

**National Council
of the Churches of Christ
in the USA**

***Faith and Order
Commission
Handbook***



**Faith and Order office
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**Welcome to the Faith and Order Commission
of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA**

I am pleased to welcome you to the Faith and Order Commission.

In the United States, the national Faith and Order Commission is housed at the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. The Commission is an institution with its own identity and its own tasks. It is, at the same time, one of the five constituent commissions of the NCCCUSA. These five commissions are Faith and Order, Interfaith Relations, Education and Leadership Ministries, Communications and Justice and Advocacy.

The NCCCUSA constitution and the information about the member churches of the Council are available for your information at <http://www.ncccusa.org/pdfs/nccconstitution.pdf> and <http://www.ncccusa.org/members/index.html>. You can find specific information about the work of each Commission and other ministries housed at the NCCCUSA in the appropriate sections of the Council's website. The Faith and Order Commission's own web-section is at <http://www.ncccusa.org/about/unityhome.html>

The NCCCUSA is pleased to have you joining in this shared ministry of unity.

Dr. Antonios Kireopoulos
Senior Program Director for Faith & Order and Interfaith Relations

Introduction

Welcome to “the most comprehensive theological forum in Christendom.”¹

Faith and Order is a movement with origins in the early twentieth century. The goal of this movement is to work towards the full visible unity of the church. Faith and Order works by bringing together Christians from different Christian communities to engage in theological reflection. This reflection focuses on the nature of the unity of the church and on the nature of the issues which divide the churches. Faith and Order seeks to deepen ecclesial unity and obviate ecclesial division.

Faith and Order is a movement present in and beyond councils of churches on the local, regional, national and global levels. The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA is one among many entities which houses this worldwide movement. Its Faith and Order Commission, comprised of representatives of member-churches of the Council, non-member churches and other appropriate sending bodies “affirms the oneness of the church of Jesus Christ and keeps before the churches the gospel call to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, in order that the world may believe.”²

“Handbook” is a fluid term to describe this work. These pages are rather “libelli,” segments compiled to form a greater whole but which also stand alone – not unlike ecclesial parchments of yesteryear. A work in progress, the handbook takes this form to ease update and revision, a common occurrence in things ecumenical.

The handbook serves two purposes: to orient newcomers to the Faith and Order movement and to the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches and serve as a ready reference guide to certain administrative activities of the on-going work of the Commission. To this end, readers are welcome to critique any “libello” and make suggestions for its next edition.

Sr. Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA

A Brief History of Faith and Order: Times, Places, People and Issues behind an Ecumenical Theological Movement¹

by Sr. Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA - 2004

Introduction

The time is the early part of the twentieth century, 1910-1948. The place is Europe. The people are predominantly Protestants, some Orthodox, mostly white, male clergy in their prime; some students. Excitement and fervor exude as Christians of different denominations come together to celebrate and deepen their unity in Jesus Christ. It is the birth of the modern ecumenical movement.

Today, the first years of the twenty-first century, it is different. The place is the world. The people are everyone – Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics, men and women, clergy and laity, White, Black, Latino, Asian, Indian. Despite graying and fatigue, the movement has matured. Networks of multilateral and bilateral church relations – of dialogues and cooperative activity on global, national and regional levels – set the tone and agenda for Christians together to celebrate their unity in the Lord and to work at overcoming remaining obstacles to manifest that unity. This one ecumenical movement embraces and umbrellas many inner movements serving what is at the heart of ecumenism, the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

In this lecture we center on one inner movement within this wider context. We will acquaint ourselves with the times, places, people and issues of Faith and Order. Our survey will reveal various identities of Faith and Order. First and foremost it is a movement within a wider ecumenical movement. It is also a commission within conciliar ecumenism. It is an agenda of theological and ecclesiological studies engaged within interchurch settings. It is an ecumenical theological method and hermeneutic. It is a foundation for new ecumenical initiatives: faith and witness organizations, an ecumenical forum of churches, a regional conference on basic ecclesiological matters.

Our discussion divides into four parts. The first three parts attend to Faith and Order in general, with focus on the global level. Part I is a reflection on the nature and purpose of Faith and Order. This reflection contextualizes the terms "faith," "order," "movement." Part II follows with a review of Faith and Order world conferences, their theological issues and the methods by which such issues are addressed. Part III describes the ongoing work of Faith and Order in the intervening years between conferences. Part IV addresses Faith and Order in the USA. A brief conclusion consists of a few personal remarks.

Part I: Faith and Order, its Nature and Purpose

To date Faith and Order is the most comprehensive theological forum gathering together representatives of Christian churches to work towards the visible unity of the one church of Jesus Christ. It embraces more Christians and churches than the World Council of Churches. Serving this movement at the global level is the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. Similar structures exist on other levels – national, regional and local. This world commission describes its meaning and purpose in its by-laws:

to proclaim the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ, to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, in order that the world may believe.²

Oneness of the church of Jesus Christ... visible unity in faith and eucharistic fellowship... worship... common life... so that the world may believe... These concerns are the heart of this unity movement, which identifies two spheres that frame their consideration.

"Faith" is the first of two spheres that expresses the goal of Christian unity in the Faith and Order movement. Behind the "faith" sphere is the desire for visible unity in the essentials of Christian faith, life and witness that inspired the churches to come together in a conciliar structure at the turn of the twentieth century. Regarding "faith," the purpose of the Faith and Order movement is to unearth the common ground that is at the root which binds Christian creed and confession.

"Order" is the second sphere that expresses the goal of Christian unity in the Faith and Order movement. At the centre of the "order" sphere is the ecclesial praxis of the Christian way of life. Concerning "order," Faith and Order's purpose is to discern the ways to mutual recognition and reconciliation of Christian spiritual and sacramental life, Christian mission and ministry.

Together, "faith" and "order" unite in a "movement" enabling the churches to enter into the theological dialogue and reflection necessary to discern and transcend the differences that are church dividing and to recognize and articulate the bonds that are uniting. The dimension of "faith," then, focuses on doctrinal matters of faith, sacraments, mission and ministry. The dimension of "order" focuses on the form or polity or discipline of these matters. That Faith and Order is a "movement" means that it is not a static entity but a journey towards unity with a direction that is charted and followed by diverse routes. Rather than a mapped-out blueprint, the movement's goal of the visible unity of the church is understood as gift and call – a gift from God revealed in the response to a call to fellowship, communion, *koinonia*. Various structures support this movement. Sustaining the world movement of faith and order is the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. This commission consists of a secretariat, programmes of studies and world conferences. These latter, the world conferences, are the peaks of ongoing theological work and prayer that is carried out in the valleys and plains of everyday life lived as an ecumenical Christian. Parallel structures exist on national, regional and local levels.

Part II: Faith and Order World Conferences

Ecumenical history records 1910 Edinburgh as the date and place of the conception of Faith and Order.³ Returning home inspired from a World Missionary Conference held there that year, Charles Brent proposed to the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church USA a world conference on church matters of "faith" and "order" as just described. The time had come. Up to this time interchurch relations consisted predominantly of interaction among missionaries and students within an attitude that "doctrine divides; service unites." Now, thanks to more scientific ways of doing research, the historical-critical method in systematics and biblical studies, advancement in communication and transportation, the late nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries laid open the way for new ecumenical approaches. The historic words of the Protestant Episcopal Church inaugurate a movement for interchurch gatherings on issues of doctrine and polity:

That a joint commission be appointed to bring about a conference for the consideration of questions touching Faith and Order, and that all Christian communions throughout the world which confess our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour be asked to unite with us in arranging for and conducting such a conference.⁴

This joint commission culminated in a preparatory meeting in 1920 in Geneva, the invitation to which 80 participants representing the Orthodox, Anglican, Reformation and Free church traditions accepted. The Roman Catholic Church declined attending, setting the precedence of its opposition to the ecumenical movement until the time of the Second Vatican Council.

Lausanne 1927

After these preparatory meetings of which Brent became the head, Lausanne was the site chosen for the First World Conference in 1927 and Brent its president. 385 representatives of 108 churches responded to what they understood was a common call to unity. In a sense the gathering was a shared dialogue in the *status quaestionis* of Christian faith and order according to the different churches represented. Using the methodology of a comparative ecclesiology, Lausanne faced the reality of one Christendom and the existence of many churches. Standing on "neutral" ground, the churches represented at the conference set out to "register the apparent level of fundamental agreements... and the grave points of disagreements remaining."⁵ In so doing, Lausanne set what remains the agenda of Faith and Order today: the call for the visible unity of the church; the nature of the church; the common confession of the faith; ministry; sacraments.

Already at this first conference it was acknowledged that a movement such as Faith and Order has much to gain by the missionary and student movements, naturally fertile ground for a comparative method and for identifying tensions between the unity of faith in a common Christian Tradition and the diversity of Christian faith traditions. Missionaries were among the pioneers in Faith and Order. Brent himself was in the Philippines and received his ecumenical inspiration at a missionary meeting. Students became the resource of personnel for the movement's future. Active participants in the Student Christian Movement, an international federation of Christian students committed to spread the gospel by shared discipleship despite denominational differences, became leaders in ecumenism.

Although the Vatican forbade participation in the First World Conference, it is interesting to note that the Lausanne gathering did attract the interest of Roman Catholic theologians. Josef Metzger and Hermann Hoffmann attended the conference unofficially. And, having followed the conference from a distance, Yves Congar noted his concerns about a "divided Christendom". Unfortunately, though, the fact that Pius XI issued his *Mortalium animos* the year after the Lausanne conference clearly indicated the ecumenical stance of the Roman Catholic Church until its turn-about at Vatican II. The encyclical *Mortalium animos* forbade Roman Catholics to take part in interchurch reunion

movements such as Faith and Order and declared that the only way in which Christian unity could be fostered is by “promoting the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it” which would require belief in the “infallible teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff”.⁶

Edinburgh 1937

A more systematic approach to the comparative method and the issues raised in Lausanne was taken ten years later at the Second World Conference.⁷ Meeting in Edinburgh under the leadership of Anglican William Temple, it features as the initial exchange of ideas regarding the use of models of unity as ways to describe the relationship of the churches’ understanding of their shared Christian doctrine and polity. Ecclesial models to describe the churches’ relationship with one another continue to serve Faith and Order dialogue in overcoming obstacles to unity and in articulating the characteristics of unity.

Discerning the value of the movement’s joint ecclesial experience thus far, the Edinburgh gathering also acknowledged the efforts of a parallel ecumenical movement called Life and Work. This movement came about as a way to address human needs in the aftermath of the First World War. It continues under different names as the key conciliar structure by which Christianity, collectively rather than denominationally, speaks to moral and social concerns of the times, to issues of justice and peace. The second conference thus widens Lausanne’s “neutral” ground.

The Edinburgh Faith and Order conference considered the proposal of forming a world council of churches by joining with the Life and Work movement. Also meeting in 1937, Life and Work considered the same proposal. On both sides was the intention to unite Christian doctrine and Christian action for sake of better mission to church and world, and so depart from a “doctrine divides; service unites” attitude. Action on the decision to come together was delayed by the Second World War. It was not until 1948 that the two movements met at Amsterdam to form the World Council of Churches. It is not the place here in a brief lecture to detail the ongoing tensions in conciliar ecumenism between Faith and Order and Life and Work and that this plays out in other ecumenical settings. Yes, we have our problems and polemics. But we also have our hopes and promises that the either/or divide of doctrine and service is not a viable ecumenical Christian stance. So, let us return to the Faith and Order story and find its role in forging true Christians. To be Christian is to be ecumenical.

Despite the fact that the war also prevented participation from the German churches, looking back over Faith and Order history, the 1937 Edinburgh conference was the largest to date – 443 official participants representing 123 Orthodox, Anglican, Reformation and Free churches. 95 of the participants of Edinburgh had attended Lausanne, indicating the first experience of lasting friendships that continue to mark ecumenical history. Despite, too, the Vatican’s relentless negative attitude towards the churches in the movement, the French Jesuit Maurice Bévenot was among the Roman Catholics secretly present at the Second World Conference, and Congar published his ecumenical concerns in his now famous *Divided Christendom* of 1939.⁸

Lund 1952

With energies raised by the initial enthusiasm surrounding the formation of the World Council of Churches, Faith and Order looked toward another world conference. Swedish Lutheran Yngve Brilioth led the movement's way to Lund in 1952.⁹ Although numerically a small delegation, the extensive representation at Lund witnessed to Faith and Order's ideal: German, Hungarian, Czech churches, churches from the Third World and four Roman Catholics attended the conference. The Third World Conference directed Faith and Order's basic theological method of a comparative ecclesiology to include a dialogue based on biblical and christological foundations. Beyond ecclesiological comparisons, Lund called for the employ of a christological method which seeks to penetrate behind ecclesial divisions, affirming the conviction of the conference participants that "As we come closer to Christ we come closer to one another."¹⁰ This shift represents a classical Protestant perspective to ecclesiological issues. Influenced by closer contact with Life and Work, included in its discourse were the so-called "non-theological factors" of church division and church unity. The lasting word from this conference, still quoted in ecumenical circles today, is the Lund Principle: "Should not our churches ask themselves... whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?"¹¹ The principle continues to serve as the test of the meaning and purpose of "faith", "order" and "movement".

Montreal 1963

An extraordinary moment in Faith and Order's history is its next conference, held in Montreal in 1963 and presided over by Oliver Tomkins of the Church of England.¹² Making it extraordinary was the official presence of the Roman Catholic Church. Until the Fourth World Conference, as already mentioned, Roman Catholic participation in Faith and Order was unofficial, even forbidden. All this changed with the Second Vatican Council. Among the preparatory groups established for the council was the secretariat for Christian unity, and, as the council fathers read the "signs of the times", a more open ecclesiology enabled a more favourable look upon the Roman Church's "separated brethren".¹³ As a consequence, the Montreal conference is the first multilateral ecumenical gathering in this century to which the Roman Catholic Church sent representatives. In retrospect, ecumenical history footnotes this as anticipation of the Roman Catholic Church becoming a member of Faith and Order, which did occur after the council. Attending Montreal as official observers appointed by the Vatican were Gregory Baum, Godfrey Diekmann, Jan Groot, Bernard Lambert and George Tavard. In addition to this representation, it has been suggested that Yves Congar traveled from sessions of Vatican II to those of Faith and Order that year, contributing to Montreal's statement on Tradition and traditions. Raymond Brown delivered a paper on "The Church in the New Testament", and Jan Willebrands, of the Vatican's secretariat for Christian unity, attended one week of the conference. Outside of this Roman Catholic participation, official delegates at the Fourth World Conference numbered 232 from 138 churches.

Another feature that marks Montreal is its employ of a trinitarian method, expanding the christological focus of Lund. This theological approach gave unprecedented attention to

pneumatology, a classical concern of Orthodox churches, whose role in conciliar ecumenism heightened after their significant presence at the Third World Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961. The trinitarian method was also used to study the unity statement received at New Delhi.¹⁴ In this context the Fourth World Conference addressed the challenge of the relationship of the unity of the church and the renewal of the human community. Expressed at Montreal and launched thematically by the 1971 F&O commission meeting in Louvain, this concern culminated in a Faith and Order study on Church and World.¹⁵ The issue at stake remains central to Faith and Order reflection.

Santiago de Compostela 1993

From Lausanne to Montreal marks four world conferences in thirty-six years. Another thirty years pass until the Fifth World Conference is called to meet in Santiago de Compostela, Spain in 1993.¹⁶ Around the theme, "Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness", conference president Mary Tanner of the Church of England called representatives to harvest the work of the movement since its inception in light of their understanding of koinonia. In the language of "fellowship", "communion", "participation", the concept of koinonia was gradually emerging in the self-understandings of the churches and as expressive of their relationship with one another. Now, looking back over past achievements since Lausanne, Santiago saw future directions in the ecumenical understanding of the church as koinonia. Manifesting the inner koinonia of God's own trinitarian life, koinonia is the experience shared in Christian faith, celebrated in Christian life and realised in Christian witness. In the biblical word "Koinonia" the Fifth World Conference found new rooting for its "faith", "order" and "movement": theological reflection on common confession of faith, sharing common life and sacraments and common witness for a renewed world done in a contextual ecumenical theology. Supporting the plea for a contextual ecumenical theology was the very demography of the Santiago gathering. For the most part church representatives attending the previous world conferences were predominantly white, male, clerical Western Europeans and Americans. At the Fifth World Conference was the widest representation yet experienced in a Faith and Order gathering in terms of geography, race, gender, age, country and church tradition – including, for the first time, full Roman Catholic participation with a voting delegation. In all, 200 official delegates from some 140 churches attended Santiago. Contextual ecumenical theology grounds Faith and Order method for post-Santiago studies: i.e., contextualizing Faith and Order's apostolic faith study, ongoing now for ten years; ecumenical worship in diverse cultures; *episkopé*; ecclesiology and ethics.

Part III: Ongoing Work

Hence, we arrive at Faith and Order during the years in between the conferences and its identity today. Such a look at Faith and Order assumes the sustaining force of the movement in local, regional, national and international settings. At the world level, the secretariat of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva plays an important role here. Likewise, commission meetings, which meet every three to four years, to further the ongoing theological reflection that takes place in between world conferences.

To cite a few examples of what happens in the in-between. The city of Louvain, Belgium 1971 marks the time and place of a commission that acutely addressed the concerns to link the question

of church unity with the unity of the human community. A connection recognized, but without being given adequate attention for reflection and clarification, in previous gatherings of both Faith and Order and of the World Council of Churches, the impetus of the Louvain meeting drew attention in such a way that the two components, the unity of the church and the unity of humankind, are now incorporated into all Faith and Order study.

Another example, considered the ecumenical milestone of the century, is the convergences on baptism, eucharist and ministry. The document of the same title as the study, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, and its process of reception surround the 1982 Faith and Order commission meeting in Lima.¹⁷ Lima approved an accumulative work of some ten years and launched an ongoing reception process on the two dominical sacraments and ministry. Unprecedented responses from the churches on the recognition of one another's baptism have led to varying degrees of agreement, consensus and convergence on eucharist and ministry as the churches are asked in the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry process to recognize in each other the "faith of the church throughout the ages". This consideration, to recognize the "faith of the church throughout the ages" in another church, shifts the focus away from looking for consonance with one's own doctrine and polity.

Lastly as an example, what has turned out to be a more tedious effort is the study on the common confession of the faith.¹⁸ Despite calls for revisiting this ecumenical explication of common Christian creed, this project has yet seen the ecumenical light of day in terms of study and reception.

The Faith and Order movement's very identity helps keep it focused on the two spheres, "faith" and "order", and ensures it as a 'movement' and not just another church institution. Its membership extends beyond the member-churches of the World Council of Churches. This affirms Faith and Order's self-understanding as a "movement" open to churches whose doctrine and polity are in harmony with the movement's foundational documents, by-laws and constitution. For example, since 1968 the Roman Catholic Church holds membership in Faith and Order but relates to the council through a joint working group. Faith and Order membership currently numbers 324 churches worldwide and represents a broader Christian identity than the council itself. For this reason alone Faith and Order takes seriously the plea to do ecumenical theology contextually in a way that is reflective of a worldwide Christianity. Only in this way will Faith and Order truly be the "movement" it claims to be. And only in this way can the classical concerns of 'faith' and 'order' be addressed in the twenty-first century. In the words of the Fifth World Conference at Santiago: "There is no turning back, either from the goal of visible unity or from the single ecumenical movement that unites concern for the unity of the church and concern for the engagement in the struggles of the world".¹⁹

Part IV: US Faith and Order

Let us bring this world movement home... to Faith and Order in the USA. The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA was formed in 1950 in New York, replacing its predecessor body, the Federal Council of Churches. Seven years later a North American Conference on Faith and Order was held in Oberlin, Ohio.²⁰ Its theme was "The Nature of the Unity We Seek". To ensure that its concern be ongoing, the Oberlin conference suggested that a national commission on Faith and

Order be established and that the newly formed National Council of Churches be its custodian. We could say here 'the rest is history'. Over the years Faith and Order received its mandate from American Christian identity. This identity itself is as internally pluralistic as is the external context of religions in America. It is much more complex than the classical Orthodox-Catholic-Protestant divide. Furthermore, visions which US churches uphold regarding the church, its faith and its unity have influenced ecumenical relations worldwide – i.e., the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. And American Christians are among the world's ecumenical pioneers – i.e., John Mott, Charles Brent. That legacy continues. Look around our meeting rooms these days. There you will meet some US Faith and Order folk whose voice is heard in Geneva, in Rome, in London, in Nairobi, in Manila.

Let us then fast-forward this history to US Faith and Order today. As on the world level, Faith and Order in America is first and foremost a movement within the churches and of Christians. As a movement, it extends beyond the structures supporting it.

The National Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order works in four-year periods, quadrennia. Each quadrennium meets eight times, twice a year, in March and October. During these commission meetings, we study, dialogue/work, pray and play together – in plenary sessions and in study group sessions. A mission statement grounds the commission's being and doing, and an abstract of commission studies frames the basic work of each quadrennium. You have this material along with related sources in your packet as we begin the 2004-2007 quadrennium. Your name appears under one of the study groups. Surrounding and supporting this commission work is the ongoing Faith and Order work which Dr. Ann Riggs carries on in her role in the National Council of Churches, assisted by Mr. Martin Rock. Dr. R. Keelan Downton is the Commission's 2005-2006 Post-doctoral Fellow. The Faith and Order office is located at in Suite 108 at 110 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC, 20002. Our March and October gatherings and the goings-on outside them are mutually informing and forming. Much more could be said, but we will learn as we live, in Faith and Order.

All of this is a privileged part of participating in unity as the God-given gift to his church and unity as the God-given call to the churches to manifest that oneness fully and visibly. You are part of this, by your ecumenical Christian identity and the church, network, institution which has called you to be here today... and for four, hopefully more, years! Welcome aboard! It's not the Good Ship Lollipop. But neither is it the Titanic! It's more like standing on holy ground or walking on water, together, to construct the Lord's dwelling, which is a place with room for all of us.

Conclusion

The task you are about to undertake as a member of the National Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order is as important today than it has ever been. Religion, faith, belief stand at many crossroads in this new millennium. The churches cannot afford to be divided. The churches will either survive by an ecumenical ecclesiology that grounds common Christian faith, life and witness, or they will perish in ecclesial isolation that separates "Faith and Order matters" from "Life and Work concerns". A way to learn how to be ecumenical in our future is to look more ecumenically at our past. To look more ecumenically at our past requires an ecumenical re-writing and re-reading of

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church history in the present – and with the historical, perceive the theological and pastoral implications of our separate living. More often history is written by the victor, the story of the vanquished told through his slant or left untold. Whatever our studies in Faith and Order, they must bring us beyond the victor/vanquished divide, must disclose the untold and level the slant. As one aspect of a wider enterprise, Faith and Order has by its identity and mission much to offer such an endeavor. As the widest array of Christians gathered in one place at one time, Faith and Order in America offers a unique perspective on all these issues as they concern the church, its faith and its unity.

Statement of Faith

From the Preamble to the NCC Constitution

"The National Council of Churches is a community of Christian communions, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord.

These communions covenant with one another to manifest ever more fully the unity of the Church.

Relying upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the communions come together as the Council in common mission, serving in all creation to the glory of God."

Pertinent Sections from the Strategic Plan of the National Council of Churches USA 2008-2011

OVERARCHING GOAL

That the churches, as an expression of their commitment to seek visible unity through the NCC, will aggressively promote in the next quadrennium a vision of authentic common life as an alternative to that prevalent in contemporary American culture.

COMMISSIONS IN THE WORK AND STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL

Goal 1: To ensure that the commissions are accountable to the member communions through the GB and to the integrating goal set forth in this Strategic Plan.

Strategies:

- ▶ The programmatic work of the NCC, including that of its various working groups and committees, will, unless otherwise indicated by the GB, be subject to the oversight of one or more of the commissions.
- ▶ The GB will ensure that the agendas of the commissions are not greater than the staff and organizational resources of the NCC.
- ▶ While each commission sets priorities for its own work, taking account of its particular history and constituency, the commissions can be mandated by the GB to undertake particular projects for the good of the Council.
- ▶ The EC will ask the commissions to make the overarching goal of this Strategic Plan a priority concern of their work for the quadrennium.
- ▶ While recognizing that the commissions have different histories and missions,

each commission will be asked by the EC to review its standing rules in order to ensure that they are consistent with the Constitution and Bylaws of the NCC.

Goal 2: To increase collaboration between and among the commissions.

Strategies:

- ▶ Chairpersons of the commissions will continue to serve on the EC, which is an obvious venue for collaborative planning, and will gather (with staff, when appropriate) during meetings of the GB to discuss possibilities for shared projects.
- ▶ Commission chairpersons and staff will look for opportunities for various commissions to meet jointly.
- ▶ Leaders of the commissions will work with the NCC Development Office to raise funds, which includes identifying new possible sources of funding.

Goal 3: To consider expanding the current structure of five commissions.

Strategies:

- ▶ The GB will determine a process and criteria for establishing new commissions.
- ▶ After the process and criteria for establishing new commissions are determined, GB will consider whether or not to establish a new Commission on Mission and Evangelism, a stream of the ecumenical movement now missing in the NCC.
- ▶ After the process and criteria for establishing new commissions are determined, the GB will consider whether or not to establish a new Commission on International Affairs in order to strengthen the Council's international ecumenical relationships, to articulate the international concerns of U.S. churches, to work cooperatively with CWS and WCC to ensure an effective, coherent witness, and to strengthen the churches' capacity to affect U. S. foreign policy.

FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION

Goal 1: To explore church-dividing and church-uniting issues in a manner consistent with the principles and practices of the world-wide Faith and Order/Faith and Witness movement.

Strategies:

- ▶ During the quadrennium 2007-11, a study on "unity in mission" will be conducted and completed.
- ▶ During the quadrennium 2007-11, a study in response to the WCC text, The Nature and Mission of the Church, will be conducted and completed.

- ▶ During the quadrennium 2007-11, a further study on Justification/Sanctification/Theosis and Justice/Ethics will be conducted and completed.

Goal 2: To use the period approaching the fiftieth anniversary of Faith and Order (FO) in the US (2007) to amplify the importance of FO for both the church and the academy.

Strategies:

- ▶ Ecclesial and academic attention will be drawn to the Commission's publishing programs.
- ▶ Through collaborations with consortia of theological schools, the attention of theological educators and students will be drawn to the work of FO in the NCC, and the development of younger ecumenical scholars will be encouraged.
- ▶ A theological conference, focusing on the history and future of FO, will be held in 2007.

Goal 3: To undertake additional theological activity in support of the churches' unity efforts.

Strategies:

- ▶ The Commission will conduct a series of consultations dealing with statements and texts from the WCC's 2006 assembly in Porto Alegre, especially those released by the WCC's Faith and Order Commission. Results of these consultations will be published.

Worldwide Faith & Order Mission Statement

To call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and common life in Christ, and to advance toward that unity that the world may believe.

Mission Statement of the Faith & Order Commission in the USA

I. Specific Mission of Faith and Order NCCCUSA within the one Ecumenical Movement and the global Faith and Order Movement:

- 1) Witness to the churches and the NCCCUSA:
 - a) to the Gospel call to full visible unity,
 - b) to the inclusiveness of the ecumenical movement to gather all who confess Christ into a common reconciling pilgrimage;
- 2) Pursue theological study and publish research serving the unity of the churches;
- 3) Provide access to the world wide faith and order discussions to:
 - a) under-represented US churches (i.e. African American, Holiness, Pentecostal and other American born churches),
 - b) global churches with US expressions (most Orthodox and Roman Catholic)
 - c) nonconciliar churches (i.e. Southern Baptist, Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Christian Reformed);
- 4) Provide the widest forum of church representatives in the US for serving the unity of the Church through theological research and dialogue;
- 5) Provide a place for the US churches to coordinate and discuss their diverse church unity efforts (i.e. Bilaterals, WCC studies, church union negotiations);
- 6) Provide studies on issues in the US churches for global ecumenical understanding, on global ecumenical issues for US churches* understanding and bridge particular interregional concerns with special significance for the US (i.e. Latin American - US unity issues, Canadian US ecumenical collaboration).

II. Approaches of this Commission:

- 1) Historical, biblical and contextual research serving ecumenical convergence, following the Christocentric methodology (Lund, 1952);

2) Outreach to all Trinitarian churches that confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior according to the Scriptures, to engage them in a reconciling dialogue sensitive to their own ecclesiological expectations.

III. Methodologies:

- 1) Publications serving the convergence in theology that will promote the unity of the Church;
- 2) Focused consultations from time to time on specific unity issues;
- 3) Continuing ecumenical studies developed in quadrennial segments;
- 4) Occasional larger conferences serving a particular unity theme of service to the churches and theological community;
- 5) Occasional ad hoc studies done to service particular ecumenical concerns (i.e. *Burned Churches* volume, *Ut unum sint* response for the NCC).

Publications Policy

Publishing the work Faith and Order is an important feature of the Commission. It is an essential way in which to share the commission's proceedings and ecumenical findings of its study groups.

It is the responsibility of study group chairpersons to see that materials from the group are prepared for publication. They carry out this responsibility working with the publications committee.

The chair of the publications committee serves on the executive committee of the Commission. Any member of the Commission may serve as editor of study group publications. Co-chairpersons are responsible to see that this work is accomplished in a timely and professional way.

The Commission has a contractual relationship with Paulist Press for the publication of book-length academic style manuscripts. Various education committees of the National Council of Churches are interested in working with the Faith and Order Commission to produce shorter, pastorally oriented manuscripts, including web-based publishing. The Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute welcomes the Commission and its members to consider the publication of their Faith and Order papers in its journal, *Ecumenical Trends*.

Worship

Worship lies at the very center of our life and experience as Christian communities. It is therefore integral to Faith and Order. Each semi-annual gathering of the Commission holds the following worship: opening and closing prayers of study sessions, prayer before meals and a more substantial prayer service ordinarily immediately prior to the Commission's plenary business meeting.

Worship Coordinator

A member of the Commission is appointed as Worship Coordinator for a quadrennium. The Coordinator is a member of the Executive Committee of Faith and Order. The Worship Coordinator is responsible for the Commission's plenary worship. This worship is ordinarily led by Commission members, but it is not required that this be so.

Worship Norms

The Commission follows the norms for prayer in common used by the World Council of Churches.¹ As they apply to the National Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, these guidelines may be briefly summarized by the following characteristics. Since not all the churches present in Faith and Order are in full communion with one another, the Commission's prayer is not eucharistic. Rather, it is the prayer of a particular church or ecclesial tradition, or it is ecumenical and interconfessional. When the worship of a particular tradition is used, the liturgical norms of that tradition are followed. When ecumenical and interconfessional prayer is preferred, the following norms are used. Men and women, lay and ordained are equally able to serve in leadership roles in the worship. Inclusive language is used in reference to humankind. In preaching and in calling upon God, the variety of images and metaphors found in scripture and tradition may be used. When naming God in common prayer, the names Father, Son and Holy Spirit are used. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, without the *filioque*, is our usual ecumenical creed. Although the RSV and NRSV are the Bible translations prepared by the National Council of Churches, other recognized translations of the Bible may be used.

Current Studies
(Quadrennium 2008-2011)

Unity in Mission

Understanding mission is perhaps the best path to unity. Mission is transformational in both personal and social dimensions of life. The implications are that the church has a prophetic vocation in the world, a calling to be an agent of transformation within the wider community of humanity that inhabits the world, without the world becoming coextensive with the church. The church is to be "in" the world without being "of" the world. What is the mission of the church in relation to and even in community with the rest of humanity? This working group will focus on the topic of "unity in mission". We will investigate various aspects of the church's mission: serving the purpose of God as a gift given to the world in order that all may believe; proclaiming the gospel in word and deed; reconciling all things to God and to one another through Jesus Christ, transforming the world; caring for those suffering and in need, suffering on their behalf; advocating on behalf of the poor, needy, and marginalized. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the church seeks faithfully to proclaim and live the love of God for all, and to fulfill Jesus Christ's mission for the salvation and transformation of the world, to the glory of God. We hope for extensive presence of theologians from non-NCCC member churches and from Baptists, both from among the NCCC-member communions and beyond, among others. We especially seek pastors and preachers, missiologists, systematic theologians, and biblical theologians.

Justification and Justice: Beyond the Dichotomies

The study continues its work for another quadrennium. What began as a response to the Roman Catholic-Lutheran World Federation Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification will now approach the topic using various denominational principles, contemporary Biblical research, and ecumenical documents. The current study group has set a series of questions to guide the future work. The present proposal is for a study that would begin by reading Scripture together, utilizing a review of appropriate materials from other dialogues as this may be helpful. A second step would be a review of pertinent developments in church history and historical theology. A third step would be consideration of how a variety of ecclesiastical cultures understand key pertinent doctrines: theological anthropology, soteriology, justification and sanctification. The choice of the term "ecclesiastical cultures" is an attempt to address dual problems in our discussion processes. While many members of the Commission directly represent churches, the number of Commissioners who represent the theological heritage of their own church or of a cluster of churches but are not directly appointed by their own church authorities is growing.

The Nature and Mission of the Church

What is this thing called the Church? Can the diverse groups of people that comprise the Body of Christ as one People of God say something together about its nature and mission? The WCC document, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* is one stage on the way to a common statement. It has been sent out from the WCC Faith and Order Commission with a request for responses in a

National Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission Handbook

process similar to that used regarding Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry. The request includes several specific questions: 1) Does this study document correctly identify our common ecclesiological convictions, as well as the issues which continue to divide us? 2) Does this study document reflect an emerging convergence on the nature and mission of the Church? 3) Are there significant matters in which the concerns of the churches are not adequately addressed? By studying the document together through the lens of their various traditions and contemporary ecclesiological scholarship, study group members will prepare a common response statement reflective of the experience of churches in the United States that addresses these questions. As the broadest forum of theological discussion in the United States, this study group will be particularly well-suited for expanding or challenging the material that has been set out from the text in boxes. By identifying areas where the WCC has not described all the relevant differences or has described differences that do not carry much weight in the context of the United States, it will provide a unique collective response from the region. As some NCCC member churches will be preparing separate responses during this same period, the study group will be a resource for sharing papers, setting up joint forums, and other forms of collaboration.

Commission Tasks

Commissioners

As one appointed by your communion or other sending body to the Commission of Faith and Order of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, a commissioner is one who has been asked to participate in a distinctive venue of exchange in service of the full and visible unity of the church of Jesus Christ. It is a ministry of reconciliation to which one is called as a Faith and Order commissioner. It is not simply an administrative or academic enterprise. Although the Faith and Order Commission is housed at the National of Council of Churches and can be asked by the Council to carry out some administrative responsibilities, the Commission belongs equally to all those who participate.

The following requirements and responsibilities are expected of a commissioner:

- to write papers and give presentations on behalf of your communion or sending body, sacrificing if necessary personal agendas and research interests in service of the church, but refraining from compromising the clear voice of your own community.
- to serve as a vehicle of communication of the commission's work and studies to your communion or sending body.
- to study the history of Faith and Order and the development of new trends in American churches as these may relate to the unity of the church and the work of the Commission.
- to be willing to develop a spirit of listening and dialogical openness with other members of the Commission.
- to be able to make a four-year commitment to the Commission, attending its semi-annual three-day gatherings and fulfilling tasks in preparation of them; to send a qualified replacement in the event of inability to attend a particular commission gathering.
- to pray with and for the commission and its ministry of Christian unity.
- to participate in and occasionally lead the worship of the commission's semi-annual gatherings.

Study Group Co-Chairpersons

Study groups ordinarily have two co-chairpersons. Initial co-chairpersons are appointed by the executive committee to serve as leaders for the first two meetings of the quadrennium. They are responsible for getting the group's work started in a productive manner. By the end of the second meeting, each study group either confirms these appointees or selects others from their group as co-chair(s) of the quadrennium.

Co-chairs convene study group sessions, provide for recording the work of the group and facilitate the group's long-term activity. Discussion within the study group may be moderated by the co-chairs, or be rotated among study group members. Co-chairpersons are members of the Executive Committee of Faith and Order. In this capacity, they attend the following: Executive Committee meetings held prior to and during the semi-annual Commission gatherings; semi-annual Commission gathering; conference calls between gatherings and other meetings as may be needed. Chairpersons oversee any publications of the study group.

Worship Coordinator

A member of the Commission is appointed as Worship Coordinator for a quadrennium. The Coordinator is a member of the Executive Committee of Faith and Order. The Worship Coordinator is responsible for the worship during the plenary session of the semi-annual gatherings. This worship is ordinarily led by Commission members, but others may be invited to take this role.

Officers

The Commission officers include one chair, one vice-chair, and a secretary.

Executive Committee

The Commission is led by the officers, the immediate past chair, the co-chairs of the three study groups, the worship coordinator and a small group of others with particular responsibilities for meeting, publication, membership, and relations with the communions and sending bodies. The Executive Committee normally meets the Thursday afternoon before the Commission's meeting to review the work of the Commission and consult with the staff on matters that impact the well-being of the Commission and the carrying out of its responsibilities.

The Commission as a whole and the Executive Committee in specific, working with the staff, are responsible for ensuring that the ecumenical needs of the churches and other sending bodies and appropriate requests from the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches and the wider ecumenical movement are attended to with care. The Executive Committee receives semi-annual reports from the staff, study group co-chairs and others on the work of the Commission and particular projects of the Faith and Order office.

The Executive Committee consults with the NCC General Secretary on the annual review of the work of the Senior Program Director of the Commission.

All Commissioners should feel empowered to bring matters of concern to the attention of the Executive Committee.

Theological Language and Ecumenical Methodology¹

By John T. Ford, CSC - 2004

Participating in ecumenical dialogue is often similar to learning a new language. Sometimes ecumenical conversation goes smoothly, just as the process of learning grammar and acquiring vocabulary can be an enjoyable activity: learning a new language can be as entertaining as learning a new game.

At other times, however, language learning is tedious; for example, we can become discouraged by the drudgery of learning vocabulary, just as we can be clumsy in trying to learn a new sport. Similarly, ecumenical conversations are sometimes frustrated by awkward misunderstandings. At still other times, language learning can be quite puzzling, especially, when we sense that a word is being used in a way that we don't quite understand; it's like playing a game whose rules are unfamiliar. Similarly, some ecumenical conversations get stalled when one group of participants is using terms that their counterparts do not really understand. When learning a foreign language, most people anticipate or at least adjust to such difficulties. However, when an ecumenical conversation is in our own language, we often fail to notice that similar language dynamics can be operative—until at some point, the dialogue comes to a standstill. Then we are puzzled why a conversation that previously was going well has suddenly and unexpectedly become problematic. However, there are three dynamics of language learning that are often operative—and occasionally obstructive—in ecumenical dialogue: (1) resonance; (2) dissonance; (3) nonsonance, nonsense.

Resonance

Perhaps the most obvious challenge in learning another language is the acquisition of vocabulary. However, much vocabulary learning seems mainly a matter of diligence, if the vocabulary refers to concrete realities. For example, with minimal effort, a student can learn the word for "father" in German (Vater), French (père), or Spanish (padre); the words are different, but the reality designated by the words is the same.

One can have similar experiences in ecumenical conversations. For example, during the "get acquainted reception" at the very first ecumenical dialogue that I ever attended, a Lutheran professor of New Testament and I, a historical systematic theologian, began to talk about "Justification"—in retrospect, such a topic seems almost predestined as a conversation piece for Lutherans and Roman Catholics. In any case, what surprised me—and encouraged future ecumenical conversations—was our mutual discovery that behind his description of justification based on the New Testament and my understanding of justification grounded in the Council of Trent was a great deal of commonality.

Like the beginning language student who learns the word for "father" in another language, we had discovered that while our words were different, the reality behind the words was much the same. In spite of the differences in vocabulary, we were able to detect an echoing or resonance in regard to the reality.

However, a word of caution is necessary here: experiences are never completely identical. There are always nuances—sometimes historical, sometimes cultural, sometimes personal—that can catch

us off guard. For example, while I can learn the word for “father” in another language, I still tend to base my understanding of “father” on my personal relationship with my own father. Thus, I tend to speak of my father in another language in the same way that I speak of him in English. However, in some other cultures this may not be appropriate; for example, in some cultures, one is expected to address one’s father in formal terms; in other languages, such formality would be considered inappropriate, since one should speak to one’s father in the most familiar of terms. Such usage can be perplexing to English speakers, since the distinction between formal and familiar address has practically disappeared from English.²

A comparable difference in usage may perplex ecumenical conversations. For example, in speaking of “sacrament,” those coming from Catholic traditions will usually mean “an outward sign of interior grace.” In contrast, some (but not all) Protestants find the term “sacrament” uncongenial, even unclear, and prefer to use a term like “ordinance” to describe Baptism as a rite in which a person publicly professes belief in the Trinity and is received into membership in the Church.

While such language usage is also current in Catholic traditions, it can become problematic when one begins to discuss the age for the reception of Baptism. For those with a sacramental understanding, Baptism not only marks the baptized’s entry into the Church, but also is a conferral of interior grace, and thus should be, indeed must be, conferred on infants; not to baptize infants would be a type of ecclesial child neglect: depriving a child of Baptism is comparable to depriving a child of food.

In contrast, for those who emphasize the need for personal conversion and commitment as necessary predispositions, Baptism witnesses an individual’s decision for Christ, and thus should be administered only to adults; to baptize infants would be a form of ecclesial child manipulation: Baptism should not be forced on anyone.

The anomaly in ecumenical discussions about Baptism is that dialogue is aided by the fact that Baptism is a concrete rite at the heart of the Church’s life: although the ceremonies vary from one church to the next, Baptism is readily recognized, since it is generally administered with water and the invocation of the Trinity. Nonetheless, this very “concreteness” in the case of the age of Baptism presents an irresolvable dilemma: at what age should a person be baptized?³ Thus, while the term “Baptism” is a common word in Christian vocabulary, the apparent resonance is deceptive, insofar as there is considerable difference among Christians in explaining its theological meaning.

Dissonance

Another frequent experience in learning a language is what a friend calls “fractured French”—for example, seeing the word “coin” in French and presuming that it refers to money, rather than “corner.” However much such words “look alike,” they are basically different in meaning. There are multiple examples of such linguistic dissonance: it is tempting to equate “compromiso” in Spanish with “compromise” instead of its real meaning of “commitment”; this type of misunderstanding can become dangerous if, for example, one supposes that the German “Gift” means “present,” when it actually means “poison.”

Similar confusion can easily emerge in ecumenical conversation. On one occasion, a participant in a multilateral dialogue kept speaking of “Jesus as verily God.” At first, I presumed that this was his personal way of expressing the ancient Christological confession that Jesus Christ is “true God of true God.” Then another participant raised a question about the relationship of the humanity and divinity of Christ and it became apparent from the speaker’s reply that he considered Jesus a human person who had an unusually insightful knowledge of God, in other words, Jesus was a person with extraordinary perceptions about the divine, but not personally divine. My initial presumption of agreement was shattered. From the similarity of words, I had assumed agreement when it did not actually exist.

This type of experience is frequently encountered in discussing “agreed statements.” On the one hand, the writers of such documents usually seek to draft statements to which all participants can subscribe. Thus, an agreed statement represents a convergence of various philosophical and theological viewpoints. In other words, an “agreed statement” is sort of a “condensation” or “reduction” of a variety of views, which in their fuller systematic development might well be incompatible.

Accordingly, “agreed statements” can usually be interpreted in a variety of ways. At their ecumenical best, such statements can resolve longstanding divisions. Yet such statements simultaneously have the potential of unraveling, if a reader attempts—as readers almost inevitably do—to analyze the statement from a specific theological perspective. Thus, for example, it is not surprising that the report of the World Council of Churches on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry not only has received wide-ranging acceptance, but also has been critiqued from specifically different denominational viewpoints.⁴

This is not to say that such agreed statements should not be drafted. Much less is it to accuse such statements of dishonesty. However, it is necessary to recognize that words that are used in ecumenical documents often have “cognates” in denominational traditions, where the meanings are not necessarily the same, indeed where they are sometimes decidedly different. Apparent ecumenical convergence can conceal theological dissonance.

Non Sonance, Non Sense

Even after a person has mastered the basics of another language, it is not uncommon to come across words that are not easily translated into English; one needs more than the standard dictionary in order to understand them. For example, it is hard to find good translations for *raison d’être* (literally, “reason of being”), or *das Gegenüber* (literally “the over-againstness”), or *mestizaje* (literally, “mixture”). As an illustration of the last example, Virgil Elizondo has entitled his autobiographical reflections on crossing cultural and theological frontiers, *The Future is Mestizo*—an enigmatic title that arouses a reader’s curiosity, which would not quite be the case were the title “The Future is Mixed.”⁵

Such terms have a certain nonsonance, non sense—it is comparatively easy to learn the word, but more difficult to identify the concept or reality behind the name: such words lack resonance with my personal experience. Thus, such terms are usually not simply idiomatic ways of speaking, they are embedded in the culture of a people. For example, while a student in Europe, I looked forward

to the weekly edition of a French newspaper that featured a “British Joke of the Week” —first of all, the British sense of humor was sometimes perplexing, but it was even more humorous to read several lengthy columns in French explaining why the joke was funny. In short, to appreciate the humor of other languages, one must try to understand the culture in which they are used.

The same may be said for ecumenical dialogue, where the words of one’s ecumenical partners must be understood from their theological perspective. For example, when Protestants speak of *sola Scriptura*, it is not always clear to a Roman Catholic whether they are advocating a fundamentally personal interpretation of Scripture given to each individual under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or whether they are maintaining that any and every doctrine taught by the Church must have some type of warranty in Scripture, or some combination of these positions.

A similar difficulty arises when Roman Catholics speak of *magisterium*, which can refer to church teaching or to its level of authority connected with a particular teaching, or to church teachers or to their teaching function—in a variety of combinations depending on context.⁶ Thus, it is hardly surprising that ecumenical conversations sometimes get entangled in lengthy, intricate, and usually frustrating discussion about the meaning of such expressions as *sola Scriptura* and *magisterium*—precisely because such terms are so deeply embedded in their respective theological traditions that their true meaning may not be immediately evident to an outsider.

As in the example of the British Jokes, it is often difficult for an outsider to understand, much less to appreciate, the meaning and the importance that such expressions have within another denominational tradition. Thus, ecumenical dialogue needs to follow the standard advice of language teachers: “when in doubt, ask a native speaker for clarification.” And even then, since languages operate differently, one may simply not understand the explanation: in ecumenical dialogue, it is not always possible to overcome nonsonance, non sense—cases where an idea is so embedded in a particular denominational tradition that outsiders do not find it easy to comprehend.

Ecumenical Methodology

Most people learn to speak another language by “trial and error”: What does this sentence really mean? Do I really understand what is being said? Or have I missed the main point? Admittedly, such a process exposes the novice linguist to a variety of potential embarrassments: Who hasn’t managed to say the opposite of what one was trying to say? Who hasn’t misunderstood what the other person was trying to say? Who hasn’t been dumfounded about the meaning of a sentence? Yet under the guidance of a fluent teacher, and with at least a modicum of humility, the process is usually constructive, if not always congenial.

A similar process can be productive in ecumenical dialogue; for example, the ecclesiology working group of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches has found it helpful to ask participants to raise three questions in their discussions: (1) resonance: where do we agree? (2) dissonance: where do we disagree? (3) nonsonance, non sense: where don’t we understand each other?

Such simple questions have multiple benefits:

(1) the effort to identify areas of consensus sometimes uncovers previously unsuspected resonance behind quite different theological language; for example, Evangelicals and Catholics have discovered more commonalities than either would have suspected prior to engaging in dialogue.

(2) nonetheless, in searching for consensus, one occasionally finds unexpected disagreement; for example, although Orthodox and Catholic theologians find much in common about sacramental ministry, agreement about the papacy remains a difficult, even neuralgic topic.

(3) in ecumenical dialogue, as in other conversations, sometimes the participants use “words full of sound” but “signifying nothing” as far as their dialogue partners are concerned; for example, Roman Catholic discussions of complex theological topics like transubstantiation are sometimes soporific.

A major benefit from language study is that it requires students to re-examine the vocabulary and grammar of their own language. A similar benefit accrues in ecumenical dialogue, where the questions of one’s dialogue partners often prompt a person to rethink personal philosophical presuppositions, to reconsider denominational terminology, and even to restructure an inherited but systematic theology.

Finally, the study of a foreign language provides an entree into a new and different world, a new *Weltanschauung* or theological worldview, but especially an *encuentro* between people of different cultures. Similarly in ecumenical conversation, one experiences a broadening of theological horizons, new ways of appreciating the Christian message, and most of all, friendship with other committed Christians.

The real joy in learning another language is that it opens a door to encountering people of another culture; in effect, language learning provides opportunities for personal enrichment unavailable in one’s own language. Ecumenical dialogue promises a similar gift: to learn about the beliefs of fellow Christians—not merely through written texts, whose meaning may not always be clear—but through persons who live and witness the Christian tradition represented by those texts. After all, the real test of language proficiency is one’s ability to converse with native speakers in their own language.

The real benefit of ecumenical dialogue is its “exchange of gifts”—through ecumenical dialogue, each participant is enriched by new insights into the Gospel, experiences new ways of living the Christian life, and becomes deeply committed to the ecumenical quest that “all may be one” (John 17:20-21).⁷

Conciliar Quotations

Excerpts from Writings of the World Council of Churches
and the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission

1952 Lund, Second World Conference on Faith and Order

Lund Principle

A faith in the one church of Christ which is not implemented by acts of obedience is dead. There are truths about the nature of God and his church which will remain forever closed to us unless we act together in obedience to the unity which is already ours. We would, therefore, earnestly request our churches to consider whether they are doing all they ought to do to manifest the oneness of the people of God. **Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?** ... Obedience to God demands also that the churches seek unity in their mission to the world.¹

1961 New Delhi, World Council of Churches Third World Assembly New Delhi Statement 1961 (Formula of Unity)

2. We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.²

10. The word 'fellowship' (*koinonia*) has been chosen because it describes what the Church truly is. 'Fellowship' clearly implies that the Church is not merely an institution or organization. It is a fellowship of those who are called together by the Holy Spirit and in baptism confess Christ as Lord and Saviour. They are thus 'fully committed' to him and to one another. Such a fellowship means for those who participate in it nothing less than a renewed mind and spirit, a full participation in common praise and prayer, the shared realities of penitence and forgiveness, mutuality in suffering and joy, listening together to the same Gospel, responding in faith, obedience and service, joining in one mission of Christ in the world, a self-forgetting love for all for whom Christ died, and the reconciling grace which breaks down every wall of race, colour, caste, tribe, sex, class and nation. Neither does this 'fellowship' imply a rigid uniformity of structure, organization or government. A lively variety marks corporate life in the one Body of one Spirit...³

**1991 Canberra, World Council of Churches Seventh World Assembly
Canberra Statement 1991 (The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling)⁴**

1.1 The purpose of God according to Holy Scripture is to gather the whole of creation under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in whom, by the power of the Holy Spirit, all are brought into communion with God (Eph. 1). The Church is the foretaste of this communion with God and with one another. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit enable the one Church to live as sign of the reign of God and servant of the reconciliation with God, promised and provided for the whole creation. The purpose of the Church is to unite people with Christ in the power of the Spirit, to manifest communion in prayer and action and thus to point to the fullness of communion with God, humanity and the whole creation in the glory of the kingdom.

1.2 The calling of the Church is to proclaim reconciliation and provide healing, to overcome divisions based on race, gender, age, culture, colour and to bring all people into communion with God. because of sin and the misunderstanding of the diverse gifts of the Spirit, the churches are painfully divided within themselves and among each other. The scandalous divisions damage the credibility of their witness to the world in worship and service. Moreover, they contradict not only the Church's witness but also its very nature.

1.3 We acknowledge with gratitude to God that in the ecumenical movement the churches walk together in mutual understanding, theological convergence, common suffering and common prayer, shared witness and service, and they draw close to one another. This has allowed them to recognize a certain degree of communion already existing between them. This is indeed the fruit of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of all who believe in Christ Jesus and who struggle for visible unity now. Nevertheless, churches have failed to draw the consequences for their life from the degree of communion they have already experienced and the agreements already achieved. They have remained satisfied to co-exist in division.

2.1 The unity of the Church to which we are called is a koinonia given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God's grace and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness. This full communion will be expressed on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. In such communion churches are bound in all aspects of their life together at all levels in confessing the one faith and engaging in worship and witness, deliberation and action.

2.2 Diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic or historical contexts are integral to the nature of communion; yet there are limits to diversity. Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8); salvation and the

final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community. In communion diversities are brought together in harmony as gifts of the Holy Spirit, contributing to the richness and fullness of the Church of God.

3.1 Many things have been done and many remain to be done on the way towards the realization of full communion. Churches have reached agreements in bilateral and multilateral dialogues which are already bearing fruit, renewing their liturgical and spiritual life and their theology. In taking specific steps together the churches express and encourage the enrichment and renewal of Christian life, as they learn from one another, work together for justice and peace and care together for God's creation.

3.2 The challenge at this moment in the ecumenical movement as a reconciling and renewing moment towards full visible unity for the Seventh Assembly of the WCC to call all churches:

- to recognize each other's baptism on the basis of the BEM document;
- to move towards the recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed through the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the life and witness of one another;
- on the basis of convergence in faith in baptism, eucharist and ministry to consider, wherever appropriate, forms of eucharistic hospitality; we gladly acknowledge that some who do not observe these rites share in the spiritual experience of life in Christ;
- to move towards a mutual recognition of ministries;
- to endeavour in word and deed to give common witness to the gospel as a whole;
- to recommit themselves to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking more closely the search for sacramental communion of the Church with the struggles for justice and peace;
- to help parishes and communities express in appropriate ways locally the degree of communion that already exists.

4.1 The Holy Spirit as the promoter of koinonia (2 Cor. 13:13) gives to those who are still divided the thirst and hunger for full communion. We remain restless until we grow together according to the wish and prayer of Christ that those who believe in him may be one (John 17:21). In the process of praying, working and struggling for unity, the Holy Spirit comforts us in pain, disturbs us when we are satisfied to remain in our division, leads us to repentance and grants us joy when our communion flourishes.

A Beginner's Bibliography

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Alphabet of the US Ecumenical Landscape

A: Anglican
AB: Alliance of Baptists
ABC: American Baptist Churches
AG: Assemblies of God
AME: African Methodist Episcopal Church
AMEZ: African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
B: Baptist (dialogue acronym)
BEM: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry study (of WCC F&O)
CBF: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
CC (DC): Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
CCT or CCTUSA: Christian Churches Together in the USA
CME: Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
COB: Church of the Brethren
COCU: Consultation on Church Union (former name of CUIC)
COGA: Church of God (Anderson, IN) (dialogue acronym)
COGC: Church of God (Cleveland, TN) (dialogue acronym)
COGIC: Church of God in Christ
CRC: Christian Reformed Church
CS: Common Statement (ordinarily of a dialogue)
CUIC: Churches Uniting in Christ (successor to COCU)
CWGs: Christian World Communions (CCM/WCG)
E: Episcopal (dialogue acronym)
ECUSA: Episcopal Church in the United States of America
EDEIO: Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers
EFI: Evangelical Friends International
ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Ev: Evangelical (dialogue acronym)
F&O: Faith and Order
FGC: Friends General Conference
FUM: Friends United Meeting
FR: Final Report (ordinarily of a dialogue)

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GEII: Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute (Graymoor's institution in NYC)

ICCC: International Council of Community Churches

IPHC: International Pentecostal Holiness Church

JC: Joint Commission (ordinarily of a dialogue)

JDDJ: Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

JPIC: Justice, Peace & the Integrity of Creation

JWG: Joint Working Group

L: Lutheran

L&W: Life and Work

LARC: Lutheran-Anglican-Roman Catholic

LCMS: Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

LEDUSA: Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue in the USA

LERN: Lutheran Ecumenical Representatives Network (of ELCA)

LM: Lutheran-Methodist

LO: Lutheran-Orthodox

LR: Lutheran-Reformed

LRC: Lutheran-Roman Catholic

M: Methodist (dialogue acronym)

Mn: Mennonite (dialogue acronym)

MO: Methodist-Orthodox

Mo: Moravian (dialogue acronym)

MR: Methodist-Reformed

MRC: Methodist-Roman Catholic

NAAE: North American Academy of Ecumenists

NADEO: National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (of RCC)

NAE: National Association of Evangelicals

NAEIS: National Association of Ecumenical & Interreligious Staff

NBC(USA): National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.

NBCA: National Baptist Convention of America

NBEA: National Black Evangelical Association

NMBCA: National Missionary Baptist Convention of America

NCC: National Council of Churches

NCCCUSA: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

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NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (of the Bible)
NWCUC: National Workshop on Christian Unity
O: Orthodox, (Eastern Orthodox/Byzantine/Chalcedonian; dialogue acronym)
OC: Old Catholic (includes Polish National Catholic Church; dialogue acronym)
OCA: Orthodox Church in America
OO: Oriental Orthodox (Non-Chalcedonian; dialogue acronym)
PCFNA: Pentecostal Charismatic Fellowship of North America
PCUSA: Presbyterian Church in the United States of America
Pe: Pentecostal (dialogue acronym)
PNBC: Progressive National Baptist Convention
PNCC: Polish National Catholic Church
R: Reformed (dialogue acronym)
RC: Roman Catholic (dialogue acronym)
RCA: Reformed Church in America
RCC: Roman Catholic Church
RRC: Reformed-Roman Catholic
SBC: Southern Baptist Convention
SCOBA: Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America
SDA: Seventh-Day Adventist
U: United (dialogue acronym)
UCC: United Church of Christ
UFMCC: Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches
UMC: United Methodist Church
USCCB: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
WCC: World Council of Churches
WCFs: World Confessional Families (former name of CWCs)
WG: Working Group
WPCU: Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Notes

¹ <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wCC/what/faith/index-e.html>.

² <http://www.nccusa.org/about/unityhome.html>.

A Brief History of Faith and Order:

¹ Fuchs, Lorelei F., SA. "A Brief History of Faith and Order: Times, Places, People and Issues behind an Ecumenical Theological Movement An Orientation Paper for New Members of the National Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission". An edited version is published as "A Brief History of Faith and Order: Times, Places, People and Issues behind an Ecumenical Theological Movement", *Ecumenical Trends* 33:10 (2004) 3-9. [erratum: mention of Nathan Söderblom is incorrect; he is Swedish, not American]. Presented as an orientation paper for new members of the Faith and Order Commission, March 18-20, 2004, at the Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, IN and revised for publication in the NCCUSA Faith and Order Handbook October 2005.

² By-Laws of the Faith and Order Commission, 2. Aim and functions, 1 [unnumbered]. Among the many Faith and Order publications in which the By-Laws appear is the report of the most recent world conference. See Thomas F. Best and Günther Gaßmann, eds., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Santiago de Compostela 1993: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, (Faith and Order Paper 166), Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994, p. 309; hereafter this book is cited as *Santiago*.

³ See World Missionary Conference, 1910, Report of Commission VIII: Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity, With Supplement: Presentation and Discussion of the Report in the Conference on 21st June 1910, Edinburgh and London/New York, Chicago and Toronto: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier/Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.

⁴ Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, [Volume 1], Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993⁴, p. 407; hereafter cited as *HEM I*.

⁵ See the historical account of this in *HEM I*, pp. 417-425, which provides focused references to the Lausanne Report, H. N. Bate, ed., *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference, Lausanne, August 3-21, 1927*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1928².

⁶ Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos, Encyclical on Religious Unity* (promulgated on January 6, 1928), articles 10 and 9 respectively; available on the Vatican website, <http://www.vatican.va>.

⁷ See Leonard Hodgson,, ed., *The Second World Conference on Faith and Order held at Edinburgh, August 3-18, 1937*, New York, NY: Macmillian, 1938.

⁸ See Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1939, (English translation of *Chrétiens désunis: principes d'un œcuménisme catholique*, (Unam Sanctam 1), Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1937).

⁹ See Oliver S. Tomkins, ed., *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*. London, SCM: 1953.

¹⁰ Ecclesiology and christology vis-à-vis Faith and Order's ecumenical method runs *passim* through the Lund Report, *The Report as submitted for the Consideration of the Participating Churches*, Oliver S. Tomkins, ed., *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order, Lund 15-28 August 1952*, London: SCM Press, 1953 pp. 15-65; the quotation is from "I. A Word to the Churches", p. 15.

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¹¹ See Nicholas Lossky and Others, eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Geneva/Grand Rapids, MI: World Council of Churches/Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 633-634; principle is on p. 633. The Lund Principle is also in Oliver S. Tomkins, ed., *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*. London, SCM: 1953, p. 16.

¹² See the following sources. Commission on Faith and Order, *Faith and Order Findings: The final Report of the Theological Commissions to the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal 1963*, (Faith and Order Paper 37), Geneva/London: World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order/SCM Press, 1963. P. C. Rodger, and Lukas Vischer, *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal 1963*, (Faith and Order Paper 42), Geneva/London: World Council of Churches/SCM Press, 1964.

¹³ *Unitatis redintegratio* 3, 4 in Norman P. Tanner, SJ, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume Two: Trent to Vatican II*, (Original Text Established by G. Alberigo and Others), [in Latin and English], London/Washington, DC: Sheed & Ward/Georgetown University Press, 1990.

¹⁴ See Reports of Sections: Unity, in W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report: The Third World Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961*, London: SCM Press, 1962, article 2; page 116:

"We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people."

And from the same source, article 10, p. 119:

"The word 'fellowship' (*koinonia*) has been chosen because it describes what the Church truly is. 'Fellowship' clearly implies that the Church is not merely an institution or organization. It is a fellowship of those who are called together by the Holy Spirit and in baptism confess Christ as Lord and Saviour. They are thus 'fully committed' to him and to one another. Such a fellowship means for those who participate in it nothing less than a renewed mind and spirit, a full participation in common praise and prayer, the shared realities of penitence and forgiveness, mutuality in suffering and joy, listening together to the same Gospel, responding in faith, obedience and service, joining in one mission of Christ in the world, a self-forgetting love for all for whom Christ died, and the reconciling grace which breaks down every wall of race, colour, caste, tribe, sex, class and nation. Neither does this 'fellowship' imply a rigid uniformity of structure, organization or government. A lively variety marks corporate life in the one Body of one Spirit..."

¹⁵ The document of the study is Commission on Faith and Order, *Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of the Human Community: A Faith and Order Study Document*, (Faith and Order Paper 151), Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990.

¹⁶ Already cited in full, the official report of this conference is *Santiago*.

¹⁷ The original publication of this document is Commission on Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, (Faith and Order Paper 111), Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982. It also appears as Commission on Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Report of the Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches, Lima, Peru 1982*, pp.465-503, in Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer,, eds., *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* [Volume I, 1971-1982, with one Anglican-Old Catholic statement from 1931; there are errors and omissions in the endnotes], (Ecumenical Documents II/Faith and Order Paper 108), New York/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council of Churches, 1984.

¹⁸ Commission on Faith and Order, *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, (Faith and Order Paper 153), Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991.

¹⁹"Message...", *Santiago*, p. 225.

²⁰ See Paul S. Minear, *The Nature of the Unity We Seek: Official Report of the North American Conference on Faith and Order*, September 3-10, 1957, Oberlin, Ohio. St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1958.

Worship

¹ These may be consulted at <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/ccdocuments.nsf/index/gen-5-en.html#Anchor--SECTIO-15275>, *Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox participation in the WCC*, Appendix A: "A Framework for Common Prayer at WCC Gatherings."

Theological Language and Ecumenical Methodology:

¹ An earlier version of this essay appeared as "Learning the Language of Ecumenism," *Ecumenical Trends* 26/9 (October, 1997): 139-143.

² The contrast between formality and familiarity is readily available in German (Sie, du) French (vous, tu) and Spanish (Usted, tú), but has largely been lost in English with the virtual disappearance of "Thou."

³ A useful work for comparing the teachings of different confessional traditions on Baptism —as well as many other doctrines —is Ted A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

⁴ See *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*. Faith and Order Paper 149. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1990).

⁵ Virgil Elizondo, *The Future Is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet* (Bloomington, Indiana: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988) uses *mestizaje* as a basic concept for constructing a cross-cultural theology.

⁶ Helpful explanations of the complex meanings of *magisterium* are given in two works by Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York/Ramsey, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983) and *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (New York/Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1996).

⁷ See the thought-provoking description of Margaret O'Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) vii-xi.

Conciliar Quotations

¹ Nicholas Lossky and Others, eds. *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Geneva/Grand Rapids, MI: World Council of Churches/Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, pp. 633-634; principle is on p. 633.

The Lund Principle is also in Oliver S. Tomkins, ed. *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*. London, SCM: 1953, p. 16.

² Reports of Sections: Unity, in W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report: The Third World Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961*, (London: SCM Press, 1962), article 2; p.116; this report is also cited as *New Delhi*.

³ Reports of Sections: Unity, *New Delhi* article 10, p. 119.

⁴ This statement was adopted by the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Canberra, Australia in 1991. It appears as Article 18 in *Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness: A Discussion Paper*

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[for the Fifth World Conference on Faith & Order], found in Thomas F. Best and Günther Gaßmann, eds., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Santiago de Compostela 1993: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, (Faith and Order Paper 166), (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), pp. 269-27.