

The Genius of Catholicism
Society of the Most Holy Trinity
John F. Baldovin, S.J.
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Many thanks to you, Amy, for that very generous introduction. And thanks to you, Paddy Rooney and the leadership of the Society of the Holy Trinity for your kind invitation to address you on the topic of 'the genius of Catholicism' in light of your own rule.

If I may begin by saying that I have great affection and respect for the Lutheran tradition, a respect that began when I heard Krister Stendahl preach the Seven Last Words in the old St. Peter's Church on Lexington Avenue in NY (i.e., before the current structure which lies under the Citycorp Building) on Good Friday when I was a sophomore in college. Prior to that, however, I had to be dragged kicking and screaming into a Lutheran Church at the age of 12 to attend the wedding of one of my sister's best friends. We were still taught then that if you even entered a Protestant church you would go to hell. Those days are long gone - thank God.

My respect for your tradition continued when I took a summer course in Comparative Dogmatics with George Lindbeck as a young Jesuit. In fact, Professor Lindbeck was very helpful in helping me to enroll at Yale for my doctorate and graciously served on my comprehensive exam committee. I would list the large number of Lutheran theologians and liturgical scholars from whose collaboration I have benefitted over the years but I would inevitably leave someone out.

It goes without saying that the Lutheran passion for and fidelity to the Holy Scriptures are admirable and an enormous gift to the Church Catholic. Let me quote to you with appreciation part of the Preamble of your own rule:

- 7. Work together to shape a parish pastoral practice centered in the Word and the sacraments that is consistent with the catholic Faith as formulated in the canonical Scriptures and confessed in the ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions (Chapter VII).
- 8. Serve the cause of Christian unity as confessing members of the western catholic Church, stopping at nothing, in so far as God and conscience allow. (cf. Augsburg Confession, Preface) (Chapter VIII).

In addition, over the years I have come to appreciate more and more the utter Christocentricity which is characteristic of Lutheran piety and theology. To all of this I would add, in terms of your own rule, the admirable nature of your own commitment to daily liturgical prayer and to what we Roman Catholics would call sacramental penance.

His dictis, let me turn to my topic. You have asked a liturgical/sacramental theologian to address you and so it will come as no surprise that my reflections will center on sacramentality. But it is impossible to deal with liturgy and sacraments outside of the context of ecclesiology and so a number of my reflections must center on the Church as well.

Let me do this in three parts, which is typically Jesuit! First, I will deal with the fundamental sacramentality of the Catholic tradition – and here I am using Catholic in the broad sense not merely speaking of Roman Catholicism. Second, I will make a plea for transcending the somewhat stale debates of the 16th century. I will focus on eucharistic theology and the nature of

the ordained ministry. My premise will be that we have learned a lot about theology and reality since the 16th century and that modernity, even with its flaws, has a great deal to teach us. Here let me applaud the following statement in your rule:

Recognizing the ecumenical dimension of the Church's life and theology, we will be open to contemporary voices that seek to express the Church's orthodox, catholic, and apostolic tradition.

Third, I will consider three specific issues that affect our understanding and appreciation of the sacraments: the institution of the sacraments by Christ, the Eucharistic Prayer and apostolic succession. No doubt the last two issues will raise the blood pressure of some gathered here. Fourth, and finally, I will consider several specifically ecclesiological issues like between Scripture and Tradition and the nature of the ordained ministry.

1. The essential sacramentality of the tradition.

Given your own Rule both in its Preamble and in the body of the text this should not at all be controversial. Theologically since Irenaeus in the second century at the very latest the sacramentality of the Christian tradition has been based on two fundamental factors: the goodness of creation and the incarnation of the Word of God. As to the Incarnation I have already mentioned what I perceive to be classical Lutheranism's Christocentricity based of course on the Scriptures and on the ecumenical creeds affirmed in your own confessional documents.

The relationship between the sacraments and especially the Eucharist is affirmed time and again among Christian theologians, for example St. Thomas Aquinas' beautiful opening verses of his hymn for the Feast of Corpus Christi, *Pange Lingua Gloriosi*:

*Sing, my tongue, the Savior's glory,
Of His Flesh, the mystery sing;
Of the Blood, all price exceeding,
Shed by our Immortal King,
Destined, for the world's redemption,
From a noble Womb to spring.*

*Of a pure and spotless Virgin
Born for us on earth below,
He, as Man, with man conversing,
Stayed, the seeds of truth to sow;
Then He closed in solemn order
Wondrously His Life of woe.*

In terms of the relation between sacrament and creation let me quote two contemporary pieces from Pope Francis. The first comes toward the end of his 2015 encyclical on care for our common home, *Laudato si'*:

It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. (236)

The second is from Pope Francis' letter on liturgical celebration, *Desiderio desideravi*, of June 29 this year.

The Liturgy is done with things that are the exact opposite of spiritual abstractions: bread, wine, oil, water, fragrances, fire, ashes, rock, fabrics, colors, body, words, sounds, silences, gestures, space, movement, action, order, time, light. The whole of creation is a manifestation of the love of God, and from when that same love was manifested in its fullness in the cross of Jesus, all of creation was drawn toward it. It is the whole of creation that is assumed in order to be placed at the service of encounter with the Word: incarnate, crucified, dead, risen, ascended to the Father. It is as the prayer over the water at the baptismal font sings, but also the prayer over the oil for sacred chrism and the words for the presentation of the bread and wine — all fruit of the earth and work of human hands. (42)

Let me add that all of this affirms an anti-Gnostic reading of the creation account of Scripture: "And God saw that it was good." The created world is at the heart of sacramentality. As William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, affirmed a hundred years ago – Christianity is the most materialist of all religions.

2. The challenge and opportunity of moving on from the stale debates of the 16th century

We need to face the challenge of moving on from what I'll refer to as the stale theological debates of the 16th century especially as they were perpetuated by later Lutheran scholasticism and Roman Neo-Scholasticism. Here let me refer to your own rule in Chapter VIII on ecumenical commitments: "the Lutheran ecumenical vocation is the *unfinished business* of the sixteenth century Reformation." You go on to cite the Augsburg Confession of 1530 which it seems to me can easily be read in an irenic ecumenical spirit today.

Although modernity has some serious shortcomings like radical individualism and a naïve belief in progress, it also has some clear benefits. We cannot be intellectually responsible and deny the importance of historicity. The Catholic theologian Bernard Lonergan made this point well when he wrote about the difference between a classicist view of the world and an historicist view of the world. This was also an insight of late 19th and early 20th century Roman Catholic Modernism, a movement which was very much misunderstood by the Roman Church since ultimately the aim of theologians like Alfred Loisy and George Tyrell was to combat Liberal Protestantism as represented by someone like Adolf Harnack.

You know, I am sure, that many traditionalist Roman Catholics today criticize Vatican II and the subsequent reforms of the Church as ‘protestantizing.’ They mean that of course as a criticism. One could put it another way and say that four hundred years later in a less polemical climate we Roman Catholics can happily acknowledge where you have been right. After all it took us a long time to accept the necessity of celebrating the liturgy in the language of the people as well as to re-introduce communion in both kinds. Theologically, the best example of this reconciliation and appreciation of the genius of the Reformers is the 1999 “Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith.” This declaration is a fine example of what we are coming felicitously to call ‘reconciled diversity’ for example in the following:

“We confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation . . . for as sinners they stand under God’s judgment and are incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God’s grace. . . . When Catholics say that persons ‘cooperate’ in preparing for and accepting justification . . . they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities” (JD 19-20).]

Coming back to moving on from 16th century debates, it seems to me that a number of recent Lutheran/Roman Catholic statements are fine examples of transcending the old stalemates. Here let me refer to the ELCA/RC statement ‘Declaration on the Way’ from 2005 and the remarkable Finnish Lutheran/RC statement “Communion in Growth” of 2017.

From 2018-2020 a joint Lutheran/RC seminar met at the annual meetings of the North American Academy of Liturgy, entitled “The Seminar on the Way”. Unfortunately, our report was never finalized due to the Covid pandemic, but you can appreciate how far we have come from the following material on the Eucharist:

“We regard that there are no remaining obstacles to full communion between our churches. Issues of the real presence and of communion in both kinds have long been resolved, as represented both in doctrine and liturgical practice. Counsel for the reverent use of any of the holy food that remains from the sacramental meal is very clear in both churches, though Lutherans may need greater episcopal leadership and presbyteral discipline in following that counsel and Roman Catholics may need greater clarity about the linkage between the adoration of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist outside of mass and the mass itself, with its intention for eating and drinking that presence. We have spent much time considering the classically divisive issue of Eucharistic sacrifice. Also, here we have come to believe that no church-dividing issues remain. When the ancient anaphoras of the churches – including the Roman Canon – are carefully read, it is clear that the “sacrifice” referred to is the *sacrificium laudis*, the sacrifice of praise which the Letter to the Hebrews calls “the fruit of lips that acknowledge God’s name” (Hebrews 13:15). This is that act of communal thanksgiving – *eucharistia* – which many in the ancient church saw as fulfilling the promise of Malachi 1:11 and enacting something of the “reasonable worship” that Paul describes in Romans 12:1. Such thanksgiving is by no means a “work” or an attempt to barter with God. It is rather a response to God’s overwhelming gift in Christ. That overwhelming gift, the “sacrifice of Christ,” is present

in fullness in the Eucharist, drawing communicants again and again into life in Christ as a turning toward the needs of every neighbor. Here is the further part of Paul's "reasonable worship:" serving the needy world. And here is the "sacrifice" which the author of Hebrews regards as "pleasing to God" (13:16).

In the future, for the sake of deeper unity, both Lutherans and Roman Catholics will do well to continue to teach and enact the strong ethical implications that flow from participation in the holy meal. Furthermore, in mutual accountability to each other in what profoundly matters for our unity, it is important that Lutherans continue to recover the Eucharistic prayer as a formal, liturgical expression of the *sacrificium laudis* and that Roman Catholics continue the pastoral responsibility of teaching Christian sacrifice as *sacrificium laudis* and care for the neighbor.

We acknowledge that for much of the church's history the eucharistic sacrifice has been intimately related to that of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. As the Lutheran confessional documents and the Council of Trent's decree on Eucharistic sacrifice make clear, however, there can be no doubt that Christ's sacrifice is all sufficient and once-for all. Recent theology (especially Trinitarian theology) as well as biblical studies of memorial (anamnesis) have enabled theologians of all persuasions to rethink the meaning of Eucharistic sacrifice. In fact, there are as many different approaches within the churches as there are between them.

In addition, the embodiment of Eucharistic worship in both of our churches needs to be re-thought so that the theology that unites us can be understood in a visceral (i.e. truly liturgical) manner. In other words, the posture of the assembly at prayer, the employment of a diversity of liturgical ministers, the manner of receiving holy communion, and the gestures of the presiding minister all play a vital role in how we understand what we do liturgically."

At the heart of our agreement is a renewed appreciation of baptismal ecclesiology - which should come as no surprise to a Lutheran given Luther's own high esteem for baptism, the priestly nature of the people of God and the recovery of baptism as the essence of conversion and therefore of penance. One could also say that (though the phrase is not used), a baptismal ecclesiology is at the heart of the Vatican II Liturgy Constitution's insistence:

14. Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

I am convinced that it is only as we come to truly appreciate a baptismal ecclesiology that we can overcome the clericalism that affects us all. I say this fully aware that we Roman Catholics have more work to do in this area than other Christian bodies. With regard to clericalism it seems to me that the Lutheran tradition has been fortunate in abandoning the

terminology of “priest” for the ordained. There is only one priesthood – that of Jesus Christ. It is fair to say that this priesthood is shared in a unique way by the ordained – but only for the sake of serving the primary manifestation of Christ’s priesthood – the common baptized people of God. The marvelous liturgical vision enshrined in the Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy that I have just quoted cannot be fully realized until we Roman Catholics have been able to integrate that vision with the ordained ministry. I am also convinced that such an integration will also open the way for Roman Catholics to imagine broadening its pool of candidates for ordination as we seem to be poised to do with women deacons. I’ll come back to ecclesiology in the next part of the paper. But let me stay for a moment with the nature of the ordained ministry.

One of the unresolved tensions in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and in the decades that have followed it is the relation between the ordained ministry and the rest of the Church as I have just suggested. Both the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and the second chapter of the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), a chapter entitled “the People of God”, affirm a strong sense of what I have been calling baptismal ecclesiology, an understanding of the Church based on the common priesthood of the baptized. At the same time the third chapter of the same Constitution on the Church emphasizes the hierarchical nature of the Church and specifically the unique role of the ordained priesthood. After acknowledging the priestly nature of all God’s people, the document goes on to differentiate the baptized and the ordained: “though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ.” (LG 10)

One can note a subtle shift in the interpretation of this statement in the similar affirmation in the Catechism of the Catholic Church which puts the emphasis on the difference between the ordained ministry and the priesthood of the baptized:

The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests, and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate, "each in its own proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ." While being "ordered one to another," they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace - a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit - ,the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. the ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church. For this reason it is transmitted by its own sacrament, the sacrament of Holy Orders. (CCC 1547)

“Directed at the unfolding of baptismal grace.” Just so. The Catechism does end up filling out what *Lumen Gentium* had said by revealing that the sole reason that justifies differentiating the ordained ministry from all of us who share a common baptism is service, an imitation of the supreme foot-washer, the Lord Jesus. Of this I do not need to convince you because it is firmly embedded in the Lutheran tradition with your robust appreciation of baptism.

You can see how crucial an understanding of the sacraments as embedded within the Church is to all of this and it is a good example of why we need to get beyond what I have called the stale debates of the 16th century. In the 16th century both Catholics and Reformers developed their sacramental theology out of their understanding of Christology. This was the heritage of

Scholasticism. It was only with the *ressourcement* that led theologians like Johan Adam Möhler in the mid-19th century to begin to appreciate how the sacramentality of the Church as the sacrament of Christ grounds the individual sacraments of the Church that we could begin to get beyond the less-than-satisfactory insistence on the sacraments as being literally instituted by Christ. Here, although historical-criticism is by no means sufficient for a genuine interpretation of Scripture, it is indeed necessary since it helps us understand how much of the New Testament is written with the lens of resurrection faith and not a literal account of the Lord's words and deeds.

I say all of this with a view to transcending the debates of the 16th century. Given what I have said above I think we can agree that much has been achieved in the past sixty years or so and that it is now much easier for Roman Catholics to acknowledge and appreciate the Catholicism which is so deeply embedded in your tradition, as your Rule so amply demonstrates. But in the meantime, I think it's important for us to recognize that Catholic sacramental theology has changed a great deal in the past century and much of the change I would imagine to be agreeable to most Lutherans. This theological transformation was very well expressed by the late Notre Dame theologian, Mark Searle in a 1987 essay entitled "Infant Baptism Reconsidered"

"During the past twenty or thirty years, sacramental theology has undergone an enormous transformation. Undoubtedly the leading indicator if not the cause of this transformation is the abandonment of the questions and vocabulary of Scholasticism in favor of more existentialist and personalist approaches to understanding what sacraments are and how they function in the Christian life. What began as a recovery of the ecclesial dimensions quickly led to further shifts: from speaking of sacraments as "means of grace" to speaking of them as encounters with Christ himself; from thinking of them primarily as acts of God to thinking of them mainly as celebrations of the faith community; from seeing sacraments as momentary incursions from another world to seeing them as manifestations of the graced character of all human life; from interpreting them as remedies for sin and weakness to seeing them as promoting growth in Christ."

It does seem to me that one would want to nuance what Searle says about contrasting sacraments as acts of God vis-à-vis celebrations of the faith community in two ways. First it seems to me that the Catholic tradition can never abandon the affirmation that sacraments are "means of grace". I doubt any Lutheran would deny that. Second, and related, both Lutherans and Roman Catholics need to affirm that sacraments are first of all acts of God =and then subsequently our response, which in itself is due to God's grace. Here Vatican II's language of liturgy as both summons and source comes in handy. After all, as Lutherans know better than most, *Gottesdienst* first means God's work for us and *only then* our faith-filled response. I would comment further that Searle's last item: "*from interpreting them as remedies for sin and weakness to seeing them as promoting growth in Christ*" merits a good deal of reflection and conversation. An approach to Christianity which is primarily (and I use the adverb advisedly) sin-oriented is in my opinion dysfunctional. I am aware of how important awareness of sin is to the Lutheran tradition and we should never abandon the necessity of true conversion and repentance. We only know sin, however, because we know God's grace in Christ by faith. Otherwise, sin is merely misdeeds. And so, Pope Benedict XVI was certainly correct when he repeatedly stated that Christianity is not primarily a set of rules or do's and don'ts but rather a saving encounter with a person, Jesus Christ.

3. Three Illustrative Issues

Now let me turn, as promised to three issues that relate to the genius of Catholicism and the relation between our two traditions, first Apostolic Succession, the Eucharistic Prayer and (with even more fear and trembling) the relation between Scripture and Tradition.

In the classic creeds we all confess belief in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The Roman Church, the Eastern Churches and the Old Catholics all claim apostolicity not only in terms of continuity in the tradition which has come down to us from the apostles but also in terms of a direct succession of bishops from the Twelve Apostles. As you are well aware, the Lutherans of the 16th century generally held to the theological opinion that there was no essential difference between bishops and presbyters. This was a position that was held by some in the early church and in a way was a logical conclusion from the fact that from the twelfth century on the essential factor that made someone a priest was the “power to consecrate” or confect the Eucharist. Thus, a distinction was made between the *potestas ordinis* (power of order) and the *potestas iurisdictionis* (power of jurisdiction). It was on this basis that German Lutherans and other Lutheran Churches allowed presbyters to ordain presbyters. On this basis, the Roman Church judged that Lutherans as well as other Protestant Churches had lost the chain of apostolic succession. For this reason, the official magisterial documents of the Roman Church refer to churches that have lost the apostolic succession as “ecclesial communions” and not churches. Let me add “unfortunately”. This position is unfortunate because it neglects the fact that other communions have indeed handed on the apostolic *tradition*.

The notion of a succession of hands, as it were, ends up being rather mechanical and can even be farcical. Think of the large number of so-called bishops who seem to multiply exponentially and whose lines of succession often start with a European bamboozling a Middle Eastern bishop into ordaining him a bishop so he could begin a “mission” in his home country. [I’ve always wanted to use the word ‘bamboozle’ in a theological lecture!] If you don’t believe me, pick up a copy of Peter F. Anson’s *Bishops at Large* which has recently been re-published. Or to appreciate the farcical side even more read A.N. Wilson’s two novels, *Unguarded Hours* and *Kindly Light*. In them Norman Shotover gets ordained a priest without knowing what he’s getting into by a wandering bishop whose “church” is in a boarding house. All of this is questionable even by the standards of medieval theology (and current Roman Catholic theology as well) which requires that the minister intends to do what the church intends in celebrating a sacrament.

If the “argument from farce” were not enough, we should take modern historical criticism into account. (Once again, I am talking about transcending the debates and presuppositions of the 16th century.) Historical criticism is able to demonstrate, persuasively I think, that the idea of a direct succession of bishops from the twelve apostles was an invention of Hegesippus and Irenaeus in the 2nd century to counter the Gnostics who claimed authenticity on the basis of their succession of teachers. For many decades whether the churches of Rome or Alexandria had what we would call a “monarchical bishop” is debatable. (See, for example, Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus* and Alistair Stewart, *The original Bishops*.) We can appreciate why the Catholic tradition wanted to ensure continuity in the apostolic tradition by a succession of historic individuals, but that does not or should not change our best efforts at getting at the facts. And the

facts, at least as far as we can ascertain them, demonstrate that a literal succession of hands is a fiction. And so, I can only find it lamentable that some non-Roman bishops seek out “genuine bishops” from the Old Catholics or the Swedes or elsewhere to “top up” their orders. At the same time, it is not unreasonable for Lutherans to reconsider the nature of the episcopacy – as has been done in a number of dialogues and in the decisions of the ELCA and the Episcopal Church with regard to mutual recognition of Orders.

The second issue I am addressing in this section is the use of a Eucharistic Prayer in the classic sense of the word. This is another example of the need to get beyond the presuppositions of the 16th century. Let me be blunt. Both Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas had extremely faulty understandings of what made for eucharistic consecration. By the 13th century the crucial issue in eucharistic consecration was the words of institution. The 12th century had seen a vigorous theological debate about the exact moment of consecration. In other words, did the bread become the Body of Christ after the words “This is my Body” or only after the entire institution narrative had been recited. Thomas Aquinas argued that although the words of institution alone sufficed for eucharistic consecration. But a priest would sin if he left out the rest of the eucharistic prayer, i.e., the Roman Canon, because the Church expected him to pray it. Luther’s reduction of the body of the eucharistic prayer to the words of the Lord was in a sense a logical corollary to this position of scholastic theology.

As modern research (or *Ressourcement*) into the development of eucharistic prayers has made abundantly clear the words of institution perform an important function in the eucharistic prayer but they should not be regarded as a formula of consecration. To that end the Roman Church has happily recovered the epiclesis or invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts and upon the gathered church as an important element in the prayer. Recovery of the epiclesis is also, I would hope Lutherans would agree, an antidote to a Pelagian understanding of the prayer. Even in the traditional Roman Canon what is done is done because God first does it and only on the basis of our pleading for God to act. Here I’m risking getting into the issue of eucharistic sacrifice which would take me too far afield. Let me just say that a number of modern theologians (of all stripes) have been able to argue for a theology of eucharistic sacrifice that can satisfy both Catholic and Protestant concerns – one that begins with God’s self-emptying in Christ (Phil. 2) and calls for our response a la Roman 12:1-2. The notion that Christ’s sacrifice is repeated in the Eucharist is a shibboleth. The Council of Trent is quite clear that Christ’s sacrifice is once-for-all although it is represented in the celebration of the Mass. Therein hangs a tale that I cannot get into here.

Moreover, the modern study of the development of the eucharistic prayer has achieved what a would submit is a fair consensus that the prayers of the first three centuries did not contain the institution narrative which we all would consider to be essential to the prayer today. The one exception would be the prayer found in the middle of the ordination rite of a bishop in the Apostolic Tradition. But it’s difficult to know which parts of that church order stem from the third century since our first manuscript witness is a Latin translation from the late fourth century – by which time the institution narrative was clearly established as a fundamental element in eucharistic praying. Further, there is one classic prayer, the Anaphora of Addai and Mari still in use in the Assyrian Church or the Church of the East (what we used to call the Nestorian Church). That prayer does not contain and to the best of our knowledge has never contained an institution narrative. In a remarkable statement in 2002, the Vatican Council on Christian Unity in conjunction with the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith declared that the Anaphora of Addai and Mari was a valid eucharistic prayer. Given the tradition of the Western Church for the

past eight hundred years this was an astounding statement indeed. The implication is that there is no such thing as a set formula of consecration which makes the rest of the prayer (to use a good Lutheran word) *adiaphora*. Contemporary sacramental theologians, both Protestant and Catholic, regard the entire prayer and even the entire prayer-action as consecratory. No doubt many of you here will be keenly aware of the vigorous debate about including eucharistic prayers in the 1978 ELCA *Lutheran Book of Worship* – and subsequently in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* and in the first, second and fourth examples of the Divine Service in the current *Lutheran Service Book* of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In my opinion it is no longer reasonable to oppose the use of a eucharistic prayer on the basis of the presuppositions of the sixteenth century. As Jaroslav Pelikan famously asserted in several places: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism the dead faith of the living.”

And so, finally in this section and here fools rush in where angels fear to tread, the relation between Scripture and Tradition. I have absolutely no intention of denying that Sacred Scripture is the *norma normans non normata* for all right-believing Christians. But the Scriptures, normative as they are, were born in the living assembly, as Gordon Lathrop among others has very ably argued. The Church’s liturgy, not the library or the pastor’s study, is the native home of the Bible. The Scriptures arise from the communal discernment of inspiration by the assembled Church and tradition means, not that Christ whispered some secret instruction to the apostles, but that the living Church has continued to interpret those Scriptures.

In addition, tradition is better understood as a verb than as a noun. Tradition is the ongoing reception by the church of the witness of the inspired Scriptures. And – if I may be so bold (maybe even foolish in this context) to add – this makes a decent argument for some kind of living magisterial authority even beyond the confessional documents that you all adhere to. The papacy of the 21st century (especially under Pope Francis) is not the papacy of the 16th century. Like anything in this world ecclesiastical authority can be problematic, *ecclesia semper reformanda*. All the same, it seems to me that the ecclesiastic structures of authority in the Roman Church including an episcopacy with more authority, are beneficial for the life of the church overall. I would hope that some day Lutherans and other Protestants will be able to acknowledge the authority of the Bishop of Rome even as we Romans struggle to appreciate the necessity of collegiality and synodality. I think you should ask yourselves – are the Lutheran Confessions an adequate source of authority without a living authority to interpret them authentically.

Let me conclude this reflection on the relation between Scripture and Tradition with a recent press conference of Pope Francis, 29 July – reported by Christopher White, NCR:

“Francis also demurred when asked about the possibility of reexamining church teaching against contraception. While the pope defended the work of theologians who have called for such a change, saying “one cannot do theology with a ‘no’ in front of you,” he said the church’s Magisterium “helps to understand the limits.”

While not addressing the question of contraception directly, Francis went on to note that there are plenty of areas of church teaching that have changed over time, saying that “a church that does not develop its thinking in an ecclesial way is a church that goes backward.”

“That is the problem of many today who claim to be traditionalists. They are not traditionalists, they are backwardists,” said the pope. “Tradition is the root of inspiration in order to go forward in the church.”

Conclusion

In reading your rule (without, I need to add, much if any knowledge of the history of the Society of the Holy Trinity) I observe how much you have come to affirm essential elements of the larger Catholic tradition of the Church. My comments here are meant only to help you reflect on those elements in light of one Roman Catholic’s observations. Your devotion to daily prayer, to the sacrament of penance (if I may dare to call it that) and to the real presence of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist is only to be admired. It is a wonderful gift to the church at large. And for that I can only give you thanks both for sharing your mission with me and for allowing me to reflect on it. Amen.