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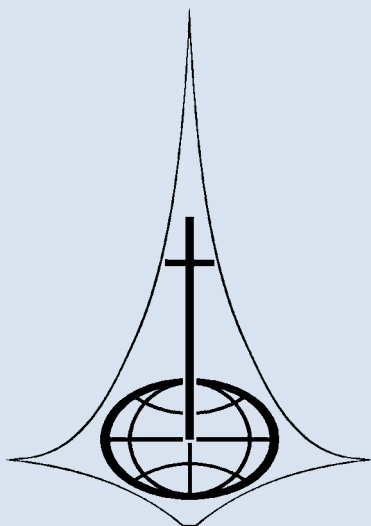
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Special Focus on 25 Years of Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue



The international Joint Commission of the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation celebrated its 25th anniversary at its 13th meeting in Bratislava, Slovak Republic. Festivities were held on Saturday, 4 November at the Theological Faculty of Bratislava's Comenius University in the presence of local church leaders and ecumenical guests.

Photo: Members of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission and guests at the 25th anniversary celebration in Bratislava. © S. Dietrich

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By evening, she will have reached Goma city in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Hermine Nikolaisen, reckons it takes about three hours from the Rwandan capital Kigali to Goma, the city that experienced extensive destruction in January 2002 when the Nyiragongo volcano erupted, leaving tens of thousands displaced, and nearly 50 people dead.

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Martin Schindehütte Is New EKD Bishop for Foreign Affairs

Martin Schindehütte is the new bishop for foreign affairs of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). A former vice president of the church office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hanover, he was officially installed as bishop and head of the EKD Department for Ecumenical Relations and Ministries Abroad by EKD Council Chairperson, Bishop Wolfgang Huber. The installation took place on 7 September. Schindehütte, 56, succeeds Bishop Rolf Koppe, 65, who retired at the end of August.

The new EKD bishop for foreign affairs studied theology and social education in Wuppertal and Göttingen, Germany, and after ordination served as a parish pastor in the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck. In 1987, he began his tenure as dean of studies at the Protestant Academy in Hofgeismar, Germany. From 1992 to 1994, he was based in Hanover in charge of the EKD church office desk for foreigners and ethnic minorities, following which he led a diaconal ministry as head pastor.



The new EKD Bishop for Foreign Affairs Martin Schindehütte (left) after his installation in Hanover. He is flanked by his predecessor, Bishop Dr Rolf Koppe (right) and EKD Council Chairperson Bishop Dr Wolfgang Huber (center). © epd-bild/J. Schulze

The EKD includes 23 Lutheran, Reformed, and United regional churches in Germany with a membership of some 25.6 million.

Global Christian Communication Body Relocates to Canada

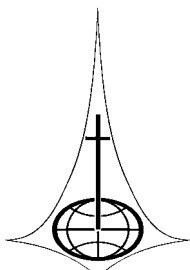
The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) has relocated its offices from London, United Kingdom, to Toronto, Canada. The organization's new headquarters were inaugurated on 2 October at a service of celebration in the sanctuary of the Hope United Church in Toronto. Some 200 invited guests joined the WACC Board of Directors to witness the commissioning of the new head office of the worldwide Christian organization for communication advocacy, research and training.

The WACC was formally established in 1968, but its work dates back to 1950. It encourages ecumenical cooperation between communicators worldwide and challenges the different

denominations to seek the broadest possible base for their communication activities. WACC also promotes cooperation between people of other faiths and ideologies.

It has corporate and personal members in 120 countries organized in eight regional associations. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is a corporate member through its Office for Communication Services (OCS), and is represented on the WACC board by Ms Karin Achtelstetter, the LWF/OCS director.

At its 3 to 5 October meeting, the governing body discussed plans to implement new program initiatives and the next WACC Congress to be held in October 2008 in Cape Town, South Africa, under the theme "Communication Is Peace."



LWF Latin American Consultation Calls for Gender Integration in All Church Work

Lutheran Seminaries Urged to Include Gender in Curricula

SÃO LEOPOLDO, Brazil/GENEVA, 11 October 2006 (LWI) – Participants in a Lutheran World Federation (LWF) consultation for member churches in Latin America have called for the integration of gender issues in all aspects of church work in the Lutheran communion.

During the consultation on “Gender and Power,” in São Leopoldo, Brazil, the 37 women, men and youth leaders from the member churches in Latin America noted that although the LWF had over recent decades developed several programs and documents on gender, the issue was still far from being an integral part of the ministry of the church. The LWF desk for Women in Church and Society (WICAS) in the Department for Mission and Development organized the 6 to 10 September gathering.

Indian theologian Priscilla Singh, WICAS executive secretary, said, “We’ve always spoken of gender as an issue for women. Now is the time to listen to what men and young people have to say.”

Singh in her introductory remarks said that gender as a concept and commitment was high on the LWF agenda and that a number of programs have been conducted in seminaries and churches to further develop the issue. “Time has come to have a reality check on how far we have come and how applicable it is in the LWF member churches at present,” she told *Lutheran World Information (LWI)* in an interview.

The consultation’s aim was to gather theologians, men, youth and women leaders in the church to deliberate further on the gender practice that should be encouraged in churches. The meeting also provided a forum for partici-



Group work on the final message from the Latin America LWF/WICAS consultation: From left to right, EST lecturer Marga Stroher; Judith Van Osdol, CLAI—Council of Churches in Latin America, Argentina; Gilberto Questsada Mora, Costa Rica; and Rev. Gloria Rojas Vargas, Chile. © LWF/A. Berthelin

pants to share and learn from the deliberations of a second regional congress on gender organized by the theological college, Escola Superior de Teologia (EST) in Brazil.

The participants also contributed to a draft gender document prepared by a team appointed by the Latin American Church Leadership Conference (Conferencia de Liderazgo—COL) in April 2006, which will be presented to the April 2007 COL meeting. The regional church leaders’ body adopted its current name last year to better reflect the inclusive character of the church leaders’ gathering.

Singh also expressed the hope that the deliberations from the consultation and the gender ‘document in the making’ would provide valuable contents for discussion as the LWF celebrates its 60th anniversary in Lund, Sweden, in March 2007. She hoped that the COL document would become a valuable contribution from the Latin American region to the LWF, as a model and a discussion starter that WICAS could use in other continents over the next two years.

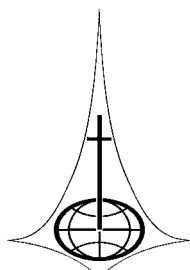
She noted that the LWF decided to open the discussion in Latin America also because the EST had conducted a number of studies and organized two international conferences on gender, thus accumulating a great amount of expertise in the field.

One of the participants, Brazilian theologian and EST lecturer, Elaine Gleci Neuenfeldt, pointed out that gender issues need to “make the leap” from being the exclusive domain of female pastors and women’s departments and groups, to being integrated into every aspect of the church’s work—mission, counseling and lay ministry.

The consultation also dealt with the issue of violence against women. Violence, said Singh, must be confronted at a structural level. The fact that it was restricted to the home simply allowed it to continue in silence.



The WICAS consultation participants Elaine Gleci Neuenfeldt (left) from Brazil and Lilia Spiller Jimenez, (Costa Rica). © LWF/A. Berthelin



An analysis of the meeting indicated a need for men and youth to discuss gender issues as well in order to promote other models of masculinity beyond that of patriarchal hegemony. The participants encouraged Lutheran seminaries in Latin America to include courses on gender and feminist theology in their curricula.

Participants came from churches in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela.

(Edelberto Behs from the Latin American and Caribbean Communication Agency—ALC, contributed to this article.)

New Namibian Bishop Seeks More Trust, Less Fear

Lutheran Churches Find Strength on Road to Unity

WINDHOEK, Namibia/GENEVA, 17 October 2006 (LWI) – After election as bishop of the German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC) in September 2005, Rev. Erich Hertel took up his new position in Windhoek, Namibia, in May 2006. This was at a time when the nation's three Lutheran churches were coming closer to constituting their own united church council of Namibian Evangelical Lutheran churches. They had been divided for decades throughout a national history of colonialism and apartheid.



Bishop Erich Hertel, German-speaking Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN-GELC). © W. Schmidt, Allgemeine Zeitung, Namibia

This effort toward Lutheran church unity was certainly one of the reasons why Hertel was willing to take on responsibilities as a church leader. "I see this as a very important task. I will be able to make use of my experience in southern Africa, and will strive to build mutual trust and reduce mutual fear," he said in an interview with the *Lutheran World Information* (LWI).

According to the bishop, the fear is indeed somewhat tangible within the ELCIN-GELC, not least because of its size. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) with 652,000 members, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN) with 350,000, greatly outnumber the ELCIN-GELC's 5,200 German-speaking members. But when Hertel speaks of the "greatness and generosity of everyone involved," this reflects the united church council's provisional constitution, which virtually allows the ELCIN-GELC an equal voice on matters. The leaderships of the three churches are to delegate a total of 15 members from their ranks to the new council, including bishops, general secretaries and treasurers. One representative from each church, in rotation, will take responsibility for the various council positions for a two-year term.

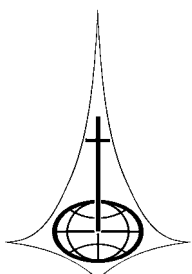
The differences in language, history, and culture of the three Lutheran churches loom large in the process of overcoming any reservation toward growing together. "I think that one must take the question of language very seriously," Hertel said. "People connect language with their identity and their self-understanding. And one may not deal with this lightly. We will need to find a common language that all can use to express themselves. This should not, however, dissolve the differences between languages, but should create opportunities

for everyone to come together. Our aim is to benefit from greater unity, and to realize that this is not about German, English, Herero, and so on, but about us as Christians bearing witness to our world, even with all our differences, even with our variety of language."

This September, the ELCIN-GELC and ELCIN synods agreed on a constitution for a common church leadership. The ELCRN has agreed to it in principle, but sees further need for clarification on some matters. The United Church Council is scheduled to convene for the first time in early 2007, and Hertel places great importance on keeping grassroots work in mind. "The fear of dialogue is often the greatest obstacle to change. I therefore feel that discussion is very important." He also sees great importance in joining together at the local level to develop new approaches, like at the meetings that have been held among young people and women from all three churches. This is precisely the type of meeting, in which "new actions can arise from new thought," he concluded.

(By LWI correspondent Erika von Wietersheim in Windhoek, Namibia.)

More LWI News at
www.lutheranworld.org/News/Welcome.EN.html



Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission Adopts Common Statement on Eucharist

25 Years of International Dialogue

BRATISLAVA, Slovak Republic/GENEVA, 6 December 2006 (LWI) – The participants of the 13th Plenary of the international Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission have affirmed recognition of the “broad areas of agreement” in their respective traditions with a view to the understanding of the Eucharist in the life of the church. They adopted a Common Statement titled, “The Mystery of the Church: The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church.”

In a communiqué from the 2–9 November meeting of the Joint Commission in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, members of the international dialogue group stated that the “Orthodox and Lutherans both confess that Christ’s body and blood are united with bread and wine, to be consumed by communicants, uniting them with Christ and with each other.”

In the communiqué, the church representatives responsible for the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) noted that they explored “the two traditions’ differing, but often converging reflections on the mystery of how the sacramental union takes place and on the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist.” They underscored the Eucharist’s eschatological dimension and stressed its significance for ecology and social action.

The Joint Commission reiterated its strong affirmation of the continuation of the international dialogue between the Orthodox and Lutherans, pointing out that there was a genuine growth in mutual ecumenical understanding and appreciation. Official



Members of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission and their guests at the November 2006 celebration of the 25th anniversary of Lutheran-Orthodox relations at the Theological Faculty of Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovak Republic. © S. Dietrich

conversations between Lutherans and Orthodox at international level began in 1981 in Espoo, Finland, after three years of preparatory meetings.

On 4 November, the participants in the recent plenary session commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Joint Commission with a celebration at the Theological Faculty of the Comenius University in Bratislava, in the presence of local church leaders and ecumenical guests.

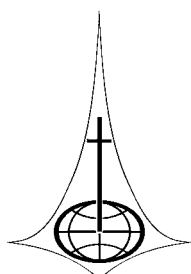
In his greeting to the commission members, LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko said the sequence of the Common Statements from the dialogue were an indication that the official Orthodox and Lutheran representatives at the world level “have been able to travel together a journey of theological investigation considering the broad, fundamental subjects pertaining to the understanding of salvation and the church.”

He noted that “the road is open for further, and even more specific discussions” in order for the two Christian traditions to move more concretely toward the commonly-desired real and visible forms of ecclesial communion.

His All Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I noted in his official greeting that the Joint Commission had already completed 25 years of fruitful and constructive cooperation. “We give thanks to God for this, and we pray that you may continue progressing, overcoming the known difficulties, and reach decisions which advance the theological discussions



13th Session of the international Joint Commission of the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation in Bratislava, 2006. © LWF/S. Oppegaard





Members of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, Bratislava, Slovak Republic, November 2006. © LWF/S. Oppegaard

and lead us closer to each other as it is the expressed will of the Lord and Savior of all," he said.

The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic hosted the Joint Commission's meeting on behalf of the LWF. The international dialogue group is co-chaired by co-presidents, Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (The Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Bishop Donald J. McCoid

(LWF) from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The Commission agreed to extend its reflection on "The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church" with a focus on the topics, "Preparation and Celebration of the Eucharist" and "Eucharist and Ecology" (including Human Society).

The next meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission is scheduled for early June 2008.

The documents listed below can be downloaded from the LWF Web site in PDF version:

Communiqué of the 13th Plenary of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/Bratislava_Communique.pdf

Common Statement on "The Mystery of the Church: D. The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church," www.lutheranworld.org/LWF_Documents/Bratislava_Statement.pdf

Lutherans and Orthodox Complete 25 years of International Dialogue

After several years of exploration and preparation the Eastern Orthodox Churches in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch agreed with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to start an international theological dialogue. The first meeting was held in 1981 and the first statement was achieved in 1985. Since then, the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission has regularly produced Common Statements on topics of fundamental importance for the two traditions and their relationship.

In the context of this year's plenary meeting of the Commission, which took place in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 2-9 November, the 25th anniversary was celebrated festively at the Faculty of Theology of the Comenius University in the presence of church representatives and ecumenical guests.

Greetings, published in this *LWI* edition with a special focus on 25 years Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue, were read from His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and from the LWF General Secretary, Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko. An Orthodox and a Lutheran presentation were given on the topic "Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue – Past, Present and Future." Shortened versions of these presentations are also



Rev. Sven Oppegaard
© LWF/H. Putsman

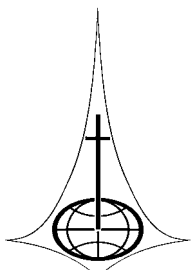
published here, which tell the story of this important dialogue and reflect upon it.

The current *LWI* also presents this year's discussion on the Eucharist. The dialogue has progressed gradually from more general topics, such as Scripture and Tradition, Authority in and of the Church, and Salvation – Grace, Justification and Synergy – to the more specific topics of Baptism and Chrismation, and the Eucharist. It was appropriate that this year's meeting concentrated specifically on the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is unquestionably true to say regarding all the topics discussed, also with regard to the Eucharist, that there is much

more that unites us, than that divides us.

The 25th anniversary was therefore celebrated with a deep sense of gratitude to God for all the shared theological insight that is now reflected in the Commission's Common Statements, which will be published together in a multi-lingual edition next year. May the Triune God bless the outcome achieved in this dialogue so far, and guide its continuation for the sake of the unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord and Savior.

Rev. Sven Oppegaard, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs from August 1997 to December 2006.



Greetings from the Ecumenical Patriarch

To the members of The XIII international Joint Commission of the theological dialogue between Orthodox and Lutherans

We greet and congratulate all the members of the international Joint Commission of the theological dialogue between Orthodox and Lutherans, at the beginning of your work in Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

This Joint Commission of the dialogue has already completed twenty-five years of fruitful and constructive cooperation. We give thanks to God for this, and we pray that you may continue progressing, overcoming the known difficulties, and reach decisions which advance the theological discussions and



lead us closer to each other as it is the expressed will of the Lord and Savior of all.

We bestow to all of you dear members of the Joint Commission our Patriarchal blessings and paternal wishes in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

At the Ecumenical Patriarchate/ Phanar,
3 November 2006.

+ Bartholomew
Archbishop of Constantinople,
New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

Greetings from the LWF General Secretary

To the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission

I greet you sincerely and warmly in the name of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As you are gathering this year, we have reason to thank God from our heart for the twenty-five years of international dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Lutheran World Federation.

As the sequence of Statements from this dialogue shows, the official Orthodox and Lutheran representatives at the world level have been able to travel together a journey of theological investigation considering the broad, fundamental subjects pertaining to the understanding of salvation and the church.

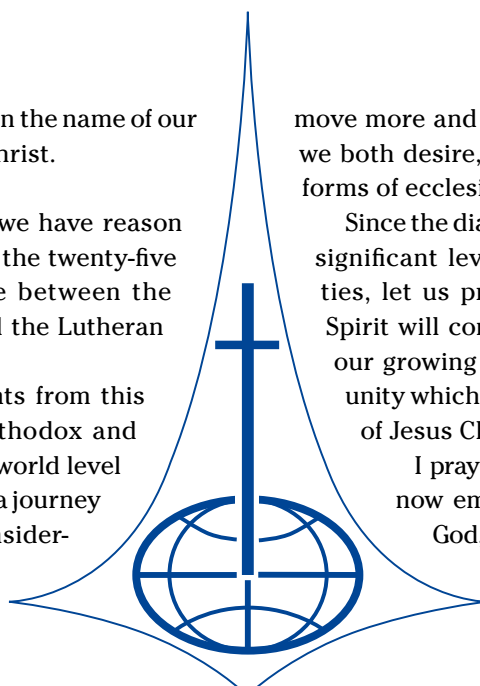
From now on, the road is open for further, and even more specific, discussions of issues that need study in order that our two traditions might

move more and more concretely in the direction we both desire, which is that of real and visible forms of ecclesial communion.

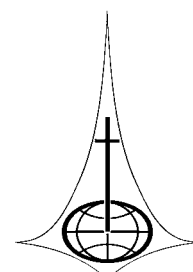
Since the dialogue has already shown the very significant level of our theological commonalities, let us pray trustfully that God the Holy Spirit will continue to guide our dialogue and our growing relationship, for the sake of that unity which is God's will for the entire Church of Jesus Christ.

I pray for the meeting on which you are now embarking, that the Blessed Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit will be with you and your deliberations this year.

Sincerely yours,



Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation



13th Session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission 2-9 November 2006, Bratislava, Slovak Republic

Communiqué

1. The 13th meeting of the international Joint Commission of the theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches (LWF)—was held in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, from 2–9 November 2006. It was generously hosted, on behalf of the LWF, by the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Slovak Republic. Co-presidents of the Joint Commission are H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima (The Ecumenical Patriarchate) and Bishop Donald McCoid (LWF).

2. Orthodox participants were delegates from the following churches: The Ecumenical Patriarchate, Patriarchate of Alexandria, Patriarchate of Antioch, Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Patriarchate of Moscow, Patriarchate of Serbia, Patriarchate of Romania, Church of Cyprus, Church of Greece, Church of Poland, Church of Albania, Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia, Church of Finland and Church of Estonia.

3. The twelve Lutheran participants, by appointment of the Council of the LWF, came from LWF member churches.

4. Contacts between Orthodox theologians from the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Lutheran professors of the University of Tübingen, Germany began already at the time of the 16th century Reformation in Europe. Thus the dialogue has precedence in history. Present official conversations began in 1981 in Espoo, Finland, after three years of preparatory meetings. The present meeting therefore marks the 25th anniversary of the Joint Commission.

5. This 13th Joint Commission discussed the fourth sub-theme of the dialogue: “The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church.” For this purpose the Preparatory Meeting took place 8–13 October 2005 in Erlangen, Germany, which heard Orthodox and Lutheran theological papers on the theme and prepared a Draft Statement. From the Lutheran side a paper was presented by Prof. Dr Karl Christian Felmy and Dr Jennifer Wasmuth on “The Lutheran Understanding of the Eucharist” and by Bishop Esbjörn Hagberg on “The Spirituality of the Eucharist and its practical implications in Evangelical Lutheran church life.” From the Orthodox side Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita presented the Orthodox paper on “The Holy Sacrament (Mysterion) of the Eucharist: An Orthodox Perspective.” An Orthodox response paper was submitted by Me Albert Laham. In Bratislava, the Draft Statement, together with the theological papers, supplemented by a paper by Prof. Dr Alexej Osipov, were presented as a basis for the deliberations of the Plenary Meeting and the elaboration of a Common Statement.

6. The Joint Commission expressed once again its strong affirmation of the continuation of the dialogue between the two traditions. It experiences a genuine growth

in mutual ecumenical understanding and appreciation. The Commission adopted a Common Statement on the theme of the meeting. According to this statement, Orthodox and Lutherans both confess that Christ’s body and blood are united with bread and wine, to be consumed by communicants, uniting them with Christ and with each other. The statement explored the two traditions’ differing, but often converging reflections on the mystery of how the sacramental union takes place and on the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist. Together they underscored the Eucharist’s eschatological dimension and stressed its significance for ecology and social action.

7. Discussions of the Joint Commission are accompanied and supported by daily prayers. On Saturday, 4 November, the Commission celebrated the 25th anniversary with a celebration at the Theological Faculty of the Comenius University in Bratislava in the presence of local church leaders and ecumenical guests. An Orthodox presentation on the topic “Lutheran-Orthodox dialogue – past, present and future” was presented by H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima. A Lutheran presentation on the same topic was written by Prof. Dr Risto Saarinen, which was read in his absence due to illness, by Bishop Donald McCoid. Ecumenical greetings were also presented and a festive dinner was given by the local Lutheran church.

8. During the meeting messages with blessings and prayers were received from His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and a message of greetings with assurances of prayers from Rev. Dr. Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the LWF.

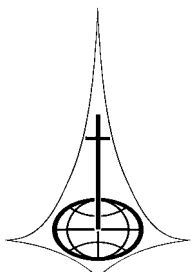
9. On Sunday, 5 November, the Commission attended the Lutheran worship in the (English-speaking) International Congregation at the “Small Church” in Bratislava, followed by a welcome by the congregation of the Lutheran “Big Church” and a presentation of this church by its pastor. In the afternoon participants went on an excursion to Cerveny Kamen Castle.

10. On Tuesday, 7 November the Joint Commission members were invited to attend an Orthodox Liturgy at the Orthodox Church in Bratislava.

11. The 13th Joint Commission meeting concluded with prayers and mutual words of thanks by the Co-Presidents. For its next meeting, the Commission agreed to extend its reflection on *The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church* and to work on the following topics: *Preparation and Celebration of the Eucharist; Eucharist and Ecology (including Human Society)*.

12. The next Preparatory Meeting is scheduled from 3–8 October 2007 in Joensuu, Finland.

Bratislava, 9 November 2006



The Lutheran—Orthodox Joint Commission: Our Continuing Work

By Prof. Dr Risto Saarinen

The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have maintained a bilateral theological dialogue since 1981. Hence, this year marks the 25th anniversary of this important bilateral relationship. Prior to the establishment of this international dialogue, various regional dialogues had already been

and the Lutheran interest has been particularly strong in the places in which local dialogues have taken place, in particular Germany, USA, Finland and Romania.



Participants of the 3rd session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, May 1985 in Allentown, Pennsylvania, USA. © Private

established, as well as formal contacts between the LWF and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, since the late 1950s. In comparison with many regional dialogues, the international Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission has proceeded very carefully. The first stages of this dialogue have been described elsewhere.¹ This presentation will review the most recent plenary meetings from 1995 to 2004.

From 1981 to 1993, the first phase of the dialogue dealt with the basic topics of revelation, scripture and tradition, and the significance of the seven ecumenical councils. Since 1994 the Joint Commission has been looking at soteriology (i.e. teaching on salvation) and the sacraments. Thus it has moved to a second phase in its work, namely discussions about the dogmatic content of faith.

While the Lutheran participants are nominated from among the member churches of the LWF and appointed by the LWF Council, the Orthodox delegates represent all churches that are in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, including the Moscow Patriarchate. The Lutheran part of the Commission lacks the participation of Lutheran churches that are not members of the LWF, whereas the Orthodox delegation does not include some branches of American Orthodoxy. Greek theologians have been especially active in the Joint Commission,

Limassol 1995: Salvation and Ecumenical Councils

The eighth plenary of the Joint Commission met at Limassol, Cyprus, from 1 to 8 August 1995 to discuss the “Understanding of Salvation in the Light of the Ecumenical Councils.”

The final document of this plenary remains very general in its common affirmations.

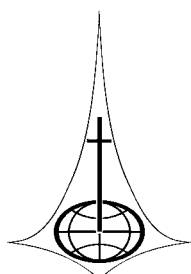
In this text one should first look at how Lutherans formulate their own doctrine. Justification is understood as forgiveness of sin and the gift of new life. As such justification becomes a participation in Christ present in faith. The believer participates in Christ and all his gifts in the church. This Lutheran description keeps

the door open towards a sacramental and ontological understanding of salvation, as emphasized by the Orthodox churches.



Participants at the 4th meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, late May and early June 1987 at the Orthodox Academy of Crete, Greece. © Private

The two partners say together in the Common Statement of Limassol that salvation is understood as “liberation from the dominion of the devil and the restoration of our communion with God.” The threefold structure of purification, illumination and glorification also appears in the text. It is presented as an outcome of the salvific communion with God, and understood



in the light of several biblical texts. The Statement thereby includes concepts of mystical theology while embedding them in a biblical framework.

Sigtuna 1998: Justification and Synergy

In the ninth plenary meeting, which took place in Sigtuna, Sweden, from 31 July to 8 August 1998, the Joint Commission was able to affirm many of the soteriological insights of earlier regional dialogues. The Common Statement of Sigtuna was titled "Salvation: Grace, Justification and Synergy." In eight long paragraphs, salvation history and the doctrine of grace are outlined. The Sigtuna text emphasizes human powerlessness and God's initiative in salvation. Grace is totally and fully the gift of God. Only the Holy Spirit can enlighten and strengthen the human will.



Discussing theology (from left to right): H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, Prof. Dr Risto Saarinen (Finland), and Bishop Dr William H. Lazareth (USA), former Lutheran co-president. Chania, Crete, 2003. © LWF/S. Oppegard

Concerning the paragraph on the interplay between God and the human will ("synergy"), it is stated jointly that grace does not work out of necessity. Human beings can resist grace. The Orthodox side also emphasizes the absolute initiative of God in the process of salvation. Both sides affirm the reality of grace as a participation in God. Lutherans are able to affirm the biblical meaning of "*theosis*" (2 Peter 1:4 and Col 2:9). Traditionally, Lutheran theology does not speak about *theosis* but about sanctification or the presence of Christ in faith. Although Lutherans have not received the doctrine of *theosis* as such, the view of Christ present in faith can be seen as a theological parallel to the Orthodox understanding of salvation. In this sense the two partners can affirm jointly the reality of the believer's participation in divine life. In this context the theology of the cross is underlined.

For several reasons it may be said that the text adopted in Sigtuna remains the most important theological result of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission thus far. The Orthodox side presents the doctrine

of *theosis* in such a manner that the Lutherans were able to understand it as a biblical perspective. On the other hand, Lutherans presented the concept of sanctification, and Christ's presence in faith, in a way which shows that the doctrine of justification is not alien to the notion of participation in the divine life. The Sigtuna text uses biblical language, and avoids stating anything on the extremely difficult issue of whether this participation exclusively consists of God's "energies"—as the palamitic concept of Orthodox mysticism has claimed.

Damascus 2000: Word and Sacrament

The tenth plenary meeting of the Joint Commission took place in Damascus, Syria, from 3 to 10 November 2000. This text also begins a new overall topic "The Mystery of the Church."

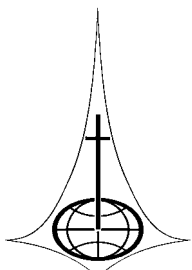
The Damascus Common Statement contains a general presentation of the concept of sacrament, and discusses the understanding of the Word of God. In the beginning, the biblical concept of "*mysterion*" is specified, and the church is described as the body of Christ. The grace of the sacraments is conceived as a free gift of God.

For the Lutheran participants it was of great importance that the Word of God then be introduced in both a kerygmatic and Trinitarian manner. Word and sacrament have their foundation in Christ. Sacramental grace flows from the sacrifice of Christ at Golgotha. When believers confess the faith of the church and participate in the sacramental life of the church, a human response to the Word of God is undertaken. In this dynamics of word and response the Orthodox idea of synergy also finds its expression. In this framework the word can be said to have a temporal priority in relation to the sacraments. But the text also states that word and sacrament are interdependent.

In spite of these convergences it was difficult in Damascus to arrive at a more precise common understanding of the nature of the church and its ministry. In



Lutheran members of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission (from left to right): Prof. Dr Mickey Mattox (USA), Bishop Dr William H. Lazareth (USA), Prof. Dr Anna Marie Aagaard (Denmark), Prof. Dr Risto Saarinen (Finland), Rev. Dr Musawenkosi Dalindlela Biyela (South Africa), Prof. Dr Jeffrey Silcock (Australia), Damascus, Syria, November 2000. © LWF/S. Oppegard



its final paragraphs the Statement says that Lutherans and Orthodox understand the church as the body of Christ, which is both a divine and a human reality. The church exists as a community of the faithful through history. The Damascus statement confirms that the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments by ordained ministers are essential for the life of the church. In the sacrament created things become “symbols” (in the theological senses) of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection. When the text states that the sacraments enable a participation in the *koinonia* of the Triune God, it becomes clear that the “symbol” comprises the reality of salvation.

It was important for Lutherans that word and sacrament could be elaborated in a theological and ecclesiological manner. The good experiences from Sigtuna, as well as the readiness of Lutherans to speak of salvation as participation in divine life, contributed to this. But it was also evident in Damascus that basic ecclesiological differences are not to be found on this topic, but rather in the churches’ view of ministry. It is therefore understandable that the new general rubric, “The Mystery of the Church” still remains in the background.



In discussion: Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita (right) with a monk at Neamt Monastery, Romania, 2004. © LWF/S. Oppegaard

Oslo 2002: Sacraments as Means of Salvation

At the eleventh plenary meeting of the Joint Commission in Oslo, Norway, from 3 to 10 October 2002, some topics, for instance the eucharistic sacrifice, were extensively discussed in the background papers and in the plenary, but were left unmentioned in the Common Statement. In spite of these limitations the statement was able to reach interesting convergences.

The opening paragraphs outline the salvific significance of sacraments, and connect this topic with ecclesiology. A careful elaboration of eucharistic ecclesiology can be recognized. As in Damascus 2000, the church is described as *mysterion* and as the body of Christ. This



Former and present Lutheran co-presidents of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission. From left to right: Archbishop Georg Kretschmar and Bishop Donald McCoid, Damascus, Syria, 2000. © LWF/S. Oppegaard

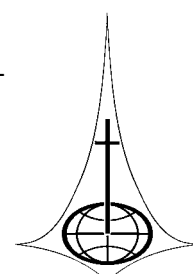
time, however, the description is distinguished from the Roman Catholic view of the church as sacrament.

The character of ordained ministry “*Iure divino*” (by divine right) is underlined. Although both churches can say that the ordained minister in some sense performs the office “*in persona Christi*,” it remains clear that different views of ministry underlie the common affirmation. Concerning the effect of the sacrament, however, a genuine convergence is achieved: both partners reject on the one hand the Donatist heresy and on the other hand the view that the sacraments would be effective by the mere performance of an act (*ex opere operato*).

The Oslo text also deals with the number of sacraments. Both partners affirm an open concept of sacramental reality, and say that although a given number of sacraments—seven or two—is traditional, a difference in this area need not be the only theological possibility. Salvation is, however, invariably connected with the sacraments, even though both churches affirm the freedom of God’s saving action. The text further emphasizes the importance of the sacraments of initiation. Baptism (and Chrismation) and the Eucharist are the proper means of salvation.

The two partners affirm together the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The Orthodox do not say, however, that the body and blood of Christ are “in, with and under” the bread. Instead, they claim that after the epiclesis the elements are no longer bread and wine, but the body and blood of Christ. This formulation does not mean an affirmation of transubstantiation, but it only emphasizes the reality of the change in elements. In spite of the expressed convergence on the issue of real presence, eucharistic theology needed to be developed further (which was done in Bratislava in 2006).

Although many tasks still remain, the Common Statement of Oslo 2002 brings the global dialogue more or less to the level achieved in some regional dialogues



concerning sacramental theology. Both in Damascus 2000 and in Oslo 2002 the Orthodox participants have been able to approach the specific doctrinal issues of Lutheran sacramental theology. This mutual understanding is especially visible in chapters dealing with “*ex opere operato*” and the real presence. At the same time, the theology of ordained ministry remains open.

Duràu 2004: Christian Initiation

The twelfth plenary meeting held in Duràu, Romania, from 6 to 15 October 2004, was given the task of elaborating the topic “Baptism and Chrismation as Sacraments of Initiation into the Church.”

The text approved in Duràu understands the Christian initiation as a threefold reality, consisting of “death with Christ, resurrection with Christ, and the sealing with the Holy Spirit.” Using Lutheran and Orthodox liturgical texts, the Joint Commission argues that water baptism in both churches comprises the two first elements. Whereas the Orthodox identify the sacrament of chrismation in the immediate context of baptism as the third element of initiation, Lutherans say that in the baptismal rite “the gift of the Spirit is connected with the laying-on of hands and either a post-baptismal blessing or a prayer for the Spirit.” Although the Lutheran tradition does not consider chrismation a sacrament, it maintains, together with the Western tradition at large, the sealing with the Holy Spirit.

The presence of this threefold structure for both Lutherans and Orthodox allows the Joint Commission to say together that “the three components of Christian initiation are to a large extent included in each other’s rites.” This argumentation may become ecumenically fruitful in the future. Whereas many Orthodox churches traditionally hold that their approval of the validity of Western baptisms is only an “economical” emergency solution, the text of 2004 clearly moves beyond this position and states a theological convergence with regard to baptism.

Even though a discussion of baptismal theology can be regarded as a necessary step in the deeper understanding of sacraments, it is clear that the treatment of ecclesiology and in particular the theology of ministry continues to be deferred. It is obvious that the most difficult problems are found in this area. Given the failure of regional dialogues to produce real progress regarding church and priesthood it is under-

standable that the global Joint Commission hesitates to discuss the nature and purpose of the church.

The work of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission from 1994 to 2006 should be read against the background of the complexity of the wider ecumenical movement. The bilateral discussions described above may appear tedious and old-fashioned. But it is also clear that the last four plenaries of the Joint Commission have also been the most fruitful ones.

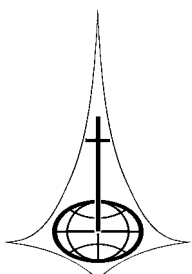
This does not mean that we should be satisfied with what has been achieved so far in the Lutheran—Orthodox Joint Commission. Many issues and themes deserved a more profound and comprehensive treatment. But at least our dialogue has continued with some integrity and the participating churches have been able to draft modest common statements. There are not many other areas in which similar Lutheran—Orthodox cooperation has taken place.



Participants of the 12th meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission with H.E. Metropolitan Daniel (front, 3rd from the right), Duràu, Romania, October 2004. © Private

It may be possible also to find other forms of confidence-building cooperation in this relationship, and this should really be tried. But until substantial forms of church relations between Lutherans and Orthodox are achieved, with common exercise of the Christian faith, doctrinal dialogue must continue in this patient, continuous and constructive fashion. Its significance in the ecumenical movement should not be underestimated.

¹ See Risto Saarinen, *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue 1959-1994* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1997). All original English common texts can be found on the Web site: ; German translations until 2000 have appeared in *Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung*, Bde. 1–3, Hg. Harding Meyer et alii (Frankfurt: Lembeck 1983-2003).



The Orthodox Church being in Theological Dialogue for Twenty-Five years with the Lutheran Churches: The Past and the Present, Hopes and Challenges

XIII Joint International Commission, Orthodox-Lutheran Dialogue
2–9 November 2006, Bratislava, Slovak Republic

Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima

1) Being in Dialogue for Twenty-Five years

Lutherans and Orthodox have a long history of fraternal relations and theological dialogue. It all started in the 16th century, when Lutheran theologians from Tübingen corresponded with Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II, and then made steady progress since 1981, when these relations were deepened by a series of preparatory conversations, and especially since 1985 by establishing the international Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission.

Today, Christian Churches cannot stay indifferent in a world of constant mutation, bringing about new challenges and changes, where wars and conflicts are still taking place in many places of the world, where people, still struggle for their national and socio-political identity, for freedom and justice, where nations and countries of Europe are in a process of being appropriated into the idea of a united Europe and where



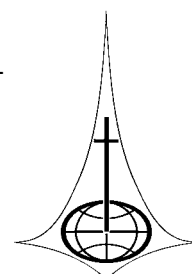
Participants of the 7th session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission in Sandbjerg, Denmark, July 1993.
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Orthodox dialogue member Maître Albert Laham (Lebanon/Switzerland, left) in conversation with Archbishop Georg Kretschmar, former Lutheran co-president of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission. © LWF/S. Oppegaard

globalization touches the daily life of people. Instead the Churches are actively involved and participate in this long process of change by continuing to proclaim faithfully the Christian hope, and by bearing witness to a communion of faith, life and mission, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our Savior. In this new phase of humanity's history, it is absolutely necessary for the Churches all over the world to continue to be in constant dialogue in a non hospitable ("afiloxeno") world, and to seek better collaboration and closer fellowship. Indeed, in a world where there is still so much division, fragmentation, human suffering, poverty, fear of war, injustice and violation of human rights, and where socio-political and economic crises need to be faced daily, the Orthodox Churches have high expectations from the ecumenical conversations and from the bilateral theological dialogues in particular.

Today, the ecumenical conversations and particularly some of the bilateral dialogues have come into being through a phenomenon which is interpreted by our Churches as a crisis of vision, concerning goals and new perspectives for the future and concerning the unity of the Church we seek, in spite of the fact that among these dialogues some have already reached considerable positive results.



However, it is the *kairos* after so many years, for the Churches to renew their ecclesial commitment to the unity of the Church, to re-appropriate their ecclesiologies by giving “ecclesial space” to one another in accordance with the Tradition of the undivided Church of the first millennium, and by continuing with realism, honesty, love and transparency their dialogical relations and theological conversations in a coherent and vital way, which is Christ’s way and not that of humankind.

Today the Churches, through their theological bilateral dialogues, are precisely trying to bring out the importance of communion (*koinonia*) in the Tradition of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church to people’s hearts in order to renew their ecclesial and sacramental life according to the message of the Holy Gospel. We need to understand in our relations more deeply the role of the whole mystery of our salvation.

On the other hand, the aim and purpose of these theological dialogues include the search for new ways of reflection; a) how to review the theological and historical presuppositions, and even misunderstandings, of the different traditions that have accumulated throughout our history and b) how to straighten the efforts in order to facilitate the process of overcoming the obstacles and hostilities of the past and even of our present times. This shows that the Churches have well understood that the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom in a communion of unity does not depend only on God’s will and grace, but also on the willingness and cooperation of human beings.

After almost a millennium of separation and divisions unity has become a “costly unity” and demands sacrifices, prayers, discernment as it provides the *kairos* for leaving behind the obstacles of our ecumenical relations and re-thinking once again whether we really wish to continue to seek after the unity of the

Church, based on new perspectives, new decisions and new presuppositions.

The “way and the path to unity appears to be long”, but the Orthodox believe and hope that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit “all things are possible” to be done and to be realized for the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom, in order to achieve communion in the unity of the Church.

The Orthodox Churches are committed to and promote all kinds of dialogue with the other Christian Churches and will continue to offer their witness and to share the richness of their theological and ecclesial tradition in the search for unity among Christian Churches, to share all efforts towards reconciliation and peace, in an attempt to serve the manifold needs of humankind, and to protect the creation which is a gift of God entrusted to humanity.

Indeed all the bilateral theological dialogues, and this dialogue in particular, need a fresh reflection on mutual respect and “repentance” (*metanoia*), on constructive relations with one another and especially on how to abandon the stagnation often caused by keeping theology, and ecclesiology in particular, prisoners to human weakness and personal interest.

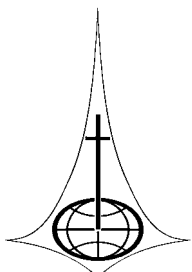
Another responsibility, or even priority, resulting from this dialogue, is the promotion of Church unity, which appears to be a long and somehow difficult journey. Nevertheless, we are not discouraged because we have encountered good partners among the Lutheran Churches who are ready to accompany us on this long journey.

We thank the Almighty God for all the progress we have made together during the past twenty-five years. It has always been a pleasure for us Orthodox, to be in dialogue with the Lutheran Churches, to continue the theological dialogue with them, and to share with them not only our knowledge but also our spiritual experience

in the life of the Church. The ecumenical platform provided for us, Orthodox and Lutherans, a sufficient *space* for our common sharing and exchanging the teachings of our two traditions. The best place and opportunity for sharing our knowledge and experience however has been this bilateral theological dialogue, carried out by the international Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission. For the last twenty-five years this dialogue has been a blessing, a source of inspiration and hope for both traditions. Especially nowadays as the world is faced with tremendous problems, as we mentioned earlier, but also dangers for the environment and the integrity of creation, all of us -Orthodox and Lutherans-should join our spiritual forces so as to work constructively, fruitfully and positively together.



Commission members on their way to the 12th meeting of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission in Durău, Romania, October 2004. © LWF/S. Oppegaard



2) The past and the present: Hopes and challenges for the future

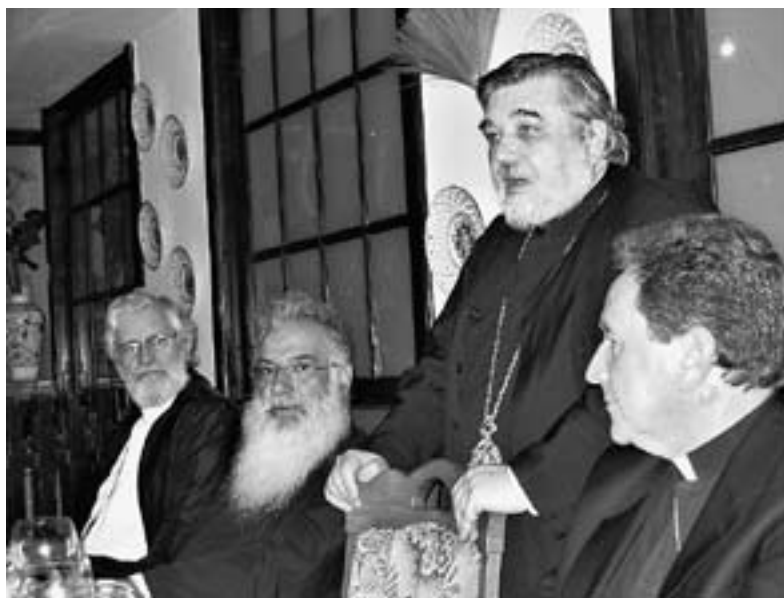
In our days, there are in the ecumenical movement, various common statements in which different Church traditions reached a considerable level of agreement on various matters without being united, like the case of the Leuenberg, Porvoo and Meissen agreements. This ecumenical ecclesial closeness mainly concerns the Churches of the Reformation, or of the Protestant tradition in general. But what lies behind all these ecclesial agreements which do not lead to union, in spite of sharing Eucharistic communion and other forms of fellowship? This “mystery is indeed mysterious”, or it is rather an external ecclesial “apophatic” attitude of Churches which are involved in such a process of agreement.

Theological conversations between Lutherans and Orthodox have undergone many phases in the twenty-five years of this dialogue. Although the two traditions have produced ten Common Statements, differences still remain¹. How did these common agreements reach most of the Lutheran Churches around the world, and what has been their reception? The Orthodox Churches are in this dialogue with the Lutheran Churches through the Lutheran World Federation. But since this international organization or fellowship of Lutheran Churches does not

pretend to be a Church, it is obvious that this is not a bilateral dialogue of all the Orthodox Churches with all the Lutheran Churches all over the world. This still remains an issue and a “problematic” one, and yet during the twenty-five years of this dialogue it has never been raised or discussed in depth. I raise it here as a question of principle and also as a question of “ecclesiastical authority and ecclesial consciousness.” On the other hand, this dialogue continues without avoiding difficulties or issues on which it is difficult sometimes to reach a common agreement or convergence. It would also be true to say that, despite all the efforts on both sides, the issues for our forthcoming period look as if they shall put the Orthodox into a very difficult position, but we have never been pessimistic and with good will and every human effort we believe that we could find ways of convergence between the two traditions.

The call for the search for unity in this bilateral dialogue was since the beginning not only greeted with enthusiasm but widely followed by all the Orthodox Churches. This dialogue, like other bilaterals, has been searching through its conversations for “models” of

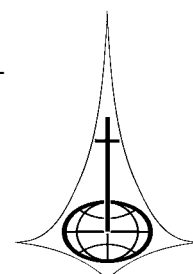
an ecclesiastical union of the parties involved as its ultimate goal and as the fruit of the long period of theological conversations. Two eminent theologians Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner have emphasized the notion of “reconciled diversity.”² For all Churches and confessional denominations, the “fundamental truths of Christianity,” as expressed in Holy Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition of the Faith, and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) are obligatory, without denying the sacramental reality. It has been repeat-



Dinner hosted by the Ecumenical Patriarchate during the Commission meeting in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, November 2006. From right to left: Bishop Donald McCoid, H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, H.E. Metropolitan Dr Makarios of Kenya and Irinouplis and Rev. Protosybyter Prof. Dr George D. Dragas. © LWF/S. Oppegaard

edly stated the “unity of faith” between the Churches is necessary for church communion. Beyond these “fundamental truths,” no dogma of an individual church is to be made obligatory for the other Churches, and no church is allowed to reject outright the authoritative teaching of the other Churches. Thus, the diversity of the ecclesial teaching will remain, but at the same time it will be neutralized, insofar as universal epistemological reasons will prevent condemnations. Communion between doctrinally, liturgically, and structurally independent Churches will be guaranteed institutionally by the sacramental and ecclesial reality. This is also a matter of a more profound discussion between Lutherans and Orthodox.

In this dialogue, however specific “models of union” have not been so far at the center of the discussions during the twenty-five years of theological conversations. Above all, the main issue which needs to be clarified to overcome the various theological obstacles and even some misinterpretations or misunderstandings, has to do with the kind of unity we are looking for. Are we seeking to reach the level of a “unity in a diverse diversity or in compromised diversity”? In our conversations it is no



longer a question of merely “understanding” ecclesiastical unity, but of looking for its concrete realization in the future. The efforts made all these years have been primarily characterized by establishing a real “credibility” between the two Churches in dialogue, in spite of broken confidence and trust in the past. How can unity be realized and lived out in the continuing diversity of the Churches? This is one of the key questions, which this dialogue will have to reflect upon and to study in a profound and clear way.

Similar procedures can also be observed in other bilateral theological dialogues. It is true that in our theological conversations the question of ecclesiastical union has not been addressed so far. Without doubt the question of the “Mystery and the Nature of the Church” and its unity will be repeated again. It also seems to be the one main issue of the various common agreements which is strictly related to the *fellowship* or *communion*, which constituted—and continues to constitute—a key obstacle for a deeper rapprochement between the Churches. This question emerges from the way in which agreements are formulated, and issues are chosen, presented and developed from both sides.



Interpreters for the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission since its beginnings (from left to right): Ms Dorothea Millwood and Ms Ursula Gassmann in conversation with Prof. Dr Eeva Martikainen (Finland). © LWF/S. Oppegaard

In our discussions today, various important and significant issues, which are closely related to sacramental and doctrinal matters, are beginning to appear somewhat difficult for discussion and even for a common agreed statement. How could the theological interpretation and understanding of the sacraments or mysteries be discussed without referring to issues such as “Ministry and Priesthood in the Church,” “Ordination of Women,” the Trinitarian or the ecclesiological implications of the Christological, soteriological and eschatological aspects of the Church? The future will show how these matters will be developed in a deeper way.

Finally, would it be possible for the Lutheran Churches to deal with the reception process of com-

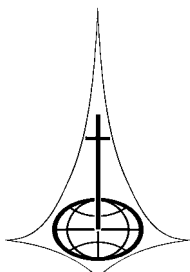
mon agreed statements and such challenges in the years to come, or will they simply continue along their traditional tracks despite all the progress made in mutual relations? Will this theological dialogue continue to be a valued and constructive instrument of further fellowship? The Orthodox would find it difficult to answer to these questions with certitude. The deadweight of the traditions might still prevail. Countercurrents can still not be ruled out.

Orthodox and Lutherans still have many reasons to be grateful for all that has been achieved in the period of the twenty-five years. Many of those who were involved earlier have since died or are not anymore involved. Those who are still alive belong now to the older generation. Does this mean that the common agreements too have grown older and without any meaning for today? In the future much will depend on whether a new generation steps forward to make use of this instrument of dialogue and to continue the work of building up a Church fellowship in truth, love and mutual respect. We the Orthodox are ready to express our deep commitment and hope for the continuation of this dialogue while looking at the future with optimism and much confidence.

In concluding, I would like to remind everyone of what His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said during his official visit to the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva, Switzerland (1995): “... even if the encounter of the very ancient Orthodox Church and the young Church of the Reformation could not be realized during the days of Luther, this became a reality today, in these days of inter-Christian dialogue of love and truth. Indeed, our Churches are conducting seriously a dialogue, which, we are sure, will allow our better acquaintance, mutual understanding, and reconciliation.”

¹ Cf. *The Common agreed Statements :Divine Revelation* (24-30 May 1985, Allentown, U.S.A); *Scripture and Tradition* (27 May-4 June 1987, Crete/Chania, Greece); *The Canon and the Inspiration of the Holy Scripture* (1-7 September 1989, Bad Segeberg, Germany); *Authority in and of the Church: A. The Ecumenical Councils* (5-10 July 1993, Sandbjerg, Denmark); *B. Understanding of Salvation in the Light of the Ecumenical Councils* (2-7 August 1995, Limassol, Cyprus); *C. Salvation: Grace, Justification and Synergy* (31 July-8 August 1998, Sigtuna, Sweden); *The Mystery of the Church: A. Word and Sacraments (Mysteria) in the Life of the Church* (3-10 November 2000, Damascus, Syria); *B. Mysteria / Sacraments as Means of Salvation* (3-10 October, 2002, Oslo, Norway); *C. Baptism and Chrismation (Confirmation) as Sacraments of Initiation into the Church* (6-15 October 2004, Durău, Romania); *The Mystery of the Church: D. The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church* (2-9 November 2006, Bratislava, Slovak Republic).

² Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner, *The Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985, 2.



Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission Adopts Common Statement on Eucharist

By Prof. Dr Kenneth G. Appold (Theological Consultant to the Dialogue)
The Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France

Lutherans and Orthodox have no history of disagreement or mutual condemnation in their teachings on the Eucharist. In fact, both have a record of rejecting the same medieval doctrine of transubstantiation. But neither joint rejection by two ecumenical partners of a third position nor the absence of explicit disagreement between them automatically yields agreement. So the 13th session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, which met in Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 2–9 November 2006, promised to be interesting. For the first time in this international context, the two church families met to discuss each other's eucharistic theology.

A preliminary meeting in Erlangen, Germany, held in October of last year to hear papers on the Eucharist and develop a draft for a Common Statement, had delineated a number of areas of consensus, but also identified several issues of concern.¹ Following intensive discussion in Erlangen, these papers were then revised and submitted to the plenary meeting in Bratislava. They were instrumental in guiding the group's discussion that yielded a joint statement.

From a Lutheran perspective, the process around this important topic has been particularly rewarding. Orthodox share several features of Roman Catholic eucharistic theology. But they present their teaching on this topic in ways which avoid those characteristics of the traditional Roman Catholic teaching that the Lutheran Reformers rejected. Ecumenically, there is no construction now of a bilateral Lutheran-Ortho-



13th session of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission, from right to left: Prof. Dr Kenneth Appold, Rev. Sven Oppegaard, Bishop Donald McCoid, H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, and Deacon Theodoros Meimaris. © LWF

dox front against Roman Catholic sacramental theology. Also in the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue it has been possible to move beyond the conceptual tensions characteristic of the 16th century.

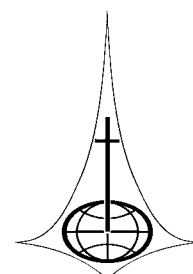
In dialogue with Orthodox, Lutherans have found that they are able to affirm the notion of eucharistic sacrifice while remaining faithful to their own tradition. Central to both Orthodox and Lutheran positions is the insight that the sacrifice is performed by Christ—and not by a priest. The eucharistic sacrifice is Christ's self-sacrifice of atonement, offered once and for all. Every time the Eucharist is celebrated, the sacrifice is made sacramentally present, so that its benefits are distributed to the believers. Human involvement in the celebration has no self-earned "meritorious" character, which is an important concern of the Lutheran Reformation.

Considerable learning took place with respect to each tradition's reflection on how the bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. It may be fair to say that both sides discovered each other's teachings on this matter in ways that neither had anticipated, and a good number of preconceptions were adjusted accordingly. Orthodox and Lutherans confess together that the Eucharist remains a mystery that transcends human understanding, and that any "explanation" of that mystery must necessarily fall short. At the same time, each tradition does have a history of theological reflection meant to aid the believer in approaching that mystery.

Dialogue between the two traditions on the topic of the Eucharist is very important, because



The altar of the Lutheran Church "Velky Kostol" (Big Church) in Bratislava.
© LWF/S. Oppegaard



Orthodox as well as Lutherans clearly reject certain explanations—such as transubstantiation or a mere “symbolic” presence—and each side needs to make sure that the other does not fall within the scope of one or the other type of rejected teaching. At the same time, joining in constructive reflection on the eucharistic mystery marks a significant step forward toward a joint exercise of faith.

The process of common reflection found a conceptual anchor in christology. Both sides are committed to the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon. Important analogies were drawn between Christ’s “hypostatic” union—which conjoins two natures into one person—and the sacramental union of bread and body, wine and blood. As John of Damascus writes, “Isaiah saw the coal. But coal is not plain wood but wood united with fire: in like manner also the bread of the communion is not plain bread but bread united with divinity. But a body which is united with divinity is not one nature, but has one nature belonging to the body and another belonging to the divinity that is united to it, so that the compound is not one nature but two.”

The Formula of Concord makes a similar point: “Just as in Christ two distinct, unaltered natures are inseparably united, so in the Holy Supper two essences, the natural bread and the true natural body of Christ, are present together here on earth in the action of the sacrament, as it was instituted” (SD 7).

Believing in such a sacramental union, both sides pointed out that a “change” of sorts takes place with respect to bread and wine. Whether they speak of *metabole* (Orthodox) or “real presence” (Lutheran), both believe that bread and wine remain bread and wine physically, but have been united with Christ in a most intimate way so that those who commune really receive the body and blood of Christ. Orthodox



Altar of the Orthodox Church in Bratislava. © S. Dietrich

have a long history of reflection on this point, and for Lutherans much of it is consistent with their own teaching.

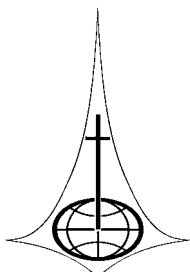
One important consequence for Lutherans needs to be stressed, however: If the bread and wine are no longer “ordinary” bread and wine, then they need to be handled with appropriate respect and care during and (if they are not fully consumed) after the eucharistic celebration. Lutherans’ historical critique of certain late-medieval practices, such as adoration of the host and other handling of the elements after the celebration (“extra usum”), should not occlude the importance of this insight. Consummation of all that has been consecrated ap-

pears as a good way to secure a worthy practice in this area.

Underscoring the Eucharist’s eschatological dimension, the Commission also began to explore its significance for the world. Since the Eucharist brings the eschatological Kingdom of God into that world, this has important consequences, which were addressed briefly by the Joint Statement, but which will be explored more fully in the next round of dialogue as the Commission takes up the topics: “Preparation and Celebration of the Eucharist” as well as “Eucharist and Ecology (including Human Society).”

¹ Members of each side had submitted papers on topics that included “The Spirituality of the Eucharist and its practical implications in Evangelical Lutheran church life” (E. Hagberg); “The Lutheran Understanding of the Eucharist” (K.C. Felmy and J. Wasmuth); “The Holy Sacrament (Mysterion) of the Eucharist: An Orthodox Perspective” (V. Ionita); “Comments to the Lutheran papers” (A. Laham); “The Place of the Eucharist in the Divine Economy of Salvation” (C. Voulgaris); and “Metabole or Transsubstantiatio” (A. Osipov).

Please find all Common Statements of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission online at: www.helsinki.fi/~risaarin/lutortjointtext.html (They have been made available on-line by Rev. Prof. Dr Risto Saarinen, a Lutheran member of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission.)



Feature: In the Heart of Africa

Hermine Nikolaisen Gives an Overview of LWF's Work in Rwanda and the DRC

KIGALI, Rwanda/GENEVA, 12 December 2006 (LWI) – By evening, she will have reached Goma city in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Hermine Nikolaisen, reckons it takes about three hours from the Rwandan capital Kigali to Goma, the city that experienced extensive destruction in January 2002 when the Nyiragongo volcano erupted, leaving tens of thousands displaced, and nearly 50 people dead.

Nikolaisen originally comes from near Munich, Germany. She started her work in Rwanda in November 2005, and has seen much of the of the “Land of a Thousand Hills,” so-called because of its hilly terrain. She is the representative of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for World Service (DWS) and director of the Kigali-based LWF/DWS country program in Rwanda and the DRC.



Children enjoying their snack time at Wanyerukula Nutrition Center near Kisangani, in Oriental Province, DRC. © LWF/H. Nikolaisen

Building Upon Local Experience

Together with a team of around 60 local colleagues, Nikolaisen is responsible for several DWS projects in both countries. She is optimistic about the program's overall work, especially because most of the projects provide long-term contribution toward improving the people's living standards. She points out, however, that the fight against poverty remains the major priority: “We can't talk about peace and reconciliation in Rwanda and the DRC while people don't have enough to eat.”

She speaks of the need to build upon the existing local experience and knowledge. Her enthusiasm is apparent as she talks about a DWS agricultural project in Gitarama, central Rwanda, where local



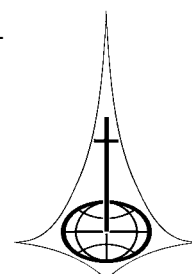
Hermine Nikolaisen (center) visits a shamba (small piece of cultivated agricultural land) in the rain forest during an hour-long walk near Wanyerukula village, Tshopo district, Oriental Province. People are known to hide their shambas in fear of soldiers and rebels. © LWF/DWS Rwanda/DRC/E. Mpanya

farmers receive training on improved and sustainable agriculture by using manure to boost the land productivity; managing vegetable gardens; or keeping cattle or chickens. The training center has well tended fields and animals for demonstration. The sale of milk, eggs, vegetables and fruits provides income to cover running costs.

It's Not About More Money

One of the center's training rooms has more women than men, which for Nikolaisen goes to confirm what many working in development cooperation have long known—women work harder and are more reliable. But she also speaks of the malnourished children, targeted by the LWF program through feeding centers. “It's not more money that we need here in Gitarama—just more time,” she says, referring to the European Union's support toward the training center. Sometimes one needs real patience, because projects cannot always be completed [say] within two years.

Before taking up her current position as the LWF representative in Rwanda and the DRC, Nikolaisen, 60, had spent 12 years in the Balkans. Between 1989 and 1992, she worked as a volunteer with the LWF/DWS Mauritania program, later on as an administration and finance officer based in Namibia, and as acting director of the DWS Malawi program. From 1992 to 1998, she worked with the LWF's operations in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, then spent two years in Kenya, before taking up the position of LWF/DWS Balkans regional representative and director of the Kosovo program



from 2000 until October 2005. She has seen conflict both between Christians and Muslims and between people from different ethnic groups in one country.

Nikolaisen pursued higher education in France, and trained in hotel management in Switzerland. She worked for some years with the German Airlines, Lufthansa, before taking up a three-year management position with a firm in Munich, Germany. But it was not long before she went to Ethiopia with a German construction firm to take charge of a large-scale water project involving dam construction. It was while in Ethiopia that she decided to take up an LWF job offer.



Members of an association of Protestant women in the town of Beni, North Kivu, receive occupational therapy and skills training in a program aiming to assist in recovery from violence and trauma.
© LWF/DWS Rwanda/DRC/A. Muinonen

Assistance to IDPs, Victims of Sexual Violence

The LWF/DWS program in Rwanda began in August 1994 with emergency aid to victims and internally displaced persons (IDPs) after the genocide, and assisting returning refugees with shelter and reconstruction of schools, health services and water systems. From 1999, the program shifted its focus to empowering vulnerable communities to achieve self-sufficiency. An integrated approach emphasized capacity building of local partners and community-based organizations, and addressed

crosscutting issues of HIV and AIDS, the environment, peace and reconciliation, and emergency preparedness.

In neighboring DRC where hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced and fear returning in the grip of the complex civil war since late 1996, the LWF program has been providing emergency assistance and relief in partnership with the member churches of the Christian Council in the DRC. The program's work also includes response to natural disasters such as the volcanic eruption near Goma.

The LWF program also works with women's associations, including the Federation of Protestant Women, that provide counseling to traumatized victims of sexual violence, and offer vocational training for women mainly in knitting, African dyeing, and handicrafts.

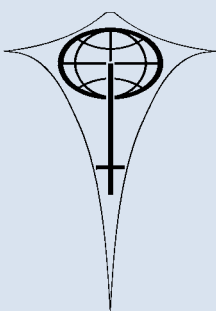
In its 2005 Annual Report the LWF/DWS program states that the stability of the DRC after the 2006 presidential elections remained the biggest challenge.

Klaus Rieth, press officer of the Evangelical Church in Württemberg, Germany interviewed Hermine Nikolaisen during a June 2006 visit to projects supported by the LWF/DWS Rwanda-DRC program. Additional information is derived from the program's 2005 annual report.

More information about the LWF's work in Rwanda and the DRC at:

www.lutheranworld.org/What_We_Do/DWS/Country_Programs/DWS-Rwanda-DRC.html

***This article is part of the ongoing *LWI Features on Healing* focusing on the LWF Tenth Assembly theme, "For the Healing of the World." The series highlights the relevance of the Assembly theme in the different contexts of the worldwide Lutheran communion by presenting projects and activities aimed at promoting reconciliation and healing. This theme continues to be an important aspect of LWF's work even after the 21-31 July 2003 Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada.**



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