Lutheran Identity in a Global World

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1.1 The Problem

A distinctive Lutheran church was never the purpose of the Reformation that took place nearly half a millennium ago, nevertheless, this was the result. What began as a reformation ended as a schism, creating a Lutheran church. However, for a minority church to survive in a time of religious and political turmoil, the Lutheran churches evolved particularities in close relation to the principalities and nations that they were conglomerating\(^1\). Consequently, the collective Lutheran identity, that had barely seen the light of day in the Confessio Augustana\(^2\), proved to be too narrow to resist the theological turmoil that rose after the death of Luther and Melanchthon\(^3\). With no ultimate authority in matters of doctrine the bedrock of a universal Lutheran Identity never became explicit\(^4\). Now, approaching the 500\(^{th}\) anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, a distinctive Lutheran identity is still not apparent. But due to substantial cultural and religious changes that the still increasing globalization has brought about, the pressure for a distinctive Lutheran identity has been amplified.

The ever-increasing dynamic exchange of capital, goods, ideas, information, and people across national and continental borders has brought about an interdependence between different peoples and nations making national matters no longer strictly national. Once a policy is adopted in one nation, it immediately reaches the public awareness in another, thus expanding the original boundary and context of that policy. These mechanisms have created a globalized world. As societies become globalized the stage for normative statements has widened, thereby expanding the context of normative statements from a national to a global perspective\(^5\). Furthermore, the multicultural societies created by the globalized world has given birth

\(^1\) At a time when church and state were closely related, the reformation movement was utilized by contemporary nations and principalities to detach from the spiritual center of Europe i.e. the Pope. Hence, the reformation movement often had to collaborate with national political powers, thus generating particularities (Schjørring & Nielsen 2012, 105).

\(^2\) The Confessio Augustana that was signed at the Augsburg parliament in 1530 by Johan of Sachsen, Filip of Hessen, Georg of Brandenburg, Ernst and Frans of Lüneburg, Wolfgang of Anhalt and the cities of Nürnberg and Reutlingen (four more cities signed later), was the expression of the common Lutheran understanding of the Christian faith (Schjørring & Nielsen 2012, 81-82).

\(^3\) Carsten Bach-Nielsen points to the fact, that in the strife between the Gnesiolutherans and the Filippians in the late 15\(^{th}\) century, the striding parties tried to demonstrate, how the counterpart conflicted with the Confessio Augustana (Schjørring & Nielsen 2012, 224-225). This adds to the understanding, that Confessio Augusta was regarded as an expression of the common Lutheran Identity.

\(^4\) Drawing up the Formula of Concord in 1577 did put an end to the theological quarrel in Germany. But not all the territories of Germany, nor the Danish Kingdom, joined the Formula of Concord. Hence, it is apparent that from an early outset an ostensive Lutheran confession was not found, thus giving way for a broad definition of the question on identity (Schjørring & Nielsen 2012, 228-229).

\(^5\) The Norwegian professor in systematic and practical theology, Harald Hegstad, assert that the same must apply for any confessional identity. A confessional identity is -among other things- characterized by the fact that it exceeds its
to the notion of pluralism, which proposes to replace the notion of universal truth with more pragmatic notions of “fitting” or “warranted”. As what would be ‘fitting’ is relative to the proposed problem, pluralism is insisting that moral conflicts can be resolved in a number of ways, as there is not only one way of determining what is morally right (Craig and Routledge 1998, 642–44). Yet, globalization has also brought about a global set of norms that are being consolidated through international organizations such as the United Nations thus creating a common measure on moral questions. The induction of a global ethical, economic and cultural standard is thus contributing in blurring the differences between nations. But on the other hand, globalization is simultaneously stating the differences on the same global stage thus displaying the divergences. Prior to globalization differences were primarily due to the common isolation from one another. However, with the expanse of a global culture, cultural and national particularities are occasionally being maintained in direct opposition to globalization thus creating an anti-globalization movement.

The creation of multi-cultural societies by the globalized world challenges all cultural institutions to express their identity anew to avoid creating a fragmented and segregated society. This is due to the induced interdependence, which forces diverging traditions to coexist. Consequently, to maintain peace amongst diverging traditions, the worldview and praxis of a culture must be made comprehensible to the surrounding cultures. This applies to the church as well, as the church in its own right is a public institution, with a praxis formed and guided by existing and preceding norms and rules (Bodilsen 2014, 189-201). Hence, when looking at the church as a public institution it can also be understood as a cultural institution and is therefore likewise compelled to express its identity anew. However, the framework of a globalized world has, as aforementioned, widened the range of normative statements, thus pushing the search for identity from a national to a global stage. Expressing an identity on a global stage means expressing an identity, that in being global, entails a universal claim. One might object, that the question of identity eo ipso has a universal aspect. Although this might be true, the pragmatically developing global stage involves a special challenge for the Lutheran church that historically has had little theological awareness of its universal character.

own boundaries when claiming to encompass universal truths. Regarding this, a confessional identity opens the way for both ecumenism and mission (Hegstad 2010, 201).

6 Several contemporary journalists, politicians, and scientists have stated, that the rise of the right wing nationalism in America and Europe can be understood as a response to the challenges of Globalization. (Toft 2016, 2; Fischer 2016; Larsen 2017; Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 255)

7 The Danish theologian, Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen, has argued that the Nordic cultures has moved, or is in a transition, from an era of Christendom to an era of Post-Christendom. Due to a long tradition of religious hegemony and religious influence in societal institutions, the multi-religious society proves to be a special challenge to the Lutheran churches in Europe (Nikolajsen 2015, 3-11).

8 An expression of this, is the weak Lutheran missiology that numerous theologians have asserted (Nikolajsen 2015, 271-272). Appertaining to this is the close relations to the state that many Lutheran churches evolved in the Nordic
especially for the Lutheran churches in the Nordic countries whose identity has primarily been nationally contingent. Consequently, when expressing a Lutheran identity in the setting of the global world the proposed identity becomes normative to the global Lutheran church.

Summarizing, globalization enacts a fundamental change in the preconditions of societies affecting the development of both societal institutions and individual lives. The magnitude and effects of the globalized world are still not clear, but the process of compressing diverging ethnicities, cultures, worldviews, religions, and languages closer together continues. This raises several problems for the coherence of any society and at least three responses have manifested in contemporary time. These are, as briefly noted in the aforesaid, 1) a process of cultural homogenization; 2) a process of cultural protectionism; 3) a notion of pluralism. To avoid a fragmented and segregated society, cultural institutions are compelled to express their identity anew, which begs the question: which of the three positions should one adopt -if any? In this paper, the notion of pluralism will be merged with the process of cultural homogenization thus leaving only two positions. This is done for three reasons: 1) pluralism can be conceived as the current dominant approach of the cultural homogenization process (‘Global Centre for Pluralism - Mission’ 2017; McGrath 1996, 201–7); 2) the notion of pluralism can function as the overall cultural approach to which a homogenization process could assimilate toward (Johnston 2017); 3) the examination of the substance of the proposed cultural homogenization is beyond the scope of this paper. To accommodate this, I am assuming that the notion of pluralism is the substance of the global homogenization process (McGrath 1996, 201–3).

The process of cultural homogenization in this paper is described as Assimilation. Assimilation is traditionally understood as the unilateral process of an immigrant minority’s adaptation of the dominant ethnicity’s culture, language, religious practice etc. However, as assimilation-theory has continued to develop it has become clear, that the unilateral process of assimilation (McGrath 1996, 201–3) is flawed -especially within multicultural societies. Thus, a reconceptualization of assimilation, according to Richard Alba and Victor Nee, has stressed that the process of assimilation is at least bilateral; or even multilateral. Consequently, a contemporary exposition of assimilation-theory expresses the notion of a bilateral (multilateral) process of assimilation which enacts a progressive uniformization process (Parrillo 2008, 58–61). This is also known as the theory of the melting-pot (Parrillo 2008, 576). However, the melting-pot-assimilation theory has been criticized for presupposing a white-middle class as the trajectory of the assimilation process, and overlooking how social inequality prevents an even-handed bilateral assimilation process. To overcome the challenges of the presupposed “upward” or “downward” process of assimilation as Alba and Nee envisions, a theory of

countries. As of this day the Queen of Denmark is still the head of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Denmark which both expresses and contributes to a national identity.
segmented assimilation has been put forth by Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou (Parrillo 2008, 61). In brief, this alternate theory of assimilation envisions multiple trajectories for assimilation, as well as asserting that it could be advantageous to keep to some of the aspects of a distinctive ethnic culture within unequal societies. However interesting and complex the theories of assimilation are, the position of assimilation in this paper is understood as the overall progressive -or regressive- process of cultural and religious homogenization enacted and indorses by the interconnectedness of a society comprised of different cultures created by the globalized world (Scott 2014). Furthermore, as aforementioned, the notion of pluralism is viewed as the present dominant line of thought that the global assimilation process is moving towards. Furthermore, the notion of pluralism could function as both the segmented and multilateral trajectory of assimilation.

The process of cultural protectionism is in this paper described as isolation. Isolation is understood as an active and voluntary segregation from the surrounding culture/cultures. As such, isolation is understood in close proximity to that of de facto segregation, which is segregation enacted through cultural practice (Parrillo 2008, 822–23). Hence, isolation is the opposite position of assimilation. Where assimilation actively endorses cultural homogenization, the position of isolation seeks to protect and maintain ethnic cultural, national, and religious particularities as a direct response to the standardization of the globalized world. Hence isolation is closely related to protectionism, nationalism, exclusivism etc. As this paper focusses on the Lutheran identity, the position of isolation is here understood as a process of voluntary segregation to preserve religious and cultural particularities in response to the standardization of the globalized world.

However, following the thoughts of the Norwegian professor in systematic and practical theology Harald Hegstad, both the position of assimilation and isolation are incompatible with any religious confession⁹. Consequently, when expressing the distinctiveness of the Lutheran identity, one must avoid a position that isolates and assimilates. Hence, the distinctiveness of the Lutheran identity should not be stressed in such a way, that it creates a sectarian and monocultural church. This would ultimately be an isolated Lutheran church. Moreover, the aspects that the Lutheran identity shares with other religious or secular cultures should not be stated to the extent that it creates a borderless and multi-cultural church. This would ultimately be an assimilated Lutheran church. Additionally, in already being a global citizen, the proposed identity should be aware of the extended range of normative statements which begs for intra-confessional conversations about the Lutheran identity if the Lutheran confession is to survive as a coherent whole. From this pragmatic outset, this paper will examine the possibility of finding a Lutheran identity, that does not

⁹ See footnote 5.
isolate nor assimilate itself. Is it viable to construct a Lutheran identity that can be sufficiently distinctive in a
global world whilst maintaining national particularities?

1.2 The Material

To construct a Lutheran identity, that does not trigger isolation nor assimilation theological
positions that ultimately could lead to either must be presented to provide a qualified theological point of
departure for a Lutheran identity that stands in-between. For that purpose, I have chosen to apply the writ-
ings of the German theologian Hermann Sasse, and the Danish theologian Peder Nørgaard-Højen. Both the-
ologians have been greatly preoccupied with the identity of the Lutheran confession, and both are mounted
in the framework of a long Lutheran tradition. However, they have come to very different positions. The
Lutheran identity that Sasse proposes could, in my opinion, be prone to the risk of isolation. Therefore, I find
it relevant to analyze his book *Hva er luthersk kristendom?* due to the fact, that it encompasses some of his
thoughts about the Lutheran identity. On the other hand, the Lutheran identity that Nørgaard-Højen presents
can be conceived as leading towards assimilation. Consequently, his book *Økumenisk Teologi* will be analyzed
as it features his understanding of the Lutheran identity. This primary literature will be accompanied
by an
array of secondary literature, that focuses on the challenges of identity in a global world.

1.3 The Method

This paper will consist of hermeneutical readings of the selected works of Herman Sasse and
Peder Nørgaard-Højen. My reading aims to display their position on the Lutheran identity with a special focus
on the Lutheran identity in the spectrum from isolation to assimilation. To do this my reading will aim at
disclosing their fundamental perspectives of the distinctiveness of the Lutheran identity. To accomplish this
my reading will search for statements that are both, directly and indirectly, normative for a Lutheran identity.
Secondly, I will look for content that can be attributed to the process of either isolation or assimilation.
Afterward, I will construct their own thoughts on the Lutheran identity from my hermeneutical reading. This
entails the danger of reading their writings on a premise that differs from their own, which will be considered
to some extent in my exposition.

Following the exposition of the Lutheran identity according to Sasse and Nørgaard-Højen, I will
attempt to construct a third position of the Lutheran identity using a synthetic-constructive method. In doing
this I will first assess the strengths and weaknesses of Sasse’s and Nørgaard-Højen’s position from the criteria
of avoiding isolation and assimilation. Subsequently, in the face of the challenges that the search for identity
faces in a global world\(^\text{10}\), I will aim at constructing a position through a combination of their strengths while adhering to avoid a position of isolation or assimilation.

1.4 The Process

This paper is divided into six sections. This first section outlines the design of the project. The second section will exhibit the distinctive Lutheran identity according to Sasse-with special attention to the spectrum from isolation to assimilation. The third section addresses the same theme but in accordance with Nørgaard-Højen. The fourth section will assess the strengths and weaknesses of Sasse’s and Nørgaard-Højen’s position when faced with the challenge of isolation and assimilation. The fifth section seeks to construct a provisional position of the Lutheran identity through a synthesis of the strengths that each position entails. The sixth section will provide a concluding remark.

1.5 The Ambition

The central matter of this paper is the distinctiveness of the Lutheran Identity in a global world. The multi-cultural society and the global normative stage forces the Lutheran church to break away from its previously national attachments and find its identity in a global world. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of such an identity, without falling into the trenches of isolation nor assimilation. Thus, I hope to contribute to the conversation about a Lutheran identity, that can not only withstand the challenges of the global world but unite the Lutheran churches at its core so that it may thrive.

2.1 The Lutheran Identity According to Herman Sasse

To reliably display the Lutheran identity Herman Sasse provides, it must be stated, that Sasse does not himself use the term ‘identity’ in his book *Hva er Luthersk Kristendom?*. The following presentation of Sasse’s understanding of the Lutheran identity is thus a construct, consisting of the fundamental perspectives and normative statements of the Lutheran confession, which he himself explicitly states in his book. The following section of this chapter will provide an account of Sasse’s understanding of the Lutheran identity accordingly. The last section of this chapter will examine where this proposed identity finds itself in the spectrum from isolation to assimilation.

Initially, it is important to note that for Sasse, the Lutheran confession is best conceived ecclesiastically-and not individually. Consequently, the substance of the Lutheran confession is not found through the diverging perceptions of “Lutheran” theologians through history but in the explicit confession of the Lutheran church (Sasse 1978, 13–15). Thus the Lutheran identity is contained within the outspoken word of the

\(^{10}\) See the last section of 1.1.
Lutheran church, confessed primarily through the confessional documents, and secondly through the liturgy and hymns (Sasse 1978, 140–41). Sasse’s ecclesiastical focus raises the question of the right understanding of the Lutheran church, which for Sasse becomes evident through the correct understanding of the Reformation.

Coming to a clear understanding of the Reformation, Sasse first displays three common but erroneous ways of interpreting the reformation. To clearly demonstrate his understanding of the Lutheran identity, which is rooted in the fourth and correct understanding of the Reformation, I will briefly summarize the three incorrect interpretations, which are as follows.

2.2 The Heroic Interpretation

The focus of this mistaken way of interpreting the reformation is the attention to Martin Luther as an individual. The line of thought is, that if one understands the inner person of Luther, his thoughts, motives, and inner experiences one understands the Reformation. The substance of the reformation becomes intertwined with the reformer himself, displaying the history of the Reformation as the story of the brilliant and extraordinary intelligence of humankind, thus creating a “heroic figure”. However important Luther is to the reformation, this interpretation is essentially an anachronistic approach of the Renaissance, which Luther himself would have rejected. Central as he might be, the Lutheran identity is not identical to the identity of the reformer. This is evident through the life of the Lutheran church, that has thrived independently from the later discoveries of the personal developments of the reformer (Sasse 1978, 16–19).

2.3 The Culture-Historical Interpretation

The second and most common misconception of the Reformation, according to Sasse, is the cultural-historical interpretation, which perceives the Reformation as the turning point in the western history of ideas, invoking a new cultural epoch. The Reformation was essentially the liberation of humanity, previously enslaved by a narrow-minded interpretation of Christianity. Through the Reformation humanity finds new self-esteem bringing about a new impetus for the entire western culture. The greatness and liberty of humanity are revealed through a God-given enlightenment, which brought forth a positive view of the world and thus revealed the capability of humanity. The previous constraining interpretation of Christianity is replaced by the liberating notion of God’s love as the fundamental aspect of Christianity, which does not envision any hostility between confessions nor between God and humanity. Thus, humankind is free to embark on the cultural progression, as the Reformation initiated. Though Sasse does not deny that the Reformation did influence the contemporary culture, it was a mere peripheral side-effect of the Reformation and not the core. Luther did not promote the greatness and liberty of humanity but the corruption of sin which permeated all areas of the human life (Sasse 1978, 20–29).
2.4 The National Interpretation:

One of the most dangerous misunderstandings of the Reformation, according to Sasse, is that the essence of the Reformation is best understood when looking through the lens of the German-national particularities at the time of the Reformation. For Sasse, it is important to emphasize that the reformation is not German (Sasse 1978, 30) and that Luther would never have applauded the notion of a national-church where the church was not autonomous. However, as Sasse mentions, there was a living understanding at the time of the Reformation, that ethnicities shape both the inner and outer life of the Church. Hence, the German particularities of Christianity are, according to Sasse, natural and welcome, but they do not encompass the correct understanding of the essence of the Reformation. This is because there is no such thing as a German Gospel, there is only one universal Gospel in Sasse’s understanding, and the Reformation is driven by the question of the right understanding of that universal Gospel -disregarding any national agenda (Sasse 1978, 29–38).

2.5 The Reformation as an Event in the History of the Church

Though fragmented aspects of truth are contained within all the three erroneous interpretations of the Reformation, the essence is not encompassed in any of them. The Reformation is, according to Sasse, an event in the history of the church of Christ, and an event that was long due. For nearly two centuries theologians, lay-people, priests, humanists, heretics, and leaders of the churches had promulgated that the church had to comply with some sort of normative commandments. The question was, what guiding principle was the right to reform by? (Sasse 1978, 38–42)

Though the wide-ranging reformation principle ‘Ad Fontes’, expressed as ‘Sola Scriptura’ by the Protestant reformers, is essential to the reformation movement, it is not the sole principle of the Lutheran Reformation. If the principle of Sola Scriptura is not inextricably linked with the Lutheran principle of ‘Sola Fide’, more specifically expressed in the doctrine of justification, it does not warrant a genuine reformation. And, as Sasse points out, the notion of ‘ad fontes’ is not unusual to the 16th century (Sasse 1978, 42). Thus, in Sasse’s opinion, the essence of the Reformation is not found in a simple reorientation towards scripture, but in the concrete rediscovery of the gospel expressed through the doctrine of justification in which any Lutheran reorientation towards scripture is guided (Sasse 1978, 44–46). Thus, the doctrine of justification is the guiding principle that functions as the catalyst for the entire Lutheran reformation. However, the Reformation is only correctly understood as an event in the history of the church, in which Luther functions as a valid teacher whom mediates the rediscovery of the correct understanding of the justification and therefore the gospel (Sasse 1978, 46). As such the Reformation was initially a new confession of the entire church, and not, at first, an ethical-religious reformation of the practices of the church (Sasse 1978, 45). In Sasse’s opinion,
the reformation was the renewal of the church through the rediscovery of the gospels true teaching expressed primarily in the doctrine of justification.

Summarizing, the correct understanding of the Reformation according to Sasse, is apparent through the lens of Luther as a genuine teacher of the apostolic Church, that through the guidance of the Holy-Spirit rediscovered the true and clear understanding of justification and following this the gospel in its clearest form. The true essence and impetus of the Reformation was this genuine interest in the true understanding of the gospel. This truth-seeking interest in the scripture was the guiding principle of the reformation movements, and the distinctive Lutheran aspect was, that it claimed to have found the correct understanding of justification and therefore the right way of interpreting the biblical scriptures (Sasse 1978, 52–53). As such the Reformation is an event in the history of the church, and its substance cannot be encompassed in Luther’s person, nor in the context of his national or western culture, as the three erroneous interpretations promoted. The distinctive ‘Lutheran’ core of the Reformation was the rediscovery of the right understanding of the gospel, and thus it is fundamental to a Lutheran identity since it was the guiding principle that brought forth the Lutheran church.

2.6 Dogma as Foundational for Identity

That the Lutheran Reformation had no interest other than the right understanding of the gospel is, according to Sasse, evident through its unwillingness to break with the Roman Catholic Church (Sasse 1978, 55). This is apparent through the deliberately vague expressions in the Confessio Augustana (from here on abbreviated as CA) which sought mutual agreement between the reformers and the Roman Catholic Church and in the far-reaching admissions of Melancthon (Sasse 1978, 55.57-58.). Furthermore, Sasse points to the Lutheran understanding of the church as Una, Sancta, Catholica et Apostolica Ecclesia, which safeguarded the existence of the ‘true’ church within the Roman Catholic Church regardless of the numerous negative superlatives that were used to describe it (Sasse 1978, 57–58). From this cumulative case, Sasse argues that the Lutheran reformations sole interest was the right understanding of the gospel, and had no interest in national or personal agendas. This is, according to Sasse, summarized in the seventh article of CA, which states that agreement concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments is sufficient for the true unity of the Church (Sasse 1978, 124).

It is evident from the above-mentioned that the Lutheran identity is identical to the correct understanding of the Gospel, according to Herman Sasse. As such the identity of the Lutheran church consists

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11 As Sasse rightly demonstrates, this argument is further emphasized by the fact that it was written ten years after Luther’s expulsion from the Roman Catholic Church.
of the relationship between Sola Fide and Sola Scriptura, expounded as the teaching of the doctrine of justification as the hermeneutical key in the reorientation towards scripture as the highest authority (Sasse 1978, 80. 82. 83-84). The entire life of the former Lutheran Church is a confession to this understanding, according to Sasse (Sasse 1978, 84). The Lutheran identity is thus narrowly understood as a teaching, a guiding principle, a confession. Consequently, the Lutheran identity, according to Sasse, can be described as a ‘dogmatic identity’. This demands that no cultural aspect, understanding, or guiding principle other than this distinctive understanding of the gospel can supersede it. If this precise understanding of the Lutheran teaching is not found in a Lutheran church, it is per definition of Sasse, not a Lutheran Church (Sasse 1978, 83–84). Regardless of any external cultural similarities, a church is only Lutheran if it internally builds its identity on this fundamental dogmatic confession and exposition of Christianity. This understanding might seem rigid and exclusive, but for Sasse, this is the result of the truth-seeking men and women in the age of the orthodoxy that knew that we live by the truth and die by the lie. This understanding of truth as universal demands an exclusive approach towards Christianity which we, in Sasse’s opinion, have forgotten (Sasse 1978, 64. 77).

Evidently, Sasse consents with this approach, and simultaneously points out, that in the search for truth one must expect a struggle between people (Sasse 1978, 65). In this struggle, it is essential, that the Lutheran Church firmly resides in its dogmatic identity because it consists of the true understanding of the Gospel. Adhering to its dogmatic identity is thus simultaneously being true to the project of ecumenism and missiology (Sasse 1978, 123.127. 137).

2.7 Isolating or Assimilating?

The understanding of the Lutheran identity as fundamentally dogmatic can be interpreted as going in the direction of isolation -both dogmatically and culturally. However, as one might object, it can also be interpreted as an identity, that can take root and be developed in any cultural setting given its dogmatic foundation, that is not dependent on any culture. This approach is not foreign to Sasse, as he at times gives way to such an understanding (Sasse 1978, 127). However, as the last third of his book is dedicated to the exposition of how and where the Lutheran teaching differs and exceeds the Reformed in being truest to the principle of Sola Scriptura, it can be argued, that Sasse moves in the position of isolation. Though it is only an emergent indication, it is attested by his appreciation of truth as universal. Though it might be ostensive to mention that objective truth is, logically, universal, it is not as obvious that it is accessible to humankind, and can be maintained as an unmediated dogmatic core of principles, that can be distributed without culturally dependent mitigation (the latter of which seems vital to Sasse’s understanding of the Lutheran identity). Poignant to identity is the circumstance that it is always presented in and by a culture. And an identity that does not embed the notion of mediation as containing culturally contingent aspects within the construct of its identity is left blind as to where it is situated in the spectrum of isolation and assimilation. Even though
the substance of that identity could prove viable to be cultivated in any cultural environment, it could unknowingly move towards isolation. Because identity is always constructed and presented within the framework of a culture, it relies on mediation. And in the interplay of mediation between cultures aspects that are culturally contingent are unavoidable. Consequently, the understanding of the Lutheran identity that Sasse indorses, which is oblivious to mediational consequences, is prone to the risk of isolation.

3.1 The Lutheran Identity According to Peder Nørgaard-Højen

Coming to a clear understanding of the Lutheran identity according to Nørgaard-Højen based on his book Økumenisk Teologi, involves a rather complicated process of disarming it of its undergirding Lutheran foundation. This is due to the primary focus of his book, which is an exposition of the history, methodology, prospects, and challenges of ecumenical theology. However, in being a Lutheran theologian, subtle notions of a Lutheran identity are scattered throughout the book, and when amassed encompasses an interesting and specific understanding of the Lutheran identity, that differs vastly from that of Herman Sasse. The following exposition of the Lutheran identity according to Nørgaard-Højen must be attentive to this hermeneutical project, which is, as all readings are, in danger of misrepresenting Nørgaard-Højen. However, as Nørgaard-Højen has recently stated in an article in the major Danish newspaper Kristeligt Dagblad, he describes his own perspective on ecumenical theology as Lutheran (Holtze 2017). Therefore, this hermeneutical project has nonetheless been undertaken, exactly because the Lutheran identity that emerges from his book Økumenisk teologi is permeated with the knowledge from the decades of ecumenical work. Further advocating for embarking upon such a hermeneutical venture is that Nørgaard-Højen is situated in a context, not unlike Sasse’s, which is a fairly monocultural religious society.

3.2 Theology in a Multi-Cultural World

Initially, it is of immense importance for Nørgaard-Højen to display how the contemporary multi-cultural and multi-religious society has changed the way in which we do theology. Because theology according to Nørgaard-Højen is essentially a search for truth, it must be ecumenically oriented, because the search for truth is eo ipso interested in what other confessions regard as truthful (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 23. 253). However, this does not relativize the notion of truth, because, for Nørgaard-Højen, relativism and Christianity are not compatible (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 14). But in the search for truth amongst other confessions, one might find compatibilities amidst the controversies. The truth-seeking is, according to Nørgaard-Højen, fundamentally guided by different hermeneutical positions: either you search for identicalness or you search differences (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 23–24). This dualism is, according to Nørgaard-Højen, further promoted by globalization, that induces both dialogue and entrenchments (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 255).
From the onset the undergirding principle of Nørgaard-Højen’s book is the understanding that the multi-religious -and cultural contemporary world directs the truth-seeking of theology, creating an unavoidable agenda of ecumenism, that can either search for identicalness or difference. Thus, an objective view ‘from nowhere’ is unobtainable, and a view ‘from somewhere’ is subsequently unavoidable as the bias of context influences one’s hermeneutics.

3.3 Ecumenism as Fundamental to Identity

As previously mentioned, Nørgaard-Højen’s understanding of the Lutheran identity is saturated by the project of ecumenism. Consequently, he does not openly declare how the Lutheran identity might look like. However, the ecumenical search for a satisfactory substance for the unity of the entire church is very similar to the search for identity. Consequently, what Nørgaard-Højen declares sufficient to serve as the centripetal core of his ecumenical project is subsequently understood as satisfactory for the substance of an identity.

Equivalent to Herman Sasse, Nørgaard-Højen understands Confessio Augustana as a fundamental expression of the Lutheran Confession, as he continuously refers to it throughout the book. However, the focus of Nørgaard-Højen are the ecumenical aspects of the confession -the seventh article in particular. According to Nørgaard-Højen, the seventh article not only motivates and animates ecumenism but puts the Lutheran confession under the obligation of ecumenism. According to Nørgaard-Højen, the seventh article stipulates ecumenism, and as such, it is fundamental to the Lutheran identity. It is clear, that Nørgaard-Højen understands the article as primarily an ecumenical article, in contrast to Sasse. Yet, Nørgaard-Højen asserts, that while CA 7 stipulates ecumenism it simultaneously establishes concrete boundaries for the ecumenical endeavor. Thus, Nørgaard-Højen’s understanding of CA 7 is, that only what is necessary for soteriological reasons has ecclesiological relevance for the (Lutheran) Church. Hence only what is soteriological obligatory can be foundational for the Lutheran Church and subsequently for the Lutheran Identity as well. According to Nørgaard-Højen, the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith is therefore inextricably linked with the Lutheran teaching of the church, and as such, not unlike Sasse, it is fundamental to the Lutheran identity. Furthermore, Nørgaard-Højen explicitly asserts that the Lutheran notions of Sola Fide and Sola Gratia are the soteriological bedrock upon which the Lutheran church -and subsequently the Lutheran identity- is built.

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12 The overarching theme of isolation and assimilation in this research project and PNH’s notion of identicalness or difference are fundamentally similar. Both principles express that one’s (presupposed) hermeneutical viewpoint is directing and framing the outcomes of a given analysis or research project.

13 This expression is borrowed from Allister McGraths book Re-Imagining Nature (McGrath 2017a).
of ecclesiological minimalism, according to Nørgaard-Højen, but the outermost definition of what is needed to have unity among the churches (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 146–47).

3.4 Dialogue as the Foundation for Truth-Seeking

Nørgaard-Højen’s understanding of theology is carried by ecumenism which, for him, before anything else, is an open dialogue about truth, and that this truth, in some way, must be expressible (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 253). Fundamental to Nørgaard-Højen’s take on ecumenical theology is the notion of dialogue, and what that demands of one’s grasp of truth. Ecumenical theology grounded in dialogue necessitates that one is open to the revision of the shared Christian memory and that the history of Christianity is the history of all confessions, which is not fully written until all confessions can write it together (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 255). Ecumenical theology based on the principle of dialogue must, in the pursuit of truth, refrain from confessional obstinacy if any shared recollection of truth is to be found (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 257).

Further emphasizing the profound consequences and demands of dialogue is Nørgaard-Højen’s notion of the exchange of opinions, which, in his view, is not dialogue as it does not encompass the critical-creative reflection of one’s own position as dialogue requires (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 257). Critical to the function of dialogue is the possibility, that one could be mistaken. This critical-creative process of dialogue is required and presupposed in any sincere truth-seeking, and subsequently in any theology, according to Nørgaard-Højen (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 257). Consequently, Nørgaard-Højen states, that ecumenical theology is always ongoing and therefore never complete (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 258).

Approaching the question of identity from the notion of dialogue demands, the understanding that truth, in contrast to Sasse, is contingent to context (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 294). However, according to Nørgaard-Højen, the search for truth is warranted by the historical revelation of Jesus as truth incarnate, yet the perception of that truth happens in a historical context that continuously requires reinterpretations and expressions as history unfolds (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 294). Thus, truth is exclusive and final, yet the perception is ongoing and inclusive. This means, for Nørgaard-Højen, that even dogmatic formulated creedal expressions of the truths of Christianity cannot be concluding, as the contemporary interpretation pervades them and opens up for the possibility of a deeper understanding14 (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 293–95). Thus, Nørgaard-Højen understands the revelatory character of truth as ongoing, which substance is necessarily found not in previously formulated perceptions, but in the always contemporary perception of revelation. Consequently, revelation is understood in the present, and not in the past. Thus, the ongoing contemporary

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14 This gets further impetus as PNH demonstrates, that even though various confessions share ancient creedal documents, such as the Apostolicum and Athanasium, their interpretations are not identical. Mutual wording does not generate mutual understanding (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 19-20. 313-314).
revelation of truth excludes any form of unshakable assertions of truth but paves the way for current definitions of truth (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 295). As a result, the identity and dogmatic core of the Lutheran confession cannot claim to encompass the full perception of what is necessary for soteriological reasons and is therefore unavoidably referred to other confessions expressions of truth (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 259). This assertion is grounded in Nørgaard-Højen’s understanding of language as the instrument God uses to interact with humankind. This is evident in the narrative composition of the Bible and the explicit notions of Christ as the Word/Logos of God. Language, understood in general as the ability to interact with the divine, is the axis mundi between the divine and humankind, thus becoming revelatory in character. Consequently, when Christians are engaged in prayer, worship and theological work they explore the entity of God. In this fellowship of God-exploration dialogue is critical as all opinions must have room for expression if this exploration is to be authentic. Furthermore, because language is a communal gift expressed in time, revelation is subjected to the change of time. And because the historicity of humankind demands that truth is expressed through language, truth becomes subject to the consequences of the changes of language and interpretations. Following truth fluctuates over time to new yet complementary expressions as history unfolds. Consequently, truth becomes a relational concept, which makes it meaningless to speak of one or multiple truths. Only by upholding truth in its pluriform equally authentic expressions through time can the notion of one truth be maintained according Nørgaard-Højen (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 319–22).

The result of Nørgaard-Højen’s ecumenical approach to the truth-seeking of theology, grounded in the perception of dialogue, envisions that other confessional expressions of truth are authentic and genuine (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 259). The core of the Christian identity, and hence also the Lutheran identity, is thus grounded in the dynamic reality of the ongoing revelation through an open dialogue between the entire Christian community (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 259). Thus, dialogue becomes the founding principle that ensures that any confession is an authentic expression of Christianity, and accordingly any confessional self-sufficiency must be overcome. Thus, the undergirding principle of the Lutheran identity is dialogical, with the understanding, that the Lutheran expression of truth concerning what is soteriologically necessary, could potentially be expressed otherwise. Consequently, the Lutheran notions of Sola Fide and Sola Gratia, for Nørgaard-Højen, acts both as the point of departure and the borderline for the ongoing dialogue concerning what is necessary for soteriological reasons. Hence, they are not finite expressions of the Lutheran identity but are merely expressing wherein the Lutheran identity exists, and must continually unfold from.

Summarizing, from Nørgaard-Højen’s approach to theology as irresolvable rooted in context, culture, and history he asserts that CA 7 binds the Lutheran confession to an ecumenical search for truth. And because the Lutheran identity is primarily fixated on what is soteriologically necessary, it unavoidably
subscribes to the continuous occupation with truth through dialogue, because it can always be discussed wherein this truth consist (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 147). However, like Sasse, the guiding principles for discerning what is relevant for soteriological reasons concentrates around the notions of Sola Fide and Sola Gratia. This means, for Nørgaard-Højen, that there must be a correct and “pure” way of expressing what is soteriological necessary. Thus, the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments cannot be random, as truth cannot be relativized, as previously mentioned. Nevertheless, contrasting the understanding of Sasse, Nørgaard-Højen understands the notions of Sola Fide and Sola gratia not as the final expressions of the substance of soteriology, but as the borderline for the ongoing dialogue in which the interpretation of these notions must continue to unfold and be interpreted in the contemporary context (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 148. 186). It is within this spectrum that the fundamental difference between Sasse and Nørgaard-Højen exists. Sasse understands the notions of Sola Fide and Sola gratia as the final and creedal expression of the Lutheran core, (i.e. identity), and Nørgaard-Højen recognizes them as an expression contingent to contextual bias that through the continuous process of reinterpretation could possibly be understood otherwise.

3.5 Isolating or Assimilating?

Coming to a clear understanding of the distinctive Lutheran Identity that Nørgaard-Højen provides proves difficult as Nørgaard-Højen shows great attention to the underlying processes of interpretation, language, and truth. From his comprehensive and complex ecumenical approach to theology in disclosing what could be substantial enough to unify the church, Nørgaard-Højen asserts from CA 7, that a fundamental aspect of the Lutheran identity is ecumenism. The Lutheran fixation on what is necessary for soteriological reasons, expressed in the notions of Sola Fide and Sola Gratia, serve, according to Nørgaard-Højen, as the boundaries of the Lutheran identity. Like Sasse, Nørgaard-Højen states that a rudimentary Lutheran identity exists in the agreement on foundational soteriology. However, the principles of Sola Gratia and Sola Fide, according to Nørgaard-Højen, are not final expressions of dogmatic truths concerning soteriology. As history continuously unfold so must the interpretation of dogmatic truths concerning soteriology continue to unfold. Therefore, the Lutheran identity cannot exist in any present or past expression of dogma, as they endlessly develop. Consequently, the ecumenical openness fixated on what is essential for soteriological reasons through open dialogue becomes the distinctive Lutheran identity. The Lutheran identity is the open dialogical strive for truth disregarding established orders. This is the “dogmatic” principle that the Lutheran identity functions after according to Nørgaard-Højen. Clearly, this Lutheran identity cannot be accused of isolating itself. However, an identity existing in an ecumenical dialogical principle attentive to the what is necessary for soteriological reasons runs the risk of assimilation. The open dialogue in the pursuit of truth presupposes that truth is relative to contextual interpretations, and in being pluriform it recognizes other confessions as
encompassing diverging yet authentic and complementary expressions of the same fundamental truth. Thus, the search for truth, the search for identity, is always ongoing and never closing. Hence, the Lutheran identity is not static, but dynamically coming into existence in the constant dialogue with other confessions. However, as this dialogue has no culmination, no final identity nor truth can be found, and as such the always provisionally expressed identity could be in danger of assimilating. An identity which distinctiveness is a principle of an open dialogical strive for truth is always in danger of assimilating.

4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses in a Global World

Previously, in the first chapter of this research paper, the consequences of the globalized world were briefly illustrated. The chief idea is that globalization induces new challenges for any Christian confession - but especially the Lutheran which has predominantly existed in monocultural societies in northern Europe. The main challenges of the globalized world mentioned in the first chapter can be summarized accordingly:

- The increase of exchange in goods, ideas, capital, information, and people across national and continental borders brings about an interdependence between different religions and cultures.
- The resulting interdependence between nations expands the stage for policies and normative statements. Hence, the stage for policies and normative statements are expanded from a national/continental stage to a global stage.
- The birth of supranational organizations such as the United nations consolidates a global set of norms and policies that generate a uniformization process. The notion of pluralism could be conceived as the substance of this uniformization process.
- Simultaneously, the consequent rise of anti-globalization movements upholding national particularities in direct opposition to the globalized world generates a process of protectionism (Toft 2016; Fischer 2016).

The results of the transition from a national/continental world to a global world stated above triggers the positions of assimilation or isolation, which religious confessions find themselves balancing when expressing their distinctive identity in the globalized context. However, these positions are invalid for a Christian confession because the very thing that makes the formation of a Christian confession defensible is simultaneously what demands it to exceed its own boundaries. Because, in claiming to encompass truth, a confession claims to have something of universal validity which paves the way for engagement with others
(Hegstad, 2010, 201). Consequently, the protective position of isolation is not valid as truth coerces any confession towards ecumenism and mission. However, the notion of truth simultaneously invalidates assimilation as assimilation would render a confession foundationless. Subsequently, assimilation is invalid as it would strip any confession of its primary warrant for existence; its confession of a distinctive truth. In claiming to encompass truth Christian confessions must, therefore, express their identity without isolating nor assimilating.

In the face of the profound changes the globalized world has invoked, how will the Lutheran identities according to Nørgaard-Højen and Sasse manage? What are the strengths and weaknesses when confronted with the positions of assimilation and isolation? And based on that assessment, could a viable identity be constructed from a synthesis of their strengths?

4.2 The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Lutheran Identity According to Herman Sasse

The identity that Herman Sasse delivers through his book Hva er luthersk kristendom? is, as previously argued, rooted in a dogmatic understanding of the right understanding of fundamental aspects of soteriology. This is evident from Sasse’s referral to CA 7 as the Lutheran exposition of what is fundamental for the unity of the Church. Only what is necessary for soteriological reasons can be foundational for the Lutheran identity, as CA 7 and Sasse categorically asserts. The core of soteriology for Sasse is, however, the correct understanding of the Gospel. Later, Sasse expounds the correct understanding of the gospel as the doctrine of justification (which is interchangeable with the notion Sola Fide). Furthermore, the doctrine of justification is understood as the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the entire biblical narrative. Hence, the Lutheran notion of Sola Scriptura is inextricably linked with the doctrine of justification. The dynamic relationship between Sola Fide (the doctrine of justification) and Sola Scriptura are the key aspects of the Lutheran identity, because the correct understanding of the gospel, can solemnly be argued for from the biblical scriptures through the hermeneutical lens of the doctrine of justification. This is the framework for the entire Lutheran Reformation and the refixation on the Biblical scriptures. For Sasse, Luther’s rediscovery of the gospel was an event in the history of the living church of Christ, which brought forth the correct and final teaching on justification and biblical hermeneutics.

4.2.1 Strengths:

It is obvious from the above-summarized description of the Lutheran identity according to Sasse, that its greatest strength when facing the contemporary globalized world is its ability to avoid assimilation. Grounded in a specific dogmatic articulation it proves resilient to assimilation, as its meticulously articulated identity leaves little room for variation. The Lutheran identity that Sasse provides is dogmatic, and therefore cannot, at least in its essence, be expressed otherwise or be partially abandoned. The doctrine of
justification and its relation to Sola Scriptura is, for Sasse, not just the method of biblical hermeneutics, but the comprehensive and complete exposition of the heart of all of Christianity. It is both the point of departure for every Christian expression and interpretation and the concise and complete account of Christianity’s core. As Sasse continuously states, the Lutheran Reformation and identity is “simply” the correct understanding of the gospel, and as such, it encompasses soteriological and hermeneutical truths that cannot be reformed. Consequently, the Lutheran identity according to Sasse exhibits at least two overarching strengths when facing the challenge of isolation and assimilation.

1. The Lutheran identity according to Sasse has a sturdy set of roots, grounded in both a *distinctive expression of the truth of Christianity* and in a *distinctive hermeneutical approach*. Consequently, it proves resilient to assimilation.

- The *distinctive expression of the truth of Christianity* narrows down to what is necessary for soteriological reasons. This is further articulated as the correct understanding of the Gospel, which is expounded in the doctrine of justification. In being attentive to the truth concerning soteriology its framework is founded on doctrine which in turn is inattentive to contextual contingencies. Thus, from the onset, the Lutheran identity according to Sasse, is disinterested in contextual particularities, as it envisions a universal identity, due to its fixation on truth as universal. Thus, the Lutheran identity, according to Sasse, imagines a limited amount of truth assertions, serving as the unshakable bedrock upon which the universal church must be built. Consequently, the dogmatic identity resists assimilation due to its dogmatic anchoring in truths which cannot be abandoned, because in doing so, one is abandoning the Gospel which is the foundation for all of Christianity.

- The *distinctive hermeneutical approach* found in the relation between Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide proves another strength when facing assimilation. As Sasse rightly demonstrated, Sola Scriptura is not a distinctive Lutheran notion. Yet, the refixation on the biblical scriptures as the sole basis for authority in matters of doctrine held together with the hermeneutical principle of Sola Fide is distinctively Lutheran. Thus, the ongoing exegesis and interpretation of the biblical texts are not left without a distinctive hermeneutical approach, as the notion of Sola Fide acts as the interpretative key to all of Scripture. Consequently, Lutheran exegesis, according to Sasse, cannot be at random, as it is framed by doctrine. Hence, the risk of assimilation is further reduced. This approach safeguards the Lutheran Identity to follow the hermeneutical trends of the surrounding culture, as the notion of Sola Scriptura offers a framework whereby one can judge truths asserted by Christian confessions (McGrath 1996,
62). As Luther himself put it: “Christ is the mathematical point of Holy Scripture” (McGrath 1996, 54).

2. The Lutheran identity according to Sasse is inattentive to national or cultural particularities, as it strives to expose the universal soteriological truths of Christianity. Thus, in being limited to that of universal soteriological truths, and a distinctive hermeneutical approach, the proposed identity by Sasse envisions an identity that has no cultural contingencies. Basically, Sasse imagines an identity which, for him, exists as an unmediated core of truths that could be, and must be, merged into any context. Consequently, the Lutheran identity as exhibited by Sasse shows potential in resisting isolation.

4.2.2 Weaknesses

Up until now, I have illustrated the strengths of a dogma based identity, however, as I will followingly demonstrate its greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. There are at least two critical weaknesses of the Lutheran identity according to Sasse.

1. The first weakness exists in Sasse’s presupposition, that a notion of truth -universal or particular- can be grasped or conceived without inference to the culture in which it originated. Sasse simply fails to appreciate the importance of tradition-mediated rationality, thus disregarding that there no longer exist any grounds for belief in universal principles. Recalling the thoughts of Nørgaard-Højjen, dialogue is constituted by the creative-critical reflection, which demands the possibility that one could be mistaken. Thus, a conversation is only a dialogue if both participants converse from the assumption, that truth can be pluriform, and the expression of truth is contingent to context. The foundation of the identity that Sasse defends, has little or no room for this uncertainty and is, therefore, unable to go into dialogue with other religious cultures. Thus, Sasse can only engage in an exchange of opinions, as he resists any creative-critical reflection of his dogmatic core. In fact, contrary to Nørgaard-Højjen’s notion of dialogue, the Lutheran identity according to Sasse, resists any modification of its dogmatic core, as Sasse insists that the Lutheran reformation came to the correct, true, and final understanding of the central matter of the gospel. Thus, it actively resists any creative-critical reflection, primarily as a protective measure to ensure the survival of the gospel and secondly as an ecumenical and missiological approach. Consequently, the Lutheran identity, according to Sasse, cannot engage in real dialogue. Subsequently, it becomes a hermetically sealed self-justifying

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15 This view is coherent to that of Allister McGrath (McGrath 2017a, 27), and the mature philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre (Trenery 2014, 18, 66).
system of religious belief, which in practice is irrefutable. And therefore, it becomes practically vac-
uous, as only those who embrace the entirety of this Lutheran identity, can recognize, from within, what warrants its existence as it is unable to engage in a creative-critical reflection and dialogue concerning the understanding of truth.

2. The second weakness of Sasse’s dogmatic identity is its ignorance of the contingencies of culture and language. As Nørgaard-Højen rightly stated in the previous chapter, having the same creedal docu-
ments does not guarantee unity as interpretation weighs heavier than wording. Furthermore, as Nørgaard-Højen briefly introduced language, it seems relevant to introduce one aspect of the thoughts of the late Ludwig Wittgenstein, who demonstrated how language receives its meaning from the culture in which it is spoken (Trenery 2014, 26–27). Thus, he further underpins the notion, that one cannot grasp the intention or meaning behind a given sentence, spoken or written, without an intricate relationship to the culture in which it is formulated. Consequently, language and culture become intertwined to such an extent that both are unintelligible unless one has personal knowledge and relationship with the given culture and language. Hence, as the identity that Sasse provides does not consider how to mediate across the borders of culture and language, it runs the risk of becoming an isolated religious community, as it does not envision how its truth could be expressed in a differ-
ent, yet complementary way.

4.2 The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Lutheran Identity According to Peder Nørgaard-Højen

Through his book Økumenisk Teologi, I have constructed Nørgaard-Højen’s account of the Lu-
theran identity, and as I have shown, his approach to the Lutheran Identity is saturated by ecumenism. Ecu-
menism understood through the notion and consequences of open dialogue are, however, the main divide between Sasse and Nørgaard-Højen, as their account of the Lutheran identity depart from the same founda-
tion, i.e. the search for truth concerning soteriological reasons extrapolated from Confessio Augustana. The ecumenical predilection of Nørgaard-Højen’s Lutheran identity becomes evident through his insisting on the open dialogue as necessary in the search for truth – which is, according to Nørgaard-Højen, what theology essentially is. Without the creative-critical process of dialogue, theology cannot truly search for truth, as truth must be expressed in contemporary time to enable humankind, which is subject to the conditions of history, to grasp it. However, the principle of the open dialogue requires, as Nørgaard-Højen demonstrates, a pluri-
form understanding of truth, as the expression of truth is always clothed by language and culture, thus mak-
ing it contingent to its context. Hence, diverging expressions of truth could be compatible though they might seem incommensurable on the surface. Additionally, given the cultural and lingual embeddedness of humanity, the biblical revelation is also subject to the contingencies of humanity. As only the contemporary expres-
sion of truth is comprehensible to humans, the articulation and reinterpretation of truth must continue to
unfold as history unravels. To accomplish this, an open dialogue between cultural and confessional institutions is required, as truth conceived as pluriform opens for the possibility that any given expression of truth could be mistaken as every expression is relative to its contextual contingencies. If theology essentially is the search for truth, ecumenism is its shadow as Nørgaard-Højen puts it (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 23). However, in the pursuit of the Lutheran identity, Nørgaard-Højen asserts that the notions of Sola Fide and Sola Gratia function as the borderline for the ongoing dialogue of what is soteriological necessary. Consequently, one could argue that the ‘dialogical partners’, are restricted to those who share the Christian faith, though truth conceived through the pluriform lens does not necessarily make this restriction.

4.3.1 Strengths

Looking through the above-summarized account of the Lutheran identity according to Nørgaard-Højen, it is obvious that the foundation upon which he builds his identity is twofold. The first pillar is the pluriform understanding of truth and the consequential understanding of truth-expressions as always being clothed by cultural and lingual particularities. The second pillar is the concept of open dialogue, which stems from the first pillar, but in being essential to the pursuit of the pluriform truth, it functions as a methodological pillar as dialogue is the only viable way of uncovering the truth. However, to restrict the construct of the Lutheran identity Nørgaard-Højen places walls around the pillars in the form of Sola Gratia and Sola Fide, to avoid a construction that relativizes the bedrock of Christianity i.e. Christology, soteriology etc. (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 14, 104). When Nørgaard-Højen’s account of the Lutheran identity is compelled to express itself in the context of the globalized world, its primary strength is located in its avoidance of isolationist tendencies. Following I will demonstrate three distinctive strengths of the Lutheran identity according to Nørgaard-Højen.

1. The understanding of truth as pluriform prevents the Lutheran identity from isolating itself from the surrounding confessions and cultural institutions as the search for truth coerces the Lutheran confession to engage with other cultures expression of truth. Secondly, truth pluriform necessitates that truth is always expressed contemporary, and must be so to be comprehensible for a cultural and lingual contingent humanity. Consequently, the assertion of truth pluriform is attentive to the cultural and lingual clothing of expressions, thus opening a space for the process of finding possible coherence between expressions of truth that might look incommensurable on the surface.

2. However, not only does Nørgaard-Højen’s Lutheran Identity resist confessional obstinacy, thus eliminating isolationist tendencies, it also provides a tool and a direction in finding the complementary assertions of the pluriform truth. This is the second pillar which consists of open dialogue. Dialogue as the only viable tool to which truth might be found strengthens the resistance towards isolation.
Being unable to avoid engagement in an open dialogical ecumenism, Nørgaard-Højens Lutheran identity cannot isolate itself from the surrounding context as it is unavoidably referred to it in its search for truth, and because open dialogue requires that everyone can be heard.

3. However, without any bearing, the dialogical search for truth has no direction and could easily succumb to the danger of assimilation. Hence, Nørgaard-Højens establishes Sola Gratia and Sola Fide as the perimeter which the search for truth must stick to. Though this does not amount to a particularly strong defense against assimilation, at least attention towards the danger of assimilating is visible. Hence it could be conceived as a strength, though it appears undeveloped.

4.3.2 Weaknesses

The strengths of a Lutheran identity founded on an ecumenical openness fixated on what is essential for soteriological reasons through open dialogue shows great strength in resisting isolationist tendencies. However, as I have stated above, Nørgaard-Højens identity shows a limited amount of strength when confronted with the danger of assimilation. Though Nørgaard-Højens does construct a point of departure and a boundary for the ongoing dialogical pursuit of soteriological truth, he does not construct any further defense against assimilation. In the following, I will illustrate the weaknesses of Nørgaard-Højens account of the Lutheran identity.

1. Nørgaard-Højens theology is saturated by ecumenism. Though he is straightforward about his ecumenical endeavor of finding similarities between the different confessions (Nørgaard-Højen 2013, 24), he occasionally asserts that his way of doing and understanding theology is the only viable option in a multi-cultural world. This runs counter to his idea of the open dialogue, as those who assert otherwise (truth is unchanging, theology is not about truth but about Christ, Scripture is self-sufficient etc.) are left without influence in the dialogue as those standpoints are incompatible with Nørgaard-Højens. Those who do not share the same foundation cannot engage in the creative-critical dialogue and is thus excluded from doing theology according to Nørgaard-Højen. Consequently, the “openness” of the dialogue that Nørgaard-Højen assert is limited, as the understanding of truth pluriform and the required open dialogue functions as ultimate criterions to which theology can be judged. But following the thoughts of George Macintyre, Alister McGrath and the like such ultimate criterions cannot be established (Trenery 2014, 23; McGrath 2017b, 26–27). Consequently, Nørgaard-Højens Lutheran identity is too a cultural and lingual clothed take on the Lutheran identity which cannot avoid being subjective. This is important as this means that Nørgaard-Højen does not break free from the bondage of subjectivity through stating that we must be attentive to exceed our cultural and lingual embeddedness. It might seem insipid to mention, but stating that truth is pluri-
form and that open dialogue is the only viable tool in the pursuit of truth is also a ‘view from somewhere’. And when confronted with the notion of assimilation, I would argue that Nørgaard-Højen’s open dialogical identity runs the risk of assimilating as he exhibits the same amount of trust in religion as George Lindbeck did, when he said that: “religions are like languages they can obviously remain the same amid vast transformations of affirmation and experience” (Trenery 2014, 162). This trust in religion is unwarranted. Religion and language are not this closely related. The identity of a language is not connected to any narrative that can limit what can legitimately be expressed. Religion, however, has a narrative core that regardless of hermeneutical, lingual, and cultural considerations limits what can be validly asserted. Consequently, an open dialogue can only function pragmatically and not dogmatically and it does not inevitably lead to a deeper understanding of theological matters; it might as well lead into assimilation towards supra-religious standards if it is not guided by a narrative core.

a. As previously mentioned (section 4.3.1) Nørgaard-Højen does establish a perimeter for the open dialogue from the notions of Sola Gratia and Sola Fide. However, as these Lutheran principles are rather broad in intent and contemporary usage, it does not practically function as a concrete border. Recently, a number of Danish theologians have asserted that the thought of reincarnation, as well as clairvoyance, is compatible with Christianity, whilst adhering to notions such as Sola Gratia and Sola Fide (Friis and sognepræst 2015; Johansen 2015).

2. The second weakness of Nørgaard-Højen’s identity resides in his understanding of truth as pluriform. How does one reconcile the existence of universal truth, with the understanding that truth only manifests in the present in a temporary and fallible way? For Nørgaard-Højen, the search for universal truth is warranted by the incarnation of Christ. As the Word/Logos and Wisdom/Sophia of God, he was truth incarnate. He made God comprehensible to humankind. Yet, to what criteria are contemporary expressions of truth judged? How does one discern whether the Reformed, Roman Catholic, or the Lutheran expressions of soteriology are true when truth can be expressed in complementary pluriform ways? By what criteria does one judge whether they are complementary, incommensurable, or even truthful expressions of the underlying truth to which no one presumably can comprehensively express or discern? Understanding truth as pluriform does not safeguard the existence of truth, rather it muddies the water imposing a wide array of criterions in the process of evaluating the validity of truth. If truth really exists, as Nørgaard-Højen believes it does, why does it necessarily express itself with such uncertainty and in pluriform ways? Is it necessary for truth to be pluriform when a priori logic and mathematics transcends the boundaries of history and culture and are thus
not pluriform (McGrath 2017b, 32, 34)? Adding to this is the imposed uniformization process of plurality which is endorsed by the globalized world. Though the understanding of truth as pluriform is not the same as a pluralist view of truth, the line of thought shares similarities leaving Nørgaard-Højen’s identity near it. Hence, the following assimilation process could be a real danger to Nørgaard-Højen’s identity, as it seems impossible to find ultimate criterions to discern how the proposed truth proclaimed by Buddhism and Christianity are pluriform expressions of the same underlying truth or different truths entirely.

3. Lastly, the Identity of Nørgaard-Højen pushes the substance of truth from scripture or a metaphysical existing God to the realm of human cognition. This is apparent through his insisting on dialogue between the confessions. Is it only viable to be in dialogue with people? Could one not be in dialogue with scripture or the Holy Spirit? This might be the reason to why Nørgaard-Højen does not mention the Lutheran principle of Sola Scriptura and Christ as the hermeneutical key though Luther asserted that Christ is the ‘mathematical point of Holy Scripture’. Consequently, the dialogical pursuit of truth is left without any material -or hermeneutical principle to guide it. Only the boundaries created by the notions of Sola Gratia and Sola Fide limits the dialogue. But in the pursuit of truth, are these not debatable? Nørgaard-Højen does not offer any solid framework to judge whether the contemporary interpretation of the biblical narrative is coherent to the biblical truths. How does one safeguard that the contemporary interpretation of the biblical narrative does not become a slave to the dominating cultural trend, which would be the start of an assimilating process?

5.1 Envisioning a Lutheran identity in a Global World.

As initially stated (section 1.1) the circumstances of the global world coerce any culture to express their identity anew to maintain peace and avoid fragmented and segregated societies. Additionally, for a Christian confession, making one’s identity comprehensible is simultaneously an inherent missiological vocation. However, in a global world the stage for normative statements such as identity articulation, exceed national boundaries thus impacting globally. Consequently, the identity that the Lutheran confession express must avoid isolationist tendencies as it could potentially fragment and disrupt the coherency of the global Lutheran community. Likewise, assimilating to a national or global culture would make it impossible to maintain a distinctive and coherent identity on a global scale. Besides these pragmatic reasons, the nature of a religious confession invalidates the positions of isolation and assimilation (see section 4.1). Based on this, I would argue, that it is evident that assimilation and isolation must be avoided when expressing the distinctive identity of the Lutheran confession in a Global world.

As noted in section 4 the Lutheran identities provided by Sasse and Nørgaard-Højen both encompass great strengths and major weaknesses when faced with the positions of assimilation and isolation.
Consequently, a Lutheran identity that avoids both assimilation and isolation when expressed in the context of a global world, could potentially be constructed on the strengths of both to be successful. Henceforth I will aim at constructing a framework for a Lutheran identity through a synthesis of the strengths of Sasse and Nørgaard-Højen.

Through my examining of the Lutheran identity provided by Sasse and Nørgaard-Højen, I have discovered a general theme within both positions which is molding and directing the Lutheran identity which they construct. Sasses Lutheran identity aims at protecting the true meaning and substance of the Lutheran identity from alteration. Naturally, as the focus is the particularities of the Lutheran Identity the strengths of his position lie in the resilience towards assimilation, and the weakness in its inability to be comprehensible to other confessions and surrounding cultures. Looking at Sasse’s approach as a heuristic methodology, his attention is biased towards only emphasizing a negative heuristic. Consequently, he primarily articulates the rules and guiding principles of what to avoid in the process of expressing a distinctive Lutheran identity, but he does not articulate in which direction (the positive heuristic) the Lutheran identity must go.

Nørgaard-Højen’s Lutheran identity is saturated by the ecumenical strive towards unity between diverging confessions. Thus, in being attentive to commonalities and identity markers not particular to the Lutheran confession (i.e. the search for truth), the strengths of his position center around its ability to make itself comprehensible to other confessions and cultures. On the other hand, its weaknesses lie in the vague articulation of the particularity of the Lutheran identity exposing it to assimilation. Looking at Nørgaard-Højen’s approach as a heuristic methodology, his attention is biased towards only emphasizing a positive heuristic. Thus, he chiefly articulates the rules and guiding principles of the direction of the Lutheran identity, but only vaguely what to avoid in the process of going there.

As I have argued in the beginning of this section, the main theme of both positions (being attentive to the distinctiveness of one’s identity, being attentive to be comprehensible and understandable) are inalienable in the context of the global world, and by the virtue of being a confession. The Lutheran identity must be comprehensible and translatable to be received and understood by others (and Lutherans themselves) in a global world, and simultaneously it must be distinctive to warrant its existence as a confession. Confessing is both the process of knowing what to confess and how to confess it. However, an expression of a Lutheran identity that could function in a global world will always be provisional and forthcoming as its surrounding context continually changes and history tirelessly unravels. Consequently, the expression of the confessional substance could, and sometimes must, change to be understood correctly. However, to change in expression without changing in substance requires an intricate understanding of what is regarded.
as foundational of one’s distinctive identity. Both processes are inalienable if a Lutheran identity is to thrive in a global world.

To overcome these challenges, I see the need to identify both the negative and the positive heuristic principles in which the distinctive Lutheran identity can continue to be expressed in the global world. The positive heuristic could be Nørgaard-Højen’s attentiveness towards making the Lutheran identity intelligible and tangible for others. The Negative Heuristic could be Sasse’s attentiveness towards safeguarding the particularity of the Lutheran identity, thus always basing statements upon a particular set of beliefs.

I propose the following synthesis of their strengths:

1. The understanding of truth as pluriform makes Nørgaard-Højen attentive to the lingual and cultural clothing of the normative expressions of the Lutheran identity. This is a strength which makes the Lutheran identity observant of its contingencies, thus making it able to go into dialogue and become comprehensible to others. However, as previously mentioned the notion of truth as pluriform cannot establish any solid criterions to which one can validate if expressions are genuinely Lutheran. However, if this attentiveness to the contextual clothing of the Lutheran identity is synthesized with Sasse’s notion of the relation between Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide, one could establish a distinctive Lutheran criterion to which such a validation could be made. The notion of Sola Scriptura combined with the distinctive hermeneutics of Sola Fide could serve as the negative heuristic, articulating what is a valid Lutheran expression and what is not. And the notion of truth as pluriform and the attention towards the lingual and cultural clothing of any expressions serves as the positive heuristic directing to where the Lutheran identity must go. Having a negative and positive heuristic could potentially be the compass that guides a Lutheran identity away from isolationist and assimilating tendencies. This way of expressing a Lutheran identity in a global world is similar to the way Allister McGrath proposes how theology functions (McGrath 1996, 105–16, 135). McGrath asserts that there exists a regulative pattern within the biblical narrative itself, which theology is to uncover and articulate. And the doctrine that forms from the account of the biblical narrative is the conceptual framework by which the narrative is interpreted. In this, both a negative heuristic and a positive heuristic exists. The negative heuristic expresses that theology must correlate with doctrines based on the account of the biblical narrative, and the positive heuristic expresses a vocation of uncovering and articulating the biblical narrative to all. This is much like the Lutheran identity that I propose. The positive heuristic is the vocation of the Lutheran identity to be attentive to its contextual clothing and to continue to make
itself understandable and comprehensible to diverging cultures. And in this vocation, a negative heuristic must exist, which expresses that there are fundamental Lutheran doctrines which cannot be altered without discarding what is essentially Lutheran.

6.1 Conclusion

The present research project has argued that the Lutheran identity is being coerced to express itself anew due to the substantial changes that the globalized world has brought about (section 1.1). The increased range of normative statements, the induction of a global set of norms in the form of pluralism, and the rise of multi-cultural societies challenges a cultural institution such as the Lutheran confession to give an account of its distinctive identity. However, in doing so two opposite positions are being propagated in contemporary time. One is a position of assimilation, another is a process of isolationism (section 1.1). As I have argued, both are invalid for the Lutheran confession due to both pragmatic and theoretical reasons (section 1.1, 4.1). To contribute to the process of articulating a valid Lutheran identity under these new circumstances I have provided an exposition of the Lutheran identity according to the two theologians Hermann Sasse and Peder Nørgaard-Højen (section 2 & 3) to examine their strengths and weaknesses when confronted with the challenges of the Global world (Section 4).

My analysis of the Lutheran identity according to Sasse (section 3) revealed that he overemphasized the particularities of the Lutheran identity, thus not giving considerable thought as to how the Lutheran identity could -and should- be made comprehensible to others. In being inattentive to the lingual and cultural clothing of his account of the Lutheran identity, he fails to recognize the importance of tradition-mediated rationality thus creating a hermetically sealed self-justifying system which is irrefutable and practically vacuous. Hence the Lutheran identity according to Sasse is in great danger of isolation. However, his greatest strength is also his greatest strength as Sasse’s account of the Lutheran identity is a detailed account of what is distinctively Lutheran, thus firmly repelling any assimilating tendencies.

Through examining the Lutheran identity according to Nørgaard-Højen (section 4) I have asserted that his inattentiveness to the particularities of the Lutheran confession is his greatest weakness. Nørgaard-Højen simply fails to provide a solid account of what is distinctively Lutheran. Being overly attentive to the commonalities between the Christian confessions, Nørgaard-Højen dissolves the particularity of the Lutheran confession by grounding the distinctiveness in supra-confessional principles such as the search for truth and ecumenical vocations. However, Nørgaard-Højen’s greatest weakness is likewise his greatest strength as he exhibits great attention to the cultural and lingual clothing of any confessional expression thus giving way to how the Lutheran identity could become comprehensible to surrounding cultures. Hence
Nørgaard-Højen’s greatest strength is the inability to isolate, as he is fixated on establishing unity between the confessions.

Lastly, through a synthesis of the strengths of Sasse and Nørgaard-Højen (section 5), I have provided a third account of a Lutheran Identity which could prove viable in a global world. The synthesis is held together by viewing the Lutheran identity as having a negative and positive heuristic. Consequently, I argue that Nørgaard-Højen’s quest of making the Lutheran identity tangible while being attentive to the lingual and cultural clothing could serve as the positive heuristic, articulating the vocation of the Lutheran identity. Additionally, I argue, that Sasse's mission of safeguarding the doctrines of the Lutheran confession from alteration could serve as the negative heuristic, articulating what to avoid when expressing a Lutheran identity in a global world. This heuristical approach to a Lutheran identity could serve as the model in which a Lutheran identity could be expressed without assimilating nor isolating from the surrounding cultures. Simultaneously, I would argue that approaching the question of identity from this angle allows for a Lutheran identity to be expressed sufficiently distinctively to maintain a global identity, whilst making room for national particularities.

7.1 Literature


