

Spirituality and Reception*

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I

The woman at the Well

I would like to begin our reflections with a story. It is a story of reconciliation and renewal. It is a story of St. Photini. Who is St. Photini – some of you will ask? Well, you may know her better as the Samaritan woman – the woman at Jacobs well. The story is found in the Gospel of St. John (4:7–42).

As I said, this story is a powerful one of reconciliation and renewal. God takes the initiative in Christ. He encounters the women at the well. Yes, it is a woman! A Samaritan woman! A woman who appears to be living in violation of the Mosaic laws. A woman whose life appears to be out of control!

Jesus initiates the dialogue: »Give me some water,« he says. Clearly, in his overture to the Samaritan woman, Jesus is going beyond the letter of the Mosaic law. He is reaching out to a person who was viewed by many as being impure and immoral. It was expected that a rabbi would not have any direct contact with such a person, especially a Samaritan and a woman.

The Samaritan woman knew this all too well. She was most probably a person who had experienced abuse and discrimination from those who claimed to be justified by the scriptures. How easy it was to use the scriptures as a justification to degrade and abuse a person. And so, the Samaritan woman responds to the Lord's request first with a question. Perhaps with some measure of sarcasm, she responds: »How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?«

The discussion between Jesus and the Samaritan woman continues. It gradually becomes more personal. Slowly, the woman reveals the condition of her life. And, Jesus enters into a dialogue of healing and reconciliation with her. Jesus does not shame the woman! Jesus does not condemn the woman! Jesus recognizes her inherent value as a daughter of God. Yet, at the same time, Jesus also wants the woman to see herself and her situation more clearly! He knows that reconciliation and healing requires an honest assessment of one's self.

Slowly and gradually, the healing and reconciliation mysteriously takes place. Despite her marital situation, the woman humbly and faithfully confesses that she waits for the Messiah. She acknowledges the deep spiritual longing which exists in her heart. She says with profound conviction: »I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.«

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And, Jesus honors her desire. He affirms her faith. Jesus declares that He is the Messiah. It is truly a moment of »Theophany«. He says to Photini: »I am he, the one who is speaking to you.« He is one who gives living water.

Jesus reveals in this encounter the love and mercy of God. And, Photini – the Samaritan woman – responds to the presence of Christ. In spite of her past and the abuse she had experienced, she comes to see herself as a beloved daughter of God.

But even more than this, she becomes a disciple. Her encounter with Christ was a life changing experience. Following her meeting with the Lord, she goes back to her village and begins to tell others about Christ. The person who knew abuse and rejection became a person who experienced God's healing and reconciliation. And, this gave her the wisdom and the courage to share the good news with others. Photini, the Samaritan woman, became an instrument of reconciliation. Yes, Photini – a woman – a Samaritan woman – a woman whose life was out of control ... became the »the enlightened one«, she became the messenger of Christ and His light.

But there is a part of the story that we should not forget. It is the reaction of the other disciples. You will remember that the disciples had gone to buy food just prior to the beginning of the encounter between Jesus and the woman. It appears that they were not present for most of the dramatic encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. When the disciples did return, they were astonished that Jesus was speaking to the woman.

Why were the disciples »astonished?« The action of the Lord challenged their religious sensibilities. The action of the Lord did not fit their expectations of how Jesus 'should' behave. The action of the Lord challenged their understanding of Scripture. The action of the Lord challenged their understanding of their religious tradition.

Perhaps the disciples also learned a lesson that day. Perhaps they learned that the reception of the Gospel message called them to go beyond that to which they were accustomed. Perhaps they learned that the reception of the Gospel message called them to a true metanoia – a true change of heart, which was open to the mighty actions of God and to the surprises of God in the present.

II

The Ministry of the Theologian

Many of us would consider ourselves to be theologians. Some of us use this title when we are asked to identify our occupation. Some of us may use this title because of our academic degrees. Some of us may have formally received this title from our Church.

But, I want to ask a simple question. What makes us theologians? Are we theologians simply because we have survived the pitfalls and snares of the academic jungle? Are we theologians simply because we teach a course in theology or because we are Church administrators? Are we theologians because we attend theological meetings? Are we theologians because we know the right people ... and have made the right connections?

Or, are we theologians because we have been gifted with the charisma of teaching the faith? Are we theologians because we have a mysterious vocation from God, to speak about God, in the presence of God, and for the sake of God's people?

There are two observations about theologians which always seem to come into my mind when I reflect upon our vocation. The first comes from Evagrius of Pontos. In the often cited remark, Evagrius says simply : »A theologian is a person who prays and the person who truly prays is a theologian.«¹

Immediately, Evagrius presents us with a perspective on the theologian which is different from the one to which we may be accustomed. Evagrius seems to remind us that the theologian is first and foremost a person of prayer, a person who is in relationship with God. According to this perspective, being a theologian is not first of all related to academic accomplishments, scholarly activity, or teaching ability. While not denying the relative value of scholarship, Evagrius is pointing to something more fundamental. He is, in fact, pointing to one's relationship with God. This relationship is one which is nurtured and sustained by prayer. Prayer is the key to this fundamental relationship.

There is another adage about theologians which deserves our attention. This adage comes from St. Gregory the Theologian, who was a teacher of Evagrius. At the very beginning of his Theological Orations, Gregory provides us with a warning and a challenge. Gregory says this: »Not to everyone, my friends, does it belong to philosophize about God – because it is permitted only to those who have been scrutinized and are past masters of contemplation and who have been purified in soul and body ... or at least are being purified.«²

Gregory causes us to think twice about the vocation of a theologian. According to Gregory's Christian perspective, it is not a calling for everyone. Those who dare to speak about God, according to Gregory, must meet certain requirements. Firstly, the theologian needs to be examined by members of the faith community. This reminds us that the theologian is intimately related to the Church. Secondly, the theologian needs to be a person of contemplation. This means that the theologian must be in a dynamic relationship with God. And, thirdly, the theologian needs to be a moral person who is growing in holiness. This means that the theologian cannot relate with God without living in communion with others. The characteristics about which Gregory speaks are fundamental features of what we might call today »Christian spirituality.«

Neither Evagrius nor Gregory would deny the value of learning, of scholarship, and of intellectual honesty. They are not representatives of that narrow-minded tradition which rejected at face value the importance of learning. Indeed, we should remember that both Evagrius and Gregory were persons who had benefited from a rich and comprehensive educational tradition. We know that Gregory especially received the best »secular« education of his day. He was a person not only nurtured in theology but also schooled in the classical tradition. His rich understanding of history, his knowledge of languages, and his skill in rhetoric are reflected in the vast body writings which have come down to us.

¹ See also *St. Nilos, On Prayer*, 60: PG 79, 1180 B.

² *St. Gregory the Theologian, First Theological Oration I*, 3, 15–20: BEP 59, 214.

No, we cannot say that Evagrios and Gregory are opponents of learning. Rather, Evagrios and Gregory are saying that there is something more important, something deeper which is of greater value. They are saying that there is something more important than the skill and discipline of the scholar. There is something more foundational in the identity of a Christian theologian.

This something is one's relationship with the living God. A theologian is first and foremost a person who is engaged in a loving relationship with God and His people in the midst of creation. It is precisely these relationships which provide the context and the foundation for theologizing. Authentic theology is nurtured by these relationships. Authentic theology is the fruit of these relationships.³

A Christian theologian, according to the tradition expressed by Evagrios and Gregory, is not simply the dispenser of religious facts. A theologian is not simply one who is knowledgeable about the scriptures and various theological traditions. A Christian theologian is one who knows God, and who speaks about God not as distant object but as an intimate friend. We simply cannot speak with integrity about God without living in communion with the living God. We cannot be teachers of God's people without living in communion with our brothers and sisters. The various disciplines of Christian life such as prayer and fasting, participation in the Eucharist, and expressions of charity are important means through which these relationships are expressed and deepened.

Here, I would remind you again of the story of the Samaritan woman. Her experience of Christ was a life changing event. Through her encounter with the Lord, Photini truly came to know the living God not as an abstract concept but as a loving friend. This was not simply intellectual knowledge. Rather, it was an experience which profoundly affected both her mind and her heart. It affected both the way she lived and the way she thought. Her experience of Christ affected her entire being. And, this experience became the basis for her new relationship with God and with others. It became the dynamic foundation for new relationships as well as for her teaching and for her missionary activity.

Are we willing to take seriously our relationship with God and how it affects our identity as theologians and our theological reflection?

A number of us have come to Moshi after attending a consultation on Theological Education and Ministerial Formation which was held in Oslo, Norway. It was a very fruitful meeting which brought together over 150 theologians and theological educators from throughout the world. It was also a meeting which raised very serious questions about Theological Education and the vocation of the theologian.

Many of the participants recognized that theological education places much emphasis upon factual knowledge and scientific methodology. But, at the same time, it pays little attention to the relationship between theology and the spiritual life. The fear was expressed again and again that theologians and ministers may grasp the technical language of theology – but they may have little personal appreciation of the Living God.

³ Metropolitan John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, Crestwood, NY 1985, pp. 67–122. See also his »The Church as Communion: A presentation on the World Conference Theme,« in: *Thomas F. Best and Gunther Gassma, (ed.), On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, Geneva 1994, pp. 103–111.

One of our colleagues here, Sister Mary O'Driscoll, reminded the participants in the Oslo consultation that theological education and formation must be concerned with our relationship with God. She said that our vocation »presupposes that all involved in ministry in the Church have a personal ongoing relationship with God. Their theological education and ministerial formation must, therefore, be concerned with nurturing this relationship. Without it, ministers would be inauthentic and shallow in putting before others the ultimate ecumenical vision. People who listen to us are easily able to distinguish between the minister who genuinely enjoys a relationship with God and the minister who does not. When ministers speak with conviction, their words carry weight. They are not the result simply of intellectual comprehension but also of sincere personal experience of the divine. Theological education and ministerial formation are ultimately about knowing God, developing a passion for God, penetrating experientially as well as intellectually as much as is possible for each person into the mystery of God's love.«⁴

We cannot easily escape the consequence of these observations. Simply stated, we must admit that the quality of the theologian's relationship with God and with God's people is bound to be reflected in the activity of the theologian. Our ability to assess and to address the critical issues which affect the Church and the society today and most especially the challenges related to Christian reconciliation are related not simply to our scholarly abilities, important though they may be. Rather, our ability to serve the Church and the process of reconciliation is directly related in the first instance to our relationships with the living God and His people and the creation. It is only when we take seriously those relationships will we be able to be nurtured by the Spirit and will we be able to use our scholarly abilities properly.

It seems to me that the Ecumenical Movement and the WCC need persons who take very seriously their vocation as theologians. This vocation can certainly make use of scholarly abilities. It certainly demands both humility and academic honesty. Indeed, our appreciation of the great issues of Christian divisions have been enriched by the thoughtful studies by theologians whose appreciation of biblical languages and historical events have enabled us to see our theological, ethical and liturgical differences in a new light, and which have enabled us to come to common understandings and consensus.

Yet, the vocation of a theologian is not simply a matter of being an expert in Church History or Dogmatic Theology or Biblical Studies. It is a vocation which requires that one be open to the workings of the Spirit in our lives and of deepening our union with Christ who leads us to the Father. It is a vocation which requires that we take seriously the values of the Gospel. Even as we struggle with our divisions and misunderstandings, we must be rooted in the reality of God and open to the working of the Spirit who guides us in all truth today.

Fr. Laurence, the abbot of the monastic communities of New Skete, speaks directly to this when he says: »No matter how professional and necessary our involvement in theological studies, it is the life in Christ in each of us that must be deepened at all times.

⁴ Sister Mary O'Driscoll, Response to the Presentation on The Importance of the Ecumenical Vision for Theological Education and Ministerial Formation, Oslo, Norway, 5 August 1996, Global Consultation on »The Viability of Ministerial Formation and Ecumenical Theological Education Today«.

Therefore, whether we speak on the sacraments or translation, on liturgical life or stewardship, or whether we consider the inner life itself from an academic point of view, we must recall that this is simply part of the whole of that mystery we call life in the Church. Practically, this means that my personal inner life cannot be ignored because of academic theological considerations, for the final step in that process will be a kind of spiritual materialism, every bit as destructive of life as secular materialism.«⁵

III

The Importance of Theological Reflection

During his recent visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople spoke about the importance of theology for our churches and for the ecumenical movement. Reflecting the rich patristic tradition, Patriarch Bartholomew began by saying: »When centered upon the Mystery of Christ and His Gospel, authentic theology always gives life or serves life. Just as the Lord is the »Giver of Life« and His words are 'words of life', our words about God must always reflect His teachings and His ministry. This means that our theology must be done with profound humility, with prayer, in the midst of the believing community, and for the sake of the salvation of the entire world. Like the Apostle Peter, we too must say: »To whom can we go, Lord, You have the words of eternal life« (Jn. 6:68)«⁶.

With these words, the Patriarch reminds us that theology seeks to nurture us in true life – which is the life in Christ. Theology guides us in our relationship with God, with one another, and with the world in which we live. Viewed from this perspective, theology is profoundly pastoral. Its ultimate concern is with healing, reconciliation, and union with God.

Having made some observations on the vocation of the theologian, I want to echo the words of the Patriarch and to affirm in the strongest way the importance of theological reflection both for our churches and for the ecumenical movement. From its beginning, the Faith and Order movement has made a monumental contribution to theological reflection especially on those issues related to Church division, and the process of reconciliation and renewal. The various bilateral dialogues and the recent agreements between the Churches have been nurtured by the work of Faith and Order. Our appreciation of so many aspects of Church History, the Scriptures, and the Liturgy have been enriched by the insights of those who have been active in Faith and Order.

Central to its work has been the fact that the Faith and Order movement consistently holds before the Churches and the WCC the »goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, in order that the world may believe«. Faith and Order reminds the Churches and the WCC that the issues of Christian division must be clearly recognized and studied. Those involved in

⁵ Hieromonk Laurence, *Orthodox Monasticism Today*, *GOThR* 32 (1987) 238.

⁶ *Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople*, Address at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Geneva, 12 December 1995.

Faith and Order struggles with their Churches in seeking to find consensus, in seeking to heal division so that the world may believe and God will be glorified!

Perhaps in these days, we have realized again how difficult this process can be. Indeed, the task before us can easily appear to be impossible – unless we really believe that we are participating in a special way in the reconciling ministry of Christ. St. Paul is reminding us of the divine actions when he says: »All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against us them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ ...« (2 Cor. 5:18–20). Our theological activity is ultimately not our own. Rather, it must constantly be related to the actions of God. We are ultimately the servants of the One who gives to all believers the »ministry of reconciliation«.

This »ministry of reconciliation« requires that we theologians engage together in serious and thoughtful theological reflection. But, this engagement must always be one which takes place in the presence of God, for the sake of all God's people, and for the glory of God. This reflection must always be done with a humility which is open to the Spirit's actions and to the Spirit's surprises. In the end, we must humbly affirm the perspective words of St. Irenaeus who says: »Not only in this present age but also in the age to come, God will always have something more to teach the human person and the human person will always have something more to learn from God.«⁷

If we believe this, then we also must be ready honestly to examine the quality – the character – the spirit – of our theological reflection. As we have already said, it is of absolute importance for the Christian theologian to be engaged in a dynamic relationship with God and His people. It is equally important that we are sensitive to the quality of our theological reflection. Our theological reflection must be such that God is glorified through our words. Our theological reflection must be such that our words lead to healing and reconciliation. Our theological reflection must be such that our words are open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit today.

This does not mean that we easily can ignore the historical points of differences between our Churches. On the contrary, I believe that we have an obligation to resolve in the present those issues coming from the past which continue to divide us. We cannot pretend that theological perspectives and, in some cases, doctrinal differences do not divide us. But, let us remember that we do not live in the past. Our approach to the disputed points must reflect the fact that we are at a different point in history from our ecclesiastical ancestors. If we so choose, we are able to look at the issues of division in a different perspective and to look at them together precisely because of the Spirit's prompting and guidance. If we so choose!

It seems to me that our Churches and the ecumenical movement can truly be enriched by this type of theological reflection. Many of you have learned about the financial crisis which afflicts the World Council of Churches. It is a serious matter. And I pray, that the Churches will respond to the Council with renewed support. But, I also believe that there is a spiritual and theological crisis at the World Council of Churches. This crisis of spir-

⁷ Cited in *Fr. Kallistos Ware*, *The Orthodox Way*, Crestwood, NY 1979, p. 185.

ity and theology manifests itself in a lack of clarity in the Council's fundamental vocation as well as a lack of internal coherence and an imbalance in the council's programmatic concerns.

With this in mind, I maintain that Faith and Order has a special role to play in affirming the critical importance of theological reflection on issues related to the restoration of visible unity and the fundamental meaning of the ecumenical movement. But, this can be done only if the theologians engaged in this critical work see themselves as servants of the Lord and His people.

Faith and Order can serve the Council by engaging in theological reflection which is not only rich in content but also rich in tone and texture:

We long for a theology which is doxological, which is rich in the praise of God and mindful of God's mighty acts of salvation.

We long for a theology which is salutary, which nurtures us in our growth in holiness, and which opens our hearts to God and to His people.

We long for a theology which is rooted in the community of faith, which is attentive to the concerns and needs of all God's people.

We long for a theology which integrates the personal and corporate, which integrates body and spirit, the material and the spiritual.

We long for a theology which celebrates the creation as God's gift and inspires us to be good stewards of our blessings.

We long for a theology which proclaims that we are God's daughters and sons, which reminds us that we are called to serve others in the name of the Lord.⁸

IV

The Context of Reception

Not long ago, I had the special opportunity to participate in the 200th Anniversary celebration of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in the United States. During the course of the week long observance, one entire evening was devoted to the issues of Christian unity. Over two thousand delegates and friends gathered to pray, to sing hymns and to hear the witness of those especially active in the quest for Christian reconciliation and unity. We were together for about four hours. I had never experienced anything like this event before.

As I reflected upon this event in the following days, I realized that I had experienced the process of reception. Within the context of worship, God's people were affirming the importance of reconciliation and unity. It was a process rooted in prayer. It was a process nurtured by the scriptures. It was a process which celebrated God's mighty actions in the present. It was a process which took seriously the dignity of all the People of God. I left

⁸ Nicholas Apostola, *Theology as Doxology, Ministerial Formation* 67:4 (1994) 35–45.

that special gathering with a feeling that the quest for reconciliation and unity truly had been advanced.

Because of our own academic training, we theologians frequently place a great deal of emphasis upon finding the 'right words'. Because of this, we often think that the divisions among the churches will be healed simply when we are able to find the 'right words'. So many of us have had the experience of spending hours upon hours in ecumenical group trying to fashion a document which contain the 'right words'. Indeed, the process of reception is frequently viewed, either consciously or unconsciously, as one which seeks only to find the 'right words' and then to present them to the churches for their acceptance.

Now, the words with which we communicate and seek to express consensus are important. I do not wish to underestimate the importance of using the appropriate words in our theological reflections. Indeed, part of our progress in the ecumenical movement has been made because we have struggled to recapture a common theological language which enables us not only to speak together but also to move beyond the 'words' which have been misunderstood or misinterpreted in the past. Words are important. And, there is a sense in which we must find the appropriate words to express our unity today.

Undoubtedly, this was a major concern of those at the Councils of Nicea in 325 and Constantinople in 381. In producing a statement of faith, the bishops certainly did not wish to give the impression that they were trying to capture in words the essence of Christian belief about the Trinity. But, they did struggle to find 'God-worthy' words which described God's mighty actions, which celebrated their faith and which could contribute to the unity of the Church. Their words were important. But, also important was the context in which the words were fashioned and received.

What we sometimes overlook today is the fact that words do not exist in a vacuum. There is always a context to our words. The words are always spoken by someone or by a group of persons within a context. The words are always heard or not heard by someone or a group of persons within a context. This means, quite simply, that the 'right words' may not be received if the context is not supportive of their positive reception.

Most of us would be quick to recognize that the divisions which afflict Christians are the result of theological misunderstanding and doctrinal differences. But the more closely we look at the historical situations in which divisions first developed, we would also have to admit that the context for dialogue had become contaminated. Groups of Christians came to see one another as adversaries. There was a breakdown in mutual respect and understanding. There was a separation for worship and prayer. There was a loss of a sense of common history and mission. Ultimately, there was a loss of a common mind which prevented the development of consensus or agreement.

It was not simply a matter of finding the 'right words'. The very context for discussion had been destroyed.

When many of the early Fathers and Christian teachers spoke about Christian divisions, they clearly recognized that it was not simply a matter of »words«. Certainly, the early Father do not deny importance of theological formulations. But, they recognize that it was also a matter of those who spoke the words and created the context. Divisions, they would tell us, are ultimately the result of a »hardness of heart« which manifest itself

in pride, arrogance, self-righteousness. It is for this reason that St. Maximos the Confessor could say very simply: »My children – nothing causes schism and heresies in the Church than the fact that we do not love God and do not love our neighbor.«⁹

Today, we must be sensitive both to the process of fashioning the words of theological consensus and the process of restoring the context which contributes to reconciliation. This means that the restoration of full communion between the Churches will not be accomplished simply through formal doctrinal agreements fashioned by theologians, not simply by finding the »right words«. These theological agreements are of immense importance. But, these agreements must be fashioned and received in a context of faith, hope and love where the whole People of God see themselves both as the »guardians of the faith« and as the »ministers of reconciliation«.

The context of reconciliation certainly must include the following: We need common prayer and liturgical celebrations which express our desire to be more fully united in accordance to the will of Christ. We need joint pilgrimages which remind us of the sacred places in our common history and which honor the saints from all our churches who are united in the bond of holiness. We need public acts of forgiveness which recognize the tragic excesses of the past and foster the healing of memories in the present. We need acts of common service to the needy and common witness in the society. We need to examine together our understanding of the scriptures, our patterns of worship, our style, our theological education and our expressions of ordained ministry with an eye towards renewing our parish life. And, we need to celebrate together every year the Great Feast of Easter, the festival of our reconciliation in Christ.

When we examine our common history, we see that there have been significant times when divisions have been overcome and reconciliation was received. A restoration of unity followed the Arian crisis and was expressed by the Council of Constantinople in 381. The historic Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed bears witness to this reconciliation. A restoration of unity between the Church of Alexandria and the Church of Antioch in 433 is expressed in a letter of Patriarch Cyril and Patriarch John. A restoration of unity between the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople also is expressed in a statement of the Council of 879.¹⁰

When I examine these documents of reconciliation, I am struck especially by two factors which are common to all three. Firstly, the statements are very brief. When one remembers the heated discussions which preceded the reconciliation, the utter simplicity of the statement appears surprising. Secondly, each statement is not very analytical either in content or in tone. Rather, each statement has a strong doxological and kerygmatic character.¹¹

Although these documents were composed centuries ago, I believe that their content and their tone tell us that something else happened! The reconciliations which were achieved with God's grace were not simply the result of finding the »right words«. While

⁹ See *Johannes Moschus*, *Pratum Spirituale*, 74: PG 87 III, 2925 D.

¹⁰ *Thomas FitzGerald*, *Unity and Prayer*, in: *Thomas F. Best and Dagmar Heller*, *So We Believe. So We Pray*, Geneva 1995, p. 53.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

the words are certainly important, they point to an even more basic reality. The documents do not create unity. Rather, the documents bear witness to a deeper reality of reconciliation which words cannot fully capture. While the words are important, what appears to be even more important is the attitude of the heart of those who fashioned the words and those who received them. Simply stated, a context had been created in which persons were open to the prodding of the Holy Spirit not simply with their minds but with their hearts as well.¹²

The restoration of Christian unity in our own time will be accomplished gradually and a very fundamental way when our statements of reconciliation are fashioned and received by persons who are open to the activity of the Holy Spirit who guides us in all truth and who reveals the presence of Christ in our midst. Our concern for reconciliation cannot be separated from our identity as persons who are striving to live in communion with God and with others through Christ. Our concern for the reception of consensus statements cannot be separated from our willingness to engage in theological reflection which reflects these relationships.

The Centrality of Christ and His Gospel

Finally, we need to affirm together that the reality of Christ and His Gospel is at the very heart and center of our quest for reconciliation and the restoration of visible unity. This may seem obvious to you. But, I feel that there are tendencies to find another basis and justification for the one ecumenical movement. Yes, it is true, that we do share a common human nature. Yes, it is true that we do share in the same creation. Yes, it is true that we all have an inherent orientation towards God. These affirmations are true and valuable. But, the Christian believer has something more to say.

For us who call Jesus Christ our Lord, God and Savior there can be no other basis for our quest for reconciliation and visible unity. Christ is the one who reveals the Father's love and sends the Spirit to bind us together. Christ is the one who reveal that our life is most fully human when we live in communion with God, in communion with one another and in communion with the creation. It is this Christocentricity which opens us up to the richness of the Triune God and which opens us up to the profound dignity of human life. Like St. Photini, the Samaritan woman, we too must recognize that Christ is the one who is the source of living water.

So, let me conclude by these words from Saint Ambrose which remind us of the centrality of Christ.

In Christ we have everything.
If you want to heal your wounds, He is the doctor.
If you are burning with fever, He is the fountain.
If you are in need of help, He is the strength.
If you are in dread of death, He is life.
If you are fleeing darkness, He is light.
If you are hungry, He is food.

¹² Kyriaki FitzGerald, *Walls of the Heart*, *Ecumenical Trends* 22:4 (1993) 13–16.

O taste and see that the Lord is good.
Happy are those who take refuge in him.¹³

Christ is in our midst!
To him be glory and honor
now and forever and unto ages of all ages.
Amen.

¹³ *St. Ambrose of Milan, On Virginity, 16: PL 16, 305 BC.*