



Times of Change: 1515—2015. Wittenberg, Rome, Dubuque

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I

Tonight and tomorrow we are recalling two moments in time: the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's call for reformation in years after 1515, and the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion in December, 1965, of the reforming Council, Vatican II. The first lies centuries in the past; the second only a few decades. We recall these past events, however, for us who are thinking about today and planning for the future.

Is it not *Time*, time itself and history that have brought us together? Time is a mystery—as so many philosophers and writers observe. Time, the philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote, has a “mutual calling back and forth between the past and future.”¹ Time fashions cultures, ages, and civilizations. And so, to think together about time is here to reflect on the past and the future.

II

Fifty years ago, when I was here in Dubuque as a student at Loras College and at Aquinas Institute of Theology, time, for most of us, seemed to have little importance or presence. Time for me at the age of 19 in the 1950s was simply the day of a month posted on a calendar or the movement of the two hands on a clock. Time was static, and periods of time seemed all the same. It was said that in the 1950s President Eisenhower read the Sunday newspaper on Monday. Nothing happened in America. In the Midwest, everything seemed slow. Life just led up to that happy minute and second when I could leave whatever I was reluctantly doing.

Today we are ceaselessly aware of time and times. Social media gives description to more and more new generations, although often they last but a brief time, even as we are writing up—on an i-pad or a smart-phone—things to be done at once or in the future.

III

Fifty years ago, in the autumn of 1961, a seminarian at Wartburg Lutheran Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, walked over to Aquinas Institute, a Catholic seminary in Dubuque run by the

1. Martin Heidegger, cited in Fred Dallmayr, *Mindfulness and Letting Be. On Engaged Thinking and Acting* (New York: Lexington Books, 2014), 95.

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Roman Catholic Dominican Friars.² Although this was a journey of less than a mile, Jerry Folk passed that afternoon through four centuries. He introduced himself to us Dominican students raking leaves and announced that he wanted to take a course at that Catholic school. Jerry's request was impossible. First, a few courses were in a simple Latin. Moreover, too many courses held only metaphysics and church law from past centuries now being given to future priests for memorization. It was unthinkable that a Protestant would take a class in a Roman Catholic seminary, unthinkable in the USA, in the Western hemisphere, in the world. That afternoon in 1961, the young seminarian also mentioned to us Dominicans a strange term that we had never heard: something called “ecumenism.”

IV

At the end of the 1950s, some said that Dubuque was a particularly prejudiced city. Growing up elsewhere in Iowa, in Des Moines in the 1940s, I took for granted Catholic and Protestant tensions. Catholics had their own schools and hospitals, and they were forbidden even to open the door of Protestant churches much less to attend weddings and funerals within them. Walking home after school at St. Augustin's, I sometimes saw signs at a Protestant church for a lecture by an ex-priest, an evening's exposé of the dubious secrets of Rome. This tension between Christians seemed destined to last forever.

Staying with the past, we need to observe that at first Roman Catholic authorities forcefully and totally condemned ecumenism. In 1929, Pope Pius XI condemned “pan Christians.” In 1948, Pope Pius XII, rejected “false irenicism” and did not permit any

2. See Thomas O'Meara, “Ecumenical Beginnings in the Midwest,” in *Lutheran Partners* (January/February, 1993): 11-13.

theologians to be present at the initial meeting of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. In 1954, Catholics working as reporters were forbidden to attend the important gathering in Evanston, Illinois.

Suddenly, change in the form of “the ecumenical movement” arrived.

V

In that same October of 1961, an important visitor came to Wartburg Seminary: the distinguished Danish Lutheran theologian Kristen Skydsgaard. He asked to have lunch along with the faculty of Wartburg Seminary with the faculties of the Catholic Aquinas Institute and the Presbyterian and Methodist seminary at the University of Dubuque. After lunch, he pointed out to the professors of the three schools what an opportunity there was in Dubuque for ecumenism: three seminaries from the Lutheran, Roman Catholic, and Calvinist traditions. A year later, Skydsgaard was in Rome as an official observer at Vatican II.

VI

Shortly after Skydsgaard's visit, the faculties of the three Dubuque seminaries began to hold ecumenical discussions in theology. Meanwhile, the students in the Dubuque seminaries were working for more cooperation. Particularly the Wartburg seminarians were always pushing for more ecumenical events. For instance, they wanted their fine choir to sing in the auditorium of the Dominican priory. This seemed dangerous to the Dominican superiors but badgered by the Catholic and Lutheran seminarians they agreed and fixed the date. As the day for the concert approached, some of the Catholic priests noticed in horror that the day chosen for the concert—was March 17th. It was risky enough to have Lutheran singers performing in a Catholic institution, singing phrases about justification by faith to melodies by Bach—but on St. Patrick's Day! There had to be a show of Catholic identity. The Dominican superiors decided that at the reception afterward soft drinks would be served—but no cookies!

In Dubuque, the months from 1962 to 1964 witnessed how fast attitudes could change and prejudices fade. Ecumenism led not to indifference or conversion but to seeing Christianity more broadly and to understanding that within Christianity there could be different emphases to the Gospel of Christ. Learning about different traditions enriched each church. Warren Quanbeck, a member of the central committee of the Lutheran World Federation and also an observer at Vatican II, has written: “The twentieth century will be known in future church history books as the beginning of the great effort to bring the Christian churches together again, one that begins with the search for understanding.”³

3. Warren Quanbeck, *Search for Understanding. Lutheran Conversations with Reformed, Anglican, and Roman Catholic Churches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) 7. “Lutheran observers were among the most consistently present at the Council. Some published important studies aimed at the Council just before it began, and evaluations of the Council...even before the Council concluded. They evaluated the Council's achievement in a positive but constructively critical way.” (John A. Radano, *Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification*.

In the summer of 1964, a first prominent marker of change was reached—and after only a few years. The three seminaries in Dubuque and the School of Religion at the University of Iowa formed the Association of Theological Faculties in Iowa. Courses were shared by students and new ecumenical programs were offered. Clusters of seminaries in Berkeley and Boston were beginning to educate together—but Dubuque was among the first in North America, among the first in the world. In December, 1962, after the first session of Vatican II, Archbishop James Byrne of Dubuque was the first Roman Catholic bishop ever to speak in a Lutheran seminary in North America.

Stimulated by ecumenism, the three Dubuque seminaries—Presbyterian and Methodist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran—developed new programs in theological education. Ecumenism was for each school a creative liberation; ecumenism showed how to be a more effective seminary, a school for theology and ministry in the contemporary world.⁴

VII

The Vatican Council, aided by the Protestant observers, in those years from 1962 to 1965 helped the Catholic Church enter the ecumenical movement. The Catholic Church admitted that ecclesiastical sin existed and that reform as well as a fuller unity was needed.⁵ Its documents stated that the being of the church “subsists” in that Church (and not “is” that Church). There is a legitimate variety for churches and “ecclesial communities” drawn from varied cultures. There is a hierarchy of truths—for instance, justification by God is more important than the primacy of the bishop of Rome.⁶ Yves Congar, ecumenical pioneer and author of the first books on the idea of reform and the theology of church unity, summed up Vatican II in this way: “The vision of the Council has been resolutely that of a history of salvation completed by eschatology. And this occurred first because the Council assumed

A Chronology of the Holy See's Contributions, 1961-1999, to a New Relationship between Lutherans and Catholics and to Steps Leading to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009] 27); see Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, “The Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Movement,” *Mid-Stream* 27 [1988]: 13-34).

4. There is a word from the New Testament that I learned at Wartburg, as a student, a word popular with Paul Tillich and others after 1930: *Kairos*. This distinctive Greek word means time not as a this or that day but as a special moment, a special time in which something important is happening (Werner Schüßler, “*Kairos*. Dimensionen eines zentralen Begriffs im philosophisch-theologischen Werk Paul Tillichs,” *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 123 [2014]: 110-122). A *Kairos* in North America, fifty years ago, brought decades of reflection and change in Christian structures and organizations and communities, a time of countless articles, books, addresses, and journals. That moment became a movement, an age, a time.

5. See the history and bibliographies in Otto Hermann Pesch, *The Ecumenical Potential of the Second Vatican Council* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006) and in particular 31, 34-37. “The Council did not point to a particular path leading towards the unity of the Church; it did not even trace the larger area within which one should look for it” (Pesch, *The Ecumenical Potential*, 32).

6. Pesch, *The Ecumenical Potential*, 49-51.

the best of studies in the bible, patristics, and theology [after 1930], but also because it has been a pastoral council.⁷⁷

VIII

In 1963, at age 26, finished with studies in Dubuque and ordained, I was sent to Germany for doctoral studies—because of Wartburg and ecumenism in Dubuque. Some Dominican needed to know something about theology after 1400, and specifically about Luther and the Reformation. I went to Munich to study. Heinrich Fries, a pioneer of ecumenism in Germany, and Karl Rahner were on the faculty. However, in America in 1963, I did not know their work.

In 1967, when I returned to teach in Dubuque, I was often invited to go to Lutheran parishes in Northeastern Iowa to talk on Vatican II. The theme of my talks was: Did Vatican II fulfill Luther's desires? In many ways, it did: the liturgy in the vernacular with participation and variety, better and frequent sermons, a primacy of the Scripture, Bible study groups, and the church seen not as the hierarchy alone but as a vital organic community with lay ecclesial ministries.

IX

Early ecumenism brought a change by Roman Catholics in evaluating Martin Luther and the Reformation.

The years around 1900 were the height of a long hostility toward Luther and his Reformation. At that time, two scholars—one an Austrian Dominican, the other a German Jesuit—wrote multi-volume studies on Luther, the first detailed studies by Catholics. The Dominican Henry Suso Denifle in 1905 explained Luther in this way: everything in his thought and actions came from his being completely immoral. A Jesuit, Hartmann Grisar in 1926 used Freudian psychology to assess Luther. He concluded that he was not so much immoral as a pathological manic-depressive personality. Newer studies by Catholics after World War II, based on Joseph Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*,⁸ took a quite different

7. Congar, "Situation ecclésiologique au moment de 'Ecclesiam suam' et passage à une Église dans l'itinéraire des hommes," *Le Concile de Vatican II* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 27. Hans Küng writes in his latest book about taking Luther's demands for reform seriously—something that would be a therapy for saving the church today (*Can We Save the Catholic Church?* [London: William Collins, 2013], 136-139).

8. Lortz, *Die Reformation in Deutschland* (Freiburg im Br.; Herder, 1935), 2 vols., English translation published in 1968. Pope Pius XII asked that this study not be translated into other languages; see Robert Krieg, *Catholic Theologians in Nazi Germany* (New York: Continuum, 2004) 76; Lortz, *How the Reformation Came* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964). "One can hardly imagine the sensation when in 1965 a "Catholic Academy," the one in Munich in Bavaria, held a conference about the Catholic image of Martin Luther and for the first time invited Protestant speakers" (Pesch, *The Ecumenical Potential*, 55); see Pesch, "Twenty Years of Catholic Luther Research," *Lutheran World* 13 (1966): 303-316. Patrick Carey, "Luther in an American Catholic Context," in T. Maschke, et al, eds. *Ad Fontes Lutheri: Towards the Recovery of the Real Luther: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Hagen's Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001); Pesch, "Nun fühlte ich mich neugeboren.' Luther's Weg zur Reformation; Rückblick

direction, showing how the Reformation came out of widespread religious needs and social changes, and Luther's recovery of Christian principles. Yves Congar wrote in 1950: "Luther's preaching was a thunderous success first of all because at last people heard in it words like Gospel, grace, Christian freedom—indeed, Jesus Christ.... This is what justification by faith (alone) meant at the beginning for a vast number of people...In place of a political church, in place of a huge juridical organization, they found communities where they could hear the word of God and sing his praises with simplicity."⁹ Similarly, in 1967, the German Catholic theologian Otto Pesch published a definitive, lengthy study on Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas to show that the two theologians agreed on justification as God's basic initiative and sovereignty.¹⁰

X

In 1965, right after the Council ended, official dialogues were set up by the Christian churches. There were international dialogues—Lutheran and Anglican, Roman Catholic and Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox, etc.—and there were national dialogues. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic bilateral discussion in the USA was commissioned by the Catholic Bishop's Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and by Lutheran World Ministries (an American committee of the Lutheran World Federation). This dialogue first took place in 1965 and soon became significant. The Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles and the Lutheran George Lindbeck, professor at Yale, concluded: "These statements of the U. S. dialogue have been hailed in many countries as solid, productive, and potentially fruitful. They manifest greater convergence on central theological issues than has emerged in any other discussions between Catholic and Protestant churches."¹¹ The topics ranged from the Nicene Creed as dogma in 1965 to those in the late 1970s on teaching authority and infallibility. The value of the North American Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue was again singled out when Otto Pesch stated ten years ago at Marquette University that the signing by the representatives of the Roman Curia and the Lutheran World Federation of the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" at Augsburg, October 31, 1999, was in fact "a German-American joint venture:" that is, it was based on the statements of the German dialogue group and the work of the American dialogues.¹² So, the result of fifty years

und ein Urteil aus katholischer Sicht," Josef Freitag, ed., *Luther in Erfurt und die katholische Theologie* (Leipzig: Benno, 2001) 29-58.

9. Congar, *True and False Reform* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011) 139 (*Vrai et fausse réforme dans l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1950).

10. Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin. Versuch eines systematisch-theologischen Dialogs* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald, 1967/1985).

11. Avery Dulles, George Lindbeck, "Foreword," Glenn C. Stone, Charles LaFontaine, eds., *Exploring the Faith We Share* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) xf; see H. George Anderson, James R. Crumley, Jr., *Promoting Unity. Themes in Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989); Karen L. Bloomquist, Wolfgang Greive, eds., *The Doctrine of Justification: Its Reception and Meaning Today* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2003).

12. Pesch, *The Ecumenical Potential*, 54. That ecumenical prog-

of dialogue has been considerable. John Radano, recently head of the Western Section of the Vatican's Pontifical Council Promoting Christian Unity, has published a detailed book on that period of "a new relationship between Lutherans and Catholics, 1961–1999."¹³

Ecumenism, positive relations between Christian churches, changes at the Council of Vatican II—these are old events and their change-making influence is long absorbed. Prejudices have faded; insights into the teaching of Jesus have been shared. Ecumenism has been a success. There have been complaints for twenty-five years that the ecumenical movement has faded away. If it has slowed down, that is understandable because it has been a success. If there is less ministry to ecumenism, that is so because all our ministries can be ecumenical.

XI

What does the future hold for Lutherans and Roman Catholics? For their ecumenical dialogue? Evangelical Christians and Catholic Christians have distinct perspectives about the basic dynamic of Christianity. They spotlight in different ways the interplay between a sovereign, active God and a needy human person. Did not the tension between those two begin the Reformation?

Otto Pesch's studies on Luther and Aquinas conclude: "... The opposition between what is Lutheran and Catholic does not emerge from a comparison of individual topics but is seen initially and fundamentally in encounters between ways of thinking and between horizons of understanding."¹⁴ Lutheranism and Catholicism differ in their perspectives on the personal dialogue between what is revealed as grace, and the changing reality of the human person. Lutheran theology concentrates on the question of personal salvation and biblical salvation-history; it looks toward the past and the present; it is centered on Christ; it is *existential*. Catholic theology concentrates on objective realms within creation and human history; it ponders a world of grace as it looks toward the future: it is focused on the Holy Spirit; it is *sapiential*. Pesch concluded: "Grace is for Luther the essence of the forgiveness of God over against the guilt and nothingness of the human being. 'Grace' means a new relationship of the human person to God received in faith... For Thomas, however, 'grace' treats the destiny of the human person in its totality, in both creation and salvation, as an on-going history deeply touched by God."¹⁵ The two

ress, Lindbeck said, was due to the retention by both Catholicism and Lutheranism of a medieval heritage, a creedal stability, and liturgical sources.

13. John A. Radano, *Lutheran and Catholic Reconciliation on Justification*; see *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism. Exploring the Achievements of International Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). Msgr. Radano did his doctorate at the consortium of Dubuque seminaries in its first years, in 1970.

14. Ulrich Kühn and Otto H. Pesch, *Rechtfertigung im Gespräch zwischen Thomas und Luther* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1967), 78.

15. Pesch, *Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin*, 940f. Martin Heidegger in a seminar with Rudolf Bultmann in 1924 observed: "The object of theology is God. The theme of theology is man in the how of his being-placed before God.

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emphases and perspectives fashion differences, but are they not complementary? We are left not with disagreements over Greek dogmas or Baroque vestments but with religious thought-forms, with spiritualities in the widest sense. We need both.

XII

To be a dialogical Christian in today's complex society is not so much to focus on past externals but to seek how to make Christian words and realities attractive for today. Let us look at four areas.

Justification. That word and reality, God's accepting salvation, must address contemporary people within their human experiences. My life colors my understanding of the reality of God, the extent of sin, and the efforts of my personality. These reflections may not use the words or conceptualities of Aristotle or Paul or Luther.

Grace. We will continue to ponder the interplay of God's word and activity with an individual personality analyzed by so many psychologies. Divine grace and human person—each has its proper place and dignity. Neither "works righteousness" nor "efficacious grace" solves all problems. Christian life does not initiate or replace God, and God does not envy the image of God, the human person fully alive (as St. Irenaeus said in the second century). Today's psychological analyses, therapies, medical care, social frameworks, and ethical problems bring questions for teaching about justification and sanctification.

Liturgy. How does the church present the biblical word and sacramental reality in preaching and worship in today's age of media?

Authority. How do authority and teaching from within the church reach people who are free and educated? How does that teaching take place in the cloud of media? The American Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue group asked that the principles of diversity, collegiality, and subsidiarity should assist leadership in its teaching. The church as a whole and in its varied ministries

But the being of man is at the same time also a being in the world... On the other hand, he must be so created that the Fall and the being of sin are possible and are not a burden falling on God" (Heidegger, "The Problem of Sin in Luther (1924)," *Supplements. From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002], 105). Pesch concludes, "The sapiential theology of Aquinas does not replace the existential realization and does not want to do that. (Pesch, "Justification and the Question of God," *The Doctrine of Justification: Its Reception and Meaning Today* [Geneva: The World Lutheran Foundation, 2003], 107).

contributes to authority.¹⁶

There are no quick responses to these profound themes present throughout the history of Christianity. The very process of thinking about these topics is theology and spirituality. They draw the influence of the Holy Spirit to us so that we might serve the on-going history of grace and word on Earth.

XIII

The moment has arrived to return to where we began, to return to *Time*.

As I said, the first Lutheran seminarian to cross Dubuque fifty years ago walked through centuries. Yves Congar said that at Vatican II Roman Catholicism again accepted and entered “history” and stopped trying to reproduce the Middle Ages.¹⁷ Time never goes backward (as the Christian revelation of an eschatological history of salvation affirms). Time is not evil, although every fundamentalism (Protestant and Catholic fundamentalisms) flees time and history as dangerous. Time holds promises of a better future. With a remarkably modern sounding phrase, Thomas Aquinas observed that time can be our assistant. “Time is,” he said, “so to say, a discoverer, a kind of co-operator.”¹⁸

We are called to be the servants of time as we serve God’s kingdom in history. We live out our lives in the midst of the mystery of God’s saving grace in Christ and we minister to the church by discovering new ways of preaching. In the time now arriving there is much for each of us to say and to do.¹⁹

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16. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Coordinating Committee, *The Lutheran-Catholic Quest for Visible Unity: Harvesting Thirty Years of Dialogue* (Washington D. C.: USCC, 1998), 11.

17. “Everything is absolutely historical including the person of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is historical. Thomas Aquinas is historical, Paul VI is historical. Note that historical does not mean just that Jesus came at a certain point in time but that one must draw the consequences of the fact that he thought and spoke through the time in which he lived even as he is conditioned by it.” (Jean Puyo, *Jean Puyo interroge le Père Congar: une vie pour la vérité* [Paris: Centurion, 1975], 43).

18. Aquinas, *Commentary on the Ethics of Aristotle* 2, 4.

19. Published with permission of the author. First appeared in Janine Marie Idziak and Winston D. Persaud, eds., *Celebration of the 15th Anniversary of the Signing of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Event held by Wartburg Theological Seminary and the Archdiocese of Dubuque (Dubuque: Loras College Press, 2015), 11-19.