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Foreword

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FOREWORD

In recent years the church has faced a number of challenges. Among these has been a concern for increased cooperation between various denominational bodies, and a concern for inclusive language, practice, and worship life in the church. In this issue of *Consensus* attention is given to these two challenges.

Like many other churches, the Lutheran church has engaged in an ongoing ecumenical dialogue with a number of denominational bodies. The first two offerings of this issue draw attention to the Lutheran-Roman Catholic part of this dialogue. An important part of that dialogue has focused on how the eucharistic presence of Christ is understood. In the first article Egil Grislis notes the emerging ecumenical convergence of understanding regarding the eucharist. However, while some see this convergence as a “novel and somewhat artificial compromise”, Grislis does not share this view. Rather, he suggests this convergence reflects a recognition by various denominations of a common heritage, a heritage that owes much to the insights of St. Thomas Aquinas. Grislis concludes with a tantalizing observation. He conjectures that the central fragments of St. Thomas’ insights, “real presence”, “spiritual presence”, and “memorial” could “serve as a base for the construction of new paradigms for eucharistic theology” in our time.

In the second article Douglas Giles also focuses on the state of the dialogue between Lutherans and Roman Catholics regarding the Lord’s table. He notes the shift in approach to this matter that has occurred since the Reformation. The Reformation church emphasized difference and divergence with the Roman Catholics on the question of the eucharist. However, today Giles finds the approach to be one of celebrating “commonly held beliefs and practices.” Giles argues that this approach of celebrating commonalities holds much promise for

enhancing the ecumenical spirit of Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue.

Pamela Moeller introduces the second challenge to the church considered here. She takes issue with those persons who would simply view language as a nominalist device for communication. In her view language is more than a sign that points to some other reality. On the contrary, Moeller argues that language has and creates a reality in its own right. For her “Language is a ‘being’ issue.” Therefore Gospel language is language that gives life and sets people free from “bondage, oppression, trivialization, dehumanization, and sin.” How one uses language reflects directly on questions of justice. Language, she contends, which ignores, impoverishes, or violates others through “un-naming”, “mis-naming”, or “limiting God to a single dimension” must be changed if it is to serve the Gospel. She challenges the church to make its language, in preaching and elsewhere, Gospel language in this fullest sense of the word.

In the final article Carol Schlueter carries forward the concern about inclusivity and Gospel language to the area of the church’s lectionary. She observes that in the lectionary the readings with men as central characters have been primarily selected for use on Sundays. Readings which feature women have generally been assigned for use on weekdays. Because, she contends, the Christian and the church’s identity is significantly formed by “the stories we tell of our history”, this placement of women in a less important light must be rectified. However, she also recognizes that this will not be a simple task. The Biblical material itself has not always given full attention to the witness and work of women. In light of this, her article makes a number of helpful suggestions for addressing and correcting this imbalance in the church’s lectionary.