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# Texts and Contexts: A Personal Reflection on Formation *for* and *by* the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A.

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Winston D. Persaud, PhD

Wartburg Theological Seminary

Professor of Systematic Theology

Holder of the Kent S. Knutson and United Evangelical Lutheran Church Chair in Theology and Mission

Director of the Center for Global Theologies

## Formation for the Dialogue

In preparing this lecture<sup>1</sup>, I was once again reminded of the critical role context plays in shaping the lens of interpretation one uses as one negotiates and seeks to make sense of the world in which one lives. Specifically, in my retrospective on my participation in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A. during the years 1991–2010,<sup>2</sup> I found myself making connections between my upbringing in Guyana, South America, and how I experienced the thrust of the Dialogue. In relation to the shaping influence of my upbringing, I am thinking about the colonial and post-colonial history of Guyana, formerly British Guiana, particularly the crucial place of that historical legacy that includes the multi-religious and multi-racial population and the consequent hybrid culture that emerged and prevails.

The period of my involvement in the Dialogue spanned the closing years of round IX, with its focus on *Scripture and Tradition*, and the complete years of round X on *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries*, and round XI on *The Hope of Eternal Life*.<sup>3</sup> Given what I noted above, I came to the Dialogue as one formed by both inter-religious and intra-Christian experiences across the ecumenical spectrum in Guyana and the Caribbean, and my studies at Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1974–1977, and the University of St. Andrews, St. Andrews, Scotland, 1977–1980. The completion of my theological and graduate studies was followed

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1. Lecture given by the Rev. Winston D. Persaud, PhD, on 28 September 2017, at the Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation sponsored by Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa.

2. Participants are appointed for each round. Thus, I began serving as a Lutheran participant during the closing years of round IX, and then was appointed to rounds X and XI and served the full tenure of each of those rounds.

3. See *Scripture and Tradition: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX*, Harold C. Skillrud, J. Francis Stafford, and Daniel F. Martensen, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995); *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries*, Randall Lee and Jeffrey Gros, FSC, eds. Preface by Bishop Charles Maahs and Bishop Richard Sklba (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005); *The Hope of Eternal Life: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, Lowell G. Almen and Richard J. Sklba, eds. (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2011).

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In all those formal settings of ecclesial service, the intra-Christian ecumenical and inter-religious realities of the local, regional, and global contexts were notably present and unavoidable. The factors of race, ethnicity, gender disparities, class, skin color, and ideology—notably in terms of the Cold War divide—were commonplace in my formation.

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by pastoral ministry at Redeemer Lutheran Church, Georgetown, Guyana, September 1980–January 1984. During my pastorate, I served as one of the two representatives of the Lutheran Church in Guyana on the Guyana Council of Churches (the national ecumenical organization). From 1981–1984, I served on the Continuation of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC), and was also a member of the Development Committee of the CCC. In all those formal settings of ecclesial service, the intra-Christian ecumenical and inter-religious realities of the local, regional, and global contexts were notably present and unavoidable. The factors of race, ethnicity, gender disparities, class, skin color, and ideology—notably in terms of the Cold War divide—were commonplace in my formation.

In January of the early 1970s, when I was undergraduate at the University of Guyana, I served as the preacher at the ecumenical worship service to mark the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The venue was St. Teresa's Roman Catholic Church, Campbellville, Georgetown, Guyana. That occasion, like similar occasions, particularly during the first two decades that followed the end of the Second Vatican Council, in 1965, was an uplifting time. As

I gazed over the congregation, I saw members of the St. Teresa's parish—including its British priest, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Lutherans—of the diverse racial-ethnic groups that made up the population of Guyana. There were women, children and youths; and, yes, there were adult men present. Ecumenical worship services were unmistakably times when the diverse racial-ethnic mix of the population was evident. During the two hours of the worship and post-worship mixing and conversation, the unity we shared in Jesus Christ was highlighted in the face of the living reality of doctrinal, class, and cultural differences, along with the divisions grounded in racial-ethnic diversity of the assembly. It was a welcome time. To this day, I carry with me the feeling of encouragement I experienced when I subsequently encountered people who were present from the wider ecumenical community. I am thinking particularly of a middle-aged gentleman, a lay member of St. Teresa's Roman Catholic Church, who would make a point of greeting me warmly whenever he saw me in the community over the weeks and months following the ecumenical worship service. It was an experience of ecumenism at the grassroots, which was aided by ethnic affinity. The formal, existential reality of being Christian—he Roman Catholic and I Lutheran—and the unspoken, assumed ethnic commonality in that encounter, seemingly formed a seamless whole.

My studies for the degree of Master of Divinity at Wartburg Theological Seminary, 1974–1977, had a pronounced ecumenical character in the context of the theological consortium of Aquinas Institute (Dominican), University of Dubuque Theological Seminary (Presbyterian), Wartburg Theological Seminary (Lutheran). That theological consortium, 1965–1981, the first of its kind in the U.S.A., offered opportunities for students in each of the three institutions to be in classes that reflected the rich ecumenical composition of the student bodies and the faculties in that united enterprise in theological education and formation for ministry. Indeed, a highlight of this ecumenical cooperation were the required classes in biblical studies that were taught by teams of faculty members from the three institutions whose students took those classes together. That was a rich ecumenical texture and a time of mutual learning. The experience of joint classes was accompanied by occasions of worship together. Classes, worship, and informal conversations made for learning about theological, doctrinal, confessional, ecclesiological, and ecclesial particularities within the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.” We learned about our own heritage from professors and classmates from the other traditions: Roman Catholic, Reformed, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran.

The foregoing reflection is written in the vein of the thesis I included in the article I contributed to the *Lutheran Study Bible*, which was first published in 2009. I wrote, “[T]he biography of the interpreter-reader plays a critical role, sometimes the decisive role, in the interpretation of Scripture.”<sup>4</sup> I am aware that this

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conviction is not exclusive to me; it was and is shared by many others, albeit in different formulations. The critique of this thesis needs to be noted as well. While it is true that one's biography does play such a crucial role—and at times a decisive role—in the interpretation of the text, if all one sees in the text is what one brings to the text, then the text has become captive to our respective biography, which is imposed on the text. In short, the text is not what we hear; it is not the primary bearer of the message. Rather, it is our biography that is the norming norm. Here, I offer the personal observation: in an ecumenical, inter-faith, multi-ethnic, cross-cultural setting, one's imposition of one's biography on the text can be and is often readily apparent. Again, I note, that wittingly and unwittingly bringing one's biography to the interpretation of the text at hand is unavoidable and is not intrinsically bad. We can discuss this phenomenon during the time for questions and answers.

### **Participation in and formation by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A.**

As noted above, my actual participation as a Lutheran member of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A., spanned the years from 1991 to 2010, and began when the text of *Scripture and Tradition* of round IX was in the closing stages of its finalization.<sup>5</sup> My participation then, which was the beginning of my initiation into the Dialogue, was followed by full participation in round X on the theme, “The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries,” and then round XI on the theme, “The Hope of Eternal Life.” At the first meeting, which I attended as a new member of the Dialogue—though unspoken—it was obvious that, as a person of color, my presence and participation added a new

4. *Lutheran Study Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 1547.

5. *Scripture and Tradition*, 62.

dimension to the Dialogue. I was welcomed cordially and was soon meeting and listening to scholars of national and international renown, some of whose names and works were familiar to me. Before I joined the Dialogue, the Roman Catholic Church was the first to appoint a female theologian. I remember well that at the first meeting I attended in spring 1992 Dr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J. welcomed me warmly and said that I shouldn't let the awe of being among the seasoned scholars, some of whom had been in the Dialogue for several rounds, prompt me to keep quiet and not offer my own inputs to the conversation! She served as a Roman Catholic participant in the Dialogue, beginning in round VIII, which was focused on "The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary."<sup>6</sup>

At the meetings of the Dialogue—typically, there were two meetings each year—each day began with devotions (a version of Morning Prayer) and closed with devotions (a version of Vespers). Thus, if Morning Prayer was led by a Catholic participant, then Evening Prayer was led by a Lutheran participant. On Saturday evenings, all participants attended Mass in a Catholic church or cathedral, and, on a few occasions, The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, D.C. At the Mass, the bishop typically presided. On Sunday mornings, we all attended a Lutheran church in which the worship was centered in Word and Sacrament. At the Mass, the Lutheran participants would join the queue with hands crossed and receive a blessing from the bishop, whose words, as he laid his hand on each of us, were typically, "...we pray that the unity for which our Lord prayed may one day be realized." There was a similar pattern at the Eucharist in the Lutheran church. Here, I should note that during the last number of meetings in round XI, which were held at St. Paul's College, Washington, D.C., the Mass on Saturday and the Eucharist on Sunday were held in the chapel there.

The act of worshipping together, which was the vital context for our conversations on crucial themes on which we were divided as churches, was a palpable and essential reminder of what we share in common: that we are united in Jesus Christ through the Spirit to the glory of the Father, for we confess our faith in God who is eternally Triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; we believe in one baptism for the remission of sins; we make confession of our sins before God and one another; and together we ask God for Jesus' sake to forgive our sins, knowing it is through the Spirit we experience God's grace and mercy. Indeed, worshipping together was a generative impetus in our work in the Dialogue.

Not surprisingly, this sense of togetherness and mutuality was tested. At a meeting during round X, there was a painful experience of separation at the Mass. We were meeting at a Roman Catholic retreat center whose physical structures contributed to that feeling

6. The round began in 1983 and concluded in 1990. See *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992). The Dialogue is characterized by mutual respect of each church's teachings, practices, and structures. Thus, in the listing of participants in rounds X and XI, both men and women among the ordained are listed accordingly.

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of togetherness and unity we have in the one Lord, Jesus Christ. However, both Catholic and Lutheran participants experienced the historical division and separation that have characterized our churches since the sixteenth century. In such close quarters, with only the participants of the Dialogue present at the Mass, the practice of differentiated "participation" in Holy Communion poignantly touched us deep within our being. Thus, in the session immediately following, a significant amount of time was devoted to personal, theological reflections about that experience. I was not alone in feeling that the ambiguity of knowing how far we have come in our life together as believers in Christ accented the sense of "the line drawn" between us, precisely at the Sacrament in which our Lord gives himself—his body and blood—to us.

### Growth in mutual recognition of doctrinal convergences and commonalities

Mutual suspicion, stereotypes, and lack of awareness of and depth in understanding fundamentals of each church's teachings and practices continue to show themselves, but the growing commitment to mutual listening to, and learning from, each other was palpable in the Dialogue. It is a notable feature of the Dialogue that the representatives of each church make recommendations, which are received and incorporated with the understanding by all that the representatives do not speak authoritatively for their respective churches, even as they strive to present faithfully and accurately what their church teaches vis-à-vis simply presenting personal and individual positions, which may not reflect the respective church's official teaching and practice. Here, I draw attention to the recognition of the depth and breadth of biblical scholarship by Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars which is recognized and celebrated across the ecumenical spectrum.<sup>7</sup> That positive at-

7. An excellent example of this ecumenical cooperation and consensus on use of Scripture is the work, *The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification: An Ecumenical Follow-Up to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2012). The text of this publication was "Presented by a task force of biblical scholars and systematic theologians from the Lutheran World Federation, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and the World Methodist Council." The study was done in response to the promise and commit-



titude predated the Second Vatican Council and it is evident in the way Protestant faculties and seminarians in the 1960s, and since, have been reading the publications by Roman Catholic scholars in the field of biblical studies. This positive attitude and practice characterize Roman Catholic faculties and seminarians who also read the scholarly works in biblical studies done by Protestants. Indeed, throughout the Dialogue to date, consensus on biblical interpretation among Roman Catholics and Lutherans is a positive feature and an impetus to the ongoing work of finding doctrinal convergences. There is a glaring exception to this feature: *Scripture and Tradition*, the publication from round IX, whose focus was on “Scripture and Tradition,” does not contain a biblical sub-section.<sup>8</sup> While the respective publications of round I on “The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church,” and round V on “Papal Primacy and the Universal Church,” do not contain a significant biblical section, which is present in each of the other rounds, II-III, VI-VIII, X-XI,<sup>9</sup> in their respective essay (round I) on “The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church,” both Warren A. Quanbeck<sup>10</sup> and John Courtney Murray, S.J.,<sup>11</sup>

ment made at the signing of JDDJ by The Lutheran World Federation and The Roman Catholic Church, 31 October 1999. Further, it is particularly noteworthy that this was the work of a quadrilateral of churches, and, also, representatives were from both the global North and global South.

8. See *Scripture and Tradition: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IX*.

9. In *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I-III*, Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, n.d.), see the two essays in round II (with its focus on “One Baptism for the Remission of Sins”) on “The Biblical Perspective,” by Raymond F. Brown, S.S., 9–21, and Krister Stendahl (Lutheran), 23–26; and the essay in round III (with its focus on “Eucharist as Sacrifice”), “The Eucharist as Sacrifice in the New Testament,” by Berth E. Gartner (Lutheran), 27–35; in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV*, Eucharist and Ministry, Foreword by Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference; New York, NY: U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, 1970), see the essay, “Ministry in the New Testament,” by Jerome D. Quinn (RC), 69–100; in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), see “Common Statement,” 58–68, “Justification by Faith and ‘Righteousness’ in the New Testament,” by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., 77–81, “The Scriptures on Merit,” by Jerome D. Quinn, 82–93, “Reward, But in a very Different Sense,” by Joseph A. Burgess, 94–110; in *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII*, see “Scripture on Christ, the Saints, and Mary,” 63–81, “Biblical Data on the Veneration, Intercession, and Invocation of Holy People,” by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., 135–147, “How Do We Interpret 1 Timothy 2:1–5 (and Related Passages),” by John Reumann, 149–157; in *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries*, see “I. Biblical Foundations for the Church as Koinonia of Salvation in Jesus Christ and the Christ-Event,” 57–59, “II. The Shape of the Early Christian Communities,” 59–66; and in *The Hope of Eternal Life*, see 22–23, 36–38, 43–44, 48–50, 54–55, 63–64, 70–73, and 93–94.

10. See the first sub-section, “The Scripture,” *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue I-III*, Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, n.d.), 6.

11. See the first sub-section, “The Nicene Faith and Scripture,” *Ibid.*, 16–20.

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give some attention to Scripture; and in “Papal Primacy and the Universal Church,” paragraphs 9–13 are devoted to “Focus on the New Testament Question.”<sup>12</sup>

Notwithstanding this new, welcome horizon in relation to biblical scholarship, the publication from round IX on the critical theme of “Scripture and Tradition,” gives us pause. Among all the publications from the eleven completed rounds, the publication from this round, *Scripture and Tradition*, is markedly the slimmest. It should be noted that the Lutherans were divided among themselves concerning biblical studies, including the use of the critical apparatus which was increasingly commonplace among both Lutheran and other Protestant scholars and Roman Catholic scholars. In fact, I recall quite vividly the intra-Lutheran exchanges among the Lutherans present at the first meeting I attended at which a draft of “Scripture and Tradition” was under critical consideration. As a new member of the Dialogue, I was like the Roman Catholic participants who sat quietly listening to and observing the honest intra-Lutheran exchanges in which central, definitive differences were presented.

*Scripture and Tradition* is, also, the last publication of the Dialogue before the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)*, on 31 October 1999 by The Lutheran World Federation and The Roman Catholic Church. It is particularly noteworthy that the publications from round X, *The Church as Koinonia of Salvation: Its Structures and Ministries*, and round XI, *The Hope of Eternal Life*—where each publication bears the title of the focus of the particular round of the Dialogue—include significant, enlightening, and strategic use of *JDDJ*. The vital work of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A., was highlighted in paragraph 3 of *JDDJ*, where the report of the round VII, “Justification by Faith,”<sup>13</sup> was included with other reports for commendation, “Special attention should be drawn to the following reports....”<sup>14</sup> The Dialogue continues with round XII, which is focused on

12. *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V*, Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 13–16.

13. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, Joseph A. Burgess, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985).

14. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by The Lutheran World Federation and The Roman Catholic Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 9f.

“Ministries of Teaching: Sources, Shapes and Essential Contents.”

Lutherans and Roman Catholics have come a long way since the early sixteenth century in making it unambiguously clear that together we share a common witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we recognize that working for the actualization in history of the visible unity of the Church is not a negotiable nor a secondary commitment. Indeed, the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ includes, at its core, Jesus’ high-priestly prayer in John 17:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (vv. 20–23).

In this vein, the second paragraph of the Foreword of *From Conflict to Communion* states:

In 2017, Catholic and Lutheran Christians will most fittingly look back on events that occurred 500 years earlier by putting the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center. The gospel should be celebrated and communicated to the people of our time so that the world may believe that God gives Himself to human beings and calls us into communion with Himself and His church. Herein lies the basis for our joy in our common faith.<sup>15</sup>

It is instructive to note how the Reformation *solas*—grace alone (*sola gratia*), faith alone (*sola fide*), Christ alone (*solus Christus*)<sup>16</sup>—are formulated in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. I am thinking particularly of paragraphs 5 and 15:

5. The present *Joint Declaration* has this intention: namely, to show that on the basis of their dialogue the subscribing Lutheran churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ. It does not cover all that either church teaches about justification; it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification and shows that the remaining differences in its explication are no longer the occasion for doctrinal condemnations.

15. In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his

15. *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, by The Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 15.

16. In addition, there are also “Scripture alone” (*sola scriptura*) and “to God alone be the glory” (*solus Deo gloria*).

I have been impressed by the sincere, deep-seated commitment of the two churches to the Dialogue, grounded in the conviction that visible unity of the church in life and practice is not simply a vital, extrinsic aid to the mission of the church in Jesus’ name but is inherent in the very *missio Dei*.

Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ’s saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.<sup>17</sup>

The reader is to understand that both Lutherans and Roman Catholics together are agreed in our confession concerning how the sinner is made just/righteous before God. Here, Cardinal Edward Cassidy’s observation is instructive, “A fundamental principle in ecumenical dialogue is that there may be a distinction between the doctrines of faith and the manner in which these doctrines are formulated or expressed.”<sup>18</sup>

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In a sense, the primary motive may be that of the compulsion to demonstrate *integrity*. Scripture makes plain that the church is *one*: Christ prayed that his followers might be one as he and the Father were one, and St. Paul speaks of the church as the Body of Christ. Every Christian claims to belong to that Body; not to just a part of it, but to its totality. Indeed, if I do not belong to *all*

17. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, 10f. and 15.

18. “The Meaning of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” p. 2. Address given on 17 September 1999. Catholic Culture.org <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=1334&repos=1&subrepos=0&searchid=1755418>; (accessed 6 September 2017).

of the Body, I don't belong to *any* of it! There is no such thing as being incorporated in a part separate from the whole. Thus, if I am not concerned about unity in the church and the well-being of all its parts, I am deficient in my understanding of the Christian faith. Specifically, I must be as much concerned about the Roman Catholics in Christ's Body, as I am about the Lutherans in it; I cannot turn my back on the Catholics without snubbing the Christ who dwells within them. For a Christian of any integrity, the pursuit of unity is not an optional matter.<sup>19</sup>

I was not alone among Lutheran participants in having to learn that terms used in similar ways, often interchangeably, have decisive differences in Roman Catholic usage. For example, when Roman Catholics use the terms "dogma" and "doctrine," they intend to convey a critical difference. Writing about the first round of Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A., which began in 1965, Paul Empie observes, "The term *dogma* is not normally used by Lutherans. They prefer the word *doctrine*. Yet their seminaries offer courses in dogmatics, and the term appears in the Lutheran Confessions, for example, in the *Formula of Concord*, which states that the Scriptures are not the only touchstone by which all dogmas must be judged. In Catholic usage, a doctrine usually explains a dogma and thus may be given less weight than the latter."<sup>20</sup>

### From the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries: Acknowledging and responding to ongoing and new challenges

It is crucial to our mutual work as Christians who are joined together through our baptism into Christ Jesus that we acknowledge there are essential differences between the sixteenth century of the Reformation and the intervening centuries and our contemporary context of early twenty-first century. Under the sub-heading, "**Commemoration in a New Global And Secular Context**," the text, *From Conflict to Communion*, presents an illuminating description of crucial differences that need to be given due consideration. As we listen to a reading of paragraph 10, ponder the questions: How do the churches in the global South, which are experiencing significant growth, view confessional conflicts of the sixteenth century? How might the contributions of the church in the global South be received and appropriated in the worldwide church for the sake of God's mission in the world? Paragraph 10 states:

10. In the last century, Christianity has become increasingly global. There are today Christians of various confessions throughout the whole world; the number of Christians in the South is growing, while the number of Christians in the North is shrinking. The churches of the South are continually assuming a greater importance

19. *Lutherans & Catholics in Dialogue*, by Paul C. Empire, Raymond Tiemeyer, ed. with Foreword by William Cardinal Baum (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 5.

20. *Ibid.*, 18.

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within worldwide Christianity. These churches do not easily see the confessional conflicts of the sixteenth century as their own conflicts, even if they are connected to the churches of Europe and North America through various Christian world communions and share with them a common doctrinal basis. With regard to the year 2017, it will be very important to take seriously the contributions, questions, and perspectives of these churches.

How might the church respond to the phenomenon of the "nones" and "dones" in the global North who, with others who still identify with the church, have forgotten the traditions that have been transmitted from generation to generation?<sup>21</sup> How might we remember the ecclesial traditions for the sake of God's mission in the world? Paragraphs 11 and 12 state:

11. In lands where Christianity has already been at home for many centuries, many people have left the churches in recent times or have forgotten their ecclesial traditions. In these traditions, churches have handed on from generation to generation what they had received from their encounter with the Holy Scripture: an understanding of God, humanity, and the world in response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ; the wisdom developed over the course of generations from the experience of lifelong engagement of Christians with God; and the treasury of liturgical forms, hymns and prayers, catechetical practices, and diaconal services. As a result of this forgetting, much of what divided the church in the past is virtually unknown today.

21. For a description of "nones" and "dones" go to this website: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/summer-2015/meet-dones.html> (accessed 27 September 2017). It should be noted that the terms have been used in the context of North America, but it may have relevance in other settings in the global North (and South). More work needs to be done in relation to the relevance of the terms in that wider context.



12. Ecumenism, however, cannot base itself on forgetfulness of tradition. But how, then, will the history of the Reformation be remembered in 2017? What of that which the two confessions fought over in the sixteenth century deserves to be preserved? Our fathers and mothers in the faith were convinced that there was something worth fighting for, something that was necessary for a life with God. How can the often forgotten traditions be handed on to our contemporaries so as not to remain objects of antiquarian interest only, but rather support a vibrant Christian existence? How can the traditions be passed on in such a way that they do not dig new trenches between Christians of different confessions?<sup>22</sup>

Given the reality that Christian witness today increasingly is done in multi-religious contexts, how might the churches engage one another ecumenically as we work at evangelical appropriation of the Reformation? Here is paragraph 15, which falls under the sub-heading, “**New challenges for the 2017 commemoration**”:

15. While the previous Reformation anniversaries took place in confessionally homogenous lands, or lands at least where a majority of the population was Christian, today Christians live worldwide in multi-religious environments. This pluralism poses a new challenge for ecumenism, making ecumenism not superfluous but, on the contrary, all the more urgent, since the animosity of confessional oppositions harms Christian credibility. How Christians deal with differences among themselves can reveal something about their faith to people of other religions. Because the question of how to handle inner-Christian conflict is especially acute on the occasion of remembering the beginning of the Reformation, this aspect of the changed situation deserves special attention in our reflections on the year 2017.<sup>23</sup>

We are now in the sixth decade of the Dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics and it is of particular significance that greater attention is being given to the historical and existential challenges in the wider world in which the church exists and bears witness to Jesus Christ. Here, let us listen to Cardinal Edward Cassidy’s timely exhortation to the 1997 Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Hong Kong, as the Assembly considered and acted on the recommended draft of the *JDD*:

To those citizens of today who are so often the victims of false and questionable values created by materialism and secularization, Lutherans and Catholics can now confess together, in the words of the joint declaration, “that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation” (*Joint Declaration*, 19). To those who are brokenhearted, or feel overwhelmed by the manifold threat to life and to well-being, we can now confess together “that the faithful can rely on the mercy and promises of God” (*Ibid.*,

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34), To those who feel deeply the burden of guilt for sins committed in the past or of a sinful life today, we can now “confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin’s enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ” (*Ibid.*, 22). To those citizens today who, as in the time of St. Paul, are looking for the unknown God, we can now “confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies and truly renews the person” (*Ibid.*, 28) and ‘that persons are justified by faith in the Gospel “apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom. 3:28)” (*Ibid.*, 31).<sup>24</sup>

The movement in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A., toward giving greater attention to the historical and existential challenges in the wider world in which the church exists and bears witness to Jesus Christ was unmistakable during round XI with its focus on “The Hope of Eternal Life.” This is aptly illustrated in paragraph 9 of the published text:

Contemporary cultural attitudes toward death are ambivalent at best. The 2008 Pew U.S. Religious Landscape Survey found that almost three-quarters of Americans say they believe in life after death. Even among those the survey identified as religiously unaffiliated, almost half agreed with such a belief. Such beliefs can take many forms, however, from the sophisticated to the sentimental, and are surrounded by a wide range of understandings of death embodied in our culture. Ernst Becker’s Pulitzer Prize winning study *The Denial of Death* began with the assertion: “The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity.” “New Atheists” call belief in life after death “dangerous nonsense” and charge that this “nonsense” provides support for fanaticism and terrorism. Dylan Thomas’s famous poem urges us not to “go gentle into that

22. *From Conflict to Communion*, 21f.

23. *Ibid.*, 22.

24. “The Meaning of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,” pp. 11f. Address given on 17 September 1999. Catholic Culture.org <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=1334&repos=1&subrepos=0&searchid=1755418>; accessed 6 September 2017.

good night,” but “rage, rage against dying of the light.”<sup>25</sup>

In their common response to the fundamental challenges noted in paragraph 10, the Lutherans and Roman Catholics state in paragraph 12 of the text of *The Hope of Eternal Life*, “**Together we confess: Life does not end in death. God in Christ offers everyone the hope of eternal life.**”<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

How does one conclude this presentation? I offer this: In the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U.S.A., interpretation of Scripture, creeds, tradition/traditions, ecclesial and the wider-world history, recognition, as a participant, of the interpretative influence of one’s own biography, and, decisively, keeping ever before us Jesus’ prayer in John 17 are crucial for the ongoing work for the sake of the unity of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, whose unity is intrinsic to the integrity and truth of its mission in the Gospel, in a world in need of healing and wholeness.

## Postscript

As I look ahead, there is still significant work to be done in examining and analyzing the “Common Statement” in each round of the Dialogue and draw out answers to the following questions (among others): What has each round of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, U. S. A. noted that Lutherans and Roman Catholics hold in common? What are the emerging convergences? What are the remaining differences? What are the primary themes which have emerged through our mutual listening to each other, and what intimations of directions toward agreements are contained in the documents of the Dialogue? In considering these questions, it should be pointed out clearly that both *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist*, by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), and *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, by The Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), are illuminating and timely resources. Finally, we need to continue to ask: What is the place of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in the way we view both pre- and post-JDDJ Common Statements from each round?

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25. *The Hope of Eternal Life*, 13f.

26. *Ibid.*, 14.