

SHARING AND LEARNING

Bible, Mission, and Receptive Ecumenism



EDITORS

Petter Jakobsson
Risto Jukko
Olle Kristenson



World Council
of Churches

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Petter Jakobsson, Risto Jukko, and Olle Kristenson (Editors)

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This publication was sponsored by the Christian Council of Sweden and the SMC – Faith in Development.

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Chapter 6: WCC Language Service

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Photo credits: Albin Hillert, Joanna Lindén-Montes, Nausikaa Haupt, Robert Odén, Mikael Sjernberg, Pingst – Arkiv och forskning, Peirong Lin

Cover design: Aaron Maurer Design

Book design and typesetting: Aaron Maurer Design

ISBN: 978-2-8254-1766-9

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Foreword

Jesus said (according to St Paul), “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The idea of giving and sharing without counting, even giving one’s life for others out of love for them, impregnates unity and mission in the Bible. The foundational text of the ecumenical movement, the end of chapter 17 in the Gospel according to John, speaks about unity that is possible because there is perfect love between the Father and the Son (and the Spirit) – a perfect sharing and giving between the Persons of the Trinity. This is the basis of unity among Christians. The World Council of Churches (WCC)’ affirmation on mission and evangelism, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (2013), expresses this as follows: “The Triune God’s overflowing sharing of love is the source of all mission and evangelism. God’s love, manifest in the Holy Spirit, is an inspirational gift to all humanity ‘in all times and places’ and for all cultures and situations” (#55, 56).

This book, *Sharing and Learning: Bible, Mission, and Receptive Ecumenism*, has as its origin a mission pilgrimage in Sweden a few years ago, based on a pedagogical process of so-called Receptive Ecumenism. The organizers were – not surprisingly – the Christian Council of Sweden and the SMC Faith in Development (Swedish Mission Council). Even here, in this mission pilgrimage, sharing, learning, and giving were inseparable. From a local and national perspective, the experience gained a global or international dimension when the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) was asked to contribute to an editorial process to adapt a nationally oriented description – in Swedish – to an international readership. The outcome, the text you have available as both a hard copy and a PDF, is addressed to the WCC’s 349 member churches as well as the council’s ecumenical partners, who are searching together for unity in their pilgrimage of justice and peace and widening from there to all Christian fellowships in the world today. To highlight unity in mission and mission in unity, the concluding words of the publication are

written by Rev. Dr Susan Durber, moderator of the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, the “sister commission” of the CWME.

Receptive Ecumenism is a rather new approach. It emphasizes conversion and learning, especially ecclesial learning, with this question: In any given situation, what can our own Christian tradition appropriately learn with integrity from other traditions? The purpose of this learning, through Receptive Ecumenism, is *ad intra*, toward oneself and one’s ecclesial structures. One dimension that becomes clear in this book – in light of the witness of those who participated in the Swedish mission pilgrimage but also through other theological and missiological reflections from elsewhere – is that this kind of learning for ourselves or only for our own ecclesial traditions needs to be completed by adding both sharing and giving: giving oneself to others to be in their service. Individual and communal level go hand in hand in the same way, as do giving and receiving and learning from each other.

It is a rewarding and commendable experience to reflect on possibilities of Receptive Ecumenism as an ecumenical pedagogical method. This allows us to see how it can be developed from an *ad intra* perspective to include an *ad extra* perspective, that outflowing movement of love and, through sharing and giving, also receiving. For, as quoted at the beginning of this foreword, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

I see this publication as one important step closer to the 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe in 2022 and to understanding its theme: “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I want to congratulate the editors, Rev. Dr Risto Jukko (WCC/CWME), Rev. Dr Olle Kristenson (Christian Council of Sweden), and Rev. Petter Jakobsson (SMC Faith in Development), who have given themselves wholeheartedly to initiating and editing this work. I also want to thank those many other people who have been involved in this project, starting with the contributors from the ecumenical movement. The publication also shows concretely how important are the mutual cooperation and support between the WCC and its ecumenical partners in common efforts to foster unity, justice, and peace in participating in God’s mission, one of God’s gifts to us.

Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca
Acting general secretary
World Council of Churches

Preface

Our Lord prayed “that they may all be one... so that the world may believe” (John 17:21). Thus mission and unity are intertwined. Consequently there is a need to open up our reflections on church and unity to an even wider understanding of unity: the unity of humanity and even the cosmic unity of the whole of God’s creation.

(Together towards Life, #61)

This passage in the 2013 mission statement from the World Council of Churches’ (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL), points to how intertwined are mission and the search for Christian unity. This was already present in the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh 1910.

The mission statement was drafted and elaborated after the WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006. The beginning of a new millennium, with all its challenges to the churches and mission, led the CWME to start working on a new ecumenical statement on mission. The aim was to have a new vision and understanding of mission and evangelism in rapidly changing landscapes.

One important thematic emphasis in the document, which was already visible in the 2005 WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Athens – whose theme was “Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile!” – was pneumatology. Another important emphasis in the Athens conference was the ecological dimension of mission. Both emphases can be found in TTL.

The mission statement was finalized in the first half of 2012, then

presented and unanimously approved by the WCC central committee at its September 2012 meeting. It was published and presented to the member churches of the WCC at the WCC Assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2013. Since then, the mission affirmation has been the base document for the ecumenical mission movement all over the world.

In 2013, the Christian Council of Sweden (CCS) and the SMC Faith in Development were intensively working with the Swedish translation of TTL, a translation that was published a week before the WCC Assembly in Busan 2013. Both the CCS and the SMC thought that this document would encourage churches and local congregations to reflect on mission and church unity in Sweden and reconcile differences in how to perceive mission in the different church traditions.

A working group on mission was established in 2014 to meet this need. Representatives from the four church families in Sweden – Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Free Church – formed the group. Two representatives from the academy were also integrated. The aim was to establish a meeting place for researchers and practitioners for a wider understanding of mission in church and society.

During the first two years, the working group discussed the concept of mission according to each church tradition. Discussions were open and created trust and a longing to go deeper in the understanding of the different positions. Sara Gehlin, a doctoral student in mission studies at the University of Lund at the time, introduced the group to Receptive Ecumenism. This concept was well received by the working group and came to be a leading idea in the group's continuous conversations.

The working group then decided to deepen the dialogue and the idea of having what would soon be called a mission pilgrimage was born. For two years (2016–17), the group met four times for a 24-hour workshop to learn from each other and discover how mission is perceived in different church traditions. Each workshop took place in formation centres of the four church families. Receptive Ecumenism became a method during this process.

This fresh ecumenical approach emphasizes receptivity, learning, and listening. It was born at the Centre for Catholic Studies at the University of Durham, among the group of researchers around Professor Paul Murray. Murray stresses that

rather than the ecumenism of the best china tea service, Receptive Ecumenism represents an ecumenism of the wounded hands: of being prepared to show our wounds to each other, knowing that we cannot heal or save ourselves; knowing that we need to be ministered to in our need from another's gift and grace; and trusting that as in the Risen Lord in whose ecclesial body these wounds exist, they can become sites of our redemption, jewels of transformed ecclesial existence.¹

Since its inception, the concept of Receptive Ecumenism has taken root in many diverse contexts around the globe. Some would regard this as a new step in ecumenical efforts. Receptive Ecumenism proceeds by bringing to the fore the dispositions of self-critical hospitality, humble learning, and ongoing conversion that have always been quietly essential to good ecumenical work and by turning them into the explicit required strategy and core task of contemporary ecumenism.

As such, Receptive Ecumenism represents a way of ecumenical ecclesial conversion and growth that is both remarkably simple in vision and remarkably far-reaching in potential. It encourages a move from traditions wishing that others could be more like themselves to instead each asking what they can and must learn, with dynamic integrity, from their respective others: "What do we in our tradition need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?"

It has never been used as a method to deal with mission – not in Sweden and nowhere else in the world. It was an exciting and challenging experience, which was very much about creating a climate of trust where participants were prepared to listen to each other.

After the mission pilgrimage, a Swedish publication was produced that tried to catch some of the insights during the pilgrimage.² Being informed about this experiment of mission and unity, the CWME/WCC showed interest in it, thinking that it would be relevant for an

1. Paul Murray, "Introducing Receptive Ecumenism," *The Ecumenist: A Journal of Theology, Culture, and Society* 51:2 (2014), 5.

2. *Berörd – samtal om mission i en föränderlig värld*, ed. Sven-Erik Fjellström and Olle Kristensson (Bilda, Sensus, SKR & SMR, 2019).

international audience. Missiologists from different parts of the globe were invited to respond to the discussion on mission and Receptive Ecumenism. Few of the texts in the original Swedish publication have been translated into English and published. This book is the result of that process.

We start with a fictitious email correspondence between Sven-Erik Fjellström and the evangelist Luke. In Part II, Sara Gehlin describes the mission pilgrimage. Part III features a broad spectrum of responses to mission and ecumenism from a variety of church traditions. Finally, in Part IV, Risto Jukko, director of the CWME, presents an overview of mission and ecumenism in the ecumenical movement after the WCC Assembly in Busan 2013; he affirms theological relations between the emphases in the ecumenical mission movement and Receptive Ecumenism. The book ends with some concluding words by the moderator of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order, Rev. Dr Susan Durber. To help the reader to explore further, Sven-Erik Fjellström points to some alternative biblical texts on mission in an appendix.

This book is meant for all those who are interested in the theological relations between mission and unity, as well as the practical consequences of committing themselves to fostering the unity of Christians and churches in the world. It serves both academics and practitioners engaged in mission and unity. If the book can be a source of inspiration and a guide for them, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

Geneva and Stockholm, July 2021

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The background features several overlapping, wavy, light gray lines that create a sense of movement and depth. These lines are centered horizontally and span across the middle of the page.

PART I
BIBLE AND MISSION



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CHAPTER 1

From Goodbye to Openness – An Email Correspondence on Mission with Luke

Sven-Erik Fjellström

Clear across time and space, this chapter contains a correspondence with Luke, the evangelist, about his book the Acts of the Apostles. Or, rather, six emails are sent, wishing it were possible to receive an answer. For, surely, the young church's struggle with the concept of mission – perhaps more in deed than in word – ties in many ways into our own thoughts today.

Luke's story about the young church begins in the first chapter of Acts with the farewell scene, in which Jesus says goodbye to his disciples, and ends in chapter 28 in small lodgings in Rome. Not in seclusion, but in open and honest talks with people who come and go in the room, where Paul is under house arrest. In its own way, the Acts narrative contains questions of daring to leave behind old ways of thinking as well as encountering new ideas with openness.

So, is it possible to read Acts as a narrative of how people in this story were struggling with their own view of mission? Is the book also a story about how the longest journey was not the travel to Rome, but rather a long inner journey with struggles about one's own attitudes and preconceptions of the people one met? We choose here to reflect on just this inner journey in an imagined correspondence with Luke. Here, examples will be given from a mission theology pilgrimage in Sweden in 2016–17 that is described in chapter 2 of this book. In my imagination, that chapter is an imagined add-on that forms the backdrop to the correspondence.

Read this chapter together with a Bible! References to Bible chapters and verses are found at each part, but it is best to read the whole biblical chapter. Perhaps you will see something new!

Re: Just as we thought we had understood what it was all about...

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Dear Luke,

I am taking this opportunity to write to you across time and space. I am doing so from a context in which we, some of today’s followers of Christ, have had a couple of years with ample opportunity to write and discuss what we really mean by “sending out” – by the concept of mission, as it were. In my imagination, I am sharing with you, as an add-on, the story about an inner journey we made in 2016–17. We call it a mission theology pilgrimage in the spirit of Receptive Ecumenism.

If you read what I write, you will find that the question did not at all become easier; rather, we ourselves were drawn into a journey, and one that perhaps is more about a way of being than of getting somewhere.

I have often thought that what you tell us in chapter 1 has a lot to say to those of us who are seeking a renewed way of conceptualizing mission in the early 21st century. In your introductory chapter, we run into a kind of farewell scene. Jesus is going to leave his disciples. But there is also a feeling of “see you again” in this scene – as well as a commandment to the power of God’s Spirit, while they are waiting.

What really surprises me in what you say is that Jesus probably gave a totally unexpected answer to their question about whether the kingdom of Israel would now be rehabilitated. For a long time, I saw his answer as similar to the answer any leader or general would give to their group about where to go: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the whole world. The circles were to grow wider and wider. And that is also the way in which we have often described our mission history. Many – at least some – of us who walked together in 2016–17 are also strongly influenced by a large conference that was held in Edinburgh in 1910. The vision was, there and then, that the gospel would have reached all peoples by 2010. And certainly, it would seem that the gospel – with means of communication

that are way faster and, as we saw them, much more effective than those you had in Acts – would stand a good chance.

The church families met again in 2010: 100 years later. And then they realized that they most likely would have to rethink it all. The longest journey was probably the inner journey of reflection that many churches had been forced to make. It seems that mission is not only about reaching out.

During our talks, we were also constantly reminded of the perspectives of what we call the Orthodox tradition – perspectives that made the rest of the traditions feel extremely activist. We define the birth of the church, the mission of the church, almost down to the exact day, but our Orthodox friends often gave us zoomed-out perspectives that defined our calling and our sending out already in the narratives of creation. That was good for us.

I am thinking about the places you say Jesus mentioned. Going there was not simply reaching out geographically:

- Jerusalem and Judea were almost the same as certain death. One had to stay hidden. And Jesus says that they should let themselves be seen! Both dialogues and confrontations followed that statement.
- Samaria: Did Jesus not understand that this should be a no-go area, at least then? And actually, it was only after having been persecuted in Jerusalem that they did go on to Samaria.
- And then this thing about the ends of the earth. Don't misunderstand me, but to us – in this time and part of the world – a kind of globe-trotter ideology concerning mission is more or less a dream come true. However, I am trying to understand their discomfort. Encounters with what you called heathens, unsafe environments, different kinds of food.

But more than anything, I think of how it was only when they dared to take this step that they would get to experience the power of the Spirit. Dared to take the step to leave old ways of thinking; dared encounters with what was new. At least toward affirming that other interpretations of mission than one's own are worth listening to.

I hope to read your reactions to this!
Sven-Erik

Re: How come we understand each other, though we speak different languages?

“And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?”
(Acts 2:8)

Did you already suspect, perhaps, that your story about the Spirit on Whitsunday would become one of the most widely read of all? One of the groups that joined our journey also calls itself Pentecostal, after a forceful revival movement more than a hundred years ago that had many things in common with what happened in Jerusalem, as you described it. Though, in one way I guess we are, in all church traditions, Pentecostals to a certain extent. It was there it began, wasn't it, or at least was emphasized in a new way?

I will leave the Spirit and the speaking in tongues for a while and instead allow myself to reflect a bit on the wonder of listening: How can we understand each other, though we speak different languages?

Our process has, in a peaceful way, been much concerned with listening – for it is possible to say that our three pedagogical metaphors are about listening, isn't it? The **crossroads** – the sharing of experiences made through different choices of paths; then, standing at the crossroads, interested and attentive to what others have encountered during their journeys; talking about own experiences and taking the opportunity to ask others now that we are meeting them. **Stillness** – sometimes like the prophet Elijah (I know you write a lot about him in your gospel), experiencing the sound of silence whispering in a group, through devotions, prayer, meditation. But as you can see, we also invited participants to take moments to themselves. In your gospel, you often underline that Jesus sought stillness to pray. When reading all of Acts, I wonder what would have happened if they had given themselves more time for secluded stillness. I will return to that. As for us, we also had the **mountain** – time when we reflected together. Perhaps these were the times when insight reached us, or rather astonishment over the fact that we seemed to understand one another, even though we outwardly spoke in different traditional church languages. This can also be seen in evaluations

and personal reflections. Despite the fact that prayer from one tradition could feel strange and unusual to people of other traditions, it was as if we understood – were fascinated, even – or were seized by what later in church history we would call a kind of “holy envy” (as Krister Stendahl, a bishop from my own tradition, used to describe it).

I think of how we so often cite the prayer that Jesus prayed, according to the Gospel of John, before he left the people close to him. *I pray that they all shall be one.* That prayer is sometimes understood to imply that we should all be the same. Perhaps, rather, we need to go back to what you write: *How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?* The wonder of understanding each other, despite differences. Different, and yet in some way *one*...

This has perhaps turned out to become more of a reflection about so-called ecumenism than about mission. Should you visit us today, though, you might call the situation we currently find ourselves in “the breaking point.” Here are many languages; here are many commendable attempts to write documents on mission, to redefine and define in new ways our “sending out” in light of the first 2000 years. To see it not as though the church/es have a mission, but rather as God having a church, sending us into precisely the contexts where we find ourselves. And in seeing it that way, we realize more and more that it may look very different.

It may well be that one of our great challenges today is to dare to meet in the spirit of Pentecost, not in fear or with a defensive attitude, but rather willing to be surprised.

If I am honest, I could sense some of this already at our second gathering of the mission pilgrimage. We met with some kind of expectation that the Pentecostal wonder would take place. Or an insight into that was taking place in stillness – the wonder that we began to understand each other, despite differences.

But it is so much easier to say “hallelujah” than to do it! It seems to me that your story speaks of how much more difficult it would become for the young church to put it all into practice. And maybe all of us have that experience. It takes time and openness to put into practice what Paul once wrote: when you come together, remember that everyone has *something to contribute* (1 Cor. 14:26).

We may come back to this and share our experiences... 😊

Sven-Erik

Re: Methods of mission, or are you trying to say something else?

“Go over to this chariot and join it.” (Acts 8:29)

Dear Luke,

I have longed to share this with you! The story of how Philip meets the Ethiopian court official is a text about mission and evangelism that we often use today. But first, some reflections about what happened before he stepped into the chariot where the Ethiopian sat.

Philip is one of the seven so-called deacons. They were selected to help with practical matters when the apostles had too much to do, according to what you write in chapter 6. One of the seven, Stephen, barely began his work before he was captured and stoned to death. But then, in chapter 8, your story about Philip commences.

I sometimes wonder if Philip was disappointed over his new task – if he would rather have done something else. He went out and preached, and according to what you write, great wonders took place. The faith of many was revived as he talked to the masses. Was he asked about why he did not stay and work on the task he was assigned in chapter 6?

And then this sudden change appears. Philip is asked to go to Gaza. That road is a wilderness road (!), says the angel. From a communications viewpoint, Philip must have thought that request to be absolutely misguided. He liked being among the masses. He must have been a bit reluctant, don't you think? But he does take the opportunity that presents itself as a chariot slowly rolls along. The talk with the court official deepens – and the man himself suggests that it is time for him to become one with Jesus by letting himself be baptized. And here, many people used to point out that the great masses were reached nevertheless. The court official returned to Ethiopia, and large parts of a continent you did not know much about could thus receive Christ, we are left to understand. We were reminded during 2016–17 that this narrative (and its continuation) plays a big and important part in the Orthodox tradition, in which the court official has been identified as an Ethiopian Jew by the name of Simeon Bachos, who later came to evangelize in Ethiopia.

Allow me to reflect on this:

- I have often read this narrative in about the same way that you tell us about the walk toward Emmaus in Luke 24 – that is, as a good pedagogical example of how encounters between people may and should take place. Philip draws closer, gets into the chariot, asks questions, and waits for his own time to speak. As in Luke 24, he then gets the opportunity to sort out some truths about the Old Testament that can shed some light on Jesus.

We who talked with so much warmth about mission and evangelism did have this story at the back of our minds, I think, when we focused more clearly on the concepts. One of our invited speakers also told us, very openly, how he had gotten on the train to the conference with a mind to use the trip to speak about Jesus with a co-traveller. She was there, was rather open to discussion, did know Jesus, and called herself a Christian. But they appeared to have pretty different standpoints on certain theological issues. After some time, they found out that they were both on their way as speakers at our conference... 😞

- I think as well that I sometimes, and this view is a bit simplified, have thought that this is where Philip persuades the court official to receive Jesus as his personal saviour. But what if the man understood the story first and foremost out of his own desperate situation as a eunuch? That is, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, he finds the story of a man who has suffered agonizing pain. He, the man of sorrow, seemed to know what it meant to be taken away, to be tormented, and also to feel as an outsider. Had the eunuch perhaps already read the text that we call “chapter 56:4” and read about Isaiah’s dream that one day eunuchs – as opposed to what was written in earlier Mosaic law – would be welcomed into the fellowship? And perhaps now had returned to chapter 53, when Philip showed up? It appears, then, that it is the eunuch who takes the initiative and wants to say: If that man knows what sorrow and feeling like an outsider is like, then I wish to become one with him. There is water here; is there anything standing in the way of that I “die and am resurrected” in baptism, and become one with him?
- Verse 37 is missing in my Bible: a verse where Philip first asks the man if he really believes and confesses Jesus Christ as the Son of God. I understand that some propose that you never wrote that verse. They claim that it is missing simply because it is possible to trace it as a later addition from the baptism liturgy of the early church. As it now

stands, without the added verse 37, I think the text emphasizes the total turnaround that perhaps also Philip was forced to make. Is this perhaps as much a story about a revival in Philip? As a preacher to masses, has he perhaps made them confess in chorus that Jesus was the Son of God? Is he learning something about the quiet encounter between people? Is he learning something about going over to “the chariot and join it” instead of rushing on? Does he meet a person here with whom he understands, after their joint journey and conversation, that no more questions need to be asked? But the church and later editors of the text needed that?

To me, these are extremely important questions, not merely questions of method. And they were strengthened – and I think not only within me – during our mission pilgrimage. Mission today: How do we meet people today, who come with different motives and backgrounds to their faith? How do we formulate the acknowledgement that sending may look very different and have different overtones and that there is room for them all in God’s mission?

Do we perhaps need more deserted roads and quiet talks? What does the challenge look like that we push away? How is this talk to be carried out? What if Philip had suggested another text, or the man in the chariot been a woman with a mid-life crisis at the beginning of the 21st century? Or a recently retired person who finds it difficult to come to terms with the fact that age and death are beginning to catch up with him? When I think about what happened in the simple and close meeting between Philip and the court official, I am reminded of what one participant wrote: “to see a person say yes to being God’s child as the natural starting point in life. Many times . . . we complicate things when there was no need to.”

I look forward to reading your thoughts. And I would appreciate it no end if you had a comment about the often excluded verse 37: *And Philip said, if you believe with all your heart, you may. And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”* Did you write it, or...?

Kindly,
Sven-Erik

Re: Where is the tablecloth coming down today?

He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. (Acts 10:11)

Dear Luke,

I must confess that it is by returning to this neglected chapter (we practically never read it in the services of my own church tradition) that I have come to reflect over the place, Joppa, as such as well as challenges in our lives. Related to our mission pilgrimage, we also, at our very last gathering, met in an imagined Joppa in order to meet both Peter and the prophet Jonah there.

I'd like to think that you, too, thought about the point that the event of the sheet came to happen just there. I think something like this:

- The prophet Jonah fled to Joppa/Jaffa when he was commissioned to go to Nineveh. I have started to think that Jonah was beginning to understand that God's love belonged not merely to his own people but also to the others – the so-called heathens (and even to animals!). He guessed that God would have mercy on the people of Nineveh if he preached to them – and that would make parts of his own theological foundation fall apart. Do you, Luke, think it is because of this that Jonah sulks in the last chapter (Jonah 4), when God has given him a second chance – and the people had, just as he had feared (!), repented and turned around?
- I would also like to think that in the times of the Acts, you – and not least the large majority of you who were Jews – remembered a much more recent event, that of the massacre when 200 Jews were killed/drowned some 100 years earlier outside of Joppa. Not pleasant reading in 2 Maccabees 12...
- Thus, what you tell us in Acts 10 almost turns into history's irony. In the place from whence one of the Old Testament's prophets had fled, because he suspected that God loved even the heathens; and in the place where heathens had been at their cruellest toward Jews – in that place, the heathens now get to play a major part! Precisely that:

heathens play a part. Because it is not Peter who has a strategy for reaching the Samaritans or the whole world. It is the world that comes to him. More concretely so in the shape of Cornelius, a representative of the Samaritan battalions of the Roman oppressive power. The commission from chapter 1:8 is moving toward “the ends of the earth,” ironically enough not by way of the disciples’ own outreach activities in mission, but because the heathens look them up!

- For Peter, who among other things remembered the vision of Jesus in a glorified light on the Mountain of Transfiguration (for example, Matt. 17), this vision of unclean food must have been bewildering. Had he imagined this on the day he left his fishing nets in the boat? Had he any idea that the journey would be so bewildering?

Chapter 9 reminds me that it takes time and courage to change attitudes. Here, in chapter 10, Peter (v. 17) gets to listen to a message from God (v. 19) and to speak to the heathen Cornelius (v. 27). The vision in Joppa was thus not the end, but the beginning (or continuation) of a struggle with faith issues. He is not ready after this vision. He still goes back and forth between being convinced of new ways and falling back into old ways of thinking, harshly criticized by Paul in the letter to the Galatians (2:1-14).

Sometime during our pilgrimage, I talked to another participant about the fact that our faith, after a number of years, can come to develop into a belief in almost the “opposite” of what we first came to believe. What, then, is an everchanging belief – in a church that is also supposed to preserve “true belief”? Is there a best-before date on (certain parts of) church doctrine? Do we dare discuss such things in our congregations or in our contacts with other church traditions? I think quite a bit of this happened among us – and I think Receptive Ecumenism as a method creates prerequisites for this.

And we even dared touch upon how the forceful Western church mission, at least in a psychological sense, sometimes has given the concept of mission a negative sound in the East. That is to say, mission has been a lot about war and forced subjugation; people, not least in the East, have become “victims” of mission.

Today, we may with joy and optimism see churches drawing closer to one another, see an identification of our joint mission. Perhaps this story will allow us to talk about what the really big questions are, the ones

beyond our doctrinal divisions, questions that today could become a kind of “theological Joppa” for the worldwide church. What comes down in the sheet today?

I am wondering about this.
Sven-Erik

luke@acts17.com

Re: Meetings in marketplaces (and at wells)

“Athenians . . . as I went through the city and looked carefully...”
(Acts 17:22-23)

Dear Luke,

I find it difficult to pass by the story of Athens and what happened at the Areopagus. It is not as if you just exchange one continent for another through a boat trip over to Macedonia; it feels as if you are also entering completely new worlds of ideas. People with different religious and philosophical systems of thought come your way. Between the two of us, I sometimes feel that the chapters give a bit too much space to debate and sophistry – and Paul almost seems to find new energy when allowed to wrangle with people with different opinions. But I think I would also have liked to know more about what you were talking about together, and how things moved on in Athens. However, I realize that your focus is rather on taking the narrative on to Rome...

The visit at the Areopagus is something we talk about now and then in our part of the world. Perhaps because we feel that our own society, which for the last few centuries seems to have been rather homogeneously Christian, nowadays is more like a marketplace of the kind that Paul enters. What can we learn from how he deals with this, by first watching and trying to understand, then speaking? Then, does his way of entering into dialogue with the people at the place have something to teach us? What would work? What would *not* work in our situation today?

I am naturally reminded of two other stories. You wrote one of them. I am thinking of what you told us about the courageous Barnabas. When everyone else seems to have been sitting tight in the headquarters of the

church in Jerusalem, afraid of the rumours about a man who had become a convert and was spreading false doctrines, Barnabas decides to meet with him and let him meet the leadership (Acts 9:26-29). The courage to meet with people who think differently is what fascinates me. We need more ‘Barnabases’ today! Don’t you agree?

The other story was written by your gospel colleague John, possibly some years after your two books, but I guess you knew that story, too. I am talking about the story in which Jesus meets a woman at the well in Sychar (John 4). Mostly, I guess we have interpreted this story according to a well-known pattern: Jesus meets a sinner and shows her the right path, one that will finally quench her thirst.

But should it be – as some will say – that the “five men” in her life rather allude to the five gods that Samaritans were known to have worshipped (and who sometimes were called men), then the story gets a focus that is very similar to that of the day at the Areopagus. Jesus meets someone with a different religious background, with respect, and moves the focus from outer doctrinal issues to questions about the innermost thirst of life. Paul encounters people’s longing in the shape of different altars: what is he actually saying when he says that it is in the God who has created all peoples that we all live, move, and exist? It would have been exciting to share more with you about these questions. Where are the marketplaces and the wells where we meet people for existential discussions about God today?

There is another issue that some of us struggle with, more or less outspokenly. I would briefly call it “outside the Church, no salvation.” The Catholics brought it up, concretely, in the middle of the 20th century; I think we all deal with it in different forms now. The church father Cyprian of Carthage used to say, “The person who does not have God as his father cannot have the church as his mother.” But, certainly, we are all struggling to know how God acts outside our built-up formats for conveying salvation – and how we should deal with this. What would the Samaritan woman, or Paul in the mood of the Areopagus, be able to contribute to our discussions today?

For your information, there are people today who point out that the meeting at the Areopagus led to merely a few persons finding faith. Some would say that this is proof that religious dialogue is stillborn. But the life of Dionysius was changed, wasn’t it? And he later became the Bishop

of Athens. Did he come to contribute with new points of view about the crossroads of religious encounters? I would have liked to know that. And Damaris, what happened to her? She is honoured annually in some parts of the Orthodox tradition, but did she perhaps also become a pillar in the congregation in Athens?

I would be thankful if you would let me know a bit more!
Sven-Erik

luke@acts28.com

Re: And then they lived, with uncertainty, for the rest of their lives.

A few thoughts about openness

He . . . welcomed all who came to him. (Acts 28:30)

Dear Luke,

It happens there, in your last chapter, and it happens today as well: after your dramatic journey, convinced that all hope was gone, you do get ashore on an island. You did not know at the time what the island was called. And, above all, you had no idea – but were afraid of – how the people on the island would receive you.

The fire, the warmth, the food in the midst of all the rain must have been really good news – and the months on Malta a time of mercy when you could catch your breath and look forward. Today, I often find reason to remind people about the fact that on precisely those waters where you sailed, people today are suffering the same kind of shipwreck – lots of them and every month. Some of them are met with hope and warmth; unfortunately, others are not even let ashore. For most of them, probably an even worse situation than the one they left awaits them. Thousands are drowning and never get to where they wanted to go.

And I meet people in our churches who wish they could have told Paul how difficult it is today to say that “we are all one in Christ.” It is one thing with the doctrinal issues themselves, but perhaps as difficult are the practicalities around cultural issues, when we come from so many different contexts and are supposed to live in one and the same place.

But I also meet the joy, the realization that we are now, more than ever, living “in lodgings in Rome.” Someone pointed out that we now work with the WHOLE world here in Sweden, and that it is not something we can choose or refrain from choosing; it is just something to relate to and use as a basis for service.

Today it is said that when John tells us about the disciples getting 153 fishes in their nets, he was alluding to the idea of the time that there were 153 kinds of fish in the sea, and that the world had altogether 153 different peoples. Such a beautiful thought: despite the fact that they were so many, the nets did not break. What would John have written had he known that today we are probably speaking of 7000 peoples if we count them by the number of languages? How would you have written the story of Pentecost had you known this? I would really like to continue this conversation with you – and I would have loved to post copies to all those who are involved today in discussions about our commission as a worldwide church – with all its differences.

I think what I am trying to say is that living in mission really is not about moving forward victoriously or sharing stories that imply setting our tables with our best china. In the spirit of Receptive Ecumenism, we have also been deeply touched when we have dared to set out that which was cracked or broken along the way. And, in so doing, better understand that we will never be done. And that is as it should be.

I have had a concept name for what I wanted to write to you: from Goodbye in chapter 1 to Openness in the last chapter. *Not* saying *Good-bye to Openness*, but rather – departing from the farewell scene in chapter 1 – reaching the story in chapter 28 in a kind of open environment.

In the lodgings in Rome, open discussions were carried out in small groups. Paul is actively taking initiative after just a few days. The attitude starts out as one of openness, and more discussions are to follow. But soon, tension rises to the surface. About the next meeting, it is written that “Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving...” (Acts 28:24-25). So, more or less what was to be expected, wasn’t it?

How I wish that you or someone else had told us more. Your colleague John ends his gospel stating that if everything Jesus did was written down “I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (see John 21:25).

Were there more discussions among you? Your story is really without an ending; it only suggests that the work was carried on. *And then they lived... not happily, as in the fairy tales, but rather with uncertainty ever after.* We want to believe that new doors were opened; if not, you would not have received these emails from me.

But may I ask, finally: Why were the disciples sent out? Was the message itself dependent on them going to the ends of the earth? Or was it they who needed to get out for the sake of their own growth?

Is this perhaps the deepest meaning of the word “mission”? Perhaps of “ecumenism” as well? To dare to leave your own safe place? To give form to the kingdom of God in everyday life and liturgy, to be a witness, *martyr*, no matter what time and which context?

Greetings in Christ,
Sven-Erik

The background features several overlapping, wavy, light gray lines that create a sense of movement and depth. These lines are centered horizontally and span across the middle of the page.

PART II
RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM



Receptive Ecumenism – A Pedagogical Process

Sara Gehlin

A Source of Pedagogical Creativity

Receptive ecumenism can be practised in many different ways. Factors like context, timeframe, thematic orientation, and group composition influence the way receptive ecumenism takes shape in practice. Receptive ecumenism inspires pedagogical creativity—it inspires the development of new tools to support ecumenical learning. Its principal question—*What is it that we in our tradition need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?*—forms the starting point for pedagogical processes which can be designed for different kinds of groups and contexts.

The insights shared in this article come from the experience of leading a pedagogical process inspired by receptive ecumenism.¹ This process, spanning 2016 and 2017, was a step in the establishment of receptive ecumenism in Sweden.² It took place within the framework of an ecumenical project initiated by the Workgroup for Mission Theology at the Christian Council of Sweden and the SMC Faith in development. The project engaged representatives from the four ‘church families’ recognised by the Christian Council of Sweden: the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, and

1. This article is a revised version of the book chapter ‘Receptiv ekumenik – en pedagogisk process’ in *Berörd: Samtal om mission i en föränderlig värld* edited by Sven-Erik Fjellström and Olle Kristensson (Bilda, Sensus, SKR & SMR, 2019), 21–27. It has been published previously in the anthology *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving in the Way of Christ* edited by Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2018), 111–122. Published here with permission.

2. The pedagogical process was conducted in co-operation between Sara Gehlin and Sven-Erik Fjellström.

Free Church families.³

The project eventually took the shape of a *Pilgrimage*. Accordingly, the pedagogical choices and actions discussed in this article reflect the work of the Pilgrimage. Leading this Pilgrimage as a pedagogical exercise required discerning and responding to a number of variables which all proved significant: *place and movement, theme, structure, dynamics, challenges, timeframes, and goals*. In the following, the influence of each of these variables will be discussed in the light of the Pilgrimage as a pedagogical process.

Place and Movement

As the name indicates, the Pilgrimage involved movement between places. The choice of meeting places was particularly significant to the way receptive ecumenism could happen. The principal question of receptive ecumenism called for consideration of who were to be the guests and who the hosts at a given meeting place. During the Pilgrimage, the constitution of the group was decisive in the choice of meeting places.

The Pilgrimage, which engaged participants from an array of different church traditions, exemplified how receptive ecumenism can be carried out multilaterally, as distinct from other receptive ecumenical projects which have been bilateral, and where meetings only alternated between the two groups' buildings. There are also receptive ecumenical initiatives, which have engaged participants from one single church tradition. Yet even these can imply a movement outwards, where the participants seek to encounter and gain knowledge from representatives of other traditions. In all cases, upon returning to their group, participants exchange ideas and insights on how to deepen one's understanding, and to contribute to the renewal of one's own tradition.⁴

The Pilgrimage had four destinations: four Christian centres which are each key to the life of the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, and Free

3. The member churches of the Christian Council of Sweden are defined as four 'church families': the Orthodox (16 member churches), Catholic (1 member church), Lutheran (4 member churches), and Free Church (8 member churches).

4. The examples derive from the work on receptive ecumenism which has been initiated by the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology, the South Australian Council of Churches, and the Dominican Sisters of Rögö Monastery in Sweden.

Church families in Sweden.⁵ Along the journey, all participants were both hosts and guests. The meetings took place every six months and were carried out over an afternoon and evening, as well as the morning of the following day.

The Pilgrimage involved taking part in the community life of each of the four meeting places. Participants engaged in the host community's prayer tradition and were provided meals that were sometimes cooked according to the particular traditions of the host-church family. Thus, the process of receptive ecumenical learning engaged several senses. It was not only about listening, but also about seeing, smelling, and tasting.

When the Pilgrimage was set as a framework for receptive ecumenical work, the World Council of Churches' ongoing program 'Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace' was one source of inspiration. Another was the pilgrim movement, which is central to many church communities in Sweden. The Pilgrimage provided a format for ecumenical learning where the meeting at each new place expanded the visiting participants' horizons.

Theme

We now turn to the particular theme chosen as the learning focus of this Pilgrimage. Receptive ecumenism has proved helpful in facilitating conversations on themes that are often avoided, but which call for further exploration and learning. Receptive ecumenism has enabled conversations on themes that are controversial, but essential to discuss, in order to find new ways of managing difficulties within churches. Hospitality, church structure, women's participation and ministry in churches, the nourishment of an active congregation, conversion, and leadership number among the themes that have so far been addressed through receptive ecumenical processes.⁶

The Pilgrimage also focused on a theme which has caused controversy

5. The participants in the Pilgrimage visited the four centres in the following order: St Ignatios Andliga Akademi (Orthodox) April 2016, Bjärka Säby (Free Church) October 2016, Marielund (Catholic) March 2017, Stiftsgården i Rättvik (Lutheran) September 2017.

6. These thematic examples are drawn from the work on receptive ecumenism which has been carried out at the initiative of the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University in the UK, the Dominican Sisters at Røgle Monastery in Sweden, and the South Australian Council of Churches.

within and between the churches: the theme of *mission*. Yet the choice of this theme was natural, given that the Pilgrimage developed out of the engagement of the Workgroup for Mission Theology at the Christian Council of Sweden and the SMC Faith in development. The Workgroup focuses particularly on the role of mission in the churches, the academy, and in society. Receptive ecumenism supplied the means to support a process of learning about different ways of living and understanding mission. The Pilgrimage to the four different meeting places involved learning about mission in each of the four church families. At each meeting point of the journey, new knowledge was gained from the church family that hosted the place.

While receptive ecumenism might imply receiving knowledge from different kinds of sources, lecturers were a central source of knowledge during the Pilgrimage. All the lecturers who visited the four meeting places of the Pilgrimage were experienced and knowledgeable about the theme of mission in the life of their own church family. However, the lecturers did more than convey new knowledge; many of them also encouraged a self-critical way of learning. Each of them had been informed about the fundamentals of receptive ecumenism. Therefore, it was not just the ‘best china tea service’ that was brought out through the lectures.⁷ Difficulties and challenges in their churches’ ways of living, managing, and thinking about mission were highlighted as well. This openness paved the way for frank and forthright conversation among the participants. The lecturers’ gesture of ‘reaching out their wounded hands’ evoked echoes in the group.⁸ Complex issues, such as proselytism and competition, formed a natural part of the participants’ conversations from the very beginning of the Pilgrimage. As a method, receptive ecumenism helped people lower their guard and share self-critical reflection with other participants. It nurtured a safe environment for trustful and constructive dialogue on the multi-layered and contentious theme of mission.

The methodological starting points of receptive ecumenism, the for-

7. The metaphor of ‘the ecumenism of the best china tea service’ is explicated in: Paul Murray, ‘Introducing Receptive Ecumenism’ in *The Ecumenist. A Journal of Theology, Culture, and Society* 51/2 (2014), 4–5.

8. Murray’s ‘Introducing Receptive Ecumenism’ also gives an account of receptive ecumenism as ‘an ecumenism of the wounded hands’ (see page 5).

mat of the Pilgrimage, and the theme of mission all contributed significantly and gave stability to the development of the pedagogical process. They led to a process moreover which called for continuous monitoring of its variables such as the nature of the meeting places and the internal dynamics of the group. However, an issue that also required special consideration was how to build a structure for such a pedagogical process. This part of the process will now be discussed and elucidated by using examples from the Pilgrimage.

Structure

Three Metaphors

Three metaphors from the Pilgrimage guided the way the structure of the pedagogical process was set up. The metaphors of *stillness*, *crossroads*, and *mountain* framed the pedagogical praxis of every meeting along the journey. These metaphors marked out the structure in the following ways.

The *stillness* gave opportunity for individual reflection on the principal question of receptive ecumenism; ‘*What is it that I and my tradition need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?*’

The *crossroads* provided space for interactive meetings in small groups. In following up the individual reflections, participants from the same tradition considered the question ‘*What is it that we and our tradition need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?*’ Moreover, the *crossroads* provided a forum for talking over the same question in groups that gathered participants from different traditions.

The *mountain* was the meeting point of the whole group, with all its participants. Here, the group could sum up their discussions and discern overarching motifs which had guided the meeting. It gave the possibility to share individual reflections as well as insights resulting from the conversations of the small groups. The gatherings on the mountain framed the meeting, and also enabled stretching one’s view out towards everyday life beyond the Pilgrimage.

The Pilgrimage involved a continuous development of the pedagogical process. The three metaphors provided significant starting points for this development. The structure, based in the metaphors of stillness, crossroads, and mountain, inspired different kinds of activities at every meeting. This structure formed an essential foundation for the modelling of different kinds of reflection and conversation practices. The activities,

which were planned with due consideration given to the internal dynamics of the group and the nature of the meeting places, became increasingly adventurous as the pedagogical process proceeded. The study guide *Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands*, composed by the South Australian Council of Churches, was an important source of inspiration as the pedagogical process of the Pilgrimage was gradually developing.⁹ In the following, this development is illustrated by examples from each of the four meeting places of the journey.

Examples

The First Meeting—Introducing the Structure

At the first meeting of the Pilgrimage, the participants of the group became acquainted with the structure of the pedagogical process. The structure of the *stillness*, the *crossroads*, and the *mountain* was introduced to them in a lecture, which also surveyed the foundations of receptive ecumenism.¹⁰ The pedagogical structure of the first meeting formed a lasting pattern for the rest of the Pilgrimage. The *stillness* provided time and space for individual reflection on the lectures on mission. The group conversations at the *crossroads* followed on from the individual reflection. The *mountain* formed a meeting point for the whole group to interact, throughout the course of the meeting and at its conclusion. Every conclusion furthermore included a moment of stillness, which gave time for writing down one's reflections on the meeting.

The Second Meeting—Word and Image

The second meeting involved formulating as well as visualising one's learning on the theme of mission. At this meeting, verses and illustra-

9. South Australian Council of Churches (2014), *Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands. The Promise and Potential of Receptive Ecumenism*, <http://www.sacc.asn.au/_data/Healing_Gifts_for_Wounded_Hands_May_2014.pdf>.

10. The metaphors of *stillness*, *crossroads*, and *mountain* were introduced in the pedagogical process by Fjellström. The introductory lecture, given by Gehlin at the first meeting, presented the foundations of receptive ecumenism, while also connecting the three pilgrimage metaphors with the principles of receptive ecumenism and the pedagogical practices presented in the study guide *Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands* (see note 9).

tions of Biblical narratives formed the point of departure for the participants' individual reflections in *stillness*. Here, one's understanding of mission was focused. These individual reflections fed into the meetings at the *crossroads*, where the conversations concentrated on the multiple understandings of mission that exist within each church family. On the *mountain* the participants eventually illustrated, in words and images, the wide landscape of understandings which had come to light in the conversations at the crossroads. Thus, the theme of mission was brought to the fore in its breadth and depth. The work on Biblical narratives, which was introduced at the second meeting, was an essential feature of the remaining course of the Pilgrimage.

The Third Meeting—Fellow Pilgrims

'Curiosity' was the *leitmotif* of the third meeting of the Pilgrimage. The conversation model of the 'curiosity box', presented by the South Australian Council of Churches, inspired the preparation of this meeting.¹¹

At this meeting, the *stillness*, which followed upon every lecture on mission, involved writing down one's questions about the content of the lectures. The questions, written on small pieces of paper, were then distributed in a number of 'curiosity boxes.' The curiosity boxes were eventually to become signposts for the approaching pilgrimage, where each participant would walk together with someone from another church family. Here, the *crossroads* implied being fellow pilgrims, who together followed a map through forests and over shores and meadows. The walk provided a forum for discussion on the questions that the participants had previously formulated. Along the path, a 'curiosity box' frequently turned up, full of new questions to talk over. The pilgrimage eventually involved new moments of *stillness*: first in meditation on a Bible verse that had been placed in the last 'curiosity box', and then in the chapel which was the geographical physical goal of the pilgrimage on that occasion. The stillness in the chapel gave time for reflection on the conversations of the pilgrimage, with a special view to the question 'What is it that I and my tradition need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?' The same question formed the starting point for the subsequent conversations at the *crossroads* with participants from their own church families.

11. South Australian Council of Churches, *Healing Gifts for Wounded Hands*, 4–5.

The interaction on the *mountain* took place with the participants' questions in view. The questions from the 'curiosity boxes' were now collected in a circle on the floor. In this way, the concluding discussion evolved from the abundance of questions that the participants had formulated and from the way the theme of mission was experienced in the life and thought of the host-church family.

The Fourth Meeting—At Sea and by the Shore

A new dimension was added to the pedagogical process when the group gathered for the fourth and last time: the *water*. At this meeting, all pedagogical activities of reflection and conversation were located at the seashore or on the sea itself. Here, the *stillness*, which followed the lectures on mission, took place by the water. The shore was the place for individual reflection on the principal question of receptive ecumenism. The shore was also the place for the *crossroads*, where each participant could follow up their individual reflections together with someone from their own church family.

The *crossroads* also included accompanying a fellow participant from the host-church family. This time the conversations were carried out while canoeing. The time together at sea gave participants space for reflection on different ways of living and understanding mission within the host-church family. A few verses from the Bible supported the conversations. Since the meeting was the fourth and last one, the journey at sea formed a special occasion for sharing new perspectives which had emerged from the Pilgrimage as a whole. To journey by canoe was a voluntary activity and some participants choose to walk along the shore together.

The gathering on the *mountain* took place in two stages. To begin with, participants had the opportunity to share insights and perspectives from their conversations at sea and by the shore. Experiences and thoughts from the Pilgrimage were linked together. Finally, the group gathered at the bridge by the sea to participate in the concluding worship of the Pilgrimage.

Dynamics

As mentioned above, the Pilgrimage exemplified the way receptive ecumenism can nurture a trustful dialogue, where people are safe to lower their guard and open up to self-critical reflection. By means

of its special focus on receiving and self-critical learning, receptive ecumenism reduced the fear of being questioned or subjected to someone else's agenda. In this way, receptive ecumenism stimulated the growth of mutual confidence among the participants.

At the same time, the Pilgrimage raised awareness of the importance of continuously considering the development of mutuality and confidence in the group. The fact that the pedagogical structure of the Pilgrimage could make space for an increasing adventurousness had its background in the mutual confidence that gradually developed among the participants. Their trust in each other allowed for pedagogical activities, which ranged from the conversation table to the reflections shared on the walking path and at sea. However, since different styles of conversation assume different levels of confidence, the pedagogical work involved considering each pedagogical activity in the light of the internal dynamics of the group.

Challenges

To lead a pedagogical process inspired by receptive ecumenism might involve dealing with certain challenges. On a number of occasions during the Pilgrimage, the very foundations of receptive ecumenism were questioned. Some limitations of the method were brought to light. When participants asked for critical viewpoints from their ecumenical fellows, receptive ecumenism with its exclusive focus on learning and receiving appeared insufficient. Since receptive ecumenism did not provide a forum for the critical debate that was called for, the question was asked whether receptive ecumenism runs the risk of fostering discussions that smooth over rather than manage ongoing conflicts.

The Pilgrimage moreover made apparent how the management of a pedagogical process based on receptive ecumenism might at times imply a balancing act. Those occasions when participants chose to scrutinise and level criticism at each other required sensitivity and care. A certain degree of diplomacy was needed to steer the conversation back to the starting point of learning and receiving, while not inhibiting the vitality of the conversation or the creativity of the group.

Timeframes

The Pilgrimage gave good reason to consider closely the question of timeframes. Other initiatives have demonstrated that pedagogical processes grounded in receptive ecumenism can be carried out within a variety of timeframes. There are projects that have comprised a series of meetings within predetermined limits. In other cases, learning processes have been launched without setting any end date. Some projects have comprised only two gatherings with homework between the meetings; yet other projects have only had one single gathering. Receptive ecumenism has also shaped longstanding collaborations of several years duration.¹²

During the Pilgrimage, the pedagogical process was supported by a generous timeframe, which spanned a period of almost two years where an afternoon, evening, and morning could be set aside for each of the four meetings. The Pilgrimage gave insight into the way receptive ecumenism involves the gradual formation of attitudes and new viewpoints, and therefore entails a slow process. The pedagogical process was similarly served by the long-term planning that was possible, and this supported the stability of the group and enhanced the continuity of meetings. While timeframes are an essential factor in the construction of pedagogical projects, a related question concerns the goals that this work aims to achieve within those parameters.

Goals

The Pilgrimage was carried out in full awareness of the variety of goals a pedagogical process inspired by receptive ecumenism might aim to fulfil. The renewal of ecclesiological structures is one goal, which frequently appears in literature on receptive ecumenism. Another is the goal of achieving a deeper understanding of one's own and others' theological traditions—a vital part of receptive ecumenical striving towards interior

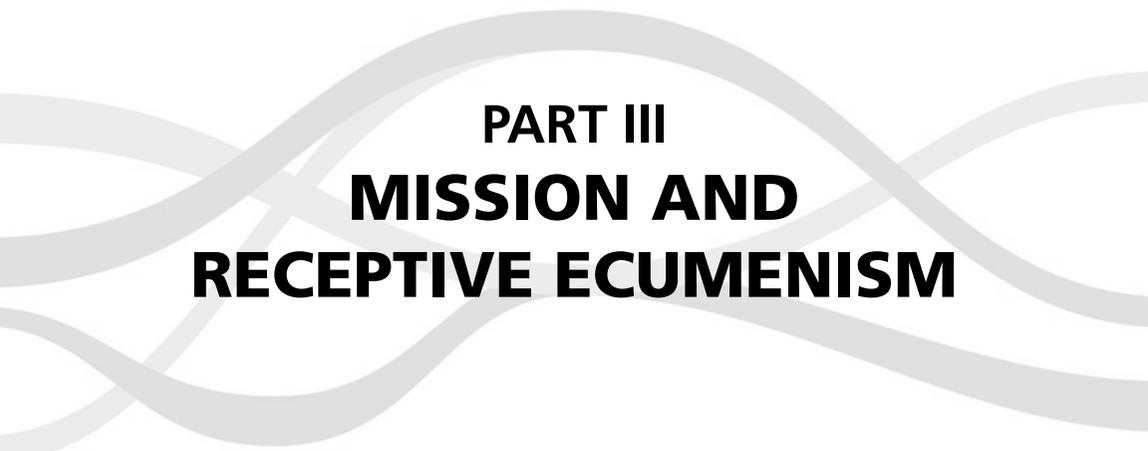
12. The examples derive from the ecumenical work that is carried out at the initiative of the South Australian Council of Churches and the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University in the UK, as well as by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission and Jönköping Christian Co-operation Council in Sweden.

church reform.¹³ Receptive ecumenical processes have proved that the methodological agenda underlying the strivings towards these goals can also generate other results that are well worth considering. By means of its focus on self-critical learning from the other, receptive ecumenism can result in the building of trust and the reduction of fear in ecumenical encounters. The construction of attitudes grounded in trust and an in-depth understanding of the other can become a goal in itself.¹⁴

Against this background it can be concluded that receptive ecumenism can lead to several results at the same time. This was exemplified during the Pilgrimage, which fulfilled its overarching goal. The participants gained a deeper knowledge of the ways in which mission is lived and understood within the four church families. The Pilgrimage resulted in mutual enrichment between traditions. On the way, however, receptive ecumenism generated results that reached beyond the sphere of thought. While searching for increased knowledge and understanding, interpersonal trust and ecumenical friendship were strengthened. The journey to the four places, with the goal of receiving a deeper knowledge of each other's traditions, also resulted in the experience of receiving a deeper confidence and trust in the other.

13. See for example Antonia Pizzey, 'On the Maturation of Receptive Ecumenism. The Connection between Receptive Ecumenism and Spiritual Ecumenism' in *Pacifica. Australasian Theological Studies* 28/2 (2015), 110–118; Ormond Rush, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the Sensus Fidelium. Expanding the Categories for a Catholic Reception of Revelation' in *Theological Studies* 70/3 (2017), 559–572; Sara Gehlin, 'Receptiv ekumenik – om hopp och tillit i ekumeniska relationer' in *Var inte rädd – en bok om hopp* edited by Dag Tuvelius (Förbundet Kristen Humanism, 2017), 89–98. See also the anthology *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning. Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* edited by Paul D. Murray (Oxford University Press, 2008).

14. See also Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel, 'From Conciliar Ecumenism to Transformative Receptive Ecumenism' in *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73/3 (2017), 6–8.



PART III
MISSION AND
RECEPTIVE ECUMENISM



CHAPTER 3

Together towards Life

Anna Ljung

Common Understanding

All churches have a heart for mission, as it is the essence of the church. Being a global community of churches means that the World Council of Churches (WCC) includes a multitude of interpretations of mission. The varieties are based on different theological approaches, traditions, cultures, religious plurality, political structures, economic situations, and contexts. Because the landscape of mission is constantly facing new challenges and possibilities, it is important to regularly reflect on mission in our own context and together with others. For the broad global community, as the WCC it is necessary to work for a common understanding of mission. This empowers the community to stay together while churches are serving in a multitude of different contexts.

Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation

To have a common understanding of mission, in 1982 the WCC approved the document *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*. It is the only official WCC position statement on mission and evangelism since the integration of International Missionary Council and the WCC in 1961. *Mission and Evangelism* became a comprehensive ecumenical statement that is known for its *missio Dei* (mission of God), to distinguish it from the *missio ecclesiae* (mission of the church). The concept of *missio Dei* was introduced at the 1952 International Missionary Council conference in Willingen.

Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes

Between the 2006 WCC assembly and the next assembly in 2013, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the

WCC worked toward the formulation of a new statement on mission and evangelism. This time, it was a longer affirmation and was created by drafters from a broader community, beyond the WCC's Protestant and Orthodox member communions, now including Roman Catholic and Pentecostal missiologists. The central committee unanimously approved the affirmation as an official WCC statement in 2012.

The new affirmation bears the title *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL).¹ Ten questions are asked at the beginning. The rich 40-page document has four parts based on the Spirit: Mission: Breath of Life; Liberation: Mission from the Margins; Community: Church on the Move; and Pentecost: Good News for All. The document concludes with Feast of Life: Concluding Affirmations as a response to the ten questions. The text is organized into 112 paragraphs.

The objective is not to replace *missio Dei* but to be a document of our time based on challenges the global community is facing in the early 21st century. We live in a time of constant and rapid changes. Many of the growing churches are mission-founded churches in the global South and East, and they have a growing missional involvement. The world community is facing an ecological crisis in which humans and the whole creation are suffering. Due to life-threatening situations, millions of people are internally displaced and seeking a safe place to call home. Human and non-human life is threatened.

Life

Together towards Life is a broad appeal for us to live and work together for the fullness of life for all, led by the God of Life. The leading biblical text is John 10:10 (KJV): "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The first affirmation gives a criterion for mission: "We affirm that the purpose of God's mission is fullness of life (John 10:10) and that this is the criterion for discernment in mission" (TTL #102). Based on life being threatened, mission needs to protect and affirm life: the life of human beings and of the whole creation – nature and animals. Therefore the affirmation has an eco-theological approach. The theme of

1. Jooseop Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/File/Together%20towards%20Life_Mission%20and%20Evangelism.pdf

the 2013 WCC assembly, where the mission affirmation was presented, was also related to life: “God of Life, lead us to justice and peace.”

Spirit

The theme of the 2005 WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism was “Come, Holy Spirit – heal and reconcile.” In *Together towards Life* there is a new focus in relation to the mission document of 1982: the Spirit. The Spirit of God was present at the creation of the world, and the same Spirit descended on Mary and brought forth Jesus. The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus at his baptism and later raised him from the tomb to life (TTL #13). The Holy Spirit chooses to work together with people, but it is only God’s Spirit who creates new life and rebirth (TTL #82).

Creation

Being a document of our time, *Together towards Life* integrates the climate crises and the concern for the integrity of the whole creation. It expresses a connection between mission, the Spirit, and creation. *Together towards Life* states that mission begins in the heart of the triune God (TTL #2) and has creation at its heart (TTL #105). This love does not proclaim a human salvation separate from the renewal of the whole creation; we are called to participate in God’s mission (*missio Dei*) beyond our human-centred goals (TTL #105).

Justice

Connected to the climate crisis is the violation of human rights. *Together towards Life* highlights social, economic, and ecological injustice. The Spirit empowers the church for a life-nurturing mission which includes wisdom, reflection, and a multitude of practical actions (TTL #50). Unfortunately, the use of the words “marginalized people” in the text (TTL #36, 39, 107) reveals an objectification of people who really should be described as people “living in marginalized situations” or in “marginal conditions,” as in paragraph 38. This paragraph also reveals that there is a life in the centre with access to rights, freedom, individuality, and respect, while living in the margins means exclusion for justice and dignity. The document states that the aim of mission is not only to

move people from the margins but to confront those who remain in the centre by keeping people on the margins. Churches are therefore called to transform power structures (TTL #40).

Weak Points

Despite being a theological radical affirmation, there are some missing aspects. One is gender perspectives. An example is the concept of self-denying, with a different burden for an already poor woman compared to a privileged rich man (TTL #41, 92). The document also missed the opportunity to connect interreligious dialogue more strongly with the common care of creation (TTL #94).

How *Together towards Life* Enriches Me

Being a commissioner of the CWME from 2000 to 2013, representing the SMC Faith in development, meant being involved in the contribution and formation of *Together towards Life*. It gave me a blessed possibility to bring perspectives from the SMC, my national reformed church, and my local congregation to the international ecumenical community, and vice versa. During these 13 years I was given great missiological training through many excellent lectures, well-prepared presentations, ecumenical and denominational worship services, interesting meetings, personal conversations, lasting friendships, and the result of the mission affirmation as such.

The process taught me that the multitude of local interpretations and practices of mission are witnesses helping us to grasp the width of God. When we come together and share from various contexts, we are given the possibility to imagine the notable grandeur of God. But we are also invited to see that the greatness has to transform itself into each local context and personal life to be close.

I have always felt at home in my denomination. This has helped me to be open and curious to learn from denominations different from my own. When meeting someone different from ourselves, we learn not only about them but also about ourselves. Listening to someone similar to us might give us words and expressions to describe our own understanding. And we are better equipped and empowered to serve in our contexts.

Only together with our brothers and sisters can we move forward in our understanding of the God of Life and in the life-affirming mission of

God. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:17-19 has borne fruit through *Together towards Life* and will guide our continual pilgrims of mission, "as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ."



CHAPTER 4

Touched, Inspired, and Renewed – Receptive Ecumenism and the Joy of My Own Roots

Ann Aldén

In this paper I share my understanding of the concept of mission. It has two dimensions, and the two need to be kept together. This definition of mission provides a model and guidance. It encourages us to witness to Christian faith as we are Christians, and at the same time to relate to people of other faiths with curiosity. In the second part of this paper, I share my experience of Receptive Ecumenism. It is as simple as profound. Even if ecumenism and interreligious dialogue do not mix, insights from Receptive Ecumenism can shed light on relationships of all kinds.

The Two Dimensions of Mission

One night, a visiting student from Thailand invited his next-door neighbour for tea. Before too long, the two acknowledged that he is a Buddhist, and she is a Christian. The Buddhist young man was curious and had a lot of questions for the young Christian woman. And the woman was eager to share. She told him about Jesus: about his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. About how we actually expect Jesus to come back one day. She talked about how Christians gather and worship on Sundays, about the songs and about the friendships that have become so important to her. At the dormitory where they both lived, evening prayer marked the end of the day. So when the bell rang, the girl said thanks for the tea and walked toward the chapel. Later, the student from Thailand told me he had learned a great deal about Christian faith and practice during the year he spent in Sweden. Very much from his young female neighbour,

but also from others in the dormitory. They were generous with their time, and they were happy to talk. Looking back, he realized that Buddhist praxis wasn't of particular interest for these Christian students. He didn't think it ever occurred to them that, and here he smiled, there was a universe to explore had they knocked on his door, a *dharma* door.

"For we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard," say Peter and John in Acts of the Apostles 4:20. This quotation captures an active imperative that is so typical of Christian spirituality. This active imperative has been the engine of missionary movements over the years. The calling has inspired young women and men to learn new languages, go to unknown places, and make disciples of as many people as they possibly can. The importance of the written text is interesting. Christian missionaries have even created written languages in cultures where there are none in order to provide the books of the Bible to potential Christians in faraway places.

A few days later they met again: the visiting student from Thailand and the young Christian woman. This time during a walk at night in an area not far from where they were staying, where tension between groups had been escalating for the last few weeks. Provided with similar yellow jackets, they walked the streets to promote dialogue as opposed to confrontation. And it wasn't just the two of them. For the common good, people from near and far took part in these walks, which had been arranged to promote a safe and secure neighbourhood. They both acknowledged that participation in the walks was a result of their faith.

Mission has two dimensions, and the encounter between the two students above can illustrate this. First, there is a mission, a task and a duty, where Buddhists and Christians, Muslims and Hindus, believers and non-believers stand together for the good of all. God created the world. God created humanity. We depend on each other, and that is how it is meant to be. No one can manage on their own. We need each other, and we need others to rely on us and count on us. No man is an island. Walking the streets of a neighbourhood where there is tension and fear is a mission we share. The well-being of our children is a concern for all of us. Based on creation, humankind has a shared mission. This is the first dimension of mission; here, people of different faiths and people of no faith stand together, strive together, side by side.

The second dimension of mission is unique: the unique mission of

those of us who identify as Christians. It is the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is telling the story of Jesus' birth, his life, his death, and his resurrection, and what this has meant to us as a group and to me as an individual. How Christian faith gives meaning to life. And we are convinced that Jesus has something important to say to everyone on earth.

The interreligious encounter holds a creative tension between these two dimensions, and they must be held together. There are two dimensions of our mission. One dimension is based on creation. We are in this (life and world) together, and we need each other. This is as simple as it is profound. The other dimension is based on the incarnation, the life and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus has something important to say to all of us. We are sent to serve each other, and we are sent to share the good news of Jesus Christ. And if we listen, we will find that religious leaders such as Mohammed, Buddha, and others have something important to say to us.

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15-16). At present, words like “gentleness” and “respect” shed light on the interreligious landscape and ask us to listen as well. Maybe with the help of what we can learn from Receptive Ecumenism.

Receptive Ecumenism

Receptive Ecumenism takes seriously the fact that many of us, if not all, have two ears and only one mouth. In this case, it means that listening is far more important than talking. The Receptive Ecumenism process gives focus to the other, whether it be a Christian of another denomination than my own, or a person with a faith other than mine. It gives full attention to the other, not because there is no mutual interest, but because there is a world to discover and much to learn from traditions and people who have their belonging somewhere else. People with whom I cannot identify immediately.

One aspect of Receptive Ecumenism is how it encourages us to serve a meal not on our best china, but on our everyday dishes. Meaning that when we share the story of who we are, where we come from, and where we are headed, we are challenged to share the story unvarnished. Who we are, rather than the image of who we want to be. My experience of Receptive Ecumenism is that this aspect of authenticity creates a sense of closeness. Our walks of life might be very different, but in our short-

comings we acknowledge that we are in “this” together. This aspect differs from the logic of our present culture, where it is very much a matter of how things appear. A matter of image.

Another aspect of Receptive Ecumenism is the way the encounter with another way of living, thinking, acting, and expressing one’s faith – dimensions of my own heritage – is called for. Dimensions hidden under layers of theology, liturgy, and praxis rise to the surface.

The story about the Thai Buddhist student and the Christian student comes to mind when I reflect on the mission pilgrimage, which I took part in a couple of years ago. Over two years, Christians of different denominations invited each other in to their “homes.” And once there, just by sharing the way of living among fellow Christians – their prayers, food, atmosphere, and other particularities – I experienced something so simple, so profound, that I will never forget. In a beautiful mansion in the Swedish countryside, the Orthodox churches in Sweden had established St Ignatios Academy, a place for the formation of theologians and priests. In long black robes and black hats, priests and monks sang the ancient liturgy several times during the day. I was amazed at how our Orthodox friends living here couldn’t care less about the modern world around them. They knew their prayers, the liturgy was integrated in each and every one of them, and they just did what they were called to do – the liturgy.

How liberating! In the light of the spirituality I was exposed to here, my own church came across as in constant search of something different and something else. I envied these monks and priests: they were so at ease and so content with their liturgy and life. Their prayers might not be very contextual, but they offered their fellow Orthodox Christians a sense of belonging and stability in a world of constant change. Having spent some time here, we knew they had their share of challenges. Here, as in every other church, there was frustration and struggle. However, these problems did not jeopardize the freedom provided by a given liturgy passed down from generation to generation. A renewed joy and rest have characterized my relationship to the liturgy of my own church ever since.

We made several stops during our ecumenical pilgrimage. Another stop that made a great impression was Bjärka Säby, where the Pentecostal churches hosted our group. If the days at St Ignatios Academy brought out respect for tradition and security, here at Bjärka Säby, confronted

with an evangelical spirituality, we sensed a glow and a zeal long forgotten. The calling is important; education is less important because we are in a hurry! Education is not a bad thing, but in the light of the urgency, we must prioritize.

If the days spent at St. Ignatios Academy brought a deeper respect for the given, here at Bjärka Säby other dimensions were visualized. We met a fervour that we had not felt for many years. For the first time, I was given an explanation of why pastors and evangelists seldom have a long theological education. The answer is this: there is no time. Jesus will be back any day now, and before his coming we must reach out to as many people as possible. Preach the good news and make it possible for them to be baptized.

By exposing myself to other Christian denominations, I rediscovered dimensions of my own spirituality. These encounters made an impact, and I can seriously say I am not the same person today. I treasure the liturgy of my own church in new ways, and I honour the enthusiasm of missionaries near and far.

Receptive Ecumenism has made me aware of the eagerness of my own Christian tradition and faith. We are eager to reach out, eager to let others know about and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. This is a wonderful thing. Imagine all the treasures out there waiting to be explored, stories waiting to be told. While walking together, let us share what enables us to keep on going, keep on hoping, keep on investing in this world as well as in the one to come.

I have tried to share my own understanding and interpretation of mission: how it can be of help when we understand how we relate to people of different faiths with respect for their integrity as well as our own. I have also shared some insights from the mission pilgrimage 2016-2017. Receptive Ecumenism paved the way for a deeper understanding of ourselves and of other Christians, and it can support the encounters between people of different faiths as well.



Perspectives on Catholic Mission Theology

Nausikaa Haupt

In 2016, I was invited to participate in the pilgrimage in mission that is described in Part II. While we were reflecting on various aspects of mission in these meetings, we also used the form learned from Receptive Ecumenism. It was a very enriching process with many valuable meetings. Later on, we presented this process at the Fourth International Conference on Receptive Ecumenism, held in Canberra in 2017.

While doing this, we were asked whether there are areas where there can be some dissonance or delicacy on these matters – important questions to address in the ongoing process in this group. One of these could be about mission in areas where there are already established churches. It could also be at home, where there can be a form of active mission or evangelization among immigrants who are already Christian. These questions touch on ecclesiology and the understanding of what a parish is. How do we look upon each other? Are members of other churches lost sheep that need to be saved, or do we regard other Christian churches and faith communities as good Christian communities? What do we think when people change churches or faith communities? There is a difference in various churches' views of ecclesiology – how open it is and how strictly membership is needed for access to the sacramental community.

Regarding the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* – that is, “outside the church there is no salvation” – you could say that it is still valid in a certain way. But the understanding of *ecclesiam*, what the church is, has been extended since the Second Vatican Council and in the ecclesiology presented in *Lumen Gentium* that speaks more of identification with Christ than distancing from others. It has to do with the view of both baptism and ecclesiology. Salvation is conveyed through baptism, but according to the Catholic Church, the grace of baptism can also be given to the one

who seeks the truth and does the will of God.¹ Belonging to Christ and a faith in the Truth is needed, but the church cannot be totally sure what the belonging to Christ must look like. Dogmas are binding humans, but not God: “God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments” (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) 1257). In our country, most people generally are in accordance with the church’s official teaching, but a smaller group is sure that formal belonging to the Catholic Church is needed. Maybe this is the same in some other churches and is something to speak about in future gatherings.

After these reflections, I will look at some general thoughts on mission in the Catholic tradition.

Mission: A requirement of the Church’s Catholicity²

The church is missionary by nature and is renewed by her mission. *The CCC* speaks of mission and the exhortation to mission in the chapter on the church as “catholic,” that is, what the church *is*: one, holy, *catholic*, and apostolic (CCC 849–56). Mission belongs to the very catholicity of the church. This is also important for the church not to be autoreferential. Here follow some main extracts showing how the Catechism defines mission and its relation to catholicity.

First, the Catechism says the church is catholic because Christ is pres-

1. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), no. 1260: “Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery.⁷⁶³ Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly* if they had known its necessity.” (Note 63: GS 22 § 5; cf. LG 16; AG 7.) https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

And in CCC 1258, regarding martyrdom and desire for baptism: “This *Baptism of blood*, like the *desire for Baptism*, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament.”

And from the Code of Canon Law, Canon 849: “Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments and necessary for salvation by actual reception or at *least by desire*...”

2. From the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

ent in her (CCC 830). Second, the church is catholic because she has been sent out by Christ on a mission to the whole of the human race (CCC 831). The church is universal by vocation and mission (CCC 835) and, as the title says, mission is a requirement of the church's catholicity.

CCC 849–56 speaks directly of the church's duty to the missionary mandate. "Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation,' the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder and because it is demanded by her own essential universality, strives to preach the Gospel to all men."³ "Go therefore..." (Matt. 28:19-20) (CCC 849).

Further, CCC 850 says that the purpose and origin of the mission are ultimately grounded in the love of the Holy Trinity. "The Church on earth is by her nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, she has as her origin the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Ad gentes*, 2). The ultimate purpose of mission is none other than to make people share in the communion between the Father and the Son in their Spirit of love.⁴ CCC 851 speaks of the missionary motivation that it is God's desire for everyone to be saved: Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the church must be missionary.

The Holy Spirit is the protagonist of mission (CCC 852), "the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission" (*Redemptoris missio*, 21). "The course of history unfolds the mission of Christ, who was sent to evangelize the poor; so the Church, urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked" (*Ad gentes*, 5).

Mission takes patience and involves inculturation. It begins with the proclamation of the Gospel to peoples and groups who do not yet believe in Christ, continues with the establishment of Christian communities that are "a sign of God's presence in the world," and leads to the foundation of local churches. It must involve a process of inculturation if the gospel is to take flesh in each people's culture (CCC 854).

3. Second Vatican Council, *Ad gentes*, (1965), 1, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html; compare with Matt. 16:15.

4. Compare with Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio* (1990), 23, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html.

Mission and Ecumenism

The Catechism then makes the connection between mission and ecumenism (CCC 855). Referring to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, it says that

The Church's mission stimulates efforts towards Christian unity. Indeed, 'divisions among Christians prevent the Church from realizing in practice the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her sons who, though joined to her by Baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. Furthermore, the Church herself finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in all its aspects'.⁵

The missionary task implies a respectful dialogue with those who do not yet accept the Gospel (CCC 856). It is, however, important to remember, as the World Council of Churches' (WCC) mission affirmation *Together towards Life* (TTL) says, the 'other' is not an object of authentic mission, but a partner in it (TTL #93).

In the recently published new *Ecumenical Vademecum* for bishops, ecumenism is described as an important way of mission for the bishop. In 2023, a bishops' synod is planned in Rome on synodality. In the *Vademecum*, it says that "both synodality and ecumenism are processes of walking together."⁶

Catholic Missionary Documents

The missionary nature of the church appears in the various missionary documents from the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council and after, which we will look at here. Mission is not just for some special

5. Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio* (1964), 4, 8, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

6. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum* (2020), 3, <http://www.christianunity.va/content/dam/unitacristiani/Documentazione%20generale/2020Vademecum/Vademecum-EN-GARAMOND.pdf>.

institutes or organizations, but for everyone. It is God's mission, *missio Dei*. The mission has its source in the Son's and the Holy Spirit's mission in the world. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). These documents are binding for the whole Church and are not just recommendations.⁷

Ad gentes (Vatican II)

Ad gentes is the mission decree of the Second Vatican Council. The title means "to the people." It is connected to the council's Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, which means "the light of the people," that is, Jesus Christ. The people are human beings; the church's mission is to make Christ known to them. Mission and Christian unity belong together; *Ad gentes* repeatedly encourages seeking cooperation with all Christians. There are also references to the council's ecumenical decree, *Unitatis redintegratio*. These three documents belong together, and many of the thoughts in *Ad gentes* are general ecumenical consensus today. This council was the first time that bishops from the global South participated in a council of this size. There had been inculturation earlier in history, but thanks to these bishops' presence, the traditions and theology of non-Western cultures were updated. Today, the majority of Christians are outside Europe and North America, and we speak of a "mission to the North," in the other direction. This is, for example, very clear in the Catholic Church in Sweden, where most priests are from abroad and many are from Africa and Asia.

Evangelii nuntiandi (Paul VI)

In 1975 came Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, "On evangelization in the modern world." It was ten years after the council and an update of *Ad gentes*. It has something to say to all Christians and is appreciated in ecumenical contexts. It seems to be a favourite document of Pope Francis, as he cites it many times in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*.

7. Katrin Åmell, OP, "Katolsk missionsteologi efter Andra Vatikankonciliet," in *Berörd: Santal om mission i en föränderlig värld*, ed. Sven-Erik Fjellström and Olle Kristensson (Bilda, Sensus, SKR & SMR, 2019), 14–15. The following presentation of the Vatican mission documents partly follows the presentation in Swedish by Sr. Katrin Åmell.

Evangelii nuntiandi starts with Jesus Christ, who first proclaimed the news of God's kingdom. It is his ways of proclaiming, living, and dying that should be our model. Since Christ returned to the Father, it is the church's mission to spread the gospel while at the same time being in constant need of evangelization herself. The gospel is primarily proclaimed by the testimonies of Christian people. *Evangelii nuntiandi* was written after the student revolts in 1968: Paul VI writes that "The modern man rather listens to witnesses than teachers, and if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses." Testimony does not imply that you have to talk all the time. It can be silent but still effective.

There is a difference in the language used. In this encyclical, the term "evangelization" is used more than "mission," as in *Ad gentes*. Which term is used can vary between cultures and language areas. Mission can relate to activities in faraway countries, while evangelization is closer. Whatever term you use, the purpose is to proclaim the message to all people, wherever and whoever they are.

Redemptoris missio (John Paul II)

Twenty-five years after *Ad gentes*, John Paul II released the encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, "The Redeemer's mission," in 1990. The title refers to Jesus Christ. It was written out of an optimism for the third millennium, where the pope saw "a new spring for the gospel" after 1989. More people seemed to appreciate the values of the gospel, which were seen in the fall of the Berlin wall in Germany, the renunciation of violence and war, respect for human rights, and more.

The pope builds on the earlier encyclicals but adds new challenges, such as rapid urbanization, population growth, migration problems, and secularization in traditionally Christian countries. There is a long chapter on the Holy Spirit as a leader of the mission. The Spirit does not only work in individuals but also in societies, history, people, cultures, and religions, which is a new way of looking at the long-time works of the Spirit. This was some years after the interreligious prayer meeting for peace in Assisi 1986, which met with both criticism and enthusiasm. The Pope addresses this issue, writing that "excluding any mistaken interpretation, the interreligious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that 'every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit,

who is mysteriously present in every human heart.”⁸ The Assisi meeting was a milestone in interreligious dialogue, as you could meet in an authentic common prayer, not just in cooperation to promote humanitarian and spiritual values. Theology and dialogue of religion were active; the pope writes of this in the chapter entitled “The Ways of Mission,” where the dialogue is seen as part of the church’s call to evangelization. In dialogue, Christians are witnessing to their faith. Dialogue and proclamation are the two legs of the Catholic Church’s mission; they are not each other’s opposites and are not interchangeable. In some places, where explicit proclamation is not possible, dialogue is a way of witnessing to Christ and serving others.

Evangelii gaudium (Francis)

Evangelii gaudium, “the joy of the Gospel,” is the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis from 2013. The message is that the personal encounter with Jesus Christ must, in a natural way, lead the church’s people to proclaim the gospel to others with joy, from heart to heart. The pope recalls somewhat forgotten motifs from the Second Vatican Council and develops them, such as the church is a people on pilgrimage, and the signs of the times shall be interpreted in the light of the gospel. Pope Francis was elected pope because the cardinals expected reforms. In *Evangelii gaudium*, his will for renewal and some reforms are proposed to mark the way for the joy of the gospel.

Mission Today – Dialogue: *Fratelli tutti* and the Day for Human Fraternity

There are two ways of mission in the church: proclamation and dialogue. Lately, Pope Francis has strongly emphasized dialogue as the *modus operandi* for the church on many occasions. In his 2020 encyclical, *Fratelli tutti*, he expresses that everyone belongs together, whereas in the 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*, on the environment and our common home, the theme was that everything belongs together. He was writing *Fratelli tutti* when the COVID-19 pandemic started and deeply affected the whole world. This also led him to stress the fact that we must cooper-

8. Address to Cardinals and the Roman Curia, December 22, 1986, 11: AAS 79 (1987), 1089. The quote is from *Redemptoris missio*, 29.

ate to meet the challenges of the world. This is his *leitmotif* in most of his writings and messages after this point. During the pandemic, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and the WCC released a joint document entitled “Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During COVID-19 and Beyond.”⁹

The Cardinal Guixot, president of the PCID, said that “the pandemic has exposed the woundedness and fragility of our world, revealing that our responses must be offered in an inclusive solidarity, open to followers of other religious traditions and people of good will, given the concern for the entire human family.”¹⁰ The document gives a Christian basis for interreligious solidarity to serve a wounded world. The method and aim are cooperation and dialogue.

This is seen in the recently celebrated International Day of Human Fraternity, declared by the United Nations for the first time on 4 February 2021. This is also, like *Fratelli tutti*, inspired by the signing by Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, of the document on *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, on 4 February 2019 in Abu Dhabi. It was the 800th anniversary of the meeting of St Francis with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil in 1219.¹¹ Both the pope and Sheikh el-Tayeb participated in this celebration.

Pope Francis called for a world of mutual respect, stressing that we can either choose to be brothers and sisters or lose everything. He also stressed that we are all born of the same Father. He thanked the imam for joining in this celebration, “because today fraternity is the new frontier of humanity. Either we are brothers, or we destroy each other” and “there is no time for indifference.” He continued, “[Fraternity] means an outstretched hand. Fraternity means respect. Fraternity means listening

9. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and World Council of Churches, “Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity: A Christian Call to Reflection and Action During COVID-19 and Beyond” (2020), <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/ServingWoundedWorld.pdf>.

10. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and World Council of Churches, “Serving a Wounded World in Interreligious Solidarity.”

11. Sr Bernadette Marie Reis, fsp, “Pope Inspires International Day of Human Fraternity,” Vatican News, 3 February 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-02/pope-international-day-human-fraternity-anniversary-celebration.html>.

with an open heart. Fraternity means firmness in one's own convictions" because "there is no true fraternity if one's convictions are negotiated."¹²

In *Fratelli tutti*, the key to interpreting the encyclical is the parable of the good Samaritan. It is not the person who is ethnically, religiously and culturally closest who helps the injured man, but a Samaritan. The pope distinguishes between being an apparently close person and a neighbour, who is the one who is truly close to the stranger. It is a difference between an outer and inner proximity. The important thing is the heart, not the outer signs of nearness to people who might belong to the same tradition or religion.

Proclamation and Dialogue

Mission is composed of both proclamation and dialogue; both are necessary. Some months after *Redemptoris missio*, the missionary encyclical of Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Arinze said, "[“Dialogue and Proclamation”] goes into further detail on an important question: how do interreligious dialogue and proclamation – announcing the Gospel in order to invite people to accept it and to be incorporated into the Church through baptism – go together?" While maintaining the permanent priority of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, the document titled “Dialogue and Proclamation” declares unequivocally that “despite the difficulties, the Church’s commitment to dialogue remains firm and irreversible” (n. 54).¹³

The necessity of showing the clear relation between dialogue and proclamation has been felt ever since the publication of *Nostra aetate*. In this context, dialogue and proclamation have become reference points for those who wish to go deeper into this argument. The Holy Father wrote in *Redemptoris missio*: “Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission

12. Vatican News staff writer, “Pope Francis on Human Fraternity: We Are All Born of the Same Father,” Vatican News, 4 February 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-02/pope-francis-human-fraternity-international-day-zayed-award.html>.

13. Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 19 May 1991, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

ad gentes; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions” (*Redemptoris missio*, 55).

In his letter for the celebration of the annual World Mission Day in October, Pope Francis has chosen as the theme for 2021 “mission of hope and compassion,” where his appeal to reach out to everyone is seen again.

Regarding the pandemic, the pope says that “when there is a temptation to disguise and justify indifference and apathy in the name of healthy social distancing, there is urgent need for the *mission of compassion*, which can make that necessary distancing an opportunity for encounter, care and promotion.” In our present circumstances, he continues, “there is an urgent need for missionaries of hope who, anointed by the Lord, can provide a prophetic reminder that no one is saved by himself.”

He also says that “the call to mission is not a thing of the past, or a romantic leftover from earlier times.” Today, too, Jesus needs “messengers and agents of compassion.” Pope Francis finishes by saying, “Always, but especially in these times of pandemic, it is important to grow in our daily ability to widen our circle, to reach out to others who, albeit physically close to us, are not immediately part of our ‘circle of interests.’” He is referring to general human fraternity. To be on mission “is to be willing to think as Christ does, to believe with him that those around us are also my brothers and sisters.”¹⁴

The latest writings and meetings have emphasized dialogue and a culture of encounter as a means of reaching the other, which could also be seen in the pope’s 2021 visit to Iraq.¹⁵ His mission focus lately seems to be on dialogue, fraternity, and reaching out to all people. In the words that have been attributed to St Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times.”

14. Vatican News staff reporter, “World Mission Day: Pope Francis Calls for a Mission of Compassion,” Vatican News, 29 January 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-01/world-mission-day-pope-francis-calls-for-a-mission-of-compassio.html>.

15. Vatican News, “Pope: ‘Charity, Love and Fraternity are the way Forward,’” Vatican News, 8 March 2021, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-03/pope-francis-inflight-presenter-iraq-journalists0.html>.



Receptive Ecumenism – The Transformation of Mission in France

Marie-Hélène Robert

Introduction

Receiving and learning from others is the condition and fruit of an ecumenism understood as a favour from God. The concept of Receptive Ecumenism, born within the Catholic context in 2006, consists in learning from partners¹ not only through spiritual exchanges (liturgy, common prayer, mysticism), but also at the doctrinal, structural, institutional, practical, and academic levels.

The formula of Pope John Paul II – “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’”² – stems from this same desire to extend the scope of ecumenical exchanges throughout all of Christian life, in reciprocity. Thus the idea is not new, but its impact on the mission of the church seems to be something that is both creative and inviting at present.

I would like to examine here how a certain type of mission in France is understood and lived according to the “receptive” approach, focusing on the way in which some Catholics learn from the missionary practices of evangelical Protestants, from two complementary perspectives:

1. The works of the anthropologist and ethnologist Valérie Aubourg, which are authoritative on this matter thanks to their scientific nature; and

1. See Jean-Baptiste Siboulet, “Le Receptive Ecumenism selon Paul D Murray,” *Istina* 65 (2020), 249–70.

2. Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* (1995), 28, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html.

2. A meeting during the Mission Congress of Paris (25-27 September 2020) on the same issue, this time within the context of activism.

I am not attempting to describe a concrete experience of Receptive Ecumenism but to show how its spirit strongly permeates the way in which a certain type of dynamic mission is lived and understood in France today.

An Anthropologist's Perspective

Valérie Aubourg is a professor of anthropology-ethnology at Lyon Catholic University and director of the Sciences and Humanities Confluence Research Centre (UCLy). In her latest book, *Réveil catholique. Emprunts évangéliques au sein du catholicisme [Catholic Awakening: Evangelical Borrowings within Catholicism]*,³ she writes on three areas: the Evenings of Miracles and Healings and their organizers, the Mothers' Prayer movement, and parish renewal. The author chose projects initiated by Catholics in Lyon and examines them against the background of inspiring or similar experiences in the Protestant world and throughout different parts of the world.

The first area, the Evenings of Miracles and Healings in Lyon and their organizers, demonstrates that personal searches transcend confessional boundaries and involve the use of various resources that are available in the respective traditions. Three initiatives, which were initiated by Yves Payen, a Catholic from Lyon, and implemented jointly with evangelicals, are analyzed: the Rooms of Healing (reception of individuals), the Evenings of Miracles and Healings, and the International Congress of May 2014. The searches unfold privately and in groups; they take into account the psychological, somatic, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual demands of people from very diverse backgrounds. The point of reference is neither a territory nor an institution but a network of people – as Sébastien Fath noted in his analysis for the evangelical world – who come together with their needs, expectations, and experience.

The Evenings of Miracles and Healings in Lyon (in French: *les soirées Prière et Guérison de Lyon*) are co-organized by the International Associa-

3. Valérie Aubourg, *Réveil catholique. Emprunts évangéliques au sein du catholicisme* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2020).

tion of Healing Ministries (IAHM; in French: *l'Association Internationale des Ministères de Guérison*, AIMG), the Rapha association (chaired by the Catholic Yves Payen; in French: *l'association Rapha*), the Charismatic and Ecumenical Council of Lyon (CECOL, chaired by the Catholic Jean-Noël Zacharie; in French: *la Consultation Charismatique et Oecuménique Lyonnaise*, CCOOL), and the Forum of Charismatic Associations (FCA, chaired by the evangelical Angelo Pace; in French: *le Forum d'Associations Charismatiques*, FAC). Together, they choose speakers from all backgrounds who respect the interconfessional dimension of these events. What do they contribute to each other respectively? An exchange of ideas, methods, resources (training, speakers, musicians, organizers, etc.), a deepening of convictions, a better knowledge of each other, a reassessment of one's own practices. For example, the culture of debate and spontaneity dear to Protestantism and the culture of unity dear to Catholicism benefit by bringing to each other their respective strengths and questions.

However, some evangelicals may be concerned about a subtle Catholic ploy to bring Protestants back into the Catholic fold, and many urge their brothers and sisters to avoid all contact with Catholics and the ecumenical spirit. "Jesus did not pray with them but for them [the idolaters]."⁴ The suspicions of some of the Catholic right wing concerning ecumenism and the "Protestantization" of the church are also well known. Although the evangelicals acknowledge that they receive much from the Catholics during these Miracles and Healings events, Catholic resources such as devotion to Mary and the saints or sacramentality (confession, anointing of the sick, eucharist) do not appear in these three initiatives in any way. They are not denigrated but excluded from these meetings. Can this exclusion lead to Catholics downplaying or even abandoning their own sacramental and devotional tradition? The risk does exist.

Conversely, in the initiatives of some missionary parishes that have certainly been influenced by the practices of evangelical churches, Catholic resources have been integrated, including for evangelization. The watchword of the missionary parish of Sainte Blandine in Lyon is change, innovation (decor, events, targeted proposals, animation, extracultural activities). "To a large extent, the innovations imitate practices established

4. Aubourg, *Réveil catholique*, 103.

in churches of a different confession (Anglican, Pentecostal, Evangelical) and outside the French context (England, United States, Australia).⁵ Thus, the study of parish renewal shows that the influence of international evangelical Protestantism extends far beyond the charismatic and Pentecostal sphere. But do these experiments involve Receptive Ecumenism? Indeed, successful practices are in circulation – those which attract, transform, and secure the loyalty of actors and participants, but “a trend toward reconfessionalization is also at work, a refocusing of identity is taking place... The ‘evangelicalization’ of practices and systems brought to light in this way does not call into question the institution but is part of it.”⁶

Valérie Aubourg analyzes the subtle relationships that play out in these initiatives between personal affirmation, respect for institutions, emancipation from established frameworks, and fascination with the model of the Protestant churches. From a reading of the book, it becomes apparent that Receptive Ecumenism is effective where those involved choose to communicate not only among themselves but also with the members and leaders of their church and with civil authorities. Addressing everyone without exclusion but without claiming to speak on behalf of everyone manifests an attitude of hospitality that respects other proposals. Lyon’s social Catholicism,⁷ which dominated in the 20th century, is still difficult to reconcile with the proposals of charismatics, which are either more demonstrative or more geared toward spiritual distress. It is naturally more comfortable with Lutheran-Reformed communities.

Also appearing in these debates is the issue of generations (younger generations are more porous to evangelical methods), social environments (privileged milieus seem to be more attached to affirming and living their faith), ethnic origins (Catholics with African or Caribbean roots are less self-conscious in expressing their religious convictions and are more easily attracted by the spontaneity of Pentecostal churches), and

5. Aubourg, *Réveil catholique*, 214.

6. Aubourg, *Réveil catholique*, 317.

7. With figures such as Antoine Chevrier, founder of Prado in 1859, and philosopher Joseph Vialatoux, disciple of Blondel and Bergson; and periodicals such as *Chronique sociale*, *Semaines Sociales de France*, and *Antenne sociale*. See Jean-Dominique Durand, ed., *Cent ans de catholicisme social à Lyon et en Rhône-Alpes* (Paris: Éditions Ouvrières, 1992).

family background (Muslim, militant atheist, indifference to the question of religion). It should also be noted that in the countryside, the awakening is taking place more slowly.

It appears that this exchange between churches does not involve a “provision of services.” Rather, it contributes to a process which experiences progress and setbacks, as well as times of stagnation, depending on the contexts and the people involved, and which makes a real contribution to ecumenism understood as a gift and mission. Unity can also be found within one and the same church whose members do not share the same understanding of mission. Instead of bringing them together, mission sometimes divides the faithful and groups – at least initially, when a novelty that strongly shakes up habits is being integrated. This is particularly what the Mission Congress experienced.

Living mission in Christian unity

On the initiative of Raphaël Cornu-Thenard, founder of Anuncio, in partnership with new communities such as the Community of Emmanuel and Ain Karem, the Mission Congress has gathered some 5000 Catholic participants involved in direct evangelization every year since 2015.⁸ Five years later, it can be observed that both the participants and the speakers hail from different currents within the church. The Congress published a manifesto in 2018, which can be broken down into ten theses:

1. We have the tremendous desire that all people of France may encounter Jesus Christ
2. We want the proclamation of the gospel to become the church’s number one priority
3. We call for courage in the explicit proclamation of Christ
4. We proclaim the gospel to all our fellow citizens without discriminating against anyone
5. We believe that prayer will be the basis for our mission
6. *We stand in solidarity with all Christians who proclaim Jesus Christ, outside the Catholic Church*

8. Congrès Mission website, <https://app.congresmission.com>.

7. We wish to cultivate and appreciate the treasure of faith more and more, in order to proclaim it clearly
8. We proclaim the Saviour, not an ideology
9. Mission is a matter for all the baptized
10. We must adopt the joy of the gospel in order to lead others to Jesus.

An evangelical Protestant could sign this manifesto without any hesitation! Thesis number six is elaborated on in the following terms: “To be united in order to proclaim him. We Catholics recognize their [all Christians’] faithfulness to Scripture and their devotion to the Saviour. We admire their missionary zeal and desire to lead souls to Jesus. We want the divisions that tear apart the body of Christ to end. We know that the world needs our unity in order to recognize Him (John 17:21), and we believe that mission carried out with one accord is the path to this unity.”⁹

The second sentence of this paragraph is perhaps more addressed to evangelical Protestants and Pentecostals. The paragraph is based on the most essential things that unite all Christians (scripture, the Saviour, the necessity of unity for mission). Learning from each other assumes recognition, admiration, commitment, conviction – four elements that characterize Receptive Ecumenism.

During the Mission Congress of 2020 on “Healing, Building and Proclaiming,” I took part in a round table which proposed a debate on “Living Mission in Christian Unity,” based on the following questions:

Am I proclaiming Jesus, my church or the church of Christ? Is the goal of evangelization the integration of the evangelized person into my community? Are our differences, or even our theological and liturgical disputes of such a nature as to prevent the joint work of proclaiming salvation? Catholics, Protestants: what can we learn from each other for evangelization? Can we imagine living mission together? Under what conditions?

9. Congrès Mission, “Manifeste pour la mission,” <http://www.manifestemission.fr>.

The arguments include a call for the transformation of practices based on awareness (the subject of proclamation, its objective, the relationship to disputes) and an invitation to “learn from each other.” Imagination and discernment can help here. The speakers – Julie Le Rouge and Thomas Belleil (Catholics), as well as Raphaël Anzenberger (evangelical Protestant) – emphasized the importance for the participants to reflect together on their common and complementary practices.

Julie Le Rouge emphasized that “evangelical zeal makes Catholics a little jealous,” which made me think of Paul’s line of argument in the Epistle to the Romans regarding the branches of the wild olive tree grafted onto the pure olive tree. The temporary exclusion of some (the first-called) and the inclusion of newcomers will arouse the jealousy of the former, and then their awakening because God wishes to show mercy to all (Rom. 9–11).

Thomas Belleil notes that a strength of the evangelicals lies in the attention given to supporting converts by empowering them in the host community. Every baptized person is called to become a disciple and missionary. Support is necessary. The internet portal *disciples.fr*, which is ecumenical in spirit, is dedicated to the training of disciples; its ecosystem allows it to increase the number of missionary disciples.

Street evangelization is not the only way to live mission. Thus, he asks, how is it possible to go further, train missionary disciples within their context, transform global structures, and evangelize together despite our theological differences?

For Raphaël Anzenberger, we are already doing this! This pastor teaches in the master’s programme in church planting at the Free Faculty of Evangelical Theology in Vaux-sur-Seine, which also accepts students from other confessions.¹⁰ He explains that the role of the “missionary church” is to denounce idols, sometimes proposing a useful counter-culture, but also to contextualize, train, and practise unity at the local level.

According to Anzenberger, we started from an ecumenism of charity (John 17), which was then joined by a charismatic ecumenism (Alpha, Word of God, gatherings, festivals, evenings of prayer, praise, and healing, the “Walk for Jesus”), but at the risk of sidelining non-charismatic

10. Mastère en Théologie, M2 Missiologie et implantation d’Églises, FLTE, <https://flte.fr/sur-place/mastere/m2-missiologie-et-implantation-deglises>.

currents. According to Sébastien Fath, he continues, we currently have a kerygmic ecumenism in which we take care to proclaim together and help each other in order to evangelize better, if we believe that God precedes us in our mission and that the kingdom of God is present and in embryonic form. The issue of the content of the faith demonstrates that we share a common kerygma, that specific elements in our personal testimony must be preserved, and that respective wounds and misunderstandings remain (Mary, the blessed sacrament, the magisterium). So, to what extent can we evangelize together? Which criteria should we adopt for discernment? How can prudence and love, communion, and respect for logics and convictions be reconciled?

“What does the Catholic Church bring to evangelical Protestants?” a participant asks him. Anzenberger notes that the megachurches are no longer successful. The sociological turnstile turns quickly! In his view, the Catholic Church, anchored in history, helps to overcome sociological packaging and passing fads. Fifty percent of the visitors to Westminster Cathedral in London experienced transcendence during their visit and wish to return for it.

The round table showed interest in holding discussions that transcend mutual mistrust, in accordance with paragraph 6 of the Mission Congress’ charter. Undergoing the same training while respecting the identity of the participants is undoubtedly a delicate but winning formula. We might add the experience of interconfessional communities such as those at Taizé, Bose, or the Chemin Neuf community, which was at the origin of Alpha France. Founded in Lyon in 1973, the Chemin Neuf community has inscribed the ecumenical dimension on its genes and vocation. Because of this, it can make an important contribution. Indeed, most of the members of this charismatic community are Catholics, but Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox contributions are lived at all levels: in prayer, *diakonia*, governance, the implementation of specific programs, communication, and friendly interaction, and of course mission.

Conclusion

Prayer groups, parishes, and dioceses in Lyon – as in other regions of France – are working toward a missionary renewal that is explicitly inspired by experiments conducted in the English-speaking world, which

is more marked by evangelical currents.¹¹ These value mission as direct proclamation, integral conversion, and the growth of communities. These initiatives are promising.

The neutral perspective of a scholar (Part 1) and the perspective of one involved in missionary activism (Part 2) have come together to show the benefits that members of various churches receive through knowing and welcoming each other. In particular, the Receptive Ecumenism between Catholics and evangelical Protestants helps them to understand mission theologically as a gift from God and to live it in practice. This is why unity among Christians is fundamental, as are respect for charismata and particularities, exchange and discernment in practices, and the stimulation of missionary zeal. This is one of the best defences against proselytizing in mission.

It is interesting that a critical internal perspective is an integral part of the process of the “Catholic awakening” for the groups, communities, parishes, and dioceses concerned, since they are aware of having been inspired by a tradition other than their own. Questioning what one keeps, loses, strengthens, and transforms in one’s own tradition allows for a shared redefinition of its purpose, vocation, and mission. Treating leaders as stars or relying on the model of megachurches, which emphasize measures for growth that are all too human, or the lack of theological and spiritual depth of certain “coaches,” are things which, apart from being annoying, should prompt people to sit down together to evaluate what needs to be fostered so that Receptive Ecumenism may bear fruit over the long term.

11. Marie-Hélène Robert, ed., *L'accueil des nouveaux convertis dans les communautés chrétiennes, Actes de colloque, janvier 2017, Faculté catholique de Lyon* (Québec: Éditions Saint-Joseph, 2018).



CHAPTER 7

Conversations on Mission – Learning from the Other Through Receptive Ecumenism

Metropolitan Serafim Kykotis

Ecumenical Movement and Orthodox Churches

After the sufferings of many people in many parts of the world during the Second World War, the international community established the United Nations in 1945 to protect all of humanity by working for peace and security. At the same time, people in many nations began to learn from each other in friendly ways when dealing with their own problems as a way of co-operating and working together to protect humanity. In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was established, following a wish by many Christians to make visible the unity of the church.

The role played by ecumenical mission ministry was very important and unique in bringing about the birth of the WCC. The ecumenical movement really began with the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh in 1910. This led to the establishment in 1921 of the International Missionary Council, which fostered cooperation in mission activity and among many prominent theologians and clergy around the world. Other landmarks in the development of the movement were the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work (Stockholm, 1925), inspired by Nathan Söderblom of Sweden; the World Conference on Faith and Order (Lausanne, 1927); and the first WCC assembly (Amsterdam, 1948). The WCC, bringing together Protestants, Orthodox Eastern and Oriental, and Old Catholic bodies, is now the chief instrument of ecumenicity; in 1961, it united with the International Missionary Council.

However, if visible unity was a priority of the WCC's ministry, it also led to Christians from different traditions beginning to learn from each other. Members of local Orthodox churches also began to meet for the first time at the meetings on World Mission, on Faith and Order, and

later at the WCC, teaching each other in so many ways about church life. The outcome of these encounters between Orthodox traditions at ecumenical meetings was the beginning of Pan-Orthodox meetings, starting in Rhodes in 1961, and later the establishment of the Inter-Orthodox Commission, working on important themes of the church. Theological dialogue began between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church as well as with the Oriental Orthodox churches, the Anglican Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Old Catholic Church.

Theological Importance of the Terms “Holy Spirit” and “Transformation” in Ecumenical Mission and Receptive Ecumenism Texts

The preface of the study paper produced by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) Working Group on Transforming Discipleship underlines that

We are particularly mindful of the claim . . . that the “Holy Spirit continues to move at this time, and urgently calls us as Christian communities to respond with personal and communal conversion, and a transforming discipleship”. Discipleship has become a key issue across all levels of the Church, in our ecumenical work, our denominational work and our witness in communities. Discipleship is key to effecting transformation in God’s body, the Earth and in Christ’s body, the Church.¹

The WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha took place in 2018, but work on its theme started following the 10th Assembly of the WCC, held in Busan in 2013. Its Final Statement notes that the “Holy Spirit continues . . . transforming discipleship.” As the above-mentioned study paper by the CWME Working Group clearly states, “Discipleship is key to effecting transformation in God’s body, the

1. Commission on World Mission and Evangelism Working Group on Transforming Discipleship, “Study paper: ‘Converting Discipleship: Dissidence and Metanoia,’” (2020), <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/study-paper-converting-discipleship-dissidence-and-metanoia>.

Earth and in Christ's body, the Church.”

In 2017, the Centre for Ecumenical Studies, as part of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, together with the Australian Catholic University's Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry and the Research Centre for Public and Contextual Theology, organized the fourth international conference on Receptive Ecumenism, titled “Learning into the Spirit: Discernment, Decision-making and Reception,” in November 2017 in Canberra. More specifically, Professor Paul Murray spoke about “Receptive Ecumenism as a Learning-in to the Spirit of Loving Transformation.”² We can see how important these two theological terms – “Holy Spirit” and “transformation” – are in the choice of theme for the upcoming fifth international conference on Receptive Ecumenism in June 2022, in Sigtuna, Sweden: “At this conference, we hope to take this process a step further as we will reflect on the transformative impact of Receptive Ecumenism as an instrument for ecclesial transformation. To which extent are the churches willing to “listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev. 2:7)?”³

Receptive Ecumenism is an important ministry of the church, giving new hope for visible unity, sharing spiritual gifts between all members of the church the way the first Christians did. It is time to consider how to spread more information about this and, most importantly, how churches and Christians can become more involved in and contribute to this ministry. Thus, by the grace of God and through our commitment as churches and Christians to the visible unity of the church, we may, as disciples of Christ and servants of God's love, at the same time improve our ministry to contribute to the salvation of all people. In the past, I have had the blessing to be a member of the Theological Commission of the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics and am now a member of the International Theological Dialogue of the Orthodox and the Anglicans – and I am learning so many things about Christian traditions and about church life of our sisters and brothers we meet. However, the most amazing thing for me when I attend a church service of any of these traditions is realiz-

2. Paul D. Murray, “Foreword,” in *Receptive Ecumenism: Listening, Learning and Loving in the Way of Christ*, ed. Vicky Balabanski and Geraldine Hawkes (Australia: ATF Press, 2018), xv–xxiv.

3. From the conference website: <https://ehs.se/receptive-ecumenism-conference/>.

ing our common foundation in liturgical texts and hymns we all use, as 99 percent of these texts come from the Bible. The Holy Bible itself is a unique foundation for the visible unity of all Christians, and I do hope and I also pray for the protection of the visible unity of the church.

Receptive Ecumenism – Mission – WCC – Visible Unity of the Church

This holy ministry of Receptive Ecumenism is another gift of the Holy Spirit, working for visible unity of the church, but also so that we can learn from each other. At the same time, this ministry is not only an important initiative of the present ecumenical movement, but also a hope for the future ministry of all of us to preserve the unity of the church by working and sharing together. At the same time we realize that this ministry is also coming from the past, from the original life of the first Christian community (Acts 2:44-47). This is very important not only for academics but for all church members if we are to improve our ministry while being visible witnesses to the world of Christian commitment to a better society, as good disciples of Christ.

In its conferences on World Mission and Evangelism, the WCC already sees the full participation of delegates from the Roman Catholic Church and from evangelical and Pentecostal churches or mission movements. Receptive Ecumenism is, in many ways, at the centre of WCC mission activities. However, it is a pastoral responsibility of the local church and the delegates who participate in the WCC activities to make it present also in the lives of local parish members. We have to understand that the important gifts of sharing and learning from other Christian traditions are not only for the participants of the ecumenical mission meetings but should be a part of the spiritual life of all members of the churches we represent. We must consider what should be the continuation after any ecumenical meeting and what structures exist for implementing its proposals to improve our ministry and our daily lives as witnesses of Christ, working for peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Let us remember that

Receptive Ecumenism is a new concept gaining respect and popularity, Receptive Ecumenism is essentially very simple. Instead of asking what other traditions need to

learn from us, we ask what our tradition needs to learn from them, what we can receive which is of God. The assumption is that if all were asking this question seriously and acting upon it, then all would be moving in ways which would both deepen our authentic respective identities and draw us into more intimate relationships.⁴

This is one of the important dimensions of the ecumenical movement, and it is valid for the present and the future. If we study the history of Christianity carefully, we may notice the movement's origins in the life of the first Christian community from the first century.

Receptive Ecumenism – Mission Past and Present

A study paper produced by the CWME Working Group on Transforming Discipleship could be helpful to us all when we try to work together to bear better witness as we carry out our ministry in our communities.

Mission, past and present, shows we have been creatures of love but also perpetrators of hate. Violence and hatred of people has been 'baptized' against those who don't conform to 'our' norms, or those whose lands and lives become expedient for the growth and profit of colonial powers or indeed of the church itself. This has been done to the peoples of the earth, and also to the earth herself. This critique can be applied to churches and Christian agencies engaged in mission, but also it can be said for congregations in their local communities. This is a spirit and praxis in discipleship which needs to be exorcised and converted.

This is to critique Western colonial missionaries who used imperial expansion as a means to Christian expansion and in proclaiming Christ, rather asserted the 'salvific', 'civilizing' power of Whiteness and a White Christ.

4. Churches Together in England website, "Receptive Ecumenism," https://www.cte.org.uk/Groups/91312/Home/Resources/Theology/Receptive_Ecumenism/What_is_Receptive/What_is_Receptive.aspx.

Mission is now understood to be from everywhere to everywhere. Missionaries are sent from all nations, especially the 'global South'... .

The history and testimony of those churches who grew up in this era, remind us that the seeds of the Gospel planted by Western missionaries grew as a result of the nurturing work of indigenous hands, these were often the true agents of mission in the colonial era. In the face of colonial power, disciples of all nations, came forward who recognized in Jesus the one who could lead them, their people, their land, indeed the whole inhabited earth to liberation and peace. This reminds us that the Gospel has a power and a horizon which is greater than the limitations imposed by those who proclaim it. It has the power, like Jesus, to confound power.⁵

Receptive Ecumenism – Mission – Unity of the Church

The Bible and the ministry of mission are always two ways of preserving the visible unity of the Church. The Meeting of the Apostolic Synod in the first century peacefully solved some problems that threatened the visible unity of the Church by stating that it was not necessary to respect the Jewish tradition as regards food or circumcision. But, while the resolutions of the Synod were important to preserve the unity of the Church, it was equally important that they worked out forms for implementation and respect of these resolutions. They prepared letters, and they asked top members among the apostles to go on special missions to reach the members of local churches in other cities and countries, spending time with them, analyzing together with them the important resolutions so as to protect the visible unity of the church in its work for people's salvation.

Even when some of the apostles themselves were not sure how to react to the problems dealt with by the apostolic synod, the Holy Spirit interfered in a miraculous way and led them in the right direction, as in

5. Commission on World Mission and Evangelism Working Group on Transforming Discipleship, "Study paper: 'Converting Discipleship.'"

the story of St Peter, who went to teach and baptize the Roman officer Cornelius and his family (Acts 10).

Another aspect of Receptive Ecumenism is that we are given an opportunity to learn more about a Christian community of a local church and its spiritual life in mission ministry. Let us remember the dialogue of Philip and Nathanael: “Come and see” (John 1:46).

The history of Christianity, and the history of every local church, is very important when we formulate new ways of cooperation for visible unity of the whole church. This is so when we work together as Christians in mission activities in our own communities – and when we reach out to people who have not yet heard the word of the gospel or to any part of the world where people are suffering, serving them together.

Receptive Ecumenism must respect the history of Christianity and consider what preserved the unity of the undivided church during the first centuries to be able to preserve through our ministry the visible unity of the church today and in the future.

Mission from the first century of the history of Christianity up till today is a ministry in two dimensions. One is internal: pastoral ministry for the members of a local church at parish level; the other is external: when members of a well-organized local church even risk their lives to – on behalf of their local church – teach the gospel to people who never heard about Christ. The success of the mission of these new apostles, in new places and countries, depends on both spiritual and material support from their local church members. If we study St Paul’s pastoral letters carefully, we may learn many lessons for our mission ministry today while also making good use of the fruits of the ministry of Receptive Ecumenism.

Above all, we should live as Christians; though we may belong to different local churches and traditions, we should live like the first Christian community: “All who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). Even the sufferings of the coronavirus pandemic show us that the first Christian community’s way of life is the way that can protect the survival of all of humanity, and the ministry of love and philanthropy will, by the grace of God, lead us all to the hope of eternal salvation. This way of life is our criterion in our following of Christ, and we are his disciples and his humble servants.

Let us keep on praying that “The love of Christ moves all of us to *metanoia*, reconciliation and unity.”



CHAPTER 8

How It Feels to Be an Orthodox in Ecumenical Mission – Eastern Orthodox Christian in the World Council of Churches’ Commission on World Mission and Evangelism

Aikaterini Voulgari

Eastern Orthodoxy is the large body of Christians who follow the faith and practices that were defined by the first seven ecumenical councils. The word “orthodox” (“right believing”) has traditionally been used in the Greek-speaking Christian world to designate communities or individuals who preserved the true faith (as defined by those councils), as opposed to those who were declared heretical. The official designation of the church in Eastern Orthodox liturgical or canonical texts is “the Orthodox Catholic Church.”

In the Orthodox faith, in addition to the theology, the term “tradition” plays a major role. This term comes from the Latin *traditio*; the Greek word is *paradosis*, and the verb is *paradido*. It means giving, offering, delivering, performing charity. In theological terms, it means any teaching or practice which has been transmitted from generation to generation throughout the life of the church. The main thing about Orthodox religion is the offering, or *prosfora* for the Greeks – when you help someone in need. As Jesus Christ said, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise” (Luke 3:11). After that comes the word “mission.” Mission gives a good reason to consider closely our position as theologians in the world; it is a deeper understanding of one’s own and other’s theological traditions. This is

one of the most serious proposals in each gathering of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission on World Mission and Evangelism to understand each other.

Nowadays, orthodoxy needs this theme of mission more than ever. In our daily life, we sometimes forget what the priorities are. The fundamental reality in the church and of the church also requires a real unity among all its members. All the members of the church live in the bond of love and unity through the Holy Trinity. It is a continuous transformation of life. Christians are the roots: it is important to emphasize both the temporality and as well the timelessness.

In other words, mission is a gift, a living experience, which is relived and renewed through time. It is the true faith, unveiled to the true people of God.

The Living Tradition of the Eucharist

It is interesting to emphasize another form of the synodical system, which accentuates the importance of Tradition: the eucharist itself. In the eucharist, all Orthodox Christians meet together and in absolute agreement, in doctrine and practice witnessing the presence of the Holy Trinity on the altar of the church. The bishop and the priest pray to God the Father to send the Holy Spirit and transform the bread and wine into the very body and blood of Christ. All the faithful present are called to receive communion and become active members of the Body of Christ. In the liturgy, as it was instituted by the Lord himself, the whole church meets every day to proclaim and live the oneness and the unity of faith in Jesus Christ. In the Orthodox liturgy, we see all the history of Tradition embodied in the body and blood of Christ. St Gregory Palamas writes in connection with the holy eucharist, “We hold fast to all the Traditions of the Church, written and unwritten, and above all to the most mystical and sacred celebration and communion and assembly (synaxis), whereby all other rites are made perfect” (*Letter to Dionysius*, 7).

This emphasis on the eucharist shows that Tradition is a dynamic way of life unfolding continuously in the liturgical framework of the church. By participating in the eucharist, we proclaim our Tradition as living and active members of the church. The Orthodox Church shares the concern and anxiety of contemporary humanity with regard to fundamental existential question that preoccupy the world today. The mission of the Orthodox Church is to be a witness of love through service. We are all

children of God. We put down our differences and participate in the lecture of mission. One example is the prayer we have as a team of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. Every morning before our meeting starts, we pray, in the chapel, if possible. This gives us time for reflection on the conversations of pilgrimage.

The Tradition of the church is a living reality, which the Orthodox Christian must live daily in a mystical way. Orthodox Tradition, therefore, is not a dead letter, a collection of dogmas and practices of the past. It is the history of salvation. It is the life of the Holy Spirit, who constantly illuminates us in order for all Orthodox Christians to become sons and daughters of God, living in the divine light of the all-blessed Trinity. It is the mysterious connection with the ecumenical message. A message from all the Christians all over the world.

Our future is young people; our obligation is to teach them right in order to continue our Orthodox context to their offspring. It is not about lessons in textbooks but lessons of life. By studying the Holy Bible, you discover lessons not only about theology but about history and philosophy, too.

We need a good education about Christianity. It is wonderful when people from different backgrounds from mine want me to explain to them my context and especially our customs. It is my honour as a theologian to answer them. In the future, church relation will play an important role in European identity. We see this already in schools, where children from different backgrounds participate in community. Orthodox confession plays a major role in the modern age, amid the new trends and challenges we face as citizens – not only in Greece but in Europe as well. We see Greek families living in Europe who keep up the traditions throughout the year. Furthermore, young communities are learning about customs back home, customs which are relevant with orthodoxy. Cultural customs and Orthodox context are really close. The circle of life makes Tradition relevant to our faith, too. The church is the life of the Christian person from birth until death. What we need for contemporary Greek theology is to face a new, dynamic, and particularly challenging global context.

In my opinion as a member in the ecumenical movement and specifically in the ecumenical Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, I can say that Eastern Orthodoxy and the ecumenical movement

can walk together. We put down our differences and participate in the path of mission. Receptive Ecumenism can emerge in different ways: a context, a thematic orientation, and so many others, as each Christian feels. We should mention that Receptive Ecumenism inspires pedagogical and philosophical creativity. Especially for Orthodox people, this is very good, as our context has a lot of spirituality and vice versa. Thus, in our gatherings as an ecumenical group, experiences and thoughts come up. I can say that all these are challenging in every meeting, since we are people from different dogmas and with different knowledge. Although this is the beauty of ecumenical friendship: we manage in that way to build the trust for our future walking together toward life.



Mission and Evangelism – An Orthodox Christian View¹

Misha Jaksic

In the year 988, the Kingdom of Rus was christened by a collective act of baptism in the river of Dnepr outside of Kyiv, as an embryo to the largest Orthodox Church to be. If we are to believe the Nestor the Chronicler and his *Primal Chronicle* (around 1113 CE), the baptism of Rus was not a primal outcome of a foreign mission. It was more of an active selection by the kingdom itself and its ruler, Vladimir the Great, opting for a spiritual tradition to be in more conformity with the domestic Slavic pagan traditions of his people. Having heard biased arguments from several missionaries, Vladimir, the *Chronicle* tells us, sent his own emissaries to places from where these missionaries emanated to build his decision by comparing each tradition's worship.

The liturgical event in the Church of the Holy Wisdom in Constantinople mesmerized the emissaries: “We did not know where we were, on heaven or on earth,” they enthusiastically rendered to Vladimir on their return to Kyiv, “and we do not know how to tell about this. All we know is that God lives there with this people, and their liturgical service surpasses those of any other people. We cannot forget that beauty, since each person, if he eats something sweet, will not take something bitter afterwards; so we cannot remain any more in paganism.” On this liturgical witness, Vladimir became the initiator of the baptism of Rus, thus in

1. This brief outline on mission and evangelism from an Orthodox Christian perspective has been inspired by the missiological document *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013) and, in particular, the ecumenical work on mission and evangelism it initiated in the Christian Council of Sweden. The document, to which I refer by the abbreviation TTL and the paragraph number, has both stimulated and challenged my Orthodox theological perception on a couple of issues addressed in the article.

the Orthodox hagiography acquiring the saintly designation of an *isapostolos*, “Equal to Apostles,” sharing this saintly order, among others, with St Mary Magdalene, St Photini (the Samaritan woman in John 4), and St Nina, the Enlightener of the kingdom of Georgia.

This rather unique missionary example above, primarily based on worship and a liturgical experience, might be something of a startling starting point from a Western missiological perspective. For our Western sisters and brothers, we Orthodox tend to involve the liturgy in every theological issue, including that of the mission and evangelism of the church. Even though there is much more to the Orthodox liturgy than being a pure assembly of worship, as we shall see, for the Orthodox, the Divine Liturgy is the real epicentre, both of the church and of the creation, while the human person is something of an evolutionary worshipper, the priest of creation.

The Holy Coincidence

During a perennial ecumenical ecclesiological work by the Christian Council of Sweden, including ecclesiological self-descriptions by seven different church traditions, the Orthodox already initially declared that they, as it were, lack an ecclesiology, a doctrine on the church, which they mainly see as a kind of comparative product of the split among Christians. Likewise, the Orthodox hesitate to define an Orthodox missiological doctrine. For the Orthodox, the church is more of an event, than she is a doctrine: an event of an eschatological kind; an encounter between heaven and earth; between eternity and time/space; between God and the human person; between the Creator and His creation, as expressed in *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL #17).

The Orthodox perspective is embossed by a holistic and pneumatological approach, with the merging and uniting hypostatic character of the Holy Spirit (TTL #12–18). When *Together towards Life*, on the other hand, asserts that “the church in history has not always existed but, both theologically and empirically, came into being for the sake of mission” (TTL #57), and that “it is not the church that has a mission, but rather the mission that has a church” (TTL #58), Orthodox theology would – rather than dichotomizing – emphasize the full coincidence between the church and its mission and evangelism. The consequences of this coincidence are usually expressed by the notion of *martyria*, witness (TTL

#80): *martyria* as the saltiness of the prophets, the human fishing of the apostles, the self-sacrifice of the martyrs, written by the blood, sweat, and tears of those emulators of Christ, “of whom the world was not worthy” (Heb. 11:38a; cf. TTL #92).

Neither the notion of mission nor that of evangelism is particularly established or employed in the Orthodox Church. A more adopted Orthodox perception, or ethos, could be exemplified by the minor but important prebaptismal ritual of “becoming an Ecclesial being,” with “the 40-day churching” connected to Jesus’ presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38) as a biblical basis. There is a strong emphasis on the organic growing together of the human person and the whole creation with the church, the body of Christ, and thus with Jesus Christ, the head of this sacred body. A patristic insight and definition of the ultimate meaning and goal of God’s creation is that of “becoming church” – the church being “created first of all things,” and “for the sake of whom [which] the world came into being” (*The Shepherd of Hermas* 8:1).

“Becoming church,” from an Orthodox Christian perspective, is a liturgical and eschatological event through the coincidence, also, by the heavenly church of the eternal kingdom and the earthly church of time and space. The Divine Liturgy – like that experienced by Vladimir’s emissaries – and the circle of worship, throughout a day, a week, a year, are not purely empty rituals. Like the biblical episode of the transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9), they connect heaven and earth, the eternal and the perishable, the very act of creation with its eschatological fulfilment. This act of liturgical and eschatological reshaping and recuperating of time and space resembles the experience of the apostolic trinity on the Mount of Tabor. Peter, James, and John perceived simultaneously the goal and the start of their apostolicity, their mission and *martyria* in a liturgical, eschatological, and transformational gathering around the church, represented by Christ himself, and two great prophetic forerunners of his, Moses and Elijah, with their own experiences of transfiguration (Ex. 3; 2 Kings 2).

The Triune Call

“Then God said: ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...’” (Gen. 1:26).

This perfection of God's act of creation, with his own image as the epitomizing link, is a kind of original act of "churching." From both a Jewish and an Orthodox Christian perspective, the human person is not purely a dominator or a steward of the creation, but, first and foremost, its microcosm. The image of God is the image of the creation as well, summarizing, recapitulating the whole creation as a link between the Creator and his creation. The origin of the human person is unique, being an outcome of a divine counsel of the Holy Trinity – the personal and relational God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – to be, itself, personal and relational toward the Creator and created matter.

When Orthodox Christian theology summarizes the role, the mission, of the human person in the creation, three main calls emerge. The human person is viewed as the king/queen, as the priest and as the prophet of creation, emanating from the coincidence of the triune holy mystery of baptism, chrismation and eucharist. The human person is created as the creation's potential perfection, as the king/queen of creation. Being so uniquely created, she or he is, nevertheless, not honoured with a day (or eon) of creation of her or his own but is created within the one and the same day (eon) as, and in harmony with, wild animals, cattle, and reptiles of every kind (Gen. 1:25). She or he is inducted in a liturgical and evolutionary course, where she or he is the very evolutionary worshipper and priest of creation. The human person is called into a development, evolution, from being the image of the triune God, to becoming a likeness of the Original Image, which Orthodox theology names *theosis* or divinization. On her or his mission to this goal of perfection, as the prophet of creation, the human person is bringing along the whole creation to its refinement.

For the Orthodox, death is not primarily perceived as a *punishment* for human violation of divine rules, but rather a *consequence* of the same. It is not the *sin* of our original parents that we, children of humanity in Adam and Eve, are inheriting, but *mortality* (Rom. 5:12). According to Athanasios of Alexandria, the human person, turning away from its origin of being in God, who is the Existing One, turns to nothingness, from which God called her or him into being – as he is (Ex. 3:14), a theology that is deeply rooted in the Orthodox liturgical tradition and life. Hence, neither is the incarnation – the eternal, immortal God's becoming human and mortal – an answer of necessity to the fall of the human person

into non-being. Rather, it is God's primordial providence of a voluntary iconic design, needed by the human person, to her or his migrating act from the initial state of image to the perfection of likeness – this completely regardless of the tragic event of the Fall.

The Trinitarian Approach

Orthodox Christian theology might appear to be prevalently liturgical and eschatological, but also personal, relational, and synergetic. The cult, liturgy, and worship of the church both enclose and disclose this holistic approach in a materialistic, incarnational way, by an engagement of all our human senses – obviously crucial for the mission to and the baptism of the giant pagan kingdom of Rus (see above). This holistic and coincidental character of theology has its foundation in a personal and relational approach to the trinitarian mystery of the Godhead, starting, not in the unity of the trinitarian essence, but in Its personal relations and hypostatic characteristics.

Hence, an Orthodox astonishment over the introducing creed of *Together towards Life* (TTL #1), from which the person of the Father is abolished, and the Holy Trinity, thus, both “orphaned” and depersonalized. This appears to be a general approach throughout the document, except for direct and inevitable biblical witnesses about the existence of the Father, merely in relation to the Son and the Holy Spirit (TTL #14, 16). Interesting might be the Orthodox “other-way-roundness,” by which the Father is the *Arche* (ἀρχή), the eternal source of the eternal birth of the Son and the eternal outgoing of the Holy Spirit.

Nor can the Orthodox Church, from her personal, trinitarian point of view, exchange the persons of the Holy Trinity with the divine characteristics of “the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all life” (TTL #1). These characteristics primarily relate to God's *economia*, God's acting in relation to his creation, while his irreplaceable names express the mysterious, ontological, personal relations of the essence of the Godhead. We might, for example, state that there was a time, or rather a divine existence, before God became the Creator, redeemer or sustainer of all life (even though this always has been a part of God's divine providence). We could not, in a similar way, state that there was a time when God was not the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, without violating the very foundations of the Christian faith. Further, a divine characteristic is not

an exclusive property of one divine person. In addition, the Son and the Holy Spirit are creating; the Father and the Holy Spirit are saving and redeeming; the Father and the Son are giving and sustaining all life.

In summary and accordingly – half-jokingly, but in all seriousness – an Orthodox aphoristic contribution to this issue might be: The church should not be afraid of having a Father, while she also has a Mother (see below).

The Human Person as God's Co-creator

An important contribution to the Christian understanding and practice of mission and evangelism is the highlighting of the human person being not purely the problem and conflicting factor of the creation – which she or he, undoubtedly, also is. In *Together towards Life*, the human person, the image of God, is predominantly portrayed as the conflicting factor of the creation. Orthodox theology, or anthropology, might help us portray the image of God more in accordance with its God-likeness, thus also being God's key to the solution and mediation of the conflicting matters in the creation, in a *theandric*, God-human, process; in Judaism, this is depicted as *tikkun olam*, “the reparation of the world,” and as “the construction of eternity.” The human person is that very solution as the image of God, with the God-man (*Theanthropos*) Jesus Christ, “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45b), as the original and final image and model (Rev. 1:8; 22:13).

This mission is not exhausted by a stewardship of the creation, on an altruistic and moralistic level, but rests essentially and inevitably in the microcosmic call of the human person in the God-given role of hers or his as God's co-creator. The human person, as the image of God *per se* recapitulates the creation, an honorary assignment, that can be pursued and fulfilled only through humility (John 3:30), emphasized by the coinciding notions of *humanity* and *humility* (TTL #22), referring to both earth and cultivation (Luke 8:15). Here the well-known words of the Russian saint Seraphim of Sarov are applicable, indeed: “Acquire a peaceful spirit, and thousands around you will be saved.” As are those of Mahatma Gandhi: “We but mirror the world.” The future of the well-being of the creation stands and falls with the human person, primarily by what she or he is, not only by what she or he does.

Very central, indeed, is also the accentuation of the key role of the

human person in the incarnation, by the *Theotokos* Mary, the Mother of God, not in an instrumental and objective way, but with the human person pre-eminently involved as a subject. Through the Holy Spirit, the human person becomes biologically involved in the mystery of the incarnation. One of us, a human person, gives birth to the Son of God, gives him the human nature, simultaneously, by grace, in exchange receiving the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Not by mere chance, the annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), the very beginning of the incarnation, in Greek is named *Evangelismos*, being the starting point of the deification of the human person and the sanctification of the creation.

There is a serious and inalienable prophetic voice of imperative in *Together towards Life*, addressing disproportions, which the Orthodox churches undeniably should recognize as the biggest of challenges of her missioning and transforming her “community of imperfect people” (TTL #54) from the state of image of God to the state of his likeness. Examples of these are ethnocentrism, polarization, and provincialism (TTL #9, 59, 69), as are clericalism, imperialism, and worldly power (TTL #33, 40, 48, 90). At the same time, the church is a community of saints (Rom. 1:7; 16:15; Heb. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:16), this key Christian and biblical notion, together with the indispensable Christian notions of holiness and sanctity, apparently being omitted in *Together towards Life*. In the Orthodox liturgy, we recurrently keep reminding and inviting each other that we “with all the saints, commit ourselves, and one another, and our whole life to Christ, our God.” The Divine Liturgy is eternity’s pulsation in time and space, while the church, as the community of saints, is its liturgical, diaconal, and transfigurational body – which in thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) and togetherness toward life summarizes the whole creation, ennobles it, and conveys it to God as a true manifestation of the God–human kinship.



CHAPTER 10

Meeting in the Spirit – Reflections on Pentecostal Mission and Ecumenism

Jan-Åke Alvarsson

Gustaf Flood was a Swedish Pentecostal missionary to Bolivia in the 1920s. He wrote home about the horror he felt when he encountered the expressions of the Catholic Church – which he called “the great whore” (Rev. 17:1). He even committed [Catholic] sacrilege by secretly placing a booklet version of the New Testament between the fingers of a Catholic figure waiting to be carried in a Catholic procession.

About the same time, he sent home a photograph of himself arm in arm with a Catholic priest wearing a black robe. “This picture requires an explanation...” he scribbled on the back. The explanation was that he had found a “brother in the Spirit.” Regardless of the many disagreements they had theologically, the Pentecostal missionary and the Catholic priest had found each other “in the Spirit.”

At that time, such spiritual “brotherhood” between Pentecostals and Catholics was extremely rare. Today, it is much more common. The birth of the charismatic movement among Catholics, partially encouraged by the Pentecostal minister David du Plessis, has opened up a common area for spiritual encounters – above all the exploration of the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12).

Pentecostalism started as an experience: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on what followers came to call “the Second Day of Pentecost” on 9 April 1906 in a humble house in Los Angeles, California. The profession of faith was not theological in the first place, but practical. The first Pentecostals were humble, poor people who had experienced oppression just because they were lower class, women, or African American. They published a statement in the quickly founded newspaper *Apostolic Faith* that “No instrument that God can use is rejected on account of color,

dress, or lack of education.” (Thus, as a manner of fact, they added “social position” to Paul’s words in Galatians 3:28.)

In their own minds, in an emic perspective, early Pentecostals “just read the Bible” and applied it pragmatically to their situation. In another, etic, perspective, they followed in the footsteps of other Christians and their traditions and picked up bits and pieces here and there as they proceeded forward. Pentecostal leaders came from a diversity of traditions. The British-Norwegian pastor Thomas Ball Barratt was a Methodist. Sweden’s most prominent leader, Lewi Pethrus, was originally a Baptist. German leader Jonathan Paul started out as a Lutheran minister. American star evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson had a Salvation Army background. And so on. These heterogeneous backgrounds opened up a variety of views, a multitude of influences, primarily connected by the Bible and the experience of the Holy Spirit that they shared. Thus, we could expect an ecumenical openness – and that was the case during the first decade – but because of the suspicion that the Pentecostals met from the other churches, they soon closed ranks.

Pentecostalism spread rapidly, and in many ways, but one important venue was the missionary field. Missionaries from different evangelical congregations met and enjoyed each other’s company. In their home countries they were locked in church battles, theological disputes, and competition over souls. In the missionary field they constituted a minority, facing the same kinds of practical and spiritual problems. Even if this amity was never, or rarely, revealed in official reports, we know from personal letters that many friendships were established among missionaries from different denominations. And Pentecostalism spread when the missionaries gathered for fervent prayer meetings for the unsaved souls of the nations they worked in. In Swedish missionary history, we find a number of cases when individuals working in one evangelical mission suddenly turned Pentecostal – sometimes in harmony, but most of the time in a clash with the original sending church.

As from the 1920s, the division between evangelical churches in Sweden became more palpable; prominent figures, like Axel Andersson of the Mission Covenant Church and Lewi Pethrus of the Pentecostal movement, clashed, and the damage to the ecumenical fellowship seemed irreparable. In the missionary field, however, the same Pentecostal movement made a treaty with the same Mission Covenant Church to

open up missionary work in the Congo in the latter's name. And when the Swedish Pentecostals were about to give up their missionary work in Southern Rhodesia, they handed over the mission to the Lutheran Church of Sweden Mission – the established state church that had persecuted Free Churches in Sweden only a couple of decades earlier!

This idea of disregarding theological discrepancies and concentrating on the basics of the Christian faith – meeting “in the Spirit” – was a way out of the spiritual hubris that characterized most churches, and, not least, the Pentecostal movement. Like the Pietists and others before them, they at times believed that they had found the “true faith” and that they were more “spiritual” than the mainline churches of the time. Thus, they could look down on the older churches and interpret disregard, suspicion, and occasional persecution as a sign of their opponents' spiritual inferiority. “Exclusivism” is an apt term, used by some researchers to denote this position.

In due time, the religious landscape changed, and the diffusion of the practising of gifts of the Spirit in most churches has led to new friendships between Pentecostals and pentecostalized members of evangelical or mainline churches. But not only that: classical Pentecostals have increasingly opened up for ecumenical relations also with non-charismatics. In this case, it is interesting that the classical Swedish Pentecostal Movement first opened up to ecumenical relations within the missionary arena by becoming members of the Swedish Mission Council, decades before they joined the Christian Council of Sweden, of which they now are an influential member.

The neo-Pentecostal churches are still sceptical about ecumenism. Some of them join in and some keep a good distance, falling into the “exclusivist” position. But they are still young, self-assured, and successful. “Humble” is not yet a household word in these churches.

Active ecumenism is similar to the “meeting in the Spirit” model, playing down discrepancies and focusing on decisive issues. The more recent Receptive Ecumenism is a step in another direction, admitting weaknesses, showing wounded hands, and learning from the other. When we, in a work group on mission theology, on the initiative of the Christian Council of Sweden and the SMC Faith in development, practised Receptive Ecumenism in Sweden through a series of mini-pilgrimages to locations of import of other churches, a whole new light came to shine

on the idiosyncrasies of our different traditions. We learned a great deal about each other that was new to us. And it made us think about and reflect on what was right, what was just, what was lacking, and what could be improved in our own traditions.

In the light of this process, a number of issues came to my mind in a new light. As my background is classical Pentecostalism, that was what I scrutinized. When listening to the Catholics, I was struck by their long-term perspective. Pentecostals have often been in a great hurry – “Jesus is returning soon!” – and thus too focused on short-term and measurable results: number of conversions, number of baptisms, number of people baptized in the Spirit. This, probably, has reigned at the cost of well-founded theology, stable congregations, educated leadership, long-term commitment in civil society, and more.

When hearing my Orthodox friends, I reflected on the overuse of words in Pentecostalism. The Orthodox tradition seems to be much more content with rituals, meditative reflection, and the silent work of the Spirit. In Pentecostalism, words are used in fiery sermons – and too often in a loud and almost shouting way, as if the Spirit dwelled in the volume. During the last few decades, this idea seems also to have influenced the music. The classical hymns are gone and have been replaced by music on drums and electric guitars, through enormous loudspeakers. In many countries you can identify a Pentecostal church just by listening to the noise. Maybe these Bible-studying Pentecostals should reread 1 Kings 19:11-12, where we read that the Lord was not in the storm, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in “a sound of sheer silence.”

When reflecting with my evangelical friends, I was impressed with their involvement in society. It is true that nowadays, more and more Pentecostals are getting engaged in politics, but in many cases the socio-political engagement has been lacking. The focus has been on salvation and first-hand experience of the Spirit, and the rest has had to stand back. Many Pentecostals have helped the needy and have shown much mercy, but to take a stand for the “the poor and the alien” (Lev. 19:10) in outright demonstration before the authorities has been too rare in Pentecostal history.

When listening to my Adventist friends, I have realized that Pentecostals have cared too little about the initial intent expressed in the story of creation. Even though they often read the Bible from the beginning

(Gen. 1), often quoting verse 26, they must have surfed over verse 29 in the first chapter of the Scripture that reveals what kind of food God had planned for man: “See, I have given you... .” In the light of recent research on health and the environment, it has become more and more obvious that the recommended vegetarian diet of the Adventists – dismissed and sometimes even ridiculed by Pentecostals – is the more divine position. It is due time for the Pentecostals to wake up and learn also what to consume!

In Receptive Ecumenism, as I have learned it, we do not scorn each other for flaws and mistakes. We share, we listen, and we learn. Hopefully, this will also lead to change, to a more mature way of life for all of us. “If they were wise, they would understand this” (Deut. 32:29)!



Ethics, Missions, and Interculturality

Néstor Medina

I propose reimagining mission as an intercultural exchange. I argue that “the cultural” fundamentally shapes and conditions the dynamics of missionary activity. I resonate with ideas surrounding Receptive Ecumenism insofar as they re-envision different ways of living and understanding mission.¹ As a result, traditional understandings of mission as an activity of the “delivery” of the gospel message to the “unevangelized” is exposed as a problematic framework which has included the undesirable effects of the colonization of peoples, such as the erasure of people’s cultural traditions, forms of knowledge, spiritualities, and religious traditions. In this renewed approach, I understand mission primarily as engagement in the proclamation of the kerygma and not necessarily as connected to ideas of conversion and proselytism.

From Indigenization to Inculturation

The original move, at the turn of the 20th century, toward indigenizing the gospel brought about the language of inculturation and contextualization. Among Catholics, the shift toward inculturation invited a rethinking of the relationship between the gospel and Christ. Great emphasis was given to missionaries learning from the local cultural communities they intended to missionize. The focus on cultural sensibilities and on learning to establish cultural bridges between the gospel message and the cultural traditions of peoples reflected a new way of thinking about mission. Unfortunately, inculturation had limits. On one hand, inculturation left the cultural tradition of the missionary unchallenged

1. Sara Gehlin “Receptive Ecumenism: A Pedagogical Process,” *A Forum for Theology in the World* 5, no. 2 (2018), 114. See chapter 2 in this publication.

and untouched. There was little recognition that the cultural traditions of foreign missionaries shaped how they interpreted and communicated the gospel message. As a result, the operating idea that missionaries could objectively preach the gospel without transmitting elements from their cultural traditions went unchallenged by the sending nations and became suspect among the recipients of the missionary work. On the other hand, claims of bringing the gospel reinforced ideas that local religious traditions were aberrations that needed to be abandoned to embrace the gospel. There was no critical engagement with how local peoples and traditions already displayed the dynamic work of God among them.²

Given the limitations of the notion of inculturation, I propose that missionizing should be articulated instead as a practice of intercultural engagement. Intercultural, as I use it here, is not only a theoretical category. It also refers to the multiple little individual acts and moments in which people from different cultural traditions encounter and interact with each other, enter a process of mutual cultural exchange, and allow themselves to be interpellated with one another. Here interculturality presupposes a levelling effect where the power differential between peoples and communities is equalized. This proposal does not entail a romantic idealization of interculturality either. True interculturality is an ethical decision of radical mutual welcoming by which those in a position of power must relinquish their claim to privilege and allow themselves to be interpellated and corrected.³ In intercultural exchanges, there is a mutual act of reception. There is a deepening of the understanding of who is to be the guest and who is to be the host at any given meeting place.⁴

As I insist, understanding mission as an intercultural exchange means a mutual hosting of each other even while both are aware that they are guests to each other. This mutual act of welcoming of each other,

2. Néstor Medina, *Christianity, Empire, and the Spirit: (Re)Configuring Faith and the Cultural* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), ch. 7.

3. In intercultural exchanges, there is a mutual act of welcoming. As in Receptive Ecumenism, there is a deepening of the understanding of who is to be the guest and who is to be the host at any given meeting place. As I insist, understanding mission as an intercultural exchange means a mutual hosting of each other even while also being guests of each other.

4. Gehlin, "Receptive Ecumenism," 112. See chapter 2 in this publication.

I believe, is provoked by the Holy Spirit. There are three further points upon which I wish to expand here concerning interculturality as applied to mission. First, interculturality includes an understanding of people's cultures as fluid and porous. Second, interculturality helps identify the cultural dimension at work in the Bible and in the gospel message itself. And third, true interculturality must entail acts of radical mutuality whereby both the missionary and the missionized are evangelized. These three points can help us reconfigure notions of missionizing and of understanding the relationship between the gospel message and people's cultural traditions. Allow me to elaborate briefly.

Interculturality Means a Redefinition of "Culture"

The work of Clifford Geertz⁵ was influential in understanding culture as a complete system through which people created meaning. Although Geertz allowed for the use of the plural "cultures," his use of the concept of "culture" in the singular communicates ideas of a consistent system of thought and organization. But as I have argued elsewhere, there is no such thing as a singular phenomenon of "culture" shared everywhere by everyone. Instead, what humans have in common is *the cultural*, by which I mean the social and interhuman dynamics and intellectual structures through which cultural communities learn to view the world and interact with each other and with the environment but are expressed differently by different historical communities. It is through the cultural that communities are conceived, constituted, and express the ways they live life.⁶

An intercultural approach requires that we view cultures as fluid and porous and in constant process of change. This framework includes ideas of cosmogenesis and notions of God/the divine. Beyond a Geertzian semiotic view in the process of meaning making in cultural communities, interculturality helps us see that the cultural encompasses all aspects of human existence, including the religious dimension. Together with Fornet-Betancourt,⁷ I view cultural traditions not as partial views of a whole; they are entire interpretive universes which form and inform people and

5. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973).

6. Medina, *Christianity, Empire, and the Spirit*, ch. 1.

7. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Transformación Intercultural de la Filosofía*. Palimpsesto: Derechos Humanos y Desarrollo. (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer, 2001).

shape their behaviour. There is no one cultural tradition that holds a monopoly of the views of the world. Thus, when two people from different cultural traditions come together, what happens is an encounter (sometimes a collision) of cultural universes insofar as both actors view, interpret, and interact with the world differently.

From a religious perspective, two people from different cultural traditions embody different lenses with which they interpret and interact with the divine/God. Two key points are worth mentioning. First, the cultural conditions the ways in which people conceive the divine and interpret the biblical text. And second, as people respond to the divine, the cultural serves as the platform from which they respond to the divine. People cannot approach the divine in any way other than with and through the cultural and material aspects they have inherited from their communities. In other words, to deprive people of their cultural tradition through the imposition of an entirely different cultural tradition and epistemological framing is tantamount to culturecide. The effects are disastrous because they prevent people from engaging the divine with the cultural tools and skills they have honed through their lived experience and socialization.

Interculturality Recognizes the Cultural in the Gospel Message

Adopting an intercultural approach to mission encompasses the uncovering of the role of the cultural in the biblical text and in the gospel message. Several points are worth mentioning. First, it is important at this stage to recognize that the Hebrew Bible as a sacred book contains the cultural memory of the people of Israel. From the book of Genesis through to Revelation, the various books reflect the cultural traditions and the cultural background of the authors. The Hebrew Bible also puts on display the intermixed nature of Jewish religious and cultural traditions. Countless passages reveal the central role the cultural plays as Israel interacted with multiple ethnocultural traditions and how such exchanges shaped their understanding of God.⁸ Moreover, the events narrated in the gospels as well as the rest of the New Testament were communicated through the languages and cultural traditions of 1st-century Palestine. In fact, a crucial aspect of recognizing the cultural in the biblical text requires that we see

8. Medina, *Christianity, Empire, and the Spirit*, ch. 2.

Jesus as a 1st-century Palestinian Jew and not as a timeless or abstract figure disconnected from his historical and culturally conditioned context, however much the text might still illuminate other contexts.

An intercultural approach to mission highlights the culturally conditioned character of everything, including divine disclosure. While some traditional approaches have claimed that the gospel transcends cultural traditions, it cannot be denied that the divine disclosure had to be articulated through the language, worldview, and epistemological traditions of the communities in which it was first written. The cultural must, therefore, be understood as an aspect without which the divine disclosure could not/cannot be communicated or understood.

As a result, a good portion of engaging the biblical text includes the multiple levels of cultural interpretation in which people engage as they bridge the centuries that separate us from the time when the text was first produced. I refer to this process as cultural translation, by which I highlight the multilevel simultaneous processes through which people decipher the meaning of the text, how it might have been received by its intended readers, how it has been understood over the years by subsequent believing communities, and how it may be understood by multiple contemporary cultural communities. Such an approach eschews methods by which specific meanings of the biblical text become standardized. Instead, I propose that different cultural communities interpret and reinterpret the text from the vantage point of their cultural communities, constantly broadening the range of possible interpretations in light of their context, concerns, and lived experiences.

Interculturality Means Radical Hospitality and Mutual Evangelization

Finally, an intercultural approach to mission acknowledges that the cultural is at play at the level of the first encounter between the missionized and the missionary. This first encounter begins a continuous process of interpretation and deciphering of the good news through people's reading of the biblical narrative and encountering the cultures in the world of the text while contrasting that world with their own contemporary reality, knowledge, wisdom, and lived experience. In the missionizing encounter, there is thus no unidirectional interaction from the missionary to the missionized. An intercultural approach decentres the

missionary. In the missionizing moment, a radical exchange of cultural elements in which both parties put on display their culturally conditioned interpretive lenses takes place. Much like in Receptive Ecumenism, both parties “seek for ways to move from mutual hostility and mistrust to [mutual] recognition.”⁹

A caveat is in order at this point. The dynamics of power must be made explicit. Traditional colonizing relations thrived on asymmetrical power relations that made it possible for the colonizers to impose their culture on the recipients of the missionary project. Instead, an intercultural approach to mission promotes a cultural reorientation of the missionary encounter. Moved by the Spirit, missionaries are not just focused on “sharing” the gospel message, operating under the assumption that the version of the gospel message they carry encompasses elements the missionized do not know about. Rather, the missionary expects to also be educated and learn about the gospel message among the missionized, from their own religious traditions, from the wide range of values, ethical principles, and ways of living life and interacting with the environment. A pilgrimage as pedagogical process exemplifies this point. In Gehlin’s experience, “participants engaged in the host community’s prayer tradition and were provided with meals that were sometimes cooked according to the [cultural] traditions of the host.”¹⁰ It invites an appreciation for the divine disclosure in other religions. In other words, missionizing through an intercultural key is a pneumatological-ethical stance of engagement.

In other words, an intercultural approach helps us articulate mission as encompassing a dynamic cultural exchange in which both the culture of the missionary and the culture of the missionized are invested, permeated, and interpellated by each other. In this same moment of cultural interaction, the missionized and missionary are each evangelized by opening to the understanding of the divine which they each can learn from each other. In other words, to use a Levinasian framing, the missionary and the missionized *transcend themselves*.¹¹ They enter a process of radical pneumatological kenotic hospitality – that is, the Spirit-provoked mutual

9. Paul D. Murray, “Introducing Receptive Ecumenism,” *The Ecumenist* 51, no. 2 (2014), 1–8.

10. Gehlin, “Receptive Ecumenism.” See page 33, chapter 2 in this publication.

11. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Huhoff, 1978).

relinquishing of social and historical privileges – and come together by welcoming discoveries of the divine self-disclosure in each other.¹²

In closing, understanding mission as an intercultural engagement allows the Spirit to work in the intercultural exchange. The Spirit is not an add-on to this dynamic. Rather, she is the crucial life force that brings people together and, in the act of bringing them together, discloses the divine more fully.

12. Gehlin's metaphor of *stillness* is useful at this point. It helps us consider the space of encounter, where the Spirit brings together the missionary and the missionized so they consider with integrity what they can learn and receive from each other. See Gehlin, "Receptive Ecumenism." See page 35, chapter 2 in this publication.



The Responsibilities of “World Christians” in Western Europe

Peirong Lin

Introduction

“What do we in our tradition need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?” This is the core concept of Receptive Ecumenism, which encourages openness to dialogue with the different traditions within the Christian family. In this short chapter, I consider Receptive Ecumenism from the perspective of an evangelical Christian raised in the majority world (Singapore) and now living in Western Europe. I have been in Europe for almost ten years: first in Belgium, where I completed my doctoral studies, and then in Germany, where I currently work for the World Evangelical Alliance.

Coming from Singapore, I am a representative of “World Christianity.” Of course, all Christians should care about global Christianity, but I am using this term in a narrower way, to represent “the complex Christian identity of people migrating to Europe, their unfolding stories, and their mission practice.”¹ This “we” as part of the question at the start of this chapter, takes seriously the perspective of World Christians here in Europe. Many different reasons – socio-political, economic, demographic, climate related – both push people out of their prior homes and draw them to Europe.²

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1. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana, “World Christianity in Western Europe: Foundational Perspectives,” in *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narratives and Missiology*, ed. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2020), 2.
 2. Aktuelles Europäische Parliament website, “Was sind die Ursache von Migration?” <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/de/headlines/world/20200624STO81906/was-sind-die-ursachen-von-migration>.

Because of their varied reasons for migration and their various homelands, World Christians are not homogeneous in nature. Not all migrants have the same tradition or the same relationship with European Christianity. As migrants, the feeling of “othering” can be more acute. Moreover, recent world events have spotlighted underlying tensions of racism and decolonization, which are certainly present in the church. For example, Botswanan theologian Musa W. Dube states, “To read the Bible as a Motswana African woman is to read a Western book.”³ This Western book evokes negative sentiments, connecting with “dangerous memories of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and neo-colonialism... [it] is to relive the painful equation of Christianity with civilization, paganism with savagery.”⁴

Dube’s sentiments can resonate with migrants who have come from countries that were once colonies. These feelings can be further exacerbated by the experiences of racism felt while living in Europe. I have experienced racism (happily, nothing life-threatening) in my day-to-day experience. While I was walking out of a neighbourhood supermarket one day, a man approached me in a drunken stupor and shouted at me, “*Zurück*” (return) with a gesture pointing away. The study of theology in Europe did not make the processing of such experiences easier. With its emphasis on philosophy and logical argument, the study of Christianity felt foreign and very much a Western construct.

Such experiences make it easy for migrants to feel isolated or mistreated and thus to respond by fellowshipping only with people from their own cultural group while looking askance on the society around them, even Christians. But this is a limited response. Migrant Christians are part of this society and influence the state of affairs in society. Asking the question “What might we learn?” reveals a posture of humility to the impact we have on our surroundings. This question recognizes that while we do not have all the answers, we can remain open to surprises. For migrants living as world Christians, the imagery of a pilgrim can be useful. A pilgrim “embraces a certain type of mobility in the context of global-

3. Musa W. Dube, “Toward a Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,” *Semeia* 78 (1997), 11.

4. Dube, “Toward a Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,” 13.

ization.”⁵ This mobility is first and foremost a result of following Jesus, responding to “the necessity of their destiny in God.”⁶ Focused on God, the pilgrim “seeks to transgress all artificial borders that impede the quest for communion with God and with other people.”⁷ This pilgrim does not “claim the power to treat every location as interchangeable and impose global solutions on the world.”⁸ Although a migrant may be in Europe for any of a myriad of reasons, the central role of faith in his or her life journey can help to restore a focus on his or her pilgrimage with God.

Taking Responsibility as a Migrant in Europe

In our travels toward God, we have certain responsibilities that I hope all migrants can agree on. Responsibility has been described as “the idea of an agent’s action as response to an action upon him in accordance with his interpretation of the latter action and with his expectation of response to his response. And all of this is in a continuing community of agents.”⁹ Each individual has agency and is thus responsible for his or her own behaviours, regardless of how others behave. This idea of responsibility is a core principle of Receptive Ecumenism. “In becoming all that we are called to be, we must own the responsibility that we can only change ourselves rather than others.”¹⁰ In the following, I provide a reflection of responsibility from my vantage point as an evangelical migrant in Europe.

Responding to the Migrant God who Sent Jesus

The main lens that determines our action is the word of God. Our relationship with the world is mediated by our response to God. The

5. William T. Cavanaugh, “Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk: Mobility and Identity in a Global Age,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008), 351.

6. Cavanaugh, “Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk,” 349.

7. Cavanaugh, “Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk,” 351.

8. Cavanaugh, “Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk,” 352.

9. H. Richard Niebuhr, “The Making of Responsibility,” in *On Being Responsible: Issues in Personal Ethics*, ed. James M. Gustafson and James T. Laney (London: SCM Press, 1969), 35.

10. Durham University website, “Receptive Ecumenism,” <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/catholic-studies/research/constructive-catholic-theology/receptive-ecumenism->

gospel is central to our understanding of God. At the heart of this gospel is Jesus, the Son of God, who became flesh. He lived, died, and was resurrected, providing a way for humankind to be reconciled back to him, to follow him. The example of Jesus is core to interpreting what we should do.

As migrants, the perspective of Jesus as a migrant is particularly useful. He had no place to lay his head (Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58). Sent by God the Father, Jesus came to earth and made his dwelling among us (John 1:14). From his birth to his itinerant ministry, his life journey reflected the challenges of being a migrant. Following in God's example, we are sent with the Holy Spirit. Living in this foreign land, we become strangers and sojourners in the present world.¹¹

Our response to the world involves recognizing that our actions should first and foremost reflect our identity as a follower of Christ. Following Jesus "involves obeying him and growing in his grace and knowledge (Heb. 12:1-2; Col. 3:1-3), from which love and service flow naturally (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Jn. 4:7)."¹²

Prioritizing Relationality

Responsibility takes into account the impact of one's actions to one's neighbours. Taking seriously the body of Christ, we are united with other members of this body and act in immediate communion with them.¹³ This solidarity with our fellow humankind is an important reminder for evangelicals. Our "love for our neighbours compels us to follow Jesus together in community, in relationship with fellow disciples."¹⁴

Despite our calling to unity as fellow believers, members of the body of Christ can be divided by race, denominational differences, or other forces. Emphasizing relationality in the body of Christ is useful

11. Stephen Dye, "The Multicultural Missionary Identity of Diaspora Christians in Germany," in *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narratives and Missiology*, ed. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2020), 38.

12. World Evangelical Alliance, "Our Pledge: Holistic Disciple-making," 2019, <https://disciplemaking.worldea.org/general-assembly-2019>.

13. Bernhard Häring, "Essential Concepts of Moral Theology," in *On Being Responsible: Issues in Personal Ethics*, ed. James M. Gustafson and James T. Laney (London: SCM Press, 1969), 102.

14. World Evangelical Alliance, "Our Pledge."

in understanding responsibility. It intentionally brings together migrants and their European hosts. In this coming together, one can discover the understanding that “I am not only I, all other churches, rooted in diverse cultures, belong to me too.”¹⁵ This understanding does not dismiss differences as deficiencies. As someone on a common journey to God, “the pilgrim preserves otherness precisely by not seeking otherness for its own sake, but by moving toward a common centre to which an infinite variety of itineraries is possible.” Additionally, the doctrine of the Trinity clearly reveals that “otherness is constitutive of unity, not a threat to unity.”¹⁶ This perspective understands that “Christians take a distance from their own culture because they give the ultimate allegiance to God and God’s promised future.”¹⁷

Relationality can be prioritized through the practice of hospitality. Hospitality is inclusive and makes space for the stranger. Even a migrant can be hospitable to one’s European hosts by refusing negative stereotypes of the other. One way that this can happen is through taking each person seriously, embracing an ethics that involves looking at the other’s face. A Continental Jewish philosopher who lived during the Second World War, Emmanuel Levinas, based his ethics on the face of the other. For him, the other cannot be contained or reduced to our comprehension or knowledge. The other is a being and counts as such.¹⁸ In living through the negative experiences I encounter, I can resist the temptation of labelling all European hosts as racists just because I have occasional experiences of racism. This involves keeping an open mind and making space for new encounters.

In practical terms, Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf’s groundbreaking book *Exclusion and Embrace* can be useful. This book imagines what it means to be open toward the other through embrace. An embrace is the metaphor Volf uses to reflect the dynamic relationship between the self

15. Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2019), 51.

16. Cavanaugh, “Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk,” 352.

17. Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World*, 51.

18. Emmanuel Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 6.

and the other. His model contains four structural elements: opening the arms, waiting, closing the arms, and opening them again.¹⁹

United in Witness to Christ

Finally, responsibility is fitting in its action. One acts and lives in limited responsibility depending on one's context.²⁰

As followers of Christ, Christians around the world are united in their prayer for God's kingdom to come. This kingdom of God invites an active response from all. This response involves being a "faithful witness of Christ" as revealer of the kingdom during this period between his ascension and his coming again.²¹ This fitting action for Christians in Europe would be for all Christians to come together as faithful witnesses. "The church is called to unity through participation in this liberating mission of Jesus, which is the good news of God's love socially embodied and lived out in the life and witness of numerous historical and cultural Christian communities for the sake of the world in order that through Jesus the world might be reconciled to God."²² "As the body of Christ, the church should be the place that suspends the worry of how multiple peoples may encounter each other together, not by avoiding such complexity but through showing a collective body moving, living, and struggling to form a space of life and love."²³ This is what *should* be happening. But in reality, it remains a challenge for different church communities to unite and witness together to Christ.

Intentionality is needed for unity to take place. Matthias Ehmann, a German theologian who is also a Free Church pastor, urged practical changes in the German church networks to foster unity. For him, "real

19. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 140–43.

20. Niebuhr, "The Making of Responsibility," 47.

21. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), 125.

22. John R. Franke, *Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 131.

23. Willie James Jennings, *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible – Acts* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 4.

community is often established while working together.”²⁴ The practices he suggested include admitting pastors who are also “tentmakers” into formal and non-formal networks. This might mean adjusting meeting times to evenings and weekends so that these migrant pastors who have another job can join in. Migrant Christians’ participation should be counted as a core aspect of this working together. They should be given roles that are integral to the program, such as presenting a message or overall event management, and not just assigned to helping ministries like food or music.²⁵ Ehmann recognizes that perspectives of migrants are central to the understanding of church communities in Europe. They are not just window dressing, token representation for the church to be politically correct. In the same way, migrant Christians should also recognize their own role and responsibility in becoming united with the churches here in Europe.

This intentionality should also be practised by migrants. It is in the pursuit of unity that one reflects one’s prioritizing of the kingdom of God above all else. This is also a key reason for Receptive Ecumenism. Embracing unity despite our differences recognizes that God has the full truth and we, as creatures in a particular context, have limited perspectives. While we are here on earth, “no single model will be adequate to account for the plurality of the biblical witness, the diverse perspectives on it in the tradition of the church, and the complexity entailed in the interaction between the gospel and culture that gives rise to theological reflection.”²⁶ All theology is contextual; together, we form the manifold witness to who Christ is.

One way of being intentional to unity is the commitment to work together with the broader church networks in one’s country. This includes making oneself available for the different opportunities presented, even if they might be less than ideal. God continues to be present in imperfect situations. Ewell describes a pattern of Jesus’ ministry that involves “creating a space around his own body where conversations, encounters and

24. Matthias Ehmann, “Knowing the Other: A First Step Towards Unity in Christ in a Post-Western Christianity,” in *Reconciliation*, ed. Tobias Faix, Johannes Reimer, and G. J. van Wyngaard (Zürich: Lit, 2020), 123.

25. Ehmann, “Knowing the Other,” 123.

26. Franke, *Manifold Witness*, 121.

listening to the other can emerge.”²⁷ In the same way, “a robust mission theology is one that trusts not in the purity of our tribe, but in the power of the Holy Spirit in the surprising ways in which God calls God’s people to encounter himself and other.”²⁸ This should include World Christians and Europeans working together for the sake of Christ.

It is also important to say yes to opportunities that arise within one’s church context. I was recently asked to preach at my local church, whose congregation is predominantly German. While terrified, I am also mindful of the opportunities to debunk negative stereotypes. As migrants, we can meaningfully contribute to a church’s multiculturalism. This enables a church to not just be multicoloured but meaningfully diverse in its leadership and structure.²⁹

Conclusion

This paper has been partly a reflection and partly an exhortation to world Christians, migrants living in Europe. While it is impossible to address all the different experiences and contexts of world Christians, we can identify some responsibilities that are common to all of them. This is particularly so when one considers one’s life as a pilgrimage or moving toward the centre, where God is.

With our primary identity as followers of Christ, world Christians respond to a God who is a migrant himself. We can recognize the importance of relationships, aware that we will be known as disciples of Christ when we love each other. Together, with Christians in Europe, we witness to Christ who loves and cares for this world.

27. Rosalee Velloso Ewell, “When Strangers Meet: Encounters and Identities in Twenty-First Century Europe,” in *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narratives and Missiology*, ed. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2020), 69.

28. Ewell, “When Strangers Meet,” 68.

29. Usha Reifsnider, “Cross-Cultural Mission from a British Gujarati Context,” in *World Christianity in Western Europe: Diasporic Identity, Narratives and Missiology*, ed. Israel Oluwole Olofinjana (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2020), 182.



CHAPTER 13

Who Is Christ for Us? *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* as Impulse for a Transcultural Transformative Receptive Ecumenism

Claudia Jahnel

The article delineates the ecumenical dialogue and learning process that evolved in Germany in the reception of the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*.¹ It claims that due to the fundamental changes in the present globalized world as well as in World Christianity, with the shifting of its centre of gravity from the global North to the global South, Receptive Ecumenism needs to take transcultural entanglements, epistemic violence, and transformative prospect more into consideration as it envisions a more just, participatory, and sustainable society.

From *Christian Witness to Mission Respect*

Ecumenical declarations are seldom so up-to-date, short, and concrete! In 1500 words, the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* outlines an ethic of mission. The first paragraph summarizes the program: it is indispensable for Christians both to proclaim God's word and to do this "in harmony with the principles of the Gospel, in full respect for and love of all people."

The document, published in 2011, is the result of an ecumenical and interreligious process of learning which aims at further learning, as it states in the preface:

1. World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, 2011, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/ChristianWitness_recommendations.pdf.

The purpose of this document is to encourage churches, church councils and mission agencies to reflect on their current practices... It is hoped that Christians across the world will study this document in the light of their own practices in witnessing to their faith in Christ, both by word and deed.

The ecumenical spirit and openness to multilateral learning is remarkable, taking into account that the document was written by three organizations that in the past seemed more divided than united on the issues of mission: the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). What brought these institutions together were concrete and ethical challenges in the multireligious context: globally and locally, transnationally and transculturally. These include interreligious tensions and conflicts, especially on the issues of mission and conversion to another religion, restrictions on the religious freedom of both Christians and members of other religions, and the misuse of religion for political and economic purposes. Yet, the good experiences in interreligious dialogue and the realization that interreligious dialogue and mission are not opposites but two sides of the same coin have led the three organizations to reflect together on how the Christian faith can be witnessed today. Together, the WCC, WEA, and PCID emphasize respect for people of other faiths, respect for each other's religious freedom, and renunciation of all forms of psychological and physical violence and all manipulation. In *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, the three global players have committed themselves to this code of conduct of mission.

Due to its topicality but also its conciseness, the document was rapidly adapted and contextualized in the Netherlands, Sweden, Brazil, India, and Malaysia. In Germany, a process of contextualization was initiated under the auspices of the Evangelisches Missionswerk (EMW) and the International Catholic Mission Agency Missio in Aachen. It was supported by 20 organizations, among them the Association of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) and the German Evangelical Alliance, which is a member of the World Evangelical Alliance.² Identifying “mission” and “respect” as key terms in the document with a high relevance for the German context.

2. See <https://missionrespekt.de>.

The reception process in Germany was titled “Mission Respect.”

A significant culmination in the process was the ecumenical congress “Mission Respect” in Berlin on 28-29 August 2014. By choosing the capital of Germany as the venue, the political relevance of the topic was stressed. An evening panel brought representatives of Parliament, the Ministry of Development and Cooperation, and the churches together to discuss the socio-political role of religions as well as issues of religious freedom and freedom of conscience.

With regard to ecumenical learning, the congress represents a first in the German context, because the approximately 250 participants represented an unprecedented broad spectrum of churches and theological “directions”: In addition to representatives of the larger Protestant churches and the Catholic Church in Germany, there were representatives of the – in Germany – “smaller” free churches, the evangelical and the Pentecostal churches. Such a variety of denominations, which sat here at one table, entered into conversation with each other, and were willing to listen to each other, is hardly to be found even within the framework of the ACK and other ecumenical alliances. The topics discussed were diverse, encompassing themes such as “mission in Germany,” “mission and proselytism,” “baptism and asylum,” “aggressive mission,” “mission and development,” or “interreligious social welfare.” These issues are often controversial among denominations, leading right to the contextually relevant pain points of ecumenism. The final declaration of the Berlin conference was encouraging:

The congress has shown that this broadly based process of dealing with the document is helpful for a deepened togetherness in our Christian witness. We are encouraged by many insights that we share in spite of our different ecclesial backgrounds. We are confident about remaining in fruitful dialogue with each other, even about controversial positions.³

3. Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland e.V. and Internationales Katholisches Missionswerk *missio*, eds., “Abschlussklärung” [Final Declaration], in *MissionRespekt. Christliches Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt*. Dokumentation. Internationaler ökumenischer Kongress, 27./28. August 2014 (Berlin, Aachen, Hamburg, 2015), 115, https://missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Doku_MissionRespekt.pdf

Christian Witness in a Broad Ecumenical Perspective

With the desire to strengthen and theologically deepen the viability and sustainability of the broad ecumenical dialogue, a consultation took place from 13 to 15 June 2016 at the Theological University of Elstal near Berlin.⁴ The consultation, which was prepared by a small multid denominational team, pursued the goal to explore to what extent the agreements and disagreements regarding the ethics of mission in *Christian Witness* reflect the mission theologies of the different denominations. Hence, again, pain points between the denominations – this time not primarily of missionary practice and “ethics” but of mission theology – were placed at centre stage of the ecumenical dialogue, in which more than 40 representatives of various churches and church-related institutions participated: “conversion and baptism as the goal of mission,” “eschatology and salvation as motivation for and horizon of mission,” “justice as the goal of mission,” “mission as invitation to worship,” and “strategies of mission.” The individual objectives were introduced by representatives from the different denominational perspectives and then discussed in the plenary and in multid denominational small groups. The whole consultation was accompanied by a spiritual program that contained morning and evening devotions as well as a closing worship service.

The contributions and discussions showed that while on a more abstract and general level, denominational differences persisted – especially with regard to eschatology, Christology, and mission strategies – these differences had to be differentiated upon closer examination. The denominational approaches were not presented as uniform entities. Rather, approaches and positions differed due to personal experiences. Thus, on the personal and biographical level, the boundaries were rather blurred. The biographical

4. The conference in Elstal is documented in Michael Biehl and Klaus Vellguth, eds., *Christliches Zeugnis in ökumenischer Weite. Konvergenzen und Divergenzen als Bereicherung des Missionsverständnisses* (Aachen, Hamburg: missio/Evangelisches Missionswerk, 2016), <https://www.missio-hilft.de/missio/informieren/wofuer-wir-uns-einsetzen/zeit-gemaesses-missionsverstaendnis/missio-hilft-mission-respekt-christliches-zeugnis-in-oe-kumenischer-weite-berlin-2016.pdf>. For an English report of the Elstal-conference, see Christian Tauchner, “Theological Consultation on ‘Mission and Respect,’” in *Verbum SVD* 57, no. 2 (2016), 232–38, <https://missionrespekt.de/fix/files/Kongressbericht%20Tauchner.2.pdf>.

approach at the opening of the conference therefore revealed surprising commonalities. Furthermore, it bolstered people's readiness to listen to the other and to engage in a truly receptive ecumenical dialogue.

One of the results of the consultation in Elstal was the broadening of the horizon of the ecumenical dialogue from interdenominational to interdenominational *and* intercultural and international respectively and to thus open up to missional theologies of the global South and how mission is lived in the families of churches worldwide. Hence a series of ecumenical consultations "Towards an Ecumenical Missiology" started.

Towards an Intercultural and Worldwide Ecumenical Missiology

In continuation of the consultation in Elstal and its observation that Christology is a controversial issue in the ecumenical dialogue on mission, the first international conference, "Towards an Ecumenical Missiology," held in Mainz in 2019, took up the topic "mission and Christologies." "The aim of the conference, which was organized as a process, was to establish the extent to which the confession of Christ and Christology can lay the ground for greater agreement in missionary theology."⁵

As was the case with the consultation in Elstal, the conference in Mainz resembled a laboratory for ecumenical learning, starting with a biographical approach and structured by lectures, group discussion, plenary sessions, as well as times for prayer and joint excursions. This did not conflict with the straightforwardly academic character of the presentations and discussions.

Thus, ecumenical learning and dialogue took place in a comprehensive way, similar to the idea of a Receptive Ecumenism as developed by Murray⁶ and Timmer⁷ and a Transformative Receptive Ecumenism as

5. Michael Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ: Contextual and Interconfessional Perspectives on Christology* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020), 13.

6. Paul D. Murray, "Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7, no. 4 (2008), 279–301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742250701725785>.

7. S. Timmer, "Receptive Ecumenism and Justification: Roman Catholic and Reformed Doctrine in Contemporary Context," PhD diss. Marquette University, 2009, https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/362.

developed, for example, by Plaatjies van Huffel.⁸ Like other conferences that follow this receptive and transformative “shift in the understanding of ecumenism and in methodology,”⁹ the conference in Mainz did not focus on “areas of potential convergence between the churches” or strive for “visible unity through theological and ecclesial convergence” and “conciliar fellowship” but focused on mutual enrichment and “individual growth and learning of each church tradition in dialogue with others.”¹⁰ Neither the conference in Mainz nor the consultation in Elstal or the conference in Berlin were designed as a conciliar ecumenical conference striving for dogmatic agreement on mission; rather, they focused on receptive learning. In this they followed the rationale inherent in *Christian Witness*, which reveals a new, transforming, and receptive understanding of ecumenism, as Biehl and Anders observe:

The surprising point is, however, that the signing bodies did not ask to comment or critique the document [but] request that the recipients implement the principles and recommendations expressed in the document and, if needed, to contextualize them, depending on local conditions . . . Such an unusual and demanding approach to the reception of a text pointing away from itself and to the discussion and adapted implementation of its ideas releases creativity but its effects are, for the same reason, difficult to measure.¹¹

Resemblances between the conference in Mainz and the concept of Transformative Ecumenism also exist with regard to the content. Plaatjies van Huffel lists seven elements of Transformative Ecumenism, according

8. Mary-Anne Plaatjies van Huffel, “From Conciliar Ecumenism to Transformative Receptive Ecumenism,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017), 1–13, at 6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4353>.

9. Plaatjies van Huffel, “From Conciliar Ecumenism,” 6.

10. Plaatjies van Huffel, “From Conciliar Ecumenism,” 6.

11. Christoph Anders and Michael Biehl, “Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Trajectories in the International Ecumenical Discussion,” *Transformation* 36, no. 1 (2019), 3–11, at 8, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0265378819831817>

to the Manila colloquium on “Living out Transformative Ecumenism,” that reveal striking parallels to the contributions in Mainz: To live out transformative ecumenism is (1) to respond to the call from the margins to seek justice, (2) to live inclusively in solidarity with each other, (3) to actively seek first the kingdom of God, (4) to empower mutually, (5) to live out the subversive nature of the Gospel, (6) to be rooted in the dynamic spirituality of life, and (7) to live and love, struggle and celebrate always hopeful in God’s power to transform.”¹²

The contributions in Mainz, for their part, revealed a remarkable broad range of “faces” of Jesus Christ and by this of Christological concepts ranging from Jesus as Palestinian and Arab in Christologies of the Middle East, Christ the ancestor and servant leader in African theologies, Jesus the Avatar in Asia, Jesus the worker in Latin America, to queering Jesus. The recurring theme in these “faces” and the Christological and missiological presentations was Jesus’ suffering and compassion, which reflected the vulnerability of life as a starting point and challenge of theological and missiological reflection as well as of solidarity and the struggle for transformation. The North American Catholic theologian Stephen Bevans called it a “Christology from below”; he referred to the term “deep incarnation,” coined by Elisabeth Johnson.¹³ Petros Malayan, from the Armenian Apostolic Church, claimed that mission in the discipleship of Jesus means taking suffering upon oneself and remaining at the side of those who suffer.¹⁴ Septemmy Lakawa called for a theology of remaining and for staying at the side of those who suffer, even if – as in the case of traumatized victims of violence in Indonesia – the suffering does not stop.¹⁵ And Wilbert van Saane concludes his deliberations on Christology and mission in the Middle East by stating that “‘Arab’ and ‘Palestinian’

12. Plaatjies van Huffel, “From Conciliar Ecumenism,” 10.

13. Stephen Bevans, “Ecumenical Christology for Mission: Implications from US American Roman Catholic Perspectives,” in Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ*, 51–69, at 55 and 58, quoting Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll: Orbis: 2018), 224.

14. Petros G. Malakyan, “Witnessing the Contemporaneity of Christ in the Contemporary World: Towards an Ecumenical Missiology through Christ-likeness – A North American Perspective,” in Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ*, 71–81.

15. Septemmy E. Lakawa, “The Theopoetics of the Cross: Trauma and Poetic Witnessing from an Asian Feminist Perspective,” in Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ*, 165–75.

contextual theologies . . . are prepared to engage with the religious other, even if that engagement comes at the price of vulnerability.”¹⁶

These examples from the ecumenical conference in Mainz reveal a profoundly subversive, countertriumphalist, prophetic, and political Christology from below resembling the idea of a Transformative Receptive Ecumenism as delineated above. Their starting points are the challenges of injustices and marginalization at hand in the concrete contexts. Unfolding political missiologies based on these Christologies, the contributions in Mainz reveal “the significant role that religious communities pay on the socio-political level,”¹⁷ as Margit Eckholt reflects with reference to Jürgen Habermas:

In Holy Scripture and throughout religious traditions intuitions of transgression and redemption and of saving ways out of a life that seems hopeless were expressed, they were subtly referred to and hermeneutically kept alive. For this reason, things can remain intact in the community life of religious communities – provided that they avoid dogmatism and moral constraints – which have been lost in other places and for the restoration of which it does not suffice to solely rely on the professional knowledge of experts. By this I refer to sufficiently differentiated possibilities of expression and sensitivities regarding failed existences, for social pathologies, for the failure of individual life conceptions and the deformation of distorted living environments...¹⁸

16. Wilbert van Saane, “Christology and Mission in the Middle East,” in Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ*, 85–92, at 91–92.

17. Margit Eckholt, “Jesus Christ – ‘Light of All Nations’: Traces of Christological Work in Germany from a Roman Catholic Perspective and New Paths for a Christology that is Dedicated to the Promotion of Peace,” in Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ*, 103–17, at 105.

18. Eckholt, “Jesus Christ – ‘Light of All Nations,’” 105, quoting from Jürgen Habermas, “Vorpolitische Grundlagen des demokratischen Rechtsstaates,” in Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung. Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg/Br. 2005), 15–37, at 31.

Thus, the many faces of Jesus Christ, the Christologies, and their missiological implication are indeed, as the introduction to the publication of the proceedings states, “influenced not so much by the denominational backgrounds of the theologians as by the social, religious and cultural contexts to which their missiological concepts are related”¹⁹ – be it “issues arising from interreligious dialogue; ecological challenges; exclusionary nationalisms and ethnicisms; the emergence of new forms of spirituality; the increase in individualism and associated loneliness; scientific knowledge; the situation of post-socialist and post-modern atheism; and the experience of a hierarchical and centralist church.”²⁰ Yet, the category “context” can be misleading, as if the challenges were not interdependent and interconnected. I would rather suggest speaking of transcultural challenges because the challenges are globally interconnected, running through many if not all cultures and countries, though taking shape in different ways. This leads to the consideration that the concept of a Transformative Receptive Ecumenism needs to be developed further to take these transcultural dynamics and their critical impact on epistemological challenges more into account.

Beyond Denominational and Contextual: Transcultural Transformative Receptive Ecumenism as Critique of Epistemological Violence and Intersectional Oppression

Presuming transcultural entanglements in the contextual challenges as well as in the Christological concepts and their missiological implications leads to assessing the convergences and divergences as results of long-standing intercultural and interdenominational negotiations. The insights into the transcultural dynamics eventually demand that in the ecumenical dialogue, “the other” tradition cannot be assumed as completely “other.” This perception exhibits (self-)critical implications for the concept of the transformative receptive ecumenical learning.

The Centre for Transcultural Studies in Heidelberg understands the meaning of transculturality as follows:

19. Michael Biehl, Hanna Stahl, and Klaus Vellguth, “Towards an Ecumenical Missiology,” in Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ*, 11–20, at 18.

20. Michael Biehl et al., “Preface,” in Biehl et al., eds., *Witnessing Christ*, 9–10, at 9.

Transculturality is built on the understanding that cultures in the widest sense have never evolved as distinct entities or even primarily by interaction of separate units. Rather, entanglement, exchange, porosity and hybridization have always been an instrumental part of the ongoing definition and development of culture. The syllable trans- (as opposed to, for instance, inter-) points in that transgressive and translatory direction: borders create border-crossing, in dividing they simultaneously connect. Ostensibly, there is a paradox at the heart of transculturality: in order to point to the transcultural, one first has to assume separate cultures, while simultaneously negating their existence.²¹

Hence, insights into transcultural dynamics demand to say farewell to the idea of acculturation, inculturation, or contextualization in the classical sense that assumes cultures and religions as closed entities and not as products of continuous entanglements. With regard to the ecumenical dialogue, transcultural insights imply that even apparent differences and particularities are results of cultural and denominational negotiations, and therefore ecumenical dialogue partners hold points of contact and entanglements even when they are not observable at first sight.

Transcultural ecumenical learning does not make ecumenical dialogue and learning easier. In fact, it can become more critical because it is not simply mutually enriching and not only furthering individual growth. It can and does also question one's own stereotypes and entanglements in the production of knowledge about "the other" – what the postcolonial sociologist Santos has called an "epistemicide":²² knowledge created about the other that at the same time eliminates the knowledge and cultures of subalternized people.

Transcultural transforming Receptive Ecumenism therefore includes

21. Laila Abu-Er-Rub, Christiane Brosius, Sebastian Meurer, Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, and Susan Richter, *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2019), xxvi.

22. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2014).

critical deconstructions of practices of epistemic violence and of claiming universal validity of one's own particular knowledge system as well as establishing a network of mutual empowerment and liberation. It also not only takes into account denominational or cultural differences but assumes that the borders of denominations and cultures are blurred and that the sense of belonging grows along various religious, denominational, cultural, but also gender-, age-, or social class-related lines and experiences. It becomes truly transformative when – like in the case of the contributions of Mainz – experiences of multiple intersectional oppression are taken into consideration and justice and liberation are sought within the field of often conflicting interests.

Border-crossing Spirituality

Last but not least, Transcultural Transformative Receptive Ecumenism involves not only critical thinking, theology, and missiology. It also profoundly relies on a transforming spirituality that touches all senses, opens up for new epistemologies as ways of creating an aesthetic knowledge of the senses and of the body and bones, and furthers the transgression of borders of denominations, cultures, geographies, sex and gender, social class, “race,” or age for resonance with a wider environment.

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CHAPTER 14

Ecumenical Communities as the Future Missiology – Learning and Communication Process in the Greater Ecumenical Family

Ulrich Dehn

The major elements of a future ecumenical missiology should be mutual learning, living together, and being in solidarity. I will try to explain and elaborate on these aspects as parts of one whole understanding of ecumenical missiology, using elements of former ecumenical discussion processes and activities.

Mutual Learning

One of the most impressive methods of mutual learning in the ecumenical movement has been the Living Letters¹ which were used within the frame of ecumenical decades: in the course of the Decade in Solidarity with Women and as a tool in the Decade to Overcome Violence. Living Letters are small ecumenical teams consisting of four to six women and men from all over the world. They visit a country, listen, learn, and share approaches and challenges to overcome violence and make peace. They also pray together for peace in the community and in the world. These women and men have witnessed violence in its various forms, and they work for just peace. A visit from a Living Letters team has been successful when those visited witness that they are not alone, and when the team members feel that they themselves have learned from those whom they visited.

1. The idea of living letters refers to 2 Corinthians 3:3: “you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

The Living Letters – demonstrate solidarity among churches and people who live in the context of and respond to particularly painful experiences of violence, – share insights and helpful approaches in overcoming violence, – deepen ecumenical contacts among the churches, national councils of churches and related organisations and networks, – connect congregations, student and youth groups, theological and other church-related institutions in the search for an Ecumenical Declaration of Just Peace.²

During the Decade in Solidarity with Women (1988–98), 75 teams visited more than 650 communities, while during the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–11) changing international teams of four to six persons had 25 visits to 27 countries in 2008–10, in preparation for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, held in Kingston Town (Jamaica) in May 2011. These Living Letters broke the pattern of observation or inspection teams, transcending a subject–object structure and transforming it into a process of common learning, mutual enrichment, and international solidarity. As a method and process with these dimensions, they proved almost more important than the conference itself, which like all conventions of its kind brought many people together and was the culmination of the process. As a dimension of Receptive Ecumenism, the Living Letters allow learning to be a dynamic event of people in a circle without definite givers and takers. This approach also prevents or corrects the exotic stereotype of old, rusty, and bureaucratic traditional Western churches on one side and the fresh and lively churches drawing young people and having crowded worship services in the global South on the other.

Living Together

“Living together” is not a means in itself, but it has its focus in shared values and aims. The term makes use of the concept of *buen vivir* (good living). It also refers to the idea of *Konvivenz* (*convivencia*) being devel-

2. International Ecumenical Peace Convocation website, “Living Letters: Ecumenical Team Visits,” <http://www.overcomingviolence.org/en/peace-convocation/preparatory-process/living-letters-visits.html>.

oped by Theo Sundermeier.³ Sundermeier writes that he found what should be meant by *Konvivenz* in Africa, but the word/concept he took from Brazil. The place of *Konvivenz*, according to him, is the core group, the neighbourhood, rendering help within and protection toward the outside and having three characteristics: (a) it is a helping community mutually rendering help in all aspects of life, like daily activities as well as feasts and rites like weddings and funerals, supporting a good living as *buen vivir*; (b) it is a learning community of human beings learning with each other and from each other without hierarchies of knowing and learning, giving and taking, but appreciating whatever comes to their mind; (c) it is a celebrating community, a community of the feast/festival. This means laughing and crying, dancing, sadness, and happiness next to each other. Feast in this sense is not the short compensation for long, laborious, and boring daily life, but is integrated in life and part of it.⁴

“Living together” has a dimension which reaches beyond the confinement of my own religious tradition. Even though the idea of mission mostly suggests the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ transcending borders, it may also include people of other faiths respecting each other as long as they don’t fight and discriminate against others but have community.⁵ This should be on the basis of a differentiation of family ties in the strict sense, and the wider community of relatives like cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents, husbands and wives of brothers and sisters, and their children. This is to mean that religions are not just strictly and in the same way different to each other but share historically grown closeness

3. See especially Theo Sundermeier, “Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz heute,” in *Ökumenische Existenz heute*, ed. Wolfgang Huber, Dietrich Rischl, and Theo Sundermeier (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1986), 49–100; Theo Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen – Eine praktische Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 190–97.

4. Sundermeier, “Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz heute,” 52–59; Sundermeier, *Den Fremden verstehen*, beginning at 190.

5. This is with respect to this passage in Jooseop Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), #58: “Starting with God’s mission leads to an ecclesiological approach ‘from below.’ In this perspective it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church. Mission is not a project of expanding churches but of the church embodying God’s salvation in this world.”

and otherness which bind them together in various ways. Many authors and interreligious activities have made use of the closeness of Jews, Christians, and Muslims and coined this “the Abrahamic family,” meaning the group of the major monotheistic religious traditions. Werner Kahl talks of “relatives in faith” (*Glaubensverwandte*) instead of “brothers and sisters in faith” (*Glaubensgeschwister*), a term he wants to reserve for Christians of various denominations.⁶ Close to this, a “trilogue” (instead of a dialogue) was suggested between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, as they are so close to each other.⁷ Definitions like these do not reflect the fact that borders between religions may be drawn in other ways, or religious traditions which were supposed to be not theistic appear to have circles of veneration of a single god/goddess, as is the case in Hinduism as well as in popular traditions in East Asian Mahayana Buddhism. Following this, I prefer multireligious ecumenical communities living together and respecting and even celebrating⁸ their heterogeneity and diversity. This community does not forget the issue of religious testimony but puts it into the context of mutual respect. In this regard I would suggest going beyond Sundermeier’s idea of *Konvivenz*.

This is an important aspect of good living, *buen vivir*, as was explored in the mission statement *Together towards Life* (TTL), using the biblical term “life in its fullness/abundantly” (John 10:10) and as an idea taken from Indigenous culture in Latin America, especially Brazil. The mission statement says: “We affirm that the purpose of God’s mission is fullness of life (John 10:10) and that this is the criterion for discernment in mission. Therefore, we are called to discern the Spirit of God wherever there is life in its fullness, particularly in terms of the liberation of the oppressed peoples, the healing and reconciliation of broken communities, and the restoration of the whole creation” (TTL #102). *Buen vivir* is not meant as

6. See Werner Kahl, “Das Narrativ von der jüdisch-christlich-muslimischen Glaubensverwandtschaft,” in *Christen und Muslime als Glaubensverwandte*, ed. Werner Kahl (Hamburg: Missionsakademie, 2019), 25–51, at 26 and fn. 2, <http://missionsakademie.de/tima.html>.

7. For a summary of the trilogue idea, see Martin Bauschke, “Der jüdisch-christlich-islamische Dialog,” in *Handbuch der Religionen*, ed. Michael Klöcker and Udo Tworuschka (München, 1997ff., 51. Suppl., 2017), 1–43.

8. I borrow the term “celebration of plurality” from Mark Kline Taylor, *Remembering Esperanza* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 34–37.

“good living” in the sense of well-being and a high living standard, but as a life in relationship, not isolated from each other, a life in accordance with nature, refusing the exploitation and instrumentalization of nature as part of turning to the ideas of Indigenous peoples in South America.⁹ In many ways, the dimension of living together¹⁰ is connected with and close to the aspect of being in solidarity, which adds the components of solidary action, mutual empowerment, mutual encouragement, and diakonia to the life dimension. “Being in solidarity” is a comprehensive expression of a way of life of a community, which includes hearing the voice of the people and all creatures “from the margins”¹¹ (meaning the neglected, discriminated against, oppressed, exploited ones), walking together with them the way of justice and peace, creating safe spaces of refuge, safety, and taking a breath. I include as an idea from the World Council of Churches’ Busan assembly in 2013 the activity of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace fostering living together as a mode of life that anticipates the reign of God as envisioned in the book of Revelation (21:1-5a)¹² and other visionary passages of the Old and New Testaments.

Another mode of a living together in terms of a new missiology is the lifestyle and mode of pilgrimage, which is not a short-term activity of weeks or months but a way of life – being on the move with others. As pilgrimage is a metaphor for a new way of existence coined at the assembly in Busan in 2013, it needs to be filled with new meaning in order not

9. Lexikon der Nachhaltigkeit website, “Buen Vivir,” https://www.nachhaltigkeit.info/artikel/buen_vivir_1852.htm.

10. I indeed pick up elements from Sundermeier’s concept but feel that the dimension of interreligious community might go beyond the idea of *Konvivenz*.

11. See *Together towards Life*, #36–54. See also “Mission from the Margins: Toward a Just World,” in *International Review of Mission*, 101, no. 1 (2012), 153–69; Michael Biehl, “Mission von den Rändern – Mission from the Margins,” in *Mission, neu erklärt*, ed. Michael Biehl and Ulrich Dehn (Hamburg: Missionshilfe Verlag, 2014), 30–41.

12. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’”

to be a new name for many old things which have been done before.¹³ “As disciples of Jesus the itinerant healer, we Christians in every age and region have journeyed, not just in an individual quest for enlightenment or forgiveness but together, supporting and learning from each other, encountering strangers and surmounting dangers, allowing our hearts to be opened ever more to the promptings of the Spirit and the new horizons of the gospel’s proclamation of the reign of God. Pilgrimage is about leaving one’s comfortable and habitual domain to seek God and God’s reign in new ways, new contexts, and new places. Christian pilgrimage has always facilitated a stronger identification with Jesus himself and with our fellow sojourners.”¹⁴ There have been many local pilgrimage initiatives picking up the regional issues and being on pilgrimage literally, symbolically, for a pilgrimage of days, weeks, or months, being on a walk for their own issues or showing solidarity with local people.

Conclusion

In this short paper I have tried to sketch how mission might be thought of in future, following my reading of the mission statement *Together towards Life* and other ecumenical discussions. I suppose the aspects of common learning, good living (*buen vivir*), and solidarity are the focus of consideration and might shape discussions in the coming years. An ecumenical missiology should bid farewell to a mentality that sees other religions as precivilizational or as a work of demons, as was done in most parts of mission history and by early missiological concepts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It should see and encounter them as other religious experiences and celebrate community using the tools which have been explained above. Testimony by life performance will be attractive to people who might decide to join the same way. I see this as being under the umbrella of a network of communities working together toward justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, celebrating Christian existence in solidarity with people walking in the common pilgrimage.

13. This is a concern of Fernando Enns in “Behutsam mitgehen mit deinem Gott,” *Ökumenische Rundschau*, 64, no. 1 (2015), 16–30, at 17.

14. World Council of Churches, *An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace* (an outcome of the 2013 WCC assembly at Busan), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Pilgrimage2016_v2.pdf.



CHAPTER 15

Ecumenism and Mission in Africa – A Missiological Perspective

Bosela E. Eale

Introduction

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ to carry the gospel to all humankind and to make all nations disciples is still to be fulfilled. The church is challenged today, as in earlier generations, with a worldwide opportunity to make Christ known. This should be a collective effort for mission among churches and mission organizations.

It is in this perspective that ecumenism plays its role in mission. In dealing with mission, it is believed that ecumenism, which promotes Christian unity and cooperation between churches and mission organizations, is therefore both a part of Christian identity and one of our most important methods for mission.

Ecumenism is a vision, a movement, a theology, and a mode of action. It represents the universality of the people of God and affects the way Christians think about their faith, the church, and the world. Commenting on the struggle of calling for ecumenism, Rouse and Neill write that “The history of the Christian Church from the first century to the 20th might be written in terms of its struggle to realize ecumenical unity. That Christians are ‘all one in Christ Jesus’ is a principle never surrendered, yet the world has beheld them worshipping in separated and mutually exclusive communions.”¹

Ecumenism is a long process that draws Christians together, uniting their life and mission and bringing the body of Christ and human community closer to the fulfillment of God’s purposes. Those involved in

1. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 27.

ecumenism participate in ideas, activities, and institutions that express a spiritual reality of shared love in the church and the human community. Ecumenism is characterized by the work of officially organized ecumenical bodies, the confessing and witnessing of Christians in local places, and the spirituality and actions of those who live together in love and prophetic proclamation of the gospel.

Ecumenism in Context

The concept of ecumenism attained a religious meaning, referring to the movement within Christianity that aimed to unify the various denominations, which are separated by questions of doctrine, history, tradition, and practice.²

Ecumenism in the context of Cameroon, for instance, is done in the mainline Protestant churches; it was advanced by the creation in 1968 of the Federation of Churches and Evangelical Missions of Cameroon. It aimed to put churches together with objectives such as to reinforce the links of solidarity which exist between various church members in the search of unity and to develop activities and coordinate efforts for evangelization and Christian service.³

In her description of ecumenism in Cameroon, Djomboué⁴ adds:

This type of activity, especially in the villages, has developed the dialogue between clergy members of these churches. The consequences of this dialogue are important: it progressively normalises the relations between members of these churches who in the past demonised each other. Though differences are still visible at the doctrinal level...

2. Jean de Dieu Madangi, "Ecumenism in Africa: Dialogue in the Continent of Diversity," *South World: News & Views from Emerging Countries* (January 2020), 2.

3. Priscille Djomboué, "Manifestations of Ecumenism in Africa Today: A Study of the Mainline and Pentecostal Churches in Cameroon," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 8, no. 4 (2008), 355–68, at 359.

4. Djomboué, "Manifestations of Ecumenism in Africa Today," 359.

The national president of the Church of Christ in Congo, Rev. Dr Bokundoa-bo-Likabe,⁵ asserts that to fully understand what gave rise to the Church of Christ in Congo, one would have to take an in-depth look at the rich and decisive past and the socio-ecclesial realities of the Protestant churches and to understand the Protestant movement that emerged during the significant period of the evangelizing mission in Congo.

The Church of Christ in Congo is an ecumenical body composed of 96 Protestant denominations. Without extensively reviewing the history of the Protestant mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is worth mentioning the context in which the early Protestant mission societies evangelized in the Congo and their cooperation with one another, which led to establishing the ecumenical movement that created the Church of Christ in Congo.

As one can observe, the ecumenical movement did not only impact churches in French-speaking Africa; its impact was also visible in many churches in English-speaking Africa. This is, for instance, the case for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. To enable its ecumenical activities, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana put in place the Committee on Ecumenism and Relations with People of Other Faiths. It is recalled that the committee was assigned the duty of advising the church on matters affecting the relations of the church with other churches and with inter-church or ecumenical bodies.

It is also to work in close contact with the inter-faith committee of the Christian Council of Ghana, organize programs on Christian witness in the midst of other religions, and facilitate relations with members of other faiths.

History shows that the contemporary ecumenical movement has its roots in the Protestant missionary movement of the 19th century and its implication in the desire of evangelical Protestants to achieve a “unity in fellowship” among themselves for greater success in the mission field.⁶

5. André Bokundoa-bo-Likabe, “The Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) and Protestant Ecumenism in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” *Global Ministries News* (October 2020), 1.

6. Peter Alban Heers, “The Missionary Origins of Modern Ecumenism: Milestones Leading up to 1920,” An address prepared for the Academic Conference “The Mission of the Orthodox Church and the World Council of Churches, 15 May 2005, 1, <http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/heers-themissionaryrootsofmodernecumenism.pdf>.

Ecumenism should always be considered as efforts to move toward common witness through dialogues that promote mutual understanding and cooperation.

Ecumenism and Missional Perspective

Ecumenism has a strong implication for the church's mission and evangelism, which is referenced in John 13:35: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Also, Jesus emphasized that the ties of Christians to one another are much greater than ties to blood relatives. The passion for evangelism gave rise to the passion for unity – expressed both on the practical level, in greater missionary success, and on the theoretical level, in the evangelical conception of the church as being a matter of the heart, spiritual not organic.⁷

The term "mission," as described by Nasimiyu Wasike and Waruta,⁸ is a vast enterprise made up of many kinds of missions and activities which were carried on cross-culturally by many kinds of Christians. From biblical revelation, the two authors view mission as something completely relative to salvation history. They argue that mission contains a positive call of God, which is affirmatively manifested in each particular case, individually or collectively.

Quoted by Heers,⁹ William Saayman asserts that "the ecumenical movement does not derive simply from a passion for unity, it sprang from a passion for unity that is completely fused in mission." Advocating for the importance of mission in ecumenism, Phillips and Coote state that "looking toward the future of Christian mission, we do not doubt that the ecumenical and conciliar world will continue to emphasize the necessity of working toward Christian unity."¹⁰

Africa needs agents of mission and evangelism with an advanced ecumenical formation, sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit: this is the

7. Heers, "The Missionary Origins of Modern Ecumenism," 5.

8. A. Nasimiyu Wasike and Douglas W. Waruta, eds., *Mission in African Christianity: Critical Essays in Missiology* (Nairobi: Acton, 2000), 1.

9. Heers, "The Missionary Origins of Modern Ecumenism," 1.

10. James A. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, eds., *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 23.

only way to read the unity loved by Christ for the world and for Africa.¹¹ Looking at missional perspectives, Senior and Stuhlmüller¹² recognize that the biblical God is the ultimate source of mission and the ultimate catalyst for the church's instinct to move beyond the boundaries of a particular culture or national group. They also comment that the universal saving rule of God stands as the final seal on our common humanity.

Glover¹³ argues that we cannot escape the obvious conclusion that Christ founded his church upon the Great Commission as its charter and incorporation. It follows logically, just as every incorporated institution on earth must strictly carry out the terms of its charter only as long as it consistently observes and fulfills the terms of its divine charter by giving itself faithfully to its appointed task of the gospel to the whole world.

Impact of Ecumenical Bodies on Mission in Africa

There are many benefits of ecumenism, such as building trust, reducing duplication, promoting unity, allowing for pooling of resources, and so much more. Fellowship within the World Council of Churches (WCC) has enabled the churches to adhere rather more firmly to contours of the unity envisioned.¹⁴

The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus cannot be fulfilled by one local church or one denomination. The success of the fulfillment of the Great Commission resides in a collective effort from Christian bodies. It is in this perspective that we see the importance of ecumenical bodies in mission. Churches as ecumenical bodies act in virtue of the commission that Jesus gave, a commission that is without limit, commending all Christians to preach the gospel to all nations.¹⁵ Ecumenism being a joint venture, dialogue was undertaken between the ecumenical movement, the Roman Catholic Church, and the conservative evangelicals, bringing major convergence.

11. Madangi, "Ecumenism in Africa," 6.

12. Donald Senior, CP and Carroll Stuhlmüller, CP, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis 1983), 339.

13. Robert H. Glover, *Bible Basis of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 33.

14. Geoffrey Wainwright, *The Ecumenical Moment: Crisis and Opportunity for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 9.

15. Nasimiyu Wasike and Waruta, eds., *Mission in African Christianity*, 1.

On the importance of ecumenical bodies having a common understanding of cooperation, Van Engen¹⁶ mentions that

In 1987 theologians representing the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, and the World Evangelical Fellowship met in Stuttgart, West Germany, to discuss the matter – and ended up issuing a very significant nine-page joint statement on evangelism.

The authority and relevance of Scripture came to occupy the very centre of discussion in the WCC. That was the conclusion of the two important meetings held by the WCC in June 1971 (DSME Working Committee Group, Jongny, Switzerland) and December 1971 (Christians–Muslims Consultation, Geneva). The outcome of the meetings revealed that the ecumenical movement was moving in a new direction that reinforced and gave impetus to the Theological Education Fund and its third mandate programme, which was mainly focused on Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific.¹⁷

In 1958, a Presbyterian dedicated to ecumenism, Akanu Ibian, initiated a conference of Christian organizations and churches in Africa. It would later lead to the foundation of the All Africa Conference of Churches at its first assembly on 20 April 1963 in Kampala, Uganda. The theme of the first assembly was “Freedom and unity in Christ.” The delegates at the ecumenical gathering identified themselves with the aspiration of the people of the continent toward the development of dignity and a mature personality in Christ; delegates exhorted the churches to participate wholeheartedly in the building of the African continent.

As an ecumenical body, the All Africa Conference of Churches continues to stand with the churches in addressing relevant issues that confront the continent and to provide a platform of collective voices and

16. Charles Van Engen, *Mission on the Way: Issues in Mission Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 199.

17. David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meaning, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 29.

collective action. It is engaged in a thorough process of reconfiguring ecumenical relationships and cooperation in the continent by integrating churches, national councils, sub-regional fellowships, and the continental body itself into a coherent network. As one can see, many challenges facing churches and Christian organizations in Africa cannot be attended by individual churches or organizations. Only an ecumenical body can respond to challenges because of the nature of collective effort.

Conclusion

Ecumenical bodies are, and will remain, an asset for mission and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. They are the means God uses to accelerate the fulfillment of the mandate given to all Christians by Jesus Christ. Ecumenism has a strong implication for the church's mission and evangelism.

The ecumenical movement seeks to recover the apostolic sense of the early church of unity in diversity, and it confronts the frustrations, difficulties, and ironies of the modern pluralistic world. It is a lively reassessment of the historical sources and destiny of what Christians perceive to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Jesus Christ. The most important principle of ecumenism is that people focus primarily on Christ, not on separate church organizations.

The background features several overlapping, wavy, light gray lines that create a sense of movement and depth. These lines are centered horizontally and span across the width of the page, framing the central text.

PART IV
RECEPTIVE
ECUMENICAL MISSION



CHAPTER 16

The Ecumenical Mission Movement on the Journey from the World Council of Churches' 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013 to the 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022 – Towards Receptive Ecumenism in Mission

Risto Jukko

A New Mission Document

In 2013, at the World Council of Churches' (WCC) 10th Assembly in Busan, South Korea, a new WCC mission statement, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (TTL),¹ was presented to the member churches of the WCC. This document had been in preparation since the 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006, and had been unanimously approved by the WCC central committee in Crete in September 2012. *Together towards Life* is the second official WCC statement on mission. In 1982, 30 years earlier, the first official WCC mission statement, *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation*, was approved.² Konrad Raiser, WCC general secretary from 1993 to 2003,

1. Jooseop Keum, ed., *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/Together_towards_Life.pdf.

2. The document can be found in *You Are the Light of the World: Statements on Mission by the World Council of Churches 1980–2005*, ed. Jacques Matthey (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 4–38.

has said that that “TTL is one of the most creative ecumenical texts produced in the early years of the 21st century.”³

A lot has been written about TTL.⁴ Here we can mention only briefly the most significant new elements of TTL.⁵ First, there is a heavy emphasis on the mission of the Holy Spirit (*missio Spiritus*) within the trinitarian concept of mission, i.e., the mission of God (*missio Dei*). TTL #11 says: “This statement highlights some key developments in understanding the mission of the Holy Spirit within the mission of the Triune God (*missio Dei*) which have emerged through the work of CWME [Commission on World Mission and Evangelism].” This is not a surprising point of departure, knowing that the fastest-growing churches of the world today are charismatic and Pentecostal churches, and that in Athens in 2005, at the time the latest WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, representatives from evangelical and Pentecostal churches were delegates with full participation in the working of the conference for the first time at a CWME conference. The Athens conference was the first CWME conference organized in a predominantly Orthodox country.

Another novelty in the mission document is the concept of “mission from the margins.” Even if it is theologically somewhat vague in its contents and hence criticized and debated, even contested, it basically means a change of perspective and of direction in mission, reversing the traditional concept of “mission to the margins” and highlighting the role of the marginalized in society as agents in mission. This concept affirms that the monopolistic and hegemonic situation of the churches and mission agencies in the global North is now definitely over. Those who so far have not had a voice or a chance to act or make themselves visible have agency, and they fully participate in God’s mission with others as equal actors. They are agents in mission and examples of how mission affirms

3. Cited in Risto Jukko and Jooseop Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019), 77.

4. See, e.g., two fully thematic issues of *International Review of Mission*: “New WCC Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism,” 101, no. 1 (April 2012) and “New Milestone in Mission,” 101, no. 2 (November 2012).

5. I loosely follow here Jooseop Keum, “CWME: From Athens to Arusha – Director’s Report,” in Jukko and Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit*, 73–87.

life in all its fullness in this respect.⁶

Ecological questions have been on the agenda of the WCC since at least the 6th Assembly, in Vancouver, Canada, in 1983, with the commitment to “justice, peace and the integrity of creation,” but at the beginning were not really connected with mission in the programmatic work of the WCC. TTL affirms that creation, combined with spirituality, is at the heart of mission: “Mission with creation at its heart is already a positive movement in our churches through campaigns for eco-justice and more sustainable lifestyles and the developments of spiritualities that are respectful of the earth” (TTL #20). Salvation that God has promised concerns not only humanity but the whole creation; the role of spirituality is to connect humanity with God and creation. A holistic and transforming character of mission is underlined in the WCC mission document.

Another feature worth flagging in TTL is the new landscapes of World Christianity, highlighting especially issues of migration and global economic markets. The world had seen enormous changes since 1982, when the first WCC mission statement was officially adopted. Not only the collapse of the socialist system in the 1990s and the dominance of the neoliberal economic system, but also the demographic shift of Christians from the northern hemisphere to the South, in particular to Africa, had become a fact that Western Christianity hardly noticed at first.

Lastly, the mission document can be seen as a renewed call to evangelism in “confidence and humility” and respect of the others. TTL #83 says: “Evangelism is sharing one’s faith and conviction with other people and inviting them to discipleship, whether or not they adhere to other

6. The importance of the concept was displayed by an administrative process including the concept in the structures of the CWME/WCC. This happened after the WCC assembly in Busan in 2013. “The entire chapter was contributed [to the TTL], and drafted by participants in the former WCC project Just and Inclusive Communities (JIC). From Porto Alegre to Busan, there has been very close collaboration with the JIC project and CWME in various levels and areas. On the basis of this experience, the CMWE commission meeting in the Cook Islands in March 2013 suggested a more structured cooperation with JIC in the post-Busan pragmatic structure of WCC, particularly on the issues of Migration and Multicultural Ministry, Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (EDAN). Therefore, since 2014, the project of ‘Mission from the Margins’ has been successfully integrated in CWME” (Keum, “CWME: From Athens to Arusha,” 78–79).

religious traditions. Such sharing is to take place with both confidence and humility and as an expression of our professed love for our world.” The good news of Jesus is a message to be transmitted to every generation and to the whole world.

Following the WCC central committee’s approval of TTL in 2012, CWME has been working on promoting the use of the document in missional formation – in the formal academic context, in the training of missionaries, and at local congregational levels. A consultation held in Kochi, India, in 2013 produced a practical guide. The Pietermaritzburg consultation, which took place in South Africa in 2014, charted the direction for this missional formation process. Since then, in a variety of contexts around the world, educators have been making use of TTL in their pedagogical processes. The third consultation was held at Matanzas, Cuba, in 2016; it provided an opportunity for critical reflection on the work that had been done so far.⁷

Other Materials to Support Ecumenical Mission

The ecumenical mission movement, before and after the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) into the structures of the World Council of Churches at the 3rd Assembly in New Delhi in 1961, has produced many publications as resources and support for the ongoing work of world mission.

To advance ecumenical mission globally, the CWME, the historical successor of the IMC, has always produced materials in addition to official mission statements. A 2016 CWME book was *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission*.⁸ It starts from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and, after giving a short description of each world mission conference, ends with *Together*

7. Keum, “CWME: From Athens to Arusha,” 79. After the WCC assembly in Busan in 2013, in the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism 42 commissioners and advisors have represented WCC member churches, affiliated mission bodies, and the wider constituency – the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostals, and evangelicals. The commission meets every two years. Between commission meetings, the officers, staff, executive group, and working groups of CWME meet regularly.

8. Kenneth R. Ross, Jooseop Keum, Kyriaki Avtzi, and Roderick R. Hewitt, eds., *Ecumenical Missiology: Changing Landscapes and New Conceptions of Mission* (Oxford: Regnum and Geneva: WCC Publications, 2016).

towards Life. The second part of the book deals with the core themes of the ecumenical mission across the 20th century, and the third part consists of the integral text of TTL and comments on it from various aspects and representatives of global Christianity, within and without the WCC-bound ecumenical mission movement.

Another CWME publication, *Sharing Good News: Handbook on Evangelism in Europe*, was launched a year later.⁹ This book is intended to show the challenges and opportunities of evangelism in contemporary Europe. It offers a theological basis on evangelism in relation to mission and ecclesiology as well as several case studies and practices. It also displays the need for the church and its ministers to evangelize in today's rapidly changing world.

The 2018 WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, held in Arusha, Tanzania, deserves a full chapter of its own, as it gave rise to a lot of material published online and in print. The December 2018 issue of *International Review of Mission* was wholly dedicated to the Arusha conference. The conference papers and other materials are presented in two volumes: *Moving in the Spirit: Report of the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*, and *Called to Transforming Discipleship: Devotions from the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*.¹⁰

A seminal WCC/CWME book was launched in the period between the WCC's 2013 assembly in Busan and the 11th Assembly, which will take place in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022: CWME adviser Kenneth R. Ross's *Mission Rediscovered: Transforming Disciples. A Commentary on the*

9. Gerrit Noort, Kyriaki Avtzi, and Stefan Paas, eds., *Sharing Good News: Handbook on Evangelism in Europe* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2017).

10. Jukko and Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit*; Risto Jukko, Jooseop Keum, and (Kay) Kyeong-Ah Woo, eds., *Called to Transforming Discipleship: Devotions from the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2019). Both volumes, as well as the most complete conference report edited by Risto Jukko, are available in digital form: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/conference-on-world-mission-and-evangelism-2018>. The electronic format permits a longer presentation than the printed versions, as well as the option of opening links to other online materials, making this digital conference report more extensive and user-friendly.

Arusha Call to Discipleship.¹¹ This book is unique at least for two reasons. It is the first systematic analysis and commentary of the main outcome document of the Arusha Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in 2018, *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*, a document unanimously approved by the Arusha Conference in 2018.¹² Also, it is the first co-publication of the WCC and Globethics.¹³ As part of the latter's digital collection, the book can be accessed from all over the world by millions of readers.

Last but not least, the periodical *International Review of Mission* (IRM) is a fruit of the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. Since 1912, it has been published without interruption. The editor is – with some brief exceptions – the director of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (and its predecessor, the IMC, from 1921 to 1961). IRM is one of the best missiological journals in the world; it reflects the ecumenical mission movement within the WCC and its member churches, and even beyond. Its role is at least two-fold: on the one hand, it looks to history, including the recent past (such as publishing keynote papers from major conferences or meetings); on the other hand, it has a prophetic role in choosing and preparing thematic issues of various topics relevant to the mission of global Christianity in the world of today and tomorrow. It also missiologically paves the way toward the WCC assemblies and the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism and evaluates and reflects on the outcomes of these gatherings from the point of view of mission and unity. Before the WCC assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022, IRM is presenting four thematic issues from 2020 to 2022 related to the assembly theme, “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”¹⁴

11. Kenneth R. Ross, *Mission Rediscovered: Transforming Disciples – A Commentary on the Arusha Call to Discipleship* (Geneva: WCC Publications & Globethics.net, 2020), <https://www.globethics.net/fr/-/mission-rediscovered-transforming-disciples>.

12. For example, in Jukko and Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit*, 2–4, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-arusha-call-to-discipleship>.

13. Globethics.net publications are scholarly works on applied ethics from a theological, philosophical, and social science perspective.

14. The first issue, with the title “Christ’s Love as Reconciling Mission,” was published in November 2020, and the second issue, with the title “Reconciliation as a Missional Task,” was published in May 2021.

Mission in the Ecumenical Movement, 2013–22

Ever since the integration of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches at the WCC Assembly in New Delhi in 1961, the role and place of mission in the ecumenical movement and in the structures of the WCC have been discussed. Over the decades, mission has taken various forms and structures. It is clear that the world is changing rapidly, and the churches and mission are constantly facing new challenges. CWME undeniably has a unique and historical role and position of giving mission impetus and reminding the churches of their inherent missionary nature.

The WCC assembly theme for Karlsruhe 2022, “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” can be helpful in this respect, as it clearly shows the importance of mission to church. Mission is based on the church being sent out into the world by the One who was sent to bring reconciliation and unity and to move the world to reconciliation and unity. Some ten years after the 1961 integration of the IMC and the WCC, the then director of CWME, Philip Potter, said in his report at the World Mission Conference in Bangkok (1972–73), “as we learned from the beginning of the ecumenical movement, the issues of unity and mission are inextricably bound together.”¹⁵ Potter reminded the conference that the integration was led mainly by the churches born out of Western mission efforts, and those churches wanted the whole church of Christ to embrace its missionary task. Through the unity, the churches in the global South wanted to be witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ for the world (John 17:21).

In addition to this important and inescapable task of mission – to advance unity “that the world may believe” – Jooseop Keum, the CWME director at the time, said in Arusha in 2018 that “we are facing a sharp challenge to define the vision and relevance of the ecumenical movement within the changing ecclesial and global landscapes of today.”¹⁶ He mentioned three points characteristic of mission that will still be valid when the ecumenical movement represented by the WCC, and even

15. *Bangkok Assembly 1973*. Minutes and Report of the Assembly of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, 31 December 1972 and 9-12 January 1973 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1973), 59.

16. Keum, “CWME: From Athens to Arusha,” 81.

beyond its fellowship, gathers in Germany in 2022.¹⁷

The first point is that mission has had, and still has, a prophetic role, as it reminds the ecumenical movement that not only mission and unity, but mission, unity, and justice, belong together. Ecumenical mission deals holistically with people and their struggles with justice, and it plays a key role connecting people and their contexts with the ecumenical movement and churches. It enables the ecumenical movement and churches to see the reality of life as it is, with its many injustices.

The second point is related to an institution. Every institution, as time goes on, tends to secure its own existence and structures. “However, over time the institution can lose the vision for the movement and fall into the temptation to only serve its self-interest.”¹⁸ As mission is movement par excellence, and not an institution or a structure or a commission, it can help the institution to renew itself, to keep its movement going, and bring fresh ideas and inspiration to the institution. As mission is movement, it builds bridges between life and enthusiasm, on the one hand, and between life and institutional or structural necessities, on the other, as it stands for both deep theological reflection and holistic action.

The third vantage point of ecumenical mission is that it has a unique position between churches and mission agencies and development agencies within the fellowship of the WCC. Many agencies find it natural to be in contact with and support in particular those concrete actions and events that the WCC Mission and Evangelism staff plans and implements, and vice versa: it is natural for the WCC Mission and Evangelism staff to look for and ask mission agencies and development agencies to be their partners in various activities and events. In those churches in which mission and church have been integrated, the whole church is involved. In those churches where mission agencies are independent associations, the church is only indirectly involved, but even there, mission can create closer relations on a national and regional level.

Finally, Keum reminded the conference participants that

Mission is all about the face-to-face encounter of people.
It is about the stories of God’s people responding to the

17. I follow here Keum, “CWME: From Athens to Arusha,” 81–82.

18. Keum, “CWME: From Athens to Arusha,” 82.

calling to be common witnesses to hope in Jesus Christ. Mission has an important role in reclaiming the human face, the powerful stories and testimonies of God's people, an experience that we have all enjoyed throughout our time together towards life. The human stories of all God's people contributing to God's mission in the power of God's Spirit can serve as a much-needed continuous challenge to the church and the ecumenical movement.¹⁹

Mission definitely has an important role in a world haunted by COVID-19, which is causing deaths and tragedies all over the globe. The pandemic has limited our physical encounters with one another and forced us to meet virtually, online. At the same time, we have discovered our responsibility for one another in a new way. And not only for other human beings, but also for the climate and environment in general, as climate changes bring many people in the world to poverty, even death. Political changes are quick and unpredictable, so wars and violent conflicts have not ceased. Uncertainty and fear have become routine.

In this rapidly changing world, the message that the universal Church of Christ can bring is the message of hope based on the gospel. To do that, the church needs to find new ways to express its inherent missionary nature: Christians need to discover that as followers of Christ, they are called to missionary discipleship.

Discipleship as a Road Sign: *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*

One of the most prominent emphases in ecumenical mission theology of recent years has been discipleship. This concept combines all the central elements of *Together towards Life* and places them before a Christian in the form of a call by Jesus: "Come and follow me." It makes mission more concrete, as it is so clearly linked with the life and ministry of Jesus and starts with the gospels. For any follower of Jesus, there cannot be any other road than the way Jesus Christ showed them – after all, he called himself "the way" (John 14:6).²⁰ In relation to mission, we see in the gospels that

19. Keum, "CWME: From Athens to Arusha," 82.

20. It is worth noting that the first Christians were called "those who belonged to the Way" (Acts 9:2; see also Acts 24:14).

the disciples are not only called to follow Jesus but also sent out in mission.

The concept of “discipleship” is nothing new in the ecumenical mission movement. The first official WCC mission statement, *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (1982),²¹ coined the expression “mission in Christ’s way” and defined discipleship as follows: “The self-emptying of the servant who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity – this was Christ’s way of proclaiming the good news, and as disciples we are summoned to follow the same way” (#28).²²

The relationship between discipleship and mission is reaffirmed in *The Arusha Call to Discipleship* (2018), in which disciples are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. *The Arusha Call to Discipleship* is a sign of renewal and hope. The mission document was unanimously approved by the participants of the Arusha Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in 2018 and has been translated into several languages. As mentioned above, its first systematic analysis and commentary (Ross’s *Mission Rediscovered*) was launched in December 2020.

Discipleship is something that combines both the personal and the communal. It does not leave a Christian in a spectator’s position but challenges him or her. What do we do when we hear Christ’s call: “Come and follow me”? If we answer affirmatively and start to follow him, this will immediately take us to the group of other followers and engage us to him “who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity,”²³ as well as to the other followers of the Way. The communal aspect is already inherent in the personal call. In the service of mission, disciples are “broken and poured out for others.”²⁴ Being a disciple of Jesus means being where Jesus is and with those people with whom Jesus is.

21. In World Christianity, it was preceded by two other important mission documents: the Lausanne Covenant (1974; evangelical) and the papal encyclical *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975). TTL was the WCC’s second mission statement.

22. Matthey, ed., *You Are the Light of the World*, 19.

23. Jukko and Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit*, 17.

24. Jukko and Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit*, 17. See also Anthony J. Gittins, *The Way of Discipleship: Women, Men, and Today’s Call to Mission* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 63.

Discipleship is transforming, in two senses of the word. First, it transforms the disciples, and through them, the context or the society in which they live. But it is also transforming in the sense that the concept itself is understood in a transforming manner. Discipleship does not mean a nominal membership of a church, a kind of Sunday-only Christianity, but a change – sometimes a radical change – of values, attitudes, and behaviour, individually and collectively.

Discipleship has been highlighted as one of the key issues in World Christianity by most of the Christian denominations in the world, at least during the last ten years or so. Pope Francis has strongly expressed the relationship between mission and discipleship, stating that through baptism, Christians are always “missionary disciples.”²⁵ In addition to the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC member churches, The Cape Town Commitment of the evangelical Lausanne Movement (2010) refers to this:

We encourage all believers to accept and affirm their own daily ministry and mission as being wherever God has called them to work . . . We need intensive efforts to train all God’s people in whole-life discipleship, which means to live, think, work, and speak from a biblical worldview and with missional effectiveness in every place or circumstance of daily life and work.²⁶

25. “In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples.’” Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), #120, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

26. Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment* (2010), Part II, 3B–3C, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.

The Anglican Communion refers to discipleship, too. Archbishop Justin Welby has said: “The best decision anyone can ever make, at any point in life, in any circumstances, whoever they are, wherever they are, is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.”²⁷ The World Evangelical Alliance, at its General Assembly in Indonesia in November 2019, pledged itself to intentional, holistic disciple making in the 2020s.²⁸

Discipleship and Receptive Ecumenism

There are obvious similarities between transforming missionary discipleship and Receptive Ecumenism.²⁹ Missionary discipleship is always ecumenical. Mission belongs to every Christian, as discipleship is a call to mission; in the same way, Receptive Ecumenism can be undertaken by any follower of Christ, at least on some level.³⁰ This similarity should not come as a surprise, as the call of Christ to follow him is given to every Christian: “We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness and worthlessness.”³¹ Baptism is a sacrament of unity. The term “Christ-connectedness” appeared at the WCC Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Arusha, Tanzania, in 2018: “To become a disciple is to follow Jesus. At the heart of discipleship, then, is Christ-connectedness – a disciple is bound to Christ.”³²

In addition, Receptive Ecumenism emphasizes conversion into Christ and learning, especially ecclesial learning, with the question “What, in any given situation, can one’s own tradition appropriately learn with

27. The Anglican Consultative Council, *Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-Making: An Anglican Guide for Christian Life and Formation* (London: The Anglican Consultative Council, 2016), xi, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/220191/intentional-discipleship-and-disciple-making.pdf>.

28. World Evangelical Alliance, “A Decade of Holistic Disciple-Making 2020–2030,” <https://disciplemaking.worlddea.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/GA-Pledge.pdf>.

29. On Receptive Ecumenism, see Gehlin’s article in this volume (chapter 2). See also, e.g., Antonia Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Renewal of the Ecumenical Movement: The Path of Ecclesial Conversion* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

30. Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism*, 78.

31. Jukko and Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit*, 2.

32. Merlyn Hyde Riley, “Following Jesus: Becoming Disciples, Mark 6:1-13,” in Jukko, Keum, and Woo, eds., *Called to Transforming Discipleship*, 9.

integrity from other traditions?”³³ Discipleship is precisely that: it necessitates repentance and conversion (Mark 1:15) followed by learning: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29). Discipleship is more than learning about Jesus: it is above all learning from the Master. It is also learning from one another, in the community of disciples. It necessitates humility, as the learning process may be slower than expected. (“Then he said to them [to the disciples], ‘Do you not yet understand?’” Mark 8:21; cf. Matt. 16:9; Luke 18:34.)

A slight difference between the concepts seems to be the direction of the process: whereas Receptive Ecumenism is clearly said to be learning for the purpose *ad intra*, toward oneself and one’s ecclesial structures, transforming missionary discipleship is both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, toward oneself in order to be in the service of the others. Missionary discipleship leads to the two different sides of John 17:21 – unity and mission – and combines them on both the individual as well as the community level.

Both transforming missionary discipleship as well as Receptive Ecumenism can be said to be “Christ-connected,” that is, Christological, but in a trinitarian framework, as both of them have also a clear pneumatological basis. Receptive Ecumenism is “a Spirit-driven movement of the heart, mind, and will.”³⁴ Receptive Ecumenism as spiritual ecumenism would not be possible without this pneumatological, Spirit-driven movement. As for mission, it has been clear since Jesus’ earthly ministry that Christian witness after Jesus’ resurrection would not be possible without the presence and power of the Spirit (see Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1ff.). As mentioned above, the latest WCC mission statement, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, underlines the pneumatological basis of mission. Paragraph 11 gives the titles of the four chapters of the document as “Spirit of Mission: Breath of Life,” “Spirit of Liberation: Mission from the Margins,” “Spirit of Community: Church on the Move,” and “Spirit of Pentecost: Good News for All.” The emphasis on the Holy Spirit is understandable from the point of view of the influence of Orthodox theology on the World Council of Churches, as well as from the point of view of the growing Pentecostal churches in 20th-cen-

33. Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism*, 124.

34. Paul D. Murray, cited in Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism*, 134.

tury Christianity. The WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism has representatives from both the Orthodox and the Pentecostal churches. The nature and the entire working methodology and process of CWME can be said to express, and be based on, the same pneumatological aspect as Receptive Ecumenism, in addition to Christology, in a Trinitarian framework.³⁵

Conclusion

In my understanding, Receptive Ecumenism needs to be completed with mission. To put it more generally, unity needs mission as much as mission needs unity, for the sake of the Christian witness. “The goal of ecumenism is to reach unity so that Christians can properly bear witness to Christ.”³⁶ Learning from others as a way to deeper unity with them is a necessity in the search for Christian unity, but we cannot stop at learning for ourselves (*ad intra*). Christian faith is also directed *ad extra*, as a witness to Christ in service of word and deed to the world. Without this outlook and love-motivated character, the search for unity to serve only oneself or one’s own ecclesial structures becomes functional, the aim in itself. In the worst case, if we concentrate only on our own learning and transformation, it means forgetting the love for our neighbour. Transforming missionary discipleship underlines love as its motive and the basis of the practice of mission. The dual nature of missionary discipleship – both personal and community-oriented – can help Receptive Ecumenism to remember the “outside world” and to change it from being an ecumenical method to a process of becoming Receptive Ecumenism in mission, “to properly bear witness to Christ.”³⁷

The journey of a follower of Jesus is not easy; it can be costly, even very costly. Not everyone is ready to pay the price, no matter what form it takes (see Luke 19:25-35). For the follower, there is no other possible

35. See the list of CWME commissioners with their respective denominations/background organizations, in Jukko and Keum, eds., *Moving in the Spirit*, 190–92.

36. Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism*, 179.

37. Interestingly enough, Pizzey echoes this idea at the end of her book, affirming that ecumenism needs to be rediscovered “as spiritual practice, of conversion into Christ, as well as about theological knowledge, and practical mission” (Pizzey, *Receptive Ecumenism*, 179). Ecumenical mission includes all these aspects.

road than the one shown by Christ, no matter where it leads. Following Jesus Christ and learning from him who made himself vulnerable, was wounded, and finally was killed displays how costly discipleship can be. All but one of Jesus' 12 disciples were killed because of their faith in him.

The appropriate word used in the New Testament is kenosis, "self-emptying" (Phil. 2:6-8). The self-emptying, kenosis, of Christ is the concrete model of discipleship to follow. Being a follower of Jesus cannot mean anything else than emptying oneself, serving others, and thus being vulnerable and ready to be wounded and die. Even if the concept of kenosis happens to appear in only a couple of passages in the New Testament, it is "a recurring picture of Christ's servant life and death."³⁸

"Belonging to the Way" or discipleship means an ongoing transformation in the lives of Jesus' followers. They "empty themselves" in order to participate in the mystery of incarnation. They know that God was made visible in Christ. Through baptism into Christ, relationships and unity with other Christians are possible.³⁹ Disciples of Jesus allow themselves to be vulnerable and wounded in the compassionate service of mission.⁴⁰ The first WCC mission statement, *Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation* (1982), affirms that "Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people" (#41).⁴¹ Being a theological and spiritual concept, in practical mission work, Christ-connected discipleship is relational and thus very appropriate for the use of Receptive Ecumenism. In addition to being relational, it has a reciprocal aspect, opening new doors to reception of the other. At the same time, it reminds us that the mission aims at connecting people to Christ. Transforming missionary discipleship needs Receptive Ecumenism, and Receptive Ecumenism cannot ignore the mission dimension, *ad extra*, of Christian faith: "that the world may believe."

38. Alan Neely, "Mission as Kenosis: Implications for Our Times," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 10, no. 3 (1989), 202-23, at 216.

39. The emphasis of baptism, such as in *Evangelii gaudium* and *The Arusha Call to Discipleship*, are in close connection with the Nicene Creed: "*confiteor unum baptismam in remissionem peccatorum*" ("We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins") (1975 ecumenical version).

40. Madge Karecki, "A Missiological Reflection on 'Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,'" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 38, no. 4 (2014), 191-92, at 192.

41. Matthey, ed., *You Are the Light of the World*, 28.

Concluding Words

Some of the most difficult conversations among Christians today can be conversations about mission. You don't have to venture even out of your own tradition, or even sometimes out of your own head, to find the subject of mission difficult, challenging, and conflicted.

On the one hand, mission is the very thing that everyone in the church now says should be at the heart of our life and energy. Indeed, we often say to each other in these times that it's not that the church *has* a mission (somehow secondary to its more essential *being*) but that *God* has a mission, and to serve that mission, God created the church. But, on the other hand, we find it hard to name clearly, and with one voice, what that mission is, how it relates to the Bible witness we know well, and how we should be doing it. Even more, we can be embarrassed by some of what has counted as mission in the past or in the present, and we may sometimes be quick to denounce the models of mission we see others engaging in or advocating. So, while mission is becoming more of a central focus in the life and talk of the church, how we understand what that mission is has become more problematized. We often find ourselves trying to resolve this conundrum either by resorting to bland generalities when we talk about mission or by being so specific that we make little common ground with other Christians. Something needs to change.

In 2018, at the World Mission Conference in Arusha, the excitement and commitment of the churches to mission was made vivid in drama, dance, song, worship, and celebration. But sometimes in the debates, and especially in the final wrangles over an approved common message, it became clear that the churches are *searching* for unity in mission but have not yet *found* it. In compressed, but increasingly tense, plenary discussion, it was evident that the very word "mission" may mean different things

to different churches, communities, and people. And the hard work of listening needed much longer than even those days together allowed. For many who were there, mission was about going to the margins of the world and listening to the voice of the Christ who speaks from there. For others, mission was about evangelism: speaking the name of Jesus Christ into cultures where he is little known or little named. For many, whatever mission now is, it must be redeemed from the legacy of colonial missionaries and of the global inequality that is the tragic consequence of those ways in which the gospel was once “taken” to the wider world. For some, mission must be rescued from those who still use it today as a means of spreading a particular version of Western individualism. For some, mission and evangelism might conflict with the more natural imperative, in their context, of interreligious dialogue. For some, mission is so important that it cannot wait for the slow, patient conversations of an ecumenism that puts unity at the heart of its purpose. It is all too easy for these competing voices to shout without listening, to cast aside people or ideas (or churches) without thought, to approach without any desire to learn.

This book, and the story it tells, reveals how fruitful Receptive Ecumenism might be in helping the churches to find ways right now to rediscover the mission of God – and to rediscover it by truly learning from each other. If this book does its work well among the churches, it could fire up the ecumenical movement in new and exciting ways. Sometimes it is when we talk about mission that we find our most deeply embedded predetermined views about other Christians. Perhaps we fear the stridency of what we are tempted to label fundamentalism. Or maybe we assume that if you care deeply about liturgy, then mission is not your thing. Or perhaps we just can’t see how looking to the margins or the marginalized will help in winning the world for Christ. This book begins to show how those embedded views can be thrown wide open by engaging in Receptive Ecumenism. And it shows that now may be the time to begin that journey.

In a multi-voice book like this one, it’s often in the appendix or in the short chapters that you find the key to what is being offered. The experience at the heart of this book is a two-year “pilgrimage” in which Christians from different traditions listened to each other reflect on mission: mission in the Bible, in their own contexts, and in their churches. It is in

these voices that we hear grace, openness, willingness to be vulnerable, and the sense of having received revelatory gifts that makes Receptive Ecumenism such a gift to the church. A mission pilgrimage invites all the participants to ask what they might need to receive from others in order to understand more deeply the mission of God and the role of the church in serving that mission. It also invites participants to be willing to share their own vulnerability, their own wounds. This could hardly be more important when we come to talk about mission – especially, perhaps, in a context in the global North when the “sea of faith” seems to be receding. What can we learn, what *must* we learn, about how to join in with the mission of God in these times?

There is reassurance here that this is not a new struggle or a new need. We learn, for example, of how those whose story is told in the book of Acts were wrestling with their own view of mission. We are reminded of how the 1910 Edinburgh conference (one of the milestones of the ecumenical movement) was a moment when some, at least in the world church, were pondering what mission was, what shape it needed, and how vital unity was to it. We are also reminded, in this book, of moments when the missions of Western churches have been experienced negatively in the East or the South, of those who have felt themselves to be victims of a certain kind of mission. The book reveals, as Receptive Ecumenism invites us to do, not only the “best china” moments of church history, but also what is cracked and broken.

The pilgrims in this multilateral pilgrimage have been ardent, persistent, and honest in asking themselves the classic Receptive Ecumenism question: “What is it that I and my tradition need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?” They exhibit admirable curiosity, mutual confidence and trust, as well as a willingness to learn from each other. You can see on the page much honest self-disclosure as well as mutual discovery. So, dialogue can be an *expression* of mission? Missionary zeal can be found in more traditions than I expected! Has evangelism been forgotten in my church? Can some Orthodox critiques of *Together towards Life* be truly and generously heard? Might a Pentecostal draw back from “looking down” on “older” churches and receive the gifts of a longer-term perspective, while at the same time knowing that other churches are receiving again a sense of vigour and renewal? The pilgrimage, as the book testifies, was clearly more than an exercise of the mind; it was an

engaging in the building of relationships and the sharing of lived experience. This is about people enabling their traditions to meet, less in theory and more in actual bodies and lives.

There is a view that the reception of Receptive Ecumenism needs to be deepened within the World Council of Churches and in mission itself. This book does a great deal to correct that view. It asks, with grace and gentleness, but also with persistence, how we can have a good conversation about mission and how we might break the awkward silence that sometimes falls upon us when we are asked what our tradition says or does about mission. This is just the beginning. The articles in this book reveal what a liberating and exciting pilgrimage that could be. The biblical pieces, for example, do much to set us free from embarrassment with or fixation on the Great Commission, and they encourage us to believe that the early church's understanding of what it was doing was much more complicated and varied than we tend to presume. The variety in the contemporary church is matched by a variety of practice and understanding in the early church – so let's learn from each other, both across time and across the world today. That feels like a liberating message.

I wonder whether Receptive Ecumenism might need to be willing to engage in its own receptive exercise with what it identifies as other forms of ecumenism, like Life and Work (being with), or Faith and Order (overcoming theological division), or Justice and Peace (transforming injustice together). Receptive Ecumenism is keen neither to take over nor to discard other ways of ecumenism, but perhaps just as we can easily make presumptions about other traditions, we might also all have rather too fixed ideas about our companion ecumenists. Is it time for us to listen to each other *even as we do ecumenism* and to be more willing to recognize that ecumenical paths, commissions, or institutions are far more fluid and variable than we might think? Many who work in Faith and Order, for example, would recognize that they come to the table with wounded hands and with open hearts – that for them, it's not about doctrine alone, but about all the gifts of a tradition. Many of us are asking first what we need to learn from the traditions of others and are trying to resist the temptation to be defensive or to be stereotypes of our own churches (we have already learned from Receptive Ecumenism!). We are all tired of “the same old ways” of doing things, and we are all open to new paths. We are all pilgrims: of justice and peace, life and work, and faith and

order. We are all eager to go beyond formalities and ready to dive deeper. If the ecumenical movement has indeed plateaued, and if progress seems difficult, then we are all ready to gird our loins for a steep climb and the next step. If Receptive Ecumenism can help us all get out of a rut, then God be praised. It is true that ecumenism can only be widened when it goes deeper. Let's do it – together!

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Appendix – What Do We Find in the Bible about Mission?

Sven-Erik Fjellström

The Great Commission – What Do We Mean by That?

Background

If you ask people in any congregation whether they know the words of the Great Commission, there will most often be some participants who know that it is found in Matthew 28:18-20 and that the words are: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

If asked *why* they know this, the answer is usually that it was taught to them in church classes or in school – and that this passage has “The Great Commission” as its heading, while also being aware that the headings are put there by the Bible publishers.

For some, it is a bit bewildering to realize that this is not the only commission in the gospels. It being called “the Great Commission” suggests, perhaps, that there are several.

If you take the time to look further, you may get some interesting input when talking to sisters and brothers of faith from other church traditions. Some may have heard about Christians in India, who have chosen to tune down the Matthew commission, because it becomes too militant in a multireligious society. Or they may have heard about other Christians who enhance the story of sowing on four different kinds of soil as an extremely important mission text. For people who come from more evangelical go-out traditions, the text about the sower may seem

too lenient; on the other hand, it contains the strong message that when people are struck by the gospel, it may grow in them more than you could ever imagine. This is not a totally uncommon experience in secularized countries, when people find their faith as adults and very enthusiastically talk about that experience. Some may even dare to ponder whether the verses from the gospel of Matthew just happened to fit very well with the geographic expansion of colonialism. If so, the knowledge that it is one of many commissions may open up space for new dialogues.

During the mission pilgrimage in Sweden (see chapter 2), an exercise was carried out with focus on the Great Commission in Matthew; or rather, it was an exercise to talk about mission *without* using those verses. The exercise came to be called 4X4 MISSION, since the alternative commissions had been taken from the fourth chapters in each of the four gospels. Participants were asked to define and share, based on the four texts, where they would place themselves, and in so doing, leave Matthew 28 behind.

Exercise

- **Luke 4**

In Luke 4:16-21, Jesus comes to the synagogue in Nazareth and reads the text from Isaiah. His comment about the year of the Lord's favour, release to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind all taking place here and now was obviously too much for the listeners. Jesus came close to being stoned. In many traditions, not least within liberation theology, it is usually stressed that this actually is our mission today: here and now, to try to recognize where the kingdom of God is taking place – but also to proclaim that there is mercy, freedom, sight, and new insights, here and now. In our own communities, and definitely not only in our places of worship.

- **Mark 4**

In Mark 4:1-9, the sower sows in four different environments. This is one of the few parables that are later explained (verses 13-20), and there is a fairly clear picture of which people represent which of the different kinds of soil. Perhaps the interpretation has become stuck there, instead of emphasizing the unfathomable

that takes place, when the word really takes root. This is beyond the control of the sower; he has, however, faithfully done his sowing job. The churches that emphasize this parable seem to find it important that we, at all times, should sow; that we, in a sober-minded way, should just notice that what we sow does not always fall into good soil, but that the growth may occur when and where we are not at all expecting it. Can you always tell by the surface whether the soil is good? Could this sowing image also inspire thoughts of what grows beyond our own time? In many churches, there are stories of how work done by someone long ago proves to be fruitful much later. How does this influence our view of mission – if compared to Matthew 28, which is rather interpreted to mean that we should preach, quickly and deliberately (so that people will repent), baptize, and teach?

- **John 4**

The woman at the well of Sychar, John 4:1-27, is a text often used in sermons. You can stress the change that takes place in the woman when she meets the messiah; you can stress that Jesus meets people no matter what their background is – in her case, with a number of unfortunate relationships and living in social loneliness, since it is often said that she went to the well in the middle of the day to avoid other people. The text is also used as a good example of pedagogy and dialogue method. Jesus uses the well and the water as a starting point for a discussion that moves deeper and deeper toward thirst and the well of life.

When the new Swedish translation of the Bible (*Bibel 2000*) was published, a note was added to those bibles that had a critical component. When Jesus has asked the woman to fetch her husband (man), she says that she does not have a man. Jesus says she is right; she has had five men, and the one she has now is not her own. The note says, “Five men.” The words may be interpreted symbolically. According to a tradition based on 2 Kings 17:24 and forward, the Samaritan ancestors worshipped five foreign gods. Would it be possible, departing from this note, to allow oneself to interpret the story as Jesus meeting a religiously experienced person, a Samaritan woman, having a conversation with

her, almost like an interreligious dialogue? What happens with the different parts of the story if you read it that way? What does it teach us about encounters at wells, about receiving rather than giving, about learning in the encounter with others?

Sermons often focus on how the woman goes in the middle of the day to avoid the gaze of other people; she, the sinner from Samaria. But the text never mentions this. If you zoom out, you will see some other perspectives of mission theology as well. Nicodemus comes in the *middle of the night* (John 3); the Samaritan woman meets Jesus in the *middle of the day*, and just after that meeting, a Roman soldier comes asking for help (John 4:46-53). When he gets home, the soldier notices that the wonder has taken place *at the same time* as Jesus was talking to him. Did John wish to say that the church had its theology of mission challenged and broadened? “The commission” in Acts 1 about going to Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world is here played out in two chapters, in the form of three stories of encounters between people from Judea, Samaria, and “the whole world.” And mission goes on, all the time, day and night, 24/7!

In what way does the fourth chapter of John challenge us? In what way does it “take place” in our mission today?

- **Matthew 4**

Matthew 4:18-22 may not have anything to do with mission theology in any obvious way, but the text was included in this exercise because of the part where Jesus calls some of his first disciples. In Luke’s version (Luke 6:12-16), he prays for a whole night before choosing them. (One might ask why, despite the prayer, he ends up with such a mediocre group.) Or was this a nightly struggle to dare choose ordinary people for the mission? The devil had earlier tried to offer Jesus various VIP lanes, but he consistently refrained. Was he also struggling to let the people he invited be just that, people, with all their faults and defects as well as their abilities?

Can the text lead to a discussion of what it means for our local mission that the text implies precisely us, we who are around, here and now? That is, could it lead us to refrain from creating a mission theology that builds on something else than what we have?

Departing from this introduction and background, from which you as a leader are free to pick certain parts, a group may be given the opportunity to discuss their own views of which commission they have been most impressed by. If done as an exercise within the format of Receptive Ecumenism, this 4X4 exercise will provide an opportunity to listen, with respect, to where others see themselves. Perhaps it is also possible to invite the participants to bring in other perspectives from the Bible that enrich the discussion.

The purpose of the regathering, the mountain metaphor in the mission pilgrimage, is not to find a common view of mission based on the discussion, but rather to use the exercise to realize how differently we think, departing from different places. And we can ask ourselves, what in another person's way of thinking enriches my own view?

The matrix that follows can be copied for group discussions. Please feel free to fill in the empty boxes with the biblical verses you find most appropriate.

Matthew 4:18-22

¹⁸ As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. ²¹ As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

John 4:13-19

¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet.”

Mark 4:3-9

³ “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. ⁶ And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. ⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” ⁹ And he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

Mark 4:3-9

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What Are You (Really) Talking About?

Background

The Emmaus story is often used when talking about encounters and discussions, but also as a text about mission. As in John 4, the focus is on the pedagogy used by Jesus, where he starts by asking questions, orienting himself as to what they are talking about. We understand, obviously, that he already knows this, but it seems important that they themselves be allowed to put it into words.

In a discussion group about Receptive Ecumenism, this exercise may be one way of helping people – for example, in groups of two – go a bit deeper but also appease curiosity.

When the exercise was carried out during the process of the Swedish mission pilgrimage, the participants had written questions the night before the walk. These were then evenly placed in a number of boxes along the way. This allowed participants to see what other people in the group were curious about concerning the Catholic tradition. The exercise may, of course, be scaled down to having two persons walk together, sharing – while they walk – questions that trigger their curiosity. If so, participants should preferably be mixed to represent different church traditions. And, as with the Emmaus text, a third person may be a co-wanderer, after a while sharing what they think they have heard.

There is no need for feedback to the whole group after this exercise; rather, there is a risk that such a discussion would spoil the good things one has talked about. One suggestion is to offer time for private prayer/stillness and reflection after the walk. This may then be followed by sharing, within one's own church tradition, what one has learned during the walk and talk.

In the pilgrimage, there was a final gathering – not to reach consensus but to share the feeling of leaving the exercise with an experience of having discovered something new, just as the persons walking to Emmaus had had time to ask questions and share. Finally, there may be a devotion in the tradition where the exercise is being done. Perhaps there is also an opportunity to talk about what each person would like to run back to their own group in Jerusalem to share.

Exercise

Choose a format according to the thoughts and ideas above. Here is an example:

- First, take a moment to listen to the Emmaus story in Luke 24:13-35. Perhaps listen to it twice.
- Walk (set aside 1.5 to 2 hours for this exercise):
 - 1) Walk in pairs or groups of three in mixed constellations;
 - 2) Share questions or pick questions that someone has set out in question boxes along the road;
 - 3) Leave a word from the Bible as a last stop – and walk in silence after reading that.
- Gather again in silence for your own reflection.
- Gather again in small groups, sharing what you wish to share.
- Gather again as a full group on the “mountain.” Choose a format to tie up the exercise: this could be a visual approach, placing all the questions on the floor, with a lit candle in the centre. Allow time for reflections to be shared.
- As in the Emmaus story, the exercise may be followed by a meal together.

With Persons from the Bible in the Boat

Adding a new story from the Bible to an ongoing process in a group may, at best, function as a side light, letting you see something new. In connection with the canoe ride during the mission pilgrimage, pairs were invited to bring the prophet Jonah and the apostle Peter along as co-passengers in their canoes. Parts of their stories in the book of Jonah and Acts 10 were printed and handed out. With a humorous twinkle in our eye, we suggested that having Jonah as a passenger might be a bit unsafe; he might even offer to throw himself into the lake. Or Peter might become so eager that he'd want to walk on the water.

That Jonah and Peter were chosen as co-passengers had to do with the fact that we had the canoes departing, in our imagination, from Joppa, a place that plays a role in several biblical stories. From Joppa – today's Jaffa outside Tel Aviv – the prophet Jonah boarded a ship as he was fleeing his calling. In Joppa, the apostle Peter (Acts 10) received a strange vision in which a large sheet was lowered from heaven, and he was urged

to slaughter animals and eat. Some of the animals were unclean to Peter as a Jew; the vision eventually led to a meeting with a so-called heathen, Cornelius. Joppa was also, according to 2 Maccabees 12:1-9, the place of a terrible massacre in which 200 Jews were killed by heathens. In Joppa, there was tension in the air; the place was perhaps remembered in the same way as we talk today about the 1995 massacre in Srebrenica or the more recent genocide in Darfur.

Therefore, along with the printed handouts for the canoe ride, there was an invitation to think about what would have happened to Jonah or Peter had they been given the opportunity to participate in a workshop on mission, using Receptive Ecumenism as a method. That also raises the question about what the point was – or were – in the story:

- In the gospels, Jesus alludes to the three days, including three nights, that Jonah was in the belly of the fish as a Jonah sign pointing to his own upcoming death and resurrection.
- To many, that story may more often have been used to inspire discussions about calling and renewed calling. Sometimes in our lives, we may let our calling down and run away but are given new opportunities.
- However, it is also possible to read it as a story in which Jonah had begun to discern that God was good to “the others,” in this case the people of Nineveh. Jonah did not want to realize that he might be wrong – or that he might be right, in that he had begun to suspect that God’s benevolence toward the others was larger than what Jonah himself was prepared to show. Therefore, he fled. Are there, within ecumenism, or even within certain interreligious issues, different Ninevehs that we do not want to experience?

Likewise, we may, departing from the story of Peter, think about what comes down on that sheet today. What would we really not like to find there? Do we separate things into clean/unclean, right/wrong, ideas that we would rather not have challenged?

Below, you will find a few more suggested exercises when bringing Jonah and Peter along in a discussion during the canoe ride.

The Story of Jonah

It is preferable to spend a fairly long time on this story.

- One way of doing this is often called remembered narrative. Sit together in smaller groups and try to remember details in the story without reading it beforehand. Make notes on pieces of paper. Then meet again as a large group and try to assemble the pieces of the story in the correct order.
- Then, read and listen to the whole story. Allow for a discussion about details you remembered that were not in the story – and about details you missed.
- If the group should want to dramatize, let some or all persons in the group act out the drama.
- Departing from the Ninevehs we do not want to go to, use small groups or the larger group to apply the story, looking through ecumenical glasses.

Peter in Joppa

Read the email correspondence with Luke in chapter 1 in this book.

What would you have written to Luke if you had wanted to tell him about what is coming down on the large sheet today in your own community?

The exercise may be visually strengthened by having four people hold up a large sheet or tablecloth, in which participants put their pieces of paper with subjects they want to lift up and discuss.

Paul Should Know...

An Exercise Where You Write an Email to paul@prison.rome

Background

Many of us may have read the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters from a perspective of propagation. Might this way of thinking also have been strengthened by looking at the maps of Paul's missionary journeys that you will find in most Bibles?

The message was to be spread; therefore, it is easy to interpret the concept of mission in such a way. Some may wonder whether Paul knew

what we seem to see when we draw maps of his journeys. Perhaps it is more ecumenical, in the spirit of Receptive Ecumenism, to read this from a perspective that Paul, through his travels and his letters, tried to exhibit something new about relationship between people, something that had happened when Christ died and was resurrected. And therefore, they all – Jews and heathen; Greeks, Romans, and other people; women and men – were now one in Christ. That is what he wanted to go around and proclaim; he wanted to gather and talk to people. That is what he wanted to remind them about in his letters.

But in his letters, we do not merely see the jubilant insight that we are all one in Christ. There are also admonitions, not least in the letters to the Corinthians, about working on unity. It can sometimes be good for us to remember this: the words we read in a service about all of us who take part of this single bread being one were originally a scolding of the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Exercise

- Bring out a map showing Paul’s different missionary journeys, found at the back of a Bible or perhaps even better as a printed sheet. What would Paul have written to us today?
 - If you have time, delve a bit deeper into some of these places. This could be a task to do at home. Sometimes, in the last chapter of his letters, there are texts that let us imagine some of the people and their relationships.
 - When you talk together, lift up some places in your own contexts. Where is the Corinth, Ephesus, or Alexandria of our own communities? Which places are there now that did not exist in the context of the New Testament? Which words of encouragement, comfort, or admonishment would Paul have written today?
- Make a copy of a picture showing how that same sea, over which Paul travelled to bring people together, is today a sea where thousands of people die each year on their flight toward Europe. What would you like to tell him? Search Google images for “Mediterranean refugees’ map” and choose a suitable picture. In which ways has such a map drawn attention to new problems that have brought churches in your community together? The Mediterranean, which once made it possi-

ble for Paul to create relations between Christians, has today become a sea of death, influencing both cities and rural areas in your country. Which narratives are there among you? Is there a new narrative growing, a new image of what it is to be a church, to live being sent out, sent forward?

- Are there other issues today that you would like Paul to hear about? That is, have other issues appeared during the history of the church that you would like to problematize with him? Out of your own imagination, write some emails to him.
- Then, talk about what you have lifted up.

Kitchen Talk at the House of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus about Getting to Know Each Other beyond First Impressions

Background

Sometimes we live with rather predetermined views of each other: in our own communities but also in the geography of churches. We think we know what a charismatic person is like, how evangelicals behave toward their fellow passengers on train trips, and so on. Sometimes, people are described as high church or low church. Discuss which definitions you have within your group for terms like these.

In our meetings with people from the Bible, we also easily form images of what some of them are like. Jacob and John live in the shadow of the brothers Simon Peter and Andrew; we may just note that they leave their father with his nets and follow Jesus (see Mark 1:16-20). But then one day, they ask Jesus for something special: they want the highest positions together with Jesus (Mark 10:35-45). And they do so just as Jesus has told them that he is on his way toward suffering in Jerusalem! In Matthew's version (Matt. 20:20-28), their mother comes as well, asking that her boys get the highest positions with Jesus in his kingdom. This infuriates the others. Did these men have a need for power that we have not thought of? It may be exciting to think about that, though perhaps the story instead shows us how, most often, it is easier to see the obvious flaws in someone else.

Here is one way of getting closer to Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus.

Exercise

Perhaps, more than anything, the story in Luke 10:38-42 has forever left its mark on us. Some people are like the practical-minded Martha, probably often working too much. Others are more meditative, like Mary, who leaves the kitchen and wants to sit at the feet of Jesus. Lazarus plays an important part – as a dead man – in John 11 but has no lines of his own in the gospels. Who was he? Read these excerpts and talk about the impressions you get.

- Luke 10:38-42
- John 11
- Matthew 21:1-17, which ends with the words “He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.” This opens the possibility that Jesus stayed with these three siblings in Bethany for the whole of his last week. In John 12, the week begins with a meal at their house, during which Mary anoints Jesus.

Do you see anything new in the siblings after this reading?

Use your discussion to consider how we could practise seeing new traits in our sisters and brothers in faith, whom we thought we already knew everything about.

Some reflections (to look at *after* your discussion, preferably):

- Martha, the theologian
In Luke 10:38-42, Martha is the practical-minded person we often point to, but in John 11:27, she is a theologically reflective person. She talks to Jesus about death and resurrection, and like Peter in Matthew 16:16, she also makes a messiah confession.
- Mary, the spiritual-minded one, or... ?
Mary is sometimes pointed out as a woman who dares to break gender rules. Her frankness in simply sitting down as a rabbinic student in Luke 10:38-42 might have been a challenge. There are also other parts in Luke when women “disturb the order,” such as when the woman anoints Jesus in chapter 7:36-50.
- Lazarus, the unwell, but also...?
This is all we are told. In John, Lazarus becomes an object only as a dead person, but naturally we understand that there is so much

more. This is the only time we hear about Jesus weeping. He weeps because Lazarus was dear to him. What does that mean?

Can we relate this to the fact that Jesus – in the time between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, when his own struggle, agony, and sadness were at their deepest – stayed with the three siblings in Bethany? In what way did their home become the context Jesus needed?

Perceiving Others in a New Light

Please use these texts to think about how people may be perceived in a new light once you find out more about them. Do we have similar experiences from ecumenical contexts, or do we need to get to know each other better? How can we contribute to this?

Receptive Ecumenism was introduced in 2014 to a working group of representatives from four church traditions in Sweden – Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran and Free Church. The group reflected together on mission and unity based on the mission statement of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (2013). Out of these conversations on mission, unity and Receptive Ecumenism, a mission pilgrimage was born.

Contributors to this volume include participants to the mission pilgrimage and representatives of various Christian traditions and regions of the world.

Receptive Ecumenism can be described as an ecumenism of the wounded hands. It brings to the fore the self-critical hospitality, humble learning, and ongoing conversion that have always been quietly essential to ecumenical work. "What do we, in our tradition, need to learn and receive, with integrity, from others?"

This book on the Bible, Mission and Receptive Ecumenism is timely and relevant. It is simply the kind of literature that churches, ecumenical organizations, national councils of churches, missiologists and theologians need to read. It is anchored on the reception and sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ with one another as a spiritual gift. It resonates in many ways with the strategic direction of the WCC's Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace – a people on the way, praying, working, and walking together as we accept that we bring different gifts to the table to offer, share and receive to enrich one another.

Dr Agnes Abuom, Moderator of the WCC Central Committee

Ecumenism – mission – evangelism – ethics – interculturality: In bringing together these key words for churches in the 21st century under the motto Sharing and Learning, this book is a strong testimony to our call for joint witness in the world. By stressing values such as mutual learning, integrity, coexistence, and solidarity, receptive ecumenism continues to be a promising path for both church and academia. There is no better way forward than healing of memories and a pastoral ecumenism of friendship and common service to a world that is crying out for hope, for just peace and for reconciliation!

Most Rev Dr Antje Jackelén, Archbishop Church of Sweden

Religion/Mission/Ecumenism



ISBN 978-2-8254-1766-9



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