

LIBERAL LUTHERANS AND VATICAN II:
THE TRIUMPH OF PROGRESSIVE PHILOSOPHY

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LIBERAL LUTHERANS AND VATICAN II:
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Introduction

For eighty-nine years it looked like the last word. Vatican I, in 1870, appeared to be the ecumenical council to end all ecumenical councils; it declared the pope to be infallible in matters of faith and doctrine. With all of that power, why would the pope call another council to determine doctrine? Yet on January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII did just that. He called for a new ecumenical council to convene, and in the years 1962-1965, Vatican II became the most recent Roman Catholic council.

How would Protestants react? When the Catholics declared the Pope infallible in 1870, W.T. Moore in the Evangelical Quarterly asked, "An Infallible Church, or an Infallible Book--Which? and answered, The Bible [rather] than the Ecumenical Council" as infallible (1). But times had changed since 1870. No longer did most Protestants declare the Bible infallible. Many Roman Catholics, meanwhile, also appeared to be moving toward softening their positions on papal power, the Latin liturgy, and Mary. So Protestants could be expected to react more favorably this time around.

What about Lutherans, the followers of the man who broke from Rome? Most of them also reacted positively toward John's announcement and the Council itself. Why the change of attitude during this time? In less than a century, much of Lutheranism in the world and in America had turned

"liberal"; they embraced the historical-critical method that no longer viewed the Bible as equal to God's Word or as inerrant (2).

One result of the historical-critical method was the theory on "relative": in order for the church to survive in the modern world, doctrine has to change. This philosophy of a "progressive" doctrine influenced many Lutherans who were reacting to Roman Catholicism in the mid-1900s and Vatican II in particular. Kristen Skydsgaard, a Danish Lutheran theologian, elaborates on relativism in a 1962 article, "Why Lutherans Must Talk With Rome":

If the Lutheran Church...regards the confessional problem [between Lutherans and Catholics] as solved and no longer existent, then this is a sign of an inner stagnation whereby that for which the reformers fought has been forgotten. The result will be a church of beati possidentes, satisfied with its particular existence, a church whose participation in the living history from which it springs and to which it belongs has eminently decreased. (3)

It is interesting to observe that Skydsgaard here warns Lutherans about embracing Catholicism too quickly when many of his fellow progressives did just that direction as a result of Vatican II. Nevertheless, in this excerpt we have two basic ingredients of their progressive philosophy: 1) church doctrine cannot remain stagnant; 2) the church has to participate in "living history" and keep up with the times. (It is also interesting to see that they claim to follow Luther and the reformers, not in their doctrine, but in their "fight against conservatism.")

This paper will examine the progressive philosophy of these Lutheran liberals reacting to Vatican II. Because of the plethora of material on this subject, this will not be

an exhaustive study of all the progressive Lutherans who were involved and wrote about the Vatican II and about dialogues with the Roman Catholics. Rather, this paper will study a cross section of Lutherans, chiefly American but also of the world to see the common threads of relativism in their writings. We will also find out how this progressive philosophy played a role in the historical-critical view of the Bible, in the emphasis on unity of the church, and in ecumenical discussions with the Catholics. A chief source will be George Lindbeck, an American Lutheran observer at the Vatican Council. Other names along the way will include Kristen Skydsgaard, Warren Quanbeck, Carl Braaten, Hermann Sasse, and the men at the Lutheran World Foundation and the writers of the magazine Dialog.

This paper will more or less follow a chronological outline, looking at the Lutherans as they wrote before the council, during the council, and after the council. In order to trace the development of their progressive philosophy, we will examine the state of liberal Lutheranism in America before the council, the liberal reaction during the council, and the liberal triumph after the council.

1. Before the Council: Liberal Lutheranism

By the time Vatican II convened in 1962, many Lutherans in America had turned liberal and progressive. Their preoccupations included the quest for unity among their own churches, relativism in theology, and ecumenism in their outlook toward other churches.

Because of the diverse ways in which Lutherans came to America, dozens of Lutheran synods sprang up from the eighteenth century to the twentieth. German immigrants who came to Missouri, for example, naturally formed their own synod rather than join the existing English synods out east. When American Lutheran synods did try to join in the nineteenth century, they found themselves in three camps instead of one. All three were divided on how Lutherans should unify in the United States: the General Synod believed that all churches who claimed to be Lutheran should join their confederation; the General Council demanded confessional subscription to the Augsburg Confession as a requirement for unity; the Synodical Conference held that Lutherans must be uniform in doctrine and practice before enjoying fellowship and uniting in one church body (4).

Lutherans continued to be preoccupied with unity into the twentieth century. By 1917 most synods of the General Synod and the General Council had come to terms and formed the United Lutheran Church of America. The Augustana Synod alone refused to join and later (1930) joined earlier "drop-outs" of the General Council and Synodical Conference (Iowa and Ohio) to form the American Lutheran Conference. The ALC would hold the medium position between the liberal

ULCA and the conservative Synodical Conference, chiefly Missouri and Wisconsin. E. Clifford Nelson observes, "[The ALC] thought of itself as a possible mediating force within Lutheranism to bring the ULCA to a more strict position on doctrine and interchurch relations and to influence Missouri...to recognize fellow Lutherans as brothers"(5).

The year Vatican II began, 1962, found the Lutherans in America once again involved in unification. Two years before the American Lutheran Conference synods, minus Augustana, united to form the American Lutheran Church. Originally the ALC might have appeared to support a strong doctrinal and confessional stance. Yet in 1969 they declared fellowship with the Lutheran Church of America, formed in 1962, and by 1982 Martin Westerhaus concluded, "The ALC has moved to the left so that today there is no appreciable difference between LCA and ALC, at least at the Seminary level"(6). In fact, later in 1982 these two bodies announced their intention to merge along with the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, so that today the majority of American Lutherans are united in one body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

But back to 1962. During this year the LCA was created when the ULCA joined with Augustana, the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Suomi Finns to form the most liberal Lutheran body in America up to that point. They would be the guiding force for the great merger that has recently taken place.

The only large American Lutheran body left out of this unification process was the Missouri Synod. But their

stand on no fellowship without doctrinal unity was also eroding by the 1960s. In 1958 Missouri accepted an invitation by the National Lutheran Council to discuss possible unification efforts. John Tietjen, a professor of Concordia Lutheran Seminary in 1966, wrote about the importance of these discussions:

The discussions are important because they give evidence of a change in the traditional approach of the Missouri Synod. Missouri's traditional answer to the question of ecclesiastical cooperation demanded complete agreement in doctrine and practice as the precondition for cooperation. The discussions between the representatives of the Missouri Synod and the NLC had revealed that "there are still points of doctrine which require further systematic study." Yet because the conversations had established the fact that "there is a far greater extent of consensus on the subjects discussed than had been generally realized," the Missouri Synod representatives joined in the unanimous conclusion that there was "a consensus on the doctrine of the Gospel and the meaning of confessional subscription sufficient to justify further exploration" regarding the establishment of an agency to include all Lutheran church bodies (7).

Missourians were still divided on this approach to unity. But Tietjen, in 1966, still hoped that a new Lutheran cooperative agency, the Lutheran Council in the United States of America, would begin operation on Jan. 1, 1967 to prove that "Lutherans are getting together"(8). While Missouri has not plunged into the merger with ELCA, it too has fallen to the temptation to have fellowship without complete doctrinal agreement.

Relativism

By the 1960s Most American Lutherans were preoccupied with unifying the diverse synods regardless of doctrinal agreement. Accompanying this preoccupation was a shift toward relativism in their theology.

In the early twentieth century, American Protestant theology seemed to lag behind that of the Europeans. Already in the nineteenth century, European theologians developed the historical-critical view of the Bible that looked at the Scriptures not as the inerrant Word of God but as a source document of religious truths handed down and developed over many centuries. Twentieth century men like Bultmann and Barth clothed these "truths" in conservative Christian language; for example, when Barth spoke of the Bible as God's Word, he meant, "So far as God lets it be His Word, so far as God speaks through it"(9). The theological climate in Lutheran America remained relatively conservative; however, Nelson noted that around 1947 "a discernible change appeared...when some professors [of Luther Theological Seminary] began to approach the Scriptures theologically and historically rather than with the a priori of inerrancy and verbal inspiration"(10). Nelson concluded that finally in America "theology was dynamic and changing"(11).

So, at the merger of the LCA in 1962, the delegates representing the various synods opted for the neo-Lutheran, historical-critical view of the Scripture. "The delegates [of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity] were not of a mind to be bound by the conservative American practice, particularly not in regard to the pattern of making an introductory and isolated statement about the Bible." They referred to the Word of God as Jesus, not the Bible (12). On the long-standing battle between Scripture and tradition, the LCA theologians decided, "The time had also come for

Lutherans to rid themselves of a four-hundred-year preoccupation with the sixteenth century." In one sentence they opposed sola scriptura, the battle cry of the Reformation(13).

The ideas of these theologians found their way into the LCA Constitution. In Article II, the Confession of Faith, section 2 reads, "This church holds that the Gospel is the revelation of God's sovereign will and saving grace in Jesus Christ. In Him, the Word Incarnate, God imparts Himself to men." Section 3 of the Confession does call the Holy Scriptures "the divinely inspired record of God's redemptive act in Christ"(14). But the LCA purposely made the wording of this document vague to avoid calling all of the Bible the inspired Word of God.

The American Lutheran Church also got involved in the debate and declared that Gospel, not Scripture, is the highest authority in the church. In both the LCA and the ALC the slogan changed from "sola scriptura" to "prima scriptura"(15).

American Lutherans had now "caught up" with the rest of the world in their view of the Bible. Carl Braaten wrote how Luther's view of the Bible was outmoded:

Luther...believed that [Scripture's] literal meaning is identical with its historical content. In other words, things happened exactly as they were written. Today it is impossible to assume the literal historicity of all things recorded (16).

A key word in the theology of these "progressive" Lutherans, (progressive in the sense that they adapted Christianity to the modern world), is relativism. In 1963 Warren Quanbeck, a professor of Systematic Theology in

Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, put it this way--we cannot know what absolute truth is. He wrote:

Since human language is always relative, being conditioned by its historical development and usage, there can be no absolute expression of the truth even in the language of theology. Truth is made known in Jesus Christ, who is God's Word, his address to mankind. Christ is the only absolute. Theological statements, which have an instrumental function, find their meaning in relation to him; they do not contain the truth nor give adequate expression to it. At best they point to Jesus Christ as the one in whom one may know the truth. Truth is not a matter of intellection only, but of obedient discipleship. Only by "abiding in Christ" can one know the truth (17).

This relativistic approach to God's Word influenced a change in other doctrines. Kristen Skydsgaard, for one, believed that the church has primacy over Scriptures due to its existence before the New Testament was written:

Historical research has proved that an oral tradition was in existence before our Synoptic Gospels. We must realize that for more than one hundred and fifty years the church lived, preached, baptized and celebrated the Holy Eucharist before it received a canon of New Testament writings as an instrument for the exercise of apostolic authority (18).

Braaten elaborated on the role of the church in this relativistic theory; in order to survive, it must adapt to the modern world and unite. He wrote that "Christianity will not again become a meaningful source...until it overcomes the denominational conflicts of the past and constructs new forms in which its own vision of life can once again become a resource for the common good"(19). Reunification of the church should be no problem, because, in a sense, unity "already exists" by the Nicene Creed, according to Braaten (20).

Here we see that Lutherans in America by 1960 were

promoting ecumenism. One obstacle seemed to stand in the way, however: What about subscription to the Lutheran Confessions, which all of the major Lutheran bodies claimed to have and which other Christian bodies wouldn't accept? The ALC and LCA got around this by subscribing to the confessions only as "symbols of a movement" and "expressions of the spirit of Lutheranism"(21). Relativism crept into this area also; Lutherans could say that the confessions once proclaimed the truth for people of the sixteenth century, but they no longer applied to the changing world of the twentieth century.

Ecumenism

American Lutherans began to look outside their own little tent by looking at other closer relations with other Lutherans in the world. Nelson summarizes how they eventually joined the Lutheran World Federation:

Ever since 1923 the majority of American Lutherans had participated in the movement to bring world Lutheranism into closer fellowship. Two world wars and the work of the National Lutheran Council enlarged the world-consciousness of American Lutherans. World assemblies had been held in 1923 (Eisenach), 1929 (Copenhagen), and 1935 (Paris). After the Paris convention the executive committee announced that the next assembly would be held in Philadelphia in 1940. Because of World War II the contemplated assembly was canceled. In 1946, however, the executive committee of the Lutheran World Convention, meeting in Sweden, planned an assembly for the summer of 1947. Held at Lund, Sweden, the assembly brought forty-four official delegates from American churches in the National Lutheran Council. Several Missouri Synod observers were also present(22).

Thus was born the Lutheran World Federation. After its start in Lund in 1947, the LWF held conventions in Hanover (1952), Minneapolis (1957), and Helsinki (1963). The LWF strove to encourage cooperation in "externals" and not

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"internals" among all Lutheran bodies throughout the world, and though Nelson noted that "this distinction was impossible to maintain," still it marked "a turning point in the history of world Lutheranism," where Lutherans could disagree in doctrinal matters and still be a force in the contemporary world (23).

But the LWF stretched its horizons even broader than that. American Lutherans had already joined hands with other Christians in the World Council of Churches. Now they also began contact with them in LWF. In Minneapolis in 1957, visitors from Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Congregational and other church bodies attended the LWF convention. There, a "Special Commission on Inter-Confessional Research" was appointed to initiate dialogue with Roman Catholics (24). In this way the LWF became a leader in promoting ecumenism with other church bodies.

The official magazine of the LWF was Lutheran World. In this magazine ecumenical talks were routinely promoted, especially with Roman Catholics. Lutheran World began in 1954, and already in the first volume Vilmos Vajta wrote an article entitled "Lutheranism and Ecumenicity." He wrote, "A certain amount of ecumenical patience should be part of the Lutheran approach. For we know that unity of the church in the sense of a truly common faith...can hardly be the achievement of a few years but is probably a task for several generations"(25).

In 1956 Peter Brunner from Germany followed Vajta's lead. He believed that both Lutherans and Roman Catholics had things in common, such as dealing with the spirit of

secularization. He wrote about some of the things he expected from Catholics if Lutherans and Catholics were to get together:

We expect you to experience the inner spiritual life of your church. The times are past in which it was thought that Christians divided in faith could draw near to one another only after deviating from a definite confessional position. Bad Catholics and bad Lutherans will never come to agreement in the truth. It is only to good Catholics and good Lutherans that it will be given to see the Truth which is in Christ(26).

In the same article, however, Brunner hoped that Lutherans and Catholics could overlook their differences. "The God who has raised Christ from the dead acknowledges no historical or dogmatic finality in the history of his church. The Word of God does not allow itself to be bound within the prison of such finality"(27). The writers of Lutheran World weren't advocating a rush into unity with the Catholics, but they were hoping for the "better" elements of both churches (i.e., the progressives), to get together and see how much they really agreed with each other.

One commission of the LWF, the "Faith and Order Commission," placed in charge of doctrine, discussed the meaning of true unity in Lund, Sweden, in 1952. "The nature of unity towards which we are striving is that of a visible fellowship in which all members, acknowledging Jesus Christ as living Lord and Saviour, shall recognize each other as belonging fully to his body, to the end that the world may believe."(28).

It was soon apparent that some Lutherans were beginning to believe that unity with Catholics was possible because they both believed in Jesus as Lord and Savior. In 1961

Carl Umhau Wolf commented at the January 24, 1960 Roman diocesan synod that Catholics were moving toward more lay participation in the liturgy and that they were writing "honestly" about the Reformation and Protestantism, a change from routine condemnation of Luther before (29). He also noted that, in 1957, Karl Barth declared that there was "no essential difference" between him and the Catholic theologian Hans Kung on justification by grace (30). These progressive Lutherans, encouraged by signs of similar "progression" among some Catholic theologians, were smelling ecumenical talks in the future.

Skydsgaard looked at where Catholicism and Lutheranism was going in 1961 and drew this conclusion:

Neither the Roman nor the Lutheran Church of today is the same as it was four hundred years ago. Both of them stand within history and its vicissitudes and they must not be satisfied with the triumphs of former periods or with the brilliance of today(31).

The stage was set. Lutheran progressives by 1960 were preoccupied with unity among themselves in America, relativism in theology and ecumenism toward other church bodies, the Catholics in particular. These attitudes would add up to a favorable reaction when Pope John XXIII announced the convening of an ecumenical council.

23. During the Council: Liberal Reaction

Vatican II, the twenty-first ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, was the brainchild of Pope John XXIII. James Manz describes the immediate reaction to his call to convene a council:

No one seems to have expected the announcement which burst onto the Christian world on Jan. 25, 1959. Pope John's idea, broadcast on the day when Catholic Christians were observing the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, seems to have come as a surprise even to himself. The intention to convene a new council was said to have come to John 'like the sudden flowering of an unexpected spring'(32).

Anticipation

The calling for a council was a surprise, since Vatican I seemed to establish that all authority rested in the pope, not in councils. For many Christian observers, both Protestant and Catholic, the call was a pleasant surprise. Progressive Lutherans began to dream about future discussions with the Romans, especially if the progressive Catholics could gain control of this council.

George Lindbeck, for one, was optimistic. Lindbeck, a Lutheran theologian from Yale University, believed that John's call was "a revolutionary change in the ecumenical atmosphere" to make Catholicism "more attractive" to non-Roman Christians. He wrote, "When the council is viewed in the broad sweep of history, there is every reason to believe that it marks the conclusion of the Counter-Reformation epoch." He noted that Catholicism before had been moving away from Christ and toward papal authority, but now it was "leading to greater freedom in the social and political spheres and...to theological, liturgical and

biblical revivals"(33).

Likewise Kurt Schmidt-Clausen, the General Secretary of LWF, asked in Lutheran World, "Does the Council Concern Us at All?", and answered affirmatively.

Both Evangelical and Catholic Christians must ask themselves in genuine searching of conscience in what measure they have refused to show, not only in the past, but also in the present, that brotherhood and love which they owe to one another. Cannot perhaps those characteristics...be traced to such fraternal love denied? (34).

Schmidt-Klausen, speaking for LWF, believed that Vatican II could break down the bad feelings between Lutherans and Catholics.

In 1962 a new magazine began publication to help Lutherans start talks with other Christian bodies, especially the Catholics. Appropriately named Dialog, this magazine in its early issues focused on the upcoming council and the changing views of Catholics. The editors bluntly stated in one of the first issues, "The calling [of the council] suddenly accorded prominence and sanction to a movement which had always been a minority movement in the Roman Catholic Church; namely, the evangelical emphasis of theologians especially in Germany and France"(35).

Writers in Dialog elaborated on these changes in Catholicism and the challenges they presented to ecumenical talks. Kristen Skydsgaard wrote that two tasks for the upcoming "dialogue" included facing the existing Roman Catholic theology of the counter-Reformation, and facing the current reforming of that theology. This "new theology" of Roman Catholics "admits that the Reformation had a necessary and positive concern. But at the same time it will maintain

that those positive principles were advocated in a negative and one-sided way which proved disastrous to the Reformation," (in other words, revolting against the church). Both sides have to get rid of the past and discover the new "dimension of the Bible" of today (36).

While Skydsgaard saw that Catholics were changing their attitude toward the Reformation (and implied that Lutherans needed to change too), Lindbeck focused on the similarities between Lutherans and Catholics. He wrote in a Dialog article that there were "large areas of theology in which the confessions [of Lutherans and Catholics] have not historically disagreed," like Christology and the Trinity. "The reason for convergence...is that theologians from both sides find themselves confronted with similar problems of trying to state the historic affirmations of the Christian faith in terms meaningful to modern man." (37). Here again we see the progressive presuppositions of these theologians taking over: doctrine has to be adapted to "modern man."

Per Erik Persson, in Dialog, also wrote about two new developments he spotted among Catholics: first, their new, positive attitude toward the Reformation, and second, the disappearance of Post-Tridentine biases against Protestants (38). In his book Roman and Evangelical Persson stated some of the changes modern Catholics were making:

[First], in the Roman Catholic church of today we find a biblical revival of great extent and importance. The reading of the Bible by laymen is greatly encouraged, although restricted of course to translations approved by the church....[There is also] a rapidly increasing interest in scholarly exegesis (39).

Other changes included reforms in worship life, a theology

that states salvation is by grace (though "it is clear that 'grace' here does not have exactly the same connotation as in the Protestant tradition"), a positive evaluation of the Reformation, and ecumenical endeavors, especially in the WCC(40).

Perhaps the definitive book on the Lutheran outlook toward Catholics before the Council was The Papal Council and the Gospel, edited by Kristen Skydsgaard. Contributors to the book included Lindbeck, Ernst Kinder, Peter Brunner, and Skydsgaard himself collaborating with Gerhard Pedersen. Kinder, in "Will the Council Be Ecumenical?", believed that "for a genuine ecumenical council, fundamental freedom from political influence and freedom of self-determination on the part of the churches would be an absolutely necessary presupposition"(41). He felt that Vatican II should take the modern ecumenical movement seriously, for it was a movement "in which, one may say, the very essential, original unity of the church of Jesus Christ really maintains its rights anew as a spiritual reality by virtue of its own powers"(42).

Lindbeck, meanwhile, took a hard look at Catholicism "on the eve of the council" and saw the struggle developing between traditionalists and progressives. Traditionalists still had clout; "there is in many quarters a deep-seated conviction, fostered in part by Catholic claims of unchangeableness, that the Roman church must forever remain basically the same as it was at the time of the Reformation" (43). Yet there were also many "favorable" signs among Catholics that times were changing: a limiting of the

pope's luxury and temporal power; increased use of the laity in the church; progress in studying the Bible; and liturgical reform (use of the vernacular, the laity, and simplicity). Regarding the latter, Lindbeck remarked, "Those familiar with Reformation controversies recognize that the liturgical movement meets many of the most serious of the original Protestant objections to Roman Catholic sacramentalism"(44).

Lindbeck noticed two attitudes prevailing among Catholics around 1960. One was traditional-- "rigid and fearful, interested in preserving the past." The other was progressive--"more open and adventurous and strives to obey God and meet the needs of the modern world" (45). Not only did Lindbeck think that the latter could prevail in the council; he also felt that progressive trends could bring Lutherans and Catholics closer together.

There is...a full consciousness that fundamental and, humanly speaking, irreconcilable differences still remain, but this is combined with a sense of genuine Christian brotherhood and a realization on the part of many that Protestants and Catholics stand united in common opposition to growing secularism, to anti-Christian movements outside the church, and to indifference and purely cultural religion within (46).

Skydsgaard and Gerhard Pedersen concurred. Logically, they wrote, Roman Catholics and evangelical Lutherans only ought to tolerate each other, because

Roman Catholic and evangelical Lutheran [sic] appear to be mutually exclusive....Yet we cannot stop with this solution. Life contradicts it. Life fights against the 'logic of mutual exclusion.'...Theologians have entered into conversation which is not a futile collision of long-established principles or mutually exclusive theses and antitheses, but rather a dialogue that means a living encounter of human beings in the realm of truth....A dialogue between the confessions is possible, a dialogue...[that] opens up new common insights, and

thus leads those who are separated closer to each other (47).

However, there was a fly in the ointment. Lindbeck had written "differences still remain"; overcoming them would not be easy. In Skydsgaard's Papal Council Peter Brunner mentioned why unity with Catholics wouldn't be easy. "No Christian church keeps the wound of the division in Christendom open as inexorably as does the Roman Catholic Church. This church sees the unity of the church in the light of itself as the only true church"(48). "Still in our day the churches of the Reformation have to charge the Roman Catholic Church with failing to keep pure and clean the apostolic Word given to us in Holy Scripture;" papal infallibility, the veneration of Mary and the sacrifice of the mass remained black marks (49). Finally, "the churches of the Reformation see in the Roman Catholic Church a high degree of danger for salvation in Christ. Therefore they will not be able to establish church fellowship with it so long as this danger continues" (50).

The Papal Council and the Gospel shows the prevailing mood of progressive Lutheran attitudes toward the upcoming council: eager anticipation mixed with uncertainty. Lindbeck, writing in Dialogue, echoed that uncertainty even during the first session of the Council. He wondered whether Catholics would have the courage to advance beyond Trent and Vatican I and replace the "dying" Counter-Reformation (51). Yet he also recognized that "progressives such as Karl Rahner, [Yves] Congar, ... and [Hans] Kung were undoubtedly the most influential theologians at the

Council." Lindbeck hoped that they could dominate the council (52).

Participation

After all of the anticipation came participation. Lutheran "participation," or interaction with Catholics, came in two forms: ecumenical discussion at Bossey, and observation at the Council.

On April 10, 1962, Protestant and Catholic theologians held an ecumenical conference together. Edmund Schlink in Dialog reported on the progress made: 1. The meetings (22 of them) helped clear up misunderstandings of each other in doctrine. 2. Expectations regarding doctrinal discussions were exceeded. 3. They realized their dogmatic formulas would have to be "translated" into exegesis and history. 4. Agreement was made regarding the relationship between faith and new obedience, as well as God's revelation in creation and man's guilt. 5. There was progress, though not agreement, on the doctrine of Law and Gospel and the efficacy of God's Word. 6. The means of grace and the ecclesiastical office was the "most stubborn" obstacle in the path to unity. 7. Both churches felt united in facing problems of the modern world (53).

Regarding this milestone of ecumenical discussions, Schlink made these observations:

It may appear as if the central difference between our churches consists in the relation between Scripture and tradition....Contradicting this view is the fact that historically the principles of theology have always been secondary rather than primary issues. The content of dogmatic statements has been of primary significance of the history of theology (54).

For ecumenical discussions, according to Schlink, "dogma"

was out and "revealed truth" was in. "What is required for the unity of the church is a consensus in knowledge and witness concerning revealed truth. Therefore, theology will have to clear up all differences and oppositions which prevent such a consensus from emerging" (55).

While Schlink and other Lutherans worked with Catholics in ecumenical discussions, others witnessed first-hand what goes on at a Catholic ecumenical council. Obviously, Lutherans and other Protestants could not actively vote or debate Catholics at the council. But Pope John did allow them to observe, as he released his "Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity" encyclical on June 5, 1960:

...In order that Our love and Our good will towards the Christians who are separated from the Apostolic See may be yet more evident, and that they may be able to follow the work of the Council and to find more easily that unity which Jesus Christ in burning prayer begs of His Father, a special committee or secretariat is being set up, which will be constituted under a cardinal to be named by Us....(56).

This did not mean the Pope had changed Catholic doctrine and viewed Protestants as full-fledged Christians: "True unity exists only in the Catholic church. And to this truth there is no way apart from the Catholic church"(57). Still, Lutherans and other Protestants accepted the invitation. Two correspondents from the Lutheran World Federation were chosen: Skydsgaard and Lindbeck. Two other Lutheran professors who observed were Edmund Schlink from Heidelberg, and Oscar Cullmann from Basel. Observers at the council would record their observations and relate them to the leaders of their churches; participate without speaking "officially" for a church; answer questions from

members and commissions of the council; and inform the general secretary of the council if false information on the Lutheran position was stated (58).

Examination

We will now take a closer look at the Vatican Council, its documents, and the reactions of Lutheran progressives. Pope John's opening speech began the first session of the Council on Oct. 11, 1962. The first session closed on Dec. 8 of the same year. During the interim between the first two sessions, Pope John died, and Paul VI took over. Session II lasted from Sep. 29 to Dec. 4, 1963; Session III began on Sep. 10, 1964, lasting until Nov. 21; and the final session took place from Sep. 14, 1965 to the Solemn Ceremony of Cloture in St. Peter's Square on December 8, 1965.

The first session concerned itself mainly with liturgy. By November 14, 1962, the council approved of the schema on the liturgy, which included a proposed change in the mass, to insert the name of St. Joseph after that of the Virgin Mary. Naturally, "the Protestant observers found the change regrettable....They could not help noting that this maneuver did little to advance the ecumenical aims of the council" (59).

Something happened, however, on the next day to change the mood of the council. When the conservative schema on revelation came out, nine out of thirteen speeches attacked it. Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh of Antioch thought the text used "outdated formulas belonging to the Counter-Reformation and antimodernism." He concluded, "I propose an outright rejection of this schema"(60). The progressives were on the rise. Lindbeck expressed his satisfaction that on Nov. 20th

they rejected a "highly reactionary schema on Scripture and tradition"(61).

By the time the first session had ended, one could think that not much had been accomplished. No documents had been produced, and even the schema on liturgy wasn't final yet. But Henri Fesquit, a Roman Catholic reporter from France, still saw progress:

Motivated by their pastoral and missionary concerns, and knowing that they had the Pope's support, [the Fathers] refused to be intimidated [by traditionalists]. Thus, Scholastic abstractions, intractable rigorism, narrow-mindedness, and unawareness of the outside world had to give way to the meaning of history,... to progress in religious knowledge, and a desire to enter into contact with "the others."....Because of this effort, a new climate came over the assembly, and the non-Catholic observers could see that the Roman Church was becoming a genuine interlocutor (62).

Unfortunately for the progressives, the second session in the fall of '63 didn't bring about the reforms they were hoping for. Lindbeck observed that after the second session, "the mood...is far less enthusiastic than after the first." Progressive bishops felt frustrated at the slowness of the change; "the conservative minority is making it difficult to get a program of reform through the council" (63). They felt that they could make reforms which do not contradict Roman dogma, or even "reinterpret" papal infallibility, but the conservatives were resisting. For example, there was an impasse on the proposed schema on ecumenism; it was too cautious for ecumenists (because the schema didn't recognize Protestant bodies as "churches"), and too ecumenical for conservatives (because it recognized Protestants as "separate brethren"). (64).

In spite of the disappointments, Lindbeck took comfort in the limited reform it was making.

[The Council] is encouraging Biblical movements in worship in theology; it is stimulating ecumenism, religious liberty, and more evangelical mission and service to the world. There can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit is working mightily in the Roman Catholic Church at the present time, and for this we must both pray and praise God (65).

In fact, by 1964 Lindbeck thought more was being done for ecumenism in Rome than at the Lutheran World Federation convention in Helsinki and the Faith and Order meeting in Montreal of 1963. "The Council mobilizes a far greater proportion of the theological and ecclesiastical leadership of its constituency than do the other meetings"(66). "It is possible that the Reformation note will be expressed more strongly in some of the decrees of the Council than in those parts of the final reports which state the consensus in Montreal"(67).

One document that was completed at the close of the second session was The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum concilium, Dec. 4, 1963). To get a flavor of its mix of tradition and reform, read the following excerpts. (All Vatican II quotes are from Flannery's Vatican Council II Documents, 1988 revised edition):

par. 22. (1): Regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is on the Apostolic See, and, as laws may determine, on the bishop.

Par. 22. (3): Therefore no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.

Par. 30: To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons, hymns, as well as by actions, gestures and bodily attitudes. And at the proper time a reverent silence should be observed.

Par. 36. (1): The use of the Latin language, with due respect to particular law, is to be preserved in the Latin rites.

Par. 36. (2): But since the use of the vernacular... may frequently be of great advantage to the people, a wider use may be made of it...

Lindbeck commented on the liturgical reforms that Vatican II was permitting:

[There is the] possibility that within decades, if the bishops and the Holy See so desire, not only will the use of the vernacular, communion in two kinds, and liturgical decentralization [go] far beyond anything which is concretely proposed in the later chapters of this schema, but also that changes will be made in the wording and structure of the mass itself, including the canon (68).

Lindbeck believed these changes could come about because of the decentralization of the liturgy; more could be done when laypeople get involved. But this could only be done when changes conformed to the "mind" of the Bible (69). Warren Quianbeck, looking back at the council in 1965, also praised the Constitution on Liturgy as "a long step forward to make the church's worship and prayer accessible to people in their own language"(70).

Meanwhile, the Council moved forward into 1964 with its third session. This session produced two major documents: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium, Nov. 21, 1964), and the Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegration, Nov. 21, 1964).

The schema on the church was already being prepared during the second session, and observers like Edmund Schlink reported about it to the Lutherans. In a 1964 Dialog article Schlink first criticized the schema for defending the church's hierarchy "[The hierarchical structure of the

church] cannot be so facilely traced to New Testament conditions as the schema would indicate"(71). However, he goes on: "In this schema New Testament factors have been more closely observed than in the dogmatic Constituo of the First Vatican Council....It provides room for new impulses and intensification of church activity in a concrete application to situations and tasks"(72).

On the topic of what the church is, Schlink noted with dismay, "In the schema, the identification of the one holy church with the Roman Church is obviously intended exclusivistically, since it does not discuss churches outside the Roman Church"(73). The schema recognized non-Catholic individuals, but not churches. Schlink's reaction? "Obviously, non-Roman Christianity must feel it has been misunderstood by such statements. For non-Roman Christinity consists not only of individual Christians, but also of churches....In this respect...the schema's statements are unproductive"(74). Schlink concluded that the schema "in its present form appears more Roman than catholic and more apologetic than dogmatic in the authentic sense"(75).

The final document ended up being as ambiguous as the schema, being another compromise between conservatives and progressives. The first three chapters outline three concepts of the church: first, the church as a "mystery"; secondly, the church as pilgrims in this world and the "people of God"; thirdly, the church as a hierarchy set up by Christ. The dilemma comes in on which is the dominant picture of the church. If chapter three is the focus,

then nothing has changed from Vatican II; if chapters one and two are, then the hierarchy is something that serves the church, which includes the laity (76).

Lindbeck had his own ideas of what the document meant. "My own guess is that it is to the eschatological view of the world and to the theme of the pilgrim people of God that the future belongs"(77). Like other Protestants, Lindbeck felt uneasy when Mary continues to be emphasized (chapter eight of the document); however, he took comfort from chapter seven, an elaboration of the pilgrim church in its role of salvation (78). Lindbeck concluded that two positive results could come from this new image of the church among Catholics:

First, the mission of the Church...can no longer be thought of representing some kind of quasi monopoly of the divine action...The task of Christians, therefore, is not primarily that of rescuing individual souls from hell, nor even of converting the world, [but] that of serving the world by reminding it in all that they are, say, and do of God's purposes, of the true future of humanity which is in Jesus Christ....

[Secondly],...Christians must be reconciled among themselves, and by their communal action, reconcilers in the world if they are to be credible and persuasive witnesses. This clearly makes ecumenism central to the purpose of the Church in a way that it is not in the traditional view of the mission of the Church, whether Catholic or Protestant, which have centered on the salvation of individuals out of the world at the expense of the coming redemption of the world itself. (79).

Not all Catholics or Protestants could draw all this out of the Constitution on the Church, much less agree with Lindbeck's conclusions. But a "social gospel" function of the church can be read into the Vatican's ambiguous statements, as Lindbeck shows.

Two other Lutheran commentators on this important

document should be cited before we move on. Carl Braaten in a Dialog article praised the ambiguity of this article: "I will not criticize, but rather commend this document for refusing to settle for easy definitions on the question of the relation between the mystical body of Christ and the visible church"(80). Quanbeck also thought that progressives prevailed here because of its "stress on the on-going work of God in Christ in the world, and on the fact that the church is the people of God, including all who are united to Christ by baptism"(81).

The other major document to come out of session 3 was the Decree on Ecumenism. Obviously, progressive Lutherans and other ecumenically-minded Protestants welcomed this document, especially paragraphs like these:

Ch. 1, par 4.The divisions among Christians prevent the Church from realizing the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her sons who, though joined to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. Furthermore, the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects.... (pp. 458-459 in Flannery, 1988).

Ch. 3, par 19.Although the ecumenical movement and the desire for peace with the Catholic Church have not yet taken hold everywhere, it is nevertheless our hope that the ecumenical spirit and mutual esteem will gradually increase among all men.

At the same time, however, one should recognize that between these Churches and ecclesial communities, on the one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other, there are very weighty differences not only of a historical, sociological, psychological and cultural character, but especially in the interpretation of revealed truth (pp. 467-468).

Not surprisingly, many Lutherans reacted positively. Carl Meyer in the Concordia Theological Monthly wrote, "With the Decree on Ecumenism the Roman Catholic Church entered more wholeheartedly into the ecumenical movement, helped to

give it a new direction, and signaled the maturity of the movement"(82). He also took comfort in the document's admission "that men of both sides [Protestants and Catholics] were to blame for the sin of separation [ch. 1, par. 3]. How different that admission is from the spirit of Tridentine Roman Catholicism!"(83).

Liberal Lutherans thus saw this document as a "maturing" of the Catholics toward a progressive philosophy. Vilmos Vajta, for the Lutheran World, saw another sign of maturity in their ecumenism. He was please that Vatican II did not try "to overwhelm the other churches by Catholic ecumenism"; instead, they tried to meet Protestantism where it was (84).

Session three provided something for the progressives to crow about. But in a way, perhaps their greatest triumph came in fourth and final session of Vatican II. Eleven more documents came out, three of which we will consider in this paper: The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei verbum, Nov. 18, 1965); the Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis humanae, Dec. 7, 1965); and the largest document of all, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes, Dec. 7, 1965).

The Constitution on Divine Revelation interested Lutherans because sources of revelation continued to be a major roadblock between Lutherans and Catholics. Is the Bible the only authority, or does tradition also play a role as a "source" of revelation? Conservative Catholics held on to the two-source theory, while progressive Catholics like J.R. Geiselman and G.H. Travord believed, "Scripture contains all revealed doctrine, and the Church's faith,

which includes apostolic traditions, interprets it" (85).

In the first session, as we've already seen, this topic was hotly debated between conservatives and progressives. The debate continued until Pope John intervened and demanded that the rather conservative schema on the sources of revelation be reworked. This was "widely regarded as one of the turning points of Vatican II, an indication that the direction of the Council would be progressive rather than conservative, ecumenical rather than polemical"(86).

By the fall of 1964 the council approved the third draft, and in 1965 the Constitution on Revelation came out. One item to note throughout this document is the term "sacred Tradition." Regarding the relationship between Scripture and tradition, paragraph nine states:

Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture...are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal. Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching. Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scripture alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence.

To the conservative Lutheran eye, it appears that nothing's been gained here--tradition and Scripture are still on the same plain. But to a progressive like Arthur Oleson, this "significantly affirms" the progressive viewpoint that "revelation is prior to both Scripture and tradition"(87). Look at paragraph nine once more and you

will notice that Scripture is not equivalent to the Word of God. Rather, the Word came first, and both tradition and Scripture testify to it--a trademark of the historical-critical method.

The Declaration on Religious Liberty also lets Catholics face the contemporary world. We read in paragraph one:

1. Contemporary man is becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person; more and more people are demanding that men should exercise fully their own judgment and a responsible freedom in their actions should not be subject to pressure of coercion but be inspired by a sense of duty....This demand for freedom in human society is concerned chiefly with man's spiritual values, and especially with what concerns the free practice of religion in society. This Vatican Council pays careful attention to these spiritual aspirations....

In a Dialog article, Faith Elizabeth Burgess wrote on the consequences of this new, "contemporary" attitude of Roman Catholics:

[The Declaration on Religious Freedom] not only insists [on] the right to search for truth (Ipar.1 3), but also clearly states that any person who makes no attempt to seek the truth, or once having found the truth makes no attempt to follow it, is also free from coercion of any sort. (Ipar.1 2) In short, the atheist shares religious freedom. The Roman Catholic Church is now willing to recognize the rights of all men, whether or not they accept the truth as she teaches it (88).

Burgess moves on to the relativistic approach of the council, witnessed by this document:

The ultimate question is, of course, whether Dignitas humanae is also merely a product of its own time, historically conditioned to the mid-twentieth century and perhaps inapplicable fifty years from now.... [Still,] the Declaration on Religious Liberty witnesses to the fact that the thinking of the Roman Catholic Church is not chained to her statements in the past, even her official statements"(89).

The final document we will briefly look at from this council is The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the

Modern World. Quite a variety of topics are included with this: the social gospel (cf. par. 40, where Vatican II gladly accepts this role for the church), and birth control (par. 51, a condemnation of birth control as contrary to the sanctity of life). In this document, as in most of the Vatican II documents, we have a balancing act between the old traditions of the church and progressive attempts at making the church more contemporary (90). It is the final proof that Roman Catholics have a new attitude toward the world, stressing the role of the Church as "servant of the world"(91).

The Church in the Modern World did contrast strongly from previous Catholic documents, such as the Syllabus of Errors by Pope Pius IX in 1864 that condemned modernism. Franklin Sherman in Dialog could indeed say that "Vatican II has finally swung the balance in the other direction" away from opposition to contemporary trends. "Modern science and technology, democracy, socialism, all now appear in a more favorable light, and even atheism is given a sympathetic analysis"(92).

Vatican II closed with a solemn ceremony of cloture in St. Peter's Square, where Pope Paul VI "spoke to all mankind":

...This is a unique moment, a moment of incomparable meaning and richness. The past, present, and future converge in this universal gathering, in this privileged point of time and space: the past, for here the Church is united with her tradition, her history, her councils, her doctors, and her saints; the present, for we are taking leave of one another to go into the world of today with its miseries, its sufferings, its sins, but also its prodigious accomplishments, its values, its virtues; and finally, the future is here in the urgent appeal from the peoples of the world for greater

justice, in their desire for peace, in their conscious or unconscious thirst for a higher life, that life precisely which the Church of Christ can and wishes to give them....(93).

In this way, on the final day of the council, Pope Paul summed up the spirit and attitude of what had been accomplished. Vatican II had brought Roman Catholicism into the contemporary world.

The ambiguity of most of the Vatican II documents led liberal Lutherans to chalk up the council as a triumph for progressive philosophy. In reality, the council wasn't quite that ready to let go of Catholic traditions. Catholics had planted one foot on progressive soil, but one foot was still mired in traditionalism.

Yet the evidence was there that Catholicism was leaning toward progressive philosophy. We will see how this was true when we take a look at the results of the council--and the resulting liberal triumph--in the next chapter.

3. After the Council: Liberal Triumph

Liberal Lutherans reacted after the council pretty much the same way they did during the council. They praised Vatican II for its reforms and encouraged Catholics to do more of the same. They found that some Catholics, especially on the progressive side, assessed the council pretty closely as they did. Dialogue and ecumenical talks soon developed between the two groups, leading to more optimism that, one day, perhaps Lutherans and Catholics could merge into one church body.

Assessment

Lutherans and other Protestants, by and large, considered the council to be a success. Liberal Protestants had a chance to praise Catholics at a 1966 interfaith appraisal in Notre Dame. Catholics, Protestants, and other theologians gathered there to discuss the council and its effects. George Lindbeck, as you might expect, was there. His thoughts on the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, expressed at this meeting, have been examined already in the second part of this paper. Another progressive Protestant, Albert Outler, discussed how the council would affect Protestant theology in America. Here is his assessment of the Council:

The genius of Vatican II...is the deliberate decision to expose the Roman Catholic mind to a spectrum of challenge and danger in today's world--and to do this with confidence that Christian truth is still mighty and will prevail even in this world. This means, among other things, the exposure...modern historical criticism (which is to say, relativism and change), to modern iconoclasm (which is to say, radical skepticism and antitraditionalism), to modern secularism (which is to say, contemporary man's narcissist claim to autonomy and self-sufficiency) (94).

Progressive Lutherans said much the same in their assessment and summary of the council. Warren Quanbeck summarized how progressives won over the council:

At the very start [of the Council] the progressives asserted their determination not to be dominated by the Curia, presented their cause with courage and eloquence, and gradually won the support of a strong majority of the bishops. Causes that seemed only dim hopes at the beginning passed with surprisingly little opposition: the vernacular in the liturgy, collegiality of bishops, the program of ecumenism, the statement on the Jews, religious liberty....Both second and third sessions ended in disappointment and frustration to the progressives, and some of the bolder hopes were not realized, but the achievement of the council is nevertheless quite remarkable, far beyond what a cautious and realistic observer could have predicted at the beginning (95).

According to Hermann Sasse, one remarkable achievement of the council had to be the pope's willingness to share more power and leadership with the bishops. "[The bishops] came to St. Peter's for the 2nd Vatican Council and, with the blessing of Pope John and to the great surprise of the world, they took as bishops the leadership of the Council away from the Curia into their hands, to rule the Catholic Church henceforth"(96). It was a learning process for all Catholics: "Today Rome knows that hurling anathemas against false doctrines is not enough"(97).

Quanbeck thought that the "new style of this council" was another plus. "In setting a new style in councils, avoiding definitions and promulgations of dogma,...the Second Vatican Council has attempted instead to initiate a movement"(98). Quanbeck believed that this movement was geared toward ecumenism, as shown by the invitation of non-Catholics to observe at the council. "The invitation of

non-Roman Catholic observers was an act of great ecumenical courage, for it meant that the council could not function as a private discussion within the family: the neighbors were always present!"(99)

In a similar vein, Sasse considered the council to be a stepping stone toward ecumenical talks. Sasse saw the movement beginning with progressive Catholics in western and central Europe, not in Rome. However, Vatican II helped to spread that movement: "A real ecumenical spring has begun among Catholics"(100).

Both Quanbeck and Sasse tempered their enthusiasm with a dose of reality. For Quanbeck, it was the realization that, in a world of change, Vatican II might soon appear archaic. Already in 1966, "younger theologians" were beginning to think of the council as "too traditionalist, too cautious." "They want to take the scientific, historical and philosophical revolution of the last two centuries quite seriously and construct a theology which will present the gospel and the church as real possibilities to an intellectual man today"(101).

Sasse, meanwhile, felt that, in the aftermath of Vatican II, it was time for Protestants to get their act together. He asked, "How is it to be explained that the Roman Church is able to undergo such a mighty reform in all spheres of its life, as it becomes manifest in the decisions of the present Council, while the Protestant churches, including our Lutheran churches, seem to be irreformable?"(102) The irony according to Sasse was that Catholics were now the reformers and the Protestants weren't.

Sasse also warned Catholics about getting too involved in ecumenism "Is not Roman Catholicism drawn into that ecumenical movement which as a movement is beyond the control of the men who think they are leading it and of which nobody knows where it will end?" He pointed to their consideration of dialogue with non-Christians, which to Sasse was flirting with universalism (103).

But Catholics were headed toward that direction--or at least toward liberalism, relativism and ecumenism, major tenants of progressive Protestant thought. In a Dialog article James McCue wrote his reactions to the council from a Roman Catholic perspective. Because of the Decree on Ecumenism, it was "now rather widely taken for granted that ecumenism (whatever it is) is a good thing, that there probably is some sort of community between ourselves and Protestants"(104). To illustrate the changing thought, McCue pointed to Karl Rahner's new theory on sacraments: the Church is "the basic sacrament," and the seven traditional sacraments of Trent were "seen as actions in which the Church most perfectly fulfills its nature." So Catholics no longer had to claim that Jesus instituted each of the seven sacraments (105).

Rahner himself wrote a book reacting to Vatican II: The Church After the Council. In this book, Rahner called the council "the beginning of the beginning [of renewal]"(106). The council started the reform, but the task still had to be put into effect. An example was the reforms in liturgy.

[There is still a need] to translate the instructions of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy into concrete forms for the celebration of the liturgy; we must yet

transform them into the real prayer-life of the Church, worship in Spirit and in truth. Now the ecumenical dialogue must begin, patiently, humbly, courageously, optimistically, and audaciously (107).

Rahner was perhaps a little too radical for Catholics when he made statements like this regarding non-Christians:

The Christian will not regard the non-Christian as standing outside the pale of salvation simply because he is not a Christian....The Christian will see the non-Christian as an anonymous Christian who does not really know what he actually is through grace in the depths of his conscience (108).

While Rahner may have been a step or two ahead of other progressives among Catholics, others were trying to follow his lead. G.C. Berkouwer reports in The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism that Catholics were beginning to come to terms with Protestants on sola fide and sola gratia: "Many writers among Roman Catholics witness strongly to the idea that there is a Catholic sola fide--sola gratia"(109). Hans Kung "concludes that there is no essential disagreement between Rome and the Reformation on the two cardinal points of soli deo gloria and sola fide. On this matter, 'The time of antithesis is over.'"(110). Catholics also were beginning to see that human activity in justification was not annihilated by Protestants (111).

On the subject of the unchangeability of the church, Catholics still defended it as "an article of faith"(112). But Berkouwer explains how changes could be made in the church without affecting the unchangeability doctrine: "The truth never changes; new representations of the truth merely reveal the truth in other dress"(113). This explains the relativism that crept into Catholicism. "Roman Catholics

have believed that dogma developed consistently with the growth of that simple gospel in the Church's consciousness. The Catholics did not admit a possibility that a real break occurred anywhere in the evolutionary process"(114). And because of this evolutionary process, "the forms in which faith is expressed manifest many idiomatic characteristics of their time"(115). Theology becomes a matter of adapting doctrine to the contemporary world.

So we see that both liberal Lutherans and liberal Catholics were thinking alike after the council. Both were explaining how teachings had to change to keep up with the findings of the modern world.

Dialogue

The ecumenical leanings of both Lutherans and Catholics produced fruits with the dialogue that began during the Council (1965) and continued after it. Plans for such a meeting began to get serious in 1964. In October of 1964 Hermann Sasse wrote what the purpose of this dialogue should be: "not to create a church but to make it possible to know what the Protestants are and [what they think],...and to reveal differences in thought [between the twol." The dialogue "will not and cannot become a means of or a substitute for negotiations toward union"(116).

The dialogue would not aim for anything big--just talks so that Lutherans and Catholics could understand each other better and hopefully get closer together. The Lutheran World Federation operated this way when they met Roman Catholics at Strasbourg on August 25-27, 1965 and April 13-15, 1966. Lutheran representatives at this "Roman Catholic/Lutheran Working Group" included Warren Quanbeck,

Kurt Schmidt-Clausen, Kristen Skydsgaard and Vilmos Vajta. Oswald Hoffman attended as an observer from the Missouri Synod. The joint report gave this reason for their discussion: "The purpose of these meetings was to determine whether and in what manner the relations which have already begun between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church can be continued and intensified"(117).

The meetings revealed that Lutherans and Catholics did agree on a number of things, in particular their progressive approach. The joint report lists some of these:

The two delegations are convinced that within the context of the total ecumenical awakening, which has developed and exists today in many churches, special and official relations are necessary between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches....

The development of the natural sciences compels us to see the traditional [theological] problems [between Roman Catholics and Lutherans] in a new setting. The expanded knowledge of the universe today, the growing secularization of the modern world, and the difficulties of faith in God for contemporary man put the anthropological problem in an acute way.

Similarly the development of historical science has given modern man a new way of apprehending the past. When one studies the questions between us on a theological and scholarly plain, the historical dimension must be constantly considered.

In the same way the development of modern biblical scholarship has modified the traditional formulation of the respective positions and opened a new approach to the confessional differences (118).

Almost as an afterthought, the group did put in this statement: "In our relations the deep difference that have developed between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran churches should not be overlooked"(119). But one thing they had in common was a concern for making doctrine contemporary. For this reason they felt that a close relationship between the two churches could exist, to tackle

the challenges of modern society.

Meanwhile, "official" dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics opened on July 6, 1965 in Baltimore. Paul Emple, a key person in organizing the LCA in 1960, headed the Lutheran contingent; T. Austin Murphy led the Catholics. According to one participant, "the purpose of the official Lutheran-Catholic dialogue group is not primarily symbolics, but theological exchange on the faith of our churches in the mid-1960s"(120).

In preparation for the dialogues, Emple discovered something that made him optimistic for success. On March, 1965, as Emple was going over two lists of proposing ground rules for the dialogue:

I was astonished that neither list included the subject of "Scripture versus Tradition" or of "Justification by Grace Through Faith." When I inquired about the omissions, I was told that the theologians, and even the church authorities, were no longer disagreeing on these subjects sufficiently to warrant special sessions to debate them! That may have been a bit optimistic...; but I responded that, if that development were true, it was so important that we needed to let the churches know about it! No longer could we assume that all of the divisive issues of the sixteenth century still separated Lutherans from Roman Catholics. Many of the differences had simply disappeared! (121).

Emple took the Vatican Council as the "signal" to start conversations with the Catholics and clear up differences that still separated them (122). The first dialogue, meeting in 1965 in Baltimore, was entitled "The Status of the Nicene Creed as Dogma of the Church." They discussed papers by Lutherans George Lindbeck and Warren Quance and the Catholic John Courtney Murray. In his paper, Lindbeck noted one difference between the two churches: "the

Catholic accepts the dogma as irreformable and the Protestant accepts the dogma as, in principle, reformable"(123). But Empe wrote how Lutherans were inconsistent on this point: "Lutherans do not in practice regard all of them [church dogmas and doctrines] as [reversible]," such as, the unity of the Son with the Father, or justification by grace alone through faith (124). In the summary statement, this issue remained unresolved: "6.c. The way in which doctrine is certified as dogma is not identical in the two communities, for there is a difference in the way in which mutually acknowledged doctrine receives ecclesiastical sanction." But they both agreed on this point: "7. We together acknowledge that the problem of the development of doctrine is crucial today and is in the forefront of our common concern"(125).

Both groups found that they were reasonably comfortable discussing doctrine with each other, and the dialogues continued. Dialogue II, meeting in Chicago in February 1966, discussed "One Baptism for the Remission of Sins." In 1966 and 1967, Lutherans and Catholics met for Dialogue III, entitled "The Eucharist as Sacrifice." Dialogue IV covered a related issue, "The Eucharist and the Ministry." "Papal Primacy and the Universal Church" was the focus of Dialogue V, while "Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church" was covered in Dialogue VI. This takes us to the year 1975. Empe died in 1979, but the dialogue on "Justification by Faith" continued from 1978 to 1983.

A detailed description of these dialogues would make a paper in itself. Here, we will be content on their hopes

for unity from their discussions. This is what Emple thought needed to be done after six dialogues:

If we clear the underbrush of misinformation and caricatures and grow in understanding, will our separated lives come together again? Will not genuine differences keep us going our respective ways? That is what those dialogues were all about....Some of us hoped at the beginning that sufficient agreement in the apostolic faith might be found to permit joint worship, including intercommunion. Although this has occurred occasionally in local situations, it does not yet have the blessing and sanction of church authorities. The necessary growth together in the faith has not as yet taken place everywhere.

....Many of us still dare to hope... that intercommunion will be officially approved within a decade or two.

Beyond that hope lies the possibility of some formal structural ties. Psychological obstacles loom enormous. They could hardly be overcome in our generation. Some persons have serious reservations that the legitimate variety of historic Christian traditions could ever be guaranteed by a monolithic structure. However the issue of papal primacy is resolved, there must be some provision to encourage fresh insights; to promote creative pluralism in authentic Christian faith; and to protect Christian freedom against the encroachment of bureaucracy which almost inevitably tends to stress uniformity at the expense of unity based on conviction (126).

Perhaps to some Lutherans, the dialogue with the Catholics was a disappointment. But the fact that there were discussions still indicated a triumph for liberal, ecumenically-minded Lutherans.

Literature

Among all the literature that came out from Lutherans after the Vatican Council, two deserve our attention. Vatican II: Renewal or Reform? was written by James Manz of the Missouri Synod. Although his writing might seem conservative by some progressive Lutheran standards, it nonetheless reveals that progressive philosophy was creeping into the Missouri Synod at this time.

In his introduction, Manz emphasized the change that

Vatican II made to Roman Catholicism and to councils in general:

Roman Catholicism had previously stressed her uniqueness, her wisdom, and her rights. Church councils had breathed forth a spirit of "triumphalism" as late as 1870. Vatican II emphasized the serving and seeking aspects of Christianity and contemporary concerns of mankind without in any manner compromising previously adopted dogmatic positions. The whole tone and direction has been on pastoral rather than doctrinal concerns, on openness rather than exclusiveness, on appreciation of modernity rather than censure (127).

That Vatican II was a blessing to all of Christianity was quite certain, according to Manz:

The powerful manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit within the Roman Catholic Church should be a cause for joy and thanksgiving on the part of all believers. Jesus Christ is being exalted as man's only Savior and Mediator; Holy Scripture is regarded by very many as the primary source of revelation; juridical tendencies and that which is merely of human origin are deemphasized. All this and much more shows that we have a situation within Christendom which is different from and much better than that which we had known before the time of Vatican II (128).

Manz divides his book in two parts; the first section looks at Rome before the Council, and second looks at the changes Vatican II brought about. In the first section he mentions the traditional Catholic errors that have continued since the Reformation. "The Roman Catholic Church, in the Tridentine decrees, did not teach the doctrine of justification by the grace of God through faith alone.... [This] is still official [Catholic] teaching" (129).

Likewise, the worship of Mary is a persistent error: "The present position of the Virgin Mary in the Roman Catholic ^{Church} is the result of a historical development which would have been impossible if theologians had been firmly grounded in the

doctrine of grace and had based their teachings solely on Holy Scripture"(130).

Because these serious errors were not rooted out (Manz also mentions the papacy and the sacrifice of the mass), Vatican II's reform work has to be considered limited:

The formal accomplishments of the Second Vatican Council, whose first session began on Oct. 11, 1962, and whose fourth and final session ended on Dec. 8, 1965, are comparatively modest and limited when judged on the basis of the viewpoints and beliefs of a Christian who adheres to the Evangelical Lutheran faith (131).

Rather than taking this approach, however, Manz evaluates the council with an ecumenical perspective:

The latest Roman Catholic Church Council is an event of major importance for all Christians today. God has a message for us now, a message from His Word being delivered from within the context of the ecumenical movement. It began in Protestant churches, spread to Eastern Orthodoxy, and now embraces also the Roman Catholic Church. Certainly the Second Vatican Council, if it accomplished nothing else, has placed the Roman Catholic Church and her people into the mainstream of the ecumenical movement (132).

Manz spends considerable time discussing what went on in the various sessions and tensions that are building up in the church between progressives and conservatives. Though he covers the council rather objectively, his sympathies seem to be with the ecumenists when he makes statements like these: "The ecumenical movement and the Second Vatican Council have done much to promote understanding and use of the Holy Bible"(133). "We should never forget that it has pleased the Lord of the church to use scholars of the type who have often been called 'liberal'--both within and without the Roman Catholic Church--to foster increased study, understanding, and use of the Holy Bible"(134).

To a dyed-in-the-wool progressive, Manz might seem conservative because he criticizes the humanistic approach to the Bible (135). He also criticizes "ecumaniacs" and advocates this process of fellowship:

As the ecumenical movement begins to take root in wider circles and in a deeper manner, we may expect that sincere Christians everywhere will become much more cautious. It is one thing to engage in dialog and even in joint prayer. It is quite another to make final preparations for the actual practice of fellowship on all levels: at the altar, in the exchange of preachers, and in the actual training and ordering of those who serve in the sacred ministry (136).

The best way to describe Manz might be a "cautious progressive." He might not have fallen for every progressive theory floating around Lutheranism in those days, but his favorable reaction to Vatican II tells us that he, too, was cheering the triumph of progressive philosophy.

Finally, we take a look at the man who participated in the council as much as any Lutheran--George Lindbeck. In 1970 Lindbeck published The Future of Roman Catholic Theology, subtitled Vatican II--Catalyst for Change. He dedicated this book to Concordia Lutheran Seminary in St. Louis, where he conducted some lectures and had a favorable response. In this book Lindbeck intends to point out the direction Roman Catholic theology is taking, as guided by the Vatican Council.

Lindbeck's view of the council, as we've noted before, was definitely favorable. In his introduction he wrote:

The old issues between Roman Catholicism and the Reformation are being resolved or radically recast. When looked at from new perspectives, positions which have been traditionally opposed now appear to be complementary aspects of a fuller grasp of Christian truth. There are also areas in which Roman Catholic

dogmas, even when radically reinterpreted, still affirm what the Reformation is committed to denying. These disagreements diminish the possibilities of [convergance]...I shall argue, however,...that the new approaches authorized by Vatican II are nevertheless making possible a Roman Catholic view of the structure of the church and its dogmatic authority which is perhaps not incompatible with the Reformation (137).

Lindbeck sets the tone for the entire book right there. He doesn't deny that areas of disagreement still exist between Lutherans and Catholics, but he does minimize them in support of the "new perspective" of the Vatican council.

Lindbeck saw as a part of this "new perspective" a new view of the church: the relativistic theory that it is natural for the church to change along with history.

Lindbeck covers this in "The Church's Secular Mission":

...The church can no longer be envisioned as fundamentally immutable or changeless. Because it is a pilgrim people journeying from one epoch to another and from one culture to another, it is seen as deeply involved and affected by the vicissitudes of history, not as skimming lightly over the waves of change. The image of the people fits in with our contemporary awareness that the church is an historically and sociologically concrete community subject in one dimension of its being to the same laws of change as any other society (138).

One consequence of this theory is a degraded view of the church: "The church and the explicitly Christian means of grace can no longer be conceived as having a quasi-monopoly of God's redemptive activity." The church is not enough to save the world: "In order to bring about [the redemption of mankind as a whole], God must be guiding all the processes of history towards the goal, not simply working redemptively in and through the church"(139). How could Roman Catholics support this view and the statement "No one can be saved outside the Church"? Lindbeck answers:

Contemporary Roman Catholic proponents of this outlook insist that this does not mean there is salvation apart from Christ, for it is precisely the gratia Christi which is at work preparing for the new humanity in many anonymous ways outside the church as well as explicitly with in it (140).

In a footnote Lindbeck states, "This is also the teaching of Vatican II: 'God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him' ([Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity] 7)"(141). If Lindbeck is drawing a correct conclusion, Vatican II is debasing the church and the means of grace in favor of universalism.

Regarding the liturgical reforms, Lindbeck's feelings run from disappointment to pleasure:

Many of the practices which the Reformation regarded [as] liturgical abuses are not eliminated. We should remember, however, that Vatican II has, by its own account, only begun the task of practical reform and that its fundamental principles point towards vastly greater changes in the future (142).

On the other hand, Lindbeck felt that both traditional Protestant and Catholic worship needed to get rid of "a medieval pattern of guilt-ridden preoccupation with one's own salvation." After all, this would not fit in "the modern world"(143).

Just as important to the church as liturgy is ecumenism, at least in Lindbeck's opinion. "The ecumenical endeavor to manifest visibly the unity of all Christians is fundamental to the church's nature as sign and instrument of the eschatological unity of the divided world"(144). The Vatican Council made efforts to subdue its teaching that the church is the Roman Catholic Church by saying that it

"subsists in it" (from the Constitution on the Church, par. 8). (145). In addition, because Roman Catholics were subduing centralism in their hierarchy, Lindbeck guessed that the "sons of the Reformation" might one day accept the Pope as a head of the church through a "historical development," a compromise allowing Protestants some freedom (146).

In the chapter "Dogma and the Word of God," Lindbeck examines the problem of dogmatic infallibility. Lindbeck shows that dogma is not infallible, but uses relativism rather than the Word to support his views:

Such convictions [that revelation is chiefly the eternal truths contained in the Bible, or oral tradition along with the Bible] become untenable once creation is viewed as in process....Dogmas can no longer be thought of as changelessly adequate embodiments of revealed eternal truths, for such embodiments do not exist. Historical studies have made Catholics as well as non-Catholics intensely aware of the time-conditioned character of all human language, even when it is used by the church. Meaning depends on the situation, and to repeat abiding truths in the same old ways in radically new circumstances is not to preserve, but to betray them. The only way to say the same thing in a new context is to say it differently.

This change of outlook was expressly recognized and approved by the Council (147).

Lindbeck also pointed out that, in the Constitution on Divine Revelation, Catholics still taught inerrancy in the Bible regarding passages on salvations. However, they did so "in such a way as to allow virtually unlimited freedom to the scholar in the use of critical and historical methods" (148). As Lindbeck remarked, "This acceptance of modern historical-critical methods of studying the Bible is of fundamental importance," because "exegetes who use these methods can no longer be divided among confessional lines"

(149).

Even though the changes that Vatican II made for Catholics were not fully "satisfactory" (e.g. not enough was done to change papal and Marian dogmas), Lindbeck believed, "there is enough of the new in the Council's documents to give solid support to a Catholic form of the sola Scriptura" (150). Lindbeck concluded that the Vatican II Council is a mixture of new and old, "but it is the new which is likely to shape the future"(151). Lindbeck was pleased with the Roman Catholic's move toward a progressive position, and believed that conditions would slowly develop where like-minded Catholics and Protestants could unite into one world church.

James Manz and George Lindbeck bring us to a conclusion of our look at liberal Lutheran reactions to Vatican II. We have seen their preoccupations with union, relativism and ecumenism in the mid-1900s. This colored their reactions toward the council itself so that, when Vatican II did make some moves toward the left and used some of their language, they believed Catholicism was finally returning to the "truth." The "truth" in progressive terms included historical-criticism, relativism and, in some circles, universalism. For liberals, Vatican II was a triumph that translated into ecumenical dialogues continuing to the present time, and hopes for unity in the future.

4. Epilogue

When I first began to research this topic, I knew that there would be a few Lutheran writings out there that would cover Vatican II from an ecumenical viewpoint. What surprised and depressed me was how much of this type of material had been written. I don't want to give the impression that every Lutheran in the 1960s was a liberal, but the abundance of these writings paints a very sad picture of the state of Lutheranism today.

However, I want to end this paper on a positive note. Not every American Lutheran body had turned liberal, progressive and ecumenical by the 1960s. The Wisconsin Synod still held fast to the Scriptures and to a quia subscription to the Lutheran Confessions. Though they didn't write as much as the ALC or LCA or LWF writers of the '60s, they wrote the truth about Vatican II: Roman Catholicism is just as lost today as it was at the time of Luther.

In the 1967 volume of the Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, Harold Wicke wrote a two-part paper entitled, "An Evaluation of the Lutheran Confessions." A major portion of this paper examined the Vatican Council and compared it with the Lutheran confessions. As we will see, Vatican II does not compare well at all.

One good thing Wicke found about the council was its encouragement for more Bible reading in the liturgy. "We rejoice whenever people hear more of the Scriptures and the Gospel of Christ. The power is still that of the gospel" (152).

However, that was about the only good thing Wicke would say about the council. Wicke took a good look at the doctrinal statements of Vatican II and evaluated them according to Scripture. Here is what he found:

How does the doctrine of Vatican II compare with [the] Scriptural stand of the Lutheran Confessions? Though the Council opened with a message to humanity, in which the fathers of the Council expressed the wish, 'In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the Gospel of Christ,' it will become clear that this renewal did not free the Gospel, for even after the Council had finished its work, Roman doctrine still included human righteousness in the ground of justification, and thus the distinctions made in the Lutheran Confessions still stand. In fact, this was not felt to be the big question facing the Council. The same Message to Humanity spelled out the direction the Council was to take thus: 'As we undertake our work therefore, we would emphasize whatever concerns the dignity of man, whatever contributes to a genuine community of peoples'. (153).

Wicke noticed that in the entire collection of documents, there was very little mention of forgiveness of sins or of justification by faith. There were, on the other hand, many misconceptions on the power of man and the nature of sin, as well as their traditional errors regarding the Lord's Supper and Mary (154).

It was obvious to Wicke that nothing essential had changed in the Roman Catholic Church.

Despite statements to the effect that the Counter-Reformation has come to an end, Vatican II is still a reaction over against the Lutheran Confessions, though they are never mentioned by name. The Roman Church still demonstrates herself as Mother and Defender of all the abuses cited in our Confessional writings. In the documents of Vatican II the un-Biblical theory of merit is still reacting to the core of the Gospel proclamation, justification by faith in Jesus Christ (155).

If this is the case, how could so many Lutherans be blind to the fact that Vatican II and the Lutheran Confessions were still at odds with each other? Wicke explains by pointing out the condition of modern theology:

The Protestant world is a confessional wilderness. There are conservative elements, and groups within Protestantism, but there are also such (possibly in the majority) who have rejected almost every doctrine taught in Holy Scripture. The ecumenical movement has captured the thinking of most, as the activity of the World Council of Churches demonstrates. Its aim, of course, is a one-church world. The least common denominator determines its doctrine. In fact, almost all doctrines have become open questions (167).

Many Protestants, including many American Lutherans, have fallen away from the pure truths of Scripture to follow relativism and ecumenism. While this saddens us, it reminds us of how thankful we should be to God for preserving his Word with the Wisconsin Synod and with other confessional, orthodox Lutherans. We pray that we may never forsake God's Word for shallow, relative theology that leads to ecumenical dialogues without doctrinal and confessional unity.

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