### Love, Unity, and Mission Together

“All will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another”–**John 13:35**

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Christ Sets Us Free to Love and Serve All

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another.

- Galatians 5:13-15

Love, Unity, and Mission

What is the sure path and motivating force that leads to Christian unity and fruitful mission? On the eve of his sacrifice Jesus took a towel and basin of water and began to wash his disciples feet and then he gave them a new command - love one another as I have loved you. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

The Lord Jesus said that he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28). Jesus was King by right, but Servant by choice. Through meekness, humility, and compassionate love Jesus chose to lay down his life for us - to set us free to love and serve one another (Galatians 5:13). This is the one true path to reconciliation, peace, and unity with all who belong to Christ who shed his blood for us and who unites us with the Father in heaven and with all who are called his sons and daughters. And this is the driving force that led the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).

The love of Christ compels us

The distinctive hallmark and trait of every follower and disciple of Jesus Christ is love - a love that is wholly directed to the good of others - a love that is Christ-centered and ready to forgive and forget past injuries, to heal and restore rather than inflict revenge and injury. The cross of Jesus is the only way to pardon, peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
Every other way will fail or fall short of the glory and victory which Jesus Christ has won for us through his death and resurrection. The love of Christ is not only a promise but a present gift and reality for all who are filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul the Apostle tells us that *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Romans 5:5).

If we embrace his love and truth and allow the Holy Spirit to purify and transform our hearts and minds, then we will find the inner freedom, joy, and strength we need to love without measure, to forgive without limit, and to serve without reward - save that of knowing we are serving the One who unites us in an unbreakable bond of peace and joy forever.

May this issue inspire us - individually and as communities of disciples on mission - to strive together for the unity and mission the Lord has called us to embrace for his glory and for the advancement of his kingdom.

Don't miss Bob Tedesco's article on *The Christian Ladder of Love: Mission, Life Together, and the Second Commandment*.

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor

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The Christian Ladder of Love:
Mission, Life Together, and the Second Commandment

by Bob Tedesco

Mission and our Life Together
In the Sword of the Spirit we say that we are a community of disciples on mission. We have gone to great lengths to define and describe that mission. I hope to summarize all of that work in a simple statement: “We are called to be a certain people and to do certain things, so that others might have true life now and forever.”

Our life together benefits us, but God’s purpose now is to use us to reach others. Our life together has a number of elements to it: community gatherings, small groups, our way of life, retreats, Lord’s Day celebrations, etc. A major current continually in motion around the various elements is a mission. A major investment of resources and energy is mission. Again, simply stated: “Community life is to lead to more life!”

More on Mission and the Great Commission
Mission is often questioned and sometimes misunderstood. “Are we just building community?” “Are we just baptizing in the Spirit?” Our mission is a big and enthusiastic “Yes!” to the Great Commission.

> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”
>
> – Matthew 28:18-20
The Father wants a family and all of human history will respond to that desire. When that family is completed, human history will end; it’s time of gestation will be completed.

The Bible can be seen as “book-ends” of God’s plan... an Old Testament and a New Testament. There are also two “book-end” commissions. The first is in Genesis: “And God blessed them, and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it…”” Genesis 1:28.

The second is the great commission in Matthew 28. So, basically, God’s people have been given two big assignments: 1) “Create the human race” and, 2) Bring the human race to new (eternal) life in Christ.

Community, made up of disciples, supports and cares for the disciples who are “making disciples of all the nations.” There is a synergy of the three: a community of disciples on mission. So, in answer to the earlier questions beginning this section: We are leading people to an encounter with Christ, leading to the Baptism in the Spirit and leading to discipleship in a community of disciples ON MISSION. Mission, in turn, energizes and builds up community.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

– Acts 2:41

The Christian Ladder of Love

Christianity can be described as a deepening progression of love, and the first step is the love of God.

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

– Matthew 22:37

He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

– Matthew 10:37-39

I am defining this second step of the progression (ladder) as the love of self.

And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

– Matthew 22:39

This second commandment as stated presumes the love of self and uses it as a standard for the love of neighbor.

“Love one another”

The third rung in the Christian ladder of love is to “love one another”, and we see love in the body tied to mission.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.
“Love your neighbor”
The fourth rung is “love thy neighbor.” Mt.22:39 (above). Here, I am interpreting “neighbor” as the world; all of those folks who are not in the family or the body of Christ. I used to think that neighbor just meant the person in the next house. In context, that would have meant that Jesus was most likely talking about a fellow Jew and a member of the same religious body. But in Luke 10:25-37, he identifies the Samaritans as the neighbor: not a fellow worshipper, not the person next door and not even someone known by the traveler.

And behold, a lawyer stood up and put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? How do you read?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered right; do this and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down the road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ Which of these three do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed mercy on him.” And Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

“Love your enemy”
The fifth and final step of this Christian ladder is “love your enemies”.

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”

“But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”

I believe that this step is the hardest and is modeled by our Lord when on the Cross he said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Notice that love of family is not in this ladder. That is presumed; it is a “given”; it is in our starter kit. We may have to work on it some but the seeds are there.

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.”

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned...
Living Bulwark

the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

– 1Timothy 5:8

Notice also that Jesus warned that love of family is not to be used as an excuse.

And another said, ‘I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come.’

– Luke 14:20

A great sports leader died recently and his motto was, “Family, faith, football”. He might have been an even greater man if he had gotten the right order.

Mission and Spiritual Growth
Some comments on the ladders…the spiritual maturity of an individual or a group can be measured by the progress up this ladder. Although we can grow some in each of these areas, the progress is mainly sequential: we can’t love our enemies if we do not love one another. Most importantly here, loving God and loving one another in the body is the basis for evangelism. (John 13:34-35). That is to say, if we don’t have deep love for the body of Christ, we are unlikely to be capable of presenting Christ to the world. Additionally, you could say that the purpose of intentional communities is to get the third and fourth levels to work.

Recently, I have been asking groups to consider the question, “What was the greatest event of the 20th century?” The answers varied according to the size and type of the group. Sometimes the responses would follow an inventions track: the airplane, the car, the computer, etc. Some thought winning World War II had to be it. Most answers were easily defended, and on two occasions I got the answer I was looking for: the Pentecostal outpouring of the early 1900’s. Hundreds of millions of people around the world have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifting and ministries have laid the foundation for an age of evangelism such as the world has never seen.

Conclusion
As we grow in love of God and one another we are in a position for service, evangelism, discipleship, community building and even worldwide community building (all the nations). In his generous nature, the Lord has filled us with his Spirit and empowered us to do the mission.

A mature disciple grows to love the world and naturally wants to share the Lord and the people that he is a part of with others!

> See other articles by Bob Tedesco

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Cooperative Ecumenism:
Being Different without Being Distant

Guidelines for working together while maintaining our theological integrity

by Mark S. Kinzer

Can Christians belonging to different traditions – Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox – work together while keeping their distinctive commitments intact? A growing number of Christians are asking this question as they find themselves laboring side by side in evangelistic efforts and renewal movements, Bible studies and prayer groups, pastoral training and political causes such as Right to Life.

The question can be asked two ways. On the one hand, given our differing beliefs, can we overcome frictions and tensions in order to cooperate with each other effectively? On the other hand, can we achieve harmony in any way other than by suppressing and forgetting about our differences?

I am convinced it is possible. Indeed, many groups of Christians are learning to do it. From their experience, I believe we can distill principles for ecumenical cooperation that lead neither to blow-ups and bad feelings nor to a loss of our theological convictions.

Three Types of Ecumenism

First it is helpful to recognize that not all ecumenical efforts have the same aim. There are various kinds of ecumenism, and many problems can be avoided if we keep them distinct.

The kind of ecumenism we are concerned with here can be called "cooperative" or "grass-roots" ecumenism. It is different from "dialogue" ecumenism and "structural" ecumenism.

In dialogue ecumenism, theologians from various churches discuss points of disagreement and explore convergent ways of expressing what the churches hold. The participants in the dialogue seek for clarity of
topics that have been shrouded in obscurity through cultural prejudice, polemical attitudes, and ignorance. Both sides make an effort to understand what the other side has been trying to say, and to talk through points of controversy in a spirit of charity.

Ecumenical dialogues have borne real fruit. For example, the document on justification produced in 1983 by a Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue in the United States is a very valuable contribution to Catholic-Protestant understanding. [Now updated by The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ), agreed to by the Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999]

Structural ecumenism involves official leaders of Christian bodies working to join their churches in a structural union. Several Christian bodies around the world represent the results of such efforts. The United Church in Canada, in Australia, and in South India, the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America (two Lutheran bodies which are themselves moving toward merger), are each an example of a church produced by joining together smaller bodies of Christians.

By contrast with dialogue and structural ecumenism, cooperative ecumenism does not necessarily involve official leaders and representatives of the churches. It is mainly the work of ordinary Christians, which is why it can also be called “grass-roots” ecumenism. The goal is to accomplish certain tasks or to share aspects of Christian life.

In cooperative ecumenism the focus is not on resolving theological disagreements, let alone trying to achieve structural unity. Rather the participants take what they already have in common as the basis for doing something together.

Of course, participants may personally be quite interested in the theological issues and earnestly desire to see their churches brought together. But they recognize that direct progress toward these goals must come on the official level. Efforts to overcome theological and structural divisions on the grass-roots level can only be frustrating and can even damage cooperative enterprises. Christians who engage in cooperative ecumenism do foster the long-term goal of Christian unity, but they do so by carrying out activities that build understanding and love between different Christians, not by tackling theological and structural issues head on.

Christians engage in cooperative ecumenism for many reasons. We find that we have similar concerns and viewpoints. We face common challenges and experience common needs. However, the most significant motivation for ecumenical cooperation is the reality of our relationship to Jesus Christ. We are brothers and sisters, baptized into Jesus Christ and by virtue of that fact are joined to one another, whether we like it or not.

Numerous expressions of cooperative ecumenism have sprung up in response to these factors. Among them are:

Publications. Many Christian book publishers publish the works of both Protestants and Catholics. There are ecumenical periodicals – Living Bulwark, for example.

Evangelism and apologetics. Protestant evangelistic organizations, particularly those reaching out to young people, have always been ecumenical among Protestant evangelicals, but in the last few years some of them have begun to work across Protestant-Catholic lines as well. Some, for example, are beginning to work in Catholic countries in Europe in ways that help bring the gospel to nominal Roman Catholics without urging them to leave the Roman Catholic Church. The Cursillo Movement, although it began as a Catholic evangelistic movement, is often able to work in an ecumenical way. In the field of apologetics, Southwestern
Living Bulwark, some leaders of Campus Crusade, and Catholics in the International Academy of Philosophy have worked together in recent years to present reasoned arguments against contemporary atheism.

*Practical instruction about Christian living.* James Dobson is an example of a Christian leader who is able to give practical teaching on family living and other aspects of daily life that is helpful to Christians from many different church backgrounds.

*Schools.*

*Prayer groups and Bible studies, spiritual renewal groups and movements.*

*Renewal communities,* like The Sword of the Spirit.

*Social and political action movements* concerning issues such as abortion, pornography, and religious liberties.

*Relief of the needy.*

*Movements for fidelity to the basic truths of the gospel and the renewal of the Christian people,* such as the Allies for Faith and Renewal conferences sponsored by the Center for Pastoral Renewal.

### The Ties That Bind

How do we engage in these kinds of ecumenical endeavors without jeopardizing either our cooperation or our different theological positions? I would suggest twelve principles.

The first I would call *the principle of the family tie.* This principle involves loving one another as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

In recent years Christians from a wide variety of backgrounds have been coming to recognize that they have brothers and sisters in Christ in churches different from their own. They may still find much that they cannot accept in one another's churches, but they acknowledge each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and the relationship carries with it obligations. This is clearly the scriptural teaching; for example, look at the First Letter of John: if we recognize each other as brethren, we are acknowledging a bond that we must express practically, concretely, in love.

In an ecumenical group, this bond determines the way we work out the various difficulties and obstacles that we encounter. There is a parallel here with the way that members of a natural family ought to treat each other. In my family, I have some serious differences with my brothers. One of them is not a Christian at all, and his world view is very much that of a secular humanist. But he is my brother, and that determines the way we handle our differences and difficulties. Despite problems, we treat each other with respect, and help each other as we are able, and do not speak about each other critically in front of other people.

### No Other Foundation

The second principle I call *the principle of the one foundation.* In cooperative ecumenism, we base our common life and work on the great truths shared by all Christians. Our cornerstone is Christ himself, as the apostle Paul says: "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).
We are not gathering together simply because we all have good intentions; we are not merely humanitarians. And certainly we do not base our unity on a common set of interests – we are all interested in education, we enjoy conferences. We are coming together because we love Jesus Christ. We want to dedicate ourselves to him, to his service, to his cause in the world. We are united in our faith in the incarnation of the Son of God, in his atoning death and victorious resurrection. We are united in our knowledge of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God, three Persons – and in our conviction that the Bible is the word of God and is authoritative for our lives. Even though we hold different views of baptism, we acknowledge our common baptism into Christ.

This is a strong foundation. To stand on it together does not mean engaging in "lowest common denominator" ecumenism. In mathematics, fractions are combined by reducing them to a lowest common denominator. To come together as Christians on the basis of a "lowest common denominator" would mean reducing our Christian beliefs to whatever minimal formula we could all agree on and forgetting about everything that did not fit into the formula. But the principle of the one foundation does not mean that we regard everything we disagree on as unimportant. It means that we appreciate the greater importance of the faith that we already share. It means emphasizing our existing unity rather than our differences, even though we maintain them.

Theologians sometimes speak of a hierarchy of truths. They mean that truths are related to one another in a certain ranking or order; certain truths of the Christian faith are more foundational than others. While holding to the full doctrinal position of their different traditions, Christians can nevertheless come together on the basis of the most fundamental elements in the hierarchy of Christian truths. When we are involved in a common ecumenical effort, we need to keep reminding each other of this foundation we share.

Don't Rush Ahead

There are differences between us, and those differences need to be recognized rather than ignored. That leads into the third point, which is what I call the offside penalty. The reference is to soccer. Being "offside" involves running ahead of the ball, getting ahead of your own men.

Some folks involved in cooperative ecumenism run ahead of their church. Commonly, for instance, Christians get offside regarding inter-communion. A group of Catholics involved with a group of Protestants will say to themselves, "Experiencing such a profound union in the Holy Spirit, how can we deny our unity by not sharing in the Lord's body and blood?" Then they "go ahead" of the Roman Catholic position and share communion.

I am not saying anything about whether I think the Roman Catholic teaching on the issue is right or wrong. The point is that, whatever one thinks of the teaching, it is the Roman Catholic position to refrain from inter-communion. Catholics or Protestants who ignore it may be trying to foster Christian unity by the sharing of communion. But Catholics who do so subject themselves to serious criticism from within their own church and in the long run create more suspicion and bad feeling than real unity.

On the other side, I believe Protestants make a similar mistake when they join in certain Catholic practices, such as Marian devotions, as a way of expressing their solidarity with a group of Catholics. In some Protestant churches, members who took part in Marian prayers would be viewed as abandoning biblical teaching, possibly giving cause for their dismissal from the church. Again, the tensions provoked within their own church might actually impede progress toward ultimate unity.

I Will Support You

Fourth principle: the imperfect marriage. The principle concerns our supporting fellow Christians in their church commitments even though we see their churches as imperfect. The comparison is to a brother or sister
or close friend who marries someone we do not think is a good partner. Once the couple have formalized their commitment, we do not seek to break up the marriage. Rather we take the marriage as a given and do what we can to support the two in living out their commitment as well as they can.

I do not believe that church commitments are of the same order as the marriage commitment. But the "imperfect marriage" analogy serves to show that there are situations in which we do support a person in a concrete relationship to someone or something, even though we think that someone or something has some serious flaws.

But how, it might be asked, can we honestly be committed to supporting our fellow Christians in their church commitments? Doesn't that mean we are encouraging them to adhere to teaching or practices that we believe are defective or mistaken?

No, not directly. Our fellow Christians have decided to make commitments not just to particular positions we disagree with, but to entire churches and Christian traditions. Those churches and traditions contain not only some elements which we may view as deficient or incorrect, but also many which we can agree are right and good. The key question for us to ask ourselves is not whether we agree with everything the other person's church teaches (obviously we do not) but whether, despite its deficiencies, we can recognize it as a real Christian communion in which God is at work. If so, we can say, "I wouldn't have chosen that "partner for you, but since you've chosen it for yourself, I will support you in being faithful in that relationship."

From my past experience when I was a pastoral leader in The Sword of the Spirit, which is an ecumenical community, I found myself on several occasions caring for a Roman Catholic who was having difficulties with Roman Catholicism, or for a Presbyterian who was having problems with Presbyterianism. I have referred them to the people who are responsible for their relationship with their church – their priest or minister.

Because I am committed to supporting brothers and sisters in our community in their church commitments, situations like this have spurred me to study other churches. The more I have studied, the more I have appreciated. I am neither a Roman Catholic nor a Calvinist, but I have come to be able to make a decent case for Roman Catholicism or Calvinism. Indeed, I have sometimes held forth on the virtues and strong points of those traditions to brothers and sisters who were part of those churches.

If they reach the decision not to continue in a commitment to their church, that changes the situation, and then I will talk with them from a different angle. But as long as they are committed to another church, I seek to support them in that. (Of course I am referring only to churches that are clearly Christian bodies, not non-Christian groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses.)

**Headache or Blessing?**

Speaking of appreciating the strengths of other traditions leads to the principle of the blessing of in-laws. This builds on another family analogy. When a person marries, he or she is marrying into another family-gaining in-laws. This is challenging. The in-laws present many potential problems, but there are also benefits. In-laws can make a real contribution through wisdom shared, help extended, care for children, and sometimes financial provision.

Whether in-laws turn out to be a headache or a blessing depends to a great extent on the attitude that the couple takes.

Similarly, without losing sight of disagreements between our traditions, we can benefit from the treasures of other Christian traditions. It largely depends on whether we are looking for and expecting a good relationship.
I personally have benefited enormously in this way in our ecumenical community. As soon as I was willing to drop the walls of prejudice that I had set up to institutional Christianity, I began to appreciate spiritual treasures there which now I would not want to do without. I think of what reading about Francis of Assisi has meant to me – and going to Assisi and praying there. Even reading about Ignatius Loyola—the founder of the Jesuits and not a man who sympathized with Protestant views—has inspired me, and so has reading about the North American Jesuit martyrs, The Desert Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox tradition have come to mean a great deal to me.

I know many brothers and sisters who are Catholic and Orthodox who have come to appreciate men and women like John Wesley and Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael and Gladys Aylward, to whom they have been introduced by Protestants in our community.

Admittedly, the anti-Catholic or anti-Protestant attitudes of many of those who have written about such people are an obstacle to other Christians' appreciation. In the times when many of these great people lived, relations with separated Christians were often marred by prejudices and unfair judgments, and even very admirable Christian men and women often shared these views. But there are treasures to be found, if we can overcome these problems. The acquaintance with other Christians that we gain through cooperative ecumenism can be an opportunity for discovering more of the vast spiritual inheritance we have as Christians.

Secret Agendas

The sixth principle is the principle of the nonaggression pact. In a cooperative ecumenical venture, we must agree not to actively seek to convert other Christians to our own church. Seeking converts is experienced as aggression against the other person's commitment and naturally provokes defensiveness and the suspicion that everyone has a Secret agenda.

To say that we are not going to seek actively to bring other Christian brothers and sisters into our church does not mean that individuals never make changes according to changing convictions. Nor does it mean that we do not speak to one another about all the dimensions of our faith and the disagreements that we have with other traditions. It does mean that we are not engaging in practical ecumenical activities from the point of view of Seeking to bring the other person around to our way of seeing the truth.

Principles seven, eight, and nine are closely related. They concern the importance of not behaving in our cooperative ecumenical groups or organizations as though everyone belongs to the same church tradition.

Cultural Sensitivity

I call number seven the principle of culture shock. As Christians become involved with one another in cooperative ecumenical activities, they encounter each other's distinctive cultural expressions. Some of these expressions stem from theological positions; they all reflect different cultural and historical experiences.

Catholics notice that what they call the "Our Father" Protestants call the "Lord's Prayer" and pray with an addendum about "Kingdom, power, and glory." Protestants see Catholics crossing themselves and genuflecting. Protestants also notice that Catholics and Orthodox use pictures of Jesus, Mary, and notable Christians of the past—Protestants generally do not do; Orthodox notice that Catholics in addition use statues, which Orthodox generally do not do. Everyone finds each other's music and devotional practices unfamiliar.

We may find some of these differences interesting. We may find others disturbing, even offensive. The social
environments we create in our ecumenical groups and organizations need to minimize this second reaction. This does not mean that, as a courtesy to each other, we refrain from using controversial religious expressions in ways that imply that everyone in the common ecumenical setting accepts them. Neither does this mean that we abandon these particular expressions, but only that we restrain ourselves from seeming to impose them on others. Each of us has many other times and situations outside the ecumenical setting in which to make use of the full range of manifestations of our own Christian tradition.

In our own community we make a distinction between "common situations" and "church situations." Common situations are those where the whole body is together or where there are groupings of brothers and sisters from different church backgrounds. Church situations are those in which our church groupings – Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and nondenominational – meet, and occasions when a family or group is together in which everyone is from one church background. In the common situations we avoid cultural expressions that involve points of difference or which are likely to seem very foreign to some members.

Most Christians tend to be oblivious of ways in which other Christians find some of their cultural expressions disturbing or offensive. Especially if we ourselves are theologically inclined, we may mainly think about divisions in terms of theological differences. But most ordinary Christian people experience the divisions on the cultural level. What songs are being played? What are the words? Is that a cross or a crucifix? What kind of robes is the person wearing?

It was hard for many of the Catholic brothers and sisters in my community to understand that I had a negative reaction to crucifixes. It was based on both my Protestant and my Jewish background. I could appreciate the way that a crucifix could inspire them in worship, and I did not object to Catholics using crucifixes in their homes, for example. But it was important for the Catholics to see the inappropriateness of using crucifixes in common community situations.

### Inclusive Language

Eight, the principle of the exclusive part. This concerns how we speak. It is all too easy to speak about things in ways that implicitly exclude some of the Christians who are present. Those Christians are then in the uncomfortable situation of a person invited to a party where an "in-crowd" dominates the conversation. We unwittingly create this effect when we use terminology such as “non-Catholics” or “non-Baptists.” The obvious implication is that our group is Catholic or Baptist – surely not the message we want to send if we are trying to work ecumenically.

To use terms familiar only to people in our own tradition without explaining them is also exclusivist. The terms may not be controversial, simply unfamiliar.

I still remember the first time I heard about a "novena." I had no idea what a novena was, and the Catholics who were talking did not stop and explain (it turns out to mean making a petitionary prayer for nine days, a practice that recalls the nine days which the apostles spent together in prayer between Christ's ascension and Pentecost).

Protestants sometimes use terms connected with church order – synod, presbytery, classis, calling a pastor – which make Catholics scratch their heads and wonder what is being talked about.

All of us grow up with certain terms in our respective traditions, and they become second nature to us. In cooperative ecumenism we have to make a conscious effort to learn what parts of our tradition need to be explained to other Christians.
By What Authority?

The ninth principle is the principle of the abuse of authorities. In an ecumenical setting, if we are presenting teaching, giving an explanation, or making a proposal, we should be careful to use as authorities only what everyone recognizes as authoritative. Otherwise we are giving the situation the flavor of a particular tradition, and those who do not recognize the authorities appealed to will feel excluded or manipulated.

We certainly do have scripture as a common authority, although we are not all in agreement on the canon of the Old Testament. Some of us recognize additional authorities, to various degrees. For instance, some traditions consider the creeds of the ancient church to be authoritative, but others would view them as less than authoritative, although to be taken very seriously. Some would put church councils and the early Fathers of the church in the authoritative category, while others would not.

In addition, in some traditions there are certain great teachers of the past who are especially influential. In one setting, to cite Thomas Aquinas clinches an argument. In another setting, it is John Calvin.

In all such cases, in an ecumenical group we should never take it for granted that the authorities we are used to citing are acceptable to everyone.

An example of the problem is the use of the deuto-canonical, or apocryphal, books of the Old Testament. Some Christians regard those books as scripture. Others treat them as books deserving great respect but not on the level of scripture. Anyone referring to these books in an ecumenical setting needs to be careful not simply to cite them as scripture. I wrote a book called The Angry Christian in which I quoted some sayings from the book of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus. In the preface I explained that it is a book which not all Christians regard as scripture but which all can at least recognize as a source of wisdom about godly living. I think that such an approach is the kind we need to take in an ecumenical setting.

Honest Differences

My next recommendation, number ten, is the principle of the honest mistake. This principle applies to how we view our theological disagreements.

Even in cooperative ecumenism, where we are not concentrating on the issues that separate us, there is a place for talking about our doctrinal disagreements. If we take each other's sincerity and commitment to Christ seriously, we can see the positions which other Christians take as mistakes that a Christian could honestly make rather than as deliberate attempts to distort the truth. This perspective allows us to discuss issues without calling our relationship as brothers and sisters into question.

Some years ago, before I had much contact with Roman Catholics, I thought that the Catholic Mass was idolatrous. As I have gotten to know Catholics who are fine Christians and who believe the Catholic teaching, and as I have studied the Roman Catholic position, I have come to see that it is clearly not idolatry. I still do not agree with it, but I have come to respect it.

When we speak about our differences, we ought to be seeking to understand them more clearly, rather than seeking to persuade each other of our own positions. This is related to the principle of the nonaggression pact that I mentioned earlier. That kind of informative, non threatening conversation changed my view of Roman Catholicism. When I really began to listen to what Catholics believed, I was able to recognize my prejudices and preconceptions for what they were. I began to see their position as reasonable, even when I was not persuaded of the truth of it.
The eleventh principle is the principle of the educational imperative. I put this near the end because the ten previous principles ought to make clear our need to learn about one another, and we cannot do that properly unless we know something about our own tradition. We need not only to learn about each other through reading, studying, asking questions, and engaging in relationships with other Christians; we also need to educate ourselves about our own tradition. Sometimes we get into difficulties in our ecumenical relationships by defending positions that are not necessarily the positions of our own church. I know that I have been in that situation, and others have too.

Finally: Forbearance

A final principle is the deportment of non-defense. It simply means not being touchy when our brothers and sisters in Christ violate all the other principles. We are going to be in situations where people from other church backgrounds do not handle things the way I am suggesting.

And, obviously, even if we are trying to follow these principles, we ourselves are going to make lots of mistakes. But if we start off with a genuine commitment to work together, to work past the difficulties and the differences, to make allowance for the mistakes that our brothers and sisters make (and desire that they make allowance for our mistakes), not being defensive and overly sensitive, and forbearing in love, then we will be able to cooperate with one another successfully in the service of the Lord.

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Detroit Community Outreach gathering with families and friends from diverse cultural, racial, and Christian traditions

Love of the Brethren

Exploring a neglected motive for cooperation among Christians of different traditions

by Steve Clark

Christians of different traditions face many common foes around the world. In many nations we must deal with governments that persecute believers for not accommodating themselves to the official ideology or religion. Here in the United States we can find many common problems to work on together in the political arena. Shared challenges such as these are spurs to interdenominational cooperation.

Along with these common concerns, other developments have been moving Christians of different traditions toward greater cooperation. One is a growing recognition of the action of the Holy Spirit among Christians not of one’s own church. Another is the increasing recognition of members of other Christian communions as “brethren” – brothers and sisters in Christ.

But while Christians of a variety of traditions have begun to speak freely of one another as brothers and sisters, the terminology does not have much impact on actual relationships. It is worth looking more carefully at what it means to be “brethren” in the biblical sense, because the term turns out to be much more than a mere platitude.

An often neglected biblical source for understanding the relationship of Christians as “brethren” is 1 John. As is well known, the first letter of John is concerned with distinguishing between “those who have gone out from us” – a group that many would identify as a gnostic or proto-agnostic sect – and true Christians. John identifies several marks of true Christians: belief in what we would now call the doctrine of the incarnation, a moral Christian life, the experience of the Spirit. A further mark essential to being a Christian, he writes, is love of the brethren (1 John 3:14-23; 4:11-2, 19-21; 5:1).
By “the brethren” or “brothers and sisters” John means fellow Christians. In this, his usage is like that of the rest of New Testament, where, except when the term is used to mean natural brothers and sisters or fellow elders, it refers to those bound to one another in covenant – either the old covenant or the new.

The New Testament, scholars tell us, never speaks of the brotherhood of the human race. It does express an idea of the solidarity of the human race, for instance, in the solidarity of all human beings in Adam. But in the New Testament the term “brethren” means “fellow Christians”; and love of the brethren,” as the phrase in 1 John is often rendered, means “love of our fellow Christians.”

First John 3:14-18 summarizes its teaching on love of the brethren in this way:

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. . . . By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his ear against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth.”

In attempting to locate the marks by which to distinguish true Christians from false ones, John is interested in criteria that relate directly to the core of Christianity – our relationship to Christ himself and to his work of redemption. John chooses love of fellow Christians since to love fellow Christians because they are Christians is to recognize the importance of belonging to Christ. As the gospel sayings put it, the relationship we have with Christ is more important than our relationship with our mother and natural brothers and sisters and it establishes a new set of primary relationships among those who follow him (Matthew 10:37; 12:48-50; Mark 10:29-30). Love of the brethren is thus an external, behavioral indication of a genuinely Christian spiritual state.

The first letter of John teaches that laying down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ involves at least the sharing of goods when they are in need. We have, in short, concrete duties toward them, duties which touch our pocketbooks. Further study of the scriptural teaching on love of the brethren would indicate that we have additional obligations towards them, such as defending them when enemies attack them. Fulfilling these obligations is essential to being a Christian.

**Revolution of recognition**

Such a statement leads naturally to the question, “Who, then, is my brother or sister in Christ?”

At present, no single answer can be offered that would satisfy every Christian tradition and church. However, it is important to observe that in the present century there has been a massive change in the way Christian people think about this question. Today Christians of very diverse theological convictions and church loyalties are willing to recognize one another as Christians.

Many of us might want to add some qualification to the terms “brother and sister,” such as “separated brother and sister.” Most of us would not recognize all the churches that other Christians belong to as fully acceptable as churches – or perhaps even as churches at all. Some, for example, while recognizing Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ, are of the opinion that the Roman Catholic Church is an apostate church; and the Roman Catholic Church has not officially come to the point of recognizing Protestant bodies as anything more than “ecclesial communities.”

Nevertheless, a revolution of tremendous significance has occurred. A large number of Catholics, Protestants, and
Orthodox now recognize one another as Christians – Christians who have embraced some serious theological errors and belong to faulty churches, no doubt, but Christians nonetheless. We would not necessarily extend that recognition to all the members of each other’s churches, nor would we agree on where to draw the line; but we do take the perspective that a large number of members of all the other churches are, in fact, Christians.

We are, then, in the position of having to acknowledge the gospel duty to help and support not only the members of our own church but also whomever we can currently recognize to be true Christians. For many of us, that is surely a substantial number of Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox.

Second Chronicles 28 provides a scriptural illustration of the obligations covenant brothers and sisters have toward one another even when there is division between them. This makes it especially relevant for us to ponder today.

The passage records a war between Ahaz of Judah and Pekah of Israel. Israel resoundingly defeats Judah and leads the captured southerners into slavery. As the northerners are bringing the captives back, the prophet Obed goes out to meet them with this message:

“Behold, because the Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have slain them in a rage which has reached up to heaven. And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the Lord your God? Now hear me, and send back the captives from your brethren whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you” (2 Chronicles 28:9-11).

Israel and Judah were in a state of schism and had no united government. Neither was in a fully acceptable spiritual position from the other’s point of view – or from God’s. Divided as they were God did not rebuke them for fighting one another. He seemed to regard a certain amount of fighting between them as acceptable, and even as a punishment of Judah’s sins.

But God was angry that the Israelites slaughtered their defeated brothers and led them back captive to enslave them. As the next verses make clear, they also neglected to provide for their needs – food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. Even in a situation in which brothers and sisters were in open conflict, the Lord was angered by his people not treating brethren as brethren.

Kinds of mutual help

What sorts of brotherly love might be practical and appropriate among Christians today? One area would be cooperation in missionary and evangelistic work. I have been impressed with much of the missionary study and writing emerging from evangelical institutions such as the Fuller School of World Mission and the U.S. Center for World Mission. It is notable how often their writings draw lessons from Catholic missionary workers – but how rarely Catholics are even aware of these Protestant institutions. In my own community, the Sword of the Spirit, which is composed of Christians with different church loyalties, we have discovered that we can be more effective in evangelism if we work together.

Christians can also help one another learn how to be more effective in spiritual renewal. For instance, the Catholic charismatic renewal is a movement in the Roman Catholic Church that has clearly gained some of its effectiveness from lessons it learned from Pentecostals and other evangelicals. Indeed, participants in the Catholic charismatic renewal were initially criticized for bringing Protestant revivalism into the Catholic Church. (The attacks normally centered more on questions of culture and technique than on doctrinal matters.) However, when one traces the history of revivalism to its roots in the 17th and 18th centuries, one finds that the Protestant renewal movements learned for earlier Catholic revivalists, especially the Franciscan friars.
Another area for making our brotherly love practical is the sharing of pastoral wisdom. We confront the same challenges, for example, regarding family life and child rearing, because we live in the same secular society. Normally, the same basic approaches work or do not work when employed by Protestants, Catholics, or Orthodox.

**Cooperative ecumenism**

Ecumenism has too often meant something which happens only between the officials of church bodies and which is carried out only by officially appointed theologians dialoguing with one another. There is, however, another kind of ecumenism, sometimes known as cooperative ecumenism, that proceeds on a different basis.

Cooperative ecumenism proceeds on the pre-supposition that Christians of various traditions do not have full agreement or unity, and we do not expect it for some time to come. In the meantime, however, we acknowledge the requirement that we should love one another as brothers and sisters, looking forward to the time when the Lord will make greater unity possible. Our rule is that we will try to do whatever builds up. Sometimes the rule indicates not cooperating in certain ways, though we might personally be inclined to do so, because of the need to take into account others in our churches who do not see things our way and to avoid worsening relations between the churches. Nonetheless, the spirit behind cooperative ecumenism urges us to lay down our lives for all those whom we recognize as true brothers and sisters in Christ, and with them to advance the cause of Christ.

Dialogue ecumenism and cooperative ecumenism proceed on different bases. Dialogue ecumenism proceeds with the conviction that we need to discuss our differences and try to seek agreement. Cooperative ecumenism proceeds with the resolution that in the meantime we will cooperate where we can in matters of common concern, even though we have disagreements.

Cooperative ecumenism does not mean we do not talk about our differences. Often one of the most helpful things we can do is to educate one another in our differences so that we do not presuppose something about each other that we should not. It certainly does not mean that we regard the differences as unimportant. But the purpose of coming together in cooperative ecumenism is not to work out the differences but to love one another as brothers and sisters and work together as best we can.

**How to go about it**

Effective cooperative ecumenism proceeds on certain principles:

1. We need to accept the fact that there are issues that divide the churches and to abide by the limits that our churches have set. Most of us cannot solve fundamental inter-church problems and should probably not try to. Nor should we act as though they did not exist. We therefore have to accept that each of us will believe the doctrines of his or her respective church and be faithful to its essential practices and current discipline.

2. In our sharing together we will emphasize the central core of Christian teaching and practice which we share in common. We will do this partly because these truths in themselves call for such emphasis, and also because we can thereby serve the convergence of the entire Christian people.

3. In discussing our differences, we should:

   - aim at having the peace in our relationships which will enable us to discuss differences in a loving manner
   - avoid discussing those things we cannot yet discuss peacefully, gradually widening the circle of the things we can discuss as we experience the peace and trust to do so
not be embarrassed by our own beliefs, nor be apologetic about them
• regard the things other Christians hold that we disagree with as mistakes a good Christian could make rather
  than as wrongdoing or a denial of Christianity
• not discuss our beliefs in a polemical way, but state them in the way that would be most acceptable to others
  – ask whether the discussion is building up love and unity in the body of Christ or tearing it down.

4. We should learn about points of doctrinal and theological dispute so that:

• we can avoid expressing ourselves in ways unacceptable to others because of doctrinal commitments where
  we are in circumstances such as leading in common prayer, proposing a common course of action, or stating
  an opinion that we think the group as a whole should hold
• we can educate one another in our differences when that is helpful.

5. When we can, we will talk together, help one another, and serve one another, so that we prevent our theological
  and cultural differences from poisoning our brotherly love, and so that our personal unity can provide the basis for a
  more complete unity among the whole Christian people.

**Christ above all**

We must also seek to prevent our cultural differences from poisoning our brotherly love.

The cultural obstacle to our cooperation is a human one. A helpful treatment of this problem was provided by
Christopher Dawson, the British historian, in a prophetic book he wrote during World War II called *The Judgment of
the Nations*. The book was written to state the program of a movement that developed during the war called the
Sword of the Spirit.

One of the concerns of the Sword of the Spirit was to bring together Catholics and Protestants in Britain in a
common response to the crisis of the hour, which the leaders saw as a crisis for Christian society. Ecumenical
cooperation of that sort was not common then. Advocating what he called a “return to Christian unity,” Dawson
gave a helpful analysis of some of the main roots of disunity:

“The fundamental problem of Christian disunity is the problem of schism. In practice this problem is
so closely associated with that of heresy, that is, differences of religious belief, that they are apt to be
confused with one another. But it is nevertheless important to distinguish them carefully and to
consider the nature of schism in itself, for I believe that it is in the question of schism rather than that
of heresy that the key to the problem of the disunity of Christendom is to be found. For heresy as a
rule is not the cause of schism but an excuse for it, or rather a rationalization of it. Behind every
heresy lies some kind of social conflict, and it is only by the resolution of this conflict that unity can
be restored.”

Dawson based his view on an analysis of the history of divisions among Christians.

“But, whatever view we may take of the causes of any particular schism and the social significance of
particular religious movements, there can, I think, be no question that in the history of Christendom
from the patristic period down to modern times, heresy and schism have derived their main impulse
from sociological causes, so that a statesman who found a way to satisfy the national aspirations of the
Czechs in the fifteenth century or those of the Egyptians in the fifth would have done more to reduce the
centrifugal force of the Hussite or the Monophysite movements than a theologian who made the
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most brilliant and convincing defense of communion in one kind or of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ. Whereas it is very doubtful if the converse is true, for even, if the Egyptians had accepted the doctrine of Chalcedon, they would have found some other ground of division so long as the sociological motive for division remained unaltered.”

Dawson draws this conclusion:

“It is, above all, necessary to free the religious issue of all the extraneous motives that take their rise in unconscious social conflicts, for if we can do this, we shall deprive the spirit of schism of its dynamic force. If we can understand the reason for our instinctive antipathy to other religious bodies, we shall find that the purely religious and theological obstacles to reunion become less formidable and more easy to remove. But so long as the unconscious element of social conflict remains unresolved, religion is at the mercy of the blind forces of hatred and suspicion.”

Dawson attributes somewhat more weight to the sociological factors than I would, but, nonetheless, he puts his finger on a key factor in Christian disunity. When two groups of people, be they nations or smaller groups, come into conflict and desire to separate from one another, they become open to theological disagreements. They desire to believe differently.

Hence, when we are dealing with ecumenical problems, we are dealing with inter-community and intercultural suspicion and hostility as well as theological issues. And insofar as there is a spiritual problem at the base of the human relations problem, it can well be described as schism. The cause of schism is putting something human above Christ as the point of unity and division in our personal relations, so that we join with and separate from others over something other than faithfulness to Christ.

The solution to this source of Christian disunity is our common commitment to Christ. The solution lies in putting above everything else our commitment to Christ and his cause in the world. It lies, practically speaking, in ecumenical cooperation – in working together to strengthen one another’s faith, defend Christianity, and bring the world to Christ.

The solution to schism lies, in short, in the opposite approach to the kind of ecumenism which many of us have learned to dislike. That ecumenism tries to unite Christians in an accommodation to the world and secular goals; it puts aside an explicit focus on Christ in order to shelve the theological differences that come from different teachings about Christ and his work. True ecumenism, however, is a matter of restoring Christ to the center, as Lord, both in our theological dialogues and discussion of reunion, and in our working together where and as we can.

Witnesses together

The world is putting a question to Christians regarding the seriousness of our faith in Christ. In many countries today faithfulness to Christ involves loss of wealth, position, and life. Historians tell us that our age has more martyrs than any other. And for the most part Christians are given a choice of compromising – avoiding personal loss or death without giving up everything involved in Christianity. They are told, for instance, that if they are simply willing to work for the good of the collective, the nation, and put aside their other worldly preoccupations and divisive concerns, they do not have to experience any penalties. In these circumstances, Orthodox, Protestants, and Catholics frequently find themselves undergoing persecution at the hands of the same persecutors.

Facing death brings one a peculiar clarity about what is of supreme importance in life. Cannot all of us who pray for the grace to be able to die for our Lord Jesus Christ, if that were to come our way, recognize one another as brothers and sisters in him? Can we not work together for him until such time as the world may put the final question to us
too, and we are called to witness to him with our lives?

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Return to Table of Contents or Archives • (c) copyright 2017 The Sword of the Spirit
In the Book of Genesis, beginning in chapter 37, we read the story of a remarkable young man who was anointed by God with a prophetic mission to be a savior for his people. Joseph, the second youngest of Jacob’s twelve sons, knew he was destined to rule on God’s behalf. What he didn’t understand at the time was that this mission would involve testing, suffering, and sacrificial service. His jealous brothers were determined to kill him. But out of fear of their father Jacob, who loved Joseph and favored him above all, they decided it was better to sell him into slavery to the Midianites who took him down to Egypt.

God was with Joseph through all his trials and setbacks. Whatever Joseph did brought blessing both to his taskmasters and to those who ill-treated him.

**Serving Potiphar: Genesis 39:1-6**

Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian, and his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.

**Serving in prison: Genesis 39:20-23**

And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love,
and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison; and whatever was done there, he was the doer of it; the keeper of the prison paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made it prosper.

Serving the ruler of Egypt: Genesis 41:38-41
And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a man as this, in whom is the Spirit of God?” So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discreet and wise as you are; you shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Behold, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.”

Joseph reunited with his brothers in Egypt
We do not hear of Joseph wallowing in self-pity, nor evading unpleasant duties. In fact he gave more than what was required or expected of him. He won the admiration and trust of his task masters because he put their interests above himself. He blessed others in the way he served them and cared for their needs, concerns, and interests.

God reversed the curse of Joseph’s slavery by elevating him to the highest position in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. When famine struck the world for seven years and threatened to decimate the surrounding peoples, Joseph’s brothers went to Egypt to buy grain, which Joseph had been wisely storing up for the seven years previously. When Joseph recognized his brothers, he pardoned rather than punished them. He used his position to save his family from death, and to reconcile and restore them in peace and unity together.

Jesus – God’s Chosen Servant
The early church fathers recognized the Patriarch Joseph as a type or prefigurement of Jesus Christ – God’s chosen servant (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 12:15-21)). Jesus understood that his mission as the Messiah and Redeemer of his people would involve taking on the role of a “suffering servant” as described in the Book of the prophet Isaiah:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law (Isaiah 42:1-4).

In love and obedience Jesus submitted to his Father’s plan of salvation. He knew that it was his Father’s will that he should suffer and die on the cross. It was love for fallen humankind that motivated Jesus to take the position of a servant rather than a king. He was king by right but servant by choice. He would bring the kingdom of God to the earth, not by military might or political stratagem, but rather by surrendering his life as an “atonning sacrifice” for the sin of the world. He knew that the cross would victory rather than defeat. The cross was God’s strategy for reversing the curse of sin and death.

Jesus exchanged a throne for a cross and won victory through the shedding of his blood for our sake. He chose to be a servant for our sake – to free us from slavery to sin. His motto was simple and revolutionary at the same time – “not to be served but to serve.” He demanded no less from his disciples – they too must take up their cross and follow in his path of servanthood.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and
whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:25-28).

Jesus embraced the way of servanthood with joy and obedience to his Father’s will. Everything Jesus did – his life and ministry, his teaching and miracles, his concern for the well-being of others – was motivated by one thing only – a love that was wholly directed towards others for their welfare. As John the Evangelist stated in his Gospel: “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

**Jesus love for others was personal and direct**

Jesus’ love was very direct and personal. He never treated people impersonally or at a distance. Jesus often made it a point to stop what he was doing and to ask people what he could do for them. When a blind man, named Bartimaeus, shouted for Jesus’ attention, Jesus immediately stopped what he was doing and asked Bartimaeus “What do you want me to do for you?” Then Jesus immediately granted his request and restored his sight (Mark 10:46-52).

When Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, asked Jesus to heal his dying daughter, Jesus immediately went to the ruler’s home and asked to see the child on her sick bed. “Taking her by the hand, he said to her, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’” (Mark 5:41).

When Jesus saw Zacchaeus, the tax collector, watching him from a distance in a tree, Jesus stopped what he was doing and began to speak with him. “Make haste and come down. I must stay at your house today!” (Luke 19:5-6. Jesus’ gracious invitation was not only an act of special favor and friendship, but a remarkable reversal of the scorn and distance usually shown to tax collectors at the time.

When the apostles tried to keep children away from Jesus, Jesus rebuked them and said, “Do not hinder the children from coming to me… then he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them” (Mark 10:13-16). When Jesus went to Peter’s home, he discovered that Peter’s mother-in-law had a fever. So Jesus “came and took her by the land and lifted her up, and the fever left her” (Mark 1:31).

Jesus’ compassionate care for others was more than a verbal expression of heartfelt sympathy. With his tender physical touch he personally identified with the misfortunes of others and went on to alleviate their suffering as well. When he met a man who could not speak or hear, he put his fingers into the man’s ears and he touched the man’s tongue with his own spittle – both to physically identify with his ailments and to bring his healing touch (Mark 7:32-35). When lepers approached Jesus he did not keep his distance to avoid contamination. He physically touched them, embracing them with his personal care, and he made them whole and well, both physically and spiritually (Mark 1:40-42).

Jesus identified so closely with people’s concerns and burdens, that these became his as well. He wept with those who lost loved ones and he mourned over the city of Jerusalem because many of its inhabitants were unprepared to receive the salvation he could bring them. Jesus shared in the joys of people as well – he even changed water into wine for a newly-wed couple when their wedding reception supply ran dry (John 2:1-10). The gospels state over and over again that when Jesus saw the crowds who came to see him “he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36; Matthew 14:14 and 15:32; Mark 6:34).

Jesus loved with a servant’s heart – a heart that was always oriented to the needs and concerns of others.

In Jesus’ darkest hour, when the enemy was about to scatter his disciples and betray him to a criminal’s death on the
cross, John tells us that Jesus “loved his own to the end” (John 13:1). In Luke’s account of the last supper, the disciples were arguing at table about “who was the greatest among them” (Luke 22:24). No wonder that Jesus rose from the table and began to do something that was shocking and unthinkable to his disciples – he removed his outer garment and stooped to wash their dirty feet with a towel and basin of water.

If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (John 13:14-15)

Put on Jesus Christ

If we want to follow Christ’s example, then we must learn how to be a servant and grow in the Christ-like qualities that make servanthood possible. Paul the Apostle tells us, in his letter to the Philippians, that the first thing we must do is put on the mind and heart of the Lord Jesus who chose to become a servant for our sake:

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

What does Paul mean when he says “do nothing from selfishness… but count others as better than ourselves?” Paul is describing the true nature of Christian humility and servanthood. We are called to empty ourselves of all that would hinder our growth in Christ – including pride, envy, hatred, selfishness, and greed. And in place of these vices we are called to put on the servant-like qualities of the Lord Jesus – compassion, mercy, kindness, patience, lowliness, and meekness. These are the qualities that enable us to truly lower ourselves to the last place – the place of a humble servant – so we can serve others better by giving them our highest attention and care.

Christian servanthood is made possible through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit. Paul the Apostle tells us that “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). Christians already have a divine power at work within us (2 Peter 1:3). The Spirit recreates us and gives us a new heart – the heart of a servant like the heart of Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us.

Obstacles to servanthood

There are many obstacles that stand in the way of growing in the virtue of servanthood. For many of us, fear is a key road block: Fear of being taken-advantage of, fear of being asked to do unpleasant tasks, or to serve disagreeable and irksome people. Pride also gets in the way. “I deserve to be first.” “I deserve better treatment.” “I’ve earned the right to insist on what I want or what I prefer.”

For others, selfish ambition is the driving force that blinds them from serving others with attentive care. Selfish ambition can make us view and treat people as obstacles, interruptions, and problems that stand in the way of getting what we want. Self-centered people are concerned chiefly with themselves and with advancing their own interests to the exclusion of others. They seek only to manipulate and use others.

In our day, preoccupation with self is perhaps the biggest obstacle of all. Our materialist culture caters to putting self first. “You deserve the best! After all, you’re first.” We can easily become absorbed in our creaturely comforts and not notice how we might be neglecting others or missing the opportunity to give a helping hand.

It takes effort to serve others selflessly, it takes discipline to put their cares and concerns above my own, and a
healthy dose of self-renunciation to place myself last rather than first. The willingness to change, and the courage to ask God to widen our hearts with generous love, are key steps for growth in Christ-like servanthood.

**Freedom to serve in love**
True servanthood is neither oppressive nor demeaning, because its motivating force is love rather than pride or fear.

The Lord Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has won great freedom for us – freedom from slavery to sin, selfishness, fear, and everything else that would keep us from loving others for their sake. Paul the Apostle reminds us that Christ has given us this freedom, not just for our own benefit, but for the opportunity to lay down our lives in loving service of our neighbor as well.

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another (Galatians 5:1, 13).

With this gift of freedom comes the choice – to advance myself first or to put the interests of others first and to serve them with love. The gift of a servant’s heart – loving and serving others selflessly – involves more than simply giving some of my time and resources to help and care for others. Being a servant of Christ involves taking on the heart of Jesus – a heart that loves to give generously and serve with everything I have. After all, everything I possess – my life, gifts, talents, and material goods – come from God. I can use them simply to please myself or share them in serving and caring for others.

The Scriptures are full of examples of men and women who loved and served with generous hearts, and who willingly put the interests of others ahead of themselves.

One notable example comes from the Second Book of Samuel, Chapter 23. King Saul, out of envy, was pursuing David as he fled into the wilderness. Saul was determined to put him to death. At one point when Saul’s men were closing in on David, David, along with a band of his loyal companions, hid in a cave at Adulum. In his weariness and thirst, David spoke of his longing for a taste of the cool refreshing waters from the well at Bethlehem, his hometown. Before David could realize the impact of his words on his men, three of his companions chose to break through the enemy’s lines so they could fetch for David some cool refreshing water. They risked their lives to serve David in this act of kindness. David wept when they returned with water from the well at Bethlehem (2 Samuel 23:13-17).

Another example, this one from the New Testament, shows how Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, looked upon herself as a “maidservant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38,48). When the angel Gabriel greeted her and told her that she would be the mother of the Messiah, she did not hesitate to give her unqualified “yes.” When she heard the news that her elderly cousin Elizabeth was expecting a child, she went in haste to give personal support and practical help (Luke 1:39). Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months – no short time of personal, probably often menial, service (Luke 1:56).

**To serve is to reign with Christ**
An early church father once said, “To serve Christ is to reign with him” (see Revelations 5:10). When we submit our lives to the Lord and Master of the universe and allow him to work in and through us, we, too become a blessing to many others. Our joy and privilege is to be servants of Jesus Christ – not just when we offer our prayers or when we perform some act of service. Indeed, our privilege is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in each and every circumstance of our daily lives.

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**Distinguishing True Servanthood from Self-serving Interests and Selfish Ambition**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Self-Serving</strong></th>
<th><strong>Serves Others Selflessly</strong></th>
<th><strong>Selfish Ambition</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serves out of self-interest; preoccupied with self-concerns, avoids unpleasant tasks.</td>
<td>Serves the interests of others, other-focused, attentive to their concerns, puts the welfare and good of others first.</td>
<td>Wants to be served and be first; acts like a dictator – overbearing, controlling, outspoken/opinionated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The self-oriented individual expresses interest and motivation for things of their own liking, and express disinterest or dislike for things they don’t care about. “What’s in it for me?” “How will it benefit me or help me advance?”</td>
<td>Other-focused, motivated to serve, build up, and strengthen others; takes on the concerns and interests of others as if they were his/her own. Not preoccupied with oneself – a healthy disinterest in self that frees a person to focus attention and service on the needs of others.</td>
<td>Self-centered and selfish, concerned chiefly or only with yourself and your advantage, to the exclusion of others. Disinterested in others. Views and treats other people as obstacles, interruptions, problems, and as inferiors. Lacks interest in and concern for the welfare of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-minded individuals are preoccupied with their own interests, opinions, and personal concerns. They don’t recognize, listen, or pay attention to what others think and are concerned about.</td>
<td>Listens first; seeks to understand others before being understood. Cooperative, and good team builder.</td>
<td>Arrogant, know-it-all attitude, “I’m always right, they are wrong.” “I can do it better by myself.” Distrust of others; can’t listen to others; prefers imposing his/her own views rather than building consensus and motivating team spirit and cooperation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interested people try to shuffle unpleasant tasks and problems to others so they can focus on their own preferences and interests.</td>
<td>Enjoys serving others anonymously – doesn’t look for credit, reward, or payback.</td>
<td>Coerces others to do his/her bidding and to advance their own interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive rather than proactive – driven by feelings/moods, and by the changing circumstances and problems which interrupt the status quo – cripples objective thinking, problem-solving, response, and decision-making. Timid/fearful of other people’s reactions, opinions, and demands.</td>
<td>Proactive and responsible (response-able) rather than reactive (being driven by feelings, circumstances, or the social environment). Proactive people make love a verb (reactive people make love a feeling). Love is something you do – the giving of self, making sacrifices, serving others freely.</td>
<td>Motivates others through fear, intimidation, and punishment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This article is excerpted from *Training in Excellence*, by Don Schwager, published by Kairos, 2014, and is available from [Tabor House Books](http://www.taborhousebooks.com).

Don Schwager is a member of the [Servants of the Word](http://www.servantsoftheword.org) and author of the [Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations](http://www.dailyscripturereadings.com) website.


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FROM CONFLICT TO COMMUNION:

Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017

Chapter 5
Called to Common Commemoration

Baptism: The basis for unity and common commemoration

219. The church is the body of Christ. As there is only one Christ, so also he has only one body. Through baptism, human beings are made members of this body.

220. The Second Vatican Council teaches that people who are baptized and believe in Christ but do not belong to the Roman Catholic church “have been justified by faith in Baptism [and] are members of Christ’s body and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church” (UR 1.3).(84) Lutheran Christians say the same of their Catholic fellow Christians.

221. Since Catholics and Lutherans are bound to one another in the body of Christ as members of it, then it is true of them what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” What affects one member of the body also affects all the others. For this
reason, when Lutheran Christians remember the events that led to the particular formation of their churches, they do not wish to do so without their Catholic fellow Christians. In remembering with each other the beginning of the Reformation, they are taking their baptism seriously.

222. Because they believe that they belong to the one body of Christ, Lutherans emphasize that their church did not originate with the Reformation or come into existence only 500 years ago. Rather, they are convinced that the Lutheran churches have their origin in the Pentecost event and the proclamation of the apostles. Their churches obtained their particular form, however, through the teaching and efforts of the reformers. The reformers had no desire to found a new church, and according to their own understanding, they did not do so. They wanted to reform the church, and they managed to do so within their field of influence, albeit with errors and missteps.

Preparing for commemoration

223. As members of one body, Catholics and Lutherans remember together the events of the Reformation that led to the reality that thereafter they lived in divided communities even though they still belonged to one body. That is an impossible possibility and the source of great pain. Because they belong to one body, Catholics and Lutherans struggle in the face of their division toward the full catholicity of the church. This struggle has two sides: the recognition of what is common and joins them together, and the recognition of what divides. The first is reason for gratitude and joy; the second is reason for pain and lament.

224. In 2017, when Lutheran Christians celebrate the anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, they are not thereby celebrating the division of the Western church. No one who is theologically responsible can celebrate the division of Christians from one another.

Shared joy in the gospel

225. Lutherans are thankful in their hearts for what Luther and the other reformers made accessible to them: the understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and faith in him; the insight into the mystery of the Triune God who gives Godself to us human beings out of grace and who can be received only in full trust in the divine promise; in the freedom and certainty that the gospel creates; in the love that comes from and is awakened by faith, and in the hope in life and death that faith brings with it; and in the living contact with the Holy Scripture, the catechisms, and hymns that draw faith into life. Remembrance and present commemoration will add additional reasons to be thankful to this list. This gratitude is what makes Lutheran Christians want to celebrate in 2017.

226. Lutherans also realize that what they are thanking God for is not a gift that they can claim only for themselves. They want to share this gift with all other Christians. For this reason they invite all Christians to celebrate with them. As the previous chapter has shown, Catholics and Lutherans have so much of the faith in common that they can—and in fact should—be thankful together, especially on the day of commemoration of the Reformation.

227. This takes up an impulse that the Second Vatican Council expressed: “Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of all praise” (UR 1.4).
Reasons to regret and lament

228. As the commemoration in 2017 brings joy and gratitude to expression, so must it also allow room for both Lutherans and Catholics to experience the pain over failures and trespasses, guilt and sin in the persons and events that are being remembered.

229. On this occasion, Lutherans will also remember the vicious and degrading statements that Martin Luther made against the Jews. They are ashamed of them and deeply deplore them. Lutherans have come to recognize with a deep sense of regret the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutheran authorities and the fact that Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon theologically supported this persecution. They deplore Luther’s violent attacks against the peasants during the Peasants’ War. The awareness of the dark sides of Luther and the Reformation has prompted a critical and self-critical attitude of Lutheran theologians towards Luther and the Wittenberg Reformation. Even though they agree in part with Luther’s criticism of the papacy, nevertheless Lutherans today reject Luther’s identification of the pope with the Antichrist.

Prayer for unity

230. Because Jesus Christ before his death prayed to the Father “that they may be one,” it is clear that a division of the body of Christ is opposed to the will of the Lord. It contradicts also the express apostolic admonition that we hear in Ephesians 4:3-6: be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The division of the body of Christ is opposed to the will of God.

Evaluating the past

231. When Catholics and Lutherans remember together the theological controversies and the events of the sixteenth century from this perspective, they must consider the circumstances of the sixteenth century. Lutherans and Catholics cannot be blamed for everything that transpired since some events in the sixteenth century were beyond their control. In the sixteenth century, theological convictions and power politics were frequently interwoven with one another. Many politicians often used genuine theological ideas to attain their ends, while many theologians promoted their theological judgments by political means. In this complex arena of numerous factors, it is difficult to ascribe responsibility for the effects of specific actions to individual persons and to name them as the guilty parties.

232. Sixteenth-century divisions were rooted in different understandings of the truth of the Christian faith and were particularly contentious since salvation was seen to be at stake. On both sides, persons held theological convictions that they could not abandon. One must not blame someone for following his or her conscience when it is formed by the Word of God and has reached its judgments after serious deliberation with others.

233. How theologians presented their theological convictions in the battle for public opinion is quite another matter. In the sixteenth century, Catholics and Lutherans frequently not only misunderstood but also exaggerated and caricatured their opponents in order to make them look ridiculous. They repeatedly violated the eighth commandment, which prohibits bearing false witness against one’s neighbor. Even if the opponents were sometimes intellectually fair to one another, their willingness to hear the other and to take his concerns seriously was insufficient. The controversialists wanted to refute and overcome their opponents, often deliberately exacerbating conflicts rather than seeking solutions by looking for what they held in common.
Living Bulwark

Prejudices and misunderstandings played a great role in the characterization of the other side. Oppositions were constructed and handed down to the next generation. Here both sides have every reason to regret and lament the way in which they conducted their debates. Both Lutherans and Catholics bear the guilt that needs to be openly confessed in the remembrance of the events of 500 years ago.

Catholic confession of sins against unity

234. Already in his message to the imperial diet in Nuremberg on 25 November 1522, Pope Hadrian VI complained of abuses and trespasses, sins and errors insofar as church authorities had committed them. Much later, during the last century, Pope Paul VI, in his opening speech at the second session of the Second Vatican Council, asked pardon from God and the divided “brethren” of the East. This gesture of the pope found expression in the Council itself, above all in the Decree on Ecumenism and in the Declaration on Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Acetate).

235. In a Lenten sermon, “Day of Pardon,” Pope John Paul II similarly acknowledged guilt and offered prayers for forgiveness as part of the observance of the 2000 Holy Year. He was the first not simply to repeat the regret of his predecessors Paul VI and the council fathers regarding the painful memories, but actually to do something about it. He also related the request for forgiveness to the office of bishop of Rome. In his encyclical Ut Unum Sint, he alludes to his visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva on 12 June 1984, admitting, “the Catholic conviction that in the ministry of the bishop of Rome she has preserved in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition and faith of the Fathers, the visible sign and guarantor of unity constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections.” He then added, “As far as we are responsible for these, I join with my predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness.”

Lutheran confession of sins against unity

236. At its fifth Assembly in Evian in 1970, the Lutheran World Federation declared in response to a deeply moving presentation by Jan Cardinal Willebrands “that we as Lutheran Christians and congregations [are] prepared to acknowledge that the judgment of the Reformers upon the Roman Catholic Church and its theology was not entirely free of polemical distortions, which in part have been perpetuated to the present day. We are truly sorry for the offense and misunderstanding which these polemic elements have caused our Roman Catholic brethren. We remember with gratitude the statement of Pope Paul VI to the Second Vatican Council in which he communicates his plea for forgiveness for any offense caused by the Roman Catholic Church. As we together with all Christians pray for forgiveness in the prayer our Lord has taught us, let us strive for clear, honest, and charitable language in all our conversations.”

237. Lutherans also confessed their wrongdoings with respect to other Christian traditions. At its eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010, the Lutheran World Federation declared that Lutherans “are filled with a deep sense of regret and pain over the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutheran authorities and especially over the fact that Lutheran reformers theologically supported this persecution. Thus, the Lutheran World Federation… wishes to express publicly its deep regret and sorrow. Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, we ask for forgiveness—from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers—for the harm that our forbears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day.”
See next > **Five Ecumenical Imperatives**

Full text of the report, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, can be downloaded from the following links:

- [https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf](https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/From%20Conflict%20to%20Communion.pdf)

### Links to Articles on Reformation Spirituality and 500th Anniversary

From the February / March 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:

- [An Introduction to the Age of the Reformation](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/christuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_christuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html), by Timothy George
- [Reading Scripture with the Early Reformers](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/christuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_christuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html)

From the April / May 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:


From the October / November 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:

- [Pope Benedict on Luther, Grace, and Ecumenical Cooperation Today](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/christuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_christuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html), address to Lutherans
- Cultural Consequences of Christian Disunity, by Christopher Dawson
238. Catholics and Lutherans realize that they and the communities in which they live out their faith belong to the one body of Christ. The awareness is dawning on Lutherans and Catholics that the struggle of the sixteenth century is over. The reasons for mutually condemning each other’s faith have fallen by the wayside. Thus, Lutherans and Catholics identify five imperatives as they commemorate 2017 together.

239. Lutherans and Catholics are invited to think from the perspective of the unity of Christ’s body and to seek whatever will bring this unity to expression and serve the community of the body of Christ. Through baptism they recognize each other mutually as Christians. This orientation requires a continual conversion of heart.

240. The Catholic and Lutheran confessions have in the course of history defined themselves against one another and suffered the one-sidedness that has persisted until today when they grapple with certain problems, such as that of authority. Since the problems originated from the conflict with one another, they can only be

The first imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.
solved or at least addressed through common efforts to deepen and strengthen their communion. Catholics and Lutherans need each other’s experience, encouragement, and critique.

The second imperative: Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith.

241. Catholics and Lutherans have through dialogue learned a great deal and come to appreciate the fact that communion among them can have different forms and degrees. With respect to 2017, they should renew their effort with gratitude for what has already been accomplished, with patience and perseverance since the road may be longer than expected, with eagerness that does not allow for being satisfied with the present situation, with love for one another even in times of disagreement and conflict, with faith in the Holy Spirit, with hope that the Spirit will fulfill Jesus’ prayer to the Father, and with earnest prayer that this may happen.

The third imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal.

242. Catholics and Lutherans have the task of disclosing afresh to fellow members the understanding of the gospel and the Christian faith as well as previous church traditions. Their challenge is to prevent this rereading of tradition from falling back into the old confessional oppositions.

The fourth imperative: Lutherans and Catholics should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.

243. Ecumenical engagement for the unity of the church does not serve only the church but also the world so that the world may believe. The missionary task of ecumenism will become greater the more pluralistic our societies become with respect to religion. Here again a rethinking and metanoia are required.

The fifth imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.

244. The ecumenical journey enables Lutherans and Catholics to appreciate together Martin Luther’s insight into and spiritual experience of the gospel of the righteousness of God, which is also God’s mercy. In the preface to his Latin works (1545), he noted that “by the mercy of God, meditating day and night,” he gained new understanding of Romans 1:17: “here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Thereupon a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me… Later I read Augustine’s The Spirit and the Letter, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God’s righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us.”(91)

245. The beginnings of the Reformation will be rightly remembered when Lutherans and Catholics hear together the gospel of Jesus Christ and allow themselves to be called anew into community with the Lord. Then they will be united in a common mission which the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification describes: “Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5f) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts” (JDDJ 18).

See also > Called to Common Commemoration
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Links to Articles on Reformation Spirituality and 500th Anniversary

From the February / March 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:

- An Introduction to the Age of the Reformation, by Timothy George
- Roots that Refresh: The Vitality of Reformation Spirituality, by Alister McGrath
- Reading Scripture with the Early Reformers
- Your Word is Truth: Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together

From the April / May 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:

- A Spiritual Orientation to 500th Reformation Anniversary, by Raniero Cantalemessa
- Justification: A Summary of Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue and Joint Agreement
- Faith is not Opposed to Love: A Clarification on “By Faith Alone” by Benedict XVI
- Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Joint Statement on the Gift of Salvation

From the October / November 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:

- From Conflict to Communion: Common Commemoration & Five Ecumenical Imperatives
- Grace Abounding – Rediscovering the Graciousness of God, by Alister McGrath
- Pope Benedict on Luther, Grace, and Ecumenical Cooperation Today, address to Lutherans
- Cultural Consequences of Christian Disunity, by Christopher Dawson
- Steps to the Renewal of the Christian People, by J.I. Packer
Having had to read countless undergraduate essays on the theme of 'the grace of God', I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that it is one of the most difficult Christian ideas to handle. The importance of the notion seems to be directly proportional to its complexity. Exasperated by my insistence that he define the idea, one of my students once retorted, "I may not understand grace - but I believe in it profoundly. What does that deceptively simple word 'grace' actually mean? How are we to think of it? How can we illustrate it? For the word 'grace' seems to denote something abstract and impersonal, an ill-defined and abstruse concept without any relation to the realities of human life. It is perhaps the abstract quality of this idea of grace that makes it so difficult to discuss.

During the Middle Ages, grace tended to be understood as a supernatural substance, infused by God into the human soul in order to facilitate redemption. One of the arguments underlying this approach went like this: There is a total and unbridgeable gap between God and human nature. There is no way that human beings can enter into a meaningful relation with God, on account of this gap. Something is needed to bridge this gap before we can be accepted by God.

Grace was therefore understood as something created within us by God, which acted as a bridge between pure human nature and divine nature – a kind of middling species. The notion of grace - or, more strictly, a created habit of grace - was thus regarded as some sort of bridgehead or middle ground, by which the otherwise absolute gulf between God and humanity could be bridged. Such ideas of grace had been the subject of severe criticism before the Reformation; by the beginning of the sixteenth century, they had largely fallen into disrepute.

Nonetheless, the way was still open for this notion to be conceived inadequately, in impersonal and abstract terms. This potential misunderstanding was eliminated by an understanding of the relation of grace and the
action of the Holy Spirit which allowed grace to be understood, not merely as the graciousness of God, but as
the dynamic and creative expression of this graciousness in human existence.

**Grace: An Idea Recovered**

The reformers, sensitive to the meaning of the Greek text of the New Testament, argued that the fundamental
meaning of 'grace' was nothing other than the gracious favour of God towards us. It did not denote a substance;
its designated God's personal attitude towards us. It did not refer to something which, so to speak, could be
detached from God (such as a divine substance); rather, it represented a crucial dynamic aspect of the person
of God. The strongly personal connotations of grace were thus recovered by the reformers. To speak of grace
is to speak of the graciousness of God, as expressed in his dealings with us.

If I were to speak of a friend of mine as being "kind", I would have to justify that statement by pointing to
actions on his or her part illustrating that kindness. Kindness is not some sort of disembodied idea, but a
personal attitude or quality which expresses itself in the way in which we relate to other people. Kindness, like
grace, is something which declares itself in life.

Grace designates a pattern of divine presence and activity which we recognise as gracious. Though we are
sinners, God is willing to meet us. Though we are deaf, God is willing to make himself heard. Though we are
far away from him, God is willing to come to us, and bring us home to him. Though Christ was rich, yet for
our sakes he became poor. Such themes recur throughout the writings of the Reformation, as its thinkers
attempted to fathom and convey the depths of the grace of God.

To illustrate this point, we may pick up incidents in the lives of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli (to note only three
of the more prominent representatives of the Reformation) which were attributed to the grace of God. The
point we wish to make is the following: to speak of grace is to speak of changed human lives. Grace is known
by its effects. God's attitude towards us is expressed in his actions towards us.

The young Luther was intensely aware of his personal sinfulness. Born in 1483, Luther entered the
Augustinian monastery at the university city of Erfurt in 1505. Although meticulous in confession of his sins
(which he later related to be numerous), he felt profoundly ill at ease within himself. His conscience was
severely troubled by these sins, which he felt he was personally incapable of overcoming. It seemed to him
that he was trapped in a sinful situation, from which there was no escape. Like a narcotics addict, he was
hooked. There was no way he could break free from sin.

But how could a righteous God overlook such sin? Luther had especial difficulties with the phrase "the
righteousness of God", particularly as it was used by Paul. Indeed, at one point (Romans 1:16-17), Paul
virtually equated the gospel with the revelation of the righteousness of God. This was beyond Luther's
Comprehension. How could the revelation of the righteousness of God be good news for sinners? It seemed to
Luther that the gospel was good news for righteous persons - but for sinners, such as himself, the gospel meant
one thing, and One thing Only. God in his righteousness would punish and condemn sinners - including Martin
Luther. In a piece of writing dating from 1545, the year before his death, Luther recalled the spiritual agony
which gripped him during this early period.

I hated that phrase "the righteousness of God" . . . by which God is righteous, and punishes
sinners. Although I lived an irreproachable life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner, with an
uneasy conscience in the sight of God . . . I was angry with God, saying to myself, "It's bad
enough that miserable sinners should be condemned for ever by original sin, with all kinds of
extra burdens laid upon us by the Old Testament law - and God makes things even worse
through the gospel.

Then the situation was transformed. Probably about the year 1515, Luther came to the realisation that God was indeed able to forgive sins - including his own. He began to read Scripture in a completely new light. No longer did terms such as "the righteousness of God cause him to panic. They now resonated with the theme of the grace of God. The righteousness of God was not the righteousness by which God punished sinners, but the righteousness which God gave to sinners as a totally unmerited gift, in order that they might find solace and peace in him. It was as if he had entered into paradise, Luther later recalled.

I began to understand that 'righteousness of God' as the righteousness by which righteous people live by the gift of God (in other words, faith), and the sentence "the righteousness of God is revealed to mean a passive righteousness, by which the merciful God justifies us by faith... This immediately made me feel as if I had been born all Over again, and entered into paradise through open gates. From that moment onwards, the whole face of Scripture appeared to me in a different light... And, where I had once hated that phrase "the righteousness of God" I now began to love it and praise it as the sweetest of words, so that this passage in Paul became the very gate of paradise for me.

Grace, for Luther, thus came to refer to a cluster of related ideas, all with a direct relevance to life. Above all, it referred to the astonishing fact that God loves sinners. Our status before God is something given, not something earned. "Sinners are attractive because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive. The amazing grace of God is shown in that we are loved before we are made lovable. To speak of the grace of God is to proclaim the astonishing insight that, despite the stranglehold which sin has upon us, God is able to break its power and purge its guilt - giving birth to a peaceful conscience and peace of mind.

To speak about grace is thus to speak about its effects in one's own life. God's gracious attitude towards us expresses itself in his gracious actions towards us. Grace cannot be isolated from its effects in our spiritual lives. A similar reflection can be detected in the writings of Paul in the New Testament, where the word 'grace' is often grounded in an account of the practical Outworking of grace in his life - such as his conversion. Much the same point is made by John Bunyan, in his remarkable (and significantly titled) autobiography Grace Abounding.

A related note is struck by Huldrych Zwingli, the reformer of the Swiss city of Zurich. Born in 1484, Zwingli celebrated his thirty-fifth birthday (1 January 1519) by taking up a new job as people's priest (Leutpriest) at the Great Minster at Zurich. Within weeks, he was preaching a programme of reform which would eventually have considerable impact in the region. In addition to preaching, Zwingli also took on regular pastoral duties within the city. By the late summer of that year, Zwingli was close to death.

The plague had struck Zurich that summer, and Zwingli found himself heavily occupied with the visiting and consolation of the dying. Perhaps as many as a third of the population of the city died during this period. By August, Zwingli himself was seriously ill, and apparently was not expected to live. He wrote a poem during this period, in which he expressed his feeling of total dependence upon God. Whether he lived or died was a matter for God. It lay totally beyond human control.

Zwingli recovered. For him, the word 'grace' now resonated with tones of divine providence and omnipotence. Grace referred to God's willingness and ability to guide the course of human existence, to intervene in situations which lay beyond human control. If grace referred primarily to finding favour in the sight of God, it referred secondarily to the practical outworking of this in human life (and Zwingli had his preservation from the Zurich plague in mind). Once more, we find the same pattern: grace is about God's dynamic and creative involvement in the lives of those towards whom he is gracious.
John Calvin, born in 1509, may have had some early ambition to become a Catholic priest. The career possibilities open to were considerable: his father was a prominent ecclesiastical administrator at the cathedral city of Noyon, and Calvin had developed Cordial relations with the powerful de Hangest family, known locally for their abundant powers of ecclesiastical patronage. But by 1529, this possibility seemed closed. Calvin's father had fallen out of favour with the cathedral, apparently over some financial disagreement. Calvin, who had by now graduated from the university of Paris, decided to study law instead of theology. Perhaps the career prospects were better.

But although he successfully qualified as a lawyer, Calvin began to develop an interest in and sympathy with the new Evangelical ideas then Sweeping through France. At some point, probably in late 1533 or early 1534, Calvin underwent an experience which he would later refer to as a 'sudden conversion'. He recalled how he seemed to be set in his ways, firmly entrenched in the familiar and consoling paths of the old religion. And then something happened. He does not explain precisely what, nor is he generous with historical references, which might allow us to establish precisely when all this took place. But the basic patterns are clear. God intervened in his life, enabling him to break with his old religious ways, and setting him free for the service of the gospel. He saw himself as a stick-in-the-mud, whom God extricated from dependence upon the old ways. God 'subdued him, in much the same way as a horse might be tamed. Calvin was aware of being called by God, to serve him in the world. The nature of this vocation was unclear - but the fact that he was being called seemed beyond dispute. Grace thus came to designate divine intervention in a situation of sin and ignorance. It referred to God's ability to turn people around, to extricate them from the mire of sin, and to tame those opposed to God - and Calvin included himself and Paul among the number of those to have experienced grace in this way.

But it came to mean more than being turned inside out. Although Calvin clearly felt that he had been called by God (as we have seen, probably at some point in 1533 or 1534), it was not clear in what capacity or at what location he was meant to be serving. He had been called - but to what? He busied himself with various matters, including the writing of a book, later to become one of the most important publications of the sixteenth century - the Institutes of the Christian Religion, published in March 1536. But it was still not clear to him how his calling to be a Christian would work itself out.

Finally, in July 1536 he decided to set out for Strasbourg, and get on with some serious academic studies. A war made the usual route from Paris to Strasbourg impassable. He decided to take another route, by-passing the war by heading further south. He had to pause for a night in a city. That city was Geneva, then in the process of adopting the principles of the Reformation. He was recognised, and asked to stay. Guillaume Farel and Pierre Viret (the reformers who had guided Geneva thus far in its road to reformation) had basically one thing to say to Calvin: you are needed here! As he later related, in his Reply to Sadoleto, he had no doubt that he was being called to stay and serve in Geneva. As his later correspondence makes clear, Calvin's sense of vocation was deeply linked with Geneva. When he was temporarily expelled from the city in 1538, he went through a spiritual crisis, apparently believing for a while that his vocation had been cancelled.

In part, this was precipitated by some letters from Louis du Tillet, who had reverted to Catholicism after showing some initial interest in Evangelicalism. Du Tillet suggested that Calvin had foolishly confused a human call - the appeal from Farel and Wiret – with a divine call. God had not called him, either to be a pastor, or to work in Geneva. His expulsion from the city proved that point beyond doubt.

But that feeling and that exile were temporary. Calvin seemed to have found out where he was meant to be, and regained a strong sense of having been called by God. "The Lord, Calvin wrote, "has given me strong reasons to confirm myself in my calling. Grace was now linked with a sense of guidance, expressed more rigorously in the doctrine of vocation and related doctrines, such as those of election and predestination. Once
more, grace is seen as something which expresses itself in real human life - not just human life in general, but the lives of specific individuals.

Grace, then, Concerns the creative, empowering and transforming expression of the graciousness of God in the lives of his people. It is a lifeline in a raging Sea of sin and despair. It expresses itself in the forgiveness of sins, the transformation of human weakness, and the guidance of individuals towards their callings in the world. When Paul wrote "by the grace of God, I am what I am' (1 Corinthians 15:10), he was bearing witness both to God's favour towards him and to the actualisation of that favour in his life. Grace is no abstract idea! To talk about grace virtually amounts to writing biographies - or even autobiographies - as it is to chronicle the gracious acts of God in the lives of men and women in history. Grace is what God does for people. That is an insight which we can use today.

The Reality of Sin — Personal and Structural
Grace is only fully and properly understood when the reality and power of sin have been addressed. The reformers generally had no qualms Over speaking about sin. Perhaps two reasons may be given for this observation. First, and not least, the writers of the Reformation believed that they had the means to deal with sin. The doctrine of justification by faith addressed sin head-on, offering peace with God in place of the wrath of God, eternal life in the place of death as the wages of sin, and forgiveness in place of the guilt of sin. This confidence in the reality of justification allowed a degree of assurance in facing up to the reality of sin. Christ died for real sins. Perhaps the most powerful - and controversial - statement of this belief may be found in a letter of Luther to Melanchthon, in which (irritated at the latter's fastidiousness in relation to his personal life), he declared: "Be a sinner, and sin boldly. But believe in Christ, and rejoice more boldly still Luther's point (although probably hopelessly overstated) is that there was no point in becoming obsessed with petty sins: Christ died for the big sins of life, and for that we should rejoice.

But the second reason is perhaps the more significant. The major reformers were not academics, whose experience of life was restricted to the ivory towers of academia. They were pastors, with experience of the profound impact of sin upon human life. They were involved in power struggles within cities and citadels of Europe, which brought home to them the reality of structural sin. In short, they lived in worlds which made it inevitable that they should realise the impact of sin upon individuals, social structures and communities. They inhabited no Walter Mitty world, but were obliged to face up to the grim realities of human existence.

In part, the reformers themselves bore painful witness to the personal and corporate aspects of sin. Luther found himself placed in a very difficult position during the Peasants' War of 1525. Should he support the peasants' revolt against their oppressive masters - or should he support the princes, upon whose patronage his reformation depended? Caught up in a complex web of possibilities, none of which could easily be described as 'right' or 'wrong, Luther found himself supporting the princes. For many, he compromised himself fatally. Luther's actions, as much as his doctrine of justification, bore witness to his sinful nature. He was forced to recognise the deep roots which sin had made, not only into his personal life, but into every level of human life, individual and corporate.

The contrast with much modern theology is significant, and reflects the shift, noted earlier (p. 31), away from the Reformation paradigm of the theologian as one who is seen to be within the community of faith to one who is seen as somehow being above that community. Many modern academic theologians have become detached from pastoral work, and have minimal involvement in the affairs of the world. A gap has opened up between academic theorists and the world they are meant to be interpreting and addressing. It is perhaps for reasons such as these that it is the pastors and writers of the Third World who have brought home to the modern period the reality of human sin. Western universities are seen to be just as tainted by sin as the Societies within which they are based, or the individuals who teach within them.

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In the twentieth century, H. Richard Niebuhr spoke powerfully of a pseudo-gospel in which 'a God without Wrath brought people without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross’. For much liberal theology, the notion of sin is to be dismissed as outdated and irrelevant, not least because it poses a powerful challenge to the notion of fundamental human goodness, upon which so much liberal optimism rests. To rediscover Reformation spirituality is to return to an age when the reality of sin was freely acknowledged. Sin has assumed for many liberal writers much the same status as sex among the Victorians: it was something that other people did, and which you didn't talk about anyway. The more open and healthy attitude of the reformers has much to commend it. It also encourages a degree of openness in relation to a difficult area of spirituality - the persistence of sin among believers.

Sinful Christians - A Contradiction in Terms?
Most Christians are aware of a sense of sin; indeed, very often it is the most mature Christians that are most aware of their sin. But underlying this practical observation is a theoretical difficulty. How can sin and faith coexist? How can Christians, who are meant to be righteous, also be sinners? Psychology and theology need to inter-relate on this issue. Luther's discussion of precisely this point is one of the most helpful aspects of his spirituality. He deals with the question in the Romans lectures of 1515–16, and we shall examine what he has to say on the matter.

Luther draws a basic distinction between the way we are regarded by God, and the way we regard ourselves. There is a fundamental difference between our status in Our Own eyes, and in the sight of God. Luther uses the terms intrinsic and 'extrinsic' in this connection. Having thus clarified this distinction between the internal human and external divine perspectives, Luther considers the difference between believers and unbelievers (to use his terms, saints and hypocrites). The saints are always sinners in their own sight, and therefore are always justified extrinsically; the hypocrites, however, are always righteous in their own sight, and are therefore always sinners extrinsically. Believers thus regard themselves as sinners; but in the sight of God, they are righteous on account of their justification. God reckons believers to be righteous, on account of their faith. Sin and righteousness thus co-exist; we remain sinners inwardly, but are righteous extrinsically, in the sight of God. By confessing our sins in faith, we stand in a right and righteous relationship with God. From Our Own perspective we are sinners; but in the perspective of God, we are righteous.

Now the Saints are always aware of their sin and seek righteousness from God in accordance with his mercy. And for this very reason, they are regarded as righteous by God. Thus in their own eyes (and in reality) they are sinners - but in the eyes of God they are righteous, because he reckons them as Such on account of their confession of their sin. In reality they are sinners; but they are righteous by the imputation of a merciful God. They are unknowingly righteous, and knowingly sinners. They are sinners in fact, but righteous in hope.

Luther is not necessarily implying that this co-existence of Sin and righteousness is a permanent condition. His point is that God like a protective covering, under which we may battle with Our sin. But - and this is Luther's central insight - the existence of sin does not negate our status as Christians. In justification, we are given the status of righteousness, while we work with God towards attaining the nature of righteousness. In that God has promised to make us righteous one day, finally eliminating our sin, there is a sense in which we are already righteous in his sight. Luther makes this point as follows:

It is just like someone who is sick, and who believes the doctor who promises his full recovery.
In the meantime, he obeys the doctor's orders in the hope of the promised recovery, and abstains from those things which he has been told to lay off, so that he may in no way hinder the promised return to health... Now is this sick man well? In fact, he is both sick and well at the same time. He is sick in reality - but he is well on account of the sure promise of the doctor, whom he trusts, and who reckons him as already being cured.

Obviously enjoying this medical analogy, Luther takes it a stage further. Having established that illness is an analogue of sin, and health of righteousness, he concludes:

So he is at one and the same time both a sinner and righteous. He is a sinner in reality, but righteous by the sure imputation and promise of God that he will continue to deliver him from sin until he has completely cured him. So he is entirely healthy in hope, but a sinner in reality.

This approach is helpful, in that it accounts for the persistence of sin in believers, while at the same time accounting for the gradual transformation of the believer and the future elimination of that sin. But it is not necessary to be perfectly righteous to be a Christian! Sin does not point to unbelief, or to a failure on the part of God; rather, it points to the continued need to entrust one's person to the gentle care of God.

The pastoral importance of this way of thinking is considerable. A colleague once told me of a meeting which he had recently attended at his local church, dealing with the theme of self-esteem. Everyone was asked to rate themselves on a Scale between zero (terrible) and ten (perfect). Most of those people - being modest Americans - rated themselves between four and six (not especially good, but not especially bad either). The visiting speaker (who had been reading some fashionable works of psychotherapy) then declared that they all ought to rate themselves as ten; they were, he said, all perfect, and merely suffered from a complete lack of self-esteem. This provoked an amused reaction among those present, who generally regarded their self-estimation as entirely accurate, and that of their visiting speaker as totally deluded.

This incident brings out neatly the reluctance on the part of many modern persons to accept the fact that they are less than perfect. To concede imperfection seems tantamount to a humiliating and degrading admission of total failure. This denial of sin finds its natural expression in the myth of perfection - the totally unrealistic assertion that the way we are is the way we are meant to be. The doctrine of justification invites us to acknowledge our imperfection and sin - while rejoicing in the purpose and power of God to transform the poverty of our nature into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Augustine once likened the church to a hospital. It is a community of sick people, united by their willingness to acknowledge their sin and their hope and trust in the skill of the physicians to whose care they are committed. Luther, as we have seen above, continues righteous in hope.

The story also illustrates how important, helpful and Christian Luther's approach to this problem of self-esteem turns out to be. God accepts us as we are. You do not have to rate yourself as ten to be a Christian. Nor is perfection a prerequisite of acceptance in the sight of God. God accepts you just as you are - he grants you the status often, on account of his promise to renew and refashion you totally. You score four, five or six - but you are accepted nonetheless. In his graciousness, God accepts you. You don't have to delude yourself (or think that God is deluded) by pretending that you are perfect. The justification of sinners rests upon no delusions, no legal fictions, and no pretense of holiness. God accepts us for what we are, while he works within us that which he wants us to be. We are given the status of ten, in the light of God's promise to rebuild us, and finally to give us the nature of ten. And that gives us encouragement and motivation to move up the scale, working on our weaknesses and shortcomings. And so, by the grace of God, our fours, fives or sixes become eight, nine or ten. God grants to us now a status which reflects his vision, intention and promise concerning what we shall be, when recreated by his grace.
But now consider the approach of our amateur psychotherapist. He was telling his hearers that they were perfect. That was regarded as ludicrous by those who listened to him, for two reasons. First, it did not accord with their experience. They knew themselves to be less than perfect. Whatever pretence of perfection they may have chosen to maintain in public, in private they were perfectly aware of their sin. And second, it removed any motivation for self-improvement. If you score ten out of ten, there is nothing more to be achieved. The scene is set for quietism, a total indifference to self-improvement and growth in holiness. Luther's approach avoids both these pitfalls. It declares that we are sinners (which resonates with our own experience and knowledge of Ourselves), and that there is considerable room for improvement - but it also affirms that we are still able to have the status of being righteous in the sight of God. The twentieth-century German-American writer Paul Tillich captured this insight when he wrote: "We must accept that we have been accepted, despite being unacceptable."

An awareness of sin, then, is not necessarily a symptom of some kind of lapse from faith, or a sign of an imperfect commitment to God. It can be nothing more than a reflection of the continuing struggle against sin, which is an essential component of the process of justification and renewal. Let Luther have the final word on this point.

In ourselves, we are sinners, and yet through faith we are righteous by the imputation of God. For we trust him who promises to deliver us, and in the meantime struggle so that sin may not overwhelm us, but that we may stand up to it until he finally takes it away from us.

Alister E. McGrath, born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, holds the Chair in Theology, Ministry and Education at King’s College London. He was previously Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University and Director of the Oxford Center for Christian Apologetics.

Originally a student of science, in 1977 McGrath was awarded a PhD in Biochemistry from Oxford University for his work on molecular biophysics. Following his conversion from atheism to Christianity, he studied divinity at St. John's College at Cambridge (1978-80). It was during this time that he studied for ordination in the Church of England. McGrath was elected University Research Lecturer in Theology at Oxford University in 1993, and also served as research professor of theology at Regent College, Vancouver, from 1993-9. He earned an Oxford Doctorate of Divinity in 2001 for his research on historical and systematic theology.

McGrath has written many books on the interaction of science and faith and is the producer of the 'Scientific Theology' project, encouraging a dialogue between the natural sciences and Christian theology. McGrath is a strong critic of Richard Dawkins, Oxford biology professor and one of the most outspoken atheists. He has addressed Dawkins' criticism of religion in several of his books, most notably in Dawkins Delusion published in 2007 by SPCK and IVP.

More information on his websites: [http://alistermcgrath.weebly.com/](http://alistermcgrath.weebly.com/) and [Professor Alister McGrath](http://alistermcgrath.weebly.com/)

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Benedict XVI meets with Lutheran Pastor Schneider at Erfurt Monastery

“How Do I Receive the Grace of God?”

A Reflection on Martin Luther's Pursuit on Faith and Grace in Christ, and the Ecumenical Task for Christians Today

by Benedict XVI

In September 2011 Benedict XVI meet with Lutheran leaders at the monastery in Erfurt, Germany where Martin Luther had studied. This is the full text of his remarks:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I begin to speak, I would like first of all to thank you for this opportunity to come together with you. I am particularly grateful to Pastor Schneider for greeting me and welcoming me into your midst with his kind words. At the same time I want to express my thanks for the particularly gracious gesture that our meeting can be held in this historic location.

As the Bishop of Rome, it is deeply moving for me to be meeting representatives of Council of the EKD here in the ancient Augustinian convent in Erfurt. This is where Luther studied theology. This is where he was ordained a priest in 1507. Against his father’s wishes, he did not continue the study of Law, but instead he
studied theology and set off on the path towards priesthood in the Order of Saint Augustine.

**Luther's driving question: “How do I receive the grace of God?”**

On this path, he was not simply concerned with this or that. What constantly exercised him was the question of God, the deep passion and driving force of his whole life’s journey. “How do I receive the grace of God?”: this question struck him in the heart and lay at the foundation of all his theological searching and inner struggle. For him theology was no mere academic pursuit, but the struggle for oneself, which in turn was a struggle for and with God.

“How do I receive the grace of God?” The fact that this question was the driving force of his whole life never ceases to make an impression on me. For who is actually concerned about this today – even among Christians? What does the question of God mean in our lives? In our preaching?

Most people today, even Christians, set out from the presupposition that God is not fundamentally interested in our sins and virtues. He knows that we are all mere flesh. Insofar as people today believe in an afterlife and a divine judgement at all, nearly everyone presumes for all practical purposes that God is bound to be magnanimous and that ultimately he mercifully overlooks our small failings. But are they really so small, our failings? Is not the world laid waste through the corruption of the great, but also of the small, who think only of their own advantage? Is it not laid waste through the power of drugs, which thrives on the one hand on greed and avarice, and on the other hand on the craving for pleasure of those who become addicted? Is the world not threatened by the growing readiness to use violence, frequently masking itself with claims to religious motivation?

Could hunger and poverty so devastate parts of the world if love for God and godly love of neighbor – of his creatures, of men and women – were more alive in us? I could go on. No, evil is no small matter. Were we truly to place God at the center of our lives, it could not be so powerful.

The question: what is God’s position towards me, where do I stand before God? – this burning question of Martin Luther must once more, doubtless in a new form, become our question too. In my view, this is the first summons we should attend to in our encounter with Martin Luther.

**Luther’s thinking and spirituality, was thoroughly Christocentric**

Another important point: God, the one God, creator of heaven and earth, is no mere philosophical hypothesis regarding the origins of the universe. This God has a face, and he has spoken to us. He became one of us in the man Jesus Christ – who is both true God and true man. Luther’s thinking, his whole spirituality, was thoroughly Christocentric: “What promotes Christ’s cause” was for Luther the decisive hermeneutical criterion for the exegesis of sacred Scripture. This presupposes, however, that Christ is at the heart of our spirituality and that love for him, living in communion with him, is what guides our life.

Now perhaps you will say: all well and good, but what has this to do with our ecumenical situation? Could this just be an attempt to talk our way past the urgent problems that are still waiting for practical progress, for concrete results? I would respond by saying that the first and most important thing for ecumenism is that we keep in view just how much we have in common, not losing sight of it amid the pressure towards secularization – everything that makes us Christian in the first place and continues to be our gift and our task.

**Ecumenical task today: common ground and common witness**

It was the error of the Reformation period that for the most part we could only see what divided us and we failed to grasp existentially what we have in common in terms of the great deposit of sacred Scripture and the early Christian creeds. The great ecumenical step forward of recent decades is that we have become aware of all this common ground and that we acknowledge it as we pray and sing together, as we make our joint
commitment to the Christian ethos in our dealings with the world, as we bear common witness to the God of Jesus Christ in this world as our undying foundation.

The risk of losing this, sadly, is not unreal. I would like to make two points here. The geography of Christianity has changed dramatically in recent times, and is in the process of changing further. Faced with a new form of Christianity, which is spreading with overpowering missionary dynamism, sometimes in frightening ways, the mainstream Christian denominations often seem at a loss. This is a form of Christianity with little institutional depth, little rationality and even less dogmatic content, and with little stability. This worldwide phenomenon poses a question to us all: what is this new form of Christianity saying to us, for better and for worse? In any event, it raises afresh the question about what has enduring validity and what can or must be changed – the question of our fundamental faith choice.

The second challenge to worldwide Christianity of which I wish to speak is more profound and in our country more controversial: the secularized context of the world in which we Christians today have to live and bear witness to our faith. God is increasingly being driven out of our society, and the history of revelation that Scripture recounts to us seems locked into an ever more remote past.

Are we to yield to the pressure of secularization, and become modern by watering down the faith? Naturally faith today has to be thought out afresh, and above all lived afresh, so that it is suited to the present day. Yet it is not by watering the faith down, but by living it today in its fullness that we achieve this. This is a key ecumenical task. Moreover, we should help one another to develop a deeper and more lively faith.

It is not strategy that saves us and saves Christianity, but faith – thought out and lived afresh; through such faith, Christ enters this world of ours, and with him, the living God. As the martyrs of the Nazi era brought us together and prompted the first great ecumenical opening, so today, faith that is lived from deep within amid a secularized world is the most powerful ecumenical force that brings us together, guiding us towards unity in the one Lord.


Links to Articles on Reformation Spirituality and 500th Anniversary

From the February / March 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:
• An Introduction to the Age of the Reformation, by Timothy George
• Roots that Refresh: The Vitality of Reformation Spirituality, by Alister McGrath
• Reading Scripture with the Early Reformers
• Your Word is Truth: Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together

From the April / May 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:
• A Spiritual Orientation to 500th Reformation Anniversary, by Raniero Cantalamessa
• Justification: A Summary of Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue and Joint Agreement
• Faith is not Opposed to Love: A Clarification on “By Faith Alone” by Benedict XVI
• Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Joint Statement on the Gift of Salvation

From the October / November 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:
• From Conflict to Communion: Common Commemoration & Five Ecumenical Imperatives
• Grace Abounding – Rediscovering the Graciousness of God, by Alister McGrath
• Pope Benedict on Luther, Grace, and Ecumenical Cooperation Today, address to
Joseph Ratzinger (Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI), for many years a renowned theologian, scripture scholar, and university professor, before becoming an archbishop, cardinal, and pope of the Roman Catholic Church between 2005-2013, was born in Bavaria, Germany in 1927. He was ordained priest in 1951. He became Archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1977.

When he was elected pope on April 19, 2005, he took the name Benedict XVI, in honor of St. Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Western monasticism. The pope said that “with his life and work St Benedict exercised a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture” and helped Europe to emerge from the "dark night of history" that followed the fall of the Roman Empire.
The Cultural Consequences of Christian Disunity

by Christopher Dawson

Note: A renowned Christian historian of the 20th century, Christopher Dawson (1889-1970) wrote several books on Christianity's influence on the development of culture in the West, and its decline due to the growing influence of secularism, and the necessary return to Christian unity. The following article was first delivered as part of a lecture series delivered at Harvard University in 1958. Christopher Dawson was one of the founding members of an ecumenical movement among Catholics and Protestants in Europe, called the Sword of the Spirit, which began in 1939 and the early '40s. The movement as a whole was short-lived because the climate for ecumenical cooperation between Catholics and Protestants was not yet ripe. Dawson's writings are very relevant today as Christians seek to build bridges and ecumenical cooperation together.

Of all divisions between Christians, that between Catholics and Protestants is the deepest and the most pregnant in its historical consequences. It is so deep that we cannot see any solution to it in the present period and under existing historical circumstances. But at least it is possible for us to take the first step by attempting to overcome the enormous gap in mutual understanding which has hitherto rendered any intellectual contact or collaboration impossible. From this point of view the problem is not to be found so much in the sphere of theology, strictly speaking, as in that of culture and historical tradition. For the changes that followed the Reformation are not only the work of the Churches and the theologians. They are also the work of the statesmen and the soldiers.

The Catholic and Protestant worlds have been divided from one another by centuries of war and power politics, and the result has been that they no longer share a common social experience. Each has its own version of history, its own social inheritance, as well as its own religious beliefs and standards of orthodoxy. And nowhere is this state of things more striking than in America, where the English Protestant North and the Spanish Catholic South formed two completely different worlds which had no mental contact with one another.
It was not until the 19th century that this state of cultural separation came to an end; and the change was especially sharp in the English-speaking countries when Catholicism and Protestantism finally came together within the same societies and cultures. In England this was due to the movement of intellectual rapprochement which is represented by the Oxford Movement and the personality of Newman, while in America it was the result of external forces – above all the mass immigration of the Irish Catholics to America in the middle of the 19th century, which produced such profound social changes, particularly in New England.

Nowhere in the world have Catholicism and Protestantism been brought together more suddenly and closely than in Boston. Throughout the 19th century these two sections of the population remained separate peoples, although they necessarily shared the same national and regional citizenship. It is only in quite recent times that they have come to share a common culture. But this culture is a purely secular one; and one of the reasons that it is so completely secular is that there has been this complete cleavage of spiritual tradition and absence of intellectual contact between Catholics and Protestants.

No doubt there are many other factors in the secularization of modern culture, but this is one for which Christians are directly responsible. The movement of history, which for Christians in some way reflects the action of divine providence, has put an end to the social division of Christendom which followed the religious revolution of the 16th century. Hence it is now our business to see that the inner division in our culture should also be overcome by a progressive movement of intellectual understanding, the reconstitution of a common world of discourse and of a new dialogue between Catholics and Protestants.

In this work of mutual explanation there are two main fields to be covered. First there is the theological field, in which the student has to study the positive developments of Catholic and Protestant doctrine so as to understand the exact nature of the divergence in our beliefs. In the past this field had become a battleground of theological controversy so that it was a source of division and antagonism rather than understanding. Indeed it was the controversial character of theology that did more than anything else to discredit it in the eyes of the world. It is only in recent times that theological studies have taken a new direction and there is a growing tendency to re-examine the whole question in the light of first principles. We see the results of this new theological orientation in the French series published under the title *Unam Sanctam*, and there has been a parallel movement of theological thought in Germany. Indeed it was there that the new approach first originated more than a century ago with the writings of John Adam Moehler. Today there is an international literature on the theology of Christian unity, which is likely to increase as a result of the Ecumenical Council.

But in addition to this theological study we have also to study the historical background and the cultural development of Catholic and Protestant society during the centuries of disunity. It is these historical studies that have been most neglected in the past, owing to the artificial separation between ecclesiastical and political history, which has had the effect of focusing the light of historical research on certain limited aspects of the past and of neglecting others that were intrinsically no less important.

Thus political history has developed as the history of the European State system and the power conflict between the European dynasties and empires, and finally of the political revolutions that have changed the forms of the state.

It is only in modern times that historians have attempted to rectify this one-sided emphasis by opening up the new field of economic history, which today is generally recognized as no less important than political history.

But this is an exception, and there are still important fields of culture which are relatively uncultivated by the historians. The obvious solution would seem to be the expansion of historical science to include the whole of human culture in all its manifestations; but in spite of the efforts of German culture-historians to create a new
study of this kind, it has failed to establish itself as a scientific discipline and is still looked on with considerable suspicion by the professional historians. In any case, we have to consider the question of religious history as a field of study which historians ought to take account of, but which they have in fact neglected. No doubt their answer would be that this is the business of the ecclesiastical historians. This is true enough in theory. In practice, however, ecclesiastical history is as highly specialized as political history, which it resembles in certain aspects.

The ecclesiastical historians have dealt exhaustively with the history of heresies and theological controversies, but they have shown little interest in religious culture. Even such a famous book as Ritschl's *History of Pietism* is not a genuinely historical work. It is a polemical work, devoted to the demonstration of a theological thesis rather than to the exposition of a phase of religious history or the explanation of a form of religious experience. In fact it is not to the ecclesiastical historians but to the literary historians that we must look for the main achievements in this field. With all his faults Sainte Beuve was a real religious historian when he wrote his *Port Royal*; and in our own days I think that the best approach to religious history has been made from the literary side, in respect of Catholicism, by Bremond in his literary study of religious experience in France in the 17th century, and of Protestantism by Professors Perry Miller and Johnston in their study of the New England mind.

When we come to the subject of this work, which is the development of the Catholic and Protestant cultures in modern times, we shall find ourselves in a no man's land, between the political and the ecclesiastical historians. For while the actual schism which destroyed the religious unity of Western Europe has been studied exhaustively by both groups of historians, neither of them has paid much attention to the development of the new forms of religious culture which took the place of the old common culture of medieval Christendom. Yet no one can deny their importance, for they had a considerable effect not only on the development of literature and music and art but also on the structure of social life, as we see in a very striking way in the contrasts in the social development of the two Americas.

And it is the same with the following period. For the political and ecclesiastical historians have both written a great deal on the history of the 18th-century Enlightenment and on the political and religious revolution which followed it, but the religious revival of the 19th century, which transformed and re-created the Christian world that we know and in which we live, has, I believe, never been studied in its cultural aspects. One should perhaps make an exception as far as North America is concerned. For American Catholicism is the creation of this period, and in so far as historians attempt to study American Catholicism, they are bound to focus their attention on the 19th-century development. Even so, it is impossible to study that development without studying the European background from which it emerged and which influenced its development in so many different ways. Yet there has been no study of the European Catholic revival by American historians, so far as I am aware, and very few translations of European works on the subject.

Moreover there is another and more fundamental reason why religious history during the last century or two should be a neglected and difficult field. For this is the age when the secularization of Western culture was triumphant and when religion was consequently pushed out of social life and increasingly treated as a private affair that only concerned the individual conscience. Whereas in the past religion had occupied the center of the stage of world history, so that a monk and a mystic like St. Bernard had moved armies and had become a counsellor of kings, now it had withdrawn into private life and had left the stage of history to the representatives of the new political and economic forces.

This progressive extrusion of Christianity from culture is the price that Christendom has had to pay for its loss of unity—it is part of what Richard Niebuhr has called "the Ethical Failure of the Divided Church". The tragedy of schism is that it is a progressive evil. Schism breeds schism, until every social antagonism is reflected in
some new religious division and no common Christian culture is conceivable.

In the old world of united Christendom these social antagonisms were as strong as they are today, but they were antagonisms within a common society, and the Church was seen as the ultimate bond of unity. As William Langland writes, "He called that house Unity – which is Holy Church in English." No one was more aware than Langland of the evils of contemporary society – the whole of Piers Plowman is an impassioned plea for social and religious reform, so much so that he has sometimes been regarded as a harbinger of the Protestant Reformation. But his emphasis is always on unity: "Call we to all the Commons that they come into Unity" "and there stand and do battle against Belial's children."

As I have pointed out elsewhere, the creative age of medieval culture was the result of the alliance between the Papacy and the Northern Reformers, represented by the Cluniacs and the Cistercians, and when this alliance was broken, the vitality of medieval culture declined.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century represents a final breach between the Papacy and the Northern Reformers – between the principle of authority and the principle of reformation. But both principles were alike essential to the traditions of Western Christendom, and even in the state of division neither part of the Christian world could dispense with them. Therefore the Catholic world developed a new reforming movement, as represented by the Jesuits and the other new religious Orders; while the Protestant world had to create new patterns of authority and theological tradition, such as we see in the ecclesiastical and theological discipline of the Calvinist Churches. But this pattern was never a universal one, and the Protestant world was weakened from the beginning by continuous theological controversies which produced a further series of schisms and permanent divisions between the different Protestant Churches.

It is difficult to exaggerate the harm that was inflicted on Christian culture by the century of religious strife that followed the Reformation. The great controversy between Catholicism and Protestantism rapidly degenerated into a state of religious and civil war which divided Christendom into two armed camps.

There could be no question of spiritual reconciliation so long as Catholics and Protestants were cutting one another's throats, and calling in foreign mercenaries to help in the work of mutual destruction, as was the case in France in the 16th century and in Germany in the 17th. Even within the Protestant world religious controversy became the cause of social conflict or its pretext, as we see in the case of the Civil War in England. That war was indeed far less destructive and atrocious than the great religious wars of the Continent, but it demonstrated even more clearly the essential futility and irrationality of religious conflict, in which each military victory led to fresh divisions and further conflicts until no solution was possible save a tired and disillusioned return to the traditional order in Church and State.

It was during this century of sterile and inconclusive religious conflict that the ground was prepared for the secularization of European culture. The convinced secularists were an infinitesimal minority of the European population, but they had no need to be strong since the Christians did their work for them. All they had to do was to point the moral, very cautiously at first, like Montaigne, and then with gradually increasing confidence and vigor, as with Hobbes and Bayle, and the English Deists. It was, however, an Anglican clergyman, a High Churchman to boot, who spoke the final word in The Tale of a Tub.

Thus it is not too much to say that the fate of Christian culture and the development of modern civilization have been determined or conditioned by the state of war which existed between Christians from the Reformation to the Revolution – first a century of civil war in the strict sense and then a century or more of cold war and antagonism. And though today Christians are at last emerging from this atmosphere of hatred and suspicion, the modern Christian world is still divided by the religious frontiers established in that age of religious strife.
As a volcanic eruption changes the face of nature – overwhelming fertile lands with fields of lava and changing the course of rivers and the shape of islands – this great religious cataclysm has changed the course of history and altered the face of Western culture for ages to come. It is impossible to ignore this dark and tragic side of religious history; for if we do not face it, we cannot understand the inevitable character of the movement of secularization.

On the other hand, it is a still greater mistake to see the dark side only, as the thinkers of the Enlightenment did, and to ignore the spiritual and cultural achievements of the post-Reformation period.

For the energies of divided Christendom were not all absorbed in internecine conflict. On both the Catholic and the Protestant side the Reformation was followed by the development of new forms of religious life and thought. These were of course very different, so that they have sometimes been regarded as opposite to one another. Yet I think it is possible to trace a certain parallelism between them, which was no doubt due to their common historical background and to common cultural influences. In the first place there was on both sides of the religious frontiers a return to moral discipline after the laxity of the early Renaissance period. On the Protestant side this took the form of the Calvinist discipline, which was the main inspiration of English and American Puritanism in the 17th century and the parallel ethos of the Presbyterian Covenanters in Scotland.

It is one of the paradoxes of religious history that a theology which centered in the doctrines of predestination and reprobation and denied or minimized the freedom of the human will should have developed an ethos of personal responsibility which expressed itself in moral activism. There can, however, be no doubt that the hallmark of the new Protestant culture is just this spirit of moral activism, which was based on intensive theological training, but which found expression in secular life-in war and business-no less than in the life of the Churches.

On the Catholic side the restoration of moral discipline took the form primarily of a return to the tradition of monastic asceticism. But this tradition was now brought out of the cloister into the world and applied by the new religious orders, above all by the Jesuits, to the contemporary situation, that is to say, to the needs of the Church, to the restoration of ecclesiastical unity and order, to the education of both the clergy and the laity, and to preaching and missionary propaganda.

But in addition to the moral asceticism of the Counter-Reformation there was also on the Catholic side a certain tendency to theological rigorism which is much more akin to the theological tendencies of Puritanism. It produced the Jansenist movement, which caused a serious breach in the unity of Post-Reformation Catholicism, at least in France. The theological feud between the Jansenists and the Jesuits and the controversy about grace and free will bear an extraordinary similarity to that between the Puritans and the Arminians on the same questions.

In the second place the Post-Reformation period is characterized by the interiorization of religion and the intensive cultivation of the spiritual life. In the Catholic world this expressed itself above all in the great mystical movement which began in Spain and Italy in the 16th century and spread to France and England in the following century. But it is also represented by the ascetic spirituality of the Counter-Reformation. Indeed the most influential of all the spiritual works of the age – The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius – was, as its name denotes, essentially ascetic, and used the reason and the imagination in order to produce a psychological change in the personality. On the Protestant side, the mystical element is less significant, for the main emphasis was always placed on the experience of conversion and personal conviction of sin and redemption.

The Pietist movement in the Lutheran church (which was later in date than the Catholic spiritual revival) was not devoid of an element of mysticism, while some of the minority sects, like the Quakers, were more
definitely mystical and ultimately came to be influenced strongly by the less orthodox representatives of the Catholic mystical tradition. There was in fact an interesting underground movement towards religious unity and spiritual reconciliation which was carried on by representatives of these extremist groups, such as Peter Poiret in the Netherlands, who attempted to create a common eirenic theology based on the consensus mysticorum; and Isaac Watts translated Jesuit sacred poetry. Though this movement was an isolated one, which affected an infinitesimal minority of Protestants, it does indicate the existence of Catholicizing tendencies in the Pietist movement as a whole, which explains the hostile reaction to the movement on the part of Protestant historians like Ritschl.

Finally, in the third place, both Catholic and Protestant Europe were deeply influenced by the culture of the Renaissance. On both sides there was a continuous effort to use the new learning for Christian ends and to bring the new culture and art into relation with the Christian tradition. Thus the ideal of a Christian Humanism held a central place in both Catholic and Protestant culture and provided an important link or bridge between them.

It is true that its influence was much stronger in Catholic Europe owing to the fact that Italy was both the home of the Renaissance and the center of Catholic culture. Moreover, Catholicism was able to use the new art and music and architecture of the Renaissance in the service of religion in a way which the aniconic and non-liturgical character of Protestantism made impossible.

Thus the Baroque culture, in which the spirit of Christian Humanism found its full social and artistic expression, was exclusively or predominantly Catholic, and the sharing of this common culture gave the entire Catholic world from Peru to Poland an international unity which Protestant Europe never possessed. In Northern Europe the influence of humanism was confined to the educated classes and found expression only in literature. But in this field it was triumphant, and throughout the 17th century, in England above all, the spirit of Christian Humanism inspired not only the poetry of Donne and Herbert and Milton and Vaughan but also the thought of the Cambridge Platonists and the Caroline divines, as well as of men of letters like Sir Thomas Browne and Isaac Walton.

Nevertheless all this wealth of literary culture could not prevent an increasing divergence between the social and psychological tendencies of Catholic and Protestant society. The Baroque culture integrated asceticism with mysticism, and humanism with popular culture, through the common media of art and liturgy; but in the Protestant world, the religious culture of the masses, which was derived from the Bible and the sermon, had no access to the imaginative world of the humanist poet and artist. Thus it was on the popular level that the differences between the two cultures are most obvious and their separation is most complete. For what could be sharper than the contrast between the popular culture of Catholic Europe with its pilgrimages and festivals and sacred dramas all centering in the great Baroque churches which were the painted palaces of the Saints, and the austere religious life of the hard-working Protestant artisan and shopkeeper which found its only outward expression in the weekly attendance in a bare meeting house to listen to the long sermons of the Puritan divines and to sing long psalms in metrical but far from poetical versions?

This difference in the form of the religious life found expression in a corresponding difference of psychological types and spiritual personalities. A man like Cotton Mather had no doubt received a good classical education, but no one can call him a Christian Humanist. His character was formed in the same mould as that of his congregation. Whereas on the other side, men like St. Francis de Sales or Fénelon were humanists not only in their classical culture but in their spirituality and their personal relations. This failure of Protestantism to assimilate the Christian Humanist tradition completely caused a certain impoverishment and aridity in English and American cultures and led ultimately to those defects which Matthew Arnold was to criticize so vigorously in the 19th century.
Nevertheless Protestant culture had its own distinctive qualities. The moral energy of the Puritan tradition inspired the new bourgeois culture of the English-speaking world in the later 17th and 18th centuries and gave it the strength which enabled it to overcome its rivals and dominate the world. What I am concerned with at the moment, however, is not to judge the values of these two forms of culture, but to point out their differences and show how their divergence contributed to the disunity of the Christian world. For when the age of religious war was over, Europe was still divided (and America also) by a difference of moral values and psychological antipathies. And these differences are harder to surmount than the theological ones, because they go so deep into the unconscious mind and have become a part of the personality and the national character.

When we come to the 19th century we shall find plenty of cases of men who have lost all conscious connection with religion but who nevertheless retain the social and national prejudices which they have inherited from their Catholic or Protestant backgrounds.

Similarly when the barriers were first broken down it was due not only to the theological converts and apologists, like Newman, but to the cultural converts, like Arnold and Ruskin. Arnold is a particularly significant case, because he admitted his debt to the Oxford Movement, though he did not concern himself with the theological questions which were its raison d'être, but concentrated all his attention on the cultural weaknesses of the Protestant tradition and the need for a revision of English cultural values. The same phenomenon is to be found on the Catholic side, though it is less easy to point to a representative figure. But one may mention the attempt of a group of Catholic sociologists in France in the later 19th century to criticize Catholic social ethics by comparison with the moral energy and activism of Anglo-Saxon culture – an attempt which was, I believe, the real source of the Americanist controversy.

Now I do not wish to suggest that we should approach the study of Catholicism and Divided Christendom in the spirit of Matthew Arnold rather than in that of Newman or Moehler. These are theological questions, and the last word must always rest with the theologians.

Yet as an historian I am convinced that the main sources of Christian division and the chief obstacle to Christian unity have been and are cultural rather than theological. Consequently, I believe that it is only by combining the study of the history of Christian culture with the study of theology that we can understand the nature and extent of the problem with which we have to deal.


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**Christopher Dawson and the Christian View of History**

While lecturing in the United States in the early 1930s, T. S. Eliot was asked which of his contemporaries was the most powerful intellectual influence in Britain... He selected Christopher Dawson. Dawson’s work was similarly praised across the ideological and theological spectra, as the likes of G. K. Chesterton, Barbara Ward, Russell Kirk, Dorothy Day, C. S. Lewis, Arnold Toynbee, and Lewis Mumford all testified to its importance for their efforts.

Christopher Dawson’s religious faith undergirded all his intellectual efforts. He believed that people are naturally religious and, hence, as a historian, concluded (with Lord Acton) that “religion is the key of history.” Yet Dawson also contended that the Christian faith makes the distinctive claim to be an essentially historical religion, one based on belief not just in the general direction of history by Providence, but in “the intervention by God in the life of mankind by direct action at certain definite points in time and place,” culminating in the Incarnation. This “central doctrine of the Christian faith” is hence “also the center of
"The Christian view of history is not a secondary element derived by philosophical reflection from the study of history. It lies at the very heart of Christianity and forms an integral part of the Christian faith. Hence there is no Christian “philosophy of history” in the strict sense of the word. There is, instead, a Christian history and a Christian theology of history, and it is not too much to say that without them there would be no such thing as Christianity."

– Christopher Dawson, “The Christian View of History” (1951)

– excerpt from Sitting Still with Christopher Dawson, article by Adam Schwartz, Touchstone Magazine, March/April Issue 1999
Steps to the Renewal of the Christian People

by James I. Packer

This essay was first given at the Summons to Faith and Renewal Conference held in October 1982 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA for Christian leaders from Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches and renewal movements. J.I. Packer's strategy for renewal is still very relevant as Christians strive for greater ecumenical cooperation and renewal of God's people today. J. I. Packer is a well-known Reformed theologian, pastor, teacher, and lecturer who has worked tirelessly and generously for Christian renewal and ecumenism for the past 40 plus years.

The Task and the Method

In the following presentation I address myself to a twofold task: first, to formulate a clear view of what the renewal of the church really is, and then to say what needs to happen in order to get us there, starting from where we are. And in tackling that twofold task I have a twofold goal: to speak both to your minds and to your hearts. For I shall try, not just to state God's truth, but also to apply it by way of challenging your concern and your action. So, as I hope that this will not be less than a responsible theological discourse, I also hope that it will be more than that. I intend, you see, not just to lecture but also to preach.

Who am I, you may ask, to set myself this agenda? Let me tell you. I am an expatriate Englishman, an Episcopal pastor by calling and a Reformed theologian by trade, who in 1945, soon after his conversion, was given a copy of Charles G. Finney's Lectures on Revivals of Religion (1835), and who since that time has carried a personal burden of concern for the renewing of God's people through a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On this subject I have spoken repeatedly, written occasionally, and thought constantly throughout those years. Now I seek to enlist you for the pursuit of the same interest, and I am grateful for the opportunity to do
There is, however, one thing that I need to say at the very outset about the manner of pursuing an interest of this kind. Renewal in all its aspects is not a theme for dilettante debate, but for humble, penitent, prayerful, faith-full exploration before the Lord, with a willingness to change and be changed, and if necessary to be the first to be changed, if that is what the truth proves to require. To absorb ideas about renewal ordinarily costs nothing, but to enter into renewal could cost us everything we have, and we shall be very guilty if, having come to understand renewal, we then decline it. We need to be clear about that. John Calvin once declared that it would be better for a preacher to break his neck while mounting the pulpit if he did not himself intend to be the first to follow God. In the same way, it would be better for us not to touch the study of renewal at all if we are not ourselves ready to be the first to be renewed. I speak as to wise men; please judge what I say.

By what method, now, shall we approach our subject? Here the gates of two "by-path meadows,' to use Bunyan's phrase, stand invitingly open. First, it is tempting to come at the renewal theme sociologically. That would mean defining "the Christian people' in external and institutional terms, as an organized association with specific goals; equating renewal with the achieving of those goals; and then occupying ourselves in pragmatic reflection on what structural and attitudinal changes would have to be engineered in order to realize these goals in a statistically measurable way. The idea that the church's health problems can be solved by such manipulation is not unfamiliar, at least to members of major Protestant denominations in North America; analysts both inside and outside denominational headquarters do a great deal of thinking at this level. Nor do I dismiss such analysis as useless; on the contrary, it does much to make us aware of lacks and needs in the church's life. But I urge most emphatically that the renewal of the church is in essence a spiritual and supernatural matter, a work of the Holy Spirit enriching our fellowship with the Father and the Son, and it takes more than clever social engineering to bring this about.

Again, it is tempting to come at our theme historically. That would mean identifying past movements of renewal and revival, from the Old Testament records of Israel's return to Yahweh under Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra, and others, and the New Testament story in Acts of revival in Palestine after Pentecost, through to the Cistercian and Dominican and Franciscan movements; the ministry of Savonarola; the Western Reformation; the early Jesuits; English Puritanism and Lutheran Pietism; the Evangelical Awakenings in old England and New England in the eighteenth century; the repeated stirrings of the Spirit in Wales and Scotland between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries; the first hundred years of the Protestant missionary movement; the frontier revivals in America; the worldwide quickenings among Protestants in the 1850s and again in the 1900s; the East African revival, now fifty years old and still continuing; the awakenings in Lewis, off the west coast of Scotland, in the 1950s, in Western Canada in the 1960s, and in Indonesia and the Californian “Jesus movement' in the 1970s; the impact of the worldwide charismatic movement over the past twenty years; and so on. It would then mean analyzing, comparing, reconstructing, and characterizing these movements in the way that historians do, and seeking to produce out of this exercise generalized typologies of renewal for future reference.

Now I do not wish to minimize the very great value of this kind of study. The psalmists charge us to keep God's mighty works in remembrance, and we should be glad that in our day so much printed material on past renewal movements is available to us. But if all we did was study renewal historically, we should in the first place be looking at it in a merely external and this-worldly way, as the phenomenon of changed outlooks and activities in certain persons' lives, and in the second place we could hardly avoid lapsing into what I call the antiquarian fallacy about renewal, the assumption, that is, that any future renewal will become recognizable by conforming to some pattern set in the past.

That there are such patterns is not in doubt; they merit careful examination, and in that connection I commend
in particular Richard Lovelace's pioneer theological phenomenology of renewal, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (1979). But we should limit God improperly, and actually quench the Spirit, if we assumed that future movements of renewal will correspond in outward form to some past movement, and that we can rely on this correspondence as a means of identifying them.

Renewal is precisely God doing a new thing, and though as we shall see every work of renewal has basic qualities, or dimensions, in common with every other, we must recognize that the contours of the cultures within which the church has from time to time lost its vitality, and also the contours of that loss in itself, have varied; which means that it is not safe for us to assume that the outward forms and phenomena of revival in this or any future age will always prove to have exact historical precedents. At this point sad mistakes in judgment have been made in the past, and I suspect are being made by some in the present. Let us strive not to be of their number.

What I have said makes it apparent, I hope, that our basic need in studying renewal is for categories and criteria that are neither sociological nor historical but theological, which for me at least means biblically based. With scripture as our guide, therefore, we shall now discuss, first, the *theology* of renewal (that is, the overall account that should be given of renewal as a work of God); second, the *elements* in renewal (that is, specific things that occur when this work of God is in progress); third, the quest for renewal (that is, the steps in seeking renewal which we and the segments of the body of Christ to which we belong could take, starting now).

**The Theology of Renewal**

For some decades the word “renewal” has been used loosely in the world church, with applications as wide as they are unfocused. The general sense that renewal is needed because the church is not all that it should be is welcome, but the vague way in which the word is thrown around is unhelpful, to say the least. Contemporary voices celebrate liturgical renewal, theological renewal, lay renewal, ecumenical renewal, charismatic renewal, and renewal in other departments too; indeed, it seems that any new outburst of activity in the church, any cloud of raised by the stamping of excited feet, will be hailed as renewal by somebody. Certainly, there is no renewal without activity, and when renewal is a reality every area of the church's life should benefit. But the implicit equating of renewal with enthusiasm and activity is inadequate in two ways. First, it gives an idea of renewal which is far too inclusive: horizontally, so to speak, it embraces too much. For in biblical thought and experience renewal is linked with divine visitation, purging judgment, and restoration through repentance, and no amount of hustle and bustle qualifies as renewal where these notes are absent. Second, this equation gives an idea of renewal which is far too superficial: vertically, so to speak, it does not include enough. It views renewal in terms of externals only, and takes no account of the inward exercise of heart in encounter with God in which true renewal as scripture depicts it always begins. But hustle and bustle do not constitute renewal apart from this inward dimension.

How then should we define renewal? The word is one of a group-spiritual, renewal, revival, awakening, visitation, reformation-which tend to be used together and need to be defined together. Five of these six are correlated by Richard Lovelace in a way which both corresponds to usage and clarifies the realities involved. I quote him. “Spiritual (as in *spiritual life*, *spiritual gifts*) . . . means deriving *from the Holy Spirit*, which is its normal significance in scripture. Renewal, revival, and *awakening* trace back to biblical metaphors for the infusion of spiritual life in Christian experience by the Holy Spirit (see Rom 6:4, 8:2-11; Eph 1:17-23, 3:14-19, 5:14). Usually they are used synonymously for broad-scale movements of the Holy Spirit's work in renewing spiritual vitality in the church and in fostering its expansion in mission and evangelism. *Reformation* refers to the purifying of doctrine and structures in the church, but implies also a component of spiritual revitalization. Renewal is sometimes used to encompass revival and reformation, and also to include aggiornamento, the updating of the church leading to a new engagement with the surrounding world.’ To Lovelace's definitions I
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add that visitation, the sixth word in group, signifies the initial divine approach to spiritually moribund communities out of which their renewal comes.

Lovelace's two definitions of renewal alert us to the fact that this is one of those 'concertina-words' which in use keep alternating between a narrower and a broader significance. The term carries its narrowest meaning (concertina closed) when it is used of the personal quickening of an individual. Used so, it signifies that his spiritual life—that is, his God-given fellowship with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, the saving relationship which finds expression in his praise and prayer, his devotion and character, his work and his witness - has been decisively deepened through God's visiting his soul. (“His,' by the way, in that last sentence includes ‘hers'; I am not suggesting that only males experience personal renewal) At the other end of the scale, renewal has its broadest meaning (concertina open) when it is applied to the church, for here, in idea at any rate, it signifies revitalizing at every level, starting with believers' inner lives (what Puritans called their ‘heartwork') and extending to all the characteristic public activities in which the body of Christ is called to engage. Following the thrust of the definite article in my assigned title when it speaks of 'renewal of the Christian people,' I focus in this paper on the latter, broader application of the word. You cannot, of course, have corporate renewal of any part of the body of Christ on earth without personal renewal of those who make it up, although the quickening of individuals can and does constantly occur without it being part of any larger local movement; but here I shall speak of personal renewal only in the context of corporate renewal, the quickening of “the Christian people' in this place or that.

In terms of biblical theology, now, we can characterize God's work of renewal in the following three ways.

First, renewal is an eschatological reality, in the sense that it is a general experiential deepening of that life in the Spirit which is the foretaste and first installment of heaven itself. Assurance of both the shameful guiltiness and the total pardon of our sins; joy, humble but exalted, in the awareness of God's love for us; knowledge of the closeness of the Father and the Son in both communion and affection; a never-ending passion to praise God; an abiding urge to love, serve, and honor the Father, the Son, the Spirit, and the saints, and inward freedom to express that urge creatively and spontaneously-these things will be the essence of the life of heaven, and they are already the leading marks of spiritually renewed individuals and communities in this world. To describe situations of renewal, as Protestants, using the word revival, are prone to do, as heaven on earth is not devotional hyperbole; intrinsically and ontologically, that is exactly what the renewal of the Christian people is.

Second, renewal is a Christological reality, in two ways. First, it is subjectively Christocentric, in the sense that awareness of the gracious, beneficent personal presence of the glorified Lord Jesus—“Jesus, my Shepherd, Husband, Friend, my Prophet, Priest and King, my Lord, my life, my way, my end,' as Newton's marvellous hymn puts it; Jesus, who guards, guides, keeps, and feeds me, and finally receives me to be with him forever in glory, is the very heart of the renewed Christian's sense of reality.

The vision of Christ's glory, the realization that every one of God's good gifts comes to us through him and the passion to love and adore him, come to pervade the minds and hearts of persons in renewal to a degree that is a major anticipation of heaven, as was said in the last paragraph. The lady who explained to me her identification with a certain renewal movement by saying, 'I just want the Lord Jesus to run my life,' could not have been better directed: she was after the right thing, and she was looking for it in the right place. It is precisely in renewal that love to Jesus and fellowship with him become most clear-sighted and deep.

The most obvious evidence of this is the hymnology of renewal movements. Charles Wesley was the supreme poet of love to Jesus in a revival context: think of his “Jesus, lover of my soul,' and the final stanzas of “Thou hidden source of calm repose'
Jesus, my all in all thou art,
My rest in toil, my ease in pain,
The medicine of my broken heart,
In war my peace, in loss my gain,
My smile beneath the tyrant's frown,
In shame my glory and my crown;
In want my plentiful supply,
In weakness my almighty power,
In bonds my perfect liberty,
My light in Satan's darkest hour,
In grief my joy unspeakable,
My life in death, my heaven in hell.

Or think of this, from the supreme preacher of love to Christian renewal context, Bernard of Clairvaux:

Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.
O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek,
To those who fall how kind thou art
How good to those who seek
But what to those who find? Ah! this
Nor tongue nor pen can show:
The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but his loved ones know.
Jesus, our only joy be thou,
As thou our prize wilt be;
Jesus, be thou our glory now
And through eternity.

One mark of spiritual authenticity in the renewal songs of our time-Christian camp fire songs, as they have sometimes been called-is that in them the theme of Christ's love to us and ours to him surfaces once more, and strongly.

Second, renewal is *objectively* Christocentric, in the sense that through it believers are drawn deeper into their baptismal life of dying with Christ in repentance and self-denial and rising with him into the new righteousness of combating sin and living in obedience to God. Authentic revivals have deep ethical effects; they produce authentic sanctity-really, though not always uniformly, tidily, or calmly - along with authentic ministry one to another; and both these features of authentic Christianity should be viewed as the supernatural life of Christ himself living and serving in and through his members by means of the operation of the Spirit. Also, the intensified communion with Christ should be seen as based upon the dynamic reality of this our union with him - or, better, this his union with us.

The third point in the biblical concept of renewal is that it is a *pneumatological* reality, in the sense that it is through the action of the Holy Spirit doing his New Covenant work of glorifying the glorified Christ before the eyes of the understanding of his disciples, as was described above, that renewal actually takes place. Here,
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incidentally, is a sure test of whether particular stirrings of excitement about interior experience of God are instances of Holy Spirit renewal or not: as Jonathan Edwards argued against critics of the Great Awakening, it is not the devil who exalts Christ, but the Holy Spirit, so that if the experiences in question deepen Christ-centered devotion, that proves their source. And if they do not, that proves their source too. For Satan's strategy is always to distract men from Christ, and getting them to concentrate on exotic experiences - visions, voices, thrills, drug trips, and all the mumbo-jumbo of false mysticism and nonrational meditation - is as good a way for him to do it as any other.

In addition to characterizing renewal in this way, biblical theology answers for us the question, what place has renewal in God's overall purposes? “Restore us again, O God of our salvation,' prays the psalmist, “and put away thy indignation toward us! Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? Wilt thou prolong thy anger to all generations? Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?’ (Psalm 85:4-6).

Those verses, which can be matched from many passages in the psalms and the prophets, beg for a quickening visitation to the community (“restore, or revive, us again’) which will have a twofold experiential significance. First, this reviving will be experienced as the ending of God's wrath, the termination of the impotence, frustration, and barrenness which have been the tokens of divine displeasure for unfaithfulness. Second, this reviving will be experienced as the exulting of God's people: joy will replace the distress which knowledge of God's displeasure has made the faithful feel. Then, third, as appears most clearly from the Acts narrative, such reviving is also experienced as the extending of God's kingdom.

God's visitation to renew his own household regularly has an evangelistic and cultural overflow, often of great power, leading to the fulfillment in churchly terms of what Zechariah foresaw in terms of the post-exilic restoration: “Ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of the Jew, saying “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zechariah 8:23). Again and again, for the glory of God in and through his church, this pattern of events has needed to recur, and has in fact recurred, both in and since the biblical period.

In Dynamics of Spiritual Life, Dr. Lovelace argues that the apparent antithesis between the two models of cyclical and continuous renewal which the Old and New Testaments respectively seem to throw up is not absolute since the same spiritual forces operate in both types of situations. “I agree, and to clarify the point I offer a distinction between renewing or reviving as an act of God - that is, the initial visitation which sparks off a new movement - and revival or renewal itself - that is, the state of revivedness in which God's people continue until for whatever cause the power of the original visitation is withdrawn.

Thus one may say that Pentecost was a day of renewing; that renewal conditions surrounded all the protagonists of the church history recorded in Acts, as the New Testament letters also show by the quality of the devotional experience to which they testify; but that six of the seven churches of the Apocalypse had quenched the Spirit, so that the quality of their inward responsiveness to Jesus Christ was now noticeably reduced, and repentance on their part and a fresh visitation from their Lord was urgently needed. How this might bear on the present life of our own churches, and on our own roles and responsibilities within them, is something at which we must look with some care. But first we should spend a moment reviewing the elements in revival, which I announced as the second part of our discussion.

The Elements in Renewal

The phenomena of renewal movements merit much more study by church historians, theologians, and exponents of Christian spirituality than they have yet received. At surface level, they vary widely, as do the movements within which they appear, and we should not be surprised at that. For, in the first place, spiritual movements are partly shaped by pre-existing needs, which in their turn reflect all sorts of nonrecurring cultural and economic factors, as well as many aspects of the morbid pathology of sin and spiritual decline; and, in the
second place, the spiritual experiences of Christians are determined in part by temperament, by atmosphere, and by pressure groups, all of which are variables; and, in the third place, God the Lord appears to delight in variety and never quite repeats himself. But at the level of deeper analysis, deeper, that is, than verbal and cultural variants and preset interpretative grids, there are constant factors recognizable in all biblical and post-biblical revivals and renewals of faith and life, whatever their historical, racial, and cultural settings. They number five, as follows: awareness of God's presence; responsiveness to God's word; sensitiveness to sin; liveliness in community; fruitfulness in testimony. Let me illustrate them briefly. 

(1) Awareness of God's presence. The first and fundamental feature in renewal is the sense that God has drawn awesomely near in his holiness, mercy, and might. This is felt as the fulfilling of the prayer of Isaiah 64: If: “O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence . . . to make thy name known to thine adversaries, and that the nations may tremble at thy presence.’ God “comes,” “visits' his people, and makes his majesty known. The effect is regularly as it was for Isaiah himself, when he “saw the Lord sitting on a throne' in the temple and heard the angels' song-'Holy, holy, holy'-and was forced to cry, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips' (Is 6:1-5). It is with this searching, scorching manifestation of God's presence that renewal begins, and by its continuance that renewal is sustained. Says Arthur Wallis: “The spirit of revival is the consciousness of God.’ Wrote Duncan Campbell, out of his experience of revival in Lewis from 1949 to 1953: ‘I have no hesitation in saying that this awareness of God is the crying need of the church today.’ This, and nothing less than this, is what the outpouring of the Spirit in renewal means in experiential terms.

(2) Responsiveness to God’s word. The sense of God's presence imparts new authority to his truth. The message of scripture which previously was making only a superficial impact, if that, now searches its hearers and readers to the depth of their being. The statement that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart' (Heb. 4:12) is verified over and over again. Paul thanked God that when the Thessalonians heard from the missionaries “the word of God ... you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God' ( 1. Thes 2:13). They did because “our gospel did not come to you in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction' (1:5). It is always so in renewal times. God's message-the gospel call to repentance, faith, and holiness, to praise and prayer, witness and worship-authenticates itself unambiguously to men’s consciences, and there is no room for half measures in response. That leads to our next point.

(3) Sensitiveness to sin. Deep awareness of what things are sinful and how sinful we ourselves are - conviction of sin, to use the old phrase - is the third phenomenon of renewal that calls for notice. No upsurge of religious interest or excitement merits the name of renewal if there is no deep sense of sin at its heart. God's coming, and the consequent impact of his word, makes Christians much more sensitive to sin than they previously were: consciences become tender and a profound humbling takes place. The gospel of forgiveness through Christ's cross comes to beloved as never before, when folk see their need of it so much more clearly. That conviction of sin was very much part of the early Christian story, and the opening chapters of Acts give us three examples of it.

In Acts 2:37-41 we see conviction accepted. Peter's congregation was “pierced to the heart” (2:37) with a sense of their guilt for compassing Jesus' death. The Greek word for ‘pierced' means literally to inflict a violent blow; it is a painfully vivid image for what was an acutely painful experience. Shattered, the congregation cried out, “Brethren, what shall we do?” Peter showed them the way of faith, repentance, and discipleship, and three thousand of them took it. Thus, conviction was the means of their blessing.

In Acts 7:54-60 we see conviction resisted. Stephen has accused his Jewish judges of resisting the Spirit,
murdering the Christ, and showing contempt for the law (7:51-53). They are “cut to the quick' (7:54)-the Greek word literally means “sawn apart'; it expresses the inner turmoil arising from the conjunction of inescapable guilt and uncontrollable anger. Too proud to admit they had been wrong, they ground their teeth, yelled at Stephen, stopped their ears, mobbed him, ran him out of town, and stoned him to death. The trauma of felt guilt had driven them into hysteria. Conviction in this case was the means of their hardening.

Then in Acts 5:1-10 we see conviction killing - literally. Peter tells Ananias that he has lied to the Holy Spirit and so to God, and Ananias dies. A divine judgment, certainly; but what account of it should we give in human terms? The most natural view is that in that revitalized community, where sensivity to the presence of God and hence to the foulness of sin was exceedingly strong, the realization of what he had done so overwhelmed Ananias that his frame could not stand it, and he died of shock; and Sapphira the same. They literally could not live with their sin. Thus, conviction became the means of their judgment.

What do we learn from this? That under revival conditions consciences are so quickened that conviction of sin becomes strong and terrible, inducing agonies of mind that are beyond imagining till they happen. But conviction of sin is a means, not an end; the Spirit of God convinces of sin in order to induce repentance, and one of the more striking features of renewal movements is the depth of repentance into which both saints and sinners are led. Repentance, as we know, is basically not moaning and remorse, but turning and change: 'about turn, quick march' is a good formula to express its meaning. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, Paul says, “The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation,’ and in the next verse he applauds the robustness of the Corinthians' repentance in the matter about which he had rebuked them. “What earnestness . . . this godly sorrow has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong!” Vivid conviction produces vigorous repentance.

In times of renewal the impulse constantly recurs, often in defiance of cultural conditioning, to signalize and seal one's repentance by public confession of what one is renouncing: as was done at Ephesus, apparently spontaneously, when “many . . . of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices' (Acts 19:18), and some occult practitioners went so far as publicly to burn their very valuable books of spells-a costly and humbling gesture, no doubt, but equally certainly a liberating one for those who made it. One or more of three motives prompts public confession. It is partly for purgation: individuals feel that the only way to get evil things off their conscience and out of their lives is by renouncing them publicly. Sins are also confessed for healing (Jas 5:16): pocketing pride and admitting one's faults and failings to others is part of God's therapy. And, finally, sins are confessed for doxology: “Come and hear, all who fear God, and I will tell of what He has done for my soul' (Ps 66:16). This kind of confession is likely to appear spontaneously wherever there is genuine renewal.

(4) Liveliness in community. Love and generosity, unity and joy, assurance and boldness, a spirit of praise and prayer, and a passion to reach out to win others are recurring marks of renewed communities. So is divine power in their preachers, a power which has nothing to do with natural eloquence. John Howe, the Puritan, once Cromwell's chaplain, spoke of this in a passage in a sermon on Ezekiel 39:29 (“I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God'). Preaching in 1678 and looking back on the great days of the Puritan revival under the Commonwealth, he told his congregation:

> When the Spirit shall be poured forth plentifully . . . I believe you will hear much other kind of sermons ... than you are wont to do now-a-days. . . . It is plain, too sadly plain, that there is a great retraction of the Spirit of God even from us. We [preachers] know not how to speak living sense [= sensus, a feeling, felt reality] unto souls, how to get within you; our words die in our mouths, or drop and die between you and us. We even faint, when we speak; long experienced
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unsuccessfulness makes us despond. We speak not as persons that hope to prevail, that expect to make you more serious, heavenly, mindful of God, and to walk more like Christians. . . . When such an effusion of the Spirit shall be as is here signified . . . ministers . . . shall know how to speak to better purpose, with more compassion and sense, with more seriousness, with more authority and allurement, than we now find we can."

Also in renewal times God acts quickly: his work accelerates. When Paul left Thessalonika after between two and three weeks' ministry there he left behind him a virile church whose quality can be gauged from 1 Thessalonians 1-3. God had moved fast. No wonder Paul asks them to pray that “the word of the Lord may speed on literally, run) and triumph, as it did among you' (2 Thes 3:1). Truth spreads, and people are born again and grow in Christ, with amazing rapidity under renewal conditions.

(5) Fruitfulness in testimony. Revival of the church always has an evangelistic and ethical overspill into the world: Christians proclaim by word and deed the power of the new life, souls are won, and a community conscience informed by Christian values emerges.

Such in outline is the constant pattern by which genuine movements of renewal identify themselves. Christians in renewal are accordingly found living in God's presence (coram Deo), attending to his word, feeling acute concern about sin and righteousness, rejoicing in the assurance of Christ's love and their own salvation, spontaneously constant in worship, and tirelessly active in witness and service, fuelling these activities by praise and prayer. The question that presses, therefore, is not whether renewal is approved as a theological idea or claimed as a shibboleth of fashion (to say “we are in renewal' is almost mandatory in some circles nowadays). The question that presses is whether renewal is actually displayed in the lives of Christian individuals and communities: whether this quality of Christian life is there or not. Which brings us to our final Section).

The Quest for Renewal

This is where analysis finally merges into application and lecturing becomes preaching. I have three points to develop: First, our guilt in not being renewed, and God's call to us to repent of it; second, our inability to renew ourselves, and God's call to us to seek renewal from him; third, our obligation to remove obstacles to our being renewed, and God's call to us to act now in this matter. What this amounts to is a summons to us all to be more honest with God, more simple and thoroughgoing in our response to his grace, more open and straightforward both with him and with others, than we may have been hitherto. Let me try to spell this out as I understand it.

Theme one: our guilt in not being renewed, and God's call to us to repent of it. For this I need only refer you once more to the letters of our Lord to the seven churches of the Revelation. With only one of them, the Philadelphian congregation, was the Savior pleased; the Ephesian church was condemned for having left its first love (2:4f), the church at Sardis for being dead (3:1), and the church at Laodicia for being self-satisfied and self-deceived. “I know your works,' says Jesus to them; 'you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.... Those whom I love I rebuke and chasten; so be zealous and repent’ (3:15-17, 19). It is hard to doubt that this is the mind of Jesus with regard to many churches in North America today.

Biblical theology knows no middle condition, for churches or for Christians, between spiritual advance under God's blessing and spiritual decline under his displeasure. The root of spiritual decline is always human unfaithfulness in some form, and its fruit is always chastening judgment from God, whose gracious plan and supernatural enabling are hereby slighted and dishonored. Marks of decline include high tolerance of half-
heartedness, moral failure, and compromise; low expectations of holiness in oneself and others; willingness to remain Christian pigmies; apathy about the advancement of God's cause and his glory; and contentment, even complacency, with things as they are.

Charles Finney once said, "Christians are more to blame for not being revived, than sinners are for not being converted.' Was he right? It is, at the very least, a question worth thinking about as we reflect on the relevance to ourselves of Jesus' words to the Laodiceans. And perhaps in doing this we shall need to make our own the words of the Anglican litany: "from hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, good Lord, deliver us.'

So we move to theme two: our inability to renew ourselves, and our need to seek this blessing from God by prayer. The point here is that whereas self-reliance, expressing self-sufficiency, is natural (we might almost say, instinctive) to us in our fallenness, it is beyond us to compass spiritual renewal by any form of activity that we organize.

The principle is that underlying Isaiah 22:8-14, where Judah's feverish bustle of defensive activity in face of trouble was ruling out anything in the nature of a genuine return to God and a genuine dependence on him for the deliverance which only he could give. To look to human ingenuity, however, for that which only God in his grace can give is arrogant, inept, and in the outcome barren. And that is how it is in the matter of renewal.

When Christians, by the Laodicean character of their lives and their ecclesiastical systems, have quenched the fire of God's Spirit, and so brought about a withdrawal of God's presence and glory, it is beyond their power to kindle the fire again, much as they might wish to do so; only God himself, by his own quickening visitation, can renew, and for this we have to wait on him in patient, persistent, penitent prayer until he is pleased to act. Charles Finney, who for a decade after his conversion was used by God in a continuous revival ministry, came to think, evidently generalizing from that experience, that self-examination and earnest prayer on a congregation's part would always secure a divine visitation and fresh outpouring of the Spirit immediately. But the experience of many who have sought to implement this formula, and indeed the different and disappointing experience of Finney himself in later years, shows that this is not so.

In no situation can revival be infallibly predicted or precipitated; there are no natural laws of renewal for man the manager to discover and exploit. That, however is no cause for discouragement, for the other side of the coin is that the possibility of renewal can never be precluded either; no one can set limits to the graciousness of God who has promised that we shall find him when we seek him with all our hearts. To seek God and his renewing grace, recognizing that he can renew us though we cannot renew ourselves, is in this instance the only constructive thing that is open to us to do. "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find,' says our Lord (Mt 7:7). The Psalter provides several pattern prayers for this purpose, notably Psalms 44, 67, 74, 79, and 85. Waiting on God in constant acknowledgment of need, pleading that he should move in mercy, is the way forward here.

Finally, we move to theme three: our obligation to remove hindrances to renewal, and God's call to us to begin doing this now. A moment ago I said that we cannot precipitate a visitation from God. That is true; God is sovereign in these matters and takes action to answer prayer at his own speed and in his own good time. Yet there is something we can do at this present moment to bring spiritual quickening nearer, and that is to break with things that are in their own nature Spirit-quenching.

For instance: surely clericalism as a leadership style is Spirit quenching. Clericalism, which on my analysis involves more persons than the ordained, is a sort of conspiracy between leaders and those led: the one party (it does not matter which) says, "all spiritual ministry should be left to the leader,' and the other party says, "yes, that's right." Some leaders embrace clericalism because it gives them power; others, running scared,
embrace it because they fear lest folk ministering alongside them should overshadow them, or because they feel incapable of handling an every-member-ministry situation. But every member-ministry in the body of Christ is the New Testament pattern, and anything which obstructs or restricts it is an obstacle to a renewing visitation from God. What does this suggest that leaders, and others, ought to do now?

Again: surely formalism as a worship style is Spirit-quenching. But many churches seem to view worship in a way that can only be called formalistic, for their interest is limited to performing set routines with suitable correctness, and there is no apparent desire on anyone's part actually to meet God. What does this suggest that leaders, and others, ought to do now?

Yet once more: surely personal attitudes of complacency about things as they are is Spirit-quenching. Think of your own church or fellowship: to what extent do you see in it the reality of worship? faith? repentance? knowledge? holiness? Do its members resolutely, energetically, passionately love the Lord? Do they love each other? How do they pray? How do they give? How much support do they get from each other in times of personal need? How much sharing of their faith do they do, or try to do? Ought you to be content with things as they are? Think also of yourself, and of what these folk see in you. Ought either they or you to be content with what you are? It must be expected that those led will become like their leaders; that is the natural thing to happen; but if it happens so in your church or fellowship, will that be good enough? What does this lien of thought suggest that leaders, and others, ought to do now?

The first step, perhaps, to the renewal of the Christian people is that leaders should begin to repent of their too-ready acceptance of too-low levels of attainment both in themselves and in those whom they lead, and should learn to pray from their hearts the simple-sounding but totally demanding prayer in Edwin Orr's chorus: 'send a revival-start the work in me.'

The second step, perhaps, is for leaders to challenge their followers as to whether they are not too much like the Laodiceans of Revelation, and whether Jesus' searing words to these latter-'you are lukewarm. . . . you say, I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. . . . be zealous, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock....'-do not apply directly to themselves, here and now.

The third step, perhaps, is for us all, leaders and led together, to become more serious, expectant, and honest with each other as we look to God in our use of the means of grace-sermon and sacrament, worship and witness, praise and prayer, meditation and petition-and as we seek to make our own the psalmist's plea: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23-24). Then the fourth step, perhaps, will be to trust the Holy Spirit to lead us on from there.

Does this prospect strike awe into you? I am sure that it does, and it has the same effect on me. But that is no justification for drawing back from it, when our need of it is so plain,

“O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy' (Hab3:2).

Let all the people say: amen.
Links to Articles on Reformation Spirituality and 500th Anniversary

From the February / March 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:
• An Introduction to the Age of the Reformation, by Timothy George
• Roots that Refresh: The Vitality of Reformation Spirituality, by Alister McGrath
• Reading Scripture with the Early Reformers
• Your Word is Truth: Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together

From the April / May 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:
• A Spiritual Orientation to 500th Reformation Anniversary, by Raniero Cantalemessa
• Justification: A Summary of Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue and Joint Agreement
• Faith is not Opposed to Love: A Clarification on “By Faith Alone” by Benedict XVI
• Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Joint Statement on the Gift of Salvation

From the October / November 2017 Issue of Living Bulwark:
• From Conflict to Communion: Common Commemoration & Five Ecumenical Imperatives
• Grace Abounding – Rediscovering the Graciousness of God, by Alister McGrath
• Pope Benedict on Luther, Grace, and Ecumenical Cooperation Today, address to Lutherans
• Cultural Consequences of Christian Disunity, by Christopher Dawson
• Steps to the Renewal of the Christian People, by J.I. Packer

This essay was first published in Summons to Faith and Renewal: Christian Renewal in a Post-Christian World, (c) 1983 by the Alliance for Faith and Renewal, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

J. I. Packer is a Reformed theologian and retired professor of theology at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada. He is a prolific author, and a well-known pastor, teacher, and lecturer.
Kairos Mission Year in Belfast

A Video Presentation with Maria Bielicka

The Kairos Mission Year in Europe and the Middle East is about focusing the energy and talents of young graduates from our region and others to serve as Mission Volunteers in our local outreaches and programmes. This often means fundraising to move city or country for a year to be on mission as staff in University and Youth Outreaches or the GAP Base. We have seen encouraging growth in Kairos Europe and Middle East, Mission Volunteers are young men and women who can see this and want to be a part of it. There are several Mission Volunteers in Kairos Europe and Middle East this year, each willing to invest a year of their lives to this mission, moving it forward, building something that will last and having a lot of fun while doing so!

To learn more about the Kairos Mission Year in Europe and the Middle East visit their website at:

https://www.kairos-eme.org/mission-year
Kairos GAP Program in North America

A Video Presentation

Mission
The mission of Kairos in North America is to help young people find theirs. Our vision is a generation of youth equipped to stand: young men and women who are confident in their faith, leaders in church and society, and on mission for the good news of Jesus Christ. We work towards this by doing four things:

- We run programs to help youth grow as Christian disciples
- We partner with other Christian organizations as a way for us to connect young people to missionary environments
- We serve churches and Christian communities to improve their ability to work with their youth
- We provide resources to help young people follow the Lord, and to help others engage in youth ministry

Name
Kairos is the ancient Greek word for the opportune moment, the special season, and the right time. It’s the time when God acts, and we respond.

Young people live in just this sort of time. It’s when they make the decisions that determine the person they will become and when they have the opportunity to give their whole lives for something truly significant.

Our organization was created to encounter young men and women during this kairos in their lives: to introduce them to Jesus Christ, to call them into mature discipleship, and to walk with them as they respond.

Network
Kairos is the family of youth and college outreaches related through The Sword of the Spirit. The Sword of the Spirit is an international, ecumenical association of Christian communities. These communities are not churches but groups of church-going families and singles striving to live as disciples on mission. While we mainly work in this context, we also partner with other organizations that are equipping their youth to stand.

To learn more about the Kairos GAP Program in North America visit their website at:

http://kairos-na.org/gap/

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The Lois Project for Moms and Mentors

The Lois Project is a Missional Motherhood Collective that aims to empower moms and mentors in their Christian faith. We seek to share real stories and insights from women around the world as a means of connection and encouragement and to cultivate a sincere faith that influences future generations.

You Can Buy That Field

by Amy Hughes

I’m outside the sanctuary again, straining to hear a muffled sermon or catch words in a worship song. I’m outside in the hallway because the baby is crying. Because church falls during naptime or because she won’t stay in the nursery, or for one of a million different reasons, in this season I often find myself on the outside looking in. Missing sermons. Interrupted during worship. And that lie, that sneakiest of lies fed on sleep deprivation and the frustration of getting everybody out the door to go to a service that I don’t get to participate in… creeps in. Is this really for you? Do you have a place here? Would it be any different if you just stayed at home?
At such times the treasure of a deep spiritual life seems out of reach. It seems like something for people with more energy or brainpower or patience. Like something I had once in college and might have again in 15 years. It seems like right now I can’t afford it. Like a child with face pressed against a store window display who doesn’t have enough money to buy what she’s drooling over.

Yesterday I read the parable of the hidden treasure in Matthew 13:

> The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matthew 13:44)

The devotional commentary on the passage spoke to me: “He [the man in the parable] did not have enough to buy the treasure. Fortunately, he only needed enough to buy the field. In a similar fashion, God offers his kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy as an incomparable treasure at a price we can afford.”

> The great surprise of Christianity is that God offers us his treasure hidden in a price we can afford.

He whispers to you, sleep-deprived and discouraged: You can buy the field. You can afford the place where this treasure is found… a life walking with Jesus. A life of prayer, sacrifice, discipleship. You can afford it, though it will come at the cost of any other kind of life. You can afford it, but it will cost you everything.

The difference between whether this statement makes you excited or weighs on you heavily depends on if you know, really know by experience, what’s in the field. When I think only of the cost, I start to think like the world… I see the craziness of what it costs to buy this (seemingly random) field. But an encounter with Jesus, with the living God, is like the moment when you realize what really lies in the field. When your shovel hits buried treasure. When selling everything seems like an amazing deal compared with what you are gaining.

Mamas, mentors, caregivers, my prayer for you, for us, is twofold:

1. That you would know that joy that makes all costs more than worth it. That every time you are reminded of what it costs to follow Jesus in your daily life with little ones, in being faithful to your spiritual commitments, in fighting for a prayer time, in saying yes to a hospitality request, you are also reminded, nearly overtaken by joy in realizing what you have now gained in Christ.

2. That you find peace in knowing you only need to buy the field, and you can afford it. If you trade your desires for your life for his desires for your life, he will show you the treasure. That means that deep spiritual life you crave is within your reach. Discipleship and motherhood can go together. You can thrive spiritually, even when circumstances whisper otherwise.

You only need to buy the field, and you can afford it.

So go… buy the field. Fight for your time with the Lord. Wrangle your babies in church. Ask God to show you the hidden treasure in the little things and the joy that makes all costs laughable.
Amy was inspired to start The Lois Project as a way to combine her love of writing and deep discussion with her desire to strengthen connections between Christian moms. She has a degree in French Education and English and taught high school French before becoming a stay-at-home mom with her three children. Amy and her husband John are part of the Word of Life Community in Ann Arbor. She loves anything and everything to do with France, has read the Harry Potter books way too many times and has a mild addiction to baby girl hair accessories (and two daughters to wear them!)

See also > A Secret Treasure, by Stephanie Smith

The Lois Project is a group of Christian women from various cities, countries, and church backgrounds who feel a common call to be disciples on mission in all seasons of life. Most of us find ourselves in a season of care-giving as mothers, grandmothers, mentors, or teachers.

Many of our writers are part of an international, ecumenical Christian community called The Sword of the Spirit. Although we come from Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant traditions we seek to foster unity among these groups and work together.

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Photo credit: mother and son looking out of window from Bigstock.com
I remember clearly the day that I realized the treasure of a time set aside daily just to be with the Lord. I was twenty-five, recently graduated from Queen’s University in Belfast, newly arrived in London, teaching at North East London University, and unbelievably lonely. I was sitting on my bed in a tiny room—the guest bedroom of a little London flat, which belonged to a friend of a friend of mine. She had generously invited me to live with her until I got my feet under me in a strange city and a new job. I had picked up my Bible to read a portion and then it struck me. No matter where I lived, I had always had this time in the morning with the Lord. In the short twenty-five years I had been on the planet at that point, I had called at least fourteen houses “home”. I had lived on two continents in five countries; I was a true nomad! In all of those places and with all the different friends I had made, the one consistent relationship that had not changed was with God. And this God, the creator of the universe who gives all living things breath, who knows the intimate thoughts of every human being, who is beyond my ability to comprehend, this God showed up every morning for a chat with me!

In the years that have passed from that day to this (and I don’t intend to tell you how many they have been but they have been many) I have never lost the conviction that this is the greatest privilege I will ever have, however long I live.

This is the greatest privilege I will ever have, however long I live.
I have had the opportunity to visit other countries; I have loved and lost friends. I have worked a myriad of jobs – including wife and mother, perhaps the most demanding of all possible jobs. I have had the opportunity to serve at my church and in my community. I have participated in urban outreaches and helped with groups providing food for the hungry. In all of these opportunities I have been so very, very blessed – but never more so than in this daily audience with my Maker.

I think back to my first year as a new mother - there were many times when I was so tired by the time I got to pray that I fell asleep in mid-sentence. When the children were very little I often could not find a moment to pray until my husband came home. I remember on more than one occasion waiting by the back door, coat and shoes on, baby in my arms, the others squabbling at my feet, my ears straining for the sound of a car in the driveway. No sooner did I hear the sound of the garage door than I bolted from the house, thrust the baby into that kind man’s arms, mumbled something super Christian like “Take them, I gotta go”. Extricating myself from the toddler’s sticky hands, I would go running down the drive gulping fresh air, marveling at the feeling of freedom and aware of the privilege of being in the presence of a God who would take time to be with a sleep-deprived, escapee mother and to hear her muttered prayers for patience. I remember too, when the children were a little older, locking myself in the bathroom just to get a moment’s peace. Was that very presumptuous of me to assume that the God of the universe would meet me there? But amazingly He did.

No matter where I was, or in what condition, when I turned to the Lord, He was always there. How do I know? Did I always hear Him speak to me? Was there always an experience of His presence? Did the Scripture verses I read always leap off of the pages rich in meaning? Actually no, not always. Sometimes but not always. But I cannot count how many times God tells us in Scripture “I will never leave you or forsake you”. So, whenever I turned to Him I know He was there.

Nowadays I often get up with the dawn and walk down the lane outside my house while praying. Being out in the midst of the creation that He made can sometimes help me focus. Every breath I take, in and out, I remember comes from Him. The sunlight through the leaves or the moon fading as the sky lightens or the birds singing their little hearts out remind me that the rest of God’s creation does a better job than me of being all that it was created to be. It is often, in those moments, that it is almost as though the curtain between there and here thins a little and I can sense His closeness and the presence of all the heavenly host that Hebrews 12 says are cheering us on.

God is waiting to spend time with every single one of his children.

God is waiting to spend this time with every single one of His children. Maybe you won’t be seeing the first gleam of dawn but rather the full light of day. Or maybe it will be in the cool of the evening like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Whatever time you choose, you can be assured that God will be there waiting to be with you, to impart wisdom, to pour out His love, to guide, direct, challenge and heal. Even if you are in a season of life where finding a consistent time is close to impossible, and even if you find you have little to say or can hardly stay awake, it is worth taking a minute to turn your face to the one who can change you “from one degree of glory to another” as you gaze on Him, your truest treasure.

Stephanie is a mother of three grown children, currently works as a high-school science teacher and enjoys writing on subjects she is passionate about. She grew up in India and Bangladesh as the daughter of English missionaries. After returning to England in her mid-teens she attended university in Belfast, Northern Ireland, worked as a college professor and research scientist before marrying and moving to Ann Arbor. She worked for Michigan Family Forum, a pro-life group based in Lansing, before having children. She home-schooled her children up to high-school after which she
returned to teaching. Stephanie and her husband, Dan, are members of the Word of Life community in Ann Arbor.

See also > You Can Buy That Field, by Amy Hughes

Lois Project is a Missional Motherhood Collective that aims to empower moms and mentors in their Christian faith. We seek to share real stories and insights from women around the world as a means of connection and encouragement and to cultivate a sincere faith that influences future generations.

The Lois Project is a group of Christian women from various cities, countries, and church backgrounds who feel a common call to be disciples on mission in all seasons of life. Most of us find ourselves in a season of care-giving as mothers, grandmothers, mentors, or teachers.

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Negativity: The Enemy of the Full Life in God

by Tom Caballes

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

- Philippians 4:8 ESV

One of the consequences of human fallenness is our susceptibility to lies, suspicions, discouragement, hopelessness, and negativity. We easily doubt the motives of the people around us, and we judge them quickly. We easily get discouraged when things do not go our way. It is very convenient for us to be selfish and seek our own plans rather than to keep the unity of the body of Christ. But Jesus came to give us life in its abundance [John 10:10]. God wants us to get rid of negativity in our lives, which, if we allow to grow in its fullness, will bring death. Negativity keeps us spiritually stunted. It is a tool which the enemy uses to put us down and keep us down and prevent us from being fruitful sons and daughters of the Most High.

So How Do You Avoid Negativity in Life?

1. Have a realistic and balanced approach to life. There will always be some bad in the good, and there will always be some good in the bad things we face and experience. God works for the good for those
who love Him [Romans 8:28], so even in seemingly hopeless situations, look for the silver lining in life.

2. Avoid the habit of judging people – especially their motives. You are not their judge, but God is; you need to give people the benefit of the doubt and not assume the negative motive behind an act.

3. You need to grow in your own self-image: yes, we are weak, sinful, and ‘bad’ – but God loves us; Jesus died for every one of us. You should see yourself based on how God sees you, and not how the society does. You have value, purpose and meaning because God deeply cares for and appreciates you!

4. You always have a choice of having a negative or positive outlook on any situation – choose to be positive - in consideration with reality. As Philippians 4:8 says, your mind should be filled with things that are holy, lovely, pure, and honourable. The battle is in your mind – choose the positive view of life.

5. Do everything to preserve the unity in Christ – in your marriage, family, and community. It will not be easy or convenient; there is a price to you to pay – your ego, your pride, and your self-centredness. When you see people’s failures and weaknesses, remind yourself of your own failures and weaknesses!

6. Truth can be found in the Word of God - you need to grow in wisdom with God’s word so you can know the lies of the enemy. Your mind needs to be transformed so you can know God’s will for you – see Romans 12:2. The battle is in your mind – choose to live and abide by the truth and not by the lies.

7. Be wary of negative people - they can bring you down. Choose to associate with positive people.

8. Finally, have a positive outlook on life no matter what – because you are on the winning side! God is with you, Jesus is your Lord, you live by the power of the Holy Spirit, and you will inherit heaven one day. You may not be on top of the world in this life, but you have on your horizon a life eternal with God – one with no death, death, crying and pain – for eternity! How much more positive can you get with that?

Other Scripture passages:

1. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. [Romans 12:2 ESV]

2. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [Philippians 4:4-7 ESV]

3. Other references: Ephesians 1:3-4; Ephesians 4:1-3; and Galatians 6:9-10.

For personal reflection or group sharing

1. Is negativity a regular thinking pattern for you? How can you slowly unlearn it?

Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
The New Testament speaks about our hidden life in God many times. Jesus, in Matthew 6:1-8, alluded to this hidden life. It is as if we are living two lives – one an external life and one a secret, hidden, internal life. This is not the same as living a double life - we act one way with one group of people and act another way with another group. Our external life is the physical one and what other people see – our reputation, awards, career, wealth, possessions and talents. Our internal life is the invisible one that only God sees – our prayer life, spiritual motives, intercessions, secret services, and the unrecognised giving of our money, time and talent for God’s Kingdom. The truth is, there is only that will remain – our secret life. We are all very busy and concerned with our external life – but are we taking care well of our internal life, that one that will last forever? We will all leave our external life behind anyway. Which one is of infinite value?

So How Do You Live Your Hidden Life Well?
1. The key to having a good internal life is your prayer life. It is your lifeline with God. Everything else in your internal life flows from your prayer life with God. Invest for your eternity with a daily quality time prayer life. Spend and devote your time to reading and studying God’s Word. Prioritise your life well.

2. Know that there is nothing in your external life you can bring to where you are “going,” and you need to be unattached to all those things, including good things. Be ready to leave them at a second’s notice.

3. As long as you are alive, you will need to put up with your sinful self. That is why you should practice daily repentance. Strive to grow in holiness and avoid temptations – you know well your weaknesses.

4. The two main enemies of having a good hidden life with God are selfishness and self-centredness. You need to battle against them for the rest of your life continually. Conquer the old man or woman in you.

5. Serve God and His people, with or without any recognition. People’s appreciation is not the one that you want to look for, but God’s approval, as He will reward you in due time. See Ephesians 6:5-8.

6. Grow in becoming Christ-like. Learn to be loving, gentle, faithful, kind, meek, and self-controlled, among many other things. Follow in the footsteps of Jesus - even if it is the inconvenient and harder thing to do.

7. Aim to do great things for God. Seek to live an ordinary life extraordinarily; live a Spirit-filled life. Do not live a half-hearted, compromised, and lukewarm Christian life – God will spit you out. You have only one life to live – live it to the full for the glory of God - see 1 Corinthians 10:31.

8. Share the gospel with people you meet – so that they can have an internal life as well, the one that lasts forever. This is the best thing you can ever share with others – Jesus and a new hidden eternal life in Him.

**Other Scripture passages:**

1. *But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* [Matthew 6:3-4 ESV]

2. *They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.* [1 Timothy 6:18-19 ESV]

3. *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* [2 Corinthians 4:17-18 ESV]


**For personal reflection or group sharing**

1. Do you value your internal life with God more than your external life? Does it show in how much time you spend on your internal life? How do you conquer busy-ness to have a good hidden life in God?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
A New Book to Help Christians Put God at the Center of Time Management

Introduction: Most time management is about getting control by putting our plans first and our plans at the center. Elizabeth Grace Saunders in her new book, Divine Time Management: The Joy of Trusting God's Loving Plans for You, turns the order upside down. She demonstrates how to recognize wrong approaches to time management and how God wants us to learn to surrender control of our plans by putting God first and aligning our plans with his loving plan for us. She challenges us to think of time management in terms of our identity and relationship with God, and how we align with God’s purposes for us.

This book is an excellent introduction for Christians who want to grow in stewarding their time well and purposefully for daily life, work and mission.

The following brief excerpt is from Chapter One.

- Don Schwager, editor

Embracing a God-Centered Approach to Time Management

by Elizabeth Grace Saunders

For those of you reading this book who are Christian, or at least curious about a Christian perspective, I want to share what I believe God has revealed to me about His goals for time management…

In Matthew 22: 36–40, Jesus gives instruction on which commandments should be our focus:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Jesus is the expert on how to live a life aligned with God, so His explanation of where to focus must be great
Living Bulwark

advice. But if you’re anything like me, you’re probably wondering, “So what does this mean that I actually have to do?”

I’m sure millions of people have talked about the practical application of these verses, so I don’t claim to have the exhaustive answer to that question. However, after spending a couple of years conversing with God on the topic, I came to the conclusion that there are three goals for time management that will best allow you to fulfill God’s two greatest commandments, to love God and your neighbor and to live out His best for you. We’ll fully unpack these in each of the three sections of this book. But in this chapter, we’ll do a quick overview of what I believe are the three right goals for divine time management:

- Trust in God at the center
- Love for your true identity
- Alignment with God

We don’t need to live in a self-reliant universe where we stress about doing everything right, and then pray to ask God to bless our plans. As children of the Most High God, we have the right to live in a God-Centered universe. We can banish fear-based control. We can focus on love and alignment. And we can be free to choose God’s best.

It’s time to stop living below the line of our privilege.

**Right Aim: Trust in God at the Center**

There is a time and a place for building self-discipline, for wise decisions, and for effective tactics. But all of these things should not be about us ensuring that our needs and wants are met through our own efforts. Instead, all of these strategies should free up our time so that we have enough space in our lives to love God, hear His voice, and stay connected with Him. Then from that place of greater intimacy with God, we can know what He wants us to do and how to do it. We can also receive all of the blessings God has for us.

Focusing on trusting God with all of our time and time management decisions opens up space for prayer and for rest. When we genuinely seek His will, God typically asks us to do less than we think we need to do and to rely on Him more. This moves us from a place of pride around how great we are at managing our time, and from fear when something doesn’t go as it “should” to a place of humble confidence in God that everything is working out for the best. And trust in God frees us up to love people enough to let go — Sometimes meaning letting go of our schedules to be with them, and sometimes meaning letting go of a compulsion to help others that isn’t from the Lord.

Putting trust in God at the center of your time management allows you to enter into God’s best…

**Right Aim: Alignment with God**

Putting trust in God at the center of your time management while knowing, loving, and living out your true identity will naturally put you in a better position to invest your time well. From this position of strength, you have the ability to choose to stay in alignment with God. Alignment means being in the Lord’s will on a big-picture level and walking in faithful obedience to what you believe God wants you to do on a day-by-day basis.

Desire for alignment with God was one of the most important qualities of the great men and women of the Bible from Abraham to David to Esther to the disciples. I believe it is an essential goal of divine time management.
**Journey to My Twilight Career**

Never, in my wildest dreams, would I have guessed that I would be doing this kind of work at age 74. When, at age 37, I was newly married with the first of our 6 children on the way, laid off and directionless after a year from my first attempt at a career (that is another story!), when God intervened in my life and led me into a 30 year career in construction, project management and finally, to Facilities Management, which eventually led me into the Career Coaching field.

During the late 80’s and 90’s, I worked as a construction project manager for a bank in the Detroit area. My work took me often into Detroit. On one of my projects I was struck by the lack of minority skilled trades persons on the job, even though we hired a minority General Contractor. Investigating the reason for this situation over the next few years was the birth of my interest in career development and eventually led me to the desire to enter the field.

In 2001, after being laid off, I decided I would try to get into Career Development work in Detroit even though I had no previous training in the area. What I did have was a compelling interest and a little knowledge of the Career Development field. The best opportunity I could find with my current level of qualifications was applying for a Facility Management position with a company that was just awarded a 10 year contract to manage all the Detroit Public School facilities, some 270 of them. The Lord opened this door for me.

I would be working with a diverse population of skilled tradesmen and women, some 1000 of them from every one of the 20 plus trades unions in the city. For the next 8 years I would go on to promote growth in awareness and participation of youth in the construction fields. It would be the last job in my 30 year career in
construction; my best job, my most challenging job, my highest paying job, the job where I first experienced work as a mission, where I felt I was a real part of the Word of Life’s outreach to Detroit that sought to break down racial and denominational barriers, build relationships, evangelize and work toward Christian unity.

In 2008 I went back to school for some training as a Career Development Facilitator. Two years later, I began volunteering as a Career Coach for the Word of Life, putting in some 2800 hours over a two and a half year period. Among others, I worked with Gappers and UCO members in order to complete the field work required for the Career Development Facilitator certification.

In 2010 I began volunteering as a Career Coach for the Word of Life, putting in some 2800 hours over a two and a half year period. Among others, I worked with Gappers and UCO members in order to complete the field work required for the Career Development Facilitator certification.

In conjunction with this effort, I became aware of the services and programs at Rockport Institute. Their career aptitude testing services and Career Coaching program were just what I was looking for. Completing Career Coach training gave me the basic knowledge and skills, with an increasing ability to interpret the results of my clients’ aptitude testing, to assist them in coming to understand their capabilities and design a career that will both satisfy and challenge them. Rockport’s Career Choice program includes all the relevant factors to be considered in making a career decision.

Making an impact for Christ in our Work
From a Christian point of view, this decision is really a matter of Stewardship. It is a decision that is a combination of our free will and God’s grace. A process of discovering, developing and applying the gifts and abilities the Lord has given us in an area of our choosing, where we can make an impact for Christ.

My goal is to help facilitate career coaching throughout Sword of the Spirit communities and to encourage others to get training in this area. I believe the need is great, but so is the opportunity to advance our call and mission through work life and service.

See > Part 2: Gaining God's Perspective on Work and Discerning Work Life Direction, by Joe Firn.

Joe Firn is a member of the Word of Life community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.
I believe that the Lord wants us to be people of influence and impact for the kingdom of God. We are called to be salt and leaven - and this extends to our work life as well. Steve Clark, in his essay in the booklet on *The Mission of the Sword of the Spirit*, uses the example of a brother from one of our communities who gave a sharing and articulated what an “ordinary” life of mission looks like. This brother was a successful businessman, a good community man, who also lived a Christian community home life.

Steve described this “ordinary” brother’s experience at work, how he expressed being a missionary at work. His low key approach to evangelism took advantage of opportunities as the Spirit led him. He described his growing influence by the way he carried himself, his attitudes, the ways he approached his responsibilities and his high standards of ethics in conducting business. Steve also said that this brother “spent more time thinking about how to do a good job than how to evangelize people, and doing a good job put him in a position to have an evangelistic influence, because it gave him respect.” This is the most common and ordinary way for a brother or sister to become a person of influence in their work and gives us the initial call or mission for our work.

We can summarize this brother’s influence at work by saying that he demonstrated what it means to be a “Christian Professional” in his work life. Both parts of this phrase are critical. To become a person of influence we must both be a virtuous “Christian,” a person of integrity, as well as a “Professional”, highly competent in our chosen profession. Being a solid Christian, but incompetent at one’s profession is a bad witness, as is being highly competent but an unscrupulous pain in the neck to work with or to work for. Our formation as a disciple
of Christ through our relationship with the Lord, the gift of the Holy Spirit, our community life and training, and the support of our brothers and sisters provides the base from which we are sent out to engage the culture through our work or service and become a person of influence. Getting the “Professional” part of that phrase right becomes a critical decision and goal if we are to fulfill our call as a disciple on mission.

Discerning our career direction is a prudential judgment. It begins with the understanding that we are free to choose what kind of work and career path we want to pursue - given our gifts and abilities, our commitments to family, Christian community, and the call to be disciples of Christ on mission. In choosing our work direction, it is a question of stewardship, free will and God’s grace. In Jesus' parable of the talents, the master did not specify how the servants were to use the resources he had given them. However, he did have the expectation that his servants would use those resources responsibly and put them to work in a wise and judicious way that would bear fruit for his estate. In choosing our work career path, we have the responsibility to make a wise choice based on counsel (what are our gifts, available job opportunities, training, etc.) and the important step to pray and seek God’s light and wisdom.

I think it is important to look at the world of work from three different perspectives: first, from the point of view of how God looks at work, second, what employers are looking for in an employee, and third, how we make a good decision for our work life direction.

**God’s Perspective on Work**

From God’s point of view, he has a four-fold purpose for work. First, we are called by grace to be a co-creator with him in his on-going work of creation by bringing the world to a greater development toward the end he had in mind when he first created it.

Second, by surrendering our Work Life to the Lordship of Christ, we enter into a participation in his on-going work of Redemption and bringing forth the Kingdom of God by becoming a disciple of Christ and missionary to the Work place. By performing our work with excellence and integrity, we grow in responsibility and influence others for Christ as a Christian Professional. This influence extends to witnessing to the “joy that is in you,” and supporting other Christians in your work place and profession.

Third, by discovering, developing and applying our "Godly Design" to the particular work He leads us to become good Stewards of his gifts to us. Our work becomes a vocation and provides a vehicle for applying our gifts and talents to an area of need in the world.

Fourth, our work allows us to earn a livelihood that supports the way of life the Lord calls us to and allows us to financially support the building of the Lord’s Kingdom. Together, these four purposes add meaning to our Work Life and give us an opportunity to make an impact on our culture and the world around us.

**What Employers Are looking for in a Candidate**

To understand what employers are looking for, we need to understand the fundamentals about how the World of Work is organized and how it functions. At its most basic level, every occupation in the World of Work is made up of a series of job functions called Technical Competencies. These consist of a body of knowledge, a set of skills, an array of aptitudes and a set of behaviors. Of these four components, knowledge, skills and behaviors can be improved and developed by coaching and learning opportunities.

At the heart of every technical competency lies the fourth component, natural abilities, or aptitudes. These are inherited abilities that are fixed throughout life and determine the ease or difficulty with which a person will learn and perform the work functions associated with that aptitude and the Technical Competencies for that occupation. Aptitudes and personality characteristics combine to form your aptitude profile, and the world of work is organized by aptitude profiles. Assessing your aptitudes and knowing your aptitude profile, enable you
to understand your capabilities and choose an occupation that will play to your strengths and what you will need to do to overcome your weaknesses in your chosen profession.

**Competencies in work**

The world of work is made up of three types of competencies. Success in your career depends on obtaining and advancing in all three of these types of competencies, advancing from awareness, to basic, to intermediate, to advanced, to the expert level.

1. Technical - these are the competencies that make up your specific occupation; engineer, banker, accountant, teacher, sales person, etc. You advance in your career by systematically developing the knowledge, skills and behaviors of the Technical competency level above you.

2. Non-technical - These are concerned with the characteristics and behaviors needed to be a high performer at work. They are concerned primarily with the way a team member goes about performing their technical competencies.

One example of this set of competencies comes from the State of Virginia. The Virginia Competencies are: understanding the organization’s purpose and mission, attaining goals and objectives, customer service, communication, teamwork, leadership and personal effectiveness. Each competency has a set of indicators that can be observed and measured.

3. Leadership competencies come in five types: leading self, leading projects, leading others, leading programs and leading organizations. Each of the non-technical competencies has a leadership component with indicators. This is a natural starting point in developing your leadership capabilities. The Virginia web site has an assessment tool for evaluating how often a team member or team leader demonstrates the indicators for each non-technical competency. This assessment can be used for self-improvement, training, or performance management. Employers are looking for the candidate that meets the technical, non-technical, and leadership requirements for the open position they are seeking to fill.

There is one additional type of competency, called “pastoral,” that is appropriate for Christians. This competency includes topics like evangelism, intercession, spiritual warfare, pastoral care, apologetics, scripture, and Christian living courses. The Sword of the Spirit has a number of courses for pastoral workers and leaders who serve in Kairos, University Christian Outreach, Saint Paul's Outreach, and our communities. There is one more step which I think we need - some formal levels of proficiency for this competency. Growth and development is based on the wisdom needed for the issues encountered at the different levels of pastoral responsibility. These Pastoral Competencies are vital to grow in as we strive to become Christian Professionals and encounter the many challenges of working in an increasingly secularized society.

**Discerning Work Life Direction**

Your Work life discernment is a self-discovery process of your "Godly Design", leading to a deeper understanding of yourself and your capabilities, and then making a free choice to apply those capabilities in an area of need. Our Godly Design is made up of our fixed and acquired abilities and the desires God places in our hearts. Our Fixed Abilities are those talents, personality traits and natural abilities inherited through our parents and grandparents. Our Acquired abilities are changeable and develop through our life experiences. These are our accumulated knowledge, skills, values, interests and formed character traits. God also works in us through our desires. He leads us to areas in our journey we find interesting, then fascinating, then compelling. We may develop a passion to solve some issue, problem or question, or provide a specialty service or product for the common good. This process is made easier by working with a Career Coach.

To uncover your Godly Design, your Career Coach will use a combination of reflective writing on your life
Living Bulwark experiences, an assessment based inventory of your personality and aptitudes, a series of three reading assignments that include written reports this Coach would develop on your background and natural abilities results. Understanding your aptitudes, how they have worked in your life in the past and how these can work for you in the future in conjunction with your personality characteristics is empowering. Once you understand your capabilities, you have the needed information to design your future work by using your best natural abilities and personality characteristics in an area of your choice where you believe you can make an impact. You can move forward in your career choice with confidence that you can quickly learn, perform and advance in the technical competencies for your chosen profession as a Christian Professional.

Finding Purpose in Mission

Entering the World of Work as a Christian Professional does not answer the question “For what purpose?” To begin with, answering that question includes embracing the purposes of God for our work. But that question is further answered in a unique way by each brother and sister as we grow in our Christian life, our vision for our work, and the opportunities that come from our personal growth and development in our profession. A helpful resource comes from the book, Restoring All Things by Warren Cole Smith and John Stonestreet. They write in regard to viewing and participating in the world:

“But Christ followers are to see the world differently and have a different posture toward it. Rather than safety from or capitulation to the world, the grand narrative of Scripture describes instead a world we are to live for. This world, Scripture proclaims, belongs to God, who then entrusted it to His image bearers. He created it good and loves it still, despite its brokenness and frustration. He has plans for it yet and invites the redeemed to live redemptively, for its good and our flourishing, even as we live for Him.”

They go on to ask four questions “that connect our actions with what we know to be true about the world from the biblical story.” These questions can give us food for thought as we seek to grow in our vision for our work and serving the common good.

1. “What is good in our culture that we can promote, protect, and celebrate? Christians believe that how God created the world was, in His own words, ‘good’. Even after the fall, much of this goodness, such as beauty and truth and human dignity, remains.”

2. “What is missing in our culture that we can creatively contribute? Christians believe that humans were created to be creative. When something good is missing in a particular time and place, we should find ways to offer it to the world. God is glorified and the world is helped by properly ordered human creativity.”

3. “What is evil in our culture that we can stop? God hates evil, and so ought we. Throughout history, courageous Christians have worked to stop that which destroys and deceives. We must do no less. It’s a basic requirement of loving our neighbors.”

4. “What is broken in our culture that we can restore? Ultimately, we reflect the gospel most clearly when what has been damaged by sin is restored to God’s intended purposes.”

We fulfill these questions by living out our call to Christian Community, but also by applying them to our work or service. They are directly related to our mission: to “Be” a Bulwark that defends people in this time of spiritual warfare, a Prophetic People that lives the Christian call radically as disciples, and a Servant People called to serve church and society by working to stem the tide of evil and promote holiness in the daily circumstances of our lives. Our mission also calls us to “Do”: to Proclaim the kingdom of God by life and word: to Gather others into communities and movements so they can live effectively; to Leaven: live as disciples and work for truth and justice in the daily circumstances of life, and to Defend Christian truth and
morality in church and in society.

Living out our call to be disciples on mission: to live, work, and strive, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that others might have true life in Christ, now and forever, is fulfilled by living out our community life. This life empowers us to go out from our communities, becoming a Christian Professional in our chosen work, virtuous and highly competent, impacting culture as a missionary while serving the common good.

Joe Firn is a member of the Word of Life community in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.
On Holiday – The Place to Be with Brothers and Sisters

from Sword of the Spirit in Europe and Middle East

by Bob Bell

De Vossermeren, Lommel, Belgium.

From Friday 28th July to Friday 4th August, some 700 members of 11 communities in the Sword of the Spirit’s Europe and the Middle East Region (and some from further afield) made their way to a small town in northeast Belgium for – of all things – a holiday together. This is the fourth in 14 years, and the largest ever.

I’m rather a fan of these holidays and look forward to each one – I think because they allow me to relax with my “family,” brothers and sisters in the Sword of the Spirit, many I’ve known for decades, but some I’ve gotten to know at these very events. The pace is relaxed, the offerings are good quality.

The venue is run by Centre Parcs, known to many in the UK and on the Continent for its well-managed holiday cottages and grounds, and all-weather swimming pools and recreation areas. The site we’ve been using can host 3,500 people, and we often are able to get cottages close to one another. People rent self-catering cottages for 4, 6 and 8 people – modest in size, but well appointed. There are also hotel rooms available on site.

Most people rent cottages as families, or two families together, or add a single person or two for good measure. Some of us intentionally invite members of other communities to be part of our cottages. In mine there were three single men connected with the Jerusalem community in Belgium, a married couple from the community in Dublin, and two men who are at university and who, like me, are Londoners. I think it was a good experience for all of us in the cottage, partly because of the richness of backgrounds, and the variety of ages – from late teens to late 60s – and partly because we tried to make it a good time for the others.

We invited another cottage round one evening for supper, and on another evening two cottages. We had a BBQ ourselves one evening, and often welcomed friends and new acquaintances for a drink and a chat after evening events.
Many of us – young and old alike – rented bicycles for the week to get around to the events and to one another’s cottages – some of us seemed to be taking a “learning-by-doing” approach, which added to the excitement, both for cyclists and pedestrians. And of course some of us are used to driving on the left, and didn’t always remember that we were on the Continent.

To make this a quality experience for everyone, an enormous number of hours were invested, mostly by volunteers among us, to organize and run the various events of the holiday. There was tennis and soccer, a volunteer choir and orchestra ensemble, painting workshops and exercise classes, and much more.

Mornings there were quality programs for children and young people, arranged by ages and staffed by experienced and professional workers. From all I could tell, the kids were having a good time. There were daily morning meditations, and some quiet space for reflection, followed by talks by Dr Dan Keating, well-known teacher in the Sword of the Spirit, and then personal testimonies by various ones of us that corresponded with the topic of the day. It was a genuine holiday, with no obligations to attend anything, but most people attended at least the morning events.

We celebrated the Lord’s Day opening together on Saturday evening, and afterwards, in mix-and-match arrangements for meals in our cottages. There was also a prayer meeting one evening with encouraging prophetic words from the Lord, a men’s breakfast, a women’s night. And one evening various countries provided characteristic ethnic food, drink, song and dance in the cottages, with hundreds of us making the rounds to taste what was on offer.

Many of the people attending admitted that OnHoliday wouldn’t have been their first choice of place or time, but they saw it as an opportunity to be with brothers and sisters from the region and experience Sword of the Spirit life on a bit wider scale. The next OnHoliday is in only a few years. I’m looking forward to it.

Bob Bell is a member of the Antioch Community in London, United Kingdom.
7th International Conference of the Bethany Association

Women living single for the Lord in the Sword of the Spirit

by Marcela Pérez

From the 9th to the 13th of August we celebrated the seventh International Conference of the Bethany Association (an international and ecumenical association of women living single for the Lord in the Sword of the Spirit) in Glasgow, Scotland. The theme was “Living Single for the Lord in the Sword of the Spirit”. 26 sisters gathered from 10 countries and many different cultures but together in one same ideal: to love the Lord with an undivided heart, being totally consecrated to him and making him our portion and our treasure.

For the first day of the conference we had the pleasure to receive our brother from the Servants of the Word, David Quintana, who encouraged us by speaking about the prophetic place we have as women living single for the Lord in the Sword of the Spirit and the richness of this way of life. In the following days we had work sessions led by the sisters in the Bethany Association Council where we discussed about our relationships as Bethany Association sisters, our vision for the future, supporting the sisters who are discerning, promoting vocations and more about our way of life.

Although it was not only work! What a blessing it was to share with women of many ages, cultures, countries and languages and yet being able to enjoy in fellowship! We had times to share and celebrate between us: the latinas taught “Salsa” Dancing, the filipinas showed us the art of Tagalog; we had time to sing, talk and listen one another’s adventures in life. Of course we couldn’t miss the beauties of such a wonderful country, so we took a day trip under the traditional, rainy scottish weather. We went to Stirling Castle and visited a beautiful small village names Luss.

Thank you, Lord, for allowing us to live and share this time together as sisters!
We would like to specially thank our brothers and sisters of the Community of the Risen Christ, in Glasgow, Scotland for being our hosts. We could truly experience the Lord’s love through your hospitality. Thank you!

What the Lord said to us:
The Lord definitively spoke to each one of our hearts during the prayer times. He affirmed that he has called us with a purpose that has not been given to anyone else and that he has called us to live out this way of life in a specific way for such a time as this. He spoke to us about seeking for a greater unity among us and walking closer to him (#BetterTogether).

The Lord gave us a certainty in our hearts of the great things he has prepared for Single Life in the Sword of the Spirit and how his Spirit is eager to call more sisters to give out their lives more fully to him.

*We ask for your prayers…*

That the Lord may allow us to be fruitful and respond faithfully to the call he has given us.

That he will fulfill all the Bethany Association’s projects and plans.

That the Lord may call more sisters to live single for him.

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Marcela Pérez is a sister living single for the Lord with an Initial Agreement with Bethany Association. She is currently a member of the Arbol de Vida Community in San Jose, Costa Rica
A Interview with Bruce Yocum - 50th Anniversary of Catholic Charismatic Renewal

At the end of May of this year (2017), International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) organized a conference in Rome to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the movement. Bruce Yocum, former Presiding Elder of the Servants of the Word, was present and spoke at the conference. Martin Steinbereithner interviewed him to find out what happened at the conference and what the main take-aways were.

To learn more about the Servants of the Word, a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord in the Sword of the Spirit, visit them at:

http://servantsoftheword.org/
Bringing God Our Emptiness

by Sam Williamson

My leadership at my church feels fruitless and my last few sermons stank. In the first 34 weeks of this year, I published only 25 “weekly” articles. And all my service to a partner charity feels last minute, like I’m doing everything in the nick of time.

Recently, I spend less time with my wife than I want; my brother (who lives in Australia) is visiting for two months and I’ve only met with him once; I’m having far fewer one-on-one meetings to care for acquaintances; and I’m falling behind in paperwork, housework, and email.

Bilbo Baggins once reflected, “I feel like butter scraped over too much bread.”

My heart says, “Me too.” I have too much to do and too little time to do it. My activities suffer from inadequate attention because I’m off to the next thing, which I’ll also do badly because something else (or someone else) cries out for attention. This morning I read this old quote:

God created the world out of emptiness, and as long as we are empty, he can make something out of us.

God is calling me to embrace my emptiness.

He Guides Us All There
Time management wisdom tells us to focus on the important and shed the unimportant. That’s easy when you have one “kid” but what about when you have nine? I don’t sense God releasing me from any of my “dependents” (though I keep asking!).

God stretches us, leading us to a life beyond natural resources. There is something he likes about the poor and he seems attracted to the needy. Because we cry out to him. He not only calls us to being poor in spirit, he guides us to that very place:

- He leads Moses and Israelites into the Red Sea” trap”, where only God can save.
- He calls Gideon to reduce his army from tens of thousands to three hundred.
- He sends schoolboy David—not strapping Saul—to fight hulking Goliath.

Why does God continually maneuver us into places of weakness? Because he needs our poverty more than our riches; he wants our neediness more than our usefulness.

Which is exactly where God is bringing me. It’s the total opposite of self-esteem and natural giftedness; he is transforming my spirit of pride (I can do it!) into a spirit of emptiness (HELP!)

God’s friendship is with those who know their poverty.

**We Need That Friendship**

Too many books on spiritual wisdom teach us exactly how to prosper: *The Seven Essential Steps to Raising Godly Children*, or *The Manual for Successful Preaching*. But Christianity teaches us that our greatest need is friendship with God. Oswald Chambers said it this way,

> He can accomplish nothing with the person who thinks that he is of use to God. The most important aspect of Christianity is not the work we do, but the relationship [with Him] that we maintain and the surrounding … qualities produced by that relationship.

That is all God asks, and it is the one thing that is continually under attack.

Amid my “too much to do and too little time to do it,” God is calling me back to friendship with him. It’s not the giftedness I offer, but the poverty I bring.

All we really need is need.

Sam

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Sam Williamson has published numerous articles and has written two books. He has a blog site, www.beliefsoftheheart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsoftheHeart.com.


Top photo by Jeremy Yap on Unsplash.com
Jesus calms the storm at sea

A mighty fortress is our God
Hymn by Martin Luther

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing,
Our helper he amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Living Bulwark

Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he.
Lord Sabbaoth, his name,
From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him.
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers
Not thanks to them, abideth.
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also.
The body they may kill,
God’s truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever.

> See also Thy Mercy Free by Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German theologian, an Augustinian monk, and an ecclesiastical reformer whose teachings inspired the Reformation and deeply influenced the doctrines and culture of the Lutheran and Protestant traditions.
Crucifixion, painting by Michael O'Brien

Thy Mercy Free

Hymn by Martin Luther

Out of the depths we cry to thee.
Lord, hear us, we implore thee.
Bend down thy gracious ear to us.
Let our prayer come before thee!
On our misdeeds in mercy look.
O deign to blot them from thy book,
And let us come before thee.

So let thy people hope in thee,
And they shall find thy mercy free,
And thy redemption plenteous.

Thy sov'reign grace and boundless love
Show thee, O lord forgiving.
Our purest thoughts and deeds but prove
Sin in our heart is living.
None guiltless in thy sight appear.
All who approach thy throne must fear,
And humbly trust thy mercy.

So let thy people hope in thee,
And they shall find thy mercy free,
And thy redemption plenteous.

Thou canst be merciful while just.
This is our hope's foundation.
In thy redeeming grace we trust.
O grant us thy salvation.
Upheld by thee we stand secure.
Thy word is firm, thy promise sure,
And we rely upon thee.

So let thy people hope in thee,
And they shall find thy mercy free,
And thy redemption plenteous.

Like those who watch for midnight's hour
To hail the dawning morrow,
We wait for thee, we trust thy pow'r,
Unmoved by doubt or sorrow.
So let thy people hope in thee,
And they shall find thy mercy free,
And thy redemption plenteous.

So let thy people hope in thee,
And they shall find thy mercy free,
And thy redemption plenteous.

> See also A Mighty Fortress Is Our God by Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German theologian, an Augustinian monk, and an ecclesiastical reformer whose teachings inspired the Reformation and deeply influenced the doctrines and culture of the Lutheran and Protestant traditions.
Jacques-Joseph Tissot (1836-1902), was raised in a Christian household in Nantes, a French seaport on the north-west coast of France. He studied at a Jesuit boarding school in Belgium where he became friends with a number of English students and from then on he became interested in all things English. He subsequently switched his French name, Jacques, to the English form, James.

Around the age of 17, James aspired to become an artist, much to the annoyance of his father who was an prosperous linen merchant and successful businessman. His father relented and at the age of 19, Tissot went to Paris and lodged with an artist friend of his mother, while he studied and worked in the studios of the French academic painters. Within a short period of time he became an admired painter in Paris and received a number of commissions for wealthy patrons. He later moved to London and painted there for several years before returning to France.
Burning compulsion to illustrate the life of Christ
In the year 1885 James experienced a reawakening of his Christian faith during a church service where he saw a vision of Jesus comforting the poor. Tissot described it as his 'Road to Damascus.' Shortly after, he did a painting called, “Inward Voices,” which depicted his vision of an impoverished couple sitting on the rubble of a building in ruins. The crucified Jesus sits beside the couple — scourged, bleeding and wearing a crown of thorns, offering them comfort and hope in the midst of sorrow and ruin. This spiritual experience had a profound affect on his art and inspired him to spend the rest of his life illustrating scenes from the Bible.

In preparation for his series on the Life of Christ, Tissot in 1886 at the age of fifty, made an expedition to Jerusalem, Palestine, Syria, and Egypt to record the landscape, architecture, costumes, and customs of the Holy Land and its people, which he recorded in photographs, notes, and sketches. Tissot sketched and then painted his many figures in costumes he believed to be historically authentic, carrying out his series with considerable archaeological exactitude. Tissot made further visits to Jerusalem and the Middle East in 1888 and 1889.
Tissot drew more than a hundred detailed pen-and-ink sketches that were later integrated into his finished compositions in watercolor of the Gospel narrative. He formally entitled his project which took 10 years to complete, *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, a collection of 350 watercolors that depicted detailed scenes from the New Testament description of the birth of Jesus through to his death and resurrection, in a chronological narrative. Two hundred and seventy of them were exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1894-95 and received enthusiastic acclaim.

In July 1894, Tissot was awarded the Légion d'honneur, France's most prestigious medal. The exhibition traveled to London in 1896 and to the United States in 1898-99, visiting Manhattan, Brooklyn, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago. In 1898, the compositions, each accompanied by related Gospel verses, were first published in four volumes known as the “Tissot Bible.” In 1900 the Brooklyn Museum in New York purchased the collection of *The Life of Christ*.

During the last few years of his life Tissot began to paint a series of scenes from the Old Testament. Eighty Old Testament scenes were exhibited in Paris. He had hoped to complete his Old Testament series, but died suddenly in Doubs, France on 8 August 1902 (aged 66), while living in the Château de Buillon, a former abbey which he had
inherited from his father in 1888.

A selection of 200 paintings from The Life of Christ by James Tissot can be viewed in the Wikimedia Commons at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:The_Life_of_Jesus_Christ_by_James_Tissot

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