connected to the philosophy of F.W.J. Schelling. For more on the relationship between Tillich’s ontology and the philosophy of German Idealism, see Andrew O’Neill, *Tillich: A guide for the perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2008), 103-123.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich *Systematic Theology, Volume Two* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 118-136.

<sup>9</sup> Tillich, *ST* 2, 44-78.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 111-162.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1963), 37. The “demonic” for Tillich is whatever is destructive of God’s creative intention.

describes revelation not as an alternative to the world-historical situation, but as its depth and fulfillment.

Second, the Protestant principle describes self-critique and reform as capacities inherent to Christian identity. While theology “serves the needs of the Church,”<sup>12</sup> the church is the messenger, not the message. As a human institution, the church is always subject to the critique of the Spiritual Presence, God’s continued revelation of life and *telos* within existence and history.<sup>13</sup> Because it speaks “for” revelation, the Spiritual Presence is also free to speak “against” the church at any time.

The Reformation serves, for Tillich, as the classic example of this paradox. However, the capacity for self-critique and reformation is not limited to Protestant churches. No church can claim ownership of eternal truth. Though churches may serve, seek after and communicate revelation, it can never be claimed as the exclusive property of any one religious-cultural group.

Taking this one step further, Tillich describes the Spiritual Community, which embodies the Spiritual Presence, as existing both inside and outside the church, wherever and however individuals and groups seek holiness, truth and justice.<sup>14</sup>

In so far as the Spiritual Presence is effective in the churches and their individual members, it conquers religion as a particular function of the human spirit . . . The Church, properly conceived, is not a religious community but the anticipatory representation of a new reality, the New Being as personality.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of the Spiritual Community is not anti-religious as much as it suggests that the ultimate goal of religion is salvation, or “essentialization”: the eschatological reunion of existence with its essence.<sup>16</sup> The church is called to be self-transcending.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tillich, *ST* 1, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Tillich, *ST* 3, 165.

<sup>14</sup> Tillich, *ST* 3, 149-162.

<sup>15</sup> Tillich, *ST* 3, 243.

<sup>16</sup> Tillich, *ST* 3, 400.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Problem of Theological Method,” *Journal of Religion* XXVII, No. 1 (January 1947): 16.

The method of correlation offers a dialectical shape to Christian identity: as created beings, we share both in the ground of our being and in the limits of existence and history. To this situation, the message of revelation offers a vision of the fulfillment of existence in the Christ, and the fulfillment of history in the Kingdom. The Protestant principle directs the church, the carrier of this vision, to be self-critical—not self-abasing and anxious, but aware that its identity lies beyond temporal limitations.

### The Cruciform Church

In *Waiting for Gospel*, Douglas John Hall, a Canadian theologian and former student of Tillich, helpfully defines Tillich's concept of self-critical religion in terms of a theology of the cross. The cross stands as a symbol both of death and resurrection, and of God's solidarity with the suffering of creation.<sup>18</sup> In a time of great change and loss for the church, the cross reminds us that the promise of fulfillment has self-giving at the heart of our shared faith and mission.

A dialectical theology, which engages in sensitive readings of both the human situation and the message of revelation, is manifest in faith that does not claim finality for itself, but draws the individual out of self-concern and into relationship with the community.<sup>19</sup> Christian identity is not found in religion *per se*, but in Christ and the kingdom he reveals.

What this implies for Christian identity, first, is that the Church's allegiance is to the gospel, and the task of speaking to the estrangement and despair common to all humanity.<sup>20</sup> "This is the meaning of faith as the state of being grasped by that which concerns us ultimately and not as a set of beliefs, even if the object of belief is a divine being."<sup>21</sup> The calling of the church is not to self-preservation, either as denominations or as a religion, but to self-transcendence.

As early as 1951, Tillich noted that the (re)assertion of a theological or ecclesiological identity, as in the case of certain forms of

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas John Hall, *Waiting for Gospel: An Appeal to the Dispirited Remnants of Protestant "Establishment"* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 83.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, *Waiting for Gospel*, 100-103.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, *Waiting for Gospel*, 132.

<sup>21</sup> Tillich, *ST* 3, 243.

neo-orthodoxy and fundamentalism, is simply not attuned to the current human situation. The error of fundamentalism, says Tillich, is not that it insists on an eternal truth, but that it insists on yesterday's articulation of that truth.<sup>22</sup> This is more than an assertion that "the church has to change with the times;" it is the belief that the Spirit encourages every church toward self-critical reflection according to the context in which revelation is communicated.

Though the "self-transcending" church clearly anticipates eschatological unity, it is not clear what Tillich, originally a Lutheran pastor, might have intended concerning denominational difference. His description of existence, however, cautions that claims to absolute truth are not only immodest, but impossible. The finitude of existence ensures the limitation of all reason and creativity, no matter over how many centuries it has been practised and refined. The revelation of New Being in the Christ ensures that religion always properly points, not to itself, but to its message. This mission must determine what shape the church takes.

Second, it follows that the mission of communicating revelation remains the first priority for religious dialogue as well. It is not enough to create agreements among denominations on issues of liturgy and polity, hoping that the mission of the church will follow. Inter-subjective encounter must include respectful discussion, but it must also adopt the approach of problem-solving, of establishing a roadmap to closer unity; not for the sake of the church, but for the sake of God's world.

This is already being lived out in many ecumenical relationships. For example, shared ministries in Canada often begin as the result of pastoral need, and issues of liturgy and polity are engaged as they arise. The Spirit calls the church to understand such ministries not as exceptional but as normal. Such prioritizing of compassion, worship and spiritual care over theological consensus is what Hall calls the *ecclesia crucis*: the church that identifies completely with the cross.<sup>23</sup> The virtues of such a church are not sight, consummation and power, but faith, hope and love.

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<sup>22</sup> Tillich, *ST* 1, 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, *Waiting for Gospel*, 92.

Placing mission first does require a certain tolerance for living with ambiguity. Some recent ecumenical documents, notably the Waterloo declaration between the Anglican Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church, deal beautifully with ambiguity by cherishing simplicity, accepting that some things, even important things, will be worked out over time.<sup>24</sup>

Yet it is important to note that ecumenical dialogue that seeks the *ecclesia crucis* is not simply about accepting loss as a condition of unity. Most ecumenical dialogue is creative and constructive, and focuses on setting milestones in a longer journey. Ultimately, the vision of unity is perhaps best stated not as *compromise*, but as *mutual recognition* of Christ in the faith and practice of the other.

Finally, then, perhaps Tillich would encourage continued ecumenical dialogue(s) by saying that, while difference is a condition of our existence, seeking shared identity is a condition of being reunited with our essence in Christ.

Upon returning from a trip to Japan in 1960, Tillich said he wished he could start his theological career over again, such was the importance of interfaith dialogue, and the encounter of world religions with secularism and quasi-religious political systems.<sup>25</sup> Though the world-historical situation we face is different, it is also a time of immense potential for the church. It is crucial that we are able to articulate our identity, for ourselves and for others, and that this identity always is held accountable to the gospel.

The eventual oneness of the church cannot be an end in itself, but it is a credible means of communicating to the world “the truth and trustworthiness of God’s abiding love for and commitment to creation.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *Called to Full Communion*, or the “Waterloo Declaration,” was approved by the National Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in Waterloo, Ontario, 2001. The full text can be found online at <http://elcic.ca/What-We-Believe/Waterloo-Declaration.cfm>.

<sup>25</sup> Tillich, *World Religions*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Hall, *Waiting for Gospel*, 165.

## THE KIND OF UNITY THE NEW TESTAMENT REVEALS

by David MacLachlan

Since the beginning of the ecumenical movement readers and interpreters of the New Testament have sought for the key to the churches' unity in its pages. Profound insights have been gained, but, as with all biblical studies they are filtered through the lenses of the readers' hermeneutics. At the beginning of his novel, *Joseph and his Brothers*, Thomas Mann speaks about the well of the past. For Mann, the well is humanity's past and he asks whether we should name it as "bottomless."<sup>1</sup> Peering into the well of the New Testament (NT), the search for the churches' unity, may seem just as "bottomless," but does not have to be endless or pointless.

An even more challenging aspect to reading the NT has been named in *The Five Gospels*, where the search is not for the unity of the churches but for the actual words of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> The authors offer a warning in the metaphor of readers looking into a mirror; the images perceived and the insights gained can be as much that of their own reflection as of actualities present in the text: "Beware of finding a Jesus entirely congenial to you" (in red letters!). It is not surprising, then, that a similar experience could accompany the search for the churches' unity in the pages of the NT. The results may reflect the convictions and vision of unity of the reader more than what our ecclesial siblings may find in the same verses.

Raymond Brown, in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, comments on the existence of the NT canon as a challenge to all who read it with the goal of buttressing the rightness of their own position and the wrongness of those with whom they may disagree.<sup>3</sup> He issues a challenge to this kind of reading by calling readers of the NT to face consciously the canonical texts they tend to ignore. Such texts then could become their "conscience" and "corrective." In a similar way we need to engage NT texts that stretch or question our own perceptions of the unity of the churches, and even our own self-understanding as Christians, instead of always focusing on texts that seem to speak in familiar ways about our unity (such as John 17:21).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. Mann, *Joseph and his Brothers*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 3.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Marshall, ed., *The Five Gospels* (New York: Polebridge Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>3</sup> *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 44.

<sup>4</sup> Many uniting churches have chosen this verse as their motto. The United Church of Canada is no exception in this and has probably often tried the patience of ecumenical partners especially in placing equality or inclusivity on the

Brown's suggestion regarding the unity and diversity of the NT canon could also connect with the recent study document of the World Council of Churches.<sup>5</sup> In the WCC document's perspective, our unity is not something we need to seek and find, as though it were lost or not even present; it is much more a gift given by Jesus Christ and needs to be received, appreciated and engaged.

In the spirit of Brown's suggestion, I wish to call attention to a few NT passages that could enhance our perceptions and appreciation of the diversity within our unity. The first passage is found in Luke 9:49-50, where "another exorcist" (NRSV) is caught exorcising demons in Jesus' name. In some translations he is called the "strange" exorcist, but the only strange thing about this one is that he is not one of the twelve disciples. Luke reports that they tried to stop him.<sup>6</sup> When they reported this to Jesus he contradicted them. The episode is probably taken from Mark (9:38-40) and the saying of Jesus at the end of the passage is found elsewhere in the Gospels (Matt. 12:30; Luke 11:23). I like Luke's version, though, because it distinguishes between the disciples and Jesus. In Mark, the group for or against is named "us," not "you," as here in Luke 9. We may prefer Mark because it sounds more as if the disciples (and we?) are always and clearly one with the Master. A grand assumption indeed! Luke shows that they were not on the same page with Jesus. It also demonstrates just as clearly how someone outside their circle took up Jesus' name and authority and exercised it with effectiveness.

We are not told much about the stranger. Did he carry on a ministry after the disciples' intervention, or did they return to him to say that their reprimand was at least premature, let alone vetoed by Jesus? Was this a story added by the early church community to address a "who's in and who's out" controversy? As Christians on the hunt for unity I think we need to make room for this very short story and any cracks it might cause in the unity wall as we see or construct it. It reminds us that we in our churches are not alone in hearing and living out the gospel. Also, the Spirit of Christ is not confined to empowering us alone. If we believe that God created the world and all that is in it, and that Jesus died for that

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agenda of ecumenical discussions.

<sup>5</sup> *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper No.214 (Geneva; WCC Publications, 2013), 2.

<sup>6</sup> The verb here is imperfect, literally "we were stopping" but often translated as a "conative," or an attempt to prevent.

world, should we be surprised that God's Spirit is working beyond our present vision or imagination, and even outside our circles?

Another thing to note here in Luke 9 is that the activity of this outside exorcist sits in definite contrast to the disciples' lack of success in exorcism earlier in the chapter (9:37-43). They tried to do precisely this for a boy and failed. Now someone outside their circle does it, and the best way they think it should be handled is to forbid it. Jesus had a deeper insight. It is a gospel reality and critique (heard also in the Hebrew prophetic writings) that those who are supposed to know about the realities of the Kingdom often do not. When it comes to engaging and living out Jesus' healing work and authority, we today may do just as poorly as the disciples. Our reaction must also make room for these "strangers." Our reaction to their disruptive appearance will much depend upon the adequacy of our grasp and of the gift of unity.

There are and will be those who live and work outside our ranks, and who can or will claim Jesus' name and authority in ways we have not conceived, or that do not fit our cherished and well-machined molds. Outsiders to our churches may well grasp the authority and possibilities of Jesus' ministry and healing in our world better than we do. It raises the possibility that at times we may try to exorcize demons in our world with the Beelzebul of our own biases and tired ways of doing things. We then fail to set people free to serve Christ in a new and life-empowering way.

Another challenging Lukan passage is found in the scene of the twelve disciples at the last supper (22:24-26). Right in the middle of a critical event for Jesus and his followers we hear that they were arguing about their own greatness. The controversy is found much earlier in the other Gospels, but Luke places it squarely in the middle of the last Passover meal Jesus shared with his disciples. Jesus addresses the theme of greatness and service in response. This theme, however, is tied to child-like faith and service, and is echoed in other NT passages (Matt. 18:1-5; Luke 9:47 etc.). In Luke it is a disturbingly realistic scene.

The company of the disciples was a mixed one: hard-working and savvy fishermen, an entrepreneurial if not despised tax collector, a possibly violent zealot and even the one who will betray Jesus. It is precisely to this gathering that Jesus lifts up the example of the "kings of the Gentiles" who lord it over their subjects. The verb Jesus uses here is



related to the term “lord” (*kurieuō* as with *kurios*) and conveys the meaning of “to be or act like a lord” or “to be a lord over others.” Jesus’ admonition is equally clear: “Not so with you! (22:26).” The way things are done among the nations is not the model for the way things should be done among the disciples.<sup>7</sup>

It is bold of Luke to place this conversation right in the last supper event. In his narrative this debate is sparked apparently by Jesus’ comment about his betrayer. How could the disciples either misunderstand or misuse Jesus’ revelation about his approaching betrayal as a platform for them to reflect on and argue about their own place in the kingdom? How can the Lord’s Supper become the occasion of such petty arguments? This scene is a devastating critique of the Twelve and quite possibly of many of Jesus’ followers, then and now. If the Twelve sensed that Jesus’ ministry was coming to an end and that they would inherit, or be empowered to take up, his work in the world, should the first thing they worry about be their own standing and authority? They do not spend much time considering the act of betrayal prefigured by Jesus’ comment. We should also note that Jesus talked more about eating and drinking in the kingdom at this table than about his followers’ greatness or thrones.

We cannot assume, either, that the disciples had a common vision about the movement, but we need to note that they were all invited by Christ to the table, even Judas. The common table was their place to experience Jesus’ wonderful gift of unity. For us today a glaring omission is the absence of any mention of the women after Luke specifically says they accompanied Jesus and supported his mission “out of their own resources” (8:1-3). For the Passover meal, as it is clearly called (Luke 22:7ff.), their omission from the company would be quite unusual. For our churches today, the presence and leadership of women at the table would be true to our diversity.

Yet, even the diversity as it is portrayed here is a challenge to the ways of the “kings of the Gentiles.” The Twelve shared at Jesus’ table and that united them at that moment. It did not make them all the same. It is clearly the Lord’s table, not theirs, and both their unity and diversity is visible. Luke’s joyous vision of the gathered community later in Acts (2:46-47) broadens our understanding of those who share at the table.

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<sup>7</sup> One example of what Jesus did not mean can be found in 1 Maccabees 1:16ff.

Nothing is lifted up there about who may come, or even who should preside. The only criterion seems to be the desire and joy of communing with the Lord and one another. They seemed to have had a sense of unity and openness that would challenge and baffle kings and rulers among the nations. An inclusive table would certainly fit Jesus' ministry in that he ate with all who wished to eat with him, even those clearly considered outsiders by others. For those with little or no bread, he provided it. We need to see the critique and the wholeness in these texts. The inclusiveness of our unity in its social, sexual and cultural differences can be the Church's powerful witness in a deeply divided world today.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus' declaration, "Not so with you" should give us all cause to ponder seriously how we conduct things in our churches and in all of our ecumenical business and discussions. Is faith and ministry really about who is in authority? Or is it much more about recognizing and fitting us and others with the gifts for witness and service? Surely Pope Francis' openness to the poor is a tremendous first step in this regard. Jesus' admonition will challenge all of our conceptions of what is authoritative in our midst and who is truly exercising his authority at the local, denominational or ecumenical levels. Are we practising being servant to one another because this is the highest value that Jesus lifted up before the disciples in his last moments with them (Luke 22:27)? Does the promise of thrones capture our imagination more than Jesus' attempt to guide the topic of conversation? Could the gift of our unity be blurred by our perceptions of authority?

It is a sad state of affairs for the churches to have to admit, especially to non-churched people, that some of our worst battles have been over matters of sharing at the table. We have a unique ability to place the rightness and wrongness of this or any question in the place of the disciples' debate about greatness at the Lord's Table as we talk with each other. Full discussion of this topic belongs elsewhere but it has implications for the kind of unity we seek and how we seek it. I like very much the conversation about the "open table" and hope this will become prominent not just as an item of theology and discussion, but for the tone

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<sup>8</sup>See for example the directions suggested in Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Coming Together in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity* (Valley Forge, PA; Judson Press, 2009).

of all unity conversations.<sup>9</sup> Our unity will appear much more quickly, with greater clarity and more tangibly as we pursue it in this direction.

In the light of the few passages in the NT I have considered here, another metaphor could be appropriate for our life together. It comes from the garden centre as much as from the NT and that would be the one of “variegated church.” Paul uses this concept when he speaks about the trinitarian pattern of gifts, services and activities (or “energizings”) among the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:4-6). This kind of diversity lifts up the pattern referenced in the WCC document on unity, namely that the dynamic and creative life of God is the model for the life of the church with respect to its diversity, service and empowerment. An ecumenically attuned church should feel inspired and empowered to live out of, and not avoid, our “cracks” of diversity. If we do, more light may enter than we expect.<sup>10</sup> Our unity is in the one Lord we all call upon, and our diversity is witness to the Lord’s presence among us. Granted, at times we may still need to sort out our diversity, but that is a task subordinate to our common witness. Our unity in Christ remains. Those outside the Church are not repelled by this variety among us but attracted to its life and challenge. Paul certainly applied this principle to the Corinthians’ worship (1 Cor. 14:26) and this giftedness included women and men, rich and poor. I would be happy to catch Paul’s ear about other diversities in the witness to Christ for which we need to make room and recognize.

My purpose here has been to lift up a few passages that could challenge us with their possible implications for the way we perceive our unity. As Brown suggests, the passages we need to reflect on may well differ for each of us. For me these highlight Christ’s gift of unity already present to, and active among, us. They can also reveal the dimness or distractedness of our vision that prevents us from seeing God’s gift to us. The NT can enliven and empower our unity if we deal with passages that are troublesome for us, as well as those that easily say we are one. Perhaps we will see our unity more clearly if we consider them together. In this way the NT can help us in the recognition both of the gift of our unity in Christ and the gift of the diversity in each other.

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<sup>9</sup> Such as Jamie Howison, *Come to the Table: a reflection on the practice of open communion at saint benedict’s table* (Winnipeg: saint benedict publishing, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Leonard Cohen’s *Anthem*. I find the whole refrain a challenge to us as church people.

## **FROM THE HEART— ABOUT THE HEART OF THE MATTER**

**by Karen A. Hamilton**

I am often asked, as I am out and about in the world, what it is that I do. I have a thirty-second “elevator” speech, a two-minute “elevator” speech and a five-minute “elevator” speech, depending on the interest and attention span of the person asking the question. I receive three kinds of responses to my description of the role of general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). One response is “Who cares?”—a response conveying the attitude that the Christian Church is irrelevant in the world. A second response indicates that what I do borders on, or actually is, inappropriate because faith has caused more harm than good in the world. Hard as those responses may seem, I think it is the third kind of response that poses the biggest challenge to all those of us specifically engaged in ecumenism. “But surely the Christian denominations have so much in common; they are all united in Jesus Christ; they should not be so divided. Why is your job even necessary?”

In answering that question I have to begin by saying that it is an awesome privilege to have been serving as the general secretary of the CCC for the past eleven years. Begun in 1944, the Council currently has twenty-five member denominations from the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, Free Church and Eastern and Oriental traditions, representing in that membership more than 85% of the Christians in Canada. It is the most inclusive church council in the world. It is an awesome privilege indeed to serve the eucharist in the Anglican tradition, to dance with the drums of the Ethiopian tradition, to feel my prayers rise up with the incense of the Roman Catholic tradition, to preach in the Christian Reformed, Baptist and Armenian Orthodox services, to witness the full immersion of newborn babies in Coptic baptism, to experience the fervour of worship combined with service in the Salvation Army, and to know the gift of icons as vehicles of prayer.

There is wondrous diversity in the member denominations of the CCC and in the denominations that are not members of the CCC, but with which we have relationships and joint witness for the sake of the gospel. There is wondrous unity also in that we are all centred in the life and ministry, and especially the death, resurrection and on-going presence, of Jesus Christ in the world. The truth of our unity in diversity is something

to celebrate with spirited and Spirit-filled enthusiasm.

Such unity is biblically mandated. Our own denomination, founded to be united and uniting, grounded itself in the words of John 17:21, “that they may all be one.” The denominations of the CCC take those words further, believing that through our unity in diversity all Christians are called to works and witness together in the name of Christ and for the sake of the world. The current President of the CCC, the first Salvation Army president in the CCC’s seventy year history, references a passage from Luke 5 to speak of the unity in diversity to which we are called. In this passage, diverse people unite, with a certain assertive determination, to rip apart the roof of a house so they can lower their paralyzed companion before Jesus, certain that Jesus will heal him. And he does.

So if the biblical mandate to the unity in diversity we name as ecumenism is so clear, why is my job necessary? Why is the Canadian Council of Churches necessary? Why was it necessary for The United Church of Canada to call itself a united and uniting church?

Of course, as frail and flawed human beings, sometimes we need reminders and facilitations. Because of that reality I sometimes describe my job as “forward, attach, nag and chase.” But perhaps the existence of The Canadian Council of Churches is not so much a necessity as a witness, a witness with a uniquely Canadian flavour.

The Canadian Council and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) have seven denominations in common and often work closely together. On one occasion the president of the EFC and I both were invited to a meeting of the Global Christian Forum in Kenya, and were delighted to be invited to make a joint presentation on the state of ecumenism in our country. We were quite lively in our presentation, both of us apparently speaking too quickly for the translators as we tried to convey the breadth and complexity of ecumenism in our context. When the break came, I was approached by someone who said that he had really enjoyed the presentation and who then remarked, “And of course you are the evangelical one!” Remembering that the word “evangelical” means to witness to the good news, I wonder if perhaps that man had been listening very deeply!

Every year the general secretary receives an invitation from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to attend its plenary assembly.

One year, when I was unable to attend, the Council's Baptist vice president was asked to attend in my stead. He was thrilled to go, was warmly received and was honoured by the forthright way that the challenges of the Catholic Church in Canada were discussed with him. But most moving for him was the fact that, given the parlous state of ecumenism when he was growing up, it would have been absolutely unimaginable for a Baptist to be attending a major gathering of Catholic Bishops.

And then there's the Canadian media. From time to time I receive calls from "the Fourth Estate." The question most frequently asked is which of the twenty-five denominations of the Council are evangelical. I respond that, given the meaning of the original Greek word, to witness to the good news, all are evangelical! This is not the desired response for people trying to publish something controversial or divisive. "People of faith united in their diversity" is just not a good sound bite. The media representatives who are particularly persistent will try again, asking me which explicitly define themselves as evangelical. I respond, "Oh, you mean denominations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada?" The media callers often hang up then, thinking that I am boring. But, truth to tell, the gospel story has deep and broad resonances for all of us.

It is the gospel story that brings questions to us about the ecumenical calling. What does witnessing to the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, what does our unity in diversity look like—really look like—in our time and place?

Since the church exists not for its own sake but for the sake of the world, where and how do we really want to witness to the good news through our unity in diversity in Christ in the world? More importantly, how do we remind each other that God's grace given to us, to all of us, however we specifically articulate it, gives us the energy and creativity we need to do more, infinitely more, than we can imagine. Speaking from the heart—about the heart of the matter also means acting from the heart.

What if each one of us committed ourselves to visiting one, just one, congregation simply for the goal of getting to know each other and each other's traditions in Christ, simply for the witness of praying for each other?

What if our congregations, parishes and denominations witnessed together to the truth that all people are made in the image of God and spoke and acted in unity to resist, resist, resist the reality of human trafficking around the world? It is a very painful subject to even talk about but this is a real form of modern day slavery. Estimates are that twenty-seven million of God's children are being trafficked around the world and that includes Canada. Every day bodies and lives are being bought and sold. To speak and act from the heart would mean to speak and act together to bring this scandalous, destructive reality to an end.

What if we as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church committed ourselves and witnessed to the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations, declaring in word and deed that God's people, all people, should live with enough food, water, housing, education, dignity, medical care and relief from dire disease?

The heart of the matter is that we whose unity in diversity witnesses to the depth of God's love are strengthened by each other's expression of the truth in Jesus Christ—so strengthened that we are then able to do all that we do for the sake of the world; that we are then able to say that all that we say and do, we do for the least of our brothers and sisters. Thanks be to God!

*Parts of this article are from a sermon preached in the English language service of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Rome, 2014.*

## PROFILE

### GORDON DOMM, URBAN MINISTRY VISIONARY

by Betsy Anderson



“For an old-fashioned man, he was very progressive.”<sup>1</sup> Thus said one long-time member of Bathurst St. United Church (BSUC) in Toronto about the Rev. Gordon Domm, minister there for over twenty years, from 1937-1958. Born at Ayton, Ontario, on March 21, 1900, Oliver Gordon Domm was a graduate of Victoria College in the University of Toronto and undertook his theological studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He was ordained in 1927, two years after the United Church of Canada came into existence, and, for all his ministry, was an embodiment of much of the witness this new denomination offered in the first 30 years of its life.

Following his education at Union, and a brief stint as Minister of Education at The First Presbyterian Church of Albany, New York, from 1927-1929, Domm returned to Canada. He served Memorial United Church in St. Catharines (now united with Welland Ave. and St. Paul St. United, forming Silver Spire United) for four years, 1929-33 and then Knox United (now Georgian Shores United Church) in Owen Sound from 1933-37.

Succeeding Rev. Stephen J. Mathers, Domm’s ministry at Bathurst St. United Church began in challenging circumstances. The church, built in 1888 by Gordon and Helliwell<sup>2</sup> with a Sunday School wing added in 1910, found itself in a changing neighbourhood at the corner of Lennox and Bathurst, with a diminishing congregation. Gordon Domm was well-suited to the call from the Bathurst St. congregation. He assessed the needs of the neighbourhood which included working class and immigrant folk, many rooming houses and transient populations in the last years of the Depression. He developed innovative approaches to ensuring the relevance of this downtown neighbourhood church.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Ray Harris, 8 October 2003.

<sup>2</sup> [Wikipedia.org/wiki/Bathurst\\_Street\\_Theatre](http://Wikipedia.org/wiki/Bathurst_Street_Theatre), consulted 5 April 2013.



## Sunday Evening Forums

One of the most famous of Domm's innovations was the Sunday Evening Forum, an experiment in place of the Sunday evening service at Bathurst St. With attendance at the evening service dwindling, and believing there was value in discussing social questions in a religious setting and from a Christian point of view, Domm and the Official Board crafted a new approach which they hoped would respond to the interests of a wider audience, including a transient soldier population. The experimental Sunday Evening Forums were launched on 21 October 1944. The *United Church Observer* took notice:

Bathurst St. United Church has been doing some pioneering this winter in the forum type of service. The service is essentially a religious service with a definite place for worship and for choir music. Instead of a sermon by a minister, an address is given by a layman who is an authority in some particular field of study or human interest, or by two speakers who present different sides of the subject. After the address, questions may be put to the speaker: these must be written and paper is provided for the purpose. Sometimes as many as 60 questions have been submitted. The service is closed with prayer.<sup>3</sup>

The *Observer* was later to carry an article on the ministry of Bathurst St. by M.A. Forsyth, who reported that the Church has attained considerable prominence as a meeting place for all races, creeds and sects, and an increasing number of people are coming to know it as "The Church of the Sunday Evening Forum" . . . Its speakers have come from all parts of Canada, from the United States, Great Britain and Europe. They have represented all shades of opinion in the professions, in commerce and the labour movements. Members of diverse races and religions have spoken on the same platform. The Church has also gained new vitality through a greatly increased membership, and as one of a very few in Toronto to show a surplus for 1946. Much of the success of this venture is

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<sup>3</sup> *The United Church Observer*, 15 February 1945, 4.

due to the initiative and courage of the present pastor, Rev. Gordon Domm, whose brainchild it was.<sup>4</sup>

Domm and the congregation did not avoid controversial topics at these Sunday evening forums. On 30 December 1946, the *Ottawa Citizen* published a newswire story on an “Uproarious debate over legislation on cocktail bars”:

Ontario liquor legislation providing for cocktail lounges was debated at an uproarious open forum in Bathurst St. United Church tonight with R.M. Willes Chitty, K.C., president of the Toronto Property Owners Association, as the sole upholder of the change. The two other speakers,<sup>5</sup> Controller Stewart Smith of Toronto and Rev. John Coburn, national secretary of the Canadian Temperance Federation, attacked the revised legislation . . . Interjection from the audience grew so frequent at times that Rev. Gordon Domm, pastor of the church, had to appeal for order.<sup>6</sup>

Anti-semitism was another issue that Gordon Domm addressed—and exposed—both through letters to the editor<sup>7</sup> and in offering a platform for education and discussion at the Sunday Evening Forum. In *How Silent Were the Churches? Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era*, Rabbi Reuben Slonim’s friendship with Domm is noted, including Domm’s invitation to Slonim to preach on this topic during the war years. Authors Davies and Nefsky observe that “Domm took seriously the menace of anti-semitism in Canada. To allow a Jew to lecture Christians from a Christian pulpit on the roots of this malady in New Testament misinterpretations of Pharisees and Sadducees required no small degree of personal courage in the pre-critical 1940s.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> M.A. Forsyth, *The United Church Observer*, 1 December 1947, “Sunday Evening Vox Pop in Toronto.”

<sup>5</sup> *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 December 1946.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Anti-semitism in Canada: History and Interpretation*, ed. Alan T. Davies (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Alan Davies and Marilyn E. Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches? Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).

Domm's willingness to create an open space through the Sunday Evening Forum for debate and dialogue among differing points of view had repercussions. In a 1951 *Toronto Daily Star* article, he responded to the challenge that "the forum has become a front for Reds because Mr. Domm permitted Communists to air their views. He answers his critics this way: 'As long as the government does not ban them, the church of Christ should not fear them. We should give them, under Christian leadership, the same privileges a democracy gives. If we really believe in what we claim, we should not be afraid to let anyone speak against it.'"<sup>9</sup> In a June 1946 *United Church Observer* article, Domm claimed that over half of the congregation's 100 new members came through the Forum approach.<sup>10</sup> The forums continued until April 15, 1951.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Beanery Boys**

The Sunday Evening Forum was not Domm's only innovation. The Beanery Boys, an infamous young men's gang that had nearby Christie Pits as its base, was also welcomed into the church. Gordon Domm acted on the assumption that gang activity was at least in part a reflection of the lack of recreational and social opportunities for young people in the neighbourhood. His thesis work at Union, entitled "Some Psychological and Educational Factors in Character Formation," likely provided good grounding for his ability to see through the posturing of tough adolescents to their personal and social potential if offered respect and a space for positive peer relationships.

Domm became involved in this issue after a widely publicized<sup>12</sup> brawl at Wasaga Beach in August 1948 involving members of Toronto's Beanery and Junction gangs. Several of the thirteen arrested and charged were from homes in the Bathurst-Bloor area. Domm arranged a Sunday Evening Forum to probe the background to gang behaviour where a "social worker, the mother of one of the gang members, and a newspaper reporter"<sup>13</sup> were the speakers. The outcome of the Forum was a decision

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<sup>9</sup> *Toronto Daily Star*, 26 April 1951.

<sup>10</sup> *The United Church Observer*, 1 July 1946.

<sup>11</sup> *Historical Booklet 1862-1962*, Bathurst St. United Church Historical File, United Church of Canada Archives.

<sup>12</sup> *The Ottawa Journal*, 23 August 1948.

<sup>13</sup> *Toronto Daily Star*, 26 April 1951.

to open the doors of Bathurst St. United Church. Domm arranged for the Beanery Gang's "use of part of the building where they could have wholesome recreational activities and also receive wise counselling. In spite of some 'outbreaks' this gang gradually ceased to be a problem to the city."<sup>14</sup>

Part way through Domm's ministry at Bathurst St., this recreational role for the church was formalized when the Kiwanis Club "approached the Official Board to discuss the possibility of establishing a boy's club in the midtown area using the congregation's basement gym and adjoining rooms as headquarters. The Board members were enthusiastic about the idea and the midtown Kiwanis Boys' Club came into being."<sup>15</sup> Garfield Weston, growing up on nearby Palmerston Ave., had attended Sunday school at Bathurst St. United Church.<sup>16</sup> His family's connection continued through the support that the Weston-owned Loblaws business gave to the Midtown Kiwanis Boys Club at Bathurst, which opened its doors in 1945<sup>17</sup> and celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1995.

Under the direction of a joint committee, some appointed by the Kiwanis organization and others by Bathurst St. United Church, this venture served boys from the community aged 7-17, and provided welcome financial resources for the maintenance of the gym and lower parts of the church building which became the boys' club rooms. Stephen Douglas, who grew up in the neighbourhood and in the congregation testifies that "Midtown 'K' Club was a tremendous influence on my life (aged 7-18). You could almost say that I grew up in the club. From floor hockey to dodge ball, from football to outdoor shinny, from general athletic skills development to public speaking and leadership development, the 'K' Club, along with Bathurst St. United Church, in whose building it was located, provided a foundational environment for who I am today."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Historical Booklet 1862-1962*, Bathurst St. United Church Historical File, United Church of Canada Archives.

<sup>15</sup> 1962 Anniversary History in the Bathurst St. United Church Historical Files in the UCC Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Trent Frayne, *The Toronto Daily Star*, 16 January 1971.

<sup>17</sup> [www.bathurststunited.ca](http://www.bathurststunited.ca), consulted November 15, 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Stephen Douglas, 4 April 2013.

From a membership of 150 the first year, the K Club grew to over 440. Hundreds of boys in the district profited from participation in its activities—games, crafts, health studies and social activities.<sup>19</sup> Some found a father figure in the leaders and a refuge in the space.

### Church as Community Centre

Interviewed by *The Toronto Star* in April 1951, following the termination of the Sunday Evening Forums, Rev. Gordon Domm reflected on his experience:

During the last 14 years, the community work of the church has grown to such an extent there is a real need for a full-time director. There is a great opportunity here for combining religion with work and play. Here we have a democratic, wholesome program, without respect for race or creed, and a place where humans can gather. Our church is in the centre of a mobile community whose members can't be reached in the usual way of churches. We must reach them where they are.<sup>20</sup>

In the same article Domm observed that the church was being used more and more as a place for community organizations to meet and is proud to report that while “it is rare for labour to come to the church, the C.I.O. and C.C.L. recently held their provincial civil liberties meeting here and during the milk strike, the milkmen's union held several conferences in our rooms.”<sup>21</sup> The Canadian Peace Congress's inaugural meeting also took place in the Bathurst St. sanctuary in May 1949 and elected James G. Endicott, a controversial former United Church minister, as its Chair.

Gordon Domm's hospitality to radical organizations, some of which were communist, or considered communist, did not go unnoticed or unchallenged. *The Globe and Mail* of 10 February 1953 records a tense meeting where Domm was both condemned, and supported, by members of the congregation for allowing the Congress of Canadian Women, the Canadian Peace Congress, the Congress of Peoples for Peace, and the

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<sup>19</sup> *1962 Anniversary History* in the Bathurst St. United Church Historical Files in the UCC Archives.

<sup>20</sup> *The Toronto Daily Star*, 26 April, 1951.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Canadian Soviet Friendship Society to use the church for meetings. A petition signed by about thirty congregational members asking Presbytery to remove Gordon Domm was circulated in the church and presented to Presbytery.

However, when the congregation's trustees agreed not to allow use of the building by these groups, the conflict was largely diffused. While many of those who signed the petition left the congregation, Domm received an overwhelming vote of confidence at a congregational meeting. Comments reported in the media coverage included the statement of Moses McKay, a union leader who said "he attended Bathurst St. United Church because the minister not only preached Christianity, he lived it. . . . Communism is a threat to our society, but it isn't the greatest threat: the Church Board that is blind to our everyday needs is a greater threat than communism."<sup>22</sup>

Gordon Domm continued his ministry at Bathurst St. until 1958, albeit with a little less freedom in the Cold War era of the 1950s. He left in 1957 to become the General Secretary of the Ontario Temperance Federation, following in the footsteps of other United Church ministers. His untimely death on 11 September 1959 was a blow to the Federation, which welcomed his efforts to strengthen their work among youth, and to build united action with other organizations in order to create a broader base for achieving the goals of the Temperance movement. Domm's obituary reflects his legacy:

Mr. Domm was one of Toronto's best known ministers; a lifelong campaigner against liquor, gambling and juvenile delinquency, in 1948 he founded the Bathurst Community Club. He was active in many community organizations and was president of the Ministerial Association of the United Church, a member of the Toronto Committee of the Canadian Council of Churches; the Council of the Civil Liberties Association of Toronto, the Board of "Good Neighbours Club"; the Christian Social Service Council of the United Church Radio Commission; and the director of the Youth Services Council. From 1939 to 1945 he conducted the Quiet

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<sup>22</sup> *Globe and Mail*, 10 February 1953.

Sanctuary religious radio programme. Besides his wife, the former Edna Viola Steele, he leaves two sons, Gordon and William of Toronto. He was a strong, fearless preacher, with a deep concern for the cause of Christ's Kingdom in the community.<sup>23</sup>

Lorne J. Henry, a long-time member of Bathurst St. United and the Ontario Temperance Federation, eulogized Domm on the occasion of his untimely death, in an article in the Federation's journal: "Mr Domm believed the church had the answer . . . he ministered to the congregation at Bathurst St. for twenty years in a ministry that was noted for its outreach into community life. It was his conviction that the Church should be concerned with communicating the Gospel to all areas of society."<sup>24</sup>

Gordon Domm provided an outstanding example of the kind of ministry in which the United Church was engaged in the changing and challenging urban ministry context of the 1930s-1950s. He had a number of ministerial colleagues in the downtown United Churches of Toronto. Ray McCleary, also a Union Theological Seminary graduate, had been called to Woodgreen United in 1936 where he engaged in a transformative ministry to that east-end neighbourhood for over thirty years. Joseph Lavell Smith, another Union graduate, was Superintendent at Church of All Nations from 1942 until it was amalgamated with Queen St. United Church in 1951, and he became minister of the united congregation until 1959.

With others, like Jim Finlay at Carlton United, Gordon Domm and his colleagues created an approach to ministry in the downtown core of Toronto that was relevant and courageous, and that became a foundation for future innovations such as the Canadian Urban Training (CUT) programme. The ministries of Domm and other urban pioneers offer a proud legacy for downtown Christian congregations, inviting them to continue to measure their ministries against these bold witnesses.

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<sup>23</sup> Obituary: Rev. Gordon Domm, M.A. B.D., 11 September 1959, United Church Archives – Personal File for Gordon Domm.

<sup>24</sup> Lorne J. Henry, *The Advocate*. October 1959.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *The Church: Towards a Common Vision.*

(World Council of Churches, Faith & Order Paper No. 214, 2013). Available at

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>

Thirty-two years ago the ecumenical world was abuzz about a distinctive little square booklet, grey, with a blue-green swirl on the cover. It was the World Council of Church's *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, a text that calmly laid out the growing agreement of Christians as diverse as Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, United, and Pentecostal on key matters of the church's life. It was called a "convergence" text, because it pointed out both areas of common ground and remaining differences, sometimes with gentle suggestions for confronting these prickly areas (believer's baptism and women's ordination, for example). The document, which soon became known by its acronym BEM, was a runaway best seller. The World Council asked for responses, and then filled several printed volumes with the feedback. The whole process injected life and hope into the ecumenical project.

And now, there is another distinctive little square booklet, this time in shades of green, but also available as a free download. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* is another World Council convergence document. This time the focus is the nature and purpose of the church itself—ecclesiology. Since the inception of the modern ecumenical movement in the early twentieth century, Christians have recognized that they must come to terms with the diversity that marks our theologies of church. This study document—which has already been nicknamed TCTCV—brings together the fruits of several decades of dialogue. It mines the texts of the many international and national multilateral and bilateral dialogues that have been working away at questions of purpose, mission and structure in the church's life. At times over those years, the task seemed hopeless, mired in a diversity of cultural and confessional positions and demanding voices. But through patient listening and crafting, TCTCV came to birth last summer.

So what is TCTCV? In just over 50 pages the WCC Commission on



Faith and Order offers global Christianity an accessible, but richly laden, text for our consideration. It situates the church in God's design and Jesus' witness; it investigates key terms and phrases that have been used to describe the church; it describes areas of the church's life where there is ecumenical agreement—and where there is not; and it describes the church's mission in the world. The document weaves together three kinds of assertions: (1) statements with which most Christians would agree (for example, the church is the body of Christ); (2) topics on which Christians differ, but in ways that may not be church-dividing (for example, how the authority of Scripture relates to the authority of "tradition"); and (3) areas where there is deep disagreement (for example, the "universal ministry of unity"—such as the Roman Catholic papacy). As with BEM, TCTCV poses important questions to the churches, asking how they see themselves (or not) in its pages, and what we might do as a result of its work.

John Gibaut, the Canadian Anglican who is the Director of the Commission on Faith and Order, suggests that TCTCV has two purposes: *renewal* and *convergence*. In other words, it should be read both *within* denominations, and ecumenically, *among* denominations. Within denominations, the framers of TCTCV hope that, as churches ponder the text, they will experience renewal; that is, they will rediscover the fullness of their individual "ecclesial life," who they are and who they are meant to be. Ecumenically, they hope that this text will help churches find new convergence with their Christian neighbours, ways to "mutually recognize" each other's life and ministry more fully.

And for the United Church? I believe TCTCV has arrived at a good moment. The United Church is currently engaged in processes of both denominational renewal and of more serious convergence with ecumenical neighbours. In terms of renewal, what might this text have to say to the work of the Comprehensive Review Task Group? Or to the national group reviewing ministry? And how might it inform our ecumenical conversations, international, national, and local? TCTCV might be a bit of a steep climb for a congregational study group, but a prepared leader could help participants work through it over several sessions. It would certainly be suited to ministerial and presbytery gatherings.

United Church people will find things both to celebrate and to challenge in *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Most significantly, it offers us an opportunity to appraise ourselves and our lives with others, so that our witness to the world God loves might be more robust and faithful. Which is, after all, the point of being “United and Uniting,” is it not?

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***Interreligious Reading after Vatican II: Scriptural Reasoning,  
Comparative Theology and Receptive Ecumenism***

**Edited by David F. Ford and Frances Clemson (West Sussex,  
UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) Pp. 236. Published as Volume 29,  
Issue 4 of *Modern Theology* (October 2013).**

A golden jubilee is a wonderful occasion to reminisce about the past, to think about how things have changed, to marvel at all that has been accomplished in so little time, and to ponder where it may all lead into the future. This book provides precisely such a journey through a collection of essays, written by pioneers and protagonists in the developing field of Catholic interreligious reading since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

There are thirteen essays in total, written by experts both within and outside of the Catholic tradition. The book begins with a superb introduction to the writers and their themes, written by David F. Ford, co-editor of the collection. In the most succinct terms, Ford explains the substance and purpose of the book:

Vatican II, as several essays say, opened up a great many possibilities for fresh engagement between churches and religions; understandably, it had less to say about how to go about realizing them. Comparative Theology, Receptive Ecumenism and Scriptural Reasoning can be seen as three answers to the question: How to engage wisely? The essays offer a range of answers to that “How?” mostly aimed at describing, critiquing and improving the three practices (8).

The rest is commentary.

Essays by Michael Barnes and Kevin J. Hughes offer insights into the complex, at times tortuous, historical and theological machinations that opened the Vatican II Catholic Church to methods of modern biblical study, the exercise of religious freedom, and ecumenical and interreligious exploration.

Hughes notes, “While the Second Vatican Council’s clarion call to engage with the wider world . . . opened the doors for Catholics to engage other religious communions in dialogue, the call itself did not present Catholics with any particular models or rules for engagement” (33). At the same time, the “style of the Council” (Barnes) offered clues toward new Catholic approaches to interreligious engagement: “*aggiornamento*, bringing the church into the world of today, and *ressourcement*, the retrieval of theological sources” (14), and “*conversazione* . . . intensive conversation around texts” (Ford, 96). Within this three-fold framework the practices of Comparative Theology, Scriptural Reasoning and Receptive Ecumenism emerged (or rather came to include Catholics), as viable approaches for Catholics to read and relate to other traditions, their sacred texts and theologies, within a wider search for divine wisdom through textual sources.

Essays by Francis X. Clooney (Comparative Theology), David F. Ford (Scriptural Reasoning) and Paul D. Murray (Receptive Ecumenism) do an excellent job of defining the particular approach developed and practised by each author in his or her specific discipline of interreligious reading. Each essay explores the strengths and limitations of their practices—how they are similar and dissimilar from each other—and examines the potential of each methodology for advancing the ecumenical and interreligious agenda of the Catholic Church into the future. This is particularly important in the wake of *Dominus Iesus*, the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, published in the year 2000, that expressly rejected extra-biblical scriptures as sources of divine inspiration (113).

The remaining essays offer critique and/or probing into Comparative Theology, Scriptural Reasoning and Receptive Ecumenism by considering them within a broader framework of interreligious engagement in the Catholic Church, namely: hermeneutical traditions

within the Catholic Church (David Dault, Mike Higton), the philosophical underpinnings of Christian interreligious reading (Nicholas Adams), successes and limitations in the practice of interreligious reading (Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier), Islamic considerations (Anna Bonta Moreland, Maria Massi Dakake) and implications for theological formation in the Church (Peter Ochs).

Based in both theory and a wealth of practical experience, this collection of essays is valuable to scholars and veterans of interreligious reading, especially those who might be looking to learn more about the specific disciplines of Comparative Theology, Scriptural Reasoning and Receptive Ecumenism. Historians of Vatican II and specialists in literary studies will also find much to value in this book. The experience of reading this collection of essays feels a bit like attending an enjoyable and rewarding conference on the theme. At the same time, the technical nature of the subject matter, the high level of the writing and an assumed familiarity with Vatican II and post-Vatican II theological developments, will undoubtedly render many of the essays inaccessible to the uninitiated.

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***Story and Song: A Postcolonial Interplay between Christian Education and Worship.***

**HyeRan Kim-Cragg (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012) Pp. 180.**

HyeRan Kim-Cragg is Lydia Gruchy Professor of Pastoral Theology at St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. A Th.D. graduate of the Toronto School of Theology, Kim-Cragg takes direct aim at Western-imposed frameworks for reading Scripture and for the hymnody that helps us to learn and tell the story. This book remedies and imagines a new Christian story and hymnody in multi-faceted postcolonial dimensions.

This book is grounded thoroughly in a self-consciously explicit postcolonial ethic, and I reflect that I am a white, ordained, middle-class, employed, well-educated female who can easily read the English text of

*Story and Song*. It is precisely my own Western dominant cultural worldview, from which I operate and benefit daily, that Kim-Cragg seeks to expose and disrupt. This slim volume requires close and attentive reading to grasp the scope of the well-explained, insight-filled methodology proposed by this Korean-Canadian scholar.

The author aims to create an inter-dependent relationship between Story (Scripture) and Song (hymnody) in order to aid in the formation (and transformation) of Christians of the twenty-first century. In *Story and Song*, Kim-Cragg provides a compelling contextual study that exposes colonializing (e.g. constructing someone into a fixed identity as other) and imperializing (negating human dignity, personal gifts and traditions of others) forces that muzzle non-Western, non-middle class persons' expressions—in particular, those of women.

Kim-Cragg's readers are invited to regard Christian formation as the relational bridge between Scripture and hymnody. Christian formation is guided by an intentional and well-explained methodology that includes two case studies (Canada and Korea). A careful undoing of the "insidious indoctrination" of Western values and norms for Christian education and worship is essential to the work of bridging story and song. Kim-Cragg returns again and again to her methodology, reminding the reader why context is so critical to persons who identify themselves by means of hybrid identities (e.g., Korean-Canadian in the Canadian case study). In a diaspora like Canada, hybrid identities abound.

The book has helped me—a practical theologian working to co-construct intercultural relational spaces of grace and justice in a Toronto-based United Church congregation—to self-critically surface and name the many biases and prejudices that influence my choices. These choices, I am often reminded throughout this book, influence the practice of congregational singing and Christian formation programs. My own intersecting and overlapping biases are difficult to hold in a coherent fashion: prepare, then, for rewarding insights into the leading of worship and Christian education when working systematically and in a sustained fashion with the methodology offered.

That said, non-Western experiences and wisdom need attentively constructed spaces to grow and assert their place among the diverse voices of hybrid non-Western tradition. These challenges are neatly

enumerated by Kim-Cragg. Undaunted by intercultural/postcolonial complexities, the author exercises a remarkable ability to explain a decolonizing methodology while rolling it out for the reader's engagement.

This book's contributions, for those willing to undertake the rewarding task of contextual and practical theological exercises, will help the church. Christians will learn to connect Scripture read in a decolonizing space of self-critical identity formation and to voice songs of lamentation and rejoicing into faithful proclamation.

Kim-Cragg is well aware of the challenges of dismantling well-established practices in faith communities. She tackles deeply rooted, complex and established worship and Bible study/faith formation programs. Take caution though: the reader ought not simply to extrapolate learnings gleaned from a well-explained context in the book and hope to repeat these intercultural practices elsewhere. The take-away message is to carry the insights hand-in-hand with our contexts and then develop new or revised practices. It is important, critical even, that each context be examined in its own particularities, from a variety of experience/perspectives, especially by listening to voices not always heard above the fray.

As Kim-Cragg says, a "long and steady process" is called for. Patience and perseverance must abound. Students of liturgical theory and practice will recognize the great encouragement in Christian formation through bridging formative Scripture and hymnody where unique and knowing voices are heard in their own right. Kim-Cragg succeeds in weaving the two in a new way where "knowing includes the relational and the experiential" (14).

I hope that Kim-Cragg will continue to invoke decolonizing methods among liturgical and faith formation scholars and practitioners as she has done so succinctly and passionately in this engaging and important work.

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***With Love, Lydia: The Story of Canada's First Woman Ordained Minister***

**Patricia Wotton. Altona, Manitoba: D & P Wotton, 2012. Pp. 291.**

This biography of Lydia Gruchy by the Rev. Patricia Wotton is the fruit of a longtime interest in this remarkable woman. Wotton took on the book as her retirement project, digging into the Gruchy records buried in the library of St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon, in the United Church National Archives, Toronto, and in White Rock, BC, the home to which Gruchy retired, and where she lived for 30 years. Her diligent research did not stop with the written records but also extended to the oral histories of many who knew and were close to Lydia. "It's daunting . . . to write a story that is so widely owned and shared" (vii), writes Wotton. However, this biography successfully manages to present the collected materials in a way that faithfully follows the footsteps of its remarkable subject.

The book contains fifteen chapters, arranged chronologically, beginning with Lydia's early years (born in Asnières, France, 1894), her immigration experience from England to Saskatchewan via St. John, New Brunswick (1913), and the impact of the Great War on her family (she lost two brothers in 1915). This loss is worth mentioning because her late brother Arthur Gruchy was a gifted student in the Presbyterian College (now St. Andrew's) in the University of Saskatchewan (hereafter U of S). Dr. Edmund Oliver, the first principal of the college, knew the Gruchy family personally, and his eyes turned to Arthur's sister, Lydia, who finished her Bachelor of Arts with distinction from the U of S, earning the Governor General's Gold Medal for academic excellence and leadership in 1920. Oliver, who believed that "the church would be ordaining women before long," (46) approached Lydia with the offer of a scholarship to follow in the footsteps of her brother. Lydia, in retrospect, wrote, "That was just the kind of thing that interested me and Dr. Oliver sensed it" (46). While she successfully completed her theological study with many honors in 1923, it took 13 years for the United Church finally to grant her ordination. At the age of 42, "St. Andrew's Miss Gruchy" was ordained at St. Andrew's United Church in Moose Jaw in 1936. It would not be fair to say that her ministry was easy. She faced many challenges

as a woman minister. However, it was harder still for married women and women with children to be accepted into the ordained ministry. The biography illustrates how Gruchy's "Miss" status provided bumpers for her to perform such confident and capable ministry.

Gruchy's ministry was deeply rooted in the soil of Saskatchewan, but her work reached out beyond the province. While she certainly was called to ordained ministry, her vocation was not limited to the pastorate. Between 1938 and 1943 she served as the secretary for the Committee on the Deaconess Order & Women Workers (to which the origin of the Centre for Christian Studies may be traced). During this time she was criticized by some advocates of the ordination of women because "promoting ordination for women was not her priority" (167). Rather her priority was the whole of women's work and their well-being.

This book contains insights and stories that can encourage readers to discern their calling and their passion for ministry. It will be helpful for women and men who are either seeking ordination, or are already ordained, or who serve the church and society in other forms of ministry. In stories that illustrate how ministry is for all and by all, lay leaders also will be able to identify with those who assisted and supported Lydia.

The book provides an informative perspective on life in the late nineteenth century and twentieth century Canada, especially Western Canada. One glimpses some of the challenges and controversies that arose as the nation struggled to establish its own geographical and cultural map.

*With Love, Lydia* is a story of love about an immigrant woman who grew up in a bilingual household and worked across boundaries of ethnicity, culture, language and church structure. Let me finish with Wotton's final reflection: "The story of Lydia Gruchy is God's story; a Canadian story, a prairie story, a women's story, a United Church story, and a story of life in ministry" (231).

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