THE
LUTHERAN
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FEDERATION

One Body
One Spirit
One Hope

A Reader – LWF Thirteenth Assembly theme

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Contents

Introduction

This volume narrates contextual experiences written by church members of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in connection with the theme of the Thirteenth Assembly of the LWF. The theme "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope" and the sub-themes, "The Spirit Creates, The Spirit Reconciles, The Spirit Renews," is captured in this volume from different angles in the seven regions of the LWF. It presents various constructive hermeneutical approaches, theological practices, and theological proposals intended to deepen and develop theological insights in a Lutheran perspective, insights that are transformative in relation to contemporary contextual realities.

"Transformative" because the Lutheran theological legacy is always responding and interpreting in context. It doesn't remain static. Secondly, transformative because the Gospel is always liberating, changing human lives in the midst of the ever-changing world and its challenges. Thirdly, transformation is a call to the church globally, guided by the Holy Spirit who creates, reconciles, and renews to act against injustices, exclusion, suffering, climate change, and hopelessness. Transformation in this volume means that all creation is called by the Triune God to renewal in a reconciled diversity grounded in hope. The transformative theological perspectives developed in this volume challenge Lutheran theology to revisit its positions through contextual experiences as a main criterion, allowing the Gospel to speak in every context and situation. With the ongoing postmodern decentering of universals, especially of European discourses, the authors discern a grammar or code that "transcends" the particularity of its founding context.

The papers collected here demonstrate that there are central dynamics in Lutheran theology that are continually deconstructing, challenging, and provoking the church to think beyond certain well-established categories or the tendency to domesticate, or tame, faith. God's purpose is glimpsed in this work of deconstruction from the margins.

The articles in this volume develop constructive theological responses to at least five core concerns of the Thirteenth Assembly theme.

(1) The role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring Scripture and illuminating its reading.

(2) The meaning of communion in the midst of a growing awareness of plurality or reconciled diversity, which sometimes is feared as a threat to unity.

(3) The problems of exclusion which create marginalization, racism, oppression, gender-based violence, and wars.

(4) The tendency to separate God's creative act from God's redemptive act, or human beings from the rest of creation.

(5) The call to care for God's creation, the whole cosmos, in view of reconciliation and for future generations.

Jean Koulagna deployed "Sola Scriptura" and the hermeneutics of "Law and Gospel" to argue that unity is not uniformity but is revealed in plurality giving rise to contextual biblical hermeneutics as diverse as they are important in reading and understanding scripture. Such a method helps the reader to be creative, constructive, and critical. Connecting with the Assembly of the LWF, Koulagna affirms that the Holy Spirit inspires the scriptures, animates, nourishes, and renews the church through the reading of these scriptures. However, the different contexts of reading – namely academic contexts, socio-historical contexts, economic, political, and cultural contexts – are all places in which the Spirit translates the divine Word and actualizes our relationship to Scripture.

Jerzy Sojka takes the LWF Seventh LWF Assembly in Central and Eastern Europe (Budapest 1984) as his starting point. The Budapest Assembly confirmed the journey from a federation to a communion for the LWF. Sojka explores the importance of being a *communio*. He looks for answers in the theme of the Thirteenth Assembly" One Body, One Spirit, and One Hope," building on the confessional proposal for Church as constituted by preaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments according to the Gospel. Sojka also draws upon the LWF's understanding of *communio* as a gift and task linked to mission, diakonia, or ecumenical commitment. Finally, he asks questions about the importance of one body, one Spirit, and one hope in the practice of being *communio.*

For Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, the theme of the Thirteenth General Assembly "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," reflects the urgency for the church to engage diligently in the healing of a wounded body at a time when the world has witnessed dire situations of brokenness, pain, disease, and death due to the pandemic of racism and the spread of COVID-19. Narrating the tragedy of one human being taking away the breath of a fellow human being based on race (George Floyd) in May 2020 in Minneapolis, USA, Anderson-Rajkumar highlights the importance of discerning the Holy Spirit: There is no life, no breath, no life-breath without the presence of this Spirit. She calls the Lutheran Church globally to advocate for the hope that is not abstract but experienced as shared energy invigorating a people's movement to rise up and protest, to speak up and speak out against injustices.

Nelavala Gnana Prasuna narrates stories of Dalit women in India and how COVID-19 brought a second layer of oppression. Drawing on Martin Luther's statement *sola experientia facit theologum* (only experience makes a theologian), Prasuna suggests *sola experientia* to work with *solus Spiritus* for the aim of constructing a Dalit feminist Lutheran pneumatology aiming to liberate marginalized groups in Indian communities.

Daniëlle Dokman depicts the oppression experienced by Indigenous people and Africans trafficked through slavery in Suriname. These peoples reduced to slavery suffered oppression by being uprooted, displaced, divided, beaten, forced to work under severe conditions, and branded on their skin like cattle. Churches were loyal to the traffickers because the slave trade mission intended to raise the

economy of the colonies. Looking at the theme of the Assembly, Dokman calls the LWF to employ its resources to grow into an ever-deeper communion in the midst of its diversity. Using Paul's teachings on the role of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:2, Dokman calls for the Holy Spirit who brings about freedom for those in bondage by sin and death. She concludes thus: "For this is our hope and assurance - communal living, freedom, and trust are gifts of the hovering Spirit, that lingers over our society reconnecting with everything uprooted and displaced, unifying the divided and diverse pieces into a mosaic, and recalibrating destructive narratives into life-giving imperatives."

Claudia Jahnel, using discourse theory and body phenomenology theories, shows how racism and violence against nature is articulated in communities. She includes stories from Female Afro-Futurism and from struggles for the agency of the future generation as well as of the Earth. Jahnel contends that Christians need to deal with ecological changes and all their disastrous consequences not in a sterile and autocratic-dystopic way, but rather in a humane way, a way that is faithful to dreams and to the value of justice and solidarity, a way that is committed in particular to future generations and to the survival of the earth. Connecting with the theme of the Assembly, "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," Jahnel sees a tension between "the one" (body, spirit, hope) and the "many", i.e., between "unity" and "diversity." She suggests an embodied theology of the cross, an enfleshed pneumatology, and a theology of hope that thrives on a creative uncertainty and surprise. An embodied and enfleshed Spirit will require an epistemology that is sensitive and creative in uncertain certainty, affected and encouraged in an ecological ecumene that includes human and non-human agents.

Szabolcs Nagy demonstrates how an effect of the environmental crisis is eco-anxiety. Eco-anxiety brings, among other things, chronic diseases among children, youths, and communities with the fewest resources on the one hand, and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, and the like on the other. Connecting with the theme of the Assembly, Nagy suggests that a theology of God's providence and communal responsibility is key in fighting against environmental destruction and is one way to bring hope for communities devastated by climate change. Through hope and communal responsibility, a climate-grieving world will find the resurrected God present in the world and realize that all humans are not alone in their suffering nor in their hopeful efforts.

Tore Johnsen advocates for reconciled diversity as the work of the Holy Spirit in creating "unity" which is beyond "uniformity," hierarchy, and anthropocentrism. In order to live into unity in reconciled diversity, LWF member churches need to decolonize their theology and recognize where hierarchy creeps in and contains to marginalize certain expressions of Christianity, thus dividing the one body of Christ. He provides examples of Luther's struggle between "hierarchy" and "equality." And then, using the Indigenous (Sámi) experience of forced assimilation in Scandinavia as a lens for exploring the assembly theme, Johnsen indicates that unity in a reconciled diversity will lead to a cosmic hope. This cosmic hope can be

learned from Indigenous people. To proclaim hope is to point towards the “unity of all things.” It is to point towards the Holy Spirit who creates, reconciles, and renews.

Topics

Baptism

The overall theme, "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," derives from the early baptismal confessions (Eph 4:1-7) in the second half of the 1st century (Koulagna). Baptism is also the base of church communion as well in the New Testament as in present churches, even though there are minor doctrinal differences on it among denominations. Baptism as a call to a life change makes a person new and carries within itself the promise of salvation, which requires faith, and the faith in it leads to sanctification lived in the fulfilment of one's vocation in the world to serve others in love (Sojka). Baptism is, therefore, a source of hope. Dokman connects the individual baptism to the internal and external communion of the Trinity.

Body / Bodies

It should be noted that the word "body" throughout the volume is used in at least four different connotations: First, it means the (mostly suffering) individual body of a person. Second, it can be used collectively for a community (even beyond human bodies) as a body. Third, it refers to the Pauline metaphor of the "body of Christ." And fourth, this "body" is identified with the church. Many of these aspects are present in the Lord's Supper (Sojka) as the Spirit animates the body. "Body" is part of the word "everybody", so the protesting community after the murder of George Floyd formed a body that experienced the humiliation in their own bodies. A "body theology" should allow for the fact that desanctifying one body (especially a body that is perceived as different) often desecrates a larger community. Similarly, new life is the hope of the broken body as well as that of the wounded community. "Embodied justice" and body theology mean not the least remembering the memory of the broken body (Anderson-Rajkumar), especially where colonial ideology is still embodied in preaching as in the Caribbean (Dokman) or in parts of Africa where especially the Black female body is subject to exploitation (Jahnel). Jahnel extends that thought even to non-human bodies. The Holy Spirit wants to restore the brokenness of the world in the One Body of reconciled diversity (Johnsen). This body is, therefore, aimed at unity, not at uniformity.

Colonialism

In many parts of the world, the situation of churches, their practices and theology reflect colonial history (Koulagna), most obvious in the Atlantic slave states where the colonial plantation system influenced the minds of both superiors and slaves, the colonial imperatives shaping the reality even after slavery (Dokman). Johnsen

shows that the same – endowing the colonizing power with divine legitimacy – is true for the Nordic Lutheran churches with respect to the Sámi people. Both authors call for a decolonializing rewriting of Lutheran theology.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic questions our understanding of the body anew, not least as to physical presence in worship (Sojka). As a suddenly emerging danger for the body, it is somewhat a counter-image to the constant and prevailing pandemic of racism (Anderson-Rajkumar). Prasuna parallels the virus with the "caste virus" and shows the double pandemic effect of COVID-19 for the Dalits: They are on the one hand further brutalized; on the other hand, it can be an opportunity to develop new chances.

Creation

The Spirit is at work in creation and ever since (Anderson-Rajkumar; Prasuna). Creation is also the object of oppression and marginalization (Dokman). We are, therefore, called to search for epistemologies that are subversive and liberating and further compassion with the whole creation (Jahnel). Nagy points to the hope that lies in the messianic prophesies of a "new earth and new heaven" (e.g., Isa 65) and reminds us that in God's creation "everything is interconnected," so suffering and "groaning" is never simply individual but always interwoven with creation itself. It is our responsibility to care for creation of which we are a part, suffering with it as a result of sin. These aspects are seen by Johnsen under the perspective of diversity of creation that is violated by uniformity projects.

Decolonialization ↔ colonialism Ecology

Jahnel calls for an "embodied ecological ecumenism of hope." In view of the ecological and social crisis, the challenges should be met by an embodied theology of the cross, an enfleshed pneumatology, and a theology of hope that furthers creative uncertainty and the readiness of being surprised. Such an ecological ecumene includes human and non-human agents. Nagy draws our attention to "eco-anxiety" to which hope is the theological response that – after repentance – enables the church to new stances that transform and inspire a new social imaginary. An example of an integral ecology is Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'*.

Experience

Apart from the many references to experiences of reality and suffering / violence, of baptism, the experience of Christian life the experience and doings of the Holy Spirit, it is two contributions in this volume that make "experience" a theological

category: Anderson-Rajkumar calls for memory and experience of bodies like that of George Floyd as a critical lens for the theological analysis of articulation of a body theology and embodied justice. She sees this history of experiences as a primary source thereof. Prasuna adds *"experientia"* as a fifth *sola* to the well-known *solae* and exemplifies this with the experiences of Indian Dalits, especially Dalit women, under the caste system to construct a "Dalit feminist Lutheran pneumatology" that provides hope. Jahnel starts from the bodily experiences of oppression and suffering (identified with the crucified God) to call for a liberation theology (e.g., as ecotheology) that discloses experiences of God's mercy.

Freedom

The Holy Spirit confers freedom as it animates the church, inspired the scriptures, and illuminates their reading (Koulagna). Freedom is part of the duality in our personhood: As *imago Dei* we are created in a dual primordial nature: personal freedom and reciprocal relationship (cf. the doctrine of Trinity). The Holy Spirit frees us from sin and death (Rom 8:2); true freedom can be regulated and restricted by fellow human beings, but never be given by them. The abolition of slavery did thus in fact lift the restrictions for the unfree, but it did not give freedom in the full sense that only the Holy Spirit can give (Dokman).

Gift

As is often the case, when it comes to "gift," church communion is on the one hand a gift that lives from God's gift, on the other, a task. Communion – *koinonia* – is a gift that is worked by the Holy Spirit (Sojka). Life breath that God blew into Adam's nostrils as a gift of grace is the gift of the Spirit as well through which God grants us to be the *imago Dei*. In Christ we receive the gift of forgiveness through his body and blood (Anderson-Rajkumar). Dokman insists that "freedom" is a gift of the triune God, that cannot be arbitrary nor be given by our fellow humans. Unity as proclaimed in the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians is a gracious gift and transformative reality that we are invited to participate in (Johnsen).

Identity

Identity – of individuals or of groups – may challenge unity. These conflicts, however, belong ultimately to the historical and, therefore, human identity of the church (Koulagna). "One body, One spirit, One hope" is a response to such historical conflicts. Identities are transcended if bodies come together to cry out against inhuman treatment of color as happened after the George Floyd incident (Anderson-Rajkumar). The attention to the body and an embodied theology of the cross strengthens the agency and identity of those who suffer oppression and violence (Jahnel).

Language

The Spirit expresses itself in different languages (Koulagna) that represent their respective cultures. Language (e.g., androcentric, colonial) itself can, therefore, convey attitudes and cement structures. As it can liberate on the other hand, the church must be aware of the language she uses and aim at non-dehumanizing language (Prasuna). The oppression of people is often accompanied with the prohibiting of their native language (Dokman). This is exemplified also by Johnsen as to the Sámi language.

Narratives

Stories (like that of George Floyd) are to be located in the larger narratives of a culture that form that community's attitudes towards people and the rules according to which people are treated (Anderson-Rajkumar). Biblical narratives criticize such oppressing narratives (Prasuna), as they explain the way the Holy Spirit is connected to everyday life and portray it as life giver. Dokman shows how the narratives of the plantation society impact on oppressor and oppressed and demonstrates their long-term continuity until this very day. Such narratives must be contested by analyzing the deficiencies in their anthropology in the light of the trinitarian *imago Dei* concept as well as by communal means of trust. Jahnel mentions the end of the "great universal narrative" which is the narrative of "scientific" and "secular" modernity. She explores the possibilities of different narratives from different backgrounds empowering each other. A similar argument is brought forward by Johnsen who speaks about the interwoven national and Lutheran narratives in the confessional Lutheran states of Scandinavia to be rewritten from a Sámi perspective.

Postcolonial ↔ colonialism Resistance

Signs of hope emerge not only with signs of victory, but resilience and resistance against abusive powers (Anderson-Rajkumar). Filled with the Spirit, Elizabeth can resist conventions and thus calls the church to resist patriarchal influences and to become an agent of restoration (Prasuna). Johnsen points out that the teaching on God's Word in the mother tongue is a means of resisting uniforming policy.

Truth

In Biblical and theological hermeneutics, truth combines criticism and conviction, rigor and submission, enabling the faithful thus to a fruitful interaction between subjectivity and objectivity that enriches faith (Koulagna). The personified body of truth, ἀλήθεια (alētheia), gets crushed when it is crammed with lies. This should be avoided by a "body theology" and "embodied justice" (Anderson- Rajkumar).

With respect to doing justice to Sámi voices, Johnsen reminds us about governmental truth and reconciliation commissions.

Unity vs. Uniformity

Church unity as main overall topic of the Thirteenth Assembly is an affirmation and an imperative that both derive from the *sola scriptura* through the Holy Spirit, as Ephesians shows. It is, however, an undeniable fact that there were from the beginning to this day different factors that challenged this unity. It is the Holy Spirit and the common spirit that make unity in plurality real (Koulagna). Sojka refers to the postulate of unity in word and sacrament when asking for "communion" and "community" as identifying markers of the LWF – the word of God both creating and affirming unity and diversity. Women like Mary and Elizabeth proclaimed God's justice and blessings in unity by reversing the existing order (Prasuna). Dokman recalls that in a slave society, unity in diversity is a danger for the colonist that needs to be fought by all means. The tension between "the one" and the many should make us respond with engagement in planetary solidarity (Jahnel). From the example of assimilation policies in the Nordic states, Johnsen shows that enforced unity often distorts the uniqueness of "the Others" as they are forced into uniformity with the majority group. This goes against "the unity of the spirit" that is manifested through the bond of peace. Therefore, "unity in diversity" is often hampered by hierarchical, non equalitarian structures. Johnsen calls for a unity beyond anthropocentrism – "the unity of all things."

Worship

The Holy Spirit gathers the communion of the church and ensures its unity. By gathering at the service, we gather to experience the Word and submit ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit (Sojka).

Preliminary questions for engaging with the Assembly theme

What are your experiences of imposed uniformity? Who carry the costs of imposed uniformity in your context?

Luther's definition of sin as the self curved in upon itself (incurvatus in se) offers a tool for critical discernment of the spirit of social, collective, or systemic realities. What demands attention in your context?

One of the authors argues that the one body is about restoring the dignity and wholeness of God's diverse creation. In what ways is the reconciled diversity of God's people both a gift and a task?

Who, in your context, is expected to embrace their own oppression for the sake of peace?

How is "the bond of peace" manifested in your congregations and neighborhoods; in your homes, classrooms, and workplaces; in your societies, nations, and in the global community?

One of the authors argues for peace beyond imposed hierarchy. What are the strengths and limitations of this perspective for a Christian understanding of the one body, the bond of peace, and the Spirit?

How, in your context, might one engage in a critical rereading of Lutheran theology from the underside of history?

What are the gifts of the Spirit in bridging the gap between God's promised peace and the realities of the world?

How do you navigate the relationship between your Lutheran faith and the urgency of climate change and the environmental crisis? What resources do you draw upon? What do you find problematic? For what do you long?

What are the links between reconciliation with the earth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples?

One Body, One Spirit, One Hope: The Breath of the Spirit and Bible Reading in Africa

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1. Introductory remarks: *sola scriptura* and the challenge of church unity

The overall theme of the Thirteenth Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," is derived from the early baptismal confessions of the church in the second half of the first century. It emphasizes church unity and recalls this unity as both an affirmation and an imperative. The subthemes, "The Spirit creates, the Spirit reconciles, the Spirit renews," underline the vocation and witness of the church, for herself and for the world. The one church, animated by the Holy Spirit who is one, is called to hope and to give hope to creation in a renewed world. This is, in substance, the declaration of this assembly.

This is clearly a pneumatological statement, and the whole reflection of this assembly will, needless to say, be concerned with the role that the Spirit plays in the various expressions and contexts of the church's witness. This study will also focus on the exegetical and hermeneutical aspects of this question, because the Spirit who animates the church is also the one who inspired the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16) and who, in principle, enlightens their reading. In other words, the present study will put into dialogue the normativity of the principle of *sola scriptura* on the one hand, and the freedom conferred by the Holy Spirit in the understanding and implementation of this same principle on the other.

The Spirit who animates the church is also the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16) and who, in principle, illuminates their reading.

The sixteenth-century reformers insisted on the centrality of these Scriptures as the supreme authority for guiding the church's decisions and actions. They proclaimed this in the slogan of *sola scriptura*, which Luther understood especially in the sense of normative Scripture, that is, supreme authority. This does not mean that other authorities – symbols of faith, writings of the fathers, decisions of the church, et cetera – are abandoned or ignored, but that they are all to be evaluated through the prism of Scripture and subjected to it. One of the theoretical consequences of this supremacy of Scripture would be a stronger affirmation of the church unity. In other words, the principle of *sola scriptura* is an essential condition for the unity of the body and its hope, because one Spirit inspires Scripture and animates the body.

Yet, church history is marked by divisions, many of which are the result of theological divergences generated by conflicts of interpretation of these very Scriptures. These conflicts proved to be of various kinds: literal versus allegorical interpretation, structural versus historical-critical approaches, scholarly versus confessional approaches, reading contexts, and so forth. The contexts, which also determine our reading of the Bible, can be confessional, historical, cultural, sociopolitical. The historical challenge of church unity is thus linked to exegesis and hermeneutics, and it is the breath of the Spirit that animates the church and irrigates the reading of the Scriptures that accompanies Christian congregations in this challenge. In the church of the first century as well as in the church of the twenty-first century, in the Church of Ephesus as well as in the Church of Africa and of other continents, this Spirit creates the church, reconciles the readings of the Word and renews the hopes of the world.

2. From Ephesus to the universal church: exegetical and historical questions

The Epistle to the Ephesians is part of the so-called captivity epistles (Eph 3:1; 4:1) and intends therefore to be taken as a personalized correspondence, especially since the apostle Paul, according to the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles and that of the first letter to the Corinthians, knows the Church of Ephesus well (Acts 18-20; 1 Cor 15:32; 16:8). Some elements, however, raise questions. We note that the epistolary elements, notably the exchanges between the author and his addressees, are reduced to a strict minimum, contrary to what we can note in the letter to the Philippians (Phil 1:3-4). This sobriety of personal elements brings the letter to the Ephesians closer to the one addressed to the Colossians (Col 1:6-8) and gives the impression that the author does not know his addressees personally: he merely mentions that he has heard about their faith (Eph 1:15). These epistolary elements seem to serve as a cover and are obviously derived from the letter to the Colossians.

In view of these observations, most exegetes classify the epistle to the Ephesians as Deutero-Pauline. Beyond the controversy that this classification may raise with the supporters of the Pauline authenticity of this letter, it allows us to underline the fact that this letter has a greater scope. It can be seen as more general, a kind of circular addressed to the churches of the last decades of the first century or, at least, to the churches of Asia Minor of that time, and hence more broadly to the universal church. In this sense, the message to the Church of Ephesus is a message to the universal church, beyond space and time.

Let us put the theme back into its literary context of Ephesians 4:1-7.

> I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all,

who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift.

This passage implies a situation of conflict, division, or at least a threat of division. Nothing is said about the nature of the conflict, but the exhortations in verses 1 through 3 clearly allude to internal tensions and recall the crisis of charisms in 1 Corinthians 12. These exhortations are found with variations in Colossians 3:12-13 and Philippians 2:1-4. The intertextual dialogue between these different passages gives a picture of the challenges to unity that run through the whole church of the second half of the first century and beyond. The splits may be due to theological differences, conflicts of authority (1 Cor 3:4), clashes of cultures (Jews vs. Gentiles: Rom 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11. Hebrews vs. Hellenists: Acts 6:1), class conflicts (slaves vs. free men: Gal 3:28), and so forth. They ultimately belong to the historical, and therefore human, identity of the church.

"One body, one Spirit. . .one hope," in this context, is a response to this historical situation. It is almost a creed, found in various forms throughout the New Testament, from the Pauline tradition to the gospels (Mt 23:8-10) and the so-called Catholic epistles (James 2:19). It is the essential content of the faith of the early church that is expressed, in a context where the young church had to face headwinds, both from the outside (contact with the religious currents of the time, various aggressions) and from the inside. In other words, it is the affirmation of the fundamental faith with insistence on church unity by virtue of the uniqueness both of the Spirit and of the vocation, which implies a unity of spirit, since there is but one unique hope.

The Greek term ἑνότης (*henotēs*), which can translate as "unity" and also as "union," is a neologism formed from ἑν (*hen*, "one"). It is extremely rare, not only in the Bible (only in Eph 4:3, 13), but also in all Hellenistic literature. The idea, as we have seen, is at the heart of the church's concerns. In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan symbol of faith, this unity of the church is closely associated with the Holy Spirit.

3. Plurality, social issues: a common hope?

As we have seen, since the beginning, the challenge of the unity of the Christian church emerged on several levels: theological, ethnical-cultural (Jews-Gentiles, Hebrews-Hellenists), social (slaves-free, men-women). Over the centuries, these challenges have become more diverse and complex on the basis of confessional, ethnocultural or racial, social, and other factors.

The confessional cleavages in Africa and in the Christian communities that emerged from the missionary efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appear essentially as products of the import of missionary and colonial history. African Christians, apart from those of Egypt and Ethiopia who have a two-thousand-year history, define themselves as Roman Catholics, traditional Protestants with all the denominational nuances, Pentecostals with their own nuances, and so forth, to which must be added the followers, who are increasingly numerous, of independent churches and movements.

Apart from the latter cases, denominational affiliations are generally the result of the reproduction on the mission fields of the antagonisms of the Western churches. Most of the faithful do not even know why they are Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or Baptist, except that they were born in churches that carry these labels or, for the first generations, that the missionary told them they were that. African Christianity has thus inherited denominational cleavages that it carefully maintains without assuming their history, even though fruitful ecumenical approaches are taking place in Europe, where these cleavages first appeared.

Adding to these divisions, often within each church itself, are ethnic and cultural or racial questions. Ethnic tensions are not exclusive to the churches, but generally characterize the nation-states born of the given colonial situation in the second half of the twentieth century. Nor are they a particular characteristic of the churches of modern missions. They can be found almost everywhere, in various forms, and can be explained by cultural differences, with the whole question of inculturation and related issues, but also by group interests, notably related to the sharing and control of the benefits generated by the ecclesiastical institution and to leadership. At a broader level, there is the issue of race. There were Black and White churches in North America and in South African apartheid, both in the Protestant and Catholic communities. This racial categorization of the churches is due to the history of slavery and segregation, which gives these churches a definite political character.

Let us emphasize the social factors: poverty, class, gender, among others. From her birth, the church has been confronted with social issues. The vast majority of ancient society was poor, slaves were very numerous. In the Roman Empire, they made up two-thirds of the population. The position of women was unenviable there. The texts of the Old and New Testaments testify to this situation. In writing that "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female" (Gal 3:28), Paul hopes that the Christian faith will put an end to social barriers based on ethnicity, social status, and gender.

But while he exemplifies the abolition of ethnic differences through his mission, Paul did little to fight slavery and continued to encourage women to maintain their status. Such inequalities, as can be seen, run throughout church history. They are visible within communities (rich and poor in the pews), between churches and communities (rich churches with the poor), and in the caste traditions of some settings, as well as in other local factors – the list is endless.

Added to this are the fragilities inherent to forced migration, which is a major issue in today's world, whether economic or linked to violence or disasters: being one body and sharing a common hope with strangers, especially with those who have not willingly chosen to leave their usual place of residence, their home, and who have not been invited. Although the passage in Ephesians 4 does not explicitly allude to this, it would not be wrong to say that such a situation was not unknown to the Church of Ephesus. As a Greek port city in the Roman province of Asia (in present-day Turkey), Ephesus must have seen a daily influx of new arrivals, whether for commercial or other reasons: slavery or other forms of deportation, but perhaps also a search for some form of security.

This feature is not exclusive to Ephesus. It must have been a general situation throughout the Roman Empire. Even the ideal community of Jerusalem described

in Acts 2:42-47 bears the marks of the problems posed by the management of foreigners and migrants. Indeed, it is in this same community that the wives of the Hellenists complain about the unequal distribution of food, forcing the emerging early church to set up the ministry of deacons, who all happen to be Hellenists, Jews of Greek language and culture (Acts 6), the first victims of the large-scale persecutions (Acts 8), and responsible in spite of themselves for the rapid spread of the nascent Christian faith throughout the empire.

All these factors question and constantly challenge the unity of body and Spirit as well as the unity of hope. The question therefore remains: In what condition does the church witness to the unity of the Spirit and her own body and how does she realize her hope? What is the meaning that her hope implies? How does the church construct the common history of her identification with this unique body and this common hope? How does she manage to express in a coherent way the unity of spirit (with a small *s*), that is, of her thought and teaching in this great diversity of her contexts and challenges? It is obvious, for example, that the hope of the poor starts with a hope for better life conditions, which is certainly the case for the rich. The same is true between members of a church who belong to different castes, or between wealthy churches and those struggling to survive. These different contexts give different orientations to the reading of the Bible: confessional (Catholic or Protestant exegesis and hermeneutics), geographical (African, American, Asian, European, Pacific), social (liberation hermeneutics with their variants), not to mention the academic and learned readings that rub shoulders with the more confessing, even popular, ones.

4. One and plural: one Word, various contexts of listening

The Spirit blows where it wills, and it addresses the reader always in context. It is in these different contexts, sometimes contradictory and conflicting, that the Spirit allows for listening to the Word, that is, reading and interpreting the Bible. Sacred Scripture, in its quality as the divine Word, is the proclamation of salvation. The interpretation of the Bible in preaching rightly occupies an essential place in Protestant traditions. In this context, the Spirit allows a first reconciliation between scholarly readings (critical exegesis and philosophical hermeneutics) and more confessional ones.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's reflections on this subject are enlightening. For him, even if understanding in theology can have its own characteristics, the hermeneutical phenomenon in the Christian regime is not essentially different from any other experience of understanding. Thus, theological hermeneutics is from the outset thought out in and for faith. It therefore has a confessional character, and starts from the Protestant understanding of Scripture: Luther considered that the Bible is its own interpreter (*scriptura sui ipsius interpres*). In this way, biblical hermeneutics extends the principle of *sola scriptura*, the Bible being read as canonical.

Biblical hermeneutics, being theological hermeneutics, thus combines criticism and conviction, rigor and submission. The believing reader, in admitting this fact, engages in a fruitful interaction between subjectivity and objectivity, between

canonical authority and freedom of thought. He enters the intelligence of the textual network of the Scriptures (he goes from his conviction to criticism) in order to transform the proposal of meaning into an experience of truth that enriches his faith (he goes from criticism to conviction). Hermeneutics is thus situated in an all-embracing model that reduces the gap between scientific exegesis and kerygmatic reading.

The same is true of objective exegesis and contextual approaches. By contexts we mean the various situations in which the reader finds him or herself: cultural, socioeconomic, political. The prologue of John affirms that "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14). This indicates that the incarnation of the Word is, in fact, a formerly unknown, new hermeneutical example that God himself brings about. Born into a Jewish family in Roman times, Jesus assumed his Jewishness together with its sociohistorical context. When he read and interpreted the writings of the Scripture of his time, the first Testament, he did so as a Jew and in the light of Jewish tradition. To all the people he came into contact with, he gave a word, to each in his own situation; he gave himself to be interpreted in the particularity of each situation. This is what constitutes, for the New Testament, the summit of revelation (Heb 1:1-2). By building his hut in the midst of us human beings (this is what is meant by the Greek expression σκηνόω ἐν ἡμῖν [*skēnoō en hemin*] in John 1:14), the divine Word has delivered itself. In doing so, it assumes the risk of being misunderstood, betrayed, or caught up in a univocal perception that generates fundamentalism and extremism, but also that of provoking divisions and conflicts in the church as the result of antagonistic contextual interpretations of Scripture.

The African reading of the Bible is situated at the juncture of all these contexts, which represents a major challenge. Indeed, between the academic approaches developed in the West and those developed by Africans, often oriented toward more or less local cultural questions (comparative studies) or toward sociopolitical concerns, African biblical hermeneutics seems to be in search of its identity. Moreover, the great majority of the faithful and ordinary readers of the Bible do not understand much of these academic approaches and more or less spontaneously develop what should be called "readings from below."

These informal readings of the Bible testify to the fact that scholarly exegesis is often at odds with the spiritual expectations and fears of most of the faithful, including the most erudite. In some places, they permeate neo-Pentecostal churches and movements and extend to popular religious music and a "magical" relationship to Scripture – a fact that is neither new nor exclusive to African contexts. The practice of phylacteries in the Old Testament and ancient Judaism, for example, eventually went beyond the level of a reminder instrument to acquire a kind of performative value, and the discovery of talismans among ancient New Testament manuscripts attests to this same magical reading.

No one can describe how the Spirit animates all these approaches to the Scriptures. What can be said, however, is that it is in the plurality of contexts and approaches and beyond the conflicts of interpretation that the Holy Spirit, at once one and plural in its manifestations, enables the church to listen to this unique Word of God. Is not the Bible itself the most vibrant witness hereof? The different traditions that make up the Pentateuch and other Old Testament texts,

the reception of Deuteronomistic history by Chronicles, the Gospel in four-voiced Gospels, and so forth, show that the Spirit allows an extraordinary dynamic in the reception of divine revelation. It reconciles, so to speak, also in the diversity of its languages and of its expectations, the people of God on their way to the place of their vocation: the kingdom of God. As a result, the plurality of contexts and readings in a certain way acquires, like the principle of *sola scriptura*, another form of normativity. In this context, even confessional differences can be seen, in reverse, as contextual. The *sola scriptura* thus becomes the hermeneutical locus of unity.

5. From hermeneutics to public theology: what hope?

The question is: How does our reading of the Bible impact our action for new creation, reconciliation and hope? How does our hermeneutics address issues of inequality, poverty, the environment, insecurity, migration, culturally based conflicts, religious intolerance, the COVID-19 pandemic and the new splits it creates (increased vulnerabilities, closed borders, unequal access to vaccines), and so forth? How does the Spirit who creates and renews nourish the hope of the world in the different contexts of listening to the Word of God?

Since the late 1960s, liberation theology has championed a theology and hermeneutics oriented toward the social and political. But before it, contexts of oppression had already favored the emergence of theologies of struggle, with hermeneutics that underpinned them, even if these were not always explicit. One example is the feminist movement, whose hermeneutical reflection can be traced back to the American Women's Bible of the late-nineteenth century, and which defines itself as a hermeneutic of suspicion and audacity. It suspects the Bible, at least in some of its parts, of containing elements unfavorable to women, as can be seen in the words of Maria Pilar Aquino:

> There is great interest in studying the Bible…. It contains negative remarks about women and is couched in androcentric language. These texts and traditions cannot be divinely inspired, especially when through Jesus' life and ministry we discover that God does not condone any discrimination against women.

This includes North American, Caribbean, and South African Black theologies, not to mention African and other contextual theologies that are based on a particular appropriation of the Bible. The "Declaration" of the National Committee of Black Clergy asserts that "Black theology is not the gift of the Christian gospel dispended to slaves; rather, it is an *appropriation* which black slaves made of the gospel given by their white oppressors." Many other contexts can be cited for the twentieth century. The reading of the Bible thus accompanies numerous struggles in historical situations, which has been the case since biblical times themselves. The interpretation of the Torah crosses the prophetic and sapiential literatures to make God's voice heard by the rulers and the world. Jesus, addressing the religious and political leaders of his time and place, relies on his reading of the Scriptures: "You have heard that…," "But I say to you…."

When he taught his disciples to say, in the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10-11), Jesus was doing more than teaching a model spiritual prayer. He clearly indicated, in connection to his reading of Scripture and drawing on the sources of Pharisaic Judaism, a revolutionary sociopolitical point of view and suggested that the reigns (both political and religious) of his time and the wills they imposed were not good, or at least often were not those of God. For this reason, a new order was needed, an order that was established by God himself.

Under these conditions, contextual biblical hermeneutics and public (or political) theology operate on the same ground. Public theology encompasses the whole of biblical history from creation onward, as to unify the diversity of authors and themes in salvation history. This allows the reader to enter the story and identify with it, which in turn allows the story to be applied to one's own environment, even if that environment may be indifferent to or intolerant of the practices of the faith. In other words, biblical theology goes beyond the private confessional sphere and touches both the reader and the reader's context in their public dimensions. It makes the creative Word of God heard in the public space. Following Engelbert Mveng, for Africa, this implies first of all a claim to belong to the world of the Bible, that is, to its people and its history, and to appropriate its message.

If the incarnation of the Word implies the imminent coming of the reign of God, that is, of a more just social order, a reign where life is abundant (Jn 10:10), then the decolonization of hermeneutics is related to the struggle for life, in other words, for existence and for a reassuring, viable, and just living environment. Biblical interpretation on the African continent is firmly rooted in the struggle for land, economic justice, and cultural survival. It remains caught between the Western and African histories of colonization and the struggle for independence on the one hand, and post-independence and globalization on the other. The interpretation of the Bible in Africa is the struggle for a place to be, a home. But to fight for a home is above all to fight for independence of perception and thought. In terms of hermeneutics, it means being able to evaluate autonomously and creatively what the Bible says to me in the light of my own experience and the present, but also allowing for my own history and that of my own environment as the starting point.

At this level, Luther's reflection on the Law-Promise (or Law-Gospel) relationship in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (art. IV) can be illuminating. This relationship has often been reduced to a simplistic distinction: this is the Law, this is the Gospel (or the Promise), and to the isolated domain of private contemplation or self-imposed spiritual exercises. Luther's reflection challenged a medieval bottom-up hermeneutic that went from text to meaning and from meaning to illumination (*illuminatio*). The Law-Promise report turns this hermeneutic upside down and affirms that God is here (with us) at war against the world (understood as the domain of the Evil One). In other words, it replaces the last term (illumination) with struggle (*tentatio*).

Consequently, we – as readers of the Scriptures – are not only invited by this relationship to a merely academic and rational distinction, but are drawn into the midst of a struggle in the present world, in our lives and around us, including in the unfulfilled desires and needs and suffering of people. The Law-Promise rela-

tionship leads to an understanding of the context of our lives (the struggle for a place) and of our role as objects in God's reclamation of the world, and hence, of each of its inhabitants, of those who have something to look forward to (a home). It is well-known today how uprooted and displaced home becomes in the face of situations that force people to migrate, with all the tragedies that this entails. We also know the deaths at sea or in the desert, the misery of people who arrive at their destination and then have to face scorn, rejection, inclemency, and all sorts of institutional obstacles that prevent them or try to prevent them from getting settled. The Law-Promise relationship brings us back to Gérard Siegwalt's idea that the scriptural principle (*sola scriptura*) can only be understood in correlation with the concrete (and historical) data of life and experience of reality.

6. Concluding remarks: reading the Bible – from the university to the church and from the church to the streets

The Holy Spirit inspires the Scriptures, animates, nourishes, and renews the church through their reading. This seems like an obvious statement that summarizes the principle of *sola scriptura* proclaimed by the reformers of the sixteenth century. However, this remains a major challenge within contemporary Protestantism and even within the Lutheran community, in Africa as well as elsewhere. The different contexts of reading – academic, sociohistorical, economic, political, and cultural – are all places in which the Spirit translates the divine Word and actualizes our relationship to Scripture and, for us Protestants, to this principle of *sola scriptura*. But they also pose the problem of interpretative frameworks that can be conflicting, threaten the unity of the body, and imply expectations that can also be conflicting.

The Spirit operates in all these contexts to reconcile the modalities of our relationship to the Bible: from church to university, from university to church, from church to the streets, that is, to society and to the whole environment in which our common hope of the reign of God is lived and unfolded. It is in the diversity of these plural, divergent, and sometimes conflicting conditions of reading and welcoming Revelation that the unity of the body of Christ is lived out. It is also by way of a correct understanding of the Law-Promise relationship in a hermeneutical context – in other words, that the Gospel involves the struggle for a just world where everyone inherits the earth and has a home – that the common hope can be experienced and lived. This is where the Lord's Prayer is fulfilled: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread."

Unity, as is well known, is not uniformity; it has meaning only in plurality. It is there that the breath of the Spirit works the miracle of the unity of the church and of its vocation, that of living and bringing to life the hope of a constantly renewed world, including homes in movement and the societal recompositions that they orchestrate.

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Body, Spirit, Hope, and Being a Communion

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Context and historical roots

In 2023, the LWF will meet for its Thirteenth Assembly in Kraków, Poland, the second time in its history in Central and Eastern Europe. The previous assembly in this region, in Budapest, made a lasting mark on the LWF's journey from federation to communion. Finally, after decades of debates, the LWF Constitution stated: "The member churches of the Lutheran World Federation understand themselves to be in pulpit and altar fellowship with each other." It was an expression of recognition that the communion of churches that make up the LWF is something more than just an association established to carry out specific tasks. There is a communion among the Lutheran churches of which the LWF is an instrument. It is a communion based on a commonly professed faith included in the common doctrinal foundations, which is implemented by means provided by the Lutheran confessions of faith (Augsburg Confession, art. VII), namely, a community that is united by consensus on the Word and the sacrament. This journey would not have been possible without a clear question in the early 1960s as to whether the Lutheran churches, which share the same confessions of faith, can only see themselves as an association and ignore the fact that they thereby fulfill the postulate of unity in Word and sacrament. It would not be possible without the involvement and role of the LWF in the ecumenical movement as a representative of Lutheran churches. Finally, it would not be possible without clearly opposing the racist practices of division and segregation at the Lord's Table that have existed in South Africa's churches because of the country's apartheid system.

The Budapest decision was the beginning of the way toward building a self-understanding of the LWF as a communion. The fact that the understanding of LWF member churches as a communion has wide implications can already be seen in the characteristics of this communion, which was prepared in Budapest:

> We give witness to and affirm the communion in which the Lutheran churches of the whole world are bound together. This communion is rooted in the unity of the apostolic faith as given in the Holy Scripture and witnessed by the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran confessions. It is based on "united witness before the world to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the power of God for salvation" (Constitution of the LWF, III.2.a). And it is based on agreement in the proclamation of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments (Augsburg Confession, Article VII).

This Lutheran communion of churches finds its visible expression in pulpit and altar fellowship, in common witness and service, in the joint fulfillment of the missionary task, and in openness to ecumenical cooperation, dialog, and community. The Lutheran churches of the world consider their communion as an expression of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

This description of the Lutheran communion places it in a wider ecumenical context. For the assembly in Budapest, the *communio* language also became a way of describing the ecumenical commitment of the Lutheran churches of the world gathered within the LWF:

> The true unity of the church, which is the unity of the body of Christ and participates in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is given in and through proclamation of the gospel in Word and sacrament. This unity is expressed as a communion in the common and, at the same time, multiform confession of one and the same apostolic faith. It is a communion in holy baptism and in the eucharistic meal, a communion in which the ministries exercised are recognized by all as expressions of the ministry instituted by Christ in his church. It is a communion where diversities contribute to fullness and are no longer barriers to unity. It is a committed fellowship, able to make common decisions and to act in common.

The reflection and decisions of the assembly in Budapest were confirmed in 1990 in Curitiba. This assembly crowned the intensive work of the 1980s on the concept of *communio* ecclesiology and indicated that this perception of the LWF is key to its self-understanding.

The experiences and challenges of being a communion have raised questions about what such a communion means. The answer to this question, in view of the challenges for the unity of the communion that came to the fore after the Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, was to indicate that the communion is, on the one hand, a gift that lives from God's gift, and on the other, a task that it sets before all its members.

The community as a task requires us to constantly look anew at how we understand it. Referring to the theme of the Thirteenth Assembly in Kraków, "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," we want to look from the perspective of its main elements – the body, the Spirit, and hope – at the biblical and Reformation inspirations of the LWF as *communio*, as well as at its current practice.

Biblical inspirations

When we turn to the thinking about *koinonia* that is present in the LWF reflection, two main biblical passages come to the fore: the description of the early Jerusalem Church in Acts 2 and Paul's reflections on communion in the eucharistic context from 1 Corinthians.

The description of the early Jerusalem Church (42-47) shows that its essence was to abide in the apostolic teaching, communion, the breaking of bread, and prayer. This communion is not only a spiritual communion, but is based on a

physical meeting, being with each other. It is realized by gathering in the temple together as well as meeting together to break bread at home. Its creation is the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It was thanks to his actions that Peter gave a sermon in which he called, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (38). In response, many were baptized into a communion of the early Jerusalem Church, which, without exception, included all those who experienced the action of the Holy Spirit in Peter's sermon and had received Baptism. This communion lived the hope of salvation on a daily basis. The author of the Acts of the Apostles concludes its description: "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (47).

Paul's reflections on *koinonia* in the eucharistic context in 1 Corinthians 11 also point to the physical aspect of this community. Paul's blade of criticism is aimed at the divisions and disorder that occur when Corinthians meet for the Lord's Supper (17-22). Scholars discuss the exact nature of the divisions to which Paul refers. There is no doubt, however, that the divisions in access to the Lord's Supper prompted the apostle to strongly admonish the Corinthians. The physically palpable *koinonia* of the congregation gathered around the Eucharist is the response of concrete people to the invitation of the Lord himself. It is the Lord himself who, through the Holy Spirit, as we will see in a moment, creates a congregation out of them. In the communion of the congregation gathered around the Lord's Table, there is no room for exclusion based on some human ideas of gender, race, property status, et cetera.

For Paul, participation in the body of Christ is an essential element of the Lord's Supper: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16). The development of the image of Christ's body is found in 1 Corinthians 12. The Apostle relates it to the church with its diversity of gifts of the Spirit (12-27). This body combines a variety of elements. None of them can be missing, none of them can be considered superior or the only one necessary for the survival of the body. This body should have the same solidarity as was to be characteristic of the eating of the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian congregation: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (26). The body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is also the work of the Holy Spirit, who incorporates everyone into it through Baptism, regardless of their origin ("Jews or Greeks") or social status ("slaves or free"). It is the Spirit who makes the body possible.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul also gives the words of the institution of the Lord's Supper (23-25). He included an accent on memory – *anamnesis*: "Do this in remembrance of me [...] Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." He also added a clear message of hope to the words of establishment: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The Lord's Supper remains the meal of Christ's saving death and is eaten in the hope of his return.

Reformation inspirations

The idea of the LWF as a communion goes back to the key ecclesiological statement of the Wittenberg Reformation – article VII of the Augsburg Confession:

> Likewise, they teach that one holy church will remain forever. The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere. As Paul says [Eph 4:5-6]: One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

The vision it contains points to the church as a gathering around the gospel proclaimed and the sacraments administered. This assembly becomes tangible when it meets in a service. The preached gospel brings the news of salvation only by grace through faith. This liberation by God's grace is not only for the human spirit. Luther, explaining the third article of the Creed in *The Large Catechism* clearly indicates that the work of sanctification, which is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit, does not concern only the human spirit or soul:

> Meanwhile, because holiness has begun and is growing daily, we await the time when our flesh will be put to death, will be buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously and arise to complete and perfect holiness in a new, eternal life. Now, however, we remain only halfway pure and holy. The Holy Spirit must always work in us through the Word, granting us daily forgiveness until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness. In that life there will be only perfectly pure and holy people, full of integrity and righteousness, completely freed from sin, death, and all misfortune, living in new, immortal and glorified bodies.

The Holy Spirit makes the redemptive justification resulting from the work of Jesus Christ reach a concrete person by including that person in the process of sanctification. This is done through the medium of the Word: the preached Word and the visible Word, that is, the sacraments (cf. Augsburg Confession, art. V). The word of the promise of salvation does not reach us only as an audible Word aimed at the human spirit or addressing its rationality. The communication of the promise also refers to the visible Word, which engages our sight as well as all the other senses. So, it is the Word that is addressed to the whole person in the preaching and sacraments. The emphasis is on the mutual complement based on the "and" in the formulation about the Word in the preaching and the sacrament as means of the Holy Spirit's action.

Luther also repeats this emphasis when defining the sacraments themselves. It goes back to the old Augustinian formula, which sees the sacrament as an inseparable combination of the Word of promise and the external sign. As Luther showed in *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, among the rites conceived as sacraments, only those accompanied by both – the clear promise of salvation given by Jesus Christ himself and the clearly distinguishable visible sign that also

embraces the human body – can be preserved. The promise cannot be separated from the sign. The sacrament is to reach the whole person – both the person's body and spirit. Luther fervently protested against those who, in his opinion, disregarded the saving promise of Baptism, understanding this rite only as a result of human profession of faith. He opposed with equal zeal when Zwingli limited the action of the promise of salvation to what is spiritual in people, disregarding the reality of the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the signs of the Lord's Supper, which are available to what is corporal in people. This conviction of the necessary mutual meeting of the promise and sign, and of directing the sacrament at the whole person, the person's spiritual and bodily aspect, was especially heard in the polemics with Zwingli when Luther, in order to explain his position, looked for an analogy in understanding Christ's incarnation in terms of teaching about the *communicatio idiomatum*, that is, the exchange of qualities of both the divine and human nature of Christ. This teaching was to guard the unity of the person of Christ, in whom divinity and humanity are fully met. Just as in the incarnation Christ lowered himself to be human for the salvation of humankind, so is he really present in his body and blood in the bread and wine of the sacrament at the altar.

When we look at Baptism, the physical experience of being baptized is for Luther a perfect picture of what a Christian experiences in life. In his early sermons on the sacraments, Luther puts it this way:

> It would be proper, according to the meaning of the word *Taufe*, that the infant, or whoever is to be baptized, should be put in and sunk completely into the water and then drawn out again. [. . .] This usage is also demanded by the significance of baptism itself. For baptism, as we shall hear, signifies that the old man and the sinful birth of flesh and blood are to be wholly drowned by the grace of God. We should therefore do justice to its meaning and make baptism a true and complete sign of the thing it signifies.

This physical experience of Baptism is not merely an illustration of God's grace at work. It carries it. Therefore, Baptism is not only the starting point of the Christian journey, but something that defines the whole life of a Christian. The thought of the experience of death and resurrection with Christ, which marks the entire Christian life in repentance, appeared in Luther's early writings in 1519, and it permanently entered the Lutheran understanding of Baptism, as expressed in the fourth question of *The Small Catechism*. It means that a Christians who have experienced Baptism should live as new persons with their whole being. Baptism is a call to a life transformation that goes far beyond the rite itself and is constitutive of every Christian action in the world. Baptism carries within itself the promise of salvation, which requires faith, and the faith in it leads to sanctification lived in the fulfillment of one's vocation in the world to serve others in love.

The Reformation understanding of the sacrament refers to an action of the Holy Spirit that reaches the whole person, which is corporal and spiritual. The effects of this action, however, are not limited to an internal change in the person who accepts the promise in faith, but is for that person a constant obligation to live for his or her neighbor. This logic applied not only to the experience of the

promise of salvation in the water of Baptism, but also to that related to the Body and Blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. In the early sermons on the Lord's Supper, the effect of receiving the sacrament goes further than merely the forgiveness of sin: it includes the communion that arises among the recipients who have experienced reconciliation with God:

> There are those, indeed, who would gladly share in the profits but not in the costs. That is, they like to hear that in this sacrament the help, fellowship, and support of all the saints are promised and given to them. But they are unwilling in their turn to belong also to this fellowship. They will not help the poor, put up with sinners, care for the sorrowing, suffer with the suffering, intercede for others, defend the truth, and at the risk of [their own] life, property, and honor seek the betterment of the church and of all Christians.[…]They are self-seeking persons, whom this sacrament does not benefit.[…]No, we on our part must make the evil of others our own, if we desire Christ and his saints to make our evil their own. Then will the fellowship be complete, and justice be done to the sacrament. For the sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a person that he is made one with all others.

The person I share the sacrament with is not without significance. For I am obliged to create a true *communio* with that person, and this means a commitment to care for my neighbor in all their needs. Luther does not write here about an abstract neighbor, but about a real, concrete crossing of what separates us from our neighbor, regardless of whether it is that neighbor's material status, our assessment of his or her behavior, the price we will have to pay for our help. When joining the communion of the Lord's Table, we are not to pay attention to these human-imaginary boundaries, but we should be ready to help our neighbor whom we meet at the Lord's Table in all possible ways. Especially since, as Luther later wrote in *The Large Catechism*, all are invited to use the medicine of the Lord's Supper, which benefits the body and soul. Christians, on the other hand, should make every effort to ensure that those who experience Baptism also receive the Lord's Supper. As Luther put it in 1519, criticizing the so-called brotherhood, the Lord's Supper is not something that a group in the church can appropriate. It is the celebration of the whole community that is united not only with Christ, but also with one another.

What constitutes *communio*, that is, the Word and the sacraments, is, in the Lutheran understanding, the Holy Spirit's means of action. This is clearly visible in the wording of article V of the Augsburg Confession, which, like article VII, talks about the proclamation of the gospel and the sacraments:

> So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, that is to say, in those who hear that God, not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they received into grace on account of Christ.

This article reflects in a classic way the belief of Lutheran pneumatology about "The Spirit`s Embodiment in the Word." The belief in the action of the Holy Spirit in the Word is also behind the explanation of the third article of faith in *The Large Catechism*: "Where he does not cause it [i.e., the Word of God] to be preached and does not awaken understanding of it in the heart, all is lost." The meaning of Holy Spirit's action is that every single Christian, though not alone but as part of the church, should participate in the salvation that Christ gained through his death and resurrection on the cross:

> Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in him and receive him as our Lord, unless these were offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed; Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure, this redemption.

The Holy Spirit not only gathers the communion of the church, but also ensures that it remains united. The Spirit also gives each of its members the forgiveness of sins. The meeting of this communion in worship is also a field of action of the Holy Spirit, because according to the famous words opening the Lutheran sermon for the consecration of the castle church in Torgau, Germany, the meaning of the service is "that our dear Lord himself may speak to us through his holy Word and we respond to him through prayer and praise." By gathering at the service, we gather to experience the Word, and thus to submit ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit.

Opening oneself to the action of the Holy Spirit is a source of hope. The Spirit's action has, as Luther shows in *The Large Catechism*, an eschatological horizon:

> All this, then, is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, to begin and daily increase holiness on earth through these two means, the Christian church and the forgiveness of sins. Then, when we pass from this life, in the blink of an eye he will perfect our holiness and will eternally preserve us in it by means of the last two parts of this article [i.e., resurrection of the body and eternal life].

All the actions of the Holy Spirit are meant to lead us to the realization of the hope of salvation. Therefore, Baptism, as Luther put it in his early sermons, is a lifelong process that culminates in crossing the border of death into life:

> This significance of baptism – the dying or drowning of sin – is not fulfilled completely in this life. Indeed, this does not happen until man passes through bodily death and completely decays to dust. As we can plainly see, the sacrament or sign of baptism is quickly over. But the spiritual baptism, the drowning of sin, which it signifies, lasts as long as we live and is completed only in death. Then it is that a person is completely sunk in baptism, and that which baptism signifies comes to pass.

The Lord's Supper also brings with it an element of eschatological hope. One of its roles is to be a meal on the way to the fulfillment of Christian hope. As Luther writes in *The Large Catechism*: "Therefore, it is appropriately called the food of the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature."

Communio at the LWF today

The self-understanding of the LWF as a communion has become its constant point of reference. The broad understanding of the communion – *koinonia*, *communio* – sketched in Budapest over the years shaped how the Lutheran communion of churches understands itself, its commitment to mission and *diakonia*, and the fulfillment of its ecumenical commitment.

- The communion – *koinonia* – uniting the LWF member churches is a gift. A gift, because its creation is the work of the Holy Spirit who makes it happen through the proclamation of the gospel and strengthens it through the sacraments.

- The communion is also a task for all its members. The implementation of this task must take into account fundamental beliefs: the gospel is the core of our life in communion; Word and sacraments are events of communion; the message of the cross heals our brokenness; the Word of God creates and affirms both unity and diversity; the gospel entails freedom, respect and bearing with one another.

The LWF's commitment to mission refers to the mission of the Triune God, who acts as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Mission understood in this way belongs to the essence of the church and constitutes its existence. The mission perspective allows us to better understand the unity, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity of the church. It gives the impetus to live as a communion of churches, rooted in a communion of the Triune God, that feels accountable to its ecumenical partners. Like the communion, its mission lives and is strengthened by the Word and guided by the Holy Spirit. This communion draws strength to carry out its mission from Baptism, in which the grace that nourishes life in discipleship is given. This mission is nourished by the Lord's Supper, to which he invites and in which Christ himself is present. This mission involves transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. It is a holistic and contextual practice that combines preaching and service, in the context of justification; it asks about justice and brings the experience of salvation and healing. It does not shy away from dialogue with interreligious partners.

The diaconal commitment of the LWF is also rooted in professing faith in the Triune God. It is an integral part of being the church. *Diakonia* together with *leiturgia* and *kerygma* form the basic dimensions of *koinonia*. The diaconal commitment draws its inspiration from the experience of participation in the Lord's Supper – which is not confined to the liturgical act of administering the sacrament itself – but seeks its fulfillment in liturgy after liturgy. The diaconal commitment is also derived from the fact that the new life in Christ, shared by Christians, calls

them to do good deeds. The realization of *diakonia* is closely related to the service, because *diakonia* cannot do without diaconally oriented spirituality. In its many dimensions, it also has a prophetic dimension, which implies the involvement of the church in the public sphere as well.

The LWF's self-understanding as a communion does not allow it to close itself only to its members. The unity given to the communion, based on the action of the Holy Spirit in the Word and the sacrament, becomes an obligation to strive for a broader unity of the whole body of Christ, and not to be closed within its confessional boundaries. Lutherans do this on a global, regional, and local level. They seek unity in theological dialogue as well as in common witness and service. Their understanding of ecumenism refers to the search for unity in reconciled diversity and differentiated consensus, as well as effective ways of reception of ecumenical experience throughout the church. In its commitments to ecumenical partners, the LWF indicates that ecumenism has a variety of forms, locally and globally, and needs to use clear terminology, working toward the continuation and renewal of bilateral dialogues, the necessary enhancing of reception, and developing pastoral ecumenism and ecumenical spirituality.

Today's questions

LWF understands itself as a communion. The biblical and reformation foundations of this self-understanding carry content that allows them to be developed on the basis of the categories of body, spirit, and hope included in the theme of the assembly. It calls us to look critically at the reality of *communio* in which we live as the LWF.

"One Body" asks us not only how we understand the biblical images of the body that reflect the unity of Christ's *koinonia* (e.g., 1 Cor 12:11ff.). The context of the world we live in, which has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, also raises the question of the importance of bodily presence and being physically together in our being church. How, then, do we understand our gift and task to be the body of Christ? What is the significance for us that God's action both in the preaching and sacrament is addressed to the whole person, both bodily and spiritually, with which we are called to act and serve? In our identity as a communion, where is there a place to be together and to be physically close? Where is it necessary? Where do we set unjustified boundaries to being together and to closeness? Where does this communion become a place of exclusion instead of inclusion because of our imaginations? How do these biblical images and questions about physical closeness and inclusive communion shape our being a communion, its mission, and its diaconal and ecumenical commitment?

"One Spirit" asks that the Holy Spirit has a place in our sense of being a Lutheran communion, where it rarely comes to expression in language and in its work among us. We, as Lutherans, often carry the experience of the Holy Spirit as a key figure, yet it is absent in the way we speak about our experience of Christianity. How do we understand the presence of the Holy Spirit in what constitutes our

communion? How is its action manifested in our mission and *diakonia*? How does it shape our ecumenical commitment?

"One Hope." In a torn world, burdened with many divisions, and with the trauma of a recent pandemic, the question about the source of hope comes to the fore. How, as a communion, do we relate to the appeal from Peter's letter, "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15)? How does our hope translate into that carried out by mission and *diakonia*? If so, what hope is there in our ecumenical meetings?

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"Life Breath" as a Tangible Symbol of God's Grace. Markers of Theology of the Body and Embodied Justice

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Introduction

The theme of the Thirteenth LWF Assembly, "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," reflects the urgency for the church to engage diligently in search for truth, reconciliation, and healing of a wounded body at a time when the world has witnessed dire situations of brokenness, pain, disease, and death due to the dual pandemic of racism and the spread of COVID-19. While the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world catching everyone by surprise, and leaving no corner of the world intact, the pandemic of racism has prevailed through centuries, eating into the vitals of human global body. Consciously or unconsciously, there is a legitimization of the ideology of power and dominance in the hands of a few, who have appropriated privilege and priority as the legitimate right of one community over another. Such a claim of exclusive privilege and exercising of rights over another person or community has resulted in easier access to resources, rights, and power while denying the same for the other, because the differential value associated with "the difference" is perceived as normal, legitimate, necessary, good, and acceptable.

In this paper, I focus on one incident that happened in May 2020 and remains fresh in the memory of the world, especially as it happened during the early pandemic days of COVID-19. It is the brutal murder, in broad daylight in Minneapolis, United States, of George Floyd, a Black man whose life breath was snuffed out when a police officer chose to kneel on his neck for more than nine minutes. This, despite people asking him to get his knee off the neck of the big burly man whose dignity, rights, and life breath lay crushed as much as his physical body. This incident led to an eruption of global movements in solidarity to protest against the inhuman treatment meted out to people of color simply because of their skin color.

The protest movements that erupted globally in over sixty countries showed that there was something different about the protests. It was no mere knee jerk reaction or symbolic protest. In the United States, people gathered on the streets in almost all the major cities, regardless of color, race, religion, or sexual identity. In other words, people decided to come together physically in a symbolic sense, to cry out against the inhuman treatment of people of color. Several recent memories and experiences of violence perpetuated against people of color were invoked. It was as if the lament required a loud recalling of the names of several of those who faced the undignified snuffing-out of their life breaths: Eric Garner, Michael

Brown, Sandra Bland, Tamir Rice, Travon Martin, Ahmad Arbury, and many more. If people decided to come out and protest against the violence and murder of George Floyd despite the pandemic situation, it highlighted the extent to which "every-body" experienced a share of that shame, indignity, and pain in their own bodies. In other words, there was a continuity between the passion, suffering, and death of George Floyd and those thousands who broke out in protests in so many corners of the world. It is important to state that George Floyd's body and experience turn into a critical lens for the theological analysis and articulation of a body theology and embodied justice. How do we critically assess where the church (global and local) stands today on matters of social justice, especially racial justice? How can the Lutheran communion help amplify the global prophetic voice of conscience, courage, and conviction with the power of faith, courage, and hope in the light of the cross and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ?

Basic theological framework of a body theology and embodied justice

The Body is the basic site of all violence, injustice, and discrimination, at any time in history. Whether it is war, violence, or hatred, the aim is to hurt, kill, and deny the body of value, right, dignity, life, and life breath. At times, communal hatred is poured out on a symbolic site, such as a religious place, the *sanctum sanctorum* (or the *womb* of a holy site), or on the bodies of the vulnerable, thereby defacing, desecrating, and demoralizing a larger community. Even as the body is the site of violence, we see that it is the same *body* that struggles, groans, and waits for change, vindication, resurrection, and hope of a new life.

The Spirit is, and has always been, at work in history, from the time of creation. The Spirit flows seamlessly as the wind, blowing wherever, to enliven the wounded world with the perpetual flow of oxygen from God's grace and love. Life's breath is also Spirit. When God blew into the nostrils of Adam, the first human, it was the gift of the Spirit given as gift of grace, to the symbolic representative of the whole of humanity. Without the presence of this Spirit, there is no life, no breath, no life breath. When God created humankind in God's image, the gift of life breath is underscored as the most tangible symbol of God's unconditional, and universal grace!

Hope: The image of hope for new life is a return of life breath, energy, and hope to the wounded and broken bodies and communities. The image of the "dry bones" coming back together as mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel is a rearticulation of the experience of resurrection, here and now. Hope is not abstract hope but is experienced as shared energy invigorating people's movements to rise up and protest, to speak up and speak out against injustices. Signs of hope emerge not only as signs of victory, but as resilience and resistance against abusive powers. Hope is always shared hope, and constantly gathers momentum and power to grow into a larger movement with greater expectation of change and transformation.

What the world witnessed in and after George Floyd's death was this gathering of global momentum for change and transformation, for better quality, equality and equity, regardless.

George Floyd: transformation from a "then moment" to a "global movement" for justice!

May 25, 2020, will go down in history as a day when humanity sank to an abysmal low, when George Floyd, a 46-year-old African-American, was murdered in broad daylight, pinned to the pavement, face down, handcuffed, with the knee of a White police officer on his neck for nine minutes and twenty-five seconds.

George Floyd went into a convenient store in Minneapolis and was alleged to have turned in an allegedly fake twenty-dollar bill. The perceived degree of criminality multiplies whenever Black persons are allegedly the ones accused, and they are often punished, killed, and their bodies even mutilated as if proportionately to that multiplied degree. The example of the ignoble murder of 14-year-old Black boy Emmett Till, in 1955, who was bludgeoned to death for daring to whistle at a White woman, is a story in history that is part of the civil rights movement in the USA. Floyd's death, which happened to be video recorded on a cell phone, reached every nook and corner of the world, and invigorated the emergence of global protests and movement for justice. Floyd's dying words, "I can't breathe," became a global cry for justice.

It was around the same time in history when a prominent actor, Lori Loughlin, was found guilty in a college admissions bribery scandal involving millions of dollars. A jail term of two months was considered an appropriate sentence for the celebrity, who has since been welcomed back into society to resume from where she had left off, following this very brief reprieve. On the other hand, George Floyd's crime was the use of an allegedly fake twenty-dollar bill. It was not because Floyd tried to escape or avoid arrest that he was murdered in broad daylight by the weight of a knee on his neck. There is no need to compare the seriousness of "the crime" committed by Lori Loughlin or George Floyd. The fundamental difference is the denial of the right of a person of color to be considered a human being worthy of bearing the image of God, an honor and grace that is bestowed on the whole humanity alike, as a symbol of equity, love, and grace.

The root of all evils and systems of oppression – sin – lies in the fundamental refusal to accept the divine presence, the image of God (*imago Dei*) in a fellow being whose body is different and negatively othered. In other words, the differential value associated with the *difference* – in terms of one's skin color, or race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sex, and sexuality – is legitimized and normalized as of lesser value. This sinful situation may be summed up in one word, namely, patriarchy. When God has gifted humanity with this unconditional and non-negotiable gift of the image of God, no power on earth can deny a fellow being of this core gift of grace.

Linking the story, history, life story, and God's love story

I used the metaphor "knee on the neck of George Floyd" in an earlier article to refer to similar yokes in history that were sustained by people's backs and necks as their lands, lives, livelihoods, and life stories were subsumed in the narration of a larger history that legitimized and normalized the story and history of enslavement and deprivation. It is important to locate the story of George Floyd in the larger narrative of history, where the lives and life stories of people who were "different" were also considered "dispensable" because their bodies are not considered worthy enough to reflect the presence of the *imago Dei.* Cases of racial violence, abuse, and injustice perpetuate in history because of colluding silence – an unwillingness to speak up and speak out against the injustice done to the vulnerable who are deemed expendable in history. The history of experiences of persons such as George Floyd (and Emmett Till) should remain in the memory and as a primary source of theology for a transformative body theology and embodied justice.

Christian theology is all about God gifting the world with Jesus, the Son, the incarnate one, born of Mary. Christian theology cannot be imagined outside the framework of a body. The theology of incarnation, the theology of the cross, and the empty tomb have to do with the body. Our future, hope, and new life also have to do with the body. This means that a theology of life, love, and justice is inconceivable without reference to the body. The promise of new life, eternal life, is connected to the faith in the bodily resurrection as part of Christian hope. God's love story for the world is complete with the inclusion of the body.

Theological significance of anamnesis in a body theology and embodied justice

The act of remembering and retelling our stories and life stories is important for body theology and embodied justice. A cursory glimpse into the existing theological curricula and pedagogy would reveal the truth about whose history, memory, and experience has become a dominant source of theology and theologizing today. Anamnesis is an important part of eucharistic liturgy because we are called to remember the night in which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was instituted, when Jesus was betrayed, remembering the context in which Jesus broke the bread and shared the cup, reminding the disciples of the significance of the sacrament. Anamnesis invokes in the believer who receives the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ the element of faith in receiving the gift of forgiveness and that of being strengthened in faith and grace. While celebrating communion, we affirm our faith and commitment to be ready to be broken as Christ was. Therefore, it is also important to keep the history and memory of the wounded and broken bodies alive, not with a sense of vengeance, but with a sense of commitment to justice, especially to those whose cries of despair still ring in our minds. The church cannot forget the experiences of people like George Floyd, especially

those that lit up a global movement for change and justice, in particular racial justice, in multiple contexts.

Significance of history as the source of body theology and embodied justice

We live at a time when the significance of history is denied, challenged, and attempts are made in some US states to eliminate anything that has to do with critical race theory from textbooks because it is deemed dangerous and unhelpful and would invoke unpleasant and troubling memories for children. Writing and remembering the stories of those dismembered, mutilated bodies, whose life breath has been expunged, must be written back into history to correct and redeem history as an important source of theology. Theological education in context cannot be transformative enough or life-giving if it ignores, silences, forgets, or erases the memory and history of broken and wounded bodies such as that of George Floyd from history. After all, the story of Christian faith is pivoted on the history of the story of Jesus' passion, death, and suffering on the cross and cannot be shunned on the claim that it would invoke unpleasant and troubling memories. God's love story for the world begins with life at creation, includes the whole body of the earth and humanity. This means that the memories and experiences of those who have been crushed or wounded in history cannot be forgotten or excluded at any time.

Contours of a body theology and embodied justice

Theologically speaking, the personified body of truth (*alētheia*) gets crushed, crucified, broken when it is crammed with lies and untruths that harm body, mind, and spirit. On the other hand, the nature of a body theology and embodied justice is to promote, protect, and enhance the image of God to its fullest, in a person, and therefore is in step with the primary dual commandment of God that is to Love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself. The presence of life breath in a person is a tangible sign and symbol of God's grace. George Floyd moved from being an individual to a collective, from an individual "body" to a symbolic representative of the victimized collective, a body crucified in the same way as Christ! The intersection of Chicago Avenue and 38th Street where George Floyd breathed his last has been renamed as George Floyd Street, to signify this transformation of a moment to a movement for justice. Rather than generating a memory around the inhuman way in which Floyd was robbed of his life breath, the attempt to rename and reclaim that space and site as one that transforms lives is the story of resurrection and hope. It is a story of being raised from the dust of shame and made into a sign of hope and solidarity for justice. This transformation of one body (George Floyd) to a collective global movement for peace and justice is an everyday story of resurrection and hope. A body theology and embodied justice is therefore in tune with the theology of the cross and resurrection. It is a theology of liberation and justice.

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Solus Spiritus and *Sola Experientia*: Dalit Feminist Lutheran Pneumatology – Hope in Double Pandemic Context

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Introduction

COVID-19 has made it almost impossible for many to imagine God as a presence, power, and hope in the world. Students in my class burst out: "Why did God allow these sufferings, especially on the poorest of the poor – the vulnerable Dalits?" "What is God doing in the COVID-19 context which killed millions and led millions to uncertainties?" On the other side, the Lutheran church in India is branded as "the church without the Holy Spirit." One of my relatives, an ex-Lutheran, advised me to get out of the Lutheran church because, he argued, "there is no Holy Spirit in that church." Anupama Hial joins me in saying that many "charismatic churches tag Lutheran pastors as 'pastors without Holy Spirit.'" But how do we measure the presence of the Spirit?

These questions are deeply theological questions. Thus, the theological problem I ponder over in this work is that the traditional doctrine of pneumatology is not sufficient to deal with the pertinent questions raised. Thus, reconstructing pneumatology from a Dalit feminist Lutheran perspective is urgently needed. While affirming the five *solae* (Christ alone, Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, and glory to God alone) proposed by Martin Luther, I add "experience alone (*sola experientia*)" and "Spirit alone (*solus Spiritus*)" as the basic foundational resources in constructing pneumatology.

I apply socio-analytical theological research in developing Dalit feminist epistemology. In past history, autobiographies were typically restricted to the dominant, elites and caste people, and the patriarchal men. Marginalized groups did not find space in the traditional histories. My own location as a Lutheran, a Dalit, and a feminist motivates me to engage with living stories of Dalit Lutheran women and document them in my research practice. This engagement creates countless possibilities to reproduce Dalit epistemology in reversing the existing order toward peaceful coexistence. I will give an overview of the double pandemic context in India in the first place and then discuss the theological deficiency of the doctrine of pneumatology. I also engage with the biblical narratives of Mary

and Elizabeth and the narratives of Dalit, tribal Advasi Lutheran women's experiences in constructing a Dalit feminist Lutheran pneumatology of hope. Finally, I offer implications of the work.

Double pandemic context in India: an overview

Heath Kelly defines a pandemic as "an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people." In light of this definition, I define caste system as a pandemic, a psychological disease that spreads the virus of untouchability and dehumanizes millions of people. The 3,500-year-old caste system can be measured in the experience of over 200 million Indian Dalits' of untouchability, destruction, humiliation, poverty, being plundered, servitude, bondage, rape, massacre, violence of all kinds, arson, captivity, police brutality, and vilified. For B. R. Ambedkar, a leader of Dalits and an architect of the Indian Constitution, "caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of mind." Beryl Logan, who experienced caste humiliation says, "I requested my dance teacher to teach me dance during my schooling. But he insulted me saying, *Paraiyars* (untouchables) cannot learn dance and I cannot teach you." However, this provoked Beryl to learn dance by all possible means. She added: "Later on I took it as a challenge, learned dance, and started a dance school on my own, and I now teach dance, especially to Dalit children."

Such incidents happen in India on a regular basis. On top of it, the COVID-19 crisis doubled the struggles of Dalit, Tribal/Adivasi communities. *The New Indian Express* reported that "the pandemic has exposed the underlying social ills of untouchability and casteist attitude with the surging cases of caste and gender-based atrocities during lockdown." Newspapers often reported how violence increased against Dalits during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of Tribals/Adivasis, Rev. Idan Topno says:

> Tribal/Adivasi church workers have suffered the pandemic both financially and socially. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, church workers never received their salaries in full; for example, they were given fifty or sixty percent of the total recommended salary. The rest will be given as arrears when sufficient funds are available, which rarely happens. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced churches to shut down all places of worship, which affected the income of the church. Rural church workers suffered a lot and their poverty doubled.

Rev. Joshuva Peter, Executive Secretary of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India (UELCI) reiterates Rev. Topno's experience in saying that COVID-19 "is exposing once again India's deep economic divide with the country's poorest people being hardest hit by restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of infection." However, when some use the pandemic crisis to further brutalize Dalits and spread the caste virus, some see COVID-19 as an opportunity for people to triumph over evil. Aishwarya Rao says:

> COVID-19 made the entire world experience barriers to mobility. But in my shelter home, I, along with forty women living with physical disability, experienced team work, oneness, co-operation, co-ordination, empowerment, encouragement, and hope during this lockdown. Some of them lost jobs due to the lockdown, but they took it as a challenge to do some constructive work during this pandemic. Our women made approximately 60,000 masks in three months and distributed them to the needy on the streets and to those working in the unorganized service sector. The lockdown period helped our women and girls to learn to play music instruments and they performed shows to bring awareness about the spread of COVID-19.

The "Spirit of God has inspired us to be in communion with each other in providing hope to the needy besides being disabled."

With this brief assessment of the double pandemic context of COVID-19 and Dalit persecution, I now turn to discuss the theological deficiency of the doctrine of pneumatology.

Theological deficiency of the doctrine of pneumatology

The traditional doctrine of pneumatology is inadequate in providing a comprehensive understanding of the Holy Spirit. The deficiency of the doctrine is expressed in various ways by different people: "orphan doctrine" (Adolf von Harnack); "Cinderella doctrine" (G. J. Sirks); "forgotten God" (Francis Chan); "faceless" (Walter Kasper), and "abstract thought" (Aristotle); and so on. Elizabeth A. Dreyer notes that descriptors of pneumatology using the Greek term *pneuma* for Spirit included qualifiers such as "ambiguous, reticent, obscure, neglected, groping, abstract" to describe the Holy Spirit. However, in the past many have attempted to recover pneumatology.

Friedrich Schleiermacher argues that the third person in the Trinity has not been treated equally compared to the first two persons. He sought to restore this deficit by suggesting that the Holy Spirit should be brought out of the margins to the center. Feminist theologians have done tremendous work in recovering the doctrine of pneumatology. "Perhaps there is no other word in the Christian vocabulary which is in our day more confused or subject to dismayingly inadequate understanding than this word, Spirit," says Joseph Sittler. The theological deficiency in pneumatology leads the church toward dualistic attitudes, divisions, otherworldly mindsets, escapism, and creates a gulf between churches that elevate the Word over the Spirit and those that elevate the Spirit over the Word. Biblical narratives explain how the Holy Spirit is connected to everyday life. Jürgen Moltmann emphasizes that the power of the Spirit is grounded in the creation of Jesus in the womb of Mary, in leading Jesus to various places, and in accompanying him. In Moltmann's holistic pneumatology, Jesus experienced communion and the presence of the Spirit in his everyday life. Paul Tillich argues that all trinitarian aspects are grounded in God the Spirit.

The *Spiritus* is an experience of presence in creation, in individuals, and in the community, providing life, energy, hope, empowerment, joy, justice, and liberation.

On the one hand, the traditional doctrine overlooks and pushes to the margins the holistic work of the Holy Spirit. On the other, it forces people to separate the work of the Holy Spirit from everyday life to "supernatural" miracles and to "speaking in tongues." Both ways are dangerous and lead to a theological deficiency and inability to deal with the questions raised in the introduction of this chapter. Hence a reconstruction of the doctrine of pneumatology is indispensable.

Pneumatology: Dalit Feminist Reconstructions

Samuel Rayan, a liberation theologian and longtime campaigner for Dalit rights, drawing on the Shakti (power) tradition, portrays the Spirit as a "breath of fire" that comes "to enable us to re-create our earth, not to put us to sleep" and is present "not in ethereal euphoria, but in committed historical action." Indian Christian theologies use the term Shakti to describe the Holy Spirit as *Maha Shakthi*. For Pandipeddi Chenchiah, the Holy Spirit, the Shakti, is *mahashakti*, "the great power," or "the new cosmic energy." These expressions are powerful in recovering both the doctrine of pneumatology and the doctrine of human beings by bringing women from the margins to the center. Feminist pneumatological thinking begins with personal communion with the *Spiritus* and then moves to the communal expression of the Spirit's power. For Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza the movement of the Spirit is not limited and she insists that women throughout history have acted in the "power of the life-giving Sophia-Spirit."

For Indian feminist theologians, the Shakti, the *Spiritus*, is an experience and the creative life-giving power. They argue that the Hebraic traditions of the רוּחַ (*rûaḥ*, spirit), שְׁכִינָה (*šᵉḵīnāh*, presence), and חָכְמָה (*ḥoḵmah*, wisdom, spirit) and Greek traditions of πνεῦμα (*pneúma*, spirit), Σοφία (*Sophía*, wisdom), and παράκλητος (*paráklētos*, advocate) have allowed the possibility for feminine metaphors for God. For Aruna Gnanadason, Shakti is the source and substance of all things, pervading everything, a spiritual energy, the creative principle of the universe and an "essence of great religions in Asia." According to Stella Baltazar, the transcended Christ can be imagined as the embodiment of the feminine principle; the Shakti is the energizer and vitalizer. For Virginia Fabella, without women's perspective and their contribution to theology, all doctrinal formulations will be only half understood. Thus, I engage in reinterpreting the narratives of women both from the Bible and from the Indian Dalit/Tribal context from a pneumatological perspective.

Mary the contextual theologian

Feminist theologians have recovered Mary's image in numerous ways by questioning the male ideal of Mary, "the reduction of the feminine to the role of motherhood to gentleness, sweetness, nurturer, patient service, home, war refuge." They have attempted to reinterpret Mary as a *Spiritus*-filled, dynamic, faithful, courageous, revolutionary prophet, mother, disciple, and saint. Mary and the Holy Spirit were in constant and deeper communion. In fact, Mary is an agent and a cocreator in

the birth of Jesus. Yet, unfortunately, the New Testament pays very little attention to Mary. Paul's letters refer to Mary three times, however not by her name (Gal 4:4)"born of a woman" and "according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3; Rom 9:5). Mark refers to her twice, once as his "mother" (Mk 3:31-35) and then as "son of Mary" (Mk 6:3). Matthew refers to Mary at the conclusion of genealogy in the dubious company of four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Mt 1:16); in the infancy narratives (Mt 1:18-2:23); and when Mary and his brothers were searching for Jesus (Mt 12:46-50). John refers to her as "his mother" twice at the wedding at Cana (John 2: 5, 12) and several times at the crucifixion (John 19:25-27). However, her name is not mentioned in these events. Luke pays more attention to Mary and portrays her as a powerful woman.

Biblical narratives portrayed the Holy Spirit as a life giver. Along with the Holy Spirit, Mary becomes the cocreator of Jesus. The gospel story of the conception of the Messiah places Mary with the life-giving powers of her body at the heart of the Sophia-Spirit's approach to the world. The church councils declare that Jesus is fully divine and human. While Jesus received divine nature from the Holy Spirit, he received human nature from his mother Mary. But according to the Orthodox Christian belief, Jesus is God's beloved child irrespective of how he was conceived or from whom he received his blood and life. However, Elizabeth A. Johnson points to Mary's bearing the Messiah outside of patriarchal norms. She states that "the reproductive power of a woman and her role in the birth of the Messiah is affirmed outside the patriarchal structure."

That the magi find "the child with Mary his mother (Mt 2:11)" shows her human communion with the messianic child. Mary to givelife and birth to Jesus and said "yes" to the divine call. Her communion with the Holy Spirit extended to a communion bond with Jesus in her womb.

4.1.1. Mary the theologian of the reversal

Mary's multiple experiences and identities such as being poor, single, woman, Jewish, betrothed, and colonized enable her to give a passionate speech of hope and faith in the goodness of a God who defends the humble and lowly. These different identities of Mary engender a plurality of visions: visions of herself, her community, her culture, her nation, and especially the poor. Mary in her Magnificat praises God for God's faithfulness in elevating her position from a lowly status to that of the "bearer of Jesus." Richard Horsley interprets Mary as representative of "the lowly," not only in the spiritual sense but also in "concrete socioeconomic and political terms." Her speech is a clear vision of reversal of the existing order: the proud-mighty-rich and the lowly-hungry have been reversed. Mary in fact sets a tone of power reversal in her speech that runs through Luke's entire gospel, emphasizing the poor who are on the periphery, the downtrodden, sinners, women, widows, Samaritans, and children – and that they have been restored to life. She sounds like a dynamic social revolutionary and an advocate of justice. Mary's image as the *Spiritus*-filled spokesperson provides a substantial amount of hope to Dalit/Tribal Christian women in India to realize the power of the *Spiritus* within them to become spokespersons on behalf of the lowly.

The experience of the *Sanctus Spiritus* on the Day of Pentecost is an experience of wind, fire, life, empowerment, interdependence, and interconnection. The *Spiritus* connects itself to the powerless group of people in the images of wind and fire – life and energy (Acts 2:2-3). Mary is part of this group (Acts 1:14). Although canonical New Testament ignores the fact that Mary was an influential leader of the church, Bernadette J. Brooten's study of stone epigraphs with synagogue titles shows that Mary had titles such as "Head of the Synagogue," "Mother of the Synagogue," "Elder," and "Priestess." The "Protevangelium of James" mentions twice Mary inside the very holy of holies of the Jerusalem temple, presenting her with the qualities of a high priest who alone can enter the holy of holies (Lev 16 and Heb 9:7). The "Gospel of Bartholomew" depicts Mary at the temple altar, standing in front of the male apostles as their liturgical leader. She preached the gospel, led prayers, healed by laying her hands, exorcised, scaled, sprinkled water, and distributed books to women evangelists to take around the Mediterranean world. Jesus' followers remembered Mary as a new Abraham, a founder of Mary's movement that brought a structural transition from patriarchal to matrilineal Judaism. As per the rabbinic law, from the second century CE until this day, the offspring of a Gentile and a Jewish father is a Gentile, while the offspring of a Jewish mother and a gentile father is a Jew. As per the extra canonical sources, Mary the cocreator of the church led the church as one body into a *Spiritus*-filled communion and challenges the church today to be as one body in one *Sanctus Spiritus*.

Elizabeth: spiritus-filled theologian of reversal

Luke informs us that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, she was filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:41); that Elizabeth and Zechariah were righteous before God, living blamelessly in keeping with all the commandments and regulations of the Lord; that they had no children and were getting on in years (Lk 1:5-7). Luke alone narrates the story of Elizabeth that has powerful gender ramifications for the church today. He first introduces Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, as faithful, praiseworthy, and prayerful (Lk 1:5-25). Shockingly, Zechariah is punished for lack of faith and made mute by Gabriel. In the ancient world, speech was overwhelmingly associated with power and men, silence with weakness and women. Silencing Zechariah in Luke had gendered ramifications, says Brittany E. Wilson. Zechariah is muted throughout the nine months of Elizabeth's pregnancy whereas Elizabeth turns to be a spokesperson and continues to speak throughout the first chapter.

4.2.1. Spirit-filled Elizabeth: a theologian of faith affirmations

Luke dissociates Zechariah from elite masculine norms despite his status as a man and a priest by repeatedly drawing the reader's attention to Zechariah's muteness. The contrast between Zechariah's muteness and Elizabeth's outspokenness is specially sharpened by Luke as Elizabeth becomes a spokesperson for Luke's theology of reversal. Elizabeth makes faith affirmations: her pregnancy is God's doing (Lk 1:25) and God delights not in people's sufferings, but rather in taking

away their humiliation. She affirms that in her hopeless situation, in her inability to bear child, it is God that enabled her to conceive, and it is God who took away the disgrace that she had endured among her people. She makes a Christological affirmation, the first person in giving one of the Christological titles "the Lord" to an unborn Jesus (Lk 1:46-56). Mary was inspired by Elizabeth's faith declaration and confirms them in her Magnificat affirming that God "has looked with favor" on her humiliation (1:48) and lifts up all the humiliated (1:52). The *Spiritus* who filled Elizabeth challenges the church today to make faith affirmations that can mute the caste and gender structures that oppress the lowly and the poor.

4.2.2. Elizabeth – a prophet of blessing

Elizabeth, in communion with the *Spiritus*, gives a prophetic speech in the form of a spontaneous pronouncement of blessing directed at Mary and her unborn child (Lk 1:42-45). She blesses Mary thrice: for who she is, for who she bears, and finally for what she has done. Although Elizabeth was not exclusively called a prophet, her words are prophetic and she speaks with authority. In becoming a prophet by announcing Mary as the mother of "my Lord" (43), Elizabeth thus becomes the first person to give one of the Christological titles, "the Lord," to the unborn Jesus. She inspires Mary to speak in the same language of reversal (46-56). The prophetic speech of Elizabeth inspires the church to become a prophet of blessing in breaking the barriers that divide the body of the church.

4.2.3. Elizabeth's resistance brings restoration

Many interpret Zechariah's muteness as the means by which Luke gives voice to Elizabeth and Mary. Zechariah, a priest, a mediator between God and the people, would be expected to explain the new divine act. Instead, it is Elizabeth who, against the traditional norms, articulates what God is doing at the conception of John (Lk 1:24-25). Elizabeth decides to name her son, a privilege she was given because of her firm faith. Although her neighbors and relatives were trying to convince her and impose a name for her child (59-62), she resisted their influence and was firm to name him with the name given by Gabriel. Some argue that it was only after agreeing with his wife before the crowd that Zechariah recovered speech, his tongue set free, and began to speak and praise God. Elizabeth's resistance and firm faith made her an agent of restoration. Elizabeth calls the church to resist patriarchal influences and to become an agent of restoration.

In their personal communion with the *Sanctus Spiritus* Mary and Elizabeth became a communion in which they share each other's joy and blessings of God. In communion with the *Sanctus Spiritus*, they proclaimed God's justice and blessings in unity by reversing the existing order. A feminist, hermeneutical rereading of Mary and Elizabeth declares that the communion with the *Sanctus Spiritus* leads to a life-giving activity, providing hope to the hopeless, lifting up the lowly, and reversing the power structures in order to bring balance in the communion. I will narrate the *Spiritus*-filled Dalit, Tribal/Adivasi Lutheran women's experiences of

communion with the *Spiritus* that led them to declare their faith affirmations of hope during the double pandemic context.

Spiritus-filled experiences of Dalit/Tribal-Adivasi Lutheran women

4.3.1. The shakti the power of the *Sanctus Spiritus* alone

Ms Ranjita Christie Borgoary becomes a spokesperson for theologically trained women in transforming three Lutheran churches toward gender justice. As a result, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Madhya Pradesh, the Christ Lutheran Church, and the Bongaigaon Diocese of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church have ordained women. Borgoary asserts that "this is the work of the Holy Spirit alone." During our conversation, she said that "some have left the church because of women's ordination, and I was also threatened by some people. Let what may come! I stand for gender justice. The Spirit of God alone gives me the power to speak out and to bring a change." She was also instrumental in electing two women vice-presidents for the UELCI.

Logan rescued several victims of sexual violence in and around Chennai with the support of the Positive Women Network. When asked, "What motivated you to take such a bold step?" she answered that "some Shakti leads me to be compassionate and bold and that Shakti is the Holy Spirit." She says, for example:

> A young girl eloped with a boy she was in love with. To her surprise, he took her to a nearby place called Red Hills, in the suburbs of Chennai, and brought a gang of boys and they all raped her and left her on the roadside. When I was informed, I rushed to the spot, informed then police, filed a case against those who had perpetrated the violence, got her to be admitted to the hospital; after her recovery, I put her in a home for the destitute. And now she is continuing her studies. This is one young woman among many whom I have rescued and provided hope to. There were times I was threatened, but I am bold enough to take up these issues and move forward. It is the power of the *shakti* that inspires me and leads me to take a bold step even at the risk of my life.

The nationwide lockdown in 2020 resulted in a crisis in which the worst affected were migrant workers. Idan Topno says:

> Migrants suffered a double pandemic during the lockdown. They were left without a penny, food, and jobs. In such a context, access to information was restricted in India as the media were asked to block information from the international community. Our friends and partners from all over the world were anxious about the situation and the vulnerable people. In these circumstances, I raised my voice along with my friends and began to collect information for reporting purposes about the actual condition of the people of Assam. These reports have helped international partners and different religious associations in India to extend their support to the needy in Assam. It was the Spirit of God alone who gave me strength to speak out, no matter what may come.

4.3.2. Indwelling *Sanctus Spiritus* of God

Borgoary explains that the Holy Spirit is *sarvantharyami* (an indweller) across the boundaries. She says,

> As our government suddenly declared a lockdown, life became miserable for migrants. Crowds began to take shelter at various shelter homes, under bridges, on footpaths, and so on. We went to an Assam home in Chennai where a huge crowd of migrants stayed. There was man who was not a Christian and did not eat food for three days. When we gave him a food packet, tears rolled down his eyes and he looked at us and said, "I understand that you are Christians, and it is your God's Spirit which is in you that made you provide food for us." He thanked us with such a grateful heart.

"People from other faiths have recognized the Spirit of God in us. I believe that the Spirit of God indwells in him which made him realize the Spirit that indwells in us."

4.3.3. Miracle of the *Spiritus*: revisited

Ms Sripati Nirmalakumari redefines the concept of "miracle of the Spirit of God." She shares how her bold steps made her an ambassador of hope during the COVID-19 pandemic:

> Jyothi was divorced fourteen years after her marriage on the grounds of a complaint that she could not bear a child. She has no parents; she took shelter in her relatives' homes as a servant. But she was ill-treated by her own people, and they doubted her chastity. As soon as I learned about her condition, I took initiative in arranging a marriage for her. I found a man, a widower with two daughters, who was working with Friends Missionary Prayer Brand (FMPB). Although it was difficult for the girls to accept her, as the elder daughter is in her teens, the situation got settled gradually and they accepted her. As per FMPB rules, spouses must be trained in the missionary work, thus Jyothi was trained for a few months, and she is employed by FMPB. Many have opposed my initiative and gave negative comments. It is with the power of the Holy Spirit who is in me (in Telugu, *parishuddatma undi*, feminine ending) that I was able to take up such a bold step and the miracle took place in the midst of the pandemic crisis. Although I am in my sixties, I moved around while following precautionary methods.

Anupama shares after seven years her experience of a miracle that happened in her life:

> While I was in Germany, I was alone, and was diagnosed with sickle cell anemia disease which has no medicines. I was deeply depressed and felt as if I died in Germany, and I was so anxious about my family back at home. I was walking on the streets of Hamburg for hours together crying and crying. Then I went home and locked up myself and for three days I was praying to God. I felt I was healed. This is the seventh year after this happened. I never tested again, and I never used medicines. Miracles happen every day in our lives. The miracle is not a onetime touch event as a few say.

> It is a process. I feel that my faith and the power of the Holy Spirit have healed and protected me in my hopelessness.

4.3.4. Inspiration of the Holy Spirit leads toward hope

"Inspiration of the Holy Spirit continues and is not restricted to the Scriptures alone," says Aishwarya. She tells how she is inspired:

> Wherever there is hope there is the Holy Spirit and wherever there is the Holy Spirit there is hope. The Holy Spirit is part and parcel of our everyday life. I am always inspired by the Spirit of God that moves me from hopelessness toward providing hope. COVID-19 has created a crisis in the lives of elderly women, especially women [with disabilities]. I have rescued two elderly women who had been abandoned: one was found at a railway station, the other, in a hospital. The visually impaired woman got lost when searching for jobs. The other one was abandoned by her son. The Holy Spirit led me to rescue them and restore them back to life. The power of the Spirit is always with me and inspires me in various ways.

The rereading of the narratives of Mary and Elizabeth and the voices of Dalit/Trible-Adivasi Lutheran women and the biblical images declare that the indwelling Holy Spirit continues its work of life-giving, sustaining, and empowering, giving hope and joy, justice and liberation.

"*Sola experientia*" and "*sola Spiritus*": toward a Dalit feminist Lutheran pneumatology of hope and implications

Martin Luther's famous statement "sola experientia facit theologum" ("only experience makes a theologian") inspires me and provides me with a foundational resource in constructing a Dalit feminist Lutheran pneumatology of hope in this paper. Based on Luther's statement, I define a Dalit feminist Lutheran theologian as "the one who approaches the Scriptures from her own experience as a woman and from her experience as a woman in her community." We experience an awakening of the mind at certain times in our day-to-day lives in communion with the *Spiritus*. We feel the Spirit's inspiration in the creation. We experience hope in hopelessness. The experience alone makes us theologians. In this work, while giving importance to Martin Luther's five *solae*, I declare my faith as a Dalit feminist Lutheran theologian in the "experience alone" (s*ola experientia*) and in the "Holy Spirit alone" (*solus Sanctus Spiritus*). The experience of personal communion with the Holy Spirit needs to be realized in the communion of the church as one body.

A Dalit feminist Lutheran pneumatology of hope affirms that: The Holy Spirit is in constant communion with people and creation; it is neither static nor fixed, but flexible and fluid; neither limited to a particular event, particular church, nor to a particular person – it is rather a process; it is an everyday communion both with the self and with the neighbors and the church as one body; communion with the Holy Spirit leads to power reversal, restoration, liberation and justice, hope

and harmony; the Holy Spirit does not prepare people for the other world but to make this world the better world; the Holy Spirit leads people toward rejoicing and celebration; the Holy Spirit is beyond gender; the Holy Spirit is the Shakti the creator of life, sustainer and the protector of life.

5.1. Implications

- The *first* implication of the work is for the Lutheran communion of churches. The rich experiences of the Holy Spirit discussed in this work are neither confined to the masculine terminology nor to justification and sanctification alone. The Lutheran church in the world needs to take steps to correct the gender-insensitive theological language of the church that dehumanizes half of the population in the world. The traditional language that boxed the Holy Spirit in masculine images needs a conscious and constant deconstruction. Lutherans and especially Indian Lutherans need to be reassured and empowered with the affirmation that the Holy Spirit is in communion with them.

- The *second* implication of the paper is for Dalits, Tribals/Adivasis, and other marginalized Christians in India. The Holy Spirit as life, power, and hope is a powerful conception toward the empowerment of Dalits and all the marginalized.

- The *third* implication of this paper is to the entire Christian community. The fundamental language of the church that limits the Holy Spirit to "supernatural miracles" and to "speaking in tongues" needs a conscious correction as it leads people to become otherworldly.

Conclusion

While providing a perspective on the double pandemic faced by Dalits in India during the COVID-19 crisis, this chapter engaged in addressing the theological deficiency in the doctrine of pneumatology. In the process, while affirming s*ola experientia* and *solus Spiritus* as the primary sources, the work attempted to reconstruct a Dalit feminist Lutheran pneumatology that provides hope by using biblical narratives of Mary and Elizabeth as well as the experiences of Dalit and Tribal/Adivasi Lutheran women.

The global health crisis was a wake-up call to the church to pay attention to the struggles of Dalits in the face of the caste virus that continues to dehumanize them and to the transforming, life-giving, and empowering power of the Holy Spirit that strengthens the church as one body.

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The Spirit Renews: A Caribbean Perspective on Unity in Church and Society

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In the year 1517, while the seeds of the Reformation took root and reformed the sociopolitical life in Europe, the first slave ships arrived in the Caribbean. It was called the "New World" from the time Christopher Columbus accidentally arrived on the shores of the Bahamas in 1492. With the planting of his sword on Caribbean soil, colonialism was embarked upon in this region. The indigenous people of the land were the first to be enslaved until the Dominican priest, Bartolomé de las Casas, proposed that Africans would be better suited for the harsh labor conditions in the colonies. The ships that followed carried many Africans, chained and beaten into an enslaved people, for one purpose: to achieve economic wealth through cheap labor. However, the cost was never cheap for the enslaved or their descendants. What was lost is more than freedom or rights, and to reclaim or regain it will take more than a shift in thinking.

The transatlantic slave trade lasted for over four hundred years and officially ended in 1863. It involved three main continents: Africa, Europe and the Americas. This massive legalized human trafficking system sparked the genesis of a new socioeconomic society within the Caribbean and the Americas, namely, a "plantation society." This was the bedrock of the economy of European and many other countries. Its effectiveness and longevity were sustained through three key imperatives that characterized that society and formed the consciousness of ten generations of African people in the New World. In this paper I first explore the imperatives of the plantation society and their influence on the Caribbean church; secondly, I analyze the imperatives needed for communion in church and society; and lastly, I describe ways in which the Spirit accompanies us on our journey toward and our being in communion.

Imperatives of the plantation society

The first imperative is uprootedness and displacement. This is seen in the demographics of the plantation society. The largest group of people living on the plantation were always uprooted and displaced or not in control of their original living spaces. The pursuit of riches, wealth, and other economic gains required manual labor. To

that end, more than ten million Africans were trafficked from Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas. Subjugating them on their own lands had proven a difficult undertaking. Their connectedness with their land and ancestorial legacy always echoed a strong sense of an unyielding posture. William Watty (1981) called it a calculated denigration and deliberate disorientation to erase the memory of Africa. It was hoped that their disconnection from their land and ancestry would make them easier to subdue. While many forcefully resisted, even choosing suicide over bondage, the second-generation Caribbean enslaved community had no reference to freedom or an ancestral song to echo self-worth and belonging. Uprootedness and displacement took a firm hold on those born in bondage.

The second imperative is division, and this has to do with the governance of the plantation. Knowing that the enslaved outnumbered them by many, the colonists intentionally deployed the "divide and rule strategy" to manage them better. The enslaved that survived the nightmarish journey on the ship, over the seas, were sold and bought as cattle and products on the market place. Those who spoke the same language or came from the same family and tribe were separated and sent to different plantations. This was intentional to limit the possibilities of uprisings on the plantations because without good communication it is difficult to unify and work together toward a common goal. Division was intentionally introduced to rule the plantation. While separation at the entrance was intentional, division was also structurally placed to keep other possible ways of unification at bay. The colonial patron chose leaders within the enslaved communities and inserted them in the hierarchal plantation system, right beneath their white masters. On the plantations in Suriname, these persons were called *basjas*. Their official function was to monitor and supervise the other enslaved, especially when their masters were away. However, more than often they were tasked with executing the dictated punishment upon their own community. They were given clothes to dress like the master and a whip to exercise authority over their own people. This, in and of itself, created division within the enslaved community because it is impossible to inflict violence upon a community and still be part of it. This was felt as a deep form of betrayal but at the same time, evidence of upward mobility and success. This false sense of power became the cause of both hatred and envy within the enslaved community. Many hated the *basja*, because he was a "sellout," but many wished to become him because life was seemingly better for him. The only way to become the *basja* was to please the master, which could only be done by showing indifference to one's own community. Upward mobility for enslaved persons or those of African descent had a high cost and that cost was to trade in their people for the clothes and speech of the White master. In the end, they and many before them were deceived with the illusion of a better life. What they received and their descents inherited was a ruthlessly divided community. Therefore, we must be vigilant and watch when division emerges among us, whether we are descendants of an enslaved community or not. As a faith community, we must always ask who benefits from our discord. For division is not an accidental occurrence but a necessary tool in the arsenal of a colonist to rule the plantation.

The third imperative is offering uniformity as the only narrative of success. The beatings, severe working conditions, and skin branding of the enslaved were lived realities designed to tell a narrative. To fill the vacuum left by the two previous impera-

tives, a false and destructive narrative was encoded into the fabric of the plantation society. The harsh treatment from the beginning of the journey, at the coast of West Africa over the ocean to the plantations, supplied a destructive narrative. It sought to erase any trail of self-worth and left uniformity as an appealing option to regain self-worth and a better life. All the beatings and difficult working conditions were to proclaim and continually repeat one false and disparaging narrative, namely, that black people were nothing but a commodity that needed to be ruled. The skin branding at the plantation was to further make this point that Black people were property to be sold and bought. The climax in this narrative is the most destructive. Many enslaved persons came to believe that the only way out of this reality was to please the colonizers or to become like them. The need to distinguish themselves from their own community and grow more in the likeness of their masters was an even real and pressing desire. This, of course, only emphasized the individualistic over and above the communal, so that further division was established within that society. Unfortunately, today this narrative continues to replicate in the Caribbean within free descendants of the enslaved and I suspect outside of the Caribbean as well. The skin bleaching phenomenon within our region may also be a result of this narrative, where uniformity with the colonist seems like the best path to salvation. However, uniformity, in this way, is division on its own. For enslaved persons to become like their masters, a certain level of self-disdain and community betrayal is needed. To this society, unity in divisiveness is a danger and cannot be accepted.

None of these three key imperatives were accidentally deployed, instead they were intentionally used to ensure the economic growth and comfort of the master and his household in the plantation society. While old and forgotten by many, these tools are still deployed in our present society. We live in an age of the greatest mis- or disinformation, and only a select few stand to benefit economically from our discord. Short conversations and engagements online have a great impact on the lives of real people and can shape long-term narratives for a great number of people. While there are positive narratives circulating online, the vast majority of negative narratives receive the most attention. Sometimes, they even have a life of their own, causing groups and individuals to lash out against each other. It is as if they all received "a digital whip" to execute justice and righteousness from the comfort of their homes, turning us all into *basja*s. The question is, who is the master? Behind every *basja* there is a master, orchestrating the scene to benefit from our discord. In this way we are still living in a plantation society that is fueled by our own uprootedness, discord, and creation of destructive narratives of each other.

The church in the Caribbean as agent of the plantation society

The traditional churches in the Caribbean came with and were established for the colonizers and consequently mirrored much of the plantation society. Therefore, it is expected that the churches would have functioned as agents of the plantation society and did so in their preaching, even to the enslaved community. In preaching and theological expositions, biblical texts were used to explain why slavery was acceptable and the natural state for Black people, while also adding

the image of the White person as the savior. By the end of the colonial period, there was a formed and ingrained theological anthropology of a person of African descent in contrast to the White person. This was an image and reality that the abolition of slavery could not abolish. Mainly because this false theological image of the White savior and the disinformed anthropological view of a Black person were ingrained in the Black community. The change in leadership of the church and the independence of the nation from the colonizer had little to no effect on changing the status quo. With these disinformed theological and anthropological references, the newly "acquired freedom" would only serve to replicate the same plantation society outline above and this is exactly what happened.

While the postcolonial Caribbean society condemned slavery, the same colonial imperatives were used to shape the new reality. The church in the Caribbean was an essential agent that molded this society. Many formerly enslaved people saw the church as a place they could extract status and prestige from. Going to church in the clothes of their previous masters and doing several other previously forbidden activities gave them a sense of equality they did not have before. Soon after, the church dictated what was acceptable wear, speech, and appearance in society for a successful Black person. Coincidently, it was always the wear, speech, and apparel of their previous masters. Traditional clothing, languages, and music were not welcomed in many churches and sometimes even prohibited. To this day creole languages are still seen as inferior and degrading in many places in the Caribbean, when spoken in public or with the elderly or seniors. This further cemented the uprooting and displacing process even for the descendants of freed slaves.

With no new theological developments in sight, the postcolonial Caribbean church returned to the old imperialistic idea of expansion and conquest. This time the expansion was not to take over lands for economic gains but to conquer cultures and other religions as converts for Jesus Christ. Postcolonial Caribbean society was much more diverse and pluralistic, making this conquest a more destructive and divisive endeavor. Anyone and everything that did not resemble the old colonial image was rejected, deemed less Christian, or seen as demonic. Unfortunately, in many places in the Caribbean, preaching still embodies this imperialistic idea and continues to contaminate our daily lives and political, social, and economic systems. A renewal in theological and homiletical insights is strongly needed to confront the grave injuries that the expansion and conquest preaching has done and is doing to Caribbean society. In many Caribbean countries political parties are formed based on ethnicity and religion alone. It is clear that time had not dissolved the old myths or the vigorous strive toward uniformity. With these advances, the church in the Caribbean has been more of an agent for the plantation society than the body of Christ, when in fact it should support, enlighten, and transform the people of God toward communion with God and with each other.

Imperatives of communion

The first imperative of communion is viewing communion as part of our personhood. To contest the oppressor's narrative, we must first unravel the skewed theological

anthropology of the plantation society that seeks to insert divisive tendencies into our human nature. While the plantation economy dictates that human beings will always strive toward self-gratification, self-preservation, and ultimately create societies of self-isolation, the community of the Triune God teaches us differently. God is not first one God and then three persons for our benefit of understanding; rather, the personhood of God is intrinsically part of God's being. God creates, initiates, and maintains only through the Son and the Holy Spirit, making this the only way for human beings to approach God. Outside of this communion, there is no God. Therefore, God's being is located in God's inescapable communal personhood. If we apply our doctrine of the Trinity in the former sense, it will only serve as a complementary view of God in our theology. In the latter form, the Trinity serves as a way of understanding *our own being*, our relationship with God, and the entire created order. The goal of the doctrine of the Trinity is less about fully understanding God and more about understanding ourselves, how we were created and to what end.

The second imperative of communion is viewing freedom as part of the duality in our personhood. The Trinity presents us with a unique image of God (*imago Dei*) that seeks to illuminate and transform our current way of being into the one holy, catholic and apostolic people we profess to be in our creed. This unique *imago Dei* shows us a God with both personal freedom and an inescapable communal nature (the latter was discussed above). The constitutive relationship God initiates with all of us, through Christ in Baptism and sustained with the Holy Spirit, is the evidence of both God's personal freedom and inescapable communal nature. God's relationship with us is not born out of necessity, but out of God's free will. However, it could not be established outside of the works of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus, it accentuates the personal freedom and reciprocal relationship of God in the doctrine of the Trinity. This is the dual primordial nature in which we are created, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and geographical location. A person called by this Triune God through the waters of Baptism cannot exist outside of this communion or this duality. Trying to do so will require going against one's own nature and ultimately will result in a depraved state of being, where we can only affirm ourselves in contrast to ourselves or at the expense of the other.

The third important imperative for communion is trust. According to John Zizioulas a person is "*ecstatic* in terms of being *'a movement towards communion, towards self-transcendence.'"* This, of course, is an exceedingly optimistic view of humanity, granted it had not been oppressed by our hundred years of slavery. Oppression and marginalization do not innately spark an ecstatic feeling toward being with others. They actually inspire the opposite of communion and unity. Communion and unity require trust to be fully operational, and this is precisely what is discouraged in a plantation society, through the second plantation imperative previously discussed. The livelihood of that society hinged on the distrust and profited from its discord and disconnection. This is why the plantation society can never produce persons but only individuals and strips all its inhabitants of their personhood and communal living. Persons fully conscious of their freedom and sacred communal nature are a great danger to the plantation. They cannot see the oppression and marginalization of others (human beings and the rest of creation) without feeling it deeply as if it is being done to them. They will never

sacrifice communal living for individual liberties, because it will intrude on their primordial dual nature (freedom and escapable communal nature). The reciprocal relationship would not allow them to see oppression and marginalization any other way or to participate in those injustices. Therefore, an important way to dismantle the plantation society and move toward the communion and unity of the church (at least for those oppressed) is to regain or reclaim our personhood.

The Spirit renews

The apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans records an essential statement: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom 8:2). Law and freedom are usually not compatible partners. Laws are meant to bring awareness to issues and regulate the way we exercise our freedom, especially in communal spaces. Yet, the apostle Paul is thoroughly convinced that the law of the Spirit of life, in this case the Holy Spirit, brought about freedom for those in bondage by sin and death. By examining this verse, it is clear that freedom cannot be given by one human to the other, instead it is an inherited raw gift of the Triune God to every being created in the *imago Dei*. True freedom can only be regulated and restricted by others, but never given by them. The word "law" in this verse also denotes a system of rules that regulates the actions of the Holy Spirit or Spirit of life. Therefore, this cannot be an arbitrary gift. If the movement of the Spirit is governed by the law of the Spirit of life, then reason and rationality are probably involved, albeit divine reason or rationality and perhaps far removed for our human capacity to understand. This statement also reminds us of an important fact: one can still be free even with rules and regulations in place. The word "law" can also by paraphrased as principle in this verse – a principal being that gives us a chain of reasoning and structure for our beliefs and helps form our behavior. Ultimately, rules and regulations will be formed out of principals, not to stifle our freedom but to help us conform our behavior to what we already believe. For this reason, it is important for us to recognize that the abolition of slavery did not give us freedom but rather lifted the horrendous regulations and restrictions upon the free lives of our ancestors. Behavior conformed to the principal of this freedom will still have to follow. This is the first step toward reclaiming our personhood and dismantling the three plantation imperatives unlashed upon our society. Wanting others to give us freedom is living in the false narrative of the plantation society.

Hence, the Spirit calls the church, particularly in the Caribbean, to an important task: to make communion both its mission and goal. In this day and age, this task requires the church to take on a more active role in calling for the abolishment of the horrendous regulations and restrictions marinated in racism and discrimination, while also persuading believers to conform their behavior in accordance with the law of the Spirit of life. The church will have to protest and advocate for the elimination of the atrocities in our midst, so that equality, equity, and a higher quality of life can be within reach of the oppressed and marginalized –not as another option or choice for the oppressed and marginalized to consider perusing, but as a natural part of a God-giving life that cannot be otherwise. Freedom is not a variety of choices

and options to do whatever we want, least we think that slavery was about people not being able to do what they wanted, as some would argue in the debates about COVID-19 vaccines or masks today. Absolutely not! It was that enslaved persons were precluded from meeting the desires and unlocking the potential given to them by God, because of uprootedness, displacement, and intentional division. This is a preclusion not only from knowing who we are but also from knowing who we might become, and it makes being and becoming an endless endeavor in nothingness for those who inherited the false narrative. The church, in its mission toward communion, must change (or at the least resist) the narrative sparked by the skewed theological view of humanity in the plantation society and help believers to reclaim their personhood and embody the three imperatives of communion: communal living, communal freedom, and communal trust.

Hovering hope

A continual point of celebration, even in difficulties, is the fact that we serve the God that creates e*x nihilo* (out of nothing). The God that can reshape every formless and empty space with the one hovering Spirit was introduced to us through the Old Testament writers in Genesis 1:2. No uprootedness, displacement, division, or destructive narrative is a match for this Spirit because it lingers on long after the sun sets on the plantation society. As a plow is used to prepare a field before sowing, the hovering Spirit of God plows through our reality, making previously hard and unfertilized ground into good soil. Even though uprootedness and displacement have left us detached from the earth, our sibling in God's creation, a conscience effort to reconnect with her, ourselves, and others is a step toward unity and communion. Although division was planted within our society, the realization that we persist as its antithesis is a step toward unity and communion. Even when false and disparaging narratives are dissimilated into the fabric of our society, the constant objection to clothe ourselves and our communities with this fabric preserves unity and communion: this society is entirely in contrast to the plantation society. For this is our hope and assurance: that communal living, freedom, and trust are gifts of the hovering Spirit that lingers over our society, reconnecting with all that is uprooted and displaced, unifying the divided and diverse pieces into a mosaic, and recalibrating destructive narratives into life-giving imperatives.

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The Spirit Poured Out on All flesh. Perspectives for an Embodied Ecological Ecumenism of Hope

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"Pumzi" or the need for new narratives

Imagine this future: We are living thirty-five years after disastrous wars over water. The climate warming has led to the complete desertification of the earth. Unable to survive in the desert, the remaining human population of the world lives in a sterile compound, busy producing clean water and energy for survival.

This is the setting of the Afro-futuristic short movie *Pumzi*, by Wanuri Kahiu, a Kenyan feminist Afro-futuristic artist. In this restricted and highly technical environment, Asha, the young female protagonist of the film, dreams of a colorful tree in the middle of the desert, until, very promptly, her dream is interrupted by a message on the screen, "Dream detected: take your dream suppressants." The surveillance of the members of the community by its leadership extends into dreams, which are obviously considered as a threat to the social and political order. Nevertheless, the dream and the image of the tree unfold their power and remain the common thread of the film narrative. In disobedience to the management, Asha opens a package with a germinating seed, escapes the compound – with the help of an unnamed cleaning woman who is obviously on an even lower level in the community's hierarchy than Asha – and wanders across the desert until she recognizes the tree of her dreams from afar. When she reaches the place of the tree, there is only desert. But Asha plants the seed, waters it with the last water from her bottle and with her sweat, and protects the plant from the scorching sun with her own body. The last shot of the film shows "that the protagonist's bodily sacrifice eventually produces the tree of her dreams by transposing a blossoming tree onto Asha's prostrate body."

No word is spoken in the film. Verbal communication takes place exclusively in written form on the screen as if the members of the community were saving at *Pumzi*, which is the Kiswahili word for breath. But this saving of breath results in a maximum distance between the members of the community that appears like a collective of lonely and anonymous singularities deprived of the fulness of life. Their cohabitation represents the opposite of a community that defines itself as *one body* in which the members enrich each other, argue with, and depend on each other. The image of the blossoming tree at the end of the movie stands in contrast to the sterile atmosphere of the community compound and symbolizes

life in abundance. But this abundance of interdependent life is yet only realized in the dream of the protagonist and, in the end, through the sacrifice of her "Black" female body.

Pumzi is an impressive example of the need for alternative stories in face of urgent ecological challenges. Environmental disasters like the desertification and water wars envisioned in *Pumzi* are a wake-up call. Not only nature is in danger. Body, spirit, and hope are threatened. Life in its fulness is destroyed. All the certainties that "we" have learned to trust in and to build our living on are called into question by the current and prospective consequences of the continuous exploitation of natural resources. Even the "we"– that I've introduced here so harmlessly – is challenged: Who, after all, is and represents the "we"? Are our societies as well as our churches not split up into many different interest groups? Is there still a bigger "we" that feels the need to communicate and wrestle with each other in spite of differences and necessary particularities? And what about those who are being excluded, muted, marginalized, who have no voice in the "we," yet are most vulnerable to climate changes? The "we" introduced by a scholar of the global North like me all too often contains a blind spot and fails to see the unjust imbalance of power and vulnerability.

I am taking *Pumzi*, an Afro-futuristic movie, as starting point for the motto of the LWF assembly because it invites us – as different and diverse as "we" are – to develop alternative stories and futures and to create life-giving scenarios of "one body, one spirit, one hope." In my context – Western academia – alternative stories and epistemologies are still undermined and neglected. *Pumzi* points to the violence of this narrow-minded knowledge production and uncovers the "one" dominant story that has furthered the current environmental calamity and that continues to be powerful. Even scientific insights into the "limits of the planet" and the "tipping points" are not able to destroy the conviction that we are experiencing "only" a climate crisis that eventually will pass as soon as more sophisticated means for the domination of the world are developed. This hegemonic story of the domination of the earth by technical means generated by "man" goes hand in hand with stories that intend to justify various forms of supremacy: man over woman, Whites over Blacks, modernity over tradition. For those who profit from this story there is no need to change the way of life in the face of the ecological and climate challenges at hand. But other stories continue to be marginalized. Leaning on Chimanda Ngozi Adichie I denote this dynamic the "danger of a single story." Critical scrutiny of the hegemonial story demands "combined competences." It calls for competences not only in natural sciences but also in epistemological and theological disentanglements. The Christian doctrine of the mastery of the earth, the body, the Spirit, and hope has heavily contributed to the "single story" that subdues the earth and causes intersectional forms of oppression. Alternative theologies and spiritualities are needed and already on the way.

What does it mean to have hope in face of the radical destabilization of life on earth due to environmental disasters? Jonathan Franzen observes that many Christians cultivate various forms of escapism and claim a hope that is out of touch with the reality at hand. The strategies range from denial of the environmental crisis to quietist attitudes holding that God will protect the earth and especially

humankind as God had promised to Noah; other strategies cling to the belief in (new) attempts to dominate nature, for example, by geo-engineering, while some escape into depressions and neuroses. Yet, all these mechanisms cannot obscure the fact that human beings are, incurably, connected with this one world and earth. What does it mean to have a hope in the midst of the current calamities? *Pumzi* challenges us to develop an non-escapist story of hope – a story about how human beings will be able to deal with environmental change and all its disastrous consequences, not in a sterile and autocratic-dystopic way, but rather in a humane and solidary way, a way that is faithful to dreams and to the value of justice, and committed in particular to future generations and to the survival of earth.

"One Body, One Spirit, One Hope": In what ways can the theme of the 13th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation further the creation of new stories of how we treat the earth and take responsibility for the next generation? How should the Lutheran story be rewritten in light of the cry of the earth and the ecological and social injustices? Following the trials of body, spirit, and hope, this article proposes that the challenges at hand call for an *embodied theology of the cross*, an *enfleshed pneumatology*, and a *theology of hope* that further creative uncertainty and the readiness to being surprised.

Yet before that, a closer critical look at the "single story" is needed because the "one" in the motto of the Assembly – "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope" – contains the temptation to again construct a seemingly universal, all encompassing "single story." There is a tension between "the one" (body, spirit, hope) and the "many," that is, between "unity" and "diversity," and this tension poses the question, How can the plurality of stories, experiences and worldviews be cherished and maintained without undermining a joint commitment to growing into the ability to respond to and engage in planetary solidarity? Again, *Pumzi* provides in-depth inspirations.

Challenging the "single story": interferences and hybridities

Within the context of African folklore, however, the transposition of Asha's body with a tree could imply a transferal of her spirit to the tree, which is a common theme across cosmologies from the continent. In this reading, Asha's spirit, while forever fixed to the tree, continues to engage with human life in meaningful ways – including rites associated with fertility, initiation, and religious customs (i.e. the significance of fig trees to Kenyan peoples, which are called *mugumo* by the Kikuyu and *oreti* by the Maasai, who consider them as symbols of the ancestors, life, and fertility. Additionally, according to Yoruba belief systems, the Iroko tree is inhabited by a vengeful spirit who causes misfortune to those who cut it down).

Pumzi is marked by diversity and hybridity. It creates space for particular regional stories from the Kikuyu, the Maasai, the Yoruba…as well as for the transatlantic story of the slave trade. This commercialization of the "Black" body is set in parallel to the commercialization of the earth as well as to the exploitation of women's bodies. Stories from the "past" intermingle with futuristic visions and ideas of what life shall be in the future. This is one of the characteristics of sci-

ence fiction in Africa, which, as the filmmaker Kahiu asserts, "has been a genre in Africa that has been used a lot for a long period of time":

> If we think of science fiction as something that is fictitiously science or speculative fiction within a story then we've always used it. Because we've used botany; we've used etymology; the idea of the study of animals to tell stories or the idea of insects to tell stories or the idea of natural sciences using trees – that's all science fiction.

Kahiu contradicts various shades of the "single story": she opposes the idea that there is only one "Western" way to do science. Thus, she questions the assertion of the one triumphant "grand narrative," which is the narrative of the "scientific" and "secular" modernity. In emphasizing the hybridity and confluency of stories, *Pumzi* marks the end of the "great universal narrative" as well as of the one "normative center." This end is not portrayed as threat, rather, the Afro-futuristic movie stimulates the imagination of how the earth and world would look like if the various, and in particular the marginalized, cosmic-mythological narratives were to empower each other. Thus, *Pumzi* gives space for both the diverse particular traditions and identifications on the one hand, and for solidarity and joint action on the other.

One central aspect in *Pumzi* is, as noted, the identification of the suffering of the earth and the suffering of the "Black" female body. *Pumzi* was published more than ten years before George Floyd was killed on May 25, 2020. Brutal violence led to a "lack of oxygen" as "cause of death." Nevertheless, the parallelism of Floyd's last words "I can't breathe" and *Pumzi*, meaning "breath," is more than symbolic. The "logic" that leads to the exploitation of the earth and the logic that causes racist as well as gender-based violence are the same. Both acts of violence rest on binary presumptions that oppose "man" to nature, spirit to body, culture to earth, individual salvation to cosmic reconciliation and communion. These binaries go along with further dualistic modes of thought that construct differences and injustices with regard to race, gender, age and social "status." As Noel Sturgeon states, "Ideologies which authorize injustices based on gender, race, and class are related to ideologies which sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment." The crossover identification of the sacrifice and survival of the earth with the life and the sacrifice of the female Back body in *Pumzi* is one out of many examples of this intersectionality that reaches far beyond our present times. The colonial gaze on the land lead, in "slow violence," to the exploitation of the earth and goes hand in hand with the exploitation of the colonized people and their bodies. Hence, since colonialism, the "Black" female body is subjected to colonial epistemological and physical violence, "romantically" depicted in closeness to the earth, yet exploited, like the earth, raped, sold, and consumed.

It is not by chance though that at present we observe at the same time the call for the decolonization of non-Western knowledge systems and a plurality of epistemologies, the cry for ecological, racial, gender- and age-related justice, an increased awareness for body-epistemologies and differences and – last but not least and crucial for the LWF assembly – the rise of a plurality of pneumatologies that bring the polyphony of the work of the Spirit into attention. This simultaneity underlines the striking interferences between ecology, spirituality, and epistemol-

ogy that become apparent in various ways today, for example, in the demand to take more seriously the body as a locus of knowledge generation, in postcolonial "body-politics of knowledge" or "ecologies of knowledge," or in the assertion that "indigenous" cosmologies are eco-friendly, non-dualistic, and "authentic." The hope and promise conveyed in these alternative, interferential stories is that the hegemony of the "single story" loses its power and that different futures and more sustainable and just knowledge cultures and narratives are possible.

It is important to keep these intersectional forms of violence in mind in order to prevent blind spots. The "Fridays for Future" movement in Germany was recently accused of "green racism." According to climate activists like Tonny Nowshin from Bangladesh or Vanessa Nakate from Uganda, "environmental racism" ignores that "Black lives" and "Black bodies" continue to be more exposed and more vulnerable to environmental changes. In the words of the famous scholar of Black theology, James Cone:

> People who fight against white racism but fail to connect it to the degradation of the earth are anti-ecological – whether they know it or not. People who struggle against environmental degradation but do not incorporate in it a disciplined and sustained fight against white supremacy are racists – whether they acknowledge it or not.

Some forms of environmentalism tend to confuse eco-justice with a renewed Western-philanthropic nostalgia and desire for "untouched places" or appear in the very hybrid, topical, and diverse phenomenon of a "green spirituality." There is a variety of eco-spiritualities and eco-theologies with different historical and contextual backgrounds. Many bridge the different experiences of violence resulting from race, gender, class, and ecology. Yet, others become very exclusivist in their rediscovery of "sacred spaces and places." Germany, for example, witnesses a reawakening of a "brown" nationalistic esoteric movement – taking shape, for example, in the Anastasia movement that furthers a resacralization of the "German earth and soil." Related dynamics are stated from an African American perspective by Christopher Carter in his publication, *Blood in the Soil*. Environmentalism is thus by no means an innocent endeavor but rather calls for critical and thorough theological reflections.

Toward an embodied eco-theology of the cross

Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi*[…includes] depictions of the future that actively recycle[s] and work[s] through the past in ways that open up new ways of imagining and understanding diaspora, ecology, historical memory, and gender. More specifically, stories of girls in the future in magical and post-apocalyptical worlds draw from earth-focused images, symbols, and narratives that speak to trauma associated with (re)membering the past in both its symbolic and material manifestations. […]From the sacred Nigerian grove of Osun-Osogbo to the lynching trees of the American South, ecological imagery holds a unique complexity for Africana historical memory – especially in relation to black women's bodies.

When reading *Pumzi* from a theological point of view, the resemblance of Asha's sacrifice to Christ's sacrifice on the cross – the tree – becomes obvious. As Amanda Rico's comment points out, Asha's sacrifice for the tree calls to mind the narrative of the lynching tree in the African historical memory which has also become a crucial symbol in African American Black theology. This composition clearly displays a political message against racism, ecocide, and violence against women. Any form of environmental romanticism is disturbed by a web of subversive narratives and lived lives. I recall one of the most well-known and touching "stories" of the "strange fruits," the dead bodies of persons of color, hanging in the tree that Abel Meeropol (alias Lewis Allen) wrote in the early 1930s:

> Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
> Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
> Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
> Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
> Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
> The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
> Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
> The sudden smell of burning flesh!
> Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
> For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
> For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
> Here is a strange and bitter crop.

Meeropol's poem reveals the enduring power of the trauma of the lynching trees. The images resist any rational comprehension. Like in *Pumzi*, contrast and contradiction are the crucial means to emphasize that something is completely wrong and even evil. The tree that in the cultural memory of many cultures represents the source of life becomes the symbol of death. By using the blossoming metaphors of fruits and trees, Meeropol makes the sheer brutality of racism as well as the victims apparent and thereby creates space for agency and resistance.

It is certainly not surprising that we find the body much more involved in theologies that are developed in contexts where the marginalization and oppression due to bodily constructed differences heavily influences the lived experiences. The bodily experience of oppression, violence, pain, and liberation forces theological reflection about this experience. Latin-American liberation theologians such as Jaci Maraschin, Rubem Alves, Leonardo Boff, Marcella Althaus-Reid, Mayra Rivera or Ivonne Gebara have since the 1980s underlined that the material, real, suffering body must be the starting point for theological reflection. The famous liberation theological paradigm, "God's preferential option for the poor," implies the call to give a central place to bodily experience. The suffering body and the person who suffers is identified with the crucified God.

In his work, *Jesus, the Crucified People*, Choan-Seng Song goes one step further: God identifies himself in Jesus and his pain not only with the suffering of the people. Jesus' pain is rather *identical* with the pain of the people crucified by acts of violence. Jesus is one with the suffering people. The pain of the crucified people of Asia is therefore the embodiment of Jesus.

> In Jesus who is in pain we perceive people in pain [...]. In the suffering Jesus we witness the suffering people. In Jesus crucified on the cross we behold the crucified people. And the reverse is also true. In the people in pain and suffering, tortured and put to death, we witness Jesus tortured.

It seems that the attention to the body and an embodied theology of the cross strengthens the agency and identity of those who suffer oppression and violence. This said, it is necessary to mention that the cross has often perpetuated sacrifice, especially women, but also enslaved people were all too often told that carrying and enduring the burden of their cross is a Christian virtue. Suffering then is spiritualized and legitimized. The liberationist narrative of God's identification with the suffering people – in contrast – sets an emancipatory impulse without hiding the violence, injustice and brokenness. It thereby contributes to the memory of the lived experience of violence that is not only a memory in the bones – which, as in case of trauma, is beyond words – but an experience that demands to be taken seriously in public spaces. Ecofeminist theologians like Ivonne Gebara from Brazil or the African American theologian Elonda Clay, have developed this option for the suffering body further by linking it to the suffering of nature and emphasizing the interconnectedness of the body and its environment. This interconnectedness is not only an issue of critical intellectual reflection. It can also be sensed: Changes in the environment immediately affect the body and its orientation in the world. They can "pull the rug from under my feet" in the same way as it can be a salutary experience to "keep the feet on the ground." This form of a body-sensitive eco-theology that takes it starting point at the vulnerable and lived body and a "corporal epistemology" opens new avenues for a carnal eco-spirituality that I will sketch in the next section.

The currently intense discourse on an embodied eco-theology of the cross make one wonder about the specifically Lutheran, or even Luther's, contribution to an embodied theology. The core of Luther's theology of the cross was his search for a merciful God. Yet, his relation to God included the body and the senses. In his sermon "Against the Heavenly Prophets" he wrote:

> For whether I want it to or not, when I hear of Christ, an image of a man hanging on a cross takes form in my heart, just as the reflection of my face naturally appears in the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin but good to have the image of Christ in my heart, why should it be a sin to have it in my eyes? This is especially true since the heart is more important than the eyes.

Luther's assumption that "the crucified Christ is an image located in man's interiority and that it has the power to destroy all other idols in the heart" reflects the pre-reformatory tradition of the *imitatio Christi* and the beginning of modernity with its idea of the "modern and individualized body." But the resonance between the image of the crucified Christ and the body also discloses an embodied experience of God's mercy. This revaluation of bodily spiritual experiences is confirmed by scholarly insights into Luther's deliberations on the two natures of human beings – the spiritual and the bodily – in *On the Freedom of a Christian*. Luther's

understanding of the human nature is far too complex to fit into the scheme of the *homo duplex*, Marion Deschamp states. Nevertheless, Lutheran studies "remain trapped" in a "dualistic body-mind division when speaking about Luther."

Luther's theology also contains an aspect that links to the abovementioned call for epistemic plurality. In his lectures on Paul's letter to the Romans, Luther, taking up a phrase from Augustine, characterizes the human being, in body terms, as being *incurvatus in se ipsum*, that is, as continuously spinning around the person and trapped in the person's perception of the world and of life. Justification, in contrast, comes from "outside" – *extra nos*: it shatters the self-devised knowledge system and follows a different logic and epistemology. Justification from *extra nos* could even be called a heresy, because it breaks with the logic, thoughts, and practices of human righteousness and orthodoxy. In Luther's context this was subversive and liberating.

Facing the challenge – posed by Christians and other faith traditions from different parts of the world as well as by the cry of the earth – to open the space for a variety of epistemological realities, the *extra nos* is a constant self-critical reminder to question hegemonial – and in particular disembodied – ways of thought. The precondition of an always reforming church is to continuously search for epistemologies that are subversive and liberating and further compassion with the whole creation.

Toward an enfleshed pneumatology

One of the greatest tensions in world Christianity are the conflicting epistemologies and world views. Some, like Philip Jenkins, intone even a "clash of epistemologies" and the "end of liberal Christianity" due to supposedly Southern-irrational epistemologies that threaten supposedly Western-rational epistemologies. One point at which these controversies break out is the Holy Spirit. The following paraphrased incident gives just one example of this:

> On 17 September 2000, an African migrant congregation – the Kingdom Exploiters' Ministries – celebrated a church service in the smalltown of Viersen in Germany. This had been advertised throughout the town. The large Protestant church on the central market square was well filled. The many Germans present clapped and danced to the music, but remained silent during the sermon. A minority of Africans from different migrant communities, on the other hand, cheered the preacher.
>
> After the sermon, the preacher called forward all those "who wanted to give their lives to Christ." There was some murmuring in the front row where I sat with two evangelical pastors of the congregation and some presbyters. A number of Germans sitting further back rose and left the church hall. Suddenly an African woman who was being prayed for fell over backwards, right in front of the German pastors. A commotion broke out. One of the presbyters rushed to the exit of the church, yelling for someone to call an ambulance and the police. Most of the Germans who were still in the church now left in a hurry. After some minutes, all who had fallen down got back up and appeared completely normal.

> The preacher then brought the service to a quick end – in a now almost empty church. After the worship the congregation was split: The German pastors and the presbyters were shocked and angry, while the preacher, his wife, and some church elders did not understand the reaction of the German pastors and presbyters. They themselves were excited because the Holy Spirit had proven to be much stronger than they had expected. The preacher was not afraid of conflict: "This is normal whenever the Holy Spirit manifests," he said.

Claudia Währisch-Oblau, who reported this incident evaluates it as follows: "When paradigms simply collide, the result is not spiritual renewal, but embarrassment and anger. In the case described, neither side was willing to at least try to understand the other's point of view."

What caused this conflict? Is it the theological doctrine of how the Holy Spirit works or ought to work? Is it an intercultural clash of conflicting epistemologies: a Western-rational-disenchanted worldview versus a worldview that reckons with personified demons and spiritual powers? Or do the expectations with regard to the involvement of the body in religious experience differ?

Probably, it is a little bit of everything. Above all, the incident in Viersen illustrates how the increased intercultural encounters between the various forms of Christianity has led to the emergence of a variety of pneumatologies. These pneumatologies are marked by particular perceptions of the world, including in perceptions of nature and the earth. The perception of a Spirit-filled world can by no means only be found in religious traditions and cosmologies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America but also in popular religion and spirituality in Europe, Australia, or the United States. In spite of the difficulties that became obvious in the Viersen incident – to deal with different, and for both sides unfamiliar, understandings of "the spirits" and of the Holy Spirit – the pluralities of pneumatology are a tremendous enrichment. Yet, they again question the "single story," in particular the story dominant in Western Protestantism that the work of the Holy Spirit aims mainly if not exclusively at the mental reassurance of subjective religious certainty. I very much agree with Kirsteen Kim that current developments in philosophy and in the natural sciences support the idea of a spirit-filled world and that we therefore need a "theological conversation that does not marginalize those whose many-spirit cosmologies differ from predominant Western and elite one-Spirit worldviews."

The ecological challenges make this even more plausible, as they reveal the interdependence between human action and the environment and point to the resonance between the human body and other living bodies. An increased awareness of the polyphony of the one Spirit that is poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28) – human and nonhuman bodies, all life, also beyond Christianity – supports the compassion for the multiplicity and intersectionality of stories and the dedication to biodiversity. "The Holy spirit does not isolate but brings into community and networks." An understanding that does not reduce the relation to the Holy Spirit to an I-You relation opens the space for other life-giving epistemologies. It is not by surprise that the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh states, "When we touch the Holy Spirit, we touch God not as a concept but as a living reality"; and, "When the energy of the Holy Spirit is in us, we are truly alive, capable of understanding the suffering of others and motivated by the desire to help transform the situation."

A pneumatology that perceives the Holy Spirit as enfleshed in the world has the potential to build bridges in the interreligious dialogue as well as in the eco-dialogue and strengthens the ability for compassion for the suffering of the earth resonating with suffering of the body.

Toward a theology of hope: staying open to be affected in an ecological ecumene

Let's face it. "We're undone by each other [...]. One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one's best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel."

This contribution started with Kahiu's Afro-futuristic movie that, as Rico stated (see above, 55f.), imagines "stories of girls in the future" and struggles for the agency of the future generation as well as of the earth. The Christian symbol of the crosstree appeared in an unexpected place and in unexpected interpretation. The cultural memory of the cross is spun into the web of narratives and memories of the suffering of the earth and the suffering Black body. This identification can perpetuate suffering in a very problematic way. But it can also pose the challenge to reflect and develop an ecocritical ecumenical theology from the perspective of the cross that narrates the many stories of brokenness, fragments, suffering, the cry of people and of the earth, but also the stories of hope and of revolution that might grow within the lived life that is filled by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is emerging, nonlinear and non-monocausal. The Spirit has, in the words of Michael Welker, "the dual character of a personal, namely, context-sensitive and intentional instance – and of a structuring force-field, which operates in polycontextual and polyphonic forms."

This always transforming and recreating character of the Holy Spirit implies that we are "undone" as Judith Butler states in the quotation introducing this section. To be undone is not a deficit but a hope. To be undone – before other human beings, before God, and before the earth – contradicts the idea of an autonomous self and points to "being addressed" by others, including by the nonhuman environment. It refers to the ability to be affected by the contagious touch, smell, and feeling in resonance with our world, and to be open to experiencing God's Holy Spirit in the midst of the world. Leonardo Boff has vividly described the process of how we are enabled to speak of this hope:

> We can speak meaningfully of God only when [God] emerges from within the experience of [humans], who [walk their] life's path together with [their] fellow [humans] and with the world. God does not hover above the world and must never be thought so or [...] outside the world. Rather, [God] meets us within the experience of [humans] and the world. [...] The cry of man [woman, and the earth] is only the echo of the voice with which God calls [us].

The Christian hope in the midst of the environmental calamities is an encouragement to stay undone, embodied and enfleshed, sensitive and creative in uncertain

certainty, affected and encouraged in an ecological ecumene that includes human and nonhuman agents.

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Finding Hope in an Eco-Anxious, Climate-Grieving World

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What is eco-anxiety?

On the 6 October 2021, the *British Medical Journal* published an article that was popularized by British news site *The Guardian*, in which two public health experts drew attention to the increasing feeling of eco-anxiety. Although this area is only gaining recognition, the studies already suggest that eco-anxiety – the chronic fear of environmental doom – has a growing impact on the mental health of children, young people, and communities with the fewest resources. Those who experience the effects of climate change will be burdened not just with physical consequences (heat-related stress, asthma, allergies or even pandemics), but also "an increased risk of depression, low mood, extreme mental distress, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, and further deterioration in those with a history of mental illness."

The impact of eco-anxiety on mental health was highlighted by climate activist Greta Thunberg, who spoke about personal experiences of depression when learning about climate change:

> When I was about eight years old, I first heard about something called climate change or global warming. Apparently, that was something humans had created by our way of living. I was told to turn off the lights to save energy and to recycle paper to save resources. I remember thinking that it was very strange that humans, who are an animal species among others, could be capable of changing the earth's climate. Because if we were, and if it was really happening, we wouldn't be talking about anything else…. So, when I was eleven, I became ill. I fell into depression, I stopped talking, and I stopped eating. In two months, I lost about ten kilos of weight.

Eco-anxiety contains a lot of diverse emotions, but one that is important to discuss is "climate grief" (also known as "environmental" or "ecological grief"). Grief is the emotional response to the sorrow of losing someone important. It is an emotion that has a vast impact on the well-being of the human mind and body. In most societies, however, grief is associated only with the pain of losing a loved one. It can be beyond imaginable that grief could be caused by anything else than the passing of an old friend, the move to another city, or the retirement of a celebrity. The term "disenfranchised grief" reflects on the experience where grief is disregarded. Cli-

mate grief is one form of this disenfranchised grief. It is the human response to the increasing annihilation of our environment: "the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change."

The obstacles of reducing eco-anxiety: hyperobjects and ecoparalysis

To give one answer to why eco-anxiety and climate grief has such an enormous impact on mental health, but also can easily be neglected, we have to look at the work of philosopher Timothy Morton, who writes about "hyperobjects." Morton's theory says that there are certain objects in the world – what he calls "hyperobjects" – that are "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans." These phenomena can be apprehended by people, but not in their entirety. They are so monumental that humanity cannot fully grasp them. Climate change, for example, is a "hyperobject," and we can look at the specific data or its real-life impact, but it is still impossible to fully comprehend the scale of it: "the more data we have about hyperobjects the less we know about them – the more we realize we can never truly know them."

It may seem that this is what leads to apathy, but apathy would not prove eco-anxiety. Psychologists suggest that climate apathy is often a myth: "Many people in fact care too much, not too little, and as a result they resort to psychological and social defenses. [Australian environmental scholar Glenn] Albrecht calls this state ecoparalysis: people would like to be able to act, but find themselves paralyzed." This creates a seemingly never-ending cycle where people want to act, but find themselves unable to do it, so they feel more anxious, however a way to battle anxiety is to act, that leads to ecoparalysis, that deepens the anxiety, and so forth.

Hope as a theological response to eco-anxiety

What can be a response to eco-anxiety from a Christian perspective is a unique understanding of hope. From a biblical perspective, hope is deeply connected to the covenantal relationship between God and humanity. Trusting this covenant – that God will provide, will be merciful, and will fulfill all promises – is what gives hope to the nation of Israel. This hope is best articulated in the writings of the prophets who are preaching the message of a messiah who provides food, brings social and economic justice, but also restores creation by inviting us into a "new heavens and a new earth" (Is 65). When God arrives into this world in Jesus Christ, we see these prophecies come true: out of hopelessness comes hope. Those without an opportunity are given a chance. The outcast, the despised, the underestimated find home and dignity. For those who suffer from pain or illness, physical and spiritual healing is provided. The blind now see, the deaf now hear, and the mute now speak. Injustice becomes justice. The imprisoning feeling of shame, despair, and loss turns into freedom. Grief becomes joy. Death becomes life. The faith in Christ's resurrection is the center of all Christian life and gives hope to all people.

As followers of Christ, we must be witnesses to this resurrection, especially in an age when the ecological crisis affects everyday life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one of the best-known Lutheran pastors and theologians of the twentieth century who tried to be a prophetic voice in Nazi Germany and was later executed in a concentration camp in 1945. He left behind an extremely rich literary legacy, of which one of the most well-known is the unfinished book called *Ethics*. Here, Bonhoeffer writes about the important duty of all Christians to be a witness to Christ, especially under the oppressive and harmful system of national socialism where the Christian churches failed to do so. In order to undergo a radical change, the church – and all Christians in it – would have to practice confession. The church has to repent her sins, her careless human behavior. In his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer shows us a long list of examples of what the church has to confess, including being silent in face of the oppression and violence against the Jewish population in Germany. Repentance begins with oneself: what do we, our churches, our communities, our countries have to repent for? The apostle Paul admonishes the Ephesians to expose the "unfruitful works of darkness" in order that they become visible "for everything that becomes visible is light" (Eph 5:11-14). This passage invites us to expose everything that is considered harmful and evil. But this is not an end, it is a start. Letting the light in to overcome darkness, elevating the resurrection, is what gives all Christian an infinite hope. Only after repentance can the church start the work of adopting ecologically sound and important political, economic, and social stances and practices to transform and inspire a new "social imaginary."

A way forward: inviting all to a new social imaginary

What is a social imaginary? Humans create dominant and accepted worldviews of a society where they – through images, stories, and legends – not only get a better understanding of the surrounding world, but also form a vision of how the world *should* work and be designed: "a common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."

The Western idea of a social imaginary currently does not involve ecological consciousness. All the resources of the earth are subordinated to the capitalistic idea of progress and domination. This impression from an eco-theological perspective is developed in the influential article by the American historian Lynn Townsend White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," where he argues that the root of the ecological crisis is found in the Christian influences of the Western world. His argument is centered around the creation story found in Genesis where God commands humanity to have dominion over the created world (Gen 1:26-28). According to White, Christian thought used this text to create and claim an anthropocentric worldview where creation itself is an inanimate object. White's article is highly debated in the sphere of eco-theology, yet it started an important discussion around how Christianity played an important role in accelerating the climate crisis and not slowing it down. This raises the question, Can Christianity transform the social imaginary of communities and cultures to represent healing, light and hope?

For this new social imaginary Panu Pihkala suggests that Christianity should frame its message as "hope in the midst of tragedy." This means – in the same ways repentance is needed for a radical change of heart – confronting the reality of the losses that result from the climate crisis, confronting humanity's role in it, and building hope on it.

Pope Francis in 2015 released his second encyclical, *Laudato si'* (On Care for our Common Home), of which one of the central messages is called integral ecology, a holistic approach for understanding the environmental, social, economic, and political roots of the climate crisis given that it is all one problem. The entire mindset of integral ecology focuses on the acknowledgment that in God's creation "everything is interconnected," so that when we face real life tragedies and suffering caused by the rapid destruction of our environment it is not only a personal matter, but is inseparable from all creation and from God. A way to see hope is to realize the overarching connection between all living things, yet this is a challenging process for all humans to do.

Based on the works of German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg, British theologian Stefan Skrimshire raises the important theological idea that Adam and Eve's attempt to know good and evil found in Genesis 3 is about them becoming independent from God and eventually denying their own mortality. As Pannenberg puts it:

> The human failure to achieve independence of God has led to an attempt to pursue supposed self-interest not only relative to God but also relative to others and to other creatures. The result is a lack of peace in creation with the consequence that we cannot at once detect the lordship of the Creator in it.

The result of sin is that human condition is unable to see the interconnectedness in the created world in its full glory. Another biblical metaphor that Pannenberg lifts up is found in Romans where the apostle Paul uses the phrase "the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Rom 8:22), expressing, besides suffering, that all creation is getting closer to a reality where God's kingdom brings a new heaven and earth. However, what is central to this expectation is the groaning, the crying out of the earth, the suffering. What all creation has in common, apart from the fact that God is the originator, is that all creation suffers as a result of sin. The suffering is what makes visible and describable the interconnectedness for which Pope Francis argues.

Suffering is not exclusive to the created world. God suffers too. The painful death of Jesus Christ shows the all-powerful God suffering in a fragile, weak body. Bonhoeffer describes God's suffering as a "vicarious representative action":

> [Jesus'] entire life, action, and suffering is vicarious representative action. As the one who has become human, he indeed stands in the place of all human beings. All that human beings were supposed to live, do and suffer falls on him.

Extending Bonhoeffer's thought, we can say that Jesus stands in the place of the suffering of all creation. What is different is that God is willingly participating

in this suffering. It is a decision. And what is also a decision is the fact that the suffering and death of all creation is not the end.

The hope of eschatological resurrection is often seen in Christian thought as an unforeseen future. Eco-feminist Kathryn Tanner argues that eschatological thinking is "overly temporalized" and focuses too much on the impending rather than the current reality. That the resurrection is a fact is a reality in Christian life. That God is alive and present in all creation right now. Tanner turns this realization into action:

> Even if one knows that all one's achievements will come to nothing with the world's end, one is obligated to act, simply because this is the only way of living that makes sense in the light of one's life in God.

Or how Martin Luther phrases it in his popular though unverifiable quote: "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree."

The closing of Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* is a prayer for our earth:

> All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
> and in the smallest of your creatures.
> You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
> Pour out upon us the power of your love,
> that we may protect life and beauty.
> Fill us with peace, that we may live
> as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
> O God of the poor,
> help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
> so precious in your eyes.
> Bring healing to our lives,
> that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
> that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
> Touch the hearts
> of those who look only for gain
> at the expense of the poor and the earth.
> Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
> to be filled with awe and contemplation,
> to recognize that we are profoundly united
> with every creature
> as we journey towards your infinite light.
> We thank you for being with us each day.
> Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
> for justice, love and peace.

The use of wordage is focused on the present, not the future: on the healing of the suffering, not the impending doom. On justice, love, and peace, not oppression, neglect, and despair. On strengthening the idea that climate crisis is one, interconnecting issue and that caring for creation is a communal responsibility, not just a personal one. Finding hope in an eco-anxious, climate-grieving world is finding

the resurrected God present in the world and realizing that we, all humans, are not alone in our suffering and in our hopeful actions. This is a new social imaginary that the churches all around the world should represent.

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The Body and Spirit of Reconciled Diversity. Unity beyond Uniformity, Hierarchy, and Anthropocentrism. A Sámi perspective

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"One Body, One Spirit, One Hope" – the theme of LWF's Thirteenth Assembly – reflects the message of "unity" as proclaimed in Ephesians 4:4. While a divine gift full of promise, history shows how the notion of Christian unity too often was distorted. This has not least been the experience of Indigenous peoples worldwide. A key insight on the matter was formulated in January 2011, as theological dialogue among representatives from the WCC Indigenous Theologians Network and the Commission on Faith and Order was facilitated in La Paz, Bolivia.

> We have encountered difficulties in translation, not between English and Spanish, but between different discourses: one side [the Indigenous] hears the word "unity" in political terms associated with empire and oppression; the other hears "unity" as communitarian and organic reality, which celebrates and protects diversity and freedom. From an Indigenous Theologian's perspective "balance and harmony" comes closer to what St Paul affirms when he speaks of the integrity of the body in 1 Corinthians 12.12-31.

In Ephesians, unity is portrayed as a foundational reality pouring out of the Triune God, embodying cosmic (Eph 1:10), political (Eph 1:21), ecclesiological (Eph 1:22-23), and interethnic dimensions (Eph 2:14-16). We may ask: How is this *one body* good news to all? In what *Spirit* is the *diversity of the one body* held together? How is the *One hope* a promise to all humanity and all creation?

This chapter invites you to reflect on such questions, mindful of how they speak to realities within and beyond your own context. In what follows, the experience of the Indigenous Sámi of northern Europe is offered as a lens for constructive engagement with the assembly theme.

One body: unity beyond uniformity – reconciled diversity

The unity proclaimed in the Letter to the Ephesians refers to a gracious gift and transformative reality that we are invited to participate in. However, this message of unity can be distorted. It happens not least when "unity" is confused

with "uniformity." The usual result is that "the others" are forced to give up their uniqueness to conform to a dominant group.

In Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the Indigenous Sámi have been subjected to this conformity through long-lasting, harsh assimilation policies. In Norway and Sweden, the national minorities referred to as Kvens or Tornedalingar were also targeted. As far as the Sámi are concerned, this policy constituted a late phase of a much longer colonial history in which the Lutheran state churches were heavily involved. As a response to the Sámi movement and to Sámi voices and allies within the churches, the Lutheran folk churches of Norway, Sweden, and Finland have since the 1990s embarked on journeys of reconciliation in relation to the Sámi people. While starting out as an intra-church discourse, "reconciliation" has today become a public concern as parliamentarian or governmental Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) are being implemented in all three countries.

These processes raise profound questions about the nature of the "one body": either we speak of it as an internal church matter (ecclesiology), or we relate it to the broader public realm (public/political theology). In both instances, the lesson learned seems to be that expansive projects of "unity as uniformity" violate the dignity of God's diverse creation. They contribute to the brokenness of the world, the brokenness that God in Christ through the Spirit seeks to restore in the one body of reconciled diversity.

The cost of unity as imposed uniformity: a personal narrative

From a Sámi perspective, this history is not abstract or distant. It is family history – in some homes passed on as a living memory, in others hidden under loads of shame. In any case, it is embodied as an intergenerational reality informing contemporary community life at various levels. My own story may illustrate the thousands of similar accounts that could be told among my people.

My Sámi father's short story about his school experience left a lasting impression on me as a young boy:

> I only spoke the Sámi language when I started school. We were not allowed to speak Sámi, neither in the classroom nor in the schoolyard. It took me 3 years to fully understand what was going on. I have 5 years of primary school. That is my education. The only thing we learned was that our Sáminess was a hindrance when entering the Norwegian society.

His older sister, my aunt – who questioned why I bothered to take up the Sámi language again at the age of nineteen, and who was clear that nothing made her more angry than seeing Sámi politicians on TV – eventually approached me after I had acquired proper Sámi reading skills. She handed over several old Sámi magazines, saying, "Look what your great-grandfather wrote." I was amazed to see that, around the turn of the twentieth century, on Christian grounds, he formulated bold critiques of the Norwegianization policy now being implemented also by the church. Regarding the former parish priest, A. Bergland, he wrote: "He was in

many ways a good priest, but he was tough in crucifying the Sámi language. He only travelled around, preaching 'Norwegianize, Norwegianize the Sámi!'" Having outlined historical developments over four decades, my great-grandfather noted: "Those who are taken by force, begin to hate."

While raised in the Sámi diaspora, I returned to my father's community in Deatnu/Tana in 1998 as the local Church of Norway parish priest. The year before, a local action group called "No to Sámi Land" had mobilized in the municipality as a response to a new Sámi education plan being implemented in public schools due to pro-Sámi developments taking place. With support from the congregation board, I started to use some phrases in Sámi in every Sunday service. In some places, I felt the tension behind my back when a prayer for the Sámi Parliament was included in the intercession. Today, more and more of the youth are wearing the traditional Sámi costume in church on their confirmation day. In some instances, their great-grandparents were the last to use it.

While costly and painful lessons, I believe that profound spiritual insights can be drawn from experiences such as those rendered above. One is that the Christian notion of *one body* cannot mean unity as uniformity, rather, it must be about restoring the dignity and wholeness of God's diverse creation.

Sin as "self-curved inward on itself" – and God's laos as reconciled diversity

A reflection on Luther's definition of sin is relevant in this context. Building on Augustine, Luther defined sin as the "self curved inward on itself" (*incurvatus in se*). While primarily applied to individuals, the same dynamic seems to express itself on a collective level. Entire groups may become curved inward on their collective selves. This happens when "we" become turned inward on "us," "we" revolve around "ours," in ways devaluating or subjugating others. Such an inward-turned spirit may become structural and systemic, at times faceless, while still destructive or powerful.

On 24 November 2021, Archbishop Antje Jackelén offered a formal apology to the Sámi people on behalf of the Church of Sweden. While not using the term "sin," the apology was clearly modelled around Luther's definition of sin: "We [the Church of Sweden] have been *curved inward on ourselves* [my italics], we have not stood up to racism and abuse of power." The LWF's Thirteenth Assembly is given a stark reminder of the existence of collective and systemic sin by the fact that it is convened in Kraków, only 100 kilometers from the former Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Collective and structural forms of sin exist also beyond its most extreme forms, at times hidden behind veils of benevolence.

By alerting us to distorted versions of the *one body*, Luther's notion of sin may point us toward healthy alternatives. The *one body* must be about *transcending* self-centered group mentalities imposing themselves on others. From a Sámi perspective, reconciliation must involve pushing beyond inherited monocultural notions of being folk churches (and nation states) in the Nordic countries. While much remains to be done, positive change is taking place. An ecclesiological

insight emerging in the reconciliation processes in the Nordic countries is that the *one body* celebrated in the church cannot be grounded in one ἔθνος (*éthnos*, ethnic group) curved into itself. Rather, it must be corrected by the perspective of God's λαός (*laós*, the common biblical term for "God's people"). In the New Testament the latter is transformed into the many ἔθνη (ethnē) coming together as a *reconciled diversity* in the One Body of Christ (cf. Eph 2:14-18).

One Spirit: unity beyond hierarchical worldmaking and the bond of peace

If the *one body* is about unity in diversity, in what *Spirit* then is this diversity held together? The admonition given in Ephesians 4:3 – the verse immediately preceding the verse inspiring the assembly theme – suggests that "the unity of the Spirit" is manifested through "the bond of peace." But what do we mean by peace in the first place?

Peace beyond imposed hierarchy (Pax Romana)

In common speech – at least in English and Norwegian – "peace" tends to draw basic connotations from the "war/peace" dichotomy. Let us start our reflection here, before elaborating on alternatives. Often "peace" is talked about as the *absence* of something else, such as violence, disturbances, conflict, and so on. However, this notion of peace is insufficient since the absence of these things may be the result of subjugation rather than harmonious coexistence. The *Pax Romana* of New Testament times, for instance – that is, the peace that the Roman Empire had imposed on its conquered territory by military force – illustrates this point. The Roman Empire was without doubt a vast unity tolerating great diversity. Yet, the nature of the "bond of peace" holding its diversity together was more associated with "bondage" than with freedom. The bond of peace referred to in Ephesians 4:3 must be of a quite different nature.

This illustrates how even the notion of unity in diversity can be distorted in structural and systemic ways. An important reason, it seems, is that some worldviews recognize diversity as essential to the whole *by seeing diversity as hierarchically ordered*. Paternalistic, colonial, race-based, cast-based, gender-based, sexuality-based, and anthropocentric worldviews all share in this type of logic in some way or another. Framing "unity in diversity" on such hierarchical premises serves to mask power, facilitate exploitation, and naturalize inequality. Under such conditions, any talk of "peace" easily translates into expectations of accepting your own oppression.

The Lutheran tension between hierarchy and equality

It is nothing new that the Christian church struggles with navigating assumptions seeing diversity as hierarchically ordered. This is evident already in Ephesians in

its references to women and slaves (Eph 5:22-24; 6:5-8). Lutherans have wrestled with a tension between "hierarchy" and "equality," two somewhat competing themes in Luther's theology.

Luther's hierarchical perception of reality was arguably strong. Yet, it is seemingly his egalitarian intuitions that have been celebrated by recent generations of Lutherans. Since the Lutheran mainstream has shifted its emphasis from hierarchy to equality, some may think that critiquing the hierarchical legacy of Lutheran theology is unnecessary and constructed. I am not convinced. The negative effects of Lutheran hierarchical thinking are likely unequally distributed, depending on whether one is associated with the overside or the underside of history. In certain aspects, the Lutheran story needs to be retold.

A concern addressed in the literature on truth commissions is the need for challenging dominant national narratives. In this context, re-storying and rewriting national history in light of the experiences of those who have suffered injustices is considered integral to truth and reconciliation. In the historical confessional Lutheran states of the Nordic region, national narratives and Lutheran narratives were interwoven in fundamental ways. Settling the colonial history of the Nordic region will most likely also call for a rewriting of *dominant Lutheran narratives* from a Sámi perspective.

The introduction of the Lutheran reformation to Scandinavia in the sixteenth century coincided with the time of the intensified colonization of Sápmi. This is likely the first example worldwide of Lutheranism becoming a dominant force in the colonization of an Indigenous people. Lutheranism contributed to this colonization project in substantial ways, far beyond the ecclesial sphere since Lutheran *theology* shaped the legislations and modelled the states in profound and far-reaching ways. Framed in the language of the assembly theme, Lutheran notions of "unity" and "one body" had a strong negative impact on the Sámi for centuries, both within the religious and the political realms. The courts, for instance, executed Lutheran theology grounded in Old Testament logic and Lutheran demonology when Sámi *noaiddit* (shamans) were persecuted and sentenced to death in the justice system in seventeenth-century Denmark-Norway. Another problem concerns how the perception of the "bond of peace" was informed by Lutheran hierarchical intuitions of the world.

Luther's three holy orders doctrine framed the realms of family, church, and state according to a strict hierarchical logic, which in turn informed Luther's two kingdoms doctrine. Luther's explanation of the Fourth Commandment essentially instructed all citizens of the Lutheran confessional state to participate in all social realms according to the logic of subordination. It is true that Luther, based on the principle of "love of neighbor," prescribed responsible interaction from all actors within these hierarchies, including the powerful. However, the hierarchical orders of society were themselves beyond negotiation. Perceived as creation orders, God was assumed to act in and through them; and rebelling against them was ultimately a rebellion against God.

The peasant war of Luther's own time illustrates the point. While the peasants were partly inspired by Luther's teaching, Luther sided with the princes resulting in a brutal outcome. The only example of a violent Sámi uprising against

Scandinavian colonialism, the Kautokeino rebellion occurring on the Norwegian side of Sápmi in 1852, was inspired by the liberating message of Sámi-Swedish Lutheran priest Lars Levi Læstadius but suffered a similar fate. The legal settlement following it was a landmark event undoubtedly reinforcing the theologically sanctioned hierarchical order of society with respect to the Sámi. Moreover, since Lutheran theology over centuries in effect had contributed to the naturalization of the colonial interethnic hierarchy, this likely masked how this hierarchy became increasingly more justified on race-based grounds during the nineteenth century. Lastly, the lauded "human first, Christian thereafter" script of Grundtvigianism – emerging as a Nordic version of "manifest destiny" – seems in paradoxical ways to have motivated a more systematic policy and implementation of the race-based Norwegianization policy from around the turn of the twentieth century.

By enduing the colonizing power with divine legitimacy, all Sámi attempts to resist it involved, implicitly or explicitly, wrestling with the hierarchical order prescribed by Lutheran theology. The only Lutheran teaching standing out as an explicit resource invoked in the resistance against the Norwegianization policy (which also some in the Norwegian clergy took part in) seemed to be the teaching on God's word in the mother tongue. Among the magazines I received from my aunt, I came across a letter from 1896, signed by my great-grandfather on behalf of the parents of the local school district, written to the municipal school board controlled by Norwegian clergy. Apologizing for violating the call to show humility and obedience to their leaders, the letter pointed out the scandal of taking the Sámi language out of all subjects in school, including Christian education, and concluded:

> Dear priests! If you knew how cold and arrogant you have appeared…, you would burst out into tears and think that we would rather be *united in a common peace* [my italics]. Dear Norwegians and soul shepherds! Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. God help us accomplish this, in our common Jesus Christ.

Confronted with the hierarchical spirit of the Norwegianization policy, the vision of the Sámi parents being "united in a common peace" in "our common Jesus Christ" turned into a call for repentance. So, if "the unity of the Spirit" is manifested through "the bond of peace," what is the nature of the *peace* of the Spirit?

The cosmological significance of "peace": harmony and balance, shalom, ráfi

Rather than thinking of peace as absence of conflict, peace can be conceptualized in terms of relational quality, which in the context of the *one body* is informed and sustained by the Spirit. The Old Testament notion of שָׁלוֹם (*šālôm*, peace) is helpful in the way it offers a substantial, holistic concept of peace, implying wholeness. This resonates with the Indigenous notions of "balance and harmony" referred to in the conversation in La Paz quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Keetoowah

Cherokee theologian Randy S. Woodley has pointed out deep-structural correlations between the biblical *šālôm* and "the harmony way" of Indigenous North America. Insights from Indigenous traditions are offered as a healthy correction to Western Christianity, in ways inviting reconciliation both with the earth and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The Sámi notion of *ráfi* (peace) reflected in North Sámi everyday Christianity may also contribute to a more substantial notion of peace. Here, *ráfi* emerges as a concept of cosmological significance, associated with two distinct but interrelated dimensions. First, *ráfi* reflects the concern for well-ordered relations to our immediate surroundings, based on an egalitarian oriented ethos informed by social logic extending to nature in its visible-nonvisible aspects. Second, the cosmological significance of *ráfi* surfaces in relation to *Ipmila ráfi* (God's peace), which in the enactment of local everyday Christianity tends to be reflected as an ordering power and source of cosmic peace. This is reflected in blessings invoking God's name.

If the North Sámi concept of *ráfi* is allowed to inform the conversation of "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," two contributions may thus be suggested. First, it implies a *relational quality*, where peace reflects the enactment of an egalitarian-oriented world. Second, it refers to the dynamic *world-ordering power of God* that we can call upon and entrust ourselves into.

This reflection of holistic notions of peace has already introduced our last question: How can the *One hope* be a promise to all creation?

One hope: unity beyond anthropocentrism – the unity of all things

Confronted with climate change and the current nature crisis it is urgent to push beyond anthropocentric interpretations of the Christian faith. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda has pointed out the relevance of the notion of sin as *incurvatus in se* in this context: "We [the human being] became a species 'turned in on itself,' oriented around humankind and human desire as the centerpiece of earthly reality to the detriment of all else." While providing an important perspective, a universalized notion of the human cosmological orientation must be avoided. The hierarchically ordered human/nature dichotomy reflected in this critique has dominated some cultural and philosophical systems, but not all. Its eventual global dominance is to a large extent the result of colonial projects. This comment resonates with a key concern informing the broader argument of this essay, namely, the need for decolonizing Lutheran theology.

The notion of *ráfi* (peace) in North Sámi everyday Christianity provides a window into an alternative *nature-centered Christian paradigm* in which social and natural realms are not separated. Local practices of "asking for permission" (also referred to as "asking for peace" in local discourse) before harvesting nature, putting up your tent, building a house, and so on, reflects an Indigenous tradition that has approached nature *as a social realm* filled with agents that must be approached with humility in nonintrusive ways. To "ask for permission" and to

"bless" in this context is about enacting well-ordered relationships reflective of the cosmological order upheld by *Ipmiláhčči* (God the Father; cf. Eph 4:6). While basically reflecting ordinary social logic applied on the rest of creation, official Lutheranism, which generally does not approach nature according to this logic, has typically misrepresented it as superstition, paganism, magic, and the like. The following anecdote is illustrative.

> A North Sámi Christian woman from the Norwegian side of Sápmi told me how she had learned from her Christian mother to approach the task of cutting shoe-grass. When arriving [at] the wet land where this particular grass is growing, she first addresses the place notifying why she has come. Then she says a Christian blessing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Finally, she cuts a small bundle of grass, rubs her hands with it saying: "Please do not slit my hands." Then she is ready to start her work. She underscores to me that this is about approaching everything "with humility." A few weeks later, the same woman shares her traditional knowledge with a Sámi audience. At the end of her presentation, she tells what happened when sharing the above-mentioned custom with a group of Norwegian Lutheran priests. One of them had responded: "This is to worship creation instead of the Creator." The woman obviously found this offensive, so she addressed her Sámi audience saying: "So you understand. You have to be careful with whom you share these traditions."

We have reason to believe that similar stories could be told in Sweden and Finland as well, and the Church of Sweden's apology to the Sámi people formulates an appropriate response: "Within the Church of Sweden, Sámi spirituality was despised. Instead of recognizing the image of God in our Sámi sisters and brothers, we tried to make them in the image of the majority culture. [. . .] We did not see your obvious relationship with the Creator and with the lands. We did not understand that Sámi spirituality expresses itself in everyday actions."

The anecdote rendered above illustrates a feature emerging in my own doctoral research. Two different Christian cosmological orientations seem to be negotiated in the North Sámi Christian experience: one shaped by a long historical reception of Christianity filtered through the Sámi Indigenous tradition; another shaped by a Western reception of Christianity filtered through a Greek cosmological construct that basically saw the world as hierarchically structured, from pure spirit on the top to dead matter on the bottom. In my opinion, the former theological construct is no less Christian than the latter.

Confronted with climate change and the current nature crisis, we must affirm that the *One hope* is encompassing all creation. Indigenous intuitions of the world may inform Christian interpretations of the world in theologically significant ways, pointing toward the "unity of all things" – in which the Spirit creates, reconciles, and renews.

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