



Dialogue: achievement and follow-up

The bilateral international dialogues of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

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- What can dialogue achieve?
 - The Reformed as dialogue partners
 - Theological themes and queries
 - Where now?
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From 1982 to 1989 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) was involved in a demanding programme of inter-confessional dialogue. The first dialogues were embarked upon back in the seventies - with the Baptist, Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. After the Ottawa general council (1982), however, the programme was considerably extended. Dialogues took place with almost all Christian denominations: Disciples of Christ, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, the Mennonites; after extensive preliminary negotiations with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, an official dialogue was taken up in 1988 with all Orthodox churches. Almost all these conversations led to tangible results. At the 22nd general council (Seoul, 1989), a host of reports were tabled - jointly formulated theological perspectives together with a long list of recommendations about what remains to be done for the further deepening of communion among the churches.

How is WARC to respond to these texts? It is clear that the actual goal of dialogues is not achieved with the mere publication of reports. The crucial question is rather the extent to which the findings can lead to a change in inter-church relations. What can be done to prevent these texts from remaining mere papers? The Seoul general council could not yet answer this question. So we must stop for a moment to compare and analyse the documents, and enquire about their significance for the life and witness of Reformed churches.

That applies to every single dialogue conducted in past years. Each has its own character. The recommendations differ according to the partner, as do the jointly formulated theological perspectives. So for every dialogue we have to reflect separately on what the next steps will be. The conference that has gathered us together here will give us an opportunity to do just this. It seems particularly important to me that these deliberations also take account of the response of our partners to the dialogues. I think, for example, of the reaction of the Lambeth Conference to the Anglican-Reformed dialogue and, above all, the statements of the Disciples of Christ in response to the Birmingham Report.

The evaluation cannot restrict itself to the individual dialogues, however, but must extend to the whole undertaking. What is the significance of this commitment? Who are we in the light of these commitments? And what conclusions can be drawn from the partly contradictory findings regarding the self-understanding of the Reformed churches? And, further, what follows from this many-faceted programme for our part in the ecumenical movement?

● **What can international dialogues achieve?**

The dialogue undertaking has been criticized often, particularly in Reformed circles. Doubts are expressed as to whether it is really worth expending so much time, energy and money on international dialogues with other confessional families. Should not other obligations take priority, in view of the great challenges of our time? At first sight, the dialogues seem to operate at a level faraway from the concerns of congregations today. The reports they draft - the result of laborious negotiation - are no best-sellers, to say the least, and generally arouse only passing attention even in the church press. So why invest so much in these encounters?

This judgment is understandable but does not go far enough, in my view. First, it seems to me important that we agree on what can be expected from a dialogue at all. Expectations must not be set too high. The dialogue reports are not a magic key to open all closed doors. Their importance must thus not be measured by this expectation. They have a far more modest function: to clarify the differences separating the denominational traditions. Are the conflicts that have torn the churches apart in the past still so serious that separation is unavoidable? Or can they be interpreted differently today? Do they allow for the development of common perspectives leading beyond the old conflicts? Is the way perhaps free for a rapprochement of churches? Can they envisage common witness or perhaps even union? Or can there at least be a deeper mutual understanding? The dialogues are something like a signal for the churches. They provide evidence that the denominational status quo has been overtaken by new common experiences and need no longer be maintained. They are an invitation and call to be open to a new future.

Is this evidence necessary? Don't we know, without having it explained at length, that we are confronted with new questions? Of course we do. And yet the way to communion can only be really cleared if the churches work through their conflictual traditions together. The past cannot simply be pushed aside. It may be pushed into the background for a while but sooner or later it will surface all the more devastatingly. It is an old maxim that whoever wants to evade history falls all the more captive to it. Today in Europe we are witnessing the power denominational traditions continue to have. Undigested history, that many believed dead, comes to the surface again and it turns out that the ecumenical movement has apparently not penetrated deeply enough into the past. In this context dialogues can make an important contribution. What is more, they can tap the treasures inherent, and often hidden, in different traditions and be enriched in both the present and the future. They can show the churches involved how they can deal with their different traditions *together* as of now. They are essential to carry out this service.

Let me in this context stress three aspects in particular:

a) How does a report come about? It is drafted by a group of theologians who are familiar with the tradition of their own churches. They meet as a rule for several consultations over extended periods. They exchange views,

they live together, they worship together (as far as their church regulations allow) and get to know each other in a new way. In the light of this experience they try to ascertain what they have in common and what still separates them. The findings are passed on to the churches in the form of a report. So this report first derives from the experience of a representative but relatively small group. It can thus not be taken for granted that the findings can be immediately understood and adopted by the churches involved. In order to really espouse them they have to reconstruct the experience behind the reports. Mere reading them is not enough. The report must stimulate further meetings at all levels of church life, in which the findings are checked and found to be plausible.

b) The reports are characterized in almost all cases by a relatively traditional theological language. That is almost inevitable since they are concerned with topics which in the past have driven the churches into separation. How should they show that these divisions have lost their weight without using the language in which they were expressed at the time? Of course, the dialogues are intended to be of benefit to common witness and confession by the churches in the modern world. Yet they are forced to start from tradition. They try to show the extent to which the churches are free to bear common witness to the gospel today. They lead to the threshold of joint confession but have not yet made this step. It requires a new stage of talks, and for the Reformed churches, as we shall see, this second step is of particular importance.

c) The dialogues raise special problems for the churches in Asia, Africa and, in a different way, also in Latin America. The topics dealt with in the reports are far removed from their prior concerns. The conflicts leading to the formation of denominational traditions are part of European and North American history. Why should the churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America be concerned with them? They are confronted with the fundamental task of grasping and interpreting Christian tradition at all. It is not automatically clear what they could gain from studying their confessional heritage in this respect. And yet the dialogues are important for them as well. The churches have taken separate paths to hand on the gospel. The younger churches have always only received the Christian tradition in the limited form of a certain church tradition. Missionaries brought them not only separation but also understanding of the gospel that corresponds to a certain age and configuration of Western history. The dialogues can contribute to breaking through this limitation and open the way again to the wealth of the total Christian tradition. A small anecdote may illustrate this. A few years ago I attended an Orthodox service with some Reformed Christians from India. They were deeply impressed and afterwards asked reproachfully: why has all this been kept from us? The dialogues can open up new resources for the churches' real task - making the gospel shine forth in their own cultural context.

These remarks indicate sufficiently, I hope, what international dialogues can achieve: they are the attempt to regain the fullness of Christian tradition for the church. They are no more than the first step. They are *one* instrument of the ecumenical movement. Their value only becomes visible when they are taken up and continued by the churches. Everything depends on the spirit in which the churches engage in dialogue. They are useless if the churches are basically dominated by a sectarian spirit. They can lend a hand, on the way to deeper communion, if the churches are resolved to reveal anew the communion given in Jesus Christ.

What can be said about the Reformed churches in this context? What does entering into dialogue with other denominational traditions mean for them? What challenges does this entail? Two remarks seem particularly important here:

1. The Reformed participants in dialogues with other traditions notice again and again that they cannot speak with one voice. Whenever their partners ask them "What is Reformed?" or "What is the Reformed view of this or that question?" they are at a loss. They can speak as individual theologians, but ultimately have to confess that their statement is of a personal nature and may not really be considered representative. In almost all dialogues there is sooner or later a moment of perplexity. Partners enquire with growing impatience after binding statements and the Reformed side has to disappoint them.

What is Reformed? The question cannot in fact be answered jointly today. The Reformed tradition has diversified considerably over the centuries and it has become increasingly hard to articulate the common elements among the variety of voices. Certainly, there are confessions, there are particularities in the way of conducting worship and there are typical emphases in ethics and spirituality. It is possible to intuit the sense of the word "Reformed" and that is probably what is meant by the undefined term "Reformed ethos" in the WARC constitution. There are no firm statements or signs allowing a clearcut definition of Reformed tradition. By contrast with the Lutheran tradition the Reformed churches have never agreed on a single confession and all attempts in later centuries to do so have come to nought. By contrast with the "Catholic" tradition the Reformed churches are not bound by a common liturgy either. And even the attempts to track down Reformed characteristics in a certain kind of spirituality have in the end proved unconvincing. WARC comprises churches that differ in confession, worship and spirituality. Who would dare to speak on behalf of them all?

This variety is probably also the reason why the findings of individual dialogues are so diverse. Since the Reformed delegations do not automatically presuppose the same theological and spiritual basis they also come to differing conclusions, depending on their particular partner. The variety of voices characteristic of the Reformed family is also reflected in the dialogue reports. Take, for example, the statements on the church in the reports with the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.

2. The Reformed churches have no higher body to speak or act on their behalf. The model of the international bilateral dialogues dates from the Sixties; after the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church sought dialogue with the "churches and communions separate from her". The - still unfilled - expectation was that two delegations would formulate an agreement to be ratified by their churches. Each church has its own form of "ratification". The Reformed understanding is distinct from the Roman Catholic view from the start. The Reformed churches assume that each individual church is itself responsible for doctrine and proclamation. WARC is no more than a loose federation. It can hold talks but is dependent on the churches' approval. The findings only achieve validity when they have been received by the churches. The difficulty, however, is that the individual churches by no means feel obliged even to take note of findings achieved at WARC level, let alone assess them responsibly. A common reception of dialogue is thus practically an illusion.

So it hardly comes as a surprise that the Reformed churches have the reputation of being unreliable partners in dialogue. They hold dialogues

with other churches, but know in advance that they are not in a position to apply findings in the life of the churches.

However, it would be wrong to judge these two Reformed peculiarities exclusively negatively. They also have their positive sides. The fact that the Reformed church has no ready answer to the question about its confessional identity can also prove to be a source of freedom. The theologians involved in international dialogues can generally respond to new issues with much greater ease than their partners. Knowing that the identity of the church is not simply given, but must be struggled for constantly anew, they have the freedom to turn to the actual goal of the ecumenical movement: the common witness to the gospel in today's world. Knowing that the question "What is Reformed?" can only be answered by the churches together listening to God's word and facing the challenges of the age, they also know that the ecumenical movement cannot confine itself to encountering fixed identities, but must be the place for a new move forward. The Reformed churches will thus have the "second step", i.e. common witness, far more in view than their partners. They expect the decisive contribution to the deepening of communion from a joint response by the churches to the challenges of the age.

The fact that every single church itself bears the responsibility for doctrine and proclamation may also prove a source of freedom. It enables initiatives with partners from the same national and cultural context. The Reformed churches do not need instructions "from above", but can enter into communion with other churches without any great delay, if they regard the conditions for this as fulfilled. Even the step into union with other churches can be taken in their own responsibility.

However, these considerations cannot hide the fact that the Reformed peculiarities also have their negative sides. The weaknesses that the "mirror of dialogue" holds up before us are too obvious to be dismissed or played down. However positive the freedom for new issues may be, the dangers cannot be overlooked: the variety of voices may deteriorate into destructive polemics or - and this may be worse - into tired indifference to the great theological questions of the age. Common assertions seem so hard to achieve that there is a flagging of endeavour and, to be dispensed from any further effort, a virtue is made of necessity: the need, even the desirability of joint witness is called into question. However positive the freedom of every individual church may be, it has another side to it. It can lead into the ghetto of self-sufficiency. It may mean the acceptance as inevitable of the internal division of the Reformed churches. Large parts of the Reformed family are today in acute danger of de facto becoming sects.

Two tasks result from this finding, in my view - not just for the sake of the dialogue partner but primarily for the sake of the credibility of Reformed witness in the world:

- 1.** If the Reformed churches want to fulfil their mission in the world they above all need an ever new understanding of the theological foundations of their witness. They cannot take the line that the identity of Reformed churches follows from the constant endeavour to interpret and articulate the gospel, and do nothing to enable this endeavour to actually take place. They must make it their task to give a common answer to the question as to what, and how, the church of Jesus Christ has to witness today. This does not mean that once again they would need to try to draft a generally acceptable Reformed confession; nor does it mean that a definition of Reformed identity would need to be worked out. Attempts of this kind would be doomed from the start. Instead, the point is to do intensive theological work in the framework of WARC. It is not a matter of finally

settling for any particular answers, but rather of the Reformed churches being drawn into a common movement. The Reformed churches need a theological forum enabling a lively tackling of the great theological questions.

2. If the Reformed churches want to fulfil their mission in the world there must be more intensive communication among the individual churches. The separation must not become a situation where no more questions are asked. However much the churches are deeply rooted in their own contexts, they are not credible if they cannot prove that comprehensive communion is possible even in this diversity. The Reformed churches cannot work for unity and solidarity in the ecumenical movement without working for unity and solidarity in their own ranks. Variety is often praised as a gift of the spirit: such admonitions miss the point, in my opinion. It is not a question of eliminating the variety of the spirit, but rather to counter the lack of communication. Diversity that destroys communion is anything but the fulness of the spirit. The fact that so many Reformed churches coexist without the slightest mutual interest is in contradiction to the workings of the holy spirit. This fact prevents common witness rightaway. The intensification of communication is thus one of the Reformed churches' most urgent tasks.

The common evaluation of dialogues can perhaps become an opportunity to give fresh attention to these two tasks - the common understanding of the gospel and the communication among the churches.

● **Theological themes and queries**

Dialogues are a ruthlessly honest mirror. By standing up to their partners' queries the Reformed churches are unavoidably made to question their own tradition. Illogical aspects are uncovered. Theological answers which seemed fixed have to be thought through again - both for the sake of one's own identity and for that of one's partners.

What questions are raised by dialogues for Reformed churches? Let me give a few examples:

1. What status do the Reformed churches give the confessions of the early church, in particular the early church's doctrine of the trinity?

Some dialogues hardly refer to the trinity, others do so briefly, while in the dialogue with the Orthodox Church it has been the centre of attention: after detailed discussions a joint text was adopted. To what extent can such a joint statement be considered representative?

The status and interpretation of trinitarian doctrine are not altogether clear today in the Reformed churches. It is no longer proclaimed and taught with the same naturalness as at the time when the classical Reformed confessions were formulated. Even if the majority of Reformed churches still keeps to this early church tradition, its significance in other churches has faded or taken a back-seat. At the Seoul general council there was even a heated discussion in one of the sections about whether the belief in the trinity could be considered a common heritage of the Reformed tradition at all.

What does this uncertainty mean for the dialogue with other confessional traditions? What does it mean in terms of participation in the World Council of Churches, whose basis refers expressly to the trinity? The Reformed

churches owe themselves and their partners an answer. The status and interpretation of the doctrine of the trinity must be clarified.

Reformed theology has always been particularly keen to find biblical grounds for the doctrine of the trinity. This special emphasis was also seen in the dialogue with the Orthodox Church. While the Orthodox consider the doctrine as defined in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed a firm premise, the Reformed understanding is that statements about the trinity have to be worked out and accounted for on the basis of scripture in each generation. The doctrine of the trinity is not a self-evident fact, but must prove its credibility again and again. What does the trinity mean in the face of new cultural contexts? How is trinitarian doctrine to be interpreted in the light of feminist theology?

2. What does sola scriptura mean?

How can the relation between scripture and tradition be defined? These two questions are raised by a large number of dialogues. Many partners share the emphasis on scripture as the only source and guideline of Christian knowledge, while asking what this emphasis means when it comes to dealing with the challenges of the modern age. Other partners raise the question of the relationship between scripture and tradition. What is the importance of the experience of the first centuries for the church's teaching and practice?

How can the Reformed churches credibly argue for the sola scriptura today? How can they avoid their emphasis on scripture becoming fundamentalism that fixes the biblical message? And, above all, how can the witness of scripture from generation to generation become a living message, that is ever new and sweeps the church with it? The conditions for an appropriate answer have fundamentally changed since the Reformation. It is not enough for Reformed churches to repeat traditional responses. This question must be worked on together, both for their own sake and for the sake of their partners.

3. How do Reformed churches regard the celebration of Holy Communion?

The dialogues aspire to the mutual recognition by the churches and "pulpit and altar fellowship". This goal automatically raises the issue of the importance ascribed to joint eucharistic celebration by Reformed churches.

The Reformed churches easily slip into a contradiction in the ecumenical movement. On the one hand, they believe that Jesus Christ himself is the host at the Lord's Supper and press for a common celebration. On the other hand, they give the impression that the invitation to the Lord's table is not particularly important to them. The celebration of Holy Communion still plays a secondary role in the spirituality of Reformed churches. How can they liberate themselves from this contradiction?

What have Reformed churches to learn in terms of the meaning and practice of the eucharist?

4. What do the Reformed churches have to say on ministry?

This topic has dealt with directly or indirectly in almost all dialogues. The experience with the different dialogues shows, however, that the Reformed church is not really clear about its understanding of ministry and the ministries. Particularly when they had to respond to the World Council of Churches' texts on baptism, eucharist and ministry some Reformed

churches were a little embarrassed. How could they express Reformed perspectives on ministry? It transpired, in particular, that there was no clarity on the importance of the ministry of elders.

Reformed churches are ultimately not bound to any specific structure of ministry. They stress the calling of the whole people of God. Ministries are necessary to ensure that God's Word is preached, the sacraments are administered and church discipline is maintained. They resist any understanding of ministry that puts obstacles in the way of the development of the whole church community. They are guided by the insight that all authority in the church must be exercised corporately. As soon as these perspectives have been guaranteed they can agree with other churches on a structure of ministry and ministries. But what does that mean in practice? To answer this question the Reformed churches must be more fully aware of their own traditions.

5. How do the Reformed churches understand church unity?

Individual dialogues close with the assertion that there are no real grounds for division any longer. What must be the next step in this case? How can communion be given visible expression? The answer to this question is anything but clear among Reformed churches.

The Reformers had the whole church in their sights. It was not their aim to found a new church. They bear the name of reformers because they wanted to reform the *whole* church. This passion distinguishes them from sectarians of all ages, whose goal has been each time to erect a new community. The reformers were unconditionally filled with the belief in the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic church".

What is the situation today? Are the Reformed churches really so concerned to express communion with other churches? Or are they basically content with the status quo? If the commitment in dialogues is to be credible the Reformed churches must be in a position to account for their understanding of unity and community. What is the indispensable basis for this? What structures are necessary?

WARC has regularly dealt with these issues. The perhaps most detailed answer was given by the Princeton general council (1954), and the latest response dates from Seoul (1989). These statements unfold a broad picture of the Reformed understanding of the ecumenical movement. But what *practical* proposal have the Reformed churches to make regarding Christian unity? And, above all, what steps will they take to express their understanding of unity in their own ranks?

● Where do the dialogues go from here?

Almost all dialogues have come to at least a provisional conclusion. What is WARC to do now to follow them up? Let me offer a few thoughts on this by way of conclusion.

1. The task can certainly not merely be to formulate topics for the "next round".

There is no point in holding one series of talks after another. The dialogues are not an end in themselves and must not become routine. Rather, they should serve to deepen communion. First, then we must check on their results in that regard. Have they opened new perspectives? Has further convergence become possible? Follow-up must be seen in the light of these

questions. In individual cases a second or perhaps even a third round of talks may be called for. In other cases, however, quite different steps may be required. In any case, before any continuation of dialogues and relations, findings to date must be reflected on together and fully drawn on in church life.

2. The most important precondition for meaningful further work is information of member churches.

It would be an illusion to think that the churches already know enough about the reports following their publication. Reformed theology is extremely sceptical about the doctrine of the sacraments when it comes to envisaging an *ex opere operato* effect. Yet they easily imagine that publication of a theological text *ex opere operato* leads to communication. In fact the dialogue reports are hardly known in the churches, and even if they were they would remain incomprehensible at many points to the uninitiated. Above all, the reports are too numerous and diverse to be worked through by the individual churches. First of all, people must be shown they are relevant. So it may be a task of this Consultation to draft a text containing the essential points. It must clearly state the steps possible for the individual churches in their respective contexts, on the basis of the dialogues. The type of possible initiative could be illustrated by a number of examples.

Such information will only have an effect, however, if WARC is clear about its own intentions. It must be visible to the member churches that the dialogue findings will be followed up at the WARC level as well. It has become ecumenically fashionable to send the churches questionnaires. Controversial issues are passed onto the churches in the form of questions, when there is no willingness to take clear decisions. The response is usually slight as the churches sense that it hardly matters whether they answer or not. A church survey can only bear fruit if it is based on a clear commitment of the institution conducting the enquiry. WARC must thus make it clear that it intends to take action on the basis of the replies received, and indicate how this is to happen.

3. In order to be able to envisage the next step for WARC it is essential to distinguish between the different dialogues.

The goals and findings to date indicate three categories:

a) First, there are the dialogues with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. They have led to a more profound mutual understanding of the partners involved. Certain basic differences were jointly described, but not removed. Misunderstandings were overcome and mutual trust created in that it was possible to formulate agreement on great themes of Christian tradition - like the mediation of Jesus Christ or the trinity. However, differences remain in the respective understanding of the gospel and, above all, the church. A certain asymmetry is visible in these dialogues. While the Reformed side pressed for communion and joint witness here and now, the other side felt that the precondition for this was the unbroken continuity of the church through the centuries and that the eucharist, in particular, could only be celebrated together on the basis of this continuity. So right away there can be no talk of full communion. The deeper mutual understanding may, however, enable a new quality of relations.

b) Other dialogues have revealed substantial common ground, showing however, at the same time, that there are still certain obstacles in the way of full communion. Controversial points are, for example, the question of ministry, in the Anglican dialogue, and the understanding of baptism, in

the dialogue with the Baptists. The conviction prevailed in both dialogues, however, *that* the goal of full communion needs to be envisaged and further pursued.

c) At least three dialogues closed with the finding that there were *no more grounds for division today*, or, in other words, that the hitherto divided churches are now in a position to carry out their mission in the modern world in every respect together. Full communion can be declared and realized. This applies to the dialogues with the Lutherans, Methodists and Disciples of Christ. The question here is what WARC intends to do in order to examine this finding and, depending on the outcome, to put it into practice.

4.The dialogue with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches

a) Both surprising agreements and open questions were formulated in the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. Further work is required and must be embarked upon sooner or later. An important precondition for further work seems to me, however, the clarification of the relationship between the Reformed churches and the Roman Catholic Church today. Reformed churches differ greatly on this point, opinions ranging from total rejection to extreme openness. While some Reformed churches still think that Rome is the anti-Christ (and they do not need to be headed by fanatics like Ian Paisley to take this line), others seek joint witness with the Roman Catholic Church in their country without any qualms. The report that has now been submitted can perhaps help to clarify the relationship. Possibly a special consultation should be convened on this question. It could collate and evaluate the positive and also problematic experiences with the Roman Catholic Church - the latter have been mounting again lately. This could perhaps help clarify the basis for future relations.

b) The dialogue with the Orthodox Church is a special case in more than one respect. Actual agreement is faraway, particularly about the understanding of the church. So steps towards church communion cannot be expected in the foreseeable future. The dialogue is an attempt to work on the division between east and west, the oldest division in Christendom, and to propose a mutual understanding conducive to better relations with the eastern churches, not just for Reformed Christians but for other churches too. The dialogue is far from concluded. It has borne fruit in that the Orthodox theologians involved have gained a new picture of the Reformed church. To their surprise they have discovered how many treasures of the early church have been preserved in Reformed tradition. Dialogue can contribute to building up a new relationship between the churches.

5.The dialogues with the Reformation churches show that full communion is close at hand or at least not too far away.

Must this statement not mean that new steps should be taken to create unity among Reformation churches? The famous and much-quoted line from Calvin. "I am willing to cross ten seas if I can contribute something to restoring unity" stems from a letter in which he discussed a proposal of this kind. Has the time come now perhaps to act upon this, and could WARC take the initiative to have it discussed at the level of the world communions of these churches?

The proposal meets with scepticism. The concern is expressed that attempts at union among the churches of the Reformation might endanger the more comprehensive communion with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Ecumenical commitment, it is argued, should always

keep an eye on the whole. Any partial form of unity inexorably leads to a communion from which the "others" feel excluded. All block building must thus be avoided. Yet are these arguments really cogent? On the contrary, is unity not built step by step? And could it not then be one of the tasks of WARC to speak out for this way towards unity?

6. The dialogue with the Disciples of Christ has led closest to the threshold of full communion.

Both sides presented a statement of full communion formulated on the basis of the report. A relatively large number of approving reactions have come in from the Reformed side, and the Disciples' Ecumenical Consultative Council has also welcomed the statement. The question now is, where do we go from here? Can WARC perhaps suggest the opening of actual negotiations to the Disciples' Ecumenical Consultative Council? Certain arrangements have already been made. Since the Seoul general council a delegate of the Disciples has attended executive committee meetings and participants from the Disciples are invited to all important events of WARC. Can we continue along these lines? Negotiations would need to examine how the mutually expressed recognition can be given visible expression, coming as it does from international organizations and national churches.

7. Keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace

As we have seen, the dialogues are an attempt to work on historical divisions and reveal anew the unity given in Christ. It would be an illusion, however, to think that unity can be restored by means of dialogues alone. Past divisions must be overcome if there is to be growth in communion. Yet the conflicts threatening to split the churches today must also be attended to. They are generally not given enough space in the dialogues. I think, for example, of the holiness movement, fundamentalism, the independent churches, Pentecostalism or the charismatic movement. In many places such movements are a danger to the unity of Reformed churches and that of their partners in dialogue. It was therefore a wise decision of WARC to include in its programme the study of the theological questions raised by these movements. They are too often dismissed as "not theological".

The church is a pilgrim people. Its unity is put to the test again in every generation. Like the church in Ephesus, it is constantly challenged - to be worthy of its calling and to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. This requires two things - that we deal honestly with the past and prepare with courage the church's way forward into the future.

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