



The Institute for  
Ecumenical Research,  
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# **Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg**

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## **Ecumenical Research**

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) was at the heart of the Institute's work in the years before and after the LWF Assembly in Hong Kong. Its research concentrated on fundamental questions:

- What do we mean when we use expressions like “differentiated consensus”?
- What does it mean when churches sign documents such as the JDDJ?
- What is the significance of doctrine within the churches?
- What does agreement in doctrine mean for the churches' relationship?

- Is there a center around which every individual doctrine is oriented?
- What are the ecumenical goals of the Lutheran churches and how do they relate to those of other churches with which they are in dialogue?

These and other related questions are examined in a common study project entitled “Ecumenical Hermeneutics,” which includes three consultations with Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic theologians from different countries. The results of these consultations will be published.

## Publications

The research work of the Institute has also resulted in numerous contributions to scholarly and ecclesial periodicals (not mentioned here) and books written by individual team members.

### Basic Ecumenical Principles

In a study published in French, *La Commun-ion ecclésiale- progrès oecuménique et enjeux méthodologiques* (Paris/Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2000), also available in German as *Kirchengemeinschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002), André Birmelé discusses the JDDJ and the statements of church fellowship among churches of the Reformation. He examines the methodological decisions that led to these steps, the challenges to which they give rise, and the fundamental concepts of the ecumenical movement: consensus, difference, reception, compatibility, communion, dialogue, etc.

In *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001) Theodor Dieter examines Luther’s relationship to theologies of the Middle Ages and corrects the widespread image of Luther as an opponent of Scholasticism. This new picture of Luther’s connections with tradition has profound ecumenical consequences, particularly for Catholic–Lutheran dialogue.

## Theology of Dialogue

Risto Saarinen’s *Faith and Holiness: Lutheran–Orthodox Dialogue 1959–1994* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1997) describes the history of Lutheran–Orthodox dialogue and explores the theological problems it has addressed. Saarinen’s work has already played a helpful role in the ongoing dialogues: the LWF’s Office for Ecumenical Affairs has provided copies to members of the international Lutheran–Orthodox Joint Commission.

*Apostolicity and Unity: Essays on the Porvoo Common Statement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), edited by Ola Tjørhom, with contributions from leading Lutheran and Anglican theologians and church officials, reflects on the reception of the Porvoo Common Statement and analyzes crucial theological and practical issues affecting the process.

## Theology of Woman

Elisabeth Parmentier’s *Les Filles prodigieuses. Défis des théologies féministes* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1999) examines questions that have accompanied the quest for unity in Faith and Order and in the WCC: How can women and men shape church life in partnership? How should power and authority be understood in Christian life? What does it mean for women to be made in the image of a fatherly God and redeemed by a male savior? The connections to feminist theology are obvious. This theology should be viewed, not as alien, but as the voice of emancipated modern-day society. “Lost daughters” help the churches to set theological questions nearer to everyday life, but to what extent can different confessions allow themselves to enculturate feminist challenges?

Mickey Mattox’s *Defender of the Most Holy Matriarchs: Martin Luther’s Interpretation of the Women of Genesis in the Enarrationes in Genesis 1535–1545* (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill Academic Publishers, forthcoming), on the other hand, explores the limits of the older Luther’s com-

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mitment to a “created equality” between Adam and Eve, and shows how he appropriated patristic and medieval hagiographical exegesis in constructing his own distinctively “evangelical” readings of the saintly women of Genesis. The ecumenical significance of this work lies in the deep continuity between Luther’s exegesis and that of the Church Fathers and medievals.

## **Academic and Ecumenical Theology**

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A new study project examines how theologians in seminaries and universities across the world receive and sometimes oppose the results of ecumenical theology set forth in dialogue documents. Academic theologians help form future pastors; their attitudes are therefore important, not least because in many countries they are part of the ecclesial teaching office. In recent years there have been many conflicts and a certain lack of contact between theology as it is practiced in schools and theology as it is practiced in dialogues. This challenges any ecumenical research institute.

## **Dialogues and Ecumenical Cooperation**

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The LWF Council has traditionally appointed Institute professors to serve as consultants to its dialogues with other churches, including Lutheran–Roman Catholic, Lutheran–Orthodox, Anglican–Lutheran, Lutheran–Reformed, and Adventist–Lutheran dialogues. During the 1990s the work of the Institute was increasingly focused on these dialogues. In addition to those of the LWF, there have been many important regional dialogues. The churches’ reception of such dialogue has required close examination. Many dialogues are now so well established that the time has come to write the first comprehensive history of bilateral relations between participating churches.

## **Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification**

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In accordance with the assignment given it by the LWF Council, the Institute analyzed the churches’ response to the first version of the JDDJ. It wrote a report that, from the Lutheran point of view, became the basis for the revision of the JDDJ in 1996 in Würzburg. Together with other representatives of the LWF, two research professors from Strasbourg participated in this meeting, in which the revisions proposed by the churches were discussed with the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and a new text was elaborated. The two professors also participated in the second revision meeting of the JDDJ.

After the “final version” of the JDDJ was sent to the churches, the staff of the Institute wrote a commentary on the JDDJ in order to promote its understanding and reception. This small booklet, published in English and German, was distributed to all delegates at the Assembly in Hong Kong. Since then, the German edition has become a bestseller and has been reprinted twice.

In May 1998 the Institute again analyzed the answers of the Lutheran churches to the JDDJ. This analysis served as a context for the decision taken by the Council and was highly appreciated by Council members. As a consequence of their cooperation in the JDDJ process, relations between the Institute and the LWF have become as close as they have ever been in the history of the Institute.

Preparations are underway for the publication of a third volume in the collection of bilateral dialogues, *Growth in Agreement*. An extensive collection of dialogue texts in French was prepared as *Accords et dialogues oecuméniques* in 1995.

## **Ecumenical Contacts**

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Contacts with other ecumenical institutes have been maintained within *Societas Oecumenica*, a network of mostly European ecumenical institutions. Joint staff meetings to exchange information have

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been held with other institutes in the vicinity (e.g., Bensheim, Tübingen). There are also regular institutional and personal contacts with our Roman Catholic partner institute, the Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institut in Paderborn. Lectures to visiting groups from Germany, Scandinavia, and North America have been delivered regularly.

Through the research work and personal involvement of Dr. Yacob Tesfai (professor in Strasbourg 1987–96), the Institute's contacts with the theological scene in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have increased considerably. Unfortunately, when Dr. Tesfai left the Institute there was no more funding for a fourth professor. Thus the Institute looked long and urgently for a doctoral student from Africa, Asia, or Latin America who would participate in the Institute's work and finish his or her studies in Strasbourg. Until now no such person has been found, but the Institute still hopes that it can find such a theologian and the required grants. With the help of the LWF (DTS) and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations it has been possible to invite speakers and participants from the South to Institute seminars.

### **Ecumenical Communication**

Assisting churches with their ecumenical work is an important task of the Institute. The years of experience gathered in the Institute lead to frequent invitations from member churches to individual professors. There thus emerges a composite picture of this aspect of the Institute's work, which extends from lectures to church leaders concerning collaboration in ecumenical committees, to local dialogues and church visits. This work ranges from short-term obligations to lengthier stays (e.g., lectures in Hong Kong in 2000 and 2003).

### **Training a New Ecumenical Generation**

Every summer 60–80 participants from a variety of confessional backgrounds and

nationalities come to Strasbourg for eight days to participate in an ecumenical seminar organized by the Institute in cooperation with DTS. These seminars have inspired new generations of theologians, involving them in ecumenical theology and providing a unique opportunity for them to exchange experiences. Papers from the 1999 seminar were published in *Positions luthériennes*.

Many LWF member churches regularly send persons to the summer seminars, making them an effective means of communication between the Institute and the churches. Moreover, the seminars have furthered the reception process for the dialogues and theological work with which the Institute has been involved. Participants are normally younger theologians who already have some ecumenical experience and responsibilities. In spite of limited resources and an increase in other available opportunities, attendance has remained stable.

## **Cooperation with the LWF**

Naturally the Institute works very closely with the LWF Office for Ecumenical Affairs. In the same way the Institute maintains close relations with the Department of Theology and Studies. While DTS is in principle concerned with the whole scope of theology, the Institute concentrates on theological questions which involve ecumenical relations. These issues can be addressed neither by DTS (on account of their wide responsibilities), nor by university institutes (because of their institutional circumstances). The theological work accomplished by the Institute in recent decades could only have been undertaken by the Institute itself, and the ecumenical relations of the LWF would not have been able to develop as they have without the Institute. This has been demonstrated in particular by the JDDJ.

A working group with representatives from the LWF (DTS, OEA, OFA) and from the Board and staff of the Institute worked intensively on issues concerning their different tasks and cooperation, the results

of which are set forth in *Theology and Ecumenism in the LWF*. This basic clarification of roles complements practical collaboration. An annual Joint Staff Meeting is held between DTS, OEA, and the Institute—alternating between Geneva and Strasbourg—where all working projects are introduced and discussed. Staff of the Institute participate in the projects of DTS (e.g., “Globalization and Church Structures”) and OEA (“Lutheran Identity in

Office for Finance and Administration renders an important service for the administration of the Institute, for which the Institute is very grateful.

## Board

The Board of the Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research consists of six to nine members, three of whom are mem-



Ecumenical Relations”), while staff from OEA and DTS serve as lecturers at the Institute’s international summer seminar.

The Assistant General Secretary of OEA and the Director of DTS also take part each year in the Board meeting of the Institute in Strasbourg. The Director is a member of the LWF delegation at the annual Joint Staff Meetings with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

The General Secretary of the LWF has in recent years provided a considerable sum from his annual budget for the support of the Institute, in thanks and recognition of the work done for the LWF. The Of-

bers of and are appointed by the Council of the LWF. The Board meets once a year to review the overall situation at the Institute, to discuss the reports of the staff, to make recommendations, and to pass resolutions on all aspects of the Institute’s work. Since 1997, Bishop Eero Huovinen from Helsinki (Finland) has been the Chair of the Board.

## Staff and Finances

Staffing and finances are discussed here together because the financial situation has a decisive influence on the size of the

Lutheran Foundation for Interconfessional Research Board members, Strasbourg, 27–28 March 1998. Fourth from left: Bishop em. Dr Johannes Hanselmann, Bavaria—a prominent supporter of the institute since its 1965 establishment. Upon his death in 1999 his place on the Board became vacant. It was filled in 2001 by the current Bavarian Bishop Dr Johannes Friedrich. © LWF

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staff. The budget of the Institute derives in part from the proceeds from its endowment fund and from a contribution from the budget of the LWF General Secretary. Mainly, however, it depends on the regular and special contributions of the member churches of the LWF. Special thanks are due to all the churches that have supported the Institute over the years!

Since the founding of the Institute the German Lutheran churches have provided particularly large financial contributions. Thus to them also is due a special word of thanks. On account of the continually declining revenues of the German churches, their support for the Institute must also continually be reduced. The level of their support is still high, but even if other LWF churches have increased their contributions they still do not offset the reduction of income from Germany.

Thus the Institute has encountered a very difficult personnel situation. Whereas in the year before the Assembly in Hong Kong, four full-time research professors worked in the Institute, by the time of the next Assembly in Winnipeg there will be only two. The continuing work of the Institute is only possible because two professors from the Evangelical theological faculty from the University of Strasbourg also serve as adjunct professors.

It has always been one of the great strengths of the Institute that theologians

from different regions and traditions of Lutheranism work there. Thus the worldwide dimension of the Lutheran churches is taken seriously and made fruitful in its everyday work. Provincialism, ever a danger in the regionality of the LWF member churches, has thereby been avoided, but this has now become much more difficult.

As often noted in the meetings of the LWF Council and made clear in its official resolutions, at least three full-time research professors must work in the Institute in order for its work to be fruitful for the whole Lutheran community. Now and for the foreseeable future this is not possible. The Institute has made great efforts to generate the required finances through fundraising. But this effort requires time; most importantly it takes valuable time that could otherwise be spent doing ecumenical research and related work.

There remains the hope that a group of churches will appreciate the significance of theology for the identity of the Lutheran churches and their ecumenical relations, and therefore find themselves ready to place a portion of that sum at the disposal of the Institute. It would bring fresh impetus to ecumenical research because staff could apply themselves at full strength to do what they are there for: to carry on theological and ecumenical work for the Lutheran churches and for the LWF.