

The Dar es Salaam Report

Tenth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues “International Dialogues in Dialogue: Context and Reception” Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 8-14 March 2012

1. The Tenth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues gathered at the request of the Conference of Secretaries of the Christian World Communions (CWCs). Members of the Forum were invited by the CWCs and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.¹ In addition to sharing information on recent bilateral dialogues, we reflected together on developments in, and relationships between, dialogues, and questions of content and reception, particularly in light of the changing face of global Christianity. We were grateful to the Tanzania Episcopal Conference and the Kurasini Conference Centre for their kind and generous hospitality. We extend our thanks as well to representatives from local churches for their engagement with our programme and for their invitation and warm welcome to us at Sunday worship.

2. Meeting in Africa for the first time, the Forum on Bilateral Dialogues was especially mindful of the significant changes in global Christianity over the last century, with its ‘statistical centre of gravity’ moving – and continuing to move – significantly southwards. And while the global spread of believers within church families differs widely, these changes inevitably affect all CWCs. Our task was to consider the impact of these changes upon bilateral dialogues thus far, and to make recommendations to promote their full acknowledgement and reflection by the churches. We were particularly concerned with questions around the content, conduct and composition of dialogues, and of their subsequent reception.

3. Such concerns were reflected in the participants from CWCs, with over half being from, or working in, the ‘South’. Our concerns were also reflected in the programme, in which, following a welcome from Bishop Bruno Ngonyani, Chairman of the Ecumenical Commission of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, we began with a presentation by a panel of church leaders on the ecumenical life of the churches across Tanzania, and of the particular closeness enjoyed by the churches in Dar es Salaam. In describing extensive cooperation spanning the Tanzania Episcopal Conference, the Tanzania Council of Churches, and the Tanzania Pentecostal Council, they underlined the importance of prayer in helping bring about ever-closer relationships at every stage of their development. In many ways, their presentation echoed the Bishop’s comment that ‘The ecumenical movement in Africa has not lagged behind. We may not be in the forefront as far as theological dialogues are concerned, but we are active in the dialogue of life.’ Discussion

¹ Participants came from the Anglican Communion, the Baptist World Alliance, the Catholic Church, the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Greek Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa, the Lutheran World Federation, the Mennonite World Conference, the World Methodist Council, the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, the Organisation of African Instituted Churches, the Salvation Army, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches. See appendix for a full list.

and evaluation of the issues underlying these words, and related matters, were at the heart of our meeting as the agenda unfolded.

4. In order to focus our considerations, panel presentations stimulated discussions led by theologians and ecumenists from the 'South' around 'Where Christian disunity hurts churches in the South' and questions of 'North-South Relations within CWCs'. The issues which we identified provided a lens through which we then considered the reports from CWCs on the current state of bilateral dialogues. Further helpful context was given by Professor David M. Thompson who offered 'A Brief History of the Forum on International Bilateral Dialogues'.

5. We affirmed the vital role of bilateral dialogues, as means of helping us towards our shared goal of full, visible unity, pursued, as our Saviour prayed, so that the world may believe (John 17:21). We rejoiced that by God's grace they are sources of living water for our common lives.

6. From the start, it was acknowledged that finding appropriate language is fraught with challenge. Even to speak of [Global] 'South' and 'North' is to make contestable assumptions, and to raise questions about who decides which term applies to whom. Migration, whether over centuries or more recently, complicates the picture. Further, we recognised that contexts, cultures, experiences, and so forth, are diverse and complex across both 'North' and 'South', and that generalisations may not universally apply. We therefore use these terms in full recognition that they are less than satisfactory, and acknowledging that Christianity began in Palestine, and spread then in all directions, East, West, South and North.

Reception

7. The Sixth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues described reception as 'the comprehensive process by which the churches make their own the whole range of results of their encounters with each other. It is thus far more than the official response to the results of dialogues, although such responses are essential.'² Reception is an integral part of the movement towards full communion.

8. The churches continue to struggle to convey the fruits of the bilateral dialogues. In doing so, it has been evident that the churches have different processes of reception, and that every bilateral dialogue has also its own dynamics, language, content, methodology and goals which require specific processes of reception. In addition, we heard that some have difficulty with the term 'reception' as it has echoes of historic mission activities that identified some churches as 'sending' and others as 'receiving'. These missionary categories do not apply to the theological reception of the fruits of bilateral dialogues. We encourage sensitivity in stressing that ecumenical reception refers to a theological process and is not related to mission history.

9. Bilateral dialogues are a specific way in which the churches are obedient to the call for Christian unity. We encourage the connection of unity and mission – 'that the world may

² Sixth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues, Geneva, WCC, 1995, I.1, Faith and Order Paper 168.

believe’ – to be made explicit in all communication about dialogues, including in the reports of dialogues. We believe this will be helpful to processes of reception.

10. Reception of the dialogues is therefore not a purely technical or instrumental concept, nor is it another way of transmitting new ideas within the social institution of the Church. It is a process of theological renewal which makes it possible to see dialogue partners in new ways. In order to ensure effective communication of the results of bilateral dialogues, reception ought to be kept in mind at all stages of a dialogue, including in the framing of its goals, content and agenda, as well as, for example, by using styles and language that are widely accessible. Engaging at local and regional levels has proved to be an effective way of making the bilateral dialogues known and relevant. We encourage the practice already adopted by some bilateral dialogues in providing different pastoral resources and common explorations by which the results are made more accessible to the local communities (for example, the Bible studies on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification; and the recommendations of the 2007 Report of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission *Growing Together in Unity and Mission*). We were encouraged by newer forms of reception that reflect a widened consensus around bilateral dialogues, for example the association of the World Methodist Council with the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification.

11. We encourage all churches to find ways of integrating the results of dialogues with theological institutions training clergy and lay people. The training and formation of church leaders, who are likely to have a significant influence on relationships between local congregations, appears to be a particularly valuable locus for promoting reception. We would welcome deeper engagement by such institutions, for example through in depth case studies of particular dialogues in the light of changes in global Christianity.

12. We rejoiced that the Lutheran World Federation and the Mennonite World Conference were able to celebrate in 2010 an act of reconciliation in Stuttgart (Germany) as a result of a common study of the painful aspect of their history. We noted that this public event resonated widely among Christians and hope that, where appropriate, similar events related to other dialogues may be possible.

Context and the Content, Conduct and Composition of Bilateral Dialogues

13. Our reporting on the current state of the bilateral dialogues took place within the context of the lived reality of ecumenism in Africa, and of our consideration of changes in global Christianity. We continued to underscore the importance of bilateral dialogues globally. We noted how the dialogues in diverse ways are responding to these changes in context, and acknowledged that varying degrees of progress have been made, and that progress continues, in different CWCs, dialogues, and regions, in reorienting attitudes and practices. We agreed that this process of change should be pursued with more intentionality and commitment. We suggest that further and deeper exchanges of respectful mutual listening, within CWCs at least as much as between CWCs, to explore jointly better means of moving forward. Our discussions in Dar es Salaam are only an initial attempt at naming and describing some of the particular issues at stake, and offering recommendations for addressing them, as appropriate to particular dialogues.

14. The legacy of ‘northern’ dominance is exacerbated by longstanding resource disparities. Historic differences in wealth are now compounded by recent economic trends of increasing inequality between rich and poor, both between and within countries. We encourage alertness to identifying and countering the pervasive consequences, direct and indirect, of a lack of resources upon bilateral dialogues and their reception, thus contributing to continuing inequalities.

15. The content of dialogue can vary greatly, for example, reflecting whether or not there are historic divisions to be addressed. Dialogues may also address issues which partner CWCs agree should be discussed jointly. Sometimes, in areas of the world which never experienced particular divisions historically, the relevance of these can suddenly become apparent, for example in relation to inter-church marriages. In the necessary tackling of these divisions, we note the importance of ensuring they are handled in ways that can be related to local contexts, and that avoid reinforcing differences. Theological work in these and other areas will always remain vital and comes alive when it is related to the current issues faced by regional and local Christian communities. This may particularly be the case when, for example, addressing socio-economic and justice matters. We underlined the importance of taking care in these areas when setting the goals and agendas of dialogues, and with due attention to the breadth of contexts within which each CWC is represented.

16. In recent years, particularly where significant theological agreements have been reached, including on divisive questions, many dialogues have moved towards deepening mutual understanding. Many are addressing a breadth of issues within the life of their churches, particularly those related to mission and ministry. Liturgical and pastoral cooperation can also often be fruitful. We encourage further exploration and deepening of such ‘spiritual communion’, alongside more theological and practical questions of mutual concern.

17. We suggest that care be taken in deciding which contextual issues are appropriate for bilateral dialogues. While some subjects, such as issues of diakonia and justice, may also be handled in regional dialogues or in multilateral forums, these matters also have a proper place within bilateral dialogues. We recognised that bilateral commitments to engage together in service can be a visible expression of growth in communion. Issues may also arise at the local level, which embody matters of international interest. Further, we recognised that sometimes bilateral dialogues can engage churches and local situations beyond the reach of multilateral bodies.

18. The conduct of bilateral dialogues should be pursued in ways that are appropriate to the participants, the breadth of expertise and gifts they bring, and the cultures from which they come. In addition to presentation and discussion of papers, whether in plenaries or groups, alternative methodologies are increasingly being employed. We encourage approaches that ensure that all voices can easily be heard. Case studies, story-telling, prayer and artistic expression are some examples. Where local working groups are part of the dialogue process (as, perhaps also of the reception process), care should be taken to ensure that their contribution is adequately reflected in final reporting.

19. Though the composition of bilateral dialogues continues to improve, there is still a bias towards members from the 'North'. There are many dimensions to this, often rooted in the lack of adequate resources and their consequences. We believe that the choice of participants in dialogues should be determined by the contribution they can make, rather than by the financial capacity of their particular churches. Hidden costs also exist which may additionally make participation burdensome to those with less resources. Meanwhile, many churches in richer nations are experiencing serious financial as well as numerical decline, thereby affecting their continued ability to sustain the primary costs of dialogues. We also noted practical questions around such issues as the language of dialogues, time availability, and varying calendar considerations in different regions. We encourage including in dialogues those who have the potential to grow in expertise through experience, in order to help train a broader pool of leaders in ecumenism.

United and Uniting Churches

20. The united and uniting churches have a particular contribution to make to the wider ecumenical discussion from their experience of living in unity. In each case, they have inherited several ecclesial, liturgical and theological traditions, and their historic divisions. After union, the often-expressed vision of drawing on 'things both old and new' is challenged by the need to make concrete their new status as a united church. There is a reluctance to speak of specific inheritances in case it suggests a desire to return to them. But a renewed 'internal dialogue' between their heritages may help them in facing the demands of contemporary contexts. In this, their role in bilateral dialogues may be of assistance to them, and illuminating for their international partner churches, and others. Their experience of change within the universal Church has value for all aspects of global ecumenical endeavour.

21. In most cases, such unions have taken place within particular regions or nations. Continuing fellowship with their respective parent-CWC bodies is important for a variety of reasons. The successful plans of union often took place decades ago, and were fruitful responses to the ecumenical dialogue of that time. It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit new participants from the united and uniting churches for contemporary ecumenical dialogues. Therefore this requires a readiness on the part of the CWCs to select members from such churches for dialogue teams. Theological seminaries in such churches ought to educate younger theologians to play their part in ecumenical conversations. CWCs must expect that united and uniting church participants may come from a different constituent church in their union, who now speak for their united reality, or indeed, they may speak from a quite different place in culture and generation. This is to be welcomed.

22. In fact, they do not appear as a matter of course among those called to dialogue by the CWCs and the rewards of their involvement to all the worlds' churches should be recognised. We encourage greater thought to be given to inclusion of the united and uniting churches.

Recommendations

23. We reaffirm the first and second recommendations dealing with reception from the Ninth Forum on Bilateral Dialogues, held in Breklum in March 2008.³ We further offer the following recommendations for consideration where appropriate, arising from our own discussions:

Communicating and Evaluating the Results of the Bilateral Dialogues

1. In addition to paying attention to reception throughout the life of the dialogue, bilateral dialogues might also give well-resourced attention to the transmission of their completed work, including communications strategies. The use of communication technology can greatly assist the wide dissemination of work of the dialogues, although it should be borne in mind that not all have equal access to such resources.
2. When an agreement results in a marked new relationship between the Communions involved, the Communions are encouraged to prepare materials enabling the agreement to be celebrated in worship throughout the world.
3. Dialogues are encouraged to engage with and in regional contexts in the course of their work, sharing and seeking contributions to the work as it develops.
4. Further consideration should be given to how bilateral partners in one region can benefit from agreements in other regions, without having to invest energy and resources to repeat work done elsewhere, except that which is appropriate for the context.
5. The dialogues, or their parent bodies, are invited to promote the development of introductory material suitable for diverse regions, together with the translation of texts into a larger number of languages.
6. Dialogues are encouraged to make more explicit the link between unity and mission, and to suggest concrete activities in which the Communions can be engaged as a result of their growth in agreement.
7. Communions are encouraged to find ways to communicate the results of the dialogues with theological institutions training clergy and lay leaders, and to have their content and methods integrated into the curriculum. Such institutions can also be appropriate places for consultation as the work develops.

³ 1. We believe that it would be of value for each dialogue to articulate its goal in relation to its vision of the unity that Christ wills for his Church (cf. John 17:21).

2. 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.

8. When dialogues address a new topic, we commend engagement with previous reports and agreements on that topic.

Context and the Content, Conduct and Composition of Dialogues

9. We recommend that the content of dialogues, including goals and agendas, be set with due regard for all regions of the CWCs concerned. Some topics might be better addressed at regional levels, and/or in multilateral relationships.
10. We encourage those responsible for establishing, conducting, and communicating the results of a dialogue to remain alert to the consequences of resource imbalances and unhealthy legacies of the past.
11. We encourage the increased practice of appointing dialogue members from a wide variety of contexts, noting that due attention be given to the ecumenical formation that equips them to participate meaningfully in bilateral dialogues.
12. Noting that the methodologies of some dialogues are changing in the light of broader participation, we encourage dialogues to make use of a number of ways of engaging with a topic, using a mixture of giving and responding to papers, small group discussion, case studies, worship, artistic expression and others.

United and Uniting Churches

13. We suggest that greater consideration be given to the inclusion of participants from United and Uniting Churches.

Participants

Rev. Canon Dr Alyson Barnett-Cowan (Anglican Communion)
Prof. Dr Jeremy Bergen (World Mennonite Conference)
Rev. Dr Neville Callam (Baptist World Alliance)
Very Rev. Michael Danios (Ecumenical Patriarchate)
Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter (Lutheran World Federation)
Prof. Dr. Priscille Djomhoue (World Communion of Reformed Churches)
Rev. Dr Peter Feenstra (Old Catholic Union of Utrecht)
Rev. Prof. Dr Benebo Fubara-Manuel (World Communion of Reformed Churches)
Rev. Canon John Gibaut (WCC Commission on Faith and Order)
Ven. Rev. John Gichimu (Organisation of African Instituted Churches)
Msgr Juan Usma Gomez (Roman Catholic Church, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity)
Rev. Dr Robert Gribben (World Methodist Conference)
Very Rev. Dr Viorel Ionita (WCC Commission on Faith and Order)

H.E. Metropolitan Serafim Kykotis (Patriarchate of Alexandria)
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