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## semi-annual Bulletin

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*A Center conducted by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement*

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# Director's Desk

The Fall issue of the *Bulletin* carries the remaining conferences that were given in the Centro's cycle honoring twenty-five years since the publication of the Lima document on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The first of these is a lecture given by Tom Best concerning the challenges that the BEM text still offers the Churches today. By publishing it we also want to greet our dear friend as he brings to a conclusion many years of service in the Faith and Order Commission. Tom retired this year and has returned to the United States. The **Centro Pro Unione** recognizes his tireless commitment to the cause of Christian unity and his loyalty to our ministry here in Rome.

The second article presented by Prof. Ermanno Genre of the Waldensian Faculty raises some interesting points about the Lima Liturgy which was not an official part of the BEM document but was elaborated as an example of how one might apply the wisdom of the Eucharist section of the document to the practice of the composing eucharistic prayers. After considering questions of the legitimacy of the text, Genre then considers the liturgical text as a model and an effective leaven for churches who do not have a tradition of frequent celebrations nor have a clear eucharistic theology. Important questions of inculturation and of establishing an *ordo* for celebrations are also taken into consideration. He concludes by looking at several renewal attempts made by Protestant churches.

Timothy Radcliffe presented the tenth annual lecture honoring the co-founders of the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement. He looked at the problem of believing in the world today by asking how can one recite the Creed today. It is not just a matter of knowing and saying the words but rather of understanding their meaning in an existential way. This itinerant preacher did not let down the expectations of a standing room only audience!

During January, the Italian Church has the tradition of setting aside a day dedicated to Jewish-Christian relations. The Centro invited rabbi Bemporard to speak to us about the relationship between Jews and Christians which he did in his stimulating lecture "Jesus as a Teacher of Judaism". In this context he illustrates the role that the teaching of Jesus played within Judaism.

This year's activity will take into consideration models of ministry. The year 2010 will mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910 with two conferences: "The Nestorian Missions: The Spread of the Gospel in Asia from the V to the XV Centuries" and "The Chinese Rites Question: A Clash of Cultures". The eleventh Wattson/White lecture entitled "Leading Women. Some Reflections on Women, Leadership and the Anglican Communion" and will be given by Dr. Jane Williams. An invitation is enclosed in this issue. Lastly, we began this year with the launching of the recent work *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (edited by Paul Murray). The month of October ended with a concert of sacred music offered by two choirs: Russian Orthodox choir from Moscow and an Italian choir.

Check our web site for up to date information on the Centro's activities.

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James F. Puglisi, sa  
Director





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Centro Conferences

## *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* A Continuing Challenge to the Churches

Thomas F. Best  
Director, Faith and Order Commission, WCC, Geneva

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday, 22 November 2007)

It is an honor to participate in this series of lectures marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Faith and Order Convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM).<sup>1</sup> On behalf of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, I would like to extend thanks to the Centro Pro Unione for marking this ecumenical milestone in such a significant way.

### **I. BEM: An Unprecedented ecumenical journey**

Since its publication in 1982, BEM has had a unique impact on the ecumenical movement and on the churches and institutions which comprise it. The remarkable story of the reception of BEM can be told in many ways, not least by the following facts and figures: the text has been printed and reprinted no less than thirty-nine times; it has been translated into 40 languages; some 180,000 copies have been sold in English alone (even today, after 25 years, the WCC bookshop is selling 1000 copies per year). It has been the subject of many reviews and comments from councils of churches, pastors, and academics,<sup>2</sup> as well as inspiring conferences such as the present series of lectures at the Centro Pro Unione.

Even more importantly, BEM has stimulated an unparalleled process of study and reflection within and among the churches themselves. No fewer than 185 member churches of the WCC issued official responses to the text, and these were published in the six-volume series *Churches Respond to BEM*.<sup>3</sup> All the responses were studied carefully by the Faith and Order Commission; the agreements among the churches, and the points on which they still differ, were carefully documented in

*Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990*,<sup>4</sup> which served as Faith and Order's "response to the responses."

In addition to these official results BEM also generated a broader "unofficial" response process, through which Faith and Order received many hundreds of comments from study groups, seminars, and concerned pastors and laypersons. As we shall see later on, in this way BEM brought issues of theology, church practice and visible unity to a much wider audience than before.

The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of BEM in 2007 has been marked by a number of publications and events: a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary reprinting with an additional introduction;<sup>5</sup> a substantial book, *BEM at 25*,<sup>6</sup> which offers evaluative and critical essays on the text and its impact over the past quarter century; and lectures and lecture series such as the present one at the Centro Pro Unione. These remarkable facts justify the claim that BEM has become, in a word, the best-known and most widely studied ecumenical text yet produced.

Furthermore, and decisively, BEM has borne fruit in the many church agreements based on, and inspired and encouraged by, the text and response process. BEM documented the level of agreement already existing among many churches on fundamental issues of faith and church order. This *agreement* has, in turn, inspired and enabled many formal church *agreements* - as recorded, for example, in the later volumes of

<sup>1</sup> Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982). The most recent printing is the 39<sup>th</sup>; see *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary printing with additional introduction, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva, WCC, 1982-2007).

<sup>2</sup> For a recent critical review of the origin and lasting effect of BEM see L. VISCHER, "The Convergence Texts on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: How Did They Take Shape? What Have They Achieved?" *The Ecumenical Review* 54, 4 (2002) 431-454.

<sup>3</sup> M. THURIAN, (ed.), *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" Text*, Vols. I-VI, Faith and Order Papers Nos. 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 (Geneva: WCC, 1986-1988).

<sup>4</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No. 149 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> See Note 1, above.

<sup>6</sup> T. F. BEST and T. GRDZELIDZE, (eds.), *BEM at 25: Critical Insights into a Continuing Legacy*, Faith and Order Paper No. 205 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007).

*Growth in Agreement*<sup>7</sup> and as documented in the *Bulletin* of the Centro Pro Unione.<sup>8</sup> I need not recount these here, as they have been surveyed admirably by Günther Gassmann, my predecessor as Director of Faith and Order, in an earlier lecture within this series at the Centro.<sup>9</sup> But they remain as the most enduring single result of the entire BEM process.

In view of all these facts and the intensive attention BEM has received, I had seriously to ask myself: What distinctive perspective and contribution can I bring to the story of BEM and its reception by the churches? I want today to offer personal reflections from the perspective of one who, coming to Faith and Order in 1984 - shortly after BEM was sent to the churches - has experienced the whole process of its reception, its use in the churches and ecumenically, the work and agreements which it has inspired, and how all this has related to other work pursued by Faith and Order on behalf of the visible unity of the church.

In doing so I want to highlight what, for me personally, are the central and enduring themes from this 25 years story of BEM. This will unfold in four stages: BEM's production and unique character; the BEM response process; BEM's presence and role today; and finally reflections on future work for the search for visible unity, as inspired by BEM.

## II. BEM: Its Production and unique character

BEM was an idea whose time had come. To understand this, it is helpful to begin with an historical perspective. The most radical 20<sup>th</sup> century shift in the churches' theological engagement with one another was that from a *comparative* to a *convergence* method. In the comparative approach, which reigned from the beginning until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, churches shared their diverse beliefs and practices, aiming at better understanding and mutual acceptance (or at least tolerance) of one another. Oliver Tompkins, then Secretary of F&O Commission, noted at the Faith and Order Plenary Commission

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<sup>7</sup> See J. GROS, FSC, H. MEYER, W.G. RUSCH, (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998*, Faith and Order Paper No. 187 (Geneva/Grand Rapids/Cambridge: WCC Publications/ William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000); and J. GROS, FSC, T.F. BEST and L.F. FUCHS, SA, (eds.), *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998- 2005*, Faith and Order Paper No. 204 (Geneva/Grand Rapids/Cambridge: WCC Publications/William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Twenty-three Supplements of "A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues" have been published in the *Bulletin – Centro Pro Unione* and may be found up-dated daily on the web site of the Centro ([www.prounione.urbe.it](http://www.prounione.urbe.it)).

<sup>9</sup> G. GASSMANN, "25 Years of the Lima Document (BEM): A Unique Document – An Extraordinary Process – A Promising Impact," *Bulletin – Centro Pro Unione* 72 (2007) 3-10.

meeting in Lund in 1952 that the churches "have reached a limit in what can be profitably done in mutual explanation."<sup>10</sup>

The meeting at Lund looked beyond this, noting that "There are truths about the nature of God and His Church which will remain for ever closed to us unless we act together in obedience to the unity which is already ours..."<sup>11</sup> That is, the active engagement of the churches with one another is necessary - not just an objective sharing of positions, but a readiness of the churches to change and even to be vulnerable to one another. This is possible because the churches, beyond all their theological and historical differences, are one in Christ and because, within the ecumenical movement, they have committed themselves to a common search to make this unity more visible in common confession, worship, mission and service to the world.

Thus after centuries of division, and decades of simply comparing one another's positions, the churches were finally ready for a deeper commitment to the search for unity - and a much more active engagement in the production of ecumenical texts. This opened up the *convergence* method, which meant that the focus was no longer on the distinctive positions of the particular churches, but upon what they might say *together* about the nature and mission of the church. This approach focuses on points at which the churches are approaching one another in their understanding and practice, while not avoiding the difficult points of divergence which remain. "Convergence" was an idea whose time had come.

And BEM was a text whose time had come: it fell to BEM to embody most effectively this new convergence method. Sent to the churches, BEM carried with it the promise of a new era marked by the churches' closer and more committed engagement with one another and towards the goal of visible unity. While many reasons can be given for the unprecedented "success" of BEM, I believe the following were most significant.

First, BEM was not only a text but a process. A preliminary document "One baptism, one eucharist and a mutually recognized ministry" had been sent to the churches from the Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting at Accra in 1974; many churches responded to this text, and the central points were incorporated into the final BEM text. This meant that when BEM was sent to the churches from Lima in 1982 for response, the churches already "owned" the text to a significant extent.

Second, BEM was, in comparison with most ecumenical texts, extraordinarily well written. Its language was clear and concise; the text was laced with biblical references; historical background on central issues and concepts was included; and

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<sup>10</sup> O.S. TOMKINS, "Implications of the Ecumenical Movement," *The Ecumenical Review* 5, 1 (1952) 19-20. Tomkins was speaking to the Third World Conference on Faith and Order at Lund.

<sup>11</sup> "A Word to the Churches," in O.S. TOMKINS, (ed.), *Third World Conference on Faith and Order, Held at Lund August 15<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, 1952* (London, SCM Press, 1953) 16.

divisive issues were identified and clarified in a helpful Commentary section which was clearly separated from the main text. All this meant that in terms of both content and presentation, BEM stood head and shoulders above other ecumenical texts. Not least important, its unique combination of theological precision and clarity made BEM accessible to a wide range of persons within the churches.

Third, BEM dealt with issues of not only theological but also existential significance. Baptism, eucharist and ministry - these are all crucial to the actual lives of the churches, they are all lively and "visible" issues within churches, and all are rich in human interest and consequences, as well as being of deep pastoral import. Many in the churches were asking fundamental questions about these areas of church life and practice: parents were asking, "Should we have our child baptized -or wait until they can affirm their faith for themselves?"; church members were asking, "Why cannot I join my friend in receiving the Lord's Supper, as practiced in his or her church?" and, "Why is my pastor's ordination not recognized by all the churches?" Thus BEM commended itself because the topics which it tackled were *already* alive in the churches. In an age in which some Catholics are considering delaying confirmation until 18 years of age or even later, and in which some Baptists are baptizing children at the tender age of 8, BEM was a prime example of the ecumenical movement speaking to issues which are "relevant" locally.

Fourth, BEM not only discussed these issues but - as an official text from an appointed body of church representatives - it gave "permission" for persons at all levels within the churches to discuss them. BEM broadened the discussion radically, encouraging persons to see these lively, sensitive and sometimes controversial issues not only as matters for theological specialists but also as issues of concern to pastors, church school classes, retreats, lay academies, and individual Christians. In a unique way, in many churches BEM was empowering to laypersons bent on serious reflection about their own faith and Christian practice.

Fifth, BEM reflected the Christian life in its wholeness. It rendered irrelevant the traditional and artificial barriers between confession and prophetic witness, between faith and action, and (in the ecumenical context) between the movements of Faith and Order and Life and Work. Few parts of BEM have been more widely influential than its proclamation that baptism has dramatic consequences for the churches' social witness:

... baptism, as a baptism into Christ's death, has ethical implications which not only call for personal sanctification, but also motivate Christians to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life (Rom. 6:9ff; Gal. 3:27-28; I Peter 2:21-4:6)<sup>12</sup>

or BEM's remarkable evocation of the social implications of the Lord's Supper:

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<sup>12</sup> BEM, "Baptism" §10.

The eucharist embraces all aspects of life...The eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationships in social, economic and political life (Matt. 5:23f; I Cor. 10:16f; I Cor. 11:20-22; Gal. 3:28). All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Thus and at one stroke, BEM affirmed a vision of the life of the church as a coherent whole, in which confession and witness are one. It insisted that the churches, and the ecumenical movement, must not be divided artificially between the faith of the church and its life, between reflection and action, between ecclesiology and ethics. In holding these aspects together, BEM was a document of the *whole* ecumenical movement in all its breadth and diversity.

### III. BEM: The Response process

Since the beginning of the ecumenical movement, literally thousands of texts have been sent to the churches for review and response. Why did BEM, of all these documents, generate an unprecedented - and still unequaled - level of engagement and response? Let us now examine some factors which make the BEM response process uniquely significant.

A first and decisive factor was the way in which BEM was sent to the churches. Even as it was sent to the churches for response "at the highest appropriate level," it was accompanied by a series of 4 requests.<sup>14</sup> In responding, churches were asked to indicate "*the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the church through the ages.*" The importance of this quietly subversive formulation cannot be overstated. Each church was asked to judge BEM not on the basis of its own theological position and tradition, but on the basis of a common standard to which all churches are accountable. At one stroke the "terms of engagement" were changed; not the position of each church but a more general standard, indeed an "ecumenical" standard, was to be the norm. As we shall see not many churches were able to take this request fully seriously; but the fact that the question was posed is of immense significance.

Further, each church was asked also to note "*the consequences which your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches...*" This points to one dimension of authentic dialogue, namely that each party in the conversation must be open to change and renewal in its own life as a result of what is learned from the other: in a word, each church must make itself vulnerable to others within the framework of their common search for greater visible unity. This is the context in which we must read many later ecumenical texts,

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<sup>13</sup> BEM, "Eucharist," §20.

<sup>14</sup> BEM, "Preface." p. x; 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Printing, p. xiv.

perhaps most notably that on the “conversion” of the churches produced in 1993 by the Groupe des Dombes.<sup>15</sup>

The churches were then asked to indicate “*the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical and spiritual life and witness.*” Here each church is asked to learn from an ecumenical text; to understand the full significance of this, we must remember the identity of Faith and Order as a representative body of the churches. Thus BEM reflects the views not of a program in Geneva but rather of the churches themselves, speaking together and together framing, as far as possible, common theological positions. Thus in this request each church is encouraged to open itself to guidance from the other churches, speaking and acting, as far as possible, as one.

In a final request, the churches were invited to offer “*the suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order...*” With this, each church was drawn into the ongoing process of Faith and Order work, and thereby within the broader context of the churches’ search for visible unity. In the immediate context of BEM’s publication this applied especially to the study “Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today.”<sup>16</sup> But the BEM response process itself has shown that BEM is intimately related to virtually all the ongoing work of Faith and Order, including the studies on

Unity and Renewal,<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiology and Ethics,<sup>18</sup> worship<sup>19</sup> and baptism.<sup>20</sup>

A second factor in the significance of the BEM response process was its openness to criticism of BEM itself. Perhaps the most familiar example of this is the reaction of some Reformed churches to what they saw in BEM as a lack of attention to the Word of God.<sup>21</sup> For them it was not enough that - as Max Thurian, one of the architects of BEM, noted in conversation - BEM is permeated with quotations from sacred scripture, that its affirmations are almost always supported by one or more biblical citations. What was needed, according to some Reformed, was a section on the Word of God itself as a constitutive element of Christian faith. Several other examples could be cited. Such critical remarks were welcomed as part of the dynamic towards the future: as we shall see, this particular reaction anticipates one of the chief recommendations for further Faith and Order work on behalf of the visible unity of the church.

A third factor in the BEM response process was the degree to which it taught the churches about one another, and particularly about their varying decision-making procedures. This is best illustrated by a comparison. In my own church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), many thousands of persons were involved in forming the official response to BEM: it was studied in church school classes, in pastors’ retreats, in lay academies, and in many other venues. Reactions and opinions were gathered and studied so that, when our theologians finally wrote our official response, it could take account of the broad mind of the church.

By contrast a former colleague of mine noted that when his church, ancient and distinguished as it is, produced its response

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<sup>17</sup> *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*, Faith and Order Paper No. 151, 2<sup>nd</sup>, revised printing, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> T.F. BEST and M. ROBBA, (eds.), *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, Units I and III, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> See for example T.F. BEST and D. HELLER, (eds.), *So We Believe, So We Pray: Towards Koinonia in Worship*, Faith and Order Paper No. 171 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> T.F. BEST and D. HELLER, (eds.), See *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*, Faith and Order Paper No. 184 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999); T.F. BEST, (ed.), *Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications*, Faith and Order Paper No. 207 (Collegville/Geneva: Liturgical Press/WCC Publications, 2008); and the Faith and Order text-in-process “One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition,” available in *Minutes of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order, 12–19 June 2007, Crans-Montana, Switzerland*, Faith and Order Paper No. 206 (Geneva: Faith and Order, 2007) Appendix V, 57–81.

<sup>21</sup> See *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990*, p. 31, Note 32, and p.133.

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<sup>15</sup> GROUPE DES DOMBES, *For the Conversion of the Churches*, trans. by Jim Grieg (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993).

<sup>16</sup> See especially *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order Paper No. 153, New Revised Version, 4<sup>th</sup> printing (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996).

perhaps only five persons had ever even heard of BEM - but, he affirmed, "they were the *right* five." In this context, the mind of the church was understood to be revealed in a radically different – but, within its own understanding, equally valid – way. Thus the BEM process made the churches aware, as perhaps never before, of each other's varied decision-making processes and understandings of authority.

This leads to a fourth factor, BEM's effectiveness in bringing some churches to a new understanding and appreciation of the position of others. In some cases, this has led even to changes and developments in the understanding and practice of the faith in particular churches. To take once again my own church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), BEM's position on the vexed question of rebaptism is clear: "Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as 're-baptism' must be avoided."<sup>22</sup> This has challenged the Disciples; while reaffirming strongly our traditional practice of baptizing professing believers, the church nevertheless gained a fuller understanding of the intention behind "infant" baptism. Thus it can be said that the Disciples' response to BEM effectively consolidated its rejection of "re-baptism."<sup>23</sup>

A fifth factor, the obverse of the fourth, has to do with the standard by which the churches framed their responses. As noted above, BEM was sent to the churches with clear questions challenging each church to judge the text not just against its own theology and tradition, but against a broader understanding of the Christian faith as a whole and through the ages. But in fact most churches *did* judge BEM on the basis of their own particular understanding of the faith. Many churches, of course, showed considerable openness to understandings other than their own; yet in most cases the distinctive confessional positions remained the norm. This led to a certain paradox within the BEM process.

In responding to BEM each church was rehearsing its own unique position and practice, and to some extent defending these against other options. In effect the process produced 185 statements, each setting out that particular church's distinctive understanding of the faith and, in many cases, defending that as its normative – if not even its definitive – expression. Through this dynamic, BEM played a role in the "re-confessionalisation" and stress on the *differences* among the confessions, which we see in today's ecumenical landscape. BEM's role in this shift must not be over-emphasized; many other factors, not least the growth in self-awareness of the Christian World Communions, have contributed more strongly to it. Nevertheless this remains as a paradox within the BEM process - a document promoting the oneness of the church, and leading to many agreements among the churches, has made us newly aware of the distinctive identities of the churches, and the differences among them.

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<sup>22</sup> "Baptism," §13.

<sup>23</sup> See "Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)" in *Churches Respond to BEM*, Vol. I, pp. 115-116. As in many other churches, Disciples congregations continue to be challenged in the pastoral context by requests for "re-baptism."

At a more fundamental level, and as a sixth and final point, we note that the response process has revealed more clearly certain historical and cultural "fault lines" within Christendom. I may illustrate this through a personal experience. Some 20 years ago, not long after BEM was sent to the churches, I was privileged to speak on its behalf at the Fifth Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches. Following the lecture, someone rose to thank Faith and Order and the World Council of Churches for sending BEM to the churches. They noted its clear exposition of what the churches have in common, and the fundamental problems that keep many churches from common confession, witness and service. And then they added: "Why, we never even knew we *had* these problems until you sent us BEM..."

All the issues raised by the shift of the Christian "center of gravity" to the Southern hemisphere, issues debated hotly today, are implicit in this comment, as indeed already in some of the responses to BEM. The "relevance" of certain ecclesiological issues in situations far removed from the theological, historical and cultural context in which they arose; profound questions of inculturation, language and appropriate symbolism; the relation of local churches to more inclusive ecclesial bodies, or of independent churches to the missionizing churches which founded them – all these and more issues of theology and culture were made visible by the BEM response process. And while some have been taken up in some Faith and Order work,<sup>24</sup> they are still largely awaiting resolution.

In summary, we may say that the BEM response process has had a most creative impact upon the churches and the ecumenical movement. Produced by a representative body encompassing virtually all the confessions engaged in the ecumenical movement, BEM created a new dialogue context, a fresh *climate of interaction* among the churches. It challenged the churches to make common reflection and discussion on matters of faith and practice the norm rather than the exception. And it challenged the churches to look beyond their own confessional norms, to focus upon a broader standard of the Christian faith which, transcending the limitations of each confession, could provide a basis for an eventual visible Christian unity.

#### **IV. "Whatever Happened to BEM?" - The Presence and impact of BEM today**

Let us turn now to a question asked often enough, particularly by laypersons who had been brought into the ecumenical movement through the BEM process: "Whatever happened to BEM?" In most places the active study of BEM seems to have ended, and to many persons it is not immediately clear where and how BEM is at work in the churches and ecumenically today. The answers to this question are several.

The first point to note is that, 25 years after its launch, BEM does continue to be distributed and studied around the world. The most recent original translation, into the Yoruban language

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<sup>24</sup> See for example the work on inculturation in *So We Believe, So We Pray* and *Becoming a Christian*.

of Nigeria, was completed as recently as 2005; one of the earliest translations, that into Korean, will soon be complemented by a fresh rendering in that language. And BEM continues to be studied in local situations, especially where the search for the unity of the church has taken on a new momentum or urgency, or where ecumenical progress has stalled and a way is sought to make a fresh start.

A second point is that BEM is very much at work within the churches themselves, as noted above in the discussion of mutual recognition of baptism within the Disciples of Christ. And it is just as, or even more, influential in the inter-church context, where it continues to provide a basis on which churches can make agreements on specific matters of faith and practice. The most recent example is the agreement signed in 2007 establishing mutual recognition of baptism among no fewer than 11 churches in Germany. The agreement – the first at the national level to include a wide range of Protestants, Orthodox and the Catholic Church – embraces “every baptism which has been carried out according to the commission of Jesus in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit through the symbolic act of immersion in water or through the pouring of water over the person to be baptized.”<sup>25</sup> Such a baptism is affirmed as being “unique and unrepeatable.” Strikingly, it concludes with a direct citation from BEM:

We confess together with the Lima Document: Our one baptism in Christ is “*a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship*” (WCC Faith and Order Convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, “Baptism,” par. 6).

As a third and related point, BEM has been influential in the churches’ bi-lateral discussions. In effect BEM offered an overall “framework” for the churches’ theological dialogues: by identifying points held in common, and identifying areas of continuing difference, BEM played a significant role in consolidating the existing agreement among the churches, and guiding the choice of topics for future dialogues. To this extent, BEM has been a major force for coherence and relevance among the many bi-lateral dialogues today.

A fourth point is that BEM continues to affect directly many studies underway within Faith and Order and elsewhere. Statements in BEM on eucharist and baptism, in particular, have inspired further work in those areas. For example, the Faith and Order text-in-progress “One Baptism”<sup>26</sup> can be understood as an extended, liturgical commentary on BEM’s affirmation that “baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth into Christ.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, traces of BEM are readily apparent in the fine recent text of the Joint Working Group of the WCC and the Roman Catholic

Church, “Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: A JWG Study.”<sup>28</sup>

It should also be stressed that BEM’s insistence on the social dimension of the church’s faith and life<sup>29</sup> was a direct inspiration to much path-breaking Faith and Order work on the relation of the unity of the church to the renewal of human community,<sup>30</sup> on ecclesiology and ethics,<sup>31</sup> and most recently on theological anthropology.<sup>32</sup>

In several areas we may even say, as a fifth point, that BEM has set the agenda for work being pursued today by Faith and Order and elsewhere. On the basis of the churches’ responses, Faith and Order identified three areas in which – at the beginning of the 1990s - work was urgently needed if the search for visible unity was to move forward. One area, the relation between Scripture and Tradition, was taken up in Faith and Order work on hermeneutics;<sup>33</sup> the second area, issues of sacrament and sacramentality, has received less explicit attention but has been noted within the hermeneutics study and in work on ecclesiology – which was the third area identified by the churches for further study. This third area requires further comment, as it has been a continuing focus of recent Faith and Order work.

In the BEM response process the *churches* insisted that the understanding of the *church* itself, its nature and its role in history and in the world, has emerged as “the” fundamental ecumenical problem. In the understanding of the nature and role of the church, all the outstanding ecumenical issues intersect in all their complexity - not only the classical ecclesiological questions (for example, is a particular structure of the church itself a part of Christian revelation?) but also issues of liturgy, authority, ministry, ordination, the witness of the church in evangelism and service to the world, and a host of others. Faith and Order has pursued steady work on ecclesiology, resulting in two major, complementary texts now before the churches for consideration and response by early 2010. We will look at these texts in some detail in the final section of this presentation.

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<sup>28</sup> In *Eighth Report, 1999-2005, Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva/Rome: WCC Publications, 2005), Appendix C, pp. 45-72.

<sup>29</sup> See for example Notes 12 and 13, above.

<sup>30</sup> See Note 17, above.

<sup>31</sup> See Note 18, above.

<sup>32</sup> See *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, Faith and Order Paper No. 199 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> See *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper No. 182 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998); and D. HELLER and P. BOUTENEFF, (eds.), *Interpreting Together: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Faith and Order Paper No. 189 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2001).

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<sup>25</sup> For this and the next 2 citations see *Baptism Today...*, *op. cit.*, 228.

<sup>26</sup> See Note 20, above.

<sup>27</sup> BEM, “Baptism,” §9.

All these points make clear that, although BEM no longer has the immediate “notoriety” which it enjoyed as long as its response process was still underway, it is nonetheless very much alive in the churches and ecumenically today.

#### V. “Will there be another BEM?” – Challenges for the future

While laypersons ask “Whatever happened to BEM?,” theologians and ecumenists have their own characteristic question: “Will there be another BEM?” “Do we look for another text which could generate the same excitement and response?” In responding to these questions I would like to offer a comment by way of perspective, and then suggest three areas where further work would be most strategic at this time.

My comment is the following: it is wise, I believe, not to expect history to repeat itself. My admiration of BEM is boundless; nevertheless I doubt that the BEM “phenomenon” will happen again. Twenty-five years after BEM the ecumenical scene has changed in many respects. One factor is that many, indeed too many, texts from a bewildering variety of sources are now being sent to the churches for review and response; another is that confessional links are absorbing more and more of the churches’ energy and resources; yet another is the mundane fact that many churches face a situation of shrinking circumstances, leaving fewer and fewer resources available for engagement beyond their own “borders.”

For a host of reasons, then, rather than simply expecting “another BEM” I think it better to ask the following question: “What is needed *today* to take forward the churches’ search for the visible unity of the church, as BEM took that search for unity forward in its own day?” Here I would suggest three areas as being most strategic for work towards visible unity today.

The first strategic area is *ecclesiology*, that major task remaining from the BEM study process. I am happy to report that intensive work is already well underway in this area, as carried by the two Faith and Order/WCC texts now before the churches. The first of these texts, the extended study document *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*<sup>34</sup> from 2005, is a nascent convergence text. Its immediate aim is to draw the churches into a conversation aimed at revising the text itself; the longer-term goal of the study process is to further the search for Christian unity by identifying the churches’ common ecclesiological ground and, not least, by clarifying the “structure” of the remaining divisive issues – that is, the ecclesiological assumptions underlying the

churches’ divisions, and what would have to be done to overcome them.<sup>35</sup>

Following at least one stage of church reactions and subsequent revision, this text could be sent to the churches for official response. Could it be the “next BEM”? If any text now in development could play this role, this would be the one. The difficulties as outlined just above are formidable; yet one cannot know what the Spirit will ordain.

The second text now before the churches, the concise document “Called to be the One Church,”<sup>36</sup> was adopted as a basis for common reflection and response by WCC member churches at the WCC’s Porto Alegre Assembly in 2006. It stands in the line of Faith and Order/WCC Assembly texts from New Delhi (1961), Nairobi (1975), Vancouver (1983) and Canberra (1991) on the nature of the unity we seek. It is not intended to be revised and reissued, but as a catalyst to help the churches renew their dialogue and to identify precisely where – in their lives at the local as well as higher levels – they can, and cannot, recognize other churches as valid expressions of the Church of Jesus Christ. As a sign of how seriously WCC members churches take issues of ecclesiology, they have committed themselves to respond to the text by the next WCC Assembly in 2013.

Ideally - speaking in a flush of prophetic hope – I would see the two ecclesiology texts working together to make a significant impact upon that Assembly in 2013, and upon the churches and the wider ecumenical movement.

The second strategic area for work towards visible unity is the understanding of *unity* itself. Since the development of “koinonia” ecclesiology the classic discussion of “models of unity” has largely fallen silent; at the same time, the term “unity” has been more and more widely used, so that it is now burdened with a hopelessly wide range of meanings from full structural union to simply cooperation in programs. “Unity” is the central goal of the ecumenical movement; but today the term is dangerously vague in meaning.

Here I am happy to report that two very different church communities have, strikingly, planned to make the understanding of unity the focus of major meetings in 2008. The first meeting, the Forum of Bi-Lateral Conversations organized by Faith and Order on behalf of the Christian World Communions, will analyze the various visions of unity underlying the wide range of bi-lateral discussions today. Doubtless they will consider how far a synthesis of these visions is possible, taking also into account the two Faith and Order/WCC ecclesiology texts. The second meeting, the Eighth International Consultation of United Churches, will consider the experience of

<sup>34</sup> Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005). See also the stimulating collection of essays from the Seminar held at the American Academy of Religion meeting in 2006: P.M. COLLINS and M.A. FAHEY, (eds.), *Receiving The Nature and Mission of the Church: Ecclesial Reality and Ecumenical Horizons* (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> These remarks on *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, and the following remarks on “Called to be the One Church,” draw on my recent article “Ecclesiology and Ecumenism” in G. MANNION and L.S. MUDGE, (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* (New York/London: Routledge, 2008) 402-420.

<sup>36</sup> The text is available from Faith and Order, World Council of Churches, 150, rte. de Ferney, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland.

churches which have actually moved from division into a full structural union - the actual meaning of unity for those who have made it visible in the fullest possible manner. These deliberations will also take into account the two Faith and Order ecclesiology texts. Hopefully these two complementary meetings will help the whole ecumenical movement reclaim the term "unity," giving it a fresh and more precise content.<sup>37</sup>

The third strategic area is the question of *mutual accountability*. When BEM was being developed, three factors were thought necessary for the visible unity of the church: the common recognition of baptism, eucharist and ministry; a common confession of the apostolic faith; and structures for common decision-making. Faith and Order pursued the first two of these aspects through the BEM process and the Apostolic Faith study; but the third lay largely neglected.

And here I am happy to report that two new Faith and Order studies will prepare the way for work in this field, with first consultations in both areas to be held in 2008. The first, "Moral Discernment in the Churches," will explore how various churches actually make decisions, especially in areas of sensitive ethical import. The second, "Tradition and Traditions: Sources of Authority for the Church," will explore what sources of authority are actually recognized in the various churches, and how authority is actually exercised within them. Both studies should focus not so much on specific issues and church positions, but rather on how decisions are made, what criteria are used, and on what basis - not only "who decides?," but "who decides who decides, and how?" The immediate goal is to help the churches *understand* one another's sources of authority and processes of decision, as a contribution to their discussion of sensitive and divisive issues. Beyond this, it could help the churches find ways of common decision-making which would make visible their obedience to Christ's command that they be one, yet honor their distinctive theological and cultural heritages.

But beyond this lies the more fundamental theme of *mutual accountability*. This challenges the churches to draw the full consequences of their being members of the one body of Christ and, as such, mutually responsible to and for one another. In fact the churches already experience glimpses of this reality and its consequences. In this ecumenical era, we live within networks of interaction, commitment and interdependence. We have already experienced, for example, the fact that there are no longer any purely "internal texts": bound together in a web of relationship as we are, every text which touches upon the self-understanding of one church inevitably impacts the identity of the other churches.

Such experiences lead inexorably to questions of form and shape. That is, a next stage of ecumenical work must include questions such as the following: what *structures* can best embody, and make manifest to the world, the fact that the diverse churches are one within the one body of Christ? What

specific organs would best enable common decision-making by the churches? How do we hold ourselves accountable to the one gospel which we share - and to one another? How can we learn from one another and, when necessary, challenge one another to greater faithfulness to that gospel? In short, how can the churches best embody and express their mutual accountability?

## VI. Conclusion

The ongoing challenge of BEM, then, is for the churches and the ecumenical movement to move "beyond BEM." Without knowing in detail what the next stage of our quest for visible unity will look like, I would venture to say that it will start from the fact that we are one in Christ (finally regarding that as the given that it is); it will seek a maximum of common confession, worship, witness, mission and service (regarding common activity as the norm, rather than the exception); and it will embody our mutual accountability to one another (making common decisions where possible, and considering the consequences of all our own actions for others within the one body of Christ).

In conclusion I give thanks to God for *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, for the point to which it has brought the churches on their ecumenical journey, and for the journey which lies ahead as we seek to make the unity which is ours in Christ more clearly visible, and more effective in witness and service to God's creation.

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<sup>37</sup> The report as well as presentations from both meetings will be available from Faith and Order, World Council of Churches, 150, rte. de Ferney, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland.



# CC

Centro Conferenze

## La “Liturgia di Lima” ed il rinnovamento liturgico nel mondo protestante

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(Conferenza tenuta presso il **Centro Pro Unione**, giovedì, 13 dicembre 2007)

### Introduzione

L'oggetto di questa mia comunicazione è, di per sé, assai fragile e, come avrò modo di dire, per alcuni suoi aspetti, anche paradossale. Intendo infatti parlare di un testo liturgico che non ha mai ricevuto un “battesimo” riconosciuto da tutti. Però, si sa, anche i bambini non-battezzati crescono e diventano adulti, ed oggi la Liturgia di Lima (LL) si presenta a noi con tutti i suoi 25 anni di vita e nella sua giovinezza resta aperta al futuro. Un quarto di secolo di un testo che – e qui sta un primo paradosso – senza aver mai ricevuto un'investitura ufficiale – o forse proprio per questo – ha avuto una larga influenza nella rielaborazione delle liturgie eucaristiche in molte chiese cristiane, nel mondo protestante in particolare. Indice significativo di questa attenzione ecumenica è anche il fatto che la nuova edizione del *Dizionario del movimento ecumenico* ha introdotto la voce “Liturgia di Lima.”<sup>1</sup>

Il mio proponimento è di attirare la vostra attenzione sulla liturgia eucaristica di Lima e di mostrare, per quanto possibile, l'incidenza, diretta e indiretta, che essa ha avuto in ambito ecumenico in questi 25 anni. Dico subito che non è facile individuare in modo netto l'influenza esercitata dalla LL nel mondo riformato, perché se è vero che essa ha influenzato i testi liturgici delle chiese protestanti, è vero anche che il processo di rinnovamento era iniziato ben prima. Tratterò il mio argomento seguendo la traccia seguente: 1) situerò innanzitutto la LL in relazione al testo *Battesimo, Eucaristia, Ministero* (BEM), varato dalla Commissione Fede e Costituzione del Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese (CEC) a Lima, nel gennaio 1982. La LL è dunque una sorta di *gemello*, se così si può dire, del BEM, essendo stata preparata per concludere la sessione di Fede e Costituzione con un culto ecumenico che ne riprendesse i risultati teologici raggiunti; 2) in un secondo momento cercherò di illustrare come la LL si sia proposta come motivo di *innovazione liturgica* nel protestantesimo; 3) riprenderò, infine, il

motivo *lex orandi lex credendi* per mantenere viva la ricerca ecumenica nella direzione di una possibile prassi comune, nel rispetto delle diversità ecclesologiche e confessionali.

### 1. Parto gemellare o parto illegittimo?

È lo stesso Max Thurian a ricordare che fu nell'ottobre 1981, dunque a pochi mesi dall'incontro della Commissione Fede e Costituzione che si sarebbe riunita a Lima i giorni 2-16 gennaio 1982, che gli venne chiesto di preparare la liturgia eucaristica che avrebbe concluso un lavoro di 50 anni.<sup>2</sup> L'intenzione era chiara: trasporre sul piano liturgico i risultati teologici raggiunti nel testo di convergenza su *Battesimo, Eucaristia e Ministero*. Thurian usa, e lo si può capire, la parola “avventurata” per trasmettere l'esitazione che lo colse nell'accettare questo incarico. Come si può far convergere, in una comune proposta liturgica, tradizioni così complesse e culturalmente distanti? È pensabile un lavoro di selezione liturgica all'interno delle tre diverse tradizioni per proporre un testo che incontri il consenso di tutti? Pur consapevole delle difficoltà Max Thurian si mise all'opera e scrisse il testo conosciuto come LL e che venne utilizzato per la celebrazione eucaristica il 15 gennaio 1982, al termine dei lavori della Commissione Fede e Costituzione (circa 130 membri, compresi i cattolici, membri a tutti gli effetti), dopo che la stessa aveva accolto all'unanimità il testo di convergenza BEM.<sup>3</sup> Una sorpresa attendeva però i partecipanti alla celebrazione eucaristica. L'unanimità dottrinale trovata nell'approvare il *testo di convergenza* del BEM andò in frantumi nel momento di partecipare alla liturgia eucaristica: cattolici ed

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. “The Lima Liturgy. Origin, Intention and Structure”, in T.F. BEST, D. HELLER, (edd.), *Eucharistic Worship in Ecumenical Contexts. The Lima Liturgy and Beyond* (Ginevra: WCC Publications, 1998) 14.

<sup>3</sup> *Battesimo Eucaristia Ministero*. Testo della Commissione Fede e Costituzione, Lima 1982, Ed. italiana a cura di P. RICCA e L. SARTORI (Leumann/Torino: Elle Di Ci/Claudiana, 1982), anche in *Enchiridion Oecumenicum 1*.

<sup>1</sup> N. LOSKY, et al. (edd.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2ª ed., (Ginevra: WCC Publications, 2002) 694-695 in cui è proposta una succinta presentazione della LL a cura di Teresa BERGER.

ortodossi disertarono la mensa comune a motivo delle differenti concezioni dogmatiche ed ecclesiologiche delle loro rispettive chiese. Questa astensione presagiva le difficoltà che di lì a poco sarebbero sorte nel processo di ricezione del BEM da parte delle chiese.<sup>4</sup>

Sarebbe certamente improprio definire queste astensioni di cattolici ed ortodossi dalla comune mensa eucaristica, un incidente di percorso. Il testo stesso del BEM riconosceva che “non siamo ancora giunti ad un “consenso” (*consentire*), inteso qui come quella esperienza di vita e articolazione della fede che è necessaria per realizzare e conservare l’unità visibile della Chiesa. . . Un consenso completo può solo essere proclamato dopo che le Chiese sono giunte al punto di poter vivere e agire insieme nell’unità.”<sup>5</sup> Il mio interesse non è qui di entrare nel merito del perché di questa mancata partecipazione eucaristica di cattolici ed ortodossi, quanto piuttosto di porre alcuni interrogativi nella direzione della relazione tra il testo dottrinale del BEM e la LL.

La prima questione può essere così formulata: la LL va considerata un parto illegittimo, dal momento che non è stata approvata dalla Commissione Fede e Costituzione e però proposta per la celebrazione eucaristica conclusiva dei lavori? La seconda: come definire la sua relazione con il testo dottrinale del BEM? È possibile, e in che misura, stabilire un raffronto teologico tra un testo dottrinale ed uno liturgico? Può un testo liturgico essere la fedele espressione della convergenza teologica raggiunta? Ed un’ultima domanda: ciò che è *normativo* da un punto di vista teologico-dottrinale deve esserlo, per analogia, anche in ambito teologico-liturgico, cioè nell’atto celebrativo? Riprenderò questi interrogativi nel corso della mia esposizione, ma volevo porli già ora perché comunque si valutino i due diversi documenti, ritengo che la particolarità della liturgia eucaristica della LL, come di ogni altro testo liturgico, pensato per l’azione celebrativa, richieda una diversa lettura rispetto ad un testo dottrinale. Io credo che un testo liturgico rappresenta un *surplus*, un’eccedenza rispetto ad un testo dottrinale, perché non è solo parola ma *azione*, e dunque *avvenimento* legato all’azione trasformatrice dello Spirito Santo.

La LL inaugurata nel 1982 era indubbiamente una liturgia eucaristica “contestualizzata,” creata per quell’occasione specifica, così come è per

ogni liturgia, *verbum concretissimum* che interseca la storia umana nel tempo e nello spazio per annunciare la grazia di Dio nella parola e nel sacramento. Nello stesso tempo però la LL intendeva perseguire un obiettivo che andava *oltre* il qui ed ora dell’incontro della Commissione Fede e Costituzione. Essa intendeva sancire, da un punto di vista liturgico, le linee di “convergenza” appena approvate con il testo del BEM e di conseguenza si proponeva di inaugurare un tempo nuovo per le chiese cristiane sino ad ora divise nel momento di manifestare l’unità visibile dell’unica chiesa di Cristo alla mensa comune.

Ora l’astensione dei membri cattolici ed ortodossi non solo veniva a compromettere questo “novum” faticosamente cercato e raggiunto, ma metteva in evidenza ciò che negli anni successivi – ed oggi in modo ancora più accentuato – sarebbe stato al centro delle questioni controverse: la diversa comprensione dell’ecclesiologia e dei ministeri. In altre parole, nella prospettiva cattolica ed ortodossa non basta l’unità della comune fede nello stesso Dio, Uno e Trino, per accedere all’eucaristia, occorre che *prima* sia riconosciuta da tutti una comune comprensione della chiesa e del ministero. Il paragrafo del BEM che conclude la parte sull’Eucaristia riconosce ed evidenzia questo stato di cose: “L’accreciuta comprensione reciproca espressa nel presente documento può permettere ad alcune Chiese di raggiungere un più alto livello di comunione eucaristica tra loro, rendendo così più vicino il giorno in cui il popolo di Cristo, finora diviso, sarà unito visibilmente intorno alla mensa del Signore” (§ 33).

Le risposte delle chiese alle 4 domande poste dalla Commissione per verificare in quale misura esse si riconoscessero nel BEM e ritenessero di poterlo utilizzare nei vari ambiti della vita delle chiese, sono state di varia natura ma, di fatto, le critiche incrociate sono state tali da parcheggiare il BEM in una strada senza uscita. Oggi vi sono dei tentativi di riprendere il testo di convergenza del BEM e rilanciarlo: poiché ne parlo in questa sede, mi permetto di ricordare la conferenza di Günther Gassmann, già direttore di Fede e Costituzione del CEC nell’aprile 2007 e che potete leggere sull’ultimo bollettino del Centro Pro Unione e, ancora, più recentemente la conferenza di Thomas Best, direttore di Fede e Costituzione il 22 novembre scorso.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. La Liturgia di Lima: un efficace lievito liturgico per l’ecumene cristiana

Dopo la celebrazione eucaristica di Lima nel gennaio 1982, il testo è stato successivamente ripreso e riadattato per numerosi altri incontri ufficiali: nella cappella del CEC a Ginevra il 28 luglio 1982, in occasione della riunione del Comitato centrale, presieduta dal Segretario Generale Philip Potter, quindi nell’Assemblea ecumenica di Vancouver nel 1983 e a Canberra nel 1991, ancora nella quinta conferenza mondiale di Fede e Costituzione a Santiago de Compostela nel 1993 e poi in numerose altre occasioni, a livello regionale e locale. Insomma, se da un lato qualcuno potrebbe sostenere che la LL fu un parto prematuro o addirittura un aborto, essa ha avuto, comunque la si valuti, un impatto reale con il rinnovamento liturgico nell’ecumene cristiana. Max Thurian

<sup>4</sup> M. THURIAN (ed.), Cfr. *Churches Respond to BEM*, Faith and Order Papers 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 (Ginevra: WCC, 1986-1988) vols I-VI; *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990. Report on the Process and Responses*, (Ginevra: WCC Publications, 1990). La risposta ufficiale delle Chiese Valdesi e Metodiste al BEM si trova nel vol. II:245-254.

Per un commento critico protestante, si veda P. RICCA, “Il ‘BEM’ e il futuro dell’ecumenismo. Un parere sui documenti di Lima,” in *Protestantesimo*, 38 (1983) 155-169; 225-243. Secondo Ricca “Il BEM...segna e contribuisce a determinare il trapasso dalla fase ecumenica dell’unità discussa a quella dell’unità tentata” (155).

Sull’eucaristia Ricca fa notare che il testo è “ipertrofico, sovraccarico, ridondante, in qualche punto persino vagamente barocco” (163); “L’euforia eucaristica che caratterizza il BEM può essere bene intenzionata ma una maggiore sobrietà e un maggiore rigore avrebbero favorito di più la causa ecumenica” (165).

<sup>5</sup> *Battesimo Eucaristia Ministero*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> G. GASSMANN, “25 Years of the Lima Document (BEM). A Unique Document – An Extraordinary Process – A Promising Impact,” *Bulletin – Centro Pro Unione* 72 (2007) 3-10.

stesso precisò, dopo Lima 1982, che il suo proponimento era quello di “illustrare le solide conclusioni teologiche” del BEM e aggiunse che “la liturgia di Lima non è l’unica possibilità: le convergenze registrate nel BEM avrebbero potuto esprimersi in altre forme liturgiche, secondo altre tradizioni, spiritualità o culture.”<sup>7</sup> Credo che il motivo vero che ha permesso alla LL di essere un fermento attivo per la creazione di nuovi testi liturgici stia proprio in queste parole del frate di Taizé. La LL non ha mai inteso presentarsi come un “modello” ma come una traccia, come un’orma che può essere seguita, indipendentemente dalla misura del proprio piede. Contrariamente al testo dottrinale del BEM che è rimasto fermo al palo, quasi ingessato nelle sue convergenze dottrinali precarie, la LL è invece stata un seme fecondo in numerosi ambiti dell’ecumene cristiana. F. Schulz ha mostrato nei dettagli la benefica influenza della LL nella ricezione ecumenica, illustrando la sua ricerca anche con una interessante tabella sinottica,<sup>8</sup> riprendendo, in conclusione, queste parole di un teologo cattolico che così si è espresso: “Il cattolico non deve vantarsi se finalmente gli altri hanno preso qualcosa della sua chiesa, e il cristiano evangelico non deve pensare di dover ora praticare qualcosa di orribilmente cattolico, al contrario, entrambi ritomano, nella scia della LL, nella comune storia della cristianità.”<sup>9</sup>

La diffusione della LL ha dunque suscitato un processo di “ricezione” positiva da parte di tutte le chiese che ne avevano fatto uso. Contrariamente al testo del BEM che ha avuto una ricezione ufficiale largamente negativa da parte di molte chiese, la ricezione della LL (non richiesta da Fede e Costituzione), ha, nei fatti, innescato un processo dinamico che ha portato molti frutti ed ha indubbiamente “fertilizzato” il terreno liturgico ecumenico.

Due incontri, due veri e propri laboratori liturgici ecumenici hanno avuto luogo nel 1994 e 1995 e meritano la nostra attenzione.

Nell’agosto 1994 Fede e Costituzione ha organizzato una consultazione ecumenica sul tema “Towards Koinonia in Worship” a Ditchingham, in Inghilterra, a cui hanno partecipato una trentina di liturgisti, teologi, musicisti e pastori. L’intenzione era di collegare gli sviluppi concernenti il culto e la liturgia in ambito locale ed ecumenico degli ultimi trenta anni, con la riflessione ecumenica sulla vita della chiesa e la sua

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<sup>7</sup> M. THURIAN and G. WAINWRIGHT, *Baptism and Eucharist. Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*, Faith and Order Paper No 117 (Ginevra: WCC, 1983) 241.

<sup>8</sup> F. SCHULZ, “Die Rezeption der Lima-Liturgie,” *Jahrbuch für Liturgik und Hymnologie* 31 (1987/88) 10. Dopo aver presentato e commentato la sinossi delle diverse liturgie comparate con la LL, Schulz sostiene che la LL altro non è se non “una espressione storica particolare del culto cristiano occidentale,” p. 12. Cfr. Ancora, dello stesso, *Die Lima-Liturgie. Die ökumenische Gottesdienstordnung zu den Lima-Texten. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis und zur Urteilsbildung* (Kassel: J. Stauda, 1983), e H. Chr. SCHMIDT-LAUBER, “Die Bedeutung der Lima-Liturgie für die Ökumenische Bewegung,” *Liturgische Jahrbuch* 35 (1985) 131-147.

<sup>9</sup> F. SCHULZ, “Die Rezeption der Lima-Liturgie,”..., *op. cit.*, 9 e nota 33.

vocazione all’unità.<sup>10</sup> La consultazione ha messo in evidenza quattro aree tematiche su cui riflettere.

1. La prima concerne la nozione di *ordo*, vale a dire l’individuazione degli elementi costitutivi del culto cristiano primitivo. Questo concetto è importante perché permette alle chiese impegnate nel rinnovamento liturgico delle proprie tradizioni, di riscoprire gli elementi comuni del culto cristiano radicati nel Nuovo Testamento e sviluppatasi poi nel corso della storia. L’individuazione di un comune *ordo* permette al tempo stesso di valorizzare i doni diversi degli uni e degli altri.

2. La seconda area si è concentrata invece attorno al concetto di *inculturazione*, concetto complesso e non privo di ambiguità,<sup>11</sup> sempre da precisare nella relazione fra le diverse culture, come ci insegna la storia della missione. La consultazione di Ditchingham ha voluto però sottolineare la forza di questo concetto nell’ambito del culto come una vera e propria “forza” in vista dell’*unità locale*: diverse chiese locali di uno stesso territorio e provenienti da altri continenti, hanno la tendenza a crescere insieme adottando forme culturali locali per esprimere la fede cristiana universale.<sup>12</sup> Vorrei aggiungere che questa tendenza è presente anche in Italia da molti anni nell’ambito del movimento “Essere chiesa insieme” promosso dalla Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia (FCEI). Ma occorre riconoscere che si tratta di un processo assai complesso e denso di problemi, legati soprattutto alla diversità delle lingue, delle tradizioni, delle modalità della celebrazione che sempre richiedono dei patteggiamenti e delle verifiche interne onde evitare abusi ed emarginazioni non voluti.

3. La terza area di riflessione consiste nella ricerca di vie in cui il culto sia realmente orientato alla *ricerca dell’unità*. Qui si situa senza dubbio il luogo della maggiore difficoltà e lo riprenderò nella conclusione.

4. La quarta area di riflessione coinvolge direttamente la Commissione Fede e Costituzione: *come* propone ipotesi di culto che tendano all’unità e come far sì che il culto stesso possa essere concepito come strumento per l’unità della chiesa?

La consultazione di Ditchingham si è poi soffermata in modo specifico sulla LL, a motivo dell’interesse che essa ha suscitato nell’ecumene “per studiare le forme, l’uso ed il futuro ruolo” che essa potrà avere.<sup>13</sup> Il gruppo di lavoro riconosce che la LL è stata recepita essenzialmente come “testo stampato,” prodotto da teologi e, proprio perché pensato per celebrare le convergenze del BEM, si prestava a più

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<sup>10</sup> Il materiale prodotto durante questa consultazione è stato pubblicato con il titolo T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *So We Believe, Towards Koinonia in Worship*, Faith and Order Paper No.171 (Ginevra: WCC Publications, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. A.J. CHUPUNGO, O.S.B., “Liturgical Inculturation and the Search for Unity,” in T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *So We Believe...*, *op. cit.*, 55-64.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. “Introduction,” in T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *So We Believe...*, *op. cit.*, . xi, e “Towards Koinonia in Worship: Report of the Consultation,” in T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *So We Believe...*, *op. cit.*, 12ss.

<sup>13</sup> “Towards Koinonia in Worship...,” *op. cit.*, 22ss.

rischi. Il rischio individuato viene così espresso: “ci può far deviare dal proponimento principale di ogni liturgia, vale a dire il culto da rendere a Dio.”<sup>14</sup>

Ho voluto riprendere nel dettaglio questi quattro aspetti della consultazione di Fede e Costituzione di Ditchingham perché un anno dopo, il CEC stesso, a distanza di 13 anni da Lima – promosse un incontro presso l’Istituto Ecumenico di Bossey, invitando musicisti, poeti e artisti, liturgisti, teologi, pastori, per riprendere la LL nel contesto ecumenico contemporaneo (12-21 maggio 1995). Lo scopo di questo incontro era duplice: da un lato intendeva fare il punto sull’uso che era stato fatto della LL e, alla luce di ciò, suggerire alcuni principi orientativi per la celebrazione dell’eucaristia in ambito ecumenico, e, dall’altro, produrre del nuovo materiale liturgico da usare nelle chiese.<sup>15</sup> Nel volume che ha successivamente raccolto questo materiale la LL viene definita “una pietra miliare ecumenica,” anche se essa non ha avuto, nel mondo cattolico ed ortodosso, quel rilievo che si è invece notato nelle altre chiese membro del CEC. In questa luce positiva, il teologo luterano Gordon Lathrop ha messo in evidenza una serie di critiche che sono state indirizzate alla LL ed egli stesso ne ha aggiunto altre. Egli ha però anche messo in chiara luce il fatto che non è possibile criticare una liturgia per il fatto di non aver saputo risolvere le questioni dottrinali controverse concernenti l’ecclesiologia ed i ministeri.<sup>16</sup>

Nell’ambito del rinnovamento liturgico verificatosi nell’ecumene cristiana mondiale voglio ricordare ancora il grosso volume *Sinfonia Oecumenica. Worship with the Churches in the World*, pubblicato dal CEC<sup>17</sup> in occasione dei 50 anni del Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese nelle quattro lingue principali: inglese, spagnolo, francese e tedesco. In questo volume liturgico di quasi 1000 pagine, la LL è ripresa in due diverse punti. Una prima volta nel culto di apertura dell’Assemblea plenaria della Federazione Luterana Mondiale ad Hong Kong nel 1997,<sup>18</sup> una seconda, con il titolo “Sotto il fico” (Lc.13,6-9), riprende invece la liturgia della Cena celebrata insieme a numerosi ospiti durante il *Kirchentag* delle Chiese evangeliche tedesche nel 1989 a Berlino. La liturgia eucaristica intendeva essere “un tentativo di contestualizzare la LL quale ‘frutto’ della dichiarazione di convergenza del BEM e di collegarla ai

motivi di una liturgia vivente.”<sup>19</sup>

In ambito riformato, la questione un tempo assai controversa della preghiera eucaristica, ha trovato nuovo spazio in quasi tutte le liturgie. In molte di esse, fra i vari moduli liturgici, si è fatto spazio all’*ordo* del rituale romano. La nuova *Reformierte Liturgie* del 1999, in uso nelle chiese riformate di lingua tedesca, un grosso volume di oltre 600 pagine, sottolinea il fatto che il culto evangelico è come tale “concelebrazione”: “esso non può rinunciare alla comunità come prima e più importante liturgia.”<sup>20</sup> E precisa in che cosa consiste questa funzione liturgica primaria della comunità, indicando il canto, la preghiera comune (Padre nostro), la comune confessione di fede, l’offerta per i bisognosi e la comune celebrazione della Cena del Signore.<sup>21</sup> Come si noterà, ci si trova in piena sintonia con l’*ordo* riconosciuto dalle consultazioni ecumeniche di cui ho appena parlato.

Altro discorso andrebbe fatto per le piccole chiese protestanti del mondo latino in cui è assai difficile indicare degli esempi concreti di contaminazione liturgia da parte della LL. in modo diretto. La mia opinione è che l’influsso di Lima sia pervenuto più per via indiretta che diretta, attraverso i testi liturgici ecumenici a cui le chiese della diaspora latina hanno preso parte attiva e che hanno utilizzato abbondantemente per la riscrittura dei loro testi.<sup>22</sup> Recentemente il noto esegeta tedesco Gerd Theissen ha proposto una liturgia eucaristica che riprende l’*ordo* di cui abbiamo detto e si situa nell’orizzonte ecumenico delle liturgie riformate che fanno anche libero uso dell’*ordo missae*.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> “Materials for Eucharistic Services,”..., *op. cit.*, 132ss. Una valutazione positiva della LL la dà H.-Chr. SCHMIDT-LAUBER, M. MEYER BLACK e K.-H. BIERITZ, *Handbuch der Liturgik*, 3° edizione, (Gottinga: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003) 912-913 (H. CORNEMANN).

<sup>20</sup> P. BUKOWSKI, A. KLONPMACKER, C. NOLTING, A. RAUHAUS e F. THIELE, (edd.), *Reformierte Liturgie. Gebete und Ordnungen für die unter dem Wort versammelte Gemeinde* (Wuppertal/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Foedus-Verlag/Neukirchener Verlag, 1999) 25.

<sup>21</sup> Abendmahl,- Form B1, segue l’*ordo* della Messa, cfr. *Reformierte Liturgie...*, *op. cit.*, 359ss. Così anche la Liturgia eucaristica delle Chiese evangeliche della Svizzera tedesca, ha introdotto, come una possibilità fra altre, l’*ordo* della Messa già nel 1983. Similmente la Chiesa Presbiteriana (USA), *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), la Chiesa Metodista, *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House 1999), ecc.

<sup>22</sup> Ricordo che la traduzione italiana della LL è disponibile in E. GENRE, *Il culto cristiano. Una prospettiva protestante* (Torino: Claudiana, 2004) 230-240.

<sup>23</sup> G. THEISSEN, “Der Sinn des Abendmahls. Zehn Thesen und eine Abendmahlsliturgie,” in *Pastoraltheologie* 9 (2004) 353-360. La liturgia eucaristica di Theissen è disponibile in traduzione italiana in E. GENRE, *Gesù ti invita a cena. L’eucaristia è ecumenica* (Torino: Claudiana, 2007) 141-145.

<sup>14</sup> “Towards Koinonia in Worship...,” *op. cit.*, 23. Si osserva inoltre che la forma della LL porta in sé “il rischio di una eccessiva clericalizzazione” ed è necessario essere più attenti alla presenza di animatori laici.

<sup>15</sup> T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *Eucharistic Worship in Ecumenical Contexts. The Lima Liturgy- and Beyond*, (Ginevra: WCC Publications, 1998) 2.

<sup>16</sup> G. LATHROP, “The Lima Liturgy and Beyond. Moving Forward Ecumenically,” in T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *Eucharistic Worship...*, *op. cit.*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> (Gütersloh/Basilea: Gütersloher Verlagshaus/Basileia Verlag, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> “Materials for Eucharistic Services,” in T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *Eucharistic Worship...*, *op. cit.*, 128s.

### 3. *Lex orandi lex credendi* come via ecumenica praticabile

Vorrei attirare ancora l'attenzione, in questa parte conclusiva del mio dire, sull'antica formula *lex orandi lex credendi*, che è stata recentemente ripresa da più parti, e ormai di casa anche in ambito protestante. Già negli anni '80 il teologo metodista Geoffrey Wainwright, l'aveva ampiamente commentata nella sua teologia sistematica, dedicandole due notevoli capitoli<sup>24</sup> Più recentemente essa è stata ripresa da Gordon Lathrop nell'incontro di Fede e Costituzione a Ditchingham di cui ho detto precedentemente. L'assioma *lex orandi, lex credendi*, come è noto, risale a Prospero di Aquitania (+ 463), ed intende mettere in luce la relazione vitale tra fede e liturgia.<sup>25</sup> Ma come è da intendere questo assioma secondo cui la legge della preghiera stabilisce la legge della fede? Lathrop ha messo bene in luce il significato di questa formula così spesso usata e anche abusata, situandola nel suo contesto, cioè nell'ambito della chiesa riunita per celebrare il culto. La legge della preghiera che istituisce la legge di ciò che si crede è *una pratica*, un *fare* costruito sul fondamento della Scrittura. Non si tratta dunque di una pratica *qualsiasi*, non qualsiasi formula è appropriata per celebrare il culto, come spesso si è pensato e talvolta ancora si pensa nel mondo evangelico, si tratta invece di una pratica che permette di riconoscere in modo nitido gli elementi fondamentali del culto cristiano, ciò che fa sì che *quella* celebrazione esprima la fede della chiesa, localmente ed universalmente. Prospero fa riferimento esplicito alla tradizione apostolica (*ab apostolis tradita*), cioè si ricollega ad un ordine riconosciuto ovunque (*in toto mundo*) e in modo uniforme (*uniformiter*) in ogni chiesa cattolica (*in omni ecclesia catholica*). Lathrop non esita a riconoscersi in questa prospettiva descritta da Prospero, di una *lex credendi* che, attraverso l'insegnamento dei vescovi e dei teologi ha avuto diretta influenza sul linguaggio della fede nella chiesa ed ha assunto un ruolo critico nella riforma del culto. Il suo interesse tende però a mettere in luce un altro elemento: il fatto che le diverse forme di questa pratica, di questo fare liturgico delle chiese, non assume una funzione tale da poter mettere in questione l'unità, al contrario: "il fatto che l'evangelo di Gesù Cristo sia celebrato in luoghi diversi in modo diverso può essere un segno di fedeltà ed un dono per un mutuo arricchimento."<sup>26</sup>

Di qui gli interrogativi che da Prospero di Aquitania ricadono nella nostra realtà ecumenica contemporanea. Qual è questa pratica, questo fare cristiano elementare quanto fondamentale capace di creare comunione fra le diverse chiese cristiane?

Tutte le recenti consultazioni ecumeniche hanno messo in evidenza il concetto di *ordo*, vale a dire una comune struttura celebrativa

<sup>24</sup> G. WAINWRIGHT, *Doxology. The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), cap. VII e VIII: 218-250.

<sup>25</sup> Il riferimento esatto è il seguente: "Obsecrationum quoque sacerdotalium sacramenta respiciamus, quae ab apostolis tradita in toto mundo atque in omni ecclesia catholica uniformiter celebrantur, ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi," PL 51: 209.

<sup>26</sup> G. LATHROP, "Knowing Something a Little. On a Role of the *Lex Orandi* in the Search for Christian Unity," in T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *So We Believe...*, op. cit., 39.

riconosciuta e riconoscibile in ogni culto cristiano. L'incontro di Bossey (12-21 maggio 1995), nella scia della LL e del BEM, ha ribadito la convinzione che "nello spirito della Liturgia di Lima" è possibile riconoscere e proporre una celebrazione riconoscibile da tutti e che invita tutti ad andare oltre le proprie esperienze in vista di una più grande unità.<sup>27</sup> Questo modello di base, questo *ordo* da tutti riconosciuto per la celebrazione dell'eucaristia è stato così riassunto:<sup>28</sup>

RIUNIONE DELL'ASSEMBLEA NEL SEGNO DELLA GRAZIA, DELL'AMORE E DELLA COMUNIONE NEL DIO UNO E TRINO

#### *Servizio della Parola:*

*Lettura* delle scritture dell'Antico e Nuovo Testamento

*Proclamazione* della crocifissione e risurrezione di Gesù Cristo quale fondamento della nostra speranza

(confessione e canto della nostra fede)

quindi *l'intercessione* per coloro che sono nel bisogno e per l'unità

(condivisione della pace per suggellare le nostre preghiere e prepararci alla mensa)

#### *Servizio alla mensa*

*Ringraziamenti* per il pane e il vino

*Mangiare e bere* i santi doni della presenza di Cristo

(offerta per i bisognosi)

e quindi

L'invio (dismissal) in missione nel mondo

Può essere interessante notare, in questa relazione dinamica fra *lex orandi* e *lex credendi*, che anche il testo di convergenza del BEM (E 27) propone un *ordo*, in verità assai lungo e dettagliato, sostenendo però che questi stessi elementi "possono presentarsi in ordine differente e che sono d'importanza diseguale" e che "una certa diversità liturgica compatibile con la nostra comune fede eucaristica è riconosciuta come fatto salutare e arricchente. L'affermazione di una fede eucaristica comune non implica uniformità né nella liturgia né nella prassi" (E 28).

Già il rapporto finale della consultazione di Ditchingham aveva messo in evidenza l'importanza di questo *ordo* costitutivo del culto cristiano. Pur in mezzo a tutte le reinterpretazioni che ha subito, esso è radicato nella relazione parola-sacramento, nella lettura della scrittura e nella predicazione, nell'intercessione, e quindi *eucaristia* e mangiare e

<sup>27</sup> "Celebrations of the Eucharist in Ecumenical Context," in T.F. BEST e D. HELLER, (edd.), *Eucharistic Worship...*, op. cit., 29ss.

<sup>28</sup> "Celebrations of the Eucharist...", op. cit., 35.

bere insieme, raccolta delle offerte per i poveri e missione nel mondo.<sup>29</sup>

La mia personale convinzione è che non sia possibile andare oltre la proposta di questo *ordo* e al tempo stesso che soltanto rispettandolo sia possibile non cadere in una uniformità liturgica che non è mai esistita e che uccide la creatività dello Spirito. Qui si situa ciò che ho cercato di indicare con il concetto di *surplus*, di *plusvalore liturgico* rispetto a qualsiasi testo dottrinale di convergenza. Un plusvalore liturgico che è legato al fatto che liturgia è *azione* (ergon); essa richiede, da parte della comunità celebrante – che viene trasformata dall'avvenimento dello

Spirito e riconciliata come corpo di Cristo nella relazione parola-sacramento - il discernimento teologico che ci ricorda che spezzare il pane e bere dallo stesso calice avviene *tra persone credenti che confessano lo stesso Signore* e non fra istituzioni. La celebrazione dell'eucaristia nella chiesa è legata al mandato di Gesù: "fate questo in mia memoria." Ciò che è determinante è l'obbedienza della fede. Non ha torto il teologo tedesco Reinhard Slenczka quando afferma che "la Liturgia di Lima ha certamente un significato più ampio dello stesso testo di convergenza." Le formulazioni teologiche infatti scompaiono assai presto nelle biblioteche e nei cestini della carta, mentre "i testi liturgici entrano direttamente nei culti delle comunità."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Towards Koinonia in Worship...", *op. cit.*, 6 (n. 4), 7-8. Il tema dell'*ordo* è stato recentemente ripreso da G. WAINWRIGHT, "Any Advance on "BEM"? The Lima Text at Twenty-Five," *Studia Liturgica* 37, 1 (2007) 1-29, cfr. 5ss.

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<sup>30</sup> R. SLENCZKA, "Die Konvergenzerklärungen zu Taufe, Eucharistie, Amt und ihre Konsequenzen für Lehre und Gottesdienst," *Kerygma und Dogma* 31, 1 (1985) 7.



# CC

Centro Conferences

## The Challenge of Reciting the Creed Today

Timothy Radcliffe, op  
Itinerant preacher and lecturer, Blackfriars, Oxford

Tenth Annual Conference in Honor of Father Paul Wattson and Mother Lurana White

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Tuesday, 18 December 2007)

When Cardinal Hume introduced a lecture I was giving, he said that it was a pleasure to welcome a member of a young Order like the Dominicans, a mere eight hundred years old, unlike the ancient Benedictines. This is a game religious orders like to play. When the Carmelites claimed to have beaten everyone by being founded by Elijah, a thirteenth century English Dominican, Dr Stokes, immediately claimed that the Dominicans were founded by the prophet Samuel. He had, for a moment, forgotten that our motto is *Veritas*, Truth!

So it is my pleasure today to celebrate the foundation of the Society of Atonement by Fr Paul Wattson and Mother Lurana. It was established as a society of the Anglican Church in 1898 and then was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1909 and so we are just coming up to its hundredth anniversary. Paul Wattson and Lurana White were extraordinarily prophetic. At a time when hardly anyone was even thinking of ecumenism, they wanted to found a society that would work for the reconciliation of the Christian churches. Paul believed that 'atonement' implied at-one-moment.

Father James asked me to speak this evening specifically about belief. At first I wondered why. What was he thinking about? I suspect that it is because religious belief is today widely assumed to be divisive. All over the world we see the rise of religious fundamentalism: Christian fundamentalism especially but not only in the United States; Hindu fundamentalism in India, even patches of aggressive Buddhist fundamentalism and, of course, Islamicist fundamentalism in Asia, Africa and Europe. Fundamentalist religion is the source of violence in every continent except the Antarctic.

Understandably, this has provoked the most vigorous rejection of religious belief since the French Revolution. Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* is the bestselling book in the world at the moment; and there are others, such as Christopher Hitchens' book *God is not great: How religion poisons everything*. So it is widely held that religious belief is usually intolerant, aggressive and divisive. The only way to make the planet safe is to get rid of God. Religion is only tolerable if it is reduced to a purely private matter, like a passion for ballroom dancing or aromatherapy, which one can practice behind closed doors, where it

does not harm anyone.

This assumption places a question mark over the very existence of the Society of the Atonement. It is a religious community devoted to reconciliation. For Dawkins and lots of modern people, this is a contradiction in terms. Creeds necessarily tear people apart. My beliefs must necessarily be in competition with those of other people. 'I believe' seems necessarily aggressive against other beliefs.

In this lecture, I will not reply directly to Dawkins. I must confess that I have never even read the book. I know I ought to, but my friends tell me that it would make me so irritated that I would have to reply. And this would be a waste of time since so many people have already done this far better than I ever could.

And so I wish to take a more positive approach and ask what it means for a Christian to have faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Is the Creed divisive? Does strong belief necessarily polarize? I wish to argue that this is not so. Shigeto Oshida, a Japanese Dominican and Zen Master, wrote "The more deeply we enter into our own mystery, the more we shall encounter other mystical traditions."

I want to grapple with some tough issues in the next forty five minutes. I hope that you will not feel like the man who drifted over the south of England in a hot air balloon. He had no idea where he was and finally he came down in a tree. He saw a couple of people walking by and so he shouted out to them, "Help, where am I?" One of them replied, "You are in a tree." "So the man replied, "You must be a Dominican." "How did you know?" "Because what you say is true but completely useless."

If I say that I believe in God, then it may look as if I am asserting the existence of a very powerful and invisible person, someone who runs the Universe, an infinite version of President Bush. Like the Loch Ness Monster or the Yeti, some people believe that this being exists and others, like Dawkins, do not. You weigh the evidence and decide. If that is how you think then you may sympathise with Bertrand Russell, the atheist philosopher. He said that if, after he died, he discovered that God did after all exist, he would say: "God, you should have made the evidence of your existence more conspicuous".

But all the great Christian theologians, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, have always rejected this idea of belief. God is not a powerful invisible person or three persons. We are not saying that besides all the important visible people whose existence is evident, like the Pope and the President of the United States, there are three extra ones whom we cannot see who are even more important. If you made a list of all the things that exist, God would not be there. God is the reason why there is anything rather than nothing.

The Monty Python team produced a hilarious film called *The Meaning of Life* in which they parody just such an idea of God. We English have an odd sense of humour, and so please forgive me if this just seems absurd. It is making an important point. The English believe that religion is far too serious not to laugh sometimes. John Cleese plays a headmaster leading the school prayers.

Oh, Lord,

R: O Lord

You are so big

R: You are so big

So absolutely huge

R: So absolutely huge

Gosh, we are all really impressed down here I can tell you,

R: Gosh, we are all really impressed down here I can tell you,

Forgive us, our Lord, for this our dreadful toadying

R: and barefaced flattery

But you are so strong and, well, just so super...

R: Fantastic

Many atheists reject the existence of this absolutely huge Celestial Daddy, the person who runs the Universe. All the great theologians, from St Augustine in the fourth century to St Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth until today would say that they are right to. That is not the Christian God. We would need to be liberated from this terrible figure, the Heavenly Boss. He would suffocate us and rob us of our freedom. Most atheism is getting out of the shadow of this oppressive figure which no decent theologian believes in anyway.

So what then does it mean to believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Naturally as a Dominican I think that Thomas Aquinas gives us the best starting point. And for Thomas, belief is not, most fundamentally, believing things about God. God is a mystery beyond the grasp of our understanding. In this life we are joined to God as to the Unknown. Belief is the beginning of a relationship with God. Belief is entering God's friendship. And we are God's friends not by thinking things about him, but seeing things with God, through God's eyes, as it were. Nicholas Lash, of Cambridge, wrote: "If faith is the way in which, in this life, we know God, then learning to 'believe in' in God is learning to see all things in the way God sees them; as worth infinite

expenditure of understanding, interest, and care."<sup>1</sup>

Let us imagine that you are a friend of my Franciscan host, Father James. Usually the first signs of friendship is that we see the world in a similar way. We find ourselves laughing at the same jokes, enjoying the same novels, sharing other friends. Friends do not primarily look at each other, like lovers. They look at the world together. They live in the same world. They treasure the same things. Of course friendship does imply knowing some facts about James, for example that he exists, and that he is a Franciscan and not a Dominican, unfortunately, and lives in Rome. If someone claimed to be James' friend and denied his existence, or claimed that he was a fifth century Chinese Emperor, then you might doubt the friendship.

So it is with belief in God. I do believe various things such as that God exists, even if I do not understand what it means for God to exist. I believe that Jesus was born, died and rose again. But the core of belief is entry into friendship with God. To believe is to share God's life. And this changes how I see everything. I see the world with gratitude, delight in its intelligibility and am thrown beyond myself in love.

So I want to argue that it will not be necessary to disband the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement before they reach their hundredth anniversary. We can be passionate believers without intolerance. Indeed it is precisely our belief in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that opens us up to others. Dogma in its best sense is not dogmatic. It opens our minds and hearts. Let's go through the Nicene Creed and see how belief in each of the three persons of the Trinity is an induction into God's hospitable friendship and happiness.

### **We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.**

We begin by proclaiming our belief in God as creator. This does not mean that God set up the world at the Big Bang 18.5 billion years ago and then left it to get on with itself. Creation is not what happens at the beginning. It is that now God gives existence to everything. To be created means that I need not exist. My existence is a gift from God in every moment. It is not necessary, a sentiment that you may come to share by the end of the evening!

Most human beings throughout history sensed that everything is a gift, which is why nearly everyone has always believed in God. But we may forget. We rush around, do important things, and forget giver all of all good things. Adam and Eve are created to till the soil and bring forth its fruit. People in touch with annual miracle of fertility are rarely atheists. But in a Supermarket, then vegetables become plastic wrapped goods. They look like products rather than gifts. Oshida gave many retreats to Asian bishops, and he made them spend the first few days just planting rice. He laughed as he refused their pleas to be let off. "Get back to the fields." He wrote "A farmer who works hard from dawn to dusk knows that a grain of rice is not his product, a thing made by his own effort, but something given to him by God. He must offer the grain of rice to God who is hidden but who gives everything. He must

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<sup>1</sup> N. LASH, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostle's Creed* (London: SCM Classics, 1992) 22.

say 'This is yours'.<sup>2</sup>

Once when I went to stay in a Zulu village in the Drakensberg mountains, I was told that I should bring a chicken. So we dropped into a supermarket and bought one, a white plastic lump wrapped in plastic. When I presented it to the chief, he gazed at it in puzzlement. "But what is it?", he asked. "It's a chicken." It did not look as if it had ever emerged from an egg, and run around eating corn, roosting in trees at night. It had become a product.

Sociologists have speculated much on the magical properties railway stations in nineteenth century France. Deeply religious peasants came to Paris to seek work, but the moment that their feet touched the platform, then they never went to church again. They forgot God. In an urban slum, it ceased to be obvious that everything was a gift, and so one easily forgot the Giver. This year, for the first time in human history, more than half of all human beings live in cities. When people live in an environment that is entirely constructed by human hands, how can one remember utter giftedness of everything?

So we share the happiness of God the Creator by gratitude. Ronald Rolheiser wrote that "to be a saint is to be fuelled by gratitude, nothing more and nothing less."<sup>3</sup> Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth century German Dominican, said that "if the only prayer I ever make is Thank you... That is enough." When my mother became old and ill, hardly able to speak because of strokes, I was overwhelmed by her gratitude. She remained constantly astonished by the endless care of God for her. When she fell out of bed, and ambulance men had come and put her back at 3am, her first reaction was gratitude to God for their help. That is belief.

In a wonderful novel by Patrick O'Brian, Stephen Maturin walks through a wood on his way to visit his friend, Jack Aubrey: "It was ordinary country raised to the highest power: the mounting sun shone through a faint veil with never a hint of glare, giving the colours a freshness and an intensity Stephen had never seen equalled. The green world and the gentle, pure blue sky might just have been created; and as the day warmed a hundred scents drifted through the air. "Returning thanks at any length is virtually impossible," he reflected, sitting on a style and watching two hares at play, sitting up and fibbing at one another, then leaping and running and leaping again... The hares raced away out of sight and he walked on, singing in a harsh undertone "Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus" until a cuckoo called away on his left hand: cuckoo, cuckoo, loud and clear followed by a cackling laugh and answered by a fainter cuckoo, cuckoo far over on the right."<sup>4</sup>

The key words are, of course, "the blue sky might just have been created." This gives a sense of the pure gratuity of existence. In the

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<sup>2</sup> Compiled by C. MATTIELLO, *Takamori Sōan Teachings of Shigetō Oshida, a Zen Master* (Buenos Aires, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> R. ROLHEISER, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 66.

<sup>4</sup> P. O'BRIAN, *The Reserve of the Medal* (New York and London, 1986) 178f.

psalms we confess that God spoke a word and the world "sprang into being." In October the Czech Catholic composer Petr Eben died. Because his father was Jewish as a child he was sent to Buchenwald and was, for a moment, in the gas chamber expecting death. But he said, even after all that, "I believe that our century is profoundly lacking in gratitude. So perhaps the most urgent task is praise, otherwise stones would cry out."<sup>5</sup>

Contrast this with the this passage from Zadie Smith's novel *On Beauty* where we meet Howard. Howard does not have time for religion. When his son goes back to England, he discovers faith and this is what he says about his father: "What I have really realized is that Howard has a problem with gratitude", pressed Jerome, more to himself than to his brother. "It's like he *knows* he's blessed, but he doesn't know where to put his gratitude because that makes him uncomfortable, because that would be dealing in transcendence – and we all know how he hates to do *that*. So by denying there are any gifts in the world, any essentially valuable things – that's how he short circuits the gratitude question. If there are no gifts, then he doesn't have to think about a God who might have given them. But that's where joy is."<sup>6</sup>

The necessity for gratitude cannot be proved but it may be infectious. Thomas' so-called five proofs of the existence of God are not really proofs in the modern sense. They are five ways of showing that nothing need be, and so we can give thanks. Basil Hume said that when he was a child, and he wanted to steal an apple from the larder, he felt that God would tell him not to. As he grew older, he came to feel that God would say to him, "Go on: Take two apples." This gratitude is just what believers of different faiths recognise in each other. When you read the Hassidic rabbis of the eighteenth century, such as the Baal Shem Tov, or Sufi mystics like Rumi, you recognise their gratitude as your own. Belief in God the Creator overthrows religious division. We recognise a fellow thanker.

But, you may say, this is all very well with belief in God the creator, but once you get to the Son, then we are entering rougher waters. This is surely where belief will be divisive. Let us see!

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.**

I was once stopped in the street in Oxford by a couple of young men with clipboards, doing research. They asked me whether I believed that Jesus was literally the Son of the Father. I replied that if it meant that he was the Son of the Father in just the same sense in which I was the son of my father, then no. But if they meant that he was truly the Son of the Father, the one who granted him everything, even his divinity, then Yes. They looked at each other in puzzlement, and then one said, "Put him down as 'don't know'."

"Through him all things were made." We do not just thanks for

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<sup>5</sup> *The Times* Obituary December 7<sup>th</sup> 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Z. SMITH, *On Beauty* (London: Penguin Press., 2005) 237.

creation; we confess that is made by the Word of God. Creation is not just the result of blind forces and pure chance. It is of the fruit of God's word, which is to say that it is intelligible. And it is intelligible to us, because we too are people of the Word. We are in tune with the Word. It is our joy and happiness that the world is not absurd. We have the pleasure of understanding it. Meaning is not imposed from the outside, but discovered. We do not just have the happiness of gratitude but of understanding. So, again, belief is not primarily believing things about God. It is sharing God's friendship, living in a world which is radiant with intelligibility.

George Herbert, a seventeenth century Anglican poet, wrote a wonderful poem called 'Prayer.' It lists all the things that belong to prayer, ending thus:

The milkie way, the bird of paradise,  
Church bells beyond the staires heard, the souls bloud,  
The land of spices; something understood.<sup>7</sup> *Something understood.*

It may be understanding the laws of nature. Einstein expressed his wonder and astonishment at the intelligibility of the world. He delighted in the theory of relativity, because it revealed what the world is really like. He wrote "The eternal mystery of the world is its comprehensibility...The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle."<sup>8</sup> It may be in understanding other people through literature and poetry, anthropology and philosophy. It may be in understanding my friends and even myself.

Simone de Beauvoir was astonished to learn that Simone Weil wept when she heard of a famine in China. De Beauvoir said, "I envied a heart able to beat across the world." She believed that it was more important for people to have a reason to live than to give them food. To which Simone Weil replied, "It is obvious that you have never gone hungry."<sup>9</sup> But which Simone is right? It is a tough call. Which is more miserable in the end, a life deprived of meaning or of food? I leave that question with you.

One sign of our society's disbelief is that it draws back from even asking the larger questions. Why is there anything rather than nothing? What is human happiness? What is our destiny? A taxi driver who picked up Bertrand Russell grabbed the opportunity to pick the famous brain: "I asked him, 'Well then, governor, what is all about?' and do you know, he could not tell me." There was a famous debate between Russell and Freddy Copleston SJ. When the question was raised of why there is anything rather than nothing, Russell maintained this is a question which cannot even be considered; it just is there. But it was the Catholic who had to insist that there are no limits to our questioning. We

<sup>7</sup> W.H.AUDEN, (ed.), *George Herbert* (London: Viking Penguin, 1973) 54.

<sup>8</sup> W. ISAACSON, *Einstein: His Life and Universe* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007) 462.

<sup>9</sup> S. de BEUVOIR, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (Singapore: World Publishing Company, 1974).

share the life of God the Son by trying to make sense of everything in the light of the gospel. We are disciples, which means 'students,' seeking the happiness of understanding.

In the lavatory in a pub in Oxford I once saw a graffito, written in very small letters, on a corner of the ceiling. It said, "If you have looked this far, you must be looking for something. Why not try Roman Catholicism?"

The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy was a cult book of the 80s. You may regard it as yet another example of the crazy British sense of humour, but it is full of insight. It suggests that every society goes through three phases: Survival, Inquiry and Sophistication. I quote: "For instance the first phase is characterised by the question *How can we eat?* The second by the question *Why do we eat?* And the third by the question *Where shall we have lunch?*"<sup>10</sup> That is spot on, for we have largely become a society which does not ponder the ultimate questions but settles for entertainment. The Mass is incomprehensible for most people if it does not entertain. If it is boring, which it often is, then it is pointless.

Believing in the Logos opens up our minds to everyone who searches understanding, whatever their beliefs or none. If all truth is one in Christ, then we will be open to the truth wherever we can find it. We will be beggars after the truth, in the word of Pierre Claverie, the bishop of Oran who was assassinated for his dialogue with Muslims. Paul wrote that in Jesus, God was "reconciling to himself all things, whether in heaven or on the earth." (Colossians 1.20). One way that we are reconciled with each other is by thinking hard, understanding the other. It is fashionable to talk of 'tough love.' Thinking hard is part of loving. Love without intelligence is just shallow emotion. The novelist A.S.Byatt wrote "The human capacity to think, and to make feelings into thoughts; It is the way out of narcissism."<sup>11</sup> Thinking breaks the eggshell of the ego.

Of course even Christians may sometimes lose any sense of meaning. We may find ourselves in the dark, as if absurdity is triumphant. And that brings us to the next part of the Creed.

**For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.**

A moment may come when we can make sense of nothing. The bottom drops out of our lives. Then the Creed does not offer us a neat explanation. It does not explain away the absurdity of someone whom we love dying of cancer. It does not remove the nonsense of some terrible suffering. What the Creed does is to offer us a story which

<sup>10</sup> D. ADAMS, *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (London: BBC Collection, 1979) chapter 32.

<sup>11</sup> 'Novel Thoughts' TLS November 30<sup>th</sup> 2007.

includes the cross, the dark moment when Christ cried out saying "My God, my God why have you abandoned me." Sometimes all that we can do is to be in the dark place, when nothing makes sense anymore, and wait for Easter. The gospel teaches us patience, until meaning is given.

Professor Eamon Duffy, the Cambridge historian, tells of how one day everything came to pieces. He was a happy practising Catholic, secure in his faith, and then a friend of his died, an Anglican priest, and everything plunged into darkness. There was the horror of death, of nothingness. "And with the horror came the realization that God was gone; there was no God, and I had no faith. All the conditioning, all the arguments and emotional scaffolding I had built around and into my life were as if they had never been. I no longer believed, no longer even wanted to believe; I was absolutely mesmerized by this overwhelming perception of mortality. I had never been much good at prayer, and now more than ever prayer seemed hollow. I felt confused and embarrassed by my attempts to pray, like a man caught talking to himself in a railway carriage."<sup>12</sup> And when faith returned, it came as a gift. He knew he had to choose between a bleak and valueless world and one in which love and forgiveness and celebration were possibilities. "I do not have much recollection of the process by which I made my choice; except that, when it dawned on me that I had made it, it seemed no so much a choice as a gift. As I sat after Communion one Sunday, simply looking at the people walking up to the altar, I was quietly overwhelmed with an overflowing sense of companionship, of gratitude, of joy and, oddly, of pity. My mind filled up, quite literally filled up, with a single verse of the Psalms (26.8):

Lord, how I love the beauty of your house, . . .  
And the place where your glory dwells."<sup>13</sup>

As Dag Hammarskjöld wrote: "I don't know who or what put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But, at some moment, I did answer Yes."

God asks some people to endure long in the Dark. We have discovered recently that Mother Teresa of Calcutta was plunged into aridity for decades. St Teresa of Avila touched by the Dark Night as was St Therese of Lisieux for most of her life. In fact it seems to be very dangerous to be called of Teresa! But it is there in the night that God gives himself more intimately. Rowan Williams wrote, "The light is at the heart of dark, the dawn breaks when we have entered fully into the night. When we recognise our God in this experience we can indeed say with the Psalmist, 'The darkness is no darkness with thee; the night is as clear as the day' (Psalm 139.12). As the Sufi poet Rumi wrote, "where there is ruin, there is hope for treasure."<sup>14</sup>

I must confess that I have never been fully plunged into the Dark

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<sup>12</sup> E. DUFFY, *Faith of Our Fathers* (London: Continuum, 2004) 4.

<sup>13</sup> E. DUFFY, *Faith of Our Fathers...*, *op. cit.* 8.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted A. LAMOTT, *Travelling Mercies: Some Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999) 76.

night of the soul, more like the occasional grey evening! Maybe God knows that I am not ready for it! He keeps it for his stronger friends. This is why St Teresa of Avila said to God, "If you treat your friends like this, it explains why you have so few!"

We share the life of the Logos by struggling to understand who we are and where we are going. But in the end, understanding is a gift. The hard work, and sometimes the dark pain, is all preparation to receive the gift of meaning. And when that glimpse is granted, then we shall never be tempted to think that we are superior to anyone else; we will be incapable of beating up anyone with our own superior faith. We shall just give thanks.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.**

Believing in the Holy Spirit is most obviously not fundamentally believing **about** yet another invisible person. It is in the Holy Spirit that we believe anything at all. The Spirit is not so much the object of belief as the subject. Sebastian Moore wrote in his latest book, "The 'third person' is the most difficult to understand only because it *is* our understanding, *is* the Son spreading in us and so taking us to the Father."<sup>15</sup> The Spirit is the wise love in which we are in friendship with God. As John Paul II said, the Spirit is "the Divine Love in person."

My elder brother's nine year old grandson, Mattie, sent my brother a card recently which said, "Grandpa I love you so much. I love you even more than I love God." God would not be jealous because God is that love with which Mattie loves my brother. St Augustine wrote, "Let no one say, I do not know what to love. Let him love his brother and he will love that very love."

So believing in the Holy Spirit is not adding one more to the list of invisible people whose existence we accept. It is believing in the love that is God, the love that can never be defeated. It is the refusal of cynicism, of the temptation to think that deep down we are all just selfish people seeking our own ends, or selfish genes, and that love is ultimately an illusion.

A few three years ago I received a visit from a wonderful man called John Rae. He had been headmaster of Westminster School and was one of the good and the great. For years John had considered himself to be an agnostic but the time had come to decide whether he believed in God or not. He asked to see a number of Christians and atheists and asked each to argue their case. I met him on a number of occasions and we became friends. Nothing that I say is in breach of confidentiality since he planned to publish a book about these conversations, which I still hope will appear. The crux of our argument was whether he would die for those whom he loved. And even more deeply, did he sense in that love something that was just ephemeral, or might he glimpse something that was eternal, that could never be destroyed?

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<sup>15</sup> S. MOORE, *The Contagion of Jesus: Doing Theology as if it Mattered* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd., 2007) 17.

John sent me the manuscript of the book for comment. I was disappointed that he thought that the atheists had the better arguments. I pointed out that this was because his definition of an argument was narrowly scientific, and science could not prove the existence of God. Then John developed cancer. Shortly before he died, he asked me to go and see him, and for two hours we thought again about the nature of love. John kept saying that I was not going to get him with a death bed conversion, but still...

So the question is this: Do we accept the invincibility of love? Is it just a fleeting emotion, useful for the evolution of the selfish gene? Is it an illusion of meaning in lives that are ultimately going nowhere? Or is it the touch of a love which cannot be defeated? Do we have here a taste of eternity? In as strange and wonderful novel by called *The Time Traveller's Wife*, by Audrey Niffenegger, the hero leaves a letter to be opened by his wife after his death: "Our love has been the thread through the labyrinth, the net under the high-wire walker, the only real thing in this strange life of mine that I could ever trust. Tonight I feel that my love for you has more density in this world than I do, myself: as though it could linger on after me and surround you, keep you, hold you."<sup>16</sup> And it does!

Two years ago I spent a month in Zimbabwe. The President, Robert Mugabe, ordered operation Murambatsvina, the cleaning out of the rubbish. The people living in the townships had not voted for him and so he ordered the destruction of their homes. 700,000 watched as their homes were bulldozed. Sometimes they had to destroy their own homes at gunpoint. Sr Tarisai, a Dominican sister who worked there took me to visit the place where some of the refugees had tried to start life over again. There was a plastic tent, not more than ten feet by twenty, which proclaimed itself 'the Young Generation pre-school.' In it there were dozens of children under the age of six, nearly all HIV+ and with TB. This was the home of a young woman called Evelyn, and she used it as the school in the day. The children sang me a song of welcome.

Sometimes there is food for them to eat, but usually there is nothing. I asked Evelyn why she did this and she said that it was because she loved the children. This is a love which might be invisible to President Mugabe. Remember the words of Rumi, "where there is ruin, there is hope for treasure."<sup>17</sup>

Once again, we see that belief in the Holy Spirit is not divisive. We are not claiming unique possession of it. We name the love that is present in every human life. We point to the God who is always before us. We proclaim that this love is Trinitarian. It is the Holy Spirit who, with the Father and the Son, is worshipped and glorified. It is an equal love. The doctrine of the Trinity criticizes any love which is condescending, patronizing. A master could not really love his slave without setting him free. The love that is God lifts up into equality, the equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So I hope to have suggested why it is that our belief in the Trinity should not fuel intolerance and arrogance. The Society of the Atonement can both be sustained by deep and passionate belief and yet also seek reconciliation with other Christians and believers of other faiths. When we proclaim the Creed we are not manning the battlements of an ecclesiastical castle against the infidel. St Thomas Aquinas said that ultimately there are only two things we believe, that God exists and that we are loved in Jesus Christ. Every word of the Creed is indeed necessary, to bring us closer to that mystery. No one could call Herbert McCabe a wishy washy liberal. He was one of the most rigorous theologians of our time. He wrote, "The whole of our faith is the belief that God loves us; I mean there isn't anything else. Anything else that we say we believe is just a way of saying that God loves us. Any proposition, any article of faith is only an expression of faith if it is a way of saying that God loves us."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A. NIFFENEGGER, *The Time Traveller's Wife* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004) 503.

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted A. LAMOTT, *Travelling Mercies*..., *op.cit.*, 76.

<sup>18</sup> H. MCCABE, *Faith within Reason* (London: Continuum, 2007) 33.



# CC

Centro Conferences

## Jesus as a Teacher of Judaism

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### *Introduction*

The title I have chosen to speak on, *Jesus as a Teacher of Judaism*, may seem strange to you. Is not Jesus in fact the founder of Christianity? So why refer to him as a teacher of Judaism? The answer is not difficult to discern. The New Testament clearly identifies Jesus as a Jew. The religious terminology he used came from Judaism. When asked, "What is the chief one of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The chief one is: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul and with your whole mind, and with your whole strength. The second is this. You must love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:32ff)

In affirming the central teachings of religion, Jesus responded much as Hillel or Rabbi Akiba responded when asked similar questions. When a pagan challenged Hillel to summarize the whole of the Torah while he stood on one foot, Hillel answered, "what is hateful to you do not unto your fellow human being, this is the whole of the Torah the rest is commentary, go and learn," (Shabbat 31A) and Akiba affirmed that the central principle of the Torah is "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Bereshit Rabbah 24)

The Book of Matthew states, "think not that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets (*i.e.*, the teaching of Judaism) but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17) In the Gospel of Luke Jesus is quoted as saying "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to drop." (16:17) While all this is undoubtedly true, is it not true that for centuries both Jews and Christians have concentrated on those elements that separated Jesus and Judaism and what shall we do with all these issues.

Indeed, Klausner in an early book on Jesus written in Hebrew summarized a number of areas wherein he thought Jesus conflicted with the Judaism of his time. The areas he noted were also noted by Christian scholars.

First, these scholars claim that Jesus or his disciples seemingly went against Jewish law, especially Sabbath observance. So his healing on the Sabbath and his disciples plucking corn on the Sabbath is considered by many to have been a radical challenge to Judaism. Also, in the

passage about washing of the hands Jesus seems to be rejecting the Jewish dietary laws. Furthermore, in his teaching in the Beatitudes, Jesus explicitly contrasts the Law of Moses with his own quite distinct inner spiritual teaching. Furthermore, what has been most stressed by interpreters is that when he taught he spoke with authority in his own name, not as the sages of his day. Matthew 7:29 states that "unlike their scribes he taught with a note of authority."

All of the above seem to separate Jesus from Judaism and thus, his distinct teaching indeed is the foundation for the beliefs of Christianity separating him from Judaism.

I will attempt in what follows to deal with these issues but I would like to preface with the observation that these conflicts relating to Sabbath Observance and the dietary laws are in principle no different than the disagreements between the various schools of Judaism of that time. They resemble the type of differences that took place between the schools of Hillel and Shammai, between the Sadducee and Pharisees and are really not such as to separate Jesus from Judaism.

Y. Kaufmann points out that "no controversy concerning the 'Son of God' concept as such is reported in the New Testament." (p.24) If I am not mistaken there is no debate between Jesus and his Jewish antagonist over whether Jesus is the Messiah or not, no debate on the virgin births or incarnation or any "dogma that may have separated the Christian sectarians from Judaism" (Ibid)

Furthermore, Jesus' so called violation of the law seems highly questionable.

First of all, it is not clear what the Halachah actually enjoined at that time, or its extent and authority. In Jesus' time the Halachah was in an oral and fluent form and it is not fair to judge Jesus by standards of a fixed and canonized Mishna which was edited in the year 200 C.E. and represented material going back over 375 years. Numerous prior controversies existed in which minority views were held that did not find expression in the canonized texts.

Whatever one may think of the historical significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other sectarian literature such as that contained in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha it is clear that there were a multitude of conflicting doctrines and views before, during, and after the time of

Jesus which were perceived as authentically Jewish at the time and vividly represented in that literature.

Perhaps the most enduring contribution of the herculean labor of Gershom Shalom was to demonstrate that Judaism throughout its history has embraced varying and differing views from those of the received tradition.

But even on Halachic grounds (grounds of Jewish law) one can easily point out that what Jesus or his disciples did, did not go against what later represented Halachic teaching.

What was prohibited was work and the method of cure, namely speech or simple physical contact, in no sense can be categorized as work. (This was pointed out by Flusser and Vermes). Also, his allowing his disciples to pick ears of corn on the Sabbath seems to me to be a very farfetched accusation since as Vermes (in his, "The Religion of Jesus the Jew") clearly shows the principle that the Sabbath was made for man and not manmade for the Sabbath is so fundamental to Jewish teaching that the disciples could not be seen as desecrating the Sabbath (see Vermes, "The Religion of Jesus the Jew," chapter 2, also Flusser).<sup>1</sup>

Also, Flusser shows that "by the third century (church father) Origin understood it (the washing of the hands) as signifying the rejection of the Jewish dietary laws by Jesus. The overwhelming majority of modern translators thoughtlessly accept Origin's interpretation when they take Mark VII, 19B to mean: 'thus he (Jesus) declared all foods clean'—although the Greek original can hardly be read in this sense."<sup>2</sup> (David Flusser, "Jesus in the Context of History," p.225) And Moffatt, in his translation relegates the phrase thus he pronounced all food clean in parenthesis indicating that it is not in the Greek text.

Simplistic or liberal minded readers of the Gospels have claimed that Jesus instructed his disciple not to bury his father but to follow him which went against the Jewish obligation to care for one's parents but I, at least, read this verse in a moral sense or in an allegorical sense namely—let the dead bury the dead. Not that the father was actually dead, but that the purpose of his teaching was to confer life and it is not for the dead.

The most serious claim that Jesus' teachings broke with Judaism has to do with Jesus' speaking with authority. On this the words of Leo Baeck are most instructive,

The famous phrase, 'But I say unto you,' is not the product of a later period; it is already found in the prophets and the Psalms. We can clearly hear it in the injunction that man should rend his heart and not his garments (Joel 2:13), in the saying that love is more acceptable to God than sacrifice (Hos. 6:6), that the broken spirit is the true offering (Ps. 51:19), and that God will put the law into man's innermost feelings and write it in his heart (Jer. 31:32). This free religious feeling found expression also in later Judaism; it is not unique to the Gospel. One hears the same note

ringing again and again in the Talmud, if only a corresponding formulation is given to the teachings: 'Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time: thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you: he who glances in his lust even at the corner of a woman's heel is as if he had committed adultery with her.' 'Ye have heard that six hundred and thirteen commandments were given to Moses. But I say unto you: do not search through the *Torah*, for thus saith the Lord to the House of Israel, seek *me*, and ye shall live.' 'Your teachers enumerate to you how many commandments the *Torah* contains, but I say unto you: deeds of love are worth as much as all the commandments of the Law.' 'You pious ones pursue self-denial and seek to aggravate your burdens—are you not satisfied with that which the *Torah* forbids, that you also must forbid?' 'It was said to the men of olden time: him whom the court condemns, the court shall put to death. But I say unto you: if a courts puts to death only one man in seventy years, that court is a court of murderers.' 'You know that it is written in the *Torah*: he who has sinned, let him offer up a sacrifice, and he shall be purged of his sin. But I say unto you in the name of God: let the sinner repent and he shall be forgiven.' 'You have heard: God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children and the children's children. But after Moses did there not arise in Israel another prophet who spoke thus: only the soul which sinneth shall die?' Thus, even in opposition to a sentence in the Ten Commandments another phrase of the Bible was singled out as the real truth!

These examples illustrate how at a certain time in order to arrive at a deeper truth one formulation of the Bible is opposed by another which seems to convey something more profound and basic; how at another time there is an appeal to the moral conscience itself to render a decision; and how at yet another time the necessary nature of the God of love is seen by the inquiring minds as the supreme law according to which judgment is rendered. And these are not mere isolated statements of single individuals; they are the teachings of men who rank as 'the wise,' who became the leaders of the people.

By indicating that the rabbis also spoke with authority I do not want in any way to diminish the uniqueness of Jesus. Here I share the views of those who claimed that Jesus spoke with charismatic authority. Vermes has championed this view, building on the trailblazing work of Rudolph Otto. Also, the work of Martin Hengel and Ellis Rivkin who in his important book, "What Crucified Jesus," has the concluding chapter call Jesus the charismatic of charismatics.<sup>3</sup>

Many have noted that Jesus could not even be seen as speaking as a prophet since the prophets spoke in the name of God saying "thus says the Lord" but it is only fair to ask who in his day spoke in those terms? No one as far as I can tell used such a phrase in Jesus' time. On the contrary, many spoke with authority and indeed their own

<sup>1</sup> G. VERMES, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> D. FLUSSER, *Jesus in the Context of History* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, [1997]) 225.

<sup>3</sup> E. RIVKIN, *What Crucified Jesus? Messianism, Pharisaism and the Development of Christianity* (NY: UAHC Press, [1997]).

authority basing it in one form or another on the received tradition. Luke 16:31 clearly endorses the authority of Moses and the prophets, and as Kaufmann points out “Jesus never cites a prophetic word which was revealed to him or claims ‘authority’ to alter Pentateuchal statutes. He either explicates the texts according to the expository system of the Pharisees or cites the intent and spirit of the law” (53) so in his discussion with the Pharisees in Mark 2:23-28 (and parallels Matthew 12:1-4; Luke 6:1-5), Jesus quotes a well known rabbinic dictum, the Sabbath was made for man and not man over the Sabbath but what is more important he then bases the legitimacy of what his disciples did through an interpretation of scripture and not on his own authority and the interpretation is a typical rabbinic hermeneutical method of inferring from minor to major. Perhaps the clearest example of the Pharisaic manner of Jesus’ exegesis is in his teaching the Doctrine of the Resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees rejected any form of resurrection and immortality as being not based on the Pentateuch. The Pharisees and Jesus defend both and defend their position using the same Hermeneutical principles. Jesus does not teach the Doctrines of Immortality and Resurrection as a prophet proclaiming the word of God nor on the basis of his own authority but rather on scriptural exegesis. Thus, Kaufmann after a careful analysis points out that on the issue of oaths and vows “the difference of opinions concerned Halachic niceties; and Jesus’ reasoning is definitely Pharisaic.” (670)

What Jesus taught was an inner piety that concerned one’s inner spiritual life, so Kaufmann claims—if anything he was “more strict than the Pharisees.”

In the Beatitudes Jesus is contrasting an inner piety with social obligation and is saying that what you have heard of old will not suffice since much of it was given to you because of your hardness of heart, and stricter standards are now needed. So Moses allowed for divorce because of the Israelites hardness of heart. Here hardness of heart is equivalent to the evil inclination. The Halachah (Jewish law) as we know in the Mishna follows the School of Hillel which allows for divorce for a numbers of reasons. Other interpretations were also given in opposition to the School of Hillel, so the School of Shammai (Gittin 9:10) makes adultery the only grounds for divorce, interpreting “*ervav darav*” (unseemly thing) in Deuteronomy in a much more restrictive way than Hillel, or Akiba who go so far as to say that a husband can divorce his wife if he finds someone else who he loves more than she.

Strictly speaking Jewish law permitted a husband to have more than one wife even though in the whole Rabbinic period as Schechter points out only one of the thousands of rabbis mentioned in Rabbinic literature could it be imputed to him that he had more than one wife, but that does not mean that other views were not held. Kaufmann quotes the Zadokite document found by Solomon Schechter in the Cairo Geniza (recently rediscovered with the Dead Sea Scrolls) which states, “Belial ensnared Israel and directed their faces to fornication, wealth, pollution of the sanctuary. ‘By fornication, the taking of two wives at the same time. But the foundation of creation is: male and female created he them and when they entered the ark, they entered two by two.’” (55) Josephus, in his *Antiquities* (18:1:5) comments on the strictness of the Essene doctrine on marriage, Essene teaching, were prevalent at the

time of Jesus and it is generally accepted that John the Baptist took over many of their practices. The Rabbinic principle of making a fence around the Torah to make sure it is practiced, thereby making it stricter and more demanding was a common Rabbinic practice at that time and S. Duran in his *Milhemet Hobah* (Constantinople 1710) plausibly interprets Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as an attempt “to build a fence around the law.” (56)

Klausner claims that Jesus is distinct from the Jewish teaching of his day in rejecting the ritual commandments and making the ethical central. But this simply fails to recognize first, when Jesus cures the Leper, he asks him to go to the Priest with an offering, a ritual enactment, but more important that the great sages in Israel, when asked, what is the essence of the Torah, always spoke in ethical categories. Not only Hillel and Akiba as noted above but even Rabbinic passages like the one that claims how the Torah was reduced to one rule, only quotes the ethical commandments. Thus, Rabbi Simlai in BMAK.24A states that six hundred thirteen commandments were given to Moses and they were gradually reduced.

Rabbi Simlai taught:

‘Six hundred and thirteen commandments were imparted to Moses—three hundred and sixty-five of which were prohibitions, answering to the number of the days of the year, and two hundred and forty-eight positive precepts, corresponding to the number of members in the human body.

‘Then came David and reduced them to eleven, even as it is written (Psalms XV):

Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle?  
 Who shall dwell on Thy holy mountain?  
 He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness,  
 And speaketh truth in his heart;  
 That hath no slander upon his tongue,  
 Nor doeth evil to his fellow  
 Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor;  
 In whose eyes a vile person is despised,  
 But he honoreth them that fear the Lord;  
 He that sweareth to his own hurt and breaketh not his word;  
 He that putteth not out his money on interest,  
 Nor taketh a bribe against the innocent.  
 He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

‘Then came Isaiah and reduced them to six, even as it is written (Isaiah XXXIII:15):

He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly;  
 He that despiseth the gain of oppressions,  
 That shaketh clear his hands from laying hold on bribes,  
 That stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood  
 And shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil.

‘Then came Micah and reduced them to three, even as it is written (Micah VI:8):

It hath been told thee, O man, what is good,  
And what the Lord doth require of thee:  
Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with  
thy God.

‘Then came Isaiah once more and reduced them to two, as it is  
said (Isaiah LVI:1):

Thus saith the Lord:  
Keep ye justice, and do righteousness.

‘Then came Amos and reduced them to one, as I is said (Amos  
V:4):

Seek ye Me, and live.’

Rabbi Nahman the son of Isaac (a Babylonian scholar of the  
second or third generation after Rabbi Simlai) suggests as an  
alternative conclusion:

‘Then came the prophet Habakkuk and reduced the command-  
ments to one, which one is the verse (Habakkuk II:4):

The righteous shall live by his faith.’

Also, in the Ritual of the Day of Atonement, the sins the Jews ask  
atonement for, enunciating a sin for each letter of the alphabet and going  
through the Hebrew alphabet three times, are all moral sins, as Herman  
Cohen pointed out. No ritual sin is included.

Rabbinic passages abound that stress the centrality of the ethical, for  
example, “all the precepts and ritual laws (of the Torah) put together  
cannot equal in importance one ethical principle of the Torah” (Peah  
16D) or “a ritual precept or ceremonial law is strictly prohibited if it  
involved the disregarding of a ethical principle.” (Suk 30A)

Indeed, in the Lord’s Prayer the concentration is on moral action  
and it was quite common for the Tannaim to compose individual  
prayers. Prof. Mihaly, former dean of the Hebrew Union College, has  
translated many of these prayers. They are found scattered throughout  
the Rabbinic writings and so the Lord’s Prayer is very much in the spirit  
of this practice. Klausner has shown that all the elements of the Lord’s  
Prayer are Jewish and express Jewish sentiments of the time. A typical  
similar type of prayer, one of many which has been inserted into the  
Siddur, the Jewish Prayer Book, reads as follows:

My God, guard my tongue from evil, and my lips from speaking  
falsehood. May my soul be silent to those who insult me; be my  
soul lowly to all as the dust. Open my heart to thy Torah, that  
my soul may follow thy commands. Speedily defeat the counsel  
of all those who plan evil against me, and upset their design. Do  
it for the glory of thy name; do it for the sake of thy power; do  
it for the sake of thy holiness; do it for the sake of thy Torah.  
That thy beloved may be rescued, save with thy right hand and  
answer me. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of  
my heart be pleasing before thee, O Lord, my stronghold and  
my Redeemer. May he who creates peace in his high heavens

create peace for us and for all Israel. Amen.

Jesus challenged the sanctimoniousness of much of the piety of his  
day. It is regrettable that such an attitude was identified with the  
Pharisees and Phariseism. Jesus criticized those who claimed that in  
strictly following the ritual commandments their duty was done and  
that the inner spiritual and ethical dimension could be ignored. He also  
condemned the all to prevalent attitude which concerned itself with the  
appearance of religiosity rather than the substance.

But such an attitude towards religion which makes punctilious  
observance of detail and a total lack of regard to its inner spiritual  
meaning the end all and be all of religion is not limited to any one stage,  
or period, or particular religion or social or national group. It is a  
universal phenomena, and its condemnation can be found in all  
religions. Especially in Judaism, the concern that ones external  
practice be of one piece with ones inner reality is central to Jewish  
teaching. Just one saying of the great sage Johanan Ben Zachai  
illustrates this clearly. On his death bed he gave as his parting adage to  
his disciples the advice to “let the fear of heaven be as great (notice as  
great and no greater) than the fear of one’s fellow” human beings. One  
of the many explanations of why we eat matzah unleavened bread on  
Passover is because matzah is the same when viewed from the inside  
and outside and represents the purity we must achieve in our lives.

In Jewish sources, the references that stress the centrality of  
making one’s inner and outer life of one piece are too numerous to cite  
but let me just point out one passage from the prophet Isaiah which has  
special significance since it has been preserved as the prophetic reading  
in the liturgy of the day of atonement. (Quote Isaiah 58, p. 611)

Isaiah clearly indicates that fasting is not the issue but justice and  
righteousness. The whole of prophetic teaching beginning with Amos,  
Micah, Hosea and continuing with the great teachings of Isaiah and  
Jeremiah is a relentless condemnation of this exclusive concern for  
ritual at the expense of justice and righteousness (Quote Amos 5:21-24,  
p. 814)

A brilliant analysis of the Rabbinic continuation of such prophetic  
doctrines by the early rabbis is presented by Jacob Z. Lauterbach in his  
very important essays *The Pharisees and Their Teachings*<sup>4</sup> and on the  
ethics of the Halachic in his book *Rabbinic Essays*.<sup>5</sup>

It is a great pity that Jesus’ controversy with the Pharisees has  
resulted in the wholesale condemnation of Rabbinic Judaism. As far  
as I can determine, no rabbi referred to himself as a Pharisee. The  
Pharisees were called Pharisees by their adversaries and the Rabbinic  
literature designates a variety of types of Pharisees, some of which  
were quite derogatory. Modern Scholarship has gone a long way to  
rectify the true character of the Pharisees and it is important to note that  
modern Catholic scholarship has led the way in many areas of  
investigation.

Matthew (23:1-3) states in the name of Jesus that the authority of  
“scribes and Pharisees who have taken Moses’ seat must be obeyed.

<sup>4</sup> (Bloch, 1930).

<sup>5</sup> (Ktav Publishing House, 1974).

Accepting the authority and the teachings of the Pharisees on the whole put Jesus in sharp opposition to the Saducees. (see Matthew 22:23-32) Jesus ate with Pharisees (Luke 7:36) and some warned him of coming danger. (*Ibid* 13:31) On one level the controversies with the Pharisees is of a highly technical nature and has led to much confusion too difficult to disentangle here. But the controversy dealing with oaths and vows is exactly the type of controversies that took place between the Rabbinic groups and in no way would convey either Jesus' separateness or indicating his being anything but a Jewish teacher.

There remains one issue that should be discussed, the issue of the forgiveness of sins.

Kaufmann claims that what distinguished Jesus from the Jews of his time was his casting out demons and his forgiving sins. This view represents the predominant view of Jewish and Christian scholars but Vermes using materials from the Dead Sea Scrolls claims to have found a significant parallel to the act of healing through the casting out of demons in Jewish texts. The Qu'mran Genesis Apocryphon recounts that the King of Egypt became ill after the abduction of Sarah. No one could heal him. Then Abraham was brought in to expel the demon and laying his hands on his head. The evil spirit was rebuked and he recovered. Jesus the Jew.<sup>6</sup> (p. 66) Exorcism was also engaged in by Rabbis. Vermes cites an incident where Rabbi Eleazar Ben Yose and Rabbi Simeon Ben Yohai "exorcised the emperor's daughter by ordering her demon to leave. To indicate how pervasive exorcism was in Judaism, my own mother told that when she was a child in Livorno she distinctly remembers being brought to the exorcist when she had a sore throat to expel the evil influences of the demons. Vermes also cites a fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls, from the Qu'mran Cave 4, entitled "The Prayer of Nabonidus" where it states, "I was afflicted with an evil ulcer for seven years. . . and a gazer pardoned my sins. He was a Jew from among the [children of Judah]."<sup>7</sup> (Vermes "Jesus the Jew," p. 67) Gazer in this case means a decree so it is one who exorcises by means of a decree. Healing through prayer was common in those days as it is in ours. Rabbi Hanina Ben Dosa was famous for his healing prayers, and a close association between physical illness and spiritual corruption was a given in those days. That is why Jesus naturally makes this connection. In Mark 2:17 Jesus states, "it is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick; I did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners." If, as it appears casting out demons and forgiving sins on the part of Rabbis and Teachers was seen to be the means of spiritual cleansing, then there does not seem to be anything strange about Jesus' behavior, especially, if we see healing as a form of exorcism and sickness being a form of sinfulness.

#### *Their Jewish Significance*

If we read the parables in the light of the demand for the inner purity and piety represented by the Beatitudes, then I believe that the parable must be read primarily in the light of Jesus' spirituality and

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<sup>6</sup> G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew. A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins, 1973) 66.

<sup>7</sup> G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew...*, *op. cit.*, 67.

religious teaching and not as has too often been done as political indictments of the Jewish leadership or of the whole of the Jewish community.

I am aware that later readings of the parables especially by some of the church fathers who opposed the demand of Judaizers, that is gentiles who wanted to include elements of Judaism in Christianity, may have made the Polemical interpretation more popular, but it is the merit of recent scholarship on the parables and indeed on all of the teachings of Jesus which has done much to make us reconsider such approaches. While the ultimate proof of what I am saying will depend on the validity of my interpretation, at least the work of Brad Young in his book, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables*,<sup>8</sup> rediscovering the roots of Jesus' teachings and the three books of Vermes noted above go a long way in clarifying this question.

My own perspective is somewhat different from these authors. I believe that Jesus was first and foremost a religious teacher, a reformer who wanted to get at the inner central teaching of Judaism and contrasted his teaching to the external teachings that were often to be Judaism in the same way that many Jewish and Christian reformers have sought a return to inner spirituality in contrast to the external mechanical religiosity of their contemporaries. He sought the inner spiritual dimension which he felt was all too often lost in the external practices. In this he was in the line both of the Hebrew prophets and the great Rabbinic figures of Judaism. I think that evidence for my position can be seen in the use made of many of these parables in the Gospel of Thomas and in the Ebionite fragments which were certainly not concerned with the controversies between the Jewish and the early Christian communities. I welcome the minute comparison of Jesus' teaching with Rabbinic texts in Young's work and the vast range of Jewish sources summarized by Vermes, and believe that their scholarship is indispensable, but I think that if we try to understand what the inner spiritual teaching of Judaism was and show how it is related to the teachings of Jesus we will be able to demonstrate indeed how and why Jesus was a teacher of Judaism.

The essence of Jewish teaching as it was pointed out above is the affirmation of the love of God and of our fellow human beings. Of the thousand verses in scripture, it was the rabbis that selected the verses from Deuteronomy as the central affirmation of the faith of Judaism—"Hear, O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You Shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and might." But they also strove to indicate what such love of God demanded. Primarily the taking on of a variety of responsibilities which would transform the nature of what it means to be a human being from a vain, prideful, self-centered individual who consistently claimed to be, know, and do, what in fact without Teshuvah or repentance or self transformation they cannot do. Judaism requires a transformation of soul so that God and the demands of God are the central focus of our lives. That we see ourselves as creatures who must recognize our proper place in the scheme of things and not pretend to have a place which sets us above others so that we can Lord it over them. The Prayerbook has a prayer

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<sup>8</sup> B.H. YOUNG, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teachings* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989).

that states, "Purify our hearts that we may serve you in truth." Inner purification is needed to properly serve God. The rabbis say God's seal is truth. The search for truth inner and outer is a way of serving God. now it is my belief that the inner core of the parables is a similar attempt to achieve inner purification and truth. In conclusion, let me cite some Biblical example and the "Parable of the Prodigal Son."

I believe that one can formulate many of the parables and teachings of Jesus that one should strive to do all that is within one's power to eradicate from oneself everything and anything that makes oneself feel good at the expense of anyone else.

The pride or vanity or self righteousness or lying to oneself about oneself is the central obstacle of human existence. This is what must be overcome and the role of religion is to recognize it and overcome it.

#### The Prodigal Son

A Jewish reading of the Prodigal son would not simply stress the importance of repentance and forgiveness as is normally associated with the reading of this Parable. It would stress the older brothers' refusal to recognize that it may be possible for him to sink to the depths of depravity of the younger brother and be in need of forgiveness also. He, as it were separates himself "from his own flesh" (Isaiah ). He feels righteous in a totally inappropriate way. He claims to be above temptation and resents the fathers loving concern for the lost son who has been found. The older brother does not have a sense of his place in the scheme of things and has a false sense of who he is and what it is possible for him to do and thus falls short of being a brother in the true sense of the word.

For centuries Jesus was viewed as totally separate and alien to Judaism. In large measure due to the work of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* and the *Guidelines* and the notes as well as many statements of the protestant churches Jesus is now finally seen as a Jew properly understood within the context of Judaism. The study of Judaism can only help Christians who believe in Jesus as the Christ have a better sense of what and who he was, his mindset and his mission. In conclusion, I would like to quote Martin Buber, a great scholar, who called Jesus "my brother." He states, "we Jews know him (Jesus) in a way—in the impulses and emotions of his essential Jewishness—that may remain to the gentiles subject to him." (Quoted by G. Vermes in his *Jesus the Jew*)

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the passage where the rich man comes to Jesus and asks him how he can achieve eternal life. The Nazarite Gospel adds to the received text, "the rich man scratched his head and did not appreciate this answer. And Jesus said to him how can you say that you observed the law and the prophets? Because in the Torah it states "love your neighbor as yourself. Now look at the multitudes of your brothers the sons of Abraham is destitute and famished but your house is full of riches, and you do not want to give anything to them."<sup>10</sup> (Quoted by Martinetti in his book *Gesu Cristo e Il*

*Critianesimo*). I believe that this passage can be read in the spirit of Hillel's response to the pagan to mean that in fact you could not have observed the law and the commandments if you think that you fulfilled what it is impossible to actually fulfill since no one is wholly good except God then do something much easier to do, give up your riches to the poor. However, the rich man was unwilling to do that. Each one has his or her own individual good that they are unwilling to part with because they are more devoted to it than they are to God and the demands of God. This call to responsibility is the Jewish teaching of Jesus.

*Amos 5:21-24*

I hate, I despise your feasts,  
And I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Yea, though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meal-offerings,  
I will not accept them;  
Neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts.

Take thou away from Me the noise of thy songs;  
And let Me not hear the melody of thy psalteries.

But let justice well up as waters,  
And righteousness as a mighty stream.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Isaiah 58:1-9*

Cry aloud, spare not,  
Lift up thy voice like a horn,  
And declare unto My people their transgression,  
And to the house of Jacob their sins.

Yet they seek Me daily,  
And delight to know My ways;  
As a nation that did righteousness,  
And forsook not the ordinance of their God,  
They ask of Me righteous ordinances,  
They delight to draw near unto God.

Wherefore have we fasted, and Thou seest not?  
Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takest no knowledge?

Behold, in the day of your fast ye pursue your business,  
And exact all your labours.

Behold, ye fast for strife and contention,  
And to smite with the fist of wickedness;  
Ye fast not this day

<sup>9</sup> Quoted by G. VERMES, *Jesus the Jew*.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by P. MARTINETTI, *Gesù Cristo e il cristianesimo* ([Milan]: Il Saggiatore, [1964]).

So as to make your voice to be heard on high.

Is such the fast that I have chosen?  
The day for a man to afflict his soul?  
Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush,  
And to spread sackcloth and ashes under him?  
Wilt thou call this a fast,  
And an acceptable day to the Lord?

Is not this the fast that I have chosen?  
To loose the fetters of wickedness,  
To undo the bands of the yoke,  
And to let the oppressed go free,  
And that ye break every yoke?

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry,  
And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?  
When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him,  
And that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning,  
And thy healing shall spring forth speedily;  
And thy righteousness shall go before thee,  
The glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward.

Then shalt thou call, and the Lord will answer;  
Thou shalt cry, and He will say: 'Here I am.'