

Reception: A Key to Ecumenical Progress

A JWG Study

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Introduction

1. Reception is intimately linked with the nature and purpose of the ecumenical movement. The *Eighth Report* of the Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (WCC) expressed the urgency of reception as an ecclesiological issue today:

“Reception” is the process by which the churches make their own the results of all their encounters with one another, and in a particular way the convergences and agreements reached on issues over which they have historically been divided. As the report of the sixth forum on bilateral dialogues notes: “Reception is an integral part of the movement towards that full communion which is realised when ‘all the churches are able to recognise in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in its fullness.’” Thus reception is far more than the official responses to the dialogue results, although official responses are essential. However, even though they are not concerned with the full range of interchurch relations, the results of international theological dialogues are a crucial aspect of reception, as specific attempts to overcome what divides churches and impedes the expression of unity willed by our Lord.¹

2. This quotation itself reveals the complexity of the concept of reception; it encompasses not only the reception of ecumenical dialogue but the broader process by which churches can receive elements, such as liturgy, spirituality and forms of witness from one another’s traditions, and even the totality of the process by which churches may receive one another in full communion.

3. By engaging in multilateral and bilateral dialogue, and by increasing contacts with one another in many ways, Christian communions long separated have begun to receive one another in fresh ways as brothers and sisters in Christ. The present text sets out to reflect the gifts and challenges of reception to the churches as they receive insights resulting from their ecumenical dialogues with one another. The pages in this report are by no means an exhaustive examination of the full scope of ecumenical achievements and their reception. The report does, however, present diverse experiences and types of reception emerging from the major ecumenical dialogues. With this study document the JWG returns to a theme taken up

1. “The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue.” (2005) *The Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches: Eighth Report*. WCC Publications, Geneva, pp. 82-83.

before and reflects further on reception as an integral part of the ecumenical movement, vital for fostering the goal of visible unity.

4. Section I starts with a brief presentation of the importance of reception in general in the life of the church. This is followed by a discussion of ecumenical reception “by which the churches make their own the results of all their encounters with one another, and in a particular way the convergences and agreements reached on issues over which they have been historically divided.”² It stresses in particular the need of continually receiving the ecumenical movement and its results into the life of the churches. Section II presents descriptions of specific processes used by various Christian world communions especially of receiving ecumenical documents. Section III shows ways in which, through the ecumenical movement, the reception of ecumenical dialogue results and the gradual reception by long separated Christians of each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, has enabled them to take significant steps towards overcoming divisions originating in the fifth, the eleventh, and the sixteenth centuries. At the same time Section IV makes clear that there remain obstacles to unity still to be resolved and therefore challenges to ecumenical reception. In this light Section V discusses the importance of ecumenical formation as a key to ecumenical reception. At the end of each section, learning points and recommendations are offered to assist the churches in receiving from one another and receiving each other. The text concludes with “An Appeal to the Churches” to acknowledge the fact that much progress has been achieved during the century of ecumenism after the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, and urges the parent bodies of the JWG to continually foster the ecumenical movement and the reception of its achievements in the life of the churches.

I. Ecumenical Reception: Vital for Achieving Unity

A. Reception in the life of the church: yesterday, today and tomorrow

5. Reception is fundamental to the life of the church. Reception is rooted in the revelation of the mutual interaction and love of the persons of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Biblical vocabulary and witness (*lambanein/apolambanein, dechesthai/apodechesthai*—receive, welcome) provides a rich source of meaning of reception as rooted in revelation.

6. To receive is essential to our experience as Christians. We receive existence and being as creatures from God, we receive salvation as

2. *The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue*, No. 59.

redemption through Jesus Christ, and a new life as anointed ones in the Holy Spirit. We receive God's word and sacraments as effective signs of the new covenant. We receive the call to mission as disciples with various charisms for the upbuilding of the Church of Christ. As the Father sends the Son and the Holy Spirit to allow human beings to receive the good news of salvation, so too those in Christ are sent so that the world may receive the joy of eternal life.

7. Since reception takes place in the Holy Spirit, it occurs in and through events of communion (*koinonia*). From the reception of the preaching of Jesus and the preaching of the gospel through the apostles, the Church was born and continues to exist. This inheritance, handed down through the ages, was received with varying degrees of difference in form and manner, reflecting the many circumstances in life of the local churches. Through mutual exchange and reception of various traditions in a visible communion (*koinonia*) the Church is sustained in unity and holiness, true to its apostolic origins and universal mission.

8. Reception necessarily involves an active discernment by the Church regarding the authenticity of what is being received. It assumes that the recognition of what is already known is grounded in the living Word of God. St. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they had already received the gospel, a gospel which he himself received (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1).

9. Reception is more than recognition: it involves appropriation and assimilation of what is received in concrete communities with concrete gestures of communion (*koinonia*). Common celebrations of the eucharist, letters of communion among bishops, profession of a common symbol of the faith (creed) and shared artistic traditions, diptychs in the liturgy, synods and councils, and pulpit exchanges are among the many and varied ways full ecclesial communion has been expressed in the Church. These signs give testimony that the call of St. Paul is lived among Christians: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

10. When a receiving community recognizes its own faith, however new its expression, it is effectively transformed and lives ever more deeply its discipleship of Christ. This dynamic of re-receiving and re-affirming the mystery of the faith is a fruit of the creative force of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. This unexpected or unforeseen aspect of reception sustains the continued vitality of the faith.

11. Reception is often gradual. At times, it is a painful experience associated with great upheaval in the lives of individuals and communities. The securing and handing on of the faith with its ecclesial life and structures, and the protection of the fellowship and unity of local churches, takes place over time, often spanning generations. This is clearly evident, for example, in such formative events in the life of the Church as the development and the establishment of the canon of scripture and the reception of the Council of Nicaea. The latter took over 50 years and the former took several centuries to achieve universal consensus.³

12. In this manner, reception has been used as a term to describe the process by which the local churches accept the decision of a council and thereby recognize its authority. This process is a multiplex one and may last for centuries. Even after the formal conclusion of such a process and the canonical reception of a council's doctrinal formula, usually through a new council, the process of reception continues in some way or other as long as the churches are involved in self-examination on the basis of the question whether a particular council has been received and appropriated properly and with justification. In this sense we can say that *in the ecumenical movement the churches find themselves in a process of continuing reception or re-reception of the councils.*"⁴ In this setting, reception "is

3. Richard R. Gaillardetz. "Reception of Doctrine." (2002) in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, ed. Bernard Hoose. Ashgate, Aldershot Hants/Burlington Vt., p. 98.

4. *Faith and Order Louvain, 1971, Study Reports and Documents.* (1971). WCC, Geneva, p. 29, italics added, and quoted by Anton Houtepen, "Reception," in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Lossky et al. (Geneva: WCC, 2nd edition, 2002), [=DEM], pp. 959-60. Here could also be documented the work of the World Council of Churches with regards to reception. For example: at the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961, there was a call for Faith and Order to undertake a study on "Councils and the Ecumenical Movement," the result of which was published in 1968. In 1971, the Final Report, "The Importance of the Conciliar Process in the Ancient Church for the Ecumenical Movement" was adopted at the Faith and Order meeting in Louvain. The appropriation of the critical discernment of the traditions according to "the faith of the church through the ages" was explicitly addressed by Faith and Order through consultations and forums on bilateral dialogues. Three of the forums are cited as the Faith and Order Paper 107, Geneva, 1982 by Johannes Willebrands, "Ecumenical Dialogue and its Reception," *Diakonia* 1-3, (1984/5): 121. This culminated in a new stage in reception when churches were asked to respond to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982).

an effect and a sign of the Spirit's presence; no mere legal category, it is a theological process that is constitutive of the life of the Church."⁵

13. In receiving and in sharing what it receives, the Church is renewed in its life and mission. It is caught up in the dynamic of revelation and tradition that always begins and ends with the living word that is sent, received and sustained in the Church itself, and shared for the life of the world. In the church, God's word is proclaimed in the scriptures and interpreted, celebrated in the liturgy, and by believers committed to living and communicating the depths of gospel in their homes, families and workplaces. In this dynamic, the Church offers itself to the world so that it may come to know God's salvation in Christ through the Holy Spirit.⁶

B. Ecumenical reception

14. Reception has assumed a new meaning in the modern ecumenical movement which is generally understood to have begun with the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Scotland. The goal of this movement, visible unity, has been expressed both by the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church. According to the WCC Constitution the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in it "is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity that the world may believe."⁷ According to Pope John Paul II, the unity we seek is "constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and hierarchical communion."⁸ The success of the ecumenical movement in achieving its goal depends on the willingness of Christians in all communities to engage in dialogue, to critically evaluate dialogue results, to receive those results into the life of their churches, and to discern ways in which the new insights can be translated into new relationships which go beyond the divisions which have afflicted Christians in the past.

5. William G. Rusch. (2007) *Ecumenical Reception: Its challenge and opportunity*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p. 7.

6. See John Zizioulas, "The Theological Problem of 'Reception'" in *Bulletin Centro Pro Unione*, No. 26 (Fall, 1984): 4.

7. Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches (as amended by the 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 2006), No. III. www.oikoumene.org/en/who-are-we/self.../constitution-rules.html (Accessed April 2, 2012)

8. Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, No. 9.

15. In this new context of churches in conversation after a period of significant estrangement, reception involves not only the consideration of results of the dialogue, but also refers to the formal decision of the competent ecclesial authorities to allow these outcomes to shape their own life and mission. The forces of receptivity and receivability are at work in this critical process of reception.⁹ While receivability deals with recognizing the results of dialogue as true and conforming to the rule of faith, receptivity designates the evangelical attitude necessary to allow those results to be adopted in one's own ecclesial tradition. Each church is called to stretch beyond its own experience to recognize and be enriched by that which is of the living word of God in other churches. The acknowledgment that one has something to learn and receive from another ecclesial body and tradition requires not only openness but also great humility. The divided churches are being called not only to receive from one another, but also to receive one another.¹⁰ Such reception includes a conscious commitment to the spiritual roots of ecumenism.

16. Ecumenical reception involves the active and distinct participation of the entire people of God. According to Cardinal Willebrands speaking from a Catholic perspective:

Reception therefore involves the *kerygma*, the *didaché*, and the *praxis pietatis*. Inasmuch as the entire People of God partakes in the search for and the unfolding of the truth of God's word, all the charisms and services are involved according to their station: the theologians by means of their research activities, the faithful by means of their preserving fidelity and piety, the ecclesial ministries and especially the college of bishops with its function of making binding doctrinal decisions. One can also say that ministry and charism, proclamation and theology, magisterial ministry and sense of faith of the People, all act together in the reception process. The Church and all her members are therefore involved in a learning process that by its very nature is not exclusively

9. William Henn, "The Reception of Ecumenical Documents," in *La recepción y la comunión entre las Iglesias*, ed. H. Legrand, J. Manzanares, and A. García y García. (1997) Universidad Pontificia Salamanca, Salamanca, p. 484.

10. Especially, "[t]his raises fundamental ecclesiological questions [...] Ecumenically, reception is coming to be seen as a process, guided by the Holy Spirit, in which churches are called to acknowledge elements of sanctification and truth in one another. This implies that they are being called to recognise in one another elements of Christ's Church." See *The Church of the Triune God: The Cyprus statement of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue 2006*. (2006) Anglican Consultative Council, London, pp. 97-98.

concerned with theological documents, but also considers developments in the domains of liturgy, pastoral care, canon law, discipline, forms of piety, etc.¹¹

17. Reception cannot and must not be understood only as a purely technical or instrumental concept or even as just a sociological process in a purely numerical or quantitative manner. Signs in the community confirming that reception has taken place must be evident, not only in words but also in life. The entire Church has the responsibility to be actively engaged as a hermeneutical community that responds to the Holy Spirit fostering unity in its midst for the life of the world. As the ninth forum on bilateral dialogues said in its 2008 Breklum Report:

We believe that it would be profitable to keep in mind right from the beginning of any phase of dialogue the reception of its results. As each dialogue is in some way a “learning process,” each needs to consider how this learning process may be shared with the wider membership of the two communities involved. Only an abiding commitment to the ecclesial reception of ecumenical texts can allow these statements of convergence or consensus to have a reconciling and transforming effect in the life of our churches. Each dialogue report might suggest some appropriate actions which could be taken by the leaders and believers of their communities on the basis of the agreements reached. We recommend that communions find a way to mark by public signs their progress in dialogue. We recommend that those churches which have made a declaration of communion between themselves develop structures of unity that provide for common decision-making, teaching, mission and action.¹²

C. Continually receiving the ecumenical movement and its results in the life of the churches

1. Receiving the achievements of a century of ecumenism

18. In the century since Edinburgh 1910, participation in the ecumenical movement has increased dramatically. At Edinburgh, only Protestants and Anglicans were present.¹³ Over the decades they were joined

11. Cardinal Johannes Willebrands. (Spring, 1985) “The Ecumenical Dialogue and its Reception,” in *Bulletin Centro Pro Unione* No. 27: 6.

12. “The Breklum Statement” of the Ninth Forum on Bilateral Dialogue, Recommendation 2, www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/breklum-statement.pdf

13. It is, however, important to note that the Bishop of Cremona, in Italy, Msgr. Geremia Bonomelli, at the invitation of Silas McBee, an Episcopalian, sent a letter of support to the Conference. Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Con-*

by Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and more recently Pentecostals in efforts of dialogue and cooperation for the sake of unity. Within a century after Edinburgh, there were closer relations among Christians. Dialogue and other contacts have addressed issues which have caused division, and have helped to radically change relationships between many Christian communities long divided from one another.

19. One can cite, for example, the continuing efforts of the World Council of Churches over six decades to relate churches to one another in the quest for unity. The many achievements of the multilateral dialogues in Faith and Order, especially *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), include the highest degree of convergence on these subjects among separated Christians since the sixteenth century Reformation. BEM has provided theological support for churches in different parts of the world as they have built new and closer relations between them, such as, among others, the Porvoo and Meissen Agreements.

20. Through recent contacts and dialogue, old conflicts over the Council of Chalcedon's Christological definition, which led to division 1500 years ago, have been faced, and have led to Christological declarations which have helped to resolve these issues. In contrast to nine centuries of separation between Eastern and Western Christians (since 1054), new relationships have developed between them in the twentieth century, and today there are many ways in which they cooperate. In regard to the sixteenth century Reformation, through dialogue a common understanding of the doctrine of justification, the central theological issue in the conflicts of the reformation, has been achieved, as seen especially in the Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Anglican and other churches in Asia have formed church unions;

ference, Edinburgh 1910. William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K., 2009, p. 11. Moreover Russian Orthodox Archbishop (now Saint) Nicolai of Japan was consulted; he pointed out the connection between unity in mission and the unity of the church: "I am in friendly, more than that, brotherly relations with all the missionaries of other sections known to me, and so are our Christians with their Christians. So shall we be from our part always, because we know that the first duty of us Christians is to cultivate Christian love to all men, and particularly to our brothers in Christ. But, nevertheless, there is no real and full unity between us and other sections; more than that, we are far from such unity because we are divided in the Christian doctrine." In *World Missionary Conference, 1910, Report of Commission VIII: Cooperation and the promotion of unity*, Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, New York, Chicago and Toronto, p. 4.

Reformed and Lutherans in Europe have entered into altar and pulpit fellowship. These and other important achievements will be discussed in detail in section III below. They have not led yet to full unity among Christians. There are still important issues to be resolved. But collectively, over the century since Edinburgh 1910, the reception by the churches of many dialogue results has created a new ecumenical situation.

2. Building on achievements as the ecumenical journey continues

21. The responsibility now is to receive and build on those achievements. A century ago, when the movement set in motion at Edinburgh first began to unfold, it was not clear what directions it might take. As the second century of the modern ecumenical movement has begun, it has become clear that the movement's achievements are significant. Christians have overcome some of the causes of the historic divisions among them. The ecumenical movement has helped promote healing and reconciliation among Christians.

22. Today, the challenge for Christians is to recognize that achievements such as those just mentioned (cf. nos. 19 and 20), have changed relationships among Christians, have allowed them to identify the deep bonds of faith they share with one another, and the real though imperfect *koinonia*/communion that exists between them. It is this new situation in their relations, fostered by the ecumenical movement, that needs to be received so that a new phase of the ecumenical movement can begin.

23. The question now is, in what ways can the ecumenical achievements of a century, which have taken Christians in many ways beyond the divisions which had long characterized their relationships, be solidified? In what ways can those achievements help fashion steps forward which will promote the unity that is sought, steps forward which will contribute to resolving the theological conflicts which still exist? There are no easy answers to these questions, which continue to challenge all Christians.

D. Ecumenical reception in the reflection of the Joint Working Group

24. The Joint Working Group is in a unique position to serve not only its own parent bodies, but the whole ecumenical movement as well. In different ways, the JWG has already acknowledged the importance of ecumenical reception by giving significant attention to it. It is also in a position to foster reception in the wider ecumenical movement. In some ways the JWG can serve as a gauge of developments in the ecumenical movement and the way in which this movement is being received.

25. The Joint Working Group has reflected on ecumenical reception both directly and indirectly. In the eighth JWG report (2005), each of its three study documents gives attention to ecumenical reception, albeit in different ways. One study document, *The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue*, illustrates the growing significance of ecumenical reception. The first JWG working paper on *Ecumenical Dialogue* (1967) had no treatment of reception, although it hinted at reception when indicating that the aim of dialogue “is to grow together in *koinonia*.” (no.1), and that the results “must be shared with the whole church” (no. 3). On the other hand, *The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue* (2005) shows that ecumenical reception is currently acknowledged as an integral aspect of the ecumenical movement. It includes a section on “The reception of ecumenical dialogues” (nos. 58-79), describing its meaning and difficulties associated with it, and giving case studies illustrating positive experiences with reception from both multilateral and bilateral dialogue.

26. A second 2005 study document, *Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism*, is in many ways an act of reception of the growing understanding of a common baptism resulting from dialogue, especially to reception of the Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM, 1982). Exploring different aspects of the common understanding of baptism, it illustrates ecumenical implications of this common understanding, and identifies ecclesiological issues, some deep bonds of faith Christians share with one another which enhance this common understanding of baptism, and others which need further treatment in dialogue in order to resolve differences which still stand in the way of the degree of unity implied in a common baptism.

27. A third study, *‘Inspired by the Same Vision’: Roman Catholic Participation in National and Regional Councils of Churches*, explores the phenomenon of the growing membership of the Catholic Church in these councils—itsself a reception of ideas put forward in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (1993).

28. Studies previously published by the JWG have included important aspects of reception. Its *Sixth Report* (1990) included two studies, both suggested in the conversation between WCC staff and John Paul II during the Pope’s visit to the WCC in 1984. One, entitled *The Church: Local and Universal*, was undertaken partly in reception of BEM. The introduction to Faith and Order Paper No. 150, in which this study was published, stated that the responses to BEM indicated that ecclesiology

must be given further attention in the future, and therefore Faith and Order took initial steps toward a major study of ecclesiology: “An important aspect of an ecumenical understanding of the church is a proper understanding of the meaning and relationship of its universal and local expressions.” Ecumenical dialogue has fostered convergence on this question, and “[t]he present study is a result of such dialogue and a contribution to its further development.”¹⁴

29. The second 1990 study, *The Notion of ‘Hierarchy of Truths’: An Ecumenical Interpretation*, was the first common ecumenical study on this subject. It refers to the expression found in number 11 of Vatican II’s *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism). It was seen as a concept which “has aroused ecumenical hopes, but...needs clarification...of its implications for the ecumenical dialogue” (no. 1). As this concept was already received as important for ecumenism, but not given ecumenical attention, the JWG study set out to study and interpret it. Its report concluded that it “has implications for the relations between churches as they seek full communion with one another through such means as the ecumenical dialogue. It can help to improve mutual understanding and to provide a criterion which would help to distinguish those differences in the understanding of the truths of faith which are areas of conflict from other differences which need not be” (no. 28). It was, in effect, inviting further reception and use of this notion in ecumenical dialogue.

30. This present study document gives examples of some of the significant achievements of the ecumenical movement, showing how new relationships have come about between churches long divided, and steps taken towards overcoming theological conflicts which have divided Christians for centuries (Section III below). These examples illustrate creative acts of reception, underlining the interrelationship of the various aspects of the one ecumenical movement. The study document also notes ongoing challenges to ecumenical reception to illustrate the difficulties before us as the movement towards Christian unity continues (Section IV below). Still other creative acts of reception should be considered in the years ahead. Continuing reception of the ecumenical movement and its various expressions in this second century of the movement will be vital for reaching the goal of visible unity.

14. *Faith and Order paper No. 150*, “Introduction,” (1990) WCC, Geneva, p. viii.

E. Learning points and recommendations

1. Learning points

To be human is to grow by receiving from others. To be Christian is to receive the grace and the gifts of God. In the ecumenical context to be Christian today involves receiving Christ in one another and through one another. In learning to receive one another we walk together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is both gift and responsibility.

- If progress is to be made in the ecumenical movement, there must be reception of the achievements already made. This responsibility is essential for the life of the churches in order to be faithful to the will of Christ (cf. John 17:21) and to live the mission of the church.

- The costly nature of discipleship teaches us that reception of these achievements takes time, is often difficult, at times painful, but always essential and fruitful. If part of reception is an exchange of gifts, those gifts can be blessings. Now is the time to harvest these fruits and gifts and move forward.

2. Recommendations

For reception to be expressed in the life of the Church and lead to concrete action, we propose the following recommendations:

- take positive steps to inculcate a spirituality of *metanoia* and welcome¹⁵ in their engagement with ecumenical partners so that the inherited barriers may be overcome and a receptivity to Christ in the other be developed;

- remind churches of the rich diversity of elements of Christian life and discipleship which can be shared across the traditions and offered for ecumenical reception;

- actively recognize, especially in the case of dialogue reports, that reception is a multilayered process, and ensure that there is a real engagement with documents in the arenas of both formal and informal reception in all its stages;

- encourage dialogue commissions to be explicit about the issues related to reception of the document when texts are being drafted and when agreed statements are achieved. This includes, for example, making clear the genre and status of the statement, giving an invitation to reader responses, and indicating that formal responses of the statements depend on the churches which sponsor the dialogue;

15. Cf. Section II.B of the 2013 JWG Study Document *Be Renewed in the Spirit: The Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism*.

- take steps to affirm ecumenical achievements and encourage the churches to receive them with a commitment to implementation.

II. How Ecumenical Reception Happens: The Experience of Christian World Communion

A. *The processes of reception*

31. Within the broadest understanding of ecumenical reception lies the precise act of a formal action whereby churches receive agreed statements of their ecumenical dialogues. Concerning such a formal action, *The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue* (2005) said the following:

If the agreements reached through ecumenical dialogue are to have an impact on the life and witness of the churches and lead to a new stage of communion, then careful attention needs to be paid to processes for receiving the agreements so that the whole community might be involved in the process of discernment.¹⁶

32. Such a precise act of reception is in and of itself only a moment within broader processes which begin long before a text or statement is formally received, and continue long after such an action has taken place. There seems to be no common process for the reception of ecumenical texts, except that it is multilayered, multifaceted, difficult to identify, at times difficult to discern, and even more difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a broadly similar pattern of reception operating across international church structures and Christian world communions. Stages of reception can be described as discovery, dialogue, and reflection on the insights of the dialogue; when appropriate, a formal act; and finally, ongoing reception.

33. Reception is born with the discovery of those brothers and sisters in Christ with whom we are called into fellowship. In a sense, the very action of discovery is an act of reception, when we learn to appreciate other churches and traditions and recognize that Christ is active and present in their life. The establishment of dialogue is a further act of reception, when we recognize an ecumenical partner as someone whose presence is needed to achieve the full visible unity of the church. The early processes of reception therefore include discovery and dialogue. An essential aspect of the dialogue is the publication of any report or agreed

16. "The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue," in the *Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches: Eighth Report*. (2005). WCC Publications, Geneva-Rome, No. 58.

statement, the promotion of its study, and reflection upon it by each of the dialogue partners. Such processes may well include rigorous theological analysis and consultation on a wide basis across the communion in question. Not all dialogues have been taken forward to a formal evaluation of the degree of ecumenical progress which the document represents. The goals of dialogue may vary from a search to lay the foundations of visible unity in one faith with one eucharistic fellowship, to a more general seeking of mutual understanding and cooperation.

34. A formal act of reception can itself take many forms. It may be a declaration by the highest authorities within a world communion, a canonical act¹⁷, or the adoption of the text by motion or resolution at a synodical or conciliar gathering or assembly. A mutual act of formal reception takes place when, after internal study, both partners respectively agree to commit themselves formally to the specific achievements of the dialogue.

35. For the fruits of the dialogue to be received it remains for the theological insights and convergence expressed in the documents to be acknowledged and lived out in the ongoing life of the receiving communions at every level of the church's life.

B. How the processes work

36. The following brief inventory includes descriptions of reception at the global level, drawing on conversations with the general secretaries and ecumenical officers of the Christian world communions. It highlights the way that international church structures, or Christian world communions, deal with the question of and response to the reception of ecumenical statements at the international level. While the list of short descriptions is not exhaustive, it does reflect different Christian traditions which are found around the world. They are listed here in alphabetical order.

37. In the formal process of reception, the interplay between the national and international levels of reception is evident in the *Anglican Communion*, but consultation across a body of autonomous provinces is inevitably slow and can be confusing to ecumenical partners. When reports are offered which need response from the churches of the Anglican Communion, they are sent to each primate and the respective ecumeni-

17. In many Anglican Churches, for example, ecumenical agreements will be incorporated into the church law of a province by a church canon or other legal process.

cal officers by one of the Instruments of Communion (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates Meetings, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council), usually the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), accompanied by questions for analysis and response. Responses at the provincial level are submitted to an Instrument of Communion, usually the ACC but also the Lambeth Conferences, often depending when the meetings are held. The new Inter-Anglican Standing Committee on Unity, Faith and Order is addressing this question and may bring recommendations for the Anglican Communion.

38. Reception in the *Baptist World Alliance* (BWA) first begins with the Committee on Doctrine and Inter-church Relations. An instance of how the process works in the BWA is in its dialogue with the Anglican Communion, *Conversations Around the World, 2000-2005*. The BWA convened a group of twelve people to assist the Committee on Doctrine and Inter-church Relations, six of whom were ecumenically aware, and six who were not so ecumenically aware, to “test the waters.” The final document prepared by the expanded committee was presented to the executive committee, but was commended, rather than voted on. An ongoing process of reception included things such as symposia at annual gatherings for questions and responses.

39. The multileveled and multilayered processes around reception are evident in the *Catholic Church*.¹⁸ When a dialogue has finished its work, the result—an agreed statement or text—is considered at this stage as no more than the property and work of the commission. The first stage of ecclesial reception begins when the text is sent by the dialogue commission to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), which then studies the text and makes a judgment as to whether or not it leads to closer communion and is open to full visible unity. Then a decision is made by the PCPCU to publish the document together with a theological commentary. This is done in agreement with the Congregation for

18. The spiritual nature and complex process of reception as understood in Catholic ecclesiology was described by Cardinal J. Willebrands in a speech to the Assembly of the Lutheran Church in America (Toronto, 3 July, 1984): “In Catholic understanding reception can be outlined as a process by means of which the People of God, in its differentiated structure and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognizes and accepts new insights, new witnesses of truth, and their forms of expression, because they are deemed to be in the line of the apostolic tradition and in harmony with the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of faith living in the whole People of God—the Church as a whole.”

the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF). It is then sent to episcopal conferences. If a document is to receive formal reception by church authorities in both communions sponsoring the dialogue, then, on the Catholic side, a joint commission of the PCPCU and the CDF is established to make the text the formal object of study and analysis. At this point, a text may be commended to the attention of the Pope, who is ultimately responsible for formal reception in the Catholic Church. This long process requires a growing agreement on the perceived value of the text; it depends on the perceived value of the text, and on whether the faithful begin to support it. Reception involves movement and reaction within the Church on the part of the bishops and the whole people of God.

40. Within the *Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)*, agreed statements of the dialogues are sent to the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, which in turn publishes the material and sends it to all the member churches. Because the Disciples of Christ have no official doctrine as in many other churches, how ecumenical texts are treated by the churches can vary enormously. Texts are often sent to congregations, ministers and other leaders, as well as to seminaries where they may function as teaching documents. Also, ecumenical texts are made available to local and national bilateral dialogues as resources. The fundamental question for the Disciples is, what does a text mean in life of the churches?

41. In the *Lutheran World Federation (LWF)* reception is a multi-leveled process, and is identified as a challenge for this Christian world communion. Creating and receiving a text is understood as occurring as a communion in communion. Dialogue reports are sent to the Committee on Ecumenical Affairs, which may give limited approval but not much more. An ecumenical text so approved is then sent to all the LWF member churches for study and comment. In practice, this stage of the reception process does not work well since many of the member churches lack the structures to give a theologically responsible response; the process appears biased towards the churches of the global north. Even in the northern churches this stage is weak, often due to lack of staff or interest. On the other hand, when the issues attract popular attention, such as with Lutheran-Roman Catholic or Lutheran-Mennonite agreed statements, more attention is paid to reception. An identified missing step is allowing dialogue statements to be part of the formation of clergy, and then being appropriated into the lives of congregations. The LWF recognizes the need for better structures for ecumenical reception.

42. The process of reception in the *Mennonite World Conference* is evident in the case of the agreed statements from the Roman Catholic-Mennonite dialogue. When the report of this dialogue was completed it was sent to the Mennonite international governing body, which then commended the report to all churches with request for responses. Responses from the local churches, which are occasionally sent to faculties of theology, were then sent back to the General Council. If recommendations for follow-up are accepted, the responses and recommendations are then sent to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Catholic Church.

43. An instance of reception in the *Oriental Orthodox* tradition is seen in the Holy See of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church. It is the responsibility of the ecumenical officer to provide His Holiness the Catholicos a progress report on a dialogue, or a final agreed statement. Then the text may be sent to the Ecumenical Relations Committee, presided over by the Catholicos. If the text is approved by the Catholicos, it is then sent to the Central Religious Council (equivalent to the Holy Synod of other Orthodox churches) for approval. Because the Armenian Apostolic Church has two jurisdictions—Etchmiadzin and Cilicia—the agreement of one Holy Synod is then forwarded to the other; representatives of the two Holy Synods must meet and agree on the text. The final step is to send the report and joint decision of the two Holy Synods to all the Oriental Orthodox churches for final reception by the family of Oriental Orthodox churches. The process of reception is largely conditioned by the nature of the agreed text or statement.

44. In most of the local autocephalous *Eastern Orthodox* churches, the findings of bi-lateral theological dialogues as well as the documents of ecumenical organizations submitted to churches for action are normally forwarded by the Holy Synod of each church to their respective specialized synodical commission or department. These would assess each document and report back to the Holy Synod. In some cases (i.e. study documents) churches may formulate and offer their own response individually. In other cases (i.e. results of bilateral theological dialogues) there is always an awareness that further consultation and final agreement with other sister Orthodox churches is needed within the framework of the pan-Orthodox conciliar process. A concrete example of coordinated Orthodox efforts aiming at reception is from the Ecumenical Patriarchate. There are cases where the Ecumenical Patriarchate would convene or encourage inter-orthodox consultations (organized, for example, by the

WCC) in order to articulate an Orthodox response or offer an Orthodox contribution to major ecumenical processes. Such responses or contributions are normally better known and received. In other cases, the Ecumenical Patriarchate would attempt to assess the level of consensus among Orthodox churches (e.g. in the case of bilateral theological dialogues) either by correspondence with the heads of Orthodox churches or by convening a consultation with the participation of all local churches. Another concrete example of reception within the Orthodox Church is the Russian Orthodox Church, where the appraisal of ecumenical texts is the responsibility of its Department for External Church Relations. Agreed statements are studied by the department, and then sent to the Holy Synod's theological commission for further analysis of the document. If approved, the text is then sent to faculties of theology for further theological study. The final stage of reception is the bishops' council. The process can be very slow, as is reflected in the agreed statements arising from dialogue with the Oriental Orthodox churches.

45. The *Pentecostal* churches have not yet developed any formal mechanisms to receive texts arising from ecumenical dialogues. While a number of international bilateral and multilateral theological dialogues currently exist (Catholic, World Communion of Reformed Churches, WCC, and Ecumenical Patriarchate) or will soon begin (LWF, Baptist World Alliance), they include both formal and informal participants. Reports are currently published and widely studied by members of the worldwide Pentecostal academic community, and the leadership of the Pentecostal World Fellowship and a number of its participating churches is both aware of and encouraging of these encounters. It is already the case that Pentecostals have begun to reflect on how they might receive the fruits of their ecumenical encounters with others. On the whole, Pentecostals are more comfortable in speaking of a diffuse and Spirit-led process of reception, and indeed, of "receiving one another as Christ has received us" (cf. Rom. 15:7). This is both difficult to define and to recognize, but it does happen.

46. The *Salvation Army* does not make joint declarations, and does not have formal processes for reception. The results of its bilateral dialogues are sent to territorial leaders. They also appear in church publications and are sent to journals.

47. Among *Seventh Day Adventists*, the reception of ecumenical texts is under the auspices of the Council for Interchurch and Interfaith Relations (CIIR). When members of a given dialogue organized or coordinated by the

General Conference have reached agreement and are ready to report their findings to the church for response, their dialogue statements are sent to the CIIR. If, in the judgment of the Council, the agreement is of interest to the whole church, it goes to the General Conference's administrative committee, and if accepted it is sent to the regional bodies for study and comment. If the agreement is not accepted at the local and regional levels, it is sent to the General Conference's CIIR for adjustment, which will be done in consultation with the dialogue partner. The Seventh Day Adventists now are engaged in an international bilateral dialogue with the Mennonite World Conference, and a regional bilateral dialogue with the Presbyterian Church (USA).

48. An example of reception in a *United and Uniting Church* is found in the United Reformed Church (URC) in the United Kingdom. The URC makes the distinction between dialogue reports which seek understanding and dialogues which seek action. Reception is an open process that can happen in less formal ways. For example, the reception of the teaching on the eucharist from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is seen in newer eucharistic liturgies. Reception of BEM's teaching on baptism is seen in a readiness to accept believers and infant baptism. Reception of BEM's treatment on ministry has been more problematic, related to the challenges around the mutual recognition of ministry. The experience of the URC suggests that when churches have an open policy concerning reception, with no expectation that official action needs to be taken, informal reception may be much easier for churches than when reception is a more formal and complex process.

49. For the *World Communion of Reformed Churches* (WCRC), reports and agreed statements are first sent to the WCRC for publication. The report is then sent to members of the executive committee, then to the General Council. If the report is accepted by these bodies, the General Secretary of the WCRC then sends it to member churches with a commendation for study and action. In the experience of the WCRC, a number of different kinds of responses are possible, ranging from silence to relatively quick reactions. Often the process of receiving responses from member churches can take up to a decade, e.g. the Leuenberg Agreement of 1973 (Lutheran-Reformed), or the Reformed-Roman Catholic dialogue. Formal reception is experienced as a challenge for the WCRC, with the expressed need for more official feedback and response. On the other hand, informally, agreed statements are received in other ways at various levels of the life of the church.

50. Within the *World Evangelical Alliance* (WEA), responsibility for ecumenical dialogues belongs to the WEA International Council. Agreed statements are committed to this body, and it decides whether it has respect from the WEA side. If a statement merits such respect, it is then sent out to the corresponding bodies in the national Alliance headquarters, and then from there to the grassroots level of local congregations. Churches who share an agreement with the dialogue statement signal so at national meetings.

51. Dialogues at the international level report every five years to the major quinquennial gathering of the *World Methodist Council* (WMC). The ecumenical reports are introduced at the WMC, questions are taken, and they are welcomed or “received” in this manner. In emerging practice, ecumenical texts are sent beforehand to the officers of the Council (now also to a new steering committee) and to the Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations (formerly “on Ecumenics and Dialogue”), and thence to all delegates of the member churches. The churches are asked to respond to the proposed texts and report their views. At its formal gathering, the WMC is asked to affirm the agreed statements of the theological dialogues; such an affirmation is registered and recorded within the minutes of the Council. The texts are published after authorisation for use by member churches and indeed the wider public. The current test-case for a higher degree of reception is the process around the recent synthesis of the last forty years of Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue, *Together to Holiness*, which was presented to the WMC in 2011. The joint report noted those doctrinal topics on which there is consensus; those where there exists a degree of convergence, and those which are acknowledged as being more resistant to such agreement and which are commended to the Commission’s future work.

52. In summary, even a preliminary outline of these processes indicates something of the complexity and uncertainty attached to the processes of reception. Moreover, the processes described above can only give some indication of the formal ways in which reports and agreed statements are brought to the point of a formal act of reception. There remains the task of ongoing reception, which is the most vital if a real change is to be brought about in the quality of *koinonia* that a formal act of reception might invite or entail.

53. The most formidable challenge facing the reception of the fruits of ecumenical dialogues must relate to the way in which documents that have

received formal approval are permitted to impact the lived experience of the faithful in mission and witness. It is all too possible for a document of convergence to remain on the shelves of an ecumenical office or department without even the fact of its existence becoming widely known and received by the churches at the local level. It is vital in addressing the processes of reception therefore that attention is given to all elements of the process.

C. Learning points and recommendations

1. Learning points

- There is growing awareness of the wide diversity of processes for reception in the life of different churches.

- Reception includes stages of discovery, dialogue, reflection, formal act (when mandated) and ongoing reception in the life of the churches.

- No church structures necessarily guarantee reception. Unless there is a will at all levels to enter the process of reception, it will not occur.

- The process of reception cannot begin until Christians discover Christ at work in one another. Reception is born when space is created to welcome the other in our midst.

- If reception is to be successful the entire people of God must be involved throughout its multifaceted processes.

- When churches enter the dynamic of reception they move from isolation and self-sufficiency towards a deepening *koinonia*. International church structures and Christian world communions in particular facilitate this process. They become instruments of and vehicles for reception.

2. Recommendations

For reception to be concretely expressed in the life of the church, we propose the following recommendations:

- ensure that structures and opportunities exist to assist the entire people of God to discover their brothers and sisters in Christ in other traditions;

- encourage all Christian leaders and the faithful to take responsibility for the ecumenical process by a commitment to concrete action;

- foster openness to a diversity that is not irreconcilable with the gospel, but which may enrich the life of the churches and be an opportunity rather than a problem for *koinonia*;

- encourage those holding authority at any level to act in service of the ecumenical movement by fostering an appropriation of the fruits of ecumenical engagement at all levels;

- commit themselves to the ecumenical formation of the entire people of God in order to guarantee growth in fidelity to discipleship in an ecumenical age.

III. Overcoming the Divisions of the Past: Reception Promoting Reconciliation

A. The new context fostering reception

54. The twentieth century transformed Christian relationships, as modern means of transport and communication allowed much closer and more frequent contact than in ages past. In the various examples explored below, it was the impact of broader ecumenical contact that created an atmosphere enabling Christians of various traditions to begin to cooperate with each other, first in the great movements coming immediately from the time of Edinburgh 1910—the Missionary Movement, Faith and Order, Life and Work, co-operation in education and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This ecumenical movement itself sustained and prompted new initiatives. Christians taking part in these movements began in some degree to receive one another as co-workers in Christ seeking the unity for which he prayed (cf. John 17:21). More specifically, as these movements led to the creation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, the churches themselves, who were now represented together in the WCC, began to receive one another as communities, and gradually to develop common cause for the sake of Christ. Though the Roman Catholic Church was not a member, some of its theologians were in contact with the WCC from the 1950s.

55. During the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church and the WCC began to develop a formal and regular relationship, and from that time, to receive each other as partners in the one ecumenical movement. At Vatican II, through the observers sent by the WCC, the churches and Christian world communions began to know the Catholic Church and vice versa. In this context, initial steps were taken to receive one another in Christ, which would help them later to take more profound steps towards facing the divisions of the past. They began to recognize together the degree to which they hold the faith in common despite those divisions. The stage was set for addressing the divisive issues of the past.

56. In order to understand the dimensions of ecumenical reception, it will be useful, first, to describe some instances when reception has succeeded. In the twentieth century, reception of ecumenical insights has contributed to overcoming some conflicts that led to the three most significant

divisions in the history of Christianity. These divisions took place in the fifth century after the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), in the eleventh century (1054), and in the sixteenth century with the reformation.

B. Towards overcoming fifth century divisions

57. In the fifth century some churches, for various reasons, did not receive certain theological statements of the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). Reactions to the Christological formulations of the Council of Chalcedon led to a separation within Christianity, a division which has lasted until today. Within the modern ecumenical movement, dialogue has led to clarification of issues which contributed, then, to misunderstanding. New contacts and dialogue between Oriental Orthodox churches,¹⁹ the churches which “historically inherit a refusal of the Christological teachings of the Council of Chalcedon,”²⁰ and those such as the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches which accepted those teachings, have led to much agreement today on the mystery of Christ.

58. New contacts between Oriental Orthodox churches and the Catholic Church at Vatican II were important for building trust after centuries of separation. New insights and clarifications achieved in dialogue, whether at the Pro Oriente Foundation in Vienna starting in 1971, or in the multilateral dialogue of Faith and Order, or in bilateral dialogue, have helped those involved to formulate Christological statements expressing the same faith in Jesus Christ. These new insights and clarifications have been received and expressed in authoritative common Christological declarations formulated by the Bishops of Rome, especially Paul VI and John Paul II, with Patriarchs of several Oriental Orthodox churches. The Eastern Orthodox-Oriental Orthodox dialogue has also formulated common Christological statements. Dialogues between Oriental Orthodox and significant Western churches have likewise achieved agreed statements on Christology, presented below in paragraph 64.

1. Common Christological declarations

a. Bishops of Rome and Oriental Orthodox Patriarchs

59. The first of these declarations, between Pope Paul VI and Coptic Orthodox Pope Shenouda III (May 10, 1973), stated:

19. The Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Churches.

20. Ronald G. Roberson, “Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic Dialogue.” DEM, pp. 862-63.

we confess one faith in the Triune God, the divinity of the Only Begotten Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity...who for us was incarnate, assuming for Himself a real body with a rational soul, and who shared with us our humanity but without sin. We confess that our Lord and God and Saviour and King...Jesus Christ is perfect God with respect to His Divinity, perfect man with respect to his humanity. In Him His divinity is united with his humanity in a real, perfect union without mingling, without commixtion, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without separation. His divinity did not separate from his humanity...not for the twinkling of an eye.²¹

60. Christological language in the same line, confessing Jesus Christ as perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, can be found also in common declarations between: Pope John Paul II and Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (June, 1984),²² John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I of the Armenian Apostolic See of Etchmiadzin (December, 1996)²³ and re-affirmed in the common declaration signed by John Paul II and Catholicos Aram I of the Armenian Apostolic See of Cilicia (January, 1997).²⁴ It is found, too, in the doctrinal agreement on Christology approved by Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Mar Basilius Marthoma Matthews I of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (3 June 1990).²⁵

b. The Bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East

61. In a process with another ancient church, the Assyrian Church of the East, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV also addressed the conflicts arising from the Council of Ephesus 431. In their common declaration of 11 November 1994, similar to those above, they confessed

our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, perfect in his divinity, perfect in his humanity, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us in all things but sin. His divinity and his humanity are united in one person without confusion or change, without division or separation. In him has been preserved the difference of the natures of the divinity and humanity, with all of their properties, faculties and operations.²⁶

21. "Visit of His Holiness Amba Shenouda III, Common Declaration," *IS* 22 (1973): 9.

22. "Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and HH Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas," *IS* 55 (1984): 62.

23. "Common Declaration of John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I," *IS* 94 (1997): 30.

24. "Common Declaration of the Pope and the Catholicos Aram I," *IS* 95 (1997): 80.

25. "Statement of the Joint Commission," *IS* 73 (1990): 39.

26. "Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and

c. The official dialogue of the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches

62. This dialogue said:

We have inherited from our Fathers in Christ the one apostolic faith and traditions, though as churches we have been separated from each other for centuries. The Logos, eternally consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit in His Divinity, has in these last days, become incarnate of the Holy Spirit and Blessed Virgin Mary Theotokos, and thus became man, consubstantial with us in His humanity but without sin. He is true God and true Man at the same time, perfect in His Divinity, perfect in His humanity. Because the one she bore in her womb was at the same time fully God as well as fully human we call the Blessed Virgin Theotokos. (First Agreed Statement, 1989)²⁷

63. The consequences of the Christological agreements reached in the dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches have not been fully received by the respective constituencies. Eucharistic communion, for instance, has not been restored. Other issues remain, such as lifting the anathemas against one another's saints, and questions about liturgical and ascetical traditions. Yet there are other signs of rapprochement. For instance, as a result of the Christological agreements, the Coptic Orthodox no longer re-baptize members of the Eastern Orthodox. Within the unique context of Syrian ecumenism, the two Antiochian patriarchates experience the pastoral reality of sacramental communion.

d. Christological agreement in other bilateral dialogues

64. Christological agreement is expressed in contacts and dialogues of other churches with the Oriental Orthodox churches. These include the Common Declaration of Pope Shenouda III and Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie (October 1, 1987),²⁸ international dialogue reports such as the *Agreed statement on Christology* of the International Reformed-Oriental Orthodox Dialogue (September 13, 1994),²⁹ and the *Agreed Statement on Christology* of the Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission (November 5-10, 2002).³⁰ Agreement on Christology

the Assyrian Church of the East," *IS* 88 (1995): 2.

27. Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch, eds. (2000) *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and agreed statements of ecumenical conversations on a world level 1982-1998 [=GA II]* WCC Publications, Geneva and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids Michigan/Cambridge, p. 192.

28. GA II, pp. 110-111.

29. GA II, pp. 292-93.

30. Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Thomas Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA., eds. (2007) *Growth in Agreement III: International dialogue texts and agreed statements, 1998-2005*

is found also in dialogues between others including the *Agreed Statement on Christology* of the Old Catholic-Orthodox dialogue (1975 and 1977),³¹ the 1977 Reformed-Catholic International Dialogue report *Presence of Christ in Church and World* (no. 84), and the 1995 Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission report *Authority in and of the Church* (no. 5a).

65. Thus, the dialogues taken together have resulted in widespread agreement on the nature and mystery of Christ. Agreement has been formally received by the Catholic Church and certain Oriental Orthodox churches through common Christological declarations of popes and patriarchs which illustrate, for them, the basic resolution of the fifth century Christological controversies (cf. note 17). Formal reception processes concerning these agreements are not yet complete and continue within other churches. It is clear that other issues also still need to be resolved. Nevertheless the broad Christological agreement seen above will enable the churches to get beyond a particular divisive fifth century conflict, and assist them in confessing together before the world the same faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

C. Towards overcoming the divisions of 1054

66. For more than nine centuries, since the mutual excommunications in 1054 between representatives of the Sees of Rome and Constantinople, and intensified by later events, the relationship between the Orthodox East and the Latin West had been characterized by schism, hostility, and misunderstanding. In the twentieth century, and especially since the Second Vatican Council, Orthodox and Catholics have renewed relationships in a variety of ways. They gradually are coming to recognize and mutually receive one another as “sister churches,” a designation which indicates that they share to a profound degree the same apostolic faith, and participate in the one apostolic succession. Nonetheless, there are still issues to be resolved before full communion is achieved.

67. The public reading of the Common Declaration of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I and Pope Paul VI on 7 December 1965³² at the

[=GAI]. WCC Publications, Geneva and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, pp. 35-37.

31. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, eds. (1984) *Growth in Agreement: Reports and agreed statements of ecumenical conversations on a world level* [=GA]. Paulist Press, New York/Ramsey and World Council of Churches, Geneva, pp. 396-98.

32. The “Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I, 7 December 1965.” Austin Flannery O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*. (1988, Revised edition) Costello Publishing

conclusion of Vatican II and simultaneously at St. Peter's Basilica and at the Phanar, was an important context for this new relationship. Pope and Patriarch, addressing the mutual excommunications levelled at one another in 1054 by the legates of the Roman See and the Patriarch and Synod of Constantinople, expressed their regret for the sad events of that time. They stated that those mutual excommunications brought consequences which "went much further than their authors had intended or expected," and, most critically, "[t]heir censures were aimed at the persons concerned and not on the Churches; they were not meant to break the ecclesial communion between the Sees of Rome and Constantinople" (no. 3). They declared together that they "regret and wish to erase from memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication which followed them and consign them to oblivion" (no. 4b). They expressed hope that this action, fostering a healing of bitter memories of the past, would be followed by dialogue leading them to full communion of faith and sacramental life which obtained between them for the first thousand years of the life of the church.

68. Since the early 1960s, ecumenical patriarchs and popes, in addressing one another, have used the designation "sister church" to describe the relationship of Orthodox and Catholic Churches.³³ It appears to have been first used by the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I in replying on 12 April 1962 to a letter from Cardinal Augustin Bea.³⁴ In the period between 1962 and 1967, the Ecumenical Patriarch or his representative addressed the Church of Rome as "sister church" seven times.³⁵ Pope Paul VI first used this designation in his letter (*Anno Ineunte*) of 25 July 1967 to Athenagoras I, describing also its significant theological meaning. Both have received the faith of the apostles, and by baptism are

Company, Northport, New York, pp. 471-73.

33. In Catholic usage, sister churches are particular churches or groupings of particular churches, for example the Patriarchates or metropolitan provinces among themselves.

34. E.J. Stormon, S.J. Editor and translator. *Towards the Healing of Schism: The Sees of Rome and Constantinople. Public statements and correspondence between the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate 1958-1984* (1987) Paulist Press, New York Mahwah, Doc 10, p.35.

35. For example, in his statement to the Holy Synod on the death of Pope John XXIII in 1963, Athenagoras said that "in the person of the late venerable leader of our sister Church of Rome we discerned an inspired labourer well able...to train his gaze on those points of the teaching of the Lord and of apostolic tradition which are common to both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches." 4 June 1963, Stormon, pp.44-45. Other usages of this designation can be seen in Stormon pp. 51-52, 71, 76, 86, 134.

one in Christ. And “in virtue of the apostolic succession, we are united more closely by the priesthood and the Eucharist.... In each local Church this mystery of divine love is enacted, and surely this is the ground of the traditional and very beautiful expression ‘sister churches’ which local churches were fond of applying to one another.” And “for centuries we lived this life of ‘sister churches’ and together held the Ecumenical Councils which guarded the deposit of faith against all corruption. And now, after a long period of division and mutual misunderstanding, the Lord is enabling us to discover ourselves as ‘sister churches’ once more, in spite of the obstacles which were once raised between us.”³⁶ And in a 1971 letter to Athenagoras, Pope Paul VI expressed his view that between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches “there already exists a communion which is almost complete—though still short of perfection—deriving from our common participation in the mystery of Christ and his Church.”³⁷

69. Their successors, too, have articulated this mutual designation together in common declarations. Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I announced together on 30 November 1979 the beginning of a theological dialogue which envisages “an advance towards the reestablishment of full communion between the Catholic and Orthodox sister Churches...”³⁸ In their common declaration of 29 June 1995, John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, reflecting on the results of the dialogue which had affirmed “that our churches recognize one another as sister churches, responsible together for safeguarding the one church of God”, concluded that these affirmations “not only hasten the way to solving the existing difficulties, but henceforth enable Catholics and Orthodox to give a common witness of faith.”³⁹

70. Besides the Sees of Rome and Constantinople, this designation has also been used by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Teoctist of the Orthodox Church of Romania in their common declaration of 12 October 2002. Stating that “[i]n accord with the traditional beautiful expression, the particular churches like to call one another ‘sister churches,’” they point to the implications this recognition has for mission: “[t]o be open to this dimension means collaborating to restore to Europe its deepest ethos and its truly human face.”⁴⁰ In some cases, as in the relations

36. Stormon, 161-162.

37. 8 February 1971, Stormon, 231-232, citation 232.

38. Stormon, p. 367.

39. In GA II, p. 686.

40. In GA III, pp. 180-181.

between the Church of Rome and the Moscow Patriarchate, there have not been common declarations. But the mutual recognition of sacraments and holy orders, reflecting the theological basis of the designation “sister churches” is known in other ways.⁴¹

71. Similarly, this designation has also been used, in at least one instance, between a pope and an Oriental Orthodox patriarch. In their common declaration on 23 June 1984, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas of the Syrian Orthodox Church, indicate that if their faithful find access to a priest of their own church materially or morally impossible, “we authorize them in such cases to ask for the sacraments of penance, eucharist and anointing of the sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister churches, when they need them.”⁴²

72. The international Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue, too, on the basis of the concept of “sister churches,” proposed a way to resolve an old conflict between them concerning the role of Eastern Catholic churches, which flared up again following the fall of communism in 1989. Its 1993 report, *Uniatism: Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion*, on the one hand affirms the rights and obligations of Eastern Catholic churches to undertake their mission (cf. no. 16). On the other hand, it indicates that the “uniatism” which developed in events and conflicts of centuries ago can today be interpreted as a form of missionary apostolate against the other (no. 12, cf. 10-11) and thus “can no longer be accepted neither as a method to be followed nor as a model of the unity our churches are seeking.” The report argues “that what Christ has entrusted to his church—profession of apostolic faith, participation in the sacraments, above all the one priesthood celebrating the one sacrifice of Christ, the apostolic succession of bishops—cannot be considered the exclusive property of one of our churches.... It is in this perspective that the Catholic churches and the Orthodox churches recognize each other as sister churches, responsible together for maintaining the church of God in fidelity” (nos. 13, 14, cf. 12).

73. In regard to those same tensions between Orthodox and Catholics after the changes in Eastern Europe, John Paul II in his 31 May 1991

41. The official attitude of the Church of Russia, among others, “is recognizing and respecting the Holy Orders and full sacramentality of the Roman Catholic Church.” See “Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism. A JWJ Study”, no. 62. Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches: Eighth Report. (2005) WCC Publications, Geneva, p. 59.

42. In *GA II*, pp. 692-93.

Letter to Bishops of Europe on relations between Catholics and Orthodox in the new situation of central and eastern Europe, made clear that “with these Churches relations are to be fostered as between sister churches.”⁴³

74. Many other developments have fostered this relationship. Although Orthodox and Catholics do not yet share full communion, this gradual mutual reception of each other as sister churches calls attention to the deep bonds of faith they continued to share, even though separated for more than nine centuries, and share more intensely now. Despite continuing areas of divergence between them, much of what has separated them has been overcome.

75. Significant and longstanding theological dialogue has been carried out between the Orthodox churches and other Western churches, such as Anglican-Orthodox dialogue, Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue, Methodist-Orthodox dialogue, Old Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, and Reformed-Orthodox dialogue. Participation by the Orthodox churches in the WCC and the numerous theological dialogues that have been initiated have led to great understanding and co-operation. All these steps bear witness to a greater sense of reconciliation between East and West.

D. Towards overcoming divisions from the sixteenth century

76. Some of the most intense divisions in the history of the Church took place in the sixteenth century. Within the complex ecclesiastical and political situation of that time, reformers from different countries criticized and sought to revise practices inherited from late medieval Christianity within the Catholic Church. Such efforts to reform and renew often led to a break in communion with the See of Rome; other reforms occurred within the Catholic Church. But separated churches, shaped by the Protestant Reformation, were in serious conflict with each other as much as they were with the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, in a variety of ways, recent ecumenical contact and dialogue have helped to resolve some of the issues leading to division in that century. Receiving the results of dialogue has enabled separated Christians to begin to receive one another again. Examples of the way in which different churches have been able to receive each other multiplied in the twentieth century.

43. Letter of Pope John Paul II “To Bishops of Europe on Relations Between Catholics and Orthodox in the New Situation of Central and Eastern Europe, May 31, 1991.” *IS* 81 (1992): 103.

1. Early examples of mutual reception

77. a. An early example of this can be found in the Bonn Agreement between the Anglican and Old Catholic churches in 1931. While not resolving a division from the 16th century, this agreement stands perhaps as a strong example of explicit reception in a relatively simple model. The Bonn Agreement is essentially an acknowledgement of reception. The churches of the Anglican Communion and of the Union of Utrecht established full communion. This has not been without its difficulties. Questions still remain about parallel jurisdictions in some European countries, and the traditions remain distinct and separate, not in full organic unity. Nevertheless, the Bonn Agreement institutes full mutual reception of the faith, sacraments and ministry by these two families of churches.

78. b. The South Asian experience of the united churches is also worth recording. Starting in the 1940s churches of the various Protestant and Anglican traditions in North and South India, in Pakistan and Bangladesh, were able to receive one another into a united fellowship and a reconciled ministry. And thus were born the Church of South India (1947), the Church of North India (1970), the Church of Pakistan (1970), and the Church of Bangladesh (1970). The mechanisms of reconciliation varied and were sometimes seen as controversial and partial in their implementation, but one generation later, the churches which participated in the various schemes of unity have now fully received one another and been united into single churches.

79. c. In the same way that Anglicans and Old Catholics have been able to receive one another, so the churches of the Anglican Communion have been able to extend reception to other churches. Sometimes this has meant that churches, such as the Lusitanian Church of Portugal (1963) and the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church (1980), have been welcomed into full membership of the Anglican Communion; in other cases, such as the Independent Church of the Philippines (1960) and the Mar Thoma Church of South India, the faith, sacraments and ministry of churches have been mutually received without formal and organic integration.

80. These processes have sometimes been at work at the regional level as well. The Porvoo Agreement between the Anglican Churches of the British and Irish Isles and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches involves the full reception of one another's lives as churches, including the reception of one another's members, ministries and sacraments.

81. Further examples could be adduced. What is clear so far is that several examples exist in which mutual reception has been possible and

indeed, has resulted. Churches have been able to recognize the fullness of the presence of the Church in one another and have translated that into concrete agreement and action—in some cases leading to full organic unity.

2. More recent examples of successful reception: Leuenberg and Porvoo

82. The 16th century movement of the Reformation was meant to renew the Church in accordance with the gospel and the ecclesial formation of the early Christian church. Within this Reformation context, however, the understandings of what was needed varied in different places in Europe due to the different political, social and cultural contexts in which theologians and laity experienced church life. Consequently, several strands developed within this broad movement which derived their energy from what was perceived as the rediscovery of the true message of the gospel. What united them was the common conviction of God's unconditional grace and the justification by faith alone. The reformers understood the Bible as the decisive source for Christian faith and teaching. According to this renewed insight into God's grace and justice, there was broad agreement among the reformers on the major issues that needed to be reformed, such as the praxis of penitence and indulgences.

83. Theological reflection on the understanding of the sacraments and the Christology behind them and on questions of predestination, however, led to conflicting positions, especially among reformers in Wittenberg and in Switzerland. Moreover, different political circumstances allowed for different institutional forms by which the reforms were established, especially with respect to ministry and church order. This is at least part of the reason for the fact that along with the modern ecumenical movement, European churches, in their effort to overcome separation, developed two different models to do so on the grounds of their heritage from the Reformation.

a. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe—The Leuenberg Concord

84. In 1973, Lutheran, Reformed and United churches in Europe together with pre-Reformation churches, the Waldensian Church and the Church of Czech Brethren, were successful in developing the *Leuenberg Concord* (LC), an agreement by which the traditional church dividing issues could be resolved on the grounds of a common understanding of the gospel. In the document itself, historical distance is counted as an advantage. This has made it easier for churches to discern common elements in their teaching despite the former differences.

In the course of four hundred years of history, the churches have been led to new and similar ways of thinking and living; by theological wrestling with the questions of modern times, by advances of biblical research, by the movements of church renewal, and by the rediscovery of the ecumenical horizon. ... In the process they have learned to distinguish between the fundamental witness of the Reformation confessions of faith and their historically-conditioned thought forms. (LC 5)

85. On the grounds of a common understanding of the gospel proclaiming God's gracious and unconditioned justification as the message of his free grace (LC 7-12), the document offers a common definition of baptism and the Lord's supper (LC 14-15). While the doctrine of justification was not controversial in the Reformation period and in later confessional development, the mutual condemnations were intimately connected with a Christological difference. Therefore, the heart of the *Leuenberg Concord* is the paragraph on Christology, saying: "In the true man Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, and so God himself, has bestowed himself upon mankind for its salvation. In the word of the promise and in the sacraments, the Holy Spirit, and so God himself, makes the crucified and risen Jesus present to us" (LC 21). The shaping of church fellowship was possible on the ground of Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession*. In this article reformers confess and teach:

that one holy church is to continue forever. The church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike.

86. According to this understanding of church unity, churches may on the ground of their shared understanding of the gospel be able to "accord each other fellowship in word and sacrament and strive for the fullest possible co-operation in witness and service to the world" (LC 29). This "includes the mutual recognition of ordination and the freedom to provide for intercelebration" (LC 33).

87. The *Leuenberg Concord* has served successfully as an agreement for more than one hundred European churches to be able to declare church fellowship to the present day. The *Leuenberg Concord* has been extended beyond Europe. The declaration of church fellowship, however, is not to be equated with its realization, but it needs a deepening of

theological reflection with respect to contemporary challenges in various contexts of the lives of churches. Thus, the realization of church fellowship is bound in with the reception of the gospel and the deepening of its common understanding and co-operation. Only in this process does church fellowship become a reality.

88. The study document *The Church of Jesus Christ* makes clear that to declare church fellowship is not just an option, but should be understood as an obligation in the light of the gospel whenever a church or an ecclesial community is recognized to truly proclaim the gospel and adequately administer the sacraments and thereby to display the marks “of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.”⁴⁴

b. The Community of British and Irish Anglican Churches and Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches—The Porvoo Communion

89. While the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) adopted the heritage of the Reformation by expounding the constitutive role of the gospel for understanding the unity of the church, in some ways a similar approach was taken by Anglican and Lutheran churches of northern Europe, this time however with a strong focus on the interrelation between the unity, apostolicity and the ministry of the church. By *The Porvoo Common Statement*⁴⁵ (PC) prepared in 1992 and celebrated in Porvoo Cathedral in 1996, these churches were able to mutually “acknowledge one another’s churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God” (PC 58a). For them this entails acknowledging “that in all our churches the Word of God is authentically preached, and the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist are duly administered” and “that all our churches share in the common confession of the apostolic faith” (PC 58a).

90. While the Statement includes an agreement in faith, there is no requirement to mutually accept doctrinal formulations characteristic of the distinctive traditions. What is, however, required is “to face and overcome the remaining obstacles to still closer communion” (PC 33). Furthermore, the agreement does not only include the acknowledgment of one another’s ordained ministries and of the personal, collegial and

44. *The Church of Jesus Christ*, p. 126.

45. *Together in Mission and Ministry: Conversations between the British and Irish Anglican churches and the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches: The Porvoo Common Statement, with essays on church and ministry in Northern Europe*, (1993) Church House Publishing, London.

communal dimension of oversight, but also the declaration that “the episcopal office is valued and maintained in all our churches as a visible sign expressing and serving the Church’s unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission and ministry” (PC 58).

91. A special characteristic of the Porvoo Agreement consists in the fact that it conceives of the episcopal office as a visible sign of the apostolicity of the Church in terms of historic episcopal succession and includes the mutual acknowledgment of this sign as part of the church communion. Those churches who did not preserve the sign of historic episcopal succession agree to resume it again on joining the Porvoo Communion. It is important to note that the churches regard the sign of episcopal historic succession as part of their apostolicity and full visible unity but at the same time emphasize that it:

does not by itself guarantee the fidelity of a church to every aspect of the apostolic faith, life and mission. [...] Nor does the sign guarantee the personal faithfulness of the bishop. Nonetheless, the retention of the sign remains a permanent challenge to fidelity and to unity, a summons to witness to, and a commission to realize more fully, the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles. (PC 51)

92. It is also important that the mutual acknowledgment of the churches and ministries “is theologically prior to the use of the sign of the laying on of hands in the historic succession. Resumption of the use of the sign does not imply an adverse judgment on the ministries of those churches which did not previously make use of the sign. It is rather a means of making more visible the unity and continuity of the Church at all times and in all places” (PC 53). Like in the CPCE, the mutual acknowledgment is seen as a step on a way to further growth in communion. Hence, the agreement entails the commitment:

to share a common life in mission and service, to pray for and with one another, and to share resources; ... to encourage consultations of representatives of our churches, and to facilitate learning and exchange of ideas and information in theological and pastoral matters; to establish a contact group to nurture our growth in communion and to co-ordinate the implementation of this agreement.” (PC 58b)

93. While the Porvoo communion conceives the exchange of ministers to be dependent upon the common acknowledgment and use of the sign of historic episcopal succession, within CPCE the mutual acknowledgment and exchange of ordained ministers is not bound to the retention of the sign of historic episcopal succession. This in fact represents a major difference

between the two movements. While agreement on the historic episcopal succession is a central aspect of the Porvoo communion, it has no role at all in the CPCE. It will be a task for CPCE and the Porvoo communion to further discuss the issue of full visible unity as they wish to deepen their ecumenical relations, which may be possible by further rethinking the heritage of the Reformation. With respect to the topic of reception, however, they both provide an example of how reception can be ecumenically successful. For in both of these ecumenical ventures churches were able to realize that their common faith in the gospel would allow for mutual acknowledgment and conceive this as a stage on the way towards further growth in communion.

3. *The continuing reception of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*

94. After decades of international and national dialogue following Vatican II, Lutherans and Catholics arrived at a consensus in basic truths concerning the understanding of the doctrine of justification, which was the theological issue at the heart of Luther's conflict with the authorities of the Church. The signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* in 1999 by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church was an important official step towards overcoming a major cause of division in the sixteenth century. The *Joint Declaration* expresses formal agreement on basic truths of the doctrine of justification, indicating that the mutual condemnations of the sixteenth century do not apply to the understanding of justification expressed therein. The JWG *Eighth Report's* study document, *The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue* (no. 74), included a case study illustrating factors involving the reception of the *Joint Declaration*. But important developments have taken place since then, leading to the Declaration's continuing reception in the wider ecumenical world.

95. The LWF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) have used the important anniversaries of the 1999 signing to celebrate it again together and renew commitment to this agreement—the fifth anniversary in 2004 in a celebration in South Africa and the tenth anniversary in a celebration in Augsburg, Germany, among others.

96. It is very significant that another Christian world communion, the World Methodist Council (WMC), received the *Joint Declaration* by formally associating itself with it in 2006. The historic significance of this is that now two Christian world communions rooted in the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church together have a formal agreement on

this theological issue which was at the heart of conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century.

97. The steps toward this development are themselves examples of ecumenical reception. The remote background is that the mutual understanding, respect and friendship in Methodist-Catholic relations resulting from the forty years of Methodist-Catholic dialogue,⁴⁶ and the many years of collaboration between the LWF and the WMC,⁴⁷ created an atmosphere which fostered this development. More proximately, starting in 1999, the WMC resolved to explore with the LWF and the Catholic Church “the possibility for the WMC and its member churches to become officially associated” with the *JDDJ*. In 2001, the LWF and the Catholic Church together invited the World Methodist Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to a meeting in Columbus, Ohio, to explore the possibility of their associating with the *Joint Declaration*. While both expressed interest, the WMC took steps shortly afterwards to move ahead on this.

98. Such association was an unprecedented step. Different bilateral and multilateral dialogues can and do influence each other. But in this case a third Christian world communion would formally relate itself to—that is, receive—an official agreement achieved by two other world communions as a result of years of intense bilateral dialogue. The WMC had not been involved in that bilateral nor had the Methodist-Catholic dialogue treated the issue of justification to the same extent as had the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue.

99. By what process did the WMC receive the *JDDJ*?⁴⁸ Two major steps were involved in this process. First, extensive consultation among Methodists within the WMC developed and approved a “*Methodist Statement of Association with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.”⁴⁹ While doing this, they were in continuing consultation with appropriate bodies of the LWF and the PCPCU. In this *Statement of Association*,

46. Cf. Address of Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, at the meeting of the World Methodist Council in Seoul, Korea, July, 2006, when the WMC accepted the *JDDJ*. *IS* 122 (2006): 58.

47. Cf. address of The Revd Dr Ishmael Noko, LWF general secretary at the meeting of the World Methodist Council, 2006, when it accepted the *JDDJ*. *IS* 122 (2006): 59.

48. The process and the pertinent related documents are found in “The Affirmation of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the World Methodist Council,” *IS* 122 (2006): 55-60.

49. Hereafter: *Statement of Association*.

WMC churches indicate that the common understanding of justification as outlined in the *JDDJ*'s nos. 15-17 "corresponds to Methodist doctrine" (no. 2). They "agree also with what Lutherans and Roman Catholics say together about some of the crucial issues in the doctrine of justification which were disputed between them since the time of the Reformation"⁵⁰ and accept the explanations which Lutherans and Catholics respectively give concerning their respective positions on these issues⁵¹ and "do not consider these diverse emphases sufficient cause for division between either party and Methodists" (no. 3). Besides these affirmations, they also add a number of paragraphs giving a particular Methodist emphasis, for example the deep connection between justification and sanctification that has always been crucial for the Methodist understanding of the biblical doctrine of justification (no. 4.2). In this way, as a third partner associates itself with the *Joint Declaration*, further insights on the meaning of justification than those articulated in the *JDDJ*, but not contradicting the *JDDJ*, are acknowledged as belonging to the common understanding of justification. The WMC meeting in Seoul, Korea in July, 2006 voted unanimously to approve the *Methodist Statement of Association* with the *JDDJ*, and authorized the second step.

100. This second step was the development of an "Official Common Affirmation" of the *Methodist Statement of Association* with the *JDDJ* by the three parties now involved. It states that the WMC and member churches affirm their fundamental doctrinal agreement with the teaching expressed in the *JDDJ*, and that the original signing partners join together in welcoming the Methodist statement of agreement with the *JDDJ* consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification, and then "building on their shared affirmation" the "three parties commit themselves to strive together for the deepening of their common understanding of justification..." The three are now related in their common understanding of justification.

101. Furthermore, a number of elements in this process show that ecumenical reception reveals and enhances the unity of the one ecumenical movement. For example, the *Statement of Association* indicates that the Methodist movement, on the one hand, "has always understood itself as deeply indebted to the biblical teaching on justification as...understood by Luther...other reformers and...the Wesleys," but, on the other

50. *JDDJ* paragraphs 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37.

51. *JDDJ* paragraphs 20-21, 23-24, 26-27, 29-30, 32-33, 35-36, 38-39.

hand, “it has also always embraced elements of the doctrine of justification which belong to the catholic tradition of the early church both east and west” (no. 4).⁵²

4. *Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation*

102. Ecumenical reception today goes beyond the receiving of agreed statements on church-dividing doctrinal issues. A powerful example of a different model of reception comes from recent Lutheran-Mennonite relations. Dialogues established to examine theological differences between these families found their work impeded by the continuing shadow of the violent Reformation-era persecutions which Lutheran forebears had perpetrated against Anabaptists. The ecclesial scars from the experience of such persecution shaped not only Mennonite self-awareness and church life, but also its collective memory. Violent coercion had been theologically defended by Lutheran reformers, but contemporary Lutherans had largely forgotten this aspect of their past. One of the goals of Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue became the healing of such memories. Rigorous historical work allowed a joint study commission to prepare the first common narrative of the painful events of the sixteenth century—itsself a reconciling process. But in the end the culmination of the process was not just the text but a powerful event—an act of reconciliation. At the 2010 LWF Assembly in Stuttgart, the LWF’s highest governing body formally asked forgiveness “from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers” for the initial wrongs and their continuing legacies. The Lutheran assembly knelt to ask this forgiveness; significantly, ecumenical guests also knelt—both in solidarity with the Lutherans and to recognize that this moment of reconciliation was healing for the entire church.

103. Mennonites had prepared for this moment through their own practices of decision-making and prayer, knowing that they wanted immediately to assure the Lutherans that the forgiveness was extended. Also acknowledging their own wrongs and rejoicing in the release which this reconciliation offered also to them, Mennonites gave the Lutherans a foot-washing tub, used characteristically in Anabaptist worship, with the prayer that since “today you have heard and honoured our story,” from this time forward “we may serve one another as our Lord and Teacher served us.”

104. While most Lutherans and Mennonites will never read the

52. The international dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Communion of Reformed Churches is currently exploring the possibility of the WCRC also adhering to the *JDDJ*.

reports of dialogue commissions, the images and the narratives around the Stuttgart action have been widely received in both communities. In the violent society of Colombia, where the historical wrongs seemed far away, it was this example of peaceful resolution which the churches particularly celebrated together. In the world's largest refugee camp, where the LWF seeks non-violently to provide civil governance and security, the collaboration of the Mennonite Central Committee has been welcomed with special warmth. Beyond these two families, the example of the LWF in seeking forgiveness has stimulated reflection in other traditions which have their own memories of persecution in need of healing. This is a further receiving of the fruits of Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue.

105. If ecumenical reception is to receive one another as Christ has received us—precisely the hope conveyed in the act of foot-washing—the reception of Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue in visible acts of repentance and reconciliation takes on an iconic role that invites others to do the same.

E. The role of the sponsoring bodies as agents of reception

1. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

106. In the description above of the Catholic processes of reception (ch. II no. 40) the prominent role of the PCPCU in regard to reception is already noted. In promoting unity it works to develop contacts with partners, both to work with them in initiating dialogues and also to foster reception of the results of dialogues. In formal reception processes within the Catholic Church the PCPCU works in close relationship especially with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in examining critically the results of ecumenical dialogue, and in contributing to official texts such as the joint statements with partners intended to be published. The culminating moment of formal reception lies in the approval of the Pope. In some way these factors have been in the background of the development of significant statements seen in this chapter (see nos. 61-63, 68-72) and the 1999 Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on Justification (nos. 95-99 above).

107. Another way in which the PCPCU promotes reception is seen in the recent PCPCU project published by Cardinal Walter Kasper under the title *Harvesting the Fruits* (2009: Continuum). It seeks to promote reception of the results of four international dialogues that began after Vatican II involving the Catholic Church with the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, the Anglican Communion and the World Alli-

ance of Reformed Churches. In this project the PCPCU studied the 36 reports published by these four dialogues. It analyzed the findings of these four dialogues in regard to four questions: (a) fundamentals of the faith, the Trinity and Christ; (b) salvation, justification, sanctification; (c) the church; (d) baptism and the eucharist. It brought together the results of the four dialogues on those issues, showing the great degree of convergence/consensus on them in the four dialogues, noting as well the differences. It also offered preliminary conclusions that could be drawn from the findings and some directions and issues that could be taken up in the future. The implications of these reports were discussed further with representatives of the four partners in dialogue. All of this was aimed at fostering the reception of the results of these reports in the life of the churches.

2. *The World Council of Churches*

108. “The WCC is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scripture and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (WCC Constitution). This “common calling” impels the churches to seek together convergence and greater consensus on the issues that yet divide them. As a fellowship of churches, the World Council of Churches (WCC) includes as members and ecumenical partners, virtually all of the churches mentioned in this present text. It has had its own unique opportunities to promote unity, and there have been recent examples of ecumenical reception relating to the WCC as well.

a. An example of ecumenical reception within the WCC itself

109. At the core of the life of the World Council of Churches is a degree of reception by the churches of one another in a collegial life in which they explore and implement together their common vocation to foster the unity which Christ wills. How this process works has itself become the subject of reflection and reception in the work of the Special Commission on the Participation of the Orthodox Churches. The Orthodox concerns about the WCC provoked a series of conversations between 1999 and 2005. These marked the first phase of an ongoing reassessment of the working structures of the WCC. The Orthodox Churches had become uneasy with the parliamentary models of debate and majority decision that were more familiar in the assembly models of Christian world communions of the Western Protestant traditions. The Special Commission was tasked with finding ways by which the authentic life and decision making of the different churches could be

offered and received, and a model of consensus decision making introduced. This model allows the WCC to take into account the spectrum of reactions to any proposal, and to be more alive to the concerns of all the traditions which contribute to the work of the Council. The Special Commission made other recommendations concerning, for example, ecclesiological and theological criteria for membership. Some of its recommendations led to changes in the WCC constitution and rules. These changes help make the life of the WCC more receptive to the whole fellowship of churches, and therefore make the WCC more representative of its whole membership. This enables better reception of one another by the member churches of the WCC, and in turn enhances the WCC's ability to serve the ecumenical movement.

b. An example of the WCC receiving the results of a bilateral dialogue report

110. The WCC's office of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) made a general request to the Christian world to contribute suggestions concerning the shape and content of the proposed International Ecumenical Peace Convocation with which the DOV would culminate in 2011. Responding, in 2007 the Mennonite World Conference and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity invited the WCC DOV office to a two-day consultation to reflect together on whether themes discussed in the Mennonite–Catholic international dialogue report *Called Together to be Peacemakers* could contribute to this process of preparation. This consultation resulted in a report giving precise suggestions of themes relating to a theology of peace based on *Called Together to be Peacemakers*, which was then received by the DOV office as a contribution, among many others, to its reflection for the 2011 event. This illustrates a method of finding ways to integrate bilateral and multilateral dialogues, by offering for possible reception by a multilateral process, the results of a bilateral dialogue.

c. Forum on Bilateral Dialogues

111. The Forum on Bilateral Dialogues is regularly constituted by the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian world communions, and convened by the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order. Its mandate is to be a forum where representatives of the international dialogues are both able to share information with one another concerning the content, developments and achievements of the bilateral dialogues, and also to bring coherence to these conversations. The bilateral and multilateral dialogues often receive insights from one another

and build on each other's convergences. Thus, the Forum provides a unique platform for the mutual exchange of information on topics, methods, challenges, solutions and aims of these different dialogues. The reports of the Forum record the shifting realities in the international dialogues, such as new participants, and the developments in ecumenical relations. The conversations in the Forum have brought fresh perspectives into the dialogues. By promoting a dialogue between the dialogues, the Forum on Bilateral Dialogue has thus become an effective instrument of reception, although at a step removed from reception by the churches. Moreover, the Forum has engaged in four distinctive reflections on the nature and processes of reception of the theological dialogues. As already noted in this text, the 2008 Ninth Forum meeting in Breklum, Germany, has said to the churches: "As each dialogue is in some way a 'learning process,' each needs to consider how this learning process may be shared with the wider membership of the two communities involved. Only an abiding commitment to the ecclesial reception of ecumenical texts can allow these statements of convergence to have a reconciling and transforming effect in the life of our churches."

d. The continuing reception of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry

112. The World Council of Churches' Faith and Order convergence text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), 1982, remains an influential part of ecumenical history. Aspects of some of the agreements mentioned above, e.g. the Meissen agreement (1988) and the Porvoo agreement (1996) were influenced by BEM. One of the documents of the Joint Working Group's *Eighth Report, The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue: A Study Document*, contained a significant treatment of the reception of dialogue results (nos. 58-79). This included "a multilateral case study" focusing on BEM.

113. That case study gives many insights into the development of the text, by describing the way in which reception processes encouraged discussion of emerging drafts of BEM by the churches. These discussions played an important role in the process leading to the final form in which BEM was published in 1982, and the fact that once published, more than 186 churches replied to Faith and Order's request for official responses to it "at the highest level of authority." This was an unprecedented response to an ecumenical text. The case study also illustrates the fact that BEM helped some churches in different parts of the world to enter into new relationships with one another. These are important expressions of the reception of BEM.

114. There are four additional ways in which reception of BEM has been experienced. The first is that BEM has been important for deepening relationships between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church was among those who submitted an official response. Its extensive response was the result of a five-year process in which the Holy See sought reflection and comment on BEM from Catholic Churches around the world, as well as involving its normal processes of study in appropriate offices of the Roman Curia. Many Catholics came to know the WCC better because of BEM. Furthermore, BEM has entered into documents of the papal magisterium. Pope John Paul II's interest in BEM is illustrated by his positive references to it in a number of addresses during the 1980s, often speaking of it as an important sign of ecumenical progress, and his mention of BEM and its significance in four places in the 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint* (no. 17, note 28; no. 42, note 71; no. 45, note 76; no. 87, note 144). There has been significant reception of BEM in the Catholic Church.

115. A second way in which reception of BEM has been experienced can be seen in the current Faith and Order study of the church. Over the last several decades, it has become clear that the nature of the Church is perhaps the central ecumenical issue today. BEM has helped to provoke deeper study of the church. A number of churches responding to BEM, including the Catholic Church, called for further reflection on the Church as a way of deepening the convergences found in BEM. After the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order (1993) called for a study on the church, the first result of this Faith and Order study was a volume entitled *The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A stage on the way to a common statement* (1998). It stated that "in the style of BEM, this document seeks to evolve into what could be called a convergence text" (no. 4). After receiving critical evaluation of this text from churches and other sources, Faith and Order produced a second volume, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A stage on the way to a common statement* (2005) which indicated that "the experience of the BEM process and an increasing interest in ecclesiology in many churches provide fresh insights into how many Christians understand being the Church" (no. 3). Faith and Order is currently continuing its study, refining the text. But the current Faith and Order study of the Church in a true sense has benefitted from the reception of BEM, and continues the heritage of BEM.

116. There is a third way in which reception of BEM has been experienced, not unrelated to the second. BEM's contribution specifically to a common understanding of baptism as a basic bond of unity among Christians has provoked ecumenical reflection on the deeper implications of this important insight. A prime example of this reflection is the text found in the Joint Working Group's *Eighth Report* entitled *Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: A JWG Study* (2005). The influence of BEM on this text is seen from its first paragraphs, and throughout the text. Examining a number of themes relating to a common baptism, the study draws out ecclesiological implications, some of which are issues which should be pursued further in dialogue in order to remove obstacles to unity which still exist, or others which give insights that help to appreciate even more the degree of unity that exists now because of a common baptism. The study also lists a series of ecumenical implications of a common baptism, many of a more pastoral character, suggesting ways to deepen ecumenical relations which are rooted in common baptism. That study, therefore, suggests additional ways in which BEM can be received.

117. A fourth way has to do with the impact of BEM on local ecumenism and the life of the churches. In addition to formal agreements which acknowledge the influence of BEM, the text (which has sold more copies than any other book published by the WCC) became a teaching tool, and a vehicle for ecumenical conversations in community settings around the world, in some cases initiated by ecumenical entities such as councils of churches and clergy associations, in others spontaneously initiated. In this case, reception flowed from the value of the text itself, meeting a need, indeed a hunger, for accessible yet substantial information about essential aspects of Christian faith and life. BEM inspired some churches to consider the possibility of developing a common baptismal certificate. It influenced those responsible for preparing baptismal rites, and was crucial—in the light of debates about inclusive language—in maintaining the classical baptismal formula in those texts.

F. Learning points and recommendations

1. Learning points

- Exploring the issues considered above in relation to the three historical periods highlights the fact that, despite centuries of divisions, many basic Christian convictions and bonds of faith also were shared in com-

mon. The new atmosphere created by the ecumenical movement, especially in dialogue through which separated Christians came to know one another and cleared away misunderstandings about each other's traditions, allowed them to recognize that truth, which had not been realized before.

- The fact that long standing church-dividing issues are being addressed and resolved gives hope that other issues can be resolved in the long term. Patience and prayer are needed if immediate results are not achieved.

- The evolution of the social sciences, philosophical thought, hermeneutics and other spheres of learning, have enhanced the appreciation of the context in which previous divisions took place. Consequently new ways of thinking have emerged, fostering an understanding of some of the reasons for divisions and helping the churches to move beyond them.

- The achievements of dialogue have shown that it is possible to express common faith while respecting the traditions and terminologies of each partner.

- Even after achieving agreement on an issue over which there had been conflict, new questions may arise that are potentially divisive and liable to cause difficulty. Even when old conflicts are resolved, long periods of separation make the healing of the bitter historical memories related to them a lengthy and continuing process.

- Where the results of dialogues are expressed by formal acts and symbolic actions the impact of the progress made might be greatly enhanced.

2. Recommendations

In order for reception to take root in the life of the churches we propose the following recommendations:

- that personal contacts be nurtured and encouraged since they foster relationships that assist in mutual understanding and lead to the resolution of conflicts. For example, we commend the example of the presence of observers from other Christian communions at the Second Vatican Council. Ongoing meetings of church leaders constitute an impact that set free the impulses for ecumenical dialogue and new ecumenical initiatives;

- that the work done by one bilateral or multilateral dialogue should be considered more widely and used to inform other dialogues as well as becoming a resource in education and formation;

- that after agreement on doctrinal questions there should be a process to ensure that continuing study of these issues is undertaken, and the implications of agreement lived out in the life of the churches;

- that churches be aware of the effects of particular bilateral relations and agreements on their wider bilateral and multilateral ecumenical relationships. The presence of ecumenical observers on bilateral dialogues may alert such dialogues to the ecumenical consequences of their agreements.

IV. When Ecumenical Reception Is a Struggle

A. Challenges to reception

118. Although ecumenical accomplishments have been cited, it must be acknowledged that reception often involves a struggle in so far as relationships between persons and ecclesial communities are concerned. The reality being faced today is that questions are being raised concerning the value and goals of dialogue in the face of perceived divergences of beliefs and practices. These can arise out of bitter memories of the past and reactions to developments in the life of some Christian traditions. Ongoing issues such as the ordination of women and new conflicting approaches to questions related to marriage and family, sexual ethics, bioethics and economic ethics have had an adverse impact on some relationships and therefore on reception.

119. Much discussion and debate continues to take place among members *within* the church traditions on the varying interpretations of their beliefs and practices. Relationships among Christian traditions are influenced by the intensity of the discussions and the extent to which each one is prepared, out of a sense of respect and in humility, to be receptive to different viewpoints. Reception in this sense can serve as a means of each one benefiting from valuable spiritual insights that are not one's own. In dialogue, participants must present the truth understood in their own tradition, while being attentive to the truth presented by the other, and seek as much common ground as possible, while being honest about the differences. A willingness to listen will go a long way in arriving at a position of mutual respect and cordiality between Christian communities.

120. It is relatively straightforward to cite instances when reception has been positive or when a reception process has been initiated. It is more difficult when reception is a struggle. While some ecumenical texts are truly received by the churches, others are received to a limited degree or not at all. The challenges to reception are many and varied: some are external, relating to the situation within particular churches or in the broader ecumenical movement; others are internal, relating directly to

the text in question, or to the process by which it was created or by which it may be responded to. Examples of the struggles of reception are illustrated in the accounts of two dialogues: one a bilateral—reports from the Old Catholic-Eastern Orthodox international dialogue; the other a multilateral—*The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* from the WCC's Faith and Order Commission.

121. As is seen in the case of the Old Catholic-Eastern Orthodox international bilateral dialogue, the context of ecclesial relationships has serious effects on reception. Between 1975 and 1987 the joint commission of Old Catholic and Orthodox theologians held several dialogues touching on such fundamental issues as the doctrine of God, Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, the sacraments, eschatology and ecclesial communion. In each case the commission affirmed that the text produced “represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic churches.” From 1987, however, relations between the two bodies became more difficult. The ordination of women in some Old Catholic churches from 1996 led to Old Catholic-Orthodox consultations held in that year with indecisive results. More recently differences have arisen on other issues related to gender and sexuality. Differences also have arisen over the participation of Old Catholic bishops in consecrations of Anglican bishops, which also have included Lutheran bishops. For the Orthodox, such participation implies a state of full communion between Old Catholic and Lutheran churches, whereas Old Catholics insist that it reflects only the full communion they have shared with the Anglican Communion since 1931. These various tensions militated against reception of the dialogues, however fruitful and positive they may have been. This illustrates that reception does not depend solely on the quality of the texts produced, since reception takes place within the context of the overall relationship between the churches concerned. A permanent Old Catholic-Orthodox committee “for reflection and exchange” was established in 2004 to develop joint theological and pastoral projects, and it is hoped that this eventually will enable the reception of the dialogue results so far achieved.

122. Different lessons may be learned from the more recent multilateral experience of the Faith and Order Commission. *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2005) by all accounts did not receive the widespread attention it deserved. Following the methodology of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* is the second in a series of texts on ecclesiology sent to the churches for study and

response, to enable the churches to begin to recognize a convergence that has emerged. The responses to *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, like its predecessor, the 1998 *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*, were intended to be integral to the process of discerning such a multilateral convergence. By 2010 eighty responses had been received by Faith and Order, yet only twenty-seven came from the churches. Although the text was sent with the specific request that the churches respond, clearly this was a text that appealed primarily to theological specialists and students. The year after *The Nature and Mission of the Church* was published, the 2006 WCC assembly accepted *Called to be the One Church*, an ecclesiology text likewise produced by Faith and Order. This text also was sent to the churches for response; since 2006 a mere handful of responses have been received by Faith and Order. In effect, two ecclesiological texts from the WCC were in circulation at the same time, each requesting study and response from the churches.

123. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is no exaggeration to speak of an ecumenical overload of texts and response processes—and this at a time when many churches face declining resources, both human and financial, with which to support their ecumenical engagement. This suggests perhaps that fewer such texts should be produced; that they should be clear and accessible to their intended audience; that if multiple texts must be sent to the churches, they should be sent in a coordinated way; that pacing is crucial. Furthermore, it is vital that clear expectations, including specific suggestions for reflection and action, be laid upon the churches in asking for their response.

124. The processes as outlined by the general secretaries or other representatives of the Christian world communions (cf. chapter II) need to be seen alongside the difficulties outlined by those responsible for overseeing the process of reception at the international, regional and local levels.

125. Again, anecdotal evidence suggests that ecumenical officers and theological commissions can exhibit a lack of confidence about the length and quality of response that is asked of them. Many reported that the churches simply do not have adequate instruments to assess a theological document arising from bilateral or multilateral dialogues, and to engage in the processes of ecclesial reception. Sometimes the level of response being requested is unclear—i.e., is a short response sufficient, or is a complex and detailed theological assessment being looked for? Is it better to

offer no response than one that is too brief or simple? Is a shorter text of less worth than a longer one? Will churches feel embarrassed by a shorter response?

126. In addition, the sponsors of dialogues often lack clarity and communication both about timelines and about what precisely is being requested in a formal response to an agreed statement. Often the questions posed to the churches are unclear and too demanding. For example, what is meant by terms such as “common,” “convergence,” or even “agreement” is not always clear.

127. Others report that the sort of responses requested by a parent body or a dialogue do not seem to fit comfortably with the pressing concerns of some national or local churches. Sometimes the topics addressed are perceived to belong to an earlier period of history or to a different context and continent, and not to relate to current global realities. The kinds of questions dealt with by a dialogue may appear to be not those of the churches but of specialists or those only of the dialogue partner. How much dialogue relates to the context of European historical divisions rather than to current mission imperatives in the developing world? The remark was made that local churches are more responsive to life and work issues than a Faith and Order theological text. These comments suggest an environment of resistance to the processes of reception. In response to these comments, it is clear that it is necessary to demonstrate the ways that the historical conflicts which led to divisions continue to impinge upon church relations today.

128. We also need to keep in mind that there are many non-theological factors that can have a bearing on the issues addressed in dialogue. These, too, can interfere with the processes of reception. The theological conflicts of the past, and the way in which they unfolded in exclusion and persecution, may have left many longstanding and bitter memories that remain unhealed and that can affect responses in the present. Sociological factors such as class and racial conflict, cultural differences and imperial history bring radically different perspectives to the questions under consideration and can affect even the will to engage in dialogue. The fear of surrendering power can be as potent a factor in continuing church divisions as can problems with doctrine. All of this requires patient acknowledgment and engagement to build mutual confidence as a context for effective dialogue and reception.

B. Learning points and recommendations

1. Learning points

- All dialogue reports, when they are published, are intended for general reception. This includes discussion, criticism and evaluation in theological institutions, in congregations and parishes and by church authorities with the hope of bringing new insights.

- Reception processes have demonstrated substantial unevenness. While some ecumenical texts have received significant attention, others, though substantial, have not received such extensive study. Careful consideration of how to support the dissemination, study and response to a text will bear significant fruit.

- Issues at the root of conflicts between Christians that arose in particular historical contexts can have a continuing impact on the churches and can be difficult to resolve even after intense theological dialogue.

- Since *episcopé* involves being an instrument for the *koinonia* of the whole church, it necessarily includes care and responsibility for reception.

2. Recommendations

In order to assist in the effectiveness of the reception of the fruits of dialogue, we propose the following recommendations to those responsible for ecumenical dialogue, specifically, that church leaders:

- make clear whether a formal process of reception is intended when sponsoring dialogue, and specify the nature of the responses required;

- give consideration to issues like context, timing and pacing when texts are ready for dissemination;

- encourage authorities at different levels to appoint and support ecumenical officers, coordinators or commissions who are tasked to ensure that there is an awareness of these reports among their constituencies.

V. Ecumenical Formation: A Key to Ecumenical Reception

A. Formation and reception

129. Ecumenical formation is in itself a way of consolidating reception. As people listen to the history of the ecumenical movement and receive the fruits of ecumenical dialogue, they themselves are deepening their formation as disciples of Christ. The multiplex process of reception requires a process of education and formation which embraces both the intellectual and theological dimensions of being trained in ecumenical dialogue and the existential and spiritual dimensions of receiving and

recognizing one another in the name of Christ. Ecumenical formation and reception, therefore, are intrinsically intertwined.

130. The primary goals of ecumenical formation are to awaken the hearts and souls of Christians to the ecumenical imperative; to acknowledge the results of the ecumenical movement in all its levels and expressions; and to form persons of dialogue now, especially in order to pave the way for the education of future generations who are committed to the quest for unity.

131. The JWG has always been concerned about ecumenical formation as a fundamental dimension on the path towards the unity among Christians. The JWG *Fifth Report* (1983) stated:

Another crucial area is that of theological education and particularly the education of pastors, perhaps the most influential point in ecumenical sensitization. There is a great range of possibilities but even where there are joint or collaborative faculties and programs, more could be done to draw out their potential with the support and guidance of those responsible in the various churches.

132. The present JWG acknowledges the successful work done in the last decades by previous JWG. Important steps have been taken in focusing on the need for ecumenical formation as a priority in the ecumenical agenda, as well as in providing the parent bodies with meaningful and fruitful tools to reflect and to act upon it.

133. In recent decades, however, ecumenical formation has gained more and more interest and centrality as a key factor in the search for visible unity, and it is still a priority to be addressed. The 1993 JWG document on *Ecumenical Formation* has been—and still is—a valuable instrument to foster ecumenical reception, and needs to be brought again to the attention of the churches. *Ecumenical Formation* reminds Christians that ecumenical formation pertains to the whole people of God, each one having a responsibility in the search for unity and in the building up of communion. It is a process in which individuals and communities must be engaged, and it is an imperative to which churches, educational agencies, academic institutions and ecumenical organizations must respond.

134. The *Eighth Report* (2005) of the JWG indicates that ecumenical formation is a fundamental goal calling for recommitment in the future mandate of the JWG: “The JWG has over the years expressed concern for ecumenical formation and education as fundamental to the search for the unity of the church.”⁵³ Further on the report adds:

53. JWG *Eighth Report*, III, no. 3.

We likewise agree that greater effort is needed in the field of ecumenical formation. Both parent bodies need to be concerned about laity and clergy who need ecumenical formation. A new generation of Christians is sometimes unaware of the way things were and how much things have changed in the decades since the founding of the WCC and since the Second Vatican Council. In this respect much is being done, but we advocate an effort to improve the coordination of such formation through a more effective sharing of information and resources, and by providing greater opportunities for participation in each other's life.⁵⁴

135. This specific mandate has been ratified by the ninth assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre in 2006. Both the *General Secretary's Report* and the *Policy Reference Committee Report* explicitly emphasize the need for ecumenical formation, confirming the relevance of this issue in the contemporary scene.⁵⁵

B. Tracing the history of ecumenical formation in the JWG context

136. The concern for cooperation in the field of formation has been an issue raised from the very beginning of the JWG.⁵⁶ This concern later developed into a process of regular information dissemination and the sharing of documents and initiatives, joint consultations, and study projects within the parent bodies.⁵⁷ The *Fifth Report* of the JWG in 1985 addressed extensively, as a priority, the need for a common concern about ecumenical formation. The report recognized its value as a complementary aspect of ecumenical dialogue and joint action, and sought to ensure that formation would have a renewed place in the life of the churches in both dialogue and action.⁵⁸

54. JWG, *Eighth Report*, V, no. 2. Important achievements and future potentials of the JWG mandate which can constitute a wider framework to address the issue of ecumenical formation have been pointed out during the 40th anniversary consultation about the mandate of the JWG between the RCC and the WCC, held in November 2005 at Bossey, Switzerland.

55. Cfr. WCC, *Official Report of the Ninth Assembly*: Official report, resolutions, "Statements and reports adopted by the Assembly. Program Guidelines committee," nos. 14, 18-20, 26.

56. Cfr. JWG, *Common statement on the relationships between the WCC and the RCC*, no. 7; JWG, *Second Report*, 3.c).

57. Cfr. JWG, *Future Joint Activities of the JWG*, 1973, I, E.

58. "The JWG insists on the present urgency of the task of ecumenical formation. It stresses that the improved relations between still separated Christians are not enough. The scandal of Christian divisions and their deleterious effect on Christian witness continues to obscure the saving power of God's grace."

137. In the following years, the JWG kept ecumenical formation on its agenda.⁵⁹ It worked towards the realization of important goals, such as the drafting of the 1998 document *Ecumenical Formation: Ecumenical Reflections and Suggestions*,⁶⁰ while remaining committed to encouraging and supporting initiatives taken by the parent bodies on the issue. Some significant steps taken in the last 20 years within the WCC are: the publication of the document *Alive Together* (1989)⁶¹ and the International Consultation on Ecumenical Formation (Oslo, 1996),⁶² both sponsored by the Ecumenical Theological Education Programme (ETE) of the WCC. Some significant steps taken in the last 20 years within the Roman Catholic Church are: the publication by the PCPCU of the most complete document on ecumenical formation and reception, Chapters II and III of the new *Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993,⁶³ which was followed and integrated into a detailed document on contents and methods of ecumenical theological formation published in 1997.⁶⁴

138. In recent times, the programme on ETE has published the *Magna Charta*⁶⁵ of ecumenical formation as well as the document *14 Reasons for Global Theological Education*,⁶⁶ while supporting and cooperating with other associations such as World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI), and the Conference of European Churches

JWG, *Fifth Report*, IV, 4. Cfr. also III, B, no. 5; IV, no. 4.

59. Cfr. JWG, *Sixth Report*, III, A, no. 2; III, B, no. 8; JWG, *Seventh Report*, III, C; V; JWG, *Eighth Report*, III, no. 3; V, no. 2.

60. JWG, *Seventh Report*. Appendix D: Ecumenical formation; ecumenical reflection and suggestions, 1993.

61. *Alive Together*, Ecumenical Theological Education Program of the World Council of Churches, 1989

62. ETE/WCC, *Towards a Viable Theological Education: Ecumenical imperative, catalyst of renewal*, Oslo, Norway 1996. (1997) J. Pobee, ed. WCC Publications, Geneva.

63. PCPCU, *Directory for the Applications of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, Chapter III.

64. PCPCU, *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of those Engaged in Pastoral Work*, 1995.

65. ETE/WCC, *Magna Charta on Ecumenical Theological Education in the 21st century*. ETE/WCC - Reference document for use in Associations of Theological Schools and Colleges, WOCATI and in the Edinburgh 2010 Process, 2008.

66. ETE/WCC, *14 Reasons for Global Solidarity in Ecumenical Theological Education: Communication initiative for the WCC program on ETE*.

(CEC), and on the organization of regional consultations.⁶⁷ The Catholic Church has committed herself in a process of verification and evaluation of the level of ecumenical formation in Catholic institutions and of the way that the guidelines given in the *Directory* have been put into practice.

C. Articulating ecumenical formation

1. General principles

140. Ecumenical formation implies first and foremost a life-long learning process for all members of the church. Ecumenical formation implies moving towards God, in the sense that it has to be understood primarily as an expression of the spiritual dimension of the ecumenical imperative: Christian spirituality “readies Christians and their churches to respond to God’s initiatives—to what the Triune God is doing in and through us according to the gospel. It involves discerning God’s activity in people, in churches, in the world. Theology and spirituality are inextricably intertwined because both deal with God and God’s relationship with humanity through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁸

141. In this perspective ecumenical formation is a process which includes: (1) discerning and enjoying the riches of God’s gifts to his people by learning the standpoints, doctrines and praxis of the different Christian traditions; (2) turning to Him in repentance and hope by acknowledging the need for conversion and welcoming in our hearts and minds our brothers and sisters in Christ; (3) deepening the sense of Christian identity and the baptismal vocation by discovering convergences among the various confessions; and (4) living out the mission of the Church as witness of His love and care for human beings by fostering a common reflection and working on common projects.

142. In the perspective of the process of reception, the following five aspects of theological reflection and church action seem to be particularly relevant and, therefore, need to be emphasized in ecumenical formation: (1) the call to receive the mandate of our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and therefore to orient our lives as Christians in the will to strive for full visible unity in the one apostolic faith among those who are called by His name. The whole ecumenical movement, in fact, is a movement of

67. ETE/WCC-CEC, International Seminar on the Future of Ecumenical Theological Education in Eastern and Central Europe, Sambada de Sus, Romania, 2008. (2009) V. Ionita-D. Werner, eds. CEC-WCC, Geneva.

68. JWG, *Spiritual Roots of Ecumenism*, par 9.

reception as it aims at fulfilling the ecumenical imperative received from Christ, the gift of unity received from the Father, and the living out of the variety of charisms received from the Holy Spirit; (2) a renewed reflection on the Church and a common understanding of the Church, its nature, mission and witness to the world, as the churches seek to receive one another, to receive the *koinonia* they share, and therefore to receive ecumenical events, dialogues, documents and efforts as part of the process of receiving one another in the name of Christ; (3) the process of dispelling prejudices and stereotypes so to be able to receive others in the spirit of the “exchange of gifts”⁶⁹ (4) an opportunity to be engaged in the process of the healing and reconciliation of memories among Christians; to reflect upon what has been achieved in decades of ecumenical theological dialogue; and what have been and are the chances of joint effort for a more authentic Christian witness to the world; and (5) a chance for a mutual appreciation of structures and programmes offered by various confessional traditions to foster ecumenical formation.

143. These principles have universal application, but it is particularly within the context of university education, and especially in seminary education, that ecumenical formation should be addressed in two ways: (1) a specific course on ecumenism with a detailed curriculum; and (2) the articulation of the ecumenical dimension in each field of theology. Both are part of ecumenical formation, so that ecumenism is not seen as an isolated speciality, but exists as a living component in all theological discourse. Ecumenical formation must be an essential element for candidates for ordained ministry.

2. Programmes and guidelines

144. In the last decade both the Catholic Church and the WCC, building on past efforts, have developed programmes and projects to promote ecumenical formation and facilitate reception of ecumenical goals and achievements, needs and priorities.

145. The WCC Programme on Education and Ecumenical Formation is well articulated and structured. It includes three elements: the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey (Geneva, Switzerland), which offers courses and programmes in theology and ecumenism for future church leaders, pastors and theologians at graduate and postgraduate levels; the ecumenical lay formation and faith nurture project, which is aimed at creating networks to engage faith formation practitioners in a fruitful exchange of ideas and initiatives; and the ecumenical theological education project,

69. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, no. 28.

which targets ecumenical and theological educators to share principles and contents concerning ecumenical formation and to create concrete possibilities dealing with ecumenical theological education.

146. The PCPCU's *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (1993) reflects on the urgency of providing ways and methods of growth in ecumenical formation, by creating a network of ecumenical concern as well as by setting rules of ecumenical formation.⁷⁰ The *Directory* presents ecumenical formation as a concern for all the faithful in whatever status or situation they may be, and therefore develops a map of structures at the service of Christian unity which include every level of church life (parishes, dioceses, lay groups and associations, religious and secular orders, episcopal conferences and synods and councils of Eastern churches, families, schools, mass-media, educational agencies) whose aim is to sensitize to ecumenism and dialogue according to their specific mandates and tasks. All the pastoral and catechetical tools (preaching, Bible studies, catechism, mission) should become an instrument of ecumenical learning.⁷¹

147. The Joint Working Group, together with the parent bodies, rejoices in the mutual appreciation and in the growing cooperation in the field of formation among churches in the past decades. In many parts of the world churches cooperate in the field of ecumenical formation through joint projects, academic institutions and research centres. Inviting scholars and theologians of different Christian traditions, for example, to lecture and to teach in interconfessional settings is almost a consolidated praxis in some contexts, as well as a growing reality in others. Moreover, students are often encouraged to engage themselves in a formation programme which includes interconfessional exposure (either in selecting the topics for doctoral dissertations or in attending one or two semesters in an institution of a different confession).

D. Learning points and recommendations

1. Learning points

- Ecumenical formation is an essential key to ensuring the continuity and forward movement of the ecumenical quest. Every generation needs to be reminded of what already has been received in the ecumenical process.

70. The Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* had already introduced ecumenical formation as an obligatory subject in the theological curriculum in 1979.

71. Cfr. PCPCU, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, II and III.

- Ecumenical formation is an integrated process which includes affective, spiritual and intellectual dimensions.

- Ecumenical formation is not the preserve of any particular section of the church, but the opportunity must consciously be given for all to participate. The fullness of *koinonia* only can be assured by giving the whole people of God the opportunity for ecumenical formation.

- Since *episcopé* involves being an instrument for the *koinonia* of the whole people of God, it necessarily includes care and responsibility for fostering the unity of Christians, and therefore for the ecumenical formation of the people of God.

- Ecumenical studies not only is a distinct discipline, but also is an all pervading orientation. Forming people ecumenically involves an outlook and methodology which should influence all aspects of theological reflection and action.

2. Recommendations

In order to ensure that ecumenical formation becomes an integral part of the life of the churches, the JWG recommends that the PCPCU and the WCC:

- foster further joint reflection on ecumenical formation, even exploring a possible follow-up to the 1993 JWG document on the same topic;

- promote the integral dimension of ecumenical formation as a spiritual as well as an intellectual process, highlighting particularly the spiritual roots of ecumenism as a fundamental dimension of it;

- continue to encourage cooperation with various ecumenical regional/international and confessional/interconfessional bodies, thus sharing the variety of styles and methods they use. A concrete goal could be the realization of a common curriculum for ecumenical formation;

- support the sharing and, wherever possible, the publication and use of common texts, and the realization of formative initiatives of common witness. The formation of young people has to be strongly encouraged both by developing ecumenically oriented projects already existing, and by creating new ecumenical formative initiatives targeting young people;

- encourage and facilitate interaction between the various experiences of formation on the local level, and connect them to the ecumenical and ecclesial bodies dealing with ecumenical formation.

VI. Conclusion

An appeal to the churches

148. During this ninth period of the Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, the JWG has had the opportunity to study the notion of ecumenical reception during the last seven years. This study has given the JWG an opportunity to review some of the major achievements of the modern ecumenical movement in the century since the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. It has helped us to recognize that in arriving at these achievements, the churches had been able to receive insights resulting from ecumenical dialogue and to implement them. But more deeply than this, it is clear that by engaging in dialogue and by increasing contacts with one another in many ways, Christian communions long separated have begun to receive one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to receive from one another. Getting beyond historic divisions of the past, Christians have begun to shape a new future in which they are better able to witness together before the world to the healing message of the gospel, free from some of the conflicts, misunderstandings and prejudices of the past.

149. Thus, the JWG appeals to the PCPCU and the WCC to challenge the churches to call each other:

- to renew their commitment to serve in the quest for Christian unity, and to intensify ecumenical engagement at all levels;
- to appreciate with gratitude the considerable ecumenical advances that have taken place over the last century, and to build on these with new energy;
- to ensure that the fruits of ecumenical dialogue and co-operation are well-known and accessible, supported by study guides and carrying their approbation;
- to take every opportunity to promote unity and to make use of the reports of dialogues, which convey new perspectives on disputed questions and new insights about other churches;
- to experience and understand the Christian life and worship of other traditions, and in turn, as much as possible, to offer hospitality to other Christians in their own life;
- to endorse the message of the Eighth Forum on Bilateral Dialogue, which occurred in 2008 during the present mandate of this JWG. It said: We

believe that it would be profitable to keep in mind right from the beginning of any phase of dialogue the reception of its results. As each dialogue is in some way a “learning process,” each needs to consider how this learning process may be shared with the wider membership of the two communities involved. Only an abiding commitment to the ecclesial reception of ecumenical texts can allow these statements of convergence or consensus to have a reconciling and transforming effect in the life of our churches.⁷²

150. In this light the JWG makes this appeal to the PCPCU and the WCC, based on the conviction that the movement toward Christian unity is a response to the will of Christ and to his prayer for the unity of his disciples. It is rooted in the conviction that unity and mission go hand in hand. Christ prayed for the unity of his disciples “so that the world may believe” (John 17:21).

72. “The Breklum Statement” of the Ninth Forum on Bilateral Dialogue, Recommendation 2, www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/breklum-statement.pdf