The Truth We Owe Each Other
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Mutual Accountability in the Ecumenical Movement

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What do we, as churches from around the world in fellowship, owe to each other? Does our communion imply, even compel, a measure of accountability to each other, to the traditions and authority we inherit, and to the wider world we serve?

In this work, I try to show that, emphatically, mutual accountability has been and remains a vital element of the ecumenical movement, its quest for unity, and its ethical relevance today. Without a sense of or the attitude of mutual accountability, how can there be an ecumenical relationship between us?

Mutual accountability refers to the quality of relations between and among people in community. It refers to an attitude of active responsibility that must characterize any authentic relationship, the profoundly moral dimension of life together. In the ecumenical movement, I therefore argue, mutual accountability is a matter of how we seek the truth together by sharing insights into the truth we carry. The truth of the Gospel can only be sought in a sense of accountability to what is given to us as the faith through the ages, and in a sense of accountability to those whom the Gospel addresses today, in their context, in their time, in their search for hope.

Ultimately, the truth we owe one another is an accounting for our hope. We are as churches and followers of the crucified and risen Christ called always
to be ready to give account of the hope that we carry. This is the criterion of our Christian witness. This is the criterion of being Church: Are we giving hope to others, real hope? This is also the criterion of what it means to be human, created in the image of God: How do we give hope to the other?

We cannot free ourselves from the accountability we carry together for sharing the treasure of the Gospel as liberation and hope, in each period and in any context of the Church. How would we know the truth if nobody had shared it with us? And how should we know more of the truth, if we are not giving account to one another for what the Spirit has shared with us? Accountability for the hope we have means that there is a truth of the resurrection that we have to share, and an openness to the world that God has created to see what this hope means today and tomorrow. The ecumenical movement is indeed a privileged context for making this account rich and real.

Several reasons impel publication of my study of mutual accountability, done some years ago. The first is the most pragmatic and obvious reason: Many have asked me where the text is available, and I had to tell them that it was only available in photocopied versions in some libraries. My original text, “Mutual Accountability as Ecumenical Attitude: A Study in Ecumenical Ecclesiology Based on Faith and Order Texts, 1948-1998,” was submitted to the Norwegian School of Theology for the Degree of Doctor Theologiae in November 2001 and defended in a public disputation in May 2002. My Doctorvater was Professor Em. Dr Torleiv Austad. The ordinary opponents were the late Professor Dr Anton Houtepen from the Netherlands and Professor (now Emeritus) Dr Viggo Mortensen from Denmark. In addition to them, Professor Em. Dr Turid Karlsen Seim and Prof Em. Dr Kjell Olav Sannes offered relevant and challenging questions to my work during my studies and at the disputation. I owe them all again my heartfelt thanks for guiding me and my questions toward texts and perspectives of high relevance for my ideas.

The study was received as a significant contribution to the understanding of the work of Faith and Order, but also to the debate on ecclesiology and ethics in the ecumenical movement. New commitments and appointments postponed for too long my intention to rewrite the dissertation for another circle of readers, so I have decided to instead to make the study in its original form available for those who are interested.

The deeper reason that motivates me to publish this text is that I quite simply find that several findings of my study are relevant to the present discourse about ecumenism and ecclesiology. In my work and service for the World Council of Churches today, as WCC general secretary, I hardly experience any day in the office or in meetings or visits elsewhere in the world without addressing the need for mutual accountability. In defining and pursuing mutual accountability, we are developing and improving the quality of human
relations in all their dimensions, particularly in relations among people of different confessions, religions, cultures, geographic or ethnic backgrounds, but also in the task of building justice and peace in the world of today.

The World Council of Churches has through its multilateral dialogues as well as in its institutions and great ecumenical gatherings been serving the visible unity of the Church, and through its many initiatives and programs for witnessing and serving justice and peace together, exercised many dimensions of mutual accountability since its very beginning up till today. At some crossroads, and in some particular studies and discussions, this has become even more clear. Some of those texts are carefully analysed in my study, to explore what mutual accountability means, whether the terminology is used or not. Already the discussions about the ecclesial character of the council, as well as the significant theological study about the Tradition and the traditions of the Church, indirectly raised these questions. The famous study of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) is the most significant exercise and document showing how it works as the heartbeat of a serious and constructive ecumenical methodology. There are also other studies I have analysed that have gone deeply into the issues of truth and accountability that should not be ignored.

Another dimension of mutual accountability is elaborated in the studies around ethics and ecclesiology. In these studies the terminology is used more often in an explicit way. However, there have not been many efforts to develop a clear definition of the concept. The context in which the concept is used is in reflection about the moral dimension of being Church together. It is not an option to seek unity, it is a moral duty. Furthermore, accountability has to be expressed in taking the quest for unity into the mission of the Church and its service in the world for unity, peace and justice. The documents from the “Costly Unity” studies, analysed in chapter 4 here, deserve further attention, not at least in our reflection on what a pilgrimage of justice and peace means today.

To elaborate the definition of mutual accountability, I made use of a theory of ethics. The theory of “attitudes” (Norwegian: holdninger) developed by my teacher, Professor Em. Dr Ivar Asheim, was a very useful tool to define mutual accountability. It leads to further reflection on the qualities that define relations and that are required in a fellowship defined as Church or between churches. These qualities are also of great relevance for the relations we need to build in any multicultural or multi-religious context.

The dynamic approach to the unity of the Church that can be pursued by the concept—and structures—of mutual accountability is shaping our daily work and objectives in the World Council of Churches and in the wider ecumenical movement. Building trust through a higher sense of transparency and accountability among all partners is a basis for all serious ecumenism. Attitudes
of openness, constructive critical and self-critical approaches, repentance, reliability, commitment to the common calling and tasks, faithfulness, sharing, and indeed hope—these are all genuine and necessary attitudes in a fellowship that follows the crucified and risen Christ.

The truth we owe one another lies in both our insights and our true life in community, defined by the attitudes of faith, hope and love. And greatest among them is love.

In love for the ecumenical movement and all its gifts, and even more in love and appreciation to all the colleagues and partners with whom I live and work in mutually accountable relations, I submit my findings for anyone interested in reading my reflections. This is part of the truth I myself owe as a result of my studies but also as affirmed through many succeeding years of work in the ecumenical movement in general and in the World Council of Churches in a special way. For all of it I give thanks to God.
Introduction

The Scene, Perspective, and Focus of This Study

The Recommendations of Mutual Accountability and Their Context

The locus of this study is the work of Faith and Order, the most comprehensive, established theological ecumenical forum in the second part of the 20th century. I have looked at the major results of the work of Faith and Order toward unity among divided churches, particularly in regard to a common ecumenical ecclesiology.

My study focuses on one feature of Faith and Order’s work. In several documents from approximately the last decade I find a recurring motif: a recommendation of more mutual accountability.1 This recommendation appears at crucial points in deliberations about the current challenges to the ecumenical movement. Sometimes the recommendation sums up an analysis of the present state and the tasks ahead; sometimes it conveys an impression of embarrassment at not being able to be more specific when identifying the relevant tools for the ecumenical work or the “cure” for its failures.

Here I will try to answer some questions related to these recommendations and explore what contribution the perspectives implied in “mutual accountability” can make.

1. Cf. ch. 4.
accountability” have made to the ecumenical endeavour. Why ask for more mutual accountability? What does this mean? How can it, eventually, be pursued? Has this perspective been important before, too, in other guises? What kind of perspective is this, really?

At this point I will only give some responses to the last question to indicate the direction of my task and procedure. The call for mutual accountability corresponds to the calling to the churches to manifest the unity the triune God has given to the Church. Hence, there is a moral perspective to the communion of the churches. The appeals refer to a standard for interchurch relationship, a quality of relations to be promoted or maintained. This moral dimension of mutual accountability can be seen as a duty or obligation to give account to one another. I will, however, dwell on another side of this moral dimension of the interchurch fellowship: the attitude required by mutual accountability. Corresponding to the duty of giving account or being accountable, there must be a willingness to do so, an openness and ability to live in a relation characterized by being accountable to one another.

Recommendations of mutual accountability do not exclude other theories, models, or concepts of the unity of the Church. They are, rather, a supplementary perspective. Although these recommendations occur in contexts of hermeneutics and ethics, I find it most adequate to anchor them primarily in ecclesiology; to be more specific, ecumenical ecclesiology.

This combination of scene, perspective, and focus is certainly not the only starting point for exploring ecumenical ecclesiology or for a study of the work of Faith and Order. But it is a useful way of getting into a study of ecumenical theology at the present moment of the ecumenical movement.

Everyone seems to speak well of mutual accountability. For this reason, it has not been adequately explored.

**The Insufficiency of “Models of Unity”**

The modern ecumenical movement has as its main basis the assumption of a given unity in Christ. Therefore, the efforts of the ecumenical movement have been to pursue manifestations of this unity of the Christian Church in a situation of diversity, even division and conflict, between churches. The efforts have been met with approval and dissatisfaction. Evaluations are, of course, dependent on how one defines the goal of the ecumenical movement.

A converging understanding of the goal and of the proper ways toward that goal has led to definitions of models of the unity of the Church. Some of these models are focused mainly on the goal or the result of the process.

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2. Introductions and presentations of ecumenical theology usually give an overview of such models, but under different titles. With some exceptions they present the same models/concepts. E.g., Beinert 1987:169–73 is talking about “Modelle christlicher Einigung”; Frieling 1992:257–65,
Some models are focused on patterns or structures of interrelations between churches—not only a definite goal, but also the process of ecumenism.\(^3\) Seen from another perspective, each model emphasizes at least one particular principle of ecumenism, defining theologically what is important for the unity of the Church: the visible unity, the doctrinal basis or requirement of unity, the episcopal succession, the Church as an organic entity, unity in diversity, and so forth. Consequently, even the focus on koinonia-ecclesiology in the 1990s can be described as an ecumenical model, although it is now perceived as a shift from a focus on unity toward focusing on communion or fellowship.\(^4\) Actually, the koinonia-ecclesiology can be interpreted as an alternative to the concept of “models” of unity, and does signify a relative decline in interest in that concept after its prevalence in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, models of unity were not the crucial point of any Faith and Order study.

The impact of such models on ecumenical efforts is not minimized when pointing to their limitations and insufficiency. Indeed, they have even been seen as obstacles to unity, for several reasons.\(^5\) There are models of unity developed through experiences in the past. Some are conceptualized in the specific ecclesiology of one or more churches or church families and confirmed and theologically defended from that position. Other models are elaborated through ecumenical dialogue, and thus they still have certain features from already existing fellowships of churches. This is both their strength and their weakness as configurations of interchurch fellowship. They are relying on theological foundations of well-established church traditions, and have shown how unity

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\(^3\) Maybe the most typical in this respect is the model of “reconciled diversity,” defined as a model of unity by the Lutheran World Federation in Dar-es-Salam in 1977. Some even see the concept of “unity in tension” (“Ökumene in Gegensatzten”) also as a model of unity (Neuner 1997:291ff.; Frieling 1992:264ff.).

\(^4\) Neuner 1997:292ff.: “Es erschien wesentlich realistischer, als ökumenisches Ziel eine Gemeinschaft von Kirchen anzustreben als deren Einheit” (293).

can be established and preserved. But they might therefore be insufficient as tools or guiding principles to establish new relations, because they represent too much one particular tradition, sometimes offending other traditions.

Another limitation of the models of unity is the tendency to focus on the end of the process, making it difficult to characterize theologically the not-yet-full unity that exists during the process leading toward the goal. Maybe the most significant reason of the insufficiency of these models for the dynamic of ecumenism is the proclivity toward focusing on certain principles of ecumenism to the exclusion of other important theological aspects of the unity of the Church. The concentration on one model also abstracts ecumenical theology from the situation in which the churches have been historically and are now in the contemporary context.

A Supplementary Perspective: The Quality of Relations

In this study there will be no attempt to make a comprehensive evaluation of the ecumenical movement, nor its models or its goals. Rather, I will focus on the quality of relations between the churches. Whatever the model and goal of

6. The model of “visible unity” has become particularly important in the Anglican tradition, focusing on the historical episcopate as the visible sign of apostolicity and unity. The model of “organic union” can have its basis in the organic communion of the hierarchical communion of bishops led by the successor of Peter in the Roman Catholic Church (Friel 1992:262f. even calls one model “Gemeinschaft mit dem Papst”). The model of “concord” depends on an understanding of unity as unity in doctrine, which is a dominating aspect in Protestant churches, particularly in the Lutheran tradition. How the church traditions have coloured the goal of unity becomes transparent in the problems of translating “council,” “conciliar fellowship,” or “conciliarity” between English and other languages, e.g., German. In the Protestant tradition “council” could be “Rat,” “Synode,” as well as “Konzil.” A dominating problem of this model of “conciliarity” has been that the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches have a definition of “council” exclusively as “Konzil,” as a representative gathering of (mainly) bishops from all churches, according to the tradition of the Old Church. Thus, the ambiguity in the name of the model reveals the ambiguity of the model.

7. A typical example of this problem can be seen in the efforts to promote church fellowship among Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed churches in Europe. The Anglican standard of visible unity expressed through a “reconciled episcopate” becomes an obstacle to “full communion” with Reformed churches, which theologically and traditionally have chosen a church model other than episcopacy. Consequently, Reformed churches do not have and do not want their church presidents (in Hungary and Romania titled as “bishops” for political reasons, however) consecrated in Anglican episcopal succession. A majority of Reformed and Lutheran churches in Europe have signed and dedicated themselves to the establishment of church fellowship through agreement on the basic theological understanding of the gospel and the sacraments (The Leuenberg Concord). The historical episcopate as sign of unity, if defined as a condition and requirement of church fellowship, could in this context become an obstacle of church unity. Cf. the report from a conference on “compatibility” between the Porvoo, Meissen, and Leuenberg agreements, Liebfrauenberg 1995.
unity, the issue at stake is the relation between the churches. The purpose of the ecumenical movement includes improving the relations between the churches. The quality of these relations cannot be isolated from the question of the basis and the form of the unity, but it is a supplement to the dominating perspectives of “faith” and “order,” and deserves attention in its own right.

Of course, the respective ideas or principles for the goal of ecumenism color the understanding of what improved relations might be. Therefore, the issue of quality of interchurch relations should not and cannot be isolated from the question of models or concepts of unity. It might seem, then, that I am playing the same game under a different name. I intend to demonstrate that it is something more.

My study reflects a tendency in several ecumenical documents from recent years to ask what is lacking in the quality of ecumenical relations. In the reflections on the status of the ecumenical movement in general, and in the World Council of Churches particularly, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of this perspective.

Attention to quality of relations is not an alternative, but a supplement to the quest for a common doctrinal foundation for interchurch relations and a common structure of the churches. According to common ecumenical tradition, as documented in Faith and Order texts I will analyze, the Church is a fellowship created by the triune God in the image of the relations within the triune God. If this is true, the question of the quality of relations is a matter of the doctrinal basis of the Church, though it is also a matter of church structures, of church order. But it goes through and even beyond the discussions of what is the structure of unity in the Church. It is a matter of quality, whatever the structure of the relations might be (hierarchical, episcopal, synodical, congregational, and the like).

The doctrinal dialogues have given many results in consensus and convergence documents. Some of them have led to agreements of fellowship between churches. But this has not reduced the need to focus on the required quality of relations. That question is not fully answered through declarations that doctrinal condemnations are no longer applicable, or through agreements on the understanding of unity and some common structures to serve interchurch relations. These types of agreement can be seen as results of improvement of relations between representatives from the involved churches.

My interest in quality of relations has not only to do with critical attention to unfulfilled tasks of the ecumenical movement. One important motivation for choosing this perspective is a presumption that what has already happened

8. The Leuenberg Agreement (1973) and the Roman Catholic–Lutheran Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) are both examples of the potential and the limitation of the first type of agreement. The Porvoo Agreement is an example of the latter.
in the ecumenical movement must have made a difference in the understanding of what the unity of the Church can be. In my view, the real development of interchurch relations must be taken into account in our reflecting theologically on what it means to be one Church in the apostolic tradition. The pursuit of the ecclesial status of the World Council of Churches might be seen as a fruit of the demand for self-reflection of the relations established through the ecumenical movement.9

Whatever the evaluation of the ecumenical movement of the 20th century might be, it has—in the perspective of a century—changed the relations between the churches.10 It is a matter of fact that the churches, through their members, have had numerous opportunities for contact and to exchange all kind of resources since the turn of the 21st century, opportunities unimaginable earlier. The changed relations are, however, more than a matter of numbers and frequency of interchurch contacts. Rather, they are institutionalized and formalized in several ways: ecumenical councils and organizations; ecumenical dialogue commissions; agreements of church fellowship and even united churches; joint ecumenical projects of material aid and struggle for peace, human rights and preservation of creation; joint efforts in mission and ministry to the world. Through the ecumenical movement most churches have been involved in relations to churches of other confessions, traditions, nations, cultures, and so forth. For a majority of churches today, to get into and stay in some kind of manifested relation to other churches has become an important and not negligible aspect of being a Christian church.

Changed relations between the churches require new theological reflection on what it means to be a Christian church. The ecumenical movement has provided significant experiences of great importance for ecclesiology, and these experiences have been evaluated and reflected in conferences, studies, and statements from ecumenical settings. This process goes both ways. There is no reason to doubt that the changes of relations have incited a corresponding revision of ecclesiology in the churches.

Theologians have gained common insight in ecclesiology through their encounter with one another in a mutual exchange and struggle with theological

9. Cf. the discussion of the ecclesial quality and status of the World Council of Churches raised through the process of the “Common Vision and Understanding of the World Council of Churches,” culminating at the Harare assembly. This process will be discussed below; cf. ch. 4, pp. 308-322.

10. In this study Church (with a capital “C”) means the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church in the theological sense, as this notion is used, for instance, in the Nicene Creed. The local churches, organized as national, regional, or confessional bodies, are here designated as church/churches. Officially, these churches—to a large extent—have been both the subjects and recipients of the work done in ecumenical organizations, although, in practice, the acting subjects of the ecumenical movement are persons representing their churches.
questions of the basis, nature, and purpose of the Church. The common insight of ecclesiology formulated in ecumenical documents is something else and something more than these theologians could have had if they had worked in splendid isolation or in cooperation with representatives from their own church tradition only.

Seen against this background, reflections on ecclesiology from ecumenical endeavours deserve attention and theological analysis. More than that, they require an adequate approach, taking into account the particular context of ecumenical dialogue.

**Ecumenical Ecclesiology**

The theological framework of this study is *ecumenical ecclesiology*. There is a need for reflection on ecclesiology that can be applied to different ecclesiological traditions and to new configurations established as a fruit of ecumenical relations. A presentation of ecclesiology can, in many cases, be an apology for one particular church tradition. Ecumenical ecclesiology should go beyond this. The perspective of “ecumenical ecclesiology” should convey a wider perspective than the concepts of unity. Any aspect of the Church, its life, and its purpose can be seen in the perspective of unity, not only those aspects having to do with the respective model or concept of unity. Therefore, the framework of “ecumenical ecclesiology” can more directly and effectively link the specific question of interchurch fellowship to other contexts (that is, other than the specific ecumenical contexts) where fellowship and unity in the churches are discussed.

The intention here is not a kind of pragmatic ecclesiology dominated only by the daily agenda of the ecumenical organizations, without the classical theological questions of what it means to be one, holy, apostolic, and catholic church. But these principles for ecumenism should not be discussed in abstraction or theoretically. Considering the *quality* of interchurch relations can give *direction* to the development of ecumenical relations. The quality of interchurch relations should be discussed in the perspective of these classical themes in order to make those themes relevant for the everyday interchurch relations. *The quality of interchurch relations is an important aspect of what it means to be a church in the apostolic tradition.*

Therefore, this is a study of *ecumenical ecclesiology*, understood as follows:

a. An ecclesiology which intends to pursue the question of what it means to be one, holy, apostolic, and catholic church;

b. An ecclesiology which takes into account the experiences and the reflections of the ecumenical movement of the 20th century, making them relevant for ecclesiology in general;
c. Ecclesiology aspiring to be a common ecclesiology for the churches, at least to some extent reflecting a consensus in issues of ecclesiology; this is ecclesiology pursued in constant dialogue with other churches, or as a reflection of the already finished dialogue between churches;

d. Ecclesiology pursued under the “ecumenical imperative,” focusing particularly on why and how to overcome those divisions of the Church which hide or contradict the unity of the Church granted by the triune God and given a model in the relations between the persons of the Trinity;

e. Theological reflection on why and how the Church can believe, live, and act as one in a certain diversity, as well as why no communion could be called “church” if it in principle and in practice is isolating itself from other churches.  

This definition of ecumenical ecclesiology presupposes that ecclesiology must be ecumenical, because of the axioms of ecclesiology. However, my particular interest in this study is not a general ecclesiology, but to analyze and discuss ecclesiology which can be relevant for the task of establishing and making perceptible the unity between churches. Texts from the ecumenical movement are of special significance in this regard, since they rely on ecumenical

11. The terminology “ecumenical ecclesiology” is the most familiar, although reflections on ecclesiology under one or more of these five perspectives is rather common among theologians exploring ecumenical theology or ecumenism. The English ecumenist Gillian Rosemary Evans uses this concept in her book *The Church and the Churches: Toward an Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (Evans 1994a). She discusses the theme under the thesis “Ecumenism cannot proceed without an ecclesiology” (ibid., 3). She has registered that the most difficult issues are what she calls “ecclesiopractical” (ibid., 16). Dealing with what are classic Faith and Order themes, she tries to indicate points of coherence and requirements that go beyond the traditional alternatives.

One of the most experienced North American Roman Catholic ecumenists, George H. Tavard, gave one of his books, *The Church, Community of Salvation*, the subtitle *An Ecumenical Ecclesiology*; cf. Tavard 1992. In the introduction to this book he follows Paul VI in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, and takes his “departure at this point: being Church means sharing a distinctive self-awareness and, on the basis of this self-awareness, engaging in a multisided dialogue” (ibid., 10). He uses Vatican Council II (where he served as conciliar *peritus*) as a genuine expression of Catholic tradition and ecclesiology. He takes as an axiom that a church must be in internal and external dialogue, and that ecclesiological reflection must take into account the outcome of ecumenical dialogue. Cf. his chapter “The Ecumenical Horizon,” in ibid., 191–208. Thus, particularly my point $b$ corresponds to Evans’s concept. Further, my points $b$–$d$ correspond to Tavard’s understanding of “ecumenical ecclesiology.” My focus on ecclesiology in diversity is to some extent integrated in his book, too. He focuses in his study particularly on the ecumenical movement manifested in the Roman Catholic Church from the 19th century (from Möhler and Newman) and the documents from Vatican II. I will concentrate my study on material mostly from the World Council of Churches.
experience, dialogue, and motivation, and thus convey insight not really accessible through other channels.

Nevertheless, I am also interested in how the experiences and reflections of ecclesiology coming out of the ecumenical encounter can be relevant for ecclesiology in general. If the churches are called to live as one, in relation to each other, the ecclesiological principles for that communion should be relevant for any relation in any church fellowship. The concern for ecumenical ecclesiology is not a matter of specialized interest for ecumenists. The quest for the unity of the Church is founded in the identity of the Church. Thus, ecumenical ecclesiology is a matter of intrachurch as well as interchurch relationships, and is relevant at any level and for any kind of fellowship in the Church. But the key issues of ecumenical ecclesiology have been raised and elaborated on extensively in the efforts to establish relations between churches through the ecumenical movement of the 20th century. Therefore, theological reflection on the premises and results of this quest for unity among different churches is the primary perspective of this study. Only after an elaboration of the specific issues of interchurch relationship can these findings be discussed in regard to their relevance for ecclesiology in general.

Because the perspective of this study is the quality of relations between churches as a matter of ecumenical ecclesiology, the core question will be, What is an adequate category for this? This question implies a moral dimension to ecumenical ecclesiology besides the questions of doctrine and order: What is a (morally) right relation between churches?

The quality of relation between churches is a profound theological issue when the Church is defined as a koinonia, a participation in the life of one another through the participation in Christ. One important perspective in the ecumenical dialogues has been the visibility of unity or the visibility of the koinonia, given in Christ. The discussions have to a large extent focused on structures and ministry, particularly the importance of the historical episcopate. These discussions of visibility tend, in my opinion, to be rather formal debates about principles, like historical episcopate versus synodical/presbyterial structures. But if visibility of unity is a manifestation of koinonia, visibility of unity cannot be conceived only in terms of structures. The meaning of a communion or a fellowship is not only the agreement about basis, goals, and structures. No less important are the values of the relations themselves. But then we must also ask how to define and evaluate such values of fellowship in the Church, between the churches. This leads to a reflection on required attitudes for the koinonia.
Attitudes as a Matter of Ecumenical Ecclesiology

To promote, establish, maintain, and improve a fellowship, certain attitudes are required. Some are common for any kind of human fellowship; some are specific for each particular type of fellowship. These are important elements in the theory of ethics of attitudes developed by Norwegian Lutheran theologian Ivar Asheim. I find his theory relevant and helpful to establish an understanding of attitudes to be applied in this study, for several reasons.

Asheim offers a brief definition of attitude: “A firm, conscious and consequent position or behavior (in a certain occasion, in a certain case).” He argues that the notion of “attitudes” (Norwegian: holdning) has a cognitive and an affective component, as well as a constitutive component of behavior. Asheim explores attitudes within the frame of the ethics of virtues (Norwegian: dyder). He finds a great deal of coherence, but also important distinctions, between the traditional concept of “virtues” and his definition of “attitudes.”

To focus on attitudes means to emphasize the goodness and righteousness in the relation between persons, not the excellence of the character of each person—as most often happens in the perspective of virtues. Asheim is critical of the traditional understanding of virtue (dyd) as the excellence, the goodness of a person, and the attractive quality of one individual. Corresponding to Luther’s critique of Aristotelian ethics of virtue, Asheim emphasizes how the goodness or righteousness of a person must be demonstrated in the relation between this person and others. Who we are by ourselves as righteous persons can only be defined in a theocentric perspective. A relational and communal aspect of attitudes should therefore, according to Asheim, replace the intro-

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12. Cf. Asheim 1991:87–117; Asheim 1994b:116–30; and, in his most comprehensive work on the theme, Asheim 1997. Asheim writes in Norwegian, and discusses the Norwegian word holdning, which I here translate as “attitude.” In my use of Asheim’s theory, I will use his definition of holdning as my definition of attitude. He finds a large degree of coherence between the English and Norwegian terms, although possibly with more emphasis on the aspect of behavior in the Norwegian terminology (cf. Asheim 1997:24–26). Asheim has presented his theory in a German article (Asheim 1998), on the basis of one part of his analysis, namely the role of virtues in Luther’s ethics. There he uses the terminology of “Haltung” and “attitude” (in the English Summary, 260) as translations of holdning.


15. Asheim 1994b:116–20. The profile and relevance of Luther’s concept of virtues is the major focus of the article from 1998.
spective, reflexive aspect of the ethics of virtues. The tendency toward narcissism in recent approaches to virtues can thereby be overcome.

These distinctions underscore the relevance of Asheim's theory for a study of interchurch relations. In his theory, attitudes go beyond the internal, introspective, and individual perspective; attitudes are relation-oriented and manifested in the common life—from the smallest to the largest scale. The sense of fellowship is developed in basic, intimate, and close relations, but is flexible and adaptable. The sense of belonging to a fellowship or unity can be widened to a universal perspective without changing character; Asheim even explicitly mentions the ecumenical movement to illustrate this.16

Attitudes can be perceived through analysis of what is said and done, through an analysis of “position,” not by an analysis of personality as such. When a group of persons is involved in fulfilling the same goal, a certain standard of attitude is a precondition to get somewhere. Therefore, the framework of institutions corresponds to attitudes at the level of social ethics. Attitudes presuppose and are realized through structures; structures are not principles or standards of ethics in themselves, but need qualification through attitudes.17 Asheim mentions a wide scale of illuminating examples of this correspondence in families, school classes, institutions for public health, international negotiations for disarmament, and so forth.18 In respect to the last example, he unveils how traditional concepts of virtues in fact are understood as collective attitudes.

To establish attitudes as values for a fellowship, the attitudes must be explainable and somehow possible to perceive. This requires agreed-upon criteria of how the partners are accountable to one another for what has been done or not.19 Reliability, stability, and duration of a relation are such significant attitudes for the preservation of a fellowship. Asheim maintains that where certain basic attitudes are missing, there is no fellowship in a real sense.20 Fellowship can, to some degree, be defined in terms of attitudes. One significant

17. This is his main concern in the chapter “Er rammene likegyldige?”; Asheim 1991:118–39.
19. Asheim 1997:267. He specifies: modesty must be shown as withdrawal to defined geographical points, credibility as concrete steps to ratify an agreement, openness as admittance of foreign inspectors to arsenals, etc. Asheim elaborates more comprehensively in his theory the need for differentiations of forms of fellowship and a corresponding differentiation of required attitudes (ibid., 284ff.).
example is “friendship.” The attitudes of friendship such as openness, loyalty, faithfulness, reliability, confidence, trust, and the like are not means to achieve a goal, but values deciding whether this is friendship or not, whether it is a good friendship, and so forth. This raises interesting questions in respect to ecclesial fellowships and interchurch relations in general: To what extent, and how, can these relations be defined according to attitudes? Is the goal of an ecumenical fellowship—at least in some ways—to promote and maintain certain attitudes?

Although Asheim is promoting a theory of general ethics, his approach is relevant for ecclesiology. This is a theory for how to define values, standards, purposes, and goals of communities in general. The specific problems of ecclesiology and ecumenical relations are not his major focus. However, he has made some efforts to elaborate the challenge of ethics for a church fellowship as well.

Since the perspective of my study is on the quality of interchurch relations, I find this theory of attitudes to be a useful tool for the analysis of texts that deal with premises, methods, models, and goals of the ecumenical movement. A church and its representatives, through positions taken in principle and in practice, in respect to internal as well as external matters, do reveal their attitudes to other churches. This perspective of church fellowship has not always been a point on the agenda of ecumenical theology, where the common basis in faith, the structures, the models of unity, and the common task have been the most dominant issues.

Neither have attitudes been a prominent theme in standard presentations of ecclesiology. But it should be nothing particularly remarkable to suggest that certain attitudes can improve the quality of interchurch relations. Here a reflection by Asheim on the relatively small attention paid explicitly to attitudes in the discussions of ethics can be illuminating for the situation in ecumenical

22. In a textbook for the study of theology, Asheim dedicates one chapter on ethics for “church life” (Asheim 1994a:273–99). Here he elaborates the ethical dimension of participating in a church fellowship locally and universally, emphasizing the relevance of attitudes of mutuality. He dwells particularly on the demand of building confidence and mutual trust (Asheim 1994a:281). He explicitly discusses the significance of ethics with respect to the task to manifest and make visible the unity of the Church, not as a matter of establishing or creating unity (which is a gift of God) (Asheim 1994a:288). In a specific exploration of the task and authority of ordained ministers, he emphasizes the attitude of mutual loyalty, openness, and willingness to accept critique from one another—as premises for living with diversity in a Lutheran church where the highest authority is Scripture, and no definition of doctrine by a magisterium (cf. Asheim 1980:56f., 83). 23. One interesting exception is the recent study and apology of hierarchy in the Church by the Roman Catholic theologian Terence L. Nichols. He redefines a church hierarchy as a “participatory social hierarchy,” which demands certain attitudes from those in power, e.g., “an authority of virtue rather than of force” (Nichols 1997:305f).
theology." The tendency to handle attitudes as somewhat self-evident, even as a banality, can be observed in both cases. Ecumenical texts talk about trust, commitment, love, faithfulness, openness, and so forth without relating them specifically to ecclesiology.

Asheim discusses the ethics of attitudes in relation to the tension between individual freedom and communal responsibility. Individual responsibility, in a proper sense, grows in a fellowship and presupposes recognition of the significance of the dimension of community. The potential for constructive critique in the Church presupposes the attitude of loyalty and willingness to be criticized oneself by the fellowship. This, we will see later, corresponds to the attitude of mutual accountability, the focus of this study.

Hence, if the quality of relation is an important issue of ecumenical ecclesiology, then the required attitudes of Church fellowship deserve much more attention than they have been given so far in reflections on ecumenism as well as on ecclesiology. My points of interest in this study are, therefore:

a. What kinds of reflections there have been on the role of necessary attitudes in general, and of mutual accountability particularly, in the ecumenical theological reflection of Faith and Order;

b. Why attitudes seem to have become a more important aspect of ecumenical theological reflection in recent years; and
c. Which attitudes are—according to the ecumenical theological reflections of Faith and Order—most necessary for the particular type of relations that interchurch relationship does represent.

Attitudes required for the improvement of an ecumenical relation must be in concord with the basis of any church fellowship, its specific character and task, and take into account its theological, historical, sociological, and cultural diversity. This requires a theological interpretation of these attitudes. Such attitudes should correspond to the fact that this kind of fellowship has its common identity based in the apostolic tradition. The same apostolic gospel of Jesus Christ and the common apostolic faith in the triune God are the common basis for any church fellowship.

This common apostolic tradition can be used and understood differently, which is the presupposition and the problem of the ecumenical movement. The attitudes of this kind of fellowship must convey a dynamic toward improving the relations and better manifesting the God-given unity, according to the call to unity formulated in Scripture. Besides this, the required attitudes should care for the integrity of all kinds of members of this fellowship, which also means a constructive approach to differences and diversity.

The theme of attitudes seems to have been paid increasingly more attention in ecumenical documents over the last 10 to 15 years. Several statements recommend a set of attitudes that can be subsumed as mutual accountability. To some extent this specific terminology is used, but not always. It sounds immediately plausible and adequate to recommend an attitude of mutuality and accountability to handle the challenges of the ecumenical movement. The same seems to be the case for many authors of texts where mutual accountability is recommended; only a few of them do attempt to discuss comprehensively what mutual accountability really means. This type of recommendation deserves further analysis and discussion.

The Material and the Method of This Study

The Selection of the Texts to Be Analyzed

The analysis will be limited to what I have called “Faith and Order texts” from the last half of the 20th century. This means reports from larger conferences and major study projects, particularly those that appear to have relevance for this type of analysis. Documents from some of the commission meetings are included in the analysis, but only as far as they appear to be important for understanding my theme. This material will be supplemented by some important documents from the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC)
from the same period dealing with theological premises for the field of Faith and Order regarding the unity of the Church. In many cases these are documents prepared for the WCC by Faith and Order.

The work of Faith and Order deserves, for several reasons, attention in any theological discussion or analysis of ecumenical ecclesiology. Faith and Order’s purpose is to give a theological foundation to and promotion for the processes toward unity among the churches. The movement of Faith and Order went through an important change into a more institutionalized life after becoming a part of the WCC in 1948. Its task has been to reflect and stimulate the process that can lead to a deeper and more clearly expressed visible unity; a matter of order on the basis of faith within the worldwide framework of the WCC. These two perspectives, since the establishment of Faith and Order in Lausanne in 1927, have been supplemented and to some extent also challenged by the focus on the common life and work of the churches. In some cases there have been attempts to coordinate and integrate the doctrinal, ecclesiological, and ethical concerns of the ecumenical movement in the studies of Faith and Order.27

The dynamic of the encounters of Faith and Order (and the World Council of Churches) has stimulated theologians to find new perspectives and themes in the quest for the unity of the Church. The documents from the study programmes, commission meetings, and conferences are, therefore, a unique contribution to the theological reflection on the unity of the church. Theological analysis of the task of the ecumenical movement and of the actual state of the relation between churches has been the main occasion for the production of these texts.

Moreover, these documents reflect encounters of theologians from a wide range of churches and traditions. The Faith and Order movement can be seen as the most representative forum for ecumenical theology. The documents from Faith and Order can, therefore, be analyzed not only to find what happened in the ecumenical movement, but also as a unique source of theological reflection on ecumenical ecclesiology.

Since the agreement in Toronto in 1950 not to make the World Council of Churches dependent on any particular ecclesiology and not to demand that any church involved in the WCC question or give up her own ecclesiology, a comprehensive, broad-scale study of ecclesiology was not pursued in the study processes of Faith and Order until nearly fifty years later.28 Nevertheless, several

27. Cf. chs. 3 and 4, pp. 227-39, 244-89.

28. See the Toronto statement of 1950, in Documentary History 1963:167–76. The Faith and Order study of ecclesiology after Santiago 1993 has so far resulted in one document, Nature and Purpose (1998). This is one of the first attempts in Faith and Order to proceed toward a common ecclesiology.
themes of relevance for ecumenical ecclesiology have more or less been inte-
grated in all study processes.

Although these texts were made in different situations, by different people,
and under different type of leadership, they represent continuity through the
constant purpose of Faith and Order. To some extent there is a tradition within
this movement, both thematically and personally.\textsuperscript{29} Other studies of this mate-
rial serve as arguments for the relevance of regarding these documents as one
corpus.\textsuperscript{30}

The term “mutual accountability” was introduced in Faith and Order
texts during the 1990s, at points where it serves as a contribution to how the
churches can proceed in the most urgent task of the ecumenical movement.
The term appears in contexts where there is an attempt to harvest the fruits of
the work done and reposition them for the present and coming challenges.\textsuperscript{31}

The immediate recommendation of this attitude, without great efforts to
define what is meant, can indicate that this applies to reflections and tenden-
cies in earlier Faith and Order texts, in ways not previously articulated. Thus,
I find it useful to study the Faith and Order texts from a period prior to the
theme when “mutual accountability” is explicitly mentioned. The main results
of Faith and Order since the establishment of the WCC can illuminate in a
wider perspective the significance of an ecumenical attitude first defined as
“mutual accountability” in the texts from the 1990s.

An interpretation of the documents of Faith and Order must take into
account the rather specific context and dynamic in which they were produced.
It makes no sense to expect from them the same consistency, clarity of con-
cepts, or continuity as in a corpus of literature from one author or one clearly
defined group of authors. An analysis of these documents should, therefore,
aim at identifying the specific contributions from this type of text, looking for
the new questions and concepts, the tendencies, the convergence of under-
standing and agreement on basic issues, and new challenges of the ecumenical
movement. The Faith and Order texts should be read as indicators of a wider
range of theological reflection on ecumenical ecclesiology, as well as catalysts
for further work on the bilateral level of ecumenical dialogue.

Thus, I have selected the Faith and Order texts to enlighten the theme of
mutual accountability as an attitude for interchurch relations because of the
general relevance of these texts as contributions to ecumenical ecclesiology, and

\textsuperscript{29} E.g., the text from Toronto 1950 has played an important role in the discussions at the fifth
World Conference in 1993 and in the Faith and Order contributions to the study of the Com-
mon Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches in the 1990s.

\textsuperscript{30} E.g., Brinkman 1995.

\textsuperscript{31} This is rather typical in the documents from Santiago 1993.
the possibility granted here to identify an important tendency in ecumenical reflection.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{The Method of the Study}

This is a systematic theological study, pursued on the basis of an analysis of Faith and Order material, treated in chronological order. The \textit{systematic theological approach} can be derived from the two-sided intention of the study: (1) to discuss the significance of mutual accountability as ecumenical attitude; and (2) to contribute to a proper theory and definition of this attitude in the framework of ecumenical ecclesiology.

This intention is carried through by a systematic-theological approach to the texts.

a. Because the analysis of the texts will aim at a \textit{discussion of a particular theme}, it will not be a study of the history of Faith and Order as such. I will not pretend to give a complete picture of what happened in the study processes, nor will it offer a complete analysis of all Faith and Order documents in the period analyzed. However, if this is an important aspect of the reflections of Faith and Order during the last five decades, my analysis could be one contribution to the history of Faith and Order.

b. The study will be done to find support for my assumption of the significance of the perspective of “mutual accountability” in these texts, and, therefore, for ecumenical ecclesiology generally.

c. The analysis is made to find relevant elements to \textit{establish a definition or theory} of mutual accountability as ecclesiological attitude.

d. I want to discuss and \textit{show the relevance of the dimension of the quality of relation and proper attitudes} for the unity of the Church, emphasizing the dimensions of “faith” and “order.” I will discuss whether “relation” should be a third, supplementary perspective in this context.

Since the main purpose of this study is to work toward a theory of mutual accountability as an important attitude of interchurch relations—hence also of ecumenical ecclesiology—I want to develop such a theory of mutual accountability in a wider perspective than the meaning of the terminology of “mutual accountability” in just a few of the Faith and Order texts. I do not want to be too dependent on the object language in the youngest texts. Therefore, it is \textit{important} to see if and, eventually, how this has been a theme in the whole

\textsuperscript{32} I have defined the end of analysis of texts by the Faith and Order documents published in 1998, i.e., before the 1998 WCC assembly in Harare. This is the endpoint of my study.
The period of Faith and Order after the establishment of the World Council of Churches. This will give a better understanding of the developing—or changing—interest in attitudes in theological reflections on the unity of the Church.

Some tools are needed to analyze the earlier texts in the perspective of attitudes and mutual accountability. The theory of attitudes referred to above will serve as one important tool for these analyses. Further, it is necessary to establish a preliminary definition of the concept of “mutual accountability.” The explicit recommendations of mutual accountability occur mostly in the texts of Faith and Order from the mid-1990s. These latter texts could, therefore, have been the starting point of my analysis, to develop an analytical language of “mutual accountability” on the basis of the object language in these texts. However, I will let my analysis of the later Faith and Order texts wait, to make them one part of an analysis in a longer perspective. Thereby I hope to avoid reducing them to an “answer book” for the analysis of the whole bulk of texts. Consequently, I will try to establish a preliminary definition of “mutual accountability” in a more general perspective than the Faith and Order texts, to have a somewhat wider reference when establishing the analytical language for the further analysis. This will be presented at the end of this introduction. This definition can then serve as an analytic tool for the texts in which the terminology does not occur.

My analytical approach to the texts will be conducted on a double track:

- How and where do we find arguments in these texts for proper attitudes of ecumenical relationships that can be subsumed under the concept “mutual accountability”? How do the texts show an awareness of what I am focusing on in this study? How and why has there been a growing interest in these attitudes?

- What can be identified as the most relevant elements of a definition of mutual accountability as the attitude significant for the quality of interchurch relations?

The analysis will be presented in chapters 2 through 4. These chapters are defined according to what I find to be an adequate ordering of the material according to my theme. In the final chapter I will discuss my thesis on the basis of the previous summaries, and establish some parameters for a theory of mutual accountability in the framework of ecumenical ecclesiology. I will also try to look at this theme in a wider perspective of ecumenical endeavours and general ecclesiology.
Introduction

The Thesis

With this background, I formulate the thesis for my study as follows:

The attitude of mutual accountability is vital to improve and maintain the quality of interchurch relations. It is explicitly and implicitly recommended in Faith and Order texts (and Faith and Order-related WCC texts) from the period from 1948 to 1998. The quality of “relation” is a supplementary perspective to the dimensions of “faith” and “order” in the quest for the unity of the Church. There are significant theological reasons why “mutual accountability” should be an important element in ecumenical ecclesiology.

It might sound somewhat abstract to discuss “ecumenical ecclesiology” and to announce mutual accountability as an “attitude” in this context. To bring my arguments into higher relief, I will briefly point to some alternatives, maybe even anti-theses.

First of all, if the churches are not mutually accountable or should not make any effort to be so, they can pursue their own theological traditions and confessions best in isolation from differing points of view. This is the core of the definition of a sect. But it is also a feature in some of the confessionalistic trends in confessional churches. In such cases, the doctrinal basis of a church and its practice becomes clearer and more reliable the more its profile is sharpened against alternative perspectives. Paradoxically, those rather close to the point of view defended by a particular church will be the most threatening and therefore to be condemned.

A doctrinal condemnation is not necessarily representing an anti-thesis to mutual accountability. It can be the only possible solution after a struggle with what appears to be directly opposed to the basis of a Christian church, a necessary “no” to be able to confirm the common “yes” of confession to the triune God and protection of human lives. But to stay with doctrinal condemnations as a necessary paradigm of identification of the Church can be an argument against any real mutual accountability to other churches, if the underlying thought is this: Why bother about taking the point of view of others seriously? Why give any apology for our church?

In this sense, there is a paradoxical similarity between isolationistic, fundamentalist tendencies, on the one hand, and more liberal and pluralistic approaches, on the other hand. None of them corresponds to the attitude of being mutually accountable in the relation to other churches. A presumed anti-thesis to mutual accountability to other churches can be to state that the only and real accountability of the church is to God. However, that could easily be a defense for being accountable only to one’s own tradition and doctrine,
immune to contributions from others. Mutual accountability as a matter of ecumenical ecclesiology means that to be a church implies being mutually accountable to other Christian churches. The deepest theological issue in mutual accountability can be identified in this question: Does a church need to be mutually accountable to other churches to be accountable to God?

Mutual Accountability: Toward a Preliminary Definition

What do the dictionaries say about the terminology “mutual accountability”? Can we get clues from its use outside the specific contexts of ecumenical texts from Faith and Order?

Dictionaries by and large give a twofold definition of being “accountable.” This adjective means either to be subject to an obligation to report, explain, or justify something, or to be able to explain or to be explicated. The former meaning can be related to a formal, maybe even juridical, relation in which the subject is positioned; the latter focuses more on the capacity and ability of the subject (not necessarily a person). The adjective can mean not only to be made accountable by someone but also to be capable or willing to give an account, to be accountable. In this study, this latter meaning predominates.

Accordingly, “accountability” (the noun) is the state of being accountable, to have the duty to give account or to be answerable. Corresponding to the meaning of the adjective, it can designate the ability, or the moral attitude, of acting openly and responsibly, having a readiness to give account at any time; or being accountable in the sense of “reliable.” The dictionaries are inclined to refer to situations of subordination, implying obligations or charges on somebody, not optional or mutual relations. They give, nevertheless, some openings for a general state or mode of “being accountable,” which is something beyond formal relations.

33. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (New York: Random House, 1983), defines “accountable” thus: “1. To be subject to the obligation to report, explain, or justify something; responsible; answerable. 2. Capable of being explained; explicable; explainable,” (13). Similar definitions appear in the Webster’s II New Riverside University Dictionary (Boston: Riverside, 1984) as well as The Oxford English Dictionary, vol. I, A–B (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933). The latter (65–66) gives five meanings of “accountable”: “1. Liable to be called to account, or to answer for responsibilities and conduct; answerable, responsible. Chiefly of persons. A. to a person, for a thing. B. Also without to or for. 2. To be counted or reckoned for. 3. Able to be reckoned or computed. 4. To be reckoned or charged: chargeable, attributable to. 5. Able to be accounted for or explained; explicable. Also with for.” This dictionary gives examples from older literature on “accountability” or “accountableness,” which means the same: “The quality of being accountable; liability to give account of, and answer for, discharge of duties or conduct; responsibility, amenableness.”
Some examples from the use of terminology in contemporary English can show the oscillation between the external and formal obligation imposed from outside and accountability as ability or attitude. The latter meaning, less related to formal structures, also tends to be more oriented toward aspects of common accountability, mutuality, and reciprocity.

A check in library indexes shows that this terminology is mostly used in contemporary English in the field of civil bureaucracy and education.

In a study by the Dutch scholar Mark Bovens on responsibility in complex organizations, we find some interesting reflections on the meaning of the word-field of responsibility/accountability. He tries to restrict the meaning of “accountability” to the first of the two meanings we find in the dictionaries. It is, in his definition, one of several meanings of “responsibility,” namely, “... in the sense of political, moral, or legal liability (or in all or some of these sense) for the results, mostly harmful, of a given form of behavior or event.”

This corresponds to his distinction between passive and active responsibility.

34. In the U.S. context of public life it is used for the (semi-) legal obligations to give reports or accounts of what has been done. Annually, the government departments present their “Accountability Acts” to the Congress. A typical example is the Clinton administration’s suggestion to rationalize bureaucracy, in order to increase the accountability of bureaucracy. That means improvement of transparency in the lines of giving and receiving accounts of what has been done. This can be in tension with the flexibility and creativity of public managers. Cf. use of this terminology in a discussion on this problem in Khademian 1996:1ff.

35. A field in which the term accountability is very much used the last years is the effort to establish a system of common evaluation of results for schools in the United States; cf. Darling-Hammond and Snyder 1992: “In recent years, the term ‘accountability’ has been used nearly synonymously with mandates for student testing and standard setting. The idea of many legislated accountability initiatives is to bring rapid order to the educational system by setting high goals and making students, teachers, and administrators responsible for meeting them” (14). These authors are concerned about how the liable accountability should be also an integrated attitude of being accountable to the superior task of education. Thus, it can serve as an illuminating example of the double level of “accountability”: “We argue, however, that accountability requires much more than measuring narrowly defined student outcomes. An accountability system is a set of commitments, policies, and practices that are designed to create responsible and responsive education. Each aspect of an accountable school’s operations should aim to (a) heighten the probability that good practices will occur for students; (b) reduce the likelihood that harmful practices will occur; and (c) provide internal self-correctives in the system to identify, diagnose, and change courses of action that are harmful or ineffective.” The authors continue by claiming that in most enterprises in society there are at least five types of accountability mechanisms: political, legal bureaucratic, professional, and market accountability (14f.).

36. Bovens 1998:25. He describes “responsibility” as a “container concept,” which can be clarified best by making a sketch which Wittgenstein called “a family resemblance.” The meanings are related, but cannot be reduced to one essential meaning. Bovens suggests five forms: responsibility as cause, as accountability, as capacity, as task, and as virtue (24–26). The distinction made in the English translation between “responsibility” and “accountability” corresponds to the words in the Dutch title: “Verantwoordelijkheid” and “aansprakelijkheid” (ibid., preface, xii).
The former is the case only when these four criteria are fulfilled: transgression of a norm, causal connection, blame-worthiness, and the relationship with the agent. This is a digital sense of accountability: you are either accountable or you are not. But accountability has not only a formal or juridical aspect. The forum for this passive responsibility can be anything from one’s internal conscience to an international court for crimes against humanity. Although accountability can have four forms (corporate, hierarchical, collective, and individual), it is still a matter of being held accountable by a forum. It is the sense of the question of “how” or “what.”

The active responsibility is defined as a virtue, and demands an answer to a question of “why.” This latter form could, therefore, better be described as “a sense of responsibility.” Bovens concludes, however, that “accountability” and “responsibility” are closely interrelated. Being (passively) held accountable is a precondition for becoming responsible in the active sense. On the other hand, the blame or the call for account does not have a meaning by itself, only as a way to mature in a deeper sense of being responsible in a community. What Bovens discusses here as active responsibility is close to the definition of “attitude” above.

There might be good reasons to make this kind of distinction between “responsibility” and “accountability.” Nevertheless, the difference between them is fluid in less scholarly use, and “accountability” can appear in both the active as well as the passive meaning of “responsibility.” The interrelation between them is important. To become actively responsible/accountable, there must be something making the sense of being so, and this must be some kind of forum or standard.

38. This constant interchange between accountability and responsibility is necessary for a community to maintain: “Norms are reproduced, internalized, and, where necessary, adjusted through accountability. . . . Giving account of oneself is therefore one of the most important means by which we can try to maintain the fragile public sphere and to make sure that the way in which society is arranged does not at crucial points slip through our collective fingers. In the course of this process, control and prevention, accountabilities and virtues, go hand in hand” (Bovens 1998:39). It is not necessarily a legal conduct that causes this effect; it can also be just to tell one’s story to clear the air. The important matter is whether the accounting process leads to those involved, and others in a parallel situation, learning from the mistakes made. Accountability is a matter after the event; active responsibility can convey control before potential deviance (Bovens 1998:39–42).
39. One obvious example: then-U.S. Senator Walter Mondale demanded a much higher degree of “accountability” from the president of the United States to the Congress, according to the U.S. Constitution. After Watergate, this was necessary to establish a new confidence among Americans that the president was an “accountable” person. Legal, constitutional obligation as well as a moral virtue of accountability was highly recommended. This should be achieved by improving the accountability to the constituency through open contact via media, etc. (Mondale
If we look at some examples of the use of “accountability” in church-related texts, we find several examples of the oscillation between the active and passive meanings. Too formal standards of accountability can lead to nonaccountable attitudes in important relations, because only the most flattering are presented, and not the total reality.40

The impression that the terminology of “accountability” and “mutual accountability” in many cases has a connotation of attitude is confirmed through its use in contexts describing dynamics in small groups.41 It can, for instance, be used to describe the covenant interrelation between people committed to nurture their mutual growth in sanctification and discipleship in congregations in the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition.42

1975). “This book represents my effort to describe what I believe the Congress, other institutions, and we as Americans must do to respect our system and our liberties from the encroachment of an unaccountable Presidency” (ibid., foreword, vii). Chapters 5 and 6 are devoted to the relation of the president to Congress; the last chapter has the title “The Presidential Personality and Public Leadership.” The double aspect of accountability flows together in a passage like this: “A healthy President must be capable of earning the trust of the American people. He can do so only if he tells the truth, obeys the law, and respects the American public and their right to an accounting of his leadership” (ibid., 259).

40. In an article on “accountability in priesthood,” the standards and routines of juridical accountability generally practiced is referred to as a given fact (accounts to the local Ordinary, the parish council, and other ecclesiastical bodies), according to canonical law. But the point to be discussed in this case is how counterproductive a mere formal meaning of accountability can be. The aim should rather be “account-ability,” a mature relationship of trust in which the priest is able to deal with his own vulnerability. This demands some kind of mutual accountability, to avoid destructive self-defense. Thus, the structures of accountability in priesthood should aim at developing “genuine accountability” in confidence and cooperation, i.e., “accountability” as a virtue making the priest able to serve and to learn, not a sole formal procedure of accountability (cf. Whitehead 1992, particularly 36–45).

41. Cf. Lawson 1994: “Creating mutual ‘accountability’ among group members is the chief means by which home fellowship groups are intended to solve the pastoral problems of congregational size and geographical dispersal” (91). “The trust, honesty, and compassion that small-group intimacy engenders create ‘accountability’. Group members are accountable to each other for the ways in which they apply God’s word in their lives, which they learn to do by collectively ‘fleshing out the Sunday sermon’” (95).

42. In a study on Discipleship Groups as a variant of the Methodist “Classes,” emphasizing a koinonia structure according to a “roundtable” model, “mutual accountability” is used as a principle. It seems to have some connotation to “forum,” but is directed toward building up the mature disciple of good virtues, e.g.: “Mutual accountability within a small group is foundational for the building up and growth of The Church. Sometimes difficult and even painful questions need to be asked of others about the table, always in the spirit of love. . . . The formation of disciples is an ongoing, even life-long process, which incorporates both heart and mind, emotion and cognition, risk and certainty. It is not only learning what Jesus said and did, but how that shapes and forms the values and ethos of the individual believer, as well as the broad scope of the community of believers” (Earley 1996:51–52).
There is a change in connotation when “accountable” or “accountability” is linked to “mutual.” This word, according to dictionaries, can be rather neutral, describing persons having the same relation each toward the other. Mostly, however, it has a positive connotation of respectful reciprocal relation, sharing without profiting one from the other. It has a more positive connotation than “common.”

The expression “mutual accountability” does not occur in standard English dictionaries. It has been used, however, in several contexts dealing with the proper relations between partners. Some of them are regulated by more or less official agreements, such as the small-group commitment mentioned above. It can go all the way to a large scale, to obligations according to documents or standards for international politics and employer/employee relations.

In conclusion, we find that mutual accountability is the state of being asked to give an account in a mutual setting, where the questions can be asked both ways and “about the table,” in a mutual way. It presupposes some kind of community with some common standards to which the different members can be held accountable. The meaning of “accountability” is, however, oscillating between this and another meaning: to have the attitude of being accountable. In connection with “mutual,” it means to be able to be open and willing to give and take account in a setting of mutual commitment and trust. It requires a mature fellowship. But confidence and maturity are also, to some degree, the goal of this kind of fellowship, too.

In the analysis of the role of mutual accountability in ecumenical texts, it is my interest to study which of the two basic meanings is preferred and, eventually, how they are interrelated. It will be relevant to analyze how much and what kind of formal accountability can be demanded in interchurch relationship and how important it might be to nurture attitudes.

From the reflections above, it is possible to sum up a preliminary definition of what kind of attitude is recommended when using this terminology. I here define mutual accountability as one attitude with several aspects. These aspects can, isolated, be defined as attitudes too, but there is a fluid border between them.

1. Openness, transparency in a mutual relation, not to keep thoughts, intentions, actions, or initiatives secret or hidden.

2. Readiness to take responsibility for what is done and should be done.


44. In this study I will sometimes make distinctions between the terminology (“mutual accountability”), the concept, idea, or notion (“mutual accountability”), and the (real) attitude (mutual accountability), but only when it is important for the meaning in a context. Where I find such distinctions more distracting than illuminating in the text, I will omit them.
3. Reliability, in the sense of staying firm to what is common, traditions, standards, and agreements.

4. The willingness to make each other mutually responsible, even in a critical way. This includes, in a mutual relationship, readiness to receive critical evaluation and take critique seriously without threats of sanctions.

Summary

Interchurch relations have changed through the efforts of the ecumenical movement over the last half century, and so has the focus of theological reflection within the ecumenical endeavours. There is a tendency in Faith and Order texts toward a stronger focus on the quality of relations, at the cost of attempting to define models of unity. This has led to a higher frequency of recommendations of certain attitudes as necessary for the improvement of interchurch fellowship. “Mutual accountability” has become a crucial concept in this respect.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to raise the question whether and in which sense a certain type of attitude is particularly important for interchurch relations. To be more specific, I want to identify and discuss the theological meaning and significance of mutual accountability as a necessary attitude for the quality of interchurch relationship. This I will do according to the thesis I want to test and, if possible, to confirm through this study.45

I find that a theory of attitudes as a third, supplementary perspective (to the ethics of duty and the ethics of purpose) formulated in the studies of Norwegian theologian Ivar Asheim is particularly relevant to identify the role of attitudes in these texts.

The study will be pursued in five chapters. In the following three chapters, the ecumenical documents from the Faith and Order movement (and some related texts from the WCC) from the period 1948–1998 will be analyzed. I will focus on how the attitude of mutual accountability (according to the preliminary definition above) has been an aspect in these texts all the way, and how it has become an increasingly important issue of ecumenical ecclesiology. Through this analysis I am also searching for elements of a theory of mutual accountability as an attitude for ecumenical relations.

In the last chapter, I will make a systematic theological appraisal of what I’ve found. I will particularly discuss “relation” in dialectic to—respectively—“faith” and “order.” This last chapter will be an attempt to formulate a theory of mutual accountability as a necessary attitude for interchurch relations,

45. See above, p. 20.
particularly in regard to what kind of necessity is implied. Mutual account-
ability will be discussed as an important attitude to improve church relations
dominated by diversity, division, and even tension, and the ecclesiological
horizon and relevance of this concept should not be limited to the efforts of the
ecumenical movement. But questions and material from the Faith and Order
texts will be the focal point of this study.