

Tactical Ecumenism

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Abstract

The article examines the relationship between ecumenical dialogues and embodied ecumenical practices. By utilizing Michel de Certeau's theory of strategy and tactics, the authors construct a hermeneutic that aims at forming ecumenists and clarifying the object of their discourse. Specifically, unauthorized practices of collaboration between denominations (i.e., ecumenical tactics) are seen as a formative source for ecumenical dialogue (i.e., strategic ecumenism).

Keywords

Certeau, church unity, ecclesiology, ecumenical strategy, ecumenical tactics, ecumenism

The publication of Konrad Raiser's *Ecumenism in Transition* over 20 years ago prompted much discussion regarding the state of the ecumenical movement. Simply put, there is a tension regarding the fruitfulness of the official ecumenical dialogues that seek to work toward visible unity among Christian churches. On the one hand, some call into question the productivity of these dialogues; on the other hand, some remain clearly optimistic that these dialogues are indeed valuable. Raiser's desire to move beyond official dialogues that treat doctrinal statements stemmed from an evaluation of official dialogue as "a tense holding together of elements which refuse

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to be reconciled.”¹ In contrast to Raiser’s evaluations, Catholic ecumenist and ecclesio-ologist Catherine Clifford confidently asserts her optimism: “This is a moment to learn from the methods and achievements of the dialogues to date, to build upon them rather than discard their accomplishments.”² Regardless of where one might fall on the spectrum from pessimism to optimism, the majority of ecumenists agree that, to use Raiser’s phrase, a “sober stocktaking” of ecumenical dialogues is warranted.³

Our article attempts such a sober stocktaking. Specifically, we agree with Clifford’s claim that “we must reflect carefully on the role of theological dialogue and ecumenical consensus statements.”⁴ We appeal to the work of Michel de Certeau, S.J. (1925–1986) on human practices, specifically his distinction between tactics and strategies, to examine the role played by ecumenical dialogue in the visible unity of Christians. As liturgical theologians, we are primarily concerned with practices, and in our estimation, much can be gained from the application of Certeau’s theories. With regard to ecumenical dialogue, all aspects of visible Christian unity involve concrete human practices.⁵ These are integral to embodying and establishing visible unity, whether they are the spiritual practices and missionary activity that partially manifest the “life and works” of a church, or the liturgical rubrics and doctrinal statements that contribute to the “faith and order” of a particular tradition. This article, then, will begin with (1) a discussion of Certeau’s theory. We will then use that theory to describe (2) strategic ecumenism and (3) images of ecumenical tactics. This distinction will allow us to (4) suggest a way of acquiring a renewed perspective from which ecumenists might envision the relationship between ecumenical dialogue and visible Christian unity. In the end, we wish to contribute a lens or hermeneutic that might serve to mitigate the tension (so often found in a single mind) between the pessimism that discourages dialogue and the optimism that overlooks the need for reform. This lens, which we call “tactical ecumenism,” is a sober stocktaking of the interplay between conceptual, strategic ecumenical dialogue and the concrete, embodied practices that constitute the encounters between Christians and their communities outside official ecumenical dialogues.

1. Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?*, trans. Tony Coates (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991) 2.

2. Catherine E. Clifford, “Loneran’s Contribution to Ecumenism,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 521–38, at 522.

3. Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition* 30.

4. Clifford, “Loneran’s Contribution” 522.

5. To describe the goal of ecumenism, we use the formulation “visible unity” as found in section III of the Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules>) (all URLs referenced herein were accessed January 14, 2015). We are, however, aware of the ambiguous nature of the term. For a detailed discussion of the difficulties encountered in expressing the goal of ecumenism, see Raiser, *Ecumenism*, esp. chapter 1, “Uncertainty in the Ecumenical Movement.”

At the outset, we wish to be clear about what we are *not* doing in this article. First, we are not offering a reflection on the theology or philosophy of Certeau; rather, we are in a way co-opting his theory of human action (though we think it is a faithful application of his thought). The way we employ that theory is not meant to suggest how Certeau would engage ecumenical dialogue. Second, we are not proposing a developed method for ecumenical dialogue. As we point out in the penultimate section, tactical ecumenism is less a method for dialogue and more a hermeneutic for reading the role of ecumenical dialogue in the visible unity of Christians.

Strategies and Tactics

In 1980 French Jesuit Michel de Certeau published *L'Invention du quotidien*, volume 1, *Arts de faire (The Practice of Everyday Life)*, which develops a theory of practices regarding the relationship between strategies and tactics. For Certeau, a strategy is a disciplinary deployment of power:

I call a "strategy" the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment." A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it.⁶

In contrast to the localized exercise of power that constitutes a strategy, a tactic has no such authority: "I call a 'tactic,' on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a *proper* (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of the tactic belongs to the other."⁷ Before applying this theory of strategies and tactics to help understand the form of ecumenical dialogue and its role in the visible unity of Christians, we first summarize Certeau's theory by examining some of the metaphors he uses in describing tactics and strategies. With a clearer understanding of what is at stake in this distinction, we will then see how this theory might be used to describe ecumenism.

Perhaps the most famous metaphor used by Certeau in describing the difference between tactics and strategies is found in the chapter 7, "Walking in the City." Here Certeau describes the relationship between tactics and strategies in terms of perspective and movement. To describe strategy, he uses the panoptic view of Manhattan achieved from the observation deck of the World Trade Center. From that vantage point, New York City appears as a unified whole. The panoptic perspective allows the voyeur (personified by the city planner) to construct a concept-city.

The panorama-city is a "theoretical" (that is, visible) simulacrum, in short, a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices. The voyeur-god

6. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California, 1984) xix.

7. *Ibid.*

created by this fiction . . . must disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and make himself alien to them.⁸

The millions of lives being lived far below cannot be seen from such a height, and therefore they cease to play a role in defining the city's unity. Through indifference to (or at least ignorance of) these unseen particular practices of the unseen millions, the strategist is able to create "New York City."

The panoptic perspective of the strategist effects a "transformation of the urban *fact* into the *concept* of a city."⁹ The urban fact is the actual life being lived in the streets. The concept created by the city planner constitutes a strategy insofar as it is used to "make sense" of the world below. Avenues and streets dictate traffic and, through separation, define neighborhoods. Sidewalks and crosswalks provide authorized places for pedestrians, while street signs and signals provide authorized time. The strategic designs (i.e., the disciplinary structures) of the city planner are conceived and deployed from this panoptic perspective. From the top of the World Trade Center, the panoptic city planner devises strategies that constitute "New York City" by authoritatively shaping its places and time. The pedestrians are then invited to live in and according to the strategist's concept.

In contrast to the strategic perspective of the city planner, the perspective of the pedestrian far below is the tactical perspective. "They are walkers . . . whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it."¹⁰ The everyday practices like jaywalking, cutting through building lobbies, double parking, taking the "back roads" to avoid the main traffic routes, and using fire hydrants as fountains on hot days are all tactics that constitute the "urban fact" of the city. They are all done without any thought of their role in the concept-city. This lack of intention is due in part to the fact that the tactical perspective is limited. The pedestrian does not enjoy the panoptic view from above. "It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city [i.e., the tactics of pedestrians] were characterized by their blindness."¹¹ In other words, to some degree tactics cannot be recognized as such; the relationship of tactics to a strategy remains hidden from users. The millions of pedestrians who cut across the grass, ignore signals, or jaywalk are tactically using/consuming the disciplinary structures of the city planner. In the mind of the planner, a grass-covered median is a barrier that serves to separate traffic. In the mind of the pedestrian it is a green picnic-spot in a sea of concrete. Controlling traffic is a strategy; having a picnic is a tactic.

All these practices (simply called "walking" by Certeau) are the tactics carried out from within the city planner's strategic structures. In their use of the strategic, however, tactics harbor influence. "The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It

8. Ibid. 93.

9. Ibid. 94.

10. Ibid. 93.

11. Ibid.

creates shadows and ambiguities within them.”¹² These walkers evade the panoptic gaze of a strategy that would corral their movement into predictable patterns. Unauthorized spaces and pathways are instantaneously created by tactical use and just as quickly disappear from the view of the panoptic gaze that would analyze and redirect their movements. Certeau speaks of these tactics as constituting stories that make up the inexhaustible history of the city. “There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can ‘invoke’ or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in—and this inverts the schema of the Panopticon.”¹³ In short, the inexhaustible history of these particular practices goes unseen and unutilized by the strategist. These histories, and not solely the strategies of the city planner, constitute the identity of the city. Far from being the meek resistance of the oppressed, tactics are practices that participate in creating identity; they remain the urban fact.

In addition to these metaphors based on perspective and movement, Certeau often speaks of tactical practices in terms of consumption. That is to say, he offers a theory that examines the practices whereby consumers consume what producers produce. Strategies are particular modes of production; tactics are particular modes of consumption. To illustrate these tactical practices of consumption, Certeau employs the term *bricolage* (tinkering), which is a type of creativity that uses what is immediately available, often relying on different resources. For example, modern sculpture often employs *bricolage* when it repurposes objects, combining them to create an innovative work of art. *Bricolage* is tactical consumption insofar as it evades the intention of the producer (the strategist). This tactical practice, however, need not be thought of as a defiant (and therefore intentional) subversion of power. *Bricolage* might simply evade the intention of the producer through ignorance or an apathetic disregard, regardless of whether this is willful.

Another metaphor Certeau uses to describe tactical consumption is *la perruque* (wig). “*La perruque* is the worker’s own work disguised as work for his employer.”¹⁴ The worker uses the master’s tools and time for his or her own gain. The strategy of an employer is to provide a disciplinary framework (time, place, tools, goals, etc.) that formally dictates the practices of the worker. The strategy is therefore a system of power. For example, a worker is given a cubicle, a phone, a computer, a schedule, and a list of tasks to accomplish. *La perruque* is the worker’s repurposing of that framework. The worker will fail (i.e., refuse, whether intentionally or unintentionally) to conform to the disciplinary framework. By using company software to create and send out e-invitations for a daughter’s graduation party, *la perruque* is the tactic whereby the worker transforms the strategic systems of discipline into a system of antidiiscipline. Hence, Certeau states, “[tactics] manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them.”¹⁵ In this way, these systems of antidiiscipline are the worker’s tactics.

12. Ibid. 101.

13. Ibid. 108.

14. Ibid. 25.

15. Ibid. xiv.

It is important to note that these tactical practices do not intentionally seek to reform the strategies they consume. Put differently, the worker does not use *la perruque* to change the employer's strategy. Making e-invitations using company software on company time is not aimed at implementing a company-sponsored "employee crafts hour." Similarly, *bricolage* is not employed to encourage manufacturers to begin creating products that more readily lend themselves for use in sculpture. Finally, "walking" is not done in order to influence the city planner's designs. When tactical consumption begins to intend the reform of a strategy, that tactic has become disciplinary, thereby constituting itself as a strategy. As tactical, practices of everyday life produce solely by consuming.

Strategic Ecumenism

Before describing ecumenical tactics or the tactical ecumenism that might help us understand those tactics, it would be helpful to describe strategic ecumenism. Simply put, the theological and ecclesiastical discourse that manifests ecumenical studies/dialogue (whether official or academic) embodies strategic ecumenism. For example, the documents produced by the *Groupe des Dombes*,¹⁶ the statements created by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC),¹⁷ and the articles published in pertinent academic journals are all strategic ecumenism because they are intentionally ecumenical in nature (which is to say they intentionally work toward unity from a place of division). They are discursive, analytical, and exercise a normative power, albeit in varying degrees. Like the panoptic perspective of the city planner that leads to the construction of a concept-city, ecumenical dialogue tends to create a concept-church. In the totalizing strategies of ecumenical dialogue, the particular lives of Christians go unseen and are replaced by an ideologized concept (e.g., the Body of Christ, the Pilgrim Church, etc.). In fairness, the concept of the church is a necessary concept. Likewise, ecumenical strategies are necessary strategies. The need for these strategies and the theological concepts they employ, however, does not undo the fact that, in Certeau's words, "beneath the discourses that ideologize the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer."¹⁸ In short, Christian lives and the myriad practices that constitute those lives continue, often largely unaware of others' ecumenical strategies.

To be sure, ecumenical strategies are a necessary good. For example, the unity of the church is undeniably served by strategies aimed at providing organization. Insofar as ecumenical dialogues work toward unity from a place of division, we can say that strategic ecumenism performs Christian unity. In constructing and deploying systems

16. See <http://www.groupedesdombes.org>.

17. See <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission>.

18. *Ibid.* 95.

of discipline (e.g., prescriptive explanations, rubrics that dictate forms of worship, dialogues carried out from official positions, etc.), strategic ecumenism functions to move communities toward a more fully realized unity. For example, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* drafted by the Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999 was an attempt to find common ground regarding a historically divisive doctrinal issue. Working toward and performing official agreement regarding the doctrine of justification was an exercise in rebuttal to polemical discourse that had used this doctrine as grounds for division. Similarly, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, published by the WCC in 1982, was a remarkable achievement of strategic ecumenism that contributed to the unity of Christians. By focusing its attention on particular liturgical practices that lie at the heart of Christian unity, this document suggested practices, hermeneutics, and vocabulary that would help "achieve the visible unity [the divided churches] seek."¹⁹ Simply put, ecumenical dialogue and the consensus statements they create are practices that manifest a kind of visible unity.

While strategic ecumenism certainly performs unity, it also unavoidably performs the division it seeks to overcome. This happens in particular (1) through the exercise of normative authority, and (2) through the employment of analytical, scientific discourse. First, the exercise of normative authority in Christian ecumenical discourse is manifested in communicating doctrinal teaching from an official position (e.g., theologian, bishop, etc.). In Certeau's terms, a "proper" (i.e., a space from which to deploy power) is established. Strategic ecumenism begins by reifying the divisions from which it will proceed. A dialogue can only be carried out from distinct places: the Methodists have a place distinct from that of the Anglicans. To have a Methodist–Anglican dialogue that seeks to bring those two communities together, the two parties must first assert their difference from an authoritative place by defining an ecclesial "home" integral to their Christian identities. In so doing, strategic ecumenism performs division, simply by its official acknowledgment of it.²⁰ Second, the use of scientific discourse ("ecclesial communities," "full communion," "consensus statements," etc.) tends to obscure and replace the ecclesial fact of ordinary Christian lives with constructed versions of concept churches that become the grounds for claiming either unity or division.²¹ By constructing concept churches using this scientific discourse, strategic ecumenism creates further properes called "denominations" or "particular traditions." Strategic ecumenism normatively writes these discursive properes onto the bodies of Christians so that individuals can recognize themselves (and, perhaps more importantly, be identified) as standing within the proper that is constituted by a

19. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982) xii.

20. We use the term "perform" to emphasize the impossibility of naming or acknowledging a preexisting division without in some sense reinforcing or even legitimizing it, regardless of the intention to do so or not.

21. Hence, the recent attention given to narrative theology as a vital resource for theological reflection.

particular tradition.²² For example, if one's everyday practices are structured by *The Code of Canon Law* and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, one may rest assured that he or she is Roman Catholic. Indeed, one's identity as a Catholic is contingent upon one's relationship to this proper. In attempting to describe, analyze, evaluate, prescribe, and proscribe Christian practices, strategic ecumenism constructs concept churches²³ using discourse founded in division. As such, in its very discourse, strategic ecumenism performs division.

It is important to emphasize the fact that performing division on the one hand and serving unity on the other do not constitute two poles of a scale by which strategic ecumenism is evaluated. Put simply, the division and unity of the body of Christ are not locked in a zero-sum game; *koinonia* is not a sliding scale. As we have said, strategic ecumenism, even in its more disciplinary and comparative approaches, has, does, and will continue to serve unity. When we assert that strategic ecumenism unavoidably performs division, this is not meant to imply that it only hinders unity. As with any lifesaving surgery, damage must be done if health is to be served. The question we seek to address here is how strategic ecumenism's unavoidable performance of division can be acknowledged, mitigated, and turned toward unity.

Certeau's words help express our aim in distinguishing between tactical and strategic ecumenism: "How is it possible to foil here and now the social hierarchization which organizes scientific work on popular cultures and repeats itself in that work?"²⁴ If the strategic ecumenism manifested by official ecumenical dialogue performs division even alongside its promotion of unity, how can ecumenical dialogue transform itself so as to more fully serve Christian unity? Certeau argues, "The resurgence of 'popular' practices within industrial and scientific modernity indicates the paths that might be taken by a transformation of the object of our study and the place from which we study it."²⁵ In other words, we ought to rethink the ways strategic ecumenism understands its relationship to the everyday practices of Christians. What are we examining and from where are we examining it? Ultimately, we suggest the hermeneutic that might be called "tactical ecumenism" rests upon seeing the tactical practices of collaboration between Christians of different denominations as constituting both the object of ecumenical study and the place from which that study might also begin.

22. Raiser observes that "dialogues seem almost to reinforce confessional self-awareness." He points out that beyond simply reinforcing division, "unity thinking [has been used] as an instrument of domination. . . . Diversity only becomes a problem if it is measured against a normative scale of unity" (*Ecumenism* 16, 76).

23. If adopting official Roman Catholic rhetoric, it may be more appropriate to say "concept *ecclesial communities*" when identifying—that is, deploying structures of discipline onto—our Protestant brothers and sisters.

24. Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life* 25.

25. *Ibid.*

Images of Ecumenical Tactics

Having outlined what Certeau's theory of tactics and strategy might connote in terms of ecumenism (as well as what we see as "strategic ecumenism"), we now turn to images of what ecumenical tactics could look like. By doing so, however, we do not mean to suggest these images as paradigms or schematics for what ecumenical engagement "ought" to look like. We begin with images of ecumenical tactics because *as tactical* they resist strict definition and formulaic representation. Ecumenical tactics can never be intentionally carried out as such, else they lose their identity as tactics. They can be described as such only from afar. In fact, when we look at examples of ecumenical collaboration, we might rightly call them ecumenical strategies insofar as they are collaborations with a purpose and method. Here, however, we describe them as ecumenical tactics insofar as they are actions carried out by members of churches that relate to strategic ecumenism in a way consistent with the relationship between strategies and tactics. That is, they are images of collaboration (or lack thereof) that are primarily about something *other* than ecumenism, but that nevertheless carry ecumenical implications.

If tactical ecumenism can be thought of as a hermeneutic of approaching Christian ecumenical practices more generally, that is, how Christians and their communities navigate life alongside one another, then images of ecumenical tactics cannot but be images of concrete Christian actions and endeavors. We therefore suggest drawing images from two primary areas where Christian division as well as Christian unity are often performed in stark visibility: liturgy on the one hand, and work for justice on the other. There are certainly other areas in Christian life where the scandal of ecclesial division, as well as embodiments of ecumenical unity, can appear and become formative. If, however, as *Unitatis redintegratio* puts it, Christian "division contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature,"²⁶ then images of tactical ecumenism ought to come at least in part from places where the will of Christ is concretely preached, and the world is visibly engaged: liturgy and work for justice.

Ecumenical collaboration in work for justice has been well documented.²⁷ It tends to take two main forms: either response to a catastrophic event and its aftermath, or sustained action and advocacy on behalf of a particular issue of justice. In some cases an ecumenical collaboration can take both of these forms. Additionally, because work for justice has long been seen as a source of some kind of ecumenical unity—note the Life and Work Movement slogan, "doctrine divides, mission unites"—one might initially view such joint effort as indicative of the ecumenical movement's bearing fruit. Put differently, the reception of ecumenical strategies has created space for and resulted in what we are calling ecumenical tactics. Granting this fact, we must still resist the temptation to see this process as unidirectional. Just as the ecumenical movement

26. *Unitatis redintegratio* no. 1.

27. See Nile Harper, *Journeys into Justice: Religious Collaboratives Working for Social Transformation* (Minneapolis: Bascom Hill, 2009).

might form in some ways one's approach to ecumenical collaboration, so do ecumenical cooperation (ecumenical tactics) form the ecumenical movement. That ecumenical tactics do so is not our primary concern; how they do so—as either fruit or inspiration or both—is more the issue.

A recent example of ecumenical collaboration following a catastrophe is the response to Hurricane Katrina. While it was certainly not only churches and religious organizations that responded and collaborated,²⁸ cooperation among faith-based organizations was a major aspect of these humanitarian efforts. Further, as Pamela Joshi writes, “Collaboration [among faith-based and community organizations] was found to be mostly unplanned and based on personal and professional ties rather than a planned response.”²⁹ This is what makes such ecumenical activity tactical. Collaboration was not primarily the result of ecumenical dialogue or prescription on the level of church governance; it was effected by those “on the ground” in the situation and by their appeals for assistance through the personal and professional channels to which they had access.

Rarely if ever was ecumenical progress or growth the primary or intended goal of ecumenical collaboration in responding to Hurricane Katrina. The goal was to attend to the disaster; the question of with whom to respond was tactical rather than strategic. The fact that collaboration *was* ecumenical, however, has become an important part of the narrative for many church communities who participated in it, especially as joint efforts have continued years after Katrina.³⁰ This is not to suggest that disaster response ought to be the paradigm for ecumenism. Rather, this image of tactical ecumenism is meant to illustrate that what can be difficult or sometimes impossible on the level of official theological dialogue—to achieve some level of unity in Christian voice and purpose—can emerge as a byproduct in situations where ecumenism is a tactic and not a strategy.

Besides responses to disasters, ecumenical collaboration on particular issues of justice can evoke a similar kind of ecumenical unity. The development and ongoing work of what is now called CommonBond Communities provides an apt example.³¹ Over its history, events of shared action across Christian denominational lines have precipitated not only progress in a particular cause of justice but also embodiments of visible

28. See Carter T. Butts, Ryan M. Acton, and Christopher Steven Marcum, “Interorganizational Collaboration in the Hurricane Katrina Response,” *Journal of Social Structure* 13.1 (2012) 1–36.

29. Pamela Joshi, *Faith-Based and Community Organizations' Participation in Emergency Preparedness and Response Activities* (Research Triangle Park, NC: Institute for Homeland Security Solutions, 2010) 2.

30. As one example, see the Christian Reformed Church, “CRWRC Works on Ecumenical Rebuild in Post-Katrina New Orleans,” <http://www.crcna.org/news-and-views/crwrc-works-ecumenical-rebuild-post-katrina-new-orleans>.

31. See Joseph Errigo, “CommonBond Communities Affordable Housing: Pathways to Empowerment,” in Nile Harper, *Journeys into Justice: Religious Collaboratives Working for Social Transformation* (Minneapolis: Bascom Hill, 2009) 139–66.

ecumenical unity. As one instance, in 1980 CommonBond (then called Westminster Corporation, affiliated with the Catholic Archdiocese of Saint Paul-Minneapolis) worked together with Edina Community Lutheran Church to build an affordable housing complex in Edina, Minnesota. In Joseph Errigo's words, the Lutheran Pastor "and his congregation were enthusiastic about teaming up with a Catholic archdiocese-sponsored organization . . . , and a wonderful and long-lasting partnership was born."³² At the groundbreaking of the complex, Errigo explains that "Archbishop John Roach joined with the Lutheran bishop, whom he'd known for forty years, and it looked like a carefully planned ecumenical event."³³

This unity of ecumenical purpose and action led to further ecumenical collaboration on housing projects,³⁴ and, as the list of donors in CommonBond Communities' annual reports illustrates,³⁵ ecumenical participation is still alive and well in the organization. Unlike the ecumenical responses to Hurricane Katrina, however, the cooperation of Edina Community Lutheran Church with the Westminster Corporation had a kind of ecumenism, at least as part of its goal. The "tools" were ecumenical, but the purpose was a matter of unity in action for justice rather than of theology or confession; the ecumenical unity was no less visible than had it been established on the basis of official confessional unity. This image of tactical ecumenism, like the image of the ecumenical responses to Hurricane Katrina, embodies a kind of ecumenical unity without depending first upon strategic warrant for doing so. It perhaps did not specifically lack strategic warrant, but that is not the point. The point is that, as timely and effective, ecumenical tactics are concerned primarily with the issues of concrete life together as Christians and Christian communities, without specifically an eye to how such tactics may or may not carry implications for strategic ecumenism.

Examples of ecumenical tactics in liturgy can be drawn from nearly any liturgical celebration where visitors from another Christian denomination are present. Weddings, funerals, even Sunday celebrations spent with family and friends outside one's own liturgical tradition often include the familiar, if unstated, question of the visitor: what should I do—or not do—as we worship together? The visitor may use the tools of strategic ecumenism and/or theological reflection, but more immediately his or her concern is the concrete, embodied liturgical celebration of which he or she is now a part. Participation, or lack thereof, is a tactical adoption by the visitor and the liturgical community of bits and pieces of strategies filtered down through time, place, and tradition. Will the visitor kneel with everyone, or remain sitting? Join in the singing, or remain silent? Receive Communion, approach the pastor for a blessing, or remain in the pew? Such questions are tactical in nature. They unfold in time and space not simply as approximations of what real, strategic ecclesial life ought ideally to look like, but as the tactical appropriation of the pieces of strategy that work in that context.

32. Ibid. 149.

33. Ibid. 149–50.

34. Ibid.

35. Available at <http://www.commonbond.org/annualreports.aspx>.

Lest we seem to suggest that tactics succeed in ecclesial life where strategies largely fail, we ought to note that, particularly in liturgy, ecumenical tactics can be both divisive and unifying, at times by the same action. A visitor accustomed to the liturgical practice of eucharistic sharing might think he or she is appropriately embodying Christian unity by participating in a closed eucharistic celebration, and indeed such an action might embody that result for some people in certain places and times. That same action in the same time and place may, however, have the opposite effect on others present, for whom the lack of official ecumenical unity makes such an ecumenical tactic inappropriate. Furthermore, in an attempt to judge the legitimacy of such tactics, one might immediately wish to evaluate this visitor's action as well as the response of regular members of the liturgical community. This is of itself not necessarily a pointless exercise, but it is carried out on the level of strategy. Tactical ecumenism cannot evaluate this liturgical action as a datum among other data. It can only participate, listen, and then return with its insight to the level of strategy—as we will see in the next section.

Toward a Tactical Ecumenism

If ecumenical tactics are ways of going about the everyday business of living and working with Christians of different denominations, particularly in liturgy and work for justice, tactical ecumenism can be described as entering into and critically appropriating ecumenical tactics, allowing them to form one's approach to spirituality, and then returning to the realm of strategic ecumenism, enriched by one's encounter with the tactics of the body of Christ. By "spirituality" here we mean something close to what Roger Haight described in a recent article: "the way persons or groups live their lives before transcendence."³⁶ However, while Haight's purpose was to suggest a particular ecumenical strategy, we suggest that there is significant value in beginning with tactical experience rather than strategic aim.

The basis of Haight's argument is that spirituality is prior to the church's institutional structures, and as such spiritual practices (particularly the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises) would be worthwhile tools in forming Christians and their churches toward greater unity.³⁷ What Haight leaves rather open to question is whether and to what extent churches and their structures also form spiritual practices. Spiritualities—or more particularly, spiritual practices—take place in concrete, embodied persons and communities, who both form and are formed by the institutional structures of which they are a part. Further, this formation process is rarely, if ever, clean and organized. The everyday lives of Christians and their communities often take place as jumbled fragments of strategy, institution, and spirituality—whatever seems to work best in a particular context. While these everyday lives may seem a mess when viewed

36. Roger Haight, "The Spiritual Exercises as an Ecumenical Strategy," *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 331–49, at 337.

37. *Ibid.* 332, 338.

strategically, the value of tactical ecumenism lies therein. Tactical ecumenism does not resolve the mess; it refuses to evaluate the mess as being a mess. Tactical ecumenism, to be tactical, must resist the initial temptation to be evaluative, to either authorize or proscribe the particular tactics it encounters. To speak of tactical ecumenism as a method (i.e., a strategy) is already nearly misleading. Nevertheless it can be viewed as a kind of method for giving due weight to the ecumenical tactics organically occurring between the churches in the lives of Christians, regardless of legitimation by strategic ecumenism. As we suggested above, tactical ecumenism is a hermeneutic, a lens through which to view the tactics of the everyday encounters of Christians as something more than imperfect approximations of ecumenical strategy.

Put positively, the method for tactical ecumenism would be to (1) *participate* in the ecumenical tactics of one's community, (2) *listen* to what transpires in those tactics, and (3) critically *appropriate* those tactics, that is, return to the level of strategic ecumenism newly enriched by tactical experience. If, as Haight suggests, spirituality translates itself into ecumenical strategy (in the guise of ecclesial structures and institutions), we suggest that both spirituality and ecumenical strategy actually exist as tactical, alive in the everyday lives of Christians and their communities. Tactical ecumenism would work to appropriate these tactics back into spirituality, further informing ecumenical strategy, and completing an ecclesial feedback loop in which messy, unsystematic, embodied Christian life becomes personally experienced theological source material rather than the byproduct of theological industry.

The first step in adopting a hermeneutic of tactical ecumenism is the foundation for the entire endeavor: participation. Tactics do not exist outside their concrete practice, and they are not systematic and replicable on demand. They are practices, and so can be experienced only by being a participant. Returning to Certeau's example of walking in the city, if one descends to the city's streets while trying to preserve a synoptic view, one will not be willing to walk across the grass. Such an action is outside the strategic, theoretical view of the city, and in adopting that view, one's analytics are inherently evaluative. Likewise, if one insists on using the scientific discourse to describe and analyze tactics, then one precludes participating in those tactics. To adopt a hermeneutic of tactical ecumenism requires a commitment to nonevaluative participation in ecumenical tactics, that is, an open and receptive taking-part-in collaboration that occurs between Christians of differing denominations.³⁸

Additionally, nonevaluative participation does not mean positive-evaluative participation. The work of tactical ecumenism cannot consist of attempting to translate the tactics positively into ecumenical strategies. Where Haight suggests a particular practice as an ecumenical strategy, we suggest attempting to leave strategy out of

38. As we will point out in the conclusion, making receptivity a fundamental principle of ecumenical engagement is a method that has been adopted by the emerging ecumenical strategy known as "receptive ecumenism." See Paul D. Murray, ed., with Luca Badini-Confalonieri, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (New York: Oxford University, 2008).

practice altogether—at least initially. To approach tactics with the goal of adopting them as good or useful for a particular ecumenical end already betrays a strategic mindset alien to the core character of tactical ecumenism. Where tactical ecumenism is concerned first with participation and action, the strategic mindset brings to those actions a conceptual template into which it can fit and mold those actions. This is inescapable on the level of strategy, but if creating ideal concepts will always be, at least in part, a projection of the strategist's mind, then conversely choosing to form one's mind through participation in ecumenical tactics is an attempt to be influenced by grace.³⁹ That is, this choice is an attempt to withdraw into silence and listening as the action of grace takes human form in the concrete practices of Christians living, working, and worshipping together, not as a performance to be observed, but as a formation in which to take part.

One might legitimately ask the question at this point, Why be so concerned with nonevaluative participation? Should not religious participation always have a sturdy theological ground, especially religious participation alongside participants of other traditions? In this vein and by way of a counterexample, Clifford has described her students as “practical ecumenists.” She points out that her students, prior to awareness of ecumenical dialogue and its concerns, are already inclined to emphasize the similarity and common ground shared by Christians of different denominations. But for Clifford,

if Christians are to collaborate in common witness and mission in this century, then we must face the theological task of establishing a firm basis for such collaboration in a new consensus on questions of ecclesiology and ethics, on the universality of salvation, and on the related question of the relationship of Christianity—including the structured relationships of the communion of the faithful within the church—to the other religions.⁴⁰

Students are “practical or functional” ecumenists whose actions, Clifford claims, contradict the division they fail to explicitly address. Hence, she says, “consensus on [theological] questions” needs to be sought as the “firm basis” for such collaboration. While such strategic ecumenism is indeed necessary if we are to avoid what Clifford rightly sees as a contradiction in our ecclesial identity, we would argue that such strategies are not the proper “firm basis” on which unity stands. Rather, such strategies should function to recognize, explicate, and affirm the unity they serve.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that tactical ecumenism ought to replace strategic ecumenism, as if they were two competing philosophies. Rather, we are insisting that a hermeneutic of tactical ecumenism could allow for a different and more fruitful approach to strategic ecumenism. Implementing tactical ecumenism is a move into

39. The distinction between strategic ecumenism and tactical ecumenism is analogous to the distinction between what Raiser calls a “material understanding of dialogue” and an “instrumental understanding of dialogue” (*Ecumenism* 14).

40. Catherine E. Clifford, “Unity and Mission One Hundred Years On,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46 (2001) 329–42, at 342.

passivity, while allowing grace to be active in practice. Let the church's ecumenical strategies be formed by its concrete life and action as the body of Christ, rather than vice versa.

The second step of tactical ecumenism is nearly an attribute of the first: listen to what transpires in ecumenical tactics. Once the active, evaluative voice of the strategist is silenced (or at least put on hold for the purpose of nonevaluative participation), space has been created for formation by tactics. For example, Certeau often describes tactics as resistance. It is possible for strategies of ecumenism to observe ecumenical tactics and see them as ignoring the boundaries or denying the differences that the strategies seek to describe and overcome (even if this observation does not have as its goal either the endorsement or reform of the tactics). Certeau's theory might, however, give us insight into the ways that ecumenical tactics are actually resistance against an imposed boundary. Strategic ecumenism does not simply describe or react to division; it also legitimizes division. To speak of moving toward authentic unity or overcoming division performs division and the absence of authentic unity. Ecumenical tactics, on the other hand, can refuse to perform that division, thereby creating a proper of their own in which dialogue can be carried out without the urgency of reversing a scandalous ecclesial sin. Similarly, ecumenical tactics can refuse to perform a hierarchy in which the consensus about theological questions is the "firm basis" on which unity might stand. Rather, ecumenical tactics are capable of performing the unauthorized *koinonia*, the communion of the Holy Spirit that is the basis of a living church.

The only way this is possible, however, is if the tactics are allowed to speak, and thereby form the ecumenical strategist. When strategic ecumenism seeks to become tactical, it must begin with self-denial, or at least with an intentional and committed stance of receptive listening. Participation in tactical ecumenism is about forming one's self through experiential learning. It is not about reforming, which inherently bears the evaluative character of improvement. The defining characteristic of this participation is listening.

The final step in tactical ecumenism is the critical appropriation of ecumenical tactics. Again, it is a matter of formation that includes dialogue, of acting that includes talking. This step is prerequisite to returning to the level of strategy, and then only as a result of the first two steps and not as a goal or culmination of them. One ought to note that ecumenical tactics continue unabated regardless of whether their impact is "carried" by the ecumenical strategist back into official ecumenical dialogues. In fact, the ecumenical strategist cannot take as his or her goal to somehow translate ecumenical tactics into ecumenical strategies without stepping outside the hermeneutic of tactical ecumenism. The absence of strategic ecumenical intentionality in the first two steps carries over into the third, when the practitioner of tactical ecumenism discovers the effects that participation and listening have had on his or her strategic ecumenical outlook. If the ecumenical strategist then thematizes such formation and intentionally brings it to bear on strategic ecumenism, then so much the better, but that is a strategic move. Tactical ecumenism remains a hermeneutic, a way of viewing the participation in and listening to the tactics at work in the lives of Christians and Christian communities.

It is important to note, however, that the third step is indeed a critical, rather than blind, appropriation of the experiences of steps one and two. While the steps of participation and listening were emphatically nonevaluative, the third must include some kind of evaluation, because it is no longer the tactics themselves that are being evaluated, but rather one's own participation in and formation by the tactics. Critical appropriation is primarily a self-reflective move to ensure that the return to strategic ecumenism is not a naïve importing of any and every practice, but rather a fruitful dialogue between what actually makes up embodied encounters of Christians with one another on the one hand, and what might be required for productive strategic ecumenism on the other.

One might rightly ask at this point what such critical appropriation could look like. We conclude this section by describing two possible ways the final step of tactical ecumenism may take shape, so long as it remains the final step, not the primary step, and not the basis for justifying the first two steps. First, critical appropriation might take the form of examination of the foundation of the relationships that manifest particular ecumenical tactics. Who is carrying out these tactics and why? What is the driving force that leads people to worship or work together? Immediately, one should recognize this examination is ultimately not possible to complete within the hermeneutic of tactical ecumenism, but its partial completion is possible. As Certeau points out, whenever statistical investigation attempts to analyze tactical movement, it inevitably fails.

Statistical inquiry, in breaking down these “efficacious meanderings” into units that it defines itself, in reorganizing the results of its analyses according to its own codes, “finds” only the homogenous. . . . It is precisely through this analytic fragmentation that it loses sight of what it claims to seek and to represent.⁴¹

The method needed for tactical ecumenism is one that relinquishes both power and the discourse that seeks something specific. The strategy of ecumenical dialogue must be to listen passively and allow that listening to shape, not the dialogue itself, but the interlocutors that proceed to strategize. Realizing the movement of the Spirit in the life of this unauthorized communion and choosing to contemplate that action open the theologian up to a type of personal formation that is then free to influence strategy. Admittedly, discourse that comes out of this prayerful contemplation is not completely free from the violence of strategy. However, if the theologian begins with the narrative of unauthorized communion, as opposed to the narrative of official dialogue, the influence of the strategy's proper is mitigated.

Second, critical appropriation might examine the effects of ecumenical tactics. How do they influence the relationships of these people? Is damage done to their Christian identity? Is the particularity of each Christian and Christian community preserved? And are both worship and work for justice present as clear embodiments of the

41. Certeau, *Practices* xviii.

gospel? Answering such questions, however, is not an evaluation of the tactics themselves, but only of the effects they produce. Are the ecumenical tactics in which one participates and to which one listens actually reflections of the life and love of God? Is the body of Christ healed or hurt by the effects of these tactics? These questions and their answers unavoidably become strategic, but even in the move to ecumenical strategy, tactical ecumenism can provide a grounded, real-world perspective. Ecumenism takes place in the life of the church, which is to say that it takes place in the lives of particular Christians and Christian communities as they encounter one another.

Conclusion

Raiser is correct in arguing that

if we discard our fixation on authoritative pronouncements, then it becomes clear that the aim of the conciliar process cannot be the harmony of a *magnus consensus* . . . but only a hard slog in the fellowship of those who are baptized into Christ and believe in him to bring about concrete embodiments of the gospel. The bond and inspiration of Christians and churches in the conciliar process is not a unity of the like-minded, but the fellowship of those who mutually correct one another as they seek the place of the church in today's world.⁴²

We would insist, however, that like-mindedness ought to be numbered as one of the "concrete embodiments of the gospel." We propose tactical ecumenism so that ecumenical dialogues might continue their hard slog in the fellowship of those who seek to give an account of the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15). Consensus might be reached, but not by simply building on the strategies of dialogues past. We must be willing to carry out a "sober stocktaking" of how and why we speak theologically about the lives of Christians and their communities. As liturgical theologians, we are concerned with the communal practices that mediate divine presence. Tactical ecumenism is one way of giving assent to this mediation.

If we were to envision what strategic ecumenism might look like under the influence of tactical ecumenism, we would envision a method something like what has been developed by those ecumenists involved in the Receptive Ecumenism project based at Durham University.⁴³ This particular method of strategic ecumenism is receptive insofar as it begins with the goal of transforming one's own tradition. As Paul Murray points out,

Receptive Ecumenism is concerned to place at the forefront of the Christian ecumenical agenda the self-critical question, "What, in any given situation, can one's own tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions?" and, moreover, to ask this question

42. Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition* 119.

43. See Murray, ed., *Receptive Ecumenism*, and <https://www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/ccs/projects/receptiveecumenism>.

without insisting, although certainly hoping, that these other traditions are also asking themselves the same question.⁴⁴

As a dialogue between traditions that seeks to transform them, Receptive Ecumenism is undoubtedly an example of strategic ecumenism. It does, however, place authentic encounter with other traditions at the heart of its project. “The core concern of the Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning Project is to explore how ecumenical encounter, ecumenical engagement, ecumenical responsibility and calling can be privileged contexts for promoting this process of personal and ecclesial growth into more intensely configured communion in Christ and the Spirit.”⁴⁵ Of course, Receptive Ecumenism is not a substitute for tactical ecumenism insofar as seeking these encounters *as an ecumenist* might dictate the experience of the encounters. But, as we said above, tactical ecumenism does need to move from tactics back into strategy. Our hope is that tactical ecumenism might help foster receptive ecumenists by first leading to experiences of *koinonia*.

We believe that ecumenical dialogue has borne fruit over the last 50 years. But if that fruit is to ripen, if Christian unity is to become visibly clearer, then a new hermeneutic is needed. While indispensable to the vitality of Christianity, agreement on the answers to theological questions cannot be the sole foundation of ecumenism. There has been and continues to be strategic ecumenism that conceives of visible unity as trickling down from ecclesial offices into the pews.⁴⁶ In fact, as with all authoritative acts of ecclesial offices, they find their source not in the immediacy of a privileged epistemology of illumination, but in their ability to recognize and affirm (so as to facilitate) the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. Trickle-down unity is concept-unity, and is the unripened fruit of strategy; collaborative unity (i.e., ecumenical tactics) is a fact of *koinonia*. If strategic ecumenism is to serve the visible unity of Christians, it must recognize that unity as both a practiced fact and a goal.

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44. Murray, ed., *Receptive Ecumenism* 12.

45. *Ibid.* 7.

46. As Raiser puts it, “The premise of all these conversations was that the unity of belief was an essential condition for the unity of the Church. The goal of dialogue was, by producing as wide a consensus as possible, to express this unity in belief and so create the preconditions for the achievement of unity and communion between the churches.” In essence, unity is authorized at an official level, and Christians are then invited to participate in that unity.

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