

Anniversary Remarks, Craigville 21, 7/13, 04
Gabriel Fackre

Just how did we get to tonight? Twenty remarkable years of theological work under this roof, and adjacent buildings, and walkways, and beach and... My few minutes will be an attempt to answer that, a thumbnail sketch of the history of the colloquies.

In the years prior to 1984, there was much talk about a "theological deficit" (Avery Post) in the UCC.. A 1980 Time magazine article on a study that of what congregations sought in their clergy titled "A Pallid but Personable Faith" spoke of UCC congregations as lacking any interest in calling pastors who were knowledgeable in the Bible, theologically concerned or committed to mission, seeking rather the qualities of amiability and energy in their prospective clergy.. A National Council of Churches leader (who shall remain nameless) wrote in a letter "There are those who might wonder if [the UCC ecumenical outreach would not be more appropriate toward the Unitarian side..." Reactions were developing to these circumstances along with efforts to overcome them in official UCC circles executive Council and presidential plans and papers (for example the document "Theological Renewal in the UCC"; OCLL-sponsored ventures--one calling for "Sound Teaching in the Church" and another a Thank Offering funded theology project which produced an imposing document on UCC theology created by a theological cross-section of 12 pastors; a highly critical "Seminary 39" statement by most UCC faculty, "A Most Difficult and Urgent Time" challenging the "theological disarray" in the Church; Seminary —sponsored-events on theological renewal 9 especially Eden Seminary); theological dialog with ECU partners; the birth of a theological journal, Prism, and later the 7 volume Living Theological Heritage series; much study and hard work on an official United Church of Christ Book of Worship; state Conference initiatives and theological publications, notably in Wisconsin and Connecticut. Then there were interesting grassroots efforts representing a spectrum with all sorts of concerns-- a Spirituality Network, the United Church People for Biblical Witness (which later became the Biblical Witness Fellowship), Christians for Justice Action, the Fellowship of Charismatic Christians, the Third Order of St. Francis, UCC.... I'm going to focus on the latter by tracing a special trajectory from these bottom-lands that made its way to this Tabernacle in 1984 and to the present moment.

The trajectory begins in September, 1977 over the dinner table at the conclusion of an event marking the 100 year anniversary of the Evangelical Synod wing of UCC sponsored by the Chicago congregation, St. Paul's served by Fred Trost (Here is the book that came out of it, Festival of the Church). At a supper in Fred and Louise's home after the conference, he said to his guests with characteristic passion, " "We've got to do something about the state of theology in the UCC!" Out of that grew, by a circuitous route, including an alliance with a few clergy and seminary folk who met weekly in the Andover Newton Faculty lounge for "Theological Tabletalk," the formation in 1978 of a gang of pastors and teachers affectionately called, "The BTL Club," a parody of the then- infamous Jimmy Baker PTL Club. For the next few years, this BiblicalTheological-Liturgical group met annually in Pennsylvania, Illinois and Massachusetts exploring various theological themes—the sacraments, the ministry, the state of preaching and teaching in the Church—producing along the way at a notable meeting in Pennsylvania, the "East Petersburg Declaration." Though few paid any attention to it then (It was refused publication in the UCC magazine, A.D), you can read it in the forthcoming Living Theological Heritage final volume 7. It is as timely as ever,

challenging --"the civil religion that tempts us to mute the uncivil Word of truth we may be called to speak... --.the latest wisdom of the world that regularly beguiles us from our fundamental norms of scripture and tradition.....the techniques of management and manipulation... that have elbowed aside biblical preaching, sound theological teaching, living worship and sacrament...."

Not long after that, some of the same suspects, plus others, meeting at a BTL event in 1983 at New Brunswick Seminary on the ground=breaking ecumenical document to which the UCC had responded appreciatively, Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry gathered in the living room of seminary President Howard Hageman and launched what came to be know as the Mercersburg Society, carrying forward the sacramental/liturgical/creedal heritage of the great German Reformed theologians Nevin and Schaff. (That Society celebrated its 20th anniversary just last year at Lancaster Seminary). And relate to that same tradition came another group, the Order of Corpus Christi.

And then along the trajectory to the colloquies themselves. The two groups just cited, with no little overlap, and nudged along by the Andover Newton Tabletalkers decided they would like to do something together to mark the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration, that remarkable witness to the "one Word, Jesus Christ" in the face of the German Christian fusion of the gospel and the blood and soil philosophy of the day. While the analogy to our own theological deficit was not exact, parallels were there between the culture- Christianity assailed by Barmen and the drift in mainline Churches toward accommodating to "spirit of the age." Indeed, at just that time the UCC lost some of its best minds because of those worries— Bill Holliday and two of our top students at Andover Newton became Roman Catholic; Paul and Elizabeth Achtemeier looking for more theological substance became Presbyterian and John Westerhof, a leading Christian educator in the UCC became Episcopalian for similar stated reasons . (We might note, in passing, the cloud hanging over all those Churches and potential schisms in the last two. The departees might better have stuck with us! Actually, there is no safe ecclesiastical harbor, as we are all in the same boat which we have to either steer or sink. So back then, with that in mind, getting the theological rudder fixed, what to do and where to do it?

It so happened that a new director of the Conference Center had just arrived on the scene, Dick Eggers. Being at the time president of the Christian Camp Meeting Association that oversees these properties, I was charged by the aforementioned interested parties to tell him that he would make a little ecclesiastical history on these grounds if he would host a meeting to honor the Barmen Declaration. He said "Why not?" From that point on, members of the Andover Newton Tabletalk group in contact with the BTL, Fred Trost, and the Mercersburgers (here is a sheaf of correspondence on all that) helped to organize 12 study groups around the country to think about the meaning of Barmen and produce papers on "theological essentials for the UCC in our day" for what came to be called, out of Reformation usage, a theological "colloquy."

So the day arrived, and lo and behold, 170 UCC people from around the country appeared, many who had been in the pre-colloquy study groups, each receiving this packet with the papers from the study groups, and the schedule. * First came worship, Al Williams the Mass Conference Minister, preaching, then the convening of the colloquy by Fred Trost (who had by then become Conference Minister of the Wisconsin conference), the division of the participants into working groups charged with drawing up what each group thought were the

defining themes of UCC. The plenaries then began with Herb Davis, moderating, and your co-chair introducing the issues in a talk, followed by a dinner, with after-dinner greetings by the President of the UCC, Avery Post, followed by Willis Elliott on the Christian Connection with special reference to the founding of Craigville by that stream of the UCC, and the first day capped off by Dean-elect of Andover Newton, Orlando Costas speaking on "The Third World and the UCC" and a closing worship. The next day came papers representing the other streams that fed into the UCC—Congregational-Joe Bassett, Evangelical-Fred Trost, Reformed-John Sheller, then an ecumenical perspective by Diane Kessler, the papers interspersed with working group sessions armed with their newsprint (we have the video tapes of most of these presentations), worship occasions through-out led by pastors, Lelly Smith .tonight's MC being one of them. On the final evening, the whole group met in

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plenary to determine who would draft the "letter" to all the world from the colloquy. To de-politicize the process, the planners had decided to use the New Testament practice of casting of lots (drawing of straws) for 5 of the 7 drafters, 2 others—"poets" being chosen beforehand by the planners). The drafting committee worked through the night. The next morning the result was read to the 140 remaining participants, page by page by Fred Trost in his godlike voice, as Charlie Ford ran the pages down from the office mimeograph machine just as Fred was ending the previous page (what timing!). Whereupon the assembly leaped in to discuss the statement, amended it here and there and editorially refined it, until after two hours of debate, the document was adopted with joy and one dissenting vote. This "Epistle to the Churches" was printed and picked up by wire services, even as the meetings were reported daily in the Boston Globe, and stories appeared about the colloquy in the Christian Century, Christianity Today and other publications. Particularly helpful was an issue of New Conversations edited by Craigville resident Bill McKinney with key grassroots documents of the day, the Seminary 39, the BWF's "Dubuque Declaration," the Craigville Letter, and responses by CJA's Jim Smucker, Seminary 39's Fred Herzog and then a round table of pastors and teachers.

Along with the many appreciative reviews and comments, the colloquy and its witness statement had its critics. A Boston Feminist Group charged that it was just the old white male establishment trying to turn the clock back. Al Krass wrote a similar indictment in a journal. While there were 40 women as planners, participants, presenters, leading worship and the small groups and a third World voice, Orlando Costas as a paper-reader, such did not count heavily in these assessments. But the critiques had to be taken into account, and ere, in fact affecting the nature and composition of Colloquy 2.

Next year? With Dick Eggers enthusiastic support, the Conference Center took the initiative, recruiting a broad spectrum for the planning committee, including some folk from the Boston Feminist Group, on the one hand and some from the Biblical Witness Fellowship, on the other. The decision was made to confront a key question raised by the first assembly: authority, or just what authorizes what Christians have to say about God and the world: the Bible? the tradition? Human experience in its various facets—moral, rational, affective? And where does Christ come in here? Calls for papers were sent out, 40 were received and 6 chosen as presenters, reflecting a wide range of viewpoints.

This time 140 pastors and laity signed up for a 3-day gathering in September of 1985, attended also by many women urged on by the Boston Feminist Group, and also continuing active participation by members of the Mercersburg Society and BTL, with the president of

the BWF and others from that group on hand this time. Plenary presentations, ten working groups, daily worship and Bible study, selection by lot of the drafting committee (again with two poets appointed), an 8 hour night drafting session, subsequent floor debate, a notable witness statement voted (with 6 dissenters) that set forth a christological lens for looking through a prism of authoritative Scripture inextricable from tradition and "lived experience," and a climactic eucharist. Again, the colloquy got national, and even international attention as the story and statement were carried by the United Press International as well as other local and national media.

The event was not without its tensions: walk-outs and stand-ups of some women who judged that language in some worship services was insufficiently inclusive; the irritation of the Mercersburg constituency when the sacramental- liturgical were not sufficiently to the fore, and BWF participants who doubted the full adequacy of the final statement. But evaluations gave the clear mandate to keep the colloquies going. And so they did. A quick review of the topics that followed, with a comment here and there on who said and did what.

Colloquy planners—all volunteers now numbering 26—decided that it was time to give attention in Colloquy III to the laity, influenced by a rising tide of movements on the ministry of the whole people of God, and did so, with note taken in the UCC News of the witness statement on such and how it was related to the pastoral office. Colloquy IV and V decided to follow the lead of the groundbreaking ecumenical document—Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry—by devoting the next two years to "Eucharist/Communion in the UCC" and "Baptism in the UCC," using UCC documents as well as ecumenical ones as resources and producing notable witness statements on the same. (The colloquies had grown in length from 3 to 4 to 5 days) The planners of Colloquy VI decided on a new tack: take on a current issue, indeed an inflamed culture-war one: abortion. But do it with theological resources in our own tradition and ecumenically, posing the question as "Human Beginnings: Deciding About Life in the Presence of God," with the Roman Catholic-Reformed document "Ethics and the Search for Christian Unity: A Statement on Abortion" being the prime resource. Dialog was intense, sometimes shrill and the witness statement was more about agreements and disagreements than a common mind. All this a straw in the wind as to whether witness statements could anymore be produced. Colloquy VII returned to a more strictly theological question, prompted by the frequent picture of the UCC as only interested in good works So the title "Justification and Justice: Good News and Good Works" with the developing Lutheran-Reformed dialog in mind and a Lutheran ecumenical observer. Colloquy VIII stretched the ecumenical range to the World Council of Churches current presenting issue: "The Holy Spirit in Creation, Truth and Power," giving Lelly Smith a subject for her outstanding 1995 D.Min. dissertation, "The Holy Spirit and the Craigville Theological Colloquies" Colloquies IX , X, XI, XII and XIII reflected planners' increasing concern about theological incoherence in all the mainline Churches, and disputes within them about signature questions: Hence a colloquy on Christology (Mark Heim, keynoter before his groundbreaking volumes on Christ and world religions; Theological Standards for Ministry in the UCC (using the Book of Worship as background), the Essentials of the Church Confident (playing off a then widely-read book by Leander Keck, who was himself the keynoter that year), How Can the Church be both Catholic and Prophetic?; the passionate issue in the UCC, of that time "The Baptismal Formula: Father, Son and Holy Spirit?" At colloquy X, one of the small groups, noting what excellent standards we did have in the Book of Worship, wondered whether they were actually practiced by clergy in the UCC, prompting a set of regional

meetings on the same and growing out of them in the fall of 1993, the "Confessing Christ" movement in the UCC, Fred Trost its first convener. During this same stretch of colloquies, it became increasingly clear that producing a consensus document out of the small groups and plenaries was getting very difficult to do given the increasing diversity of attendees, so we went to group reports printed up as resources for all interested.

A number of the following colloquies took a definite pastoral and parish turn: Resurrection and Christian Burial; and Faithful and Powerful Language in Preaching; Praying and Liturgy; Christian Formation; Christian Worship and Witness. But in that mix from XIV to XIX, was a return again to a doctrinal issue, Christology, and an ethical one "Christian Faith and Genetic Ethics." The last colloquy was a re-sounding of the ecumenical note, "Christian Solidarity in a Fragmented World." And now this one, returning full circle to our founding Barmen theme, "Sound Teaching."

What a sweep of subjects! How interesting to me an observer and participant through-out to see the continuities—hard theological work in small groups and plenaries, quality Bible studies, grassroots momentum throughout but also increasing supported by UCC bodies, outstanding presenters in both papers offered and presenters requested, significant final products be they witness statements or resources, attention given to the colloquies by the wider Church and the media. But also the changes—while still grassroots, we have tended to give more visibility to the prominent speakers—our keynoter UCC president this year, last year, a World Council of Churches leader, Tom Best, well-known authors, Marva Dawn, Leander Keck, Percel Alston (of sainted memory) Ron Cole- Turner, Max Stackhouse, Beth Nordbeck, Sam Solivan, Tom Dipko, Paul Crow, Howard Paine, Martin Copenhaver, Elisabeth Hilke .Lee Barrett, Mark Burrows, Tony Robinson, Ellen Charry, Catherine Mowry LaCugna (of sainted memory), Bob and Norma Koenig, Mark Heim Of course notable Bible study leaders, Eugene Wehrli (also of sainted memory), Paul Hammer, Gil Bartholomew, Abraham Smith, Willis Elliott, Greg Carey (who will be next year's keynoter). Distinguished ecumenical observers—Jeff Gros, Bill Rusch, Carter Lindberg, Ed O'Flaherty, Beverley Mitchell, Demetrios Demopolis... And if we had time, what a list of grassroots paper-writers, some right here..

Enough history. On to what it all means, with Fred , Avery and Lelly.