

Contents

Editorial 50

Articles

Roger Whittall Reflections on the Australian Lutheran–Catholic dialogue on the Augsburg Confession 54

Steen Olsen Good news and godly action: Anglicans and Lutherans working together in God’s mission 59

Peter Lockwood A chronicle of joy: plotting the path to full eucharistic agreement between the Uniting Church in Australia and the Lutheran Church of Australia 70

Jeff Silcock Where East meets West; International Lutheran-Orthodox conversations 2000–2018: a personal reflection 83

Geraldine Hawkes Receptive Ecumenism: a journey in patience, love and humility 93

Reflections

René Pfitzner The sliding doors of denominational affiliation 103

Emma Strelan From the Lutheran Church via Tabor College to the Uniting Church 105

Mark Juers What makes the grass on the other side of the fence greener? 106

Philippa Lohmeyer-Collins The fellowship of the church and the encouragement of believers 108

Leigh Newton Reflecting on leaving the LCA NZ 110

The sliding doors of denominational affiliation

René Pfitzner

I was baptised and grew up in the Lutheran Church. My father was a Lutheran pastor, and church attendance was the default for us on Sundays. I remember church on Sunday mornings being a mixture of boredom and comfortable familiarity. From the mid-80s we moved to Melbourne and joined St John's Lutheran Church, Southgate, where my grandparents were long-time members. There I had a sense of belonging to something larger than myself.

I became more invested when I started going to the evening services where Dad was the students/young adults pastor. It was good to see him in his element and to see how other people my age were invested in the community and were gaining strength from his teaching and example. I didn't have many close friends in the community, but I enjoyed the comradery of a shared identity.

When I moved to Sydney for work, I regularly attended the local Lutheran church. I was on the younger side of the congregation's demographic, and I didn't have strong friendship connections there either. At about that time, friends from work invited me to their inter-denominational lunch-time bible study group. They could see that I was lukewarm in my faith and wanted to encourage me to a deeper commitment to Jesus.

We did social stuff together outside of work, and they invited me to Katoomba Christian conventions, including the Easter and men's conventions. I heard preaching that was expository and had pointier application than I was used to in a Lutheran setting. My new friends also took me to an Anglican church near where I lived. St Barnabas Broadway was connected to the student ministry at Sydney University. It had a large congregation of young adults.

I remember being struck by the quality of the band; the congregation sang with gusto, and the preaching was framed around the expectation that we would become familiar with our bibles and apply the things we learnt to our daily lives. The exhortations to faith and godly living from the pulpit were directed particularly towards people in my stage of life. Liturgical elements such as the responsive prayers and the commemoration of the Lord's Supper were similar to what I was familiar with from my Lutheran upbringing. I attended a couple of times that month, and I was quickly invited to one of the bible study groups, which met weekly in the homes of group members.

At about the same time I was having a crisis of faith. If my behaviour and attitudes didn't line up with Jesus' teaching, was I genuinely indwelt by the Spirit? I had always taken for granted that I was elect, safely in God's care, and that nothing could snatch me out of his

hands. But how could I reconcile that with the words of Jesus: 'If you love me, you will obey my commands'?

This crisis initially had me doubting my own election and led to a search for answers. I began to read Christian books on apologetics and comparative religions. I was aware that even though I had logged more than years of church attendance, I couldn't describe the coherence of all the Old and New Testament stories, parables, poetry and laws. I struggled to paint a picture of Jesus' life and ministry in my own words.

This led me to study biblical theology, and I read the bible through a couple of times, which I had tried and failed to do previously. But now it seemed more urgent!

I was also meeting with a friend to read the bible and pray. He was a little further on in his faith journey, and he was leading the youth group ministry at his Chinese Evangelical Church. I remember my confusion over trying to reconcile the Lutheran emphasis on grace with the evangelical Anglican emphasis on an activist faith.

Eventually, I understood that both traditions understood the connection: Christians obey because we are connected to Jesus, not in order to become connected to Jesus. We are united to him by faith, which gives us the power to respond in thankful obedience. Not a flawless obedience, but one that rests in God's faithfulness, and returns to him in regular repentance.

I came out the other side of this struggle satisfied intellectually, but also energised to serve in church community, beginning with teaching Sunday school. After a few years I considered ordained ministry, and by this time it made sense to be trained and ordained in the Anglican rather than the Lutheran tradition, in which I had spent most of my life.

Soon after my crisis phase I was frustrated that I could have spent so long in Lutheran church services and not grasped the essentials of the faith. But over time I came to appreciate the structure of Lutheran worship, and the patterns of deliberate formation that I experienced. Last year I went back to St John's Southgate for my niece's baptism. There I was reminded of the strengths of Lutheran worship: belonging, humbly receiving, and the full sound of a church organ belting out a few good Lutheran classics.

Rev René Pfitzner is on the roll of ministers at St Alfred's Anglican Church, in North Blackburn, Melbourne. Following his ordination to the priesthood in 2012, he became an associate minister successively at St John's Cranbourne, St John's Heidelberg, and St Luke's Frankston Anglican churches.