

## THE CHALLENGE OF AFRICAN CHURCHES IN THE ECUMENICAL DISCUSSION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ETHIOPIA

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**Abstract:** This article aims to explore the challenges faced by African churches in achieving ecumenism and unity amidst geographical, cultural, and confessional divisions. It examines the various models of Christian unity that have been proposed in the last century and highlights the ongoing debate surrounding the desired form of unity. The significance of reconciliation and forgiveness in addressing divisions rooted in sin is underscored, although complete reconciliation may not always be attainable.

Drawing upon the example of Gudina Tumsa and the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), this article stresses the importance of maintaining cultural diversity within the church while simultaneously fostering unity. It argues against the notion that ecumenism should eradicate individual identities or enforce a new confessionalism, and instead advocates for a framework that respects and encompasses ongoing differences and disagreements. Additionally, the article posits that the goal of ecumenism should not be to eliminate disagreements or impose a standardized theology, but rather to encourage individuals to engage with and learn from diverse theological traditions, leading to a more comprehensive comprehension of their own strengths and weaknesses.

Furthermore, the article puts forth the concept of differentiated consensus as a potential strategy to facilitate ecumenical dialogue. This approach allows different theological traditions to manifest the same essence of the Christian faith in distinct forms. By engaging in thoughtful discussions, common ground can be discovered, and theological variances can be viewed as less significant than previously assumed. Numerous bilateral dialogues have successfully employed this approach, enabling a deeper understanding, addressing misunderstandings, and acknowledging that diverse expressions of faith can coexist within the parameters of acceptable Christian teaching.

I would first of all like to thank Samuel for the invitation to speak at this conference, which is an honor and has been an opportunity for me to stretch my own theological knowledge through careful study of the life and works of Gudina Tumsa. Reading through the lectures from previous forums, I have become a little envious to realize that I am one of the few to speak on this great man who never had the chance to meet him in person. I am already looking forward to doing so in the heavenly kingdom! For now I must be content to learn through the record he left behind and the witness of others.

I would also like to say how humbled I am to be asked to speak on such a topic as the challenge of African churches in ecumenism. Like many other Christians and theologians of the North Atlantic world, I have only gradually and recently come to recognize the vast world of Christianity outside my own small piece of it. I am inspired by the vitality of Christian faith in the Global South and sorrowful over the misdeeds past and present of those whose culture I share. I hope that this lecture can in some small way contribute toward rebuilding bridges of trust in the church across all kinds of divisions, whether they are geographical, cultural, or confessional.

I approach this topic from my position as a Lutheran theologian who is also an ecumenist. There are many people who still believe that there is a fundamental tension between these two realities—claiming for oneself the Lutheran theological tradition, wishing to foster it and continue in it, while at the same time being an ecumenist, desiring the unity of the church and recognizing as full and true

Christian's others whose theological approaches are dramatically different. I spend as much time trying to develop Lutherans' understanding of Luther as I do trying to understand other Christian communities and traditions. How can it be that these two tasks do not stand in stark contradiction to one another?

The fact that this question must be asked, that an apparent contradiction must be resolved, indicates that the nature of the unity we seek is still very much up for debate. Over the past hundred years, since ecumenism first emerged in response to the travesties of missionary competition, many different models of Christian unity have been proposed. They have spanned every possibility from mere practical cooperation to complete organizational merger. Each proposal has its strengths but each has probably even more weaknesses. If anything has become clear, it is that the true unity of the church will ultimately be a gift of God, not an achievement of humankind. Gudina himself noted the important distinction between "ecumenism" understood as churches working together and the "unity" for which Jesus prayed for during his last evening with his disciples.<sup>1</sup>

What then can we be working toward ecumenically as the Holy Spirit forms us into one church? What kind of oneness are we seeking? It is all too clear that many of the divisions of the church—possibly even most of the divisions of the church—are rooted in human sin, in failures to listen and failures to forgive, in self-seeking and other-hating, in competition and power struggles and prejudice. Some of these breaks, it seems, will never be reconciled. Other times there are glimmers of hope that reconciliation is possible, even centuries later. Here I am thinking of the Lutheran World Federation's decision to apologize to the Mennonite community for Lutheran complicity in the execution of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, which was met by a full declaration of forgiveness by the Mennonite World Conference.<sup>2</sup> But such cases are unfortunately rare.<sup>3</sup> We could easily spend our whole lives working toward ecclesial reconciliation where sin lies at the root. Such ecumenism addresses failures in love.

But the many faces of the church are not due only to sin, and it is extremely important that we recognize this fact. There are also disagreements about truth. These surely are and can be driven and exacerbated by failures in love. But disagreement is not in itself sinful. None of us has the God's-eye view of reality. All of us are limited and struggling to understand a world, and a Lord, that are beyond our full comprehension. Because of this, disagreement is valuable. It is even essential. It forces us to think more clearly, more acutely. It forces us to expand the scope of our knowledge, to consider things outside our own personal experience. Genuine disagreement born of a struggle to understand, as opposed to false disagreement born of a failure to love, is a triumph and a blessing. I would argue that loving those with whom we disagree, without sacrificing our own convictions, is a mark of Christian maturity. It is also a mark of ecumenical progress.

Therefore, we should *not* say that the goal of ecumenism is the elimination of disagreements or the creation of a super-theology or mono-theology that would suppress disagreements or fresh thinking because it claimed to solve every problem and promised to put an end to troublesome arguments. If that were our goal, we would ironically have to return to a strategy of competing theologies, a winner-takes-all approach, with the assumption that one theological tradition would ultimately win and all the others

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<sup>1</sup> Gudina Tumsa, "The Responsibility of the ECMY toward Ecumenical Harmony," in *Witness and Discipleship: Leadership of the Church in Multi-Ethnic Ethiopia in a Time of Revolution: The Essential Writings of Gudina Tumsa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Hamburg: WDL-Publishers, 2007), 14.

<sup>2</sup> See *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ: Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission* (Geneva and Strasbourg: Lutheran World Federation and Mennonite World Conference, 2010), available online at [http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Report\\_Lutheran-Mennonite\\_Study\\_Commission.pdf](http://www.lutheranworld.org/lwf/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/Report_Lutheran-Mennonite_Study_Commission.pdf). I should also mention my recent discovery that Mekane Yesus helped to protect the tiny and vulnerable Mennonite church in Ethiopia during the Derg regime; today the partnership between the two is very strong. It is a great joy to see such a reversal of historical patterns!

<sup>3</sup> Some steps in this direction on the Roman Catholic side can be seen in *Unitatis Redintegratio* §7: "So we humbly beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive them that trespass against us," and also in "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past," available online at [www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000307\\_memory-reconc-itc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000307_memory-reconc-itc_en.html).

would lose, or that each church would donate one portion of its heritage but toss everything else away in order to make way for this new, final, silencing mono-theology.

Such a notion may sound ridiculous, yet I think many people fear and suspect that this is exactly what ecumenism is all about. But such a model is as unfaithful as the notion that there is and should be only one true church culture. Here again I think of Gudina's insistence that the EECMY should *not* be a monolingual, monocultural church, but rather a church that deliberately includes many languages and cultures—a conviction that, I suspect, was related to the bad Oromo experience with the Amharic cultural hegemony of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was not to make everybody speak and understand *one* language, but to make all the people there understand the gospel in their *own* language. In mission we do not seek to draw all people into one single culture that alone houses the gospel, but for the gospel to move out into every culture and make each culture its dwelling place. This means that people are entitled to remain "at home" in their own cultures, even as the gospel takes hold of those cultures, inhabits them, and transforms them.

But Pentecost also implies that we need to step outside of our home cultures, out of those places comfortable for us, to see what other people's homes are like. (Note how hard it was even for the apostles to leave Jerusalem; the Spirit had to keep nudging them out.) This is an essential part of growth into Christian maturity so that we don't make the mistake of thinking that the gospel and our home culture are logical equivalents. We will naturally equate the two if not pushed beyond our boundaries. The tension between "at home" and "away" has to be maintained, not eliminated. We *are* allowed to be at home where we are at home; we are *not* allowed to deny other people the right to be at home where they are at home.

This cultural analogy helps us to grasp what ecumenism should and should not be. Ecumenism should not demand that no one feel at home anymore, leaving one theological tradition for an ecumenical super-theology that belongs to everybody and nobody. But ecumenism *should* drive people to travel beyond the borders of their home theology and home church to see what else is out there, which will then help them to be better Christians both at home and abroad. Ecumenical voyaging helps people see the weaknesses and failures in their home church—every church has them, for none can manage everything perfectly—and also to recognize their own real strengths. It should make them discover that there are real Christians over there—and thus that *their* church is also *Christ's* church, which means it is also *our* church, even if in different clothing! We may legitimately critique other Christians, but we may not deny them the baptism that made and keeps them Christian. This approach to ecumenism should also take some of the burden off of "converts"—those people who find that they are more at home in a different church home than the one where they started. The anti-ecumenical approach means that converts from one kind of Christianity to another often feel the need to reject everything in their first church home and accept everything uncritically in their new church home. That does not contribute to the unity of the church, either!

For all these reasons, I sometimes wonder if the appeals made for an "ecumenical theology" or "ecumenical education" aren't a kind of softer, gentler colonialism in disguise. The new ecumenical consensus can become its own new confessionalism, as all-encompassing and demanding of total loyalty as any confessional formulation of the past. That is not a real strength but an attempt to buy unity cheaply without the ongoing hard work that every generation and every place must take up for itself. Efforts toward unity that don't allow for ongoing difference and disagreement are really just seeking to strip people of their identities, even if for a supposedly good cause. This is surely not the unity that Jesus prayed for.

A wiser ecumenical approach is embodied in the strategy known as differentiated (or differentiating) consensus. Its basic insight is that the various theological traditions may express the same content of the Christian faith in different forms, forms different enough that other Christians may not immediately recognize them as testifying to the same content. Through careful ecumenical discussion, two church traditions with different expressions and formulations may find that they hold a great deal more in common than previously believed. Most of the bilateral dialogue work done over the past fifty years has come to exactly this conclusion. It has allowed the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox,

for instance, to declare that their break at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 was due to semantic misunderstandings rather than mutually exclusive conceptions of the nature of Christ; and it has allowed Lutherans and Roman Catholics to co-sign the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, addressing what seemed to be the most foundational difference between them.<sup>4</sup> In neither case was either church asked to stop being itself or to abandon its own forms of expression and distinctive emphases. Instead, it was asked to recognize that the other church's theology lay within the boundaries of acceptable Christian teaching, such that division and denial of the other's Christianity was no longer the absolutely required consequence of the difference. Naturally, this method cannot solve every problem. Sometimes differences are not merely apparent but real. But it has been a helpful tool to discover when, in fact, the difference is not as great as confessional polemics, driven by failures in love, have assumed them to be. For this reason, Pope John XXIII often said, "What unites us is much greater than what divides us"—which, given the history between the various church factions, is a really remarkable thing to say!

Ecumenical concepts are usually much easier to understand when matched with concrete examples. I can think of no better example of this best kind of ecumenism than the way the EECMY under the leadership of Gudina Tumsa dealt with the challenge of Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Encounters with Pentecostal missionaries had led to a revival especially among the youth of Ethiopia. They encountered fierce resistance from their fellow Lutherans and were so frustrated that they were prepared to walk out altogether. They told Gudina that they wanted to start a new church because their own church was dead. Gudina's witty but pointed response was, "Jesus died, but he was raised from death. Don't build a new church, but rebuild your old church. Raise it from death."<sup>5</sup> Under his leadership, a group of forty leaders in the EECMY got together to address the charismatic challenge and make recommendations to the church at large, through analysis of the scriptural witness to the Holy Spirit and evaluation of how other churches had dealt with charismatic renewal. The result was far and away the most theologically rich, positive, and nuanced response to the charismatic movement that any Lutheran church in the world has ever produced. It was all the more remarkable for its fidelity to Lutheranism at the same time that it called the Lutheran church to open up to something new. The encounter with Pentecostal movements recalled this Lutheran church to its *sola Scriptura* standard of judgment, since it forced a more careful reading of the Bible's words about the Holy Spirit. It also offered fresh empowerment in the church's fundamental calling to evangelism.

I see in this document and its results a distinctly African gift to world Lutheranism and the ecumenical movement. For example, its experience as a mission church that had decided to take responsibility for itself allowed it to take the words of Augsburg Confession 7 more seriously than the missionaries themselves ever did. As the document's section on "The Conflict over Ways of Worship" reports, "There should be a possibility in the congregations to have meetings with more freedom and openness for the manifestation of different gifts of the Holy Spirit. Ways of worship cannot be considered as doctrine. 'It is not necessary that human traditions or rites or ceremonies instituted by man should everywhere be the same' (Augsburg Confession, Article 7)."<sup>6</sup> From there the document recommends both that "young people [be] taught the meaning of the traditional worship service" and that the EECMY "develop one common liturgy for the whole Church, a liturgy with a form that fits better in our Ethiopian context." Prayer for the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit and for healing are encouraged, as is speaking in tongues as long as interpretation is offered as well.

One also sees in this document how Ethiopian Lutherans, living in what we may call a "Spirit-sensitive" part of the world, were able to detect the poverty of Lutheran reflection since Luther on the Holy Spirit and how they sought to address the lacuna. Lutherans in all parts of the world would be well-served by studying the first section of this document in its careful review of the Bible's teaching on the

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<sup>4</sup> Sometimes the passage of time is the only thing that can make such consensus possible. There is no doubt that a great deal of evolution in Catholic thought had to take place first to bring it to its agreement with Lutherans in the Joint Declaration.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Hoffman (ed.) "Summary of the Discussions," in *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa: Lectures and Discussions: First Missiological Seminar 2001*, 2<sup>nd</sup> expanded ed. (Hamburg: WDL-Publishers, 2007), 143.

<sup>6</sup> See Kilian McDonnell (ed.) "The Work of the Holy Spirit," in *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, vol. II, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1980), 150–182.

Holy Spirit—and if they did, perhaps they would be less startled by the kind of worship practices they find in the Lutheran churches of Africa, and maybe even wonder what they're missing back home!<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, this document is exemplary for its serious, peaceful assessment of an ecclesial challenge. Perhaps because of its taking place outside the Christendom context of the West and all the historical bitterness that dogs those churches, the EECMY was able to consider calmly what should and should not divide the church instead of simply reacting and then hardening.<sup>8</sup> It did so by making the insightful distinction between "necessary conflicts"—namely the conflicts between God and Satan when the latter wants to destroy a reawakening of faith—and "unnecessary conflicts," such as those over authority, doctrine, and styles of worship, all of which can be resolved through scriptural guidance and righteous behavior. This distinction echoes the language of the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration), which perhaps inspired it: "[W]e must steadfastly maintain the distinction between unnecessary, useless quarrels and disputes that are necessary."<sup>9</sup>

And finally, this document of the EECMY is a gift to the wider church because it strikes at the heart of a longstanding but unfortunate "ecumenical" slogan that claims, "service unites, doctrine divides" or sometimes "spirituality unites, doctrine divides." This is, first, naïve about service and spirituality. Service involves ethics, and ethics has proven to be as divisive as ecclesiology! We see this especially in the heated discussions in Africa and elsewhere over development and the proposed moratorium on missionary aid.<sup>10</sup> And it was precisely the form of spirituality in charismatic worship practice that threatened the unity of the EECMY. Certainly "worship wars" are an ongoing problem in churches everywhere. A careful and considered *doctrinal* evaluation of the question is what rescued the EECMY from a potential split, strengthened its own theological position, and set the stage for the phenomenal, miraculous growth in the forty years that have followed.

It should come as no surprise to fans of Gudina Tumsa that an ecumenism which chooses one aspect of the Christian faith over the others—whether it is service, or spirituality, or doctrine—is going to falter and will lack the resources it needs to address the challenges it faces. The hallmark of Gudina's own theology was the call for a wholistic witness. His deep immersion in Scripture and the Lutheran theological tradition enabled him to grow in unprecedented directions, not only in his embrace of charismatic renewal but also in his bold confrontation with the powers and principalities on behalf of the people of God.<sup>11</sup> In him we see the remarkable power of a Christian faith where service, spirituality, and

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<sup>7</sup> For more on this issue, see my "Spiritless Lutheranism, Fatherless Pentecostalism, and a Proposed Baptismal-Christological Corrective," available online at <http://strasbourginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Seminar-2011-Wilson-Spiritless-Lutheranism-Fatherless-Pentecostalism.pdf>, and Kenneth Mtata, "The Holy Spirit in the Lutheran and Reformation History: An African Perspective," available online at [www.ecumenical-institute.org/en/2012-summer-seminar/](http://www.ecumenical-institute.org/en/2012-summer-seminar/).

<sup>8</sup> Which is, essentially, what most Western mainline Protestants did in response to charismatic renewal. The American Lutheran Church sent a psychologist to investigate; the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod ultimately had to broker a "peace treaty" with the charismatic elements; and a former bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America deliberately separated charismatic pastors from charismatic congregations in order to suppress the movement.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds.) *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 530.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Gudina Tumsa's essays, "The Moratorium Debate and the EECMY," "Memorandum to Emmanuel Abraham," and "Report at the Ethiopia Consultation," in *Witness and Discipleship*.

<sup>11</sup> That said, it is unfortunate that Gudina's stance has been tied to a rejection of the two kingdoms doctrine, in his own words and those of others. See, for example, Øyvind M. Eide's report of a conversation between himself and Gudina on the topic of the two kingdoms, in which the latter said, "It's impossible for an African to divide the secular from the religious, mind from body, faith from development. *Confessio Augustana* was relevant to the needs of the reformers. African churches of our time have to develop a 'Confessio Africana,' a confessional stand relevant to African social, political and ideological reality"; quoted in "Integral Human Development," in *The Life and Ministry of Gudina Tumsa*, 37. Eide shares Gudina's criticism, as does Tasgara Hirpo in the article "Rev. Gudina Tumsa's Contribution to the Understanding of a National Church, Partnership and Independence in the Global Church, as Viewed in and Developed in the EECMY," in the same volume, p. 91. I fully acknowledge that the two kingdoms doctrine has a complex heritage and is not unproblematic. However, it seems often in these essays to have been misread as a systemic isolation of the church from the world, which is not what Luther meant. In fact, critiques of Muslim mergers of religion and society or the religio-political dominance of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church could have been greatly strengthened by study of Luther on this topic, since his own context of state-church power alliances was

doctrine work in concert and not in competition. Wholistic Christianity, as Gudina saw it, is equally a matter of service, spirituality, and doctrine. It would be a false unity that built on the first two and neglected the third.

To develop further Gudina’s wholistic approach to Christianity, of maximal service to Lutherans engaged in their ecumenical vocation, it would be valuable to reassess what portions of Luther’s writings are taught and studied by seminary students and church leaders. Attention is usually, and not surprisingly, focused on what spawned the Reformation—where Luther differed from medieval teaching, where he differed from other reform movements, what his distinctive “breakthroughs” were. I certainly don’t wish to ignore these vital parts of the story, but the need to define Lutheranism over against every other theological tradition is evident in the exclusive focus on such texts. It also means that huge portions of Luther’s massive output are ignored. How different a theologian he would appear if equal time were given to his moral and social treatises, to his advocacy for diakonia and political involvement, or to his personal letters addressed to people in all different situations. Then we would see the wholistic Luther, who undoubtedly would also make much more sense to Ethiopian Lutherans and others involved in the development of an indigenous wholistic Christianity for their own contexts. The source of Luther’s social and diaconal teaching in his confession about Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity would then be much clearer.

I do, however, sometimes worry that Christians in the rest of the world look to Africa to be progressive on matters of service and spirituality, to take the lead on diakonia, but to leave doctrine aside. The apparent assumption is that there are so many pressing issues that require solutions *right now*, such as HIV/AIDS, the abuse of women, human trafficking, political crises, and so forth, that Africans can’t be expected to make serious contributions in the area of doctrine. As if doctrine were a kind of luxury for people to engage in during their spare time, but service and spirituality were the real business of the Christian life! This is a deadly division of what needs to be a seamless whole. In our world today, so interconnected through global media, we all, not just Africans, can be condemned to a state of continually reacting to current events, staggering from one crisis to the next. Gudina speaks to this problematic as well; in his “Memorandum on Some Issues,” he writes: “Theology is a relative statement on the central message of the Christian Gospel, in an attempt to translate that message to the people in the process of revolutionary changes in this country of ours. Lack of a sound theological reflection in the present Ethiopian situation has, in my opinion, affected our work in a negative way, which if allowed to continue uncorrected will be very harmful to the life of this church to which we have committed ourselves for service.”<sup>12</sup> For the sake of both church and world, we need to insist on time for quiet, calm, study, reflection, and preparation. Gudina’s friends testified to his lifelong habit of quiet prayer, theological reading, and meditation on Scripture. Doctrine is not a bonus activity for a church at peace; it is the daily confession that God is *this* way, that God’s creation is *this* way—so, therefore, we pray *this* way, we preach *this* way, we act *this* way, and not *that* way. Service and spirituality lose their power and get sucked into the sinful systems of the world if not anchored in the basic confession of God’s own being and mighty acts.

Let me put these concepts again into a more concrete form. A wholistic ministry needs to be founded not only on a wholistic anthropology but also on a wholistic christology. Human physical and spiritual needs are deeply interconnected, but they can only be addressed with the necessary compassion and strength by a savior who exists for both and in both, who in his incarnation shares their physical and spiritual needs, and who in his death and resurrection fulfills both sets of needs, integrating them, holding together what sin and death wish to tear asunder. There are outstanding resources for such a christology in Luther’s writings, and also in his far-off theological ancestor, Cyril of Alexandria—who, of course, was one of the great African theologians of the early church. I’d like to outline here briefly some profitable

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actually quite similar to the Ethiopian situation. Misgana Mathewos gives a more accurate reading in “Gudina Tumsa’s Hermeneutical Interpretation of the Bible from Global and Ethiopian/African Perspectives,” *Swedish Missiological Themes* 98/2 (2010): 207–8.

<sup>12</sup> Gudina Tumsa, “Memorandum on Some Issues,” in *Witness and Discipleship*, 57.

lines to explore in their writings for the sake of appropriating a wholistic christology that will in turn undergird a wholistic ministry for the whole church.

First, I want to dip into one of Luther's most important treatises, his Confession Concerning Christ's Supper. Though its ostensible purpose is to refute Zwingli<sup>13</sup> on the nature of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, it is also an essential source for Luther's wholistic christology and its soteriological implications. One of Luther's firmest convictions is of the unity of the person of Christ. There are two natures, divine and human, but in Christ they are so united as to make one single person, one agent, one actor, who is the incarnate Son of God named Jesus, the Messiah. Luther will have nothing to do with christologies that have each nature "do its own thing"; for him, salvation depends on both the human and the divine being fully involved in every action of Jesus'. Thus Luther writes: "Wherever this person is, it is the single, indivisible person, and if you can say, 'Here is God,' then you must also say, 'Christ the man is present too.' And if you could show me one place where God is and not the man, then the person is already divided and I could at once say truthfully, 'Here is God who is not man and has never become man.' But no God like that for me!"<sup>14</sup>

From there Luther draws an analogy between the unity of the human person, body and soul, to the divine-human union in Christ: "The humanity is more closely united with God than our skin with our flesh—yes, more closely than body and soul. Now as long as a man lives and remains in health, his skin and flesh, body and soul are so completely one being, one person, that they cannot be separated; on the contrary, wherever the soul is, there must the body be also, and wherever the flesh is, there must the skin be also. You cannot indicate a special place or space where the soul is present alone without the body, like a kernel without the shell... Thus you cannot shell the divinity from the humanity and lay it aside at some place away from the humanity."<sup>15</sup> Note that this argument comes in the context of a dispute over the Lord's Supper. The question is not only about where the risen Lord Jesus can be present, but also what of himself he offers in the sacrament, and what of us he heals and renews with it. The Supper is for both body and soul, not for one or the other. It intends to forgive and heal all that makes us *us*, because it is all of Christ present for us.<sup>16</sup> You see the connections here: a wholistic christology serves a wholistic anthropology with a wholistic sacramentology. Gudina surely would have approved!

We hear the same themes in Cyril of Alexandria, whose works Luther probably never read, as they weren't available in western Europe at the time, but because of their common wholistic approach to the unity of Christ they drew the same conclusions. In a strongly worded letter to Nestorius, Cyril defends the title "Theotokos," Mother of God, for Mary on the grounds of the unity of the person of Christ. As he says, "...Jesus Christ is considered as One, the Only-begotten Son, to be honoured with one adoration together with his own flesh. We confess that he is the Son, begotten of God the Father, and

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<sup>13</sup> I am persuaded by Luther's Christological argument in this treatise. At the same time, I find his deliberately offensive mockery of Zwingli to be a real failure. Certainly, it was part of the rhetoric of the time, and certainly Luther realized how much was at stake for us and for our salvation. Nevertheless, if he had really hoped to draw Zwingli to the truth, could he have expected to do so with such disrespectful attacks on Zwingli's person, thought, and even his Swiss German language? Luther's style closed down any possibility of growth in understanding on Zwingli's part instead of fostering it. Even though we can accept Luther's arguments today, we should definitely reject his insulting strategies of (non)communication.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, "Confession Concerning Christ's Supper," in *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.) [hereafter cited as LW], 37:218–19.

<sup>15</sup> LW 37:219.

<sup>16</sup> An excellent resource for those looking to develop wholistic christology-anthropology-sacramentology further is Regin Prenter's classic work *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001 [1946]), an account of Luther's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This quotation gives a sampling of Prenter's argument: "The teaching about a bodily fruit of celebrating the Supper is a protection against the spiritualistic interpretation of the fruit of the Supper, an interpretation which might be very natural because of the strong emphasis on the forgiveness of sin in the words of institution. Because Luther does not know a Christ who is not the *bodily* incarnate God, a purely 'spiritual' Christ, therefore he does not know a mode of receiving Christ, which is *only* spiritual without simultaneously being bodily. He does not know of any reception of forgiveness of sin which is not simultaneously a hope about the resurrection of the body. If it is really the incarnate Christ we receive, then we receive a *whole* (spiritual-bodily) Christ as whole (spiritual-bodily) human beings... *a celebration of the Supper which does not contain the assurance and hope of a bodily fruit is not a spiritual celebration at all*" (276–77). Prenter's italics.

Only-begotten God; and although according to his own nature he was not subject to suffering, yet he suffered for us in the flesh according to the Scriptures, and although impassible, yet in his Crucified Body he made his own the sufferings of his own flesh; and by the grace of God he tasted death for all: he gave his own Body thereto, although he was by nature himself the life and the resurrection, in order that, having trodden down death by his unspeakable power, first in his own flesh, he might become the first born from the dead, and the first-fruits of them that slept."<sup>17</sup> You hear in this passage how important the union of the two natures is: Jesus Christ is really God, the eternal and unchangeable, Who is not naturally subject to death, but out of His compassion He took human flesh from the body of His mother to become fully and completely human, which means subject to change and death. Only those two opposites perfectly united in one Person do justice to the wonder of salvation. Cyril has little use for other theories that sort of loosely combine the two natures but don't actually unite them in one Person. Christ is not just a "God-bearing man," and God is not in Him the same way God is present in the saints, for example. The Son of God "made his indwelling [in the flesh] in such a way, as we may say that the soul of man does in his own body."<sup>18</sup>

And, just like for Luther, the unity of Christ's person in order to save all the human body and soul alike means that we need a sacrament that offers the whole Christ to the whole person. Therefore, Cyril writes, "we offer the Unbloody Sacrifice in the churches, and so go on to the mystical thanksgivings, and are sanctified, having received his Holy Flesh and the Precious Blood of Christ the Saviour of us all. And not as common flesh do we receive it; God forbid: nor as of a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of worth, or as having a divine indwelling, but as truly the Life-giving and very flesh of the Word himself. For he is the Life according to his nature as God, and when he became united to his Flesh, he made it also to be Life-giving..."<sup>19</sup> This is, indeed, a wholistic christology for the wholistic ministry of the whole church.

I'd also like to suggest that the remarkably similar christologies of Luther and Cyril could form a solid foundation for an EECMY-Ethiopian Orthodox dialogue, since Ethiopians, like other Oriental Orthodox, were the loyal followers of Cyril in the split that followed the Council of Chalcedon. In fact, you could say that Luther retrieved the insights of the Oriental Orthodox over against the christology espoused in the Tome of Leo, also approved at Chalcedon, which came to dominate Western theology and in Luther's mind reached its unfortunate apex in Zwingli.

I should now conclude this wide-ranging commentary on ecumenism and its challenges for Lutherans today with my specific charge to speak about Africa and its place in today's ecumenical discussion. Although I do not want to be so presumptuous as to speak for or to an entire continent and its Christians, it is my opinion that Africans generally, and Ethiopian Lutherans particularly, could do little better than to follow the lead of Gudina Tumsa in insisting on the wholistic nature of the ecumenical task. I would like to see the Truth and Reconciliation work done in South Africa provide a model for a more honest assessment of the bad history between Christians. I would like to see more of the interweaving of service and doctrine as exemplified in the recent Anglican-Lutheran dialogue on diakonia entitled *To Love and Serve the Lord*.<sup>20</sup> This study took its shape during a bilateral meeting in Moshi, Tanzania, in 2006, when three African bishops (Sebastian Bakare and Musonda Mwamba on the Anglican side, N. P. Phaswana on the Lutheran side) suggested a study of how diakonia could concretely enable Anglican-Lutheran ecumenical cooperation. I would also like to see the emergence of more African scholars of the early church and the Reformation, whose cultural distance from later European history, especially post-

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<sup>17</sup> Philip Schaff (ed.) "The Epistle of Cyril to Nestorius with the XII. Anathematisms," in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 203; available online at [www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.x.viii.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.x.viii.html). Although it is strongly worded, it is not as insulting as Luther's to Zwingli. Cyril, however, was one of the most notoriously unpleasant of the early church fathers. Once again, we should emulate the theology but reject the strategy.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 202–3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>20</sup> "To Love and Serve the Lord: *Diakonia* in the Life of the Church," The Jerusalem Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission (ALIC III), 2012. PDF available from the Lutheran World Federation by email request.



Enlightenment and post-industrial revolution, could shed fresh light on these theologians. And I look forward to all the surprises that African theology will offer that I cannot even imagine at this moment, the distinct gifts that it will present to the whole body of Christ. Though I am not "at home" in Africa the way I am in the North Atlantic world, I have been greatly blessed by my visits there, whether in person or by books or through friends. May our visits with one another strengthen the conviction that we are truly all members of one church, and that this church belongs to Christ, to whom be the glory now and forevermore.