



A First Step Toward the Dialogue Between Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches

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How does a dialogue between the two separated Christian churches begin? At present we have several larger and smaller bilateral ecumenical dialogues¹ and we also have a multilateral dialogue that takes place at the World Council of Churches.² These dialogues are led by powerful church

¹On different bilateral dialogues see Angelo Maffèis, *Ecumenical Dialogue* (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2005), 39–48.

²On different documents produced during this dialogue see Lukas Vischer and Harding Meyer, eds., *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984); Jeffrey Gros et al., eds., *Growth in Agreement 2: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1982–1998* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992); Jeffrey Gros et al., eds., *Growth in Agreement 3: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1998–2005* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007); Thomas F. Best et al., eds., *Growth in Agreement 4.1: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 2004–2014* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2017); Thomas F. Best et al., eds., *Growth in Agreement 4.2: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a*

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leaders and esteemed and highly educated theology professors. Hundreds or even thousands of pages of ecumenical documents are discussed, drafted, produced, and signed (although in most cases, unfortunately, not enforced). Scholarly books and articles in journals are written analyzing them and exploring their potential for the good of the church and world. Theology students learn about them in their classes and bemoan the fact that there are so many that need to be memorized. And finally, in some cases, if they are successful, these dialogues open new perspectives for Christian collaboration and joint action. But, how does a new dialogue begin?

At the University of Tübingen, where I taught for many years, there is a story about the university founder Count Eberhard (1445–1496), who decided he wanted to have his own university.³ At that time, it was a matter of prestige to have one so everyone understood *why* he wanted this. The real surprise came when he said *where* he wanted to establish it. Everyone was shocked at the announcement of his choice for Tübingen. At that time Tübingen was nothing but a small village far away from the main roads and with no real historical or political significance. Of course, his advisors tried to persuade him against such madness by warning him of the strategic liability of the town that no one would want to study there and so on. But, despite the criticism, he stood firm by his choice. When asked to explain his decision, he simply responded with “*attempto*” (Latin for “I dare”). With this phrase, he meant that one must take risks in order to succeed. The Count went on to establish the university where he wanted. And, not only did it work but it became one of the most eminent universities in Germany and one of the most respected across the world. “*Attempto*” to this day remains the motto of the University of Tübingen,

World Level 2004–2014 (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2017). In addition to the bilateral and multilateral dialogues we also have the so-called interreligious dialogue, which although it is a dialogue it is not considered an ecumenical dialogue because its goal is not unity between different religions but tolerance between them. On the achievements of interreligious dialogue see Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2013); Douglas Pratt, *Christian Engagement with Islam: Ecumenical Journeys Since 1910* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Francis X. Clooney, *The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies: A Theological Inquiry* (Oxon/New York: Routledge, 2017.).

³About the foundation of the University of Tübingen see Waldemar Teufel, “Die Gründung der Universität Tübingen. Wagnis und Gelingen—Anstöße und Vorbilder.” In: *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Universität Tübingen 1477 bis 1977*, edited by Hansmartin Decker-Hauff et al., Vol. 1 (Tübingen: Universität Tübingen, 1977).