

NOTE

RECEPTION PAST AND PRESENT

The term "reception" is generally used today in two distinct but related senses. The historical or "classical" concept refers to the acceptance by local churches of particular ecclesiastical or conciliar decisions.¹ A more recent, ecumenical usage of the concept refers to the acceptance by one church of a theological consensus arrived at with another church, and ultimately the recognition of the other church's faith and ecclesial life as authentically Christian.

In the last few years reception has become a crucial issue in this ecumenical context, for it emerges precisely at the point of the discrepancy between the progress made in the ecumenical dialogues and the apparent inability of the sponsoring churches to build and move forward on the basis of what the dialogues have accomplished. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has been in official dialogue with other churches on both the international and the regional level. Among the more significant dialogues on the international level are those carried on by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission, the Joint Commission of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, the Reformed-Roman Catholic Study Commission, and the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Theological Commission. In the United States the Catholic Church is involved in dialogues with Episcopalians, Lutherans, Southern Baptists, Methodists, the Presbyterian/Reformed Church, the Eastern Orthodox, the Oriental Orthodox, and the Polish National Catholic Church. Yet, so far, none of the statements produced by these dialogue commissions has been received by the sponsoring churches, with the exception of the Episcopal Church in the United States, which has begun the process of officially receiving the ARCIC Final Report.² The one semiofficial response of the Roman Catholic

¹ John Zizioulas speaks of the "classical idea of reception" in "The Theological Problem of Reception," *Bulletin/Centro pro unione* 26 (1984) 3.

² At its 66th General Convention (1979) the Episcopal Church approved the ARCIC Final Report statements on Eucharistic Doctrine and on Ministry and Ordination as providing "a statement of the faith of this Church in the matters concerned"; the 68th General Convention (1985) affirmed that the Final Report statement on Authority in the Church "represents a theological model of convergence towards which both of our Churches may grow and, in that sense, is sufficiently consonant in substance with the faith of this

Church, the "Observations on the ARCIC Final Report" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF),³ has generally been perceived as a negative one.

The CDF's cool response to the Final Report occasioned considerable disappointment; it was interpreted by many as an unwillingness on the part of Rome to receive the considerable agreement arrived at through the ARCIC dialogue. Indeed, the CDF singled out what it considered to be the Final Report's understanding of reception as one of its objections, arguing that it was in conflict with the Catholic teaching on magisterial infallibility expressed at Vatican I in the constitution *Pastor aeternus* (DS 3074) and at Vatican II in *Lumen gentium* (no. 25).⁴ But it may be that the general frustration with the failure of the churches to officially receive the bilateral statements reflects the same tendency to place too much emphasis on what formal authority can accomplish by itself that one sees in the CDF's sharp juxtaposition of magisterial infallibility against reception. Perhaps too much has been expected of authority, as if reception were a purely juridical process. But it is much more. As Cardinal Willebrands has recently observed, the problem that arises in respect to the bilateral documents is "how *theological* consensuses and convergences can become *ecclesial* consensuses and convergences."⁵

The current ecumenical discussion of reception is very much concerned with this issue. In what follows I would like to address it by focusing on some of the past and present implications of reception. I will first consider the biblical roots of the concept; second, review the classical and ecumenical concepts; third, analyze reception as an ecclesiological reality; finally, offer some suggestions for facilitating the process of reception.

BIBLICAL ROOTS

Various authors point out that the process of reception is constitutive for the life of faith and for the Church itself.⁶ Behind the Latin words

Church . . . to offer a basis for taking further steps towards the reconciliation of our Churches grounded in agreement of faith" (Resolution VI, ARCIC Final Report, in "Report of the Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations to the 68th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 1985," to be published in the *Journal of the 68th General Convention of the Episcopal Church*). Cf. *The Final Report* (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1982).

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Observations on the ARCIC Final Report," *Origins* 11 (1982) 752-56.

⁴ *Ibid.* III, 5.

⁵ Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, "The Ecumenical Dialogue and Its Reception," *Bulletin/Centro pro unione* 27 (1985) 6.

⁶ Ulrich Kuhn, "Reception—An Imperative and an Opportunity," in *Ecumenical Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, ed. Max Thurian (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983) 165; Zizioulas, "The Theological Problem" 3.

receptio and *recipere* lie the New Testament Greek words *lambanein* ("to receive") and *dechesthai* ("to accept") and their derivatives. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they have "received" the gospel he preached (1 Cor 15:1); similarly, he tells them that they have received the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 1:12; cf. 1 Thess 2:13; Col 2:6). In the parable of the seed the word is accepted (Mk 4:20); in Acts Peter's preaching is accepted by those who are subsequently baptized (Acts 2:41). Those who accept Jesus and his messengers in doing so also accept God (*dechesthai*, Mt 10:40; *lambanein*, Jn 13:20). In Paul the idea of reception appears in the context of tradition, for he several times uses the Greek equivalents for the technical rabbinic terms for the process of handing on (*paradidonai*) and receiving (*paralambanein*) the tradition.

What resulted from the reception of the apostolic preaching by those who became the converts of the apostles and other early Christian missionaries was the Church itself. The same dynamic can be seen in the formation of the New Testament canon.⁷ Those Christian writings which were accepted by the early communities as expressions of the apostolic faith became through this process of reception part of the Church's canon of Sacred Scripture. Still later the receiving of liturgical practices, church laws, and customs of one church by others further illustrates the process of reception. Edward Kilmartin points, as examples, to the fourth-century reception of the Spirit epiklesis in the East, to the acceptance of the Roman liturgy in Germany beginning in the sixth century, and to the reception of the Mainz Pontifical by Rome in the tenth.⁸

RECEPTION: CLASSICAL AND ECUMENICAL

Although reception as an ecclesiological reality has a broad application, the term in its classical sense is used restrictively to refer to the acceptance in the early Church of conciliar decrees and decisions, particularly those of the great ecumenical councils. Ulrich Kuhn points out that those writing in the last 20 years tend to speak of reception in the ancient Church in two main connections. First, in the pre-Constantinian period reception is primarily concerned with the process through which decisions of local or regional synods were made known to and accepted by other churches. Kuhn stresses that what underlies this practice is the recognition that a particular church is authentically church only if it lives in communion with other churches.⁹

Secondly, after Constantine the focus is generally on the process

⁷ Kuhn, "Reception" 166.

⁸ Edward J. Kilmartin, "Reception in History: An Ecclesiological Phenomenon and Its Significance," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 41-43.

⁹ Kuhn, "Reception" 166.

through which those decisions made by the great "ecumenical" councils were discussed, interpreted, and received by a later council, though the process might also lead to a rejection.¹⁰ Kilmartin points, as a prime example, to the eventual reception of Nicaea I (325) after a long process involving considerable opposition.¹¹ Other examples include that of Leo II, who both confirmed the teaching of Constantinople III (681) and asked the Spanish bishops to support it with their own authority, which they did at the regional Council of Toledo XIV (684). On the other hand, the theologians of Charlemagne decided that the decision of the Council of Nicaea II (787) on ikons did not reflect the universal faith and authority of all the churches.¹²

The classical concept of reception must be understood as an ecclesiological reality which emerged in the life of the Church of the first millennium. It is most important to note that during this period the Church was understood as a communion of churches. It is this ecclesiology of communion as well as the practice which it grounded which have important implications for the Church of today. Attempts to explain reception which look to the late-medieval or post-Tridentine Church are less helpful; for the excessively hierarchical concept of church which developed tends to reduce reception to a purely juridical category,¹³ if indeed it does not so emphasize the role of ecclesiastical authority that the notion of reception is virtually rejected.¹⁴

While the classical concept emerged in a church which understood itself as a communion of churches, it was nonetheless a united church. In the ecumenical context, however, a new element appears; for now what is involved is a process of reception between churches separated from one another by differences of history, doctrine, and structure. In the absence of communion between the churches, the process of reception is complicated considerably; as Anton Houtepen observes, "more theological consensus is needed to restore unity than to preserve unity."¹⁵

From the time of its founding in 1948, the World Council of Churches has been working to build consensus among the churches, receiving reports and statements and forwarding them to its member churches "for

¹⁰ Ibid. 167.

¹¹ Kilmartin, "Reception in History" 40.

¹² Ibid. 49; for other examples see Yves Congar, "Reception As an Ecclesiological Reality," in *Election and Consensus in the Church*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Anton Weiler (Concilium 77; New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 46-47.

¹³ Kilmartin, "Reception in History" 35-36.

¹⁴ Congar, "Reception" 60.

¹⁵ Anton Houtepen, "Reception, Tradition, Communion," in Thurian, *Ecumenical Perspectives* 148.

their study and appropriate action."¹⁶ So the ecumenical process of reception has already been initiated.

As a formal, ecumenical concept, reception first began to emerge as a result of a meeting on the ancient councils organized by the Faith and Order Commission at Oxford in 1965 and then at Bad Gastein, Austria, in 1966.¹⁷ Gradually both the concept and the term became part of the ecumenical vocabulary. Zizioulas mentions an attempt to use the concept of reception in a decisive way at the Faith and Order meeting at Louvain in 1972.¹⁸ The WCC statement *One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry* approved at Accra in 1974 did not speak specifically of reception, but it was "submitted to the churches for consideration and comment."¹⁹ The WCC Assembly at Nairobi in 1975 specifically called the churches "to receive, re-appropriate and confess together . . . the Christian truth and faith, delivered through the Apostles and handed down through the centuries."²⁰ And when the WCC text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)* was published and transmitted to the churches throughout the world in 1982, the Faith and Order Commission invited all the churches "to prepare an official response . . . at the highest appropriate level of authority" as part of "this process of reception."²¹

Thus the ecumenical movement and, especially since the end of the Second Vatican Council, the appearance of the various bilateral dialogues, along with the official statements formulated by them, have made the issue of reception unavoidable.

RECEPTION AS AN ECCLESIOLOGICAL REALITY

We have reviewed the classical and ecumenical concepts of reception. If both are understood in the context of the broader ecclesiological reality of reception of which each remains a part, a number of conclusions can be drawn.

1. Reception cannot be reduced to a juridical determination, either of authority or on the part of the faithful; it is a process involving the whole

¹⁶ See "The Rules of the World Council of Churches" XIV, 6, (a) in *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975*, ed. David M. Paton (London: SPCK, 1976) 339. Cf. Houtepen, "Reception" 141.

¹⁷ Zizioulas, "The Theological Problem" 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1975) 5.

²⁰ *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi, 1975*, Report of Section II, 66.

²¹ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982) x. For the history behind *BEM*, see William G. Rusch, "'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry'—and Reception," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 21 (1984) 129–43.

Church. In the ancient Church ecclesiastical decisions or teachings became normative for the later Church only when they were received by the communion of churches and ultimately by the faithful themselves. At the same time, reception does not constitute a decision as legitimate. Congar emphasizes that reception "does not confer validity, but affirms, acknowledges and attests that this matter is for the good of the Church."²²

Vatican II teaches that the whole Church is involved in grasping Christian truth:

The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith which characterizes the People as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when, 'from the bishops down to the last member of the laity,' it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals.²³

More recently, Cardinal Willebrands has stressed that reception cannot be understood "as a purely technical or instrumental concept." He argues that it involves the whole People of God and in this sense "has certain aspects of a sociological process."²⁴ Thus it involves the research activities of theologians, "the preserving fidelity and piety" of the faithful, and the binding decisions arrived at by the college of bishops.²⁵

As a contemporary example of reception, Willebrands points to the reception of the ecumenical movement itself by Vatican II, a reception made possible by earlier development in theology, in the Christian lives of the faithful, and in some "often hesitant" statements of the magisterium.²⁶ At the same time, not all initiatives on the part of authority have been received by the faithful. John Long calls attention to the failure of church authorities in the 15th century to translate the agreements between the Eastern churches and the Latin West reached at the Council of Florence into terms intelligible to the clergy and faithful of both traditions, with the sad result that this attempt at reconciliation itself failed.²⁷ Congar points to Pope John XXIII's apostolic constitution *Veterum sapientia*, recommending the continuation of the use of Latin especially in seminaries, as an example of church legislation not received

²² Congar, "Reception" 66.

²³ *Lumen gentium*, no. 12; tr. *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: America, 1966) 29.

²⁴ Willebrands, "The Ecumenical Dialogue" 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 6.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 5.

²⁷ John Long, "Reception: Ecumenical Dialogue at a Turning Point," *Ecumenical Trends* 12 (1983) 19-20. Long refers to Joseph Gill's study, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959).

by the faithful.²⁸ The question could also be raised as to whether or not *Humanae vitae*, Pope Paul VI's encyclical on artificial contraception, has been genuinely received by the faithful, and thus, by implication, the question of what kind of authority the encyclical itself possesses.²⁹

2. Reception also involves formal decisions on the part of those authorities who represent and serve the unity of the Church. In the classical model of reception the bishop symbolized the link between the local church and the apostolic Church; the bishop also maintained the communion between the local church and the universal Church by participating in conciliar gatherings.³⁰ Sometimes it was the role of the bishops in council to initiate a process of reception through formal conciliar decisions. The creed proclaimed by the First Council of Nicaea is an obvious example. For a council itself to be ecumenical, it must be received by the bishop of Rome.³¹ Sometimes the authority of the bishops served to give formal approval to a process of reception already underway, thus bringing the process to a juridical close. For example, the practice of private, frequent confession, brought to the European Continent by the Irish missionaries in the sixth and seventh centuries, was only gradually received there, though it finally became the official and universal practice when the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) decreed that every Christian who committed a serious sin should confess it within a year.

Therefore church authorities have a role to play in the process of reception, but they do not carry out that role simply by making juridical decisions. Their role is to articulate what is the faith of the Church. Even the dogma of infallibility is essentially a statement about the Church, not about the pope, or the pope and the bishops, apart from the Church. The statement in the constitution *Pastor aeternus* at Vatican I that solemn definitions of the pope are "irreformable of themselves [*ex sese*], and not from the consent of the Church,"³² means only that papal teachings are not dependent on subsequent juridical approval by national hierarchies, as the Gallican view maintained. In saying that "the Roman Pontiff . . . is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed," the Council was pointing to how the Church's infallibility comes to expression.³³ Vatican II clarified the teaching of Vatican I by including the college of bishops

²⁸ Congar, "Reception" 57.

²⁹ See Joseph A. Komonchak, "*Humanae vitae* and Its Reception: Ecclesiological Reflections," *Theological Studies* 39 (1978) 221-57.

³⁰ Zizioulas, "The Theological Problem" 5.

³¹ Congar, "Reception" 51.

³² DS 3074.

³³ *Ibid.*

in the exercise of the Church's charism of infallibility, at the same time pointing out that to "the resulting definitions the assent of the Church can never be wanting, on account of the activity of that same Holy Spirit, whereby the whole flock of Christ is preserved and progresses in unity of faith."³⁴

3. Reception cannot be reduced to the acceptance of doctrinal formulations; it involves the recognition and acceptance of a common faith. Forms of worship, life, and practice emerge out of a living tradition which bears the faith experience of a community. To accept a liturgical practice from another community is to acknowledge a shared faith which comes to expression through a ritual.

The same holds true for doctrinal formulations. When the representatives of churches in dialogue are able to arrive at a statement of consensus or agreement on those issues which have previously divided them, the completion of the dialogue process represents more than the mutual acceptance of a linguistic formula; it also implies the recognition of a common faith. That common faith is often expressed differently in the various Christian traditions, and no particular expression, no matter how true, completely captures the reality with which it is concerned. There will always be a diversity of expression.³⁵ But when a consensus based on a common language is reached, the dialogue partners are beginning to discover each other as sharing the same faith.

The process of reception has already begun when two churches, in spite of their separate histories, commit themselves to the search for unity by entering into dialogue. Such a commitment implies not just a willingness to trust each other, but also the recognition of the dialogue partner as a community of Christians also living a Christian life. Furthermore, entering into dialogue commits each church to re-examine its own tradition and ecclesial life in the light of Scripture and the dialogue itself.³⁶

4. The norm for recognizing a common faith is not agreement with one's own ecclesial position but agreement with the apostolic tradition. In his study of reception Kilmartin singles out the work of Herman Josef Sieben as the best description of the relationship between reception and the authority of ecumenical councils, formulated as a *consensio antiquitatis et universitatis* grounded in the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ The

³⁴ *Lumen gentium*, no. 25 (Documents 49).

³⁵ Cf. Robert Butterworth, "Reception and Pluriformity," *Month* 18 (1985) 348-58.

³⁶ Kuhn, "Reception" 169.

³⁷ Kilmartin, "Reception in History" 48-50; Herman Josef Sieben, *Die Konzilsidee der alten Kirche* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1979) 511-16.

consensio universitatis represented the “horizontal consensus” of the whole Church which the council had to express and which had to be secured by reception. But the *consensio antiquitatis*, the “vertical consensus” with the teaching of Scripture and the apostolic tradition, had to be demonstrated by the council and tested by the whole Church. Of the two, Kilmartin argues, the vertical consensus, which includes the element of formal authority, has priority and “is ultimately decisive because the truth of faith is, from its essence, a truth handed on.”³⁸ In other words, in receiving the teaching of a council an individual church was acknowledging that its own life of faith received from the apostolic tradition could be expressed by the conciliar decision.

J. M. R. Tillard also stresses the apostolic tradition as norm. He warns against making the term “reception” so extensive that it loses any specific meaning. The correct approach in respect to any ecumenical accord must be found “in subjecting it to a critical evaluation in the light of the apostolic tradition,” for the essential requirement is not merely mutual understanding but rather “a collective conversion to the claims of the apostolic faith *as such*.”³⁹ Tillard suggests several practical considerations for those willing to implement reception with the conversion it implies. First, they should beware of accepting only what is already included in their own tradition. Second, there must be a willingness to inquire if an ecclesial element present in another tradition and absent from one’s own—even if one’s own tradition dates from the earliest Christian centuries—is not a deficiency.⁴⁰ Finally, in the case of one tradition lacking something strongly present in another, the question must be asked: “Does this lack arise from a denial of the point at issue, or from an alternative and valid interpretation which also has its roots in the great apostolic tradition?”⁴¹

RECEPTION TODAY

Agreed statements formulated by theologians are important steps on the road to a future communion between the sponsoring churches. But the statements by themselves will not be able to bring the churches together. The real breakthrough will only be realized when the People of God in different churches begin to discover for themselves that the

³⁸ Kilmartin, “Reception in History” 50; see also Congar, “Reception” 53.

³⁹ J. M. R. Tillard, “‘Reception’: A Time To Beware of False Steps,” *Ecumenical Trends* 14 (1985) 145; Tillard’s emphasis.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 146–47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 148.

consensus formulated reflects a common faith.⁴² When Christians from different traditions begin to experience each other's faith experience as their own, they will begin to experience communion. How can this process of reception today be facilitated?

1. On an educational level, the results of the dialogues must enter into the practical life of the churches. Liturgies should incorporate the consensus emerging on baptism and Eucharist. A particular tradition might have to reconsider the importance of the Eucharistic epiklesis; another might have to express more clearly the importance of personal belief in baptism. Catechisms should be updated to include the agreement reached through the dialogues.⁴³ It will be interesting to see if the new Roman Catholic catechism recommended by the 1985 extraordinary Synod of Bishops incorporates this ecumenical convergence.

2. The most effective way for Christians from different traditions to discover a common faith is through living and worshiping together. This is certainly the experience of those who have lived in ecumenical communities. The Third World Conference on Faith and Order (Lund, 1952) proposed as a principle that the churches "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."⁴⁴ More recently, in responding to the Final Report, the Catholic bishops of England and Wales have made a similar affirmation:

We wish to endorse, in particular, the spirit of the last sentence of the *Final Report*: 'We suggest that some difficulties will not be wholly resolved until a practical initiative has been taken and our two Churches have lived together more visibly in one *koinonia*.' It is widespread experience of many people in our countries that the work of ecumenism must be carried out at all levels and in all dimensions of Church life. Doctrinal discussions alone are not sufficient.⁴⁵

Yet, too often the very thought of Christians from different traditions living and worshiping together is resisted; for it raises for many the issue of intercommunion, with its attendant difficulties and painfulness. A process of reception already underway has led to progress in this area; interim sharing of the Eucharist has been authorized for Episcopalians and some Lutherans on the basis of the dialogue between the Episcopal Church in the United States and three Lutheran churches (the American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches,

⁴² Cf. Lukas Vischer, "The Process of 'Reception' in the Ecumenical Movement," *Mid-Stream* 23 (1984) 226.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 231.

⁴⁴ *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order, August 15-28, 1952*, ed. Oliver Tomkins (London: SCM, 1953) 16.

⁴⁵ *One in Christ* 21 (1985) 179-80.

and the Lutheran Church in America). Short of intercommunion—which presupposes an experienced *koinonia*—there are many areas in which local parishes can begin to co-operate by pooling their resources. Before talking about common worship, common schools, or common plants, neighboring parishes might at least consider a joint vacation school or social-outreach program.

A special case is presented by those Christians who have lived in ecumenical communities; their experience needs to be taken into consideration. If it is true that reception involves not just church authorities but the entire People of God, the question must be raised as to what it means when Christians from different traditions—Roman Catholics among them—are able to recognize the Lord's presence in one another's celebrations of the Eucharist, even though their church leaders have yet to acknowledge this. Is it not simply a fact that today many Christians would not raise questions about the "validity" of Eucharistic celebrations in other churches unless the traditional difficulties were pointed out to them? Local church authorities should consider and weigh carefully the experience of their people, particularly those who have lived in ecumenical communities, not as an instance of the collapse of discipline but as part of the process of reception.

3. Local churches should themselves enter into the process of reception. An important precedent was set for the Roman Catholic Church when, thanks to the Secretariat for the Promoting of Christian Unity, the process of responding to *BEM* and the Final Report was broadened beyond the Church's central administration in Rome so that national episcopal conferences and ultimately local churches could also take part. Thus local Catholic churches throughout the world (or English-speaking churches in the case of the Final Report) for the first time are able to become involved in the process of reception. As of June 1986 in the United States, out of some 180 dioceses and archdioceses, only 21 had submitted reactions to *BEM* and eight to the Final Report. Certainly not an overwhelming response.

Often the objection is raised that the resources are lacking; the local church does not have the experts, theologians, seminaries, or institutes needed to formulate a response to an ecumenical text such as *BEM* or the Final Report. But that is to leave ecumenism in the hands of the specialists and runs the risk of reducing reception to the acceptance of doctrinal formulations. Local churches need to develop their own ways of responding, using the resources and structures available. A first step might be to conduct a series of hearings, listening to those involved in ecumenical encounters at university campus-ministry centers, retreat houses, ecumenical communities, the various renewal movements, and

other activities in which Christians from different churches are engaged. The current hearings being conducted by the Catholic Church in the United States on the issue of women in the Church could serve as a model. Ecumenical groups might reflect together on a statement during a particular liturgical season such as Lent or Advent or at a weekend retreat. The local ecumenical commission could prepare a written response incorporating the experience of people in the local church as well as theological reflection on the document itself.

4. Finally, churches at the national or regional level should begin to respond to ecumenical initiatives in a way that goes beyond offering theological reactions to the dialogue statements. One hopeful sign for such a step forward appears at the end of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' evaluation of the Final Report in what appears to be a recommendation for a joint synod of Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops. The NCCB evaluation concludes: "Looking ahead to the future, we hope that ARCIC II will be asked to prepare its conclusions for a session of the Synod of Bishops with Anglican input *and representation*."⁴⁶

It is unfortunate that today more energy seems to go into the preservation of confessional or doctrinal identity than into building on the ecumenical progress that has already been achieved. The ecumenical dialogues have displayed substantial areas of agreement. They need to be received, but this demands more than a juridical decision on the part of church authorities. If the concept of reception originally presumed an ecclesiology of communion, then it is essential today that local and regional churches themselves become involved in the reception process.⁴⁷

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⁴⁶ "Evaluation of the Final Report," *Ecumenical Trends* 14 (1985) 23; emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ An important work that has come to my attention too late for consideration in this brief essay is *La réception de Vatican II*, edited by G. Alberigo and J.-P. Jossua (Paris: Cerf, 1985); see the review by Carl Peter in this issue of *TS*.