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“Ecumenical Recognition” in the Faith and Order Movement

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Abstract: “Full recognition” has been the expressed goal of ecumenical endeavours since the beginning of modern ecumenism. This article investigates the development of the idea of “recognition” in the ecumenical movement as represented by the Commission on Faith and Order. The text introduces a theoretical framework for investigating the idea of recognition, with special attention paid to the theological impact of the Roman Catholic Church’s official entry into the ecumenical movement after the Second Vatican Council. The article notes that the idea of recognition has received little attention as an independent concept in ecumenical theology until recently. However, the notion of recognition could function as an overall concept, bringing together various aspects of the ecumenical movement.

Keywords: ecumenical theology, recognition, Faith and Order, Second Vatican Council, koinonia, communio, World Council of Churches

Introduction

“Ecumenical recognition” is a notion that has been part of ecumenical discourse since the beginning of the modern movement, but only recently has it been studied as an independent concept, despite its centrality to ecumenical thinking. In this paper “ecumenical recognition” is the concept used to account for changes in ecumenical thinking over a period of time. The researched material consists of a number of central documents from the World Conferences on Faith and Order and more recent Faith and Order studies on the church.

The opening of the Roman Catholic Church to ecumenical cooperation after the Second Vatican Council and consequent membership in the Faith and Order Commission were major events in the history of ecumenism, and the Faith and Order Commission text highlights the theological impact of the Roman Catholic Church’s entry into Faith and Order. Roman Catholic influences are certainly not the only ones significant to development of the idea of ecumenical recognition. However, their impact is discernible.

1 For an overarching study on Faith and Order and “recognition” see Kelly, Recognition. A more recent treatment can be found in Lim, “Toward Ecumenical Unity.” See also Lim, “Ecclesial Recognition,” which is the doctoral dissertation of the same author. See also Hietamäki, “Recognition and Ecumenical Recognition.”
2 An earlier version of this article was presented at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in San Diego 2014 as part of the joint session of the Ecclesiological Investigations Group and the Vatican II Studies Group.
3 E.g. Cardinal Cassidy has stated: “Have you ever noted just how much the positions taken in Faith and Order documents, and in the vision of visible unity as articulated in the Canberra statement of 1991, are in the same line as perspectives opened in the renewal undertaken by the Second Vatican Council and expressed in documents of the council, such as Lumen Gentium and Unitatis Redintegratio?”. Cassidy, “The Future,” 141.
and the moment of official Roman Catholic participation in the Faith and Order movement can be clearly identified.4

The paper will start with a proposed theoretical framework to assist in identifying the phenomenon of recognition in the researched material, making some references to recent studies on recognition in the field of political philosophy,5 then exploring the earliest Faith and Order movement. The focus is on understanding ecumenical recognition during the first four World Conferences (Lausanne 1927, Edinburgh 1937, Lund 1950, Montreal 1963). Some notes will then follow on recognition in the Second Vatican Council Decree on Ecumenism. The text ends with a discussion on central themes in the Faith and Order context after the entry of the Roman Catholic Church, specifically in the texts of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order (Santiago de Compostela 1993), the study document on One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition and the ecclesiological convergence document The Church: Towards a Common Vision.6

**Ecumenical Recognition: A Theoretical Framework**

Ecumenical recognition is an application of the general form of the act of recognition, consisting of three instances where (1) A takes (2) B as (3) “something” (X). In the general “A-B-X” scheme, A is the subject, B the object and X the content of recognition.7 The act of recognition has numerous dimensions, producing a variety of “recognitions” depending upon which aspects are active or relevant.8

The first dimension is the relational context in which the recognition takes place. This dimension addresses the character and status of the “recognizer” and the “one recognized”, the direction and motivational background of recognition, and the actions required and forbidden in the relationship.

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4 All efforts from the side of the nascent ecumenical movement towards the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Second Vatican Council were met with either silence or explicit denial. Negotiations started in 1919 with the first meeting between the Pope and the representatives of the Reformation churches since the 16th century. Both this meeting and the subsequent discussions ended with a refusal of the Roman Catholic Church to officially participate either the 1927 First World Conference on Faith and Order or the Conference on Life and Work (1925). In 1920s the issue of participation in ecumenical gatherings in general was discussed and responded to negatively. The whole ecumenical movement was condemned in the 1928 encyclical Mortalium Animos. See e.g. Tomkins, “The Roman Catholic Church,” 677–693; Gros, “Toward Full Communion;” “Dubium De Convenib,” 278; Gibaut, “The Commission.” Except for the 1927 meeting local Catholic bishops appointed unofficial observers to all World Conferences. At the 1963 meeting in Montreal there were already official representatives and the Holy See joined Faith and Order in 1968. Tomkins, “The Roman Catholic Church”; Gibaut, “The Commission.”

5 Various writers conceptualize the relationship between “reception” and “recognition” differently. “Recognition” has more often been discussed as part of “ecumenical reception”. See e.g. Rusch, Ecumenical Reception, 76. Lim is mostly speaking of “recognition and reception” without defining their specific character. See e.g. Lim, “Ecclesial Recognition,” 16–27. E.g. Tavard perceives “reception” as a stage that follows “dialogue”. See Tavard, Understanding Reception. It appears that literature describes similar phenomena of ecumenical rapprochement with the help of both “reception” and “recognition”. Paul Avis has stated, “reception, as a critically under-determined concept, can be made to mean many things and to justify almost anything”. See Avis, Reshaping, 81. There is obvious need for more clarity on the relationship between “reception” and “recognition” in ecumenical discourse. This task is beyond the scope of this article. Bringing more conceptual clarity to this issue merits a study of its own.

6 While my presentation aims to be more systematic than historical it is relevant to mention that there were several members of Faith and Order movement who were present at the Second Vatican Council as ecumenical observers and also some Roman Catholic participants either had earlier experience with Faith and Order or were nominated as representatives of the Roman Catholic Church to Faith and Order after the Council. See e.g. Gibaut, The Commission.

7 Koskinen, “Mediated Recognition,” 3.

8 Timothy Lim speaks of “layers” in the definition of recognition. These “layers” consist of (1) a continuum of the “fullness of recognition ranging from non-recognition via partial recognition to full recognition, (2) the concrete acts of recognition by churches when “they are in the process of receiving the expressed faith, life, and witness of the churches“, (3) the level of recognition from local, region, national to international level, (4) an ideal or eschatological recognition of all Christians and churches everywhere and (5) the eschatological recognition of “the true Church” in God’s eternal presence. Lim’s initial definition of “ecumenical recognition” focuses on the churches accepting the legitimacy and authenticity of other churches as Church in a process of dialogue”. This definition is more contextual and particular than the description of “recognition” used in my text. See Lim, “Ecclesial Recognition,” 7–10. The dimensions presented in this paper could be used to further describe the different variations of what Lim calls “productive ecumenism” and to give nuanced responses to the questions he poses in his recent article “What If We Could?,” 67.
Two primary issues relating to recognition (A) are A's attitude defining the sincerity of recognition, A's recognitive response, which has cognitive, volitional and emotive characteristics. The response should also be in accordance with the characteristics of the object of recognition. Failing to give due recognition to the characteristic features of the object of recognition constitutes misrecognition. The significance in giving and receiving recognition is not in the psychological effect, but in the normative consequences of granting a status.

Depending on the nature of the object of recognition (B), the act of recognition is sometimes better described as either identification or acknowledgement instead of recognition. Of these three, identification is the most allowing, because anything can be identified as something. In the case of identifying persons, we can speak of both external identification and self-identification. Acknowledgement is less allowing since, as a concept, it can only be applied to normative entities or facts, such as norms, principles, claims, concepts or conceptual frameworks. In this case, the object is acknowledged as “valid” and “good”. Recognition proper is the most restrictive concept since it is reserved for recognizing persons, either “as persons” or as persons of a certain kind. Recognition of persons is a dialogical event where both the attitudes of the one recognizing and the one being recognized count. Theoretically, one can also construct a monological act of recognition where one adequately responds to the relevant characteristics of the object.

The second dimension deals with the accuracy of the act of recognition, which should acknowledge the normatively relevant features of the object of recognition. The challenge, however, is determining the accurate or adequate features of the one being recognized and the criteria of adequacy. A minimum requirement might be correct identification of the recognized features, so no misidentification takes place. The features normatively relevant might, however, be deliberated. Considerable amount of debate circulates around questions of identity (in the form of identity politics) and the authenticity of identity. Issues may arise regarding the power to define identities, discrepancies between external identification and self-identification, and the temporal consistency of personal and corporal identities.

The third dimension is the acknowledgement of convictions and practises, i.e. evaluating and attaching value. Here, we can distinguish between descriptive acceptance and normative approval. Descriptive acceptance merely acknowledges the existence of a phenomenon whereas normative approval judges the phenomenon as something meriting acceptance. A full-fledged approval implies the complete acceptance of the institution that creates the reasons for the convictions and the acceptance of the reasons as employable normative premises. Much doctrinal dialogue operates in this area.

In ecumenical contexts, the acknowledgement of convictions and practises relate to the question of legitimate diversity. Churches differ in their understanding of how much diversity is tolerated and in which area (where descriptive acceptance is enough and where normative approval is required). The idea and structure of toleration is important. Toleration and recognition are partly overlapping notions, since some forms of toleration assume quite far-reaching acceptance and respect of the other. Essential for toleration is that a component of objection always remains, irrespective of the far-reaching acceptance. Various conceptions of toleration exemplify different ways of constructing toleration of the other that is at the same time accepted and objected to.

The fourth dimension of recognition relates to the consequent post-recognition social reality for the churches. This is not a static state of uniformity but a dynamic state of tolerated, accepted or recognized
differences. In the life of the churches this means widening the area of implicit, everyday recognition and developing functioning ecumenical methods to re-negotiate intra- and inter-church recognition as necessary. Extensive implicit recognition of the rights and duties of the other will at least lead to partial dissolution of concrete institutional boundaries. The various classical models of unity, e.g. “reconciled diversity”, exemplify different understanding of accepted differences and the consequent social reality for the churches.

**Recognition in the First World Conferences on Faith and Order (1927-1963)**

It is symptomatic that the First World Conference on Faith and Order 1927 was not able to conclude a report on Subject VII “The Unity of Christendom and the Relation Thereto of Existing Churches” during the conference. This section dealt with the issue of the diversity of churches and the shared vision of one Church. Nevertheless, both the draft and final report finished after the conference speak in terms of recognition. The finished text reads: “Whatever the way to the goal, complete unity will require that the Churches be so transformed that there may be full recognition of one another by members of all communions.” (emphasis added)

The earliest Faith and Order discussion was not entirely consistent on the subject and object of recognition. In the First World Conference on Faith and Order, the emphasis was on “members of all communions” recognizing each other while at the Third World Conference recognition was already perceived to have taken place between churches. The early discussion focused on individuals and had no specific vision for the institutional consequences of ecumenical recognition. Emphasis on individuals resonates well with the more recent scholarly insistence on the centrality of recognitive attitudes in recognition proper. The relationship between recognitive attitudes and the institutional sphere is extremely complicated, and differing views exist on the implications of the person-to-person level recognition to institutions.

The adequacy or accuracy of identification is present in the early Faith and Order through the comparative method, which aims to accurately explicate the viewpoints of the other without intentionally reconciling differences. Correct identification is perceived as a necessary but not sufficient element of ecumenical recognition. The comparative method was already deemed insufficient at the Lund conference in 1952, which introduced a new method that aimed at reconciling various viewpoints by setting them in a Christological framework. An example of this form is the recognition explicated by both the WCC Central Committee and the World Conference on Faith and Order in the early 1950’s. The Christologically mediated recognition appears in two variants, a weaker and a stronger variant.

The weaker variant was articulated as a direct response to the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948. In the beginning, it was not clear what the implications of a church’s membership in the WCC would be for the recognition of other members as churches. The question was firmly resolved by the 1950 Toronto statement of the WCC Central Committee, which declared that the WCC neither has one

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16 The report was completed after the Conference, presented to the business committee and submitted to the churches in December 1927. Bell, “The Unity of the Christendom,” 174.
17 Draft 2 of the First Conference on Faith and Order reads: “[o]nly when full mutual recognition has been attained (…)” and the final version: “Whatever the way to the goal, complete unity will require that the Churches be so transformed that there may be full recognition of one another by members of all communions.” See Bate, *Faith and Order*, 399 for the draft and; Bell, “The Unity of the Christendom,” 179 (paragraph VI) for the final text.
18 Bell, “The Unity of the Christendom,” 179. The necessity of change was even more drastically stated in the preparatory material of the WCC Assembly in New Delhi 1961: “The achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth for many forms of church life as we have known them. We believe that nothing less costly can finally suffice.” Printed as “Report of the Commission on Fath and Order to the Central Committee on the Subject of the Future of Faith and Order (1960),” in Vischer, *A Documentary History*, 209.
19 See e.g. Tomkins, *The Third World Conference*, 37.
21 See e.g. Tanner, “What Is Faith and Order?,” 1005.
singular view on the Church or the unity of the Church, nor does the membership of the council imply the acceptance of any particular theological viewpoint on the church or the recognition of other WCC members as churches. Still, through Christ’s love, the member churches share a relationship.\(^{22}\)

In Christologically mediated recognition, the primary object of recognition is not another church but Christ: a church (A) recognizes Christ (B) as God and Saviour (X). God’s salvific nature, manifested in Christ and characterised by love, creates a relationship between the acknowledging church (A) and God (B). Those churches that are in a love-relationship with God are bound to God and, because of this bond, are also bound to each other. The resulting relationship between various churches (A\(_1\), A\(_2\), etc.) has some recognitive elements but they are not very strong. The intention is practical and functional. The weak variant does not include any intentional recognitive acts between churches, though an overall agreement exists that the other churches have a similar relation to God as one’s own church. The practical orientation of WCC membership allows many churches to become members, yet it falls short of the early Faith and Order vision of full unity characterised by “full recognition of one another by members of all communions”.

The Faith and Order movement articulated a stronger variant of a similar, mediated form of recognition, which was explicated at the Third World Conference on Faith and Order (Lund, 1952). The text reads:

the nature of the unity towards which we are striving is that of a visible fellowship in which all members, acknowledging Jesus Christ as living Lord and Saviour, shall recognise each other as belonging fully to His Body, to the end that the world may believe.\(^{23}\)

In this stronger variant, acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour is the context in which churches (A\(_1\), A\(_2\), ...) recognize each other “as belonging fully to His Body”. This alternative is Christologically mediated, and the main recognitive act is between churches who grant each other the status of “belonging fully to His Body”. The recognition takes place between two status-granting institutions (not between individual persons) and aims to create a “visible fellowship”, that is “organic” by nature.\(^{24}\)

These two examples of weaker and stronger variants of Christologically mediated forms exemplify early developments of recognition within the Faith and Order movement and the WCC, as analysed from the viewpoint of diverse subjects and objects of recognition.

The early Faith and Order texts also represent numerous approaches to acknowledging convictions and practises. In general, the convictions and methods of other Christian denominations should be more or less accepted (in a descriptive sense). Some consider that views should be (normatively) approved as hermeneutically adequate variations in a given context, while others that diversity should be limited and that denominational theologies are not “adequate variations” and should not be accepted or approved. The Toronto Statement is an extreme example where the acknowledgement of convictions and practises is put to the side. The early texts of the Faith and Order movement illustrate the persisting challenge to define the necessary and sufficient amount of agreement needed for “full recognition”.

The various views on necessary and sufficient agreement as criteria for “full recognition” were systematically categorized for the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1954). In the preparatory materials, the Commission identifies four kinds of recognition reflecting four categories of attitude and belief. The first category, “Full recognition of other churches” refers to an unconditional recognition of other churches based solely on the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The beliefs and practises beyond this confession are irrelevant, as is the reciprocity of recognition. This

\(^{22}\) “The World Council of Churches is composed of churches which acknowledge Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. They find their unity in him. (...) Unity arises out of the love of God in Jesus Christ, which, binding the constituent churches to him, binds them to one another. It is the earnest desire of the Council that the churches may be bound closer to Christ and therefore closer to one another. In the bond of his love, they will desire continually to pray for one another and to strengthen one another, in worship and in witness, bearing one another’s burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ”, World Council of Churches, The Church, the Churches, para. I.

\(^{23}\) Tomkins, The Third World Conference, 37.

\(^{24}\) That recognition takes place between institutions is made clearer by the consequent paragraphs that discuss the idea of “organic unity” in relation to the idea of “covenant unity” between churches. The above quoted text could also be read as referring to individual persons. See Tomkins, The Third World Conference, 38.
category is very allowing. The second category, “Full recognition based upon common agreement on
essential doctrine and order”, refers to recognition based on shared principles and the possession of
mutually recognized ministry. Within the second category are significant differences regarding which
doctrines are agreed upon and the extent of ministerial compatibility. The second category differs from
the first by claiming that some form of doctrinal agreement and shared praxis in ministry are necessary
for the recognition of churches. The agreement-nature of this form of recognition also implies some form
of mutuality. The third category, “Full recognition of churches holding the same doctrines”, differs from
the second category by demanding more uniformity on doctrine but less on ministerial practice or church
order. The fourth category, “Recognition as identification only” is used for cases where the demand for
uniformity in theology, spirituality and tradition are so great that no church (other than one already in
that tradition) may be recognized. This category allows for individuals to be identified as Christians and
particular elements of a church’s practice to be perceived Christian, but withholds affirmation of the
ecclesial character of another institution. Even though the four categories of recognition are presented
as either-or models, the text recommends churches to observe “partial recognition”, i.e. the recognition
of some “elements of the church” even though “full recognition”, in the sense of recognizing the other
church entirely, was not possible.

The 1954 categorisation of “ecumenical recognitions” can be grouped into three differing approaches.
The first approach (first category above) emphasises unconditional or unproblematic recognitive attitude.
Discernment of relevant features receives minimal attention and there is maximum tolerance (or even
indifference) for diversity. The second approach (fourth category above) emphasises the discernment of
particular features to the degree that recognition becomes virtually impossible. Tolerance is minimal since
only sanctioned denominational variation is allowed. The third approach (second and third categories
above) puts emphasis on recognitive attitude, but conditions it by demanding that other doctrinal
teachings, and in some cases the practice of ministry and church order, need to be acknowledged and
approved. The conditions and degree of approval depend on the particular theological approaches of the
participating churches. This means that denominational differences have a great role in defining what
sort of recognition is possible. The early Faith and Order had no shared understanding on the existence
of various denominations. Some held them to be a reflection of the disastrous fragmentation of the
Church, others an adequate response to the various contexts in which the Church lives. Justification of
denominations themselves is, nevertheless, crucial for the relevance of a denominationally grounded
criteria for ecumenical recognition.

Recognition in the Second Vatican Council Decree on Ecumenism
Unitatis Redintegratio

The Second Vatican Council notably brought about a major change in the perceived relationship between the
Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches. The relational context of ecumenical recognition was
altered when the Roman Catholic Church moved away from its earlier position where unity was possible only
by the return of separated Christians to “papal obedience”. While this denied the legitimacy of diversity
beyond the confines of the Roman Catholic Church, both Lumen Gentium and Unitatis Redintegratio held
that communion extends imperfectly to other Christian communities and even beyond.

Unitatis Redintegratio’s ecclesiological grounding for ecumenical endeavours is essentially based on
the idea of recognition. Special emphasis is given to the nature of recognitive attitude by the recognizer

26 Ibid., 39.
27 For the earliest discussion see e.g. Bate, “Documents Received,” 331, 350–359, 398. See also Tomkins, The Third World
Conference; Rodger and Vischer, The Fourth World Conference, 85.
28 Tomkins, “The Roman Catholic Church,” 693.
29 Unitatis Redintegratio, para. 3.
(A). *Unitatis Redintegratio* states that the correct attitude of Roman Catholics towards those belonging to communities outside the Catholic Church is acceptance.

Even in spite of [obstacles to unity] it remains true that all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ’s body and have right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brother by the children of the Catholic Church. (emphasis added)

Through justification by faith in baptism, members of other Christian communities merit the status of “Christian”, therefore the correct attitude towards them is acceptance. This argument is reinforced with a reminder that many significant life-giving elements of the Church exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. The communion is real, although imperfect; the others are still Christians.

Acceptance is discussed only on the individual level, not that of institutional churches; the direction of recognition is bottom-up. The text is unclear whether individual acceptance would lead to recognition of churches as institutions. The standpoint of *Unitatis Redintegratio* is similar to both the early Faith and Order vision and the 1952 Faith and Order texts, except in emphasizing that full recognition between churches is not an accumulation of recognitions by individuals. The significance of par. 3 is that it addresses the attitudes of persons who perform acts of recognition and affirms that these attitudes (e.g. sincerity of expression of attitude, mutuality) are essential to recognition proper.

The centrality of attitudes also becomes clear in the explication of “spiritual ecumenism”, considered to be the heart of ecumenism. “Spiritual ecumenism” refers to a “change of heart, holiness of life and public and private prayer for the unity of Christians”. Ecumenical attitudes, espousing a “change of heart” denies arrogance, triumphalism and false irenism. Replacing a false peacefulness at all costs is a call for honesty and truthfulness. Proper recognition is an adequate regard of the object of recognition. Therefore, proper attitude towards the other is one of truthfulness.

It follows that the first step in ecumenical advances is avoiding misrecognition of the other that often occurs through “expressions, judgements and actions, which do not represent the condition of our separated brethren with truth and fairness (...)” and, second, to strive towards clearer and more authentic identification of the other through dialogue.

The question of “truth and fairness” also relates to the dialogical character of recognition. It can be assumed that the judge of “truth and fairness” is not only the Catholic part of the dialogue but also the “separated brethren” who have a say on how their “condition” is described. The text exemplifies a dialogical understanding of recognition where both the attitude of the one recognizing and the one being recognized counts. The dialogical act of recognition has two moves. The first is A recognizing B as something (e.g. the Catholic faithful recognizing another person as Christian) and the second is B understanding and accepting A’s attitudes towards B. The second move also includes B respecting A as a competent judge of B’s condition. The method of dialogue also emphasises the active participation of both parties.

*Unitatis Redintegratio* touches upon questions of legitimate diversity by speaking on “acknowledging and esteeming the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren.” The text continues: “It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ”. The call to “recognize the riches of Christ” goes beyond identification or descriptive acceptance. It is a call to highly value the Christian life and faith of others, which “merits acceptance”, because “anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification.”

Accepting and esteeming the faith expressions of others implies tolerating differences within the Church. The text, as the entire ecumenical movement, struggles to balance between “preserving unity in essentials” and “enjoy[ing] proper freedom” in “various forms of spiritual life” etc. At the end it remains unclear whether

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30 Ibid., para. 3.
31 Ibid., para. 8.
32 Ibid., para. 4.
34 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, para. 4.
the “proper freedom” extends from diversity within the Catholic Church to diversity among various Christian denominations. Two things suggest this would not be the case. First, the note on unity in essentials and proper freedom is made, followed by an “on the other hand” call to recognize the riches of Christ in the other. Secondly, those things recognized in the other are the “truly Christian endowments from our common heritage.” It appears that only those endowments that are common, not those that differ, should be recognized.


On the Way to Fuller Koinonia (1993)

The main theme of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order was koinonia, reflecting Unitatis Redintegratio’s affirmation of “an already existing real, though imperfect, communion between churches.” The “fullness of unity” is identified with “full Eucharistic communion”. Basic ecclesial recognition of other Christian communities (i.e. the “real, although imperfect communion”) motivates taking further steps toward the final goal of full, visible unity, reached “when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in its fullness”, This is later described to mean the sharing of common life where “members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled” including joint witness and service. Essential for moving forward from separation to communion is the process of discerning what is part of the “faith of the Church through the ages”. This discernment is a form of acknowledging convictions and practises that deal with acceptance, approval and legitimacy of diversity.

The notion of recognition in the Santiago discussion paper differs from both the early Faith and Order notion that was more comparative and the Christologically mediated model of the Lund period. The discussion paper’s focus is on the “faith of the Church through the ages” where neither “the faith” nor “the Church” is identified with the teaching of an individual existing church. The process of recognition would seem to include two movements, one which is self-critical and another that is directed towards the other churches. The self-critical move involves re-identifying oneself as a Christian church in light of “the faith of the Church through the ages” whereas the second move involves acknowledging the teaching of other churches. The text pays attention to common forms of decision-making, which also function as authoritative status-giving instances. The joint forms of decision-making are also important because the churches need a mechanism for jointly discerning the “legitimacy” of diversity.

The section reports adds further to the discussion paper’s presentation of recognition.

A significant addition to the discussion is the Trinitarian grounding of theological anthropology that underlies the reports’ understanding of recognition. The fundamental state of being for humans is to dwell in a relationship of love, in accordance with the state of persons in Trinity. The relationship between humans and the Trinity is intimate, since all who are baptised are called to “become partakers of the divine nature”. Members of the Church are called to “enjoy[ing] the membership in the Kingdom with fellow believers” and “called to relate with each other as respectful persons and as members of the human community”.

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35 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 268–269.
38 Ibid., 269.
39 Ibid., 281.
40 E.g. para. 60: “Churches are challenged as they move towards mutual recognition to face frankly, discuss thoroughly and seek agreement on questions related to taking decisions ad teaching authoritatively.”
41 Best and Gassman, “Report of Section I,” 231.
The basis of ecumenical recognition is the call to exercise our humanity as members of God’s Kingdom in respect of the other personhood. Emphasized is the relational structure of the Church where each person is “given to each other with their differences or personality, race, gender, physical abilities, social and economic status”.42 From the perspective of koinonia ecclesiology, the primary motivation behind ecumenical recognition is the relational character of human persons, the communal nature of life and the attitude of respect towards other human persons. These characteristics necessitate a life in communion, which, in its fullness, is not realized when churches are divided.

The anthropological grounding, set in a Trinitarian framework, opens up a possibility for fruitful dialogue between ecumenical recognition and recognition theories of political philosophy. One of the evident discussion partners is Axel Honneth, whose theory of interpersonal recognition is based on an initial experience of love in intimate relations (family, small circle of friends), realized as respect for the person (as a person like me), of the other in society, and in esteeming the specific skills or qualities of the unique other.43 Similarly, Charles Taylor’s work on multicultural societies offers insights into how various identities might need recognition within the Church that celebrates diversity within itself.44

The necessity, not only desirability of diversity has a central role. Human beings are considered “complementary” and to be “confronted by others in their otherness”.45 Church’s character as koinonia necessitates an attitude of respect towards the other, a willingness to listen and to understand the other. Church’s communal character is also described as a dynamic state where various identities are not only encountered but also changed in the encounter. Encounter with the other is described as a self-emptying, kenotic, and often threatening one’s identity. Still, putting oneself in the vulnerable position of encountering and dialogueing with the other at the expense of one’s own identity is necessary. Even though the text does not describe an “A recognizes B as X”-event in church-church relations, it does address a radically different understanding of relationship between persons where identities become vulnerable to the other. Attention is also paid to the attitudes behind recognitive acts.46

Recognition in church-church relations is connected to the notion of apostolicity, which characterizes the whole Church and the ways the whole community is maintained in truth. Recognizing another church’s apostolicity is, therefore, acknowledging that the convictions and practises of that church are faithful to the revelation of God in Christ.47 The basic level recognition is oriented towards the attitude, i.e. the desire to be authentic, not the specific ways of upholding apostolicity.

The discussion on baptism is quite relevant for the whole discourse on ecumenical recognition, as baptism is the most basic status-yielding institution in Christianity. Baptism, in other words, has significant status functions within Christianity and carries with it a number of “deontic powers”, i.e. rights, duties, authorizations etc. Although many churches do recognize each other’s baptism, through absense of rebaptism, the full consequences of “mutual recognition of baptism” has not yet been realized. Section report III notes that “agreement in understanding, performance and practise” of baptism has decreased rebaptisms. This is perceived as a “minimum of ‘mutual recognition’”. “Agreement” in this context could be perceived as acknowledgement of convictions and practises, where baptism is not merely descriptively accepted but normatively approved. This “minimum of mutual recognition” does not allow the same status or “full deontic powers” to a Christian who is not a member of the same communion. The acceptance is not complete, because it fails to receive the baptised state of the person or the institutional reasons of baptism as being valid and normative.48 The report invites a fuller recognition of the “authenticity of (...) baptism and the divine life that is being lived within that baptismal community.”49

42 Ibid., 232.
43 Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition, 107–130.
46 Ibid., 233–234.
48 See discussion on acceptance of institutions e.g. in Laitinen, “Recognition,” 333–339.
“Recognition” in general is described as a realization of churches “that they already share an existing degree of koinonia”. The main content of “realization” is a normative discernment or “acknowledgement” of an already existing quality, identity or status of the other. The “acknowledgement” is not objective in the sense of pertaining only to the object. Rather, the “realization grows” with the churches’ experience in the ecumenical movement. “Recognition” is a combination of a subjective realization of an already existing reality pertaining to an object.

The criterion (“as what”) of acknowledgement is “apostolicity”, which is understood as “coherence and continuity with the faith, life, witness and ministry of the apostolic community (...)”. The object of acknowledgement may be the rite of baptism, the larger pattern of Christian initiation (formation, baptism, chrismation/laying on of hands) or the totality of the life and witness of the church that baptizes and forms Christians. The text suggests that not only the teaching of the church (on baptism) but also the praxis that could function as the criterion for mutual recognition.

The text enumerates three “dimensions of recognition”, each of which have a different a subject and object of recognition. The three dimensions are: churches recognizing one another as churches, churches recognizing the baptism of a person seeking to enter another church and persons recognizing one another individually as Christians. The subjects of recognition may be either churches or individual persons, and the objects either churches, the baptism of a person or an individual. Identifying the subject of recognition is partly an ecumenical ecclesiological question. If one takes individual Christians as valid subjects (and objects) of recognition, one must ask how the recognition of individual Christians becomes recognition of churches. Similarly, one can ask in what way churches, as institutions or organisations, can experience subjective feelings such as “realizations”.

Focusing on the recognition of baptism immediately raises a question regarding the ecclesiological significance of baptism. What are the ecclesiological consequences of the recognition of baptism? One Baptism discusses the relationship between the recognition of baptism and the fuller recognition of churches as a continuum of recognition status.

At one end of the continuum is the non-recognition of baptism, manifested as the requirement of (re)baptism for those changing church affiliation. The non-recognition of baptism also implies the non-recognition of the communion (and the ministry of the clergy) that has baptized the person and the non-recognition of the person as Christian. The constrasting view of baptism implies full sharing in faith and life among the churches, including Eucharistic communion. According to this understanding, the recognition of baptism implies full mutual ecclesial recognition, including the other church as “church” and “proper” ministries, although this is not discussed.

Between these two extremes are various stages of limited or absent forms of sharing without the requirement of (re)baptism when changing affiliation. This continuum reflects a variety of views on the ecclesiological significance of baptism. One is forced to ask whether it is possible to recognize a person as a baptised Christian without recognizing either the baptism or the Christian church that performed the baptism? Baptism also relates differently in various churches to full church membership. This variation appears to lessen the ecumenical value of the recognition of baptism and strengthen the ecumenical value of “full membership”. This is paradoxical since an obvious and necessary connection exists between baptism and membership, and one could assume baptism is the more theologically significant concept of the two.

It might be that stages of recognition also manifest a variety of understandings of “recognition”. The requirement for (re)baptism is a clear case of non-recognition of baptism, but what should be said of...
arecognition of baptism that does not imply any sharing of life between the churches? The text itself seems to suggest that the recognition of baptism should have some consequences to inter-church relations. At least the concrete manifestations of recognition of baptism might increase the ecumenical experience and, consequently, contribute to “realizations” of the already existing communion. Even though the document notes that, for some churches, the recognition of baptism implies full communion, the text itself holds that the recognition of baptism is not the only condition for full communion but still “fundamental to the churches’ search for visible unity”.

Being more explicit about the recognition of baptism is suggested to increase common witness and service. At the same time, taking (theologically) fuller advantage of recognition of baptism is difficult because of the more fundamental questions pertaining to ecclesial recognition, which is presumably understood as an either qualitatively or quantitatively more advanced form of recognition. Nevertheless, the document asks whether the recognition of baptism could be perceived as a first step towards “degrees of recognition” corresponding with “degrees of communion”.

One Baptism demonstrates some of the challenges of ecumenical recognition. Several candidates emerge for both the subject and object of recognition, and the character (and status) of the subject and object inform the character of recognition. Because of the variation in the subject and object, the overall character of the “recognition of baptism” remains undefined. The text illustrates how differences in the simple identification of the phenomenon at hand affects its recognition. One Baptism shows how various perceptions of the relationship between baptism and full membership reduces the ecumenical significance of recognizing baptism. Finally, there is a call for making the existing, often implicit, recognition more explicit.

The Church: Towards a Common Vision (2013)

Faith and Order’s document on ecclesiology, The Church: Towards a Common Vision offers a comprehensive discussion on various aspects of the Church. Especially pertinent regarding ecumenical recognition is the note in One Baptism that the implementation of baptismal recognition is hindered by the lack of a comprehensive “ecclesial recognition”. The Church is the second convergence document produced by Faith and Order and the result of joint ecclesiological work that started with World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela (1993).

The Church explicates the goal of the ecumenical project in terms of recognition:

Visible unity requires that churches be able to recognize in one another the authentic presence of what the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381) calls the “one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.” This recognition, in turn, may in some instances depend upon changes in doctrine, practice and ministry within any given community. This represents a significant challenge for churches in their journey towards unity.

In The Church the subjects of recognition are various churches involved in the movement towards the full unity. The objects of recognition are the other churches, and the criterion of recognition is “the authentic presence” of the Church as expressed in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople. The text values the ability to recognize greater than the desire to retain unchanged doctrine. The fundamental ecumenical question is: “How can we identify the Church which the creed calls one, holy, catholic and apostolic?” The process of recognition is both critical (towards the other) and self-critical, since none of the participating churches claim to represent the Church exclusively.

56 Ibid., para. 15, 79.
57 Ibid., para. 79.
58 Dagmar Heller seems to interpret “ecclesial recognition” as the formal or legal pronunciation of a theologically discerned acknowledgement of apostolicity. Heller, “Anerkennung,” 268.
59 One Baptism, para. 88.
60 The Church, para. 9.
61 Ibid., 10.
The document states that diversity exists in both enriching and destructive forms. Diversity is first and foremost perceived as God’s gift, manifested in diverse gifts of the Spirit. Secondly, cultural and historical contexts positively contribute to the Church’s diversity. Problems arise when Christians become exclusive with their particular cultural expressions and seek to impose it upon others. Both contextual needs and human frailty contribute to the church’s diversity. The issue is not clear and there remains a continual need for self-examination, penitence, conversion, reconciliation and renewal. Legitimate diversity is restricted to things outside what is considered “necessary” for the Church.

This dynamic, self-critical vision resonates with Unitatis Redintegratio’s call for “spiritual ecumenism” where “change of heart” plays a significant role. The “change of heart” refers to both the attitude towards the other and towards oneself. Unitatis Redintegratio is clear on the need for critical self-examination to “examine [their] own fidelity” and on renewal as a consequence of increased fidelity to the Church’s calling. The Church states that by continuous self-critical examination the Church is brought back to a more authentic place of service to God’s salvific plan. This is the authenticity that the churches are called to recognize in one another. “Authenticity” is also connected with holiness, as “holiness means a greater authenticity in relationship with God, with others and with creation.”

This self-critical attitude towards one’s group identity seems to be particular to ecumenical recognition. In general, contributions to discussions over multiculturalism appear to emphasise the right of each to foster and strengthen their own identity. In juxtaposition, ecumenical recognition appears to challenge both parties in the act of recognition to also investigate their own authenticity. Because the normative point of reference is not identical with any existing church, (being the Church as expressed in the Creed of Nicaea-Constantinople), all churches, in a way, share the criteria for evaluation without exclusively owning them.

The wider context of recognition is the inherent capacity of human beings, based on creation, to live in relation and communion. The created reality of communion has been damaged by sin, but God is actively working to ultimately restore this broken communion, which is God’s gift by which the church lives and demonstrates life to wounded humanity. The reality of an existing, though imperfect, communion is fundamental to The Church’s ecclesiology. Communion exists from the dawn of creation to the eschatological consummation of all in Christ. The emphasis on communion is so strong that it blurs the line between the communion of humanity and the Church, underscoring the inherent need and capacity of humans to exist in relation to others, even more than a particular group of people (Christians) living in a particular relationship.

The Church follows One Baptism in recommending a full recognition of baptism. Baptism, the text argues, binds Christians together as brothers and sisters in one family of God: “Baptism is (...) a basic bond of unity”. Baptism is considered the foundation of the already existing (though imperfect) communion. At the same time, baptism is not separated from other elements of the communion, such as the Eucharist, intercessions and life of service. The emphasis on baptism as the foundation of communion is visible in Unitatis Redintegratio (e.g. paragraph 3) and has also been emphasised by Roman Catholic theologians in

62 Ibid., 28.
63 Ibid., para. 28–30.
64 Unitatis Redintegratio, para. 4.
65 Ibid., para. 6.
66 The Church, para. 50.
67 See e.g. Gutman’s introduction to Gutman, Multiculturalism.
68 A good example of the self-critical aspect of ecumenical recognition is the entire project of “receptive ecumenism,” which urges the churches to join a collaborative effort of mutual learning as a way towards a fuller or more “intensely configured communion in Christ.” Murray, Receptive Ecumenism, 7.
69 The Church, para. 1.
70 Relational anthropology is emphasised my some prominent thinkers on recognition such as Axel Honneth. Honneth argues for an intimate connection between identity formation and social life, neither which is possible without inter-subjective recognition. Honneth finds his thinking on a psychological theory of development in loving relationships. Honneth, The Struggle for Recognition, 92–121.
71 The Church, para. 41.
72 Ibid., 41–44.
ecumenical contexts. Tillard stated in his paper at the 1996 Faith and Order meeting in Moshi: “(...) wherever true baptism is administered there is a universally recognized life of grace.” 73 Common recognition of baptism has been suggested as a foundation for Christians of various denominations to develop a common baptismal spirituality that, in turn, would assist in recognizing that what unites them is stronger than what separates.74 Again, the recognition of baptism is perceived as necessary and practically useful. Still, not many are willing to claim that the recognition of baptism would be sufficient for full ecclesial recognition.75

Conclusion

In the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, recognition was mostly focused on the mutual recognition of individual Christians. Recent ecclesiological document have focused on the mutual recognition of churches as institutions. Unitatis Redintegratio offers valuable discussion on the necessity of proper attitudes of individuals. The emphasis there, as in later Roman Catholic ecumenism, has been on “spiritual ecumenism”, which focuses on the change of heart, holiness of life, and public and private prayer for unity.76 It remains a challenge to bridge between individual recognition, based on appropriate attitudes and truthful acknowledgement of the other’s normatively relevant features, and the institutional level where churches formally recognize each other as organizations. As for now, none of the researched documents are able to bridge these perspectives. It appears that “ecumenical recognition” comprises a number of different recognitive acts that could be described as identification or acknowledgement, love, respect and esteem.

The later, perhaps more mature, form of recognition is clearly set in the theological framework of koinonia (or communion) which emphasises the relational, co-dependent character of recognition. Koinonia implies strong interrelatedness. Consequently, recognition is perceived as an event where both parties have an active role as subjects. The Koinonia approach also stretches the phenomenon of recognition beyond church-church relations. The later documents base the need for fuller communion of churches on the relation of the entire creation. Some of the recognitive acts mentioned above also apply beyond organisational limits of churches, where others, especially those taking place on the organisational level, do not.

Concern for accurately perceiving the dialogue partner has been prominent within doctrinal ecumenism. In earlier stages, this led to the use of a comparative method to achieve greater clarity on the teaching of other churches. Ecumenical recognition focuses primarily on the accurate identification of the other, and appears to be critical to the characteristics of both oneself and the other. This is most prominently visible in the idea of “spiritual ecumenism” as presented in Unitatis Redintegratio and later in Faith and Order documents. Ecumenical recognition is characterised by mutuality in the sense that all relations exist within a comprehensive framework (koinonia or communio) that defines the character of individual relations. Individuals are characterised by relationality and this, in the ecumenical context, appears to imply that both parties of recognition are subjects (and objects) of the recognition act. The focus is not only in perceiving the other in an adequate way, but also in self-critical examination of one’s own being (as church).

One of the important questions in speaking about ecumenical recognition is the relationship between the acknowledgement of convictions and practises, and the more holistic ecumenical recognition proper. This has been the most traditional area of bilateral ecumenical dialogue that has concentrated on beliefs, doctrinal formulations and the search for agreement. Faith and Order’s multilateral dialogues address principle questions of “faithfulness” or “apostolicity” without evaluating the specific ways particular churches manifest their faithfulness or apostolicity. The focus is on the attitude of “desiring to be authentic”, which is suggested as grounds for recognition. Faith and Order has strongly emphasised the relevance of the recognition of baptism for ecumenical recognition. While most mainline churches would implicitly

73 Tillard, “From BEM to Koinonia,” 183.
74 Henn, “Reflections,” 83.
75 See e.g. Heller, “Anerkennung,” 266.
76 See e.g. Kasper, That They May; Kasper, A Handbook.
recognize each other’s baptism, there is no consensus on the relevance or consequences of this recognition. While ecumenical recognition is not fully focused on the object of recognition, the “growing realization” is stressed for the one recognizing, and points to a greater understanding of the implications of, and adequate performance for, recognition.

The researched material is weak on discussing the post-recognition social reality for the churches. Suggestions are mostly made in the form of questions that should find locally adapted answers. The general orientation points to increase capability to adequately recognize a variety of “apostolicities” (ways of being faithful to the Church through the ages). Concrete solutions include bilateral, rather than multilateral, documents.

At the end I would like to point out some of the significant, emerging issues for the future of the ecumenical movement.

“Ecclesial recognition” in the ecumenical context appears to have two distinct, but interrelated, levels. One of these is the identification and acknowledgement of the existence, relevance and value of a conviction or practise. The other is formal recognition with juridical implications of what has been identified and acknowledged. Heller identifies these as the “internal” or “theological” acknowledgement and “external” or “legal” recognition of the other church.77 One of the ecumenical questions concerns how to proceed from theological level acknowledgement to the more comprehensive recognition that might have legal implications. Theoretically, a situation can emerge where theological acknowledgement has been achieved but full ecclesial recognition has not materialized. Another issue Heller underscores is the relationship between recognition of apostolicity and the presence of apostolicity. Heller notes that non-recognition of a church as a “church in the proper sense” implies either that the church in question is not an actual church or that the recognizing church is not able to “see” or acknowledge the convictions and practises of the other community correctly.78 Non-recognition might, in other words, actually be misrecognition. While ecumenical recognition could be perceived as status-giving, it is also reactive to the relevant characteristics of the other. Ecumenical recognition does not create the reality of “being a church in the proper sense” but voices its presence.79

A major, remaining issue is the difference between recognizing individual Christians and recognizing Churches. While recognition of individuals falls short of recognizing churches, even the recognition of individuals is made possible by the reality of communion. Instead of concentrating on forbidden actions when full recognition is lacking, ecumenical endeavours should concentrate on actions required for the recognition of Christians outside the physical boundaries of any church. Furthermore, careful theological consideration should be given to the authenticity of denominational identities. It appears more important to identify authenticity with the apostolic Tradition or “the faith of the Church through the ages” than of our confessional traditions. Finally, ecumenical dialogues should be quite conscious of the distinction between what must be rejected, what can be descriptively accepted and what can be normatively approved. The unity of the church is about life in community with the complications of everyday life. Our recognition of the other must materialize in both explicit and implicit everyday actions, not only in official declarations that facilitate and justify them.

References


78 Ibid., 266.
79 Heikki Ikäheimo discusses in a helpful way the distinction between the constitutive and responsive character of recognition in Ikäheimo, Anerkennung.


Lim, Timothy T. N. “Ecclesial Recognition: An Interdisciplinary Proposal.” (Regent University, Virginia Beach, 2014.


