

'RECEPTION' - ECUMENICAL CRISIS OR OPPORTUNITY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN CHURCHES?

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Abstract

The authors agree with the conviction in ecumenical circles that 'reception' may be one of the most important challenges for the ecumenical process today. They claim that it may be especially urgent in South Africa today (1). They then provide a conceptual clarification of the term 'reception' by briefly discussing three related questions: What is the historical background of the notion? (2); How is the process of reception normally described? (3); and: Which complicating factors are involved in reception-processes? (4). They hope that this could provide a framework within which various forms and stages of 'reception' amongst Christian churches may be interpreted.

1. Introduction

On Sunday afternoon, June 8 1997, the Western Province Council of Churches organised a meeting in the Civic Center in Cape Town. All the congregations of member churches, church leaders and politicians, and Christians from the region were invited to attend. A booklet, *Until peace and justice embrace - a challenge to the Church and Christians in the Western Cape*, was launched. The purpose was to involve all Christians, congregations and communities on grass-roots level in an initiative against crime and violence. Only a few people attended.

In 1982 the (then) Dutch Reformed Mission Church adopted a Draft Confession of Belhar. In 1986 it became an official Confession of the Church. In 1990 it was adopted by the (new) Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. Some congregations in the Free State refused to join, and it became a long and painful legal process. In the unity discussions between the URCSA and the Dutch Reformed Church Belhar is still very controversial. During August and September 1997, fifteen years after it was written, Belhar is being discussed in DRC-congregations and circuits for the first time.

In September 1997, Pieter van Niekerk, a doctoral student from the UWC completed his dissertation. He did research in a rural congregation of the URCSA, in the Eastern Cape, and found that the members of the congregation did not really know the Confession of Belhar and that they had not appropriated its content.

Since 1996 some representatives of South African churches and groups of ministers have made statements to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, causing major differences of opinion amongst members of their churches and their colleagues.

any people involved in the ecumenical movement in South Africa are of the opinion that the movement is experiencing a crisis, locally, regionally, and nationally. The reason is not merely lack of funding, but a deep-seated lack of interest, involvement, commitment, and support on the part of most South African churches and believers.

All these examples have something in common. They illustrate the seriousness of what is called - in ecumenical circles - the problem of 'reception'. Reception has been called the singlemost important issue in the ecumenical movement, the main future problem of the ecumenical movement (Rusch 1988), the number-one problem of the ecumenical movement

(Kilmartin 1984). Reception is an umbrella-term, referring to many aspects and issues. How can local churches and congregations be persuaded to take ecumenical challenges, opportunities, issues, decisions, notions, documents, and initiatives more seriously? When have local churches really received and appropriated these documents and decisions, including those of its own denomination? How can churches accept the decisions and documents of other churches and face common challenges collectively? How can local churches and congregations be effectively involved in the drawing up of these documents and the making of these decisions?

Ultimately, however, 'reception' concerns more than merely 'receiving' common decisions, documents and initiatives. It concerns *the questions how we receive one another*, how we learn to live with one another, how we come closer to one another.

Since we believe that South African churches indeed face the question of reception today as an urgent crisis, but also an opportunity, we hope to contribute to this process by providing some conceptual clarification concerning the way this notion has been used in the ecumenical movement. We give some information on the historical background of the expression (2). Then we make some remarks on important aspects of the processes of reception (3). Finally, we offer some very general pointers to important complicating factors in processes of reception (4), that South African churches will have to keep in mind in every specific case (5).

2. The historical background of the notion: canon - council - ecumenism

Reception as theological term¹ within the Christian tradition stems from the recent history of ecumenical reflection. The first articles on this theme stem from about the nineteen seventies with the appearance of studies by Alois Grillmeier (1970), Heinrich Bacht (1971), and Yves Congar (1972) with an official reference in the report of the German Bishop's Conference in its reply to Hans Küng's book *Unfehlbar?* (1971, see Bacht 1971:157 note 48). As technical term, it did not appear in the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*² (1962), and was still absent from the *Evangelisches Soziallexikon* (7th edition, 1980) and the *Evangelisches Staatslexikon* (3rd edition 1983). It found its first official entry into the *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (edited by Lossky, 1991) with an article on reception by Anton Houtepen.

This does not, however, mean that the matter to which reception refers, is of recent origin. For the sake of clarification, one could discern at least three distinctive stages in the development of 'reception' in the history of the church. These three stages may be described as canon-council-ecumenics. The purpose is not to give an exhaustive historical overview, but merely to orient us with a view to our later discussion. The literature cited may be followed for detailed information on any given period.

The first is the *canonical* phase. In the New Testament itself words like *lambanein/apolambanein* (receive) and *dechestai/apodechestai* (accept) refer to the act of faith

1. The concept found applications in other disciplines too. The most influential of these are from studies in legal history, specifically the reception of Roman law in the German legal system. See Franz Wieacker's *Privatrechtsgeschichte der Neuzeit unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen Entwicklung* (Vandenhoeck u Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1967). It also found wide support in literary studies primarily referring to a study of the 'reception' of a literary work in specific communities (see Beinert 1991:16; Loewe 1988:637-638). It is theologically noteworthy that especially New Testament hermeneutics developed reception as interpretative strategy by moving beyond historical and structuralist approaches to reader-reception in describing the relation between text and reality. See e.g. Lategan and Vorster 1985 and the interpretation thereof in Naude 1997b.
2. The revised edition of *LThK* is presently being published. The latest volume (number 5), published in 1996, reaches the word 'Kirchengemeinschaft' under the letter K. It is to be expected that reception will receive its due attention in the appropriate later volume.

through which the word/Christian message (Mk 4:20, Acts 2:41) or Christ Himself (John 1:11-12) is accepted and the gospel (1 Cor 15:1) or Spirit (1 Cor 2:12) is received. Paul utilizes technical rabbinical terms in 1 Cor 11:23 to describe the process of traditio/receptio (*paradidonai/ paralambanein*) whereby the institution of the Lord's Supper is recalled and carried forth.

This constitutes the church as fundamentally a 'Rezeptionsgemeinschaft' (Beinart 1991:36). The process through which she interpretatively serves as transmitter of tradition (*paradosis*, see Tillard 1986:414), is seen as profoundly pneumatological. The Spirit (according to the Gospel of John) will teach the disciples and keep Christ's remembrance as guarantee of the truth (see Loewe 1988:639 and Vischer 1984: 223). Whether the first reported 'convention' of the apostles in Acts 15 may be seen as a form of 'ecumenical' dialogue is as yet unexplored in the literature.

On the level of canon history one could designate the formation of both the Old and New Testaments as reception processes. Concerning the latter, the early Christian communities 'received' the Scriptures, accepted their content as apostolic and particular books 'came to be confirmed and adopted as authoritative for the Church' (Kuhn 1983:166). This process of reception continued for more than three centuries until the first formal reception with the publication of Athanasius' canon in 367.

The second phase relates specifically to the *conciliar process* in the pre- and post Constantinian periods. In the first three centuries after Christ reception refers to the process whereby local or regional churches met under leadership of the bishop to take decisions on matters of faith. They made their decisions known to other churches by means of synodal letters. The acceptance of these confirmed the authenticity of the decision-making church and respected, retained and strengthened the community of believers. The basic assumption was that each local/regional church is the true church that can speak to and on behalf of other churches³.

In the post-Constantinian phase, reception is, apart from an ecclesial, also a political process⁴. In his excellent *Die Konzilidee der alte Kirche* (1979), HJ Sieben⁵ shows that the concept of an universal, ecumenical council, developed slowly via a long and varied historical-theological process. The shared conviction grew 'dass Konzilien das Geheimnis der Christusglauben unverkürzt und unverfälscht überliefert haben' (Sieben 1979:512, his emphasis; see also Schatz 1991:96-107). A short-hand explanation of the councils is provided by the double consensus expressed (originally by Vincence of Lerin) as *consensio antiquitatis et universitatis*.

Vertical consensus refers to the traditionary process of being in congruence with the apostolic faith (*antiquitatis*), whereas horizontal consensus refers to the reception of a council by the universal church (*universitatis*). Sieben notes the 'Wagnischarakter' of the councils as there was no a priori guarantee that a council would be accepted as legitimate expression of tradition or received by all the churches⁶ (1979:516, see Houtepen 1983:145). Seven of these

3. There are many examples of local synods held during this period. Two of these that assumed special positions due to their wide influence and acceptance are the Synods of Athioch in 268 and Arles in 314. See Rusch 1988:29-31.
4. 'Konzilentscheidungen wurden von jetzt an nicht mehr nur durch Synodalbriefe zur Anerkennung durch die Kirchen verbreitet, sondern durch den Kaiser direkt akzeptiert und zu einem Teil des Reichsrechts gemacht' (Rusch 1988:32).
5. Sieben wrote several authoritative volumes on the development of the council-idea. See his *Die Konzilsidee des lateinischen Mittelalters (847-1378)* 1984; *Die katholische Konzilsidee von der Reformation bis zur Aufklärung*, 1988; *Die katholische Konzilsidee im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 1993. (All published by Ferdinand Schoening in Paderborn).
6. See his discussion of the Nicene Council (325) which were only gradually accepted and formally ratified 56

Councils eventually emerged as truly ecumenical, i.e. as received in both the East and West. During the Middle Ages the church in the West grew more and more hierarchical with reception being diminished to a juridical-institutional act, reaching, at a later stage, the declaration of the infallibility of the bishop of Rome (*pastor aeternus*) at Vaticanum I (1869-1870).

The position of the *Eastern Church* should be seen from its perspective of a more inclusive ecclesiology where reception is primarily a dialectic process between laity and clerics and not so much a juridical and formal act as in the West.

The *Reformation* stood in continuity with the Ancient Church, accepting the creeds (like Nicea) and the decisions of Councils (see e.g. articles 1 and 3 of the Confession of Augsburg and the acceptance of the Apostles' Creed by the Heidelberg Catechism), but radically reorientated the criterion for acceptance to the Scriptures alone. The authorization process itself altered significantly due to a radically different conception of ministerial authority (see Fischer 1989:41; Beinart 1991:44).

The third, and for our purposes the most significant phase⁷, was heralded by the modern *ecumenical movement* as represented specifically by the work of Faith and Order in the context of the World Council of Churches⁸. The very aim of the ecumenical movement attests to the reciprocal reception by churches of one another. Already at the First World Conference on Faith and Order⁹ it was expressed as conviction '...that it is the will of Christ that the one life of the one body should be manifest to the world' (quoted in Kelly 1996:226). The first purpose of the WCC expressed in its constitution is 'to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in the one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe' (WCC 1996).

The effort to unite the churches is highlighted when reception is viewed in relation to two other important ecumenical terms which have acquired the status of technical terms. These are 'consensus' and 'recognition', and seen together these three terms describe the whole process of inter-church relations as consensus-recognition-reception.

3. The process of reception: consensus - recognition - reception

Without pursuing the many finer distinctions (see Burgess 1991; Meyer 1986), one may define *consensus* as the aim and desired result of inter-confessional doctrinal conversations. In ecumenical language, the terms 'fundamental consensus' and 'fundamental difference' are normally used as referring to church uniting or church dividing factors respectively. Following

years later at Constantinople (381)! See also Rusch 1988:32-33.

7. There are obviously links and differences between the 'conciliar stage' and the modern ecumenical movement. Faith and Order, in its study on 'The Importance of the Conciliar Process in the Ancient Church for the Ecumenical Movement' (requested by the WCC in New Delhi in 1961), makes the continuity explicit by stating that '...in the ecumenical movement the churches find themselves in a process of continuing reception or re-reception of the councils' (Louvain 1971:29). It is clear from repeated references in ecumenical documents that only a truly Ecumenical Council (again requested at the recent Santiago-meeting) or a kind of pan-Orthodox Synod will suffice to formalize church unity by serving as authoritative *determinatio fidei*. Contrasting notions of authority and ministries make this, however, more problematic than meets the eye.
8. Since its inception in 1948, the WCC grew from 147 to 320 member churches by 1991. The active participation of the Roman Catholic (no official member yet) and Orthodox Churches makes this the most significant form of inter-church dialogue in the history of the church since the split between East and West (1034) and between Rome and the Reformation (1521).
9. This original aim is retained in the present formulation of the aim of Faith and Order (Unit I) which follows the almost exact wording of the first purpose of the WCC referred to above (WCC 1996:35). It should be noted that FO precedes the establishment of the WCC in 1948 and sees itself as continuing calling the churches to the goal of visible unity.

the essays edited by Burgess, one may distinguish between a hermeneutical and ecumenical definition of these terms.

The hermeneutical definition would emphasise that a specific fundamental consensus/difference serves as interpretative explanation for the nature of a comprehensive and systematic convergence/divergence between two traditions. As heuristic notion this type of consensus/difference does not necessarily influence the state of communion between two traditions. In other words, it is possible for churches to maintain a hermeneutical difference without necessarily affecting fellowship.

In the case of ecumenically defined fundamental consensus/difference, the opposite is true. The reference is to consensus or difference which has a direct, incompatible relation to church communion. In summary: 'The differing senses of fundamental difference and fundamental consensus thus form two matched pairs: a hermeneutical pair defined by the presence or absence of a single difference that interprets and explains other differences and an ecumenical pair defined by the presence or absence of a difference incompatible with the full visible unity of the church' (Burgess 1991:14).

In terms of our discussion, it is important to note that fundamental consensus normally refers to the texts which are the outcome of inter-confessional doctrinal conversation. In some way this consensus (or for that matter, difference) must (officially) be accepted by the churches involved. And this is where a lot of frustration is created by the 'widespread official inaction of proposals that have emerged from the dialogues' (Burgess 1991:11). It leads us directly to the next phase of inter-church relations, namely that of recognition.

That *recognition* is also a complex term, emerges clearly from the careful analysis undertaken by Gerard Kelly in his doctoral thesis (1992) published as *Recognition: Advancing ecumenical thinking* (1996). Apart from the historical complexities relating inter alia to the conciliar period, he argues for a distinct Catholic-Protestant difference on this issue¹⁰. Despite these complexities¹¹, one may distinguish at least two contexts in which recognition functions:

It may, firstly, be understood in the context of the dialectic between consensus texts and an individual church. In this case a church would study such a text (like *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry* or *Confessing the one faith*, for example) and recognise the text as in continuity with this church's understanding of Scripture and tradition, i.e. the apostolic faith as professed through the ages. Non-recognition may imply (partial) rejection of the consensus, or, where a church discovers neglected parts of the faith in her own tradition, a renewal of the church tradition.

Recognition may, secondly, be understood in the context of the mutual recognition of churches. In this case churches do not necessarily agree on all aspects of doctrinal formulation or church order, but recognise in each other a sufficient degree of communion in the faith to establish a relation of sister churches. Recognition normally occurs via the official decisions of churches¹² and - depending on the history of relations between the churches in question - develops in stages which (hopefully) act as a prelude to full intercommunion or reception¹³.

10. See his comparison of Congar and Tillard (Catholic) with Harding Meyer (Lutheran) and the tension in the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Joint Commission's publication, *Facing unity* in 1985 (Kelly 1996:7-34).

11. See Meyer's illuminating analysis which highlights seven dimensions of recognition, Meyer 1980:34-38.

12. Meyer insists that the work of theologians alone is not sufficient. Genuine recognition ultimately requires an official act of the whole church in question (1980:36).

13. All the dialogues between the historical traditions are examples of this process. Perhaps the best example of a very advanced process is the relationship between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. They fully 'recognise' one another, but have not yet crossed the threshold to 'canonical reception' (Kelly 1996:218) which, in this discussion, would equal 'reception' and full intercommunion.

For the sake of some clarity, it seems therefore helpful to describe the relation among churches in terms of the process of fundamental consensus leading to official recognition and ultimately to full *reception*. It is clear that reception is at the same time the motivating force and ultimate goal of any ecumenical endeavour. It is only via reception that visible church unity will be reached. Let us look at this more closely.

Highly simplified, *reception refers to the process whereby churches accept one another in full communion as a result of ecumenical encounters*¹⁴. Rusch (1980:31) attempts a more elaborate definition worth quoting in full:

'Ecumenical reception includes all phases and aspects of an ongoing process by which a church under the guidance of God's Spirit makes the results of a bilateral or multilateral conversation a part of its faith and life because the results are seen to be in conformity with the teachings of Christ and of the apostolic community, that is, the gospel as witnessed to in Scripture'

This definition correctly highlights the processional¹⁵ character of reception in referring to the 'fundamental consensus'-aspect in the results of bilateral and multilateral encounters, as well as the 'recognition'-aspect ('because the results are seen to be...') on the basis of the apostolic faith. It perhaps overemphasises the results¹⁶ of ecumenical encounters ('... the results of a bilateral or multilateral conversation') as the object of reception instead of the reception by churches of one another as sister churches. Kilmartin correctly depicts 'the number-one problem of the ecumenical movement' as 'the reception of churches of one another' (1984:35). This is the real object of reception!

These definitions, and descriptions of specific reception processes¹⁷, give some hint of the complexity of the reception concept which may be highlighted by the following considerations.

4. Complicating factors: history - context - theology

Reception is *historically* complex, not merely because of its long prehistory and development as hinted to above, but also due to its employment in processional¹⁸ terms which leads to a certain diffusion of precision to include a wide range of derivatives. These vary from the processes of bi- and multi-lateral conversations themselves ('die Einsichten und Auswirkungen eines Dialogprozesses', Gassmann 1984:361), to re-reception in the life of the

14. Edward Kilmartin emphasises the reception as ecclesial reality. 'It (reception) can be described as a process by which one ecclesiastical body adopts as its own a spiritual good which originates in another and acknowledges and appropriates it as applicable to its own life of faith' (Kilmartin 1984:36).
15. Gassmann, very early in the debate (1974:319-320), already argued for an 'erweiterte Rezeptionsverstaendnisse' which transcends the idea of reception as a single closed event of an official church decision. It includes a juridical dimension, but is fundamentally a spiritual (Spiritual!) process.
16. We are not underestimating these results in the process of consensus and recognition, but the results themselves (liturgy, canon law, doctrine, credal formulation, etc.) are serving the greater goal of visible church unity, i.e. where churches accept *one another*. See examples of instances of reception in Kilmartin 1984:40-51.
17. There are too many examples to list here. We refer to specific dialogues (e.g. the Anglican-Roman Catholic or Roman-Lutheran dialogues); how a specific consensus document was received in the churches (see volumes on Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry-responses or case studies on BEM in Ford and Swan 1993), how a confession found its way in the church (see Mehlhausen 1985 for an excellent discussion of Barmen's reception in the Evangelical Landeskirchen since 1945); or how an inter-church agreement was received in specific congregations (see Brandt 1986:19ff on the 'Leuener Konkordie'). All examples underline the complex processional character of reception.
18. The process-character of ecumenical conversation is one of its most salient features. In the case of the project on Confessing the One Faith, it is structurally built into the method of the study project itself through recognition-explication-common confession with the middle term as starting point (*Confessing the One Faith* 1991:3-7).

churches which is an historically open process (Gassmann 1974:322). Analyses of reception also include non-reception ('Ablehnung') as a form of 'reception'! (Evans 1996:212; Rusch 1980: 59; Gassmann 1984: 366; Kilmartin 1984:39-40¹⁹).

Reception is *contextually* complex - obviously on the level of inter-church relations which took a dramatic turn when the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, albeit in different degrees of status and involvement, joined the ecumenical movement (in 1961 and 1968 respectively) and with the growing number of churches from the South enjoying full participation. To operate in the ecumenical field is to enter '...in einer Konstellation von kirchlichen Beziehungen, der äussert komplex ist' (Gassmann 1974:315). The manifold bi- and multi-lateral conversations are evidence of this complexity which in sheer scope and volume surpass all previous situations in the church's history and may justifiably be seen as kairos-moment for ecumenical movement towards church unity.

But the contextual complexity also refers to the 'Zeitgeist' where the church (at least in the West) is struggling between modernity's 'flight from authority' (Stout 1981) and Enlightenment's prejudice against tradition (McGrath 1990: 132-145 and 179-185) on the one hand, and strands in post-modernity on the other hand, which opt for the rejection of metanarratives (Lyotard 1984) and for radical pluralism to the point of relativism²⁰. In a time that the church is aiming for greater unity on the basis of a shared faith and Tradition, it has, in the words of Mark-Kline Taylor (1990:40), to struggle with the trilemma of acknowledging her tradition, but at the same time celebrating plurality whilst resisting domination.

The churches from the so-called Third World further increase the complexity of reception because many of them operate in conditions of pre- or sub-modernity without the context of the Enlightenment tradition or supposition of secularism (see Naude 1996:19). Nor do they share the cultural thought forms in which many of the Ancient Church's traditions are couched²¹, but which they are requested to accept.

Reception is also *theologically* complex. It calls into question, on a metatheological level, the very presuppositions from which conversation partners operate. What will count as criterion for truth, and what relative weight is assigned to Scripture, the Tradition and variety of traditions²²? It focuses on material doctrinal issues varying from issues like *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (WCC: 1982) to the specific creedal expression of the apostolic faith in *Confessing the One Faith* (WCC:1991). It forces into the open the question of theological authority in addressing the issues of conciliarity and how the church can teach with authority

19. Kilmartin, based on careful historical analysis of the conciliar period, states that 'non-reception of spiritual goods is not a marginal aspect in the history of the church...'. He shows (1984:39-40) that not all instances of reception are beneficial (e.g. the Romanization of the Eastern and German liturgies) and non-reception 'does not necessarily signal the end of the reception process. It may only indicate that the decision is not opportune, that it does not really touch the life of the church.' Both Nicea and Chalcedon are examples of gradual reception processes which may take decades to run their course! For an analysis of the 'non-reception' of the Belhar Confession in the DRC, see Naude 1997a.
20. See Van Niekerk (1992) for an extensive analysis and critique of, inter alia, the post-analytical pragmatism of Richard Rorty. See Michael Welker's incisive theological discussion (1994:21ff; 1995:1-57) wherein he, drawing on insights from Luhmann, develops a coherent view on the structural dimension of pluralism whilst arguing for a 'Ja zu einem konstruktiven, schöpferischen Pluralismus' (1995:117) in the church.
21. See Hood 1990, especially 247-248, and the subsequent reaction by Stanley Harakas in Harakas 1991.
22. In 1963 (Montreal) the study on 'Scripture, Tradition and traditions' clarified the concepts as follows in par 39: 'We speak of *Tradition* (with a capital T), *tradition* (with a small t) and *traditions*. By the term *Tradition* is meant the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church... By *tradition* is meant the traditionary process. The term *traditions* is used in two senses, to indicate both the diversity of forms of expression and also what we call confessional traditions... In the later part of our report the word appears in the further sense, when we speak of cultural traditions.'

today, as well as what it means to be in a pre-conciliar stage of the ecumenical process²³.

The most profound theological loci presupposed in the ecumenical movement are without doubt ecclesiology and pneumatology. Most questions arising from the struggle for church unity can in some way or another be linked to notions about the nature of the church and the work of the Spirit.

In the light of the discussion above, one may suggest that reception is the umbrella under which it is possible to house the whole ecumenical movement with its deepest intention of church unity as full reciprocal reception amidst the complexities of history, context and theology.

5. Conclusion

These complexities have led some to question the validity of the term 'reception'. Fischer (1989), for example, argues that the concept is too vague and wide-ranging to serve a proper purpose. Kelly, in discussing the responses to BEM, indicates that a precise definition of terms is crucial to make ecumenical progress (1996:226). Our suggestion of a three-phased description of ecumenical dialogue hopefully provides some direction which has to be clarified by dialogue partners in each specific case.

Although precision is sometimes lost, a wider connotation is simply truer to the real complexities of the ecumenical situation. This, and the fact that the term itself has found considerable reception(!) in ecumenical theology, are adequate grounds for its continued employment as heuristic framework in the ongoing search for (greater) Christian unity.

In particular we believe that, if we understand the term in a general sense, pointing to the diverse ways in which Christians, congregations, and churches are called, and challenged, *to accept one another*, to learn to live with one another, the ecumenical discussions concerning 'reception' serve as a very useful reminder to South African churches of a serious challenge that we face, today. We have differed from one another for too long already, even about major moral and ethical issues, albeit for many reasons (see De Villiers and Smit 1994, 1995, 1996). In a democratic, pluralistic, secular and multi-cultural society, we can no longer afford to ignore this challenge, and in the process ignore one another. We must learn to receive one another and to co-operate, for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of our public responsibilities (see Smit 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1996a, 1996b).

23. See extracts from Faith and Order papers on all these issues cited in Gassmann's useful guide, 1993, part IV.

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