
Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue
PATHWAYS FOR ECCLESIAL DIALOGUE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
Revisiting Ecumenical Method
Edited by
Mark D. Chapman &
Miriam Haar

# Pathways for Ecclesial Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century

## PATHWAYS FOR ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

**Series Editors**: Mark Chapman and Gerard Mannion

Building on the important work of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network to promote ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, the Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue series publishes scholarship on ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and encounters in relation to the past, present, and future. It gathers together a richly diverse array of voices in monographs and edited collections that speak to the challenges, aspirations, and elements of ecumenical and interreligious work. Through its publications, the series allows for the exploration of new ways, means, and methods of advancing the wider ecumenical cause with renewed energy for the twenty-first century.

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## Revisiting Ecumenical Method

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# Contents

# Introduction

*Mark D. Chapman and Miriam Haar*

Many people within the churches will be all too familiar with the effects of the ecumenical winter that descended on the churches in the 1980s and has affected nearly all the mainline denominations, which have often become increasingly self-absorbed. While some might have been tempted to give up altogether and retreat, others have seen the strained relations across the different Christian denominations—and more widely the different faiths—as heightening the imperative for ecumenism to be reenergized. Indeed, what now seems crucial to many Christians is an expansion of ecumenism in the face of the many tensions and divisions both *between* the particular denominations and faith communities and also *within* the particular Christian traditions. New forms of dialogue, as well as a reinvigoration of the old—which is the main focus of this collection—seem central for the renewing the ecumenical and interfaith movements.

This collection is the second volume of essays that began life as short presentations at the conference of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network, "Where We Dwell in Common," which took place in Assisi, Italy, from April 17 to 20, 2012, which was explicitly intended to reignite the flame of ecumenical dialogue. Placing the emphasis upon where people dwell in common was Pope John XXIII's explicit intention when he called the Second Vatican Council. Needless to say, many theologians and faith community leaders—particularly among Christians and perhaps especially in the Roman Catholic Church—in subsequent decades have rejected such an approach and favored accentuating difference first and foremost to the detriment of dialogue and commonality. But there remains a sense of hope and optimism that the council inspired and that the Ecclesiological Investigations Network has sought to encourage since its

foundation in 2006. It is led by a dedicated team from widely differing contexts and experiences, who hoped that in Assisi the themes of openness, charity, dialogue, harmony, peace, community, and shared endeavor would inspire every aspect of the gathering. To this end, there was a strong devotional and corporate aspect to the gathering that made it quite different from a "secular" academic conference.

The gathering at Assisi was in many ways countercultural: it took place at a time when dialogue within and between the different churches and the different faiths, and between the various faith communities and the wider world, seemed to have been placed on the backburner or even to have stalled completely. Many enthusiastic ecumenists of earlier generations had been sidelined in what appeared to be a period of retrenchment and reconfessionalization. As an example, this became increasingly apparent during the papacy of Benedict XVI, who seemed to have been elected in 2005 to continue the course that had been taken when he was Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith under John Paul II. Benedict's task as pope seemed to be to try to do something to stem the tide of church decline in an increasingly less-Christian Europe. However laudable, the mood through his papacy was one of retrenchment and resistance to a world that was usually seen as hostile and militantly secularist and anti-Christian rather than as a creation of God for the sake of which his Son died. The optimism of earlier ecumenical endeavors was thrown into question, particularly through the encyclical *Dominus Iesus* of the year 2000. Later, the great achievements of ecumenical dialogues such as the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission seemed to have been thrown into jeopardy by such unprecedented gestures as the setting up of "personal ordinariates" for disaffected Anglicans without any prior consultation with either local Anglican or Roman Catholic leaders in 2011. All in all, the mood in 2012 was certainly not rosy for ecumenists, especially within the Roman Catholic Church.

During this period of retrenchment, however, it was obvious to most observers that the world was continuing to develop in sometimes dramatic ways, and that liturgical anachronism and resistance to change were doing little to stem ecclesial decline in the West. The energy in the church was now outside Europe, which was making a huge, if sometimes unacknowledged, impact on the churches. The organizers of the Assisi gathering deliberately sought to bring as many people as possible to the conversation table from outside the confines of Europe and North America. It was greatly encouraging to see so many participants present from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania. There was as much a desire to learn from and encourage

dialogue from below and from the margins as there was to learn from the institutions and communities pursuing and promoting dialogue in more formal ways. In all, we hoped to discuss, to enhance, and to promote the "science of bridge building." That said, sometimes the voices from outside the rich West were not as strong as they might have been (as Eduardus Van der Borght notes in this volume).

Assisi also tried to bring the voices of as many "emerging scholars" as possible to the table. They represented the people who would continue the dialogue into the future. Many participants remarked through the gathering how inspiring and encouraging it was to see so many younger people interacting with the older generations and sharing their own wisdom and energy toward the furtherance of dialogue. There was an awareness of the numerous implications of the obvious fact that the world in the twenty-first century was a very different world even from the ecumenical heyday of the 1960s and 1970s. This meant that innovative ways had to be developed if pathways for dialogue were to be cleared. In many ways, the 250 or so scholars, church leaders, and representatives of other religions from 55 countries who gathered in Assisi did so as an act of resistance to the prevailing pessimistic mood. Such a mood was not limited solely to the Roman Catholic Church; many of the other churches that were represented at the gathering—most obviously the Anglican Communion, which had become increasingly divided over the issue of homosexual clergy—were preoccupied with their own internal conflicts, which meant that ecumenism was no longer the first priority.

Assisi was no accidental choice of venue. It was chosen because of its long and instinctive association with openness, charity, dialogue, peace, harmony, and communion. The example of St. Francis was constantly held up before the participants who met to discuss and to "think outside the box"—it was virtually impossible to avoid being touched by the great saint's example, which offered such a powerful witness to the official church of his time. To "think outside the box" certainly did not mean jettisoning the past or rejecting or neglecting other forms of dialogue and ecumenical and interfaith achievement. Instead, at Assisi 2012, along with a desire to encourage innovation, there was also a focus on learning from the best of the past—to revisit, develop, renew, and adapt some of the methodologies employed to great effect in earlier dialogues, some of which are discussed in this volume.

Assisi also proved important as the home to so many who have followed Francis into one of the orders established under his name and who also contributed so much to the gathering. The particular

charisms of the orders founded by Francis and Clare have, from their beginnings, helped inspire countless ventures in promoting dialogue and openness among peoples. The history of the orders still has lessons to teach the church of today, as Vladimir Latinovic demonstrates in his chapter in this volume. It was fitting that the gathering took place in the "Year of Clare," which marked the eight hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Santa Chiara's Order. Many of the papers were presented in the large Franciscan Conference Center, the Domus Pacis, which adjoins the Porzioncula within the great Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli in the lower town. Others were given in the great churches of upper Assisi, including the Basilica of Santa Chiara, the Cathedral of San Rufino (where a plenary was held that brought together perspectives from South Africa, Vietnam, the Philippines, and England), and even in the lower Basilica of St. Francis itself where ecumenical vespers were celebrated.

The conversations on the long walk up the hill and over dinner added a further dimension of informality and excitement. These were unofficial dialogues where differences were named and where new voices could be heard from across the world. It was important that nobody was formally "representing" any church. The gathering was engaged in something necessarily different from but complementary to official processes of dialogue between churches and faiths. Here one can draw an analogy with processes of diplomacy in situations of conflict in the political realm. In recent years, a framework has been developed that delineates between different processes and practitioners in such diplomacy and situations of conflict and tension. It is called the Tracks of Diplomacy Framework. Essentially, track 1 involves official voices, such as foreign office personnel. Track 2 involves nonofficial and grassroots voices and practitioners. Recent studies of the distinctive forms of such diplomacy demonstrate that the dividing lines between official and nonofficial diplomacy are no longer as clearly demarcated as was once believed and should not be seen as rigid. What has emerged is a "track 1½ diplomacy" that tries to bridge the gap between 1 and 2 and encourage a two-way exchange of insight and inspiration between the two. Ecumenical and interfaith efforts have much to learn from this, and Assisi 2012 sought to test this experiment.

We sought to involve people with experience of official discussions as well as people from grassroots ecumenical ventures and tried to build a bridge between the two. It was especially significant that all the participants were invited as private individuals and not as representatives and spokespersons of particular churches, traditions, and

organizations. Of course, many have been and are still involved in official track 1 modes of dialogue and were encouraged to speak out of their various experiences of such initiatives. But there was no sense of expectation for anybody to toe the party line. Instead, there was a desire to discern the best pathways for dialogue into the future. Consequently, instead of speaking about tracks of diplomacy, the gathering at Assisi spoke about pathways for dialogue—this was something that was more evocative, open ended, and existentially engaging than the more formal-sounding diplomatic language. Of course, tracks *can* meet, but the problem is that they run parallel or in different directions. In contrast, pathways are often intersecting or being cleared anew. There are many junctions and crossroads.

What united virtually everybody who attended the Assisi gathering, then, was a profound anxiety about the state of ecumenism and a desire for conversation and dialogue. The motivation was a renewed sense of the importance of a common witness of the churches and the faiths, more generally for the sake of the peace of the world, which became ever more pressing after the catastrophic events that followed the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. The power and beauty of the place, as well as the memories associated with Francis and his friends, gave a renewed sense of urgency to the task at hand. The overall aim of the gathering at Assisi was to discern new ways, means, and methods for advancing the dialogical cause. It was intended to be not so much a conference, convention, nor a one-off event but rather the beginning of a process—indeed a series of ongoing processes—the start of a pathway for ecclesial dialogue. Assisi 2012 was not an ecumenical gathering where differing factions and competing interest groups came together merely to rehearse overly familiar arguments about lines in the sand that divide people of differing faith communities. "Formal scripts" were neither required nor desired (which is one reason the process of production of this volume has been quite drawn out). Instead, the gathering sought to identify, share, shape, and put into practice productive pathways for dialogue into the future. The process of production of the volumes has been collaborative and developmental, stemming from the friendships that were forged and new research links that were established. This volume is but one example of that process and is intended stimulate further work.

Assisi 2012 had its own framework and method. After exploring the ongoing causes of division—doctrinal, organizational, sacramental, moral, social, ethnic, or cultural—it turned to sources and features of commonality. There was a focus on shared or complementary beliefs, commitments, ethical and social endeavors, and common humanity,

as well as a shared concern for the environment. Each day explored three thematic areas, which were examined from perspectives both within and between the churches. These were explored in interfaith contexts and perspectives, and finally investigated in regard to relations between faith communities and the wider world. In a postsecular age, where issues such as racism, migration, war, militant atheism, and globalization challenge all faith communities, it was important to remember that dialogue with people of no faith is equally important, as are the shared concerns for our world that transcend religious divides.

It was notable to some of us who attended the Assisi gathering that even though Benedict XVI had visited the city only a few months before the Conference in October 2011, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of John Paul II's great gathering of representatives of the religions, there were still far more pictures of the recently canonized John Paul II and John XXIII. Benedict's image did not seem to feature high in the gifts aimed at the thousands of visitors and pilgrims to the city. This might, perhaps, have represented an unconscious desire for change or at least a tacit assumption that his was a stopgap papacy. This could also be observed through the actions of some of the hosts in Assisi. Archbishop Domenico Sorrentino, the local bishop, showed an extraordinary degree of hospitality to the organizers and helped secure the great churches of the city for lectures and devotions. A group of relatively young scholars without an ecclesiastical dignitary among them—many of whom came from non-Catholic churches—were received with open arms and hearts because what they were doing seemed to chime in with the message of the city itself. They gained access to the power of the episcopal *telefonino* (which worked wonders at the planning stage), as did the networks of Father Brian Terry of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement.

Of course, nobody in 2012 could have predicted the extraordinary changes that were soon to take place within the Roman Catholic Church that would soon have repercussions in all other churches: it was not long before the resignation of Benedict and the election of Cardinal Bergoglio who took on the name of the great saint of Assisi. This simple gesture, as the veteran Vatican watcher John Allen remarked, contained "a whole program of governance in miniature." In his assessment of the first year of Francis's papacy, Allen continued, "This iconic figure in the Catholic imagination that awakens these images of the antithesis of the institutional church—that is, the charismatic leadership. Close to the earth, close to the poor, simplicity and humility. That's an awful lot of weight to put on your shoulders right

out of the gate. If you're not prepared to walk that talk, then you're going to be in real trouble. Francis, however, during his first year, has convincingly walked the talk."[1]

It is refreshing that this volume is appearing under such changed circumstances, when dialogue and debate are being encouraged both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church. The one who "does not know to dialogue," Pope Francis said at Eastertide 2015, "is not open to the voice of the Lord, to the signs that the Lord does among the people."[2] He is certainly following in the footsteps of his medieval namesake and has begun his pontificate by quickly "thinking outside the box."

St. Francis received a vision to "rebuild the church." In one famous action from his life, he stripped himself bare and renounced his former life, challenging the presuppositions of his own society and church. This had an enormous impact across the globe. Francis was soon joined in his work by Clare, whose vision and followers have also made an extraordinary impact across the globe in the centuries since. In its own small way, the gathering at Assisi sought to challenge the prevailing norms of the church to help an older generation move beyond the logjam and lethargy of recent times by looking both backward and forward. In the present context, the two Francises frame the discussion. We learn from the pathways of dialogue in the past—many of which are discussed in this volume—that enable us to place our present-day ecumenical and interfaith initiatives under differing forms of scrutiny. This will help us better understand the methods and means of promoting dialogue that will prove fruitful, as well as those that have now had their time. And all this is for the sake of the future—not just in abstract terms of "what might come to pass" but in ensuring that crucial positive developments and initiatives do indeed come to pass.

When the organizing committee set out to plan Assisi 2012, there was a hope that there would be a collective "thinking outside the box." There was also a desire to place the difficult questions on the table; some issues simply could not be glossed over. This is discussed at length by Elieser Valentin in his essay on the Pentecostal tradition in this volume, and it also emerges in the sometimes uncomfortable questions expressed in the contributions by Eduardus Van der Borght and John W. de Gruchy. At the same time as being honest about the difficult questions, there was also a need to express and discover sometimes unlikely areas of commonality. There was a process of learning from people who have worked in conflict resolution and from others from widely different forms of Christian churches

and other religions, whose experience of difficult situations has helped generate the demand for new methods. This was a gathering where we listened, shared, and learned together; where participants mutually inspired one another. Our great hope was for participants to return to their own contexts—geographical, ecclesial, religious, and societal—renewed and reenergized in their commitment to dialogue. This volume is an expression of that renewed commitment, which began in that very special part of Umbria.

The editors
Easter 2015

## NOTES

1. "John Allen, Jr. on Pope Francis' First Year," *Radio Boston*, March 25, 2014,http:// radioboston.wbur.org/2014/03/25/pope-francis.
2. "Pope at Mass: Those Who Do Not Dialogue Disobey God," *Vatican Radio*, April 16, 2015, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/04/16/pope_at_mass_those_who_do_not_dialogue_disobey_god/1137174.

# Part I

# Method and Ecclesial Dialogue

# Chapter 1

# Dia-Logos

## Reflections on Different Forms of Inter-Christian Dialogue and Their Possibilities

*Dagmar Heller*

The word *dialogue* traces its origin to the Greek *dialogos. Logos* is "word," but it also has the more general meaning, "speech," and *dia* means "through." *Dia* therefore suggests movement. "Dia-logos" may be understood as "the word that moves" or "a multidirectional exchange of speech." In this sense, every verbal exchange between two or more people is a dialogue. But the following reflections will take into consideration only dialogues between or among churches. These normally take place on different levels, such as the international, regional, and local. There is dialogue at the level of church representation (between leaders and official delegations of different churches), at the parish level, and also at the level of unorganized encounters.

This chapter is selective in the sense that it focuses on dialogue between officially appointed delegations, yet it needs to be kept in mind that the other levels also play a role and are never totally absent or completely separated from this kind of official dialogue.

## Different Forms of Official Dialogue between Churches

Official dialogue between churches occurs mainly in two sorts of settings: in (1) multilateral settings and (2) bilateral settings. And both multilateral and bilateral dialogues are happening on the international

level as well as on regional and national levels. A look at all these dialogues shows that they use slightly different methods depending on the aim of the respective dialogue. The following examples will explore this relationship in rather more detail:

1. A first example—a bilateral dialogue on the local level—is the dialogue established since 1959 between the Evangelical (Protestant) Church in Germany (EKD) and the Russian Orthodox Church. This is a dialogue that looks for mutual knowledge and mutual understanding. It has in different sessions discussed various theological issues, with both sides presenting their respective views. The communiqués of the different dialogue sessions describe where the differences rest. In some cases, similarities and agreements are mentioned, but there are practically no reflections about how to bring the sides closer together or how to find solutions for overcoming the differences because these measures do not belong to the aim of this specific dialogue.
2. A classical multilateral dialogue on the international level is the work of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The commission developed a method that became famous in the ecumenical movement as the "convergence" method; the best-known example is the so-called Lima Document of 1982 called "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry."[1] Because the final goal of the Faith and Order Commission is to overcome doctrinal divisions, the idea of this convergence document is to bring the different confessional positions on the issues mentioned closer to each other.[2] The BEM text does this methodologically by trying to formulate, on the one hand, what churches can say together and, on the other hand, by making proposals for points in which churches would need to change something in their theological reflections or in their practices in order to make an obstacle for unity less impedimentary.
3. The dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, which resulted in the Joint Declaration on Justification,[3] is an example of a bilateral dialogue on the international level. The method—and consequently, the result—that was developed in this dialogue is called "differentiated consensus." This may be understood as an adaptation of the aforementioned convergence method to a bilateral situation: the two partners find agreement on what they can say together and they agree that the remaining differences are "tolerable" and "do not challenge the agreement."[4]

All these three dialogues have different backgrounds and different purposes, which lead accordingly to the use of different methodologies:

a. The first example mentioned previously uses probably the least-closely defined method of dialogue but also the most popular one: two parties talk about a theme that they have identified and agreed upon. From both sides, the theme is presented from different perspectives (historical, theological, exegetical).[5] But something important to note is that the presentations from both sides are in themselves "monologues"—one side tells the other about itself or its tradition. The others listen without having much possibility to react, except that they in turn talk about their position by means of a paper that was carefully prepared in advance, not as a direct response to the first presentation. This amounts to a second monologue. The idea is not so much to discuss a common issue as to listen respectfully to the other in order to understand that position. This corresponds to the aim of this sort of dialogue, which is to build knowledge and mutual confidence.
b. The convergence methodology may be described in the following way: The parties involved try to look together at the different positions from a theoretically neutral standpoint in order to identify the commonalities. In turn, they either make proposals for change on one or all sides or propose a different view of a given issue in order to bring the positions closer together. The convergence method works with the presupposition that all sides involved have something in common—a common core that they have to discover in order to be able to recognize each other as churches and to make their existing unity visible.
c. The method of differentiated consensus also begins by pointing to the commonalities but then focuses on points of divergence. It then interprets them in a way that discerns the wider consensus that exists despite divergences related to different emphases. It tries to make space for acceptable differences within the consensus that binds the two sides together. This methodology is similar to the convergence method, but it is seeking convergence for a specific bilateral situation. The direct aim is reconciliation on a specific theological issue—in the given example, on the doctrine of justification.

To a certain extent, these three dialogue methods can be understood as representing three different steps in a process toward unity:

the first one allows Christians to get to know each other (for example, the EKD–Russian Orthodox dialogue), the second is to find convergences (BEM), and the third step is to make concrete agreements on differentiated consensus (Joint Declaration). The underlying presupposition in each of the three models of dialogue is the idea that, for the sake of unity, consensus between the churches is necessary.

## FROM CONSENSUS TO DIFFERENCE

During the last decades, some of these ideas about ecumenical dialogue have been questioned. This has to do with a changed ecumenical landscape in general. Although many ecumenical agreements have been established, such as the Porvoo Agreement,[6] the Leuenberg Agreement,[7] the Reuilly Common Statement,[8] and the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, the overall impression is that the major lines of separation between the main confessional church families—namely, Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants—remain firmly in place. This is especially visible at the Eucharistic table, where sharing between the three traditions is not possible. In addition, there are new types of churches that have come into existence, the Pentecostals and a variety of independent churches, for example, that bring new perspectives and challenge the classic concept of unity. The main question, therefore, that needs to be asked is this: Is the concept of unity that lies behind consensus and convergence dialogues as mentioned previously truly the unity for which Jesus Christ prays in John 17? In order to come closer to an answer to this question, this chapter will try to reflect on some newer concepts of dialogue and thus, of unity.

As mentioned previously, the idea of reaching consensus through convergence and emphasis on commonalities has not succeeded in achieving the expected results on the scale of most church separations. Therefore, over the last twenty years, some scholars—especially on the Protestant side—have propagated a "hermeneutics of difference."[9] This is a method that does not produce a construct of unity that all the churches would have to attain but tries instead to interpret existing differences as legitimate within a core unity. This method presupposes that the gospel is always interpreted according to different historical and cultural circumstances. As I have shown elsewhere,[10] this method leads to a similar *aporia* as the consensus model. But what is interesting in the context of this chapter is the fact that the hermeneutics of difference is in line with a fundamental tendency that

can be observed in contemporary ecumenical dialogue, which is also obvious in concrete new forms of dialogue.

One of these new forms of dialogue that have developed since 1998 is—on the international and multilateral level—the Global Christian Forum.[11] Here, the churches come together without any specific commitment. The forum understands itself as a platform that brings together all the different traditions to one table, including those that, for ecclesiological reasons, have felt that they cannot be members of the World Council of Churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church and many Pentecostal churches. One of the important methodological features used in this kind of dialogue—as the official report of the first international meeting in 2007 states[12]—is simply to tell one's story. "The formation of relationships that transcend differences"[13] is more important than the common agreed statements known in traditional bilateral or multilateral conversations. This type of dialogue uses—in accordance with its concept of unity based on the reality of existing and remaining legitimate differences—a method that may be described as a "marketplace" in which everybody brings his or her views, stories, and ideas on the common assumption that they are on the same footing.

Both of these methods—the traditional consensus approach and the marketplace method—have their problems. Both are working with concepts that are not agreed on in all traditions. The traditional dialogue works from a presumption that some form of a consensus is necessary in order to achieve unity. This idea is supported, in general, by the more traditional churches, although they may harbor different ideas about how far consensus needs to go; however, this is not an obvious pathway for more recent types of churches. The marketplace dialogue, on the other hand, seems more fitting to these new churches; however, this has its own limits for traditional churches, since it is not understood as leading to the goal of visible unity. The first approach raises concerns about the danger of uniformity, the second about the danger that nothing will be changed within the different churches and a concern that, in the end, only the participant who has the loudest voice will be heard.

## Modern Theories of Dialogue Skills and the Biblical Understanding of Unity

I would like to propose and explore an idea related to modern theories of dialogue. Thus far, the standard approach in reflecting on ecumenical dialogue has usually begun with an examination of the results